



Paper Type: Original Article

# The Manchu People and the Inheritance and Development of Shamanic Music: A Case Study of the Southeast Region of Northern China (Mudanjiang)

Wanrong Li<sup>1,2,\*</sup>

1. Philippine Women's University

2. Heilongjiang Preschool Education College

## Abstract

China is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Among its diverse ethnic groups, the Manchu people, with their long-standing history, hold a significant position in the cultural heritage of both China and the world. The Manchu people are primarily concentrated in the northeastern region of China. Over time, through the transitions of dynasties and the integration and migration of ethnic groups, their influence has gradually extended to the southeastern part of northern China (Mudanjiang), creating a unique cultural phenomenon in the Ningguta region. Shamanic music, as an essential component of Manchu culture, not only preserves rich historical memories and ethnic spirit but also shows vibrant vitality in the process of inheritance and development.

**Keywords:** Manchu, Shamanic Music, Waist Bells, Shamanic Hymns, Sacrificial Rituals

The southeastern region of North China (Mudanjiang City) is a region with a long history and profound cultural heritage, especially the Manchu culture. Manchu, as one of the important ethnic minorities in Chinese history, its unique cultural tradition has been well preserved and inherited in Mudanjiang area. As an important part of Manchu spiritual culture, shaman music not only carries rich historical memory, but also shows the unique artistic aesthetic and religious belief of Manchu people. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the basic situation of Manchu people and the status quo of shaman music inheritance and development in the southeast of

Corresponding author: Wanrong Li, email: [175258428@qq.com](mailto:175258428@qq.com), Ph. D. candidate in ethnomusicology, Philippine Women's University. She is a teacher at Heilongjiang Preschool Education College

north China.

Manchu, as one of the important ethnic minorities in Chinese history, shamanic music plays an important role in its unique cultural heritage. Shamanic music, as an important part of shamanic ritual activities, not only shows the worship and reverence of Manchu ancestors to nature, ancestors and gods, but also an important part of their spiritual life and social life.

## Origin and local population status

The Manchus live in the vast northeastern region. The unique natural environment of Northeast China, the Manchu people's production methods (such as hunting, fishing, farming), and cultural exchanges with other ethnic groups have shaped the diversity and uniqueness of shamanic music. Shamanic music not only reflects the Manchu people's reverence and worship for the natural world, but also reflects their thinking and solutions to life, death, disease and other major issues in life.

The legend of the Manchu origin "Three Fairies" tells the story of three fairies living in Bukuri Mountain, east of Tianchi in Changbai Mountain. Among them, the three fairies, Vogulun, accidentally swallowed a red fruit from a magpie, causing her to become pregnant and give birth to a son, Bukuri Yongshun. This son later became the ancestor of the Manchu people, and the story not only tells the magical experience of the three fairies, but also reveals the reverence of the Manchu people for nature and ancestors.

The history of the Manchu people, known in ancient times as the Jurchen, dates back thousands of years. With the establishment of the Qing Dynasty, the Manchus became the ruling ethnic group, and their culture, language, and customs spread widely throughout the country. As one of the important settlements of Manchu, Mudanjiang area has been one of the important birthplaces of Manchu culture since ancient times, and has retained a large number of traditional customs and cultural heritage of Manchu.

According to the 7th population census of China in 2024, there are 140,967 people in China's 9.6 million KM<sup>2</sup> land area, and 10,682,262 Manchu people. The largest number of people live in Liaoning and Hebei, and the rest are scattered in Beijing, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Shandong and other provinces and cities. After 1985, Qingyuan, Huanren, Benxi, Kuandian, Qinglong, Weichang and Kuancheng Manchu Autonomous Counties were established successively [1], with nearly 390 Manchu townships. The Manchu population in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province exceeds 1.3 million, accounting for about 4 percent of the province's total population. In the southeastern region of North China (Mudanjiang City), there are about 99,000 people, accounting for about 6% of the total population of the city. At present, there are still a certain number of Manchu people in Mudanjiang area, who coexist harmoniously with other ethnic groups and form the face of local multi-culture. There are about 80 Manchu natural villages in Mudanjiang area. Although the proportion of Manchu population has changed with the changes of The Times, the influence of Manchu culture in the local area is still far-reaching, and it has become an indispensable part of Mudanjiang culture.

Shamanism is a primitive religion widely believed by the Manchu and their predecessors, such as the northern nomadic fishing and hunting peoples. Saman means "knowing" or "wise". In

shamanism, the medium of communication between man and God is the priest or sorcerer, who is responsible for holding various rituals such as sacrifice, blessing and healing. Shamanic music is an integral element of these ceremonies, creating a sacred and solemn atmosphere through the playing of specific instruments, singing and dancing, in order to achieve the purpose of praying for divine protection and eliminating disasters. It was gradually formed and enriched with the development of shamanism.

Manchu culture is famous for its unique clothing, food, festivals, weddings and funerals. In Mudanjiang area, you can see many Manchu villages that retain their traditional features. Villagers still wear Manchu costumes and celebrate Manchu unique festivals, such as the Gold Award Festival (the birth day of the Manchu) and the Taicang Festival, showing a strong ethnic customs.

## Special characteristics of music form

Shamanic music, as an important part of Manchu shamanic ritual, is the carrier of Manchu people's spiritual belief and cultural inheritance. It combines various art forms such as singing, dancing and instrumental music. Its melody is melodious, the rhythm is bright, has a strong appeal and mystery. Shamanic music not only reflects the Manchu people's reverence and worship for nature, but also reflects their rich imagination and creativity.

The expression of shamanic music can be roughly divided into two parts: sacrificial ceremony and daily life. The origin of Manchu shamanic music can be traced back to the fishing and hunting culture in ancient times. Under the condition of low productivity and poor natural environment, the Manchu ancestors prayed for the gift and protection of nature through shamanic rituals, and shamanic music gradually formed and developed in this process. With the change of history, shamanic music has absorbed elements from other cultures and formed a unique musical style, which has become a bright pearl in the Manchu cultural heritage.

The most typical form of Manchu shamanic music is the musical performance in the sacrificial ceremony. In these ceremonies, the shaman dressed in gorgeous costumes, holding a variety of rituals, dancing along with the rhythm of music, to complete a variety of mysterious and complex ritual movements. Music is closely integrated with dance, singing, chanting and other art forms, and together they create a space full of divine power.

In addition to the formal sacrificial ceremonies, shamanic music also permeated the daily life of the Manchu people. For example, at weddings, funerals, festivals and other occasions, people will invite shamans to perform, in order to pray for God's blessing, exorcism and disaster. Shamanic music on these occasions, although less solemn and mysterious sacrificial ceremonies, but more cheerful and festive.

Manchu shamanic music has various forms, including god song, god dance, drum music and so on. Among them, the god song is mainly chanting, and the lyrics are mostly praising gods, narrating mythological stories or expressing prayers, with melodious melody and free rhythm. God dance is accompanied by singing, through the movement of the limbs to simulate the image of the gods or show the ritual scene, the movement is rough and bold, full of power; Drum music is particularly important in shamanic rituals, as it is seen as a sound that can summon spirits and ward off evil spirits, and its varied rhythm can guide the progress of the ceremony.

In terms of melody and rhythm, the melody of Manchu shamanic music is long, simple and primitive, and has a strong primitive flavor. In the rhythm, there are both steady and powerful drums and melodious bells. These rhythmic elements are interwoven to create a mysterious and solemn atmosphere and artistic color. In addition, grace notes such as glissando and trill are often used in shamanic music to make the melody more vivid and expressive.

### 摇车曲



Example: "Rocking Car Song" is a Manchu shamanic folk song for adults to sleep children in life. Its melody reflects the long and simple Manchu shamanic music.

In terms of Musical Instruments and performance, shamanic music uses a wide variety of Musical Instruments, including percussion instruments such as god drums, waist bells, cymbals, etc., and wind instruments such as God (a long wind instrument dedicated to shamans) and horn horns. In the sacrificial ceremony, shaman played these instruments to simulate the sounds of nature, such as wind, rain, thunder, mountains and rivers, so as to achieve the purpose of communicating with the gods.

In terms of lyrics and singing, the lyrics of shamanic music are mostly ancient words or special words of shamanism, and the contents are mostly related to god worship, ancestor sacrifice, praying for blessings and disasters. When singing, shaman with its unique voice and tone, the emotion and artistic conception of the lyrics to everyone present, so that people's hearts have been purified, emotions have been sublimated.

Manchu shamanic music shows the simplicity and innocence of primitive art with its unique melody, rhythm and way of playing. It not only has an important position in the field of music art, but also provides valuable material and inspiration for modern music creation.

## Manchu shaman heritage and modern fusion

Manchu shamanic music is an important carrier of Manchu history and culture, which records the life customs, religious beliefs and aesthetic pursuit of Manchu ancestors. Through the study of shamanic music, we can have a deeper understanding of the history and culture of Manchu and its ancestors, and add rich content to the diversified and integrated cultural pattern of the Chinese nation. Education plays a vital role in the inheritance of Manchu culture. More and more schools began to incorporate Manchu culture into the curriculum system, through setting up ethnic culture courses, holding cultural lectures and other forms, so that students can understand and understand the essence of Manchu culture. At the same time, some experts and scholars are also committed to the research and inheritance of Manchu culture, and contribute to the

sustainable development of Manchu culture by publishing monographs, publishing papers, and training inheritors.

In the south-eastern region of North China (Mudanjiang City), the inheritance of shamanic music faces many challenges, such as the aging of the inheritors, the loss of interest of the younger generation, and external cultural shock. However, in recent years, with the enhancement of the awareness of intangible cultural heritage protection and the revival of national culture, the inheritance of shamanic music has gradually attracted attention. Some local governments and cultural institutions have begun to take measures to promote the inheritance and development of shamanic music, such as holding shamanic music festivals, training courses, data collection and publishing.

Entering the modern society, Manchu culture still maintains its unique charm and vitality after experiencing the baptism of history and the impact of modernization. In recent years, the Chinese government and all sectors of society have attached great importance to the protection and inheritance of ethnic minority cultures. Manchu culture, as an important part, has been effectively protected and inherited. Cultural and ecological protection areas have been established in many Manchu areas, where traditional Manchu houses, costumes, festivals, music and dances have been systematically sorted out and studied, and the unique charm of Manchu culture has been demonstrated to the public through cultural festivals, exhibitions and performances.

In the Manchu community, shamanic music plays an important role in uniting people and enhancing the sense of national identity. By participating in shamanic sacrificial ceremonies and listening to shamanic music, the Manchu people can feel the wisdom and power of their ancestors, and enhance their pride and sense of belonging to their national culture. While maintaining the tradition, Manchu culture is also actively integrating with modern society. On the one hand, Manchu people still keep some traditional customs in their daily life, such as wearing national costumes and celebrating traditional festivals. On the other hand, they also actively absorb the essence of modern culture, combine traditional elements with modern aesthetics, and create cultural products with national characteristics and in line with the trend of The Times.

In the vast river of Chinese culture, Manchu culture shines immortal light with its unique charm. Among them, as an important part of national culture, Manchu shamanic music not only carries the historical memory, religious belief and aesthetic emotion of the Manchu ancestors, but also connects the past and the present, man and nature, and even mysterious supernatural forces. In order to meet the needs of modern society, Manchu shamanic music is constantly innovating on the basis of inheritance. On the one hand, through the introduction of modern musical elements and performance forms, shamanic music is more in line with contemporary people's aesthetic habits; On the other hand, the use of digital technology, network platform and other means to expand the spread of shamanic music, improve its popularity and influence. In addition, some artists also tried to combine shamanic music with other art forms to create innovative cultural products, which further promoted the innovation and development of shamanic music.

## Conclusions

Manchu shamanic music is a treasure in the Chinese cultural heritage. It crosses the boundaries

of time and space with its unique charm, connects the past and the future, and conveys the common spiritual pursuit and emotional sustenance of human beings. The basic situation of Manchu people and the inheritance and development of shamanic music in Mudanjiang City, a city in the southeast of northern China, have unique research value. In the face of the challenges and opportunities in inheritance, in the context of the new era, we should pay more attention to actively take measures to protect and inherit shamanic music, promote the living inheritance and innovative development of shamanic music, and make this ancient and precious art form glow with new vitality and vitality in the new era to make it more colorful.

In short, Manchu shamanic music is an important part of Manchu culture, its origin and development witness the long history and splendid culture of Manchu people. In today's society, Manchu culture is showing in front of the world with a new attitude, which not only retains the essence of tradition, but also integrates with modern society, showing strong vitality and broad prospects for development.

## References

[1] Guiteng Liu. One of the series studies on "Chinese Shamanic Music Culture" [J]. Yuefu New Sound (Journal of Shenyang Conservatory of Music), 2007.