
**DUTOR INSTRUMENT: HISTORY, CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL ESSENCE
AND EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY**

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Abstract

This article is devoted to a comprehensive study of the history, cultural-spiritual essence and educational potential of the dutor – a musical instrument that occupies a special place in the national cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and all Central Asian peoples. The article traces the historical path from the Persian etymology of the word meaning 'two strings' to the first written sources of the 15th century – the treatise 'The Canon of Musical Science and Practice' by Zaynulobidin al-Husayni. The role of the dutor in the Shashmaqam tradition, bakhshi art, and folk ceremonies, as well as its influence on the cultures of various peoples through the Silk Road, are described in detail. The instrument's contribution to national identity, moral education and aesthetic development is analyzed from a pedagogical perspective. The article is based on studies by Uzbek and world scholars, ancient treatises and modern ethnomusicological sources.

Keywords: Dutor, national instrument, Central Asia, Shashmaqam, bakhshi art, moral education, musical heritage, Silk Road, Zaynulobidin al-Husayni, aesthetic education.

Introduction

Among the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the Uzbek people, national musical instruments occupy a special place. These instruments are valued not only as a mirror of musical art, but also as living documents expressing the history, psychology, way of life, and worldview of the people. Each of them has passed the test of millennia, been passed down from generation to generation, and instilled feelings of patriotism, beauty, and humanity in the consciousness of successive generations.

One such ancient and sacred instrument is the dutor. Although it consists of only two strings, its melodies embody the wide breath of the steppes, the rushing of mountain streams, the anguish of love and separation, and the spirit of heroism and patriotism. The dutor is preserved in all regions of Uzbekistan – the Fergana Valley, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm schools – with slightly different yet essentially unified performance traditions.

Although the topic of the dutor has been studied separately by Uzbek and foreign scholars, comprehensive scientific research analyzing it as a unified system in terms of its history, cultural-spiritual essence, and educational potential is rare. This article was written on the basis of ancient treatises, ethnomusicological studies, pedagogical theory, and modern scientific articles with the aim of filling this gap.

The scientific significance of the article lies in presenting the dutor not merely as a musical instrument, but as a unique pedagogical resource for fostering national self-awareness, morally and spiritually educating youth, and shaping an aesthetic worldview. At a time when preserving national values and passing them on to future generations has become an urgent task in the era of globalization, the importance of such research is growing.

Etymology and Historical Origins of the Dutor

The word "dutor" is of Persian origin, formed from the combination of "do" (two) and "tor" (string, wire). Thus, "dutor" means "two-stringed." This name directly reflects the instrument's primary structural feature — its two strings. In Uzbek it is called "dutor," in Tajik and Persian "dutor/dotor," in Turkmen "dutar," and in Uyghur "dutar." Additionally, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and South Asia, this instrument is known under the names "dotara" or "dambura" (Delaram Music, 2026).

Different sources provide varying information about the origins of the dutor. Archaeological and paleographic studies indicate that dutor-like instruments existed in Central Asia as early as the first centuries of the Common Era. Figurines found in ancient Merv (present-day Turkmenistan) depicting musicians playing the dutor date from the 12th–15th centuries, confirming that the instrument played an important role not only among craftsmen, but also in the lives of Silk Road merchants and nomadic tribes.

According to modern researchers, "by the 11th century, the term 'do rud' — 'two-stringed' — was mentioned in the work Qabus Nama. The term 'dotar' appeared in the 15th century, specifically in a musical treatise in Samarkand" (Delaram Music, 2026). This evidence shows that the dutor has at least five to six centuries of written history in Central Asia, and particularly in the territory of Uzbekistan.

The history of the dutor is closely linked to the history of the Silk Road. This great trade route carried not only goods and wealth, but also art and culture from one country to another. The dutor also spread along this route from Khorasan to Transoxiana, and from Transoxiana to the western regions of China. Thus, the dutor remains a living symbol of Silk Road civilization and a living witness to cultural exchange.

The Dutor in Written Sources and Scientific Literature

The most important primary source for the scientific analysis of the dutor is the treatise "The Canon of Musical Science and Practice" (Qonuni ilmi va amali musiqa) by Zaynulobidin al-Husayni. Written in the second half of the 15th century and dedicated to Alisher Navoi, this treatise provides detailed information about the dutor of that time. In particular, it describes the dutor as an instrument with eleven frets tuned at a perfect fourth interval.

As noted in scholarly sources: "The earliest information about the dutor instrument can be found in the treatise 'The Canon of Musical Science and Practice' by Mavlono Zaynulobidin al-Husayni, dedicated to Alisher Navoi. In this treatise, written in the

second half of the 15th century, the dutor is described as an instrument with eleven frets tuned at a perfect fourth interval" (CyberLeninka, article on dutor performance).

By the 17th century, the Bukhara musicologist Darvesh Ali provided detailed information about the dutor, tanbur, chang, kanon, rubob, kobiz, ghijjak, and other instruments in his musical treatise. The sources of this period confirm that the dutor had firmly established itself in Uzbek professional musical culture. According to Darvesh Ali, most of the musical instruments he recorded — including the dutor — still survive today in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and other republics of Central Asia.

In the second half of the 19th century, interest in the culture of Central Asian peoples grew in Western countries. The travel journals of explorers and ethnographers such as Marco Polo, Vámbéry, and Eichhorn later served as the basis for major scholarly works on the dutor and other national instruments. At the beginning of the 20th century, Abdurauf Fitrat, a leading figure of the Jadidist movement, offered valuable thoughts on the place of national instruments in Uzbek culture in his work "Uzbek Classical Music and Its History."

During the Soviet period, musicologists V. Belyayev, F. Karomatov, T. Vizgo, and A. Malkeeva carried out important work in the study of Uzbekistan's national instruments. T. Vizgo's work "Musical Instruments of Central Asia" (Muzikalnyye instrumenty Sredney Azii), published in 1980, remains to this day one of the fundamental sources in this field.

Construction of the Dutor and Performance Techniques

Although the structure of the dutor appears simple, it embodies deep architectural refinement and craftsmanship. The instrument consists of three main parts: the resonator body (kosaxona), the neck (dasta), and the tuning pegs (burma). The resonator is usually made from apricot, mulberry, walnut, or white mulberry wood. In Uzbek and Tajik dutors, the resonator body is prepared by gluing thin ribs together; it is sometimes also carved from a single block of wood.

As described in the Qomus.info encyclopedia: "A thin lid is placed over the open upper part of the resonator body, which is connected to the neck through a throat. The long and narrow neck of the dutor has 13–17 frets tied onto it. Decorative patterns made from bone and mother-of-pearl are inlaid on the resonator body and neck" (Qomus.info). This description shows that the dutor is not merely an instrument, but also a delicate work of art.

The two strings of the dutor were traditionally made from twisted silk thread. In modern performance practice, nylon and nylon-core strings are also used alongside silk strings. The strings are usually tuned to intervals of a perfect fourth, perfect fifth, or unison. The tuning method varies according to the performance repertoire and regional traditions. Performance techniques on the dutor are highly varied and complex: single stroke, double stroke, forearm stroke, tremolo, and reverse stroke are the main technical methods. These techniques allow the creation of complex polyrhythmic textures and a diverse range of dynamic effects on the dutor. For a professional musician, mastering

the dutor requires many years of practice and systematic training passed from master to student.

As noted in an international scholarly article: "The Uzbek dutor's repertoire is diverse – from small everyday pieces to large makoms and dastans. The dutor is used as a solo, ensemble, and singing accompaniment instrument. It is widely used in home music-playing (in particular, by women) and by folk professional musicians" (People-Travels.com). This broad repertoire demonstrates how universal a role the dutor has played in Uzbek musical culture.

Regional Performance Schools

Regional performance schools have their own distinctive features. In the Fergana-Tashkent school, masters such as Ko'zixon Madrahimov and Turgun Alimatov performed traditional pieces such as "Nolish," "Cho'pon," and "Andijon Kurdi," forming the refined style characteristic of this school. In the Samarkand school, Haji Abdulaziz and Qori Siraj Yusupov enriched the school's traditions by performing works such as "Guluzorim" and "Bebokcha." In the Khorezm school, pieces such as "Koradali" and "Aliqambar" reveal the local characteristics of dutor performance.

The Dutor and the Shashmaqam Tradition

The connection between the Shashmaqam – the pinnacle of Uzbek-Tajik classical music – and the dutor is extremely deep and centuries-old. Shashmaqam is a large musical-artistic system consisting of six principal maqams (Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugah, Segah, Iraq), which took shape in the court culture of Bukhara in the 16th–17th centuries and then spread throughout Central Asia. One of the main instruments in this vast musical architecture has always been the dutor.

From the 1970s onward, instrumental and vocal parts of the Shashmaqam also began to be performed as dutor solos. This shows how broad the capabilities of the dutor are, and that it has attained maturity not only as an accompanying instrument, but also as an independent soloist. Today, it is difficult to fully conceive of Uzbek classical music without listening to the Shashmaqam with dutor accompaniment or dutor solos.

Bakhshi Art and the Dutor

One of the most ancient and great traditions of Uzbek folk oral literature is the art of the bakhshi. Bakhshis are professional performers who have passed on folk epic poetry and dastans orally from generation to generation. They performed great epics such as "Alpomish," "Goroghli," "Ravshan," and "Kuntugnish" – often to the accompaniment of the dutor – enchanting listeners for entire evenings.

For bakhshis, the dutor was not only a musical accompaniment, but also a spiritual support and a means of communication. A bakhshi cherished his dutor like a shield and sword, treating it as though drawing inspiration and strength from it. There are many legends and tales about the dutor in Uzbek folk oral literature, some of which are connected with the belief in its magical power – its ability to "drive away evil spirits."

As highlighted in international research: "Dutar was an integral part of the musical culture and creativity of the folk singers Bakhshi, the keepers of the musical and poetic tradition, classical works and ancient instruments" (People-Travels.com). This definition clearly expresses the central role of the dutor in bakhshi art.

Cultural-Spiritual Significance of the Dutor

The dutor is valued in Uzbek culture not only as a musical instrument, but also as a symbol expressing national identity. It has always been present at weddings, celebrations, public festivals, and family gatherings, serving as a spiritual thread that binds people together. When an Uzbek hears the sound of the dutor, the heart stirs – through that sound one feels connected to the spirit of one's ancestors, to the nature of the homeland, and to the centuries-old songs of the people.

As researchers have noted: "Dutor takes its place of honor in the Uzbek tradition of makom and shashmaqom. It is believed that the very sound of dutar expels evil spirits. Women equally with men played dutar. There are many images instantiating this fact in the history of Uzbekistan" (People-Travels.com). This information shows how deeply rooted the dutor is in Uzbek culture.

The dutor has also shaped the aesthetic taste of the Uzbek people. The melodies performed on the dutor – maqams such as Tanovar, Dugah, Chargah, and Ushaq – have the power to cultivate the perception of beauty in the human soul, to refine emotions, and to foster spiritual humanism. For this reason, the value has taken hold in Uzbekistan that "a home with a dutor has a bright face" – meaning a home with a dutor is a home imbued with spirituality.

Educational Potential of the Dutor

The dutor instrument is important not only as a musical instrument, but also as an educational and pedagogical resource. In the process of teaching young people to play the dutor, several important personal qualities are formed simultaneously: patience, diligence, attentiveness, aesthetic sensitivity, and creative thinking.

First, learning the dutor requires patience and consistency. The daily repetition of musical exercises, trying again and again in difficult situations – all of this fosters the willpower and resilience that lead young people to success in life. Second, playing the dutor in an ensemble develops skills of collective communication and cooperation. Third, learning national melodies helps the young person draw closer to the historical memory and spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people through the language of their parents and grandparents.

As noted in scientific works on music education: "Our national instrumental art has developed hand in hand with the art of singing for many centuries, so that one often cannot even be imagined without the other" (JDPU scholarly journal article). This organic connection makes the dutor an inseparable part of the national education system.

The educational potential of the dutor manifests in three principal directions:

The first direction — fostering national self-awareness. By learning to play the dutor, a young Uzbek feels a sense of belonging to the ancient cultural heritage of their people. In today's era of globalization, preserving national cultural identity is an urgent issue. The dutor is one of the most effective tools for addressing this challenge.

The second direction — aesthetic education. Dutor music develops the ability to perceive beauty, nurtures refined emotions, and cultivates a love of art. A person who has been aesthetically educated can see, create, and preserve beauty in all areas of life.

The third direction — moral-spiritual education. Most dutor melodies extol noble human qualities such as love, loyalty, friendship, patriotism, and compassion. As a young performer learns these melodies, the seeds of these virtues are sown in their own heart.

The Dutor in the Education System

Interest in the dutor and education-related activities connected with it are growing year by year in Uzbekistan's education system. Dutor classes have been organized in children's music and art schools, and teachers instructing in the dutor are active in many cities and districts. In recent years, the practice of teaching "dutor prima," "dutor alto," and "dutor tenor" varieties in music schools has also become increasingly widespread. As noted in scholarly articles: "Taking into account the needs of school-age children to study Uzbek folk instruments, a dutor class has been established among the various instruments offered in Republican music schools. As a result, the enthusiasm of the younger generation for the dutor is increasing" (CyberLeninka, Dutor Performance). This trend indicates that the dutor will continue to hold its important significance for future generations.

The Dutor in World Ethnomusicology and Comparative Study

The dutor is not only an instrument of the peoples of Uzbekistan and Central Asia — it is also a unique instrument that attracts special attention and interest in world ethnomusicology. Various regional varieties of the dutor exist in countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, China (Uyghurs of Xinjiang), Pakistan, and India, and they differ from one another in structural design, tuning method, and performance technique.

Comparative analysis shows that each people has reinterpreted the dutor through the prism of its own cultural worldview. For example, the "Herati dutor" of Afghanistan's Herat province has fourteen strings, which differs fundamentally from the two-stringed dutor of the Uzbeks and Tajiks. The Turkmen dutor stands out with its length of 87 cm, its narrow fingerboard, and its thirteen low metal frets that differ from one another. The Uyghur dutor is the largest of the Central Asian dutor family, with an elaborately carved corpus made of mulberry wood.



International sources describe regional differences as follows: "Uzbek and Tajik dutors are often larger, with bodies constructed from glued ribs rather than a single block. The neck is broad, and the instrument may reach up to 125 cm in length. Silk strings are traditional, though synthetic alternatives are now widespread. The sound is warm and mellow, suitable for both solo and ensemble contexts" (Delaram Music, 2026). This description clearly shows the distinctive structural features of the Uzbek dutor.

There are also well-known scholars in world musicology who specialize in the study of the dutor. A research group at the Smithsonian Institution (USA) has prepared a number of publications on Central Asian musical instruments, in which the dutor has been studied separately. This fact itself demonstrates that the dutor is recognized by the world scientific community as a musical phenomenon worthy of attention.

The Ustoz-Shogird (Master-Apprentice) Tradition

In Uzbek musical tradition, the relationship between master (ustoz) and apprentice (shogird) holds special significance. In dutor performance as well, this system has been the most effective method of education for centuries. The master imparts to his apprentice not only technical skills, but also a mode of musical thinking, the spirit of the melodies, and a culture of performance. This process is much more than simply teaching music — it is a living chain of spiritual heritage passed from one person to another.

Renowned dutor masters — Turgun Alimatov, Abdusolat Vakhobov, Orif Qosimov, Yusuf Aliev — were not only skilled performers, but also devoted preservers of this tradition. In teaching their apprentices to play the dutor, they also passed on respect for national musical heritage, loyalty to their master, and dedication to art. This chain of master and apprentice continues today, ensuring that the dutor is transmitted to future generations. The pedagogical value of the "ustoz-shogird" system lies in transmitting knowledge and skills not only intellectually, but also emotionally and spiritually. The apprentice learns by sitting with their master, observing, listening, repeating, and discussing. In this process, in addition to musical knowledge, they also receive life wisdom, patience, humility, and a love of hard work.

The Dutor in the Contemporary Period

In the 21st century, the dutor is confronting new challenges. Globalization, the influence of mass culture, and the widespread adoption of digital technologies tend to reduce interest in traditional national instruments. Nevertheless, interest in the dutor is being maintained among Uzbeks and is even growing in certain directions.

The main reason for this is the purposeful policy of the Uzbekistan state aimed at preserving national cultural heritage. Various festivals, competitions, the revival of national instruments, programs for improving music education, and support for national music schools — all of these serve to ensure the living presence of the dutor in contemporary society.

Modern digital technologies are opening new opportunities for bringing dutor music to listeners around the world. On platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and others, it is now

possible to listen to Uzbek dutor melodies, watch performers' recordings, and learn. This helps to introduce the dutor not only within Uzbekistan, but on a global scale.

At the same time, the dutor continues to evolve as a component of the orchestra. In the 1930s, orchestral varieties such as "dutor prima," "dutor alto," "dutor bass," and "dutor contrabass" were developed on the basis of a reworking of the traditional dutor. This enabled the formation of a national instruments orchestra and the wider use of the dutor in ensemble performance. Today, the dutor occupies an important place in the performances of the Uzbekistan State National Symphony Orchestra and the National Instruments Orchestra.

Conclusions

This article has comprehensively examined the history, cultural-spiritual essence, and educational potential of the dutor instrument. Based on the results obtained, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, the dutor is one of the most ancient and unique national instruments of Uzbekistan and all the peoples of Central Asia, and its history is connected to the era of the Silk Road. Although the dutor is first mentioned in written sources in the 15th century — in al-Husayni's treatise — archaeological evidence shows that it has even more ancient roots.

Second, the dutor is a mirror of Uzbek national culture. It is organically linked to the Shashmaqam tradition, bakhshi art, folk ceremonies, and celebrations, and has met the spiritual needs of the people for thousands of years. The dutor's influence on the cultures of various peoples through the Silk Road confirms its contribution to the development of world civilization.

Third, the dutor is an unrivaled pedagogical resource in terms of educational potential. It can simultaneously serve the cause of fostering national self-awareness, aesthetic education, and moral-spiritual development. Dutor education carried out through the "ustoz-shogird" system cultivates patience, diligence, creativity, and respect for cultural heritage in young people.

Fourth, the future of the dutor in the modern era appears promising. State policy, the expansion of dutor instruction in the education system, and the use of the opportunities offered by digital technologies together play an important role in passing this unique instrument on to future generations.

By way of conclusion, it must be emphasized: the dutor is not merely a handheld instrument with two strings. It is a living heritage in which are embodied the thousand-year history, spirituality, worldview, and inner life of the Uzbek people. Every person who hears the sound of the dutor — whether young or old — unknowingly enters into a dialogue with the spirit of their ancestors, resonating with the beating heart of the people. For this reason, preserving, teaching, and promoting the dutor is the duty not only of musicians, but of society as a whole.

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