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GUQIN: MUZIKOS KELIAS

Guqin: The Path of Music

SUMMARY

In Chinese culture prevails understanding that every thing and phenomena in the universe follow their own Dao (Cosmic Path). The article discusses how Chinese literati generation after generation continuously reinterpreted and reinforced the idea of musical instrument guqin as Dao Path, making it a significant symbolic representation of Chinese culture. The Dao of guqin was gradually linked with a cluster of other cultural and philosophical ideas – the “Path of Music”, the “Path of Confucianism”, the “Path of the Sage”, the “Path of the Universe” and other “Paths”. Thus, a special instrument was transformed beyond its mere musical function, and was connected with ineffable Dao. The article concludes that consequently Dao can be interpreted as Dao of national culture, where important cultural contributors not only inherit from cultural tradition, but also continuously reconstruct and give life to the core ideas and values – Dao of the nation.

SANTRAUKA

Kinų kultūroje vyrauja supratimas, kad kiekvienas daiktas ir reiškinyvisatoje seka savo Dao (kosminiu keliu). Straipsnyje aptariama, kaip kinų intelektualai karta iš kartos nuolat iš naujo interpretavo ir stiprino muzikinio instrumento guqin, kaip Dao kelio, idėją, paversdami ją reikšminga simboline Kinijos kultūros reprezentacija. Guqin Dao pamažu buvo susietas su įvairių svarbių kultūrinių ir filosofinių idėjų lauku: *Muzikos keliu*, *Konfucianizmo keliu*, *Įšminčiaus keliu*, *Visatos keliu* ir kitais *keliiais*. Taigi specialus instrumentas buvo pakeistas taip, kad pranoko vien tik savo muzikinę funkciją ir susijo su nenusakomu Dao. Straipsnyje daroma išvada, kad tą Dao kelio idėją galima interpretuoti kaip nacionalinės kultūros Dao kelio idėją, kur reikšmingi kultūros kūrėjai ne tik paveldi iš savo kultūrinės tradicijos, bet ir nuolat rekonstruoja bei atgaivina kertines idėjas ir vertybes, sudarančias tautos Dao kelio esmę.

In April 2023, French President Macron visited China, and after his official visit in Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Macron travelled to Guangzhou for a private visit. Macron was greeted with a cup of tea and the “Flowing Wa-

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Dao, kelias, takas, intelektualai, muzika, guqin, liutnia, citra.
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ter" melody played on a Tang dynasty *guqin*, known as "The Jade Brocade of Ninth Heaven". Tea and *guqin* are certainly the most representative parts of traditional Chinese culture, but there is a deeper metaphor – the *guqin* musical piece "Flowing Water" is a symbol meaning dear friend, a hint to the mutual understanding and appreciation between Chinese and European cultures.

The story of *guqin* friends comes from "The Spring and Autumn Annals of the Lü Family", written in the Pre-Qin period, and is very well known in China:

Boya was good at playing the *guqin*, and his friend Zhong Ziqi enjoyed listening to him play. When Boya was playing the *guqin* and thinking of Mount Tai, Zhong Ziqi would say, "How beautiful and magnificent is the music! It was as if a high mountain stood before me." After a while, Boya was thinking of flowing water, and Zhong Ziqi said, "How beautiful and

smooth the music is, just like flowing water." When Zhong Ziqi died, Boya broke his *guqin* and never played it again. He thought that no one in the world deserved listening to his playing. (Lü, 2009)

Since then, the musical piece "Flowing Water" has become a symbol of friendship, just like the theme of landscape in traditional Chinese painting, where mountains and water are connected, as are the hearts of friends. The words understanding the music *zhi yin* 知音 became a synonym of dear friend or true friendship. Thus, to understand the music *zhi yin* 知音 means to understand the heart *zhi xin* 知心, and this kind of true understanding does not need words, it is deeper than a common friendship. In this sense, the *guqin*'s performance of "Flowing Water" (Gong, 2021) not only expresses the beauty of music, but also conveys the sound and power of the Dao Path 道.

THE ESSENCE OF THE PATH OF THE QIN

The *guqin* often is seen both as a musical instrument and *not* as an instrument at all. In Chinese music culture, the *guqin* has a special, even transcendental status. In terms of etymology, the *guqin* is originally called *qin* 琴, which means the instrument in Chinese, and thus *qin* has become the root word for many stringed instruments in Chinese. In the traditional Chinese musical instrument system, the *guqin* was praised as "the best and the most virtuous among all music instruments" (Ji, 1996). The shape and manufacturing methods of the *guqin* have not changed since the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 25–220). The oldest sur-

viving *guqin* is more than a thousand years old, and even became a United Nations Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. However, the most unique feature of the *guqin* is that, in addition to the instrument itself, there is also the Path of the Qin, which has been pursued philosophically by Chinese literati for generations. The Path of the Qin combines the philosophical concept of the Dao Path 道 with the *guqin* and music, resulting in an elegant, yet relatively conservative *guqin* culture that has been passed down to this day.

Music embodies the harmonious way of the universe and is an expression of

the resonance of all things and the unity of cosmos and humanity (Zhang and Vaitkevičius 2020). In the course of Chinese history, after the Zhou dynasty (1046 B.C.–256 B.C.), music quickly changed from its function of amusing the gods, to rational aesthetic thinking, and in the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–220 B.C.), as Confucianism became the ruling ideology, the aesthetic characteristics of

classical Chinese music theory and art theory finally became concentrated in *guqin* music through its Path of the Qin. If we further examine the connotation of the Path of the Qin in the framework of history, it includes the following three basic aspects: the unity of the Cosmos and humanity, the path of the sage, and the beauty of centered harmony *zhong he* 中和.

REACHING THE DIVINE THROUGH THE UNITY OF THE COSMOS AND HUMANITY

In early human societies, the worship of the gods was an important ritualistic function of music. In “Magic, Science and Religion” (Malinowski 2014), Malinowski argues that myth has the normative power to establish customs, to control norms of behavior, and to give dignity and importance to an institution. The Confucian classic “Book of Rites”, written in the Han dynasty, records music for important ceremonial occasions such as the Chinese worship of the heavens and ancestors. The following quote from the “Book of Rites” illustrates well Malinowski’s argument on the myth’s normative power:

(Sacrifice to Heaven) The emperor ordered the music masters to repair the various percussion instruments, adjust the stringed instruments, prepare the various decorations for the dance, and place the woodwind and stone instruments in their proper places. Amidst the grand music, the emperor ordered the high priest to pray to the mountain gods and river gods for the people. One hundred young nobles were ordered to perform the dance asking for rain, praying for good winds and a good harvest of grain. (Legge, 1885)

(Ancestor worship) The tributes of animals were placed on the table, and various musical instruments such as lyres and bells were placed under the table. These rituals not only invited the spirits of our ancestors to descend from Heaven, but more importantly, made fathers and sons, brothers, old and young, and husbands and wives to understand their status and position. That was expressing gratitude to Heaven for granting us parent-like love. (Legge, 1885)

As the earliest invention of the silk-stringed instrument, the *guqin* assumed the dual identity of a ceremonial instrument and a musical instrument during important events such as heavenly and ancestral rituals. But the very unique feature of the *guqin* was that the instrument had quite a noble birth. In a mixture of Chinese mythology and history, the *guqin* was crafted by ancient sages and was made not for personal entertainment, but in an attempt to express an understanding of cosmic order and a desire for human harmony. As a result, the *guqin* was given rich and detailed interpretations in the context of unity of the Cosmos and humanity – another pre-

vailing Chinese philosophical idea usually known as *tian ren he yi* 天人合一. Future generations of scholars emphasized and regularly cited *guqin*, and have turned it into what American anthropologist Clifford Geertz might call “a web of significance” in musical culture.

In his *Xin Lun* 新论, Huang Tan 恒谭 of the Han dynasty suggested that Shennong, the ancestor of ancient Chinese agriculture, “observed and learned from the principles of operation of Heaven and Earth ... and [based on that] began to use the wood of the parasol tree to craft the *guqin*, turned silk into strings, and used the *guqin* to communicate divine realms, and to seek harmony between Heaven and Earth.” (Collected Books of Ancient Philosophers, 1986)

By the Song dynasty, Zhu Changwen’s “History of the Qin” directly traced the origin of the *guqin* back to the legendary Fuxi’s eight diagrams of the *ba gua* 八卦: “Long ago, the ancient sage King Fuxi not only painted eight diagrams, but also made elegant *guqin*. Eight diagrams were used to calculate the operation of Heaven and Earth, and *guqin* was used to investigate the sounds between Heaven and Earth.” (Zhu) At this level, myth, history, and philosophy were solidified in the *guqin*, in a real physical presence that could be touched and felt. The *guqin* was thus directly connected to the origins of music, and has played an extremely important role in shaping the cultural orthodoxy of *guqin* music.

Guqin was originally made of a piece of wood and five strings. Later, in order to expand the range and enhance the timbre, the number of strings was increased to seven. The strings were calibrated according to the pentatonic scale of *do, re,*

mi, so and *la*. The sound board was made of cork and the underboard of hardwood¹. Thirteen inlays are used on the *guqin* to mark the pitch position. The middle digit is half the length of the string, or an octave, and the left and right sides are calculated by using the method of subtracting and adding thirds. The instrument structure of the *guqin* has not changed since the Han dynasty and continues to this day. During the 400 years of the Han dynasty (202 B.C. – 220 B.C.), with the rise of the *yin yang* theory, *guqin* was immediately connected with the cosmology of *yin yang* and the five phases, thus the “unity of the Cosmos and humanity” of *guqin* was first interpreted as: the specific shape of *guqin* represents the model of the universe. This is how Huang Tan describes that in his “Xin Lun”:

The length of the *guqin* is three feet, six inches and six points², which represents the number of days in a year. The thickness of the *guqin* is one inch and eight points, symbolizing the harmony of yin and yang (18=3 times 6, where 3 is the yang number and 6 is the yin number); the width of the *guqin* is 6 inches, representing the six basic tones of music. The top of the *guqin* is round, symbolizing the sky, and the bottom is flat, representing the Earth. The head is wide and the tail is narrow, indicating the difference in rank and dignity.

In the Song dynasty of the 10th century, Zhu Changwen’s “History of the Qin” further elaborated on the strings of the *guqin*, and the emblem that marks the pitch of the instrument on the basis of Chinese image mathematics:

In the past, the sage Fuxi made eight diagrams and a *guqin*. The eight diagrams were used to deduce the truth of the Uni-

verse, and the *guqin* was used to investigate the harmony of Heaven and Earth. The sounds of Heaven and Earth all come from *qi*-energy, and *qi*-energy corresponds to every month, so there are 12 kinds of *qi*. Twelve kinds of *qi* are divided into four seasons, but the growth of all things cannot be separated from the Earth, so the Earth controls all the seasons. There are 13 kinds of *qi* altogether, so the *guqin* has 13 inlay positions. The one in the middle represents Earth. In the Book of Rites, in the chapter Yue Ling, it is said: Earth is the center (of five directions), its corresponding pitch is *gong* 宫 (*do*), which is the sound of the yellow bell in phonology.

Zhu Changwen further combined the five tones (*gong* 宫, *shang* 商, *jiao* 角, *zheng* 征 and *yu* 羽) with the five phases (*metal* 金, *wood* 木, *water* 水, *fire* 火 and *earth* 土) and the five directions (east 东, south 南, west 西, north 北 and middle 中), forming a community of mutual induction of music, geography and cosmic *qi*.

The sages observed the changes in the phases of metal, wood, water, fire,

and earth appearing in the sky, the *qi* of Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn moving in different seasons, and metal, wood, running water, stove fire, and fields being used by people in their lives, so they formulated the corresponding pentatonic scale of *do, re, mi, so* and *la*. All the music in the world uses these five tones as their origin.

Here, the *guqin*, as an expression of musical essence, is connected to all that exists, and is given a practical function in “understanding *qi*-energy by observing wind”. (Zhang and Vaitkevičius, 2020) Since then, the *guqin* has been transformed from one of the instruments of ritual music and dance, to a cultural symbol of philosophical depth and rational spirit. Through the performance and musical expression of the *guqin*, the performer and the listener can feel the *qi* of the universe, and in the many stories of the *guqin*, those who are good at the *guqin* can even judge whether society behaves in harmony with the Cosmos.

THE PATH OF THE SAGE

If we emphasize that the *guqin* had noble blood since its birth, then even a more significant meaning of the “Path of the *Guqin*” *qin dao* 琴道 lies in the inheritance of the tradition of the “Path of the Sage” *sheng ren zhi dao* 圣人之道, also known as orthodoxy *dao tong* 道统. The inheritance of this orthodoxy is reflected in the *guqin* culture, that is, the important performers or composers of the *guqin* music are consistently aligned with the inheritors of Confucian or Daoist thought. As a result, *guqin* culture was always accompanied by the images of sages in

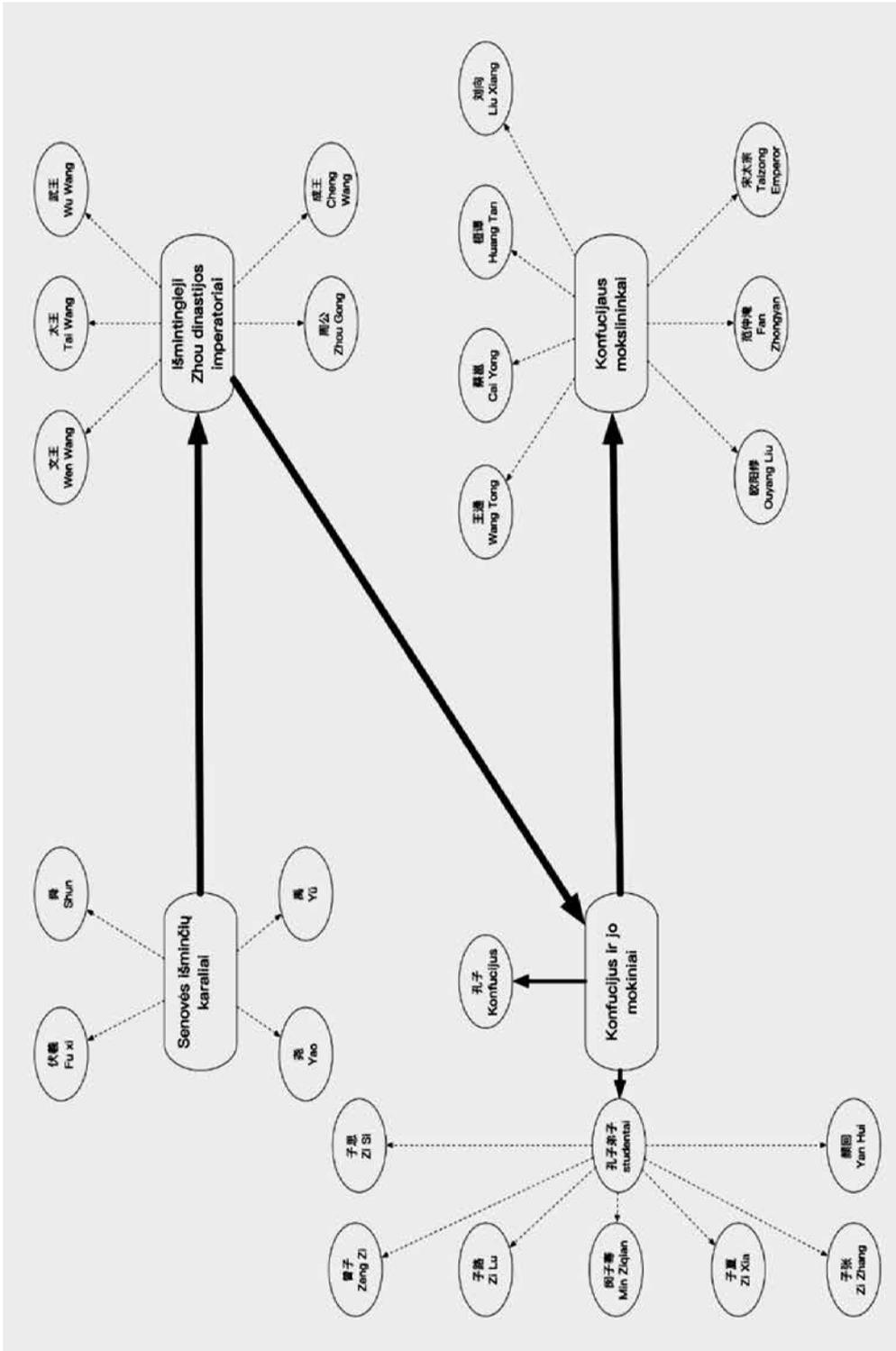
Chinese civilization, and thus was imbued with a presence that transcends music. As a synthesis between music and sages, *guqin* represented the continuation of tradition, as well as harmonious governance and order in the world. The classical scripture the “Book of Rites” *li ji* 礼记 presented the idea that “the scholar does not part with his *qin* or *se* without good reason” (Legge, 1885) which shaped *guqin* into the image of a scholar-official *shi da fu* – the cultural symbol of an elite group responsible for royal politics and the transmission of civilization.

Both the “Records of the Grand Historian” *shi ji* 史记 and “Huainanzi” 淮南子 in the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 24) wrote that “Shun as the Son of Heaven, played five stringed *qin*, sang the South Wind poem, and thus the world was properly governed.” (Sima, 1959) “The Outer Commentary to the Book of Songs by Master Han” *han shi wai zhuan* 韩诗外传 highlighted that the aim of the performance of *guqin* was to “sing to the accompaniment of the lute of the lessons of former kings.” Master Kong 孔子, the founder of Ru 儒 tradition, usually known as Confucianism in the West, left a number of popular stories about him and the *guqin* for the sake of posterity: he studied the *qin* under the *qin* Master Shi Xiang; he sang and played the *qin* in the face of military turmoil and was not afraid of danger; in his later years, he sat on the apricot platform and played the *qin* amidst the noise of many disciples reading aloud; according to legend, Master Kong (Confucius) himself composed the *qin* songs “The Melody of Returning” *jiang gui cao* 将归操 and “The Melody of the Orchid” *yi lan cao* 猗兰操. There is no doubt that as a consequence of the master’s personal example, in later generations, no one even tried to attack or challenge the cultural status and sophisticated taste of the *guqin*.

In the Northern Song dynasty (A.D. 960–A.D. 1127), along with the revival and reconstruction of Confucianism, Zhu Changwen, a Confucianist living in Suzhou, wrote the “Qin History” for *guqin*. In this book, from the abundant historical records, he found evidence for almost every important person in the Confucian orthodoxy *dao tong* 道统 to be accompanied by the *guqin*. The his-

tory, that starts with the legendary wise rulers Yao, Shun and Yu, then continues with intelligent kings and benevolent ministers of the Zhou dynasty, and includes Confucius himself and his important students, as well as significant Confucian thinkers and writers from the Han to Tang dynasties spanning 800 years. It is rich with colorful stories about most, if not all, being related to *guqin* or its music. Zhu’s aforementioned unique text, literally “The History of the Musical Instrument”, masterfully integrated the legacy of Confucian thought with the history of the development and inheritance of *guqin*. It is because of this book that the “Path of the Qin” became one with the “Path of the Sage” from China’s Classical Ancient times.

In Zhu Changwen’s “History of the Qin”, the ancient sage kings Fu Xi 伏羲, Yao 尧, Shun 舜, Yu 禹 formed the first *guqin* performers group, representing the establishment of the *guqin* and the order of the Cosmos and man. In the Zhou dynasty, King Wen 文王, King Wu 武王, King Cheng 成王, and Duke Zhou 周公 formed the second *guqin* group of performers and composers, representing the integration of *guqin* and the order of the state. Confucius and his students formed a third group, representing the official alliance of Confucian culture and *guqin*, where *guqin* expressed the culture of ritual and music so emphasized by Confucians. Important Confucians from the Han dynasty to the Song dynasty formed the fourth group of *guqin* legacy, which represented the mainstream of the historical development of “the Path of the Qin”, and pointed out the direction for the development of *guqin* music.



THE BEAUTY OF CENTERED HARMONY AND THE SUBTLETY OF GREAT SOUND

In the Chinese tradition of thought, the development of the concept of harmony *he* 和 was based on music and was regarded as the ultimate goal pursued by philosophy, aesthetics, cosmology, and politics, and was also perceived as the basic feature of *guqin* aesthetics. Xu Shangying 徐上瀛 of the Ming dynasty said in his text of “Xishan Qin Kuang” 溪山琴况: “Ancient sages had a deep understanding, had strong personal integrity attuned with their spirit. They managed their feelings and dispositions, and people in the world followed their example. They integrated those higher principles of integrity into *qin*, and in *qin*, the most important feature was harmony.” (Chinese art research institute et al, 2010) Later generations took it for granted, that *guqin*, as the core instrument of Chinese musical aesthetics, was the representation of harmony. If we analyze the concept of harmony even further, both from the macro and micro scales, we can interpret it as harmony on three different levels: the harmony of the universe, the harmony of politics, and the harmony of one’s inner world.

In the Qing dynasty, the “Spring Cao Tang Qin scores – Drum Qin eight” 春草堂琴谱·鼓琴八则 text states: “The *qin* instrument contains the original sound of the universe, nourishes moral behavior aligned with centered harmony, and speaks the subtle metaphorical language of Dao. Thus, the *qin* player’s mind transcends things, and then the music is in tune with Nature, and subtle things are

hard to express in words, but the player and the listener can communicate through their hearts.” (Chinese art research institute et al, 2010) If *guqin*’s shape as a small universe expresses the structure and inner laws of the larger universe, then the harmonious operation of all things in the universe can be perceived through the beauty of centered harmony, where humanity and all living things would resonate and dance together in harmony. In the “Shang Shu” 尚书 it is said that, “At the nine notes, even phoenixes, both male and female, came to dance their stately dances.” (Ruan, 2009) During the Spring and Autumn period, it was said about Shi Kuang, a *qin* master, “When he was playing the *guqin* in a higher F key, sixteen black cranes came to the door of the corridor. When Shi Kuang continued playing, they stretched their necks to sing and spread their wings to dance.” (Yang, 1981) When Zeng Zi, a student of Confucius, played lute and sang at the foot of the mountain, all the mountain birds gathered around him. (Zhu) Under proper conditions, the harmony between the Universe and Nature can be expressed concretely and vividly through the performance of *guqin* as a prelude.

The beauty of centered harmony in human society is manifested as “political harmony”, while the political ontology of Confucian society lies in “the governance by ritual and music”. However, the pursuit of ritual and the pursuit of music paradoxically strive in two con-

tradictory directions. In Xunzi's chapter "Discourse on Music", it is said: "Music joins together what is common to all; ritual separates what is different." (Knoblock, 1994: 84) Real music makes everyone forget themselves and enter into an elevated state of mind, forming a spiritual community. Rites *li* 礼 deliberately distinguish the differences and social statuses among people, keeping interpersonal relations in order, and making the country run smoothly on track. Therefore, rites and music are just like *yin* and *yang*, which manifest both as a contradiction, and as an indivisible whole. A long time ago, Shennong 神农 created *qin* to calm the mind, prohibit social extravagance and promiscuity, to get rid of negative desires, and let people return to their true selves."³ Thus the music of *qin* was not used for entertainment, but for regulation and alignment. "The emperor under his brilliant governance inherited his ancestral land, and the country was filled with hymns devoted to him. Suddenly, the auspicious Phoenix flew over, and people composed a *guqin*'s ballad called: 'Song of the Phoenix'. The Dukes of Zhao and Kang were praised in the poem: look at the Phoenix, forever singing on the mountain top. Look at those parasol trees, always facing the sun." (Zhu) The prevalent idea was that only when politics are clear and appropriate, the wind is adjusted and the rain is beneficent, in other words, the whole atmosphere or situation becomes favorable to people, and only then the music can become harmonious, and all beings, people and animals included, resonate with each other.

"The ancients believed that *qin* can cultivate one's character, because *qin* has the *qi*-energy of great harmony, thus its sound was called: the subtle sound *xi sheng* 希声." (Chinese art research institute et al, 2010) Indeed, practical significance of *guqin* is that on a personal level it can be used as practice of self-improvement *xiu xing* 修行, and also as cultivation of inner *qi*-energy, and then forms an aesthetic quality of "the great sound is subtle", where a certain barely audible rhythm *yun* 韵 is more important than the sound *yin* 音. From the perspective of the literati people who played the *guqin*, the music of *guqin* was essentially heavenly music (or the music of Nature) *tian yue* 天乐. For them, being in tune with the "Path of Qin" implied that it also meant being in tune with the Path of Heaven. Therefore, they believed that one's inner world and *qi*-energy can be expressed by means of *guqin*: "the sound of *qin* arises from the depths of my heart", "The Dao Path gives birth to *qi*-energy, *qi*-energy gives birth to form, form moves in interaction with *qi*-energy, and thus the sound arises. That being so means that the origin of form, *qi*-energy and sound are due to the breathing of the Cosmos that manifests as wind, when it is faster the sound goes up, when slower – the sound goes down, when aligned, it is in the middle." (Chen) More importantly, because the volume of *guqin* naturally is quite low, and the second part of the musical sentence often is produced by vibrating a string, by the end of the vibration, it becomes almost impossible to actually hear the sound, which makes music that only sounds in the performer's heart. And that is what

makes *guqin*'s music different from other instruments – it brings into play a certain rhythm *yun* 韵, a quality that always has something more, but can never be exhausted (有余而不尽). That rhythm *yun* 韵 still is the movement of music, however, inaudible music, that echoes in the hearts of the performers and of dear friends *zhi yin* 知音. The idea of the dynamic and vibrant rhythm of *qi – qi yun sheng dong* 气韵生动 through the work of “Six Principles of Chinese Painting”, written in around the 6th century by Xie

He, became very important in the aesthetic theory of Chinese calligraphy and painting. However, if one does not go back to the source and does not understand how *guqin* expresses the musical rhythm *yun* 韵, then it is difficult to fundamentally understand the core meaning of Xie He's aesthetic principle of *qiyun*. This idea of subtle *yun* of *guqin* music was very well described in the poem “The Shortened Form of a Magnolia Flower. *Qin*” written by the Song dynasty literati Su Shi (1037 B.C.–1101 B.C.):

Leisurely and tranquil,
When all voices are hushed, the sky and Earth seem still.
Before a tune is played
By fingers and lute of jade, its feeling is conveyed.
The breeze saddens the stream,
The lute exhales an unfulfilled eternal dream.
Sleepless when back, I hear
Its music lingering all night long in the ear.

INTERPRETATION OF DAO OF A NATIONAL CULTURE

As we are approaching the end of this discussion it is worthy to come up with some conclusions and summarize the cluster of important Chinese literati ideas that all link to the Path of Qin. The Path or Dao, as Chinese call it, on one hand is the highest, the most sublime, primordial principle of the Universe, that invisibly operates both without and within human consciousness. On the other hand, especially in *guqin*'s case, it is the educated literati people who continuously inherit, recreate and enrich Dao with new energy and qualities. Through literati work the Dao of the Qin, the Dao of the Universe and the Dao of national culture become closely intercon-

nected. The interpretation and building of national culture are based on the “rational critique of history”. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz proposed in “The Interpretation of Cultures” that culture is the “web of significance” woven by human beings. According to him, the establishment of national culture is not only an observation, but more importantly, it is based on continuous interpretation and reinforcement. People's faith in the sacredness of myths and rites essentially means willingness to accept the symbols of the national culture, consequently the symbolic meaning of those symbols profoundly influences individual and group behavior. (Geertz 1973) In

this sense, the core position of *guqin* in Chinese music culture represents or manifests the fundamental ideas of harmony and the Dao Path. At the same time, this position and its aliveness in culture is inseparable from generations and generations of scholars who kept *guqin* ideas and practice alive, and who through literature, history, and other means, continuously reinforced it.

The continuous reinforcement of core ideas and waving of “web of significance” of one national culture by its thinkers, artists, leaders and other contributors, becomes more evident in comparison. Thus, let the reader allow me to conclude the article with a short comparison with the contribution of M. K. Čiurlionis to building Lithuanian national culture and making some ideas and symbols inseparable from Dao Path of Lithuania. Chinese believe that the spiritual or inner world of humanity, on the level of the Dao Path, is one and interconnected and does not belong to one separate region or culture. When researching M. K. Čiurlionis’ life and works, especially while reading “Čiurlionis: Kūrėjas ir Žmogus” written by Stasys Yla, I observed a lot of striking parallels that resonate with literati and *guqin* history in China. It is quite evident that Čiurlionis, as a musician and composer, by exploring and collecting Lithuanian folk music, and then looking for its new modern expressions, on one hand inherited a lot from tradition, on the other hand, from the perspective of art and culture, carried a modern reconstruction of Lithuanian culture, and gave a soul to the Lithuanian national-

ity. The music and paintings of Čiurlionis reveal to us, the non-Lithuanian observers and researchers, the “web of significance”. As Čiurlionis observes: “Talents (...) are born and die. And songs, the new songs that come straight from the spirit of the forefathers, nobody produces any more. (...) And the time will come when our composers will open that enchanted realm (...) and then we will all understand ourselves better, because it will be the true music of the Lithuanian nation.” (Yla, 1984) It can be said, that the tone of these words and the implied sense of responsibility are almost indistinguishable from the declarations and the commitment that Chinese literati in the Song dynasty displayed when they were reestablishing Confucian cultural orthodoxy.

We know that at the First Art Exhibition of Lithuania, Čiurlionis often performed and improvised the song created by Vincas Kudirka “Lithuania, Our Fatherland” which later became the official anthem of Lithuania. He made certain musical changes to the long breath and pianissimos. It is hard to say whether the version on YouTube (Berwick, 2017) that I enjoyed listening to was the one that Čiurlionis made changes to, but for the musically attuned ear, it is quite clear that at the time the words “*mūs žingsnius telydi*” and “*tegel meilė Lietuvas*” are reached, then the techniques and the way of silencing the volume of vocals and music remind us so much of how *yun* is manifested while playing *guqin*. In both cases, the sound of the music softens so much that it seems that it has stopped, but the inner feeling continues

to develop. Perhaps one of the reasons why the creativity of Čiurlionis is so appealing to the Chinese is exactly this striking parallel – as the aesthetics of

guqin music is interconnected with Chinese calligraphy and painting, so are Čiurlionis' musical ideas inseparable from his paintings.

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Endnotes

- ¹ This is also the common manufacturing method of most Chinese and Western stringed instrument resonance boxes.
- ² The dimensions here are in traditional Chinese units.
- ³ Shennong 神农 a "Divine Farmer" or "Divine Husbandman" was a legendary Chinese ruler known as the first Emperor Yan, who has become a deity in folk religion.

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