

Exploring the Origins and Intertwining of Music on the Silk Road

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Abstract: This paper takes the music exchange on the Silk Road as the research object, and systematically explores the origin of music, its propagation paths and its integration mechanism in the multicultural context. The study shows that since Zhang Qian's passage to the West, the Silk Road has not only been a trade route, but also a link for the spread of music and culture. Through the multiple paths of commerce and travel, religion, military and political affairs, court system, and migration of ethnic groups, the music elements of India, Persia, and the Central Plains have been blended in pivotal zones like Guzi and Dunhuang, forming a music system that combines both regional characteristics and crosscultural commonality. As confirmed by archaeological artifacts, documentary records, cave murals, musical instruments and music theories that evolved during the spread of the music, and were eventually integrated into the Tang Dynasty's institutional achievements like the Tang Dynasty's Ten Sections of Music and other institutional achievements. The study further suggests that the experience of ancient Silk Road music exchanges can provide inspiration for contemporary crosscultural initiatives, including the construction of digital music collaboration platforms, the development of crosscultural education programs, and the innovation of music economic models and cultural diplomacy strategies, thus promoting civilization mutual understanding and sustainable development.

Keywords: Silk Road Music Exchange; Instrument Transmission; Cultural Integration; Intercultural Exchange; Digital Cultural Heritage; Musical Anthropology

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of the study

Since Zhang Qian's passage to the Western Regions in the 2nd century BC, the Silk Road has developed into an important trade and cultural exchange route connecting Asia and Europe. The route not only facilitated trade in commodities, but also played a key role in exchanges in numerous fields, including culture, art, science and technology. Music and dance, as core cultural elements, spread and interacted through the Silk Road, greatly enriching the cultural life of the countries along the route and promoting mutual understanding and deep integration among civilizations.

According to *Records of the grand historian: Biographies of Dawan in the Records of the Grand Historian*, when Zhang Qian traveled to the West, he not only brought back information about the countries in the West, but also introduced a lot of music information. This information laid a solid foundation for subsequent cultural exchanges. In addition, *the Book of Han: Biography of the Western Regions* also contains a detailed account of the music and dance cultures of the countries in the Western Regions, providing valuable historical information for the study of music and dance along the Silk Road.

The opening of the Silk Road has promoted extensive exchanges and deep integration of cultures between China and Central, West and South Asia as well as Europe. Music, as an important medium of cultural dissemination, has not only enriched the cultural and artistic forms of various countries, but also promoted cultural diversity and inclusivity in the exchanges and integration of the Silk Road. Historically, countries and regions along the Silk Road have formed distinctive music and dance styles through continuous trade and cultural exchanges, and these styles not only map the cultural characteristics of each place, but also show the mutual influence and integration of different cultures.

For example, the murals of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang present numerous musical scenes, which not only show the form of musical performance at that time, but also reflect the integration of different cultural elements. These murals provide valuable information for the study of Silk Road music. According to statistics, nearly onethird of the Mogao Grottoes' 492 caves in Dunhuang have murals

related to music and dance, involving more than 40 types of musical instruments. This not only reflects the prosperity of music culture at that time, but also highlights the prominent position of music in cultural exchanges. In addition, archaeological excavations along the Silk Road have uncovered numerous artifacts related to music and dance, such as musical instruments and dancing figurines, which provide important physical evidence for the study of Silk Road music.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to explore in depth the origin and spread of music on the Silk Road and its integration process in different cultural contexts. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical documents, archaeological discoveries and extant musical forms, to reveal how music became a bridge of cultural exchange on the Silk Road and how this exchange promoted cultural diversity and innovation.

These exchange on the Silk Road was a complex and multifaceted process, in which music and dance from different cultural backgrounds influenced and fused with each other through the Silk Road, forming unique musical styles. These styles not only enriched the cultural and artistic forms of the countries along the route, but also promoted cultural diversity and inclusiveness. At the same time, the experience of musical exchanges on the Silk Road is an important inspiration for modern crosscultural initiatives and cooperation.

2. Origins of Music on the Silk Road

According to the Biographies of Dawan in the Records of the Grand Historian and the The Western Regions Biography of the Book of Han, between 138 and 126 BCE, Zhang Qian was commissioned to undertake a mission to the Western Regions. At that time, the countries and regimes along the Silk Road were spread across what is now Xinjiang in China and eastern Central Asia (such as Loulan "Shanshan," Khotan, Shule "Kashgar," Kucha, Cheshi "Gushi"), as well as the nomadic and agricultural regimes of Central Asia (including Dayuan "Fergana Valley," Kangju, the Yuezhi, Daxia "Bactria," and Wusun). In addition, there were places Zhang Qian heard of but could not visit personally, such as Anxi "Iran," Shendu "India," and Tiaozhi.

The geopolitical pattern can basically be divided into the Xiongnu's dominant region, which spanned from the Mongolian Plateau to the north of the Tianshan Mountains, forcing the countries of the Western Regions to oscillate between the Xiongnu and the Han Dynasty and to maintain a state of submissive submission that was pleasing to both sides. The two major northsouth transportation routes, namely, the southern edge of the Tarim Basin, centered on Ütsang and Loulan, and the northern edge of Guzi and Shule, constituted important trade routes in ancient times. In this region, the ethnic and cultural characteristics are remarkable, with multiethnicity cohabitation of Saka, Tocharian, Qiang, Yuezhi... , and the legacy of Greek culture and local civilization blending with each other to form a unique cultural landscape.

Among them, the Xiongnu music style is rooted in the characteristics of nomadic civilization, characterized by functional instruments and multicultural fusion: the threetone bone whistle unearthed in the tomb of Nuoyan Ula, the wooden neck of the horsetailed string instrument (the predecessor of the huobusi) in the tomb of No. 2 of Gaole Maodu, and bronze wolfotem war drums from the Altai's Pazyryk constitute the system of "music on the horse," with the functions of military mobilization (Horn hooter), faith rituals (Ulan Gumu five chimes group) and pastoral narratives (Ordos deer hunting bronze band ornaments linking five jumps melody); Artistic integration is reflected in the infiltration of "three sections and two fiddles" of Hu Jia of South Huns into the Han Music House, the eastward transmission of Konghou of the Western region through Guezi (Dunhuang 285 caves mural), as well as the "Real People" of Xianbei. Auditory characteristics include the 1/4 differential tone of Tuwa huomai, the compound rhythm of Siberian horseshoe bone rattles, and the spatial sound field of Ordos golden crown bells, which, through the artifact evidence and crosscultural comparisons, reconstruct the grassland rhythm system centered on the imitation of nature and spiritual appeal, elements of which persist in the rhythms of the Mongolian long tunes and Central Asian Harmonium.

During the Silk Road period, the music styles of the southern and northern routes each had distinctive characteristics and deeply intertwined: the southern route centered on oasis rhythms infused with Buddhism, exemplified by the fivestring pipa (figure 1), phoenixheaded konghou (Dandan Ulik murals), and a combination of bronze cymbals and conch shells at the Nagarjunakonda Buddhist site. This was accompanied by a mixed structure of Indian raga scales and Kucha rhythmic patterns based on the Milan

Kharosthi script chanting score of the Lotus Sutra, as well as cultural layering evidenced by the co-burial of a Hellenistic harp and Hanstyle yu in the Hotan Shanpula tombs. The northern route focused on the Kucha music and dance melting pot, with the bichelis, darra drums, and the "headshaking, eyeplaying" dance posture from the Kizil Caves forming a fastspinning Huxuan (whirling) music and dance. The Shule Wudan Qidi musical fragments (22 microtonal system) connected Indian shruti and Central Plains pitch systems, while the Gaochang musician roster from the Jiaohe ancient city confirmed the military music lineage. The interaction between north and south is reflected in the Kuchamodified Persian pipa with four phases and fourteen frets transmitted through Khotan to Dunhuang (Mogao Cave rebound pipa, figure 2), the Sogdian Gaochang music score and Hotan Sanskrit music notation forming a chain of notation transmission, and the joint shaping of Chang'an's hundred entertainments by Yanqi's Sumo Zha drama (beastfaced stepping song) and Khotan's procession festival (camel musician sculptures). Although the two exhibited differences between southern softness (Buddhist meditation) and northern hardness (banquet military music), through musician migration, shared grotto styles, and the Tang dynasty's integration of ten music departments, they were ultimately fused into the Western Regions music system, whose genetic legacy persists in the Muqam "Qongnai Eman" structure and the necktilting, fingerplucking movements of the southern Xinjiang Sainaim.



Figure 1 Fivestringed pipa



Figure 2 Mogao Grottoes Rebound Pipa

The pioneering course of the Silk Road not only marked the first systematic knowledge of the political map of the western region by the Han Dynasty, but also revealed the mystery of the initial formation of the EastWest trade network, laying a solid cornerstone for the full opening of the Silk Road. The countries along the route, whether they were the guardians of the passes of Loulan or the leaders of the caravans of Kangju, jointly constructed the basic framework for exchanges and interactions among different

civilizations.

3. Transmission Routes

3.1 The medium of commercial travel: The Spread of Sogdian Music

Trade in musical instruments: the frescoes of Samarkand depict Sogdian caravans carrying harps and lutes, and the stone coffin of Shijun's tomb in Xi'an depicts a merchant traveling across the desert with a waist drum.

Accompanied by musicians: The Old Book of Tang records that the Kangju merchant group "presented huxuan dancers to the court every time they arrived in China", and the Central Asian Zhezhi dancers entered Chang'an Jiaofang on the business route.

Transplantation of tunes: The Dunhuang writing of S.0381, the Siddhartha chapter, which retains Buddhist songs with Kuchean neumes, confirms that camel caravan chants were incorporated into religious music.

3.2 Religious Carriers: Sound Field Construction in Buddhist Temples and Grottoes

Sutra painting sound: Mogao Caves Cave 220 Yakushi Sutra painting (figure3.) The 26member orchestra includes Indian phoenix head konghou, Persian suona and Chinese square sound, recreating a Silk Road orchestra ensemble.

Spreading of chanting programs: The fivestringed pipa held by the kabukito in the "Saying Picture" in Cave 38 of the Kizil Grottoes is highly compatible with the fingering of the Tang Dynasty's inlaid pipa in the collection of the Shosoin Temple in Japan.

Nestorian hymns: Fragments of Syriac hymns, notated in Greek stave notation, have been excavated from the Gaochang Imperial City in Xinjiang, indicating the eastward spread of Christian music along the Silk Road.



Figure 3 Yakushi Sutra Variations

3.3 Militarypolitical Impetus: the migration of music and dance in wars and garrisons

Trophy input: Later Qin Lu Guang's western expedition to Guzi (382) was awarded "exotic entertainments", which was recorded in Sui Shu Music Zhi as bringing 46 kinds of dance music from Kucha.

Fusion of military music: The combination of the horizontal blowing (flute) used by the garrison army in the Han Dynasty and the Xiongnu horn reed formed the Out of the Seaside, Into the Seaside and other drumandwhistle music.

Garrison music records: Juyan Hanjian records that soldiers carried "hulus and zheng" to the west of the river, and the excavation of Chinese music scores on wooden slips at the Loulan site confirms that military music activities were carried out in Tuen Mun.

3.4 The Palace System: integration of music and dance at the national level

Establishment of the music Bureau: the Sui Dynasty seven music to the Tang Dynasty ten music, the

Gaochang, Guzi, Shule and other Silk Road regimes music and dance into the court ceremonial system.

Institutional legacy: Tang Taishang Temple set up under the "Hu Bureau" specializing in Western music, Central Asian musicians Cao's family (Cao Bao, Cao Shancai) three generations served in the pear orchard.

Standardization of musical notation: Dunhuang P.3539, "Twenty Score Characters for the Pipa" (fig. 4.), and the Japanese "Tianpin Pipa Score" (fig. 5.) use the same notation system, demonstrating crossdomain circulation of official notation.

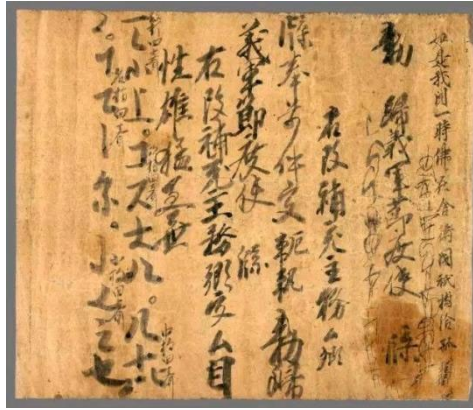


Figure 4 "Twenty Score Characters of the Pipa"

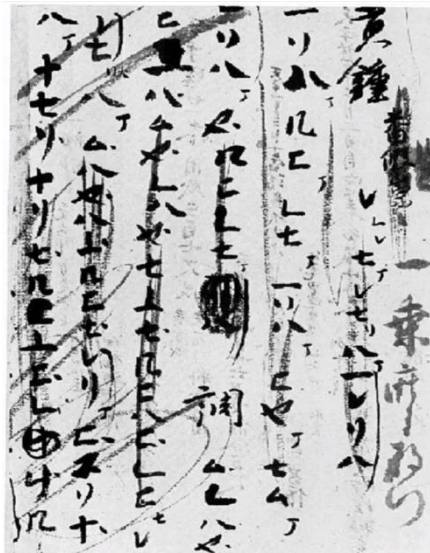


Figure 5 "Tianpin Pipa Score"

3.5 Ethnic Migration: the Sound Memory of Mobile Populations

Westward Migration of the Yuezhi: In the 2nd century B.C., the Dayuezhi migrated westward with the Qinzhen, and a Warring Statesstyle of the se zither was unearthed in the Ferghana Basin of Uzbekistan.

The Uighurs migrated southward: In the 9th century, the Uighurs brought the shaman drums in Mobei to Hexi, and the New Book of Tang recorded that the Uighur "mountain sacrifice ceremonies" in Ganzhou used threestringed and huobusi to dance.

Persian Refugees: After the fall of Sassanian Persia, groups of musicians moved to the city of Suyab (near modern Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan) via Tantalus, and the Turpan documents refer to "Persian lute instructors".

3.6 Artistic Intertextuality: crossmedia communication of images and texts

Reproduction of Grotto Imagery: Guzi Kizil "flying sky holding Ruan Xian" pattern was repeatedly copied by Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, Yungang Grottoes, forming a fixed performance paradigm.

Poetic Documentation: Cen Sen's "Night Gathering with Judges in the Liangzhou Pavilion" describes how "the pipa and flute harmonize with each other, and the Qiang children and hu children sing together," reflecting the realities of music in the Silk Road post stations.

Music Literature: 22 Shruti theories in the Indian Nāṭya Śāstra (Treatise on Performance), which were introduced to Chang'an through Sanskrit translation monks and influenced the compilation of the Essentials of Music Book.

3.7 Artifactual Evidence: acoustic reconstruction of archaeological remains

The chain of musical instrument forms: from the fourstringed pipa excavated in the Golden Mound in Afghanistan in the 1st century BC to the curved pipa painted in the mural of Li Shou's tomb in Tang Dynasty, Xi'an, the trajectory of the instrument's eastward transmission is presented in its entirety.

Acoustic experiments: reconstruction of wooden reeds (3rd century BC) unearthed at the Niya site, whose 440Hz fundamental frequency is highly consistent with the yellow bell rhythm of the Middle Kingdom, confirming the spread of pitch standards.

Costume Resonance: The goldembellished celluloid dance garment excavated from a tomb of the Tubo people in Dulan, Qinghai, was tested for the acoustic frequency of its metal ornaments, which showed that it matched the rhythm of the Sut dance.

These paths did not exist in isolation, but were interwoven into a network through nodes such as caravan stations, Buddhist grottoes, military passes, and palace music offices, enabling the theoretical unification of the Indian lagoon, the Persian dastagharh, and the Central Plains pentatonic scale in the Guzi system of "five dances and seven tones". The spread of music is not only the result of cultural collision, but also serves as an acoustic link for crosscivilization understanding.

4. Mutual Influence and Integration of Music from Different Cultures on the Silk Road

4.1 Dissemination and integration of musical instruments

4.1.1 The introduction of Western musical instruments to the Central Plains

The Silk Road led to the introduction of many Western instruments into the Central Plains, such as the pipa, konghou, huqin, and jiegu drum. These instruments had unique tones and playing styles, adding new colors and expressiveness to the music of the Central Plains. For example, the pipa, as one of the important musical instruments spread along the Silk Road, has an important exemplifies this diffusion of its spread and integration in China. The pipa originated in Persia and gradually became one of the indispensable instruments in Chinese music after it was introduced to China via the Silk Road. Three types of pipa emerged in Chinese history: the fourstringed lute, the fivestringed straight lute, and the ruan or qin pipa. In the early pipa reliefs in India, you can see more straight lutes, which are the fivestringed pipa documented historically, and should be called the fivestringed straight lute in full. This kind of lute was directly imported from India into China through Guzi (now Kuqa), the Hexi Corridor into the Central Plains, peaking during the Northern and Southern Dynasties in the Tang Dynasty. [1]

4.1.2 Outreach and evolution of musical instruments in the Central Plains

Some traditional musical instruments from the Central Plains also spread to other regions along the Silk Road, and in the process of spreading they interacted with the local music culture and underwent certain evolutions. Central Asia absorbed the music of East and West Asia and even South Asia, forming a unique Western music. From the point of view of musical instruments, there are sheng, zheng, fou, reed pipes and xiao from East Asia in the music of Central Asia, vertical konghou, curvednecked pipa, bronze cymbals from West Asia, and phoenixhead konghou from South Asia, and so on. [2]For example, after the zheng was introduced to the Korean Peninsula, it gradually developed the Gayageum with Korean characteristics; and after it was introduced to Japan, it evolved into the Japanese thirteenstringed koto, which is different from the Chinese koto in terms of playing style and repertoire.

4.2 Integration of music

4.2.1 The Eastern Transmission of Western Music

A large number of Western music pieces were introduced to the Central Plains, such as the Brahman Songs. These compositions have unique melody, rhythm and stylistic features, which infused new vitality into the music of the Central Plains. The preface of the poem "Brahman" in the Lefu Poetry Series says: "The Shang tune was introduced by Yang Jinshu, the governor of Xiliang in the middle of the Kaiyuan era, and was changed into "The Study Bag of Feather Clothes" in the thirteenth year of the Tianbao era (754 A.D.)." Wang Jian's "Ten Poems on the Nishang Song and Dance" also contains the phrase "Listening to the wind and the water to make nishang".[3]Emperor Li Longji of the Tang Dynasty combined the Brahman Songs imported from the Western Regions with his own musical creativity to create the famous Nishang Yuyi Song, which became a classic of Tang Dynasty music and dance.

4.2.2 The Outreach and Integration of Central Plains Music

Some excellent music from the Central Plains also spread to the Western Regions and other regions through the Silk Road, and merged with local musical traditions. For example, in the process of spreading, Chinese guqin music interacted with musical traditions of neighboring countries and regions, absorbed some local music elements, and at the same time had a certain influence on the local music creation.

4.3 Music and Dance Fusion

4.3.1 The Introduction and Popularity of Music and Dance in the Western Regions

The style of music and dance in the western region is unique, passionate and exuberant, with a strong infectious force. With the opening of the Silk Road, Western music and dance were introduced to the Central Plains, and was quickly popular among the populace and widely spread in the court and folk. For example, in the Tang Dynasty, the Huxuan Dance and Huteng Dance, etc., the dancers showed their unique artistic charms in the rapid rotation and jumping, which became an important form of entertainment for the court and the folk at that time.

4.3.2 Fusion and Innovation of Music and Dance of the Central Plains and Western Regions

The fusion of the music and dance culture of the Central Plains and the music and dance of the Western Regions has gave rise to new forms and styles of music and dance. Such as in Dunhuang murals show the music and dance scenes, both elegant Central Plains styles and passionate Western styles, and the passionate and unrestrained music and dance of the West, reflecting the characteristics of the fusion of the two. East and West music and dance cultural exchanges is not a wholesale, occupationstyle behavior, but rather a process of selective adaptation.[4]This kind of integration and innovation not only enriches the expression and content of music and dance, but also promotes the development and prosperity of music and dance art.

4.4 Music Theory Integration

4.4.1 Importation of Western Music Theory

The western region also has unique achievements in music theory, such as the music theory of Guzi music. After these music theories were introduced into the Central Plains, they had an important influence on the development of Central Plains music, prompting reforms in metrics, scales, and tuning systems. For example, the 28 keys of Yan music in the Sui and Tang dynasties were formed on the basis of absorbing the music theories of the Western regions.

4.4.2 The Outreach and Influence of Music Theory in the Middle Kingdom

The music theory of the Central Plains also spread to other regions along with the Silk Road, which had a certain influence on the music development of neighboring countries and regions. For example, the ancient Chinese theory of twelve rhythms, pentatonic scale and other music theoretical knowledge were adopted by neighboring regions in the process of spreading, which promoted the improvement and development of the local music theory system.

5. How modern society can draw on the experience of musical exchanges on the Silk Road to promote crosscultural exchanges and cooperation

The Silk Road was not only a link for ancient trade, but also a bridge for the mingling of Eastern and Western civilizations, in which music played an important role. For example, musical instruments such as the pipa and konghou were introduced to the Central Plains through the Silk Road, Persian melodies interacted with the Chinese pentatonic scale, and Buddhist chanting merged with Western music and dance to form a unique cultural landscape. This musical dialog across time and space provides valuable experience for modern society. The following four dimensions explore how to draw on historical experience to promote contemporary crosscultural exchange and cooperation:

5.1 Constructing a "Cloudbased Lerou" in the digital age

Creation of a global music collaboration platform: the use of blockchain for a shared music copyright repository to support the realtime cocreation of works by multinational musicians. For example, developing an Alassisted composition system that automatically fuses the Uyghur muqam and Indian raga scales.

Virtual Reality Music Archaeology: 3D scanning technology is used to restore the musical instruments in the murals of the Kucha grottoes and to synthesize their lost tones using physical modeling. The Dunhuang Research Academy has cooperated with MIT to develop a "Digital Dunhuang Musical Instrument Library".

Algorithmic analysis of musical genealogy: Developing a musical DNA matching system to trace the Silk Road elements in contemporary popular music. For example, Spotify can launch a "Music Silk Road" intelligent song list, revealing the genes of the cornucopia of rhythms in reggae music.

5.2 Reconstructing the Music Codes in the educational ecology

Developing a crosscultural music literacy curricula: Stanford University's "World Music Puzzle" program requires students to improvise dialogues using the Central Asian jew's harp, the Persian santur, and the Chinese guqin to develop crosscultural aural thinking.

Establishment of a Music Language Laboratory: Combining the throatsinging techniques of Turkic folk songs with electronic music production, the Tokyo University of the Arts has developed a "Vocal SensorSynthesizer" interactive device.

Revitalized teaching of cultural heritage: the Xinjiang Arts Institute opened a "Grotto Music Workshop", where students copied the Flying Musical Instruments at the Kizil Grottoes, and created a modern musical drama using a restored fivestringed lute.

5.3 Creating a New Paradigm for the Geomusical Economy

Music Corridor Economic Belt: A music free trade zone has been established along the ChinaEuropean liner routes, allowing tariff-free circulation of musical instruments, sheet music and audio equipment. The Xi'an International Port Area has piloted a bonded warehouse for musical instruments.

Developing music tourism resources: creating the "Silk Road Sound Map" AR navigation system, where tourists can hear the stereo restoration of the 8th century A.D. Cornish orchestra by sweeping the code at the Samarkand site.

Establishment of a trading mechanism for cultural carbon offset programs: combining traditional music heritage with ecological preservation, the Pamir folk song preservation project in Tajikistan has been included in the United Nations REDD+ scheme.

5.4 Musical Grammar for innovative cultural diplomacy

Musical cryptodiplomacy: creation of "diplomatic suites" containing multiple cultural metaphors, such as jazz played on the Afghan rubab, which implies codes for peace initiatives.

Establish a mechanism for mediating musical crises: The United Nations could establish a "musical envoy" to organize improvised musical dialogues in regional conflicts. During the war in Syria, musicians in Damascus used improvisation to defuse street confrontations.

Development of a musical metaverse embassy: Iranian santur performers and Israeli electronic musicians build a "PersianHebrew sound garden" in virtual space, breaking through realpolitik barriers.

Contemporary crosscultural musical exchange should not remain in simple collage of forms, but should build a network of meaning with deep intertextuality. Composer Faruk Arslan(Turkey)'s "Silk Code" series of works transforms the Uyghur Twelve Muqam into algorithmic parameters, generating multidimensional soundscapes through quantum computers, a creative approach that reveals new possibilities for cultural dialog. In the future, it is necessary to establish an evaluation system for a "shared musical future for humanity", and use quantitative indicators to measure the actual effectiveness of musical exchanges in reducing the risk of cultural conflict and enhancing the efficiency of economic cooperation, so that the echoes of the Millennium Silk Road can be truly transformed into the 21st century's code of civilizational dialogue.

6. Conclusion

The music exchanges on the Silk Road can be described as a feast of civilizations. On this ancient road, musical traditions carrying diverse cultures of different regions blended and learned from each other, and have gradually developed a distinctive artistic style. These art forms have not only enriched the cultural heritage of the countries along the Silk Road, but are also powerful testimony to cultural diversity and inclusivity. An indepth study of the musical exchanges along the Silk Road not only helps us gain insight into the inherent rules and unique charm of ancient cultural exchanges, but also provides valuable experience and inspiration for crosscultural exchanges and cooperation in today's world.

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