



STUDYING THE “LIUPANSHAN HUA’ER” FOLK SONG OF HUI ZU IN NINGXIA, CHINA FOR PRESERVATION

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Abstract

In the context of growing global interest in cultural diversity and the safeguarding of intangible heritage, this research addresses the preservation and promotion of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song tradition of the Hui ethnic group in Ningxia, China. As global cultural exchange deepens, the protection of regional and ethnic music traditions becomes essential to maintaining cultural identity and enriching the world's cultural landscape. This study explores the "Liupanshan Hua'er" as a vital form of Chinese folk expression, highlighting its significance within both local and global cultural frameworks. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the research was carried out in three phases: documentary research using primary and secondary sources, extensive fieldwork through interviews with key cultural inheritors and participation in the Hua'er Festival, and systematic data analysis. Key informants--three provincial-level inheritors--shared their expertise, shedding light on performance practices and improvisational techniques. **The findings were** compiled into the Ningxia Liupanshan Hua'er Folk Song Guidebook, which includes detailed documentation of cultural background, musical and lyrical structures, performance theory, and preservation strategies. Evaluated by experts and applied

in the "Three Zones" Talent Training and Hua'er Seminar in Tongxin County, the guidebook demonstrated strong educational and cultural value, as confirmed by a satisfaction survey of 234 participants. This research not only contributes to the academic understanding of ethnic music traditions but also provides a practical model for sustaining intangible cultural heritage in a globally interconnected world.

Keywords: Liupanshan Hu'er; Musical traits; Performance theory; Preservation

Introduction

"Hua'er" is an oral art created and shared by the people of nine ethnic groups, including Hui (Muslim), Han, Tibetan, Dongxiang, Bao'an, Yugu, Salar, Tu, and Mongolian, living in the four provinces (regions) of Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang in the northwest plateau region of China. It has spread to some parts of neighboring provinces (autonomous regions) such as Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Inner Mongolia. Based on differences in melody traits, language patterns, and transmission regions, "Hua'er" folk songs are usually divided into three types: "Hehuang Hua'er", "Taomin Hua'er", and "Liupanshan Hua'er" (Wei, 2005). "Liupanshan Hua'er", also known as "Shanhua'er", "Ganhua'er", "Shangezi", "Wild Hua'er", "Saohua'er", etc., is a folk song mainly circulated in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Ningxia is called Hui Autonomous Region because it is the most important Hui ethnic settlement area in China, but "Liupanshan Hua'er" is a mountain song created and shared by various ethnic groups living here. "Liupanshan Hua'er" has two concepts: broad and narrow.

Narrowly defined, "Liupanshan Hua'er" refers to the "Hua'er" that is different from "Hehuang Hua'er" and has been passed down in the southern mountainous areas of Ningxia. This type of folk song has undergone long-term historical evolution, gradually forming its own unique artistic style and aesthetic traits, both in literary format and musical melody. That is to say, it only spread within the cultural circle of Liupanshan and did not spread to other parts of the northwest. Ningxia does not have traditional "Hua'er hui" or "Ge hui", so "Liupanshan Hua'er" is basically a self-entertainment singing of the people in daily production and life. Compared with "Hehuang Hua'er" and "Taomin

Hua'er", it has formed its own distinct traits in terms of lyrics and music. It has both the rough and bold traits of mountain songs and wild songs, as well as the smooth and beautiful charm of minor tunes, with distinct styles and a strong local flavor. In terms of structure, "Liupanshan Hua'er" has both four sentence and six sentence structures, as well as a "three sentence and one stack style", with various rhyme patterns. People often improvise and sing lyrics in the form of a single set of short songs during the "Man Hua'er" period. The content of the songs reflects various aspects of local production and life, and has high research value in literature, ethnology, and folklore; In terms of music, it inherits the four tone and five tone characteristic modes of ancient Longshan folk songs, while absorbing various factors such as Xintianyou, Pashandiao, Taomin Hua'er, Hehuang Hua'er, and Islamic chanting tones. It is mostly carried out in a five tones scale with twists and turns, and its musical structure, mode and tonality, rotation method, and rhythm are also relatively flexible and diverse. Representative songs include "Cows Drinking Water on the Yellow River Bank", "Take a Look at Ga Hua'er in My Heart", "Hua'er are Words in My Heart", "How handsome Ga looks", and so on (Zhang, 2004).

Therefore, researchers have an interest and obligation to study the "Studying the 'Liupanshan Hua'er' folk song of Hui Zu in Ningxia, China for preservation", including the tone structure, scale, rhythm, and form structure of the Ningxia "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song, as well as the structure, rhetoric, rhyme patterns, and backing words of the lyrics. These are the core features of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song. If knowledgeable people learn, summarize, and recommend the principles of creation and improvisation in the folk song "Liupanshan Hua'er", so that even those with lower cultural levels can understand the cultural symbols contained in this folk song. This is to promote and expand the dissemination dimensions of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song, and to comprehensively study the performance principles of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song based on academic data. With the development of the times, the survival environment of these principles has become precarious due to the impact and erosion of contemporary popular music (Qiao, 1987). Currently, the use of a multimodal music analysis system to integrate data and apply it to modern media

provides an accessible learning pathway for young people in the new era, facilitates the training of young learners, and enables in-depth communication with local cultural and tourism bureaus, universities, and media on the principle of improvisation in the oral tradition of "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk songs. This creates a new identity for sustainable development in a multicultural dimension.

Research Objectives

- 1.To study the "Liupanshan Hua'er" Folk Song of Hui Zu in NingXia,China.
- 2.To construct a “Ningxia 'Liupanshan Hua'er” Folk Song’s Guidebook.
- 3.To use the"Ningxia 'Liupanshan Hua'er"Folk Song’s Guidebook for Preservation.

Literature Reviews

Origin of “Huaer”: Among the three major systems, the earliest one called "Hua'er" is "Taomin Hua'er", also known as “Lianhua shan Hua’er” (“Lianhua shan” is the Chinese name and its translated English name is Lotus Mountain”). There is a beautiful folk legend about its origin. In the book “Lianhuashan and Lianhuashan Hua’er--Series One”, Ding Zuoshu told a folk legend about the origin of "Hua'er" --According to legend, in ancient times, the Lotus Mountain area was a lotus pond with vast expanse of blue waves. One year, the Queen Mother of the West held a banquet, and Empress Sanxiao was invited to travel to the west. When she came to the sky above the lotus pond, she saw an evil dragon causing trouble. When Empress Sanxiao saw this, she was furious and said: “How can this precious land of immortals and Buddhas allow evildoers to cause trouble and harm the people!” She recited the mantra, pulled out the golden hairpin, turned it into a divine sword, and cut the evil dragon into several pieces. She also removed the Eight Treasure Golden Lotus, and suddenly a mountain peak rose up from the lotus pond, shaped like a lotus, suppressing the evil dragon at the bottom of the mountain. Since then, the famous Lotus Mountain has existed. Later, in order to express their appreciation for Sanxiao’s merits, the people built the “Sanxiao Empress Hall” and other Buddhist and Taoist monasteries and temples

in Lianhua Mountain. On the day of the inauguration ceremony of the main hall, the local Tibetan and Han people were arguing about the celebration ceremony. The Han people asked to set up a stage to sing opera, and the Tibetans asked to chant sutras and worship Buddha. While they were arguing, three fairies stepped on the lotus, held lotus leaf umbrellas, and shook the lotus leaves. The fan spread out the high-pitched, loud, stretching and melodious flowers. The crowd was so mesmerized that they began to sing along without realizing it. "Hua'er ya -- lian ye'er ya....." Since then, it has become a custom. During every June event, people go to the mountain to worship Buddha, and "Hua'er are everywhere" when they go to the mountain (Bu, 1980).

Du Yaxiong (1983) said in this article: Regarding the naming of "Hua'er", there was a popular theory in the past that "using 'Hua'er' to metaphor people" believed that "Hua'er" got its name because the young girls called the "Hua'er" during the duet. In fact, the names for girls in "Hua'er" are usually "Gamei", "Lian'er" and "Lianshou", which shows that this theory is untenable. The birthplace of "Hua'er" is Kangle County, in Gansu Province. There is a beautiful Lotus Mountain in the county, where a grand "Hua'er Hui" is held every year on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month. Legend has it that in ancient times, three fairy aunts were flying through the clouds and mist with leaves in their hands. Suddenly, a heavy rain knocked down all the leaves of the lotus. The fairy aunts were so angry that they threw the remaining flowers in their hands towards the world. The lotus fell to the ground and became a lotus flower. There is a stone peak that reaches into the clouds. Its tall and straight posture is like a beautiful lotus. People call it Lotus Mountain. Local singers said: "Lianhua Mountain is like a lotus. It has flowers but no leaves. When singing folk songs, two leaves are added. The folk song is called 'Hua'er' because Lianhua Mountain is a "Hua'er".

According to legend, after the temple on Lianhua Mountain was built, what method was used to decorate it? Celebrate, and which day to choose to celebrate? Everyone had great differences. Among them, the Tibetan donor who built the temple said that the celebration should be celebrated by chanting sutras; while the Han donor said that the celebration should be celebrated by singing

opera. In this way, no one was willing to give in, and everyone could not agree on the same opinion. Suddenly, three fairies floated from the west of the mountain. They were very beautiful. They stepped lightly on the auspicious clouds with their soles, shaking colorful fans in their hands, and holding lotus leaves. The flower umbrellas were made into flowers and they came singing beautiful folk songs. The way they sing is: “Hua”er - Two Lian Ye’er”, each person sings a sentence and sings in turn. Finally, the ending of “Hua”er - Two Lian Ye’er” (Two Lotus Leaves) sung by the three of them together. In an instant, everyone suddenly became enlightened and understood each other tacitly. Thus, the question of how to celebrate the Lotus Mountain Temple Ceremony was satisfactorily resolved. Since then, singing "Hua'er" in Lianhua Mountain has gradually become a local custom and has been passed down year by year. The local people regard the three equally high peaks on the sister mountains as the incarnations of the “Three Xiao” Empresses of Yuanxiao, Qiongxia and Bixiao, so they built the “Sanxiao Empress Hall” on Lianhua Mountain to commemorate them. The song “Hua”er - Two Lian Ye’er” has been sung year after year (Chen, 2006).

It is true that the charm of culture is always great and long-lasting. Myths and legends, as an important part of folklore matters, always bring interest and reverie to people. However, the origin of a music genre is obviously not so convincing if it is only based on myths and legends or some kind of imagination without historical evidence. In this regard, Liu Kai made sharp criticism in his article “Suspicious and Credible - ‘Re-exploring the 'Ins and Outs' of Hua’er”” (1962, 3): In our country in traditional folk tunes, there are many impromptu duets based on legends and stories. This kind of duet is improvised, so it is not based on conclusive historical materials and is used as a basis for tracing the history. It’s very unreliable.

Research Methodology

The research is a combination of qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. The researcher has divided the research method into 3 steps, as follows: 1) Documentary research collects data related to the creation and performance principles of "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song in the integration using reference documents from the primary sources, namely the Ningxia volume of Chinese folk songs integration, and secondary sources, namely comments, research reports, speeches, papers, academic documents, dissertations, electronic media (Internet), and related books and documents. 2) Collect qualitative, in-depth research data, through in-depth field work, interviews with key informants, and participation in the grand "Hua'er Festival", valuable local social customs and lifestyles are examined, local dialects and folk songs are learned, and valuable improvisational performance principles of "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk songs are summarized based on this. 3) Analyze the data and summarize the results. Collect literature data from the library and summarize the results. After summarizing the research results, present them in a descriptive writing form, and propose preservation suggestions and improvisation principles for the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song.

Key Informants: 1) Ma Jianlong: provincial inheritor of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" intangible cultural heritage in Ningxia, China. More than 40 years of experience in "Liupanshan Hua'er" performance. 2) Sa Lina: provincial inheritor of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" intangible cultural heritage in Ningxia, China. More than 12 years of experience in guiding disciples and has more than 70 disciples. People have won awards nationally and provincially. 3) Ma Derong: provincial inheritor of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" intangible cultural heritage in Ningxia, China. More than 20 years of experience in guiding disciples and has more than 70 disciples. people have won awards nationally and provincially.

Results

To study the "*Liupanshan Hua'er*" Folk Song of Hui Zu in Ningxia, China

After an extensive process of data collection through documentary research, literature review, fieldwork, interviews with key informants, seminars, and lectures, the researcher conducted a comprehensive analysis of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song tradition in Ningxia, China. The study began by analyzing interviews with three key informants, offering valuable insights into the local understanding and preservation of the music. The classification of Ningxia's "Liupanshan Hua'er" songs was explored, highlighting their diversity. The musical traits of the tradition were a major focus, particularly the tonal structure, which includes three-tone, four-tone, and full five-tone column structures. Specific pentatonic modes such as Zhi, Shang, and Yu were detailed, along with unique modes like Jiao and Yu that are distinct to the region. Additionally, the study examined the scale, rhythmic features, and overall structure of the songs, shedding light on their technical composition and traditional musical aesthetics.

Beyond musical characteristics, the research delved deeply into the lyrical aspects of "Liupanshan Hua'er". The structure of the lyrics follows various traditional patterns such as head-tail alignment, broken waist style, and triple-sentence stacking, with new forms emerging in recent years. The rhetorical techniques of the lyrics, including Xing (evocation), Bi (metaphor), and Fu (elaboration), were analyzed to showcase the rich literary artistry of the folk songs. Furthermore, distinct rhyming schemes—scheme rhyme, cross rhyme, and rime suffisante—demonstrate the sophisticated phonetic beauty of the lyrics. The study also highlighted the differences in literary format between "Liupanshan Hua'er" and "Hehuang Hua'er," along with the use of filler words (衬词) that enhance lyrical rhythm and expression. Ultimately, the research provides an in-depth understanding of both the shared and unique features of "Liupanshan Hua'er," emphasizing its cultural importance within the broader Hua'er tradition.

To construct a "*Liupanshan Hua'er*" Folk Song's Guidebook

After conducting an in-depth literature review and engaging in initial documentary research, the researcher prepared thoroughly for fieldwork and embarked on multiple field visits to various locations across the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region—including Yinchuan City, Zhongwei City, Guyuan City, Tongxin County, and Haiyuan County—between March and August 2024. These field investigations allowed the researcher to gain first-hand insight into the living tradition of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song among the Hui people. Building on this immersive fieldwork, the researcher developed the Ningxia Liupanshan Hua'er Folk Song Guidebook and submitted it to three experts for evaluation. The guidebook begins by introducing the cultural and historical background of the Ningxia Hui region, providing context on the evolution of the Hui ethnic group and their connection to the folk tradition. It then outlines the musical and lyrical features of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song, including its tonal structure (three-, four-, and five-tone column forms), scale, rhythm, and song structure. Particular attention is given to unique tonal modes and their stylistic significance in the local musical landscape.

In terms of lyrics, the guidebook explores structural forms such as head-tail alignment, broken waist style, and triple-sentence stacking, as well as recent developments in lyrical composition. Rhetorical devices like Xing (evocation), Bi (metaphor), and Fu (elaboration) are discussed, alongside three types of rhyme schemes and filler words that enrich the folk song's poetic expression. Comparative analysis between "Liupanshan Hua'er" and "Hehuang Hua'er" highlights both shared and distinct literary traits. The final section of the guidebook focuses on the inheritance and preservation of the tradition, addressing performance theory, the structure of performance "programs," and important traditional principles such as "relying on sound to fill in lyrics" and "bone score and flesh tone." Several case studies are included to illustrate practical applications, and the expert evaluations of the guidebook are analyzed to assess its academic value and cultural relevance. Together, these elements form a comprehensive resource for understanding, teaching, and sustaining the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song in modern contexts.

To use the "Ningxia 'Liupanshan Hua'er' Folk Song's Guidebook" for Preservation

After completing the guidebook, the researcher participated in the "Tongxin County 2024 'Three Zones' Talent Training and 'Hua'er' Inheritors and Amateur Training Course" and "Tongxin County 'Hua'er' Seminar" from April 20 to May 1, 2024 in Tongxin County, Wuzhong City, Ningxia Hui Zu Region. In this event, researcher participated in lectures at the "Hua'er" training class, teaching of "Hua'er" folk songs, speeches at seminars, and rehearsals and performance for the final program. And conducted a satisfaction survey on the lecture content after the course ended. A total of 234 students participated in the folk song lecture and submitted a satisfaction survey. The survey consists of 11 items, covering the course arrangement, quality of the guide, demonstration of lecture introduction, content, performance style, researcher's teaching and singing methods, scores, pictures, theoretical knowledge, post class performance, preservation methods, etc. of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song. And after the lecture, a performance of the folk song "Liupanshan Hua'er" was held.

Discussions

Through the study of the world-class intangible cultural heritage project of "Liupanshan Hua'er" in Ningxia, China, it was discovered that the "Hua'er" folk songs circulating in Ningxia Hui Zu Region include both the "Hehuang Hua'er" folk songs co-created and shared by nine ethnic groups in the entire northwest plateau region (referred to as "Shang-zhi mode Hua'er" by scholars), and the "Liupanshan Hua'er" (referred to as "Jiao-diao mode Hua'er" and "Yu-diao mode Hua'er" by scholars), which are only sing within Ningxia Hui Zu Reign and have not spread to surrounding areas. These types or styles of "Hua'er" folk songs have some similarities in terms of lyrics, rhetoric, melody, interludes, and structure, but there are also some differences in some places. For example, most of their content is love songs or life songs, which are improvised lyrics and sing based on melodies passed down for thousands of years. This means that their melodies have a certain degree of stability; Lyrics also have a fixed program "Routine", such as the improvised word formation format of "single sentence with a single character ending, double sentence with a double character ending; short sentences added to

the waist, single and double waist bending beauty", the first two sentences are metaphorical, the last two sentences are narrative or lyrical rhetorical devices, and the commonly used rhyming methods in traditional Chinese poetry; The difference lies in the use of a large number of so-called "three sentences and one stack" lyrical structures in "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song, which further changes the musical structure. Moreover, it also incorporates musical elements from Xiaodiao, Xintianyou, Pashandiao, Qin opera and Muslim chanting in its musical style, resulting in a sound that combines the high pitched and melodious traits of mountain songs with the graceful and graceful features of Xiaodiao. All these traits make the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song shine brightly in the western plateau region of China (Wang, 2011).

Like other intangible cultural heritages, the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song in Ningxia is also facing difficulties in preservation and inheritance. The most urgent aspects are as follows: Firstly, with the development of technology and urbanization, the lifestyle of the younger generation has changed, and traditional agricultural life has gradually decreased, which directly affects the environment for the creation and inheritance of folk songs; Secondly, the influence of television, the Internet and popular culture has made the young generation's interest in traditional folk songs continue to weaken, and they are more inclined to modern forms of entertainment; Thirdly, the implementation of national policies benefiting the people has led many villages to move to the city area for living, thus causing the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song to lose its original habitat. The result is a large number of young and middle-aged people go out to work, leading to the hollowing out of rural areas and reducing the opportunities for the dissemination and performance of folk songs, especially in specific festivals or agricultural activities where young and middle-aged people lack participation; In addition. Today's school education focuses on standardized curriculum, with insufficient emphasis and promotion of local traditional culture, resulting in the younger generation not having the opportunity to engage with and understand the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song; Moreover, economic development has made people pay more attention to economic benefits rather than cultural values, and folk artists are unable to earn enough income through performances, which affects their enthusiasm and survival status (Xing, 2011).

So, cultured people need to take active action. On the one hand, they need to deeply study the relevant knowledge of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song in Ningxia, China. On the other hand, they need to shoulder the responsibility of its preservation, inheritance, and development, so that this excellent intangible cultural heritage of humanity can shine brightly and remain timeless in the long river of history.

New Knowledges

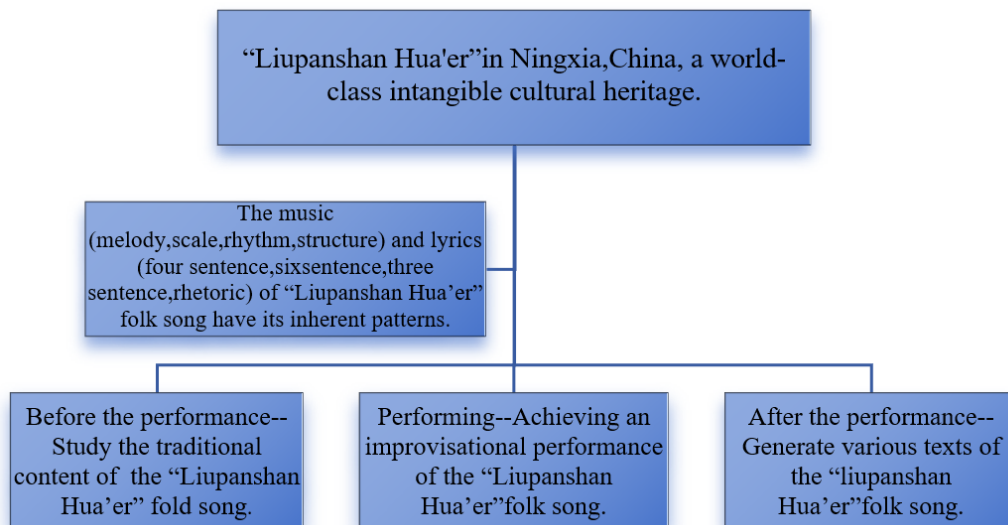


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of "Liupanshan Hua'er" Folk Song of Hui Zu in Ningxia, China for Preservation.

Conclusions

This research focused on the study, documentation, and preservation of the "Liupanshan Hua'er" folk song tradition of the Hui ethnic group in Ningxia, China. Through a rigorous process involving literature review, fieldwork across multiple counties, interviews, and expert consultations, the researcher conducted a thorough analysis of the musical and lyrical characteristics of "Liupanshan Hua'er," including its unique tonal structures, rhythmic patterns, rhetorical devices, and poetic forms. These findings were compiled into the *Ningxia

Liupanshan Hua'er Folk Song Guidebook, which also includes cultural background, performance practices, and strategies for preservation. The guidebook was evaluated by experts and then applied in a real-world teaching context during a talent training course and seminar in Tongxin County, where the researcher taught and assessed its impact through a satisfaction survey involving 234 participants. The results demonstrated both the educational effectiveness and cultural value of the guidebook, establishing it as a practical and scholarly tool for preserving and promoting this important folk tradition.

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