

# A Study on the Music Characteristics of the Ceremony of “July Official God”

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**Abstract:** July Official God is the second batch of intangible cultural heritage list published by Gansu Provincial People’s government. The project is located in Yuzhong County, Lanzhou city. The ritual process and ritual music of “July Official God” are the main contents of this folk cultural space activity, which are closely connected and indispensable. Therefore, the study of ritual music is also one of the work of intangible cultural heritage protection. The combination of ritual music research and intangible cultural heritage protection will be one of the important orientations of future ritual music research.

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## 1 Introduction

“July Official God” is the second batch of intangible cultural heritage list released by Gansu Provincial People’s government. The project is located in Yuzhong County, Lanzhou city. The ritual process and ritual music of “July Official God” are the main contents of this folk cultural space activity, which are closely connected and indispensable. Therefore, the study of ritual music is also one of the work of intangible cultural heritage protection. The combination of ritual music research and intangible cultural heritage protection will be one of the important orientations of future ritual music research. With the method of field work and historical documents, a large number of audio and picture materials are collected. The music, song

and dance in the ceremony are analyzed and songs and drums in the ceremony are classified and explained. There is no systematic study on this ceremony in our region.

“July Official God ” is the second batch of intangible cultural heritage list published by the people’s Government of Gansu Province. The project is located in Yuzhong County, Lanzhou city. “July official God” originated from “cutting off the vassal state” in Jianwen and Yongxuan periods after the “Jingnan change” in the early Ming Dynasty (Volume 2 of the biography of the kings in the history of Ming Dynasty): In order to prevent Zhu Di, the emperor of Ming Su, from weakening his ruling power, the traditional temple fair was held by Zhu Di, the emperor of Ming Dynasty to train his troops. It has a history of more than 600 years (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Ceremony of “July Official God”

The ritual process and ritual music of “July Official God” are the main contents of this folk cultural space activity, which are closely connected and indispensable.

Therefore, the research on music in this ceremony is also one of the work of intangible cultural heritage protection. It will be one of the important directions of the future research on ritual music to combine the research of ritual music with the protection of intangible cultural heritage.

As an important channel of cultural exchange between China and the West in ancient times, Lanzhou has left a lot of valuable cultural wealth for modern people in history. In addition to some well-known art forms, such as the Hui folk song “Hua’er”, drum dance “Taiping drum”, there are many musical art forms existing in the folk. July official God is a folk activity that people in Yuzhong area of Lanzhou, Gansu Province, offer sacrifices to the local protection gods “Baima Tianzi” and “Bala TianZu” in order to obtain favorable weather for crops and good weather for the country and the people. “July Official God” with the traces left by the history of Northwest China, integrates the Han, Manchu, Tibetan, Mongolian and other ethnic cultures. Based on the ritual music and dance of Taoism, Buddhism and Shamanism, it forms a “July official God culture space” with local ancient buildings and villages, forming a unique folk custom of Northwest Han nationality. It is a common phenomenon that music is widely used in ceremonies. Not only music is the carrier of ritual, but also the combination of ceremony and music adds some weight to explain the connotation of ceremony. Therefore, it is of great significance to analyze the cultural and historical background, music repertoire and style structure of the ceremony, to explain the multi-cultural characteristics and cultural space attributes of the ceremony, and to further study July official God.

## **2 Music, song and dance in ceremony**

### **2.1 Instruments in the ceremony**

The musical instruments used in July official God were very simple, and only three kinds of percussion instruments, such as drums, cymbals and gongs.

#### **2.1.1 Sheepskin drum**

Drum plays an important role in the whole ceremony of July official God, both on the way of inviting the gods to March, and in the formal ceremonies. Drum is also one of the most important accompaniment instruments for both song and dance.

The drum used in the ceremony is sheepskin drum, or fan drum, which looks like a big sunflower fan.

This kind of drum is popular all over the country, but its name is different. It is called fan drum in Beijing, single drum in Northeast China, Taiping drum in Hebei, and Shengu used by Manchu shamans. It is called sheepskin drum in Pazhong County. It is made of goat skin covering on a Pufan shaped or horizontal oval iron ring, and three large iron (or copper) rings are tied on the handle. The three large rings are connected with three small rings respectively, and the nine rings are only connected, which means “three knocks and nine obeisances”. The drum surface is made of refined sheepskin with a thickness of only 1 mm. It is as thin as a cicada wing. Its surface is smooth. Some drum surfaces are not decorated, and some are printed with Tai Chi Eight Diagrams; Drumsticks are simply made of long strips of bamboo. Some of them are decorated with red and green tassels at the front end and the handle respectively. Drum makers used to be artists themselves, but now people buy drums from specialized sheepskin drum makers. When playing, their left hand holds the drum to erect, the right hand holds the drum mallet to knock sounds. However, the sheepskin drum in the ceremony can not only make sound by knocking, but also produce sound “Chucha” by shaking the iron ring at the bottom of the handle of the drum, which is the special timbre of the ceremony. The rhythm of different ritual drums is different, and the required performance methods, including arm strength and direction, are also different. In fact, with the body movements, it has the nature of dancing while drum. In the ceremony, the sheepskin drum is usually performed by “shigongzi” and accompanied by ritual dance or singing.

#### **2.1.2 Big gong**

Gongs, percussion instruments, have been popular in the Song Dynasty. The structure of Gong is relatively simple. It is composed of three parts: the body of the Gong, the frame (rope) and the hammer. The body of the Gong is in the shape of a disc. It is fixed around with its own frame. The central part of the Gong is vibrated and produce sound with the hammer. Generally, the central part is slightly convex, which is called navel, guangor Tang. It is the main part of sound production. There are also flat central part without navel or bulge into a semicircular ball. These constitute the main characteristics of gongs. According to the shape characteristics, it can be divided into three types: flat Gong, navel Gong and breast-shaped Gong; According to the level of sound, it can be divided into three types: Bass Gong, mid tone Gong and treble Gong;

According to the form of performance, it can be divided into two types: one-sided Gong and combined Gong. When playing, they are often used together with other percussion instruments.

### 2.1.3 Cymbals

Small cymbals, which are called “cha”, “xiao cha”, xiao shu, guo cha in folk. It is usually 12 cm to 20 cm in top diameter, 2/5 in bottom diameter and 1.5 cm to 2.5 cm in height. When played, two hands hold one side, right hand is on top, left hand is down, and beat to produce sound. It is often used in Buddhist and Taoist music, entertainment and propaganda activities, and is also an important rhythmic instrument in some opera, instrumental music ensemble and dance accompaniment. In the band, it is mostly combined with gongs and drums to beat the measure for melody.

## 2.2 Drum and dance in ceremony

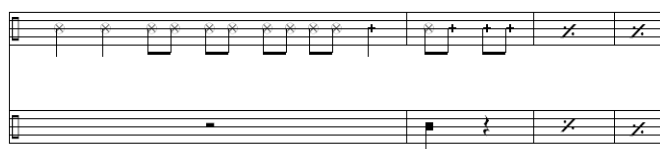
The rhythm of gongs and drums in the ceremony is very rich. Each ceremony has its own fixed drumbeat, and often matches with some dance movements, or gives rhythm and action tips to the sorcery dancers.

### 2.2.1 Drum beginning and ending

Before each ceremony, the drumbeat is played, and at the end of the ceremony, the drumbeat is played as follows:

(Music score example 1)

起鼓：



(Music score example 2)

落鼓：



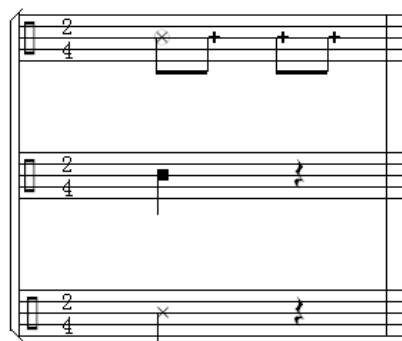
There are four timbres in the instrumental music of the ceremony. | Sheepskin drums | Drum sound ring | Gong | Cymbal sound. It should be noted that cymbals and gongs are almost the same rhythm in any occasion. Therefore, there is no separate expression in the above music score examples.

The performance method of sheepskin drum is the most strict in the ceremony, because most drum beats have the timbre of the drum ring, so the performer is

required to hold the drum in the left hand and hold the drumstick in the right hand. After brating, the elbow drives the right hand to pull forcefully to the right direction, and then both hands are forced downward at the same time to make the ring sound. The steps follow the requirements of different rituals correspondingly. It has become a unique style of drum dance.

### 2.2.2 Commonly used drum beat type

(Music score example 3)



This sound pattern runs through the whole ceremony and is the most frequently used rhythm type. It is used as a transition after the main gongs and drums are played or when the rhythm types are changed. It often appears in the drum accompaniment of ritual aria.

### 2.2.3 Xinglugu

(Music score example 4)



That is, ask the divine team to play in the course of the March. Drum a bar, Gong a bar, alternating with each other to show warning, avoidance.

### 2.2.4 Drum

(Music score example 5)



When the God is being dragged, the drum team is divided into two teams A and B, led by two masters and boys respectively. And they move and run just like the following route (Figure 2).

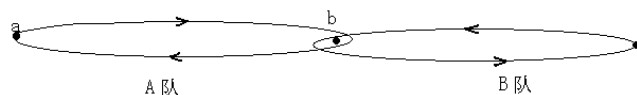


Figure 2. Drum team running line

The two masters run with the axe in front of them. The drum team starts with the most commonly used drum beat (music score example 3). The master starts

from point b and runs to points a and c in the direction of the arrow. When they arrive, they hit the Zhuoshen drum point (music score example 5). All the drummers have their left feet in front, their right feet on the back point, and their bodies lean forward to the left. When the second bar stops, they turn around and continue to beat the last two bars, At the same time, the master brush the axe, call “oh ho” and each stand in a golden rooster independent style. Then he continues the other semicircle of the ellipse. Do this at least three times.

### 2.2.5 The temple drum

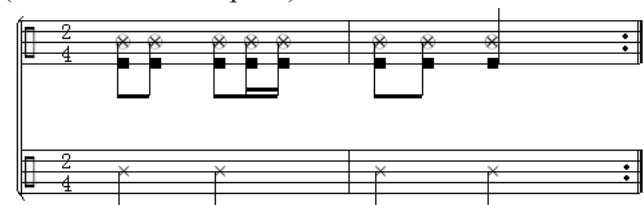
(Music score example 6)



When robbing the temple, gongs, drums and cymbals play the above rhythm patterns at the same time, which can be said to be fast. Until the end of the rolling hexagram, the gongs, drums and cymbals play down the drums and beat the drums when masters shouted “Long Tian Xie Ma”.

### 2.2.6 Welcome the plate and walk the drum

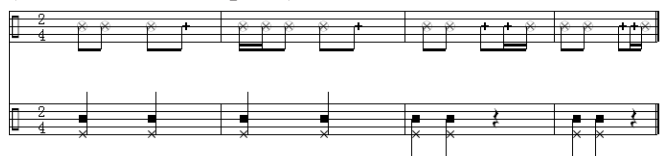
(Music score Example 7)



As the name implies, it is the gongs and drums played on the road to meet the plate. To meet the plate, the eight masters first beat “Yingpan walking drum” and at the same time swing Shaozi to the table. After receiving the plate, the offering table will be carried to the official God field beating all the way “Yingpan walking drum”.

### 2.2.7 Yingpan drum

(Music score example 8)



When they came to the table, the master sang the words of welcome plate first, and then the drum team played “Yingpan drum”. The two leading masters made many dance movements while tapping, and formed a

circle according to the following route(Figure 3).

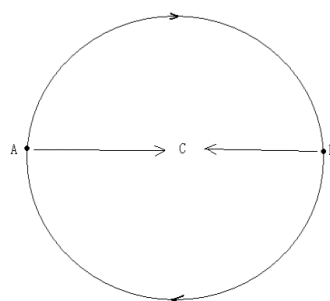


Figure 3. The two sides make a circular road map

Starting from A and B, the two masters play the sheepskin drum while walking, or turn the drum around the drum handle as the axis, or turn the drum around the head with the top of the head as the center. When they go to each other’s position, they return. This is a circle. In the second lap, the master shakes the Shaozi, beats the Yingpan and walks the drum. At his feet is a running and jumping step. After his feet take off, his left foot points in the front, left and back directions according to the time value of the octave note, and then both feet jump at the same time, which is called “triangle cushion step”, which just forms the total time value of a bar. When they reach each other’s position, they converge to the center of the circle according to the route shown in the figure above. Take a step with the left foot and jump with the right foot. This is a beat. This is repeated until the end of the last two bars of the front plate drum beat. When the two sides meet at point C, they will return again and again. The total four bar drum beats are also repeated. After performing about four or five circles, the master knocked the drum again, and brought the table back to the official God field, and the reception was over.

### 2.2.8 Other gongs and drums

Square drum beat

(Music score Example 9)



Other rhythms:

(Music score example 10)





From the above analysis of music score examples, it is obvious that drum and dance play an important role in the ceremony. The combination of the two is so close that they complement each other and enrich each other. They jointly undertake the task of explaining the meaning and connotation of the ceremony.

In addition to the dance content described above, we have to mention the “dancing God” action in the ceremony. For example, when breaking the sheep plate, the division master wears God’s clothes, holds the drum in his left hand, holds the drumstick in the right hand, sings and dances while beating the drum, squints his eyes, stops his feet, and runs back and forth, waving his arms, yellow watch paper and axe, which is a tense picture of soul attached. This kind of dance retains the appearance of primitive religious dance.

### 3 Songs and drums in the ceremony

In addition to rhymes and rhymes, there were many melodic lyrics in the ceremony, such as Qishen Ci, Yingpan Ci, baiwax Ci and Bingzhu Ci, with drum accompaniment. Among them, the most special is bingzhuci, which is a form of rap. There are singing and rapping. There is one person who leads the singing, and there are two teams singing against each other, and there are also singing in unison. The following is an analysis of the music of each aria in turn.

#### 3.1 Qisheng word

(Music score example 11)

起神词

记谱: 王晓鹤  
演唱: 张玉瑾

变体

There is no fixed pitch for the chant of Qisheng word, which is similar to shouting tone. The purpose is that the onlookers can hear clearly. On the one hand, the master reports the things on the earth to the upper world. On the other hand, it conveys the will of God to the ground, which plays the role of prayer and makes the process of ritual consistent and unified. There are three groups of lyrics. The four characters consisting of one sentence pattern is sung according to the first line of the music score example 11, and the six character one sentence is sung according to the variant. This melody has a large interval, which is actually the decomposition of the main chord of the mode. In the falling tone, there are lining words and decorative tones to form a unique feature. This melody style appears frequently in rituals. It is not only used in raising spirits, but also used in calming and transporting gods.

#### 3.2 Welcome words

(Music score example 12)

迎盘词

演唱: 龚泽成  
记谱: 王晓鹤

♩ = 100

哎 哟 哎 哟 哟 太平盛世 哟 兴起了家

邦 政通人和 哟 民族

兴 哎 哟 旺 (风调雨顺哟, 国富民康哟, 五谷丰登, 人口吉祥, .....)

The melody is irregular and characterized by mode. After an introduction composed of lining words, it enters into the theme. It is composed of two single music segments (a, a ‘) that are repeated several times according to the content of the lyrics. The last sound

of each sentence is extended freely, resulting in the characteristics of yelling and shouting, which together form the unique characteristics of greeting plate words.

### 3.3 Worship wax and candle-holding words

The ceremony of worshipping wax and holding candle is closely connected and alternated with each other. Worshipping wax first and then holding candles. Some believers come to offer incense when holding candles. Shigongzi will change the aria according to the content of the ceremony.

(Music score example 13)

The melody of this aria is long, with humming method, which is similar to chanting, with slow speed and steady rhythm, which matches the speed of waxers turning wax and worshipping. At this time, the master was standing and singing while beating the drum.

(Music score example 14)

This segment is followed by example 13, which is also sung when the gods worship the wax. The two segments are repeated several times respectively, until all the Shentou, Shetou and Zongye are waxed. After the wax worship, the master sits down and prepares to hold a candle.

There are only two sentences in example 14, the second is the shortened development of the first one, and the final ending is on the tone theme.

The above two aria are symphonic, but there is no melodic instrument in the accompaniment instruments. Generally, the tuning of melody is decided by the leading master, so there is uncertainty. This is why the author did not set the dialing in the music score example.

After the wax worship, the master reads the following content, similar to the rhyme in the absorption. Every word is written in a song, the volume and tone are gradually higher and lower, and the last words are long down trowel.

The lyrics are very regular, and each sentence rhymes. In the first paragraph, a rhyme and ang rhyme appear alternately and end with ang rhyme. In the second paragraph, ou, eng, an, ang rhymes are used.

The next is the aria. The main content of libretto is to

praise the great achievements of Baima and Bala, but sometimes the local god of the village will be praised when playing God. It is said that Baima Ye was Yin kaufu, a general in the spring and Autumn period, known as “Baima general”. Bula was Yin Jiao, the son of Yin Shou, King of the Shang Dynasty. Therefore, some villages sang about the events of the two masters during the period of holding candles. However, there was a taboo that they could not expose their shortcomings or sing about the local bad luck.

(Music score example 15)

记谱: 金福祈  
演唱: 金正芳

手 拿 马 你 们 诚 心 哪 就 膜 你 们  
往 西 哟 拜 呀 拜 开 西 天 雷 音 寺 里  
门 两 哟 扇 (上面坐的罗汉三, 这三人那三人, 手捻茶珠口念咒, 口口咄咄)  
拜 开 西 天 雷 音 寺 里 观 哟 世 音  
菩 萨 哟 萨

This aria is divided into two parts. The first three lines are the first part. After the introduction of a bar, it is composed of two phrases with the same tail and changing head. After such repetition, it enters the second part. This part is equivalent to a conjunction. According to the development of the content of the lyrics, the melody returns to the first part.

十二月的内容:

一 月 风 调 雨 顺 哪 二 月 国 泰 民 安

(Music score example 16)

According to the content of the lyrics, the melody is also different. In the above music example 16, the master sings on behalf of the believers and conveys his wish for 12 months a year to God, meaning blessing. There are four sections, divided into two sentences, the latter is the change and development of the previous sentence. The melody is repeated 6 times until the content of December is finished.

The next chant is to praise the gods, and according to

the level of God’s status, they sing Yuzu (jade emperor), Bai Ma Lord, and Bala Lord in turn.

(Music score example 17)

玉祖爷的宝号

演唱: 金正芳  
记谱: 金福祈  
记谱: 王晓鹤

玉 祖 爷 的 宝 号 念 一 遍 玉 斧 狮  
智 请 母 的 岸 上 打 起 那 个 铜 锣  
快 面 鼓 先 点 哪 吒 三 太 子 后 点 八 卦  
试 雷 声 (略)

The most distinctive feature is that after the praise of each God, the closing words of “great mercy and salvation” are added, and the melody changes to the following tone (Music example 18).

(Music score example 18)

玉皇老爷 大 慈 大 悲 救 苦 救 难

In addition to praising God, the master also sang about common people and things.(see attachment 3: Bingzhu libretto)

The master is a profession specialized in dancing deities. There are teachers and apprentices participating in the ceremony. This ceremony is also a favorable place for the apprentices to deepen their practice of Kung Fu. In addition, in July, the master, who are officials of gods, are recruited from other places. Teachers from all over the country have different kung fu skills. They also exchange singing skills and adaptability in the candlelight ceremony. In this way, there is a question and answer style, a leading crowd and style of singing.

(Music score example 19)

记谱: 王晓鹤  
演唱: 姜泽成

♩=100

听 上 播 叹 上 播 听 来 哟 掌 鼓

听 来 哟 掌 鼓 的 师 傅 跨 上 听 叹

昔 日 里 有 一 个 木 莲 叹 佛 叹 哟

一 头 就 担 叹 一 头 叹 经

他将经担叹朝担在前哟，恐怕就背了母的恩，他叫经担叹在后哟，恐怕就负了佛家叹经

The example 19 reflects the form of teachers and apprentices singing together. The master sings one sentence and the apprentice learns one sentence. There are four sentences in one phrase in three sections. The structure is regular and the mode is Shang mode. (Music score example 20)

记谱: 王晓鹤  
演唱: 刘仲发

♩=76

Candle-holding's aria is a collection of different artists' aria. Due to the long time of candle-holding ceremony and the absence of melody instruments, all

the aria belong to the same GongDiao system.

Generally speaking, the singing in the ceremony has beautiful melody and moderate speed, which is different from other music forms in Northwest China, and has the characteristics of Chinese religious music, especially Buddhism and Taoism music. The dominant mode is the most frequent melody, which has both palace mode and commercial mode. Most of them are composed of two or four phrases as the main body, repeated for many times. The melody rotation method is mainly to expand or reduce the unique sound form of one or two bars, with a small range. The melody development of each phrase has a downward trend, which makes the melody slightly dull.

## 4 Conclusion

Since entering this century, the ritual living environment is facing crisis, people have a indifferent sense of traditional culture and fewer and fewer people participate in the activities. The ideological concept has changed, and the endangered situation is serious. We should pay attention to the protection of the folk activities of the official gods in July.

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