

## The Evolution and Literacy Transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, China

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the evolution and literacy transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, China. It traces its origins back to Taoism's influence before becoming a cultural legacy. During the early Qing Dynasty, Chuandong Zhu Qin performers used folk music in their storytelling, secularizing it. Government backing, particularly the formation of the Chengdu Quyi Team, was critical to its maintenance and extension, allowing cultural knowledge and literacy to be transmitted more effectively. Artists switched from seating to standing performances, which improved character depiction and enriched the instructional component. Chuandong Zhu Qin artists actively participated in revolutionary propaganda throughout the War of Resistance Against Japan, and following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, they developed new compositions honoring the party, revolution, and people. This educational dimension was critical in conveying Chuandong Zhu Qin's cultural knowledge and literacy, ensuring their preservation. Chuandong Zhu Qin's adaptation and persistence in changing cultural situations demonstrate its importance as a traditional art form. It continues to engage audiences, educate future generations, and enrich Chongqing's cultural legacy.

**Key words:** Evolution, Transmission, Literacy, Knowledge, Chuandong Zhu Qin

### INTRODUCTION

The art of Chuandong Zhu Qin is a valuable asset in the domain of Chinese national art. It is classified as one of the more than 400 types of folk art in China and is officially acknowledged as a national intangible cultural asset preservation project. Initially, it was utilized as a method of disseminating Taoist teachings through traditional spoken literature. Gradually, it underwent changes to include musical components, ultimately leading to the emergence of a unique traditional art form (Wu & Zhang, 2011).

Chuandong Zhu Qin, situated in the eastern part of Sichuan province, boasts a lengthy historical background, abundant cultural legacy, melodious harmony, and exquisite poetic verses, rendering it a prime example of traditional rap art in eastern Chongqing. During its initial stages, Chuandong Zhu Qin artists predominantly depended on their artistic skills as a means of sustenance. This art form was commonly observed at teahouses and restaurants on a regular basis, enchanting the tea guests. The majority of individuals have a natural inclination towards it, and a significant number are capable of vocalizing, so aiding in the development of education and literacy. The properties of the item are uncomplicated, and its functioning is not dependent on the location. Performances can occur in many locations, such as fields, small courtyards, junctions,

stations, wharves, or traditional stages, which helps in passing it down from one generation to another. The performers may exhibit variations in quantity and gender, encompassing individuals of both male and female identities, engaging in performances while assuming an upright position or moving about (Liu, 2008).

The residents of the three-gorge reservoir area in Chongqing highly value Chuandong Zhu Qin, a traditional art form. It holds significant historical, artistic, humanistic, and practical significance. In 2006, it was designated as one of the original sets of municipal intangible cultural heritages in Chongqing, and it was subsequently acknowledged as part of the second set of nationally safeguarded intangible cultural heritages. East Chuandong Zhu Qin holds a significant role not only in Wanzhou and Bayu but also throughout the entire country. It is imperative to uphold the Chuandong Zhu Qin heritage in eastern Sichuan in order to advance education, literacy, and cultural preservation. It stimulates the development of spiritual civilization in the Bayu area, increases the cultural life of the people, deepens their appreciation of the arts, promotes the overall growth of artistic expression, and contributes to the construction of a harmonious society. In the realm of Chinese singing history, there are prominent genres including crosstalk, pingtan, fast book, allegro, money board, and others. However, the Chuandong Zhu Qin stands out for its enchanting melodies and exceptional vocal

characteristics, making it a valuable rarity in the sphere of vocal art (Fan & Wang, 2022; Gong et al., 2024).

The traditional plays conserved in Chuandong Zhu Qin exhibit an exceptionally abundant cultural heritage. Based on our first study, there are a minimum of 300 segments, primarily protected by enthusiasts and traditional artists from Wanzhou District, such as Xiang Deyuan, Liu Guofu, Jin Tongquan, Fu Kaiguo, Jiang Qizhi, and Jiang Yuanwan. These plays are regarded as valuable assets and have been carefully safeguarded, acknowledging their significance in terms of education, literacy, and the transfer of culture (Shi, 1996; Bo et al., 2009).

This study focuses on analyzing the evolution and literacy transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, China, with a particular emphasis on its significance in education and literacy transmission. The researchers seek to improve the understanding of the developing history of the Chuandong Zhu Qin, promoting a deeper recognition of its artistic worth, educational importance, and role in transmitting literacy. Furthermore, aim to enhance the comprehension of Chuandong Zhu Qin's musical performance, boosting its exploration among a broader audience, thereby fostering education and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

### Research Question

- How is the evolution and literacy transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, China?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The General Knowledge of Chuandong Zhu Qin

There are two distinct styles of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Sichuan: the Yangqin, which is prevalent in Western Sichuan, and the Zhonghe, which is common in Eastern Sichuan. The Zhonghe style of the East Sichuan School is characterized by its traditional nature, featuring well-defined board styles, distinct singing, and elements of colloquialism. It is widely favored in East Sichuan. Wang Daohe established the Sichuan Eastern School of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Beishan Temple, Wanzhou, during the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty. At the age of 13, he commenced his study of Taoism and at 21, he developed Chuandong Zhu Qin. Wang Daohe utilized the instrument primarily for disseminating Taoist teachings, with the aim of promoting ethical ideals. It was given the fun nickname 'dao qin' because of its pleasant sound and 'chi pound pound' due to its phonetic resemblance to 'pound' and 'chi' in local legends (Bai & Liu, 1995; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023).

Chuandong Zhu Qin is a renowned form of traditional art originating from the Sichuan region. The origins of this can be traced back to Henan, but it made its way into Sichuan during the early Qing Dynasty. Originally, Taoists employed it for instructional purposes during public presentations. Subsequently, it underwent a transformation to portray diverse narratives and motifs derived from historical events and literary works. In 1927, a prominent conference greatly

increased its impact, leading to the widespread popularity of Zhuqin performances in the entire region. Legend attributes the origin of the instrument to Zhang Guolao, one of the Eight Immortals, who supposedly heard its unique sound while observing a woodpecker's pecking (Liu, 1990; Hou & Seekhunlio, 2023; Chen, 2013).

### The Significance and Preservation of Chuandong Zhu Qin

Chuandong Zhu Qin is of great significance in Wanzhou, Bayu, and throughout the entire country. Conserving the Sichuan Eastern Chuandong Zhu Qin can greatly influence the development of spiritual culture, enhance the cultural experiences of the people, cultivate their artistic appreciation, promote holistic artistic growth, and aid in the establishment of a harmonious society in the Bayu region. Within the domain of Chinese performing arts history, prevalent forms include cross talk, Pingtan, Kuaishu, and Qianqianpan. However, Chuandong Zhu Qin is characterized by its exceptional and enchanting allure, showcased through its exquisite and harmonious melodies and vocal performances, establishing it as an exceptional and prestigious genre of art (Mittag, 2003).

In February 2008, Chuandong Zhu Qin, a literary work from Eastern Sichuan, achieved fame. It was part of a big series made cooperatively by over 30 important literary journals in China and was published in China Workers Press, with Liu Hongwei as the chief editor. Mr. Xiong Tongfu devoted many years to collecting, organizing, and studying the intricate singing techniques and essential playing methods of Chuandong Zhu Qin, a unique folk art in Eastern Sichuan that is on the verge of disappearing. Mr. Xiong Tongfu diligently documented the performances of numerous experienced performers and thoroughly organized and revised the material. His unwavering commitment has ensured the preservation of this valuable traditional art form from Eastern Chongqing, which today has a significant position in the domain of national intangible cultural assets (Liu, 2008).

### Folk Art and Cultural Expression of Chuandong Zhu Qin

Chuandong Zhu Qin is a distinctive form of folk art that has a long and illustrious history. The "Legend of Hua Ziliang" program by Chuandong Zhu Qin is an elaborate production of 16 episodes. It encompasses over 80,000 words and has a runtime of more than 500 minutes, making it a remarkable masterpiece in the world of Chuandong Zhu Qin programs. Adapted from Gong Ge and Kong Bi's novels, this show depicts Hua Ziliang's quest in Bai Gongguan Prison, where he faces enemies and eventually manages to flee and defect to liberated regions (Jiang & Zheng, 2009).

Artistic advancement, akin to personal maturation and advancement, requires the exploration and surpassing of oneself, building upon one's initial groundwork. To achieve lively and dynamic artistic development, it is crucial to overcome established patterns and boundaries that have lost their vitality, as well as to surpass confining ideological restraints and antiquated conceptions. The audacious invention and exploration carried out by the music and vocal designers are

to blame for “The Legend of Huazi Liang’s” exceptional popularity. During the 1990s, the erstwhile Wanxian Quyí Troupe presented this grand production featuring over 30 performers. They integrated elements from other musical genres, such as the theme music of the opera “Jiang Jie,” as well as materials from Sichuan opera, yangqin, instrumental music, folk songs, and others, while maintaining the authentic vocal style and structure of Chuandong Zhu Qin. This enhanced the musical compositions and creative execution of Chuandong Zhu Qin (Jing, 2009; Yue & Seekhunlio, 2023).

Chuandong Zhu Qin, as a folk art, has surpassed geographical limits and been disseminated across the entire nation. Due to the presence of prose and rhyme, Zhu Qin lyrics can be considered a folk variant of rap literature. Prose serves the purpose of interpretation, while rhyme enhances the melodic aspect of the song. Prose enables the use of spoken language, and the sentence structure of the verses usually consists of sentences with seven characters and cross sentences. However, in contrast to the primary use of third-person narrative style in traditional Chinese opera to portray characters and stories, Chuandong Zhu Qin employs a style that is more similar to traditional Chinese opera. In order to enhance differentiation, an additional character is appended to every segment of the text that is written in the third-person narrative perspective (Wichmann, 1990; Lovrick, 2011; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

### Research Theory

This study utilizes ethnomusicology to examine the progression, instruction, and dissemination of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, China. This explores the historical, cultural, and musical dimensions of this distinctive folk art form. The study seeks to comprehend the evolution of Chuandong Zhu Qin throughout time, its cultural importance within the local community, and its function in safeguarding traditional storytelling and musical traditions through education and literacy transmission. The research technique encompasses many approaches, such as fieldwork, archival research, musical analysis, and interviews with practitioners. These methods provide a full understanding of this culturally significant heritage and its role in education and the transmission of literacy (Mu, 2003; Fan, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

### Fieldwork and Observation

In order to thoroughly examine the formation and transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, a complete fieldwork technique will be utilized, with a specific focus on the areas where this distinctive art form flourishes. Researchers will get the chance to observe Chuandong Zhu Qin performances firsthand, engage directly with talented artists, and thoroughly study their techniques through immersive fieldwork. Directly interacting with practitioners and their art will provide essential firsthand understanding of the intricacies of Chuandong Zhu Qin’s evolution, its complex musical skills, lyrical traditions, and the strategies

used to preserve this cultural heritage. The purpose of this ethnographic approach is to connect the academic study of Chuandong Zhu Qin with its living traditions. This approach helps us gain a more profound comprehension of how education and the transmission of literacy contribute to the preservation and development of Chuandong Zhu Qin within the local community.

### Archival Research

An extensive examination of historical records, documents, and archives is necessary to comprehend the historical progression and significance of education and literacy transmission in Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality. This study methodology involves a thorough analysis of ancient writings, manuscripts, and any existing written materials pertaining to Chuandong Zhu Qin. By conducting a thorough inquiry, scholars may track the ancestry and development of this artistic expression and get valuable knowledge about how education and the transfer of literacy have played a role in its ongoing existence over several generations. Examining historical records will not only offer important background information but also shed light on how education and the transfer of literacy have played a crucial role in safeguarding and transmitting Chuandong Zhu Qin as an essential element of Chongqing’s cultural heritage.

### Data Management

The entirety of the gathered data has been categorized and arranged to enhance its usability within the realm of education and the dissemination of literacy.

- 1) Interview records and audio recordings are transcribed into written notes. The raw data and audio recordings were stored independently to function as important assets for instructional objectives.
- 2) The music and video content were categorized based on their musical structure, in accordance with the educational goals of the study. Data on scores and employee evaluations were collected to evaluate and promote the transfer of conventional musical expertise.
- 3) Diverse forms of literature, music, audio recordings, papers, and other materials were classified to facilitate the acquisition and spread of the distinct attributes and abilities related to Chuandong Zhu Qin singing and playing. This effort aimed to promote the transmission of cultural knowledge and literacy.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis is a thorough qualitative analysis to extract significant insights on the development and transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin, with a particular emphasis on its pedagogical implications. This investigation seeks to untangle the complex network of influences and variables that have affected the growth of this folk art by thoroughly examining interview records, audio recordings, and historical documents. This analysis aims to explore the educational elements involved in the transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin’s skills.



It aims to identify the main mechanisms and practices that have helped preserve and spread this cultural heritage, which contributes to the broader significance of traditions like this in cultural education and literacy transmission.

## RESULTS

### The Evolution of Chuandong Zhu Qin to Cultural Legacy

During the early Qing Dynasty, characterized by stringent literary restrictions and ideological oppression, disenchanted Han intellectuals discovered solace in Taoism as a vehicle to articulate their dissatisfaction. Xu Dachun and Zheng Banqiao, represented by their artworks, employed Taoism as a means to express their emotions. The transition from Taoist teachings to literary expression provided them with a means to articulate their grievances and experiences. Their literary works, particularly Letters, demonstrated notable enhancements in vocal rendition by integrating folk music components, introducing a more mainstream and secular aspect to their storytelling (Figure 1).

During the initial years of the Republic of China, the Liangshan region in Sichuan Province organized a conference dedicated to Chuandong Zhu Qin. This event significantly increased its influence, extending beyond the cities of Chengdu and Chongqing and establishing itself as a noteworthy cultural phenomenon. The Chuandong Zhu Qin had significant growth and became divided into two distinct schools: the dulcimer and Zhonghe melodies. Jia Shusan, the originator of the Chengdu school, enhanced the vocal technique by using Sichuan dulcimer methods, yielding a harmonious and accurate performance. It was primarily used for Taoist persuasion.

Over the course of time, Chuandong Zhu Qin music underwent diversification, giving rise to a range of styles, such as harmony and dulcimer. The Zhonghe tune of Chuandong Zhu Qin, which sprang from earlier tunes, gave rise to many vocal factions. Vocalists frequently mimic personas, effectively conveying a range of moods and introspective musings. In addition, they provided explanations, outlined the storyline, and assessed the characters and

events, thereby exposing their ideological preferences and emotional encounters (Figure 2).

The evolution of Chuandong Zhu Qin music demonstrates its capacity to adapt and its extensive historical background, transitioning from its religious roots to becoming a widely embraced and multifaceted art form. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, efforts were made to gather both traditional and contemporary songs, and Jia Shusan's compilation of Chuandong Zhu Qin music was published, guaranteeing the safeguarding and ongoing advancement of this distinctive cultural legacy. Chuandong Zhu Qin musicians utilized fishing drums and basic boards to produce unique sounds, synchronizing them with their vocals in the absence of a band backing. Blind and older artists frequently assumed a seated position during their performances at teahouses, thereby cultivating a serene ambience. Nevertheless, during the establishment of the People's Republic of China, several artists shifted towards adopting upright performances, employing bodily gestures and facial expressions to augment character depiction and narrative. Amidst these changes and advancements, the practice of Chuandong Zhu Qin not only persisted but also flourished and developed, playing a significant role in the transmission of cultural knowledge and literacy.

### The Transformation of Chuandong Zhu Qin to Innovation for Literacy Transmission

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, young singers underwent a notable transformation in their approach to concerts, transitioning from a seated position to a standing and walking style of singing. This modification enabled them to assume diverse character roles with varied attributes, encompassing virtuous, elegant, pure, and malevolent parts. They utilized their corporeal presence and countenances to augment character depiction, resulting in a more immersive and captivating experience for the spectators. In accordance with the party's directive to foster originality and ingenuity, Chuandong Zhu Qin artists swiftly created novel compositions that honored the party, the revolution, and the populace. These advancements were crucial in the transmission of cultural knowledge and the transfer of



**Figure 1.** Chuandong Zhu Qin music instrument  
Source: Ling Li



**Figure 2.** Chuandong Zhu Qin performance  
Source: Ling Li

literacy, guaranteeing the enduring relevance and allure of this distinctive art form for future generations.

Chuandong Zhu Qin artists played an active role in promoting revolutionary propaganda during the War of Resistance Against Japan, utilizing this kind of folk art and making significant contributions to the cause. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the "Chengdu Quyi Team" was created, and quyi performances gained significant prominence as a platform. Chuandong Zhu Qin witnessed a significant expansion as performers such as Yang Qingwen, the originator of the Yang School of Chuandong Zhu Qin, shifted from seated to upright and mobile performances. Their incorporation of methods from Sichuan opera encompasses intricate movements of the hands, eyes, body, hair, and steps. These modifications facilitated the depiction of numerous roles by a solitary artist, efficiently animating characters and enhancing the performance. Small ensembles accompanied the artists, which improved the entire musical experience. This transition not only enhanced entertainment but also played a crucial role in cultural education and the transmission of literacy, guaranteeing the continued relevance (Figure 3).

Throughout their extensive artistic evolution, artists such as Xie Huiren included diverse artistic components, such as Chuandong Zhu Qin, opera, folk ballads, musical instruments, and dance, into their performances. They adopted the distinctive "Yang Diao" Chuandong Zhu Qin style and skillfully integrated novel artistic elements to enrich their narrative. Their performances incorporated elements from Sichuan opera and folk music, seamlessly integrating variations in vocalization, tonalities, and rhythmic patterns. They derived inspiration from the diverse gongs and drums of Sichuan opera to craft vibrant and intricate rhythms, modifying them to suit the developing storylines. This creative progression not only provided amusement to audiences but also played a crucial role in the dissemination of cultural knowledge and literacy (Figure 4).

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chuandong Zhu Qin musicians adhered to the party's directive for innovative artistic expression by both

performing old repertoire and introducing new compositions. From 1958 onwards, the introduction of folk art groups and teams at different levels facilitated the shift of Chuandong Zhu Qin performances from libraries to theater stages. This transition resulted in alterations to vocal styles and performing practices. Artists transitioned from a seated position to a standing position while singing and integrated techniques from Sichuan opera into their performances. These techniques included precise hand movements, expressive eye gestures, deliberate body postures, intricate hair arrangements, and coordinated step sequences. These elements were used to portray characters and enhance the liveliness of their performances (Figure 5).

Furthermore, the artists cleverly included the fishing drum and basic board as props to enhance the narrative, deviating from the conventional approach of depending exclusively on vocal delivery without instrumental accompaniment. In order to better align with the existing views and features of the era, they ingeniously modified the traditional singing structure, harmonizing it with the evolution of characters and ensuring consistency with the plot and historical



**Figure 4.** Teaching theory of chuandong Zhu Qin  
Source: Ling Li



**Figure 3.** Teaching Chuandong Zhu Qin skills  
Source: Ling Li



**Figure 5.** Books and documents used in the teaching of Chuandong Zhu Qin  
Source: Ling Li



backdrop. This artistic progression not only provided amusement to audiences but also played a pivotal role in cultural enlightenment and the spread of information.

In the midst of swift societal changes, Chuandong Zhu Qin not only persevered but also adjusted to contemporary tendencies and narrative styles. These developments played a crucial role in disseminating cultural knowledge and promoting literacy, guaranteeing the lasting significance and attractiveness of this unique art form for future generations.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion and conclusion of the study on the evolution and literacy transmission of Chuandong Zhu Qin in Chongqing Municipality, China, highlight several key findings and their implications.

Firstly, the research findings emphasize the extensive historical background and development of Chuandong Zhu Qin, starting from its roots in Taoist Daoqing and evolving into a widely appreciated folk art form. Gradually, it has assimilated components from many local folk traditions, Sichuan opera, and contemporary influences. This dynamic development demonstrates the art form's ability to adapt and endure while remaining connected to its cultural background (Blumenfield, 2013; Shen et al., 2010; Li et al., 2012). The study highlights the significant influence of artists, specifically individuals like Jia Shusan, Yang Qingwen, and Xie Huiren, in determining the trajectory of Chuandong Zhu Qin. These artists implemented groundbreaking methodologies, revolutionized vocal methods, and broadened the range of musical compositions to accommodate evolving audience tastes and modern subject matters. Their efforts not only upheld the tradition but also elevated it to unprecedented levels of popularity (Quan & Jia, 2021; Zheng et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of government support and legislative initiatives in promoting and preserving traditional arts like Chuandong Zhu Qin. The establishment of the Chengdu Quyi Team and the formation of folk art organizations and teams played a pivotal role in providing artists with a forum to showcase their talents and adapt to evolving performance criteria (Wang et al., 2020). A significant finding of the study is the incorporation of literacy dissemination and instruction into Chuandong Zhu Qin. The performers mesmerized the audience with the fusion of storytelling, character portrayals, and the integration of cultural and historical narratives, delivering both amusement and enlightenment. The educational aspect of this served as a means of preserving and disseminating cultural knowledge to younger generations, enhancing the vitality of the art form (Tong & Mitra, 2009; Wang, 2021; Sriken & Seekhunlio, 2024).

In conclusion, the Chuandong Zhu Qin's development and literacy transfer in Chongqing Municipality, China, demonstrate the persistence and adaptation of traditional folk arts. This unique art form has not only weathered the test of time but has also thrived in changing cultural contexts. Artists have been at the forefront of this transformation, adopting inventive techniques and adding varied components to keep the art form dynamic and fascinating. Chuandong Zhu Qin has greatly benefited from government

sponsorship. Initiatives aimed at protecting intangible cultural heritage, financing performances, and establishing cultural institutions have created a solid foundation for its continued expansion. Education has played an important role in the growth of Chuandong Zhu Qin. Furthermore, incorporating Chuandong Zhu Qin into educational curricula has aided in the transmission of information and skills to future generations, ensuring the preservation of this valuable cultural heritage.

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