

# Analysis of Buddhism' s Influence on Music Culture of Tang Dynasty

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## Abstract

**In order to more accurately understand the influence of Buddhism on the music culture of Tang dynasty, through interviews conducted by Buddhist temples in the Tang dynasty and literature review, the influence of Buddhism on the music culture of the Tang dynasty is objectively analyzed and summarized in this study. Buddhism has made great contributions to music in Tang dynasty which can be illustrated from the aspects of music foundation, music thought, social status of Buddhism, Buddhist diplomacy and so on. The results show that the Buddhism of Tang dynasty has played a great role in promoting the music culture of the whole Tang dynasty and greatly enriched the music culture of the Tang dynasty. Buddhist music has become an indispensable part of the music culture of the Tang dynasty. This study will help us to understand and think deeply about the Buddhist music characteristics of the Tang dynasty and the music culture characteristics deposited by Buddhist music.**

## Keywords

**Tang dynasty; music; Buddhism; music score; characteristics.**

## 1. Introduction

Buddhist music is the general name of all sound Buddhist things and music related to Buddhism [1]. It belongs to modern nouns. Its music system is so huge that different countries have gradually developed Buddhist music culture with rich and varied significance of the times [2], which is a phenomenon seen by people with horizontal vision today [3]. People inherit such a rich Buddhist music cultural heritage because of the vertical evolution of history. Buddhist philanthropy, wisdom and harmony are all embodied in Buddhist music [4]. Music is used to convey all kinds of Buddhist spiritual language. Without any translation, people all over the world can understand [5]. Only by inheriting and developing together can Buddhist music play a greater role in building a harmonious society, promoting the spirit of Buddhist culture and maintaining the peace of the world [6].

The prosperity of Tang dynasty' s economy and the Qingming dynasty' s politics provides material conditions and foundation for the development of Buddhism in Tang dynasty. Empress Wu Zetian violated the cultural traditions of China for thousands of years and ascended the throne of the emperor, which is also the product of this era [7]. The emergence of Empress Wu Zetian pushes Buddhism to its heyday, and makes Buddhism a de facto state religion [8].

To sum up, through interviews with Buddhist temples in the Tang dynasty and literature review methods, people have a deep understanding of the promotion and development of music in the Tang dynasty by Buddhism in the Tang dynasty. At the same time, it is also known that Buddhism greatly promotes the music culture of the Tang dynasty, and Buddhist music has become an indispensable part of the music culture of the Tang dynasty. This study is helpful for people to deeply understand and think about the characteristics of Buddhist music in Tang dynasty and the music cultural characteristics deposited in it.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Methods and Process

The method of field investigation and analysis is used in this study. Since July 2012, in Foguang Temple, field visits have been carried out many times. The Yankou ceremony and the prayer ceremony of the first month in Foguang Temple are all filmed.

Using the method of individual interviews, the author interviews Master Wansheng, the host of Foguang Temple, in view of the influence of Buddhism on the music of the Tang dynasty.

### 2.2. The fundamental role of Buddhism in music in the early Tang dynasty

In the early Tang dynasty, people were extremely anxious for a stable life, and Buddhism played a very important role in people's minds. Buddhist music naturally became the most widely disseminated and heard music, which greatly improved the development of music in the Sui dynasty, which laid a good foundation for music in the Tang dynasty [9]. The main measures adopted in the late Tang dynasty on the road of music development are as follows. There were special institutions for music in the court, which were mainly used to study music and improve the theoretical knowledge of music [10]. In addition, some people were taught music knowledge, so that a lot of excellent music talents were trained. These talents were the invisible power of music in Tang dynasty. In the Tang dynasty, music institutions were subdivided into left and right teaching halls, and a clear division of labor was adopted [11]. Right teaching halls were mainly good at arranging and singing songs, with emphasis on the development of songs [12]. Left teaching halls studied dancing and created more elegant dancing postures. This meticulous division of labor made the music art develop rapidly.

### 2.3. Buddhist Diplomacy Promotes Music in Tang dynasty

During the Tang dynasty, Buddhist music and cultural exchanges became an important part of the Tang dynasty's diplomacy, which greatly promoted the power holders' promotion of Buddhist music and the development of music in the Tang dynasty [13]. The prosperity of Tang dynasty's economy and the Qingming dynasty's politics provided material conditions and foundation for the development of Buddhism in Tang dynasty [14]. In Tang dynasty, due to the further strengthening of the regime and the integration of various nationalities, together with the love of music by the ruling class, the music culture of all nationalities has been developed unprecedentedly [15]. Music in minority areas converged to Chang'an and merged with Han music, forming a new situation of mutual exchange and development of national music, making the Tang dynasty a political, economic and cultural center, in which the music of various countries was exchanged and developed. Tang scholars have unique opinions on music, among which Bai Juyi's music education thought is the most representative [16]. He not only inherited the traditional Confucian music thought, but also developed on this basis. He put forward the highest level of music aesthetics of "harmony with heaven and earth", thus Buddhism and music became an indispensable part of Tang society.

### 2.4. Buddhist Thought Promotes Music in Tang dynasty

Happiness in Buddhist thought means that Buddhism is a religion that gives people joy. The Buddha's doctrine of compassion is to solve the suffering of all living beings and to give them happiness. It also greatly promotes the rich content of music in the Tang dynasty. Music can give all living beings happiness, so people inherit such a rich cultural heritage of Buddhist music. Buddhist concepts of compassion, wisdom and harmony are all embodied in Buddhist music [17]. Music is used to convey the language of many Buddhist spirits without any translation, which can be understood by people all over the world. Buddhist music plays a greater role in building a harmonious society, promoting the spirit of Buddhist culture and maintaining the peace of the world only by inheriting and developing together.

## 2.5. Buddhist Status Promotes Music in Tang Dynasty

During the Tang dynasty, the majority of the people were very devout to Buddhism, which greatly promoted the development of Buddhist music in society because of its broad mass base [18]. During the more than 200 years of the Tang dynasty, eight emperors, Gaozong, Wuhou, Zhongzong, Suzong, Dezhong, Xianzong, Yizong and Qizong, successively greeted and supported Buddha finger relics. Every greeting was spectacular, the whole court was stirred up and the worships with high rank. The prosperity of Tang dynasty's economy and the Qingming dynasty's politics provided material conditions and foundation for the development of Buddhism in Tang dynasty [19]. The emergence of Empress Wu Zetian pushed Buddhism to its heyday, making Buddhism a de facto national religion [20].

## 3. Results and Discussion

Most of the Buddhist music in Tang dynasty is a one-piece structure, with a tone of A, while folk ditties and popular music are mostly played in C, D and G. The tune of Buddhist tune is six-character tune, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Gongchi spectrum, phonetic name and six-character tone contrast table

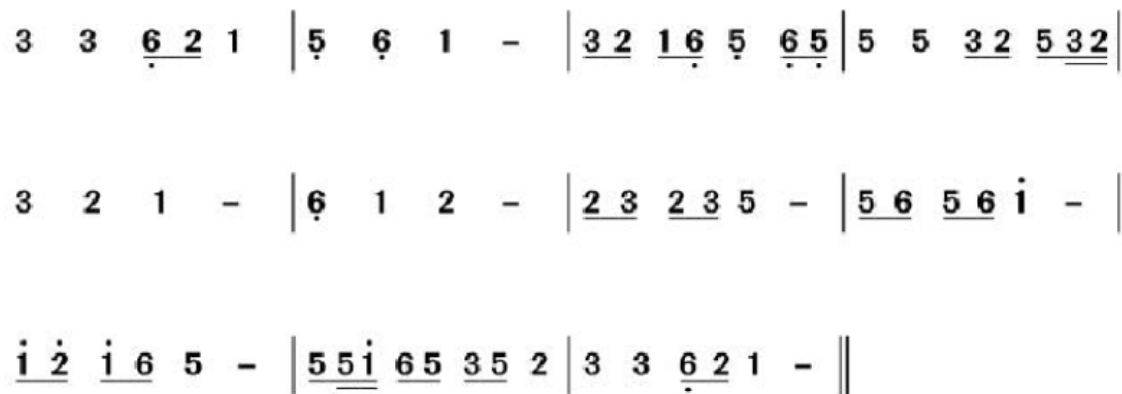
Gongchi spectrum	Six	five	one	up	Chi	Gong	Fan
Phonetic name	A	B	C	<sup>b</sup> D	<sup>b</sup> E	<sup>b</sup> F	<sup>b</sup> G
Six-character tone	do	re	mi	fa	sol	la	si



**Figure 1.** Buddhist instruments and Dang Zi

From figure 1, it can be seen that the Dang Zi is one of the Buddhist instruments. Most of them are made of copper sheets. There are three or four small holes around the Dang Zi, which are attached to a round bracket made of copper. The wooden handle is attached below and beaten with a bamboo mallet. Generally, the left hand holds the Dang Zi, and the right hand holds the mallet, following the beats or rhythmic strikes in Buddhist music. When playing, both hands should be placed at chest level. Foguang Temple uses large pipes with a length of about 28cm, a diameter of about 3cm and a sentinel length of about 4cm. The sound of the big tube is calm, thick and resonant. It can highlight the main melody of the music in the process of playing. Its playing technique is difficult to master.

Unknown tune



**Figure 2.** Buddhist music “anonymous song”

The work of figure 2 is "Anonymous Song", which is an old song handed down from Foguang Temple. Because the specific name of the score is not specified in the biography, it is called "Anonymous Song" by later generations. This song is a four-beat song. It lost some bars or 11 bars when it is first handed down. It does not have the regular rhythm of the music. Maybe this is the original form of the original score.



**Figure 3.** Musical instrument performance in Tang dynasty

From figure 3, it can be seen that the music performance in the Tang dynasty was very grand, with a large number of people and many musical instruments, including pipa, cymbals, pipes, drums, flutes and other instruments. In addition, Buddhism made an important contribution to the prosperity and development of music in the Tang dynasty.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through interviews conducted by Buddhist temples in the Tang dynasty and literature review, the influence of Buddhism on the music culture of the Tang dynasty is objectively analyzed and summarized in this study. The results show that Buddhism greatly promoted the development of music culture in Tang dynasty.

Buddhism contributed a lot to the music of Tang dynasty from the aspects of music foundation, music thought, Buddhist social status, Buddhist diplomacy and so on. To sum up, Buddhism in the Tang dynasty played a great role in promoting the music culture of the whole Tang dynasty and greatly enriched the music culture of the Tang dynasty. Buddhist music has become an indispensable part of the music culture of the Tang Dynasty. This study will help us to understand and think deeply about the contribution of Buddhist music and Buddhism to the

development of music in the Tang dynasty. There are still some deficiencies in this study. Some aspects are not comprehensive and detailed enough, and the follow-up needs continuous improvement.

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