Ethnic Cultures of China

THE MUSIC OF CHINA'S ETHNIC MINORITIES

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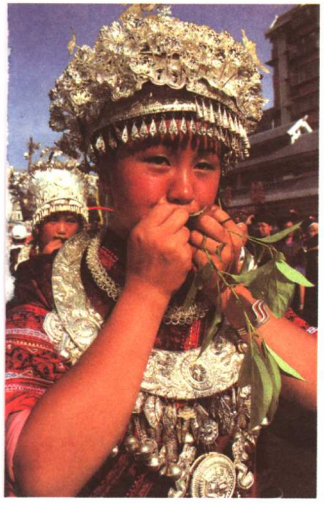

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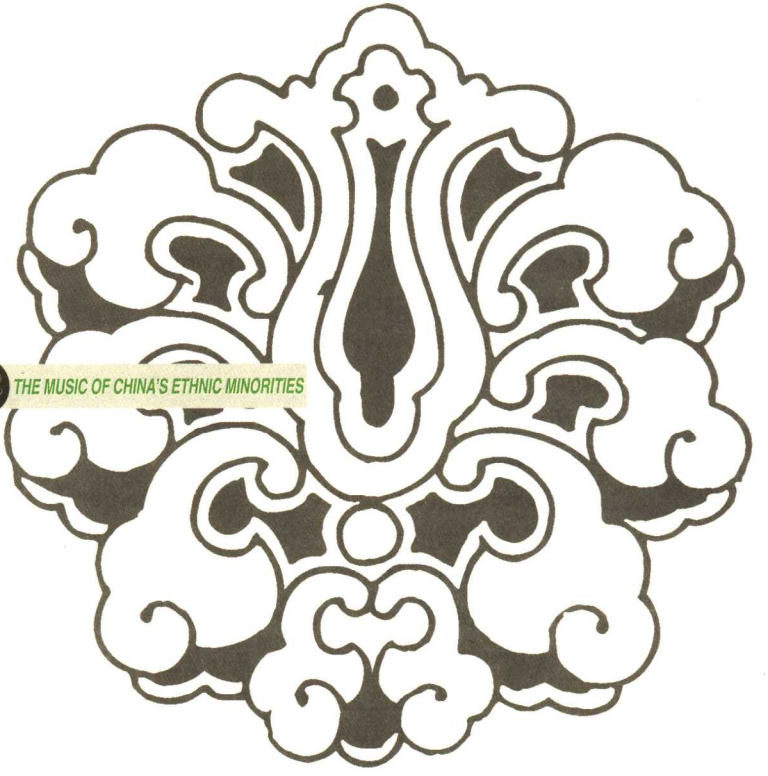


Ethnic Cultures of China

THE MUSIC OF CHINA'S ETHNIC MINORITIES

CHAPTER I A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE MUSIC OF CHINA'S ETHNIC MINORITIES

As a country with great ethnic diversity, China boasts many great musical traditions. These traditions have made an indelible mark on Chinese culture that has been felt by every generation. The amalgamation of the Hua Xia musical culture with that of the Yellow and Yangtze River areas around 5,000 years ago is just one example of the impact of various musical traditions on the whole of the Chinese nation. In fact, the absorption of diverse musical trends from the periphery to the center has brought about a rich musical tradition that is distinctly Chinese. Despite this fusion of old and new, the traditional music of China's ethnic minorities still plays an important role in their daily lives.

The distinct history and experiences of each of China's cultural groups has had a strong impact on their musical traditions. Not only does their music reveal an affinity to the past, but it also serves as a moral compass to orient the values of each successive generation. In fact, specific to each group is a distinct musical style that can be divided into six categories: folk song, folk instrumental, folk dancing and singing, and folk opera.

I. Folk Song

The folk song serves to express feelings, thoughts, and desires. These songs are commonly sung while engaging in tasks associated with agricultural production and during weddings and funerals. A great number of these songs, in fact, serve to articulate feelings of love, romance, or a longing for home and their sweet tunes carry over the grasslands, forests, mountains, pubs, and homes of the Chinese, enriching old musical traditions and inspiring new ones. In addition, folk songs are often sung at music festivals throughout China including the Zhuang's Folksong Fair, the Tu Hui and Salar's Hau'er Festival, the Miao Dragon-boat Festival, the Raosanling Ceremony of the Bai, the Dong's Mulberry Leaf Picking Festival, the Bouyei

Singing Fair on the Glede Slope, the Dai Singing Contest Festival in the spring, the Singing Festival of the Yao, the Yi's Torch Festival, and the Qiang's Oriocho.

The folk songs of China's ethnic minorities were often adapted by Chinese musicians to form the repertoire of Chinese folk songs still sung today. The *Jiu ge* (nine songs) of the Chu ci (Songs of the South) is a collection of folk songs by Qu Yuan who lived in Chu State during the Warring States Period (475-221). Qu remodeled traditional Chu folk songs designed to offer sacrifices to the gods. Jiu ge consists of 11 sections:

I. Dong Huang Tai (the Great Unity: the God of the Eastern Sky)
II. Yong-zhong Jun (the Lord in the Clouds)
III. Xiang Jun (the Goddess of the Xiang)
IV. Xiang Fu-ren (the Lady of Xiang)
V. Da Si Ming (the Great Master of Fate)
VI. Xiao Si Ming (the Lesser Master of Fate)
VII. Dong Jun (the Lord of the East)
VIII. He Bo (the River Earl)
IX. Shan Gui (the Mountain Spirit)
X. Guo Shang (Hymn to the Fallen)
XI. Li Hun (Honoring the Dead)

While section X, Guo Shang, honors and mourns for the soldiers who fought and died for Chu State, the other ten sections reflect on Yuan's disappointment in achieving his ideals while depicting the sentimentality between the gods.

II. Folk Instrumental

Folk instrumental music varies from region to region both in terms of style and the instruments used. From the Uygur Muqam, Tujia Taliuza, Bai cave music, and Naxi White Sand and Small Moon instrumentals to the Bronze Drum music of the Zhuang, Miao, Dong,

Yao, and Yi instrumental music is either performed solo or in ensemble and features over 500 musical instruments including string, wind, and percussion instruments. These folk instruments, in fact, greatly influenced the development of musical instruments in Han-dominated areas. The erhu or huqin, the two-stringed fiddle, is said to have originated from the xiqin during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and was referred to as the qiqin during the Song Dynasty (960-1270). Today, the erhu is one of China's most popular traditional instruments, capable of expressing a great range of emotion and adapting to a variety of musical styles.

III. Folk Singing and Dancing

The combination of folk singing and dancing is most commonly seen in the drum dance, jumping music, and the stamping song. The rhythmic accompaniment of the drum to dance is characteristic of the drum dance where the rhythm is altered as dancer's move and gesture as seen among the Miao, Yao, Yi, Shi, and Li minorities as well as the shoulder pole dance of the Zhuang, the Va's wooden drum dance, and the Korean bronze drum dance. The Kazak Swan Dance, the Xibe *lusheng* and *hulusheng* dance, the *Yu-kin* and *Sanxian* dance of southwest China are examples of jumping music, which features a troupe of dancers who move to an ensemble of musical instruments. The Stamping song, in turn, alternates between dancing and singing and is found in the Zhuang Tea-leaf Collecting Dance, the Bai Taboincho, the Uygur Senmao, the Mongolian Andia, and the Tibetan King Gesar. These song and dance forms made their way into Han-dominated areas; however, it was not only the Han who incorporated elements of minority folk singing and dancing, but also the minorities who used Han musical traditions as a point of reference as seen in the Northeast Yangge Dance. Around 280 years ago, Yang Bin of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) wrote a poem entitled *Shangyuan*

Song which spoke of the Yangge Dance: "At midnight, a village girl put on silks and danced the Yangge accompanied by the loud, jarring noise of the drum". Yang Bin, in fact, was in an area dominated not by Han, but by China's various ethnic minorities. What he witnessed may have been similar to the Liaoyang Yangge Dance which featured a troupe of 50 dancers who moved at the sound of a leather whip or ox mallet. The *Tolik*, meaning power or commander, used the whip to alter the dance routines of its performers and did so throughout the dance. The dance became popular among the Han of Northeast China as the Northeast Yangge Dance and aspects were adapted into the Manchu's Tartar Yangge Dance during the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty.

IV. Folk Opera

Combining song, dance, and drama, folk opera is found throughout China within many of China's ethnic minorities: the Mongolian Mahan Opera, Zhuang Opera, Bai Opera, the Korean Singing Opera, Miao Opera, Dong Opera, Dai Opera, Yi Opera, the Manchu Town Opera, Buyi Opera, Maonan Opera, and the Tibetan Opera. While folk opera evolved from traditional folk song and dance as with the Southern Route Zhuang Opera, the Korean Singing Opera, and the Manchu Town Opera, folk opera came into being under the influence of the Han. For example the Manchu Town Opera used Han melodies to create a more dramatic presentation while the Bai Chuichuiqiang Opera incorporated elements of the popular Han Guyangqiang Opera that became fashionable during the Ming Dynasty. However, despite heavy Han influence, folk opera maintained distinct styles and themes dependent on their own history and experiences. Thus, Tibetan Opera is opened with lion and mossback dancing in which Wenba the hunter mediates a dispute while the Hafang the fairy sings and dances. Likewise, the tune-pattern of the Lute Song, as well as the ballad style

and word structure, characteristic of the Dong Opera, are typically Dong. Similarly, both the Bai and Dai Operas utilize traditional song and dance.

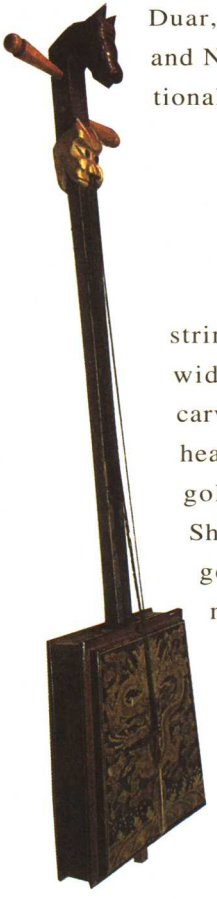
Although the Han had great influence on the music of China's ethnic minorities, minority groups also influenced one another, especially those in close geographical proximity to each other. The folk music of Northwest Sichuan, then, contains melodies specific to the Tibetan, Hui and Qiang. Moreover, many minority groups sharing similar religious beliefs had certain songs in common such as the Tibetan and Mongolian people who both sung the Ballad of King Gesar.

The amalgamation of diverse musical traditions has led to a folk music that speaks to both the past and the present. While serving to carry on the oral traditions and elucidate the cultural values of China's ethnic minorities it also speaks to the national spirit and character of the Chinese as a people who, in sharing rich musical traditions, are unified in diversity.

CHAPTER II THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF CHINA'S ETHNIC MINORITIES

I. The Folk Musical Instruments of North and Northeast China

The Manchu, Xibe, Heze, Ewenki, Oroqen, Mongolian, Duar, and Korean minorities all occupy China's North and Northeast regions and have a great variety of traditional musical instruments.



Ancient matouqin or Horse Head Musical Instrument inlaid with golden pieces

a) String Instruments

Horse-head stringed instrument

A Mongolian folk instrument, the horse-head stringed instrument, or horse-head fiddle, features a wide body with a long neck on the top of which is carved a horse head. Derived from the xiqin, the horse-head string instrument became popular with the Mongolian people during the 13th century. Arriving in Shangdo (present-day Toron County in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region) during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), Italian explorer Marco Polo (1254-1324) even brought a horse-head fiddle back to his native Italy, aiding in the future development of European bowed and stringed instruments.

Referred to by a variety of names including *Char* or *Chor* in eastern Inner *Mongolia* (Hulun Buir and Jirim groups as well as Chifeng city) and Molinhar in western Inner Mongolia (Baynnur, Yih Ju, Ulaan Chab, and Xilin Gol groups), early performers made the 100cm long instruments themselves using around 40 to 60 pieces of horsehair for the inner

and outer strings as well as the bow. Different from other bowed and stringed instruments, the horsehair bow touches the string so as to create a soft, sweet sound like the wind whistling through the grass of the Mongolian Plain. Played both solo and in ensemble, the horse-head stringed instrument is best showcased in the Mongolian Kerchin and Turgott styles. Popular to eastern Inner Mongolia, Kerchin style performers use the pads of their fingers to press the strings generating a light, muted tone. The Turgott style, on the other hand, is popular in western Inner Mongolia and is characterized by a clear, bright timbre as the performer presses the strings with his finger tips. However, the horse-head fiddle also lends itself well to a variety of musical styles as seen in traditional folk songs such as the *Garda Plum Forest*, the *Spring in Ordos*, the *Cool and Refreshing Spring*, the *Walking Horse*, and the *Steps of the Horse*, as well as new songs including the *New Song of the Grassland*, *Paean Grassland*, and *Ten Thousand Horses Galloping Ahead*.

Sihu

The sihu is also referred to as the *siguzi*, *sixian*, or *erjiaxian*, and is, like the horse-head fiddle, a bow instrument derived from the xiqin. Resembling an erhu in structure, the sihu is distinguished by four pegs which run along a rectangular column 2.4-2.6cm wide and from which four silk or steel strings are strung. The long, thin, undecorated rosewood or ebony neck is 70-85cm in length and a mere 1.9-2.4cm in diameter and runs down towards a resonance box which is either round or octagonal in shape. The round resonance box is made of copper and 13.3-14cm long and 6.8-9cm in diameter while the rosewood octagonal resonance box is 13.2-13.8cm in length and 8-10cm wide. The front of the resonance box is covered in snakeskin, the back framed, and the turning page decorated with pieces of bone. The 75cm bow is made of horsetail hair gathered in two bunches allowing both sets of strings to be played simultaneously. The bow allows for both single and double rhythms and the strings, each pair tuned to the same key,

produce both a silky sound and a resonating ring, depending on the manner in which the fingers are placed on the string. These qualities allow the Sihu to adapt perfectly to the dramatic nature of the Beijing, Tianjin, Hubei, Shaoxing, and Zhejiang ballads as well as the Er Ren Tai and Quju operas.

Huobusi

The Huobusi, a four-stringed Mongolian instrument, is also known as the *hunbusi, hubusi, hebisi, hubosi, hupoci*, all variants of the Mongolian meaning qin. Created at the beginning of the 1st century and utilizing features of similar Han instruments, the huobusi became popular during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The *Record of Ceremony Instruments in the History of the Ming Dynasty* reveal that the ancient huobusi "resemble[d] the lute in shape, with no neck, no bridge, a small slot, a bottle-like belly, and four strings". After the founding of the People's Republic of China, three distinct varieties of huobusi emerged: the alt, median, and baritone huobusi; in form, however, much of the traditional Mongolian design was retained. The long, narrow arrow-like pole is set with four parallel pegs at the upper left from which four strings are attached. The flat calabash-shaped resonance box is wrapped in flexible wood rather than the traditional snakeskin. On either side of the lower frontal board is carved two cloud-like sound holes to which particular sound tools can be attached to create a deeper, richer sound.

Jiayeqin

The jiayeqin has a distinctly Korean flavor and is comprised of a

Korean musical instrument

resonance box, measuring 150cm by 25cm by 5cm and made of phoenix or birch wood, and 13 natural silk strings, which stretch across the length of the jiayeqin and whose tone can be adjusted by moving the frets at the top of the organ. The top of the jiayeqin is placed on the player's knee with the end on the floor and then plucked with the right hand while strings are compressed with the left. Accompanied with jiayeqin singing, a jiayeqin performance is stunning in terms of both its tonal and emotive quality.

The Xibili, a wind instrument, has a powerful resonance that lends itself well to both solo and ensemble performance. Descendent of the bili, the xibili was commonly used among the Korean minority during the Sui and Tang Dynasties and continues to be used today as the most popular double-reed wind instrument in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin Province.

The xibili is made of two parts: a pipe whistle and a long body. The pipe whistle is 4cm long and attached with copper wire to a perfectly shaped and evenly cut reed. The body, in turn, is a slim bamboo pipe that is 20-25cm long and 1cm in diameter. It is essential that the bamboo be free of knots to ensure the best quality sound and to accommodate the seven sound holes down the front and the single alt hole at the back. The three varieties, the alt, median, and double xibili differ little in terms of structure but have different tonal qualities. The median xibili is an octave lower than its alt counterpart while the double xibili utilizes two alt bilis to achieve double tones in the same octave. In fact, all xibilis are capable of producing double tones in the same octave as well as different octaves depending on the number of pipe whistles. In performance, the pipe is held vertically with the left hand pressing the top three holes and the single alt hole and the right hand covering the last four holes.

Tongxiao

The Tongxiao, a bamboo wind instrument, is particularly popular among the Korean minority. It is relatively small and easy to carry and as such often played in ensemble with the Korean long drum as an accompaniment to traditional singing and dancing. Many elderly Koreans are especially adept at playing the melodious tongxiao. In performance, the tongxiao is suited to the expression of a wide variety of emotions due to its relatively free playing style and the typical glissandi, roulade, and grace notes which, when played, resemble the human singing voice.

Tongxiao, a wind instrument

Great attention is paid to the materials used in the making of the tongxiao. The highest grade bamboo, grown for over three years in Fujian and Jiangxi Provinces, is cut between the first and eighth knot. The bamboo's center is carved away and the pipe then baked to create a hard, resonant surface into which is drilled a blow hole at the top, a diaphragm hole at the bottom, a bottom hole for tune adjustments, and five sound holes, four at the front and one in the back. The pipe is then painted and thread wound around its body.

c) Percussion Instruments
Korean long drum

The Korean long drum, or *zhang* (stick) drum, evolved from the slender waist drum of India and lends itself well as an accompaniment to song, dance, and in ensemble. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties the long drum dominated the central plains and was used in a variety of traditional musical styles. Towards the end of the Song Dynasty, the long drum entered the history books as the zhang drum and was featured in *The History of the Yuan Dynasty: Musical Instruments.* Over the next century, however, the zhang drum all but disappeared