

# Qin in art essay sample

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### *Introduction*

The usage of *Qin* instrument in art has always been influenced by culture, stage of development and tradition. The *Qin* instrument is one of the oldest ancient instruments that can be traced back during the *Qin* Dynasty (221 to 206 B. C.) under the leadership of Shi-Huang Ti. According to Duckworth and Fleming (1997), the *Qin* instrument is a fretless type of Zither that (1) possessed the standard seven strings, (2) no movable bridges and (3) believed to be part of the Zhou musical classics.

Origins of the *Qin* remains a mystery since most resources describing their characteristics and usage are limited to being a type of zither. Modern art archeologists and Chinese historians are using two principal sources to study this music instrument, particularly the (1) tombs with their ancient remains and (2) authenticated ancient paintings and portraits that embedded minor to major portrayals of *Qin* instrument Thompson 2007. Other forms of deciphering the mystery of *Qin* are the literary compositions that mention the usage of *Qin* and songs that relate their messages to the subject of *Qin* playing. Hence, the discussion further analyzes the history and mystery of *Qin* by using these paintings, poems and songs that mention or illustrate the *Qin* instrument; hence, the term, the *Qin in Art*.

### *Discussion*

#### *Chinese History: Confucianism and Daoism*

The philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism are two religions that emerged in China during the periods of 475 to 221 B. C. The two ideologies have

greatly influenced the political turbulence and social unrest within the walls of Chinese society. According to Gardner, Kleiner and Mamiya (2004), Daoism (from the word *Daodejing* - “ *The Way and Its Power* ”) is derived from the metaphysical teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi about “...intuitive awareness nurtured by harmonious contact with nature, and eschews everything artificial (196)”. Daoism seeks to follow the universal path derived from nature and personal cultivation through isolation and meditation. On the other hand, the ideology of Confucianism derives its primary concepts from the belief of “ *junzi* ” or superior person or man who should also possess “ *ren* ” (human-heartedness). The philosophy of Confucius aims the achievement of Junzi to oneself by cultivating different virtues (e. g. empathy, suffering, pursuit of morality, justice, social relationships, adherence to tradition, etc.).

The two ideologies are essentially differentiated by their fundamental beliefs: (1) Daoism’s belief of cultivation by reclusion and (2) Confucianism’s social responsibility and order in the community (Gardner, Kleiner and Mamiya 2004). In the Daoist ideology, the playing of Qin or other zithers is regarded as a form of peaceful self-expression and lingering to tradition. The imagery of Qin in Daoist perspective initiates multiple meanings, such as eroticism, friendship and contemplation (Kohn and Roth 2002). Meanwhile, Confucianism regards the playing of Qin instrument as a form of self-embodiment and socialization (Hall and Ames 1987).

*Chinese Instrument: Qin Art*

The Chinese instrument, Qin zither, is the primary instrument used to accompany the processes of meditation and self-cultivation. Considering its soloist nature, the Qin music is characterized by its extramusical themes and degrees of abstraction. Furthermore, the sound it produces is rather imitative towards its surrounding environment, especially the sounds of nature, emotive and psychological themes (Myres 1992). Qin instrument belongs to the category of *chordophones* or stringed instruments. The strings are stretched towards the entire length of the instrument's body (Duckworth and Fleming 1996). The physical instrument comprises specific parts, namely (1) the body, (2) silk strings, (3) tassels, (4) *Zhen* (turning pegs) and (5) *Hui* (studs along right sides of Qin body). The actual body of Qin is made from two boards about 125 cm in height and 20 cm in length, which are fused together to form a sound box present along the entire length of the board. The accessory parts of the board include (1) *nayin* (a sound hole) used as sound resonator, (2) *hui* (studs) that acts as the harmonic nodes and (3) the two sound posts (a. heavenly post on the right, b. earthly post on the left) (Thompson 2007).

Various characteristics of the instrument affect the quality and sound production; hence, these are important considerations of Qin as an instrument. These contributing factors include (1) wood, (2) lacquer and (3) strings. The wood used to construct the body of the entire instrument is the rare, *Wutong*; however, there are also substitutes used to construct the body, such as old woods from coffins, temples, etc, and *tong* from certain types of pine. Another consideration is the lacquer, the thin coat used to cover the body should be soft enough to produce sounds (Thompson 2007).

### *Qin Arts*

The applications of Qin instrument in artistic illustrations and compositions are rather rare, and most date from historical times, especially from Qin and Han dynasty. There are three forms of Qin's illustrations of art, particularly (1) among old oil paintings, (2) literary poems and (4) musical compositions. Some of the famous Qin paintings are seen in figure 1 and figure 2. In these two illustrations, the common element in Qin paintings is the utilization of the background to illustrate the natural inclinations of the music. Evidently, Qin melodies are inspired by the natural sounds through imitative music. In addition to the natural setting of the background, most paintings are illustrating the elements of (1) nobility and (2) philosophy. From the earlier discussions of Confucianism and Daoism (fig 3), the playing of Qin has been associated to abstraction and the concept of self-searching. In these paintings, fig 1 illustrates the men's disposition in society as part of the Chinese traditions. Confucianism emphasizes the value of men domination against the opposite gender, while the feminine portrayal is attached to the role of servitude towards men. On the other hand, the second painting illustrates the higher place of the instrument in the presence of the society by associating the characters to the higher class or politically inclined elements of the society.

### *Korean Old Instrument*

The most notable Korean instrument similar to the Chinese *Qin* is the Komungo (Geomungo) or Hyeongeum. Komungo is the Korean version of zither stringed instrument that possesses nearly similar attributes of Qin. The

origin of the instrument is the fourth century Circa through the *Goguryo* kingdom of Manchuria and Korean peninsula. The Prime minister *Wan San-ak* (1145) is considered as the main proponent of the instrument through his earliest version called *quqin* (seven-string zither) (Howard 144). The physical object measures 162 x 23 cm, possesses movable bridges ( *Anjok* ), 16 frets shaped in convex manner, and possess a hollow body that acts as the sound box. Wood characteristic of Komungo is hard chestnut wood, particularly resembling to *Paulownia* . Unlike Qin, the sound produced by Komungo is rather aggressive, vigorous and strong, which resembles to a masculine environment (May 33).

#### *Comparison of Chinese and Korean Drawings*

Korean Komungo possesses significant similarities and differences to the Chinese Qin zither music instrument in terms of (1) usage and (2) the characters playing the musical piece. In Chinese Qin drawings, the ideologies of Daoism and Confucianism are presented in the paintings with Qin musical plays. In Daoism applications, paintings (fig 1 and 2) demonstrate the idea of meditation and seclusion, while Confucianism (fig 3) involves the illustration of socialization. On the other hand, the Korean drawings also illustrate how the society conducts their social gatherings, and forms of community traditions and customs while playing their Komungo (Howard 2006).

However, Korean drawings of their Komungo are different from the Qin paintings in terms of their classifications of people playing the instrument. In figures 5 and 6, the people playing the instrument are considerable members of the common society, unlike in figures 1 and 3 wherein the characters are obviously parts of royalty. In addition, the elements of the <https://assignbuster.com/qin-in-art-essay-sample/>

paintings depict two components that best describe the illustrated events, particularly (1) recreation (fig. 5) and (2) social traditions and norms (fig. 4). In Chinese Qin illustrations, the paintings are oriented to the nature and purpose of the instrument, specifically (1) philosophy and (2) nobility.

### *Conclusion*

The famous instrument Chinese instrument Qin has long been part of the Chinese culture and philosophies (Confucianism and Daoism). In the Chinese traditions, the application of Qin in art provides significant link on how ideologies of Daoism (seclusion and self-searching) and Confucianism (social interactions and order) are applied as part of their culture. In the Korean instrument, *komungo*, the physical instrument itself possesses similarities to Chinese Qin but differs in many ways as well. In Korean paintings, the playing of Komungo illustrates mostly recreational purposes and part of fulfilling their Korean traditions. In a sense, two different culture and their two nearly similar instruments provide different use in their society and culture.

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