

# The Preserving of Morin khuur at Home of Morin khuur in China

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## Abstracts

In 2006, Mongolian *Morin khuur* music was selected as the national intangible cultural heritage. The objectives of this research were 1) Learn to make *Morin khuur* at Qian Gorlos County. 2) Study the current situation of the local *Morin khuur* inheritance education. 3) Study the music trait of *Morin khuur*. 3) Constructing *Morin khuur* guidebook for *Morin khuur* preservation and to use it locally. Research methodology: 1) The research method was ethnomusicological qualitative research getting data by doing fieldwork combining with documents studied. 2) The place of studied was Qian Gorlos County, Jilin Province, China. 3) Research tools Interview form, Observation form, Questionnaire, Recorder. 4) Key informant: Four key informants.

Research findings were: 1) Handmade *Morin khuur* is patient, complex and difficult, and finding a successor is difficult. The inheritance of Matouqin craftsmanship is not as simple as opening a *Morin khuur* instrument factory to make money, it requires the inheritor to invest time, energy and money to do public welfare from the heart. Every time the inheritor does the publicity course of making *Morin khuur*, he needs to explain it over and over again. If there is a brochure, it will reduce a lot of burden. 2) Almost all schools in the county have opened *Morin khuur* club classes, but there is no unified teaching material. Students' understanding of the *Morin khuur* is limited to how to play it, and they know little about the history and culture of the *Morin khuur*, the connection between their hometown and the *Morin khuur*, and the production process of the *Morin khuur*. 3) *Morin khuur* conservation brochures can help inheritors use them in activities and classes. The *Morin khuur* Protection manual can be directly used in the course of *Morin khuur* teaching in schools. The *Morin khuur* conservation brochures contain a collection of the music from famous local composers.

**Keywords:** The Preserving; Morin khuur; China

## Introduction

On August 4 of the same year, Chinese National Orchestra officially named Qian Gorlos County as "Home of *Morin khuur* in China". Under the background that the country vigorously advocates the protection and support of intangible cultural heritage, the government of Qian Gorlos County in Jilin Province has been actively carrying out the protection of local intangible cultural heritage. According to historical records, Qian Gorlos County was retroactively rated as the hometown of Chinese *Morin khuur* originated as a photo in the National Museum of Denmark. The photo was taken in 1930 by a Danish explorer in the Qian Gorlos County, King Gerroese House. The photographer was called Henning Hashren. The discoverer of the photo is Mr. Sukhbalu, a famous historian in Qian Gorlos County, who studies the art source of *Morin khuur*. Mr. Sukhbalu, a famous historian of Qian Gorlos County who

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studied the art of *Morin khuur*, saw a photo in his book "People and gods of Mongolia" written by Danish explorer Henning Hashren, The artist in the photo is very familiar. His instrument is "Chao", the predecessor of the *Morin khuur*, He thinks the artist in the photo is very familiar, the artist is holding the instrument is "chao er", "Chao er" is the predecessor of the *Morin khuur*. So he told Yili Qi, who was in charge of the excavation of the intangible cultural heritage in Qian Gorlos County, who found that in the 13th century, the instrument was widely circulated among the Mongolian people. By the end of the Qing Dynasty, Chaoer evolved into *Morin khuur*. Later, according to the valuable clues provided by Suhbalu, Yili determined the owner of the photo, Zhang Qingbao, the father of 90-year-old Zhang Chengxuan in Qian Gorlos County. Zhang Qingbo used to be a famous folk artist in the Songnen Plain. In the late Qing Dynasty, the Danish explorer Henning Hashlun took this precious photo in the palace of the front flag of the Qian Gorlos. No one would have thought that a hundred years later, this photo has become an important evidence of tracing the development of *Morin khuur* in Qian Gorlos County and the application for the World Heritage Site (Yang, 2013: 33).

After *Morin khuur* was selected as the national intangible cultural heritage list, Chinese scholars began to study *Morin khuur* successively, no one except the legend can prove which tribe *Morin khuur* rose from. Most of them were limited to a few *Morin khuur* players and the Inner Mongolia region. Few articles using ethnomusicology field survey writing techniques. The ancient Mongolian tribe in Qian Gorlos County has an inseparable connection with *Morin khuur*. Through the ethnomusicology field survey researchers found that the local schools have actively offered *Morin khuur* courses, the local students know little about the local history, *Morin khuur* culture, and nothing about the complicated production of *Morin khuur*. Researchers believe that the development of national instruments and music should be combined with the protection of traditional culture. From the past development history of Qian Gorlos County, people's life is getting better and better. All ethnic groups blend together, and the traditional culture of all ethnic groups has gradually disappeared. Just like the history of *Morin khuur* in Qian Gorlos County, it experienced the Mongolian tribes to the Manchu in the Qing Dynasty, and finally to the Han nationality. Various national cultures interweave, *Morin khuur* music culture has experienced from something to nothing, and then from nothing to have.

Now, Qian Gorlos County is well known as the home of *Morin khuur*. It not only has very rich *Morin khuur* activities, but also widely popularized *Morin khuur* music culture in the county. There are many *Morin khuur* masters here. For example, Master Buhe carried out *Morin khuur* enlightenment at Chagan Lake in Qian Gorlos County. For example, Zhao Jinbao is the inheritor of the *Morin khuur* music in Jilin Province, which has a relatively complete relationship between teachers and students. In terms of *Morin khuur* works, the *Morin khuur* works of Qian Gorlos County are very representative. The representative works, such as the suite of Tao Ke Tao Hu by Mr Xun Zhonghua contained the contents of local national literature and history, which have excellent research value. Bai sugulang is the provincial inheritor of *Morin khuur* hand-made. All these are important reference materials for the researcher to study the inheritance status of *Morin khuur*. Qian Gorlos County, as the epitome of the nation, as the hometown of *Morin khuur* in China, should shoulder the protection of *Morin khuur*, so that the teaching, the production and the music culture of *Morin khuur* can be better inherited and protected here.

China is a country with multi-ethnic culture. The Chinese culture is the root, and the minority culture is the leaf. Only when the root is deep can the leaf flourish. It is the responsibility of the whole people advocated by the General Secretary of China to strengthen the sense of community of the Chinese nation and promote the traditional Chinese national culture.

## Research Objectives

1. To learn to make Morin khuur.
2. To study the current situation of the local Morin khuur inheritance education.
3. To constructing Morin khuur musical culture preservation guidebook.
4. To using the guidebook for Morin khuur preservation.

## Literature Review

### **Morin khuur**

In the Erguna River valley around the 7th century B.C., a group of Mongolian ancestors survived in the deep forests of the mountains, collecting and hunting for a living. During this long history, many musical instruments with characteristics of mountain hunting came into being, such as: ancient hunting songs, shamanic songs and dances, collective tap dances, and even early history of characters, all of which added a unique color to the local culture. The earliest origins of the Mongolian *Morin khuur* can be traced back to a plucked instrument that appeared in the early 1st century BC (He, 2019:1).

*Morin khuur* gets its name because the head is carved from the horse head. In the annals of rites and music there are: Huqin, neck rolled, shaped like a horse's head. So researchers think *Morin khuur* is a Huqin. There are also researchers who believe that the *Morin khuur* got its name from the horse's tail. There are records related to the *Morin khuur* in the Yuan and Qing historical manuscripts. In the Qing historical manuscripts, the *Morin khuur* is also recorded as a wooden horsetail tied with 81 stems. It can be seen that *Morin khuur* is also related to horsetail (Yang, 2013: 33).

According to some historical data, it can be found that in ancient Mongolian belief, the head of musical instrument is also the symbol of its people. At first, the people believed that the head of a dragon head or monkey head could suppress demons, so they set its shape as the head of a dragon head or monkey head, and later evolved into the head of a horse. *Morin khuur* was first born in the transitional period from hunting culture to nomadic culture, as a string instrument for people's entertainment. Some scholars have shown that *Morin khuur* was widely popular among the Mongolian ethnic groups in the Tang and Song dynasties, and it was originally used as a stringed instrument and shared with other Musical Instruments. By the time of Genghis Khan. *Morin khuur* gradually became popular among the people. *Morin khuur* music is very rich and exciting, which was once fascinated by the masses. It deeply reflects the daily life and real feelings of the grassland people on the vast grassland, and also reflects the enthusiasm and unrestrained of the grassland people. At present, there are historical records available from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, when the head of the horse head evolved from the head of the dragon head or monkey head to the head of the horse head in the Yuan Dynasty. Due to the increasing variety of palace entertainment, the

*Morin khuur* moved from the folk to the court and became an indispensable part of the palace entertainment.

The origin of *Morin khuur* has always been the focus of discussion by experts and scholars, but it has rarely been studied. In the article the Origin and Flow of *Morin khuur*, the development track of *Morin khuur* was summarized and he thinks that the ancestor and ancestor of modern *Morin khuur* should be Huobusi in Tang Dynasty and Horsetail Huqin in Song Dynasty. The Chao-Wuer clan was formed in the Mongol Yuan Empire and the Ming and Qing dynasties. For example, the Chao-Wuer of the Hulei style gradually formed the *Morin khuur* after historical development (Li, 2020: 52-54).

In the paper on the Origin and Flow of *Morin khuur*, it is believed that the current historical data are not complete, and there are some faults in the research on the origin of *Morin khuur*, so different researchers have different research results. In the origin and origin of *Morin khuur* is recounted that since the Yuan Dynasty, *Morin khuur* has been called Yehuer and so on. Its development has a long history and has been evolved from different plucked Musical Instruments, and it is also the earliest stringed musical instrument that used horsetail bow to play in our country (Hu, 2021: 11-13).

### **Morin khuur music**

The development of the repertoire, score and mode of the horse-headed *Morin khuur* can be roughly divided into the following stages: Traditional repertoire stage (from the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th century) At this stage, the *Morin khuur* mainly plays traditional Mongolian folk music. The modes of these tracks are mostly based on pentatonic scale, and the most common ones are flat and high. A track usually consists of an introduction, several passages and an ending. Common tracks include "Horse Race", "Long Tune *Morin khuur*", etc. (Sambu, 2021:1). From the beginning of the 20th century to the middle of the 20th century, the *Morin khuur* began to set foot in new musical styles, such as song and dance, opera, symphony, etc. The tracks and modes began to diversify. Some tracks adopt the mode of western music, such as "Mongolian Youth March" (C major), "My Motherland" (F major), etc. At the same time, there are also tracks that adopt traditional modes and change them, such as the Concerto for High-tone *Morin khuur*. At this stage from the end of the 20th century to now, the *Morin khuur* zither has started cross-border cooperation with various music styles, such as jazz and pop. The changes of tracks and modes are more diversified. For example, "The Yellow River" (C minor), played by *Morin khuur* performer Amu and famous American jazz musician Stanley Clark, is a representative cross-border cooperation track (Bai, 2019:1).

In different historical periods and different regions, the way of playing the *Morin khuur* and the selection of its repertoire are different. In the Mongolian region, the repertoire of *Morin khuur* lute is mainly divided into long and short tunes. The long tunes are mostly used for themes such as sadness, myth and legend, while the short tunes are mostly used for fast-paced dance music and festival music. At the same time, the repertoire of *Morin khuur* in the Mongolian region is also influenced by the Tibetan, Kazak, Manchu and other national music, forming a unique style. In the Republic of Tuva in Russia, the way of playing the *Morin khuur* zither and the selection of its repertoire are also different from those of the Mongols (Bai, 2019:1). In the Republic of Tuva, the repertoire of the *Morin khuur* lute is mainly in long tune, with themes of sadness, hunting, nature, etc. At the same time, the way of playing the *Morin khuur* in the Republic of Tuva is more unique, for example, the use of throat, whistle and other

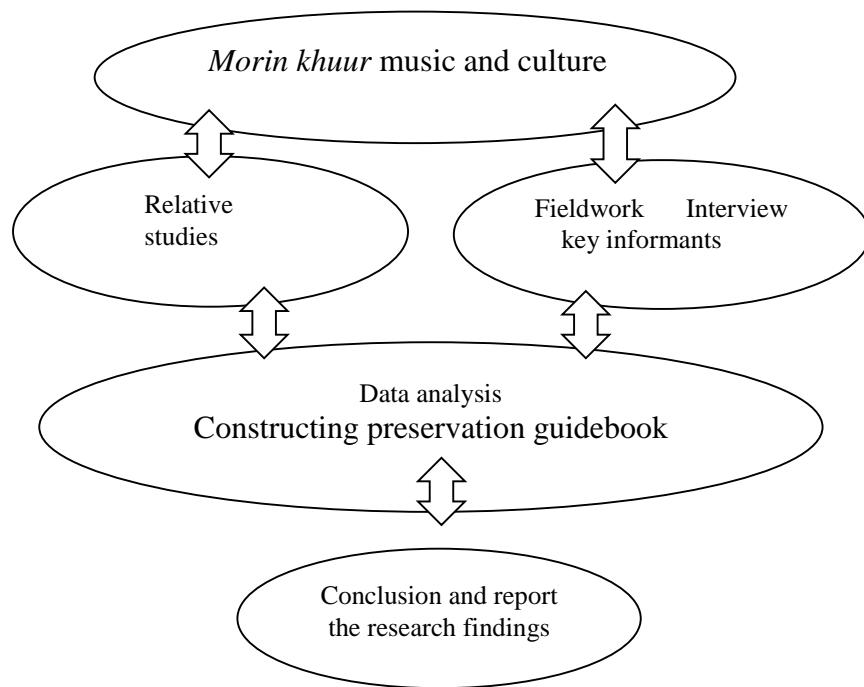
unique playing techniques. In the mainland of China, the repertoire and performance methods of the horse-headed *Morin khuur* are also different. The repertoire of *Morin khuur* in the mainland mainly comes from Mongolian and Manchu music, but it is also influenced by Han music. In the mainland, the way of playing *Morin khuur* lute is more focused on skills and expressiveness, and the repertoire covers all aspects of grief, war, love, etc.

To sum up, the performance and music selection of *Morin khuur* are different in different historical periods and regions. In Mongolia, the repertoire of *Morin khuur* is mainly divided into long music and short music. Long songs are often used to express themes such as sadness, mythology, and legends, while short songs are often used for fast-paced dance and holiday music. At the same time, the *Morin khuur* repertoire in Mongolia has also been influenced by Tibetan, Kazak, Manchu and other ethnic music, forming a unique style. In the Republic of Tuva, Russia, the playing method and music selection of the *Morin khuur* are also different from those of Mongolia. The *Morin khuur* repertoire of the Republic of Tuva is mainly composed of long pieces, with themes involving sadness, hunting, nature, etc. At the same time, the *Morin khuur* played in the Republic of Tuva is more unique, such as the use of throat, whistle and other unique playing techniques. In Chinese Mainland, the repertoire and performance method of *Morin khuur* are also different from Mongolia and Tuva. The *Morin khuur* repertoire in mainland China mainly comes from Mongolian and Manchu music, but is also influenced by Han music. In mainland China, the performance of *Morin khuur* pays more attention to skill and expressiveness, and the repertoire covers sadness, war, love and other aspects. With the passage of time, the performance and music selection of the *Morin khuur* have also continued to develop and evolve, and cross-border cooperation has become increasingly diversified.

## Research Methodology

This is ethnomusicological qualitative research, gathering data by doing fieldwork. Researcher learns how to make *Morin khuur* and collect and analyze the local music of matur music with the key informants, analyzing data by descriptive analysis.

## Research Conceptual Framework



## Research Findings

1. The Morin Khuur and its music in Qian Gorlos Mongol Autonomous County can be divided into traditional folk songs and modern folk songs, which are respectively representative of original Mongolian folk songs and original creations from Qian Gorlos. Traditional Mongolian songs have been passed down to this day. The changes and developments in modern Morin Khuur music reflect the lifestyle, day-to-day activities, and beautiful scenery of the people of Qian Gorlos County. It has certain sociocultural functions and serves as a medium for personal expression.

2. There are several challenges associated with hand-making Morin Khuur in Qian Gorlos County. The provincial-level inheritor, Bai Sugulang, has been fighting a lone battle. Most Morin Khuur manufacturers focus primarily on making a profit. However, as an inheritor, Bai Sugulang's mission is more oriented towards public welfare activities. He frequently promotes the Morin Khuur and passes down the craftsmanship of handmade Morin Khuur. It is precisely because of his significant contributions to public welfare that there is a need for a guidebook and tutorial on the manual skills required for making the Morin Khuur.

3. The content of the *Morin Khuur* Conservation Guidebook encompasses the step-by-step process of crafting the *Morin Khuur*, as well as a collection of musical scores specific to Qian Gorlos County. This book incorporates both Chinese and English languages, providing a concise introduction to the history of the Mongolian ethnic group in Qian Gorlos County and the reasons behind its designation as the "Hometown of the Chinese *Morin Khuur*." The section on Morin Khuur crafting is meticulously captured by the researcher's personal involvement in each step, while the musical scores are presented in the form of sheet music, compiled from

on-site recordings and handwritten manuscripts. Additionally, the sheet music is accompanied by two-dimension code, allowing users to scan and listen to the melodies. Part of the performance was recorded on home mobile phones by local *Morin Khuur*. The book also includes numerous photographs collected by the author during on-site visits.

4. The *Morin Khuur* protection guidebook will be used by primary and secondary schools throughout Qian Gorlos County, as well as by Songyuan Vocational University, for learning *Morin Khuur* music and craftsmanship. In addition, the production section will be exclusively used by Bai Sugulang in his annual public welfare courses on the inheritance of *Morin Khuur* skills.

## Discussion

Old photographs taken in the thirties of the last century are in the collection of the National Museum of Denmark by Henning. The Danish explorer of Hashrun, Sukhbaru who studied the origin of the art of the horse head qin in 2007, saw this photo in the book of Mongolian people and gods written by Henning, the instrument held by the artist is Chaoer, the predecessor of the horse head qin, so he told Yi Liqi, who was in charge of the excavation of the intangible cultural heritage of Qianguo County, and Director Yi Liqi found that in the 13th century AD, this instrument was widely circulated among the Mongols, and by the end of the Qing Dynasty, Chaoer evolved into the horse head qin, According to the valuable clues provided by Sukhbaru, Yiliqi determined the owner of the photo, which is Zhang Qingbao, the father of the 90-year-old Zhang Chengxuan in Qianguo County, Zhang Qingbao is a famous folk song artist in the Songnen Plain, and in the late Qing Dynasty, Henning took this valuable photo in the former Guorros Qianqi Wangfu (Huang, 2011: 21).

It is the evidence of the development and application of the horse head qin in Qianguo County retrospectively, the second batch of horse head qin music intangible cultural heritage list, and the horse head qin technique is the third batch of testament, relying on the double heritage.

The inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage horse head qin making skills, he began to learn to make the piano with his father at the age of 18, from Hulunbuir, and at the age of 25, he came to the hometown of the horse head qin in Qianguo County in Qianguo County along the direction of Nazhen Khan's migration (Zhang, 2021: 26-28).

The Mongols are a horseback people, so the horse head qin carves the horse head, the Chinese national dragon head characteristics, meaning the dragon horse spirit.

A variety of cultures integrate and collide with each other, inheriting the musical culture of the horse head qin, Alatan is the head of the horse head qin music in Qianguo County, in the former Guo County horse head qin mostly appeared in folk celebrations and family and friends gatherings and other daily activities, with a deep social and folk tradition foundation, on August 4, 2006, Qianguo County was named by the Chinese Nationalities Orchestra Society as the only hometown of horse head qin in China, on September 1, thousands of horse head piano performances for the first time created a Guinness record, and now Qianguo County has created three Guinness records for horse head piano.

## **Recommendation**

### **1. Practical Recommendations**

The research results show that the production section of the book is suitable for vocational high school and technical university students and adults. Most students and adults over the age of 15 can understand the process of making Morin Khuur by reading the book and looking at the diagrams, and can also engage in hands-on production. However, the parts about carving the horse head and stringing the instrument require assistance from a teacher. The music and learning sections are suitable for local school practice and performance of the Morin Khuur. Students find the QR codes in the score that lead to video and audio performances very helpful. However, primary school students are unable to independently understand the Morin Khuur scores and music analysis, as they involve specialized musical theory knowledge. Moreover, feedback shows that most students learning to play the Morin Khuur prefer simplified scores and are not fond of reading staff notation.

### **2. Recommendation for future research**

The comparative research in Morin Khuur in different area in China need to be discovered. Investigate the historical evolution of the Morin Khuur within the broader context of Chinese culture. Trace its origins, migrations, and interactions with other musical traditions in China to understand its role in shaping regional musical landscapes. Study the regional variations of Morin Khuur playing techniques, styles, and repertoires across different provinces in China. Analyze the influences of local musical traditions on the development of Morin Khuur music in each region. Explore the methods of transmission and pedagogy employed in teaching Morin Khuur in China. Examine traditional and modern teaching approaches, instructional materials, and the role of master-apprentice relationships in preserving and transmitting this musical heritage. Investigate contemporary Morin Khuur performance practices in China, including collaborations with other musical genres and modern artistic expressions. Analyze how traditional techniques have been adapted to suit changing performance contexts and audience preferences. Examine the cultural significance of the Morin Khuur for various ethnic groups in China, such as the Mongols and Kazakhs. Investigate how the instrument contributes to cultural identity, social cohesion, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Encourage interdisciplinary research that explores the intersection of Morin Khuur music with fields such as anthropology, linguistics, sociology, psychology, and environmental studies, providing new insights into its multifaceted cultural and societal roles.

Moreover, by addressing these research directions, scholars can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the Morin Khuur's role in China's cultural mosaic, its dynamic evolution, and its significance for future generations. This research will not only enrich academic scholarship but also contribute to the preservation and appreciation of this unique musical tradition.

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