

# Study on the Guqin Teaching Method: “Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching”

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## Abstract

“Inner understanding through oral teaching” is the main teaching method that runs through Guqin for thousands of years. In order to inherit and protect traditional Guqin art originally in the modern society, it’s very important to research this method which is used to teach Guqin in the ancient. It consists of two teaching levels: “Oral” and “Mentality”: the combination of the two promotes the inheritance and development of traditional Guqin. The teaching method of “inner understanding through oral teaching” is closely related to the application of the word reduction spectrum, and it is not contradictory to “viewing teaching”. In the current society, “inner understanding through oral teaching” is of great significance to the protection and inheritance of Guqin.

## Keywords

Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching, Guqin

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## 1. What Is the Connotation of the “Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching”

“Inner understanding through oral teaching” is a teaching method formed under certain historical conditions and social and humanistic environment. It mainly includes two aspects: “inner understanding” and “oral teaching”. The so-called “oral teaching” means that the teacher imparts skills through actions, such as speaking, singing and acting; “Inner understanding” mainly refers to the way in which the students can understand the spiritual essence of the music beyond the technical level in a way that makes the students understand the spirit. In the article, Liu Fulin mentioned the dialectical relationship between “Oral” and “Mentality”: “use ‘oral teaching’ to teach the music that heart can feel, which is through the direct singing or performance of music and through the transmis-

sion. The communication of the mind such as language and non-verbal body behavior makes the music not only stay at the level of the form, but also strengthens the inheritor's understanding of the music and the feeling of the music, and achieves the resonance of the music charm. It can be 'mouthed', and the inner charm can only be understood, which cannot be said, only by the inner heart to comprehend, relying on 'heart' to teach." [1] From the teaching technology level, "oral teaching" is the foundation. The "oral teaching" technique is patiently demonstrated by the teacher, tirelessly explaining and correcting the students' mistakes, etc. Fan Zuying said, "This improvisational way of 'Inner understanding through oral teaching' not only emphasizes the overall grasp of intuition, but also emphasizes the spiritual communication between the two sides. Through the direct singing and playing of music, and through the means of language and non-language communication, the inherited can strengthen their understanding of music..." [2]. The "oral teaching" stage is the beginning stage of the students' mastery of skills and preliminary understanding of the music. "Inner understanding" is often the only way to reach the deeper level of art, just as Boya who has learned Guqin for three years, and it is said that Boya has mastered the skills of Guqin playing. Even the part of the playing skills taught, that is, the "oral teaching" has been learned, but the book also said that "as for the spirit of loneliness, the love of the single, Boya cannot get it" [3], so Cheng Lian pointed to Boya to Penglai Mountain self-realization. This was the performance of "inner understanding". The resulting effect is the ultimate purpose and intention of "oral teaching". From the spirit and attitude of teaching, "oral teaching" and "inner understanding" are a whole. In addition to the transfer of knowledge and skills, teachers and students have established a bond of some kind of feelings. The teacher not only teaches students how to play Guqin, but also explains with the heart. There is some deep communication and interaction between the teacher and the students. Because there is no gap between the teacher and the students, the students can learn what they have learned in this situation.

## 2. Why to Study Guqin Teaching Method: "Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching"

The inheritance of traditional Chinese art in ancient times is mainly based on "inner understanding through oral teaching", from martial arts, opera, to medicine, architecture, etc., all rely on the direct contact between the master and the apprentice to spread the skills, although there are some related teaching content which is handed down in words, such as music scores, boxing, medical books, etc., but the essentials in each field must be taught by the teacher's instructions.

Since ancient times, the teaching of Guqin has also been dominated by "Inner understanding through oral teaching", such as Boya learning "Shuixian Cao" from Chen Lian [4], and Ji Kang in the solitary hall to learn "Guangling San" from the ancients [3], the teachings and studies involved in these legends or documents. Basically, the teacher presides on the premise of the teaching, highlighting the students' understanding of the spirit of the music. The teacher does

not emphasize that the students imitate themselves in the process of learning the Guqin, but encourage and respect the students to take the initiative to absorb the nourishment of nature and seek internal and external spiritual state. It is precisely that the traditional teaching method encourages students to pursue the spirit and the realm of art, so that the traditional repertoire has been continuously integrated into the new vitality in the inheritance of thousands of years of Guqin history. The author believes that the connotation of the traditional teaching method has important guiding significance for the inheritance and creation of Guqin art. This is the main purpose of this paper.

### 3. The Use of the “Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching” Method in Guqin

The author’s induction and understanding of the “oral teaching” method comes from the author’s experience of learning Guqin from the older generation. The author’s enlightenment teacher is also the author’s grandmother - Mr. Liu Rongzhen, who likes to sing while playing Guqin which is called “singing and tuning”, she sings the breath, the string, the fingering, etc. (the following example is the author’s notation):

The image displays three staves of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Below each staff are specific fingering instructions:

- Staff 1: 7 5 7 5 7 5 6 4 7 4 6 4 5 3 6
- Staff 2: 5 3 4 2 5 2 4 2 3 1 4 1 4 1 5 2 6 3
- Staff 3: 5 6 up 7 4 4 up down pinch 6 4 4 7 6 4 1 6 gather

The above method of “oral transmission” is called “singing string”. When I interviewed Mr. Sun Jinxi (the son of Sun Shaotao), the first thing he can recall is that his father taught him to play the string of “Yangguan Three Repeat”: “Three Four five six...”. This method can help the learners to remember the breath, the string position and the partial fingering of the music. As a beginner, the students of the Guqin will promote their memory of the music.

In addition to “singing the strings”, the most common way is to play Guqin face to face between the teacher and the student. The teacher plays a sentence or repeats the demonstration. The student imitates or follows the song. The author has followed Liu Yang, Mei Yuqiang and Liu Shanjiao to study Guqin. When the student learns Guqin, he learns in this way almost. In the process of teaching, the teacher will express his understanding of a certain paragraph or sentence of the music, and then demonstrate it repeatedly. The impression is more profound. When Mr. Liu Yang taught “The Song of Woodman”, as in the sixth pa-

ragraph, “Singing” [3], Liu said: “You have to feel the woodman’s feeling of singing.” He repeatedly played to the author, from his melody, he can experience the “Clothing Shaking Thousands of Time” [3] when he is logging, and his debauchery when he sings. In the eleventh section of “The Drunk Dance Down the Mountain” [3], he said that he wants to express a kind of drunkenness, and imitates the drunken steps to play the “Hook and Pick” behind him. It is very vivid and he can put the feelings which felt in the heart and which are unreservedly placed in the sound of Guqin, and then carefully explained and demonstrated. At that time, although the author did not have enough skills, but left a very deep impression in my heart, in the future, every time I play “The Song of Woodman”, I will carefully understand the feeling that the teacher said.

The author believes that all the teachings of “oral teaching” have some methods that belong to “oral teaching”, but not all “oral teaching” can have the meaning and effect of “teaching”. “Inner understanding” is a teaching method based on skill teaching and transcending skills. It requires teachers and students to carry out the teaching of the spirit of music through face-to-face communication or other means. Judging from the definition of “mentality”, that is, “the way to make students understand the spiritual essence of the music beyond the technical level in the way of making students understand the truth” [1], the author believes that there must be several prerequisites: a, Artistic accomplishment of teachers and the understanding of the music and the realm of playing; b, the student’s own artistic literacy, understanding and the pursuit of artistic conception. The meaning and effect of “heart-to-heart” will depend on the above two conditions. As Liu Fulin said in the article: “Chinese traditional music fully exerts the interaction between ‘heart’ and ‘love’, music is provided by ‘heart’ and is accepted by ‘mentality’.” [1] That is, the premise of the “grant” is that the teacher and student are “heart” relative, and Guqin music is a living inheritance content full of emotions and fullness. On the contrary, if the teacher has limitations on the understanding of the music and the realm of playing, he can’t play the role of “mentality” well. On the other hand, if the students’ understanding is not enough or the music is tasted, then it cannot understand the inspiration of the teacher accordingly. However, compared with “speaking”, “teaching” is not a concrete method. It can be a teacher’s intention to demonstrate a piece of music; it can also be a movement full of meaning, or it can be a melody, but it can play a role in enabling students to comprehend the deep connotation of music. In the process of “teaching through the heart”, the teacher’s understanding of the music will be integrated into his own demonstration and singing, and the teacher’s breath will be passed on to the students subtly. Therefore, from a deeper level, the teacher may not only pass on which the music itself is, and more importantly, it conveys the personality and heart of the teacher.

#### **4. “Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching” and Visual Teaching**

Guqin spectrum has been constantly changing in the thousands of years, from

the earliest existing text spectrum, to the reduction of the word spectrum, to the combination of the subtraction spectrum and the ruler spectrum of Qing Dynasty, and finally used by people now. The combination of the notation or the staff and the subtraction spectrum, the information of the score is becoming more and more clearly, and the rhythm, melody and fingering can be learned directly from the score. The change of musical scores provides great convenience for those who learn Guqin, and also establishes a certain basis for the preservation of music. Today, when the music score is clarified, does it mean that the “inner understanding through oral teaching” teaching method can be withdrawn from the historical stage? Or is there any conflict between the visual teaching method and the teaching of “inner understanding through oral teaching”?

I have visited some people who have studied Guqin with the older generation of Qin players. They remember the experience of learning Guqin before. For example, Liu Yanling once studied Qin with his father Liu Shaochun. He recalled that his father was teaching first which he will be taught to read the scores (reduced word spectrum), for example, before teaching him to play “The Wine Mania”, first teach him to know the spectrum of “The Wine Mania” and then teach him fingering according to the music. Liu Rongzhen recalled that when his father Liu Shaochun learned Guqin from Sun Shaotao, Mr. Sun also taught him to recognize the word spectrum. It can be seen that the older generation of Guqin players are not out of the spectrum in the process of teaching the Qin, not blindly “oral teaching”, but in accordance with the local “oral teaching”.

With the continuous penetration of western music and folk music on the Guqin, much rhythmic melody appeared in the music of modern and ancient Guqin. Among them, the representative works of Western music infiltrated the melody of the music, Gong Yi, Xu Guohua’s “Spring Breeze”, Jin Xiang’s “Lou Lan Scattered”, “Golden Love” created by Jin Fu Zai, and the representative works of folk music include the “Dao Yi” and “Chang Men Yuan” of the Meilong School. Such melody and rhythm are easy to record through the notation and staves, while the other part is from the rhythm of the rhythm that was passed down in ancient times was difficult to express its subtle relationship through the combination of notes. The musician Wu Wenguang proposed the theory of “speed change” for the rhythm of such free transformation. He said: “I am aware that there are many so-called free rhythms related to the change of speed in Chinese Guqin music performance. The ancient Chinese Qin masters know how to use the speed of the art in the performance. For example, the music of the Guangling School is played in them. It is full of various irregular tempo transformation phenomena.” [5] Although Mr. Wu believes that the tempo transformation principle can record the rhythm of free rhythm, some Guangling school song is still difficult to beat the combination between the records, the reason is the use of “breath”. Du Yaxiong and Qin Dexiang said, “Music score is just a kind of symbol used to record music, although it has some corresponding relationship with music sound in a certain extent and in a sense, but it can’t record the music sound accurately and comprehensively...” [6]. Therefore, in a

sense, music scores can only be a reference for teaching, not a template for inheritance, otherwise, the original state of art may be distorted.

There are many differences between the music that was handed down in the ancient way and the Guqin music created by the modern and contemporary Guqin. The former uses the “breath” to lead the fingering, to express the god, and the “breath” can be expressed, but it cannot be said just be felt, which cannot be quantified, must be guided by the teacher’s heart to guide the students, while the latter with “sound” will be as the main body, emphasizing the melody of sound and sound, just like the pitch relationship marked in the staff or the notation, for the subtle changes in phonology cannot be fully displayed. For example, the ancient “Yin” and “Nao” categories have only the “Yin” and “Nao” subtractive writings on many of today’s scores. However, the rich phonological changes in the ancient songs cannot be fully marked in the notation or the staff, especially the temperament of the breath with the change of feelings is more difficult to learn only through the notation or staff. Therefore, the author believes that music teaching cannot replace “oral teaching”, “inner understanding through oral teaching” is still very important for the teaching of Guqin traditional music.

Some people will also misunderstand that the so-called “inner understanding through oral teaching” can leave the scores. As mentioned above, this view is wrong. Because, “oral teaching of the heart” cannot be detailed in the music scores, on the other hand, “inner understanding through oral teaching” will still unable transfer to exhaustively spectrum (subtraction of the spectrum) information, so for the study of the Guqin, even if the students learns the music by the oral tradition, but if you need to continually deepen the original face of a piece of music, you must follow the original book of the track you are learning, in case the teacher has missing information in the teaching or the student is forgotten while studying section. Mr. Lin Youren wrote in the memory of his teacher, Mr. Liu Shaochun: “And the beginners often seek more and more greed, but they often try to use the phrase. Half of “Ping Sha Luo Yan” will be enough to encourage the students’ eagerness to seek success and excessive emotions. When the song is familiar, the students are asked to play with the word by word, so as not to leave the sample. This is called ‘Shu Qu Sheng Tan’. Because in his opinion, although cooked, it is skillful, but it can also produce ‘You’ and ‘Shu Qu Sheng Tan’ is a good recipe for gram ‘You’ disease.” [7]

In summary, the author believes that the combination of the staff and the spectrum can be used as a reference for the music, but if you want to understand the more comprehensive spiritual connotation of the ancient songs, you must get the guidance and reading music of the relevant musicians. The original textbook, otherwise it may ignore many key symbols and playing essentials in the music.

## **5. The Inheritance Significance of Guqin Teaching Method: “Inner Understanding through Oral Teaching”**

The teaching method of “teaching through the heart” has existed in many fields

in China for thousands of years, and its formation was created by the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture for thousands of years. Chinese traditional culture is rooted in the process of continuous transformation and reconciliation of “yin” and “yang”, so the things produced on such soils will not be absolutely static, but relatively moving. Take “Guangling San” of Guqin music as an example, its circulation is not a layer. From the Tang Dynasty, Li Liangfu’s “Guangling Zhixi” spectrum has 23 paragraphs or Lu Wei’s “Guangling Zhixi” spectrum has 36 paragraphs, to the Northern Song Dynasty changed to Guangling from 41 sections of the spectrum to 44 sections of the Yuan Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty’s “Mysterious Secrets” was changed to 45 paragraphs [8]. These changes in the process of communication were formed on the basis of the pre-spectrum, and although the passage of the music has increased, the inner spirit of the mainstream version of “Guangling San” has not changed. It can be seen that the inheritance of Guqin is not the permanence of the form of music, but that different people in each period or even in the same period can inject personal interpretation into the score according to their own understanding, so the music is naturally change following the times, the performance of the music can be revived according to the aesthetic needs of the times. This is inseparable from the characteristics of Chinese culture. Just as Liang Shuming said in the analysis of “the meaning of Chinese metaphysics”: “All things that are present which are relative, double, moderate, balanced, and harmonious. All existence is true. This is all about observing changes, not watching the quiet universe but watching the changes in the universe.” [9] The heritage of Guqin is in this flowing culture of water, which is “inheritance”. The main method borrowed is “inner understanding through oral teaching”. Therefore, the author believes that “inner understanding through oral teaching” is an important means of retaining the characteristics of Chinese Guqin culture. The teaching method of “inner understanding through oral teaching” is not only the inheritance of form, but more importantly the inheritance of spirit.

In November 2003, Guqin was listed as “oral and intangible cultural heritage”. Although the meaning of the word “heritage” is somewhat confusing, the purpose of “application for the legacy” is very clear, that is, to protect the traditional culture of Guqin. As the most representative meaning of “verbal and non-material”, Guqin culture includes the music and the way of the music reproduction. For the protection of the “Guqin heritage”, modern people generally reproduce the traditional music style by means of “playing”, but if the rhythm is fixed by the form of a staff or a notation, it is very likely that the expression of the music will be fixed, and the fluidity of the music is neglected. Therefore, the author believes that the way of “playing” is not necessarily related to “biography”. The music after “playing” can also directly use the method of “inner understanding through oral teaching” to spread the music, which can respect the “live” of the music.

Mr. Huang Xiangpeng wrote in “On the Preservation and Development of Chinese Traditional Music”: “From the historical evolution to the existing music

reality, traditional Chinese music is not a narrow, totally closed cultural system. It is constantly flow, absorption, fusion and variation continue the life of art; at the same time, it passes through the blockade of countless rocks and ice, and has experienced various threats of loss before it can be passed down to the present.” [10] The whole spread of traditional Chinese music in the process, the vitality of Guqin music cannot be underestimated, and the way to carry it cannot be ignored. In the current society where Western culture and multiculturalism coexist, the cultural tradition is not a single, one-sided inheritance, but a “harmonious”, “balanced” and “relative” inheritance.

## 6. Conclusion

The development of Guqin in modern society is influenced by various cultures, no matter in the notation, playing skills, teaching forms and so on and the existence way of Guqin is very different from the ancient society, for example, the Guqin notation is more and more concrete, and the rhythm is clear. These changes also show that the essential characteristics of Guqin music are changing; the ancient music form of the literati as the main body is influenced by modern music, pop music and western classical music, the traditional Guqin music making “breath” as the core backbone of the system is gradually turning to the rhythm and regular pace to form melodic Guqin music. Nevertheless, there is still a small number of Guqin music that has been handed down from ancient times and exists through oral instruction, and this part of the Guqin has its unique musical characteristics: breath and rhyme. This part of the Guqin music is often difficult to record with the regular rhythm, which must be a specific teacher combined with singing and demonstration of the way to teach. The author is also trying to use this particular structure and flavor characteristics to continue to excavate ancient not yet handed down the Guqin music, in China. Such a way is called “translating score”. In the author’s monograph “The Score of Guangling School Translating Research” and “The law of Liu Shaochun Guqin Playing”, the author summarized from the tenth generation of Guqingling School of Mr. Liu Shaohui’s Guqin music to extract the ancient song unique musical gene, and then use of this musical gene of Guangling School to the music. The answer is that why the author can use the characteristics of traditional Guqin music freely to translate the score, which is because of the benefit of the way called “inner understanding through oral teaching”, which can make the Intangible Cultural Heritage keeping for a long time. Therefore, the way of “inner understanding through oral teaching” will be not instead of or ignored in the modern society, and it is also the best way to inherit and protect the traditional Guqin music.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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