

Exploration of the Origin and Development of the Guzheng

(Penerokaan Asal-usul dan Perkembangan Guzheng)

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ABSTRACT

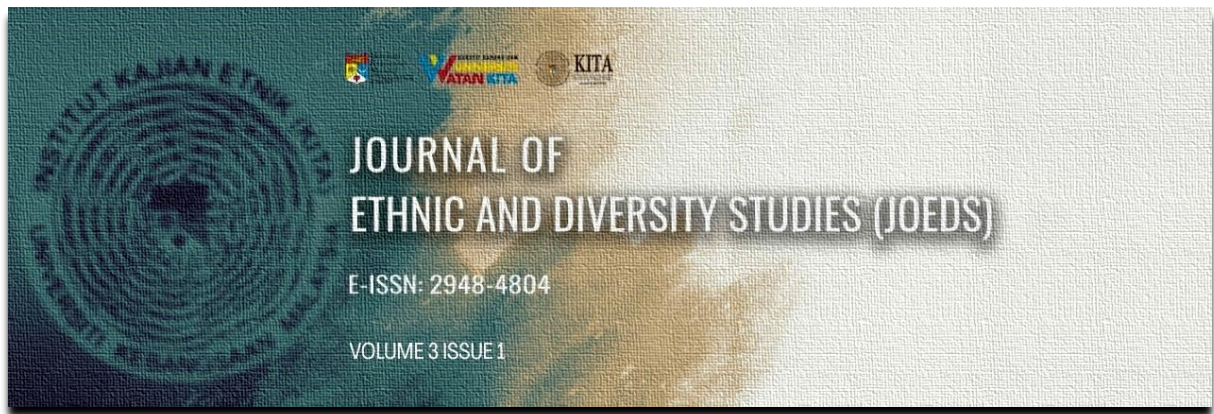
As one of the traditional Chinese Musical Instruments, Guzheng has a long history and rich cultural connotation. First of all, this paper reviews the origin and development of Guzheng, and discusses the background of Guzheng. Secondly, it analyzes the origin of the name Zheng, and reveals the historical and cultural connotation and naming meaning behind it. With the development of society, because of some geographical, historical, cultural and other reasons, Guzheng has formed different schools, each with its own characteristics, showing the diversity and richness of Guzheng art and propose some specific methods to protect the Guzheng school. Through these methods, we can enhance people's awareness of protecting the traditional art of Guzheng and at the same time make innovations, speed up the construction of inheritors and use the Internet and other modern media for communication and learning. This paper aims to enhance people's cognition and understanding of Guzheng, a traditional musical instrument, arouse their love and attention to the art of Guzheng, and provide useful ideas and references for the inheritance and innovation of Guzheng culture.

Keywords: *Guzheng; Origin; Development; Heritage; Preservation methods*

ABSTRAK

Sebagai salah satu Alat Muzik tradisional Cina, Guzheng mempunyai sejarah yang panjang dan konotasi budaya yang kaya. Pertama sekali, kertas kerja ini mengkaji asal usul dan perkembangan Guzheng, dan membincangkan latar belakang Guzheng. Kedua, ia menganalisis asal usul nama Zheng, dan mendedahkan konotasi sejarah dan budaya serta makna penamaan di belakangnya. Dengan perkembangan masyarakat, kerana beberapa sebab

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geografi, sejarah, budaya dan lain-lain, Guzheng telah membentuk sekolah yang berbeza, masing-masing mempunyai ciri tersendiri, menunjukkan kepelbagaian dan kekayaan seni Guzheng dan mencadangkan beberapa kaedah khusus untuk melindungi sekolah Guzheng. Melalui kaedah ini, kita boleh meningkatkan kesedaran orang ramai untuk melindungi seni tradisional Guzheng dan pada masa yang sama membuat inovasi, mempercepatkan pembinaan pewaris dan menggunakan Internet dan media moden lain untuk komunikasi dan pembelajaran. Kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kognisi dan pemahaman orang ramai tentang Guzheng, alat muzik tradisional, membangkitkan kecintaan dan perhatian mereka kepada seni Guzheng, dan menyediakan idea dan rujukan berguna untuk warisan dan inovasi budaya Guzheng.

Kata kunci: *Guzheng; Asal; Pembangunan; Warisan; Kaedah pemeliharaan*

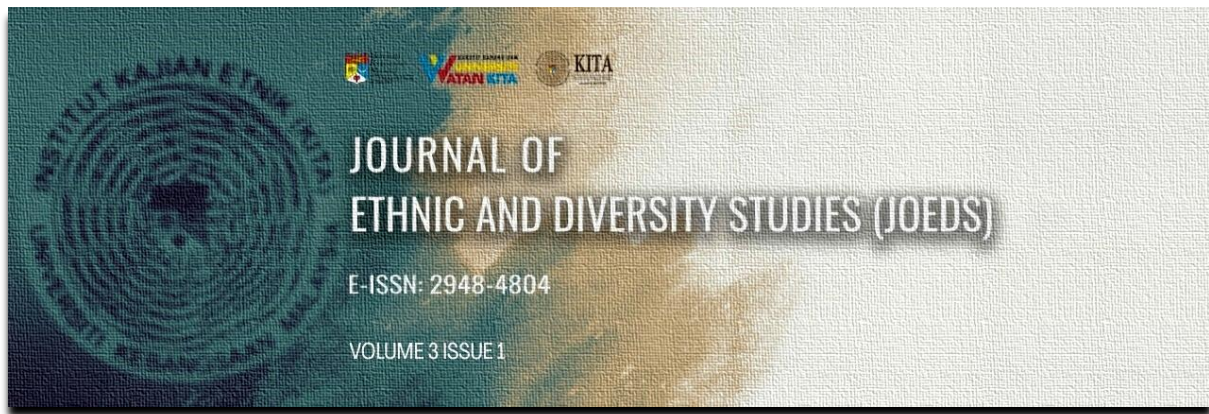
INTRODUCTION

The Guzheng, as one of the treasures of the Chinese nation, is not only a symbol of traditional Chinese music culture but also an important part of world music culture (Lv 2018). The Guzheng's beautiful timbre, rich expressiveness, and profound cultural heritage have made it deeply cherished. With a history spanning over two thousand years, this instrument's origins remain somewhat mysterious, but the author has compiled available literature to offer insights that highlight its significance in Chinese music history. The paper explores the main schools of Guzheng, each distinguished by regional cultural differences, showcasing the diversity and richness of Guzheng art. It analyzes the current status of these schools, examining the challenges and opportunities they face in modern society. Finally, the paper proposes specific methods for protecting and promoting Guzheng schools, including integrating traditional education, utilizing digital platforms, fostering collaborations, and organizing festivals. These strategies aim to ensure the continuous development and vitality of this precious cultural heritage.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUZHENG

THE ORIGIN OF THE GUZHENG

The Guzheng, one of the traditional Chinese folk instruments, is highly representative and nationalistic. China's long history and rich cultural heritage are essential when studying the historical background of the Guzheng. As time progressed, the Guzheng was influenced by



China's geographical factors, and people formed various schools based on local culture, customs, and beliefs. In the formation and development of these schools, common characteristics include folk nature, regional characteristics, conservatism, and continuity (Fu W. and Liu 2011). There are various theories regarding the origin of the Zheng, and the academic community has yet to reach a consensus. The instrument is referred to as "Zheng," with several explanations for its name. The earliest recorded mention of the Zheng can be found in historical literature, specifically in the *Jian Zhu Ke Shu* in the *Records of the Grand Historian*. The text states: "Striking the rims of jars and pots while playing the Zheng and tapping the thighs to keep rhythm, singing joyful songs, this is the true music of the State of Qin." (Sima Qian and Han Zhaoqi 2023). In the *Jian Zhu Ke Shu*, it is recorded that in 237 B.C., at the end of the Warring States period, Emperor Qin Shi Huang ordered the expulsion of high-ranking officials from foreign lands. Li Si, serving as the Left Prime Minister, wrote a letter exhorted the emperor to withdraw the expulsion order. Thus, the academic community generally agrees that the appearance of the Zheng predates 237 B.C.

For a detailed study on the specific time of the Guzheng's origin, Teacher Zhao Manqin in the article *A Brief Analysis of Guzheng History* (Zhao Manqin 1981), based on the aforementioned literature the *Jian Zhu Ke Shu* and the issue of the attribution of "Qin" in "the true sound of Qin," identifies three possibilities:

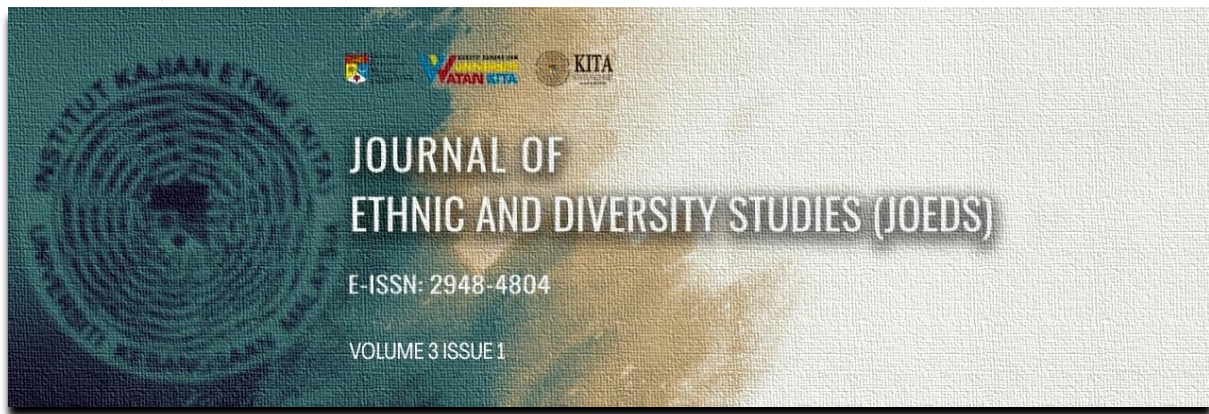
1. If "Qin" refers to the "State of Qin," then the Guzheng's origin would date between 770 BCE and 237 BCE.
2. If "Qin" refers to the "Qin region," then the Guzheng's origin would date between 884 BCE and 237 BCE.
3. It is also possible that the Guzheng was already popular in this area before the Qin's rule, which would date its origin earlier than 884 BCE.

There is still no unified conclusion regarding the origin of the Guzheng, with various theories and opinions. Although it is difficult to determine definitively, the research process gradually unveils the Guzheng's mysteries and indirectly proves its ancient origin. Due to the numerous historical accounts regarding the Guzheng's origin, I have summarized the following six important theories:

1. The theory that the Guzheng evolved from the Se.
2. The theory that Meng Tian invented the Guzheng.
3. The theory that Jing Fang invented the Guzheng.
4. The theory that Hou Kui invented the Guzheng.
5. The theory that the Zhu was the precursor to the Guzheng.
6. The theory that the Guzheng and the Se share a common origin.

The Theory of the Guzheng Evolving from the Se.

The Se is also an ancient traditional Chinese plucked instrument, mentioned in *The Book of Songs*. Some ancient records do suggest that the Guzheng evolved from the Se. Zhao Lin of the Tang Dynasty noted in his *Yin Hua Lu* that "The Zheng is an instrument from the State of



Qin and belongs to the Qin school. In ancient times, the Se had fifty strings. Emperor Huangdi once ordered Su Nv to play the se, and after listening, he became very sorrowful and split the Se in half. Since then, the Se had twenty-five strings. Later, the people of Qin played the Se, and two brothers fought over it, causing it to be split in half again. This resulted in the creation of the Zheng, and that's how the name "Zheng" originated." Ding Du of the Song Dynasty also recorded a similar theory in his *Ji Yun* that "A selfish father and son from the State of Qin fought over the Se and split it apart, resulting in the creation of the Zheng. The Zheng has twelve strings, derived from the division of the Se's twenty-five strings." In the *Music and Taoism Collection* by Japanese court musician Masana oka in the 17th century Genroku period, it is noted: "...According to legend, in the State of Qin, there was a man named Wan Wuyi who passed down a Se to his two daughters. Because both daughters fought over the Se, it was broken apart and became two separate instruments. Therefore, this instrument came to be called the Zheng." (Qiu 1982) The theory that the Zheng originated from a dispute over the Se, leading to its creation, lacks scientific basis and is merely a legend. Aside from the portrayal of the disputants as unkind, from a purely instrumental perspective, an instrument consists of numerous components, all essential. Breaking one into two would result in fragmentation or incomplete parts, making it impossible to form two separate instruments.

The theory that Meng Tian invented the Guzheng.

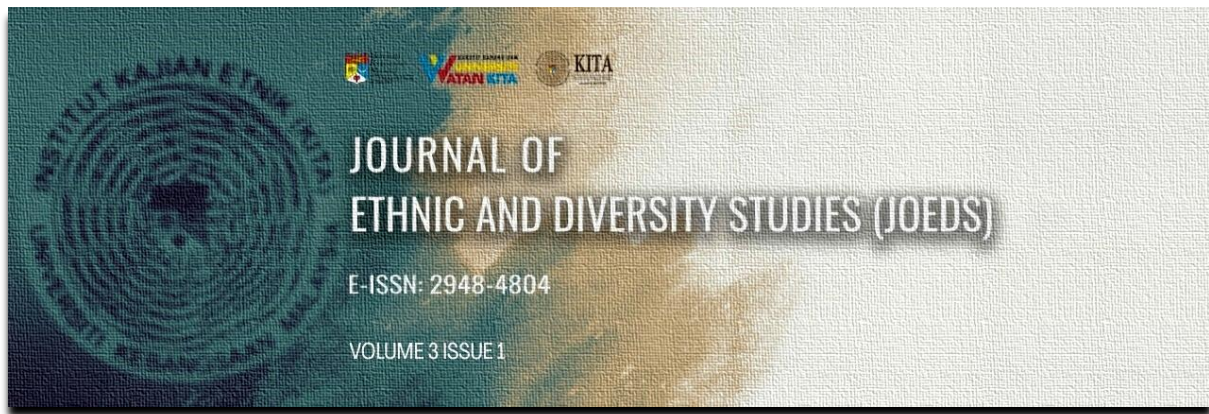
According to the *Music Chronicle* in *The Book of Sui*, it is stated: "The Zheng has thirteen strings, and the sound it produces is known as the unique sound of the State of Qin. It is said to be an instrument created by Meng Tian." However, Liu Qu recorded in the *Music Chronicle* in *The Old Book of Tang* that "The Zheng is an instrument from the State of Qin, and it is said to have been created by Meng Tian, but this is actually not true." In 237 BCE (the tenth year of Emperor Qin Shi Huang's reign), Prime Minister Li Si wrote the *Jian Zhu Ke Shu* to persuade Emperor Qin Shi Huang to rescind his expulsion order against foreign officials. In this memorial, he mentioned: Striking the rims of jars and pots while playing the Zheng and tapping the thighs to keep rhythm, singing joyful songs, this is the true music of the State of Qin." (Sima Qian and Han Zhaoqi 2023). This predates the rise of Meng Tian by sixteen years, making the claim that Meng Tian invented the Zheng unreliable.

The theory that Jing Fang invented the Guzheng.

Jing Fang was a great music theorist during the Western Han Dynasty, well-versed in musical scales. He invented the thirteen-string "Zhun" used to calibrate musical scales. Because both had thirteen strings, later generations mistakenly attributed Jing Fang's pitch calibration instrument as the Zheng (Li M. 2014).

The theory that Hou Kui invented the Guzheng.

"Kui" was a person from the era of Yao and Shun, and "Hou" is a respectful title for him. "Kui" held the position of overseeing music at that time, so he was said to have created the Zheng (Lv 2018). However, through the study of oracle bone inscriptions and related historical



materials, there is no evidence of stringed instruments even in the Xia Dynasty, let alone as early as the era of Yao and Shun when Kui lived.

The theory that the Zhu was the precursor to the Guzheng.

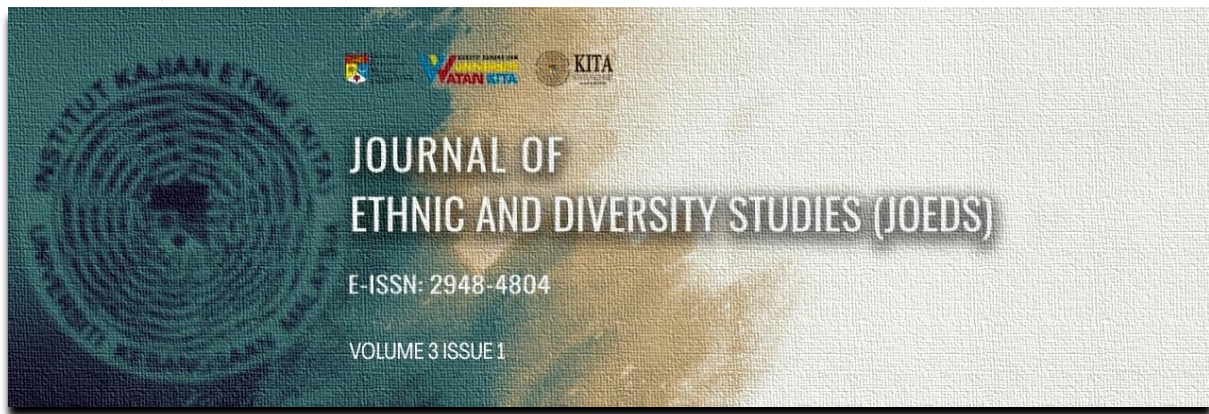
The theory that the Zhu is the origin of the Zheng first appeared in the Eastern Han Dynasty in Ying Xun's *Feng Su Tong* that "The Guzheng was originally an instrument with five strings, and its shape was similar to the Zhu." This theory suggests that the Zheng originated from an ancient instrument called the Zhu, which had five strings and was played by striking bamboo. The Eastern Han scholar Xu Shen's *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* holds a similar view and further explains that "The Guzheng is an instrument that produces sound by plucking its strings. Its character contains the 'bamboo' radical, indicating its material is related to bamboo, and the character 'Zheng' itself represents its sound." This means that the Zheng is made of bamboo, its shape and appearance are derived from the Zhu, and it produces a distinctive twanging sound. According to Zhou Yunjian, from a historical materials perspective, early zither and Guqin were more similar: both had wooden bodies, were made of bamboo, had a rod-like shape, a thin neck, and both had five strings. The theory that the Guqin originated from the zither has some reasonable aspects, but there are also aspects that have not been fully explained. Since the zither gradually fell out of use after the Warring States period, it is currently difficult to draw a definitive conclusion regarding their relationship (Zhou Yunjian 2012).

The theory that the Guzheng and the Se share a common origin.

In the essay *On the Discussion of Ancient Zheng History* by Mr. Cao Zheng (Cao 1981), Mr. Cao not only refutes the theory that Zheng originated from Se, but also provides a detailed analysis of various historical records to argue for the possibility that Zheng and Se share a common origin. He explains in detail why numerous excavated artifacts include Qin, Zhu, and Se, but not Zheng: Firstly, the exclusion of the popular folk instrument Zheng from funeral rites after its death was determined by the feudal ruling class's preference for elegance over commonality. Secondly, tools essential for the survival of folk artists were unlikely to be discarded or buried alive.

THE NAMING OF ZHENG

One theory about the origin of the name "Zheng" is that it was named for the "zhengzheng" sound the instrument produces, a theory that seems quite reasonable. For example, Liu Xi from the Eastern Han Dynasty recorded in his book *Shi Ming* that "When the Guzheng is played, the strings are pulled very tight, producing a zhengzheng sound." "Additionally, Xu Shen from the Eastern Han Dynasty wrote in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* that Zheng is "from bamboo, the Zheng sound," indicating that the naming of Zheng is related to its sound. The instrument was named "Zheng" because it produces a "zhengzheng" sound. Qiu Dacheng, in *The Origin of Chinese Zheng* (2008), asserts that the naming of Zheng, like that of instruments such as the Qing and Xiao, is based on the sound it produces, affirming this hypothesis. Shu Shunping, in *Discussing*



the Origin of Zheng from the Record of 'The Jian Zhu Ke Shu' (Shu 2011) , and Jin Jianmin, in *The Origin of Guzheng* (Qiu 1982) and *The Mystery of Guzheng's Origins* (Jin 1988), all suggest that the "zhengzheng" sound produced by "highly strung strings" clearly differentiates it from the more mellow sound of the Se, linking Zheng and Se together. The name "Zheng" likely originated from its sound, as it is common in traditional Chinese instruments to be named based on their origin, playing method, or sound. Therefore, naming Zheng based on its sound is logical and reasonable.

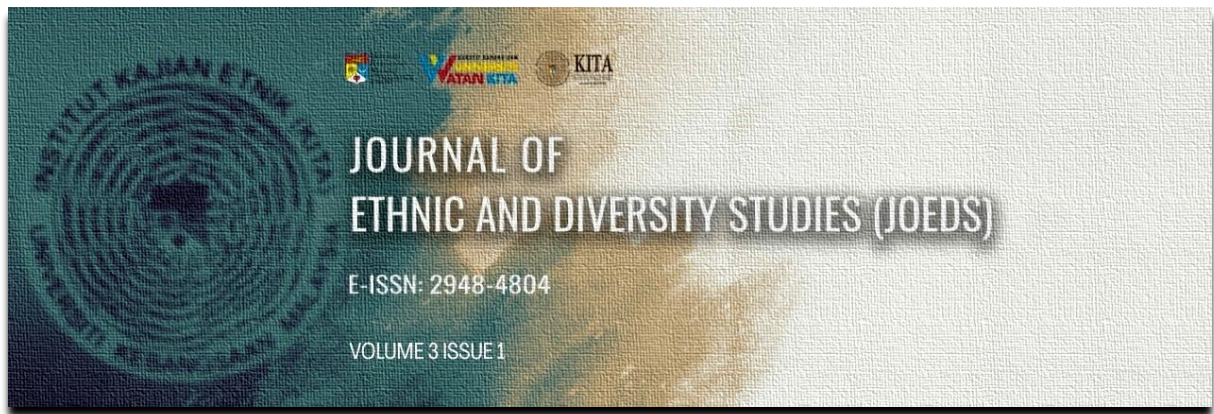
The Guzheng is also known as the "Han zheng," "Qin zheng," "Qin Sheng," and "Guzheng." The Zheng has been widely popular in the state of Qin for a long time. During festivals and banquets, people often played the Zheng and struck the Fou (a type of ceramic instrument), making it a local custom that has been passed down through generations. Consequently, it is also referred to as "Qin Zheng" or "Qin Sheng." Bai Juyi, in his poem **Zheng**, wrote, "The sound of the Zhao state's Se is clear and melodious, similar to the Qin zheng, but the noisy sound of the Huqin is entirely different from them." In these verses, 'Qin zheng,' 'Qi se,' 'Zhao se,' and 'huqin' are not only used for poetic symmetry but, more importantly, indicate the regional popularity of the instruments. 'Qin,' 'Qi,' 'Zhao,' and 'Hu' are names of regions, not dynasties.

In ancient times, some names expressed people's fondness for the Zheng, calling it "Yao zheng," "Silver zheng," "Treasure zheng," "Cloud zheng," and more. Some names were based on the Zheng's decorations, such as "Xi zheng," "Tortoiseshell zheng," etc (Li M. 2014). The term "Guzheng" is used because of the instrument's long history. Modern people added the word "Gu" (ancient) to distinguish it, which is now the most common name for the Zheng.

SCHOOLS OF GUZHENG

China has always had vast territories and complex geographical conditions. In ancient times, due to the difficulties of transportation and communication, most ordinary people lived in relatively fixed regions. Accordingly, influenced by factors such as geography, climate, history, religion, and culture, different regional cultures emerged. Guzheng, as a part of traditional Chinese culture, naturally developed distinct regional musical styles based on local conditions (Fu L. 2015). This gradually formed the eight major genres of modern Guzheng music (Some scholars believe that it is the Nine Zheng school, but because some geographical and historical issues of the Korean zheng school are controversial, the author tends to divide the Guzheng school into the following eight zheng schools):

1. Henan Guzheng School, known for the 'Zhengwei Sound' of Zheng and Wei.
2. Chaozhou Guzheng School, influenced by the 'Hanjiang Silk and Bamboo' culture.
3. Shandong Guzheng School, characterized by the 'Qilu Da Ban' style.
4. Shaanxi Guzheng School, renowned for the 'True Qin Sound.'
5. Hakka Guzheng School, featuring the 'Hanhao Ancient Rhyme.'



6. Hangzhou Guzheng School and Zhejiang Guzheng School, known for the 'Wulin Heritage Rhyme.'
7. Fujian Guzheng School in the Minnan region.
8. Mongolia Guzheng School, known for the 'Yatuge' style on the grasslands.

As ancient people said, local conditions shape local people, and the same goes for Guzheng music. From its early formation to its later prosperity, local folk music has played a vital role in its development. These genres can generally be divided into two major branches, see the table 1 and table 2: the Southern School, known for its elegance, softness, melodiousness, and subtlety, and the Northern School, characterized by its boldness, clarity, vigor, and majestic style.

Table 1: Guzheng North-South School Classification Chart:

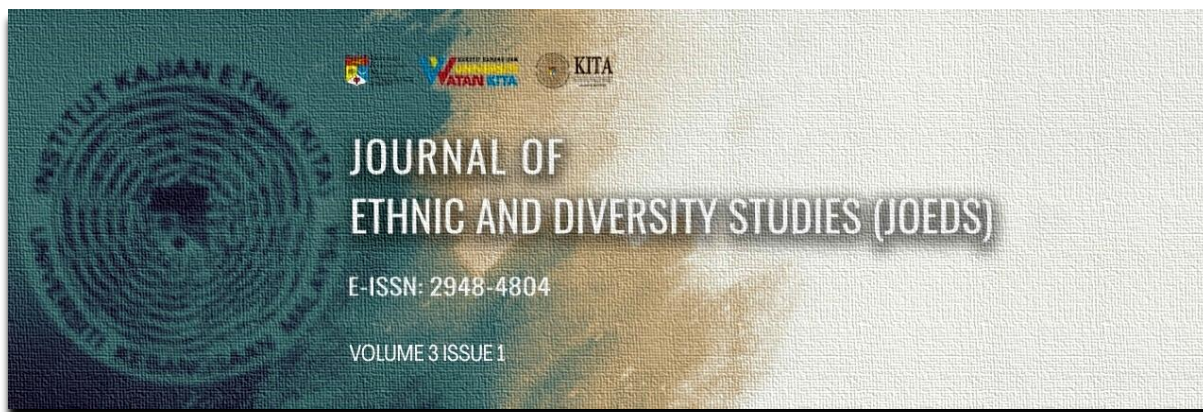
Southern School	Zhejiang Guzheng School, Chaozhou Guzheng School, Hakka Guzheng School, Minnan Guzheng School (Fujian)
Northern School	Shandong Guzheng School, Henan Guzheng School, Shaanxi Guzheng School, Mongolia Guzheng School

Table 2: List of Eight Main Schools of Guzheng:

School	Region	Founder	Style
Shandong Guzheng School	Shandong Province	Li Bangrong	Firm and deep
Zhejiang Guzheng School	Zhejiang Province	Wang Xunzhi	Bright, smooth and beautiful
Henan Guzheng School	Henan Province	Cao Dongfu	Beautiful and elegant
Hakka Guzheng School	Guangdong and Fujian Provinces	Chen Anhua	Fluent and soft
Shaanxi Guzheng School	Shaanxi Province	Zhou Yanjia	Generous and quick
Chaozhou Guzheng School	Guangdong Province	Yang Litong	Simple and elegant
Minnan Guzheng School	Fujian Province	Chen Maojin	Simple and elegant, beautiful and express feelings
Mongolia Guzheng School	Inner Mongolia	anonymity	Bold and bold

THE "ZHENGWEI MUSIC" OF THE HENAN GUZHENG SCHOOL

Henan Province is located in the central plains of China, historically known as Zhongzhou. Henan Zheng music is also known as "Zhongzhou ancient tunes," commonly referred to today as "Henan Zheng music." Henan has always been an agricultural powerhouse and deeply influenced by the cultural environment of the central plains. Henan Zheng music absorbed the essence of local folk opera arts such as Yu Opera, Bantou tunes, Quju opera, and Datiao tunes,

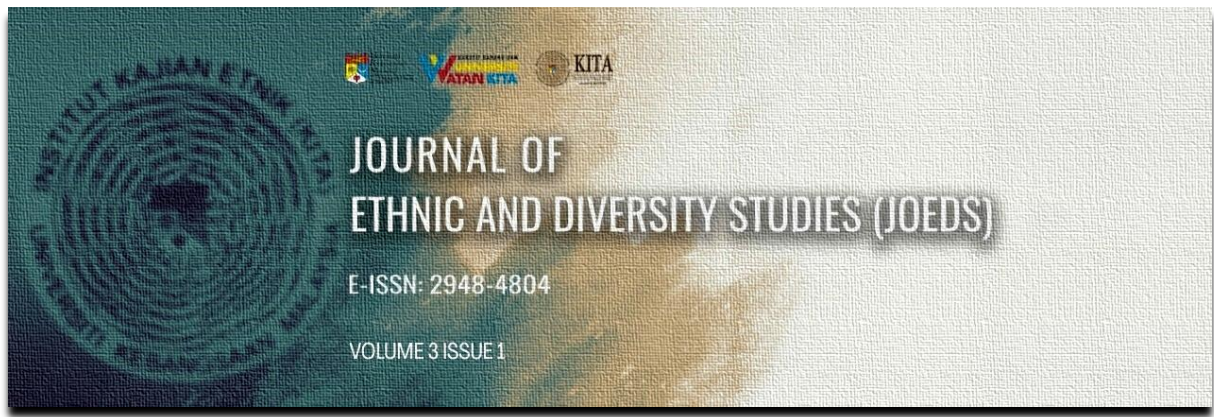


gradually forming its own artistic style. For a long time, "Zhengwei Music" flourished throughout Zhongzhou. Later, due to the capital relocation, Qin Zheng entered Henan. In the mid-Ming Dynasty, a folk music form called "Xian Suo" was introduced to areas like Henan in the central plains. This Xian Suo music ensemble, performed mainly by instruments such as Guzheng, Pipa, and Sanxian, served as accompaniment, enhancing the atmosphere and expressive power before or during the singing of Datiao tunes. Moving into the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Henan Datiao tunes emerged, combining Xian Suo with Bianliang Xiaoyue (N. Li 2006). Initially, Guzheng's performance accompanied Datiao tunes and other vocal music in Henan, gradually absorbing much of their musical content and innovating its techniques during performance, enriching Guzheng's musical expression (Xiao 2023). Ren Qingzhi, Wei Zixian, Cao Dongfu, and Wang Shengwu are all prominent figures of the Henan guzheng school, each making significant contributions to its formation and development. In terms of repertoire, the Henan guzheng school is very rich and diverse, with representative pieces including "Hanjiang Melody," "Lantern Festival," and "Chen Xingyuan and the Fan." (Wang X. 2009)

THE CHAOZHOU GUZHENG SCHOOL OF "HANJIANG SIZHU"

In northern China, the Guzheng is represented by the Henan and Shandong schools, while in the south, it is mainly represented by the Chaozhou Zheng School. Traditional Chaozhou music can be divided into two main categories: "Wenpan" and "Wupan". Wenpan refers to Chaozhou string poetry music and delicate music, while Wupan refers to percussion music. Chaozhou Zheng music originated from Wenpan's string poetry music and delicate music and is an important part of Wenpan. Chaozhou Zheng mainly circulated in the Chaozhou area of Guangdong Province, originally as an accompaniment instrument for Chaozhou string poetry music and delicate music. It gradually appeared as a solo instrument form in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Traditional Chaozhou Zheng tunes are mainly used in "delicate music," which involves the ensemble of Sanxian, Pipa, and Zheng. Performers follow the same original scores but embellish their performances based on the characteristics of each piece and their own technical habits (Guo 2017).

Chaozhou Zheng Music inherits the tonal characteristics of Chaozhou music, distinguishing various modes through "Complement sound with rhyme" technique of the left hand, which involves pressing strings and rolling them to create tones. This is also an important distinguishing feature from other modes. The fingering techniques of the Chaozhou Zheng School are also distinctive, including techniques like "gou tuo ma tuo," "he fei zhi," "qi zhi," and "xiao gou da" (also known as "ji zhao li"). Structurally, Chaozhou Zheng music mostly inherits the structure of Chaozhou string poetry music and delicate music, mainly divided into headboard, second board, third board, and cao pai types. Each board type can be played independently or connected during performances (Xu 2019). Representative pieces include "Han Ya Xi Shui," "Liu Qing Niang," "Fen Hong Lian," among others. Key figures in the Chaozhou Zheng School include Su Wenxian, Lin Maogen, Gao Zherui, and Yang Xiuming.



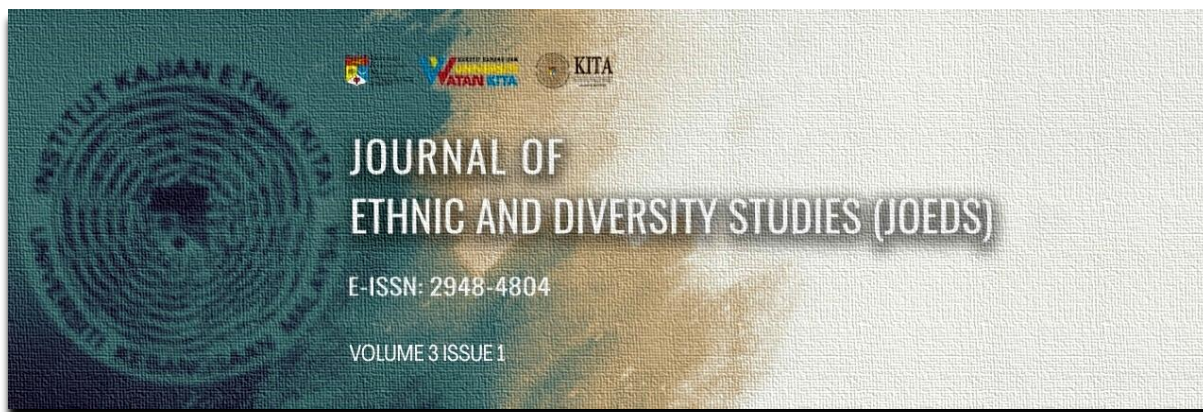
THE SHANDONG GUZHENG SCHOOL OF THE 'QILU BIG BOARD'

According to *Intrigues of the Warring States - Qi Strategies*, it is recorded that "The place of Linzi is very rich and prosperous, where the people enjoy playing the Bamboo Flute, striking the Zhu, and plucking the Zheng." (Liu Xiang and Zhou Liuyan 2022). Therefore, the Shandong zither is also known as the Qizheng. Shandong zither music consists of two parts: traditional Qin music and zheng music evolved from Shandong qin songs. Shandong zither music is mainly popular in the southwestern part of Shandong, including Juancheng, Yuncheng, Heze, and Linqing in the Liaocheng area (Zhao Mingming 2018).

Traditional Shandong zither music adopts the "eight-section structure," with the "collision of eight sections" being the most common silk-string ensemble form. The "eight-section structure" consists of eight musical phrases, each with eight beats, except for the fifth phrase which has twelve beats, totaling sixty-eight beats. The "collision of eight sections" silk-string ensemble form is unique to the Shandong zither school. It involves the Guzheng, Yangqin, Huqin, and Pipa each playing an equal number of sections (phrases), with consistent small sections and musical spaces, but different melodies and titles, creating a naturally harmonious polyphonic music effect (Peirong, Yodwised, and Panyanan 2023). In traditional Shandong zither music, some pieces gradually became independent from Shandong Qin music ensemble, such as "Qin Yun," while others originated from Shandong Qin books' vocal music, such as "Yin Niu Si." The majority of tunes are in court style, compiled from eight large sections. Suite performances are a common music structure in folk music, demonstrating diverse and complex musical expressions. For example, the representative piece of the Shandong zither school, "Gao Shan Liu Shui," is a suite composed of four small pieces: "Shu Yun," "Qin Yun," "Ye Jing Luan Ling," and "Feng Bai Cui Zhu." In addition, there are adaptations from Shandong narrative music vocals, such as "Die Duan Qiao" and "Feng Xiang Ge." Representative figures include Wang Leyong, Zhang Niansheng, Gao Zicheng, Jin Yuting, and Zhao Yuzhai (Yu 2023).

"THE TRUE QIN SOUND" OF THE SHAANXI GUZHENG SCHOOL

The Shaanxi Guzheng School, historically known as the Qin Zheng School, has a long and rich heritage. Earlier in this article, in the section on the 'Origin of the Zheng', it was mentioned that "Striking the rims of jars and pots while playing the Zheng and tapping the thighs to keep rhythm, singing joyful songs, this is the true music of the State of Qin." (Han Dynasty, Sima Qian, 1986), excerpted from *The Jianzhuke Shu* (Sima Qian and Han Zhaoqi 2023). The text describes musical practices in the state of Qin during the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, where the term 'plucking the Zheng' appeared, indicating that the Zheng was popular in the Qin region even before the Warring States Period. The Qin region during the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period corresponds to today's Shaanxi and Gansu provinces, hence the Shaanxi Zheng School is often referred to as the 'True Qin Sound'.

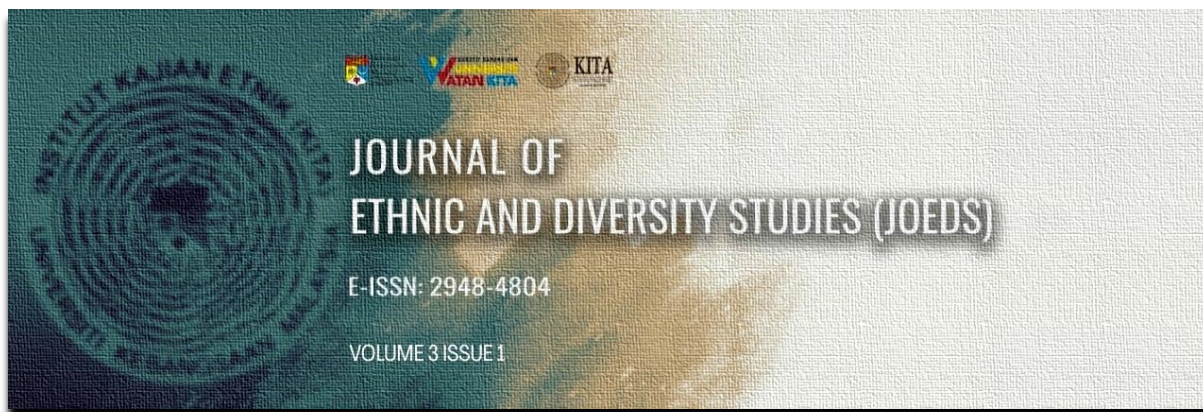


Shaanxi is located in the northwest region of China, due to underdeveloped transportation in earlier years, some areas of Shaanxi were relatively isolated from external influences in terms of economy, culture, and other aspects. As a result, traditional Zheng playing techniques were preserved for a long time. With the development of the times, musical perspectives gradually opened up in line with the era. The decrease in folk artists and the reduction in applications have made Shaanxi Zheng difficult to trace for a long time. In modern times, Zhou Yanjia took on the teaching responsibilities without hesitation. In the preface to *Guzheng Fan Hu Qu Collection*, he clearly proposed the cultural concept of 'Qin Zheng Returns to Qin', which has historical significance. This aimed at revitalizing the national Zheng music industry originating from the Qin region, and also provided a direction for establishing the Guzheng major at Northwest Music College (Yang Z. H. 2024).

In the Shaanxi Zheng School, the most representative stylistic features are undoubtedly the "bitter tones" and "joyful tones". The tune of the joyful tones follows the Mixolydian mode, using the notes sol, la, do, re, mi, expressing emotions such as happiness, brightness, and liveliness. Bitter tones, also known as weeping tones, as the name suggests, convey sorrowful and indignant melodies using the notes sol, si, do, re, fa. The term "bitter tones" originates from the Tang Dynasty poet Cen Can's *Qin Zheng Song sent my nephew Xiao Zheng back to Beijing* that "Have you not heard? The sound of the Qin Zheng is the most bitter. Its strings are entwined with threads of five colors across thirteen string pillars." In the Shaanxi and Gansu regions, Qin tunes and Wanwan tunes in operas and other folk music also feature a characteristic tone known as "bitter tone tunes." (Li Y. 2019). Broadly speaking, bitter tones refer to a tone of bitterness and indignation; narrowly, they refer to the two characteristic tones in this tone: "micro # Fa and micro ♭Si." Representative works include "Embroidered Gold Plaque," "Tears of Jiang's Wife," "Qin Sang Melody," among others. Representative figures include Qu Yun, Zhou Yanjia, Zhou Wang, and others (Wang Yingrui 2016).

THE HAKKA GUZHENG SCHOOL OF "HAN GAO ANCIENT MELODIES"

The Hakka Zheng School, also known as Guangdong Han Music Zheng, primarily thrives in Hakka regions such as Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Fujian, and is one of the significant branches of Chinese Zheng music. Unlike most other branches named after geographical areas like Shandong or Chaozhou, the Hakka branch is named after a distinct ethnic group—the Hakka people. The Hakka Zheng has a long history, partly originating from Guangdong Han Music (Li Z. 2018). Legend has it that Guangdong Han Music emerged during the Eastern Jin to Song dynasties as Central Plains people migrated southward, blending the melodious and ancient "Central Plains melodies" and "Han Gao old scores" with local Guangdong music culture. Guangdong Han Music is also known as "Waijiang Xian," "Hakka Han Music," or "Confucian music." Some of the sources of Hakka Zheng music come from the "Silk String Music" in Guangdong Han Music, a small ensemble combining ancient Zheng, pipa, yehu, and dongxiao in a "Da Diao" style composition (Wang Yingrui 2022a). Through generations, Hakka Zheng musicians enriched, developed, and refined these pieces, gradually transforming them into solo



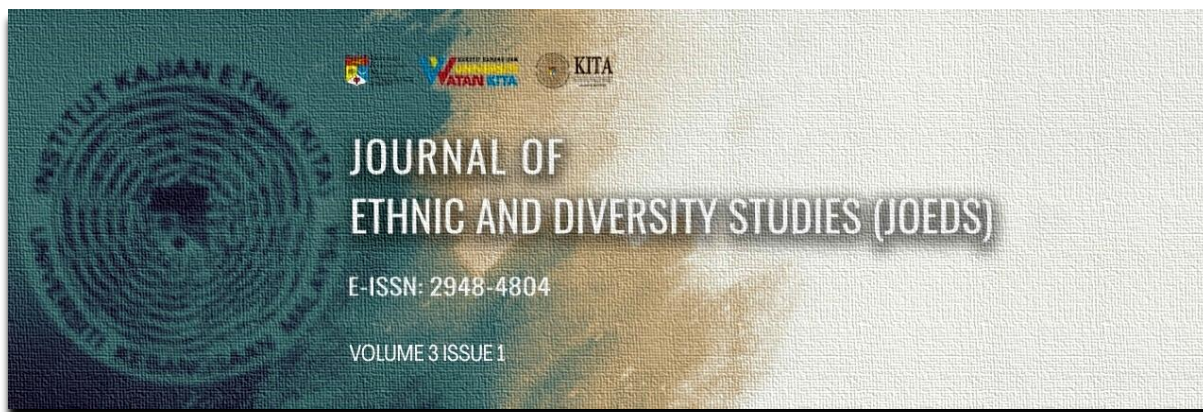
pieces distinctive to the Hakka Zheng school. Another part of the repertoire comes from local folk music and performance arts, known as "Chuan Qu." During performances, Hakka Zheng musicians often use the middle finger, employing vibrato techniques with significant pitch variations, resulting in lingering echoes of Zheng music. Stylistically, Hakka Zheng music is characterized by its elegance and lingering charm. Notable figures include He Yuzhai, Luo Jiuxiang, He Baoquan, and Chen Anhua. Representative compositions include "Emerging Lotus from the Water," "Night Rain at the Banana Window," "Lament of Ya Shan," and "General's Command." (Wang X. 2009)

THE HANGZHOU GUZHENG SCHOOL AND ZHEJIANG ZHENG SCHOOL OF 'WULIN YI YUN'

The Zhejiang Zheng School broadly refers to a regional genre popular in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions. Its "previous incarnation" is often referred to as "Hang Zheng," because "Wulin" was the ancient name for Hangzhou, also known as "Wulin Zheng." "Hang Zheng" emerged in the early 20th century, separating from "Hangzhou Tan Huang" and "Jiangnan Silk and Bamboo," and developing into an independent form of instrumental music (Yuan Jingfang 2004). The performance style of the Zhejiang Zheng School is diverse: it includes elegant, ancient, and simple literary styles, gentle and tranquil tones, as well as magnificent, splendid, and bold martial music styles. It features unique performance techniques, melodic characteristics, and musical structures. Performance techniques include "string lifting," "fast four points," "big thumb shaking," and others. During performances, the Zhejiang Zheng School integrates the playing techniques of other instruments such as the pipa and yangqin. "Swing fingers" in the Zhejiang Zheng School require performers to swing their wrists to make the thumb move quickly and accurately back and forth on the strings, creating melodic and smooth musical lines similar to those produced by bowed string instruments. In addition, "swing fingers" have been widely used in modern compositions of ancient Zheng music, becoming one of the more important and commonly used performance techniques in ancient Zheng music compositions (Wang Yingrui 2022c). Representative works include "High Moon," "Harmony and Auspiciousness," "Generals' Orders," "Celebrating Clouds," among others. Prominent figures include Yin Chun, Wang Xunzhi, Wang Changyuan, Sun Wenyan, and Xiang Sihua (Huang 2013).

MINNAN GUZHENG SCHOOL

Some even believe it has no difference from the Chaozhou zither school. The Minnan zither school is also referred to as "Minnan zither" or "Fujian zither," although there are distinctions between the two. Yang Fan detailed this in his doctoral thesis, noting that Chen Maojin first proposed the concepts of "Minnan zither" and "Fujian zither" in his paper "Exploration of Minnan Zither." Zhang Xuehai also used these terms interchangeably in his paper presented at the First Chinese Guzheng Academic Exchange Conference in Yangzhou. Since then, these

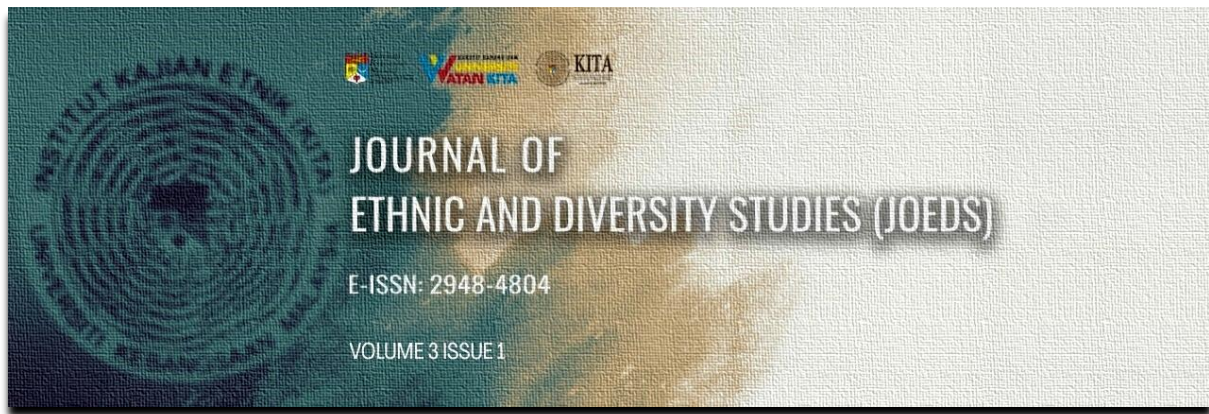


concepts have been widely adopted. Dr. Yang Fan suggests that discussions about "Minnan zither" and "Fujian zither" primarily define the phenomenon of zither appearance in Fujian's history, rather than discussing the artistic characteristics of the Minnan zither school. "Minnan" and "Fujian" are essentially two terms for the same concept, where "Minnan" is a shorthand for Fujian. Therefore, both Chen Maojin and Zhang Xuehai equated "Minnan zither" and "Fujian zither" in their writings. (Yang F. 2017) However, because the Minnan zither school mainly thrives in the Minnan region, using the concepts of "Minnan zither" or "Fujian zither" expands the scope to the entire Fujian province, which risks confusion with another zither school belonging to Fujian—the Hakka zither school. Hence, Dr. Yang Fan chose to use "Minnan zither school" rather than "Minnan zither" or "Fujian zither," a convention followed by the author as well. Representative works include "Spring Beauty Not Yet Clear," "Unintentional Railing," "Inaudible Whisper," "Liáng Fǔ's Song," "Cross-stitch Brocade," "Dragonfly Water Tapping," "Snow Stepping on Plum Blossoms," "Daiwa Fan," "Hundreds of Birds Returning to Nest - Moon Above Begonia," and more. Representative figures include Tang Guocheng, Zhang Yonggu, Chen Youzhang, and Li Wuzhou, among others (Wang Yingrui 2022b).

MONGOLIAN GUZHENG SCHOOL OF "YATOGU" IN THE GRASSLANDS OF INNER MONGOLIA

Yatuga is an instrument frequently used by the Mongolian people and has a long history of development, making it one of the most ancient instruments and a form of the ancient Chinese Guzheng. Therefore, the relationship between yatuga and Chinese instruments is very deep, and it is crucial to fully consider the connections between various instruments when studying them. "Yatuga" is translated from the Mongolian term "yatug," which refers to an instrument long used by the Mongolian ethnic group and now also known as the Mongolian zither. As early as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, this instrument had already gained widespread attention among the populace and became prominent during the Qin Dynasty. The earliest mention of the Mongolian zither in historical documents is found in *The Yan Ju Wu Yue in The Meng Da Bei Lu* written by Zhao Gong of the Southern Song Dynasty and annotated by Wang Guowei, where it was referred to as the "fourteen-stringed instrument." Subsequently, it was recorded in the poem collection *Yushan Pu Manuscript: Two Songs of Si Song* by the Yuan Dynasty poet Gu Ying. The Mongolian zither is also documented in historical texts such as the Ming Dynasty's *Zheng Shizi Se Pu* by the famous music theorist Zhu Zaiyu, the Qing Dynasty's *Si Ku Quan Shu: Shi Bu: Huang Chao Li Qi Tu Shi: Yue Qi, Qing Shi Gao*, and paintings and literature like *Sai Yan Si Shi Tu*, *Zi Guang Ge Si Yan Tu*, and *Qing Chao Wen Xian Tong Kao* (Wang Yu 2017).

The playing techniques of the yatoga generally involve using the right thumb for techniques such as "tuo" and "pi," as well as the index finger for "gou" and "tiao" to perform monophonic pieces. Artists from the grassland regions use the thumb to sweep the tonic or dominant chords up and down, whereas ordos artists use both the thumb and index finger in



the same pattern of "tuo" and "tiao" to increase intensity, change moods, and express individual characteristics. Representative pieces include "ASL" and the various "ASL" named after different banners of Xilingol League, "He Ying Hua," "A Qi Tu," "Ba Yin," "Gao Lin Tao Hai," and "Hundred Birds Gathering in Spring." Notable artists include Yin Dan, Zhang Guoyu, Li Yan, and Xue Tingting (Zhang Y. 2016).

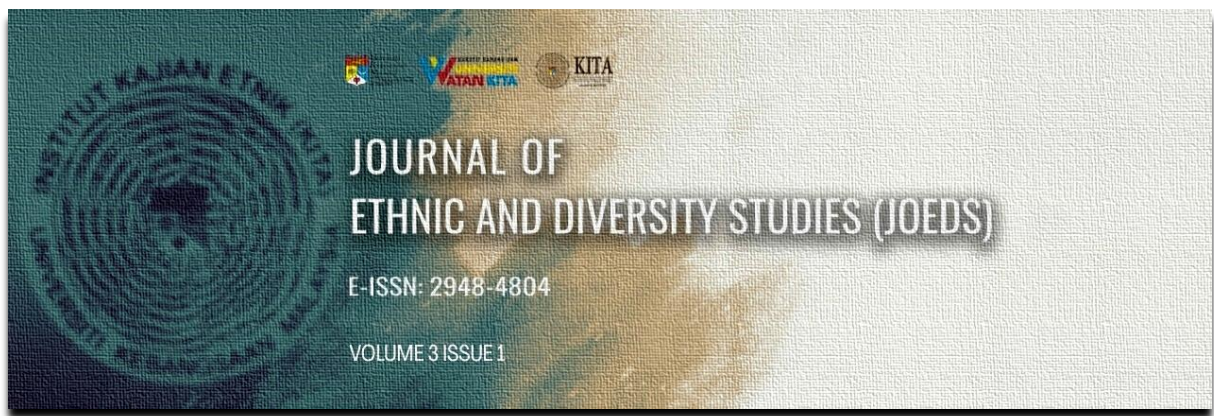
CURRENT STATUS OF THE INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF GUZHENG SCHOOLS

Culture is the soul of a nation and its people. The inheritance and protection of excellent traditional culture require the joint efforts of the state, society, and individuals. In recent years, countries around the world have been actively advocating for the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage. Influenced by various national policies, people have begun to value the study of Chinese traditional culture and traditional musical instruments. In China, the implementation of protective policies has increased social awareness and recognition of traditional musical instruments. National policies provide institutional guarantees for the inheritance and development of traditional culture. Culture is the crystallization of people's wisdom, and people are the creators and inheritors of culture. Focusing on the people is essential to promoting the high-quality development of the cultural industry. Therefore, the protection of inheritors and the cultivation of successors are also particularly important. Through the previous analysis of the musical styles and representative works of the eight major schools of the Guzheng, I have gained new insights into the study, inheritance, and development of Guzheng music.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF GUZHENG SCHOOLS' INHERITANCE

Transmission Media.

From ancient times to the present, the development of the Guzheng has gone through three key periods: oral transmission, written notation, and multimedia. In the earliest times, traditional Guzheng techniques were mainly passed down through oral transmission between master and apprentice. Guzheng masters would impart their skills and experiences to their apprentices, who would then master these techniques through long-term training and practical performance. Subsequently, written notation began to spread. Guzheng scores became an important medium for the inheritance of Guzheng art. Both traditional hand-copied scores and modern printed scores play a crucial role in Guzheng education. The standardization and normalization of scores have enabled the wide dissemination of Guzheng works, allowing students to learn classic pieces from different schools by reading scores (Guo 2017). In contemporary society, with the advancement of technology, multimedia has become an important tool for the inheritance of Guzheng art. Video tutorials, online courses, and Guzheng performance videos have greatly enriched learning resources. Internet platforms such as YouTube and Bilibili



provide a wealth of Guzheng performance and teaching videos, allowing students to watch and learn anytime and anywhere. The use of multimedia has made the dissemination of Guzheng art more convenient and efficient, especially during the pandemic, when online teaching has become the primary mode of learning.

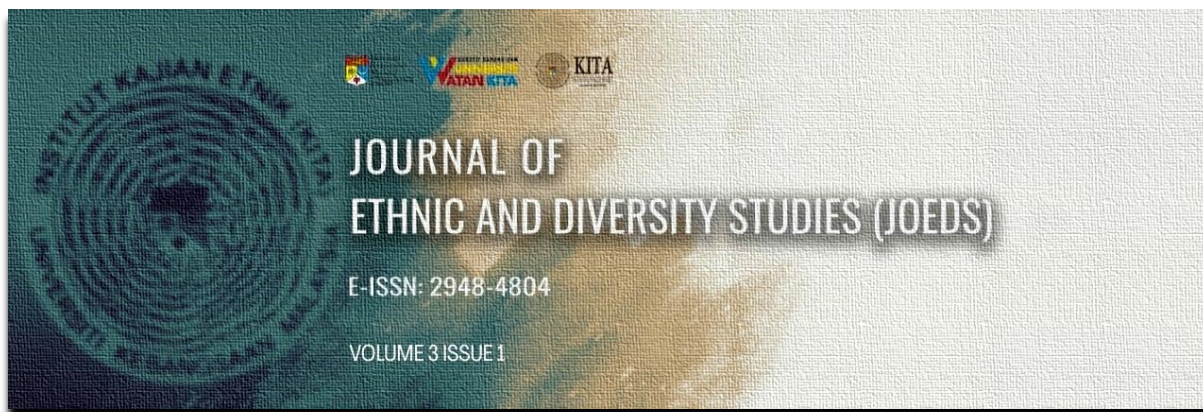
Market Inheritance.

Technological advancements have provided new avenues for the dissemination and inheritance of Guzheng art. Digital technology has made high-quality audio and video recordings possible, allowing Guzheng performances to be recorded and shared with greater fidelity. Various audio formats such as digital discs, MP3, FLAC, as well as high-definition video files, enable Guzheng works to be widely distributed around the world. Guzheng art is gradually becoming industrialized. Professional recording studios and production teams provide technical support for recording Guzheng performances. These specialized recording teams are standardizing and improving the quality of Guzheng music recordings, producing standardized and high-quality art discs. The recording of Guzheng art discs includes not only traditional classic pieces but also modern Guzheng compositions, enriching the expressive forms of Guzheng music (Xu 2019). As market demand grows, the recording and distribution of Guzheng music discs are becoming increasingly professional. The environment of recording studios, the professionalism of equipment, and the technical skills of recording engineers have all seen significant improvements. High-quality audio and video recordings faithfully capture the details and artistic expression of Guzheng performances, allowing listeners to appreciate the performers' exquisite skills through discs. The distribution channels for Guzheng performance discs and digital products are becoming more standardized and orderly, with enhanced market regulation and copyright protection. Music platforms like NetEase Cloud Music, QQ Music, Apple Music, and video websites ensure the rights of Guzheng artists through legitimate authorization and standardized distribution. A favorable market environment and regulated distribution channels have broadened the dissemination of Guzheng art and promoted its development and inheritance.

PROBLEMS FACED IN THE INHERITANCE OF GUZHENG SCHOOLS

Limited Participation of Traditional Guzheng Masters in University Teaching.

Most inheritors of traditional Guzheng schools are independent artists or work in local music groups, with few opportunities to participate in university teaching. This results in difficulties in systematically imparting traditional techniques and culture, leading to a lack of a standardized education system. Consequently, students are unable to comprehensively and deeply learn the essence of traditional Guzheng schools (Yu 2023). Additionally, university curricula tend to focus more on modern performance techniques and theories, resulting in a relatively weak foundation in the knowledge system of traditional Guzheng schools, and causing gaps in the inheritance of this art form.



Weakening of Traditional Guzheng School's Dissemination Due to Development of Western Music.

With the popularization and increasing influence of Western music in China, the dissemination of traditional Guzheng schools has been somewhat impacted (Zhao Mingming 2018). The maturity and rich resources of the Western music education system have led to more students and parents choosing to study Western instruments, resulting in a decrease in the source of students for traditional Guzheng schools. Additionally, changes in modern music aesthetics and performance techniques have made traditional Guzheng schools appear relatively conservative in performance and teaching, further weakening their dissemination and influence.

Heritage and Development of Guzheng Performance Techniques.

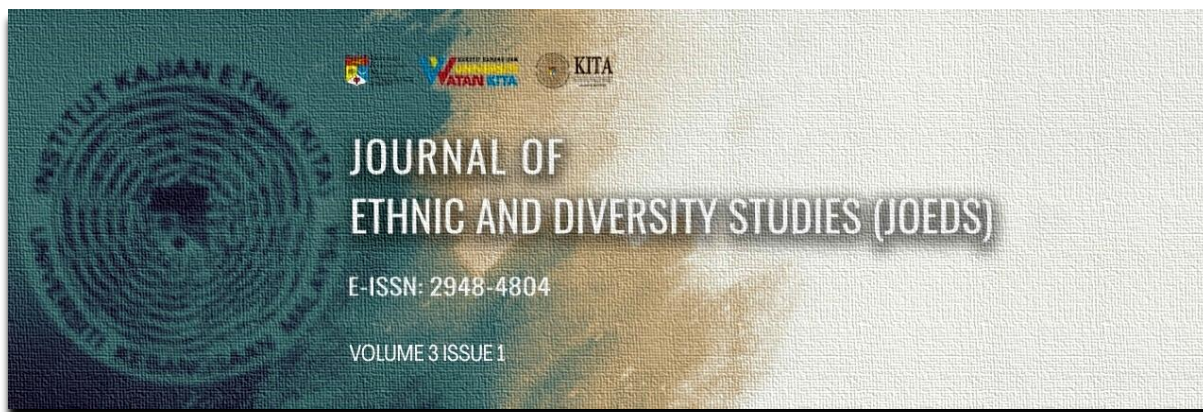
With the rapid development of information technology, the Guzheng faces the impact of diverse music styles, intensifying changes in techniques, and the development of dual-handed playing techniques is an inevitable trend. Guzheng techniques have evolved from simplicity to brilliance, reflecting the development from melody-centric to more harmonic approaches. Traditional techniques form the core of Guzheng art, expressing richness in flavor, artistic conception, philosophical thoughts, and emotions. Since the 21st century, with the enrichment of Guzheng repertoire, there has been a necessary emphasis on the return to traditional techniques. This requires exploring traditional techniques deeply from emotional content and stylistic characteristics, conveying the profound meanings of Chinese traditional music culture (Zhou Yi 2020). While emphasizing traditional techniques, modern compositions require richer expressive capabilities. Integrating traditional and modern techniques demands strong musical literacy and humanistic sentiments. It involves interpreting works sensibly, capturing stylistic nuances, enhancing personal performance levels, and promoting the development and innovation of Guzheng techniques.

Lack of Professional Talent Pool Construction.

The inheritance and development of Guzheng schools require a strong support of professional talent. However, there are currently some issues in the construction of a professional talent pool, such as a shortage of high-level teachers and performers, and an imperfect teacher training system. To address these issues, efforts should be made to enhance the training and professional development opportunities for Guzheng teachers and performers, thereby improving their professional skills and teaching capabilities (Wang Yingrui 2016). Furthermore, establishing a sound teacher evaluation and incentive mechanism is essential to attract more outstanding talents to engage in Guzheng education and performance careers. Simultaneously, encouraging excellent students to pursue further education and become future professionals is crucial for ensuring the inheritance and development of Guzheng art.

Lack of Financial Support.

The inheritance and development of Guzheng schools require adequate financial support, but currently, investment in this area remains insufficient. The lack of financial support affects the



development of Guzheng education, creation, and performances at all levels (Chen 2019). Therefore, governments, businesses, and various sectors of society should work together to increase financial investment in Guzheng art and the training of talents. It is crucial to establish a diversified financial support system to ensure that Guzheng schools can develop healthily in a conducive environment.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF GUZHENG SCHOOLS AND METHODS

Emphasizing the Training and Protection of Guzheng School Inheritors.

From ancient times to the present, China has upheld the philosophy of "harmony in diversity," where traditional culture embodies openness and inclusiveness, reflecting the essence of Chinese civilization (Gaywood 1996). With the popularity of Western music in China, traditional culture has faced challenges. However, the state has implemented policies to revitalize traditional culture, emphasizing the importance of protecting and inheriting it (Liu Xinwei 2019). Currently, inheritors of Guzheng schools face the issue of aging, with fewer young successors. Therefore, it is urgent to intensify efforts in training and protecting Guzheng inheritors. Through various channels, efforts should be made to attract and cultivate more young people to join the ranks of Guzheng art inheritance, ensuring the continuous development of Guzheng schools.

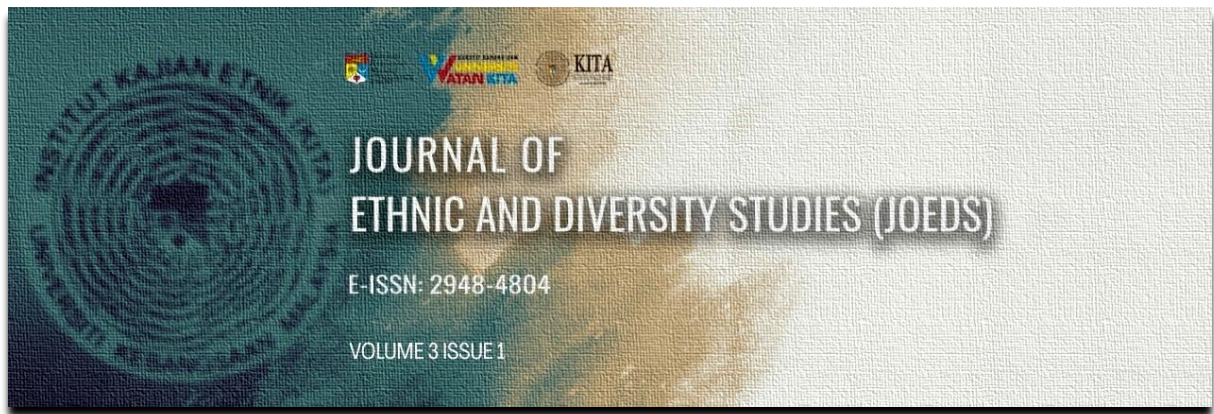
Utilizing the Internet to Promote Dissemination and Development.

The internet has provided unprecedented opportunities for promoting and disseminating Guzheng schools. Through online platforms, teaching videos can be published, online concerts and training courses can be held, providing more people with the opportunity to engage with and learn Guzheng art. Additionally, social media and music platforms can serve as important channels for promoting Guzheng schools. Leveraging the convenience and wide reach of online communication, these platforms can expand the influence and audience of Guzheng schools, thereby promoting their development.

Commercialization Trend in Guzheng Music.

With changes in market demand and the influence of commercialization, some Guzheng compositions have shown a trend towards commercialization. This trend focuses on superficial effects, neglecting the artistic essence and traditional techniques of Guzheng, which can lead to the vulgarization and shallowness of Guzheng art (J. Zhang 2018). Therefore, emphasis should be placed on the quality of Guzheng composition, encouraging creators to delve deep into traditional culture, integrate modern aesthetics, and create outstanding Guzheng pieces that not only possess artistic value but also preserve traditional characteristics with contemporary relevance. This approach helps to avoid the trend towards commercialization, ensuring that the development of Guzheng schools retains its essential ethnic identity.

Differences in Musical Aesthetics.



In contemporary times, Guzheng art also faces challenges regarding differences in musical aesthetics. Some performers and audiences pursue forms of music expression that are "homogenized," "academic," or "exaggerated," while overlooking the unique charm and traditional techniques of Guzheng schools (Yang Z. H. 2024). Therefore, it is essential to advocate for diverse musical aesthetic views, respect and embrace the artistic characteristics of different schools, encourage innovation while preserving traditions, and avoid blindly pursuing flashy techniques and homogenization. This approach ensures that Guzheng art thrives in a diverse aesthetic environment while maintaining its foundation in traditional inheritance.

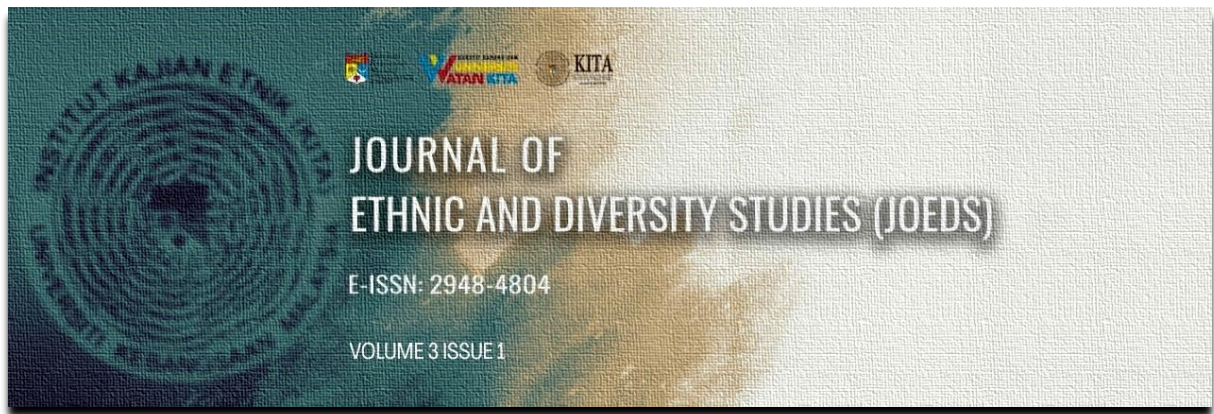
Professional Personnel Team Building.

The construction of a professional talent pool in the Guzheng schools first requires a sound education system. Establishing Guzheng majors in various levels of music colleges and art schools to systematically teach the history, techniques, and theoretical knowledge of Guzheng schools is essential. The emphasis should be on increasing the proportion of traditional Guzheng courses to ensure students comprehensively understand and master the technical characteristics and performance styles of each school (Xiao 2023). Additionally, offering graduate and doctoral degree programs will cultivate high-level Guzheng professionals, providing academic support for the inheritance and development of Guzheng schools. A high-quality teaching team is crucial for nurturing professional Guzheng talents. Combining the introduction of high-end talents with the cultivation of local talents is necessary to build a highly qualified Guzheng teaching team. Encouraging current teachers to participate in further education and training will enhance their teaching and research capabilities. Organizing regular teaching and research activities for teachers to share teaching experiences and methods will elevate overall teaching quality.

CONCLUSION

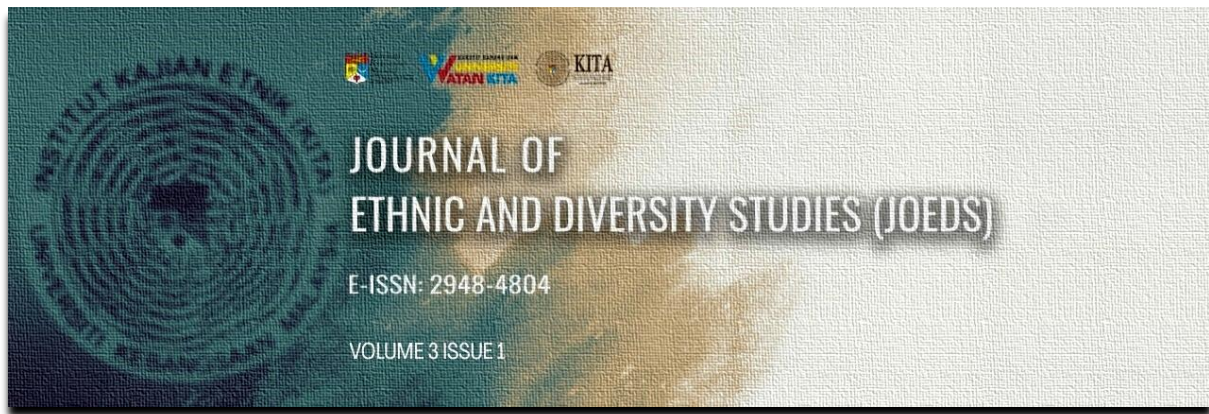
The Guzheng, as a treasure of Chinese traditional music culture, possesses a long history and profound cultural heritage. From its origins to its modern development, the Guzheng has continuously evolved and innovated, forming rich artistic forms and distinctive schools (Liu Xueqi 2019). Through discussions on its origins, nomenclature, schools, current status of inheritance and development, as well as explorations of protective measures, we gain a more comprehensive and profound understanding of this traditional instrument.

The origin and development of the Guzheng demonstrate its significant position in Chinese music history. The Guzheng is not only a carrier of musical art but also a symbol of Chinese culture. However, the origin of the Guzheng remains a mystery to this day, awaiting further investigation and research by scholars. Behind the naming of the Guzheng lies rich cultural connotations. By exploring the origin of the name "Guzheng," we can better understand its status and significance in Chinese traditional culture. The naming of the Guzheng not only reflects its unique sound and artistic characteristics but also embodies the traditions and cultural



customs of naming ancient Chinese musical instruments. Meanwhile, the various schools of Guzheng demonstrate the diversity and richness of its artistry. Different schools exhibit distinctive techniques, styles, and forms of expression, collectively constituting the blossoming of Guzheng art. Through analysis of these schools, we can appreciate the multifaceted charm of Guzheng art and understand the efforts and contributions of different schools in heritage and innovation. Reflections on the current status and development of Guzheng schools reveal the challenges and opportunities facing Guzheng in modern society. By analyzing the current state of heritage, we can identify effective approaches and methods to protect and propagate Guzheng schools.

Finally, the exploration of protective methods for Guzheng schools provides practical and feasible recommendations for the inheritance and development of Guzheng traditions. Accelerating the construction of succession teams, and actively utilizing modern communication mediums like the internet are crucial means to safeguard Guzheng cultural heritage. Only through collective efforts across society can Guzheng schools be better protected and preserved, revitalizing with new vitality.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments on the original manuscript.

Authors' contributions

Li Yanjun, Shazlin Amir Hamzah and Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah design the research. Li Yanjun looked up all the data information mentioned in the paper. Li Yanjun completed the analysis of the data and wrote a manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

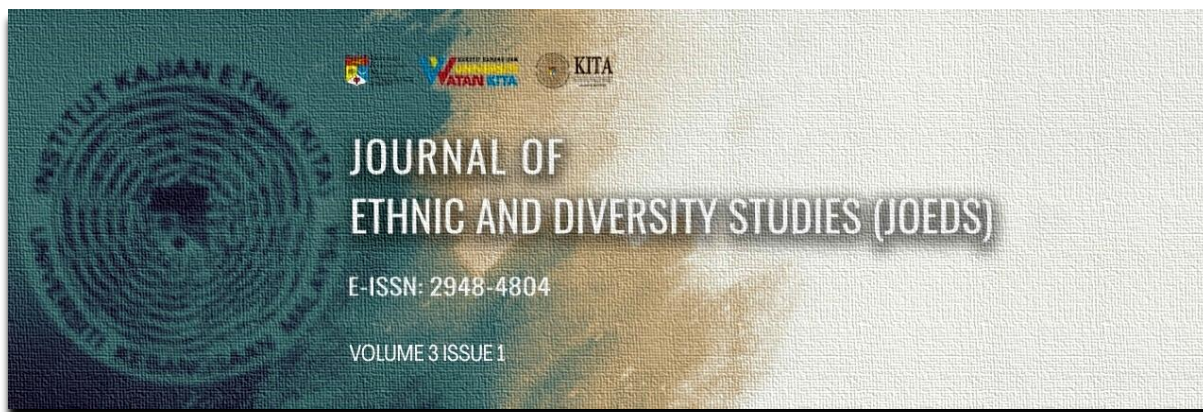
Not applicable.

Competing interests

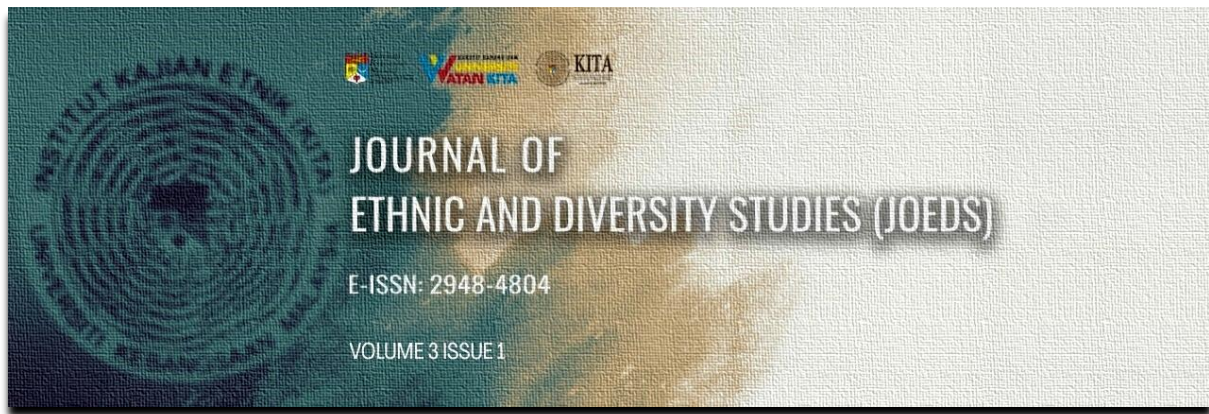
All authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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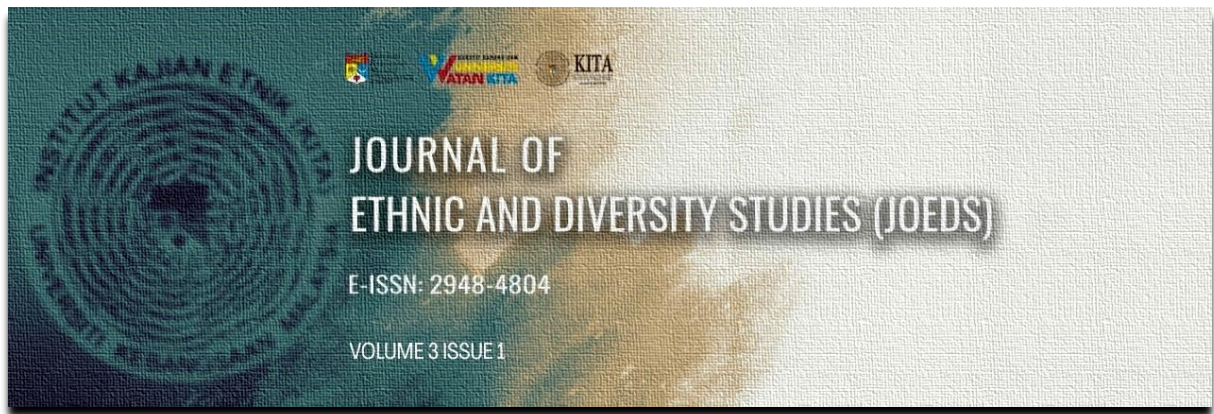
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