

## Brief Discussion on the Application of National Musical Instruments in Middle and Primary Schools' Music Course: Taking the Qiang People's Qiang Flute for Example

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### Abstract

Since the Qiang is an ancient nationality, its musical instruments also have a long history. However, with the rapid development of the times, we gradually forgot such classical minority musical instruments and have very limited applications and understanding of them. The current researches regarding Qiang musical instruments mainly focus on specialized higher institutions and related professional groups and seldom involve the music class in middle and primary schools. This paper researches the application of Qiang's national instruments in music teaching, introduces Qiang's cultural background and traditional instruments, and mainly states how to use Qiang's musical instruments in music appreciation, music activities and music creation, in the hope of carrying forward Qiang instruments, cultivating students' interest in national music culture and attaining better inheritance of Qiang instruments.

**Key words:** Qiang's musical instruments; Music courses in middle and primary schools; Application

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### INTRODUCTION

Qiang has a deep cultural deposits and its national music culture is even more so. Teachers need to comply with

the requirements in *New Curriculum Reform*, develop resources of music course with the regional, national and school characteristics by combining the local cultural and geographical environments as well as national cultures and traditions, and use the local national and folk music in the music course well. Education is the main path of cultural inheritance, so it is very significant to choose minorities' music cultures as the course resources of music education in schools, choose the contents suitable for music classroom teaching in primary schools, cultivate students to love national music culture from childhood and establish their awareness of inheriting national music culture.

### 1. QIANG'S NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

As one of the most ancient and time-honored minorities among Chinese ethnic peoples and the only ethnic group recorded by inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells, Qiang is mainly distributed in Songpan, Maoxian and Wenchun in Aba Autonomous Prefecture as well as Beichun in Mianyang. It is also called "the nationality on cloud". Even though Qiang has no writing system, the Qiang people have their own language—Qiang language. As a time-honored nationality, Qiang still reserves its minority traditional music culture. The most representative musical instruments are 4 types: Qiang flute, disc bell, sheepskin drum and harmonica.

#### 1.1 Instruments for Religious Rites

The primitive religion is the important faith of Qiang people. "Shibi" holds an extremely lofty position in Qiang people's heart because "Shibi" is the Qiang people's religious master, who acts as the bridge between human and god and inherits history. Besides, "Shibi" is mainly engaged in offering sacrifices to mountains, restoration, expelling evil spirits, removing ill fortune and other religious activities. The religious instruments, which are

tools used by “Shibi” in sacrificing activities, include the sheepskin drum and disc bell etc.. They are not only the religious instruments for witchcraft but also Qiang’s representative musical instruments. A disc bell is similar to a round disc in its shape with a diameter from 10 cm to 16 cm; there is a bell handle inside the disc a wooden handle on its bottom; one can shake the bell handle to make the clapper beating the disc body for sound production. A sheepskin drum, which is round in its shape, is about 30 cm in diameter and about 1 cm in height. There is a piece of sheepskin on its one side, a drum handle in the center of drum and some tinklers on drum side. During playing, one can hold the drum handle with one’s left hand and beat the drum with a mallet on the right hand. The sound produced by beating the drum side is clear and melodious while the sound produced by beating the drum center is vigorous. Based on such unique characteristics of the two musical instruments, the Qiang people generally include them into the scope of religious music.

### 1.2 Musical Instruments for Expression of Emotion

When falling in love, the Qiang men and women usually express their feelings and love by playing harmonica. The harmonica, also called “Eluo”, was produced and handed down in Beichuan Qiang Minority Autonomous County. It is about 11 cm in length and 0.15 cm in thickness. It’s a small bamboo piece which can be divided into two parts from the middle; one end is about 1.3 cm in width and the other end is about 0.8 cm in width. The harmonica is played by women in the way of solo or ensemble. When playing, one puts it on the side of the mouth, vibrates the striking blade with the airflow breathed and, simultaneously, stirs it to produce a sound. Due to its simple, unsophisticated and vigorous timbre, we can hear the pleasant melody played with harmonicas whenever people celebrate a festival, hold a wedding or when the young male and female are in love etc..

### 1.3 Musical Instruments for Other Occasions

Apart from the religious sacrifice, expression of emotion and other occasions, the Qiang’s musical instruments can also be used for other occasions such as wedding, funeral and festival activity. For instance, the Qiang’s representative musical instrument—Qiang flute. As an ancient wind instrument, the Qiang flute was recorded in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* early in A.D. 100; besides, the verse that “there is no need for one to play such a sorrowful melody of Zhe Yangliu with Qiang flute, because the spring cannot reach Yumen Pass” in Tang poetry has been sung everywhere through the ages. The popular Qiang flute in Qiang regions is made of bamboos or bones with only one spring and two tubes. The two tubes have the same length. Each tube is provided with five or six holes. When playing Qiang flute, one needs to keep the two tubes in the mouth and play it with the cyclic air change method. Its vocal range is between  $c^1$  and  $c^2$ , and it is the

favorite musical instrument of the shepherd. In addition, the Suona horn, which is also an indispensable musical instrument in wedding, festivals and other occasions, is a distinct representative of Qiang culture. However, with the development of times, such Qiang’s national musical instruments have been gradually forgotten by people and are not developed well. As successors of such intangible cultural heritages, do we need to consider how to reserve them? Do we need to carry forward and develop those left by the old generations? Therefore, our music teachers need to reasonably use such musical instruments during their music teaching so that students can get interested in such national musical instruments and thus will inherit them.

## 2. APPLICATION OF QIANG’S MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE MUSIC TEACHING IN MIDDLE AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

How to apply such Qiang’s national instruments in music teaching in middle and primary schools is a seemingly easy but practically difficult problem. Music teachers need to not only systematically know Qiang’s musical cultural background but also have deep understanding of the generation backgrounds, playing methods and application ways etc. of Qiang’s national instruments. Besides, they also need to consider the forms of such instruments in music teaching, how to show them reasonably, and how to help students to visually learn and recognize such instruments. Only when the above problems are solved, can the students better inherit and carry forward the Qiang’s national music instruments and carry forward the traditional music culture of Chinese nation.

### 2.1 Integrating Them Into Musical Teaching as Musical Instruments

In a music class, the teacher may add Qiang’s musical instruments into music teaching by playing them. Playing Qiang’s musical instruments on the background of vivid and interesting music background and letting the students who professionally learned Qiang’s musical instruments to give a performance in music class can help students to know and appreciate the Qiang’s musical instruments more visually and make them become more interested in learning. For instance, when learning the *Toasting Song*, the teacher can ask students to learn the meaning behind the song and the Qiang’s musical instruments applied in the song first; after students learned how to sing the song, teachers can accompany the same melody by playing piano first and then playing Qiang flute and let students sing, so that students can grasp the main melody of the song and can memorize it to feel the different music experiences.

## 2.2 Using Them as Musical Instruments for Accompaniment in Dances or Songs

To use the Qiang's musical instruments in music teaching, teachers need to carry out abundant classroom teaching forms and choose some instruments with strong rhythmicity and characteristics, such as sheepskin drum and disc bell. The teacher can choose one section of music or dance as the background and then make a comparison between an ordinary big drum and the sheepskin drum specific for Qiang people. For example, the teacher can accompany for the same section of dance or music by playing ordinary big drum first and then the sheepskin drum. In this way, the students can compare whether the emotions expressed through different musical instruments on the same music background are the same and thus they can understand the special charm of Qiang's sheepskin drum.

In addition, the teacher can also manifest different types of music with a sheepskin drum, such as the heavy and sorrowful sacrificing music and active and pleasant festival celebration music. According to the various music images expressed of Qiang's sheepskin drum in various music works, students can understand that various musical emotions and meanings can be expressed by playing sheepskin drum, which is a percussion instrument, through different beating ways, beating the different parts of drum and changing the beating speeds etc. When students understand such different feelings, the teacher can accompany for various music backgrounds with the sheepskin drum so that it can help them to better understand the special ways of manifestation of Qiang's musical instruments. Later, students can give play to their free imaginations to extemporaneously play instruments according to their understandings of music works and instruments; besides, they can also carry out some music activities in various forms and integrate "music, dance and instruments" into such activities so that they can manifest music through singing, rhythm and playing.

## 2.3 Expressing the Music Content as Expression Techniques of Music

The key to the success or failure of a music class lies in whether the teacher's expression technique of music is vivid or not. Teachers can carry out teaching in a vivid and pleasant way based on the characteristics of music learning. Besides, teachers can also guide them to participate in all kinds of music activities for teaching Qiang's musical instruments so that students can personally experience Qiang's musical instruments. For instance, the teacher can use the characteristic sacrificing activities in Qiang culture and tradition and let students understand the meanings of sacrificing activities; then, the teacher can let students to consider which Qiang's musical instruments can be added to the theme. After students give answers, let students to create a music activity on the background of the theme in groups. Then, students

can play varied roles in the music activity, use the disc bell and sheepskin drum in the activity and show different music occasions through varies musical instruments. In such a music teaching mode, students become the protagonists in class. Thus, it can not only fully realize students' performance desire but also maximally motivate their learning interest.

## 2.4 Using Them in Music Appreciation as Theoretically Common Sense

Music appreciation is an outside-to-inside experience of music emotion. In class, the teacher can choose some representative Qiang's musical instrument works and national festival celebration activities. According to the audio and video materials, students can learn the common sense of national musical instruments, grasp the historical and cultural background of music works and obtain the experience of music emotion. Through the teacher's detailed explanation of Qiang's national musical instruments, students can learn the playing methods for different musical instruments, distinguish the sound effects and timbre characteristics achieved by playing various musical instruments, experience the musical emotions expressed by musical instruments in music works and thus reach the goal of music appreciation; in this way, students can better enjoy the joys brought by music and feel the charm of national music. For instance, the teacher uses Qiang flute works as the theme of music appreciation; then, the teacher can let students to feel music through video materials; later, the teacher can help students to learn the musical instruments with Qiang characteristics through penetration step by step and respectively introduce the historical culture, material composition of musical instruments, principles for sound production, playing characteristics and the music emotion expressed etc. so that students can understand and learn the Qiang flute more visually.

Although teachers are absolutely dominant in teaching, they cannot neglect students' subjective initiative. Therefore, there are some implicit requirements on the learning of Qiang's musical instruments. In order to carry forward the Qiang's musical instruments, we should not only use them in class but also use them in each part of life art. For instance, establish Qiang's musical instrument band; teach various Qiang's musical instruments according to different students' interests and hobbies; form a band to jointly play national music based on mastering basic playing methods. In this way, the teacher can not only help students to master the playing methods and skills for various Qiang's musical instruments but also improve their music cooperation ability in varying degrees. Establish an interest group for making Qiang's musical instruments so that we can develop some activities such as making national musical instruments. This not only can enhance students' operational ability but also can deepen their enthusiasm for national musical instruments. After-

class study is the most visual and vivid learning mode. The teacher can carry out the Qiang's country music activities in the forms of collecting folk songs etc., so that students can personally feel the national styles, features and cultures and deepen their understanding of national musical instruments.

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## CONCLUSION

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With long histories, China's national musical instruments have deep cultural and artistic values and deposits. Most musical instruments with histories for hundreds of years, such as Qiang flute, carry the deep brands of times and society, so they can reflect the environment of the social music environment at that time, and embody the level of musical art at that time. Therefore, we need to learn and research them continuously, actively carry forward the values of national musical instruments in music education in middle and primary schools, break through the traditional educational pattern, innovate boldly and be brave in exploring the new patterns for music education.

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