

A Brief Description of the Music of the Tajiks in China

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Abstract

The Tajiks have a long history, and the term “Tajik”, which translates as “crown” in Persian, is widely recognised by the Tajiks in our country. According to evidence, in several centuries BC, the ancestors of the Tajiks in China were the Iranian-speaking tribes in the eastern part of the Pamir Plateau. Ancient Tashkurgan was a stronghold of economic and cultural exchanges between the East and the West, and on the plateau known as the “Roof of the World”, the Tajiks’ ancestors gradually developed their own unique cultural charms in the course of ongoing exchanges. The first part of this essay focuses on a brief description of the origin and history of the Tajiks in China, from the second century BC to the present. The second part briefly describes the religious beliefs of the Chinese Tajiks, from the beginning of Zoroastrianism, to the later introduction of Buddhism, and up to the present day Islam. The third part briefly describes Tajik music. The author divides Tajik music into four parts: folk songs, folk instrumental music, folk songs and dances, and music for religious ceremonies. The author summarised the characteristics of Tajik music after nearly two months of investigation and research in Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County in Xinjiang in 2023, combining the findings of some other scholars.

Keywords: Chinese Tajik, Tajik music, religious music

1. Introduction

China is a country of fifty-six ethnic groups, each of which has a fixed area of residence and a separate cultural heritage. One such ethnic group is the Tajiks, an ancient people who live on the Pamir Plateau in southern Xinjiang. The Tajiks have a very small population, and are the only ethnic group of the European race in China, as well as the oldest inhabited ethnic group in Central Asia, with a population of about 40,000 according to current statistics. The ethnic group’s area of residence is the Tashkurgan County, with Shache County and Yetao County to the east, Muztagh Ata Peak and Aktau County to the north, and bordering with Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to the southwest, and is situated on the Pamir Plateau where East meets West. It is worth mentioning that the relationship between the Tajik nation in China and the Tajik nation in the Republic of Tajikistan is different from the general cross-border ethnic groups. Although the Tajiks in China and the Tajiks in Central Asia are both called “Tajiks”, the difference between them can be said to be two completely different ethnic groups, due to the specificity of the geographic location, and the fact that the Central Asian region has long been the home of various civilisations. Because of their special geographical location, the Central Asian region has long been a region where various civilisations have intermingled and collided with each other, thus leading them to different paths of national development, and eventually to the division of them into the “plains Tajiks” and the “plateau Tajiks”. The “highland Tajiks” are often referred to as “Pamirs” in the countries neighbouring China.

2. A Brief History of the Tajik People

In the second century B.C., during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty, Zhang Qian travelled to the Western Regions on behalf of the court, thus opening up the Silk Road, which communicated between the East and the West on the Eurasian continent. In 60 B.C., the Western Han Dynasty set up the Western Regions

Prefecture in present-day Xinjiang, which formally incorporated the Western Regions west of Dunhuang into the Chinese territory. Ancient Tashkurgan was situated at an important location on the ancient Silk Road, a stronghold of economic and cultural exchange between the East and the West, and it was on this plateau, known as the “Roof of the World”, that the Tajik ancestors of Xinjiang gradually formed and developed their own traditions and customs during the long-lasting exchanges between Eastern and Western cultures.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, a small alpine kingdom, the Kingdom of Tserkabanta, emerged in the Tashkurgan region, and the Tserkabanta people were the distant ancestors of the Tajiks in Xinjiang, China. In the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, the Yabantas developed irrigated agriculture and lived a half-farming, half-pastoral life. At this time, there were 12 castles and more than 10 monasteries in the country, and Hinayana Buddhism was the state religion. During the reign of Tang Kaiyuan (713-741), the garrison of “Onion Ridge Guard” was set up here. According to the record in Volume 12 of the Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty, it is said that the father of the founder of the state came from the middle of the sun, and his mother was a Han Chinese (a princess of the Han Dynasty), so the royal family called themselves the Han Japanese and the heavenly species, and their appearance was the same as that of China, and they wore square crowns and hu costumes. In the early 20th century, the British-Hungarian explorer Marc Aurel Stein discovered a mountain in a gorge in the southern part of the Xinjiang Province, China, which was inhabited by the Tajiks, which was made of earth bricks stacked with pine branches. The neighbouring Tajiks called it “Kizkurgan”, meaning “Princess Castle”, after an ancient fortress made of earth bricks and pine boughs. Combined with other evidence, Stein concluded that this castle was the place where the princess stayed on the Pamir Plateau in the legend of the “Han Dynasty”.¹

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Around the 8th century A.D., the Khabandha state died out. From the 9th to the 16th centuries A.D., the Tashkurgan region came under the jurisdiction of the Tubo, Karakhan, Western Liao, Mongol Yuan, and Chaghatai khanates. Islam, which was introduced into the territory of the Karakhan dynasty in the 10th century in particular, had such a strong influence on the Tajiks that it later became the religion of the entire nation. From the late 17th to the 19th centuries, many Tajiks from Shiknam and Wakhan in the western and southern Pamirs migrated to Sariqul, where they gradually formed the Tajik ethnic group in China.

In the mid-17th century, when the Qing Dynasty unified the country, it adopted the Yuan Dynasty name “Selkur” as the name of the Tashkurgan region, and established Selkur Huizhuang under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Counsellors of Kashgar. The establishment of the Selkur huizhuang under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Counsellors of Kashgar in the Qing Dynasty greatly strengthened the close economic and cultural ties between the Tajik region and the Uyghur region in the southern borderlands. After China’s Xinhai Revolution, the Tashkurgan region was transformed into Puli county, and the Burke system was retained for better rule of the region until 1926, when it was abolished by order of the Xinjiang provincial government. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the People’s Government of Tashkurgan County was established in the region in 1950, and regional ethnic autonomy was introduced in 1954.

The Tajiks are generally Sunnis of the Ismaili sect of Islam, and they have their own language, Tajik. The Tajiks do not have their own script, but at one time in history Persian was used, and now Uyghur is commonly used. Tajik belongs to the Pamir group of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. At present, the Selikur dialect is spoken mainly in the Tashkurgan region, with a few people speaking the Wakhan dialect, and the Uighur language is spoken by Tajiks in the Shache region.

The Tajiks are mainly found in Central Asia and are the dominant ethnic group in Tajikistan; within China, the Tajiks are mainly found in the Tajik Autonomous County of Tashkurgan in Xinjiang. According to the China

Statistical Yearbook, the Tajiks within China have a total population of 50,896, making them one of China's ethnic minorities.

Unlike other cross-border ethnic groups, the differences between the Tajiks of China and the Tajiks of Central Asia, although both are called "Tajiks", can be regarded as two different ethnic groups. Religiously speaking, although they both believe in Islam, the Tajiks are Shia and the Tajiks are Sunni.

Linguistically, Tajiks speak Pamir, which belongs to the East Iranian branch of the Iranian language family of the Indo-European language family, and is very much related to the Serbian language spoken by the ancient Chinese people of Ü-Tsang. The Tajiks, on the other hand, speak the West Iranian branch of the Iranian language family, which is simply Persian. These two languages are so different that direct communication is impossible.

3. Religious Beliefs of the Tajiks

In the history of the Pamirs, the integration of religion and secularism has been complex, and many concepts about the real world in both religious and secular life have been influenced by the idea that "everything has a spirit", which makes it very difficult to define religion and secularism.

In July 2014, an archaeological team led by Wu Xinhua, head of the Xinjiang Archaeological Team of the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, discovered a Girzanqal cemetery, about 100 metres long and 50 metres wide, with a gently sloping surface on a terrace northeast of the village of Qushman in Tashkorgan Tajik Autonomous Prefecture, Kashgar Region. The surrounding area is regularly covered with black and white radiating strips of stones, each about 80-100 cm wide. This cemetery is bordered by the Tashkorgan River to the east and backed by the Muztagh Ata Peak, at an altitude of 3,050 metres, and the burials are about 2,500 years old. Unearthed open fire into the burial of Zoroastrian fire altar, fire sticks, Zoroastrian secondary burial of the eagle's head and the typical secondary burial (Zoroastrianism believes that water, fire and earth are holy, the body is unclean, after the death of a person by some raptors, beasts will be torn to eat the body after mortuary bones into the burial.) The human bones. From these unearthed artefacts, is when the origin of Zoroastrianism era preserved the most complete scale of the largest relics.

From this exploration of Tajik religious culture, it can be concluded that the Tajik nation has been influenced by Zoroastrianism (Persian: مزديسنا), Buddhism, and Islam successively over thousands of years of history, and still retains some of the most primitive beliefs and customs, such as the reverence for nature, and some of the lyrics of songs about the gods of nature.

The Tibetans, who live at the same latitude as the Tajiks, have been described to this day as a people "whose ideals are based on the world of gods and dreams". Although the extent of the influence of religious culture on the world of thought of the Tajiks has not yet been noted, studies have shown that the pantheistic overtones of the religious culture of the ancient Pamirs continue to influence modern Tajiks today. Among the deities commonly found in modern Tajik folklore are the god Baring (who appears at night, laughs and drops laughing flowers from his mouth, and blesses others by saying, "Let the god Baring help you"), the god Chilidaro (who is a metaphor for the good), and the god Aromast (who specialises in the harming of women and babies). Women who are gluttonous are accused of being "just like Aromast". During the first 40 days of a baby's life, it is necessary to guard against Aromast by lighting torches in front of the door, hanging a stallion's bridle or a hunter's girdle from the beams of the house, placing thorny branches in the roof chimneys and light holes, and burning mugwort), Chatako (it is believed that every unborn child is under the protection of the god of goodness, and that the foetus is killed because of the god of badness, Chatako), Jeva (the goddess of goodness), and Jawa (the goddess of evil.). (The belief that every unborn child is under the protection of a good god, and that the death of a foetus is the work of the evil god "Chahauko"), Jawa (goddess. Those who have the ability to create are said to be "those who have been educated by Jawa"), and so on.

They also believe that rocks and stones have spirits, and that they have the power to break bad luck. Black graphite, a mountain speciality, was used to ward off evil spirits and to paint eyelashes (modern Tajik women still use this natural mineral from the mountains for make-up after it has been sterilised in a frying pan).

Tajiks worship Muztagh Ata, legend has it that Muztagh Ata is above the gods living, full of flowers and grasses of the fairy garden, the status of the sacred mountain as the Kunlun Mountain in the mythology of the Han people, Muztagh Ata is the holy mountain of the Tajiks, the legend has it that there is a beautiful princess of the glacier, she and the snowy prince of the Chogori Peak fell in love with the gods, but the gods did not agree that they were together, and the princess of the glacier left behind the tears of the glacier into the mountain of the one glacier. In the hearts of young Tajik men and women, Muztagh Ata Peak is a symbol of love. Tajik proverb: human navel on the belly button, the world's navel in the Pamir. Tajiks still pray to the mountain every day, to the loved ones out of the house, said "Muztagh Ata with you". The Ismailis also believe that the human soul takes two shapes - the animal form and the talking human form - and that the animals and birds they encounter on their journeys may be the embodiment of the human soul, which is why the Tajiks revere and protect animals.

The Tajiks are a people who revere the eagle, which they believe brings them joy. In the Tajiks, everyone dances the eagle dance, with arms moving like eagle's wings, up and down like eagles soaring in the sky. They make the eagle's wings into an eagle flute, capable of wonderful music, which is similar to the Jiahu bone flute in the Henan Museum, one is an eagle bone and the other is a crane bone.

4. Tajik music

Tajik music is divided into four parts: folk songs, folk instrumental music, folk songs and dances, and music for religious ceremonies.

- 1) Tajik folk songs occupy an important place in Tajik folk music. There are many of them, with a wide range of themes, depicting the rich and colourful life of the Tajiks. Folk singers and poets often improvise songs out of a sense of urgency. The compiler leads the singing, the crowd joins in, and a new piece is born. This kind of improvisation has led to the continuous development of folk songs in terms of subject matter, melody and structure, and has maintained the vitality of folk music. In addition, herdsman often sing to express their feelings and relieve their fatigue when they are herding animals, milking cows, shearing sheep and working in the fields.

Tajik folk songs are classified according to their ethnic customs and subject matter. There are narrative songs, such as "White Eagle" and "The Immortal Kulkak"; there are resistance songs that expose and rebel against the old system, such as "Soldier's Bitterness" and "Can't Stand Up Straight"; there are love songs, such as "Gulibeita", "Xielin Lijiang", "Red Rose", "Phoenix" and so on (most of which are titled with people's names and birds' names); and there are customary songs, such as the Wedding Song, Funeral Song, Lullaby and so forth. There are also customary songs, such as "Wedding Song", "Funeral Song" and "Lullaby".

- 2) Tajik folk instruments are mainly used to accompany songs and dances, and common instruments include the three-hole eagle flute (Nayi) made of eagle wing bone, the seven-hole harp made of wood (Sur Nayi), the plucked instruments of Rawap, Saiytur, Branzkum, Kumri, the bowed instruments of Aijek, the mouth harp (Kuruz), and the tambourine (Dap), and so on. The tambourine plays a very important role in the music, and it is often used as a rhythmic introduction to songs and dances, whereas in the whole music the tambourine plays the role of a conductor and a foil.

Nayi, the name for the eagle flute. The body of the flute is made of the wing bone of a large eagle and varies in length, thickness and size, usually about 24-26 centimetres in length and 1-2 centimetres in diameter. Both ends of the tube are open, the lower end of the tube has three holes for sound, and the upper end of the tube has a mouthpiece. When playing, the lower end of the pipe is held in both hands, the mouth is half contained in the mouthpiece, and the tip of the tongue is used to block a part of the mouthpiece to form the mouthpiece, and then the pipe is blown according to the holes, which is also used for flat blowing and overblowing. The sound range can be up to nine degrees, the tone is high and bright, similar to the sound of the whistle, and is mostly used in grand festivals and weddings to play the eagle flute and the tambourine to accompany songs and dances and Diao Yang horse races.

- 3) The Tajik dance Chavsuz, means "fast and skilful". The beat is 7/8, consisting of 3/8 single beat and 4/8 double beat. The single beat is lively and jumpy, while the double beat is smooth and powerful. The combination of movement and static, and the interlacing of urgency and slowness are the basic movements of the Tajik dance. The traditional form is mostly performed by men, mainly in pairs. After the 1950s, the prevalence of male and female dance, by the man asked the woman to dance, the two Xu show arms, such as the double eagle hovering and soaring; the rhythm is fast, chasing each other playful, and as the double eagle landing; then rush to lean on each other, suddenly flashed away, from low to high to do the twisting and rotating body. At the climax, the crowd and the beat call out, "Qiao Uba, Qiao Uba!" (Come on, come on, come on!). The dance ends in a spin. The style varies slightly from place to place. There are single step, wrong step, wrong turn, jump turn and so on. Hand styles include single wing, double wing, alternating style, etc. Accompanied by tambourine, eagle flute, Rawaf, Bombur, Ajek, etc. From time to time, two eagle flutes are used to accompany the dance. From time to time, two eagle flutes are used to play alternately, and two women play a tambourine together.

Lapui, usually used for indoor banquets. The movement is light and free. There is a fixed tune and the beat is 7/8. Highly skilled dancers put the Rawaf on their shoulders and dance while playing, accompanied by another Rawaf. Bailis, which means "specific beat". It is a 5/8 beat, consisting of 3/8 and 2/8 beats. When the music is played continuously, there is a sense of jumping in the continuity, forming a smooth, subtle and passionate dance characteristics. Most of them are accompanied by folk music or folk songs. There are solo dances, duo dances, group dances or free performances. This dance is especially popular among women. When performing, they invite each other to walk four steps in 5/8 beat at a medium speed, accompanied by instruments such as eagle flute, tambourine, playing the Boolean, Rawaf and so on.

- 4) The Tajiks are regarded as “the people of the eagle”, they have special feelings for the eagle, and the eagle dance is their favourite dance. The Eagle Dance is mostly performed in the form of a duo dance at festivals or family parties. From the content to the form, it simulates the movements of the eagle. When dancing, people sit in a circle or half circle, men and women are invited to dance in pairs; sometimes several pairs of partners perform at the same time. The men’s dance is handsome, pure and rugged. The main movements include stretching the arms (the forearms are higher and the back arms are lower), swinging back and forth, and dancing with flexible steps.² At the climax of the dance, the arms and palms are shaken fiercely, rotating to the left and right and leaping sideways, making the eagle spreading its wings and fighting against the wind and clouds. Women’s dance steps and postures are slightly similar to those of men, with only a smaller and lighter step than men. Both hands are swirling inward or outward on the head, and the movement is stretching and soft. With the tambourine as the main accompaniment, usually 7/8 is the basic rhythm of the dance, with whistles, high fives and shouts of “Lapuyi” to set the mood.

Horse Dance, known as “Alu Kamak” in Tajik. Performers one to two people, waist tie horse props, singing and dancing or singing and then dancing, the lyrics praise the horse is good at walking on the mountain road, robust and tenacious, the dance is expressed in the gallop, slow, peaks, streams and other episodes. The movements include jumping, running, flashing and turning. There are special tunes, and the rhythm is 7/8 beat.

Knife Dance, mostly solo, performed by dancers armed with Persian-style long knives. The rhythm is 7/8 beat, with special accompaniment tunes. Difficult skills, movements have swung into the sword, staggered jump, split turn, etc., quite the ancient warrior style. This dance is rarely seen in folklore.

Puppet dance, Tajik language called “Dan bow Ba Chaiyiq”, meaning “good boy”. The performer holds a stick in his left hand, on which a small boy puppet is tied; his right hand caresses and coaxes, singing and dancing. The performance is humorous and funny.

- 5) The main faith of the Tajiks is the Ismaili sect of Islam, with a small minority practising Sufism. The general Tajik population worships only on holidays, and only some elderly people worship three times a day. Religious music consists of the “chanting of sutras”, the “Kasoyd”, “religious lamentations” and “Nesketi” chanted after worship, and the Sufi sect’s “Kasoyd”, “Nesketi” and “Nesketi” chants. The traditional music of the Tajiks belongs to the Persian- Arabic group.

The traditional music of the Tajiks belongs to the Persian-Arabic musical family, and the tonal scales of the music are very varied, including the seven-tone scale, the six-tone scale, the five-tone scale, and the four-tone scale, which are similar to the tonal scales used by the Uighurs in southern Xinjiang. The seven-tone scales include the seven-tone la scale and the three-step up mi scale, which is a two-degree interval between the second and third steps of the scale. There are also incomplete scales, such as pentatonic, hexatonic, and tetratonic. One of the main features of Tajik music is the rhythm and beat, of which 7/8 and 5/8 are widely used and are rare in other ethnic music. The 7/8 beat has two accents and is a combination of 3/8 and 4/8; the 5/8 beat also has two accents and is a combination of 3/8 and 2/8. These two types of beats have asymmetrical rhythms because the two accents before and after are different in substance, but at the same time they give a special vigour and character.

Tajik folk songs are typically characterised by parallel sections consisting of two phrases with the same material and the same termination (which can be configured in different harmonies). Since the lyrics are long and the phrases themselves are often repeated or varied, most of them are sectional songs with a phrase structure. In addition, there are also sections in which the first phrase contrasts with the second phrase in terms of material and melodic line (i.e., derivative contrast).

In a section composed of three phrases, the third phrase is often a repetition of the second phrase, and there are also ABA-type three-phrase sections. The singing form of traditional folk songs is often one leader and many choruses, the first phrase is led by one person, the second phrase is sung by the chorus, the chorus often enters from the end of the first phrase, the leader often joins in from the end of the second phrase, and then starts the repetition of the section; there are also some songs where the first section is led by one person, and then the chorus joins in during the repetition of the section.

Folk instrumental music represented by the eagle flute solo is mostly a theme equivalent to the size of the motif or section repeated uninterruptedly to form the structure of the section with repetition, and sometimes using the form of variations to form a small structure of the variations, but has not yet formed a complete variations of the form.

Tajik music has five modes: the gong, the shang, the jue, the zhi and the yu. In terms of scales, there are seven, six, five, four and three-tone scales (six-tone scales can also be called incomplete seven-tone scales; four-tone scales and three-tone scales are called incomplete five-tone scales). The tuning of these scales is different from that of other ethnic scales in the form of combinations, spins, backbones, etc., the most characteristic of which is

the heptatonic tuning of the ascending III scale. There are two kinds of Tajik notation of the seven-tone modes of the ascending III scale: the angular notation of the ascending III scale; and the plummet notation of the ascending II scale and descending II scale, which is different from the harmonic minor of Europe and the modes of other ethnic groups in China, and whose most important feature is the interval of the second degree between the II and III scales, which is unique to the Tajik music, and called the Tajik ascending-III seven-tone modulation. It belongs to Tajik music's unique scale tuning, which is called Tajik Ascending Seventh Tone Tuning. Although the III tone of the modal is a stable tone, it is a semitone higher variant and has a tendency to resolve upwards, so III and IV have a mutual tendency relationship, which is different from other modes. From the point of view of modal colours, the upper third of the dominant is a major third, which belongs to the major mode; however, the leading tone below the dominant is a major second in relation to the dominant, which belongs to the natural minor mode. Therefore, the melodic and vocal colours are right in between the major and minor modes.

One of the main features of Tajik music is the colourful variety of beats and rhythms. Among the various types of music, 7/8 and 5/8 are the most numerous, the former being rare among the 56 ethnic groups of China (the Uighurs also have it, but in a different way), while the latter can be found in the music of the Uighurs and other ethnic groups, and not often in other ethnic groups either. In addition, there are a few 3/4, 2/4 and 4/4 beats in Tajik music.

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