



REVIVAL OF ANCIENT FOLKLORE INSTRUMENTS DURING THE YEARS OF UZBEKISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE AND THEIR PLACE IN MODERN ETHNOCULTURE

Ruslan Kudenov Asanovich,

Lecturer, Department of Folklore and Ethnography, Nukus Branch of the Uzbekistan State Institute
of Arts and Culture

ABSTRACT. This scientific article provides a comprehensive analysis of the large-scale reforms carried out during the years of Uzbekistan's independence to restore the national spiritual heritage, with particular focus on the revival of ancient and nearly forgotten folklore musical instruments and the study of their organological, acoustic, and artistic features. The article examines the historical and archaeological roots of Uzbek and Karakalpak national instruments (qobiz, dutor, balaman, shinqobiz, sopol nay, sibizg'a), their role in the art of epic storytelling (baxshi and jiraw performance), and the process of their reconstruction. It provides scientific and pedagogical grounds for integrating these ancient instruments into the modern system of professional arts education (using the example of the Nukus branch of the Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture and children's music and art schools) and for preserving them for future generations.

Keywords: independence, folklore, ethnoculture, organology, reconstruction, qobiz, dutor, balaman, shinqobiz, baxshi, jiraw, Nukus branch, pedagogical integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is not a notion that emerged yesterday or today; it is a great value that has lived and developed together with our people for centuries.¹ From the day a person is born, they grow up and mature within the values, traditions, and material and spiritual heritage of the people to whom they belong. After Uzbekistan gained independence, the attitude of our people toward their history, past, customs, values, and cultural heritage changed fundamentally. The broad use of national customs and traditions in educating members of society, the revival of age-old values, and the shaping of national ideology in the minds of young people through these means became one of the priority tasks of state policy.

In the course of this spiritual renewal, new life was breathed into simple and complex folklore musical instruments that had previously fallen almost entirely out of use in musical performance and had come close to being forgotten. Today, the wide use of our people's ancient instruments — such as the changqobiz, sibizg'a, dombira, and sopol nay — has begun not only in

¹Eshonqulov Jabbor. Folklor ijrochilik san'ati tarixi. Tashkent, 2018, p. 480.



the activities of amateur folklore ensembles, but also in professional academic ensembles and even in popular (estrada) performance.²

By its very nature, the concept of folklore is extremely broad, encompassing oral poetic creativity, traditional music, dance, applied arts, and examples of architecture. The term 'folklore,' proposed by the English scholar William Thoms in 1846 to express the notion of 'the wisdom of the people,'³ is today interpreted in its own particular way within each branch of art. For example, a musician regards folk melodies, a choreographer regards folk dances, and a folklore scholar regards epics and tales as works of folklore.⁴ These synthesizing processes are vividly reflected in the folk musical instruments that give voice to national melodies. Musical instruments are not only a material but also an incomparable spiritual treasure of our people.⁵

The Department of Folklore and Ethnography of the Nukus branch of the Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture serves as the leading scientific and practical center in the region for studying, preserving, and introducing into the modern education system the rich folklore heritage of the area — particularly the ancient traditions of epic storytelling, baxshi and jiraw performance, and traditional instrumental music of the Karakalpak and Uzbek peoples.⁶ One of the most responsible tasks facing the teachers and students of the Nukus branch is to make scientific use of the opportunities granted by independence in order to analyze ancient instruments that are falling into disuse, to restore their forgotten forms, and to raise the younger generation in the spirit of national values.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research devoted to the history of musical instruments, their structure, and the features of their performance has roots reaching far into the past. Uzbek folklore studies and organology developed beginning with the earliest records found in Mahmud Kashgari's famous eleventh-century work *Devonu Lug'otit Turk*.⁷ In this work, Kashgari mentioned the names of musical instruments widely used among medieval Turkic tribes — such as the qobiz, sibizg'a, and karnay — and described their ethno-folkloric characteristics.⁸

The musical treatises of great encyclopedic scholars of the Middle Ages — Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Abu Ali ibn Sina, and Abu Abdullah al-Khorazmi — served as the cornerstone for the

²Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. *Cholg'ushunoslik*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 19.

³Axmedova O. *Folklorshunoslikka kirish*. Tashkent, 2018, p. 102.

⁴Eshonqulov Jabbor. *Folklor ijrochilik san'ati tarixi*. Tashkent, 2018, p. 486.

⁵G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. *Cholg'u ijrochiligi*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 4.

⁶Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. *Muzika tariyxi*. Tashkent, 2024, p. 546.

⁷Eshonqulov Jabbor. *Folklor ijrochilik san'ati tarixi*. Tashkent, 2018, p. 48.

⁸Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. *Muzika tariyxi*. Tashkent, 2024, p. 35.



formation of organology as a science. In his world-famous work *Kitab al-Musiqi al-Kabir*⁹, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, and Darvesh Ali Changi in his own treatises, classified musical instruments and left thorough information on their form, structure, string ratios, tuning, and the acoustics of sound production. Ibn Sina, in particular, in his *Book of Healing*, *Book of Knowledge*, and *Treatise on the Science of Music*, precisely demonstrated the relationship between the length of an instrument's strings and the pitch of the sound produced, as well as how the diameter of a pipe affects sound production in wind instruments. As al-Farabi noted, the formation of musical instruments first arises in practice; their timbral and acoustic qualities take shape and are perfected directly through the process of performance, and only afterward do they become a basis for scientific observation.¹⁰

By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, interest grew in collecting and systematizing the national instruments of Central Asia. August Eichhorn, Viktor Belyaev, and Tamara Vizgo compiled collections of Central Asian musical instruments and developed their earliest scholarly classifications.¹¹ Viktor Belyaev's book *Musical Instruments of Uzbekistan*, published in Moscow in 1933, laid the foundation for the scholarly organological study of Uzbek and Karakalpak national instruments.¹²

During the years of independence, an entirely new period began in Uzbek and Karakalpak folklore studies. As a result of the fundamental research of scholars such as Academician To'ra Mirzayev and Doctors of Philology J. Eshonqulov, Sh. Turdimov, and O. Axmedova, the social and artistic essence of folklore works and traditional performance art was studied from a new scholarly perspective.¹³ Today, new branches of folklore studies — ethnofolkloristics (the study of folk creativity within its ethnographic context), ethnolinguistics, archaeofolkloristics (the study of folklore subjects and instruments found in archaeological materials), and linguofolkloristics — are developing rapidly.¹⁴ This research has created the theoretical and methodological foundations for the revival of ancient folklore instruments.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In determining the revival of ancient folklore instruments and their place in modern ethnoculture, this article employs a number of scientific research methods.

⁹G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. *Cholg'u ijrochiligi*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 367.

¹⁰Matyoqubov Otanazar. *Maqomot*. Tashkent, 2004, p. 272.

¹¹G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. *Cholg'u ijrochiligi*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 8.

¹²Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. *Cholg'ushunoslik*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 352.

¹³Eshonqulov Jabbor. *Folklor ijrochilik san'ati tarixi*. Tashkent, 2018, p. 482.

¹⁴Axmedova O. *Folklorshunoslikka kirish*. Tashkent, 2018, p. 428.



The methodological basis of the research is formed by the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On Education' and government resolutions concerning the preservation and development of national spiritual heritage.¹⁵

The following methods were applied in the course of the research:

1. **Archaeofolkloristic method:** comparative study of musical depictions found on artifacts unearthed during archaeological excavations, ancient wall paintings, and rock-art petroglyphs, alongside folklore texts and the forms of traditional instruments.
2. **Comparative-typological method:** comparative analysis of the structural and functional features of Uzbek and Karakalpak traditional instruments, as well as their common features with the instruments of other Turkic and Eastern peoples (for example, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen).
3. **Ethnographic and field research method:** conducting interviews with folk craftsmen (instrument makers) and epic performers (baxshi and jiraw) active in the Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Khorezm, and Karakalpakstan regions, and directly observing instrument-making technology.¹⁶
4. **Pedagogical analysis and experiment:** analyzing the curricula of the Department of Folklore and Ethnography at the Nukus branch of UzSIAC and of music schools, and evaluating the results of introducing restored ancient instruments into practical lessons.

4.1. Historical and Archaeological Roots, and Restored Instruments

Central Asia, and in particular the territories of Uzbekistan and Karakalpakstan, is one of the most ancient centers of musical culture. The discovery of a bone flute from the Bronze Age, found together with gold and bronze items in a woman's grave in the village of Mo'minobod near Samarkand,¹⁷ the circular tambourine-like images depicted in the rock drawings of Saymalitosh in the Fergana mountain range, and the petroglyphs of Sarmishsoy, prove that the musical culture of our land has a history spanning several thousand years. Ancient wall paintings discovered at Varakhsha, Afrasiyab, Bolaliktepa, and Tuproqqal'a depict musicians playing the ud, chang, qonun, and various wind and percussion instruments.¹⁸

¹⁵Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. Muzika tariyxi. Tashkent, 2024, p. 579.

¹⁶Axmedova O. Folklorshunoslikka kirish. Tashkent, 2018, p. 142.

¹⁷Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. Cholg'ushunoslik. Tashkent, 2015, p. 21.

¹⁸Axmedova O. Folklorshunoslikka kirish. Tashkent, 2018, p. 430.



During the years of independence, extensive practical work was carried out to revive ancient instruments that had long fallen out of use and been forgotten, based on these historical sources and miniature paintings. The many years of research carried out by the Andijan craftsman Abdumalik Madraimov deserve special recognition in this regard. As a result of long research and the study of historical miniatures, the earliest models of six classical instruments dating to the Timurid and Baburid periods were restored. These include such rare instruments as the 'G'ijjaki Boburiy,' 'Qo'shtor,' 'Xushnavo,' 'Dilrabo,' 'Dilnavo,' and 'Meros.'

Each of these restored instruments has its own distinctive acoustic and constructive structure:

Qo'shtor — first made in 1985 in the carved-dutor shape, based on depictions found in miniatures; it was later further improved, with special strings replacing silk strings, giving it a more attractive sound.¹⁹

G'ijjaki Boburiy — a bowed string instrument mentioned by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in his own works, recreated on the basis of archaeofolkloric sources.

Sopol nay (shipillak) and sibizg'a — ancient wind instruments that were widespread for centuries among shepherds and ordinary working people in folk tradition, but which were falling out of use by the end of the last century. Today, the revival of the sibizg'a has come about thanks to the performance traditions of Nodir bobo of Surkhandarya and his children, in particular Abdurashid bobo. Nowadays, it has become a tradition for major state celebrations and Navro'z festivities to open with the enchanting sound of the sibizg'a.²⁰

4.2. The Process of Improving and Reconstructing Instruments

The reconstruction and improvement of musical instruments is carried out with the aim of bringing national performance art to a world level, improving sound quality, and creating new technical possibilities.²¹ Work to improve folk instruments in Uzbekistan on the basis of the twelve-step equal temperament system began in the mid-1930s. Under the leadership of the renowned musicologist A. I. Petrosyants, instrument makers S. Didenko, V. Romanchenko, Usta Usmon Zufarov, and Matyusuf Xarratov, together with composer Yunus Rajabiy, jointly created related families (prima, alto, tenor, bass, and contrabass) of instruments such as the dator, tanbur, Kashgar rubab, and g'ijjak.

¹⁹Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. Cholg'ushunoslik. Tashkent, 2015, p. 40.

²⁰G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. Cholg'u ijrochiligi. Tashkent, 2015, p. 10.

²¹Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. Cholg'ushunoslik. Tashkent, 2015, p. 28.



As a result of this improvement, our national instruments were converted from a diatonic to a chromatic scale. This made it possible to perform complex compositional works and examples of world classical music on national orchestras.

However, during the years of independence, a new and partly critical attitude toward these reconstruction processes also began to form. Some of the improved instruments (for example, the chang-tenor and chang-bass) fell out of use, having lost their true national timbre and characteristics. For this reason, during the years of independence, attention shifted once again toward preserving 'traditional folk instruments' that had retained their natural charm and form among the people for centuries, and toward reviving them in their original state.²²

4.3. The Place of Ancient Instruments in Karakalpak Ethnoculture

In the rich ethnocultural environment of Karakalpakstan, ancient and traditional instruments have long been an inseparable part of folk life. Among them, the oldest and most sacred is the qobiz (qobız).

The qobiz holds deep mythological and philosophical meaning in the ethnoculture of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, particularly the Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz. In Karakalpak legend, the creation of the qobiz is linked to the name of the legendary genius Qorqit ota (Qorqit ata).²³ According to legend, Qorqit ota fled from death and traveled the whole world, but wherever he went he saw people digging graves. He then cut a jujube-tree branch from a wild grove, covered it with camel hide, strung it with a string made from horsehair (qılı), and thus created the first qobiz, from which he drew forth a mournful sound.²⁴ When the qobiz is played, Azrael does not dare to take his soul; the sounds of the qobiz become a symbol of victory over death.

The qobiz is a distinctive two-stringed bowed instrument, the lower half of whose resonator body is covered with hide (Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich, *Muzika tariyxi*, Tashkent, 2024, p. 268). Both of its strings, as well as the hair of its bow, are made from horsehair (jılqı qılı), and it is usually tuned in fourths (Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich, *Muzika tariyxi*, Tashkent, 2024, p. 268). In Karakalpak ethnoculture, the qobiz is used exclusively by jıraw (epic performers) as accompaniment to their guttural singing (goblash) when performing heroic epics (such as 'Sharyar,' 'Alpamis,' and 'Qoblan') (Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich, *Muzika tariyxi*, Tashkent, 2024, p. 267).

²²G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. *Cholg'u ijrochiligi*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 2.

²³Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. *Muzika tariyxi*. Tashkent, 2024, p. 266.

²⁴Selected Musical Works [Muzika shig'armalarin tallaw]. Nukus, 2012, p. 250.



Another widely popular and beloved instrument of the Karakalpak people is the dutor.²⁵ The word dutor comes from Persian and means 'two strings'.²⁶ The distinctive difference between the Uzbek and Karakalpak dutor is that the Uzbek dutor has a longer neck (grif) and silk strings, while the Karakalpak dutor has a shorter neck, with strings made mainly from sheep gut (ishak tar),²⁷ and its neck is inlaid with bone, which is why it is called the 'Ala moynaq' dutor. Dutor performers are divided into two groups: *sázende*, musicians who play instrumental melodies only, and *baqsı*, singers who perform epics and folk songs accompanied by the dutor. Karakalpak *baqshi* schools are divided mainly into three branches — the *Axımbet baqsı*, *Muwsa baqsı*, and *Súyew baqsı* schools — each of which is distinguished by its own manner of epic performance, melodic notation, and ornamentation.

Two other ancient instruments hold a special place in Karakalpak ethnoculture:

5. **Balaman** — an ancient wind instrument made of wood, with eight tone holes, fitted with a reed mouthpiece similar to that of a clarinet or oboe. The *balaman* is used mainly together with the dutor to provide accompaniment (*janapayshı*) in *baqshi* performance, and produces a charming, mellow sound in traditional ethnoculture.
6. **Shinqobiz (shing'obiz / changqobiz)** — a tiny instrument with a steel tongue, played by women and children by placing it between the lips and plucking it with the fingers of the right hand. It has its own ancient melodies, such as 'Qara jorga,' 'Eskek esiw,' and 'Gaz gahqildisi,' which are wordless and performed purely through the vibration of timbre.

5. INTEGRATION INTO MODERN ETHNOCULTURE AND THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

During the years of independence, the task of not merely preserving the ancient folklore instruments that have been revived and safeguarded as museum pieces, but of widely introducing them into modern life, the professional music education system, and concert performance practice, has become a priority.²⁸ Professional music education in the Republic of Uzbekistan is carried out in a number of continuous stages.²⁹ The initial stage of this system consists of children's music and

²⁵In Karakalpak, this instrument is called "duwtar" (Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. *Muzika tariyxi*. Tashkent, 2024, p. 269).

²⁶Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. *Muzika tariyxi*. Tashkent, 2024, p. 562.

²⁷Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. *Cholg'ushunoslik*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 365.

²⁸Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. *Cholg'ushunoslik*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 19.

²⁹G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. *Cholg'u ijrochiligi*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 116.



art schools, followed by specialized boarding schools, colleges of culture, and higher education institutions (conservatories and institutes of art).

The history of training professional personnel in folk instrument-making and traditional performance in Karakalpakstan dates back to the middle of the last century. Institutions such as the No. 1 Children's Music and Art School named after Esjan baqsi Qospolatov — originally founded in 1937 as a vocal-music school and later relocated to the city of Nukus — and the No. 18 Children's Music and Art School in the Ellikqala district, were provided with modern material and technical facilities during the years of independence. Classes in the traditional qobiz, dutor, and Kashgar rubab have been opened at these schools, where hundreds of young people are now learning the secrets of national music.

At the level of higher education, the Department of Folklore and Ethnography, established at the Nukus branch of the Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture, occupies a leading position in this field. The main sources used by students studying at the department are new-generation textbooks and study guides created during the years of independence, including B. Rajapbaev's *Muzika tariyxi* (History of Music),³⁰ O'. Toshmatov and X. Beknazarov's *Cholg'ushunoslik* (Organology),³¹ and Z. Hayitov's *Doston ijrochiligi — Baxshichilik* (Epic Performance / Baxshi Art).³²

Folk instrument ensembles and orchestras play an important role in the development of ethnoculture.³³ The restored ancient instruments (sopol nay, sibizg'a, balaman, and qobiz) are actively used today in the 'Muxalles' dutor ensemble, in the wind and string instrument ensembles of the Esjan baqsi school, and within professional folk instrument orchestras. This ensures that our national music is enriched with a diverse range of timbres and ancient melodies.

6. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the elevation of the revival of spiritual and cultural heritage to the level of state policy during the years of Uzbekistan's independence, great achievements have been made in reviving ancient folklore instruments. The recreation of forgotten instruments from the Timurid and Baburid periods, and the revival of the performance of traditional instruments such as the qobiz,

³⁰Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. *Muzika tariyxi*. Tashkent, 2024, p. 1.

³¹Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. *Cholg'ushunoslik*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 1.

³²Hayitov Zafar. *Doston ijrochiligi* (Baxshichilik). Tashkent, 2026, p. 18.

³³G'ofurov Mirmuhsin. *Cholg'u ijrochiligi*. Tashkent, 2015, p. 7.



dutor, balaman, and shinqobiz, have made it possible to present our national ethnoculture on a global scale.

In order to further develop work in this field and to enhance the scientific and pedagogical potential of the Nukus branch of UzSIAC, the following practical recommendations are proposed:

7. **Regularly organizing ethnographic field expeditions:** Organizing expeditions by the Department of Folklore and Ethnography of the Nukus branch to remote villages of Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Khorezm, and Karakalpakstan, to transcribe into musical notation the rare instruments and performance styles preserved there, and to analyze their visual records.³⁴
8. **Establishing an 'Experimental Organological Laboratory' at the department:** In this laboratory, in cooperation with folk craftsmen, new copies of ancient instruments would be made based on archaeological drawings, and their acoustic potential tested using natural materials (mulberry and apricot wood, camel hide, fish skin, and horsehair).³⁵
9. **Increasing the number of textbooks and notated collections:** Transcribing Karakalpak baqsı and jıraw melodies and qobiz tunes into musical notation and publishing them as textbooks for higher and specialized secondary art education institutions.³⁶
10. **Expanding ethnofolklore groups and ensembles:** Including not only reconstructed instruments but also ancient traditional instruments such as the sopol nay, sibizg'a, balaman, and shinqobiz more widely in the repertoire of professional and amateur folklore ensembles, and promoting them at international festivals (such as 'Boysun Bahori' and the 'International Baxshi Art Festival').

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³⁴Axmedova O. Folklorshunoslikka kirish. Tashkent, 2018, p. 152.

³⁵Toshmatov O'tkir, Beknazarov Xayrulla. Cholg'ushunoslik. Tashkent, 2015, p. 31.

³⁶Rajapbaev Batir Bekimbetovich. Muzika tariyxi. Tashkent, 2024, p. 292.



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