

# **A Comparative Study of National Musical Instruments and the National Culture behind Them**

## **-- Taking the Comparison of Gayageum and Lusheng as an Example**

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**Abstract.** In order to study the relationship between traditional ethnic musical instruments and the characteristics of ethnic minorities, this paper selected two distinct ethnic minorities. They are Miao and Korean, respectively. This paper compares the two traditional musical instruments in terms of the geographical characteristics of minority residences, the living habits and the use of minority nationalities. The two instruments are Lusheng and Gayageum.

**Keywords:** Lusheng; Gayageum; Ethnic Minority Areas in Southwest China; Korean Nationality Region; Cultural comparison.

### **1. Introduction**

Lusheng is made of bamboo, wood and metal, and is divided into 2 types of lusheng: light-weight lusheng and accent-lusheng. Lusheng originated in the Central Plains, and later spread to minority areas as reed instruments for the Miao, Yao, Dong and other ethnic groups in the southwest. The earliest document for the LuSheng, The Book of Songs, records "Blowing Sheng, Blowing Sheng, Drum Reed", indicating that LuSheng has a history of more than 3000 years. On June 14, 2008, Lusheng Music was approved by the State Council to be incorporated in the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists.

Gayageum is a Korean multi-string plucked musical instrument that originated in North Korea. Depending on the records of "History of the Three Kingdoms": "The twelve-stringed Gayageum made by the King of Gayageum Kingdom. It is just like the law of December. It destines to restrain its music." Gayageum Koto originated from Gayageum Kingdom and was made by imitation of Han Zheng. The Gayageum is rectangular in shape, like a zheng. The Gayageum's panel is made of tung wood, the bottom plate is made of chestnut wood, the Gayageum horse and other decorative parts are composed of locust, rosemary, rosewood or ebony. A total of 21 strings. According to the "Documentary Examination", "Han Youse, its shape is like a building. It plays with sound, music and Huqin class." Describes the overall appearance of Gayageum and the types of musical instruments.

This article attempts to start with two national musical instruments, LuSheng and Gayageum, using research methods that combine literature research and field investigations. Make a comparative study of the two national musical instruments themselves and the national characteristics behind them, as well as the protection and inheritance path of national instrumental music culture.

### **2. Comparison of Two National Musical Instruments**

#### **2.1 Comparison of Performance Skills and Methods**

Lusheng is a clarinet musical instrument of the Miao, Dong, Shui, Yao, Gelao and other ethnic groups. When playing, the Sheng tube is erected, the hands are organized in the hands, the finger presses the sound hole, the mouth contains the mouthpiece, and the mouth can be pronounced. LuSheng's playing skills are similar to Sheng's, and he uses the single vomit method to play. It can play two-tone or three-tone, four-tone chords of various intervals, and can play C, F, G and other tunes. Can be utilized to solo, duet, ensemble or accompaniment. Lusheng music belongs to the

federal five-tone mode. In terms of chorus, as the player's mood changes, sometimes there will be discordant intervals. Lusheng music's rhythm is slow, the melody is mellow and soft, free and soothing, with greater improvisation and randomness. Lusheng's tune is long, rich in content, and euphemistic.

In Yanbian, China, the original Gayageum was dominated by twelve strings. Before the 1960s, Yanbian Song and Dance Ensemble and other art groups transformed the Gayageum, adding 13 to 18 strings. The Central National Song and Dance Troupe widened and lengthened the sound of the Gayageum, and changed the material of the strings to steel wire nylon strings or nylon silk strings. There are two ways to play Gayageum. When playing a smaller Gayageum, put the left end on the ground and the right end of the left knee. When playing a larger Gayageum, it will be given to the frame. In the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region, Gayageum players were mostly men before liberation, and more women after liberation. The main techniques of Gayageum playing are dialing, rolling, and arpeggio. More common is "stringing", which is used to produce chanting and vibrato. Pentatonic scales are widely used in Gayageum music. Its playing skills are comparable to those of many traditional Chinese plucked musical instruments.

## **2.2 Intuitive Experience of Field Investigation**

The author went to Miao Village in Southeast Guizhou, Guizhou in early June of this year [1]. Miao Village we visited was not a commercial village, but a common residential area. After we walked the Yeshan Road for more than two hours, we finally arrived at Miao Village. We were greeted by LuSheng and firecrackers. In the sound of firecrackers, I can still hear the high-pitched sound of LuSheng clearly. Some players use a strap to carry LuSheng on their backs. Lusheng players can hold Lusheng and perform Lusheng dances. The focus of Lusheng Dance is mainly on the change of footsteps, because both hands are used to play Lusheng. Due to the unique chord composition of LuSheng, the music played by LuSheng is very similar most of the time. Except for some changes in rhythm, other chord changes are really difficult to recognize. Therefore, when listening to LuSheng, it is very difficult for everyone to hear the tune.

This summer, during my academic exchanges in South Korea, the author observed South Korea's national music and Gayageum.[2] There is a citizen Music Museum in Seoul, South Korea, as well as a place dedicated to enjoying national music. A performance time is about one and a half hours, and there is no more than ten tracks in total. Compared to popular music, Korean national music requires people to spend a long time listening. Coupled with the passionate repetition of the tune, the audience is prone to reactions such as drowsiness. When I am enjoying Korean national music, I need in order to concentrate to stay awake. I don't know if it's a mistake or the characteristics of the instrument itself. The pitch from the traditional Korean musical instruments such as Gayageum is low. I feel that the whole genre is very weird and has a sinking feeling, and it does not commit people full of energy (especially in slow-tempo music). Whenever a note finishes playing, the tone will naturally fall, giving a feeling of ups and downs. For Korean national music (non-pure percussion), most people do not like to accept some music that doesn't remember well.

## **2.3 The Performance Occasions and Cultural Functions of the Two Musical Instruments**

### **2.3.1 Lusheng's Performance Occasions and Cultural Functions**

Lusheng's immense role in the Miao people is basically related to marriage and funeral. The most frequent are Lusheng in funeral ceremonies and Lusheng in various welcoming ceremonies and festive days.

In funeral ceremonies, the Miao people have their own worship of the Miao culture: nature worship, ghost worship and ancestor worship. Lusheng is mainly utilized for reassuring and opening the way for the dead. The Miao people have a tradition of reassuring with music. The Miao people usually play LuSheng and drums during funeral ceremonies. The main purpose of playing LuSheng is to mourn the dead relatives, express their sorrow and miss the dead. It is mainly used to appease the departed souls of the dead and let the dead feel the missing of the world. Another purpose is to ensure that funerals not so sad. LuSheng will also be used to activate the atmosphere

at the funeral, so that the family will not be too gloomy. Nevertheless, at the same time, it also well conveyed the family's reluctance to the dead.[3]

In addition to the funeral ceremony, LuSheng also has a connection with LuSheng dance. In the Miao people, there is a spontaneous non-governmental organization Lusheng dance activity: the traditional slope meeting. Pohui is a traditional festival of the Miao people, usually held on the thirteenth of the first lunar month to honor ancestors. It will also serve as an occasion for people to exchange feelings and celebrate the harvest. Pohui is a large gathering of the Miao people. Of course, apart from traditional festivals, Lusheng also plays an important part in the current festivals. In modern government-led festivals, Lusheng mainly plays a part in rendering the atmosphere and creating a festive atmosphere. This approach can enhance the regional artistic soft power and accelerate local economic development.[4]

### **2.3.2 Gayageum's Performance Occasions and its Cultural Functions**

Gayageum is generally used for sacrifices. When worshiping the heavenly spirits in ancient times, the Gayageum will accompany the dance as an accompaniment instrument. The performers of dance are generally queens or kings. In the entire dance music, Gayageum will appear alone in front of the music. The rhythm of the entire dance also changes from slow to fast, and Gayageum also perfectly complements the beauty of dance.

At the customary wedding of the Korean ethnic group, there will also be Gayageum. It's just that they don't appear alone but play music with other national music to set off the jovial and cheerful atmosphere.

## **2.4 The Status Qua of the Survival of the Two National Instrumental Music**

### **2.4.1 The Crisis Encountered by the Inheritance of Lusheng Culture and the Countermeasures**

The Miao people have no words, and Lusheng tunes have no sheet music. It all passes down from generation to generation. There is always some discrepancy between the Lusheng song that everyone plays now and the previous ones. This seriously affected the effective inheritance of Lusheng culture.

Chords in Lusheng's music sound extremely unharmonious, and it is difficult for the public to accept it. Even indigenous children do not like Lusheng's voice very much.

With the inflow and outflow of culture, while the outflow of Miao culture is also accompanied by the inflow of mainstream culture, teenagers have more opportunities to contact foreign cultures and multiculturalism, but at the same time the disadvantages brought by themselves are Miao Culture is lost. Foreign cultural influences young people's aesthetics. When pop music and other mainstream music in a foreign culture are introduced into the Miao nationality, young people are more inclined to accept the changes and foreign cultures. However, because of this, young people's attitude towards Lusheng has changed, and few people are willing to learn and inherit Lusheng art, so it leads to the loss of Lusheng's inheritance talents. The influx of alien cultures has diluted the native culture of the Miao people in the Miao region, and the new generation has not had the same opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their own ethnic groups. This lack of national identity led to their lack of identification with LuSheng. Although the Miao people still think that Lusheng is an integral part of their culture and is a representative musical instrument. Most Hmong young people feel that learning Lusheng culture is not necessarily worth it.

In addition to the influx of culture diluting its own Miao culture, additional problems also affect the inheritance of Lusheng. Because young people are not interested in Lusheng, so there are fewer people who can blow and make Lusheng, resulting in the lack of qualified protection talents.

According to relevant literature surveys, Lusheng encountered economic problems in the heritage of protection, that is, "insufficient security funding". "The revenue of the various Lusheng teams is barely enough to use for musical instrument production, clothing purchase, and rarely used to subsidize life. Even the most basic life guarantee of Lusheng players cannot be satisfied." [5] Without sufficient funding, it is difficult for the Miao people to rely on their own power to protect, inheritance and promote Lusheng art.

As each Miao Village is connected with society, there are individual Miao Villages that have specifically transformed Miao Village into tourist attractions. This will undoubtedly bring improvements to the fiscal situation of the Miao minority area. However, in terms of protection and development, some Miao villages have not reached a balance. Too much development of tourism and forgetting the cultural laws of Lusheng culture itself is not conducive to inherit and protecting Lusheng culture. On the contrary, it may cause a wrong impression to tourists.

Miao Village we visited requires us to take nearly two or three mountain roads and dirt roads to reach it. Compared to those of Miao Village that can be achieved by driving a bus, this Miao Village in southeast Guizhou is relatively closed, so it is also relative to the Lusheng cultural heritage. It's quite impressive. Nonetheless, the number of Miao villages is too small, and it is not enough to form a Lusheng team.

In summary, the biggest threat to Lusheng's artistic heritage is the influx of foreign culture. Young people's gradual involvement in alien cultures leads to a decrease in learners, and entertainers gradually enter the aging stage, and there is a danger that they may be lost. In order to protect the Lusheng and Lusheng dance culture, the Miao people can solve the corresponding problems from the following aspects. First, the relevant policies can be modified, "establish non-legacy protected areas, popularize the knowledge and importance of Lusheng dance culture, and improve the The enthusiasm of dance culture learning and protection ". Second, to strengthen capital investment. Now the problem faced by Lusheng artists is insufficient funds. Some Lusheng artists' income cannot even cover the normal living expenses of the artists, let alone improve the protection of Lusheng culture. Increasing capital investment can also attract more people to protect and inherit Lusheng. Third, the Miao people need to utilize the education of the school to help inherit and develop Lusheng. For example, they can join Lusheng's teaching in music classes and organize corresponding Lusheng dance teams. Finally, the people of the Miao nationality should create a brand effect for Lusheng, "as a domestic legacy, make it a famous festival brand." This can make foreign people understand Lusheng, or it can be used more widely than just local funeral ceremonies and local traditional festivals.[6] Examples of more successful Lusheng cultural activities Kaili International Lusheng Festival. The Lusheng Festival is not a traditional festival, but a festival specially developed for Lusheng. The purpose of developing the Lusheng Festival is to attract tourists and spread Lusheng culture. While spreading and protecting Lusheng culture, it also brought certain progress to Kaili tourism.

#### **2.4.2 The Current Status of Inheritance of Gayageum**

Since the beginning of the domestic music system education in the middle of the 20th century, Gayageum began to be valued in Korea. In 1959, Seoul National University established the Gayageum Music Major under the Department of National Music. In 1963, the National College of Music was set up. There is specialized Gayageum teaching in Korean colleges. Nevertheless, for the masses (most Koreans), Kayako did not interest them.

In the Korean area, almost everyone knows Gayageum. Among the nearly 20 college students and teachers I asked in South Korea, they all felt that Gayageum can be used as a musical instrument representing the Korean people. However, the problem arises in the spread of Gayageum. The main reasons are.

Students lack learning initiative. The music played by Gayageum cannot be appreciated and loved by most people. Regardless of the fact that the Korean people think that Gayageum is their unique traditional instrument and should be preserved, it still cannot attract them to actively study Gayageum to enjoy Gayageum music. Students rarely learn Gayageum thanks to their love for Gayageum, so they lack the motivation to learn and thus lack the initiative to learn.

The teaching is boring. The teaching method of Gayageum is similar to the teaching methods of other musical instruments. The teacher tells the knowledge and the students practice thinking. Gayageum's voice is relatively melodious and soothing, and students need to focus to prevent distractions. So boring in teaching will strengthen the boredom of those students who are not interested in Gayageum.

The textbook is missing. For the people of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region, the textbooks they use are all Korean textbooks. On the contrary, Chinese Koreans have lost their music.

Teachers are scarce. The teachers who teach in the Korean ethnic group are mostly the Han nationality, but they only play the Gayageum. Teachers do understand the Korean culture itself, and they cannot pass on the most authentic Gayageum skills to the students. The history of Gayageum is closely related to the Korean culture, and there are many courtesy details during the performance that is related to the Korean cultural etiquette. If the teacher does understand the Korean culture, the students cannot know the source and meaning of those etiquette, nor can they understand Gayageum in depth. [7]

Some problems also appeared in the field of Gayageum playing. The most important thing is the case that the players are older and the technical talents are aging. Because there are expected to be very few young people who are actively learning Gayageum, so now they insist on performing some middle-aged people. Despite the fact that some young people are interested in Gayageum, generally speaking The proportion is large. Another problem is that Gayageum lacks capital and technical input. And without sufficient financial support, it is difficult to promote Gayageum teaching. Without sufficient capital and technical input, there is no way for Gayageum's manufacturing site to keep pace with the time. The original Gayageum relied on craftsmen to manually grind and cut, the manufacturing speed was slow, it could not reach mass production and required a lot of energy. Therefore, there are fewer people who want to know how to make Gayageum. [8]

### **3. Comparison of the National Characteristics behind the Two Musical Instruments**

Lusheng is mainly prevalent in the Miao region of China. The Miao are mainly distributed in Guizhou, Hunan, and Yunnan provinces in southwest and central China. The Miao nationality gathering place examined in this article takes Guizhou, Southeast Guizhou as an example. Southeast Guizhou is situated in the southeastern region of Guizhou Province, on the slope of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, with high elevations ranging from 137 meters to 2178.8 meters. The southeastern Qianzhou area is mountainous, and the water system belongs to the Yangtze River system. The southeast of Guizhou is high in the north and southwest, low in the east. The north is the vast extension of the Wuyi Mountains, and the middle is the main peak of the Miaoling Mountains. The climate belongs to the central subtropical monsoon humid climate zone, with clear four seasons, sufficient rainfall (rainfall), high humidity, complex terrain, changeable weather, and obvious climatic differences. [9]

The principal raw material needed to make Lusheng is bamboo. Most bamboos prefer a warm and humid environment, abounding in tropical, subtropical and temperate regions. The Asia-Pacific region is the most important thing bamboo region in the world, while in China, bamboo regions are mainly distributed in the south. During the growth of bamboo, the underground stems enter the soil shallowly, and the shoots are from summer and autumn, so the growth in the north is generally restricted. Precipitation in Southeast Guizhou is abundant and mild and humid, and can be used as a region where bamboo grows well.

Gayageum is a national musical instrument of the Korean nationality. Koreans are mainly distributed in South Korea, North Korea, and Yanbian in northeastern China. Yanbian is situated on the east of Jilin Province in the northeast region and is the gathering place of the Korean ethnic group in China and the Korean autonomous prefecture. Yanbian is a border area of our country and borders with North Korea. Yanbian is on the east coast of the mainland on the west side of the mid-latitude ocean and belongs to the Changbai Mountain fold belt. The Yanbian area is also included in the coast, as well as mountainous hills, located on the transitional zone of seasonal changes in atmospheric pressure on the continental margin. The climate in Yanbian area is "late

spring, last autumn, no summer heat in summer, cold winter, long frost period, more clouds and less sunshine". [10]

Compared to southeast Guizhou, Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region is located near Changbai Mountain in northeast China. The weather is quite cold, so it is not suitable for bamboo growth. The main wood used for making Gayageum panels and bottom plates is the undesirable tree species, which prefers to grow on the deep, moist and fertile slightly acid brown forest soil. Can withstand low temperature and severe cold. Fish scale pine is mainly distributed in the Greater Xing'a Mountains, Xiao Xing'a Mountains, Changbai Mountains and other regions in Northeast China. The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, located in the fold belt of Changbai Mountain, is abundant in fish scale pine for the production of Gayageum.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Lusheng and Gayageum are representative melodic instruments of two distinct nations, enough to reflect some characteristics of the Miao and Korean ethnic groups. Judging from the historical literature of the two musical instruments, one can be regarded as a native Chinese musical instrument, while the other can be regarded as a counterfeit musical instrument. This has something to do with the history of the indigenous group. The Korean ethnic group is a merged ethnic group. Before dividing the border, the Yanbian area has been regarded as a "public" area that China and North Korea have not been clearly separated. Officially belonging to China, it can be stated that the remaining Koreans also stayed with their traditional musical instrument Gayageum. LuSheng appeared in the court folks of ancient China at an initial time. Two musical instruments can be regarded as foreign musical instruments and local musical instruments, but they are both expressive musical instruments of Chinese minorities.

From a geographical point of view, the production of musical instruments is closely linked to the geographical environment in which the nation is located. It mainly uses for musical instruments. Both the Korean and Miao people have chosen limited materials to make musical instruments. Taking materials locally can reduce the cost and protect the manufactured musical instruments.

In terms of protection and inheritance, both celebrities have their own conforming measures. The Koreans have specialized colleges, while the Miao people adopt Lusheng into the cultural experience, that is, integrate the Lusheng experience into the Miao folk experience of tourists and commercialize it. Two kinds of protective measures, one is conducive to inherit musical instrument performance, the other is conducive to promoting the spread of musical instrument culture.

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