

## Su Haizhen's Learning and Teaching for Literacy Transmission of the Duxianqin Single-String Zither

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: January 21, 2024

Accepted: April 30, 2024

Published: March 31, 2025

Volume: 13 Issue: 2

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

### ABSTRACT

This study examines Su Haizhen's approach to learning and teaching literacy transmission using the Duxianqin single-string zither, employing qualitative methods through interviews and observations. The findings are as follows: Su Haizhen's steadfast dedication to safeguarding and proficiently disseminating the esteemed Duxianqin heritage among the Jing ethnic group highlights the utmost significance of inventive pedagogical techniques and flexible instructional strategies. This extensive investigation explores her diverse methodology, with a particular focus on personalized instruction and pedagogy, collaborative educational tactics, and the customization of teaching to cater to individual abilities. Su Haizhen's commitment not only ensures the preservation of the Duxianqin culture but also fosters its continuous growth and recognition. This study sheds light on the potential benefits of transitioning from traditional, community-based teaching methods to more formalized instruction in the field of preserving intangible cultural assets. Su Haizhen's exceptional effort provides a great example in the broader domains of cultural preservation and education, highlighting the crucial role of adaptability and inclusivity in protecting and continuing cherished traditions.

**Key words:** Su Haizhen, Learning, Literacy Transmission, Teaching, Duxianqin

### INTRODUCTION

The Duxianqin is an ancient bamboo musical instrument associated with the Jing ethnic group in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It stands out for its unique use of bamboo as both the body and strings. Its roots can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty, with historical records mentioning a single-stringed Pao Qin made of spotted bamboo. The instrument's construction involves a bamboo tube and bamboo skin strings. It serves as a cultural reminder of the ingenuity of ancient craftsmen and musicians in teaching and transmitting their musical heritage, thus contributing to cultural literacy (Huang, 1998; Li & Lyu, 2022; Meihuan, 2023).

The Duxianqin is highly esteemed in the Southeast Asian music and culture scene in Guangxi, particularly among the Jing ethnic group that resides in the Wei, Wutou, and Shanxin islands of Fangchenggang City. The growth and improvement of the Jing ethnic Duxianqin has turned into a multifaceted project that includes exploring and improving the instrument, writing new music, and trying different ways to protect cultural heritage. This article elucidates the progression and enhancement of Duxianqin's framework, demonstrating its dynamic interaction with many growth facets (Xiao, 2021; Yijun, 2012; Ying, 2020)

The examination of the Jing ethnic Duxianqin has conventionally placed significant emphasis on tangible artifacts

and visual representations, prioritizing the material dimension of the instrument. Prior studies on the Duxianqin have focused on stationary performances. However, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, academics redirected their attention toward investigating the dynamic performance of the Duxianqin, including its stage presentation and the live music production during performances, emerging as primary areas of concentration (Yantian et al., 2021; Yue & Seekhunlio, 2024).

Su Haizhen's interdisciplinary viewpoints have led the way in transforming the examination of the single-stringed instrument, transitioning from a solely instrumental approach to a deeper emphasis on oral history. Su Haizhen's work largely focuses on examining live performances by the inheritors and practitioners of the monochord instrument.

Her work highlights the significance of exploring the relationship between humans and the single-stringed instrument within its historical context. Su Haizhen's comprehension of the complex connections between the musician, the single-stringed instrument, and the learning, teaching, literacy, and transmission aspects of this musical tradition have been greatly enhanced by gathering information from individuals who have firsthand experience with the instrument (Sheng, 1999; Zhuang & Pan, 2022).

The goal of this research is to perform a comprehensive examination of Duxianqin's learning and teaching methods in the framework of literacy transmission, with a focus on Su

Haizhen's work. Su Haizhen has played a significant role in altering the study of this single-stringed instrument, ushering in a transition away from a strictly instrumental perspective and toward a more in-depth exploration of oral history. This focus allows the study to shed light on a variety of important aspects, such as learning and teaching methods, literacy growth in this musical heritage, and transmission processes from one generation to the next. This study seeks to enhance our understanding of the dynamics involved in learning, teaching, literacy, and transmission in this musical tradition.

### Research Question

- How does Su Haizhen's learning and teaching contribute to the literacy transmission of the Duxianqin single-string zither?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### General Knowledge of Duxianqin

The Duxianqin, an ancient Chinese national musical instrument, possesses a certain charm associated with the southern region and represents the essence of the nation. The beautiful and delicate sound of the instrument blends perfectly with voice performances, captivating the Jing people in different phases of their lives. Duxianqin is an art form that involves both skillful performance and the skilled construction of musical instruments. It is closely connected to the spiritual and material parts of the Jing people's existence and is considered an important part of Jing culture. The Duxianqin is highly esteemed by the Jing people for its exceptional adaptability as it is capable of producing a multitude of sounds with just a single string. Widely utilized by the Jing people, it serves as a means to articulate emotions during festive occasions, amidst moonlit flowers, or simply for leisure. The singing of Jing folk melodies frequently goes along with it (Tzeng & Huang, 2017).

The Duxianqin is a highly valued musical instrument that originates from the mountainous districts of Fangchenggang City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It is closely associated with the Jing ethnic group and is commonly found in regions such as Shanxin, Qianwei, and Wutou. The Jing ethnic culture has a strong historical connection to this traditional bamboo musical instrument. The rich bamboo resources in southern China served as the primary source for the manufacture of these instruments. In ancient times, they were created from thick bamboo and had a pipe-like design. These bamboo-made musical instruments played by striking or plucking bamboo skin strings, also known as bamboo strings. This established the groundwork for the ongoing advancement of stringed instruments (He, 2010; Hou & Seekhunlio, 2023).

Duxianqin's monochord instrument with a historical association with the court had restrictions in terms of its relatively low volume, which restricted its suitability for usage in stage performances. Consequently, it became widely popular, mostly among the general populace, especially in Vietnam and specific areas of Guangxi, China. Public recognition

of this single-stringed instrument began to grow in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Su Shanhui, a musician from the Jing ethnic group who introduced it to the stage. Thus far, there has been a lack of a comprehensive and scientifically organized framework for examining the fundamental methods of performance (Huang, 2021).

### Posture for Optimal Performance of Duxianqin

The solo Duxianqin has a variety of performance positions, each with unique benefits, enabling performers to choose depending on personal tastes and musical needs or even develop bespoke positions for ease and adaptability. Irrespective of the selected stance, it should emanate a sense of authenticity, elegance, aesthetics, and suitability (Qin, 2016; Liu, 2013). Below are concise explanations of some prevalent playing positions:

#### *Flat-legged sitting posture*

This sitting position is commonly used for solo performances because it exudes dignity, elegance, and a natural appearance. The performer positions the Duxianqin horizontally on its frame at an elevation of around 60–70 cm, which often corresponds to the performer's seated lower abdomen height. The Duxianqin's body should be positioned approximately 25–30 cm apart from the performer's torso. The player assumes a seated position with legs extended and holds the left hand in a parallel position to the rocker in a relaxed manner.

#### *Cross-legged pose*

This position is casual and informal, not limited to any certain style, and does not necessitate a Duxianqin stand, giving it a more authentic and effortless appearance. Nevertheless, extended periods of sitting in this position can result in exhaustion. To adopt this posture, sit with knees crossed and put the end of the single-string Duxianqin with a joystick on the left thigh, allowing for left-hand control of the joystick. Keep the other end of the Duxianqin relaxed while maintaining an upright and smooth sitting position.

#### *Upright posture*

The goal of standing performance is to achieve a dynamic rhythm, enabling the performer to be in a state of relaxation and naturalness while adapting to different postures as required. The movements can align with the rhythm of the music, and physical engagements with other artists, dancers, or the audience can be facilitated. The performer should select an appropriate elevation for the Duxianqin, often ranging from 80 to 100 centimeters, depending on their height. Typically, the instrument's body should be positioned in line with the performer's navel or be parallel to their raised left hand. At present, there is a lack of specialized support for single-string instruments used during standing concerts, with the majority relying on electrical fork-type lifting brackets.

## Methods for Enhancing Performance

The solo Duxianqin stands out as an instrument characterized by its reliance on overtones, setting it apart from other musical instruments. While playing, the musician delicately presses the flesh of their right pinky finger against a specific area on the string to effectively muffle the sound the string makes. Concurrently, they grasp a bamboo segment in their right hand to pluck the string (although contemporary artists often use their right hand unaided). When the string is plucked, the little finger quickly lets go of the string, creating harmonics from the muted part and primary vibrations from the entire length of the string. This distinctive audio system produces exquisite and mellow harmonics, a substantial sound level, and somewhat restrained primary tones (Dong, 2021).

The Duxianqin commonly employs harmonics produced by dampening the string at precise locations, such as the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth nodes. The six notes, generated exclusively by plucking the strings with the right hand, are commonly referred to as natural overtones. However, depending exclusively on these six inherent harmonics would be inadequate to fulfill the requirements of a musical performance. To address this limitation, the Duxianqin utilizes a unique mechanism: the joystick. Manipulating the joystick with the left hand allows the performer to adjust the string's tension, altering the pitch by either raising or lowering it. Extending the joystick outward intensifies the tension and pitch, and retracting it inward loosens the string and decreases the pitch. This manipulation facilitates the generation of more harmonics by adjusting the tension of the strings, thus expanding the instrument's capacity to produce a wider spectrum of musical tones and a more comprehensive musical composition (Chen, 2020).

## Research Theory

Musicology, the academic investigation of music, is essential for understanding the intricate relationship between music, literacy, and transmission. This discipline integrates both empirical and humanistic approaches, requiring thorough data gathering and systematic research methodology (Kramer, 2003). Ethnomusicology focuses on the cultural context of music, particularly its role in education, teaching, communication, and distribution across different cultures and regions. This methodology uses fieldwork to examine these aspects, aiming to unravel the sources, development, and evolution of music in many cultural settings. This study employs theories to comprehensively analyze Duxianqin's music and Su Haizhen's performing techniques. The adoption of a multidisciplinary approach enables a thorough examination of the various aspects of learning, teaching, literacy, and transmission that are inherent in Duxianqin music (Mu, 2003; Wang, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

Su Haizhen's approach to Learning and Teaching for Literacy Transmission with the Duxianqin Single-String

Zither involves a comprehensive and interdisciplinary methodology that encompasses various aspects of musicological and ethnomusicological research. The methodology for this study can be broken down into several key components:

1. Collect audio and video recordings of Duxianqin performances by Su Haizhen and other individuals in Dongxing City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. These recordings function as primary source materials for analysis.
2. Conduct fieldwork in Dongxing City to observe and document the cultural context of Duxianqin music. Conducting interviews with practitioners and community members will provide valuable insights regarding the instrument's cultural relevance and its role in the process of learning and teaching.
3. Accurately transcribe the Duxianqin performances from the collected recordings to notate the music precisely. Record all verbal accounts, narratives, or personal experiences about the instrument's transfer and the techniques and approaches used in its instruction.
4. Observe Su Haizhen's teaching methods and interactions with students in the context of Duxianqin's teachings. Record her educational methodologies, emphasizing how she facilitates literacy and knowledge transfer through her instructional techniques. Collect and examine any teaching materials, such as notation, instructional books, or resources used by Su Haizhen and other Duxianqin instructors. Analyze the ways in which these resources enhance the process of acquiring and imparting knowledge.
5. Examine the dynamics of teacher-student interactions during Duxianqin instruction. Examine the process of transferring, acquiring, and retaining knowledge, which has a role in literacy and the transmission of information within the musical culture.
6. Integrate data from both musicological and ethnomusicological research to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the processes of learning, teaching, literacy, and transmission within the framework of Duxianqin music.

This study employs a comprehensive approach to examine the intricate process of transmitting Duxianqin music and the role of Su Haizhen's teaching in fostering literacy within this distinctive musical tradition.

## RESULTS

### The Transmission of Duxianqin with a Focus on Folk Teaching

Su Haizhen's approach to preserving the Duxianqin heritage is primarily rooted in oral transmission and personalized instruction, with a focus on teaching performance skills, production processes, cultural origins, and other pertinent topics. This technique is crucial in preserving and promoting traditional teaching traditions, ensuring the ongoing flow of knowledge, education, literacy, and transmission of this musical tradition.

### **Individualized instruction**

During Su Haizhen's personal learning experience with the Duxianqin, the small student population and the abundant teacher's time facilitated individualized and direct instruction. Usually, the teacher would begin by teaching the pupils the melody and then guided them on playing the Duxianqin. The instructional procedure would advance gradually, with the instructor and learner working together to acquire one musical sentence at a time. Afterward, students would be motivated to engage in individual practice and request clarification on any difficult elements. The teacher would closely monitor the student's performance during their practice, promptly recognizing and correcting any problems that emerged. This method of identifying and resolving problems stands out for its promptness and capacity for quick adaptation (Figure 1).

In addition, individualized instruction requires the adjustment of teaching methods to cater to the diverse proficiency levels and abilities of each student within an appropriate instructional structure. This involves tailoring the instructional approach to align with individual students' personality characteristics and distinct learning conditions.

However, a greater number of people have expressed a desire to learn how to play the Duxianqin in recent years, driven by an increase in curiosity and cultural awareness. Su Haizhen's student base initially started with a small number of pupils, but it grew dramatically as demand increased. As a result of this growth, a student organization was established, which ultimately attracted 50 members. They all convened at Su Haizhen's apartment to get instructions in Duxianqin.

### **Collective teaching**

To meet the growing demand and ensure uninterrupted advancement for students, Su Haizhen used a communal teaching style. The Jingzu Duxianqin Art Training Base was founded in August 2013 as the only specialized training facility for Jingzu Duxianqin art in the Jingzu region. This training base, under the authority of the Dongxing Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Sports, and Tourism,



**Figure 1.** Individualized Instruction  
Source: Yiqian Liu

has the main role of instructing, protecting, preserving, and showcasing the Duxianqin legacy.

The demand for education from a larger student population drove the implementation of collective teaching, which led to a shift from an individualized teaching model to a group-based model. Contrary to Su Haizhen's personal experience of learning with the Duxianqin, present-day pupils are taught in a collective setting under Su Haizhen's supervision. Su Haizhen employs a one-to-many teaching method, where she teaches knowledge and skills to a group of students at the same time. However, she also takes into account each student's specific interests and ensures their educational advancement in terms of learning, teaching, literacy, and transmission (Figure 2).

Nevertheless, this collaborative instructional approach is subject to specific constraints. For example, Due to time limitations, problems that students may not notice during the instruction session may become evident later during their practice sessions. At such a juncture, they may solicit the teacher's counsel. Nevertheless, the teacher's attention may be focused on providing instruction to other students during that period, which could result in a delay in resolving the issue and impede the achievement of the desired teaching goals.

### **Transmission of Duxianqin to Individual Aptitude**

Within the domain of education, pupils demonstrate diverse levels of skill in playing the Duxianqin, which may frequently be related to characteristics such as their propensity for learning. Certain students demonstrate exceptional aptitude for learning and actively participate in rigorous self-study, resulting in swift advancement, whereas others may experience a slower progression in their academic pursuits. It is imperative for a skilled teacher to recognize and appreciate these individual characteristics of students, including their learning abilities and personal traits. This is particularly important in the context of education, teaching, literacy, and communication, and it requires the development of customized and efficient teaching methods. Typically, the practice of tailoring instruction to meet individual requirements can be classified into the following methodologies:



**Figure 2.** Collective Teaching  
Source: Yiqian Liu

### *Gender-based differentiated instruction*

Male performers were the dominant presence throughout Su Haizhen's training in the Duxianqin. However, a gradual shift has transpired, witnessing an increased presence of female participants who now outnumber their male counterparts. Female learners generally demonstrate a strong inclination towards meticulousness and disciplined practice routines, which calls for a teaching method that emphasizes the refinement of the intricacies of Duxianqin playing. In contrast, male learners may have superior physical strength and improved joystick mastery. With their logical thinking talents, individuals may discover it more effortless to utilize the overtone possibilities of the single-stringed Duxianqin, effectively conveying the creative essence of the music. Nevertheless, the declining population of male Duxianqin learners among the Jing ethnic group is causing apprehension. When Su Haizhen meets male students who are interested in learning the Duxianqin, her main goal is to foster their enthusiasm, gradually unleash their potential, and then offer more extensive guidance to foster male pupils in this tradition (Figure 3).

### *Age-based differentiated instruction*

In structuring her instruction, Su Haizhen accommodates a diverse age range among her students, ranging from 5-year-olds to individuals approaching 80 years. The difficulties and intricacies of acquiring proficiency in the Duxianqin vary among different age cohorts. Children who are younger than 12 years old may have a restricted ability to understand things; thus, it is important to provide them with gentle and interactive teaching methods. Their physical prowess may be inadequate for certain skills, therefore restricting their training to chores such as tuning, string cutting, and plucking. Once they attain sufficient power, they can then progress to joystick manipulation. On the other hand, older kids frequently demonstrate increased initiative and more advanced cognitive abilities. Su Haizhen primarily instructs through demonstrations, eliminating the necessity for a detailed, step-by-step teaching method (Figure 4).

### *Individualized instruction tailored to personal aptitudes*

Su Haizhen's student body consists of individuals with varied career backgrounds and musical abilities. Certain students may possess prior expertise in specialized music research or mastery of alternative musical instruments, which can expedite the learning process. Su Haizhen prioritizes the unambiguous transmission of core abilities to these students, enabling them to rapidly improve their competency in Duxianqin through repeated practice. On the other hand, pupils who do not have any previous musical experience need careful and detailed instructions that are given one step at a time. Su Haizhen prioritizes the nuances of Duxianqin playing and provides thorough, useful advice to prevent any delays brought on by haste. In addition, students who do not belong to the Jing ethnic group and are not familiar with the Jing language may need to be taught the lyrics, including pronunciation and melody, in conjunction with their Duxianqin training.



**Figure 3.** Su Haizhen's Duxianqin Classroom  
Source: Yiqian Liu



**Figure 4.** Training Base for the Teaching and Transmission of Duxianqin  
Source: Yiqian Liu

The flexibility of folk teaching methods has facilitated the continued preservation of the Qin culture, which is characterized by the use of a single string, within the Jing ethnic group up until the present time. Nevertheless, it has also posed obstacles to further enhancing the Duxianqin culture. Presently, the Duxianqin field requires a high level of expertise, making it necessary to incorporate Duxianqin training courses into established educational institutions like colleges. The establishment of a standardized teaching model is only possible through the transition from folk to professional instruction, which will facilitate the advancement of the Duxianqin heritage.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Su Haizhen's groundbreaking contributions to the realm of Duxianqin, a distinctive single-string zither associated with the Jing ethnic group, have significantly influenced the dissemination and conservation of this musical heritage. Su Haizhen's inventive approach to learning and teaching has been essential in preserving the enduring vitality of the Duxianqin culture.

Su Haizhen's teaching style is notable for her astute recognition of the many abilities and traits exhibited by her students. She acknowledges the heterogeneity of learners and customizes her training to cater to their specific requirements. Su Haizhen's adaptive teaching methodologies have

demonstrated efficacy in tailoring and optimizing the learning experience for every student, regardless of their gender, age, or personal abilities. This technique not only improves the learning results but also promotes a feeling of inclusiveness within the Duxianqin community (Wang & Farmer, 2008). Su Haizhen's methodology, emphasizes pulling, assisting, and leading, demonstrates her dedication to maximizing instructional resources and fostering collaborative learning. Through the identification of skilled students and their appointment as group leaders, she has established a vibrant and engaging learning atmosphere. This method encourages the practice of peer mentorship, allowing students to learn from each another. The active involvement of the community not only benefits the students, but also secures the preservation of the Duxianqin legacy (Tang, 2021; Kexia et al., 2023).

Within the broader context of cultural preservation, the creation of the Beijing Duxianqin Art Training Base is a notable and important achievement. This institution, overseen by Dongxing City's Cultural, Radio, Television, Sports, and Tourism Bureau, functions as a central location for the training, preservation, transmission, and display of Duxianqin art. The base has significantly contributed to enhancing the reputation and promotion of the Duxianqin legacy via training thousands of students and achieving several prizes in regional and national competitions (Li & Kantasiri, 2022; Seekhunlio et al., 2023). Su Haizhen's commitment to acquiring knowledge, instructing others, promoting literacy, and passing down the traditions of the Duxianqin culture demonstrates proactive endeavors to safeguard and disseminate this intangible cultural treasure. The Duxianqin legacy has been sustained by the teacher's inventive pedagogical approaches, flexibility, and backing from the training institution. Su Haizhen's work demonstrates the significance of creative and all-encompassing educational methods in safeguarding cultural assets (Law & Ho, 2011).

In conclusion, Su Haizhen's contribution to the subject of Duxianqin serves as a remarkable illustration of the profound influence a committed educator may have on the preservation and dissemination of cultural customs. Her dedication to customizing instructional approaches to meet the individual needs of each student, promoting cooperative learning, and making use of institutional resources has guaranteed the ongoing survival and expansion of the Duxianqin culture. The work of Su Haizhen will serve as a lasting source of inspiration for upcoming artists and educators in the field of preserving intangible cultural heritage.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project was financially supported by Mahasarakham University.

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