



# Preservation of Uighur Muqam Art through Teaching Materials and Transmission Strategies in Education in Xinjiang Province, China

Jian Cui <sup>a</sup> & Khomkrich Karin <sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Kantharawichai 44150, Thailand

---

## Abstract

This study investigates the preservation and transmission of Uyghur Muqam art through teaching materials at Xinjiang University, situated in Urumqi, China. The research objective is to investigate the preservation of Uighur Muqam art through teaching materials and transmission strategies in education in Xinjiang Province, China. The study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews and fieldwork as data collection methods. Three expert practitioners, Professors Tumlis Msabayev, Gurigamira Kader, and Zhang Li, adopt distinct teaching approaches, highlighting variations in teaching materials, methods, and structure. While Professor Tumlis Msabayev prioritizes personalized materials, Professor Gurigamira Kader emphasizes foreign teaching resources, and Professor Zhang Li adopts a more structured approach. These findings suggest the need for standardized teaching materials, a student-centered teaching philosophy, enhanced professionalism, and improved material analysis. This research contributes to the discourse on Uyghur Muqam preservation and offers valuable insights for the development of effective teaching strategies.

**Keywords:** Uyghur Muqam art, teaching materials, transmission, Xinjiang University, expert practitioners

---

© 2016 IJCI & the Authors. Published by *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction (IJCI)*. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

"Muqam" stands as a distinctive classical music tradition deeply rooted in the Uyghur culture of Xinjiang, China. This rich musical heritage comprises as many as twelve sets, collectively referred to as the "Twelve Muqams." Remarkably, historical records from the Qing Dynasty (1746) describe the Uyghur music, denoted as "Hui Music," using instruments such as Dab, Nagara, Setar, Labab, Surnah, Harzak, and Haroon—many of which remain in use today, maintaining both their names and shapes. Furthermore, historical accounts document song titles like "Sinapu," "Selekhas," "Tsakhan," and "Juru,"

---

\* Corresponding author Khomkrich Karin  
E-mail address: [khomkrich.k@msu.ac.th](mailto:khomkrich.k@msu.ac.th)

some of which correspond to Muqams still performed today (Yu, 1996; Millward, 1998; Wong, 2012; Wang, 2021).

The artists who contributed to the development of Muqam were born in various regions of Xinjiang, with some traveling extensively to places like India, Egypt, and Iraq (Harris & Dawut, 2002; Millward, 2005; Pawan et al, 2017). For instance, Kesha Gurus, known for "learning astronomy in India, and the Indian people learning music from him," exemplifies the cross-cultural exchange that enriched Muqam. Artist Maiulana Ili, who embarked on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, composed the "Iraqi Gobi" Muqam during his journey, lending the name to this particular Muqam. Eminent musicians like Kedir Khan attracted students from distant cities such as Iraq, Iran, Istanbul, and Kashmir, further fostering cultural exchange and the prosperity of Muqam (Abudouriyimu & Tuxunayi, 2018; Farraj & Shumays, 2019).

While many Muqam song titles from historical records remain in circulation today, new Muqams have been composed over the centuries, continually enriching this musical tradition (Mu, 2018; Anderson & Byler, 2019; Qian, 2021). Xinjiang Uyghur Muqam music differs significantly from traditional Han Chinese music in terms of tuning, meter, rhythm, and instrument combination. The diverse tunings include variations with Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si, and more as ending tones, resulting in multiple scales and pitches. Uyghur Muqam's unique characteristics, including intricate rhythms, beats, and the use of a variety of musical instruments such as Naiy, Balaman, Sunaiy, Sattar, Aizhiq, Bombur, Dutar, Gewap, Karon, Medan (YangQin), and Dap, contribute to its captivating and distinct artistic value (Harris, 2008; Ma, 2023).

The roots of Uyghur Muqam can be traced back to the Uyghur ancestors, who created songs for self-expression while engaging in fishing, hunting, and animal husbandry. Over time, these songs evolved into the 12th-century "Boyawan" group, which laid the foundation for Muqam. A pivotal figure in the formal incorporation of Muqam into Chinese cultural heritage was Amanisa (1533-1567), a Uyghur queen who restructured and standardized Muqam with the help of numerous musicians and Muqam singers (Harris et al., 2013; Howard, 2016). This transformation included replacing difficult foreign Arabic words, ancient Uyghur terms, and court poems in Muqam lyrics with more accessible language, leading to the creation of new Muqams, including the celebrated "Yixileti Ankuz." The Twelve Muqams, as we know them today, gradually took shape in the 19th century when they were condensed into twelve suites, each lasting approximately two hours (Wong, 2013).

Despite being passed down from generation to generation, Muqam faced the threat of extinction due to its vastness, complexity, and the challenges of oral transmission. Recognizing these challenges, this paper aims to investigate the teaching of Uyghur Muqam art at Xinjiang University in Urumqi, Xinjiang, with a particular focus on the

potential lack of standardized teaching materials and their role in the preservation and transmission of this cherished musical tradition.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Evolution and Diversity of Uyghur Muqam Art*

Xinjiang, a vast region in China, is home to the Uyghur people who reside in various oases surrounded by deserts and the Gobi. Uyghur Muqam, a characteristic classical music form, has evolved over time, maintaining its diversity and richness. This music tradition traces its roots back to Western daguerreotypes and has undergone refinement through transitions between the folk, the palace, rich households, famous temples during peaceful times, and the folk during times of war (Dillon, 2003; Rahman, 2005).

In the 16th century, during the Yarkand Khanate's rule in present-day Shache County, Xinjiang, 16 sets of songs and dances were consolidated into what we now know as the Twelve Muqams. These Twelve Muqams have profoundly influenced Uyghur Muqam in other regions of Xinjiang. Various Muqams across Xinjiang, such as "Ili Muqam," "Hami Muqam," "Tulufan Muqam," and "Daglan Muqam," have direct or indirect connections to the Twelve Muqams. They share similarities yet exhibit unique characteristics influenced by their respective regions (Chuen-Fung, 2006; Tursun, 2019; Light, 2023).

Uyghur Muqam is characterized by its trinity of song, dance, and music, preserving the ancient traditions of the Han and Tang daguerreotypes. Unlike these Chinese traditions that lost their dance elements over time, Uyghur Muqam has retained its trinity form, becoming a living cultural artifact. It serves as an encyclopedia reflecting the Uyghur people's customs, spirituality, and cultural fusion, making it a valuable source for studying the development of Uyghur arts and cultural exchanges between East and West (de Tiesenhausen, 2022).

One major challenge in teaching Uyghur Muqam art is the lack of standardized teaching materials in colleges and universities. Teachers often select materials based on personal preferences without considering students' diverse levels and interests. This results in materials that either fail to engage students or hinder their learning. Furthermore, the varying forms of musical score recording and the absence of standardized teaching materials pose challenges to the inheritance and development of Uyghur Muqam art.

The curriculum's success hinges on effective knowledge selection and organization, which extends to curriculum resources and teaching materials. These materials, whether standardized or flexible, play a crucial role in achieving teaching objectives and ensuring smooth teaching activities. The relationship between normality and flexibility in curriculum resources guides their selection and organization, allowing for adaptation to local realities and students' needs.

## *2.2 Research Theory Used*

This study employs a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates elements from musicology, Western music theory, Chinese music theory, and fieldwork research methods. This comprehensive approach allows for a holistic exploration of the preservation and transmission of Uyghur Muqam art through teaching materials in Xinjiang Province, China.

**2.2.1 Musicology:** Musicology provides the foundational framework for understanding the historical and cultural context of Uyghur Muqam art. It encompasses the study of music history, musical traditions, and the socio-cultural factors that have shaped this art form. Musicologists contribute by examining the evolution of Uyghur Muqam, its regional variations, and its significance within Uyghur culture (Nikolić, 2021).

**2.2.2 Western Music Theory:** Western music theory offers a comparative perspective, allowing for the analysis of Uyghur Muqam's unique musical elements, such as tuning, meter, rhythm, and instrument combinations. By drawing parallels and distinctions between Uyghur Muqam and Western music, this theory aids in understanding the specific characteristics that make Uyghur Muqam distinct and captivating (Lochhead, 2015).

**2.2.3 Chinese Music Theory:** Chinese music theory is essential for contextualizing Uyghur Muqam within the broader framework of Chinese music traditions. It helps identify points of convergence and divergence between Uyghur Muqam and other Chinese musical forms, facilitating a deeper understanding of the art's place in Chinese musical heritage (Rifai, 2016).

**2.2.4 Fieldwork Study:** Fieldwork research methods are crucial for collecting primary data, conducting interviews, and observing the practical aspects of Uyghur Muqam transmission in educational settings. Fieldwork allows researchers to engage directly with teachers, students, and practitioners, gaining insights into their experiences, challenges, and preferences related to teaching materials and transmission strategies. Through participant observation and interviews, researchers can uncover valuable qualitative data that inform the study's findings and recommendations (Mulhall, 2003).

## **3. Method**

### *3.1 Location Selection*

This study focused on Xinjiang University in Urumqi, China, as its primary research site. Xinjiang University was deliberately chosen due to its unique status as the only institution offering MA-level education in Uyghur Muqam art. This selection provided a central and pertinent context for investigating the preservation and transmission of Uyghur Muqam art through teaching materials.

### *3.2 Data Collection Timeline*

The research was conducted over a six-month period, commencing with a 3-month document review phase starting in June 2022. Three months of field research and data gathering came after this phase, which allowed for a thorough understanding of the subject.

### *3.3 Data Sources*

The primary sources of information for this study were three distinguished experts in the field of Muqam, each possessing over 50 years of age and boasting more than 30 years of teaching experience.

### *3.4 Informed Consent*

All three experts willingly participated in this research project, providing their full consent for the use of their names and insights in conjunction with this study. Their contributions were instrumental in shedding light on the subject matter.

### *3.5 Data Validation and Analysis*

To ensure data validity and reliability, the study employed the material collection and analysis method, comparative method, and typological analysis. These ways of analyzing data were in line with the research goals, which made it easier to look at the data in a structured way and give a lot of information about how to teach and spread Uyghur Muqam art through materials and methods of transmission.

## **4. Result**

Based on interviews and fieldwork conducted in this study, several common problems have been identified in the teaching of Muqam art transmission:

4.1 Lack of Attention to Curriculum Standards: One prevalent issue in the teaching and transmission of Muqam art is the insufficient focus on curriculum standards. Students often view curriculum standards as merely a means to acquaint themselves with the textbook's knowledge points and the textbook's logical structure. They tend to believe that a superficial understanding of the textbook framework is adequate, neglecting the necessity for a more detailed and in-depth grasp of curriculum standards and textbook content.

4.2 Unclear Establishment of Student-Oriented Teaching Ideology: Many teachers still adhere to a traditional perspective where students are considered mere "faithful executors" of the curriculum. They often overlook their roles as "participants" and "designers" of the

curriculum implementation process. Muqam teachers with limited teaching experience may struggle to effectively engage students in the learning process. There's a tendency to prioritize teaching explicit knowledge while neglecting the exploration of implicit values and tacit knowledge within the materials. It's essential to recognize that teaching involves not only knowledge transfer but also skill development and the cultivation of critical thinking, willpower, and emotional growth. Hence, teachers should thoroughly analyze teaching materials to uncover hidden factors, enabling their consideration in teaching design to promote students' holistic development.

4.3 Neglect of Student Needs Analysis: Many professors have not adequately considered how to align students' existing developmental levels across different stages with the material and enhance knowledge coherence between academic years. The influence of students' life experiences on their learning is often overlooked during material analysis. Ausubel's theory emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when students connect curriculum content with their existing cognitive structures. Scholars emphasize that course content should be meaningful to students and relate to their interests and personal concerns. This underscores the importance of understanding students' needs and inner worlds as crucial curriculum resources.

4.4 Limited Professionalism: Muqam experts from non-academic backgrounds may exhibit passivity in material analysis, primarily due to a lack of professionalism. Professionalism here refers to the mastery of various elements within the educational system, which significantly affects teaching effectiveness and efficiency. To excel as a teacher, one must acquire fundamental teaching skills and professional knowledge while continuously enhancing their professionalism. Preparing standardized teaching materials is a foundational skill and essential competency for teachers, pivotal for effective lesson planning and instructional design.

4.5 Insufficient Knowledge of Material Analysis: Many issues arising during material analysis by Muqam art experts can be attributed to their inadequate understanding of material analysis. Firstly, the concept of textbook analysis is often narrowly defined, primarily as the analysis of textbook content. However, textbook analysis encompasses a broader spectrum, including the analysis of curriculum structure, classroom teaching processes, the teaching environment, and assessment methods. Secondly, teachers often lack a clear understanding of the general steps and basic requirements of textbook analysis, which include assessing the textbook's role and significance, analyzing its content and structure, determining teaching objectives and priorities, exploring methods for skill development and value education, identifying textbook shortcomings, and designing suitable teaching approaches or providing relevant teaching recommendations.

Table 1. The common problems identified in the teaching of Muqam art transmission

<b>Common Problems</b>	<b>Transmission Key</b>
Lack of Attention to Curriculum Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students often consider curriculum standards merely as tools to grasp textbook knowledge superficially</li> <li>- Detailed and in-depth understanding of curriculum standards and textbook content is neglected</li> </ul>
Unclear Establishment of Student-Oriented Teaching Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many teachers view students as "faithful executors" rather than participants and designers of curriculum implementation</li> <li>- Limited teaching experience may hinder effective student engagement</li> <li>- Teaching primarily focuses on explicit knowledge, overlooking exploration of implicit values and tacit knowledge.</li> <li>- The role of teaching should encompass skill development, critical thinking, and emotional growth</li> </ul>
Neglect of Student Needs Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient consideration of students' developmental levels and their alignment with material</li> <li>- Overlooking the influence of students' life experiences on learning</li> <li>- Meaningful learning occurs when curriculum content connects with students' existing cognitive structures</li> <li>- Course content should be relevant to students' interests and concerns</li> </ul>
Limited Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Muqam experts from non-academic backgrounds may lack professionalism, impacting teaching effectiveness</li> <li>- Professionalism reflects mastery of educational elements and is crucial for effective teaching and instructional design.</li> </ul>
Insufficient Knowledge of Material Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inadequate understanding of material analysis concepts, often limited to textbook content analysis</li> <li>- Textbook analysis extends beyond content to include curriculum structure, classroom processes, environment, and assessment</li> <li>- Lack of clarity regarding the general steps and basic requirements of textbook analysis.</li> </ul>

4.6 Teaching Muqam Art at Xinjiang University: Professor Tumlis Msabayev's teaching approach at Xinjiang University predominantly revolves around the creation of personalized teaching materials. He dedicates significant effort to transcribing and recording his extensive repertoire, meticulously documenting these musical pieces. Subsequently, he shares handwritten copies of these recorded materials with his students for their study. A notable aspect of his teaching method is the absence of standardized teaching materials within the classroom. Over an extended period of teaching, variations have emerged in the versions, lyrics, and rhythms of many musical compositions. This lack of uniformity in teaching materials is exemplified in Figure 1, which illustrates Professor Tumlis Msabayev's teaching materials.



Figure 1. Teaching materials employed by Professor Tumlis Msabayev

Professor Gurigamira Kader, an accomplished scholar who received education in Turkey, employs a distinct teaching approach. His emphasis lies in utilizing foreign teaching materials, particularly focusing on the acquisition of Western singing techniques by students. Professor Kader's method often involves granting students the autonomy to explore the art of Muqam on their own. This entails observing live performances and listening to audio recordings, which they then attempt to replicate and eventually master. While some Muqam compositions have been transcribed and supported by notation software, their availability remains limited, posing challenges for students. Figure 2 provides an insight into Professor Gurigamila Kader's teaching materials.

The image displays a musical score for two instruments: PIPA and PIANO. The score is written in 2/4 time and is divided into four systems. The first system starts with a PIPA staff that is mostly empty, followed by a PIANO staff with a bass clef. The tempo is marked 'ANDANTE'. The second system continues the PIANO part with a treble clef. The tempo changes to 'ALLEGRETTO'. The third system shows the PIPA staff with a treble clef and a melodic line, while the PIANO part continues with a bass clef. The fourth system shows both instruments playing together. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 2. Teaching materials employed by Professor Gurigamila Kader's

Among the three experts, Professor Zhang Li, the youngest, adopts a more structured approach to teaching Muqam art. His method involves utilizing his published treatise on Muqam art as a foundational textbook. This approach integrates various music materials and systematically imparts historical and literary aspects to students. However, significant shortcomings persist in the classroom, primarily due to the absence of standardized scores and illustrations. In particular, the inconsistency in musical versions poses challenges to effective communication among students. Figure 3 offers a glimpse into the teaching materials employed by Professor Zhang Li.

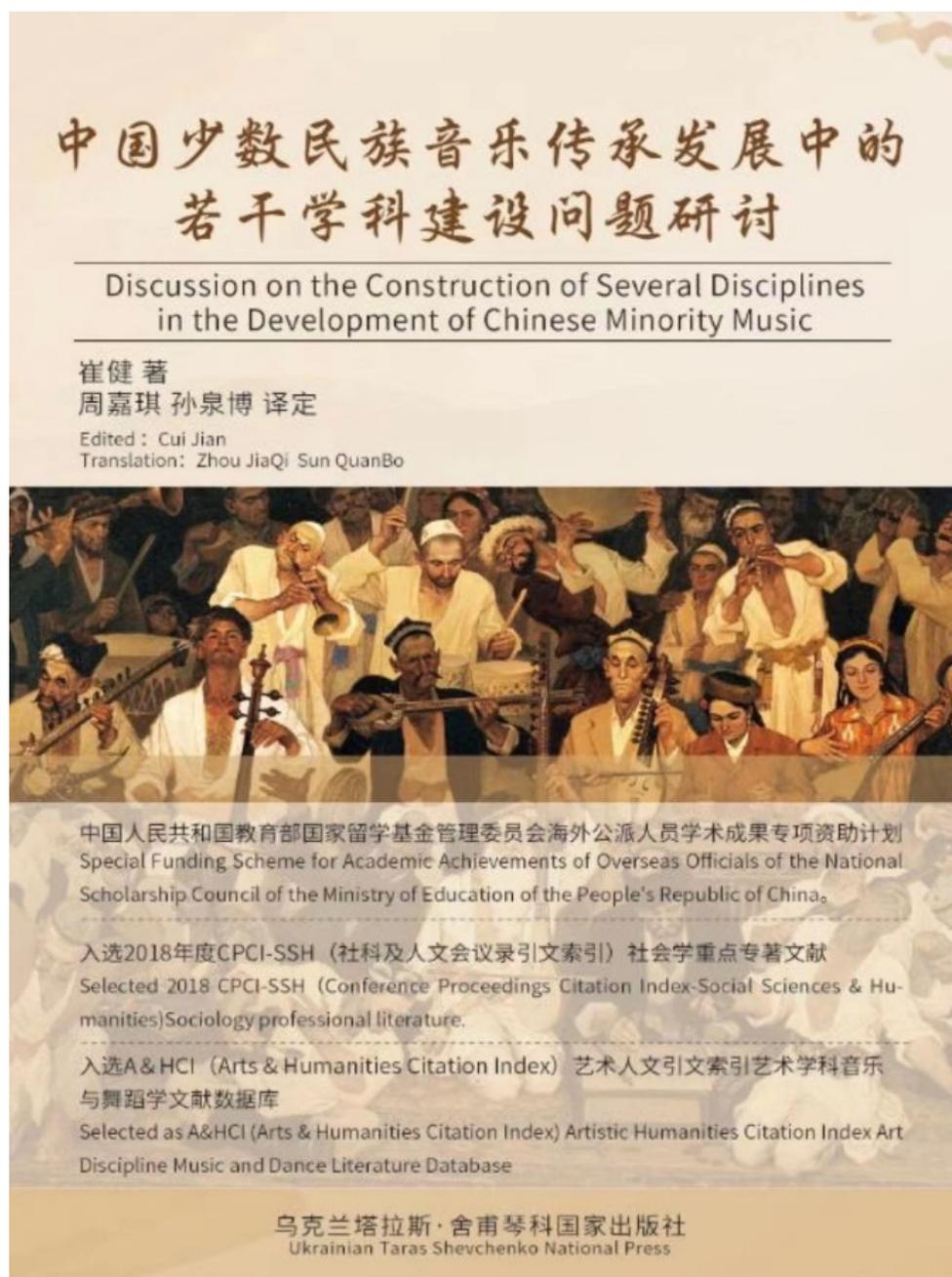


Figure 3. Teaching materials employed by Professor Zhang Li

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The preservation and transmission of Uyghur Muqam art represent a complex and multifaceted challenge within the cultural context of Xinjiang, China. This discussion will

delve into the findings of this study and their alignment with both existing theoretical principles and broader research on Uyghur Muqam art preservation.

The common problems identified in the teaching of Muqam art transmission, such as the lack of attention to curriculum standards, the absence of a student-oriented teaching ideology, and limited professionalism, resonate with previous research. Scholars like Harris and Dawut (2002) and Harris (2008) have explored the challenges of preserving Uyghur music traditions in the face of political and cultural shifts. The findings corroborate the need for a more student-centric approach, as emphasized by theorists like Ausubel, who stress the importance of meaningful learning aligned with students' cognitive structures.

Moreover, the study's examination of teaching materials and methods used by expert practitioner's sheds light on the diversity of approaches employed at Xinjiang University. These variations in teaching materials and philosophies align with the work of Chuen-Fung (2006) and Wong (2013), who have explored the evolving nature of Uyghur music traditions and the adaptation of teaching methods to contemporary contexts. The study's three expert practitioners exemplify the adaptability and fluidity required to transmit Muqam art effectively in a changing educational landscape.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal a pressing need for reform in the teaching of Uyghur Muqam art at Xinjiang University. The challenges identified, including the neglect of curriculum standards, the absence of a student-oriented teaching ideology, and limited professionalism, underscore the urgency of standardizing teaching materials and promoting pedagogical innovation. While the expert practitioners at Xinjiang University exemplify diverse teaching approaches, their methods also highlight the absence of standardized teaching materials and the need for improved material analysis.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to develop and implement standardized teaching materials that align with curriculum standards while allowing for pedagogical flexibility. Furthermore, a paradigm shift towards a more student-centered teaching philosophy is essential, emphasizing not only knowledge transfer but also skill development and holistic growth. Enhancing teacher professionalism and training in material analysis will further strengthen the preservation and transmission of Uyghur Muqam art.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on Uyghur Muqam art preservation and offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers committed to safeguarding this cherished cultural tradition within the diverse tapestry of Xinjiang's heritage.

## References

- Abudouriyimu, R., & Tuxunayi, A. (2018). Study on Uyghur Folk Dastan from the Perspective of “Belt and Road”. In 2nd International Conference on Art Studies: Science, Experience, Education (ICASSEE 2018) (pp. 241-245). Atlantis Press.
- Anderson, A., & Byler, D. (2019). “eating hanness”: Uyghur Musical tradition in a time of re-education. *China Perspectives*, 2019(2019-3), 17-26.
- Chuen-Fung, W. (2006). The Future of the Uyghur Musical Past: Reconstructing Uyghur Muqam in Chinese Central Asia. *Asian Musicology*, (9), 1-34.
- de Tiesenhausen, A. (Ed.). (2022). *The Social Role of Art and Culture in Central Asia*. Routledge.
- Dillon, M. (2003). *Xinjiang: China's Muslim far northwest*. Routledge.
- Farraj, J., & Shumays, S. A. (2019). *Inside Arabic Music: Arabic maqam performance and theory in the 20th century*. Oxford University Press.
- Harris, R. A. (2008). *The making of a musical canon in Chinese Central Asia: the Uyghur Twelve Muqam*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd..
- Harris, R. A., Pease, R., & Tan, S. E. (2013). *Gender in Chinese music (Vol. 4)*. University Rochester Press.
- Harris, R., & Dawut, R. (2002). Mazar festivals of the Uyghurs: music, Islam and the Chinese state. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 11(1), 101-118.
- Howard, K. (Ed.). (2016). *Music as intangible cultural heritage: Policy, ideology, and practice in the preservation of East Asian traditions*. Routledge.
- Light, N. (2023). The Uyghur twelve muqam and the performance of traditional literature. In *The Central Asian World* (pp. 685-699). Routledge.
- Lochhead, J. (2015). *Reconceiving structure in contemporary music: New tools in music theory and analysis (Vol. 2)*. Routledge.
- Ma, Z. (2023). *The Presentation and Adaptation of Xinjiang Musical Elements in Chinese Piano Composition: An Analysis of Three Xinjiang Style Piano Works [Doctoral dissertation]*. The University of Alabama.
- Millward, J. A. (1998). *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*. Stanford University Press.
- Millward, J. A. (2005). Uyghur art music and the ambiguities of Chinese silk roadism in Xinjiang. *The Silk Road Journal*, 3(1), 9-15.
- Mu, Q. (2018). *Experiencing God in Sound: Music and Meaning in Uyghur Sufism [Doctoral dissertation]*. SOAS, University of London.
- Mulhall, A. (2003). In the field: notes on observation in qualitative research. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 41(3), 306-313.
- Nikolić, S. (2021). Five Claims for Global Musicology. *Acta musicologica*, 93(2), 219-235.
- Pawan, S., Dawut, R., & Kurban, S. (2017). Uyghur Meshrep culture and its social function.

- Fourth World Journal, 15(2), 81-90.
- Qian, M. (2021). From Sufism to communism: incarnations of the Uyghur song 'Imam Hüsäynim'. *Central Asian Survey*, 40(1), 76-96.
- Rahman, A. (2005). *Sinicization Beyond the Great Wall: China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*. Troubador Publishing Ltd.
- Rifai, A. (2016). Learning through immersive study: Contextualizing music in the elementary music classroom. *Music Educators Journal*, 103(1), 34-40.
- Tursun, G., Tudaji, R., & Juma, O. (2019). Overview of China's Uyghur Twelve Muqam in the Past 40 Years of Reform and Opening up. In 3rd International Conference on Art Studies: Science, Experience, Education (ICASSE 2019) (pp. 180-182). Atlantis Press.
- Wang, Z. (2021). *Adaptation of Ethnic Chinese Music for Western String Instruments. A Study of Three Works: The Song of the Prairie, Summer Night, and Why Are the Flowers so Red?* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Kansas.
- Wong, C. F. (2012). Reinventing the Central Asian Rawap in modern China: Musical stereotypes, minority modernity, and Uyghur instrumental music. *Asian Music*, 43(1), 34-63.
- Wong, C. F. (2013). Singing muqam in Uyghur pop: minority modernity and popular music in China. *Popular Music and Society*, 36(1), 98-118.
- Yu, S. W. (1996). *The meaning and cultural functions of non-Chinese musics in the eighteenth century Manchu court*. Harvard University.

---

### **Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).