

The Role and Popularity of the Chinese Guzheng in Thailand's Musical Development

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Abstract

This study examines how the Chinese guzheng has developed within Thailand's musical landscape and how it is learned, adapted, and sustained. Using a qualitative design, the research combines content analysis of documentary materials with fieldwork in Bangkok, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires from students and parents. The analysis focuses on three objectives : 1) clarifying the guzheng's cultural role, public recognition, and learning patterns in Thailand; 2) identifying integration approaches in Thai traditional and popular music, especially tuning, arrangement, and collaboration; and 3) developing guidelines for strengthening guzheng education. Findings indicate that guzheng popularity is shaped by the interaction between institutional support and sustained public performance. Integration is most effective when arrangement and ensemble role design take priority over minor technical adjustments. Sustainable development depends on coordinated support across teaching systems, localized curriculum design, and performance platforms. The study proposes a T-L-P model linking Teacher Development, Localized Curriculum, and Performance Integration as a framework for long-term development.

Keywords: Guzheng, Thailand, Cross-cultural integration, Music education, Cultural exchange

Introduction

Guzheng is an ancient Chinese plucked string instrument once called "Qin Zheng." Because of its long history, people use the word "Gu" to emphasize its antiquity. With a history of more than 2,700 years, the guzheng developed through different dynasties and reached a peak in the Tang Dynasty, becoming an important part of both court and folk music (Ning & Maneewattana, 2024). Its performance combines right-hand plucking and left-hand ornamentation, producing expressive tones that can imitate natural sounds and convey refined aesthetic ideas such as harmony and elegance. With globalization, the guzheng has gradually expanded beyond China and entered international cultural and educational contexts.

The guzheng was introduced to Thailand around the 1830s through Chinese migration and community musical practices. By the 1960s, related performance groups became active, and between 1964 and 1987, visiting opera troupes from Hong Kong further promoted repertoire and performance styles. A key turning point occurred in 1990 when the guzheng master Li Yang introduced the instrument into royal contexts, significantly enhancing public recognition. At the same time, Thai musicians began integrating the guzheng with local instruments, forming hybrid styles that retained Thai characteristics (Chen, 2023). In recent years, Sino-Thai cultural cooperation, educational programs, and media exposure have further increased its visibility and accessibility.

However, practical challenges remain. Differences in tuning systems, musical structures, and aesthetic conventions affect teaching outcomes and performance adaptation. For Thai learners, the issue is not only technical learning but also effective integration with Thai musical traditions.

More importantly, existing studies mainly emphasize historical dissemination and cultural description, while lacking systematic analysis of how the guzheng is localized, integrated, and sustained within contemporary music education in Thailand. Furthermore, few studies propose an operational framework linking teaching, curriculum design, and performance practice as an integrated system for long-term development.

This study therefore focuses on the guzheng's role and popularity in Thailand, integration methods in practice, and strategies for strengthening education. By combining empirical evidence with a structured T-L-P model, this research aims to bridge the gap between descriptive studies and practical educational implementation.

Objectives

1. To examine how the Chinese guzheng has taken shape in Thailand's music scene, with attention to its cultural role, public recognition, and current patterns of learning and training.
2. To identify and describe the main ways guzheng teaching and performance are adapted to Thai traditional and popular music, including practical approaches used in tuning, arranging, and collaborative work.
3. To formulate workable guidelines for strengthening guzheng education in Thailand- especially in teacher preparation, localized teaching materials and course design, access to instruments and performance opportunities, and wider institutional/community support and to outline a sustainable model for long-term development.

Literature Review

1. History, Role, and Popularity of the Guzheng in Thailand

Existing writing links the guzheng's Thai presence less to a single "arrival date" than to longer patterns of migration, performance circuits, and community institutions. Work on Chinese

music migration in Thailand points to southern Chinese movement as a practical carrier of instruments and repertoires, with opera troupes, temple activity, and festival performance forming early spaces where Chinese instruments were heard, copied, and gradually normalized within Chinese-Thai social life (Sukhumvat, 2011). From this perspective, “popularity” can be understood not only as audience preference but as a result of sustained cultural practice and institutional continuity. That also explains why an instrument may be present for decades without becoming broadly visible : continuity can remain inside community settings even when the wider public is only occasionally exposed.

More recent discussions shift from origins to visibility and cultural positioning. Thailand’s longer cooperation with China -especially in the cultural sphere -creates more stable channels for concerts, exchanges, and institutional programming that lift the guzheng out of purely community circulation (Sawasdiapakdi, 2021). Studies of Confucius Institute cultural work in Thailand show how teaching, workshops, and performance events operate as concrete infrastructure for dissemination, turning occasional exposure into repeat learning opportunities (Chen, 2018). Media-facing cases further suggest that recognition can expand quickly when guzheng sound and imagery circulate through programs and public cultural narratives, reinforcing the idea that “Chinese music” is not distant but watchable, learnable, and shareable (Chen, 2023). Taken together, these studies indicate that the guzheng’s development in Thailand follows a dual mechanism of grassroots continuity and institutional amplification, rather than a single linear process of diffusion.

2. Integrating Guzheng Instruction with Thai Music

Writing on integration usually begins with musical structure because the friction shows up first in how students *hear* and how they *place* expression. Comparative discussion of Chinese music stresses pentatonic thinking, modal color, and a performance logic where ornament, flexible pitch, and timbre shaping are tied closely to instrumental technique (Van Aalst, 2012). By contrast, accounts of Southeast Asian traditions often highlight cyclic organization, layered textures, and ensemble logic music that is built through interlocking rhythm and timbral contrast rather than Western-style harmonic progression (Anderson et al., 2011). These structural differences highlight that cross-cultural integration is not merely technical adaptation but involves negotiation between distinct musical systems. For teaching, this becomes practical : students trained in one system may misinterpret phrasing or stylistic expectations in another.

Because of that, the integration literature pays attention to method how musicians make the guzheng workable inside Thai musical settings without flattening either tradition. One productive direction is role design : letting the guzheng do what it naturally does well (melodic lead, ornamented counter-line, coloristic commentary) rather than forcing it into a function already dominated by a Thai instrument. Another is arrangement strategy that respects Thai ensemble habits while still leaving space for guzheng phrasing, so fusion is not “decoration” but a negotiated performance practice. A

concrete example appears in work on performing Thai traditional song material with guzheng, where adaptation is treated as a sequence of decisions what to preserve, what to re-voice, what to simplify, and how to manage stylistic expectations in performance (Ruiya et al., 2024). This suggests that successful integration depends on structured, teachable processes rather than spontaneous fusion.

3. Guzheng Education in Thailand

Music education literature adds a different lens : even when cultural interest is strong, teaching systems decide whether learning expands or stalls. Work on instrumental programs in Thailand shows how curriculum structures, teacher capacity, and school timetables shape what can realistically be taught and sustained over time (Volk, 2006). In the guzheng case, studies grounded in Thai institutions suggest that dissemination often relies on a limited number of teachers and a small set of stable teaching sites; when those sites are active, learning has continuity, and when they weaken, progress becomes uneven (Chen, 2018). This indicates that educational sustainability depends on system-level support rather than individual expertise alone.

A second strand focuses on outcomes and teacher development. Research on preparing non-specialist music teachers suggests that rapid growth in learner numbers can outpace the available pool of specialists, and quality is more likely to hold when instruction is organized into step-by-step levels, assessment is kept practical for schools to run, and teachers receive sustained follow-up support rather than relying on short, isolated training sessions (Julia et al., 2020). Overall, existing studies point toward the need for an integrated approach that connects curriculum design, teacher development, and performance practice-yet such a framework remains underdeveloped in current research.

Conceptual Framework

As Figure 1 shows, this study adopts a conceptual framework linking theory, data, analysis, and outcomes. Guided by Cultural Integration, Cross-Cultural Communication, Curriculum Development, Cultural Capital, and Ethnomusicology, it addresses three objectives : the guzheng's role and popularity, integration with Thai music, and educational development. Evidence is drawn from literature, interviews, media, and audience feedback. These data are interpreted through theoretical perspectives to reflect interactions between cultural transmission, educational practice, and social reception. The framework integrates theory and empirical findings to explain relationships among cultural integration, teaching systems, and performance practices.

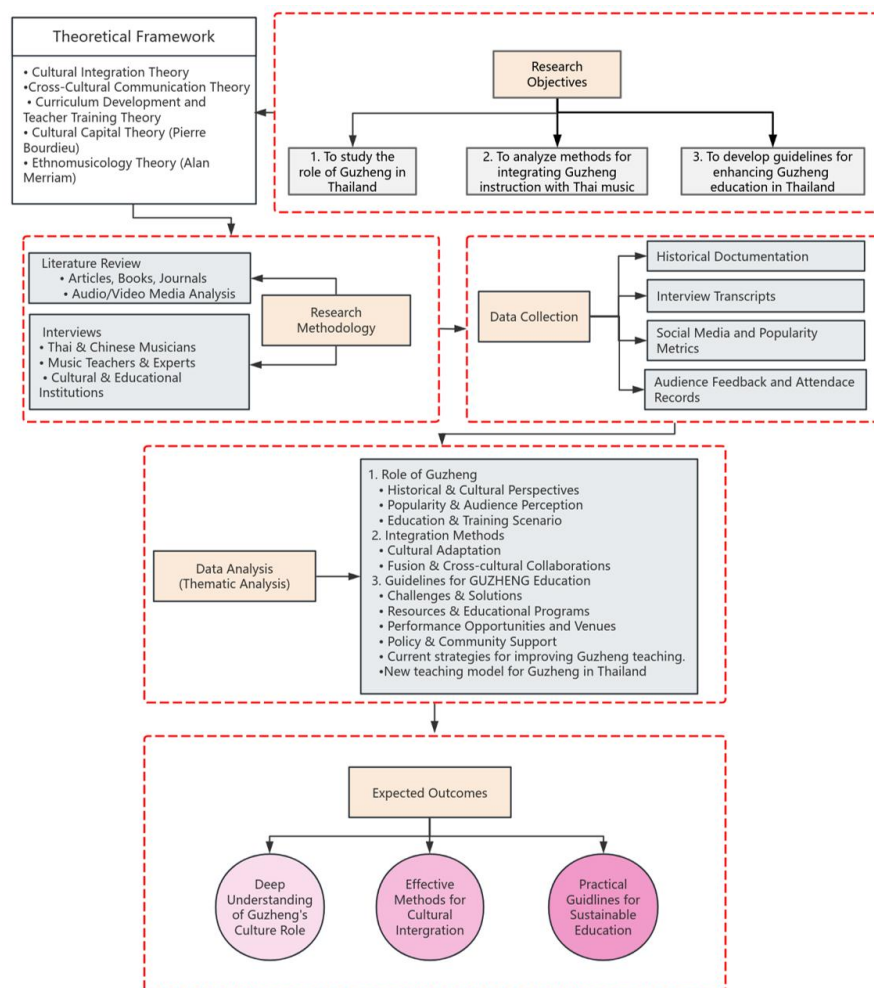


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework Diagram

Research Methodology

1. Research Methods

This study is qualitative. It combines content analysis and interviews to investigate the guzheng's position in Thailand from multiple angles. Content analysis is used to examine existing materials that record or represent guzheng-related activity in Thailand, while interviews are used to capture lived experience from people who teach, perform, organize, or support guzheng learning. The two methods are used together so that what appears in documents and media can be checked against what practitioners describe in real teaching and performance settings. This combination allows cross-checking across data sources to strengthen consistency of findings.

2. Data Collection

Data were collected through document review and fieldwork in Bangkok. The documentation strand includes literature, textbooks, audio/video materials, and academic databases such as Google Scholar, CNKI, and Scopus. The fieldwork includes interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders (teachers, institutional representatives, and educators), along with questionnaires

from students and parents. Participants were selected to represent key roles in guzheng teaching and cultural dissemination, and the data provide both practitioner and learner perspectives.

3. Data Processing

After data collection, all materials were systematically organized and prepared for analysis using a consistent procedure. Documentary materials are sorted and labeled so that their source type and relevance are clear. Interview recordings are transcribed verbatim to preserve wording and meaning, and field notes and observation records are typed and labeled with corresponding dates and locations. During processing, the dataset is kept aligned with the study focus so that later analysis can connect evidence to the three core concerns of the project : the guzheng's role and popularity, the practical question of integration with Thai music, and the challenges that shape teaching and learning in Thailand. This comprehensive dataset supports research objectives and provides an application basis for educational recommendations.

4. Data Analysis

All analyses are based on documentary evidence and interview data and are conducted using thematic analysis. The researcher reads and re-reads the collected materials to form an overall understanding, then identifies meaningful statements related to the guzheng's role, integration practices, and educational challenges. These statements are coded and grouped into themes that recur across different sources. The themes are reviewed and refined by checking whether they accurately represent the data, and each theme is clearly defined to support interpretation. This iterative process ensures that themes are grounded in recurring patterns rather than isolated observations. Within this framework, the analysis focuses on three areas aligned with the objectives : 1) the guzheng's role and popularity, 2) integration methods with Thai music, and 3) challenges and strategies in education. The final step connects themes to guideline development, with cross-checking across documentary, interview, and questionnaire data to strengthen the validity of the findings

Results

This section reports the study's findings in line with the research objectives. It summarizes evidence on the guzheng's role in Thailand, identifies practical approaches to integrating guzheng instruction with Thai music, and outlines recommendations for strengthening guzheng education. The results draw on documentary sources and fieldwork data, including interviews, questionnaires, and supporting records from educational and performance contexts.

1. Role of Guzheng in Thailand

Guzheng has been positioned in Thailand : it moved from a low-visibility “heritage instrument within migrant networks” to a widely recognized symbol tied to Sino-Thai cultural exchange and contemporary music learning. In the early stage (described mainly as the 1990s to early 2000s), public familiarity was limited. Learning opportunities depended on a small number of teachers

and private lessons, so participation stayed narrow and the instrument was often encountered as something “new” rather than socially embedded. This matters because it explains why the guzheng could be present for a long time in Thailand without becoming broadly visible : an instrument spreads when there are stable teaching channels, regular performance settings, and a social reason to keep playing, reflecting the combined effect of grassroots continuity and limited institutional visibility.

A second stage is marked by high-profile cultural visibility, especially when royal attention and media circulation helped reframe the guzheng as elegant, refined, and culturally meaningful. In participants’ descriptions, this kind of endorsement did not replace community-based transmission; instead, it amplified it. Once public recognition rose, performances were no longer limited to insider cultural occasions. The guzheng began appearing more often in institutional events and public programs, which in turn created clearer incentives for students to learn and for organizations to support classes, concerts, and experience activities. In short, visibility and infrastructure started to reinforce each other : performances attracted learners, learners created demand for teaching, and teaching produced more performers, indicating a mutually reinforcing relationship between visibility and educational infrastructure.

Across the data, the guzheng’s “role” in Thailand is not singular. First, it functions as a cultural connector. Many participants treated it as a practical medium through which Thai audiences and learners access Chinese musical aesthetics and cultural stories, while also signaling friendship and exchange at events where China and Thailand meet through education, festivals, and performance. Second, it is understood as an aesthetic practice. Learning is commonly described as training listening sensitivity, patience, and refined expression outcomes that parents and teachers link to personal development rather than only musical technique. Third, it has growing instrumental value in education and work. As the local learning market expands, advanced learners can teach, perform, and use musical credentials to support future study planning. This “cultural-to-practical” pathway is important for sustainability : when an instrument offers both meaning and utility, students have stronger reasons to persist beyond initial curiosity, suggesting that its role extends across cultural, educational, and practical domains.

The Thai case shows a layered mechanism : long-term grassroots continuity (teachers, students, diaspora institutions) establishes presence; symbolic recognition (high-visibility learning and media exposure) increases legitimacy; and platform-based teaching and performance (cultural centers, schools, associations) converts legitimacy into stable participation. This combination explains why the guzheng can operate simultaneously as cultural symbol, learning practice, and skill-based resource in Thailand’s current music landscape.

Taken together, the guzheng’s role in Thailand is built through three linked layers : 1) historical–cultural positioning, 2) social and aesthetic meaning, and 3) practical pathways in education

and work. Table 1 summarizes these themes and indicates the main types of evidence used to support each theme.

Table 1 Thematic Summary of Role of Guzheng in Thailand

Theme	What it means in Thailand	Typical evidence used in this study
Historical & cultural positioning	Shift from low public awareness to broad recognition; guzheng becomes a visible sign of Sino–Thai cultural exchange	Interview summaries from senior teachers/organizers; documentation of major events; observation notes
Social meaning & aesthetic value	Learning is framed as taste cultivation and artistic refinement, not only performance training	Parent/student questionnaire summaries; teacher accounts of learning outcomes
Practical value & pathways	Expansion of teaching/performance opportunities; skill can support future study plans and income	Accounts of teaching demand, performance invitations, student progression patterns

2. Integration Methods

2.1 Cultural Adaptation

Findings show that “integration” in Thailand is handled less as a single technique and more as a practical workflow that starts from instrument compatibility. In mixed ensembles, the tuning flexibility of the partner instrument often decides the direction of adjustment. Thai xylophones and some percussion-based setups tend to keep stable pitch frameworks and are not easily retuned, so the guzheng is more frequently adjusted to meet the ensemble’s pitch center. When the guzheng performs with Thai string instruments, pitch decisions are usually negotiated with local musicians because those instruments allow more mobility, and the final choice is shaped by rehearsal convenience and the established sound of the group, highlighting that adaptation is driven more by practical ensemble constraints than theoretical alignment.

Across cases, arrangement work matters more than small mechanical changes in plucking position. The typical route begins with selecting Thai melodies that audiences already recognize, then transcribing them when notation is missing, and finally arranging them specifically for guzheng technique. This arrangement-centered approach allows the adaptor to preserve Thai melodic identity while inserting guzheng idioms slides, vibrato, left-hand ornament, and timbral coloring without pushing the music into an unfamiliar Chinese structure, indicating that structured arrangement plays a more critical role than isolated technical modification.

Reception and quality control form another recurring pattern. Thai listeners especially learners and enthusiasts generally respond well when the adapted piece still “sounds

Thai,” meaning it respects familiar phrasing, contour, and overall gentleness. At the same time, the work is not only driven by guzheng performers : Thai professors and experienced musicians often take part in arranging, sometimes linking the process to academic research or institutional projects. After an arrangement is completed, it is commonly checked through peer feedback asking performers to review playability and asking Thai musicians to confirm that melodic logic and stylistic boundaries are not violated, reflecting that adaptation is a negotiated process shaped by performer expertise and audience expectation.

2.2 Fusion and Cross-cultural Collaborations

Collaboration practices show a wide range, from small pairings (guzheng with a single Thai instrument) to expanded ensembles that combine Chinese instruments, Thai instruments, and Western elements under a “world music” style. Performances reported in the study include television appearances, regional tours within Thailand, festival stages, and overseas showcases where Thai elements and Chinese instruments are presented in the same program. Within these collaborations, musicians often use simple structuring strategies to keep the audience engaged while protecting the shared aesthetic : short solo passages for each instrument, controlled changes in tempo, and rhythmic punctuation from Thai percussion that adds movement without turning the music aggressive, demonstrating practical strategies for balancing contrast and cohesion in performance.

A repeated technical solution in ensemble work is finding a workable tonal “meeting point.” The guzheng may be retuned to a convenient center (often discussed as C in practice) to coordinate with Thai instruments that frequently sit in another pitch center and with common Chinese ensemble habits. The goal is not theoretical purity, but a stable rehearsal pitch that produces a softer blend and reduces friction in ensemble tuning. Over time, collaboration also feeds back into education : adapted pieces become teaching materials, and the same repertoire is taught in levels so students can move from classroom technique to public performance, suggesting that performance practice functions as both an integration mechanism and a pedagogical resource.

To clarify how these findings group together, Table 2 summarizes the two recurring themes and links each theme to the types of evidence used in this study.

Table 2 Summary of Themes for Guzheng Integration with Thai Music

Theme	Summary	Evidence Base
Cultural Adaptation	Compatibility-led tuning decisions; arrangement as the core method; tiered versions for different skill levels; review/feedback to protect Thai stylistic integrity	Ensemble cases with different Thai instruments; transcription–arrangement process; audience/teacher responses; repertoire differences (popular vs classical/royal)

Fusion & Cross- cultural Collaboratio ns	Formats from duo to mixed ensembles; “world music” blending; structuring with solos and tempo/rhythm variation; tonal alignment for smoother blend; collaboration feeding back into teaching and visibility	Performances (TV, tours, festivals, overseas events); rehearsal/tuning practices; adapted pieces used in graded instruction; performance-based promotion alongside teaching
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3. Guidelines for Guzheng Education in Thailand (condensed, with the new model included)

Field evidence shows that early teaching barriers in Thailand are often practical, while later barriers are more structural. Language is usually the first difficulty for newly arrived Chinese teachers, yet it tends to shrink through daily communication, self-learning, and repeated classroom interaction. Students and parents, however, still ask for Thai and English supported learning materials, which suggests that the problem is less “speaking in class” and more “learning independently after class.” When language becomes manageable, cultural comprehension becomes the harder issue. Teachers repeatedly noted that many Thai learners do not share the cultural references that shape traditional Chinese repertoire, so students may play accurately but treat music as technique exercises, without grasping style, mood, or narrative meaning, indicating that technical learning alone is insufficient without cultural understanding.

The most persistent constraints are resource-related. Participants emphasized limited instrument supply, expensive accessories, weak repair networks, and a shortage of qualified teachers especially local teachers who can teach confidently in Thai. Low salary levels for specialist teachers also reduce long-term stability, which makes programs dependent on a small number of individuals. Learning challenges add another layer : young students frequently lack persistence, while adult learners usually sustain practice longer. Technical barriers were described in very concrete terms finger pain, difficult techniques, and unfamiliarity with number notation or staff notation so effective guidelines must treat endurance, literacy, and gradual progression as part of the teaching design, not as “personal problems” of the learner, suggesting that these challenges are interconnected rather than isolated.

Against this background, current improvement strategies in Thailand tend to follow a practical logic : keep students engaged first, then deepen cultural content and technique. Teachers and institutions often mix Chinese and Thai materials by using Thai melodies or familiar popular elements as an entry point, then introducing more traditional guzheng works once basic skills and interest are established. Localization is repeatedly mentioned as essential : Thai explanations of key terms, simplified supporting notes, and translated materials reduce the drop-off that happens when students cannot review alone. Motivation is strongly linked to performance. Questionnaires

emphasize that frequent public playing by teachers and students attracts new learners and keeps existing learners practicing. At the program level, resource shortages are partly addressed through cooperation among schools, cultural centers, and Chinese institutions, highlighting that development depends on coordinated support across teaching, resources, and performance platforms.

Performance platforms and community support function that keep the system visible. When students perform in schools, festivals, and exchange programs, they gain confidence and visibility; meanwhile, teachers' residencies, media exposure, and online videos provide clear role models and a sense that improvement is within reach. Policy and community support appear most effective when they are coordinated rather than isolated : embassies, cultural organizations, universities, and reputable language/music institutions improve credibility and attendance through workshops and events, but long-term development still relies on stable school-based teaching and cross-institution cooperation for funding, instruments, and access.

To make these results usable for guideline design, Table 3 condenses the major themes and shows what kinds of evidence each theme draws on in this study.

Table 3 Thematic Analysis Summary of Guidelines for Guzheng Education in Thailand

Theme	Summary	Data Source
Challenges & Responses	Language fades; cultural understanding persists; pop vs traditional tension; resource scarcity; persistence and technique barriers	Interviews + questionnaires
Resources & Programs	Localized/translated materials; online multilingual learning ; instrument access; teacher-made handbooks	Interviews
Performance & Venues	Performances drive motivation, skill growth, and public visibility	Interviews + questionnaires
Policy & Community	Cooperation improves credibility and resources; single-site reliance is fragile	Interviews
Current Teaching Strategies	Online/offline promotion; student-centered pacing; localized repertoire; “play first” teaching	Interviews + questionnaires

Drawing on Themes 1 - 3, this paper proposes a localized and sustainable model built on three linked components : Teacher Development (T), Localized Curriculum & Learning Pathways (L), and Performance & Community Integration (P) (Figure 2). T focuses on building stable teaching capacity through a leveled certification route, long-term residency support combined with online masterclasses, and an apprenticeship-plus-course approach that gradually forms local master teachers. L emphasizes staged courses (beginner to advanced) that start with bilingual support and Thai-familiar melodies, then move toward ensemble skills, tone control, Thai adaptations, and finally

broader traditional and modern repertoire with cross-cultural collaboration; it also requires Thai/English/Chinese resources (textbooks, videos, charts) and a resource center that integrates offline and online materials, linked to a national pathway of exams, camps, and competitions. P turns learning into a visible social practice through regular school concerts, community events, annual festivals, embassy programs, and online cross-border performances, while expanding student participation through ensemble projects with Thai classical, popular, or Western groups; together, these components translate the thematic findings into implementable guideline items for institutions (Figure 3). Implementation can be staged across three phases : Year 1 builds the foundation (pilot certification, core courses, online resource library), Years 2–3 expand through pilot schools and annual festivals with improved grading systems, and later years consolidate localization by forming a stable local teacher team and embedding guzheng more firmly within Thailand’s arts education ecosystem (Figure 4).

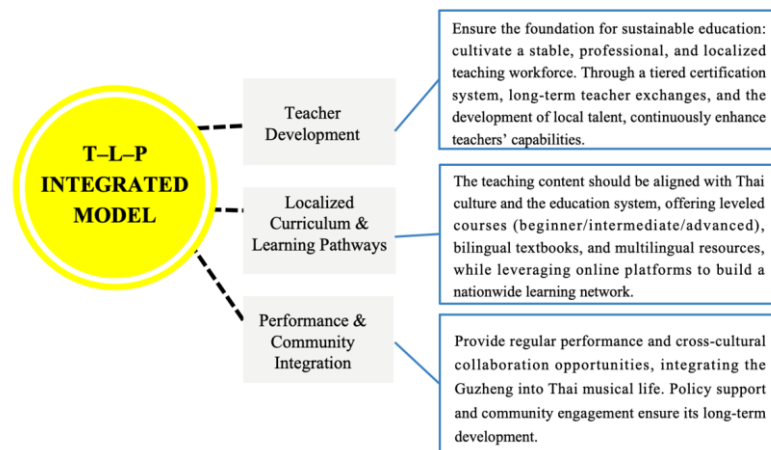


Figure 2 The T-L-P Integrated Model for Guzheng Education in Thailand

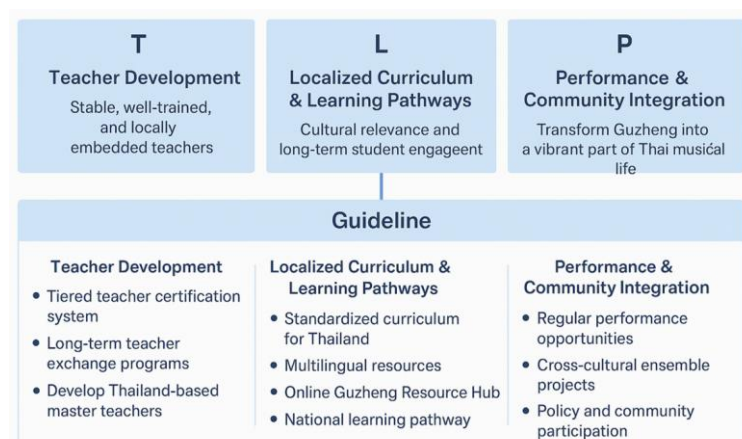


Figure 3 Guzheng Education in Thailand : Model and Guideline Framework (T-L-P)

Phase 1 (Year 1)	Phase 2 (Year 2–3)	Phase 3 (Year 4+)
Foundation Setup • Pilot the teacher certification system • Launch foundational courses • Establish an online resource library	Expansion & Integration • Implement Guzheng courses in national pilot schools • Hold annual Guzheng festivals and cross-cultural music concerts • Improve and refine the grading/examination system	Localization & Sustainability • Develop a core team of local teachers • Integrate Guzheng into Thailand's arts education system

Figure 4 Phased Implementation Roadmap for the T–L–P Model (Year 1; Years 2–3; Year 4+)

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion

This study shows that the guzheng's development in Thailand is best understood as a long process of localization rather than a single moment of "introduction." Early circulation depended on migrant communities and small teaching networks, so the instrument remained visible mainly inside limited performance and learning spaces. Public recognition rose sharply after the early 2000s, when royal engagement and media exposure reframed the guzheng from an unfamiliar foreign instrument into a widely legible cultural symbol. In today's Thai setting, the guzheng functions on several levels at once : it is a bridge for Sino–Thai cultural exchange, a concrete learning pathway for aesthetic cultivation, and especially for advanced learners an asset that can be converted into teaching, performance opportunities, or educational advantage, indicating its functional expansion from cultural symbol to practical educational resource.

Findings also suggest that musical integration with Thai repertory is not driven by minor technique adjustments alone, but by arrangement choices, tuning decisions, and negotiated ensemble roles. Practical adaptation varies by partner instrument, reflecting that integration is shaped by context-dependent musical and practical constraints. fixed-tuned Thai instruments often require the guzheng to adjust, while string instruments allow more flexible coordination. Finally, the study identifies a teaching ecology shaped by cultural distance, unequal resource distribution, and competing expectations about repertoire. Sustainable development therefore depends on guidelines that do more than "recommend practice." It requires a coherent support system : localized materials, stable instrument access, structured learning stages, frequent performance platforms, and a teacherdevelopment pipeline. The proposed T–L–P model (Teacher Development, Localized Learning Pathways, Performance & Community Integration) summarizes these needs and offers a

feasible direction for strengthening guzheng education in Thailand without weakening its cultural depth, suggesting that sustainability requires balancing cultural preservation with practical adaptation.

2. Discussion

The discussion confirms key claims in prior scholarship while clarifying where local evidence shifts the emphasis. First, the role of migration and community performance circuits is consistent with accounts of Chinese music in Thailand that highlight southern Chinese movement and the institutional life of diaspora communities (Sukhumvat, 2011). In this study, that background explains presence but not necessarily popularity : participants described long periods when the guzheng existed in Thailand yet remained socially peripheral, sustained mainly by individual teachers and private events. The turning point, in their accounts, was not only “more contact,” but a change in public visibility and cultural framing especially through royal and media-facing moments that made the guzheng a recognizable emblem rather than a niche practice, highlighting the role of symbolic visibility in transforming cultural presence into social acceptance.

Second, the findings align with work that treats guzheng performance in Thailand as a cultural bridge with multiple social functions (Suwanwattana, 2022). At the same time, participant narratives broaden that idea by showing how “bridge” work is carried by everyday teaching routines : repertoire negotiation, staged arrangements, and repeated public performances that gradually convert curiosity into sustained learning. The main inconsistency is therefore one of scale and mechanism. Prior research foregrounds historical turning points and institutional mechanisms, while the present empirical findings draw attention to motivations rooted in media habits, instrumental career goals, and learners’ repertoire preferences for accessible works. Rather than presenting a contradiction, the two strands can be read together as a layered explanation : macro-level diplomatic and institutional structures establish legitimacy, whereas micro-level pedagogical decisions and performance opportunities shape whether legitimacy is converted into stable participation, demonstrating that sustainable integration depends on the interaction between macro-level structures and micro-level educational practices.

Recommendations

1. Build evidence-based, localized pedagogy rather than general “cross-cultural” advice.

Future studies should move from broad claims about language and culture to testable teaching designs. This includes comparing bilingual or trilingual materials (Thai–Chinese–English), identifying which cultural explanations actually improve interpretation (not only technique), and mapping common beginner obstacles in Thailand (notation literacy, hand fatigue, practice routines). Research can also separate learner groups by age and motivation, because children and adult learners often persist for different reasons. Small-scale classroom trials using the same repertoire but different

teaching sequences-would help clarify what works best in Thai settings and why, contributing to more evidence-based and context-sensitive pedagogical models.

2. Clarify workable models for repertoire localization and Thai-guzheng integration.

More work is needed on how Thai melodies are selected, transcribed, arranged, and graded for learning. Studies can document arrangement decisions (tuning choices, ornament strategies, ensemble roles) and then evaluate outcomes : student retention, performance readiness, and audience response. A practical direction is to develop a “Thai-adapted graded repertoire bank” that begins with familiar Thai tunes or popular styles and gradually introduces classical guzheng pieces, so that interest-building and cultural depth reinforce each other rather than compete, supporting a balanced approach between cultural depth and learner engagement.

3. Evaluate sustainability : teacher pipelines, resources, and performance ecosystems.

Future studies should ask why some programs continue after a “star teacher” leaves, while others fade. Key topics include teacher development routes (mentorship, certification, residency-style appointments), systems for instrument access and upkeep, and performance targets (festivals, school concerts, embassy/cultural-center events) that keep learners practicing. Longitudinal work tracking cohorts for 1–3 years can reveal learning trajectories, dropout moments, and the impact of regular, structured performance opportunities. Comparative studies across Bangkok and other regions would also help identify whether current patterns are capital-centered or replicable nationwide, providing insight into the scalability of guzheng education models.

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