

The Inheritance and Development of Chinese Ethnic Music Art from the Perspective of Humanities and Arts

Lili Liu¹, Wei Wang^{2*}

¹Art and drama college, Taiyuan University of Technology, Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province

²Music academy, Shanxi Normal University, Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province

Email: 703226@sxnu.edu.cn²

***Corresponding Author**

Abstract

Chinese ethnic music is an artistic representation of the diverse ethnic groups, regions, and cultural spirit throughout different periods in China. As a carrier of local music culture, ethnic music plays a crucial role in exploring the historical development and theoretical system of ethnic music, serving as an important approach to inheriting and developing the traditional cultural heritage of Chinese ethnic music. To fill the gap in research on the historical development of Chinese ethnic music in the field of humanities and arts, this article aims to promote the unique cultural aspects of Chinese ethnic music to the world and enrich the historical research materials of minority music in China in the context of world music history. Taking the development and inheritance history of traditional Tujia folk music in China as a research object, this article explores the development and inheritance history of Chinese ethnic music from a perspective of humanities and arts. It compiles the Tujia folk music culture based on domestic records, literature, and historical texts related to Tujia ethnic music. Furthermore, drawing on the existing academic research results, as well as a large number of historical literary notes, this article adopts research methods from disciplines such as humanities history, folklore studies, geography, and sociology to analyse the relationship between Tujia ethnic music and folk customs, as well as the influence of diverse political and ecological changes on Chinese ethnic music. Through the examination of historical records, this article systematically studies the development history of traditional folk music in Chinese ethnic music, aiming to promote Chinese traditional ethnic music to the world and expand the influence of Chinese ethnic music

culture.

Keywords: Humanities and arts, Folk music, Chinese traditional culture, Tujia ethnic folk music, Historical inheritance

Introduction

Traditional Chinese humanistic arts development has a long history and diverse ethnic characteristics. The inheritance and development of humanistic arts represent the embodiment of the human spirit. Studying the historical development process of traditional humanistic arts can infuse new vitality into the humanistic arts left behind in the process of human society's development. French historian Marc Bloch once said, "History, with human activities as its specific object, spans thousands of years, sees thousands of miles, and embraces countless forms, captivating people's souls. Therefore, it can inspire people's imagination more than other disciplines." Therefore, by exploring in depth the cultural development history of traditional Chinese ethnic music and delving into the humanistic spirit in its development process, not only does it enrich the research materials on ethnic music in our country, but it also breathes new life into traditional music culture and exerts its influence in modern society (Wu, 2022). Traditional Chinese ethnic music culture not only enriches the history of music culture in our country, but also provides rich content for the development of world music culture history. Researching the humanistic development history of ethnic music can help ethnic groups remember their national traditions in terms of humanistic arts history and culture.

By deeply understanding the history and current situation of traditional folk music in our country, we can better contemplate the future inheritance and development direction of national ethnic music. Regarding the inheritance and development of traditional folk music culture, scholars both domestically and internationally have conducted research on it. The uncertainty in Chinese traditional ethnic music texts, explaining the complexity, diversity, and ambiguity in human humanities and arts from the perspective of contemporary philosophy of information and complex information system theory (Gengxia, 2022). Starting from the dimensions of contemporary philosophy of information and information systems, it explores the humanistic

and artistic information of Xi'an drum music texts and their inheritance, and elucidates the significance of ethnic music texts in the inheritance of humanities and arts by analyzing the uncertainty in traditional ethnic music texts. Ethnic music culture is an art paradigm with unique national characteristics formed through historical sedimentation, and it is an important part of the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional ethnic culture (Wang, 2022). Furthermore, he proposed that higher education should serve as the main battlefield for the inheritance and development of ethnic music culture, continuously infusing ethnic music culture into the reform of music education in universities through various musical cultural forms.

Currently, research on the inheritance of traditional Chinese ethnic music in China mainly focuses on promoting and studying minority ethnic music from a historical and cultural perspective. It primarily involves studying the theoretical knowledge and cultural ideas of minority ethnic music. Chinese Wang (2023) has explored the performance and theoretical symbol standardization of percussion instruments in Chinese ethnic music. He analysed the limitations of the traditional oral and apprenticeship transmission methods in the inheritance of ethnic music and presented the performance techniques of Chinese percussion instruments, such as drums, in a standardized and symbolic form, providing strong written materials for the inheritance of ethnic music. Jing (2022) has examined the influence of Chinese cultural ideas on traditional folk music of the Chinese nation, using ethnic culture and cohesive cultural ideas as the forms of expression for traditional ethnic music in the new era. They explored the impact of cultural identity on the individual's self-awareness and the collective pursuit of transcendence in the process of ethnic music inheritance.

In summary, current domestic and international research on the cultural inheritance of Chinese ethnic music focuses more on understanding the theoretical knowledge, cultural ideas, and oral and apprenticeship transmission methods of ethnic music, with relatively less emphasis on studying the history of ethnic music. To illustrate the importance of historical research in the inheritance of ethnic music, this paper takes the traditional folk music of the Tujia ethnic group in China as an example to elucidate the historical development of Tujia traditional folk music

culture, aiming to enrich the research on the history of traditional folk music in China.

Research Background:

Chinese ethnic music culture has enriched the connotation of world music culture history and provided important cultural content for the construction of Chinese music culture and even world music culture. Since ancient times, there has been a saying, "Taking history as a mirror, one can understand the rise and fall of the past, examine the gains and losses of the present, appreciate virtues and criticise vices, and distinguish right from wrong." This straightforwardly presents the importance of summarizing the history and drawing lessons from it. The same applies to ethnic music culture. As one of the important crystallisations in the field of humanities and arts, when studying traditional Chinese music, China usually focuses on the more widely spread Han ethnic music, and there is a strong tendency to take Han ethnic music as the representative of Chinese music history. In recent years, the series of documents on the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture and the improvement of ethnic work under the new situation have reflected the urgent need for in-depth research in the field of ethnic music in Chinese music history.

Research Methods and Approaches:

The study of the history of ethnic music culture is based on the dialectical materialist view of history and adheres to the principle of integrating history and logic. Starting from the perspective of humanities and arts, it adopts methods from human history and geography, fully understanding history through the combination of historical theory, and using historical evidence as the basis for presenting arguments. Building upon human geography and cultural ecology, it integrates ethnic music with natural geographic locations and cultural backgrounds, emphasizing the interconnectedness of folk music in different historical stages. The main research focus is on the relationship between Tujia ethnic folk music and historical development, aiming to reveal the basic laws of the development of ethnic music and humanities

Development of Ethnic Music in the Field of Humanities and Arts:

The period from the Qin Dynasty to the Sui Dynasty was the origin period of Tujia folk music. According to historical records, the concept of "unification" during the Qin Dynasty and the dual-driven model of the commandery and county system implemented during the Han Dynasty were the policy manifestations of different feudal dynasties in dealing with ethnic relations. They provided policy guidance for the construction of unity and a sense of community among the Tujia people. Since the "unification" of the Qin Dynasty, the Tujia people have been in a relatively closed and independent space, adhering to the unique administrative concept of China, and embodying the distinctive human and geographical customs of the Tujia ethnic group. The Tujia people, living in a closed geographical area, have formed a bond that maintains various activities among tribal races based on kinship and the traditional culture of witchcraft. It has become a timely manner and the basic characteristic of the ancestral groups in different Tujia regions throughout history (Liu, 2023)

From the Qin Dynasty to the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the rulers of each dynasty implemented a policy of "garrison administration" to maintain relationships with ethnic minorities. This policy involved nominal control over the minority regions, marking the beginning of the formal integration of these areas into the feudal rule of the dynasties. After the unification of the Qin Dynasty, different policies were adopted for the unification and administration of ethnic minorities. According to the "Biography of the Southern Barbarians and Southwest Yi" in the Book of Later Han, it is recorded that "King Hui of Qin unified the Ba region and appointed the Ba people as leaders of the barbarians." Qin allied with the "Yi people of Ba County and Langzhong," and the alliance stated: "If Qin violates the Yi people, they shall present a pair of yellow dragons; if the Yi people violate Qin, they shall present a cup of clear wine." The Yi people agreed to this agreement (Xu, 2023). Based on this, the unique beliefs and worship of ethnic minorities in our country were able to be passed down. Among them, the traditional songs of the Tujia ethnic group, such as "Creation Song," "Tima Song," and "Waving Song," which mainly represent the content of daily life, have been able to continue. At the same time, since the feudal dynasty imposed fewer "Ba people's taxes," traditional agricultural methods

were able to develop, providing abundant creative resources for Tujia folk songs, which primarily take the form of fishing songs and hunting songs (Wei, 2023).

The Han Dynasty strengthened its rule over ethnic regions by implementing the system of prefectures and counties for direct governance of the Tujia ethnic areas. Additionally, it employed the system of "jimi" to indirectly administer the minority ethnic areas, thus establishing a form of military management in the settlements of minority ethnic groups. Although the minority ethnic areas were influenced by economic exchanges and diverse cultures, many minority groups resorted to resistance measures when facing the rule of the Han Dynasty. As a result, the later policies of the dynasty did not disrupt the indigenous ethnic cultures of the minority groups, providing a stable environment for the development and preservation of their original customs and traditions in the minority ethnic areas (Sun, 2023).

Factors Influencing Education and the Preservation of Ethnic Customs:

At the educational level, the measures of the Han Dynasty, such as "establishing schools and selecting talented students," only focused on the education of Han ethnic officials' children, resulting in minimal cultural influence on various regions. Therefore, it created opportunities for the persistence of unique cultural beliefs in minority areas. The Tujia ethnic group, with a longer history of inheritance, practices the "Wudoumi Dao," which is a blend of ancient civilizations, witchcraft, and the worship of natural spirits and gods dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. It also incorporates the immortal path that has been passed down since the end of the Warring States Period and the mysterious legends inherited from the Han Dynasty. These are indigenous religious and cultural traditions that have been passed down in our country's history. In later periods, Taoism had the most direct influence on Tujia music and culture. This belief worships gods and prays for their assistance in achieving one's desires. For example, the most widely spread Tujia folk dance and song is the "Funeral Dance," which is performed with high-pitched and flat melodies, distinct rhythms, and often depicts themes related to ethnic history and ancestral totem worship. It includes topics that sing about the life stories and daily anecdotes of the deceased. After each line, everyone

sings in unison to console the family of the deceased, using the phrase "resolve worries and sorrows" to alleviate their grief (Hu, 2021).

Research Results

The Tujia ethnic group is a tribal population with a splendid civilisation history spanning thousands of years. They mainly inhabit the Wuling Mountains, as well as the Wujiang River basin, Qingjiang River basin, Youshui River basin, Lishui River basin, and Yuanshui River basin. They have not experienced significant social unrest during the changes of social dynasties. In their long history and favourable geographical conditions, they have gradually formed a diligent and simple cultural atmosphere. Influenced by traditional shamanistic culture and to meet the needs of introspective expression and social labour, they have created a folk music style called "Baioxian," which is characterized by simple and lively language, rhythmic and powerful music (Wei, 2021). Tujia folk music is delicate in tone and has a loud sound. It is a reserved yet artistically profound form of vocal performance. Moreover, Tujia folk music has been passed down in various forms, such as chants, tunes, and mountain songs, which are well-known in traditional folk music. The singing style and natural expressions possess a strong regional characteristic. Taking the "Hao Cao Luogu" in the "Field Song" as an example, it illustrates the unique ethnic characteristics of Chinese ethnic music created under the influence of human history and geography.

Overview of Tian Ge

Tian Ge is a genre of ethnic music that is widely present in the Yangtze River Basin and the Yungui Plateau. Its creation is closely related to the modes of human social production and labor. Tian Ge is a type of song that expresses the inner emotions of laboring people, often sung during field work. The development of Tian Ge is greatly influenced by the local climate and geographical environment. The warm climate, abundant rainfall, and flat terrain in the Yangtze River Basin create favorable conditions for the development of Tian Ge, as it is suitable for the cultivation of various crops. Currently, widely circulated representative examples of local Tian

Ge include "Hao Cao Luo Gu" (harvesting grass with gongs and drums), "Cha Yang Ge" (transplanting seedlings song), and "Chuan Hao Zi" (marching song).

Analysis of the "Hao Cao Luogu" Phenomenon

Due to regional factors, the cultivation of crops under the practice of "Hao Cao Luogu" varies in different geographical locations and is known by different names. In Wang Yi's "Sancai Tuhui" during the Ming Dynasty, there is a painting called "Hao Gu Tu" (as shown in Figure 1). The painting is accompanied by textual annotations which state: "In the fields, there are drums. When I first arrived in Shu (referring to Sichuan), I gathered the people to come together. Once they arrived, they would organize their work, and after working, they would prevent laughter and distractions. The sound is swift, intense, clear, and vigorous, with variations in rhythm and melody" (Bao, 2020). From the painting of "Hao Gu Tu," it can be seen that the drummers and singers serve as a source of motivation and emotional support for the labouring farmers in the fields.



Figure 1: Wang Yi's "Plucking the Drum"

"Hao Cao Luo Gu" is the main form of Tujia field songs, which mainly refers to a type of drum music created based on the content of farming activities to alleviate fatigue during labor and improve work efficiency when commanding production and experiencing fatigue during the

process of production and tasks. In addition to drumming, the traditional Tujia folk music of "Hao Cao Luo Gu" also incorporates recitation. With the continuous changes and development of agricultural production methods, the rhythm and lyrics of the drum music have been organically integrated, and the melodic expression has been continuously optimized. In the later stage, it has developed into a performance form with dedicated "song masters" as lead singers.

In different regions, due to differences in production methods and customs, there are variations in their manifestations. In the traditional Tujia ethnic group's "Hao Cao Luo Gu" folk music in Hubei Province, China, the content also exhibits different forms of expression (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1: Contrasting Features of "Hao Cao Luo Gu"

Location Type	Morning		Afternoon		
	First Break	Second Break	First Break	Second Break	Third Break
Badong	Gaoqiang, Yangge, Duisheng Haozi	Gaoqiang, Changhao, Gan Haozi	Gaoqiang, Yangge, Duisheng Hao	Tea Break	Gaoqiang, Xiaoshan Haozi
Hefeng	Zhengsheng, Heye Er	Tisheng, Zapai Diao	Zhengsheng, Heye Er	Tisheng, Zapai Diao	Jiesheng, Xiaoshan Haozi
Enshi	Yinqiang, Yangge, Jiaoge	Paige, Jieluoye	Yinqiang, Yangge, Jiaoge	Paige, Jieluoye	Chongtianpao, Weisheng
Jianshi	Huage	Chage	Yangge	Chage	Liuliuge
Lichuan	Qizige	Haocao Ge	Pingqiang	Haocao Ge	Chuan Haozi

Laifeng	Gaoqiang	Pingqiang	Gaoqiang	Pingqiang	Gaoqiang
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That is to say, "Haocao Luogu" (a type of folk song) has different manifestations in different historical periods and geographical locations. The structure of "Haocao Luogu" mainly consists of four parts, forming a systematic pastoral song system. Each part of the structure is relatively independent and can be sung in different forms according to the sequence of agricultural processes. The melody of the suite has the characteristics of scattered-starting, slow pace, medium pace, fast pace, and scattered-ending. The melody is very similar to that of traditional opera, and it is mainly based on traditional folk music. The lyrics often express the feelings of Tujia people when they are working, expressing their emotions directly in a plot-based manner.

Conclusion

Chinese ethnic music represents a vital cultural legacy, embodying the spiritual and material heritage of the nation's diverse ethnic groups. The study of Tujia music reveals how ethnic musical traditions are deeply rooted in historical, geographical, and sociocultural contexts, reflecting the symbiotic relationship between people and their environment. Emerging from agricultural life and mountain landscapes, Tujia music serves not merely as entertainment but as an expression of collective identity, documenting labour, rituals, and communal values through its distinctive melodies and rhythms. The preservation of ethnic music relies fundamentally on folk identity and community participation. As an oral tradition passed through generations, Tujia music maintains cultural continuity while adapting to modern influences. This dynamic transmission process demonstrates how traditional art forms can remain relevant without losing their essential character. However, contemporary challenges including globalization and cultural standardization, threaten this delicate balance, making conscious preservation efforts increasingly crucial.

Ethnic music also functions as a historical record of interethnic relations, revealing patterns of cultural exchange and mutual influence between Han and minority groups. State cultural policies have played a dual role, both documenting and sometimes inadvertently homogenizing

these rich traditions. Today, digital platforms offer new opportunities for dissemination but also risk commercializing or distorting authentic expressions. The future of Chinese ethnic music depends on finding an equilibrium between preservation and innovation. This requires supporting grassroots cultural practices while facilitating thoughtful adaptation to contemporary contexts. As both an art form and a living heritage, ethnic music continues to foster national unity and cultural diversity. Its sustained vitality will contribute significantly to China's cultural landscape, serving as a bridge connecting traditions with future creative possibilities. Protecting this intangible heritage demands collaborative efforts from communities, scholars, and policymakers alike.

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