

# Breath, Sound, and Daoist Aesthetics in Dizi Pedagogy: Teaching Methods, Performance Practices, and Evaluation Guidelines for Northern and Southern Traditions

Jiangdi Liu<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Krisada Daoruang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International College for Interdisciplinary Studies, Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-Ok, Thailand.  
Email: jiangdi.liu@rmutto.ac.th | ORCID: 0009-0001-0644-2139

<sup>2\*</sup> Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International College for Interdisciplinary Studies, Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-Ok, Thailand.  
Email: krisada\_da@rmutto.ac.th | ORCID: 0009-0009-5278-5229

## Corresponding Author:

Dr. Krisada Daoruang<sup>2\*</sup>  
Email: krisada\_da@rmutto.ac.th

**Abstract:** This study develops teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation guidelines for Dizi pedagogy by examining breath control, sound production, and Daoist aesthetics in the Northern and Southern Dizi traditions. Rather than treating Dizi instruction only as technical training, the study interprets Dizi performance as an integrated practice of breath, sound, body, style, and aesthetic expression. Daoist aesthetics is used as a cultural-aesthetic lens rather than as a doctrinal or ritual framework. A practice-based development research design was adopted at Hunan First Normal University. Data were collected through document analysis, teacher interviews, student questionnaires, expert validation, classroom implementation, pre- and post-performance assessment, classroom observation, and student satisfaction feedback. The findings suggest that Northern Dizi pedagogy emphasizes direct breath, bright tone, rhythmic strength, articulated techniques, and energetic stylistic expression, whereas Southern Dizi pedagogy emphasizes flexible breath control, lyrical tone, delicate ornamentation, and expressive subtlety. Based on these findings, the study developed a pedagogical framework that integrates breath regulation, tone production, stylistic comparison, repertoire-based practice, reflective performance, and multidimensional evaluation. The proposed evaluation guidelines include rhythm, pitch accuracy, completeness and fluency, technique, expressiveness, playing style, breath control, tone quality, and aesthetic interpretation. The preliminary implementation results provide supporting evidence that the framework can guide students toward clearer stylistic awareness and more integrated performance practice. The study contributes to Dizi pedagogy by linking artistic tradition, embodied performance, and culturally grounded aesthetic understanding..

**Keywords:** Dizi pedagogy; breath control; sound production; Daoist aesthetics; Northern and Southern traditions; performance practice; evaluation guidelines

## Introduction

Dizi performance is an embodied musical practice in which breath, sound, body movement, finger technique, stylistic knowledge, and aesthetic intention are inseparably connected. As a Chinese transverse bamboo flute, the Dizi produces sound through the performer's breath, embouchure, resonance control, finger coordination, and bodily regulation (Luan et al., 2024). For this reason, Dizi pedagogy cannot be understood only as the teaching of notes, fingerings, or technical exercises. It also involves the cultivation of sound quality, phrase breathing, timbral imagination, regional style, and



cultural meaning. In university teaching, however, Dizi instruction often gives more explicit attention to techniques such as tonguing, chopping, glissando, trill, and ornamentation than to the deeper relationship among breath regulation, tone production, bodily ease, stylistic expression, and aesthetic interpretation (Liu et al., 2025).

The problem becomes particularly visible in the teaching of Northern and Southern Dizi traditions. The Northern tradition is commonly associated with bangdi, northern opera, folk wind music, bright timbre, direct airflow, lively rhythm, and techniques such as tonguing, chopping, glissando, and flower tongue. The Southern tradition is commonly associated with qudi, Kunqu opera, Jiangnan silk-and-bamboo music, mellow timbre, flexible breath, lyrical phrasing, refined ornamentation, and subtle expressive control. These traditions are not merely collections of repertoire. They are performance systems that organize breath, sound, body, technique, and aesthetic orientation in different ways. If students learn only the external techniques of these traditions without understanding how sound is produced and why particular timbral and expressive qualities matter, their performances may be technically competent but stylistically shallow.

Breath is therefore a central pedagogical concern. In Dizi performance, breath affects pitch stability, tone color, phrase length, dynamic control, articulation, and emotional expression. Strong and direct airflow supports the bright and penetrating sound of many Northern pieces, while flexible, restrained, and continuously shaped breath supports the soft, rounded, and lyrical sound of many Southern pieces. Sound production is equally important because Dizi timbre is not a neutral acoustic result; it is a cultural and aesthetic target. The performer must learn how breath becomes sound, how sound becomes style, and how style becomes musical expression.

This article uses Daoist aesthetics as one cultural-aesthetic lens for interpreting this process. Daoist aesthetics is not treated here as a religious doctrine, ritual system, or theological framework. Instead, it is used as an interpretive vocabulary for understanding breath-based performance and teaching. Concepts such as *qi* or breath-energy, *ziran* or naturalness, *wuwei* or non-forcing, *xu* or emptiness, *jing* or stillness, and *he* or harmony can help teachers describe musical qualities that are difficult to explain through technical language alone. In Dizi teaching, these ideas may be translated into concrete pedagogical principles: natural sound production without excessive muscular tension, non-forcing breath use rather than squeezed tone, stillness and emptiness in phrase endings and pauses, and harmonious coordination among breath, fingers, body, and musical feeling.

The existing literature on Dizi pedagogy has made important contributions to teaching concepts, technical training, repertoire analysis, artist studies, and textbook development. Scholars have emphasized the integration of breath, technique, sound, and artistic image (Wang, 2024); the importance of artistic imagination (Song et al., 2022); the need for systematic breath training in university courses (Czajkowski et al., 2022); and the value of modernizing Dizi teaching through scientific methods (Liu et al., 2025). Studies of regional styles and representative artists have also demonstrated that Dizi performance is shaped by local musical traditions, repertoire lineages, and evolving artistic practices (Liu, 2026). However, relatively few studies have integrated breath control, sound production, Daoist-aesthetic concepts, Northern/Southern stylistic characteristics, performance practices, and evaluation guidelines within one pedagogical framework.

The main objective of this study is therefore to develop teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation guidelines for Dizi pedagogy by examining breath control, sound production, and Daoist aesthetics in the Northern and Southern Dizi traditions. The study has three sub-objectives. First, it analyzes the concepts of breath control, sound production, and Daoist aesthetics as reflected in the artistic characteristics of Northern and Southern Dizi traditions. Second, it investigates existing teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation approaches used in Northern and Southern Dizi pedagogy. Third, it develops teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation guidelines for Dizi pedagogy based on the artistic, aesthetic, and pedagogical characteristics of Northern and Southern Dizi traditions.

Accordingly, the study is guided by three research questions. RQ1 asks: How are breath control, sound production, and Daoist aesthetics reflected in the artistic characteristics of Northern and Southern Dizi traditions? RQ2 asks: What teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation approaches are currently used in Northern and Southern Dizi pedagogy? RQ3 asks: How can teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation guidelines for Dizi pedagogy be developed based on the artistic, aesthetic, and pedagogical characteristics of Northern and Southern traditions? By answering these questions, the article contributes a practice-based framework for Dizi pedagogy that connects traditional performance knowledge with concrete teaching and assessment strategies.

## Literature Review

### Breath Control and Sound Production in Dizi Performance

Breath control is the foundation of Dizi performance because the performer's breath directly generates tone, supports intonation, shapes phrases, and carries expressive intention. Unlike instruments in which sound may be mechanically produced after physical contact, Dizi sound depends on the continuous regulation of airflow, embouchure, oral cavity, bodily posture, and finger coordination. Therefore, breath is not only a physiological action but also an artistic medium. A stable breath supports pitch accuracy and tonal center, while flexible breath allows changes in dynamic level, phrase direction, timbre, and emotional nuance.

A Liya (2015), in discussing Professor Tang Junqiao's understanding of Dizi fundamentals, emphasized the relationship among *qi*, technique, sound, and artistic image. This idea is highly relevant to pedagogy because it suggests that technical training should not be isolated from tone and expression. Breath exercises are not merely preparatory drills; they are the basis for producing meaningful sound. Similarly, Sun (2021) argued that Dizi teaching should cultivate artistic imagination rather than remain at the level of mechanical practice. Students must learn to connect breath and sound with the image, mood, and style of the piece.

Li (2017) examined breath training in university Dizi courses and argued that different pieces and styles require flexible approaches to breath. This is especially important for Northern and Southern traditions. In Northern pieces, direct airflow, quick articulation, rhythmic force, and bright tone often require strong breath support and clear tongue-breath coordination. In Southern pieces, the performer must often sustain long melodic lines, control soft tone, shape ornamental figures, and create subtle transitions through more flexible and restrained breath. These differences show that breath control is stylistically embedded. It cannot be taught as a single general technique detached from repertoire.

Sound production is equally central. Dizi tone quality includes brightness, mellowness, resonance, focus, softness, penetration, and breathiness. Each quality is produced through technical control, but it also carries stylistic meaning. The bright tone of Northern Dizi performance supports energetic, vivid, and outward expression. The mellow tone of Southern Dizi performance supports lyrical, flowing, and inward expression. Thus, sound production is a bridge between technique and aesthetics. Effective pedagogy should guide students to hear stylistic differences, analyze how breath produces these differences, and apply them in performance.

## Northern and Southern Dizi Traditions

Northern and Southern Dizi traditions represent two major performance systems in Chinese Dizi art. The Northern tradition is shaped by northern opera, folk wind music, and bangdi performance. It often uses a shorter and brighter instrument, strong breath, vivid rhythm, and powerful articulation. Representative techniques include tonguing, chopping, glissando, rapid rhythmic articulation, and flower tongue. Representative pieces such as *Happy Meeting*, *Birds in the Shade*, and *Five Sticks* require energetic sound, clear articulation, and expressive vitality.

The Southern tradition is closely connected to qudi, Kunqu opera, Jiangnan silk-and-bamboo music, and the refined musical culture of the Jiangnan region. It emphasizes a mellow and rounded sound, long and flexible breath, lyrical melody, delicate ornamentation, and subtle emotional expression. Representative techniques include trill, overlapping, zengyin, staccato, glissando-like ornamentation, and phrase-based breath shaping. Works such as *Joy Song*, *Three Five Seven*, and *Partridge in Flight* require students to control timbre, line, and expressive nuance rather than only speed or force.

The pedagogical value of comparing these traditions lies in the fact that they organize breath, sound, technique, and aesthetic orientation differently. The Northern tradition teaches students how breath can become rhythmic power and bright projection. The Southern tradition teaches students how breath can become lyrical continuity and tonal subtlety. Together, they provide complementary foundations for Dizi performance training.

**Table 1 summarizes the breath, sound, technique, and aesthetic orientations of the two traditions.**

| Tradition        | Breath                                             | Sound                             | Technique                                                                           | Aesthetic orientation                |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Northern<br>Dizi | Strong, direct, and rhythmically energized airflow | Bright, penetrating, focused tone | Tonguing, chopping, glissando, rhythmic articulation, flower tongue                 | Energetic, vivid, outward expression |
| Southern<br>Dizi | Flexible, controlled, phrase-based breath          | Mellow, lyrical, rounded tone     | Ornamentation, trill, zengyin, delicate phrasing, subtle finger-breath coordination | Subtle, flowing, inward expression   |

This comparison shows that Northern and Southern traditions should not be taught only as separate repertoire categories. They should be taught as different ways of organizing embodied performance. Students need to understand why one tradition requires a sharper articulation and another requires softer tonal flow; why one style foregrounds rhythmic vitality and another foregrounds melodic elegance; and how breath and sound support these differences.

Pedagogical Development and Evaluation in Dizi Teaching

Research on Dizi teaching has emphasized the need for systematic curriculum design, diversified teaching methods, and stronger integration between technique and expression. Ma (2019) reviewed the development of Chinese bamboo Dizi textbooks after the founding of the People’s Republic of China and showed that teaching materials have gradually become more structured. Zhang (2024) examined Zhang Weiliang’s Dizi textbook series and identified gradual progression and scientific organization as important features. Such studies suggest that teaching materials should move from basic skills to advanced repertoire while connecting technique, musicality, and cultural understanding.

Nevertheless, university Dizi teaching still faces challenges. Some students enter university with uneven foundations, limited experience with traditional repertoire, and incomplete understanding of regional styles. Some teaching practices remain score-centered, emphasizing the completion of pieces rather than systematic development of breath, sound, technique, and style. Hao (2026) criticized the tendency of some teaching to focus on playing through scores while neglecting deeper basic skill training and stylistic refinement. Feng (2026) noted that college Dizi teaching must respond to diversified student goals and learning backgrounds.

Evaluation is another important issue. Existing performance assessment often focuses on rhythm, intonation, fluency, technique, expression, and style. These dimensions are necessary, but they may not fully capture the central concerns raised by the editor's framework: breath, sound, and aesthetic interpretation. If assessment does not explicitly include breath control, tone quality, and aesthetic understanding, students may treat these qualities as secondary. A revised evaluation framework should therefore include both technical and aesthetic criteria. In Dizi pedagogy, assessment should ask not only whether the student played the correct notes, but also whether the student produced appropriate tone, controlled breath in relation to phrase and style, and interpreted the aesthetic character of the tradition.

## Method

### Research Design

This study adopted a development-oriented, practice-based research design. Its purpose was not to conduct a large-scale experimental test of teaching effectiveness but to develop, validate, and preliminarily implement a Dizi pedagogical framework based on breath control, sound production, Daoist aesthetics, and Northern/Southern stylistic traditions. The research was exploratory and context-specific. It was conducted in a real undergraduate Dizi teaching environment and therefore combined conceptual analysis, needs investigation, pedagogical development, expert validation, and classroom implementation.

The study was organized into four stages. Stage 1 involved conceptual and artistic analysis of breath, sound, Daoist aesthetics, and Northern/Southern Dizi traditions. Stage 2 investigated existing teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation approaches through teacher interviews, student questionnaire data, and group discussion. Stage 3 developed teaching methods, performance practices, lesson plans, exercises, repertoire-based activities, and evaluation guidelines. Stage 4 conducted expert validation and preliminary classroom implementation using IOC assessment, pre- and post-performance assessment, classroom observation, and student satisfaction feedback.

### Participants and Research Site

The study was conducted at the School of Music and Dance, Hunan First Normal University. Five first-year undergraduate students majoring in Dizi participated in the classroom implementation. The student group included four male students and one female student. Five university Dizi teachers from different institutions participated in interviews and expert validation. These teachers included professors, associate professors, lecturers, and professional performers with substantial experience in Dizi teaching and performance.

**Table 2 presents the student participants.**

| Student   | Gender | Grade    | Role in the study                    |
|-----------|--------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| A Student | Male   | Freshman | Classroom implementation participant |
| B Student | Male   | Freshman | Classroom implementation participant |
| C Student | Male   | Freshman | Classroom implementation participant |
| D Student | Female | Freshman | Classroom implementation participant |

| Student      | Gender | Grade    | Role in the study                    |
|--------------|--------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| E<br>Student | Male   | Freshman | Classroom implementation participant |

Because Dizi major instruction often occurs in small-group or individual teaching contexts, the small sample was suitable for practice-based pedagogical development. However, the results should be interpreted as preliminary and context-specific rather than broadly generalizable.

#### Stage 1: Conceptual and Artistic Analysis

The first stage analyzed how breath control, sound production, and Daoist-aesthetic concepts are reflected in Northern and Southern Dizi traditions. Materials included literature on Dizi teaching, performance techniques, repertoire style, regional traditions, and Chinese aesthetic concepts. Representative Northern and Southern works were examined in terms of breath demands, tone quality, techniques, phrase structure, and stylistic expression. This stage generated the conceptual foundation for the teaching method: breath should be taught as the source of tone and style; sound should be taught as a culturally meaningful quality; and Daoist-aesthetic concepts should be translated into concrete teaching language such as natural tone, non-forced breath, phrase stillness, musical flow, and body-breath harmony.

#### Stage 2: Investigation of Existing Pedagogy

The second stage investigated existing teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation approaches. Interviews with five university Dizi teachers focused on current problems, students' technical foundations, the presence of Northern and Southern school content in teaching, performance practice routines, and evaluation needs. A student questionnaire examined students' familiarity with representative Northern and Southern works, their knowledge of typical techniques, and their views on Dizi teaching content and methods. A group discussion further explored students' learning needs.

The interview and discussion data were analyzed thematically. The questionnaire data were summarized descriptively because of the small sample. The purpose of this stage was to identify the pedagogical gap between current teaching practices and the desired integration of breath, sound, style, and aesthetic interpretation.

#### Stage 3: Development of Teaching Methods and Performance Practices

The third stage developed a 32-hour teaching framework for Northern and Southern Dizi pedagogy. The teaching content was organized around six representative works: *Birds in the Shade*, *Happy Meeting*, *Five Sticks*, *Joy Song*, *Three Five Seven*, and *Partridge in Flight*. The framework integrated lesson plans, exercise materials, repertoire-based activities, stylistic comparison, breath-control exercises, sound-production tasks, and reflective performance practice.

**Table 3 presents the repertoire sequence and class hours.**

| Teaching cycle | Repertoire                | Tradition/style focus                                          | Class hours |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Cycle 1        | <i>Birds in the Shade</i> | Northern breath, bright tone, vivid rhythmic articulation      | 5           |
| Cycle 1        | <i>Happy Meeting</i>      | Northern projection, tonguing, energetic expression            | 5           |
| Cycle 2        | <i>Five Sticks</i>        | Northern representative repertoire and stylistic consolidation | 6           |

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| Teaching cycle | Repertoire                 | Tradition/style focus                                         | Class hours |
|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Cycle 2        | <i>Joy Song</i>            | Southern lyrical tone and ornamented phrasing                 | 5           |
| Cycle 3        | <i>Three Five Seven</i>    | Southern folk style, melodic flow, phrase breathing           | 5           |
| Cycle 3        | <i>Partridge in Flight</i> | Southern breath refinement, tone subtlety, expressive control | 6           |
| <b>Total</b>   |                            |                                                               | <b>32</b>   |

Four teaching strategies were used. Demonstration teaching allowed students to observe posture, embouchure, breath use, finger technique, and tone. Decomposition teaching divided difficult techniques and passages into smaller units. Multimedia teaching used audio and video materials to support listening and stylistic comparison. Comparative teaching guided students to distinguish Northern and Southern traditions in breath, sound, technique, and aesthetic orientation. Reflective performance tasks were added so students could describe how breath and sound affected their stylistic interpretation.

#### Stage 4: Expert Validation and Preliminary Implementation

The fourth stage included expert validation and preliminary classroom implementation. Five experts evaluated the teaching plan using the Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC). The evaluation criteria included fit with research purpose, fit with course nature, student ability level, actual teaching situation, repertoire appropriateness, skill development, gradual design, teaching goals, student interest, and lesson plan standardization. Classroom implementation was then conducted over 32 class hours. Students completed pre- and post-performance assessments across six original dimensions: rhythm, pitch accuracy, completeness and fluency, technique, expressiveness, and playing style. Classroom observation and student satisfaction feedback were also collected. These results were used as supporting evidence for refining the teaching framework and developing expanded evaluation guidelines.

## Results

#### Breath, Sound, and Daoist-Aesthetic Features of Northern and Southern Dizi Traditions

The analysis of Northern and Southern traditions showed that breath and sound function as central carriers of style. Northern Dizi performance emphasizes strong airflow, bright tone, rhythmic strength, and vivid articulation. These qualities are not simply technical preferences; they express the energetic character of Northern repertoire. Tonguing, chopping, glissando, and flower tongue require breath that is direct, supported, and rhythmically coordinated. The sound goal is often penetrating and lively, and the performer’s body must support quick articulation and strong rhythmic projection.

Southern Dizi performance emphasizes flexible breath, mellow tone, lyrical phrasing, and subtle ornamentation. The performer must avoid excessive force and maintain continuity of tone across phrases. Techniques such as trill, overlapping, zengyin, staccato, and delicate glissando-like ornaments require refined finger-breath coordination. The sound goal is rounded, flowing, and expressive. Phrase endings often require quiet control and musical space rather than strong closure.

Daoist-aesthetic concepts helped clarify these differences. In Northern performance, *qi* is expressed through rhythmic energy and projected sound, while *he* appears as coordination among breath, tongue, fingers, and rhythm. In Southern performance, *ziran* and *wuwei* appear in natural tone and non-forced breath, while *xu* and *jing* appear in musical space, quietness, and subtle phrase control. These findings suggest that Daoist aesthetics can serve as a pedagogical vocabulary for explaining qualities that are embodied and audible rather than purely conceptual.

#### Existing Teaching Methods, Performance Practices, and Evaluation Problems

Teacher interviews and student data revealed three main problems in existing Dizi pedagogy. First, student foundations were uneven. Some freshmen had learned several pieces for entrance examinations but lacked systematic training in breath, tone, fingering, and style. Second, Northern and Southern school content was insufficiently represented or insufficiently systematized in some teaching contexts. Teachers and students both recognized the importance of this content, but students reported limited familiarity with representative works and techniques. Third, existing teaching and evaluation tended to emphasize technical execution more than breath control, sound production, and aesthetic interpretation.

Teachers identified the need to strengthen basic skills, increase the proportion of Northern and Southern repertoire, and develop a more systematic teaching method. Students similarly expressed the need to learn representative works, understand typical techniques, and grasp stylistic differences more accurately. Most students believed that traditional North–South repertoire was essential to Dizi learning but stated that their previous exposure was limited. They also requested clearer explanations of how to practice techniques and how to perform style.

**Table 4 summarizes the needs analysis.**

| Stakeholder | Problems identified                                                                                                                             | Needs identified                                                                                                                          |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teachers    | Uneven student foundations; limited systematic North–South content; lack of standardized pedagogical method                                     | Strengthen basic skills; increase North–South repertoire; develop scientific and flexible teaching methods                                |
| Students    | Limited knowledge of representative works; insufficient mastery of techniques; weak stylistic understanding; relatively simple teaching methods | Learn representative repertoire; receive systematic technique explanation; understand playing style; receive clearer performance guidance |

The findings indicate that the pedagogical problem is not only a lack of teaching content but also a lack of integration. Breath, sound, technique, style, and evaluation need to be organized as one teaching system.

#### Developed Teaching Methods and Performance Practices

Based on the conceptual analysis and needs investigation, the study developed a pedagogical framework consisting of six connected components. The first component is breath regulation. Students practice stable airflow, phrase-based breathing, direct breath for Northern works, and flexible breath for Southern works. The second component is sound production. Students compare bright, penetrating tone with mellow, lyrical tone and learn how embouchure and breath shape timbre. The third component is technique training. Northern techniques such as tonguing, chopping, and flower tongue are practiced alongside Southern techniques such as trill, zengyin, and delicate ornamentation.

The fourth component is repertoire-based practice. Techniques are not taught only as isolated drills but are linked to representative pieces. The fifth component is stylistic comparison. Students compare Northern and Southern approaches in breath, tone, rhythm, ornamentation, and expressive direction. The sixth component is reflective performance. Students are asked to describe how they used breath, sound, and aesthetic intention in their performance. This component helps transform tacit performance knowledge into explicit learning.

**Table 5 presents the developed pedagogical framework.**

| Component                 | Pedagogical purpose                                    | Teaching activities                                                         | Link to breath, sound, and aesthetics                                         |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Breath regulation         | Build stable and flexible breath foundation            | Long-tone practice; phrase breathing; direct and flexible airflow exercises | Connects <i>qi</i> with tone production and phrase direction                  |
| Sound production          | Develop stylistically appropriate tone                 | Bright-tone and mellow-tone comparison; embouchure and resonance exercises  | Links sound quality with Northern/Southern aesthetic character                |
| Technique training        | Master tradition-specific techniques                   | Tonguing, chopping, glissando, trill, zengyin, ornamentation practice       | Converts style into embodied technical practice                               |
| Repertoire-based practice | Apply techniques in musical context                    | Study of six representative works                                           | Connects exercises with complete performance practice                         |
| Stylistic comparison      | Strengthen awareness of differences between traditions | Listening, demonstration, score analysis, comparative performance           | Clarifies energetic/outward and subtle/inward orientations                    |
| Reflective performance    | Develop aesthetic self-awareness                       | Performance journals; oral reflection; peer discussion                      | Translates naturalness, non-forcing, flow, and harmony into learning language |

The expert validation showed strong overall content validity. The mean IOC value was 0.90. Seven items received full agreement, including fit with research purpose, course nature, repertoire appropriateness, performance skill training, gradual teaching design, teaching goals, and lesson plan standardization. Two items, fit with actual teaching situation and fit with student interests, received lower but acceptable values, indicating that teachers should adjust pace and content according to student ability and motivation.

**Table 6 presents the IOC validation results.**

| <b>Evaluation item</b>                      | <b>IOC value</b> | <b>Interpretation</b>           |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fit with research purpose                   | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| Fit with course nature                      | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| Meets students' ability level               | 0.80             | Appropriate with adjustment     |
| Fits actual situation and research question | 0.60             | Acceptable but needs refinement |
| Appropriate North-South repertoire content  | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| Suitable for improving performance skills   | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| Gradual teaching design                     | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| Reasonable teaching goals                   | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| Fits students' interests                    | 0.60             | Acceptable but needs refinement |
| Standardized lesson plan writing            | 1.00             | Strongly appropriate            |
| <b>Mean</b>                                 | <b>0.90</b>      | <b>High content validity</b>    |

Preliminary implementation data provided supporting evidence for the framework. Student total performance scores increased from a mean of 14.20 to 20.80 out of 30. The largest improvement occurred in playing style, followed by technique, completeness and fluency, and musical expression. These results are not presented as definitive experimental proof because the sample was small and there was no control group. However, they suggest that the framework helped students become more aware of stylistic performance and more able to integrate techniques into complete playing.

**Table 7 presents the pre- and post-performance assessment results.**

| <b>Student</b> | <b>Pre-test total</b> | <b>Post-test total</b> | <b>Gain</b> | <b>Percentage improvement</b> |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| A              | 18                    | 25                     | 7           | 38.9%                         |
| B              | 12                    | 20                     | 8           | 66.7%                         |
| C              | 17                    | 22                     | 5           | 29.4%                         |
| D              | 10                    | 16                     | 6           | 60.0%                         |

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| Student     | Pre-test<br>total | Post-test<br>total | Gain        | Percentage<br>improvement |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| E           | 14                | 21                 | 7           | 50.0%                     |
| <b>Mean</b> | <b>14.20</b>      | <b>20.80</b>       | <b>6.60</b> | <b>49.0%</b>              |

Student satisfaction was also high, with an overall mean of 4.68 out of 5. Students rated the teaching method and teacher teaching level especially highly. The relatively lower scores for class time, teaching environment, and individualized guidance suggested that future implementation should provide more practice time and more individualized feedback.

#### Developed Evaluation Guidelines

One of the main outputs of this study is a revised evaluation guideline for Northern and Southern Dizi pedagogy. The original assessment dimensions included rhythm, pitch accuracy, completeness and fluency, technique, expressiveness, and playing style. Based on the new research focus, three dimensions were added: breath control, tone quality/sound production, and aesthetic interpretation. These additions make the evaluation framework more consistent with the study's emphasis on breath, sound, and Daoist-aesthetic understanding.

**Table 8 presents the developed evaluation guidelines.**

| Evaluation dimension     | Description                                                                          | Link to breath, sound, style, or aesthetics                                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rhythm                   | Accuracy and stability of rhythmic execution                                         | Supports stylistic clarity, especially in Northern pieces with strong rhythmic drive |
| Pitch accuracy           | Control of intonation and tonal center                                               | Reflects stable breath, embouchure, and finger coordination                          |
| Completeness and fluency | Smoothness, continuity, and completeness of performance                              | Shows integration of technique, phrase breathing, and musical flow                   |
| Technique                | Execution of tonguing, chopping, glissando, ornamentation, trill, and related skills | Differentiates Northern and Southern performance practices                           |
| Expressiveness           | Emotional communication and musical shaping                                          | Connects sound production with aesthetic intention                                   |
| Playing style            | Accuracy of Northern or Southern stylistic features                                  | Demonstrates understanding of regional performance systems                           |
| Breath control           | Stability, flexibility, support, and phrase-based                                    | Reflects <i>qi</i> -based embodied performance and breath-sound                      |

| Evaluation dimension            | Description                                                                    | Link to breath, sound, style, or aesthetics                              |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                 | breathing                                                                      | coordination                                                             |
| Tone quality / sound production | Brightness, mellowness, resonance, focus, softness, and timbral control        | Connects sound production with Northern/Southern aesthetic character     |
| Aesthetic interpretation        | Understanding of naturalness, non-forcing, stillness, flow, space, and harmony | Reflects Daoist-aesthetic awareness translated into performance practice |

These guidelines allow teachers to evaluate Dizi performance more comprehensively. They also help students understand that performance quality includes technical accuracy, stylistic appropriateness, breath-based sound control, and culturally informed interpretation. By making breath control, tone quality, and aesthetic interpretation explicit, the guidelines reduce the risk that students will treat them as secondary or purely intuitive concerns.

## Discussion

### Breath and Sound as Foundations of Dizi Pedagogy

The findings suggest that breath and sound should be treated as foundational categories in Dizi pedagogy rather than as supporting techniques. In many teaching situations, students learn fingerings and technical passages before fully understanding how breath generates tone and how tone expresses style. This study shows that such sequencing is incomplete. Breath control shapes pitch, fluency, articulation, tone color, and expressive direction. Sound production translates breath into audible style. Therefore, Dizi pedagogy should begin from the relationship between breath and sound and then move toward technique and repertoire.

This argument is consistent with A Liya (2015)’s discussion of *qi*, technique, sound, and artistic image, and with Wang (2026)’s emphasis on flexible breath training. However, the present study extends previous research by linking breath and sound to Northern/Southern stylistic systems and evaluation guidelines. Breath is not a universal technical foundation alone; it is also tradition-specific. Strong, direct airflow may support Northern brightness and rhythmic force, while flexible and restrained breath may support Southern lyricism and subtlety. Teachers should therefore explain not only how to breathe, but also why different styles require different breath qualities.

### Northern and Southern Traditions as Complementary Performance Systems

Northern and Southern traditions are best understood as complementary performance systems. The Northern tradition develops students’ projection, rhythmic vitality, articulation, and energetic expression. The Southern tradition develops students’ breath refinement, tonal subtlety, ornamentation, and lyrical expression. Both are necessary for comprehensive Dizi training. If students study only Northern repertoire, they may develop strength but lack softness and nuance. If they study only Southern repertoire, they may develop delicacy but lack projection and rhythmic force. A balanced curriculum should therefore use both traditions to cultivate flexible and stylistically informed performers.

The study also shows that stylistic comparison is a powerful teaching method. When students hear and perform Northern and Southern versions of breath, tone, technique, and phrase movement, they become more aware of how musical style is embodied. This supports previous studies emphasizing regional style and artistic lineage (Wang, 2026; Zhang, 2026; Zhou, 2025). The contribution of the present study is to transform stylistic comparison into a structured pedagogical practice supported by exercises, repertoire sequencing, reflection, and evaluation.

## Daoist Aesthetics as a Pedagogical Lens

Daoist aesthetics provides a useful pedagogical lens for translating traditional aesthetic qualities into teaching methods and evaluation criteria. The study does not claim that Dizi pedagogy is essentially Daoist, nor does it treat Dizi instruction as religious practice. Rather, Daoist aesthetics offers a culturally grounded vocabulary for describing breath-based performance. Concepts such as naturalness, non-forcing, stillness, emptiness, flow, and harmony help teachers explain why a tone should not be squeezed, why a phrase ending requires space, why breath must be coordinated with the body, and why technique should serve musical expression.

This lens is especially useful because instrumental teaching often contains tacit knowledge that is difficult to verbalize. Teachers may say that a student's sound is too stiff, too forced, or lacking charm, but such comments can remain vague. By connecting these observations to *ziran*, *wuwei*, *xu*, *jing*, and *he*, teachers can give students more precise aesthetic guidance. For example, *wuwei* can be translated into relaxed but efficient breath support; *xu* can be translated into expressive space in phrase endings; and *he* can be translated into coordination among breath, fingers, posture, and emotion. In this way, Daoist aesthetics becomes pedagogically practical rather than abstract.

### Practical and Theoretical Implications

Practically, the study suggests that university Dizi teachers should design lessons that move from breath and sound to technique, repertoire, style, reflection, and evaluation. Breath-control exercises should be linked to specific repertoire and stylistic goals. Sound-production activities should train students to distinguish bright Northern tone from mellow Southern tone. Technical exercises should be connected to complete musical passages. Evaluation should include breath control, tone quality, and aesthetic interpretation in addition to rhythm, pitch, technique, expression, and style.

Theoretically, the study contributes an integrated model of Dizi pedagogy. The model connects embodied performance, regional tradition, and cultural aesthetics. It suggests that traditional instrumental education can be modernized not by removing cultural specificity but by making it more explicit, teachable, and assessable. The study also shows that aesthetic concepts can be translated into practical pedagogical categories when they are connected to concrete performance behaviors.

## Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, it was conducted with five students in one institution, so the findings cannot be generalized to all university Dizi contexts. Second, the implementation was exploratory and did not include a control group. The pre- and post-performance data should therefore be interpreted only as preliminary supporting evidence. Third, the implementation period was limited to 32 class hours. Longer studies are needed to examine whether students retain and deepen breath, sound, and aesthetic awareness over time. Fourth, the Daoist-aesthetic framework was used selectively as a pedagogical lens. Future research could examine more deeply how Chinese aesthetic thought, including but not limited to Daoist ideas, can inform instrumental pedagogy.

Future studies should apply the framework across multiple universities, include larger samples, compare different student levels, and investigate long-term performance development. Research may also explore digital tools for breath and tone feedback, video-based stylistic analysis, and cross-institutional evaluation rubrics. Further studies could compare how teachers interpret Daoist-aesthetic concepts in practice and how students internalize these concepts through performance learning.

## Conclusion

This study developed teaching methods, performance practices, and evaluation guidelines for Northern and Southern Dizi pedagogy by examining breath control, sound production, and Daoist aesthetics. The study repositioned Dizi teaching as an embodied practice of breath, sound, body, technique, style, and aesthetic interpretation. Through conceptual analysis, teacher interviews, student

questionnaires, pedagogical development, expert validation, classroom implementation, and feedback,

the study produced a framework that integrates breath regulation, tone production, repertoire-based practice, stylistic comparison, reflective performance, and multidimensional evaluation.

The findings suggest that Northern and Southern Dizi traditions offer complementary pedagogical resources. Northern pedagogy emphasizes direct breath, bright sound, rhythmic vitality, and energetic expression. Southern pedagogy emphasizes flexible breath, mellow sound, lyrical flow, ornamentation, and subtle expression. Daoist aesthetics provides a useful cultural-aesthetic lens for translating naturalness, non-forcing, stillness, emptiness, flow, and harmony into teaching language and evaluation criteria. The proposed evaluation guidelines extend conventional assessment by adding breath control, tone quality, and aesthetic interpretation to rhythm, pitch accuracy, fluency, technique, expressiveness, and playing style.

The study is exploratory and context-specific, but it offers a practical contribution to Dizi pedagogy. It shows how artistic tradition, performance practice, and aesthetic understanding can be integrated into teachable methods and assessable criteria. Future research should test and refine the framework with larger samples, longer implementation periods, and cross-institutional collaboration.

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