



The Development Process of Qinghai Mongolian Folk Songs Through Anthropological Perspectives

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, cherished expressions of the Mongolian community's cultural identity, are the focal point of this anthropological study. The research aims to investigate the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs through anthropological perspectives.

Materials and Methods: Employed a comprehensive methodology integrating both ethnomusicology and anthropology on in-depth interviews with two key informants renowned for expertise. Additionally, participant observation techniques were applied, carriers of traditional knowledge, and agents fostering cultural continuity within the community.

Results: This study resoundingly emphasizes the critical need to safeguard the exquisite tapestry of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, serving as a melodious gateway into the soul of the Mongolian community. Beyond preservation, the study sparks curiosity for future exploration, beckoning researchers to unravel the regional intricacies, contemporary transformations, and dynamic community-driven conservation strategies that shape the ongoing narrative of these cultural treasures.

Conclusion: This research contributes to the discourse on safeguarding traditional cultural expressions while celebrating the enduring beauty of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs and honoring the rich heritage of the Mongolian people in Qinghai.

Keywords: Mongolian Folk Songs; Anthropological Perspectives; Preservation; Traditional Knowledge; Cultural Continuity

Introduction

Qinghai, a province nestled in the northeastern Tibetan Plateau of China, is home to a rich tapestry of ethnic groups and cultural traditions (Smith Jr, 1995; Collins, 2014; An et al., 2023). Among these diverse cultural expressions, Qinghai Mongolian folk songs stand as a testament to the enduring vitality of the region's unique heritage. These folk songs, characterized by their melodious tunes and poignant lyrics, offer a window into the soul of the Mongolian community in Qinghai, reflecting their history, lifestyle, and collective identity (Pegg, 2001; Wang, 2021). While Qinghai Mongolian folk songs have captivated both scholars and enthusiasts for generations, the intricacies of their development process remain a subject of curiosity and scholarly investigation. To unravel this musical odyssey, we embark on a journey through the lens of anthropology, a discipline uniquely equipped to delve into the sociocultural dimensions of these cherished songs (Cheng, 2005; Dondhup, 2017).

Previous studies have explored the musical traditions of diverse ethnic groups in China (Bohlman, 2002; Seeger, 1992) and the role of music in shaping cultural identity (Stokes, 2017; Merriam, 1964). However, the specific nuances of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs and their adaptation in the face of modernization remain underexplored in the existing literature. Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, deeply rooted in the pastoral life of the Mongolian community, are not only a source of artistic expression but also a mirror reflecting the evolving dynamics of the region. As the world rapidly modernizes and cultural landscapes transform, these folk songs find themselves at an intriguing crossroads, where tradition intermingles with the contemporary. The need to comprehensively understand the multifaceted development of these songs becomes imperative in preserving their cultural significance and legacy (Shi, 2023; Yao & Chaotchamrat, 2023; Qiu et al., 2024).

The intersection of tradition and modernity raises pivotal questions about the persistence and adaptation of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs. What socio-cultural factors have contributed to the





development and evolution of these songs over time? How have changing lifestyles and the shifting landscape of Qinghai impacted the themes, styles, and contexts of these songs? What role does community identity play in shaping and preserving this musical heritage? These questions encapsulate the core of our research problem (Ho, 2018). The central research question guiding this anthropological exploration is: How have Qinghai Mongolian folk songs evolved and adapted within the changing sociocultural landscape of Qinghai, and what anthropological perspectives can help us elucidate their development process?

This study endeavors to offer a comprehensive anthropological understanding of the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, shedding light on their historical roots, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance. By uncovering the intricate interplay of tradition and change, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the preservation and revitalization of traditional cultural expressions in the face of modernization (Jones, 2003; Shi & Nicolas, 2023). Furthermore, this study aims to enrich the existing anthropological literature by offering fresh insights into the role of music in shaping and reflecting the identity of a vibrant ethnic community in Qinghai. Ultimately, this exploration strives to celebrate the enduring beauty and resilience of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs while honoring the rich heritage of the Mongolian people in Qinghai.

Objective

To investigate the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs through anthropological perspectives.

Literature review

The cultural tapestry of Qinghai Province in China is woven with threads of diverse ethnic traditions, each contributing to the vibrant mosaic of this unique region. At the heart of this cultural diversity lie the Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, cherished expressions of the Mongolian community's identity and history. As we embark on an anthropological journey to investigate the development process of these folk songs, it is essential to situate this study within the context of existing literature that has explored similar themes and subjects.

Anthropological Studies on Music and Culture: Anthropological perspectives on music have long been recognized as invaluable tools for understanding the intricate relationship between culture, society, and artistic expression (Merriam, 1964). The works of scholars like Alan P. Merriam, Steven Feld, and Timothy Rice have laid the foundation for anthropological investigations into music's role in preserving, evolving, and reflecting cultural identities (Feld, 1984; Rice, 2003). By adopting an anthropological lens, this research aims to contribute to this growing body of knowledge, specifically in the context of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs.

Traditional Music in a Modern World: The juxtaposition of tradition and modernity is a recurring theme in studies concerning traditional music. The cultural shifts and socioeconomic changes taking place in the area are examples of this tension in Qinghai Mongolian folk songs. Researchers like Philip V. Bohlman and Anthony Seeger have studied how traditional music adapts to and survives in a world that is becoming more and more urbanized (Bohlman, 2002; Seeger, 1992). Our study seeks to build upon this discourse, investigating how Qinghai Mongolian folk songs navigate the contemporary landscape while maintaining their cultural significance.

Mongolian Cultural Heritage in Qinghai: Scholarship focused on the Mongolian cultural heritage in Qinghai provides valuable insights into the broader context of our study. Works such as "Mongolian Ethnic History in Qinghai" by Zhiqiang and Yuan Fang and "The Social and Cultural Life of the Mongols in Qinghai" by Wei Wei shed light on the historical roots, lifestyle, and cultural practices of the Mongolian community in Qinghai (Zhiqiang & Fang, 2014; Wei, 2003). Understanding this historical backdrop is crucial for comprehending the evolution of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs within the socio-cultural milieu of the province.



Music as Cultural Identity: An essential aspect of this literature review is recognizing music's role in shaping and reflecting cultural identity. Studies like Martin Stokes' "Music and the Global Order" emphasize the power of music as a marker of identity, capable of transcending boundaries and articulating the collective spirit of a community (Stokes, 2017). In our exploration of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, we will examine how these songs serve as a repository of cultural identity and heritage for the Mongolian community in Qinghai.

In conclusion, The literature review establishes a comprehensive foundation for our study, highlighting critical gaps that our research seeks to address within the interdisciplinary realm of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and Mongolian cultural heritage studies. While existing anthropological studies, exemplified by the works of Merriam, Feld, and Rice, have delved into the relationship between music and cultural identity, there is a notable scarcity of research applying these perspectives specifically to Qinghai Mongolian folk songs (Merriam, 1964; Feld, 1984; Rice, 2003). Moreover, the literature review underscores the limited exploration of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs within the context of the tension between tradition and modernity, an area extensively covered in studies of traditional music adaptation (Bohlman, 2002; Seeger, 1992). The review reveals the significance of understanding the historical roots and cultural practices of the Mongolian community in Qinghai, emphasizing a gap in the specific exploration of the cultural heritage associated with Qinghai Mongolian folk songs (Zhiqiang & Fang, 2014; Wei, 2003).

Theory Used

Ethnomusicology serves as a pivotal theoretical lens in this study, by leveraging ethnomusicological principles, delves into the intricate interplay of music as a cultural artifact, revealing how these melodies serve as repositories of history, identity, and social practices within the Mongolian community (Joseph, 1990). That captures not just the musical aspects but also the socio-cultural nuances embedded within these folk songs.

Anthropology provides a holistic framework that contextualizes the development of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs within the wider socio-cultural milieu. This theoretical perspective facilitates an exploration of not just the music itself but also the surrounding cultural ecosystem, encompassing traditions, rituals, communal practices, and historical narratives (Nanda & Warms, 2019). Allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how these songs are interwoven with broader cultural dynamics.

Conceptual Framework

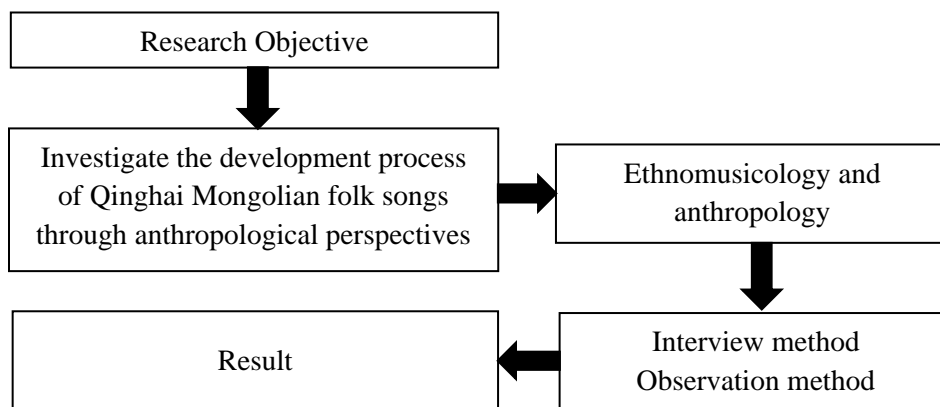


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research site: The selection of Haixi Prefecture in Qinghai Province as the research site holds immense significance for our study of the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs through anthropological perspectives. This region's cultural authenticity, deep historical roots in Mongolian nomadic traditions, ethnic diversity, and accessibility provide a unique opportunity to explore the interplay of different cultural elements and their impact on the evolution of folk songs. Haixi Prefecture is emblematic of Qinghai Mongolian culture, making it representative for drawing broader conclusions about the development of these songs. Furthermore, studying this site allows us to gain valuable insights into the preservation of traditional cultural practices in the face of modernization, while the interdisciplinary approach of anthropology enriches our understanding of the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of folk song development.

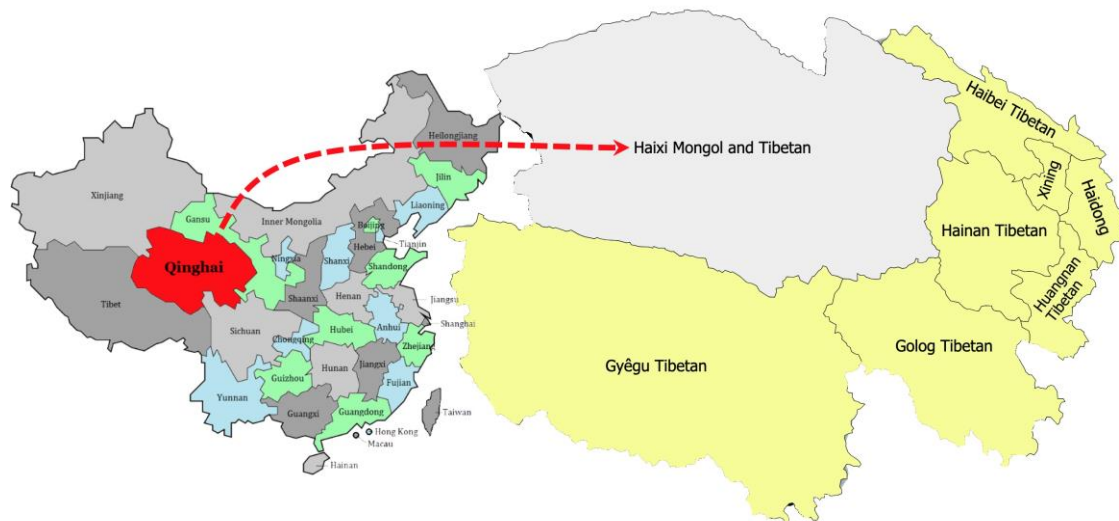


Figure 1 Map of the research site in Haixi City, Qinghai Province

Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), Paintmaps (n.d.)

Key Informants: Selected two key informants who possess invaluable expertise and deep-rooted connections within the local Mongolian community. The first key informant is a respected elder within the community, renowned for their extensive knowledge of the historical narratives, cultural significance, and traditional contexts of these folk songs. Their oral accounts and personal experiences will provide rich insights into the songs' evolution over time. The second key informant is a proficient Mongolian folk singer who has actively participated in the preservation and transmission of these songs. Their musical expertise and firsthand experiences in performing these songs will offer a unique perspective on the artistic aspects and contemporary relevance of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs. Together, these key informants will contribute to a holistic understanding of the songs' development, bridging historical and contemporary perspectives.

Method: This research employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining ethnomusicology and anthropology, to investigate the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs through anthropological perspectives. To achieve this, a set of research tools and methods have been meticulously selected and employed. This section outlines the research tools, their creation and quality, the steps for their use, and the subsequent data analysis process, as shown in Table 1.



Table 1 Research Tools, Creation, Steps for Use, and Data Analysis

Research Tool	Creation	Steps for Use	Data Analysis
Fieldwork Interviews	A structured interview protocol was developed, incorporating both ethnomusicological and anthropological inquiries	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Selection of key informants based on their expertise and involvement within the local Mongolian community2. Conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key informants, capturing their oral narratives and experiences	Thematic content analysis of interview transcripts, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs
Participant Observation	Ethnographic fieldwork involved prolonged engagement and participant observation within the local Mongolian community	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Immersion in community activities, festivals, and gatherings where folk songs are performed2. Participation in cultural events to gain firsthand experience and build rapport with community members	Interpretative analysis of field notes, highlighting cultural practices, social dynamics, and contemporary relevance associated with Qinghai Mongolian folk songs

From Table 1, this comprehensive methodology combines various research tools and approaches to offer a holistic understanding of the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, bridging the realms of ethnomusicology and anthropology.

Results

1. Historical Development of Mongolian Culture within Qinghai

The historical evolution of Mongolian culture within the Qinghai region is a captivating journey through time, providing profound insights into the intricate development process of this vibrant culture. This section delves into the rich historical tapestry of the Qinghai Mongolian community, shedding light on how their unique musical tradition, represented by Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, has been interwoven with the broader historical narrative of the Mongolian people in Qinghai.

1.1 Cultural Resilience and Adaptability: One of the central themes that emerge from this historical exploration is the remarkable resilience and adaptability of the Mongolian community in Qinghai. Through centuries marked by shifting sociopolitical landscapes, including changes in governance, economic structures, and religious influences, the Mongolian people have managed to preserve and celebrate their cultural identity. The enduring presence of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs stands as a testament to their ability to withstand external pressures while maintaining their distinctive cultural heritage.

1.2 A Mirror of Historical Experiences: Qinghai Mongolian folk songs are more than just melodies; they are mirrors reflecting the historical experiences, cultural values, and spiritual connections of the Mongolian community in Qinghai. These songs have not only served as a source of artistic expression but also as a means of communicating the collective memory and wisdom of the community. Through the lyrics and melodies of these songs, one can discern the joys and sorrows, triumphs and hardships, and dreams and aspirations of the Mongolian people throughout their history in Qinghai.

1.3 A Thread Connecting Generations: Beyond their historical significance, Qinghai Mongolian folk songs play a vital role in connecting generations within the Mongolian community. They serve as a bridge between the past, present, and future, ensuring that the cultural legacy of the Mongolian people endures. As these songs are passed down from elders to youth, they perpetuate not only musical traditions





but also a sense of identity and belonging. The continuity of these songs fosters a deep cultural connection that binds the community together.

1.4 Interconnectedness with Broader Mongolian History: The historical evolution of Mongolian culture within Qinghai is intrinsically linked to the broader history of the Mongolian people across East Asia. From their origins in the Mongolian plateau to the era of Genghis Khan's unification, the Mongolian people in Qinghai have shared in the triumphs and tribulations of their fellow Mongols. This shared history has contributed to a sense of solidarity and identity among Mongolian communities, fostering cultural exchanges and mutual support.

In summary, the historical evolution of Mongolian culture within Qinghai is a captivating narrative of cultural resilience, adaptability, and interconnectedness. Through their enduring musical tradition represented by Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, the Mongolian community in Qinghai has not only preserved its cultural heritage but also celebrated its identity in the face of changing times. These songs continue to serve as a melodic testament to the enduring spirit and unity of the Mongolian people in Qinghai, linking the past, present, and future in a harmonious cultural continuum.

2. Significance and Imperatives in the Protection of Qinghai Mongolian Folk Songs

In this section, we delve into the paramount significance of safeguarding Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, emphasizing their intrinsic value as carriers of cultural heritage. We highlight the imperative of protecting and revitalizing this genre in the contemporary context, shedding light on the critical role of anthropological perspectives in understanding their cultural significance and formulating strategies for their preservation and promotion.

2.1 Preserving Cultural Identity: Qinghai Mongolian folk songs serve as a vital conduit for preserving the cultural identity of the Mongolian community in Qinghai. These songs encapsulate centuries of traditions, beliefs, and experiences, providing a direct link to the rich cultural tapestry of the region. As globalization and modernization exert their influence, the preservation of these songs becomes imperative to ensure that the Mongolian identity remains vibrant and intact.

2.2 Transmitting Traditional Knowledge: Within the lyrics and melodies of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs lies a repository of traditional knowledge. These songs convey the wisdom, values, and historical narratives of the Mongolian people. Through generations, they have been a primary means of passing down knowledge about the environment, nomadic practices, and communal life. Protecting these songs is essential to ensure the continuity of this valuable traditional knowledge.

2.3 Fostering Cultural Continuity: Qinghai Mongolian folk songs play a pivotal role in fostering cultural continuity. They create a sense of cohesion within the Mongolian community, strengthening bonds between generations. The act of teaching and learning these songs perpetuates a sense of belonging and shared heritage. The loss of this cultural treasure would disrupt the intergenerational transmission of traditions.

2.4 Enhancing Intercultural Understanding: Beyond their role within the Mongolian community, Qinghai Mongolian folk songs possess the power to enhance intercultural understanding. They serve as bridges for cultural exchange and dialogue between different communities and regions. By protecting and promoting these songs, Qinghai can share its unique cultural heritage with the world, fostering mutual respect and appreciation.

2.5 Anthropological Insights: Anthropological perspectives offer invaluable insights into the cultural significance of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs. They provide a holistic understanding of the songs' role within the social, historical, and cultural context of Qinghai. Anthropological research helps identify how these songs intersect with daily life, rituals, and traditions, offering a comprehensive view of their importance.

2.6 Formulating Preservation Strategies: Recognizing the imperative of safeguarding Qinghai Mongolian folk songs, anthropological insights can guide the formulation of effective preservation and promotion strategies. Anthropologists can work alongside community members and policymakers to develop initiatives that prioritize the documentation, revitalization, and dissemination of these songs. This





collaborative approach ensures that protection efforts align with the needs and aspirations of the Mongolian community.

In summary, the significance of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs extends far beyond their melodic beauty. They are carriers of cultural identity, repositories of traditional knowledge, and agents of cultural continuity. Their protection is not only a matter of preserving the past but also a means of fostering intercultural understanding and promoting a vibrant future. Anthropological perspectives are instrumental in recognizing the multifaceted importance of these songs and formulating strategies to ensure their continued existence in the contemporary world.

3. Prairie Love: An In-Depth Analysis of Haixi Mongolian Folk Song in Qinghai Province

Prairie Love, stands as a captivating emblem of the Haixi Mongolian community's cultural heritage in Qinghai Province, offering a poignant ode to the Mongolian grasslands and the resolute spirit of its herders. This comprehensive exploration delves into the multifaceted attributes of the song and its profound cultural significance. The following table outlines the key characteristics and elements of "Prairie Love," providing a structured view of this lyrical masterpiece, as shown in Figure 2 and Table 2.

PRAIRIE LOVE

China sang

Transcription by QinHan

我 虽 然 不 会 讲 蒙 古 语 但 我 深 深 爱 着 草 原
 wo sui ran bu hui jiang meng gu yu dan wo shen shen ai zhe cao yuan
 我 虽 然 不 穿 着 蒙 古 袍 可 我 爱 喝 飘 香 的 奶 酒
 wo sui ran bu chuan zhe meng gu pao ke wo ai he piao xiang de nai jiu
 我 虽 然 不 敢 骑 草 原 的 骏 马 可 我 爱 听 古 老 的 马 头 琴
 wo sui ran bu gan qi cao yuan de jun ma ke wo ai ting gu lao de ma tou qin
 朋 友 们 朋 友 们 欢 迎 你 来 家 做 客
 peng you men peng you men huan ying ni lai jia zuo ke
 朋 友 们 朋 友 们 欢 迎 你 来 家 做 客
 peng you men peng you men huan ying ni lai jia zuo ke
 朋 友 们 朋 友 们 看 看 我 那 家 乡 的 草 原
 peng you men peng you men kan kan wo na jia xiang de cao yuan
 朋 友 们 朋 友 们 看 看 我 那 家 乡 的 草 原
 peng you men peng you men kan kan wo na jia xiang de cao yuan





Figure 2 Prairie Love: An In-Depth Analysis
 Source: Han Qin, transcription from fieldwork in May 2023

Table 2 Prairie Love: An In-Depth Analysis

Characteristics	Description
Melody Characteristics	Splendid Mongolian folk song from Qinghai, celebrated for its captivating melody and welcoming style that extols the beauty of the grasslands while embracing guests from around the globe. Its melodic tension remains moderate, predominantly showcasing lyrical qualities that enchant listeners
Music Structure	The song, a two-part form, features 16 bars and expresses the songwriter's love for Mongolian grasslands in Qinghai and their fondness for kumi wine. It also showcases their admiration for Mongolian grassland culture, despite their reluctance to ride horses, through the enchanting melodies of the horsehead qin. The song concludes by welcoming distant guests, demonstrating respect and hospitality.
Rhythm and Beat	Adheres to a 4/4 time signature, resulting in a smooth rhythm with minimal fluctuations. Comprising 16 notes, including syncopated elements, the song maintains a steady, subtly light beat throughout its duration.
Lyrics Characteristics	Adopts a lyrical narrative form, characterized by enthusiastic word expression, well-organized language structure, and warm emotions. These collectively convey the songwriter's hospitable and warm-hearted nature.

Discussion

The research presented in this study aimed to investigate the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs through anthropological perspectives. To achieve this, the study employed a multidisciplinary approach that combined elements of ethnomusicology and anthropology. The research was conducted in Haixi Prefecture in Qinghai Province, a region renowned for its cultural authenticity and historical ties to Mongolian nomadic traditions. The key informants, including a respected elder and a proficient Mongolian folk singer, provided valuable insights into the historical roots, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs.

The research findings align with several theoretical principles from the fields of ethnomusicology and anthropology. Firstly, the study's use of anthropological perspectives to understand the development of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs is consistent with the principles of anthropology, which emphasizes the exploration of human societies, cultures, and traditions within their broader social context (Nanda & Warms, 2019). The research method employed, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, reflects the anthropological approach of immersing in the community to gain a holistic understanding of cultural phenomena.

Secondly, the study's incorporation of ethnomusicological principles is evident in the analysis of the musical characteristics of "Prairie Love," a Qinghai Mongolian folk song. Ethnomusicology emphasizes



the examination of music within its cultural and social context (Feld, 1984). The detailed analysis of the song's melody, music structure, rhythm, and lyrics characteristics aligns with the ethnomusicological approach to understanding music as a cultural expression.

The research is also consistent with the theoretical principle of cultural preservation, as discussed in the literature review. Qinghai Mongolian folk songs serve as carriers of cultural heritage, transmitting traditional knowledge, and fostering cultural continuity (Section 2.1). This aligns with the broader anthropological concept of preserving and revitalizing traditional cultural expressions in the face of modernization (Jones, 2003; Shi & Nicolas, 2023).

While the research aligns with theoretical principles in anthropology and ethnomusicology, one potential inconsistency lies in the limited geographical focus on Haixi Prefecture within Qinghai Province. While this region is undoubtedly significant in representing Qinghai Mongolian culture, the broader diversity of Qinghai Province could introduce variations in the development of folk songs that were not fully explored in this study.

Conclusion

This research explores the development of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs through anthropological perspectives. It combines anthropology and ethnomusicology to understand the historical evolution, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance of these songs. The study highlights the resilience and adaptability of the Mongolian community in preserving their cultural identity. Qinghai Mongolian folk songs have been instrumental in communicating historical experiences and fostering cultural continuity, connecting generations. The research emphasizes the importance of protecting and revitalizing these songs to preserve cultural identity and enhance intercultural understanding. The study, primarily focused on Haixi Prefecture, serves as a foundational exploration of the development process of Qinghai Mongolian folk songs. Future research could expand the scope to the broader Qinghai Province.

Recommendation

1. These initiatives should involve collaboration with local organizations, Mongolian community leaders, and government agencies, documenting and archiving the songs, oral histories, and associated cultural practices. Educational programs should be implemented to transmit this knowledge to younger generations. Funding and support from cultural preservation grants, local and national government agencies, and educational institutions can help ensure the songs' long-term preservation and raise awareness among younger generations. Collaborative cultural exchange programs can promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, fostering a sense of belonging among the Mongolian community.

2. Future research on Mongolian folk songs, including regional variations, contemporary adaptations, community-based conservation strategies, the impact of educational initiatives, and collaborative research across Mongolian regions. It suggests exploring regional variations in song styles, themes, and influences, assessing the effectiveness of community-based conservation strategies, and evaluating the impact of educational programs on cultural awareness and identity. The research also suggests fostering collaborative research initiatives to gain a comprehensive understanding of Mongolian culture and its various expressions.

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