



THE ROLE OF THE FLAY IN CENTRAL ASIAN MUSIC CULTURE

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive and profound analysis of the role of the flute, one of the oldest wind instruments that has existed in the musical culture of Central Asian peoples since ancient times. The main focus of the research is on the three-layered essence of the flute: first, its material-technological aspect, that is, the material of manufacture, structure and acoustic properties; second, its socio-functional aspect, that is, its place in the way of life of the people, in ceremonies, in the art of maqom; third, its spiritual-symbolic aspect, that is, its symbolic meaning in the philosophy of Sufism and classical Eastern literature.

Keywords: flute, wind instrument, national instruments, maqom, philosophy of mysticism, ethnomusicology, traditional performance, breathing technique, musical heritage, national identity.

Introduction

The Central Asian region possesses a centuries-old rich musical culture, in the formation of which various folk musical instruments played a significant role. Throughout history, the peoples living in this region have created unique musical instruments in harmony with their daily lifestyles, labor activities, religious beliefs, and recreational rituals. Among these instruments, the flute holds a special place—it is valued not only as a musical instrument but also as a symbol carrying spiritual and philosophical meaning, an expression of the people's spirit, and a carrier of cultural memory passed down from generation to generation.

The nay is a traditional wind instrument made of reeds, shaped like a tube in length, with volume controlled through its open holes. Despite its outward simplicity, producing a high-quality and rich sound from it requires complex skill and years of practice. It is precisely this combination of simplicity and complexity that distinguishes the flute from other instruments.

The history of the flute goes back thousands of years, and there is a lot of evidence about it in ancient sources, archaeological finds, folklore, as well as in classical Eastern literature. One of the oldest and most famous literary references to the nay is found in the opening verses of the 13th-century great thinker Jalaluddin Rumi's work "Masnavi-i Ma'navi," which indicates that the nay was not only a simple folk instrument but also a subject of high philosophical thought.

The relevance of the topic is explained by several factors. Firstly, in the context of modern globalization processes, the intermingling of cultures around the world is intensifying, and the issue of preserving national identity is becoming increasingly relevant. Secondly, in recent years, great attention has been paid at the state level to the preservation and promotion of national cultural heritage in the Republic of Uzbekistan, which strengthens the need for a deep scientific study of traditional instruments such as the flute. Thirdly, against the backdrop of increasing interest in modern musical trends among the younger generation, there is a risk of

a decline in attention to national instruments, which necessitates the conduct of targeted scientific and promotional work.

The purpose of the article is to comprehensively reveal the role of the flute in Central Asian musical culture from historical, theoretical, and practical perspectives, analyze its functions in different periods, and evaluate its significance in the modern era. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been defined: studying the historical origins of the flute; analyzing its structure and acoustic characteristics; conducting a comparative study of its place in the musical traditions of the region's peoples; revealing its symbolic meaning in Sufi philosophy; and, finally, identifying modern problems and developing recommendations for its preservation.

Theoretical basis. In ethnomusicology, there are several theoretical approaches and classification systems for studying musical instruments. According to the internationally accepted system of instrument classification—the Hornbostel-Sachs system—all musical instruments are divided into four large groups: idiophones (instruments that produce sound by themselves, such as spoons and trumpets), membranophones (instruments that produce sound through a membrane, such as tambourines and drums), chordophones (stringed instruments, such as tanbur and dutar), and aerophones (instruments that produce sound through air vibrations). In this classification, the flute is included in the group of aerophones, specifically the "end-blown flute" according to its structure. A characteristic feature of this series is that the performer blows the air not directly into the open end of the tube, but at a certain angle, as a result of which the air flow creates a vibration inside the tube, creating a characteristic soft and delicate sound.

In theoretical terms, the following main directions (approaches) are distinguished in the comprehensive study of the pipe:

1. **Historical-genetic approach.** This approach is aimed at studying the process of the instrument's origin, its ancient ancestors, and its form that has changed over time. Within this approach, the nay is compared to similar instruments from other regions, such as the Iranian nay (ney), the nay in the Arab world, the Turkish nay, as well as the bansuri in the Indian subcontinent. Through such a comparative analysis, it will be possible to observe processes such as ancient cultural and trade ties between regions and the exchange of musical traditions through the Great Silk Road.

2. **Structural-acoustic approach.** This approach examines the physical structure of the instrument, the material used, its dimensions, the arrangement of holes, and their impact on sound quality, range, and timbre. This approach is of great importance for the scientific substantiation of performance practice and the art of instrument making.

3. **Functional-cultural approach.** This approach is aimed at analyzing the functions of the flute in the life of society - that is, its role in ceremonies, weddings, labor processes, religious and secular practices. Here, the instrument is studied not as an isolated "art object," but as an integral part of social life and an expression of social relations.

4. **Symbolic-philosophical approach.** This approach examines the interpretation of the flute as a symbol of the human soul, divine love, and separation in Sufi literature, particularly in the works of Jalaluddin Rumi. According to this approach, the mournful and deep sound of the flute is associated with the reed being separated from its root—"the reed bed," that is, from its homeland. After the reed is cut, its interior is dug, and the holes are drilled, it transforms into

a tube—a process interpreted as a profound metaphor for the human soul's separation from the divine source, its birth into the world, and its desire to return to it. The "cry" of the flute—its musical sound—is actually perceived as an expression of separation and longing.

5. Executive-pedagogical approach. This approach focuses on studying flute playing techniques, breathing styles, and the mechanisms of knowledge and skill transmission from generation to generation through master-apprentice traditions. This approach serves as an important theoretical basis for improving the methodology of practical education.

The combination of these five approaches allows for a deep and comprehensive study of the flute not only as a musical but also as a complex cultural and philosophical phenomenon. It is precisely this comprehensive approach that forms the methodological basis of this study.

Discussion. In the musical culture of the peoples of Central Asia—Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Uyghur, and others—the nay appears in various forms and under various names. In different regions of the region, this instrument is called "nay," "gagey nay," "qamish nay," but the basic structure and principle of performance remain similar. This situation testifies to the continuity of cultural and musical ties that have existed between the peoples of the region since ancient times.

Formation and structure. The traditional flute is made from a special type of dry reed, which typically grows along riverbanks and lakes and is cut after reaching a certain level of maturity. After the reed is cut, it is dried for a certain period, then the inside is cleaned and five or six holes are made in it. The placement and size of the holes determine the instrument's pitch and range. Some craftsmen reinforce one end of the pipe with a metal ring, which prevents the reed from cracking and ensures the instrument's long-term durability. In the modern era, some performers also utilize wood or metal flutes, yet the traditional reed flute remains the most valued due to its natural and warm sound.

Performance technique and breathing style. Playing the flute requires complex skill, as the performer must place their lips at a specific angle to the tip of the flute and blow the air in a precise direction. Mastering this technique requires years of practice. One of the most complex aspects of flute performance is the "circular breathing" technique, where the performer manages to breathe through the nose through the air reserve stored in the oral cavity without stopping the blowing. This technique allows for the creation of a continuous, relentless melody, which is especially important when performing long and seemingly unfinished maqom melodies.

Its place in the art of maqom. In the art of the maqom of the Uzbek and Tajik peoples, the nay is an important ensemble instrument. In large musical cycles consisting of six parts, such as Shashmaqom, the nay is played in harmony with other traditional instruments—tanbur, doira, ğijjak, and dutar. In this case, the soft and deep sound of the flute is a delicate accompaniment to the vocal parts, further enhancing the spiritual depth of the song text. Among maqom performers, musicians who mastered the flute were held in high regard, as playing this instrument requires not only technical skill but also profound artistic taste and spiritual preparation.

Role in rituals and customs. In folk practice, the nay is often played at weddings, festivities, and national holidays, where its cheerful and lively melodies further enliven the overall festive atmosphere. At the same time, in some regions, it is noted that the flute is also played at mourning ceremonies, which is explained by the natural sad and deep tone in its voice. Thus,

the flute is a unique instrument capable of expressing joy and sorrow, wedding and mourning—both poles of human life.

Reflection in Sufi literature. The spiritual meaning of the nay is expressed deeply and vividly, especially in Persian-Tajik and Turkic mystical poetry. In this literature, the nay is often interpreted through the image of a "divided reed" as a human soul separated from the divine homeland. According to such a symbolic interpretation, a reed cut from a reed bed goes through several stages before it turns into a flute—it is cut, dug in, holes are made, and only then does it acquire the ability to "moan," that is, to create music. This process is interpreted as a symbol of the human spirit reaching perfection through trials. Such a symbolic interpretation turned the flute into not only a musical but also a religious and philosophical symbol, transforming it from a simple folk instrument into a high spiritual theme.

Comparative aspects among regional peoples. In Tajik musical traditions, the nay has a distinct local style, particularly in the Badakhshan region, where it is widely utilized in regional folklore melodies. In Turkmen music culture, the nay is often performed in harmony with the performance of the bakhshi. There are similar wind instruments among the Kyrgyz and Uyghur peoples, which can be interpreted as part of a common Turkic-Islamic musical tradition. At the same time, each nation introduced its own melody and style to flute performance in accordance with its national mentality, natural and geographical conditions, and historical destiny, which is a vivid example of the cultural diversity of the region.

State in the modern era. Today, the nay has found its place in Uzbek pop and modern national music, actively used in concert programs, national theater performances, and musical accompaniment for movies and TV series. Some modern composers are creating new cross-genre works by blending the sound of the flute with electronic music. At the same time, some specialists are expressing concern about the declining number of young performers learning to play the flute, which indicates the need to revive the traditional teacher-apprentice system, strengthen flute departments in music schools, and conduct targeted work to popularize this instrument.

Result. The results of the conducted research allowed for the formulation of the following main conclusions:

Firstly, the nay is a multifaceted instrument with a long and rich history in the musical culture of the peoples of Central Asia. Its history goes back thousands of years, and during this time, it has occupied a stable place in the musical practice of various peoples of the region.

Secondly, the socio-cultural functions of the flute are very diverse and have not only an entertainment-festive but also a deep spiritual-ceremonial character. It has the ability to simultaneously be an expression of joy at weddings and funerals, and a companion of sorrow during mourning ceremonies—this indicates that the flute's sound palette is incredibly rich and capable of reflecting various facets of human experiences.

Thirdly, although there is a significant commonality in flute performance among the peoples of the region—Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and Uyghur (this commonality is explained by ancient cultural and trade ties and a common historical destiny), each nation has preserved its national identity, local melodic styles, and performance traditions. This situation demonstrates the richness of regional musical culture, manifested in the harmony of unity and diversity.

Fourthly, the symbolic interpretation of the flute in Sufi philosophy, particularly the image of the "separated reed" in the works of Jalaluddin Rumi, transformed this instrument from a simple musical instrument into a high spiritual and philosophical symbol. This circumstance proves that the flute can be an object of study not only from the perspective of musicology but also from the perspective of literary criticism and philosophy.

Fifthly, in the modern era, the flute has not lost its significance; on the contrary, it is harmonizing with modern musical genres and acquiring new creative opportunities. At the same time, a downward trend in interest in playing the flute among the younger generation has been identified, necessitating institutional approaches to the preservation and teaching of the flute to the younger generation, particularly the strengthening of the music education system.

In conclusion, the flute is an integral and unique part of the musical culture of the peoples of Central Asia, which for centuries has lived not only as a musical instrument but also as a symbol of the people's psyche, philosophical worldview, and spiritual values. Its role in the art of maqom, folk ceremonies, and Sufi literature clearly proves the multi-layered, complex cultural significance of this instrument. Using the example of a flute, we can see how a simple piece of reeds has become a high expression of the people's spirit, philosophical thinking, and artistic skill over many centuries.

In modern conditions, preserving this unique heritage, its deep scientific study, and its correct, systematic transmission to the younger generation is one of the important conditions for ensuring the continuity of our national culture. In this regard, the following practical recommendations can be proposed:

- Expansion and modernization of special educational programs teaching the art of the flute in music schools and colleges;
- Develop state and public programs that support the traditional mentor-apprentice system;
- Regular organization of festivals, competitions, and concert programs promoting flute performance;
- Encouraging research work, including dissertations and monographs dedicated to the history and theory of the flute;
- Documenting the art of the nay using digital technologies and presenting it to the general public, particularly foreign audiences;
- Involve modern composers in creating new works featuring the flute, thereby ensuring the modern vitality of the instrument.

The implementation of these recommendations will ensure that the art of the nay will remain an active and respected part of the musical culture of the peoples of Central Asia, particularly the Uzbek people, in the future.

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