

# The fusion of Nei Mongol music and pop music -- A case study of Nine Treasures

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**Abstract.** With the dissemination and development of diversified pop music, Chinese traditional music has been skillfully fused with it. Music creators combine Nei Mongol traditional music elements with pop music elements, or integrate pop music elements into traditional Mongolian songs, enabling Mongolian music to introduce new ideas and step onto the international stage constantly. Taking the Nine Treasures as an example, a folk metal band singing in Mongolian, this paper studies the creation and adaptation of its music. This paper analyzes how it combines pop music elements such as heavy metal with traditional Inner Mongolian ethnic music, taking two songs, Namindalai and Tes River's Hymn, as examples, to explore the integration of Nei Mongol music and pop music.

**Keywords:** Nine Treasures, Nei Mongol music and pop music.

## 1. Introduction

Located in the north of China, Nei Mongol is known as the People on Horseback. The lifestyle of traditional nomads and the unique geographical environment of the northern region have created the unique musical characteristics of NeiMongol. It is characterized by a unique vocal technique. Such as a long tune, which is characterized by a long melodic breath, and lyric fluency. At the same time, there is a unique Mongolian sound method khoomei[1]. Khoomei is a guttural singing style, which is characterized by harmonic overtones and guttural sounds. It can produce multiple tones at the same time. [2] The commonly used Musical Instruments of the Mongolian people are the Morin khuur, Kopuz, Topshur, Hujia, Xinglong Sheng and flute. In the process of ethnic development in Nei Mongol, nomadic herdsman created a large number of songs based on daily life, love, nature and heroic deeds, which were preserved and developed through oral transmissions, such as *Sing the Praises Bagomal*, *Holy Lord Genghis Khan* and *Little Yellow Horse* [3]. With the founding of the People's Republic of China, the social transformation and the formation of new social thoughts and ideologies, the traditional lifestyle of herdsman has undergone major changes, and the traditional life customs and entertainment modes have been diluted or even replaced by new social norms and behavior modes. The disappearance of various sacrifices and rituals and the simplification of customary activities have made the long-tune singing activities that depend on them disappear or become alienated. The increasing cultural exchanges between Mongolian and Han nationalities and other nationalities have produced a new musical art genre. Adapted from the melody of Mongolian folk songs, *Grassland Song of Praise* and *Pastoral Song*, with a long and soothing melody and unique structure, quickly spread in China, and also promoted Mongolian songs to the whole country, making grassland music popular throughout the country. By the 1980s, with the in-depth development of reform and opening up, China's economy and society had undergone tremendous changes, and various popular cultures emerged endlessly. Chinese folk music also changes and develops accordingly. Nei Mongol music combines its folk music, other folk music, and foreign songs, and adds popular elements. The guitar in *Wind in the Countryside* makes Nei Mongol music show a trend of diversified development. Until the end of the 1990s, the emergence of grassland musicians led to the modern style of grassland music. They tried to integrate the traditional folk music of the Mongolian people with popular music, creating modern music with strong charm and unique national characteristics. For example, Tenger's *Paradise* is typical of Mongolian long-tone music. *Paradise* is a simple four-sentence structure with a melodious melody and free beat, which is chanted repeatedly with the accompaniment of a modern electro-acoustic band. The performance of the morin khuur

shows the vastness of the vast grassland against the backdrop of the blue sky and white clouds. Tenger's husky voice makes the Mongolian long-tune show its endless artistic life in a new form. In the late 1990s, Mongolian music began to go to the world, attracting the attention of music lovers and the Western world [4]. In the 21st century, the music of Nei Mongol absorbed the elements of rock, jazz, rap and other diversified foreign popular music, combining folk singing and popular singing methods, which are both classical and fashionable, and opened a new era of popular folk music. Classic folk song elements are constantly adapted, covered, and perfectly harmonious combined with electronic music, giving people reverie and shock. Hanggai Band, Nine Treasures and other folk instruments and cultural elements into metal music, recognized by music fans, and set foot on the international stage.

This paper takes Nine Treasures as an example, through the analysis of its composition and adaptation of the music, to explore its music creation characteristics and innovation.

## **2. Introduction of the Nine Treasures**

### **2.1. Introduction and experience of the Nine Treasures members**

Nine Treasures was formed in 2011 and was the only folk metal band singing in Mongolian at the time. The main members of the band are vocalist/guitarist Askhan Avagchuud, morin khuur player Chao Ke, bassist Ao Rui, drummer Ding Kai, and plucked Strings player Saina. [5]

At the beginning of the band in Beijing live house performance, and had a good response. Nine Treasures released the album *Arvan Ald Guulin Honshoor* in 2012. The album debuted at the top of the Chinese rock charts and rose to the top three within a week. It was rated 4.5 points by Metal Apocalyptica. [6] In 2013, they released the album *Nine Treasures*, which gained wider recognition and won the WACKEN METAL BATTLE in China, and went to Germany to participate in the WACKEN OPEN AIR show, which finished second in the world. After the show, they became the most popular young band of the time. In 2014, the band made their first southern tour and participated in music festivals in China. In early 2015, the band released the EP *Gallopig White Horse* and toured China in more than 30 cities. In the same year, the band toured Europe for the first time, including Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Latvia, Hungary, etc. In 2016, Nine Treasures released a new album *LingYan* and filmed the music video of the song in Mongolia. In the same year, they performed a domestic tour of 43 cities in half a year, starting from Beijing and ending in Hulunbuir League, and carried out the second European tour. They participated in large-scale music festivals such as Woodstock and MetalDays in Europe, and at the end of the same year, they gave a large-scale performance in Beijing Candy Tango for 1000+ people. In 2017, Nine Treasures won the Golden Spining Top Award at the Przystanek Woodstock, becoming the first Chinese band to win this honor. In June, they went on their third European summer tour, and in August, the band traveled to Poland for the Przystanek Woodstock, playing on the main stage in front of an audience of more than 50,000 people. The Nine Treasures performed on the first day of the Rio Rock Festival in 2019. On November 18, 2020, the band released their new album *Awakening From Dukkha*.

Nine Treasures has 28k subscribers on YouTube, and their music videos have been viewed 2.09 million times, 890,000 times, 390,000 times, 110,000 times and so on. It has 128,000 followers on Weibo, and its videos have been viewed 23,000 times, 56,000 times, 42,000 times and so on. Nine Treasures has a large audience. How can a folk band enter the international field of pop music? This article conducts a study from perspectives such as performance, singing style characteristics, adaptation of works, and how to integrate folk music into pop elements.

### **2.2. Music style of the Nine Treasures Band**

The songs of the Nine Treasures are mainly rock-style. Each song has a strong sense of rhythm. Compared with the simple characteristics of Mongolian folk songs, the songs of Nine Treasures are

richer in arrangements and instruments. Traditional Mongolian Ordos folk songs use a simple pentatonic scale throughout the whole song, and the melody features the connection between the Major 2nd and minor 3rd intervals. At the same time, there are few qingjiao, vario-gong, dissonance *interval*, or dissonant chord in the melody of the accompanying instruments[7]. However, Nine Treasures has completely retained the original main melody of the folk song and enriched the accompaniment based on the main melody. Dissonance was added to the music to give the song a stronger punk feel. Their songs heavily emphasize the presence of bass, drums and electric guitar. The use of bass highlights the song's strong beat, and the bass's timbre also makes the music more distorted, thick, loud, and distorted in the auditory effect, emphasizing individuality and free expression. The use of drums makes the song faster-paced, more powerful and prominent, and powerful, which is also the core of its movement and vitality, electric guitars often use distortion, replay, and other special effects to create unique timbre. Compared with the soft and lyrical folk songs, the songs adapted by Nine Treasures have more sense of rhythm and power. Nine Treasures retains the unique timbre of traditional folk instruments and folk singing methods. For example, the brilliant passage of the morin khuur, which often appears in the interlude, not only reflects the national characteristics but also follows the improvisation characteristics that often appear in rock music.

Secondly, the rhythm of the band's songs is very strong, which can break the strange language, the sense of distance brought by the lyrics, and the use of rhythm to drive and enhance the atmosphere. As the overall style of the Nine Treasures band is rock, their songs are characterized by punk and a strong sense of rhythm. This rhythmic nature can break down the audience's fear of unfamiliar languages and quickly mobilize emotions, allowing people to dance along with the music. *The 'Praise to the Steed* by Nine Treasures uses the continuous repetitive an eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes, which are commonly used in morin khuur playing to imitate the galloping of a steed, as the main rhythmic pattern. The bass's deep sound and strong drum beat provide the rhythm, and the Morin khuur melody is combined to quickly immerse the audience in the beautiful grassland.

In addition, the unique singing style centered on khoomei and the use of diverse instruments have formed Nine Treasures's distinctive musical style. Khoomei precisely matches the deep and wild musical style of rock music. The band often uses morin khuur, electric guitar, bass, drum set, balalaika etc. The use of multiple instruments combines folk music and Western music. The combination of melodic from traditional instruments and riffs from electric guitars creates a unique sound that is both heavy and melodically rich. Traditional melodies add a touch of mood and folk color to the music. The extensive use of traditional ethnic instruments in heavy rock performances brings people a powerful auditory impact and emotional rendering. The morin khuur is a two-stringed bowed instrument from Mongolian folk music. The tune a stringed instrument of the morin khuur is in reverse fourths. It has a trapezoidal body and a carved horsehead head, as shown in Figure 1. The timbre of the morin khuur is close to the human voice and can well imitate and represent the human voice. The sound is soft and rounded, and the timbre is melodious and infectious. The soundbox has good resonance, which makes the tone fuller and more magnetic, and at the same time can imitate the sound of a horse. [8] When playing solo, the morin khuur can perform both soaring and stirring melodies, as well as grand, vast, and melodious tunes, along with virtuosic and brilliant passages.



**Figure 1.** Morin Khuur

Electric guitars are equipped with volume, pitch adjusters (tuning pegs) and tremolo system (whammy bar). Combined with the use of effects pedals, electric guitars have a strong expressive power. Electric guitars have versatile tones. It can produce diverse tonal effects. In the high-frequency range, the electric guitar's tone are "crisp" and "bright," while some electric guitars are renowned for excellent performance in the low-frequency range, with tones that are rich, deep, and full. This type of tone is particularly common in heavy metal music, giving a profound and intense feeling. There are also electric guitars with warmer and softer tones, giving a relaxing and pleasant sensation. In addition, the harsh and piercing tone of an electric guitar is widely used in rock music. By using devices such as distortion pedals, electric guitars can produce distorted, heavy, and even piercing tones, adding a strong impact and passion to the music [9].

The bass is one of the indispensable instruments in the band, it plays the bass part in the band, and sometimes also improvises solo. Traditional jazz generally uses an acoustic bass to reflect its original flavor. In modern jazz, the electric bass is often used. The BASS is very similar in shape to the electric guitar. The scale is in the bass position, so the strings are quite thick, the string tension is quite high, so the plucking force is much greater than the guitar. The bass is a bass instrument, that usually plays lower notes than other instruments. The consistent bass and weak beat give the music an important rhythmic foundation, and It can maintain the rhythm and tone of the music. The bass sound is usually very rich and deep, sometimes with some hoarse or " distortion" effect. The sound of the bass can be tweaked to play different roles in the music. [10]

The drum set is a very important percussion instrument in jazz bands, and it usually has a bass drum with a foot, a snare drum, two or more tom drums one or two crash cymbal, a ride cymbal, and a Hi-Hat with pedals. The drummer struck the parts with a drumstick to make them sound.



**Figure 2. Balalaika**

The Balalaika is a Russian stringed instrument. [11] The harp has a triangular belly. The Balalaika has three strings. The Balalaika's fret can be moved. Due to the different sizes and dimensions of balalaika, which lead to different ranges and pitches, it was also used in large balalaika orchestras in the 20th century. The sound of Balalaika is crisp, bright, transparent, and of short duration.

Nine Treasures mixes traditional Mongolian folk rhythms with metal rhythms, with powerful metal parts contrasted with traditional instrumental timbre and Khoomei singing passages, creating a vibrant and engaging listening experience.

### **3. Analysis of the music of the Nine Treasures**

#### **3.1. Analysis of music of *Tes River's Hymn***

Nine Treasures's most famous song *Tes River's Hymn* has a rhythmic prelude to the Ordos short-key folk song Gugurima. This folk song has a clear and light rhythm. The melody has a large span and ups and downs. The singing part is *Tes golin magtaal* from Mongolia. [12] The song praises the grandeur of the river and depicts people's lives.

The *Tes River's Hymn* is structured in a single movement, in F key and 4/4 time. The introduction starts with 16 bars of drum set and bass, followed by 8 bars of electric guitar melody and another 8 bars of morin khuur melody from bars 17 to 32. The prelude from bars 33 to 40 leads to the main verse, which starts from bars 41 to 48, and the chorus begins from bars 49 to 58. The structure of the main verse and chorus is a8+b10. The interlude spans from bars 59 to 66, and then it's followed by the main verse from bars 67 to 74 and the chorus from bars 75 to 84. During the interlude from bars 85 to 116, a morin khuur cadenza is added from bar 109, which elevates the music. The performance of the morin khuur is free and lingering, resembling the musical form of Mongolian long-tune songs. Although such a free and lingering melody is out of place in a song with such a powerful rhythm, it gives the audience who have been constantly excited by the music a moment of respite. Meanwhile, the continuous electric guitar melody, bass, and drum beats also maintain the emotional tone of the music, making the khuur cadenza performance less abrupt. In the coda section, the morin khuur, electric guitar, bass, drum kit, and balalaika are used. Throughout the song, Khoomei singing is employed, providing a magnificent auditory experience. In this song, the horsehead fiddle plays the light and lively main melody line, while the electric guitar complements the melody with a metallic sound effect. The bass and drum kit continuously provide a dynamic rhythm, embodying the characteristics of rock music.

### 3.2. Analysis of music of *Namindalai*

*Namindalai* is adapted from the Erdos short-tune love song *Round-Top Hat*. The original *Round-Top Hat* has been passed down through generations in the community or through oral tradition, often accompanied by the morin khuur or Mongolian three-stringed lute. Most of the accompaniment takes the form of improvisation. [13] This folk song consists of two musical sections, with a rhythm pattern of "eight beats first, then sixteen beats, followed by two eighth notes" running through the entire composition. The melody of this song has significant ups and downs, with a joyful rhythm, reflecting the outgoing and unconstrained personality and aesthetic characteristics of the people of Erdos. One of the characteristics of Mongolian short-tune folk songs is the adept use of syncopation. The main melody of this song employs a combination of large syncopation and dotted rhythm, making it lively and playful, reflecting the vitality of Erdos folk songs and inspiring listeners to dance along with the music. The Nine Treasures did not alter the melody of this song, but enriched the accompaniment, making the music more robust. In the first verse, they used electric guitars. In the second verse, they employed the balalaika to emphasize the off-beat, altering the rhythm and making the song more dynamic and interesting. The background music is also interspersed with the sounds of drums and bass. The addition of these metal music elements better caters to the listening habits of domestic and international rock music enthusiasts, shortening the sense of distance from unfamiliar songs and quickly creating an immersive atmosphere for the audience.

*Namindalai* is composed in the simple binary form of E flat minor with a 4/4 time signature. It begins with 2 bars khoomei, followed by 4 bars prelude. Bars 7 to 20 are the main melody of the morin khuur performance, and bars 21 to 28 are verses using Khumai singing  $a^4+a'^4$ . Bars 35 to 42 are the interludes of the main melody played by the morin khuur. Bars 43 to 50 repeat the main verse  $a^4+a'^4$  in a regular singing style. From bars 51 to 56, the chorus of  $b^6$  returns to khoomei. Bars 57 to 70 are virtuosic interludes played by the morin khuur. Bars 71 to 74 are played by the drum set. Bars 75 to 82 are played by the balalaika, the snare drum joins in at bar 83, and the morin khuur joins in at bar 86 and plays to bar 90. At bar 91, the main melody comes in, and all the instruments play together for 8 bars, and then the khoomei joins in at bar 99. The tear-like heavy metal music perfectly merges with the deep and hoarse khoomei, bringing the audience a refreshing national rock song.

## 4. The Inspiration of the Success of Nine Treasures

Nine Treasures has innovated Nei Mongol traditional music, forming a unique Mongolian folk metal music. They combine traditional instruments like the morin khuur and balalaika with Western rock instruments such as electric guitars and drums. Aggressive guitar improvisations and typical metal drumming add a unique Mongolian flavor to their music. Their music is also characterized by khoomei singing, which gives their voice a unique musical style. Nine Treasures has explored a path of integrating Mongolian traditional music with modern music, both preserving the traditions and characteristics of Mongolian music and embodying a commitment to folk music, while the incorporation of heavy metal elements represents their exploration of internationalizing folk music.

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