

Analysis of Artistic Characteristics and Contributing Factors to the Performance Style of Hami Ghijak Inheritors

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Abstract:

Known as Yizhou in ancient times, Hami served as a critical node along the Silk Road and a vital hub for cultural exchange between the Central Plains and the Western Regions. Its unique geopolitical environment fostered the development of Hami Muqam, a distinctive art form integrating song, music, and dance. Among its instrumental components, the Hami Aijieke (a bowed string instrument) stands out as the primary accompaniment instrument. Not only is it a representative local instrument of Hami, Xinjiang, but it also carries profound regional cultural significance. This study focuses on six representative inheritors of the Hami Aijieke, examining a typical excerpt—"Dilwikejian" from the "Ulughedur Muqam". From the perspective of these inheritors, we analyze musical scores, waveform diagrams, and tempo variation graphs to explore both common features and individual differences in their performances. The dialectical unity of these "similarities" and "variations" not only reflects the preservation of the core cultural essence of Hami Aijieke music but also demonstrates the unique artistic expressions of individual inheritors, offering practical insights for the living transmission of traditional ethnic instrumental music.

Keywords:

Hami Aijieke, Inheritors, "Dilwikejian", Performance Style

1. Introduction

To delve into the artistic charm and inheritance practices of the Hami Aijieke, this study initiated multiple in-depth interviews with its performers and inheritors since March 2024, focusing on aspects such as performance techniques and instrument craftsmanship to obtain firsthand research materials. However, field investigations revealed that the same piece, when interpreted by different inheritors, consistently exhibited improvisational treatments reflecting individual artistic understanding. This characteristic provides a critical opportunity to explore the underlying mechanisms of performance style variations. Concurrently, significant disparities were observed among inheritors regarding instrument usage: some preferred the 11-string variant, while others adhered to the 9-string type, with distinct contrasts in material choices (iron, copper, or wood). A review of existing research highlights that scholarly

attention to the Hami Aijieke has predominantly centered on ontological dimensions, such as historical origins, structural analysis, timbre and range description, and performance techniques. Yet, few studies have adopted the perspective of inheritors to compare the “similarities and differences” in interpretations of the same piece across different practitioners.

This gap raises a series of thought-provoking questions: Are variations in instrument selection linked to their cultural-ecological environments? To what extent do differences in inheritance models (e.g., familial versus master-apprentice transmission), evolving social contexts, family influences, and individual learning experiences shape their performance styles?

2. The Inheritance Entities of the Hami Aijieke

The Hami Aijieke is a gem among the traditional bowed string instruments of the Uyghur people in the Hami region. The continuity of its vitality relies on the collaborative efforts of diverse inheritance entities. These range from the dedication of individual inheritors to the innovative practices of the Hami Song and Dance Troupe, and from the systematic preservation efforts of the Hami Muqam Inheritance Center to the spontaneous participation of local communities. Together, these forces form a cohesive network safeguarding the legacy of the Hami Aijieke.

Firstly, as the most direct and vibrant bearers of this craft, inheritors integrate the instrument's craftsmanship and performance techniques into their daily lives, perpetuating them through traditional oral transmission. For instance, Kahar Halik, a representative instrument-making inheritor, mentored his apprentice Aizezi Yibulayin through oral teaching—guiding him from identifying wood materials to independently crafting instruments—thus fully passing down over 20 processes, including material selection, tube crafting, and string tightening. Meanwhile, representative performer inheritors like Aisaiti Mohetaer trained over 600 folk artists between 1991 and 2007 and are locally recognized by communities and experts as the only inheritors capable of performing the complete Hami Muqam repertoire. Secondly, the Hami Song and Dance Troupe has enhanced public awareness and promotion of the arts city-wide by organizing artistic seminars and actively participating in national and regional cultural performances and exchanges, facilitating extensive external cultural dialogue. Thirdly, since its establishment, the Hami Muqam Inheritance Center has conducted visits and distributed questionnaires to Hami Muqam artists across the region. After comprehensively documenting their profiles, the center provides subsidies categorized by inheritance level: national, autonomous regional, and municipal. Additionally, the center has become a cradle for nurturing Hami Muqamqis (master performers). Through multifaceted efforts and support, it established training workshops inviting outstanding Muqamqis from various local associations to teach here. [1] Lastly, the local Uyghur community in Hami integrates the Hami Aijieke as an indispensable element of festive celebrations and family gatherings, where its melodies carry collective emotional memories. The younger generation further innovates inheritance methods—sharing performances via short videos and experimenting with fusion into popular music—ensuring the ancient instrument's voice endures in contemporary life. Thus, though these entities play distinct roles, they collectively sustain the Hami Aijieke: inheritors maintain technical foundations, the troupe stimulates artistic vitality, the center provides institutional support, and the community cultivates cultural soil. It is this multi-stakeholder synergy that allows this ethnic treasure to

retain its vitality through changing times, serving as a cultural messenger bridging past and present.

In light of the aforementioned practices of these inheritance entities in skill development and cultural dissemination, this study visited the Hami Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Television, and Tourism, the Hami Publicity Department, and relevant personnel including Mr. Abudurexiti Wayiti, Director of the Hami Muqam Inheritance Center, to efficiently and accurately identify local Hami Aijeke inheritors with exceptional performance skills, hoping to obtain relevant clues to support the research. However, due to practical constraints such as the advanced age of some inheritors which made them unsuitable for interviews, the Director of the Hami Muqam Inheritance Center ultimately provided contact information for six inheritors to facilitate data collection through interviews. They are as follows:

Aisaiti Mohetaer, National Representative Inheritor of Hami Muqam;

Aimaiti Supi, Autonomous Regional Representative Inheritor;

Abulizi Yiming, First-Batch Municipal Representative Inheritor;

Aximu Wushouer, Fourth-Batch Municipal Representative Inheritor;

Amaiti Kaheer, Municipal Inheritor;

Yibulayimu Yahefu, Municipal Inheritor.

3. Comparison of Performance Styles of Dilwikejiang by Hami Aijeke Inheritors

The Ulughedur Muqam comprises eleven short sections. In Hami, it is not only an essential musical element for major celebrations but also frequently performed at important occasions such as weddings, reflecting its high practical value and profound cultural significance. It carries the emotional and life memories of the local community. Among these sections, Dilwikejiang is a duple-meter piece with dance-like characteristics. Compared to the free-rhythm Sanxu (prelude) of the first section, its rhythmic patterns are clearer and accents relatively regular. The performance differences among the six inheritors are primarily manifested in pitch selection, bowing techniques, ornamentation, and tempo control. Due to significant variations in pitch choices, there are also notable differences in notation. Therefore, the analysis of this section focuses on the first 20 measures. The following discussion explores the commonalities and distinctions in the six inheritors' interpretations of Dilwikejiang.

3.1. Presentation of Notational Characteristics by Different Inheritors

In this musical segment, Aisaiti Mohetaer incorporates a brief prelude at the beginning. The theme enters with a weak beat (anacrusis), and a fourth-interval leap ornament is added in the second measure, echoing the melody in the 18th measure (see circled section in Example 1). This is followed by a brief pause on the D note in the fourth measure for emphasis. In subsequent passages, he further embellishes the original score with second and third-interval decorations, creating a passionate and exuberant performance atmosphere.



Example 1. Measures 1-20 of "Dilwikejiang"[2]

Aimaiti Supi employed glissando bowing techniques in performing the theme, incorporating more ascending and descending second intervals in pitch. Ornamental notes with up-bow and down-bow movements were added in dense note passages such as measures 3 and 5, resulting in a subtle and fluid overall performance character. Aximu Wushouer did not directly present a clear thematic passage at the beginning but instead entered after performing another melodic segment. This segment is inferred to correspond to measures 18-19 of the notated score (see bracketed section in Example 1), resembling the approach of Aisaiti Mohetaer. Additionally, his opening extensively employed ornamental figures based on the original score, making the thematic presentation in this version clearer. Amaiti Kaheer's performance was relatively compact, slightly shorter in duration than the notated version. An ascending third ornamental figure was added in the second measure to enrich the musical imagery (see boxed section in Example 1), with frequent use of small leaps and tremolos, creating significant divergence from the original score. Abulizi Yiming emphasized the second measure with an ascending ornamental motif (see boxed section in Example 1). Measures 3-4 were handled with descending glissando bowing to lead into a pause after the rest. His performance is characterized by frequent use of portamento and legato bowing in passages featuring sixteenth notes. Yibulayimu Yahefu similarly applied ornamental glissando between notes D and E in the second measure, closely resembling Abulizi Yiming's approach. Additionally, in the fourth measure, he employed pauses and repeated the same note on D, emphasizing breaks and breaths.

3.2. Presentation of Audio Acoustic Characteristics by Different Inheritors

As a chordophone, the sound source of the Hami Aijieke is generated by bow-string friction vibrations. The force and speed of the right hand's bowing affect the amplitude, while the left hand's finger positions on the strings determine pitch, and force control influences tonal consistency. These factors collectively impact the performance outcome. Below, Adobe Audition and Vmus.net software are employed to comprehensively analyze the waveforms and tempo variation graphs, revealing the commonalities and differences in the first 20 measures of Dilwikejiang as performed by the six inheritors.

Aisaiti Mohetaer's waveform exhibits sharp and dense amplitude variations, with extensive use of vibrato and relatively distinct bowing techniques in his interpretation. In the tempo variation graph, the peak value in the fourth measure reaches

approximately 55.5 BPM, while the trough in the fifth measure drops to around 52 BPM, indicating overall stable tempo maintenance (Figure 1).

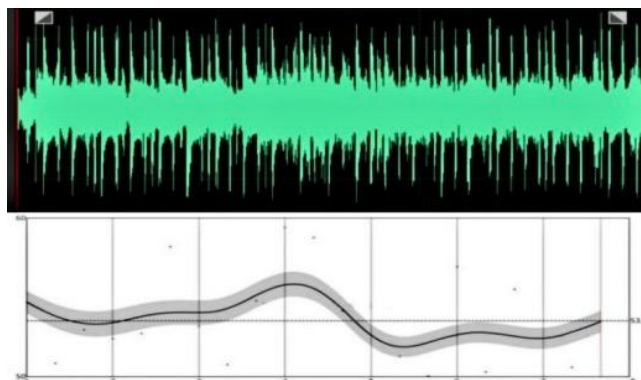


Figure 1. Waveform and tempo variation graph of Aisaiti Mohetaer's performance of the first 20 measures of "Dilwikejiang".

Aimaiti Supi's waveform displays gentle vertical amplitude variations with loudness maintained below -15 dB, reflecting the subtlety of his dynamic control. Additionally, the waveform, though fine in detail, shows regular amplitude fluctuations at certain frequencies, indicating the inheritor's frequent use of glissando and vibrato techniques. The tempo variation exhibits a gradual slowing curve: the first measure reaches a peak of approximately 78.5 BPM, while by the end of the seventh measure, it drops to a trough of 68.5 BPM. This pattern demonstrates both an overall slowing treatment trend and reveals the inheritor's characteristically brisk performance style (Figure 2).

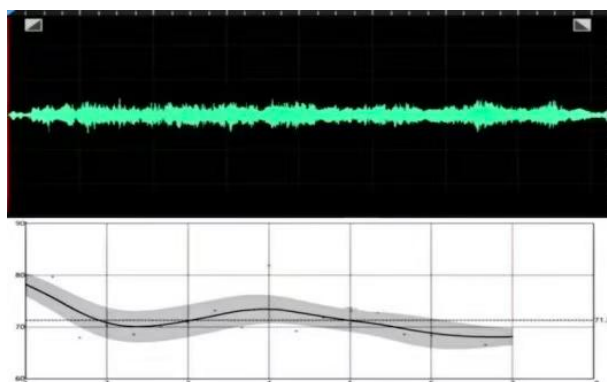


Figure 2. Waveform and tempo variation graph of Aimaiti Supi's performance of the first 20 measures of "Dilwikejiang".

Aximu Wushouer's waveform shows overall large amplitude variations, with a maximum loudness of approximately -3 dB. Combined with the tempo variation graph, it is evident that the amplitude is more significant in the first section, where the tempo rapidly decreases from a peak of 95 BPM to a trough of about 84 BPM in the second measure. This indicates the use of strong and extensive vibrato and ornamentation in this passage, along with a freely gradual slowing of tempo. In the latter section, both loudness range and amplitude diminish, suggesting reduced vibrato and ornamentation. Simultaneously, measures 4-6 exhibit an upward trend in tempo, reflecting a brighter timbre, lighter dynamics, and a gradual acceleration in the latter phrase (Figure 3).

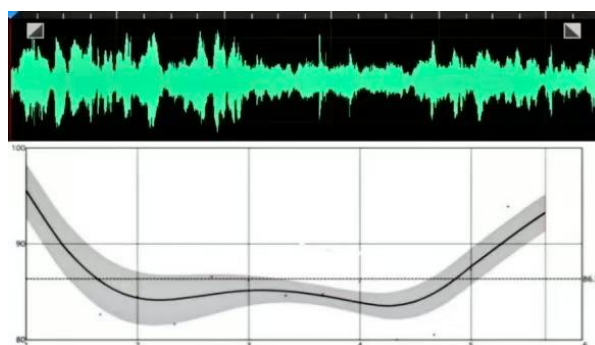


Figure 3. Waveform and tempo variation graph of Aximu Wushouer's performance of the first 20 measures of "Dilwikejiang".

Amaiti Kaheer's waveform exhibits relatively low overall loudness, with stronger amplitude in the middle section that gradually diminishes and shows softer fluctuations toward the latter two-thirds of the passage. Combined with the tempo variation graph, the tempo sharply decreases from a peak of 95 BPM to 84 BPM, clearly demonstrating an olive-shaped dynamic envelope in his phrasing. Ornamentation and vibrato are added between phrases, while the ending tempo drops to its trough accompanied by subtle vibrato, resulting in a gentle and crisp phrase conclusion (Figure 4).

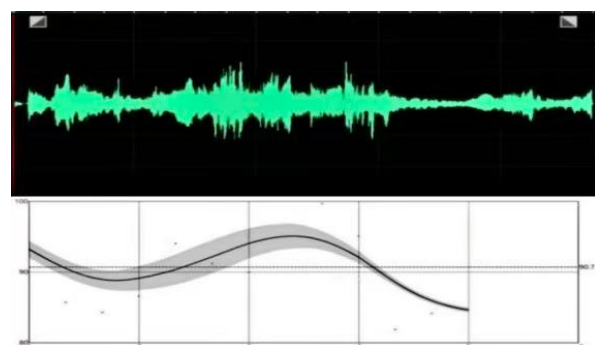


Figure 4. Waveform and tempo variation graph of Amaiti Kaheer's performance of the first 20 measures of "Dilwikejiang".

Abulizi Yiming's waveform also exhibits relatively low overall loudness, with moderate amplitude variations but dense loudness fluctuations. He creates sonic contrast through extensive vibrato and emphasizes pitch using techniques such as descending glissando and legato bowing. In the tempo variation graph, the tempo gradually rises to a peak of 85.5 BPM in measures 2-5, then sharply drops to a trough of 70 BPM in measures 4-5. At this point, the waveform amplitude reaches -3 dB, fully demonstrating the performance's immense tension (Figure 5).

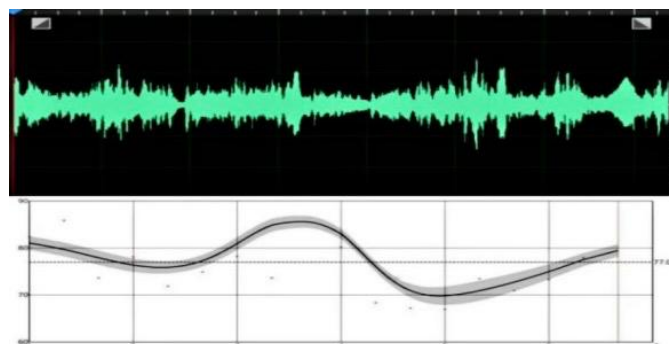


Figure 5. Waveform and tempo variation graph of Abulizi Yiming's performance of the first 20 measures of "Dilwikejiang".

Yibulayimu Yahefu's waveform exhibits relatively high overall loudness, concentrated between approximately -3 to -9 dB, with numerous moderate amplitude fluctuations. This indicates his bright dynamic treatment and frequent use of moderately-ranged vibrato in interpreting the melody and note repetitions. The tempo variation graph shows a gradually accelerating envelope curve: the first measure reaches a trough of 37 BPM, while the fourth measure peaks at about 42 BPM. The overall tempo variation is balanced and clearly defined (Figure 6).

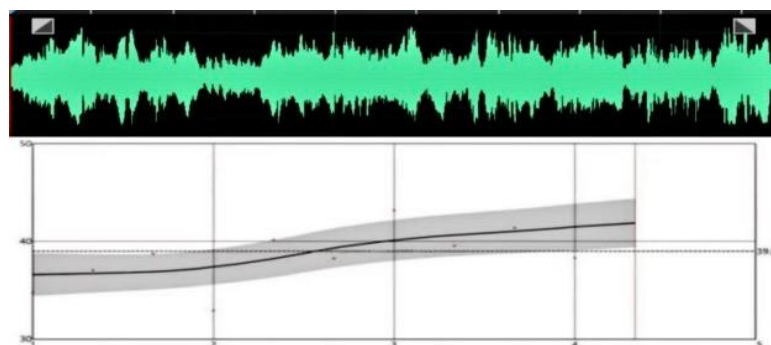


Figure 6. Waveform and tempo variation graph of Yibulayimu Yahefu's performance of the first 20 measures of "Dilwikejiang".

In summary, the performance approaches and interpretive techniques of the six inheritors exhibit both commonalities and differences. Notational analysis reveals that similarities and variations in their performances are manifested in aspects such as tempo choices, placement of ornamentation, treatment of sustained notes with or without note repetitions, and pitch selection, highlighting strong personal improvisational styles. The waveform and tempo variation graphs further corroborate these nuanced distinctions and parallels. For instance, the waveforms of Aisaiti Mohetaer, Aximu Wushouer, and Yibulayimu Yahefu suggest a bold, forward-driving melodic direction with unrestrained expression; whereas the performances of Amaiti Kaheer, Aimaiti Supi, and Abulizi Yiming are comparatively gentler. Thus, beyond the factors evident in the notation, differences in interpreting the same excerpt also arise from elements such as dynamic and loudness planning, tempo variation range and peak/trough positioning, sonic contrast, vibrato extent, and dynamic envelope treatment. Moreover, the waveform and tempo variation graphs visually elucidate the scope and layering of tempo fluctuations, as well as the inherent flexibility and tension in the melody, thereby clearly illustrating both the shared traits and individual distinctions among the inheritors.

4. Analysis of the Causes of "Similarities" and "Differences" in the Performance Versions of Hami Aijieke Inheritors

As a representative bowed string instrument in the Hami region, the Hami Aijieke carries the cultural memory and emotional expression of the local people. The same piece, when performed by different inheritors, exhibits commonalities due to shared musical cultural backgrounds, while also revealing rich diversity stemming from individual interpretations and performance habits. Through the analysis of musical notation, waveform graphs, and tempo variation graphs, the similarities and differences in the performances of the six inheritors can be deeply explored. This not only aids in understanding the characteristics of Hami Aijieke performance art but also reveals the inherent patterns of the inheritance and development of Hami's musical culture.

4.1. “Differences” in Performance

In the nuanced details of the notation, various inheritors demonstrate distinct approaches to ornamentation in Hami Aijieke performance. Taking the second measure of Dilwikejiang as an example, although four inheritors employed ornamental techniques, their specific methods differed: Aisaiti Mohetaer utilized an ascending fourth-interval leap, Amaiti Kaheer adopted an ascending third-interval ornament, while Abulizi Yiming and Yibulayimu Yahefu opted for subtle glissando. These variations not only reflect the personal performance styles of the inheritors but also reveal their diverse interpretations of the piece’s emotional expression, highlighting their individualized musical aesthetics.

Regarding tempo management, the waveform and tempo variation graphs illustrate unique characteristics in dynamics and tempo handling among the six inheritors. Notably, Amaiti Kaheer’s interpretation stands out: he employed an olive-shaped dynamic envelope for phrasing, with tempo fluctuations transitioning from slow to fast and then returning, complemented by delicate vibrato at the conclusion to create a soft and clean phrase ending. The coordination between vibrato frequency and bow speed resulted frequent sound wave fluctuations, visually reflecting the inner restlessness and gradual accumulation of power conveyed through the music. Evidently, these variations in dynamics and tempo endow the same piece with distinct emotional tension and interpretation across different performances.

4.2. “Similarities” in Performance

From the perspective of notated records, although different inheritors exhibit variations in details when performing the same piece, most adhere to the fundamental melodic framework. This can be attributed to the Hami Aijieke’s role as an iconic symbol of local musical culture, which has developed relatively fixed melodic patterns through long-term oral transmission. For instance, Aisaiti Mohetaer, Aximu Wushouer, and Amaiti Kaheer, while performing excerpts of Dilwikejiang, both follow the original score and incorporate their own improvisational treatments, demonstrating a balance of respect for tradition and innovation. Furthermore, the performances of the six inheritors show common patterns in waveform and tempo variation graphs, specifically a return trajectory from slow—passionate—slow, though differences in amplitude arise due to variations in bowing techniques and vibrato intensity. Through musical analysis, it is evident that different inheritors maintain a high degree of consistency in their treatment of basic rhythmic patterns when performing Dilwikejiang. For example, both Aisaiti Mohetaer and Yibulayimu Yahefu emphasize the D note in the fourth measure with a brief pause, indicating that both experienced senior inheritors and younger performers accurately grasp these rhythmic characteristics, thereby conveying the unique rhythmic sensibility of Hami music.

4.3. Intrinsic Reasons for Commonalities and Differences

Field research interviews reveal that the commonalities and differences in the performing styles of the inheritors stem from the following factors:

Firstly, the profound influence of the traditional music inheritance system. Hami Aijieke music is primarily transmitted through familial and master-apprentice lineages. While this approach provides inheritors with relatively fixed musical knowledge and performance techniques, different inheritance methods also introduce subtle variations.

For instance, Aimaiti Supi was influenced by his family. developed a unique performance style by inheriting the craftsmanship of his elders and integrating personal innovative practices. Yibulayimu Yahefu, on the other hand, blended the emotional depth of family heritage with the technical proficiency acquired through formal training, forming his distinct interpretive approach. Moreover, as these inheritors rely not on written scores but on oral transmission or learning via recordings and television, they naturally incorporate personal understandings into their performances, resulting in distinctive techniques that highlight differences in inheritance lineages and learning environments.

Secondly, socio-cultural changes have profoundly shaped the performance styles of the Hami Aijieke. During periods of frequent cultural exchanges, inheritors gained more exposure to other musical traditions, leading to innovations that inject modern vitality into traditional music. For example, Aximu Wushouer's participation in the Handan Wind Music Festival provided a platform not only for technical exchanges with other inheritors, enhancing the expressive power of the Hami Aijieke, but also accentuating the performance differences among various inheritors. Furthermore, inheritors emphasized in interviews that they prioritize the cultural connotations of traditional music during performances—adhering to traditional styles and techniques while integrating music with Hami's folk customs, history, and festive culture. It is precisely this respect for tradition and expression of culture that endows the interpretations of different inheritors with distinct common characteristics in terms of artistic expression and cultural connotations.

Thirdly, at the individual level, each inheritor's musical talent, learning capacity, and artistic pursuits vary, contributing to their unique performance styles. Those with exceptional talent often exhibit personal characteristic through keen perception and creativity. For instance, inheritors like Amaiti Kaheer and Yibulayimu Yahefu stated in interviews that they pursue innovation by actively exploring new musical elements and forms, integrating modern concepts and techniques into their performances to steer Hami Aijieke music toward new developmental directions.

Thus, ontological research extends beyond musical morphology itself to encompass the perceptions, behaviors, and performative characteristics of the musicians. The analysis of the six Hami Aijieke inheritors' performance styles reveals a confluence of factors: while they share commonalities in adhering to traditional melodies, rhythms, and cultural connotations, differences arise in ornamentation, tempo management, and stylistic innovation. These intertwined elements propel the inheritance and evolution of Hami Aijieke music, allowing the instrument to maintain traditional distinctiveness while continuously absorbing contemporary influences, thereby resonating with current cultural contexts.

5. Conclusions

As a recording carrier of musical works, music scores not only embody the original intentions of composers but also provide a basic framework for performance practice. However, when performers transform scores into actual sound, they often engage in a complex and subtle interaction with the scores—this not only involves the application of performance techniques but also embodies the in-depth integration of culture, art, and personal expression. Nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis of the music score examples, waveform graphs, and tempo variation graphs of the six Hami Aijieke inheritors shows that all of them break through the static constraints of the scores in

unique ways during their performances, fully demonstrating the essential characteristics of improvisation. It is evident that while music scores lay the basic framework for Hami Aijieke performances, the improvisation and personal expression in actual performances endow this traditional instrument with vivid vitality and unique charm. Naturally, this phenomenon is not exclusive to the Hami Aijieke; it is widely present in many musical forms, thereby promoting the continuous development of musical culture through inheritance and innovation and enabling it to maintain vitality amid the changes of the times.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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