

The Identity of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs in the Southern Gan River Basin in Jiangxi Province

¹Wenwen Yuan, ²Surasak Jamnongsarn, and ³Veera Phansue

Department of Thai and Asian Music, Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

Email: ¹125828733@qq.com, ² surasakja@g.swu.ac.th, ³veerap@g.swu.ac.th

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Abstract

This study aimed to (1) explore the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs (2) investigate the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs and (3) examine the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs. The sample of this study was 9 renowned inheritors of Gannan Hakka folk songs and 1400 individuals who have knowledge in Gannan Hakka folk songs from the Gannan Hakka community residing in the 18 counties (cities, districts). The methods for conducting the research were mixed method. The instruments for collecting data were document analysis, expert interview, and questionnaire survey. The data gathered from the methods were analyzed by descriptive statistics and content analysis. The research results were as follows;

1. Gannan Hakka folk songs are known for their emotional depth and local uniqueness, expressing life, love, and family sentiments. These songs embody regional characteristics in tunes, rhythms, and singing styles, preserving cultural heritage and historical insights. They are integral to local identity.

2 . Since its origin, Gannan Hakka folk songs have evolved while retaining traditional elements, influenced by modern music genres. Inheritance methods, including oral traditions, education, and cultural recognition, ensure authenticity and propagation, preserving their cultural essence.

3. The process through which the Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs encompasses several aspects, which are historical tracing, cultural heritage and

integration, dialect transformation and development, emotional expression and resonance, and social interaction and influence.

This study provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between ethnic music, cultural heritage, and identity, deepening our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics within specific cultural contexts.

Keywords: Gannan Hakka Folk Songs; Identity Construction; Musical Connotation; Evolution and Inheritance

Introduction

Gannan Hakka folk songs are an important branch of Han folk songs and a crucial component of the Hakka cultural system. They reflect the production and life, local customs, ethnic spirit, and aesthetic preferences of the Hakka people over thousands of years, embodying the wisdom and profound social connotations of the Hakka community (Zhou & Hu, 2020). However, like many traditional cultures, the current preservation and inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs are facing new challenges (Huang & Deng, 2019). The new challenges facing the current state of Gannan Hakka folk songs can be summarized in three main points (Zhu & Li, 2021). Primarily, a concern arises regarding the aging inheritors within the domain of Gannan Hakka folk songs. The gradual aging of the older generation of practitioners raises the prospect of a potential hiatus in the transmission of the cultural heritage associated with Gannan Hakka mountain songs. This predicament may engender repercussions on the identity formation of the younger generation and contribute to a deficiency in innovative practices within the realm of Gannan Hakka folk song artistry (Huang & Huang, 2020). Secondly, the ascendancy of Western culture and foreign influences among the younger generation over time has led to a diminishing impact of Gannan Hakka folk songs. This shift in cultural preferences has resulted in a decreased interest among Gannan Hakka people in traditional folk culture, posing potential implications for their identity formation (Huang, 2018). Finally, there exists a tendency for Gannan Hakka folk songs to exhibit stagnation and adherence to traditional norms. Over-reliance on classic repertoire and a lack of innovation may constrain the capacity of Gannan Hakka folk songs to remain dynamically relevant, limiting their potential as a means for expressing identity within the Gannan Hakka community (Zhu & Li, 2021; Zhou & Hu, 2020).

Scholars have approached Gannan Hakka folk songs from various research area. Deng and Ma (2023) examined the narrative features, evolution, and developmental trajectory of Gannan Hakka folk songs from a historical perspective. The study explores the social functions of historical narratives in mountain songs, aiming to provide an interpretation of the developmental trends of Gannan Hakka folk songs from a narrative standpoint. Luo et al. (2022) conducted an in-depth study on Gannan Hakka folk songs, exploring their origins, their significance to the Hakka people, as well as the structure, types, and melodic characteristics of these songs. Shi (2023) explored the definition, characteristics, and academic value of oral history as a method in historical research. He specifically analyzed the role of oral history in the inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs, providing examples to illustrate its application. Furthermore, He conducted an analysis of the current status of Gannan Hakka folk songs inheritance, identifying existing issues and challenges. He finally proposed a series of practical strategies and measures aimed at facilitating the continued preservation and development of this traditional musical art form. Dai and Gong (2022) emphasized the crucial role of universities as vital platforms for the preservation and innovation of Gannan Hakka folk songs. They underscored the importance of actively promoting local distinctive musical cultures within higher education institutions to foster their sustainable development. However, a notable gap exists in the exploration of identity construction within the context of Gannan Hakka folk songs. The existing studies have yet to systematically investigate how these songs contribute to the construction of individual and collective identities among the Hakka people. Addressing this gap in the literature would provide valuable insights into the multifaceted roles of Gannan Hakka folk songs in shaping cultural identity and societal perceptions.

In the field of ethnomusicology, "identity" has emerged as a significant theoretical and analytical perspective in recent years, focusing on how music is employed in specific local contexts to construct ethnic boundaries, uphold distinctions, and assess cultural domains (Jiang, 2015). This study takes Gannan Hakka folk songs as the research object, aiming to explore the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs, investigate the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs, and examine the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs. The researchers employed a mixed research method, exploring the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs, as well as the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs through document analysis and expert interviews. Additionally, an analysis and summary of the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs were conducted through questionnaire

surveys and expert interviews. This study offers valuable insights, expanding the understanding of the intricate relationship between ethnic music as cultural heritage and identity. Through its nuanced exploration, it provided a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics inherent in the interplay between music and identity within specific cultural contexts.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs.
2. To investigate the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs.
3. To examine the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs.

Literature Review

Theoretical background

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates *Cultural Identity Theory*, *Cultural Ecology Theory*, and *Linguistic Anthropology*, offering a multifaceted framework for understanding cultural phenomena.

Cultural Identity Theory: Cultural identity theory, within the realm of social sciences, posits that individuals establish a connection with a particular culture by acquiring knowledge about the distinctive characteristics of that culture. This framework helps elucidate the thought processes and behaviors of individuals, shedding light on why people perceive and act in certain ways (Lustig, 2013). This theory initially viewed culture as an expression of the spiritual realm, a perspective that evolved over time. Edward Burnett Tylor defined culture as encompassing knowledge, beliefs, art, and customs, indicating its broad scope (Cheng, 2003). This theory views culture as an organic entity, consisting of material, institutional, and spiritual layers. The concept of identity, as discussed by Zhou (2008), is central to this theory, representing an individual's or group's sense of belonging and recognition within a culture. This identity formation process is bidirectional, involving both internalization and externalization of cultural elements.

Cultural Ecology Theory: Developed by American anthropologist Steward in the 1950s, this theory emerged as a response to environmental possibilism and cultural diversity (Ren, 2004). Steward emphasized the interactive role between culture and the ecological environment, moving away from the deterministic view of the environment on culture. Cultural ecology highlights that

while environments may shape cultural patterns, they do not determine culture, instead having a restraining or permitting effect (Steward, 1955).

Linguistic Anthropology: This discipline, which intersects linguistics and anthropology, treats language as a dynamic symbolic system integral to social action and culture (Hymes, 1963; Duranti, 1997). It explores how language is involved in the construction of social realities and cultural identities. Linguistic anthropology covers themes like symbolic representation, cultural construction of the self, and the influence of cultural contact on social change (Duranti, 1997). It also emphasizes the role of language as a social symbol and a part of human agency, influenced by the works of *Boas*, *Sapir*, and *Malinowski*.

Related research

In the academic exploration of Hakka folk songs and Gannan Hakka folk songs, scholars have conducted comprehensive investigations into various aspects, including historical origins, cultural significance, musical connotations, as well as educational promotion and inheritance. This multidimensional exploration contributes to a comprehensive understanding of this musical tradition. Several studies have conducted in-depth explorations into the historical origins of Gannan Hakka folk songs. Deng and Ma (2023) investigated the historical narrative elements, evolutionary aspects, and developmental path of Gannan Hakka folk songs. Their research delved into the societal roles of historical narratives in folk songs, with the goal of interpreting the developmental trends of Gannan Hakka folk songs from a narrative perspective. Chen (2018) extended this exploration, focusing on the historical roots, literary significance, and the cultural impact of these songs, alongside their preservation and transmission. Certain research endeavors concentrate on unraveling the roots of Hakka folk songs. For instance, Lin (2005) examined Hakka culture through the lenses of Confucian, mountain, and immigrant cultures, illustrating how ancestry, folk customs, and beliefs shape the distinctive traits of the Hakka community. Similarly, Yang (2007) investigated the ethnic characteristics of Hakka folk songs, probing into their connection with the original Central Plains culture in terms of origin, genres, themes, content, and linguistic style. Some studies focus on exploring the musicality of Hakka folk songs in Gannan. Luo et al. (2022) undertook a thorough examination of Gannan Hakka folk songs, investigating their roots, cultural importance to the Hakka community, and delving into the structural, typological, and melodic characteristics of these songs. Wang (2021) studied artistic features of Hakka folk songs and how they are integrated into rural traditions and tourism, using field investigations for verification. Zhu and Li (2021) approached these songs from the angle of oral history of intangible cultural heritage

inheritors, studying the social transformations linked to these songs. Deng et al. (2017) employed comparative analysis to contrast the Gannan Hakka folk songs with Shaanbei folk songs, providing translation strategies based on Shaanbei folk song translations to guide the lyrical translation of folk songs. In an educational context, Zheng (2019) employed diverse methodologies to analyze the inheritance and evolution of these songs, while Dai and Gong (2022) highlighted the essential role of universities as key hubs for safeguarding and innovating Gannan Hakka folk songs. Their emphasis lies in actively advocating for the promotion of distinctive local musical cultures within higher education institutions to ensure their sustainable growth.

From previous research literature, it is evident that the active areas of Hakka studies are primarily located in the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Taiwan. Research on regions like Gannan has been relatively overlooked due to insufficient knowledge of Hakka history. Therefore, it becomes crucial to increase the promotion and awareness of Hakka knowledge, culture, history, and language through Gannan Hakka folk songs. Furthermore, past research on Gannan Hakka folk songs has extensively analyzed and studied aspects such as their origins, musical characteristics, singing styles, lyrical translation, artistic features, educational transmission, cultural traits, literary value, and cultural significance. However, there is currently a gap in research regarding the identity of Gannan Hakka folk songs and the identity confirmation of their inheritors. For the preservation and development of Gannan Hakka folk songs, it is essential to first define the identity and status of these folk songs, clarifying how they can continuously elevate their role and significance in the ever-changing societal context. Simultaneously, establishing clear process for the dynamic inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs paves the way for securing their position and legacy in modern society.

Conceptual Framework

This research employed a mixed methods approach. The researchers defined the research conceptual framework based on the **Cultural Identity Theory**, **Cultural Ecology Theory**, and **Linguistic Anthropology**. The details are shown in figure 1.

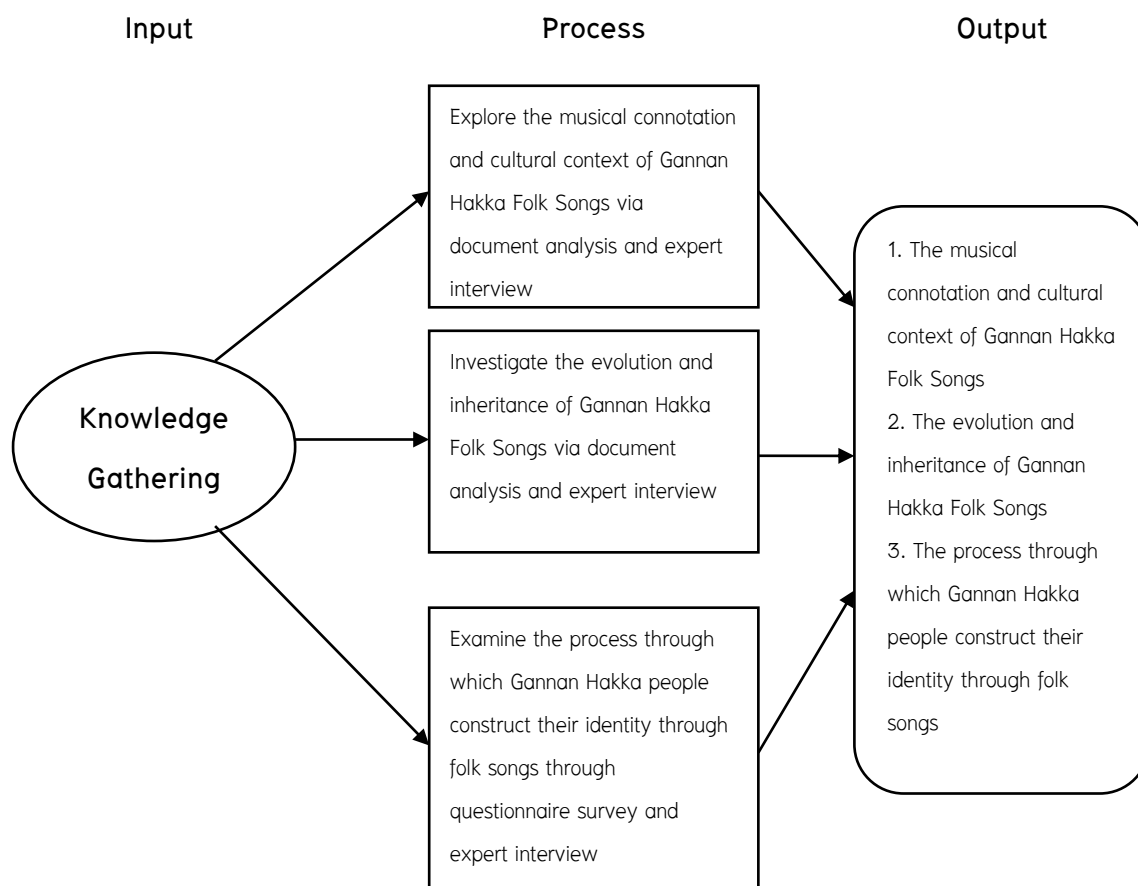


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

In this research, a mixed methods approach was utilized, and the methodology is detailed as follows:

Research Population

The study focuses on the Gannan area, known as the cradle of the Hakka ethnic group. In Gannan, there are 18 counties (cities, districts) where no single one is a "non-Hakka County", with approximately 7.8 million Hakka people, accounting for about 12% of the global Hakka

population and 15% of the mainland China Hakka population. This extensive population forms the broader demographic context of the study (Gannan Normal University, 2023).

Research Sample

In this study, data was gathered through a questionnaire survey conducted among the Gannan Hakka population and interviews with distinguished inheritors of folk songs. For the interview part, the researcher recruited a sample of 9 renowned inheritors of Gannan Hakka folk songs. Additionally, the researcher selected a sample size of 1400 individuals from the Gannan Hakka community residing in the 18 counties (cities, districts) in the region for the questionnaire survey.

Data Collection

Firstly, this study employed the document analysis method to collect and organize documents related to the research of Hakka folk songs in Gannan, systematically collating and analyzing this information. It will help explore the historical background of the Hakka people in Gannan, their ethnic group, dialect, identity, and the distinct characteristics and cultural essence of Hakka folk songs. Through a critical analysis of prior research literature, the study will identify the imperative for further investigation, encapsulating the lyrics, melodies, rhythms, cultural depth, and the evolutionary facets of these musical elements. It also examines the language, culture, geographical aspects, and lifestyle of the Gannan Hakka people, uncovering elements of identity in these four domains. This forms a solid foundation for subsequent expert interviews and the questionnaire survey.

For the interview, the researcher conducted interviews to gather the data from 9 renowned inheritors of Gannan Hakka folk songs. The interview period is roughly 10 days.

For the questionnaire survey, the researchers collected the data using a combination of online and offline questionnaire distribution methods. The questionnaires began with screening question to filter out respondents who do not belong to the Hakka community Gannan region and lack knowledge in Hakka folk songs specific to the region. The questionnaire distribution and collection period extended from August 15, 2023, to September 15, 2023.

Data Analysis

Researchers initially conducted content analysis on data gathered from the literature and materials.

For the interview data, the researcher employed content analysis to summarize the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs, the evolution and inheritance

of Gannan Hakka folk songs and the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs.

The researchers employed statistical analysis for the data collected from questionnaire survey as follows: the frequency and percentage were calculated to assess the respondents' demographic data and evaluate the respondents' perception on Gannan Hakka folk songs, the influence of folk songs on Hakka cultural identity, and their participation in activities aimed at preserving and transmitting folk songs.

Research Results

Objective 1: To explore the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs.

The musical connotations of Gannan Hakka folk songs involve three aspects.

The first aspect is lyrics style. Gannan Hakka folk songs' lyrics are closely integrated with the local society, geography, and living environment, creating lyrics filled with the breath of life and artistic beauty. Various literary techniques such as allegory, comparison, allusion, exaggeration, puns, and repetition are used, making the song lyrics rich, colorful, and full of poetic wisdom. In terms of vocal characteristics, the initials and finals of the Gannan Hakka dialect differ from Mandarin, showcasing a unique dialect aesthetic. The second aspect is its modal tonality, sentence structure, and rhythm. Gannan Hakka folk songs mainly exhibit the 'Zhi' mode (Zhi is equivalent to 'sol' in Western music) and 'Li' (Tonicization) mode (Li is the process of temporarily making a non-tonic chord sound tonic is known as tonicization. Secondary dominant or secondary leading-tone chords—also referred to as applied dominant and applied leading-tone chords—are used to achieve this) (Peterson & Lavengood, 2023), reflecting the unique style of Hakka music. The sentence structures are diverse, ranging from two to five lines, with distinct rhythms and beautiful melodies. The third aspect is its vocal techniques, singing styles, and performance forms. The vocal techniques include natural voice, falsetto, and soft voice, each with its own characteristics. The singing style features unique vocal embellishments such as glides, vibrato, and straight tone, demonstrating rich expressiveness. The forms of performance vary, including solo, duet, and group singing.

Figure 2 presents the music score of a famous Hakka folk song in Gannan which is called *Su Qu Gan Bu Hao Zuo Feng* Song. The overall meaning of the lyrics is as follows: Soviet area cadres possess admirable work ethics; they bring their own provisions to the office. Wearing grass

shoes, they actively participate in the revolution. Comrades journey through mountainous paths at night, holding lanterns to light their way. The lyrics convey a portrayal of commendable work ethics among Soviet area cadres as they bring their own provisions to the office, exemplifying a strong commitment to their duties. Clad in grass shoes, these cadres actively engage in the revolution, traversing mountainous paths at night with lanterns in hand. The lyrics reflect a dedication to the cause and a resilient spirit in the face of challenging circumstances, encapsulating the essence of the work style and commitment of the Soviet area cadres. This Gannan Hakka folk song encapsulates the distinctive characteristics of Hakka music. The lyrics, deeply connected to local life, employ diverse literary techniques, creating colorful and poetically rich expressions. The modal tonality adheres to the 'Zhi' and 'Li' modes, reflecting the unique style of Hakka music. Sentence structures are diverse, contributing to the song's rhythm and melodies.



Fig.2 Su Qu Gan Bu Hao Zuo Feng Song

The cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs includes four key aspects: their historical origins, cultural development, regional characteristics, and collective creation. These songs date back over a thousand years, closely linked to the Hakka people's migration history and encapsulating their lifestyle, cultural traditions, and social transformations. Throughout different historical periods, from the late Qing Dynasty to the era of reform and opening up in modern China, these songs have evolved, becoming an integral part of Hakka culture. Regionally, they are deeply influenced by the geographical environment of Jiangxi's Gannan area, reflecting the distinctive lifestyle, dialect, and traditions of the Gannan Hakka people. Finally, as a collective creation, these songs represent the crystallization of the Hakka community's collective wisdom and

creativity, playing a vital role in maintaining the cultural identity and collective memory of the Hakka people.

Objective 2: To investigate the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs.

The evolution of Gannan Hakka folk songs reflects a journey from authentic, primitive expressions to modern adaptations in the 21st century. Originally, these songs were straightforward ballads, echoing the daily lives of Hakka ancestors, epitomizing the simplicity and sincerity characteristic of ancient folk songs, and emerging as a unique cultural symbol of the Gannan Hakka region. Stemming from their migration from China's central plains, the Hakka people blended their agricultural practices with the customs of local cultures, thereby enriching their musical heritage. Entering the 21st century, influenced by popular and electronic music trends, folk songs have undergone a significant transformation. They have managed to preserve their traditional essence while embracing contemporary influences. This modernization is attributed to several factors including governmental support, academic research, and the development of Hakka folk songs operas. These operas innovatively combine traditional melodies with new musical arrangements, symbolizing the adaptive and evolving nature of the Gannan Hakka musical tradition.

The inheritance of Gannan Hakka folk songs spans traditional oral transmission to contemporary preservation efforts. These songs, deeply embedded in the daily lives of the Hakka people, were initially passed down orally in rural communities. Local folk artists and religious figures have played a crucial role in preserving and teaching these songs, often during community gatherings and cultural events. In recent years, an innovative approach to keeping this cultural heritage alive has been its incorporation into school curricula, thereby educating the younger generation. Additionally, regular cultural events and festivals have become vital platforms for showcasing and promoting these songs, reaching a wider audience. Recognizing their significant cultural value, government initiatives have been instrumental in safeguarding folk songs as intangible cultural heritage. This has ensured not only their preservation but also their continued relevance and resonance in contemporary society.

Objective 3: To examine the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs.

Before exploring the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs, the researchers conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the respondents' perception on constructing identity based on folk songs.

Table 1 Demographic data

Category	Subcategory	Percentage	Frequency
Gender	Male	52.97%	742
	Female	47.03%	658
Age	18 years and below	0%	0
	18–25 years	10.31%	144
	26–35 years	31.75%	444
	36–45 years	36.51%	511
	Above 46 years	21.43%	300
Educational Level	Elementary school and below	15.64%	219
	Middle/High school	43.56%	610
	Junior college	28.10%	393
	Bachelor's degree and above	12.70%	178
Social Status	Ordinary citizens	64.41%	902
	Hakka mountain song inheritors/artists	19.84%	278
	Government employees	7.19%	101
	Experts/scholars/intellectuals	8.56%	120

According to table 1, the demographic analysis revealed a slight male majority (52.97%, n=742) and a predominant age group of 26–45 years (68.26%, n=955), indicating significant interest in these songs among middle-aged adults. Educationally, most respondents have middle to junior college education, with only 12.70% (n=178) holding a bachelor's degree or higher. A majority are ordinary citizens (64.41%, n=902), highlighting the cultural resonance of Hakka folk songs across various social and educational backgrounds in the region.

For the second part of the questionnaire, the results of the respondents' perception on constructing identity based on folk songs were summarized in the following content.

Firstly, there is a notable ambiguity in identity among the majority of respondents, with many expressing confusion or uncertainty about whether they identify as Hakka. This highlights a blurred sense of cultural identity in contemporary society, especially where traditional cultures intersect with modern lifestyles. Regarding familiarity and affection for Hakka folk songs, only 29.03% of participants have an in-depth understanding and fondness for these songs, indicating a

need for greater dissemination and education about this cultural element. Most people have only a general awareness of it. Moreover, the majority view Hakka folk songs as playing a significant role in reinforcing Hakka identity, underlining the importance of music and cultural traditions in shaping and sustaining regional identity. However, the efforts in preserving and passing down these songs seem insufficient; 37.10% believe that the existing activities need strengthening, and 40.00% show almost no attention to these efforts, suggesting challenges in cultural heritage preservation. In terms of participation, 42.12% are actively involved in preservation and heritage activities, 35.91% participate minimally, and 21.97% do not participate at all. This indicates a general need for increased engagement, particularly among younger demographics and those with varying educational backgrounds.

Overall, the survey sheds light on the community's awareness, attitudes, and the significant role of Hakka folk songs in cultural heritage, while also pointing out areas for improvement, especially in engaging younger generations and enhancing educational initiatives.

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey, the researchers conducted interviews with 9 famous folk songs inheritors, to examine the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs.

After the interview, the researchers found that the process through which the Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs encompasses several aspects, which are historical tracing, cultural heritage and integration, dialect transformation and development, emotional expression and resonance, and social interaction and influence.

Historical Tracing: As a form of folk art, Hakka folk songs document the socio-historical changes of the Hakka people, from agrarian civilization to commercial prosperity and modern industrialization, reflecting changes in their lifestyle. These songs nostalgically recall pastoral life and praise modern living. Through these songs, the Hakka understand their historical roots, making them a crucial carrier of historical identity.

Cultural Heritage and Integration: Hakka folk songs are more than a musical form; they are emotional links to history, ancestors, and homeland for the Hakka people. These songs reflect their way of life and aesthetic standards, becoming an integral part of Hakka culture. They provide spiritual solace amidst life's challenges and strengthen cultural heritage and identity.

Dialect Transformation and Development: The Hakka dialect forms the basis of these folk songs. It serves not just as a linguistic medium but also as a tool for emotional communication and

cultural transmission. The transformation and development of the dialect provide new inspiration and material for the songs, allowing for innovation and perfection in content and form.

Emotional Expression and Resonance: Hakka folk songs encapsulate the thoughts and emotions of the Hakka people, reflecting their customs and folk religions. The emotional expressions in these songs enhance the cultural identity of the Hakka people in Gannan, embodying their fidelity and purity in love.

Social Interaction and Influence: With increasing cultural activities, Hakka folk songs have become a means of cultural exchange, strengthening the internal connections and identity within the ethnic group. They are also disseminated through media channels, enhancing the cultural identity of the Hakka people in Gannan.

In summary, through folk songs, the Hakka people of Gannan continuously reinforce and strengthen their Hakka identity in historical tracing, cultural heritage and integration, dialect transformation and development, emotional expression and resonance, and social interaction and influence, forming a multifaceted and interactive process of identity construction.

Discussions

The objectives of the study were to explore the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs, to investigate the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs and to examine the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs. In order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher selected 9 renowned inheritors of Gannan Hakka folk songs and a sample of 1400 individuals with knowledge in Gannan Hakka folk songs hailing from the Gannan Hakka community residing across 18 counties (cities, districts). Additionally, relevant literature, research materials, and documents were incorporated as subjects of study. By conducting both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the researchers aimed to undertake a thorough and comprehensive exploration of the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs, the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs and the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs.

Objective 1 of the research aimed to explore the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs. Through the content analysis of past literature and documents combined with the results of expert interviews, the researchers reveal the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs. Musically, these songs are distinguished by their

lyrical style, deeply embedded in local society and geography, and characterized by the use of various literary techniques and the unique aesthetic of the Gannan Hakka dialect. They exhibit specific modal tonalities like 'Zhi' and 'Li' modes, and their sentence structures and rhythms are diverse, contributing to their melodious nature. The vocal techniques range from natural voice to falsetto and soft voice, each adding distinct characteristics, while the singing styles are marked by unique embellishments, demonstrating rich expressiveness in solo, duet, or group performances. This finding was inline with Luo et al. (2022), they found that the 'Li' mode and 'Zhi' mode play significant musical functions in Gannan Hakka folk songs. 'Li' mode often involves the leading tone serving as the tonic, moving towards the "dominant" direction, introducing a distinctive emotional color to the music. Simultaneously, the use of 'Zhi' mode as part of the pentatonic scale, emphasizing the stability of the tonic, contributes to the fundamental structure of the melody.

Culturally, these folk songs span over a thousand years, closely linked to the Hakka people's migration history and encapsulating their lifestyle, cultural traditions, and social transformations. They have evolved through different historical periods, becoming integral to Hakka culture. Regionally influenced by the Jiangxi's Gannan area, these songs reflect the distinctive lifestyle, dialect, and traditions of the Gannan Hakka people. As a collective creation, they represent the crystallization of the Hakka community's collective wisdom and creativity, playing a vital role in maintaining the cultural identity and collective memory of the Hakka people. Huang and Deng (2019) also affirmed that Gannan Hakka folk songs are a crucial branch of Han ethnic folk songs, serving as a vital component of the Hakka cultural system. These songs embody the Hakka people's production, daily life, local customs, ethnic spirit, and aesthetic preferences over the centuries, reflecting the profound wisdom and social significance of the Hakka community.

Objective 2 was to investigate the evolution and inheritance of Gannan Hakka Folk Songs. The evolution of Gannan Hakka folk songs, particularly those of the Gannan Hakka region, represents a transition from authentic, primitive expressions to contemporary adaptations in the 21st century. Initially, these songs were simple ballads reflecting the daily lives of the Hakka ancestors, embodying the simplicity and sincerity of ancient folk songs, and emerging as a cultural symbol of the Gannan Hakka region. Influenced by their migration and integration of agricultural practices with local customs, these songs enriched their musical heritage. In the 21st century, influenced by popular and electronic music, Gannan Hakka folk songs have evolved significantly, maintaining their traditional essence while incorporating contemporary elements. This modernization, supported by government initiatives, academic research, and the creation of Hakka

folk songs operas, demonstrates the adaptive nature of Gannan Hakka music. This aligns with the observations made by Shi (2023), who highlighted the imperative to actively investigate and identify contemporary manifestations and developmental trajectories for Gannan Hakka folk songs. This exploration may entail the integration and innovation of these songs with modern art forms, including music, dance, theater, and film, aiming to uncover novel possibilities and avenues for their incorporation into contemporary cultural and artistic expressions.

In terms of inheritance, Gannan Hakka folk songs transitioned from traditional oral transmission in rural communities, where local artists and religious figures played a crucial role, to contemporary preservation efforts. These songs, integral to the daily lives of the Hakka people, are now part of school curricula and are showcased in cultural events and festivals, widening their audience. Government initiatives have been key in recognizing and safeguarding these songs as intangible cultural heritage, ensuring their preservation and continued relevance in modern society. This is in accordance with the perspective of Xie (2021), who contended that the evolution and inheritance of Hakka folk songs are closely tied to artistic inheritors, local government support, as well as backing from family and school education.

Objective 3 investigated the process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs. Through the results, the researcher summarized the process of identity construction among the Gannan Hakka through folk songs into five dimensions, which were historical tracing, cultural heritage and integration, dialect transformation and development, emotional expression and resonance, and social interaction and influence. In their work, Zhou and Hu (2020) outlined the historical significance of these songs, underscoring their richness in historical narratives as a vital means of comprehending and connecting with Hakka history. Moreover, Gannan Hakka folk songs emerge as a conduit for cultural inheritance, echoing the sentiments expressed by Shi (2023). The emotional resonance embedded within Gannan Hakka folk songs, as observed in the current study, mirrors the findings of Zhang (2020), who emphasized the role of emotional expression in fostering a sense of shared experience and solidifying group identity. Lastly, the social interactions within the Gannan Hakka community, particularly during events like singing competitions and cultural festivals, as illuminated in this study, align with the observations of Zhu and Li (2021), who recognized the reinforcing and celebratory nature of such interactions in shaping and affirming the Hakka identity.

Gannan Hakka folk songs, often rich in historical narratives, help in understanding and connecting with Hakka history, thus playing a crucial role in identity formation. They also serve as a medium for cultural inheritance, with the dialects being central to preserving and evolving the songs. Emotional expression in these songs fosters a sense of shared experience and strengthens group identity. Finally, social interactions at events like singing competitions and cultural festivals further reinforce and celebrate the Hakka identity.

These findings underscore the significance of Gannan Hakka folk songs in maintaining cultural heritage and identity among the Gannan Hakka community.

Knowledge from Research

This study entails summarizing the musical connotation and cultural context of Gannan Hakka folk songs, their evolution and inheritance, as well as the process of identity construction among the Gannan Hakka people through Gannan Hakka folk songs. It elucidates that fostering Hakka identity among the Gannan community via these Gannan Hakka folk songs necessitates addressing five key facets as shown in figure 2.

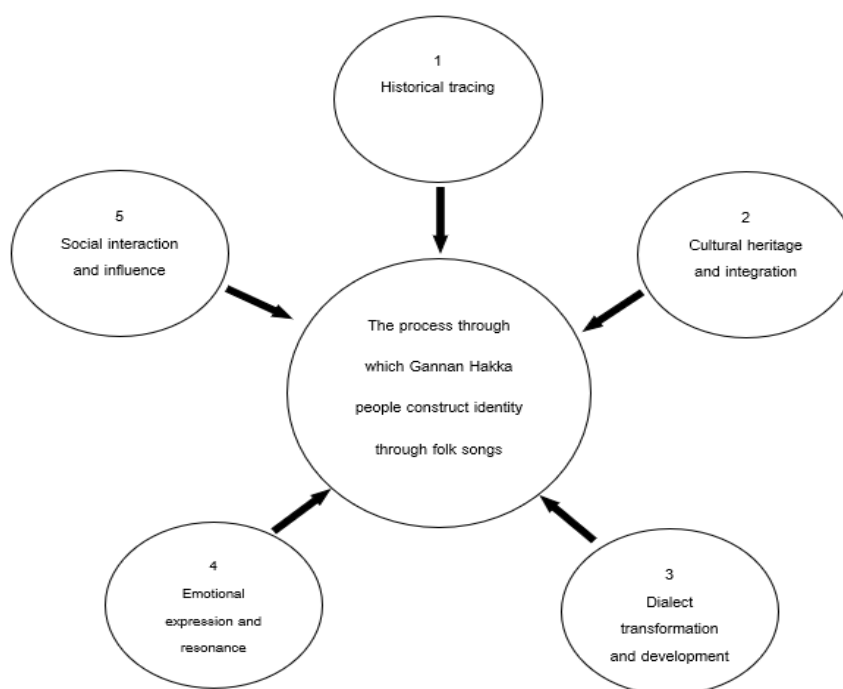


Fig.3 The process through which Gannan Hakka people construct their identity through folk songs

Conclusion

The folk songs, written in the distinctive Hakka dialect of Gannan, represent a unique genre of folk music. These songs, created spontaneously by Hakka ancestors amidst their daily toils, embody the Hakka people's historical memories and life philosophies. These songs are a crucial component of Hakka culture, expressing love and longing for their homeland, relatives, and traditional customs. They serve as a medium for the Hakka community to connect with their historical origins, reinforcing their emotional and cultural ties and displaying their distinctive cultural and ethnic identity.

The study focuses on three main aspects of Hakka identity in the Gannan region as shaped by these folk songs:

The musical connotation and cultural context of folk songs: The folk songs are renowned for their emotional depth and strong local characteristics. They encompass emotional expression through touching melodies, simple lyrics, and passionate singing, reflecting people's feelings about life, love, and family. They also carry distinct local features in their tunes, rhythms, and singing styles, mirroring the lifestyles and beliefs of local people. As a traditional cultural form, these songs are an essential part of cultural heritage, laden with diverse historical information and societal memories.

Evolution and inheritance: Originating in the Tang Dynasty, these songs have undergone significant evolution over centuries, influenced by various modern musical genres like pop and electronic music, while retaining their traditional essence. Their inheritance includes methods like impromptu singing in fields, folk artists' oral traditions, classroom education, cultural festivals, and recognition as national intangible cultural heritage. These methods ensure the songs' authenticity and widespread propagation.

Identity Construction through folk songs: The process of identity formation among the Gannan Hakka through these folk songs involves historical tracing, cultural heritage and integration, dialect transformation and development, emotional expression and resonance, and social interaction and influence. The songs often contain historical narratives, aiding in understanding and identifying with Hakka history. They also facilitate cultural inheritance, with dialects playing a key role in preserving and evolving the songs. Emotional expression in these songs allows for a shared communal experience, strengthening group identity. Lastly, social exchanges at events like singing competitions and cultural festivals bolster the Hakka identity.

The study reveals how folk songs are not just a form of music but a conduit for historical tracing, cultural heritage and integration, dialect transformation and development, emotional expression and resonance, and social interaction and influence, playing a vital role in strengthening the Hakka identity. This multifaceted identity-building process reflects the songs' importance in local culture and their growing influence in global cultural spheres.

Suggestions

The primary recommendations of this study encompass the amalgamation of innovation with cultural adaptation, involving updates in the content, themes, and musicality of folk songs to reflect contemporary life and aesthetic preferences. This entails creatively blending traditional elements with modern influences, diversifying themes to attract a broader audience, and incorporating contemporary musical structures and styles. Simultaneously, the preservation and propagation of Gannan Hakka folk songs should prioritize the utilization of technology and media for promotion and conservation. This strategy entails leveraging digital platforms and social media for disseminating these songs, integrating them into educational curricula to engage younger generations, and fostering individual artistic expression during performances. Furthermore, in the face of globalization, Hakka folk songs are envisioned as a conduit for multicultural exchange. They should adapt to global influences while preserving their unique Hakka identity. This multifaceted approach ensures the sustainability of Gannan Hakka folk songs, allowing them to remain a vibrant and relevant component of Hakka cultural heritage in the modern era.

Further studies can consider conducting comparative studies between Gannan Hakka folk songs and Hakka folk songs from other regions to identify unique characteristics and variations that can promote Hakka ethnic identity.

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