

The Cultural Characteristics of the Region of Timbuktu, Republic of Mali

-- Analysis based on Popular Music of the Songrai People --

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Back Ground and Objectives of My Research

In West Africa, music constitutes an important part of daily life. Both traditional and popular forms of music attract enthusiastic followings in West African countries.

The Republic of Mali, at times referred to as the "Big Country of Music", has produced a particularly large number of musicians who have gained international fame. Many of them are members of the Mande group and come from 'griot' families, the hereditary music caste. The Mande constitute the most populous group in Mali and live over a wide area in the western part of the country. This group has maintained the griot music culture over centuries.

Much has been reported about the music of West Africa in general, and that of the Mande in particular, but little has been reported about the music of other West African peoples and many issues in this regard lack clarity.

The aim of this study involves clarifying the actual situations in which the traditional and popular music of the region of Timbuktu, the north-eastern part of the Republic of Mali, is embedded and, thereby, to contribute to an overall understanding of West African music.

Timbuktu has been the base of trades between the Sahara and the Niger River. In this area, there are so many ethnic groups living together, such as Songrai, Fulbe, Tuareg, etc. Those tribes also have the social hierarchy including the griots, like the Mande, and they regard music as something like taboo. But there are so many musicians from non-griot families in Timbuktu region. And it is interesting to see that singers in this region sing in several languages such as Songrai, Fulfulde, Tamascheq, etc., though most singers of other regions of Mali sing in Bambara, the most popular language in the country.



pic#1

Monsieur Yoro CISSE playing 'njurkel'
the traditional instrument of Songrai
(Bamako, Mali)



pic#2

"YASTESERYAL" [2005]
The latest album of Tewodros KASSAHUN
(a.k.a. Teddy Afro)
I bought this CD in Mercato, Addis Ababa



pic#3

Typical 'Bob Marley Shop' in Africa
(Mercato, Addis Ababa)