

Exploring the Connotation and Function of Guqin Art from the Perspective of Origin

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Abstract: In 2003, UNESCO officially included the art of guqin in the second batch of the World Representative List of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, highlighting the extraordinary status of guqin in global culture. As the oldest plucked instrument in China, the guqin has always been an outstanding representative of excellent traditional Chinese culture, carrying rich cultural connotations and profound historical heritage. This article aims to analyze the production of guqin from its origin, explore its cultural connotations and functions, and understand the charm and value of ancient guqin art.

Keywords: Guqin, Origin, Cultural connotation, Function.

1. Introduction

As a traditional Chinese plucked string instrument, the guqin is also known as the jade qin, silk tung, and seven stringed qin. Its origin can be traced back to ancient times, and there are many legends in ancient books about emperors such as Fuxi and Shennong creating the qin, symbolizing the wisdom of the beginning of Chinese civilization and the budding of art. After thousands of years of baptism, the guqin has gradually accumulated and formed a unique cultural connotation. It is not only a microcosm of the ancient Chinese social etiquette system, but also a concentrated display of aesthetic concepts and philosophical thoughts at that time. By delving into the origin of the guqin, we can gain a profound understanding of its profound philosophical foundation, lofty aesthetic pursuit, and long historical heritage. These elements together construct the unique charm of the guqin as a cultural treasure of the Chinese nation.

2. The Origin of Guqin in Mythical Legends

In the long history of the Chinese nation, countless myths and legends full of wisdom and mysterious elements have been passed down from generation to generation, becoming important literature resources for studying ancient Chinese civilization. It is not difficult to find that the Chinese nation invented the instrument "qin" as early as ancient times. There are many versions of its origin recorded in historical myths, and there are different opinions about its creator, which is full of mystery and legendary colors.

2.1 Fuxi Said About Playing the Qin

The production of qin can be traced back to the record in the Xia Dynasty's "Shan Hai Jing". In the "Shan Hai Jing · Hai Nei Jing", it is said that "Shi Ben Yun Fuxi made qin, and Shen Nong made se." According to the record in the "Shi Ben", it is mentioned that Fuxi made qin. Cai Yong said in his book "Qin Cao": "In the past, Fuxi made the qin," and "Er Ya Zhu Shu" states: "Fuxi made the qin. The above documents clearly point out that Fuxi, the leader of the three emperors, made guqin from wutong wood and other materials.

2.2 Shennong Said About Playing the Qin

Another theory is that Shen Nong made the qin, as recorded in the ancient document "Huainanzi · Taizu Xun": "At the beginning of Shen Nong's qin making, he returned to the gods and his licentiousness was against his heavenly heart." Here, it is said that Shen Nong made the qin in order to communicate with the gods and bring people back to their true selves. At the same time, the Book of Rites records that "or a minister of the Zhu Xiang family, Shida, made the five stringed qin", and the Shilin Guangji records that "The Age of Emperors" says: "Emperor Yan made the five stringed qin". These documents sometimes refer to the Shennong family as Emperor Yan or Zhu Xiang when discussing their qin making. It can be clearly seen that at that time, the qin had already appeared, and even had five strings, and its making was connected to gods, heaven, and earth.

2.3 Emperor Shun Made a Qin and Said

There are also many records related to the reign of Emperor Shun. "The Corpse" says: "Emperor Shun made a five stringed qin to sing to the south wind and relieve our anger." Here, it is said that Emperor Shun made a five stringed qin to play songs to alleviate people's worries and dissatisfaction. And Sima Qian's "Records of the Grand Historian: Book of Music" elaborates in detail: "The original 'Shennong made the qin', written by Yun Shun today, does not mean that Shun first created it, but instead used the five stringed qin to sing poems about the south wind, which began with Shun." It should be noted that the mention of Shun making the qin here does not mean that he created it, but rather that the act of using the five stringed qin to play the south wind and educate the world about filial piety began with Shun.

In addition, there is a small amount of literature that suggests that the qin was created by Emperor Huangdi and Emperor Yao. In the "Ten Thousand Volumes of Jinghua", it is recorded that "Huangdi made a qin named Qingyong". Here, it is mentioned that Huangdi made a qin and named it "Qingyong". According to the "Tianzhong Ji", "Yao [10] ordered Wuju to make a five stringed qin", which states that Emperor Yao had a person named Wuju make a qin with five strings and so on at that time.

Through the analysis of different claims about the creators of the guqin in ancient literature, it can be found that although there are differences in the creators of the guqin, they were

either outstanding rulers or wise sages. The creation of the guqin was linked to the "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors", which established its position in Chinese culture. At the same time, these documents are mostly mythological stories or posthumous legends. Whether the guqin appeared in ancient times still needs to be studied in conjunction with unearthed cultural relics and historical materials. However, it is not denied that there is a possibility that historical materials related to the guqin in ancient times have not been excavated yet.

3. The Cultural Connotation of "High, Deep, and Broad" in Guqin

The art of guqin is not only a form of musical expression, but also carries rich philosophical ideas and humanistic spirit. By combing through the details of the ancient sages' process of making guqin, we can easily find that the design of guqin is related to auspicious animals in nature, with totem elements integrated into various parts, giving guqin a noble place. At the same time, the materials used in the production are derived from various plants, taking the essence of nature and connecting with the universe, highlighting the profound connotation of ancient people's pursuit of harmony in the universe. And with the application and development of society, the art of guqin has remarkable effects on personal cultivation and social progress. Its cultural connotation can be condensed into three words: "high", "deep", and "broad".

3.1 High Occupancy

The guqin is not only a musical instrument, but also a precious artwork that carries the national spirit and cultural memory. In the process of making the guqin, the wisdom and creativity of the sages are particularly crucial. They cleverly associate it with auspicious animals such as phoenixes, blend the symbolic spirit of totems with the guqin, and invisibly convey its noble cultural connotations. The Ancient Music says that "when Fuxi saw the phoenix gathered in the tree, he cut the tree like its shape to make a zither". When Fuxi saw the phoenix gathered on the wutong tree, he cut wutong wood to make a zither, imitating the shape of the phoenix. This process reflects the ancient people's reverence and imitation of nature and animals. The "Shantang Kaosuo" states that "the Yellow Emperor listened to the phoenix and fixed his tone", and the twelve laws based on the sound of the phoenix's call reflect the ancient people's sensitivity and respect for natural sounds. In the Classic of Mountains and Seas, it is said that "there is a bird, which looks like a chicken and is written in five different colors. Its name is Emperor Phoenix of the Sun... Seeing it brings peace to the world." In the hearts of ancient people, the phoenix was a symbol of beauty, purity, and tenderness, and was a divine bird that could bring peace, tranquility, and happiness to humanity. Fuxi made the guqin or named it after the phoenix, symbolizing that the qin also has the noble qualities of the phoenix, symbolizing auspiciousness, harmony, and beauty.

3.2 Deep Meaning

When Fuxi, Shennong and others made guqin, they often used silk and wood as materials. It is recorded in the "Shiben" that "Fuxi carved paulownia trees into guqin". The Ancient Music

once said that "wutong, a natural thing, is fragile and smooth, and its sound is thorough, so it is the best material for making zither. In addition, the "Huainan Honglie Jie" states that "cutting down mountain paulownia trees is used as a qin, the catalpa trees in streams are used as the belly, the sound has a clean corner, and the sound is clear during cultivation." Here, it is mentioned that the body of the qin should be made of mountain paulownia wood, and the belly of the qin should be made of catalpa trees in streams, so that the sound produced by the qin is clear and angular, harmonious and clear. The sage made the ancient zither from the materials of heaven and earth. The tenacious patience, beautiful lines and warm colors of the paulownia wood are all displayed in the ancient zither. At the same time, the Book of Songs once said that "wutong trees are born, and rise in the sun there." wutong wood is also regarded as an auspicious thing, which can bring good luck and happiness. When it is used to make the zither, it also means good luck and beauty.

Upon closer inspection of the style of the guqin, it is evident that the sage incorporated his contemplation of natural concepts such as the universe and the four seasons and five elements into the production of the guqin. Volume 1 of the "Shiben" records: "Fuxi carved paulownia trees into a qin, with a round face that resembled the sky and a flat bottom that resembled the earth, and a dragon pond that was eight inches long... The qin's face was circular, symbolizing the shape of the sky and a flat bottom, symbolizing the flatness and stability of the earth, reflecting the ancient concept of time and space where the sky was round and the earth was square. The eight inches of the dragon pond were connected to the eight winds, demonstrating the ancient qin's ability to connect various breaths and sounds between heaven and earth, and possessing a magical power to communicate between heaven and earth. The length of Fengchi is four inches, symbolizing the changes of the four seasons. The "Wu Zhi Zhai Qin Pu - Shang Gu Qin Lun" states that "the length of the qin is three feet, six inches, and five minutes, resembling 365 degrees in the Zhou Dynasty and 365 days in a year; the width of the qin is six inches, resembling six in six." The length of the qin symbolizes 365 days in a year, and the width of the qin is associated with the "six in six" symbol, meaning that the width of the qin symbolizes the vastness of space in the universe.

From this perspective, when the sage made the guqin, he associated it with the phoenix and incorporated the noble qualities of the phoenix into the guqin, becoming a cultural symbol. The use of different materials, such as wutong, rope and silk, shows people's values of advocating and cherishing nature, and the growth and change of wutong trees to their tenacious characteristics are reflected in every detail of the ancient zither. At the same time, the design of the shape of the zither contains the ancient people's profound understanding and understanding of the universe, nature and the operation of heaven and earth.

3.3 Wide Impact

The cultural functions of Guqin art are rich and diverse. Based on the records of the origin of Guqin mythology, we can glimpse the original intention of emperors to make Guqin. For individuals, Guqin can cultivate their character and cultivate

their emotions. In terms of national governance, the guqin is an important medium for educating the people. These records indirectly reveal the unique functional role played by the guqin and its music in the development of individuals and society in ancient social life.

3.3.1 Cultivate oneself and cultivate one's character

When ancient emperors such as Fuxi and Huangdi made guqin, they hoped to convey a profound understanding and respect for the natural world and social ethics through the music of guqin, in order to guide people to cultivate themselves and cultivate their sentiments. Cai Yong's "Qin Cao" states: "In the past, Fuxi made the qin to resist evil and debauchery, cultivate rationality, and reverse naivety." Here, it is said that making the guqin is to cultivate one's character, restore one's simple nature, and the sound of the qin can help people resist inner evil. Huainanzi": "At the beginning of Shennong's reign, he played the qin to return to the gods; he was extremely lascivious and opposed his heavenly heart... regardless of politics, he would eventually perish. "This article explains the motives and decline of the sages' enjoyment of music, and conveys the principles of harmony and moderation to future generations. The Book of Music records that "silk is the ruler of the music system, silk is the ruler of the qin, and the qin is the ruler of the middle string. Therefore, the prohibition of licentiousness and the correction of human emotions are emphasized." This reflects the important position of the qin in ancient music, and points out that music (especially the qin) can harmonize the qi of heaven and earth, prohibit licentiousness, and correct human emotions. This is an ancient concept of using music to cultivate temperament and enhance spiritual cultivation.

3.3.2 Educate and promote local customs and traditions

The guqin is also a tool for rulers to educate the people. The Complete Collection of Qinshu records: "Yao wrote the 'Great Chapter' and made Wujia a five stringed qin, bringing great harmony to the world. Emperor Yao brought great harmony to the world because of the five stringed qin. The "Essentials of Qunshu Tongyao" states that "Shun made a five stringed qin and wrote the poem 'Nanfeng': 'The fragrance of the Nanfeng can relieve the anger of our people; the sound of the Nanfeng can enrich our people's wealth.'" This reflects Emperor Shun's ideal of governing the country with benevolence, hoping to educate the people through music, and promote national harmony and prosperity. The Corpse "says:" Shun made the five stringed qin to sing the southern wind and relieve our anger. "This sentence highlights the unique power of the five stringed qin music." Relieve our anger "refers to playing such music, which can dispel people's grievances and dissatisfaction, make people feel calm and comforted, and emphasize the function of the qin to appease the people and reconcile society.

In the era of ancient sages, the guqin was originally created by divine beings to educate the world, calm the gods and ward off evil, and pursue the harmonious unity of goodness and beauty. Later, the sage used the music played on the qin to educate the people and govern the country. Studying the functions of the guqin during this period can not only understand the cultural characteristics of the sage era, but also help to understand the

development and transformation of guqin culture in later times.

The high position, profound meaning, and extensive influence of the guqin jointly construct its unique cultural value system. It is not only a form of musical art expression, but also a cultural symbol closely connected to sacred symbols such as the phoenix totem. At the same time, the selection of production materials and the design of the qin style make its connotation more profound and rich. As a representative of high culture, its dissemination and popularization help to enhance the cultural literacy and moral level of the people, thereby promoting social harmony, stability, and cultural prosperity and development. These aspects are intertwined and influence each other, together forming the unique cultural charm and value system of the guqin.

4. The Reasons for the Cultural Connotations of "High", "Deep", and "Broad" in Guqin

The Guqin is closely intertwined with ancient holy kings, totems, and natural elements, rooted in its sacred role in history and the extraordinary charm displayed by its musical characteristics. Its sound is deep and infectious, capable of creating a solemn and sacred atmosphere, often used as a sacrificial instrument. As an outstanding representative of silk instruments, the unique design of the guqin carries rich symbolic significance.

4.1 As a Sacrificial Instrument

In the past, the kings did not have palaces, the winters lived in camps, and the summers lived in troughs. They did not have cremation, but ate food from plants and trees, meat from birds and animals, drank their blood, and rubbed their fur. They did not have hemp fibers, but wore their feathers and skin. In primitive societies, the natural environment was harsh, and people's living conditions were difficult. The Book of Documents, Yao Dian, once said, "The soup and flood were cut off, and the mountains and valleys were desolate and towering." "In the Han River, landslides and earthquakes occurred, and the river water flowed backwards." Faced with natural disasters, humans were full of powerlessness and fear. After realizing their own insignificance, they began to rely on and pray for the protection of heaven and gods. As the Book of Rites and Rites states, "Mountains, forests, rivers, valleys, and hills... Being able to emit clouds, being able to withstand wind and rain, and seeing monsters are all called gods. Natural phenomena such as mountains and rivers have divinity in the hearts of ancient people, and they need to be prayed for and blessed through sacrifice, hoping to bring harvest and peace. At that time, the qin was an indispensable tool in sacrificial ceremonies. The Book of Songs, Xiaoya, Fu Tian, once said, "The qin and the zither beat the drum to ward off the ancestors of the fields." The Commentary on the Rites of Zhou also mentioned, "The qin and the zither of the clouds and the winter arrived... The qin and the zither of Longmen were played in ancestral temples." This shows that instruments such as the qin and the zither had already been used in sacrificial activities, connected with the gods of heaven and earth, and had an important position in the cultural field and among various instruments. They were indispensable elements in national rituals and religious ceremonies.

4.2 As a Silk Instrument

The qin is a silk instrument in the classification system of the Eight Tones. The "Baihu Tongde Lun · Li Yue" once said: "The sheng is in the north, the bai is in the northeast, the drum is in the east, the xiao is in the southeast, the qin is in the south, the xun is in the southwest, the bell is in the west, and the chime is in the northwest." It can be seen that people matched the Eight Tones with the Eight Trigrams of Heaven and Earth and the Eight Directions at that time. There are two rectangular sound holes at the bottom of the qin, named Dragon Pool and Phoenix Marsh, and at the tail of the qin, there are dragon ships, crown horns, etc. It can be seen that the shape and structure of the qin incorporate elements of totems such as phoenixes to a certain extent. "There is a phoenix and a phoenix, the heart of Emperor Le", "phoenix" and "phoenix" appear as symbols or images, which are related to the emotions and attitudes of emperors. In "Yilin," it is said that "the phoenix is on the left, the qilin is on the right, and the benevolent saints meet." This describes an ideal political, social, or cultural environment where benevolence and wisdom blend together that a king desires. Moreover, the qin holds a prominent position among various musical instruments, such as "the eight tones are broad and the qin has the best moral character" and "the elegant qin is the unity of music, parallel to the eight tones". And "qin, qi, calligraphy and painting", qin ranks first, and literati and scholars all rely on qin as their spiritual sustenance. They firmly believe that 'the seat of a gentleman must be on the left qin and on the right shu', which also means that the qin has a high status among kings and literati. It can be seen that ancient people associated the shape and name of the qin with auspicious animals such as dragons and phoenixes, and the qin is closely related to emperors and literati. Compared to local theories such as the Western style of the erhu, Eastern nonsense, and the belief that "Ji Qin is a symbol of a stringed instrument," as well as instruments such as the zheng made by Meng Tian, the zheng made by Zheng Se, and the zheng originated in the folk culture of Qin during the late Warring States period, the connection between the qin and auspicious totems, as well as the gods of heaven and earth, is closer.

It can be seen that the reason why Guqin has a high position, deep meaning, and wide range of cultural connotations is mainly due to the dual endowing of its historical role and musical characteristics. As a sacrificial instrument, the qin not only serves a practical function of playing music and creating an atmosphere, but also serves as a bridge for communication between gods and spirits. The sacredness and nobility it carries make the guqin an irreplaceable part of cultural heritage. At the same time, as a leading instrument among silk and bamboo instruments, the Guqin's close connection with natural totems and sacred emperors, as well as its leading position as the first silk instrument, have jointly shaped the artistic realm of transcending the world and the unity of heaven and man in Guqin music. This realm not only reflects the ancient people's profound understanding and reverence for nature and the universe, but also showcases their superb achievements and unremitting pursuit in music and art. The rich cultural connotation of Guqin is the result of the interweaving and joint action of its historical role and musical characteristics.

5. Conclusion

The origin of the guqin is long and mysterious. Whether it is the ancient legend of Fuxi creating the guqin or the story of Emperor Yao ruling the world with the guqin, they are deeply imprinted in the long history of Chinese music culture. From the perspective of literary analysis, these origin stories are not only a trace of the origin of the guqin, but also the profound insights of ancient people into the laws of nature and the mysteries of the universe. Through a detailed analysis of the shape and structure of the guqin, as well as careful selection of production materials, it is not difficult to find that it contains the profound imitation and high respect of the ancient people for the natural world. More importantly, the art of guqin transcends the scope of simple musical instruments and has become a comprehensive art form that integrates culture, philosophy, and aesthetics. It is not only an excellent tool for self-cultivation and moral cultivation, but also an important carrier of the spiritual world of the Chinese nation, embodying people's yearning and pursuit for a better life. In the future, we can comprehensively and systematically analyze the historical and cultural significance of the guqin from the perspectives of multiple disciplines such as history and archaeology, and further verify and enrich the evolution process of the guqin through archaeological discoveries, in order to explore the deeper cultural connotations of this instrument.

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