

THE INFLUENCE OF GUANGDONG FOLK MUSIC ELEMENTS ON THE OVERALL STYLE OF CHINESE CHORAL WORKS

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: The development of Chinese choral music has seen continuous integration of regional folk music elements, enriching its stylistic diversity and cultural depth. Among these, Guangdong folk music—with its distinct melodic, rhythmic, and linguistic characteristics—plays an increasingly influential role. As a region with a profound musical tradition and cultural heritage, Guangdong offers a unique repository of folk music that enhances the expressive potential of modern Chinese choral works. However, while northern folk music and ethnic minority musical styles have received substantial academic attention, systematic studies on the use and impact of Guangdong folk music elements in choral music remain limited. This research aims to address this gap by examining how Guangdong folk music elements are integrated into Chinese choral compositions and how they influence musical style, performance practices, and cultural transmission. The study also seeks to explore the educational and cross-cultural value of incorporating these elements into contemporary music-making.

Methods: The study employs literature analysis, on-site investigation, interviews, and inductive summarization. The research analyzed academic journals, theses, and local histories related to Guangdong folk music and its cultural background. Interviews with composers, conductors, music educators, and folk musicians were conducted, as well as discussions with various choral groups to assess their knowledge and attitudes toward Guangdong folk music elements.

Results: The research identified five key musical features of Guangdong folk music that have a significant impact on choral works: melody and pitch, rhythm and beat, harmony and tonality, instrumentation, and language. The integration of pentatonic scales, lyrical ornamentation, and expressive melodic lines enriches the musical expressiveness of choral pieces. Complex rhythmic patterns, such as mixed meters and syncopations, add vibrancy and depth. Harmonically, Guangdong music contributes to innovative choral textures through polyphony and chromatic progression. Traditional instruments like the erhu, pipa, and gaohu enhance regional color and authenticity, while the use of Cantonese and other Lingnan dialects deepens the emotional resonance and cultural identity of the works. These elements not only elevate the artistic quality of the

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compositions but also serve important cultural functions. They help preserve regional traditions, promote educational engagement, and facilitate intercultural exchange. The case studies of works like *Flowers Morning and Moonlight*, *Liwan Lullaby*, and *Yongqingfang* vividly demonstrate how Guangdong folk music breathes new life into Chinese choral compositions.

Conclusions: This study reveals that the incorporation of Guangdong folk music elements significantly enhances the artistic and cultural dimensions of Chinese choral works. By integrating melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, instrumental, and linguistic features unique to Guangdong, these choral compositions gain distinctive stylistic identities rooted in regional tradition. Moreover, they contribute to the cultural inheritance of Guangdong folk music, transforming it into a living, evolving practice that resonates with both local and global audiences. The research underlines the value of cross-disciplinary approaches—including ethnomusicology and cultural communication—in understanding and promoting regional music within modern artistic frameworks. It also points toward the potential of Guangdong folk music to serve as a bridge between tradition and innovation, education and performance, and local identity and global cultural exchange.

Keywords: Guangdong Folk Music / Musical Elements / Chinese Choral Works / Stylistic Influence

Introduction

Choral singing is a polyphonic form in which multiple singers simultaneously perform a composition each singing their voice part.¹ Most academics concur that choral music, which is characterized by several singers performing the various sections of a polyphonic piece, originated in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.² Chinese choral music originated from the “Western Music Eastward Progression” at the beginning of the 20th century. Over the past century, it has undergone significant development, including the “localization” of Western choral music and the “nationalization” within the context of Chinese culture.

Musical elements are the source of motivation for music creation. Like the molecules of an object, embody the original musical melody, rhythm, mode, and other musical characteristics. From the characteristics of musical elements, can see the attributes of national music culture and national music.³ As the southern gate of China, the Guangdong region, with its rich folk music elements, plays a pivotal role in Chinese choral works. Guangdong region has a long and deep cultural history, and its folk music elements have distinctive local characteristics and unique artistic charm. As a national intangible cultural heritage, Guangdong music not only carries rich historical and cultural information but also has unique artistic value. Through the form of choral singing, the elements of Guangdong folk music have been more widely spread and developed.

¹ Jiahai Chen, *Conducting Design for Famous Choral Pieces* (Zhengzhou: Henan University Press, 2000). (in Chinese)

² Manfred F. Bukofzer, “The Beginnings of Choral Polyphony,” in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950), 189.

³ Xinmei Zhang, *Nationalization of Chinese Piano Art: A Study of Pentatonic Modal Harmonization Techniques in Contemporary Piano Music* (Xi'an: Shaanxi Normal University Publishing House, 2020). (in Chinese)

The folk music elements in the culture of the Guangdong region have a profound influence on Chinese choral works, marking a fusion of culture and art.

In recent years, the academic community has conducted extensive research on the application of folk music elements in Chinese choral works. Most of it has focused on the exploration of northern folk music and minority music elements. There are relatively few systematic studies on Guangdong folk music elements, especially on the application of them in choral works, and there is obvious research space.

The research aims to deeply analyze the application of Guangdong folk music elements in Chinese choral works, revealing their unique musical characteristics and cultural values. By introducing the theories of ethnomusicology and cultural communication, not only focuses on the artistic expression of the musical elements but also explores their transmission and dissemination paths in modern society. The great theoretical and practical significance for promoting the inheritance and development of Guangdong folk music and improving the artistic level and cultural connotation of choral works.

Research Objectives

1. To study the application and expression of Guangdong folk music elements in Chinese choral works.
2. To analyze the influence of Guangdong folk music elements on Chinese choral style.

Literature Review

Research on Choral Music

Choral art originated from religious activities in Europe and has a history spanning over a thousand years. The earliest forms of choral singing can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, where choirs played significant roles in theater and religious ceremonies. In the early Middle Ages, Gregorian Chant became the primary form of church choral music, characterized by monophonic sacred songs. By the Renaissance period, influenced by humanist thought, choral music began to emphasize human expression, leading to the emergence of complex polyphonic choral works by composers such as Palestrina.⁴

The Baroque era marked a pinnacle in the development of choral art. Composers like Bach and Handel elevated choral music to new heights through rich harmonies and intricate structures. For instance, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and Handel's *Messiah* are outstanding representatives of this period. During the Classical period, choral music placed greater emphasis on formal perfection and balance. Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" in his *Ninth Symphony* seamlessly combined choral singing with symphonic orchestration, pioneering the genre of symphonic choral works.⁵

⁴ Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 5th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

⁵ Martin Cooper, *Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

In China, choral art developed within the context of modern society. In the early 20th century, with the influx of Western culture, Li Shutong composed the three-part choral piece “Spring Outing,” regarded as a representative of early Chinese choral works and marking the advent of choral art in China.⁶ Subsequently, musicians such as Huang Zi, Nie Er, and Xian Xinghai created numerous choral works with distinct national characteristics, such as the *Yellow River Cantata*, laying a solid foundation for the development of Chinese choral art.

Choral music in the Guangdong region has a profound cultural background. As early as the Ming Dynasty, Guangdong had choral forms performed in local dialects. In the early 20th century, Western choral forms were introduced to Guangdong, leading churches and schools to establish choirs. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Guangdong's choral movement entered a new developmental stage, producing choral works with local characteristics, such as “Red Lychees,” reflecting the culture and social conditions of Guangdong.⁷

Research on the Cultural and Musical Characteristics of the Guangdong Region

Yu Qiwei defines Guangdong music as a new form of folk music genre, asserting its unique position and value in the history of Chinese music. By tracing time and phenomena, he systematically reviews the developmental characteristics and compositional techniques of Guangdong music across different historical periods. He categorizes its evolution into stages: gestation, formation, maturity, and decline. During the gestation period, Guangdong music was primarily based on folk tunes and Cantonese opera music, gradually forming its distinctive style.⁸ The formation period marked its maturation, with increasingly diverse compositional techniques and more refined structures, leading to the emergence of numerous representative works such as “Bu Bu Gao” (“Step by Step”) and “Cai Yun Zhui Yue” (“Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon”). Yu emphasizes that the development of Guangdong music is inextricably linked to the fusion of Chinese and Western musical cultures and the assimilation of new elements. This openness and innovation distinguish it from traditional Chinese music. His research offers a comprehensive perspective for understanding the historical trajectory and artistic features of Guangdong music.

Xie Ji conducts a comprehensive analysis of the formation and development of Guangdong music from the perspectives of urban civilization and cultural integration. He asserts that Guangdong music is a product of urban civilization and the result of the convergence of modern Chinese and Western musical cultures. Given that Guangdong has been at the forefront of China's opening to the outside world in modern times, the introduction of Western musical culture profoundly influenced Guangdong's music.⁹ While assimilating Western

⁶ Zaisheng Liu, “Li Shutong and the Early Choral Art in China,” *Music Exploration* 25, no. 4 (2009): 33-37. (in Chinese)

⁷ Guohuan Chen, “Development and Prospects of Guangdong Choral Art,” *Music Research* 29, no. 2 (2015): 45-50. (in Chinese)

⁸ Qiwei Yu, “Overview of Guangdong Music,” *China Music* 18, no. 2 (1998): 25-29. (in Chinese)

⁹ Ji Xie, “Thoughts on the Innovative Development of Guangdong Music,” *New Sounds of Yuefu: Journal of Shenyang Conservatory of Music* 28,

elements, Guangdong music retained its national characteristics and traditional charm. Under shared traits of openness, inclusiveness, and a willingness to innovate, Guangdong music has continually evolved and, through widespread dissemination via modern media, has garnered extensive influence both domestically and internationally.

Research on the Use and Impact of Guangdong Folk Music Elements in Choral Works

Melodically, Guangdong folk music is smooth and graceful, often employing pentatonic scales particularly the Zhi and gong modes and frequently utilizing techniques such as melodic leaps and glissandos to enhance vivacity. Rhythmically, it is brisk and imbued with strong rhythmic vitality, commonly featuring syncopations and dotted notes, contributing to the music's dynamism. Harmonically, simple and harmonious intervals of thirds and fifths are prevalent, with accompaniment instruments like the pipa and yueqin enriching the harmonic texture. Instrumentation typically includes the erxian, yueqin, san xian, and pipa, each offering unique timbres that augment Guangdong folk music.¹⁰

Li Fubin, employing various classification methods, categorizes Guangdong folk music elements as follows: by musical style Cantonese opera music, mountain songs, and ditties; by occasion celebratory songs and ceremonial songs; by function educational songs and entertainment songs. In terms of emotional expression, the natural and sincere emotive qualities inherent in Guangdong folk music enable choral works to handle emotions more delicately and authentically, thereby enhancing their appeal.¹¹

Wan Shanshan notes that incorporating Guangdong folk music as an element into choral works not only possesses artistic value but also holds significant educational significance and contributes to cultural transmission. This integration elevates the aesthetic awareness of students and audiences, cultivating their sense of identity and pride in local culture. Additionally, this practice provides new avenues for the inheritance and innovation of Guangdong folk music. Through the medium of choral singing, Guangdong folk music can be disseminated to broader audiences, promoting its influence and sustained development.¹²

Research Scope

Time Frame

This study focuses on the period from the mid-20th century to the present, covering the historical evolution and development of Guangdong folk music, as well as its application and innovation in choral works. The choice of this period contributes to an in-depth understanding of the evolution and development trend of Guangdong folk music elements in choral works.

no. 3 (2010): 125-127. (in Chinese)

¹⁰ Jiaguo Sun, "Research on the Application of Guangdong Folk Music in Choral Creation," *Journal of Musicology* 4, no. 3 (2015): 45-50. (in Chinese)

¹¹ Fubin Li, "Characteristics and Applications of Guangdong Folk Music Elements," *Music Research* 21, no. 2 (2007): 60-65. (in Chinese)

¹² Shanshan Wan, "Artistic Characteristics Analysis of Lai Guangyi's Choral Work 'Heavy Rain,'" *Choral Art* 51, no. 4 (2017): 28-32. (in Chinese)

Geographic Scope

The study focuses on the core of Guangdong, the Guangfu area while expanding to the whole of Guangdong and the wider Lingnan region. The Lingnan region includes Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, and parts of Fujian and Hunan, and the similarities and interoperability of the musical cultures of these regions help to comprehensively analyze the influence of Guangdong folk music elements on choral works.

Cultural Scope

This study focuses on the cultural characteristics of the Guangdong region, including the diversified cultural branches such as Guangfu culture, Hakka culture, and Chaoshan culture. Each of these cultural branches possesses unique musical elements and artistic expressions, which are an important part of Guangdong folk music. Studying them helps to comprehensively understand the diversity and richness of Guangdong folk music.

Research Methods

To ensure the breadth and depth of the research, this study adopts a variety of research methods, specifically including method, an on-site survey method, an interview method, and an inductive summarization method. The researcher carefully selected seven distinctively representative choirs, namely Lingnan Girls Choir, South China Normal University Choir, Guangzhou Liwan Children's Choir, Guangzhou Xiguan Female Choir, Guangzhou Fun Sing Chorus, Yueren Chorus and Huaihai Choir of Guangdong University of Education, to conduct comprehensive and in-depth interviews.

The research utilizes a multifaceted methodology to understand the impact of Guangdong folk music elements in Chinese choral works. The literature analysis includes reviewing academic journals, theses, and local histories about Guangdong music culture. First-hand investigations on-site and interviews with composers, conductors, music educators, folk musicians, etc., provide valuable insights. Discussions with different choral groups help understand their familiarity and attitude towards Guangdong folk music elements. This approach aims to explore the integration and innovation of folk music into modern choral compositions.

Literature Analysis Method

Systematically collect and analyze relevant literature on Guangdong folk music elements, Guangdong regional culture, and Chinese choral works, especially from the middle of the 20th century to contemporary times. Through analyzing this literature, we understand the historical development, cultural background, and artistic characteristics of Guangdong music, and explore its specific application in choral works.

On-site Investigation Method

Go deep into the musical activities and choral groups in Guangdong to investigate and record the performance practices of folk music and the activities of choral groups on the spot. Through technical means such as audio and video recording, the performances of folk music are recorded and first-hand information is obtained to help analyze the characteristics of folk music elements and their application in choral works.

Interview Method

Seven representative choirs were selected for in-depth interviews, and two experts with profound attainments in the field of choral singing were specially invited, namely Professor Guo Hechu, a famous Chinese composer, and Professor Zhang Xin, a famous Chinese conductor. The interviews were conducted in the form of face-to-face communication, telephone interviews, and video conferences.

The Interviews include:

Lingnan Girls Choir: to discuss the technical and artistic approaches adopted by the choir in interpreting elements of Guangdong folk music, especially the innovations in melodic and harmonic treatments. South China Normal University Choir: To understand the specific use of Guangdong folk music elements in the piece, such as the unique treatment of rhythm and beat, as well as the choice of instrumental arrangements. Guangzhou Liwan Children's Choir: focusing on understanding how to integrate Cantonese folk music elements into children's choral works, especially in terms of adaptability and innovation in melody and lyrics. Guangzhou Xiguan Female Choir: explore how to present the artistry of Cantonese folk music in a non-specialized context, especially the use of rhythm and beat, harmony and tonality. Guangzhou Fansheng Chorus: sharing how elements of Guangdong folk music are integrated in arrangements and performances, and how these elements enhance the expressive power and cultural connotation of the works. Yueren Chorus: Introducing the specific ways in which the elements of Guangdong folk music are expressed in their choral works, especially in the integration of melody and intonation. Huahai Choir of Guangdong Second Normal College: shared their understanding and application of Guangdong folk music elements, especially the innovation in instruments and orchestration and language expression. In addition, famous conductors and composers in China were interviewed to discuss their personal views on the elements of Guangdong folk music and the style of the choir's interpretation of the work, thus inspiring the researcher.

Inductive Summary Method

Systematically classify, organize, and analyze the collected data and information. Using qualitative analysis methods, the specific application of Guangdong folk music elements in choral works and their far-reaching influence on the development of choral art are summarized through content analysis and thematic coding.

Research Results

Through literature analysis and inductive summarization, the research identifies five fundamental features of Guangdong folk music: melody and pitch, rhythm and beat, harmony and tonality, instruments and orchestration, and lyrics and language. By combining on-site research, choir rehearsal observation, and in-depth communication with choir conductors and members, the research analyzes the performance of seven choral works about these features. Interviews with renowned conductors and composers further explore how these elements influence and shape the artistic style and expression of the choral works.

1. Application and Expression of Guangdong Folk Music Elements

1.1 Melody and Expressiveness

The melody of Guangdong folk music significantly enhances the artistic expression of choral works with its smooth, beautiful, and lyrical characteristics. By incorporating the pentatonic scale along with techniques such as glissando and ornamentation, these melodies not only preserve the traditional charm but also imbue modern choral works with a vivid expressiveness and captivating appeal.

Choral Work “Flowers Morning and Moonlight” - performed by Lingnan Girls Choir. Founded in 2013, Lingnan Girls Choir is dedicated to promoting Lingnan music with Professor Zhang Xin, Vice President of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, serving as its artistic director and permanent conductor. The choir has earned gold medals in numerous competitions both domestically and internationally, gaining wide acclaim for its beautiful tone and excellent expressiveness. The melody of “Flowers Morning and Moonlight” features the traditional five-tone scale of Guangdong, consisting of five tones: Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, and Yu, and demonstrates the delicate and lyrical qualities of Lingnan music. The incorporation of glissando and ornamentation sounds further enhances the emotional expression and local characteristics of the piece. Reflecting on the experience, Troupe member Huang Yingying remarked, “The smoothness of the melody and the use of pentatonic scale allowed us to deeply feel the unique flavor of Guangdong folk music.”

Choral Work “Moonlight” - sung by Guangxi Yueren Chorus. Established in 2015, the Yueren Chorus is composed of more than 60 members with different professional backgrounds but a love for music and is dedicated to interpreting the multi-ethnic culture of the Guangxi region through the art of choral singing. The choir's works incorporate a variety of ethnic music elements and have gained wide social influence. The group sang “Moonlight” with its melodious and lingering melody and deep and rich emotions, skillfully utilizing the iconic pentatonic scale of Cantonese music to create a soft and beautiful musical atmosphere. Li Wen, a member of the group, said, “Every time I sing this song, I feel a warm and nostalgic emotion as if I have gone back to the time when I was a child and listened to my mom humming this song.”

1.2 Rhythmic Fusion

The rhythms of Guangdong folk music are rich in variations and layers, often employing complex rhythmic patterns and beat transitions that enhance the music's dynamics and expressiveness.

Choral Work “Liwan Lullaby” - performed by the Guangzhou Liwan Children's Choir (Figure 1) this piece adopts a lively 12/8 time signature that complements its lullaby theme. Since its establishment in the 1990s, the choir has gained recognition in the choral world for its fresh, pure tone and versatile performance style. The choir has won many competitions at home and abroad, demonstrating its outstanding strength. In their performance of “Liwan Lullaby,” the choir adopted a brisk and energetic rhythm, utilizing a 12/8 time signature that perfectly complements the theme of the lullaby. Conductor Zhang Xin said, “The diversity of rhythms makes this piece more layered, with each rhythmic change expressing a different emotion.”

Sheet music for "Liwan Lullaby" featuring two vocal parts (Soprano and Alto) and a piano accompaniment. The music is in 12/8 time, with a tempo of 64. The vocal parts sing lyrics in Chinese, such as "嗳 姑 娃" and "似 那珠江水 滚 爱 意天长 地久 呀". The piano part includes dynamic markings like "p" and "mf", and pedal markings like "Ped.".

Figure 1 Sheet Music of "Liwan Lullaby"

Source: Composer's manuscript of the work

Choral Work "Macau in the Old Days" (Figure 2) - Sung by Huahai Choir of Guangdong University of Education. Established in 2016, the Huahai Choir consists of non-professional students who share a passion for singing. Despite lacking a professional music background, they show extraordinary choral strength and artistic expressiveness through their dedication and love for music. In their group sang "Macau in the Old Days" skillfully switching between two-beat, four-beat, and three-beat, presenting a vivid sitcom effect. The choir's conductor, Fu Yixi, said, "Every rhythmic change was followed by a distinct emotional flow, giving it a rich feeling of hierarchy akin to a little musical."

Figure 2 Sheet Music of “Macau in the Old Days”

Source: The Hong Kong Children's Choir, *A Tribute to The Hong Kong Children's Choir Volume IV* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Sanlian Bookstore, 2007).

1.3 Innovations in Harmony

The harmonic treatment of Guangdong folk music in choral works enhances the sense of depth and harmonious beauty by incorporating double or multiple parts.

Choral Work “The Falling Sky” - was performed by the South China Normal University Choir. Founded in 1988, the Choir comprises the students from the School of Music as its core members and is dedicated to choral education by university students by combining teaching with practice. The choir has won numerous awards in both domestic and international competitions and has collaborated with many international choirs. The group sang “The Falling Sky” as a female three-part chorus, structured in an ABA form.

The conductor, Professor Zhang Xin, commented, “The Falling Sky lets us hear the natural mingling of folk tones and modern technology, giving us a brand new acoustic experience.”

Choral Work “Silver Clouds Chasing the Moon” (Figure 3) - was performed by the Guangzhou Fun Sing Chorus. Established in 2015, the Guangzhou Fun Sing Chorus specializes in singing original works in Cantonese to convey the voice of Guangzhou. The choir comprises members from various walks of life. Through continuous efforts, the group has achieved outstanding results in numerous performances and competitions. The group's rendition of “Silver Clouds Chasing the Moon” demonstrated diverse and rich harmonic effects, incorporating innovative elements such as dissonance and passing tones. Liang Qi'an, the conductor and composer of the adapted choral version, expressed, “The multiple chromaticized progressions of the harmonies, off-key progressions, altered chords, and other techniques give the piece a refreshing feeling.”

The sheet music consists of two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in G major and the bottom staff is in C major. The lyrics are written in both Chinese characters and English phonetic spellings. The first section of lyrics is:

飄 piu 近 gan 迷 mai 人 yan 迷 mai 人 yan 春 chun 宵 siu 添 tim 情 tsing

近 gan 夜 ye 正 zing 迷 mai 人 yan 夢 mung 也 ya 迷 mai 人 yan

The second section of lyrics is:

韻 wan 晚 man 風 fung 輕 hing 輕 hing 流 lau 水 shui 歡 foon 歌 go 怡 yi 人 yan 之 ji 夜 ye

Performance instructions include "a tempo" above the second section and "rit." (ritardando) below the second section.

Figure 3 Sheet Music of “Silver Clouds Chasing the Moon”

Source: Composer's manuscript of the work

1.4 Musical Instrumentation

In terms of musical instruments and orchestration, the use of traditional instruments in Guangdong folk music, such as the erhu and pipa, adds a unique tone and flavor to the choral works, enhancing the local characteristics of the music.

Choral Work “Yongqingfang” - was performed by the Guangzhou Xiguan Female Choir, a group dedicated to preserving and promoting Guangfu music. Established in 2016, the Guangzhou Xiguan Female Choir is composed of more than 40 women dedicated to preserving and promoting the songs of Guangfu. The choir has received recognition for its distinctive musical style and cross-border performance forms, and it has won honors in several domestic and international contests. The group's performance of “Yongqingfang” incorporates the distinctive elements of Lingnan music, blending traditional styles with modern choral techniques (Figure 4). Composer Guo Hechu said, “The performance of the gaohu fills ‘Yongqingfang’ with the local characteristics of Lingnan, and every performance makes us feel as if we are in the streets and alleys of Lingnan.” In a way similar to this, conductor Zhang pointed out the enriching nature of the choral harmony concerning the emotional density of the piece: “Traditional Cantonese music is stunningly coupled with modern choral techniques to bring Yongqingfang alive so that people can feel the vibrancy of Lingnan culture.”



Figure 4 Musical Instrument of “Yongqingfang”: Gaohu

Source: by author

Choral Work “Moonlight” - sung by Yueren Chorus, featured the erhu and piano as the main accompanying instruments. The mellifluous melody of the erhu and the harmonic foundation of the piano complemented each other well, blending the simplicity of traditional folk music with the smoothness of modern music. Li Wen, a member of the group said, “The melodious sound of the erhu and the smooth accompaniment of the piano made us feel as if we were immersed in a cozy night.”

1.5 Expression of Language

The use of the Cantonese dialect made the songs closer to local life and emotions, enhancing their expressiveness and impact.

Choral Work “Liwan Lullaby” - sung by Guangzhou Liwan Children's Choir. The group sang “Liwan Lullaby” in authentic Cantonese, with a melodious melody and deep emotion. Troupe member Fu Yuqing exclaimed, “The Cantonese expression is unique, and it made me feel a unique cultural emotion.”

Choral Work “Yongqingfang” - Guangzhou Xiguan Female Choir. Incorporated Lingnan dialects such as Cantonese, Hakka, and Chaoshan, fully demonstrating the diversity and richness of Lingnan culture. Zhou Jingrou, a member of the group, said, “Singing 'Yongqingfang' in Cantonese, Hakka, and Teochew allowed us to more deeply appreciate the richness and diversity of Lingnan culture.”

2. The Influence of Guangdong Music Elements on Chinese Choral Works

2.1 Diversification of Expression Methods

Guangdong music elements set high demands on singing skills, especially in pitch, timbre, and language expression. Their fusion makes choral works a full range of artistic enjoyment both visually and aurally in choral works.

For example, “Flowers Morning and Moonlight” requires singers to achieve a high degree of precision in pitch and timbre control, while “Silver Clouds Chasing the Moon” tests singers' mastery of Cantonese pronunciation and intonation to ensure accurate conveyance of the song's emotion and rhythm. Additionally, the fusion of various dialects in “Wing Ching Fong” not only demonstrates the cultural characteristics of the Lingnan region but also enhances the expressive and infectious power of the work.

The lighting design of “Lullaby of Liwan” creates a cozy atmosphere, making the audience feel as if they are on a peaceful night; the stage set of “Macau in the Old Days” enhances the expressiveness and sense of scene of the work through the props and sets with the style of a fishing port (Figure 5). “Yongqingfang” was even shot on location in Yongqingfang, showing the unique style of Lingnan culture through the integration of local characteristics into the set, lighting design, and body language (Figure 6).



Figure 5 Stage for “Liwan Lullaby”

Source: by author



Figure 6 Field Scene of "Yongqingfang"

Source: "Chanting of Youth, the Charm of Xiguan," Weixin, last modified October 12, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/rEffwH-Eqv60Zr5VCuWyvw>.

2.2 Cultural Inheritance and Innovation

The use of Cantonese music elements in choral works helps to pass on and carry forward the essence of Cantonese culture and promotes the exchange and understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures.

Cultural Identity: For example, "Moonlight" conveys the profound heritage of Cantonese culture through the singing of Cantonese nursery rhymes, which enhances the listeners' sense of cultural identity. "Yongqingfang", on the other hand, demonstrates the diversity and richness of Lingnan culture through the fusion of various dialects, further deepening the listeners' sense of cultural identity and pride. Yang Baoxiong of the Hezhou Institute provides a more incisive understanding of this: "The formation of any kind of speech or text must be the product of a variety of relationships. The dissemination of Hakka nursery rhymes has the function of constructing an ideology. Interpreting the Hakka rhyme 'Moonlight' in a specific Hakka historical and cultural context, excavating the literary meaning of the rhyme, and understanding the Hakka consciousness it contains is an important way to recognize Hakka folklore."¹³

Educational Implications: Through studying and singing these pieces, students not only enhanced their musical artistry but also gained an in-depth understanding of the connotations and characteristics of Guangdong's local culture. For example, "The Falling Sky" enhances the instability and expressiveness of the music through polyphonic weaving and tonal changes, enabling students to master more musical skills and expressive techniques in the learning process.

Cross-cultural Promotion: The unique musical styles and profound cultural connotations, these works showcase the music culture of southern China, attracting the attention and love of a wider international audience.

¹³ Baoxiong Yang, "The Ideological Function of Hakka Nursery Rhymes: A Cultural Interpretation of the Hakka Nursery Rhyme 'Moonlight' in Hezhou," *Journal of Hezhou College* 24, no. 1 (2008): 14-18. (in Chinese)

Singing Skills: For instance, Flower has an impeccable demand on the singers' mastering of the very tricky vocal techniques of breath control and dynamic modulation enrich to this piece in expressiveness more. These enable the performers to relay the very emotions and cultural essence the song had hoped to showcase.

Through these detailed research results, it can be seen that Guangdong folk music elements play an important role in Chinese choral works. They not only enrich artistic expression and enhance local characteristics but also convey deep cultural connotations. The skillful use and innovative expression of these elements not only enhance the artistic level of choral works but also highlight the unique charm and cultural depth of Guangdong music.

Discussion of Results

Choral works gain a smooth and lyrical quality through the infusion of Guangdong folk melodies, characterized by their use of the pentatonic scale and ornamentation. The resulting blend has retained its traditional charm while enhancing expressiveness and modern appeal. Complex rhythmic patterns add dynamism and depth- the 12/8 time signature of both the Liwan Lullaby and the mixed beats of Macau in the Old Days. These complexities create layered textures that further enrich the storytelling aspect of the performance. The harmonic complexity is increased through polyphonic lines with their dissonances and chromatic progressions as found in Falling Sky and Silver Clouds Chasing the Moon. It is a combination of folk tones with modern choral techniques. Instruments such as the erhu, pipa, and gaohu, whose wonderful timbres embellish the compositions Yongqingfang and Moonlight, imbue the orchestration further with regionalism and cultural authenticity into the performances. Singing in Cantonese, Hakka, and Teochew such as the ones engaged in Liwan Lullaby and Yongqingfang would facilitate much deeper concatenation and authenticity about what it represents; it would equally buttress emotional engagement on the part of both performers and audience towards the music itself. These works serve to both protect the heritage and promote cross-boundary intercultural exchange. Local identities are sustained and point towards an educative process with singers and audiences such as in Moonlight and The Falling Sky, in addition to raising the global profile of music culture in Guangdong.

In-depth exploration of the background and application of Guangdong folk music elements: more in-depth exploration of the historical background, cultural connotations, and musical characteristics of Guangdong folk music elements, to further reveal the specific application of these elements in choral works and their impact on artistic expression. Folk choral music is “original” and intangible cultural heritage, so attention must be paid to ensure its original inheritance; on the other hand, folk choral music should be developed to realize a high level of real normalization¹⁴ Increase empirical research and data collection: through more fieldwork, interviews, and experimental research, to obtain more detailed data and information.

¹⁴ Xiaobao Tian, “The Diversified Development of Chinese Choral Music Nowadays,” *Chinese Music* 23, no. 4 (2009): 173-174, 183. (in Chinese)

Strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation among musicology, ethnology, communication, and other disciplines, and synthesize and apply multidisciplinary theories and methods to deeply explore the application and influence of Guangdong folk music elements in choral works. The social music practice of human beings is, in its essence, the communication practice of music.¹⁵ The future development trend of communication studies is the increasing deepening of research content and the diversification of branch directions.¹⁶ Cultural communication theory helps to analyze the degree of acceptance of Cantonese musical elements in different regions and communities, as well as their influence in the choral field.

The study found that integrating Guangdong folk music elements would be an important enhancer of art expression and cultural connotation in Chinese choral works. These elements affect all aspects of playing and singing techniques, performance styles, and the overall stylistic identity not only of the societies themselves but also of the compositions. The research indicates that Guangdong folk music serves to strengthen the tradition of cultural inheritance and innovation, as well as enhance the relationship with cultural identity and educational values. Additionally, the findings suggest that these musical elements significantly contribute to encouraging cross-cultural exchange and appreciation, thereby positioning Guangdong music within the broader choral culture of China.

Conclusion

This study examines the incorporation of Guangdong folk music elements in Chinese choral works, highlighting the following key findings: 1. The comprehensive integration of Guangdong folk music elements, including melody, rhythm, harmony, instruments, and language, enhances the artistic expression and cultural significance of choral works, adding local characteristics and cultural depth. 2. Choral works serve as a platform for promoting Guangdong folk music elements, fostering cultural identity, and facilitating cross-cultural understanding, ultimately enhancing the influence of Guangdong music globally. Key features of the study include a multi-dimensional analytical framework that explores the integration of Guangdong folk music elements in choral works. The combination of empirical research and theoretical analysis to provide insights into the application and impact of these elements. Cross-regional and interdisciplinary perspectives to promote a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and artistic implications of Guangdong folk music in choral works. Overall, the study underscores the cultural promotion and artistic innovation achieved through the incorporation of Guangdong folk music elements in Chinese choral works, enriching the cultural landscape and fostering cross-cultural exchanges.

¹⁵ Suijin Zeng, "From Natural Communication to Technical Communication of Music (Above): One of the Explorations of Contemporary Music Communication Theory," *Huang Zhong: Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music* 15, no. 3 (2003): 29-36. (in Chinese)

¹⁶ Sen Wang, "From Communication to Music Communication," *Huang Zhong: Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music* 1, no. 2 (2005): 121-124. (in Chinese)

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