

# Identity and Musical Culture Construction of Xianning People in Hubei Province

<sup>1\*</sup>Wang Feiyan, <sup>2</sup>Metee Punvaratorn, and <sup>3</sup>Tepika Rodsakan

*\*Corresponding author*

Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand

E-mail: feiyan.wang@g.swu.ac.th<sup>1</sup>, tepika@g.swu.ac.th<sup>2</sup>, matee@g.swu.ac.th<sup>3</sup>

**Received** May 31, 2024; **Revised** July 12, 2024; **Accepted** September 4, 2024

## Abstract

In recent years, the study of ethnomusicology has increasingly focused on the nuanced and localized musical cultures within China. Xianning, a city in the southeast of Hubei Province, presents a unique case with its rich and diverse folk music traditions. Despite the city's rich heritage, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive ethnomusicological research that addresses how dialectical and cultural influences have shaped the musical identity of Xianning's people.

Xianning is composed of Xian'an District, Jiayu County, Tongcheng County, Chongyang County, Tongshan County, and Chibi City. This area serves as the southern gate of Hubei Province and is historically significant due to its strategic location bordering Hunan, Jiangxi, and other regions. The city's diverse dialects, described as "three miles of different tone, ten miles of different cavity," reflect the cultural and historical confluence of Mandarin, Jiangxi, and Hunan dialects dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. The primary focus of this research is Xianning, characterized by its mountainous terrain and extensive water systems, which have historically isolated its musical culture, leading to its preservation in a relatively unaltered form. The author, a native of Xianning, has been immersed in this rich cultural environment from a young age, experiencing firsthand the vibrant folk songs and dances that mark local festivals and daily life. This personal connection and extensive background in Xianning's folk traditions provide a unique perspective and depth to the study.

The objective of this study is to explore the ethnographical and musical context of the Xianning people in Hubei Province, to investigate the musical and cultural dimensions of the creation identity process of Xianning people in Hubei, and to provide a systematic analysis of Xianning's folk music instruments and their role in shaping the region's musical identity. This research paper presents an in-depth examination of Xianning's folk music traditions, aiming to address the existing research gap and contribute to the academic understanding of this region's unique cultural heritage. The structure and content of this article will cover the study's objectives, methodology, results, and implications, highlighting the significance of preserving and promoting Xianning's folk music in the face of modernization and globalization.

**Keywords:** Musical Identity; Xianning people; Xianning folk music

## Introduction

In recent years, the study of ethnomusicology has increasingly focused on the nuanced and localized musical cultures within China. Xianning, a city in the southeast of Hubei Province, presents a unique case with its rich and diverse folk music traditions. The city's strategic location, bordering Hunan and Jiangxi, has created a cultural melting pot where diverse dialects and traditions blend. Historically, Xianning's music has been influenced by its geographical isolation, which has preserved its musical culture in a relatively unaltered form. Despite this rich heritage, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive ethnomusicological research that addresses how dialectical and cultural influences have shaped the musical identity of Xianning's people. Previous studies, such as those by Zhang and Li (2022), have highlighted the cultural significance of Hubei's folk music but did not delve deeply into Xianning's unique contributions. Governmental reports from the Hubei Cultural Bureau (2021) have emphasized the preservation of intangible cultural heritage without specific focus on Xianning, indicating an existing gap in research.

This research aims to fill the gap by exploring the ethnographical and musical context of the Xianning people in Hubei Province. The study employs a qualitative research model, drawing upon concepts from cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology. The research was conducted through a combination of literature review, fieldwork, comparative analysis, and interviews. The literature review involved systematically gathering existing cultural and historical materials, local histories, reference books, and previous research studies relevant to Xianning's musical traditions. Fieldwork was conducted in various representative villages within the Xianning area to collect first-hand data on local folk music through immersive observation, participation, and

documentation of musical performances. Comparative analysis was used to examine the collected field data alongside existing recordings and documented performances, identifying changes and continuities in the musical traditions. In-depth interviews with local experts, scholars, folk artists, government cultural officials, and educators provided personal narratives and expert insights into the cultural and musical practices of the Xianning people.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of cultural inheritors for the survival and development of Xianning's folk music. However, the research also identifies significant challenges posed by urbanization and globalization, which have led to a decline in the transmission of folk music traditions among younger generations. Despite government efforts to protect and promote intangible cultural heritage, sustainable preservation requires active involvement from social groups and educational institutions. Future research should focus on integrating folk music into school curricula, enhancing public awareness through media, and developing the folk music industry. Comparative studies between different regions within Hubei and other provinces can provide a broader perspective on the unique and shared elements of folk music traditions. Additionally, interdisciplinary research that integrates musicology, anthropology, and digital humanities can leverage new technologies for documenting, analyzing, and disseminating folk music, ensuring that these cultural treasures are preserved for future generations.

## Research Objectives

To study the ethnographical and musical context of Xianning people in Hubei Province.

## Literature Review

The literature review aims to identify and describe the findings of relevant documents, articles, and research papers to demonstrate the knowledge gap that this research intends to fill. The reviewed literature is fully referenced and analyzed to establish the relationship between various studies.

### 1. Research Status of Chinese Folk Songs

The study of Chinese folk songs primarily focuses on the form and structure of music. Zhou (1993) discusses the main theoretical courses offered by Chinese and foreign music history, musical aesthetics, and folk music theory. The book aims to inspire readers to consider problems from multiple angles and levels. Similarly, Wang (2008) subdivides Chinese folk music into sixteen

music culture areas, introducing the music of China's 56 ethnic groups and analyzing their characteristics. These works provide valuable insights but do not specifically address Xianning's folk music.

## **2. Research Status of Hubei Folk Songs**

Liu (2016) categorizes Hubei folk songs into distinct linguistic sub-regions based on cultural conditions. This foundational work provides an understanding of Hubei's musical identity but lacks a detailed focus on Xianning. Additionally, the "Hubei Folk Songs" compiled by the Hubei Xianning Mass Art Museum (1987) serves as a comprehensive repository of folk songs from the Xianning area. Despite its extensive collection, the work primarily documents songs without delving into the cultural and historical contexts.

## **3. Research Status of Xianning Folk Music**

Rao (2015) offers detailed accounts of the development and evolution of Xianning's opera traditions. Similarly, Huang and Zhong (1987) and Hu and Cai (2007) enrich the understanding of Xianning's musical heritage. Recent studies by Li (2020) and Zhao (2020) provide valuable insights into specific musical traditions in Xianning, but there remains a notable gap in the comprehensive exploration of Xianning's folk music instruments.

## **Summary of the Literature Review**

The reviewed literature highlights a significant gap in the comprehensive understanding of Xianning's folk music, particularly in terms of its musical instruments and their cultural significance. Existing studies have provided valuable insights into Hubei's and Xianning's musical traditions but often lack a detailed focus on the intricate relationship between Xianning's geographical isolation and its musical culture. This research aims to address this gap by systematically analyzing Xianning's folk music instruments and their role in shaping the region's musical identity. By integrating theories and concepts from ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology, this study will explore the distribution, types, and artistic characteristics of folk music in southern Hubei and examine the current state of its cultural inheritance and development.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This research is a comprehensive study aimed at understanding the intricate dynamics of Xianning's folk music culture. The conceptual framework guiding this study draws upon the foundational concepts and theories of ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, and regional studies. The details are as follows.

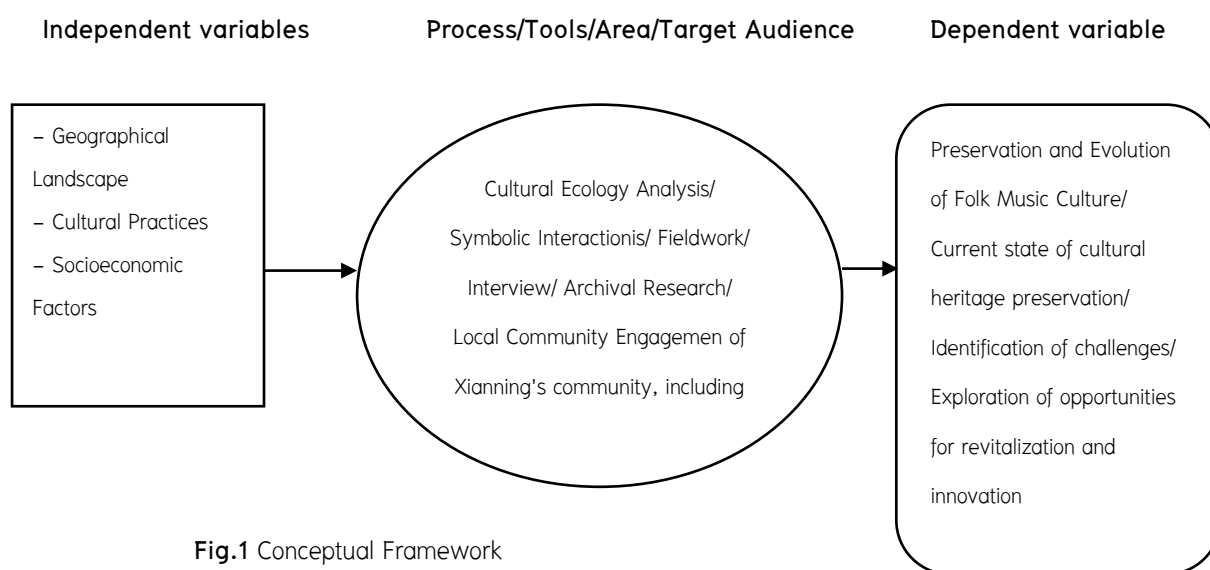


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

## Research Methodology

The research on the Musical Identity and Culture Investigation of the Xianning People in Hubei Province is a qualitative study, wherein the researcher has structured a systematic approach for conducting the research. This includes collecting information, organizing data, and conducting data analysis. The specific details are outlined below.

### Screening Process

The screening process began with a comprehensive review of existing literature on Xianning's folk music and related ethnomusicological studies. This step was crucial in identifying the gaps in current research and establishing the framework for this study. The screening process included the following steps:

**Literature Review:** A systematic gathering of cultural and historical materials, local histories, reference books, and previous research studies relevant to Xianning's musical traditions.

**Identification of Key Informants:** Selection of local experts, scholars, folk artists, government cultural officials, and educators with in-depth knowledge of Xianning's musical traditions.

**Preliminary Fieldwork:** Initial visits to representative villages in Xianning to observe and document musical performances and rituals.

### **Sample Acquisition**

The sample for this study was acquired through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who have a significant role in the preservation and practice of Xianning's folk music. The sample acquisition process involved the following:

**Selection Criteria:** Participants were selected based on their expertise, involvement in folk music, and willingness to share their knowledge. The criteria included:

- Local experts and scholars with published works on Xianning's music.
- Folk artists actively involved in performances and cultural rituals.
- Government cultural officials responsible for cultural heritage preservation.
- Educators who incorporate folk music into their teaching curriculum.

**Recruitment Process:** Potential participants were identified through referrals from local cultural institutions and community leaders. They were then contacted and invited to participate in the study.

**Sample Size:** The final sample comprised 25 participants, including 10 local experts and scholars, 5 folk artists, 5 government cultural officials, and 5 educators.

### **Data Management**

Data management involved the systematic collection, organization, and analysis of data to ensure the integrity and reliability of the research findings. The data management process included the following steps:

#### **Data Collection Methods:**

**Fieldwork:** Conducted in various representative villages within the Xianning area to collect first-hand data on local folk music. Methods included immersive observation, participation, and documentation of musical performances, rituals, and daily activities involving music. Detailed notes, audio recordings, photographs, and videos were taken to capture the nuances of musical practices.

**Interviews:** In-depth interviews with a diverse group of participants. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility and exploration of emergent themes. Responses were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

**Literature Review:** Systematic gathering of existing cultural and historical materials, local histories, reference books, and previous research studies relevant to Xianning's musical traditions.

**Comparative Analysis:** Analyzing collected field data alongside existing recordings and documented performances of Xianning folk music to identify changes and continuities in musical traditions.

**Data Organization:**

**Transcription:** All collected data, including field notes, interview recordings, and audio recordings of musical performances, were transcribed and organized systematically.

**Thematic Analysis:** Conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes such as traditional musical instruments, ritualistic music, and the evolution of musical styles.

**Comparative Analysis:** Contrasted findings with historical data to highlight changes and continuities in musical practices over time.

**Data Storage and Security:**

**Digital Storage:** All digital data (audio recordings, photographs, videos, and transcriptions) were securely stored on encrypted hard drives and cloud storage with restricted access.

**Physical Storage:** Hard copies of notes and printed materials were stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

**Data Analysis:**

**Qualitative Analysis:** Employed to analyze the content and write a descriptive narrative. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes. Comparative analysis further contrasted these findings with historical data, highlighting changes and continuities in musical practices over time.

## Research Results

From the objective to study the ethnographical and musical context of the Xianning people in Hubei Province, the results are as follows:

### 1. Ethnomusicological Context

The ethnomusicological context of Xianning's folk music reveals a deep connection between music and the daily lives and traditional practices of the Xianning people. The unique terrain of Xianning, characterized by hilly areas and isolated by mountains, has fostered a rich but marginalized musical culture reflecting a blend of diverse regional influences. This cultural isolation has helped preserve musical traditions in a relatively unaltered form. As local historian Li Mei

noted, “The mountains and rivers of Xianning have protected and preserved our unique musical traditions” (Interview, June 2023).

Folk songs are the collective creation of the working people, reflecting the life and culture of the people in different times, regions, and nations. Xianning folk songs, deeply rooted in the Han agricultural civilization, demonstrate a strong connection between musical creation and the local way of life. The study found that the themes and content of Xianning folk songs are diverse, including historical stories, love and marriage, labor and production, local customs, and ethical education (Li, Interview, June 2023). Xianning folk songs are spread in Xianning (Xian 'a District), Tongshan, Jiayu, Chibi, Tongcheng, Chongyang vast Xianning area of southern Hubei' Han folk songs. All the folk songs studied in this paper are from the book “Hubei Folk Songs Collection–Xianning Regional Volume” led by Hubei Mass Art Museum and Xianning Cultural Bureau, and some are from the folk songs collected by the author many times.

The theme content of folk songs is an important symbol to test whether folk songs have people's nature. The folk song of the patent deeply reflects the people's life form and ideological style, creation, and enterprising spirit.

Historical stories and folklore account for a considerable proportion. The way of spreading folk songs is oral, heart, heart. Therefore, the historical stories of the era as the predecessors will be passed on to the next generation with folk songs. In this way, each generation to generation will be handed down from generation to generation, so that many historical stories can be handed down among the people. For example, the song “Everyone Pity Emperor Guangxu”, “Sun Yat-sen of 1911 Revolution”, the folk song “King Li Chuang”, the field song “Three Brothers in Taoyuan Kitted”, the custom song “Qu Yuan Down from the Earth in the Air” and so on. The folk songs of these historical figures as the protagonists, on the one hand, reflect their review of history and the dissemination of historical knowledge, on the other hand, they reflect the people's respect for history and the praise and criticism of historical figures, and at the same time, it also confirms the profound truth that history is created by the working people. There are many long narrative poems sung with folk songs in Xianning, such as “Begonia Flower”, “Plum Flower”, “Orchid”, “Osmanthus Flower”, “Four Seasons Flower” and so on. The singing of such folk songs reflects people's pursuit of a happy life and yearning for a better future.

The theme content of Xianning folk songs is very wide, summed up mainly historical stories and folklore, love and marriage life, labor and production, local customs, knowledge teaching, accusing the old society, praise of the new system, and so on. Folk songs are the aspirations of



the people, they reflect the feelings of the working people; folk songs are a collective creation, and they condense the wisdom of the people. With the development of history, folk songs write down the pulse of social progress. With the rapid development of socialism, the construction of material civilization and spiritual civilization is constantly leaping forward, and the theme of folk songs is also constantly enriching. We should pass on the traditional folk songs from generation to generation.

## 2. Distribution, Types, and Artistic Characteristics of Folk Songs

Xianning's folk songs are diverse in themes and content, reflecting the life and culture of the people. The primary genres identified include:

**Hao Zi (Work Songs):** Coordinated labor songs to synchronize efforts and reduce fatigue.

**Shan Ge (Mountain Songs):** Flexible melodies sung in the mountains. (Zhang, Interview, July 2023).

**Tian Ge (Field Songs):** Agricultural songs sung during farming activities.

**Xiao Diao (Canzonets):** Short, structured songs with delicate tunes.

**Fengsu Ge (Custom Songs):** Songs performed during local customs and ceremonies.

**Deng Ge (Lamp Songs):** Festive songs sung during lamp festivals.

**Er Ge (Nursery Songs):** Children's songs reflecting their daily lives and interests.

The distribution and types of these songs are closely tied to the region's geography and cultural practices. For instance, "Shan Ge" is prevalent in the mountainous regions of Tongshan, Chongyang, and Tongcheng, resonating with the physical and cultural landscape. Folk artist Zhang Wei explained,

"Our mountain songs echo the highs and lows of our terrain, carrying the spirit of our ancestors" (Interview, July 2023).

### 1. Hao Zi (Work song)

Hao Zi, people work together with the same meaning, and the working people's working environment is closely accompanied, closely with the labor rhythm. Because the trumpet is the flag order, it has the function of directing production and coordinating the labor force. The song is the sound of Shouting, and calling, so Xianning people sing in the process of labor called "Shouting". Xianning has a diverse geographical environment, including the mountains of Tongshan, Chongyang, and Tongcheng South counties, and the three counties of Chibi and Jiayu live by the river, so the folk work in a variety of songs, such as: hitting, carrying, pressing oil, water, boats, boats, and boats, etc. Among them, the song is the most popular in Xianning.

The hit song is shouted (sung) by people to unify the movement and relieve the fatigue. Xianning hit song singing content is very extensive, some people sing, see things, and for the command hit and impromptu sing, based on historical stories and folklore. The hit song is also called “Hit My Song”, “my song”. It is people in the dike dam, digging the singing forms of the hit chant are all the singing words of the lead singer, the harmony lining words or the interspersed lining sentences. Lead the crowd with the rhythm of the music, I do not move; when the resultant will lift E, then fall. The tune of the chant is high, bold, and appealing. The beat is more regular, and the rhythm is very distinct. Normally, the vocal range is within the octave, and the singers sing with the true voice.

The miner of the next sentence and the four-sentence pattern are the most common. Use the traditional five-tone tone. For example, Tongshan’s hit song “Ren ren ke tan guang xu wang” is composed of sentences, written in A five-tone style, with simple melody and rhythm.

人 人 可 叹 光 绪 王

Ren ren ke tan guang xu wang

Transcription by Wang Feiyan

Fig. 2 Tong shan folk song “Ren ren ke tan guang xu wang”

Another example is the Chibi folk song “Dui mian shan shang yi ke huai”, which is composed of four sentences and five tones of A Shang.

对 面 山 上 一 棵 槐  
Dui mian shan shang yi ke huai

Transcription by Wang Feiyan



Fig. 3 Chibi folk song “Dui mian shan shang yi ke huai”

## 2. Shan Ge (Folk song)

Shan Ge, as the name suggests, is sung on the mountain. The melody of folk songs is a kind of song cavity handed down since ancient times. When people sing folk songs, they sing with the words. Therefore, the melody of folk songs has the flexibility of “ten songs sing nine different”. Xianning folk songs generally refer to the lyric songs sung in the mountains, including high cavity, flat cavity, low cavity folk songs, cattle folk songs, firewood songs, hemp songs, folk songs, and so on. High, flat, and low cavity folk songs are the most common in Xianning folk songs. The song sentence structure is the most common five sentences, mostly using the national five-tone style.

High-tune folk songs are also known as “Scattered Across the Mountain Lost”, and “Across the Ridge Song”. It has a high tone, broad vocal range, undulating melody, free rhythm, drag (swing cavity) is very long, using a lot of lining words, emotional bold, singers on the mountain with a fake voice (singers also called “edge sound”) singing. Most of the people solo, there are also two people duets, sing, sometimes there is a leading word, many and lining words. For example, Tongcheng's high-tone folk song “Sai ge hui shang wo dai tou” is composed of five sentences, using B feather five tones.

赛歌会上我带头  
Sai ge hui shang wo dai tou



Fig. 4 Tongcheng high-tone folk song “Sai ge hui shang wo dai tou”

### 3. Tian Ge (Field Song)

Tian Ge is the agricultural song, the most common field song is the grass gongs and drums, which generally refers to the farmers in the paddy field, early or hilly hillside work for the command of production, encourage energy, reduce the fatigue in the process of heavy labor, to the song master, the singing and singing form, and the accompaniment of gongs and drums set. For example, the Xianning area is called “planting field drum”, “planting field gongs and drum”, “falling field ring”, “field name”, “digging mountain drum”, “mountain drum”, “mountain gongs and drum”, “digging ground drum”, “playing single drum” and so on. The theme of the gongs and drums is very wide and rich, including singing historical figures, singing legends, teaching rural knowledge, and improvised oral creation by song masters. On the melody, there is the tone of the rhythm stretching, but also the colloquial melody with a compact rhythm, forming its rich tone. There is usually a solo or a duet. A singing form of singing. Most of them are single. In addition, there are other forms of field songs such as fishing songs, cattle songs, wo songs.

### 4. Xiao Diao (Canzonet)

The word “tune” has the meaning of “tune” in folk, and the minor tune is the meaning of short songs, also known as the time tune, which is usually spread by foreign folk artists to the locals to sing. After the spread of the past dynasties, the art after more processing, with the characteristics of balanced structure, orderly rhythm, delicate tune, gentle and soft characteristics. Xianning’s number of minor songs, the theme range is very wide. Xianning minor tune shows the feelings of delicate twists and turns, regular rhythm, singing form to solo for more, followed by duet and a leading crowd, etc. The format of minor lyrics is diverse: in addition to seven-character

sentences, there are also long and short sentences, in addition to two sentences, four sentences are common, often non-dual three sentences, five sentences, and other structures; coupled with the rich and varied lining, make the structure of minor songs more mature and varied than the song and folk songs.



Fig. 5 Singing Xiao Diao on the fire during the winter slack season

#### 5. Fengsu Ge (Custom song)

Fengsu Ge refers to the songs sung in the unique custom ceremony of Xianning. Xianning folk customs are simple and honest, local customs inherited from generation to generation, people in a variety of rural atmospheres on the etiquette, singing the custom song, spread in Xianning various places. Among them are dragon boat tunes, cry marriage, funeral songs, God songs, and so on. The custom song is the folk music on various important folk ceremonies, is also the most reflects the Xianning people's religious beliefs, family culture, ethnic identity, and other issues of the music form, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.

#### 6. Deng Ge (Lamp song)

Deng Ge refers to the song sung by people when playing with the lamp according to the customs of various places. Because playing with lanterns is mostly a festive form of singing and dancing, the lantern song is also called a folk song and dance song. Xianning city lantern song form is wide, there are lotus boats, high warped, land boats, lanterns, and so on. The content of the lantern song is more extensive, singing historical stories, love stories, folklore, watching lanterns, flowers, songs, flowers, and some humorous and funny songs. Lantern songs have a deep life atmosphere and strong local color, singing content to sing auspicious, peace, harvest,

rich, and congratulations. The tune is relaxed and lively, and the rhythm is lively, with rich local flavor.



Fig. 6 Xianan Sing Deng Ge song

#### 7. Er Ge (Nursery)

Children's songs are songs sung by children to reflect their own life and interest. The number of Xianning children's songs is not much, but the content is very rich, with the mother shaking the children to sleep, such as "my son to sleepy", "baby sleepy", "baby sleep", "enlightenment song" primary school", "moon", "cattle song", "playing cattle whip", and teach sea song, riddle song, practice song (tongue twister) and so on. The tune of children's songs is short in syllables, the vocal range is not wide, and the rhythm jumps, close to the chanting. Children's songs singing form has a solo, also have a question-and-answer duet.



Fig. 7 Xianning folk music types

### 3. Musical Characteristics and Cultural Inheritance

Xianning's folk music exhibits unique musical elements such as specific scales (pentatonic, quaternionic), tonal patterns (gong, shang, jiao, zheng, yu), and lyrical structures influenced by local dialects. The preservation and development of these musical traditions rely heavily on cultural inheritors who pass down knowledge and skills to younger generations. Despite the challenges posed by urbanization and globalization, there are ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Xianning's folk music through educational and community programs (Wang, Interview, August 2023).

#### 1. Language characteristics of Xianning folk songs

Folk songs are the collective creation of the working people. It has been sung by millions of people and formed a variety of lyric formats through continuous training. Music is the product of feelings, language is a way and method of expressing feelings, and the tone of language is an important factor of language and is also one of the most common means to express feelings. Xianning is located at the junction of Hubei, Jiangxi, and Hunan provinces. Most of the spoken language belongs to the Jiangxi language system, and the two ends of the junction with Hunan have a Hunan sound, and the dialect of each county is six tones. Due to the restraint and influence of dialect intonation, Xianning folk songs also have different artistic characteristics from other places in tone. Xianning dialect has six tones, the tune of Xianning folk songs has a very close relationship with the dialect, the melody of the suppression, Yang, dun, and frustration, all by the dialect tone, this melody is a local melody handed down since ancient times, which is a popular tune melody in Tongshan. When this four-tone scale is stacked in the song, it becomes a unique tune. The ancient tone of Xianning is a folk song cavity called a mountain drum cavity. When the cavity acts, the melody of the basic tone will be controlled by the dialect intonation. Because of this restraint, the melody with the basic cavity often conforms to the intonation of the dialect in the pronunciation of the lyrics. The intonation of the Xianning dialect constitutes a unique local language level and oblique. In folk songs, the level and oblique of the lyrics are often reflected in the static relationship of the song.

In addition, there are many common lining words in Xianning folk songs. There are general lining words and meaningful lining word lining sentences. The lining words (especially the lining sentences of the meaning) appear alternately with the positive words in the song, which makes the song style and sentence patterns of folk songs more complicated. We call them folk songs. This kind of folk songs exist in many Tian songs in the Xianning area and become one of the



characteristic sentence patterns. If you take the appearance of the subject and the sign head. In the song, there are two kinds of one sentence and two sentences. An interspersed method: that is, half of the singing of the song, there is a general lining of words, and the word sings a sentence, the first sentence. Two sentences with method: is positive sing one, a general lining, positive sing two sentences, with the first sentence, the above column positive and number, for example, two lines with the singing way the two interspersed types of song, most are composed of song card song body form, the singing method is by the song teacher to lead, the state cavity and sing. The word style of Xianning folk songs is the most common with four sentences and five sentences, followed by similar urgent commands. In syntactic structure, seven words and one sentence are the most.

Xianning folk song lyrics of the speech devices are also very diverse. For example, improvisation, comparison, dual, foreshadowing, exaggeration, overlap, asking, reflection, idioms, slang, proverbs, and homophonic, are used by the working people to send feelings, making the folk language vivid, sincere, and sincere.

## 2. The scale and tone type of Xianning folk songs

From the point of view of the scale tone type, Xianning area folk songs, three, four, five, six, and seven sound scales (sound list). In the existing data, the pentatonic scale is the most, the quaternionic scale is the second, the proportion of the six-tone steps and the separate three-tone folk songs is not large apart, and the sevens tone scale is very few. In terms of tone patterns, there are gong, Shang, jiao, Zheng, feather, and transferred folk songs, but the levy tone patterns are the most common. Yu tone type period, official tone type again, business, corner tune type, and transfer of folk songs are rare. In 1983, the official organization of "Hubei Folk Songs into-Xianning regional volume" folk songs collected forty-three tones alone of folk songs, with Sol La Do and La Do Re cavity. In some places across the river from the Jingzhou area, are found folk songs with do mi sol alone, and in some places bordering Hunan province, there are found folk songs with La Do Mi alone. These undoubtedly reflect the tone characteristics of folk songs in the Xianning area.

## Discussions

The discussion delves into the multifaceted realm of folk music in Xianning, exploring its nuances through geographical, cultural, and socio-economic lenses. Xianning, situated in the ethnic valley of southern Hubei, presents a unique case where the convergence of diverse cultural



influences has shaped a distinctive musical identity. This section explores the cultural connections and influences that define Xianning's folk music, emphasizing its significance within the broader ethnomusicological context.

Xianning's location in a valley surrounded by mountains has historically limited cultural diffusion, preserving its unique musical traditions. The rugged terrain and relative isolation have allowed Xianning to develop a distinct musical culture, characterized by diverse dialects and regional influences. As Liu Zhengwei (2016) noted in his analysis of Hubei folk songs, the geographical isolation of southern Hubei has fostered distinct cultural units, each with unique musical identities. This context has allowed Xianning's folk music to retain its traditional elements while integrating influences from neighboring regions such as Hunan and Jiangxi.

The traditional agricultural lifestyle of the Han nationality in southern Hubei serves as the foundation for the creation of Xianning's folk music. The study highlights how material production modes, such as farming and labor, have shaped the themes and forms of folk music. For instance, work songs (Hao Zi) are deeply rooted in the agricultural practices of the region, coordinating efforts and enhancing the communal labor experience. This connection between music and daily life underscores the cultural significance of folk music as a reflection of the community's values and practices.

Cultural inheritors play a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of Xianning's folk music. The study emphasizes the importance of individuals and social groups in maintaining musical traditions amidst modern pressures. As Wang Jian (Interview, August 2023) highlighted, integrating folk music into educational curricula and community programs is essential for its survival. This proactive approach ensures that younger generations appreciate and continue these traditions, fostering a sense of cultural identity and continuity.

Urbanization and globalization pose significant challenges to the transmission of Xianning's folk music. The study identifies a decline in the transmission of folk music traditions among younger generations, driven by modern lifestyle changes and external cultural influences. However, there are opportunities for revitalization through strategic preservation efforts. Incorporating folk music into school curricula, enhancing public awareness through media, and developing the folk music industry can create sustainable pathways for preserving Xianning's musical heritage.

Xianning's folk music serves as a microcosm for understanding broader trends in the preservation and evolution of Chinese folk music amidst modern pressures. The study's findings contribute to the academic discourse on ethnomusicology, providing insights into the complex

interplay between geography, culture, and music. Future research should focus on comparative studies between different regions within Hubei and other provinces to gain a broader perspective on the unique and shared elements of folk music traditions. Additionally, interdisciplinary research integrating musicology, anthropology, and digital humanities can leverage new technologies for documenting, analyzing, and disseminating folk music, ensuring that these cultural treasures are preserved for future generations.

The discussion connects the cultural heritage of Xianning with the broader context of the ethnic valley in southern Hubei. By examining the geographical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that shape Xianning's folk music, the study highlights the importance of preserving and promoting this unique musical tradition. The proactive involvement of social groups, educational institutions, and media is crucial for sustaining Xianning's folk music, ensuring that it continues to enrich the cultural identity of the region and contribute to the global tapestry of musical heritage.

### **Knowledge from Research**

The research on Xianning folk songs has yielded significant insights into the theme, content, genres, and musical characteristics of this rich cultural heritage. Through a comprehensive analysis, it has been revealed that Xianning folk songs serve as a reflection of the life, culture, and history of the local people, encapsulating diverse themes such as historical narratives, love and marriage, labor and production, and local customs. The research has systematically categorized the main genres of Xianning folk songs, including work songs, mountain songs, field songs, canzonets, custom songs, lamp songs, and nursery rhymes, each with its unique characteristics and cultural significance.

Furthermore, the study has elucidated the linguistic, tonal, and structural characteristics of Xianning folk songs, shedding light on the intricate interplay between language, melody, and lyrical structure. The research findings highlight the dynamic nature of folk music, which evolves and adapts over time while preserving its roots in local culture and tradition. Through diagrams, charts, and concept maps, the research has provided a visually engaging synthesis of the knowledge gained, offering a concise and easy-to-understand overview of the rich tapestry of Xianning's folk music heritage.

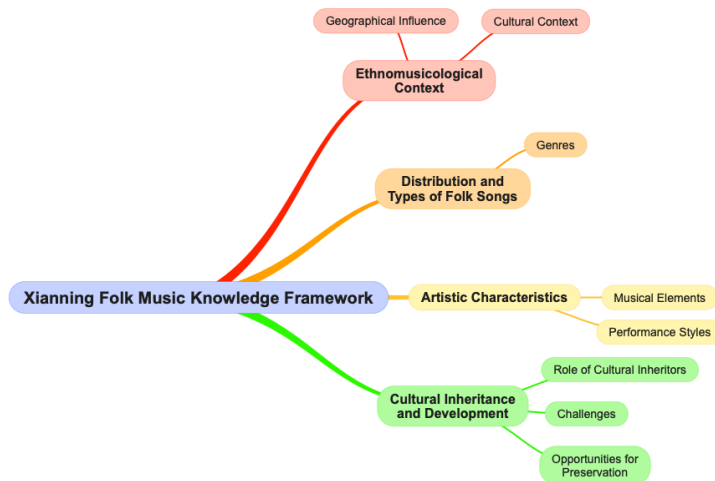


Fig. 8 Xianning folk music types

## Conclusion

The research on the musical identity and culture of the Xianning people in Hubei Province provides valuable insights into the region's rich musical heritage. The study's findings align with the research objectives, highlighting the ethnomusicological context, distribution, types, artistic characteristics, and cultural inheritance of Xianning's folk music.

The unique geographical and cultural context of Xianning, characterized by its mountainous terrain and relative isolation, has played a crucial role in preserving its distinct musical traditions. The study reveals that Xianning's folk music is deeply intertwined with the local way of life, reflecting the community's values and practices. The cultural isolation has fostered a blend of diverse regional influences, creating a rich but marginalized musical culture.

Xianning's folk songs are diverse, encompassing several genres such as Hao Zi (work songs), Shan Ge (mountain songs), Tian Ge (field songs), Xiao Diao (canzonets), Fengsu Ge (custom songs), Deng Ge (lamp songs), and Er Ge (nursery songs). These genres are shaped by the region's geography and cultural practices, each with distinct characteristics and social roots. The study provides a detailed analysis of the distribution and types of these songs, highlighting their significance in the local cultural landscape.

Xianning's folk music exhibits unique musical elements such as specific scales (pentatonic, quaternionic), tonal patterns (gong, shang, jiao, zheng, yu), and lyrical structures influenced by local dialects. The preservation and development of these musical traditions are closely linked to cultural inheritors who play a vital role in transmitting knowledge and skills to younger generations.

Despite the challenges posed by urbanization and globalization, there are ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Xianning's folk music through educational and community programs.

The study identifies significant challenges to the transmission of Xianning's folk music, including the decline in tradition among younger generations and the impact of urbanization and globalization. However, it also highlights opportunities for revitalization through strategic preservation efforts. Integrating folk music into school curricula, enhancing public awareness through media, and developing the folk music industry are crucial for sustaining and revitalizing Xianning's musical heritage.

## Summary of Findings

**Ethnomusicological Context:** Xianning's folk music is deeply rooted in the region's geography and traditional practices, reflecting diverse influences preserved by its unique terrain.

**Distribution, Types, and Characteristics:** The genres of Xianning folk music, such as work songs, mountain songs, and field songs, are shaped by the local environment and cultural practices, with distinct musical characteristics aligning with local dialects and traditions.

**Cultural Inheritance and Development:** While facing modern challenges, Xianning's folk music remains a vital cultural heritage. Efforts to integrate folk music into educational and community programs are crucial for its preservation and revitalization.

## Suggestions

To further advance the understanding and preservation of folk music in southern Hubei, future research should focus on several key areas. First, there is a need for in-depth ethnographic studies that explore the socio-cultural contexts and individual narratives of folk musicians in the region. These studies should aim to capture the nuances of their lived experiences and the socio-economic factors influencing their art. Additionally, comparative studies between different regions within Hubei and other provinces can provide a broader perspective on the unique and shared elements of folk music traditions. Another important avenue for research is the impact of modernization and globalization on traditional music forms. Investigating how these forces are reshaping folk music and its reception among younger generations can offer valuable insights for developing adaptive strategies that keep the traditions relevant. Lastly, interdisciplinary research that integrates musicology, anthropology, and digital humanities can leverage new technologies for

documenting, analyzing, and disseminating folk music, ensuring that these cultural treasures are preserved for future generations.

## References

- Hu, J., & Cai, J. (2007). Musical origins of Xianning's opera traditions. *Journal of Music Research*, 12(3), 45–58.
- Huang, Z., & Zhong, Q. (1987). *Tiqin opera music*. Hubei University Press.
- Hubei Xianning Mass Art Museum. (1987). *Hubei folk songs*. Hubei Publishing House.
- Li, W. (2020). On the two traditions of Jiayu Wudu. *Journal of Music Instruments*, 25(2), 78–92.
- Liu, Z. (2016). Analysis of the characteristics of Hubei folk songs. *Huang Zhong Journal*, 42(3), 112–128.
- Rao, H. (2015). *Chongyang violin drama (1903–2014)*. Hubei Literature and Art Press.
- Wang, J. (2023, August). Interview on the preservation and promotion efforts for Xianning folk music.
- Wang, Y. (2008). *Chinese folk music*. Beijing University Press.
- Zhao, Y. (2020). The art form and cultural inheritance. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(1), 56–70.
- Zhang, L., & Li, H. (2022). The cultural significance of Hubei's folk music. *Journal of Ethnomusicology*.
- Zhang, W. (2023, July). Interview on the artistic characteristics of mountain songs in Xianning.
- Zhou, Q. (1993). *Chinese folk songs*. Beijing University Press.