

# The History and Current Situation of Sino-Vietnamese Music Cultural Exchange

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**Abstract:** Vietnam and China have a geographical and cultural relationship, and they are both members of the Asian Han cultural circle. Music cultural exchanges have a long history as well. Through the analysis of the traditional Vietnamese performance art "A dào's Song", which is similar to the "Ca trù" in the Tang Dynasty and shares the same lyrics with it, this paper expounds the "historical product" of Sino-Vietnamese musical exchanges - the "A dào's Song". The monochord is now an intangible cultural heritage in Guangxi, China, and it is also a traditional musical instrument of the Viet people, the main ethnic group in Vietnam. This article will take the monochord as an example to explain the current situation of music cultural exchanges between China and Vietnam.

## 1. History of Sino-Vietnamese Music Cultural Exchanges

### 1.1 Overview

Vietnam lies in the south of China and borders its territory. In 214 BC, the area under the jurisdiction of Xiang County(Xiang County was a county-level administrative region of Qin Dynasty.) in China included Vietnam. After the establishment of the Ding Dynasty in 968 AD, Vietnam officially became independent and became a vassal state of China, no longer under the direct control of China. However, the two countries have always had a continuous relationship, and Vietnam is one of the countries which are closest to China and have the longest cultural exchange. Vietnam has always been deeply influenced by Chinese culture in history. After its independence, the language is still Chinese characters, and it follows the political system of ancient China. Therefore, the historical cultural kinship between China and Vietnam is typical in the Han cultural circle.

The most prominent evidence of the fusion of the two cultures is the language. The main historical stages of the development of Vietnamese characters are: the period of Chinese characters, the period of the coexistence of Chu Nom<sup>1</sup> and Chinese characters, and the period of modern Vietnamese characters. The script of the main ethnic group in Vietnam is called "Chu Nom", and its writing and use are similar to Chinese characters.

According to the existing literature records, the "A dào's Song" is similar to the songs of the Tang Dynasty in China. And most of them use Tang and Song poems as lyrics, which is a typical representative of the products of Sino-Vietnamese music cultural exchanges.

### 1.2 The Relationship between the "A dào's Song" and Han Culture

The "A dào's Song"[1] is also known as "Ca trù", because the lead singer is called "A dào", so it is called "A dào's Song". It is an exquisite solo performance performed by a professional geisha, with two main roles: the lead singer "A dào" and the accompanist "Guàn qiáp". It features that A dào is the lead vocalist, with a "Guàn qiáp", a "Đàn Đáy", a clapboard, and a drum as accompaniment. The "A dào's Song" is used in similar situations and similar to the songs of the Tang Dynasty. According to

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<sup>1</sup> "Chu Nom", also known as "Nam", is a character used by the Jing people, the main ethnic group in Vietnam. And it derives from Chinese character.

the existing research results, in terms of singing, the "A dào's Song" integrates its local poetry with the poetry of the Tang Dynasty in China. In the 14th century, An Nam chí lược was the first historical book to record Vietnamese music. It mentioned that "A dào's Song", like most Chinese music, was spread from top to bottom, and then slowly developed into local folk music. Phong cách hội thảo kiểm tra written by the Vietnamese Ministry of Rites records the situation that A dào ceremonial examination was held on occasions such as blessing and sacrificial ceremonies, which is also very similar to the situation in the music management organization of the ancient Chinese government.

The "A dào's Song" has no special teaching schools in Vietnam, and it has always been passed down by the method of "oral teaching" because of no music score. The "A dào's Song" is still active in Vietnam's art stage. In the meantime, there are still song-making artists in Hanoi that have been passed down from generation to generation. As a result, you can still see live A dào's performances. While they are singing, their mouths are in a straight line along with their abdominal breathing, delicate and long voices as well. It is a pity that the living inheritance of the "A dào's Song" is hardly seen in China at present.

As far as the language of the performance is concerned, Chinese-Vietnamese is the language sung in the performance of the "A dào's Song", and it is also an important feature of this kind of song, which fully shows that it is deeply influenced by Chinese culture. In terms of the subject matter of the "A dào's Song", many choose Tang and Song poems to fill in the lyrics according to the score. Besides the tunes have various forms: four to eight characters, four to six, six to eight as well. The selection of Tang poems in the "A dào's Song" can be divided into three situations. The first is to completely use Tang and Song poems to fill in the lyrics. The second is to directly translate Tang poems with Chu Nom, which has a unique flavor of Vietnam., such as The Beautiful Lady Yang translated in Chu Nom:

The original Chinese poem corresponding to this Chu Nom translation of The Beautiful Lady Yang is:

云想衣裳花想容，春风拂槛露华浓。  
若非群玉山头见，会向瑶台月下逢。

Her face is seen in flower and her dress in cloud,  
A beauty by the rails caressed by vernal breeze.  
If not a fairy queen from Jade-Green Mountains proud,  
She's Goddess of Moon in Crystal Hall one sees.

(Translated by Xu Yuanchong)

The third is that the musicians and geisha fill in the lyrics. On the basis of the original Tang poetry, it is excerpted and filled with the new, and then written into the tune for singing. Such an adaptation method is more suitable for the performer's own singing level, as well as the understanding of the lyrics and own vocal conditions.

And this is also divided into two cases, one is to add a number of Chu Nom after the original Tang poetry.

This "A dào's Song" is composed of Wang Han's Liangzhou Song, with the addition of Chu Nom.

The second is to break up the order of the original poems, and use multiple Tang poems to piece together and add Chu Nom.

The first line of the "A dào's Song" is from Wang Jian's To Du Langzhong On Mid-Autumn Festival Night in the Tang Dynasty; the second, third and fourth lines are from Cen Shen's Mountain House in Spring, and the fifth and sixth lines are Chu Nom added by Vietnamese artists.

Regarding the relationship between the "A dào's Song" and Han culture, the author has sorted out the information provided in Wang Xiaodun's A Bibliography of Vietnamese's Chu Nom Literature, and the list is as follows. There are 29 collections of "A dào's Song", 50 books of Six-eight poems and 4 books of Chinese, belonging to Chinese literary works. Among the 29 books of the "A dào's Song", 27 are hand-copied and 2 are block-printed. Most of the books are from the 19th century, which is characterized by hand-copies and long history.[2]

Table 1 A summary of the art categories.

Category	Chinese Documents	Chu Nom Documents	Chinese Reprints	Totals
Music	2	2		4
Sixty-Eight Poems	4	50		54
Song	2	23	1	26
A đảo's Song		29		29
Opera		3	30	33

## 2. Status Quo of Sino-Vietnamese Music Cultural Exchanges

### 2.1 Overview

Today, although China and Vietnam are two independent countries, their exchanges are still close due to their cultural kinship. The main ethnic group in Vietnam, the Jing people, is also called the Yue people, which is actually the same ethnic group as the Jing people in China. Geographically, Jiangping Town, the southernmost part of Guangxi in China, is an important settlement of the Jing people, which is only separated by a bridge from the north of Vietnam. The two ethnic groups share similar ecological environments, beliefs, customs, and lifestyles, so they share the similar cultural identity.

As the traditional musical instrument of the Jing nationality, the monochord is also one of the representative musical instruments of the main ethnic group in Vietnam, which reflects the music cultural identity between China and Vietnam to some extent. According to ancient records, the shape of the Jing people's monochord is roughly the same: a string connected to a rocker and a tube made of thick bamboo or wood. When playing, you shake the joystick evenly with the left hand, and pluck the strings with the bamboo or fingers with the right hand, which can perform 4 fundamental and ornamental tones. Nowadays, with the development of electronic technology, in order to make the monochord more suitable for solo performance and keep the tone delicate and tactful, the Jing people will install speakers in the resonance box to increase the volume, making the treble clearer and the bass fuller.[3]

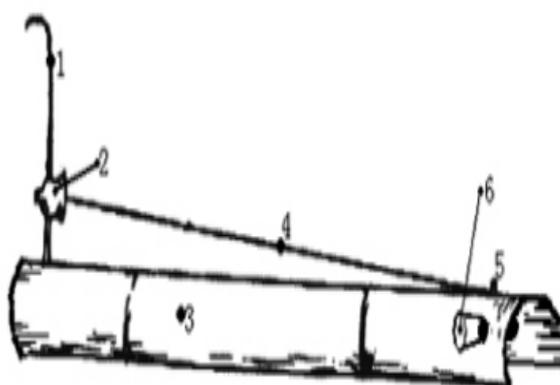


Figure 1 The monochord recorded in ancient books.



Figure 2 The modified monochord.

There has always been controversy about the origin of the monochord, including the theory of Chinese origin and the origin of Vietnam. But no matter in which country, the shape of the early monochord is roughly similar. In addition, although they were born from the same source, they are now developing very differently in these two major countries.

## **2.2 The development status of the Chinese and Vietnamese Monochord**

### **2.2.1 Development Status of the Monochord in China**

"Hat Festival" is a traditional festival of Jing nationality in Guangxi. "Hat" is a transliteration and means "singing". It is a festival for the Jing people to worship the gods. And it was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage project in 2006. The traditional "Hat Festival" ceremony is divided into four stages: "welcome to the gods - sacrifice to the gods - drink ritually in the village - send to the gods". The lyre is mainly used in the third stage or the period during singing. When the guests are seated, the monochord plays the music with the characteristics of the Jing nationality, which is accompanied by Hat Mei (the females of Jing people) who are singing. The lyrics of the local characteristic songs are mostly composed of "Chu Nom", which is accompanied by Hat Ge (the males of Jing people) who play the monochord. The form of performance also features in culture of the Jing nationality.

As a unique national musical instrument of the Jing nationality, the monochord is a cultural symbol of Jing people. Its protection and inheritance are supported by the state, and are included in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region regional intangible cultural heritage list and the third batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists respectively. In recent years, the number of people who learn and play the monochord has been increasing, and the innovative repertoire has become more and more abundant, so that the popular areas are no longer limited to the Jing people inhabited areas in Guangxi.

In terms of inheritance education, the monochord is mainly based on social education, supplemented by school education. Monochord training classes can be seen everywhere in the settlements of the Jing nationality, which creates good conditions for cultivating soloist players. In the field of education, some domestic colleges and universities have set up a major in instrumental music performance of the monochord. In the Jing nationality area of Guangxi, some primary and secondary schools carry out inheritance education on this kind of instrument in the form of characteristic courses. In the aspect of social communication, in the context of the modern Internet, videos related to monochord performance, teaching and production can be easily retrieved through major video websites. The abundant audio and video materials allow its fans to better understand and recognize the monochord, and feel the unique charm of traditional music.

### **2.2.2 The development status of the monochord in Vietnam**

The monochord is a representative national musical instrument of Vietnam. It can be seen in various performances in its territory. Therefore, it has already been an indispensable part of Vietnamese people's life.

The inheritance and education of the Vietnamese monochord basically follows a top-down development path. Since the 1950s, the monochord began to move from the folk to the professional education in schools. After decades of reform and development, a relatively complete teaching system for the solo stringed instrument has been formed, which has not only entered professional art schools, but also integrated into every corner of social music education. The inheritance method has also helped to form a scientific and systematic teaching material and syllabus from the initial "oral teaching", and a strong teaching staff is no exception.[4] Electro-acoustic equipment is now widely used in the production of monochord instruments, and the monochord currently used in Vietnam is generally improved by electronic technology.

### **2.3 Comparison of Chinese and Vietnamese Monochord Music Cultures**

In China, the monochord is a traditional musical instrument of the Jing nationality, which belongs to the regional traditional music culture, and its distribution is basically limited to the settlements of the Jing nationality. In Vietnam, the Jing nationality is the main ethnic group. As the representative musical instrument of the Jing nationality, the monochord belongs to the mainstream culture of the society and has been integrated into the daily life of most Vietnamese people. Now the monochord can be regarded as an important part of Vietnamese national music, and a main carrier to display Vietnamese music culture as well.

In China and Vietnam, the monochord is a rocker-type pan-musical instrument with one string.[5] This unique common feature shows that it is a national musical instrument with same origins but different paths. The melody, rhythm and other elements of the traditional Vietnamese monochord music are mostly suitable for the singing of Guangxi Jing nationality folk songs, but the music materials of the Vietnamese native monochord are basically taken from the daily life of its citizens, among which some Han music characteristics are also incorporated into it. In this way, it gradually developed and formed the monochord music with local characteristics. Therefore, the author thinks that the folk songs of the Jing nationality in Guangxi should be more influenced by the music of the monochord.

### **3. Conclusion**

The geographical and cultural ties between Vietnam and China have established an inseparable connection between the traditional cultures of China and Vietnam. The "A ðào's Song" and the monochord are only the epitome of Sino-Vietnamese cultural exchanges. Through the analysis of the relationship between the "A ðào's Song" and Chinese culture, it can be seen that Vietnamese music culture is deeply influenced by Chinese culture, especially in the aspect of language and writing. By comparing the development status of ethnic musical instruments with same origins but different paths, the monochord, we can know the important influence of Vietnamese music culture on the traditional music culture of Guangxi Jing people who live across the country.

Throughout the history and current situation of music cultural exchanges between China and Vietnam, we are full of confidence and expectations for the cooperation and development prospects of the two countries' national music culture. This tradition of cultural exchange will further enhance regional cultural identity. In the context of the construction of the Belt and Road, it will play a good role in promoting economic and cultural construction on the modern Silk Road.

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