



Research Article

A Study of the Music Culture and Characteristics of the Tajik Music in Xinjiang, China¹

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Abstract

As an important node of the Silk Road, Xinjiang is a place where multiple ethnic groups co-exist, and the Tajiks there have a unique historical background and musical tradition, which tends to be further enriched by the various cultural exchanges brought by the Silk Road. This study aims are: 1. To explore the origin of the Tajik musical culture. 2. Uncover the themes, emotions and characteristics of Tajik folk songs. Also, this study analyzes the history, culture and music of the Tajiks using documentary research and conducts in-depth field and interview research through fieldwork.

The study shows that the Tajik music embodies the deep historical and cultural traditions of the Tajik people, incorporating diverse cultural factors, especially cultural integration with the Silk Road. The Tajik folk songs not only reflect daily life and emotions, but also provide researchers with a window into the Tajik history and culture. In addition, the Tajik musical instruments, such as the eagle flute, Tajik Ghizhak, etc., have their own unique structure and playing skills, and these instruments deeply reflect the style and characteristics of Tajik music. In general, the Tajik music is not only an art form, but also an important carrier of the history and culture of the Tajiks, which merits further research and inheritance.

Keywords: Tajiks, music culture, musical characteristics

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Introduction

Xinjiang, an important province in western China, has long been a place where diverse ethnic groups have co-existed since ancient times, such as Uyghur, Kazakh, Tajik, etc. Among them, the Tajik people were influenced by the “Silk Road” in ancient times and are famous in the Western Regions of China, which have a long and unique history and cultural tradition. In the process of cultural exchanges at that time, the Western Region civilization flourished, and the migration of many ethnic groups was also hidden in this prosperous scene. In spite of the rises and falls, it added light to the Western Region civilization. It shows the diversity of ethnic groups and the complexity of cultural exchanges along the “Silk Road”.

The Tajiks have shown a deep musical tradition and unique musical characteristics. As an indispensable ethnic group on the border trade road, the Tajiks silently recorded the rise and fall of the Western Region civilization and, at the same time, inherited some forms of the “Silk Road” music art. In particular, the Kizil cave paintings in the Turpan region of Xinjiang can also be traced back to the dance, music, and musical instruments of the Western Regions period, reflecting the life of the people at that time and the common customs of the Western Regions music and dance are reflected in today’s Tajik dance.

The famous music historian Mr. Zhou Ji once pointed out in “The Rhyme of Qiuci” that “all the musical instruments used in Qiuci are composed of three major systems: qi sound, string sound, and body sound”, which are common in the Tajik music with 2/4, 3/4 beats, of which the most important rhythm type is 7/8 beat, and this rhythm change is very close to the beat rhythm of the ancient Western Regions music (Lan, 2017, p. 25). As a result, Tajik music has its own unique rhythm, and this form of music is most common in Xinjiang (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Unique 7/8 rhythm pattern of the Tajik ethnic



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For Xinjiang and even the whole of China, the study of the Tajik music culture is of special significance. It shows not only the unique style of this nation but also the similarities, differences, and



connections with the music culture of other ethnic groups, providing an important perspective for understanding Xinjiang's ethnic diversity and cultural integration. An in-depth study of Xinjiang can enhance understanding of Xinjiang's multi-ethnic culture, carry forward the tradition of diversity and unity of the Chinese nation, and strengthen ethnic unity. Moreover, Tajik music culture also has a non-negligible value for the study of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. Through the in-depth discussion of its musical culture, we can explore the process of cultural exchanges and interaction with neighboring ethnic groups. With the advancement of globalization, the conservation and inheritance of local culture are particularly important. As an intangible cultural heritage of Xinjiang, the study and inheritance of Tajik music is not only a respect for the Tajik ethnic group but also a safeguard of the common cultural heritage of all mankind.

Purpose of Study

1. Explore the origins of Tajik musical culture in the specific geographical and historical context of the Pamirs and its role in Tajik society.
2. Uncover the unique themes, emotions and musical characteristics of Tajik folk songs and explore their place in folk tradition and modern times.

Scope of Research

The research focuses on Tajik musical culture and its characteristics in China's Xinjiang region, in particular the Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County on the Pamir Plateau in Xinjiang, which is not only the main Tajik settlement but also represents the core of its musical culture. The scope of the research covers Tajik folk songs, especially those that are widely sung, beloved and representative. By discussing these songs, we hope to reveal the deep-seated characteristics of Tajik's musical culture and its unique position in Xinjiang's multicultural background.

Research Methodology

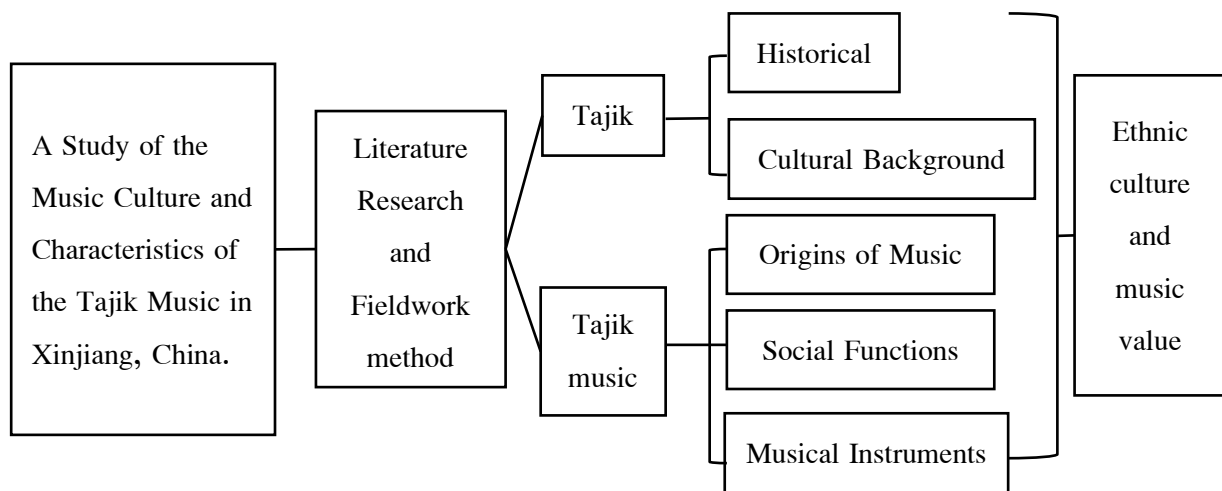
1. Literature Research Method: Systematically analyze relevant documents on Tajik history, culture and music, focusing on ethnomusicology and Tajik music culture. Provide collated empirical reports and provide a basis for judgment to reveal its music's historical evolution, cultural background and artistic value.
2. Fieldwork method: Entering the Tajik Autonomous County in Xinjiang, China, conducting in-depth field research to understand their living conditions in the mountainous areas, customs, wedding ceremonies, etc. From this, the musical characteristics of the Tajik people and the unique expressions of ethnic musical instruments are captured for specific research.



3. Interview Method: In this study, through interviews with Tajik musicians and instrument performers from the Xinjiang Arts Institute, like Mr. Hanik, the musical culture and performance characteristics of the Tajik people are explored. The interviews provide a deeper understanding of the Tajik cultural background, musical traditions, history, and evolution, offering valuable firsthand information.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 Research process diagram



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Research Result

Thanks to its long history and unique geography, the Tajik ethnic group located in the Pamir Plateau is endowed with a unique musical culture. From the songs of the Tajik people, you can feel the vastness of the grassland, the majesty of the snow-capped mountains and the rhythm of people's lives. Step into this magical land and explore the musical culture and characteristics of the Tajik people; you can experience the rich emotions and culture behind the music.

1. Tajik Musical Culture

Tajik music culture has long been deeply rooted in this mysterious Pamir plateau. From the intimate dance of Tajik people with nature to the fusion of musical styles brought by the Silk Road, this musical heritage is both a love of life and an important testimony to history and culture.

1.1 Historical and Geographical Background of the Tajiks

The Tajiks are undoubtedly an ancient ethnic minority with a deep historical background and rich cultural traditions among the many ethnic groups in China. In the vast territory



of our country, the Tajiks do not appear to be large in the big family, with a population of about 40,000. However, they are unique in their geographical distribution. The vast majority of the Tajiks choose Tashkurgan County on the Pamir Plateau as their place of residence. This isolated and mysterious land, with its complex topography and climatic features, not only shapes the Tajik people but also provides a unique background for their living habits and cultural traditions, enabling them to develop a tenacious, hardworking and hardworking national character. At the same time, this environmental factor has also left a deep mark on the Tajik musical tradition, reflected in the uniqueness of melody and rhythm.

From a more academic ethnomy perspective, the Tajiks are explicitly classified as Indo-Europa (Figure 3). In the field of linguistics, the languages spoken by the Tajiks belong to the eastern branch of the Iranian language family under the Indo-European language family. Although this branch of the language is exceptionally rich in oral tradition, Tajiks do not have their own unique writing system, but generally adopt Uyghur as a writing instrument. This feature of language use not only shows the close ties and exchanges between the Tajiks and other peoples of Central Asia but also reflects the profound historical and cultural ties between them and the Europa people (He, 1994). In real life, the Tajik people, with their resilience, courage and hard work, have worked hard to graze livestock and grow crops in the changing natural environment of the Pamir Plateau to ensure their livelihood and provide sufficient support and security for the daily needs of the ethnic group – clothing, food, housing and transportation. (Figure 4)

Figure 3 *Tajik brides*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

Figure 4 *Life of Tajik people*



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1.2 Traditional Life and Musical Origins of the Tajik People

The Pamirs, a land with spectacular scenery but harsh environments, offer unique challenges and opportunities for the survival of the Tajiks. Under such natural conditions, they rely mainly on grazing and farming for their livelihoods. This way of life, which is closely related to nature, not only creates their ability to live in symbiosis with the environment but also injects endless inspiration into their artistic creation, especially music. Imagine when herders guide cattle and sheep to gallop across the vast grasslands or farmers toiling among the fields; their hearts often sing along with melody to comfort physical exhaustion and mental heaviness. Most of these songs born from life are simple and straightforward, but they deeply integrate Tajik's reverence for nature, sincere emotions for life, and longing and expectations for the future.

The origins of Tajik music are rooted in their close connection with nature. Art comes from life, as is especially true with the Tajiks in their daily grazing and farming; they strive for survival and the meaning of life through humming and improvisation to express personal emotions and release daily stress and fatigue (Zhou, 2007). Over time, this long-standing folk tradition has gradually shaped the unique folk song culture of the Tajik people. Most of these folk songs are improvisational, and the content constantly evolves under the external environment, ensuring the vitality and continuity of Tajik musical culture. (Figure 5)

Figure 5 *Tajik song and dance*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

For a long time, these songs, born out of life and full of true feelings, have gradually formed a stable form of singing. When they are inherited, future generations also continue to innovate and improve, making them richer and deeper. Therefore, for the Tajiks, music is not just a way to entertain or relax; it is also an important part of their lives, carries their emotions, and is a valuable legacy of their cultural traditions.

1.3 The Fusion of Tajik Music and the Silk Road

The Pamirs are not only the birthplace and main settlement of the Tajik people, but also have another remarkable identity – it was an important transportation route along the ancient Silk Road. This ancient trade route, which crossed Asia and connected the Far East and the Far West, witnessed countless exchanges and collisions of cultures, beliefs and arts throughout history. Because of this, the Tajiks, located on this communication line, are in a unique geographical position, and thus naturally become the recipient and beneficiary of multicultural exchange.

Under the long-term influence of the Silk Road, Tajik music gradually integrated the musical styles and elements of Central Asia, China, and even further West Asia. The diversity and complexity in Tajik music is the result of this cultural blending. Listen to their music, you will be amazed to find that their songs not only incorporate melodies with Chinese characteristics, but also musical rhythms from Qiuci, and even Persian and Arabic music styles (Zhang, 2015). These diverse foreign elements have, instead of causing the Tajik music to lose its original flavor and characteristics, given the Tajik music a broader vision and richer connotation.



To sum up, the Tajik musical culture was formed in its unique historical and geographical background. It carries not only the emotions and lives of the people of the ethnic group, but also reflects the far-reaching influence of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. As an important part of the ancient Silk Road, Tashkurgan County of the Pamir Plateau brings together the cultures of many ethnic groups, so that Tajik national songs have the characteristics of the ethnic group and the delicate melody of China and the rhythm characteristics of Qiuci music as well as gradually attained their own artistic characteristics in the long-term development. Through generations of integration and continuous innovation, Tajik music has gradually developed a unique style that preserves tradition and embraces modernity. It has become a tool for the Tajik people to express their feelings, powerfully manifesting their history and culture.

It is apparent that the musical culture of the Tajik ethnic group did not develop in isolation, but was gradually formed in a unique historical and geographical background. This music not only carries the emotions and life experience of the Tajik people, but also fully reflects the profound impact of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. Especially in Tashkurgan County on the Pamir Plateau, the convergence and integration of multiple ethnic cultures make Tajik folk songs retain their uniqueness while incorporating the exquisite melody of China and the unique rhythm of Qiuci music, which is also an artistic feature formed in the long-term development of Tajik music.

2. Characteristics of Tajik Music

Tajik music, as an important cultural heritage of this ancient ethnic group, is not only a beautiful melody and harmony but also a treasure trove full of rich cultural and historical information. When delving deeper into its musical characteristics, it is evident that Tajik contains unique musical structures, melodies and rhythms. These characteristics, on the one hand, are the formal expression of the music itself and also reflect the living habits, historical changes and cultural traditions of the Tajik people. In general, Tajik folk music can be divided into two main forms: Folk songs and folk instrumental music.

2.1 Tajik Folk Songs and Their Characteristics

In the rich and colourful cultural traditions of the Tajik people, folk songs are undoubtedly one of the shining pearls; they reflect the Tajik people's deep understanding of nature and daily life. Such songs have not only occupied a vital position in the cultural and artistic field of the ethnic group but also their lyrics and melody have become an important carrier of people's daily life and emotional expression. Compared to other art forms, Tajik folk songs cover almost everything from trivial life to grand epics, from innocent love to religious beliefs.

Among them, love songs are the most numerous categories. According to statistics, love songs account for almost half of the total number of Tajik folk songs, and this proportion is quite significant among all ethnic groups in the world. This fully reflects the Tajik people's deep worship of love and their desire for free love and the pursuit of happiness in life (Liu, 2011). However, in some periods of history, especially in the context of feudal society, these songs are not only a celebration of good feelings but also show more of the Tajik people's criticism and dissatisfaction with the feudal system and gender inequality at that time. Religious songs, as another category, profoundly demonstrate the faith of the Tajik people and their endless reverence for the gods. These songs, often in praise of the gods with solemn, sublime melodies, convey a deep understanding of religious dogma and a search for the meaning of life.

Historical songs show us the long historical background of the Tajik people. In such songs, heroic deeds, major events or national memories are often mentioned, providing a precious window into the Tajik past for future generations. Classic love songs such as “Guli Bita” and “Bala Make” (Figure 6) have a special place in Tajik culture and are widely spread and loved by people of all ages (Zhu, 2009).

Figure 6 *Tajik wedding song and dance*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

Tajik folk songs are not just musical expressions but also a testimony to the history, culture and emotions of the Tajiks. Whether celebrating love, faith or history, each song is a pearl in the hearts of the Tajik people, shining with the brilliance of their culture and traditions.

2.2 Characteristics of Tajik Folk Instrumental Music and Instruments

In the musical culture of the Tajik people, folk instrumental music plays a vital role. In particular, a series of traditional musical instruments with distinctive characteristics embody the rich cultural heritage and historical memory of the Tajik people. The design and production of these musical instruments reflect the Tajik people's reverence for nature and respect for craftsmanship, and play an important role in the Tajik rituals and daily life.

First and foremost is the wind instrument known as the eagle flute (Figure 7). This instrument is made from the bones of the wings of an eagle and has considerable symbolic significance. It is about 24 cm long and has three carefully carved press holes. The top of the instrument is equipped with a mouthpiece, and when played, it can produce music with a clear tone and a wide range of fields. On many Tajik weddings and festive occasions, the Eagle Flute Band plays traditional music to add a unique atmosphere to the event.

Figure 7 *Tajik musical instrument eagle flute*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

In addition, the stringed instrument, the *Tajik ghizhak* (Figure 8), is a unique work among the Tajik ethnic group and the only stringed instrument. It is 56 cm long, thin at the top and thick at the bottom, and there is a speaker in the center of the body, which is a key part of its sound. The timbre of this instrument is similar to that of a violin, but it is thicker and more rounded, providing players with a rich space for expression.

Figure 8 *Tajik Ghizhak*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

The plucked instrument, *rebupu* (Figure 9), is carved from almond wood and is a plucked string instrument. It is about 78 cm in total length, and its speakers are designed in an oval shape with a unique shape. To play the *rebupu*, mostly in a sitting position, the body is placed across the waist; the piano case is placed on the outside of the root of the right leg, the left hand hold the stem, and the fingers press the string to take the sound, the right elbow bends to clamp the case, and

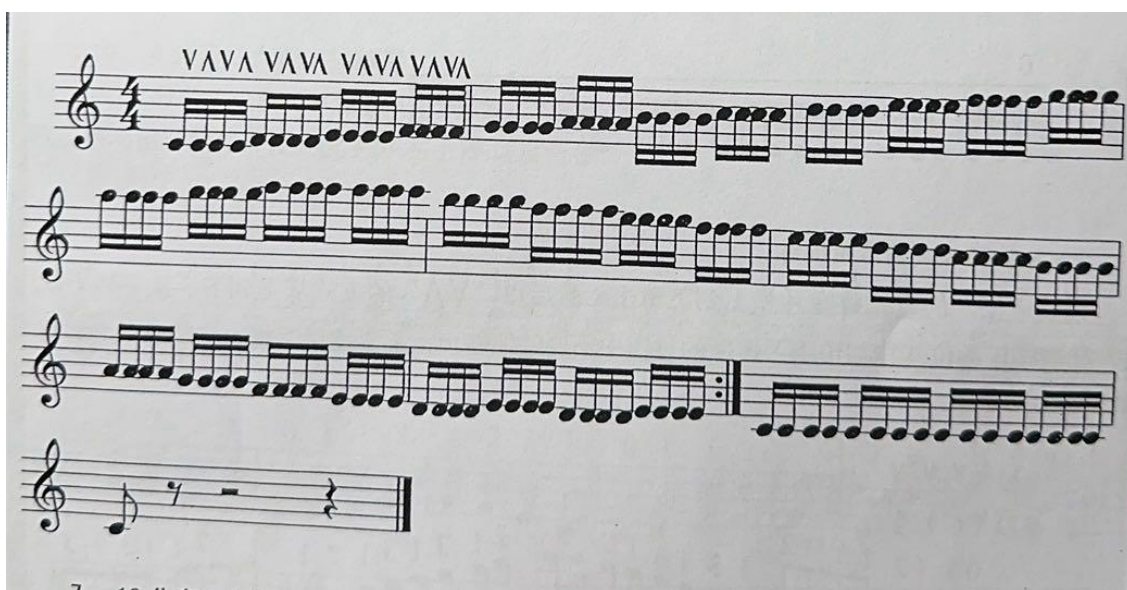
the right thumb and forefinger hold the plucked strings. At small evening parties between family and friends, the *rebupu* is often used to accompany the song and dance. Such as 16 – note C major scale training music (Figure 10). This etude is completed by picking pieces, manually matching up and down, and using the method of tapping (where “^” is the mark of up and down strokes)

Figure 9 *Tajik musical instrument Rebupu*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

Figure 10 *Tajik sheet music of Rebupu*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

In addition, the percussion instrument, the tambourine (Figure 11), plays a key role in Tajik music. The head of the Tajik tambourine is generally made of cowhide, donkey skin, and sheepskin, while the drum frame is made of local verdant mulberry, sand date and other fruit trees. It has a lid on one side and a small iron ring in the drum frame. The sound of this drum is light and bright, and it is usually played by two women at the same time, one mastering the main rhythm and the other playing together through different rhythms, bringing a lively rhythm and atmosphere to the whole musical performance.

Figure 11 *Tajik musical instrument Rebupu*



Noted. By He Xiaoying, 2010.

Tajik folk instrumental music is a core component of their musical culture. These musical instruments are not only tools for making sound but also carry the cognition and experience of people's lives, emotions, history, and culture (Xia, 1983). In order to truly understand and appreciate Tajik music, the study and interpretation of these instruments is indispensable. When we dig deeper, we will find that behind these musical works and musical instruments are hidden the deep cultural connotations of the Tajik people and the stories passed down from generation to generation.

Conclusions and Discussion

Through in-depth investigation and analysis, this study arrives at the following main research results and conclusions from the Tajik music culture and the characteristics of Tajik folk music:

1. This study systematically explores the Tajik musical culture, studying the evolution of Tajik music and its role in Xinjiang's multicultural environment. From the history and geographical background of the ethnic group, the integration with the Silk Road, to the multiple emotions and



meanings contained in the songs, revealing the depth and breadth of Tajik musical culture. The study found that Tajik music has obvious characteristics of multicultural composition, revealing its position in the entire Xinjiang region and the broader Silk Road culture, which is not only supported by the inheritance of their own musical culture, but also promoted by musical cultural exchanges with other ethnic groups. Tajik folk songs are particularly eye-catching, not only reflecting people's daily lives and emotions, but also providing us with a window into Tajik history and culture.

2. As an ethnic minority in China, the Tajik ethnic group has a rich folk music art, and this study analyzes in detail the unique musical instruments of this ethnic group and their performance characteristics, including instruments such as the eagle flute, the *Tajik ghizhak*, the *rebupu* and tambourine. The study found that these instruments are closely linked to the geography, history and culture of the Tajik ethnic group, and this is reflected in the musical instruments themselves and in the elements of musical composition, showcasing a unique blend of musical styles that have evolved over time through cultural exchanges. The timbre, structure and playing technique of these instruments are an important part of the musical culture of the ethnic group, and together, they have shaped the unique style and charm of Tajik music, showing us a fascinating musical world.

Suggestions

1. Field trips and comprehensive studies: In order to further deepen the understanding of Tajik musical culture, the researchers plan to further strengthen the combination of field trips and systematic research to continue the field trip to the Pamirs, experience and feel the charm of Tajik music firsthand, while systematically exploring its evolution, integration with other ethnic groups, and its important place in Tajik society.

2. Combining traditional and modern technology: In the process of preserving and carrying forward traditional music, the researchers plan to explore how to better integrate modern technology with tradition. The use of digital technology for music teaching, the production of simulated musical instruments and the dissemination of music can not only inject new vitality into traditional music, but also ensure that its cultural heritage is widely inherited and popularized.

3. Cross-cultural comparative studies: Considering the connections between Tajik music and other Central Asian folk music, the researchers intend to conduct a series of cross-cultural comparative studies. In this way, it is not only possible to deepen the understanding of Tajik music, but also to explore how music can be used in other aspects of Tajik society to create interactive relationships.



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