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Research on Inheritance and Development Path of Eight Immortals Wind and Percussion Music of Zhuang in Guangxi, China

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ABSTRACT

The Eight Immortals wind and percussion music of the Zhuang people in Guangxi, China, boasts a rich history and diverse repertoire, celebrated as a significant treasure of Chinese folk music. Despite its cultural importance, the music faces challenges in inheritance and development due to modernization and evolving social contexts. This paper examines the cultural connotations and artistic characteristics of the Eight Immortals music, identifies key factors impeding its transmission, and explores innovative pathways for its preservation and growth in contemporary times. Through a comprehensive analysis of national and local policies, audience engagement in the digital age, and field research, the study proposes strategies to sustain and revitalize this traditional music.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader understanding of intangible cultural heritage preservation in the face of rapid modernization. By highlighting the unique aspects of the Eight Immortals music and the cultural shifts impacting its practice, the paper underscores the urgency of adaptive strategies for cultural sustainability. Key recommendations include enhancing the protection system for inheritors, expanding digital dissemination channels, integrating cultural activities with tourism, and fostering cross-generational and cross-cultural engagement. These measures aim to ensure the vibrant continuation of the Eight Immortals music, enriching the cultural tapestry and supporting the cultural identity of the Zhuang community.

Introduction

In the Zhuang area in the northwest of Guangxi, China (The Zhuang nationality has the largest population among the ethnic minorities in China.), there has been an ancient folk wind and percussion music with a history of more than 200 years, which is composed of Suona as the main instrument, supplemented by trombone, drums, cymbals and other percussion instruments. Local people call it "eight immortals blowing", which is related to Chinese Taoist fairy tales. In order to safeguard and improve interests and reputation of the industry, practitioners of this music take eight immortals believed in by Chinese Taoism as pioneers of the industry. It can be divided into four forms of performance: wind, percussion, ensemble and rap percussion. It is often used in weddings and funerals, birthday celebrations, housewarming, welcoming, opening, festivals and other folk activities, and is deeply loved by local villagers. In 2012, the eight immortals music of Zhuang in Tian'e County was included in the fourth batch of representative projects of intangible cultural heritage at the autonomous region level. However, with the development of China's digital social media era and the evolution of people's aesthetic concepts, the eight immortals wind and percussion music is facing many difficulties, such as insufficient policy support, inability to adapt to network digital communication and lack of inheritors. In view of the problems found above, this paper systematically investigates national and local support policies for folk music and the audience in cyberspace and puts forward path suggestions for innovative development of this music in the new era.

Artistic Form and Cultural Connotation of Eight Immortals Wind and Percussion Music

Eight immortals wind and percussion music have a long history and has been developed for about 200 years. In the long history of continuous inheritance, development and improvement, it has formed its own unique morphological characteristics. Among them, based on Chinese pentatonic mode, Suona is simple, beautiful and pleasant in tunes, and is relatively regular, with uniform and steady rhythm, simple music theme and small fluctuation of interval. Melody of the whole piece is developed and changed around a simple musical theme, supplemented by various grace notes, constituting its original, simple, plain and changing aesthetic characteristics.



Figure. 1: Performance of Eight Immortal Music Class

2021 Source: Ning Qing, 2021

What is special about the eight immortal music is that Suona tunes are often developed on the basis of rhyming tunes. All the Suona tunes can be matched with corresponding rhyming tunes. Whenever the ceremony is at its climax, musicians will play and sing along with the strength of wine. Rhyming tunes in the eight immortals music are mainly sung by musicians with their natural voices, accompanied by percussion instruments such as Suona, brass cymbals and leather drums, making the sound loud and rough, and the style strong and bold. As a variety of wind and percussion music that integrates blowing, music, and rap, simple singing melody combined with rough suona, cymbals and drums, endows the eight immortals music with a double feast of visual and auditory aesthetics.

The Status Quo and Problems of Inheritance and Development of Eight Immortals Wind and Percussion Music

In recent years, with the increasing influence of cultural globalization, the author finds through field research that inheritance and development of eight immortals wind and percussion music of Zhuang in Guangxi, China is facing severe challenges. Traditional folk customs (such as funerals and weddings) on which it depends have weakened or mutated, and related "cultural patterns" and "contexts" have encountered unprecedented crises.

1. Factors of inheritance subject

Compared with material heritage, intangible cultural heritage is characterized by "liveliness" and "rheology", and it is developed by inheritors, who play an extremely important role in it. (Hu Liang, 2009, 89) Tunes are very abundant in the eight immortals music. In the process of inheritance, there are neither scores that can help to memorize nor strict rules for instrument playing. It is mainly taught by these masters of eight immortals music orally, which indirectly increases difficulty of inheritance. Due to changes of the times and needs of the host family, as well as physical problems of musicians, many traditional time-consuming and laborious tunes are no longer played, and fewer and fewer musicians are able to accurately memorize and fully play them, resulting in a serious loss of traditional tunes.

Eight immortals music class lacks power to inherit from its source. With the advancement of China's urbanization process, local villagers have migrated out, leading to changes in rural family structure and population structure, and middle-aged and elderly people and children have become main left-behind population. Young people generally have to go out to work and earn a living, so they can't practice all year round. It takes a long time and energy to practice playing the suona. The author observes that some young apprentices work outside to earn money, and play the drums and gongs when they return to their village during the Spring Festival. They are now studying not for pleasure, but as "temps" to earn an income supplement. According to the questionnaire survey, there are quite a few young students in the village who are not optimistic about the "eight immortals blowing". Some think that "this is just an entertainment method for the older generation", some think that "this is a backward and outdated culture", and some think that "it's not decent to play the eight immortals music", and even clearly express that "they don't like it, let alone will not learn ". It is a true portrayal of lack of inheritors of the eight immortals music. Therefore, how to arouse young people's interest in the eight immortals music is an urgent problem to be solved in the inheritance process of the "eight immortals".

2. Changes in cultural field

Cultural and ecological environment suitable for eight immortals music has changed. Collective inheritance field of eight immortals music has changed with the diversification of modern cultural communication modes, and its living space has become narrower and narrower. (Zhao Yan and Song Pei, 2014, 67)

It is a local tradition to invite an eight immortals music class, who acts as the 'master of ceremonies' on different occasions. It can be said that this is the highest etiquette used to welcome guests and is a symbol of good luck. With the diversification and complexity of China's modern social life, forms and contents of local folk activities have undergone profound changes

and development, and aesthetic concepts and tastes of the public have changed, and their sense of identity with the eight immortals music class has gradually faded.

For example, wedding is a common and solemn folk activity. The "eight immortals" performance is accompanied by a series of ceremonies such as fetching the bride, congratulatory gifts, crossing the mountain, welcoming guests, setting banquets, taking a feast, toasting, meeting the bride, paying homage to the ancestors and seeing off guests. From September to February of the lunar calendar is the golden period for wedding customs, and there is an endless stream of hosts who invite the eight immortals music class. Every lunar month, the man fetches the bride on the even-numbered date, and the woman gets married on the odd-numbered date. In particular, the first lunar month is the peak time for young migrant workers to return to their villages to get married. But in recent years, a large proportion of young migrant workers have bought homes in cities and are reluctant to return to the countryside for weddings. Traditional wedding customs are generally held in "three days", including fetching the bride on the first day, celebrating on the second day and seeing off guests on the third day. Because of different ideas, people now generally require the wedding to be completed in one day. When most of participants in the wedding are elderly, the eight immortals music can be performed in a certain order. When most of participants are young people, it is usually a symbolic performance and pop songs are played on a live stereo instead. The original eight immortals music class is condensed into "mini" version of two to four people. Indeed, this situation directly affects inheritance and development of the eight immortals music.

3. Dissemination and promotion to be optimized

During the investigation, the author interviews the staff of local cultural center, who participated in the application of eight immortals music as a cultural heritage. In 2014 and 2015, they published 9 publicity reports with the theme of "folk customs" on their official website, one of which was titled "Eight Immortals (suona) Playing of Zhuang in Tian'e County" with 2005 hits. Photographers from Nali village, members of Chinese Folklore Photography Association, took many photos with the eight immortals music as the theme with nostalgia for their hometown. Postgraduate students majoring in journalism and communication recorded performance and inheritance of the eight immortals music in the form of documentary. It is understood that the government will give each inheritor a corresponding inheritance subsidy every year for purchasing musical instruments and carrying out study activities.

In recent years, although relevant departments of the local government have been actively committed to protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, they are limited by correlation of various factors such as funds, cultural level of musicians and lagging development of cultural industries. Hence, there is a lack of strength in the propaganda,

promotion, development, and novelty of strategies. At present, it mainly relies on government recommendation and publicity, public communication, static natural display and so on. Therefore, with continuous integration and deep interembedding of culture and science and technology, it is worth exploring how to innovate cultural expression and communication means with cultural connotation of the eight immortals music as the core and modern science and technology as the means.

Thoughts on Inheritance and Development Path of Eight Immortals Wind and Percussion Music

With the change of social, economic and cultural environment, there have been some changes in "form" and "context" of inheritance and development of the eight immortals wind and percussion music of Zhuang in Guangxi, China, including both realistic opportunities and some problems and challenges. However, with continuous renovation of modern entertainment, the author has the following thoughts on inheritance, protection and development path of the eight immortals wind and percussion music in the new era and new situation:

1. Improve and make innovations in the inheritor protection system

With certain authority, representativeness and influence, inheritors are important carriers and transmitters of intangible cultural heritage, possessing rich knowledge and exquisite skills of intangible cultural heritage. Considering the "eight immortals" wind and percussion music class as a collaborative art group, the number of applicants for inheritors is often limited. In fact, most "grassroots" musicians have no chance. In the process of application and recognition, there is often a phenomenon of "competing for favor", which even affects enthusiasm of representative inheritance groups.

To solve bottleneck problems in the identification of representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage for collective inheritance and public practice, the author believes that if the eight immortals wind and percussion music class is identified as an inheritance group of intangible cultural heritage, enthusiasm of the group can be better brought into play, and inheritors of the group can jointly shoulder the responsibility of protection and inheritance. Representative inheritors of the eight immortals music who have lost the ability to pass on the music and are unable to fulfill the obligation of passing on the music, as well as inheritors who have made outstanding contributions, are granted "honorary inheritors" and certain special care. The author thinks it is worth learning from.

2. Expand dissemination channels of the eight immortals music

Inheritance depends on persistence of the minority, while dissemination depends on attention of the public. The two complement each other, but cannot replace each other. With the development of mobile Internet and social media, short video is becoming more and more popular. In the mobile era, shooting tools become more portable, processing tools become more simple, dissemination platforms become more social, and video production and dissemination become more daily, contributing to a new wave of grassroots videos. (Peng Lan, 2020, 283)

The author observes that WeChat (As a cross-platform communication tool, WeChat supports single and multi-person participation and sends voice, picture, video and text through the mobile phone network.) has become the most favorite social platform and the most important social media of eight immortals musicians, and they share videos of eight immortals music through WeChat. They use "moments" as a new way to record, showcase their skills and make friends with common interests. Nowadays, an inheritor of the eight immortal music has opened an account on Tik Tok (short video social software) and released 34 videos related to the eight immortal music on the platform, which have won 15,000 likes, 1,829 followers and 211 favorites. He tells the author that some of his followers like the eight immortals music and want to learn it, and some are migrant workers who grew up with the eight immortal music and want to find their hometown sounds and feelings. He organizes activities and holds training sessions on WeChat to teach skills of the eight immortals music for free.

In recent years, as popular applications in the field of short videos, Tik Tok and Kuaishou (Tik Tok and Kuaishou are national short video apps.) have gradually become important platforms for dissemination of intangible cultural heritage by virtue of their entertaining content and lively expression. If the word "suona" is typed into the search box of Kuaishou, hundreds of suona bloggers can be found, including professional performers, folk music classes and grassroots musicians, with followers ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. For example, Zhao Xiaolong (suona version of white dragon horse), a folk suona player in Northeast China with 595,000 followers, plays songs with strong regional colors on Kuaishou. He has released 698 suona solo videos on Kuaishou in new media communication modes of short video, live broadcast and e-commerce, including traditional northeastern regional songs, as well as new folk songs and pop music adapted by him. From February 17, 2022, he started to broadcast live on the platform at 6:30 every night. So far, he has done 57 live broadcasts on Kuaishou, with a maximum number of online users reaching 47,000 at the same time, and opened two fan groups. In order to cater to young people's media usage and consumption habits, he also recorded his suona music into a car flash drive and sold 128 copies at a price of 98 yuan on Tik Tok.

New media platforms provide opportunities for dissemination of "intangible cultural heritage". It enables intangible cultural heritage skills to be seen and passed on through

interpersonal connections, and enables inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to benefit from their efforts. More importantly, the platforms provide a way to "teach people how to fish", allowing inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to better "connect to the network" and adapt to the new era. In other words, if reasonably used, short video platforms can promote both horizontal transmission and vertical inheritance of "intangible cultural heritage". Whether it is "moments of WeChat ", "Tik Tok", or "Kuaishou", at least three points are worthy of affirmation: Establishment of a spectator platform to attract attention; expansion of social scope to arouse interest; acting as a database to promote inheritance (Sun Yujie, 2020, 46-47).

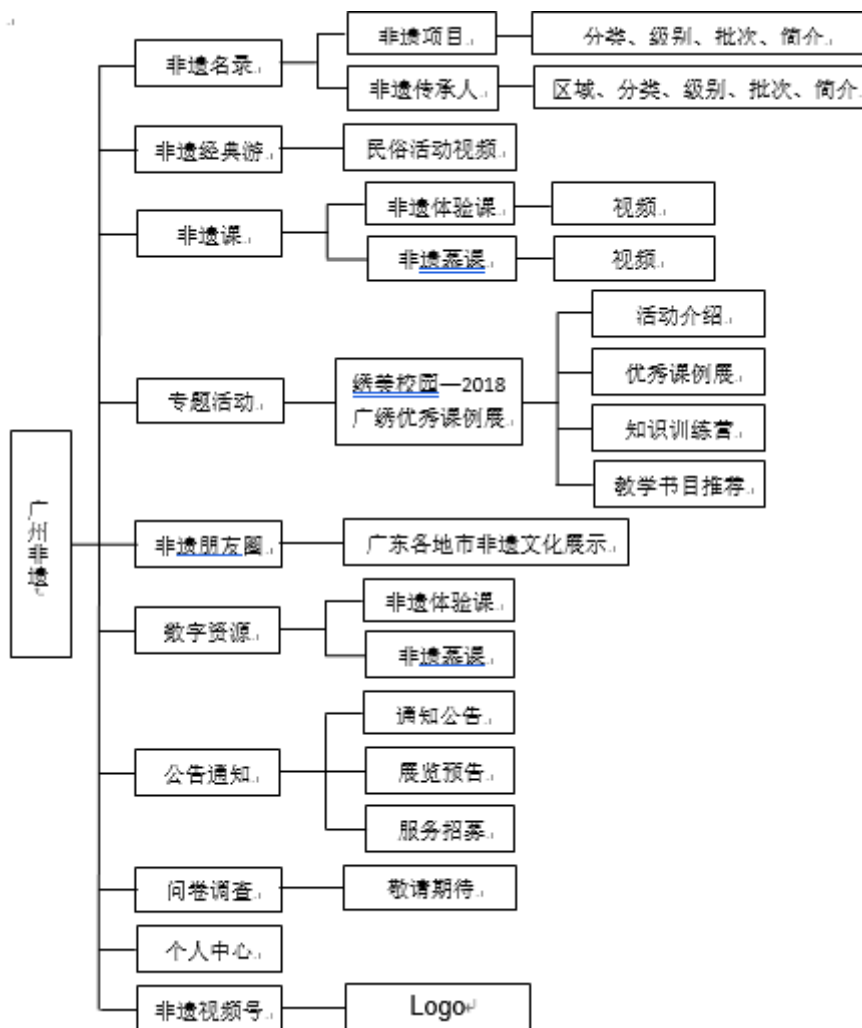
3 Establish a network platform for information collection and sharing

Objectively speaking, the eight immortals wind and percussion music is not well known in the society. Most of the musicians live in mountainous areas with closed traffic, and they use dialects and lack the ability to communicate in Putonghua. Collection of materials is hampered by low level of culture and limited expression ability of musicians. From a subjective point of view, relevant materials are mainly collected by cultural authorities or scholars, who often take what they need from each other without forming a joint force. Inheritors of the eight immortal music also lack consciousness of collecting and organizing. Limited by their own cultural level and conditions, these materials are easy to be undiscovered and lost.

The famous historian G. Evans once pointed out that "oral history research is a unique method of historical research, which is based on oral evidence and uses interviews and other methods as its research means". If oral history and documents are of equal importance, it will undoubtedly play an important role in research of the eight immortals wind and percussion music with little literature. Old musicians have precious materials in their hands or hearts, and even techniques and unique skills. In order to improve expressive force and visual effect of playing the suona, the inheritor Wang Yongkun explores and creates a unique and highly difficult double suona playing technique, which is a unique skill.

The author suggests that local cultural authorities can advocate local cultural stations, intangible cultural heritage research centers, inheritors and musicians via documents, publicity, encouragement, and material support, so that they can further comprehensively and deeply collect and sort out historical evolution of production and development of the "eight immortals" wind and percussion music, as well as its distribution, spread status, folk musicians, instruments, lyrics, singing customs, singing methods, pronunciation skills and their value. Data obtained from the census shall be sorted out and archived by categories of characters, sounds, images, pictures and objects. Elderly folk musicians' materials should be timely collected and sorted out (audio and video recordings) to solidify and preserve their skills. (Wu Junlin, 2019, 49)

As one of the effective ways of cultural dissemination in the current Chinese network media context, it is an important path for digital development of cultural dissemination of intangible cultural heritage to integrate WeChat official accounts with folk intangible cultural heritage. (Ge Fang, 2019, 11) Firstly, intangible cultural heritage can be protected, innovated and spread by the platform. Secondly, professionals engaged in intangible cultural heritage are attracted to carry out intra-industry and inter-industry exchanges and cooperation, learn from others' strengths and complement our own weaknesses. At the same time, more experts and scholars pay attention to and study intangible cultural heritage. As for WeChat subscription accounts (Similar to newspapers and magazines, WeChat subscription account is to provide media and individuals with news or entertainment as a new way of information dissemination.) mainly for cultural dissemination, Li Mengya from Wuhan University of Technology analyzed the "Guangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage" created by Guangzhou Cultural & Arts Center (Guangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center) from the perspective of custom menu content setting in her 2017 master's thesis "Construction and Promotion Practice of WeChat Public Platform for Intangible Cultural Heritage".



广州非遗	Guangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage	非遗朋友圈	Moments of Intangible Cultural Heritage
非遗名录	List of Intangible Cultural Heritage	广东各地市非遗文化展示	Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibitions in Cities across Guangdong
非遗经典游	Classic Tour of Intangible Cultural Heritage	数字资源	Digital Resources
非遗课	Course of Intangible Cultural Heritage	公告通知	Announcement
非遗项目	Projects of Intangible Cultural Heritage	通知公告	Notice
非遗传承人	Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage	展览预告	Exhibition Preview
民俗活动视频	Folk Activity Video	服务招募	Service Recruitment
非遗体验课	Experience Class of Intangible Cultural Heritage	问卷调查	Questionnaire Survey
非遗慕课	MOOC of Intangible Cultural Heritage	敬请期待	Coming Soon!
视频	Video	个人中心	Personal Center
分类、级别、批次、简介	Classification, level, batch, introduction	非遗视频号	Video Number of Intangible Cultural Heritage
专题活动	Events		
绣美校园-2018广绣优秀课例展	Beautiful Campus of Embroidery – 2018 Excellent Curriculum Exhibition of Canton Embroidery		
活动介绍	Activities		
优秀课例展	Excellent Curriculum Exhibition		
知识训练营	Knowledge Training Camp		
教学节目推荐	Teaching Program Recommendation		

(Data in Table 1 are from the WeChat subscription account of "Guangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage", and the chart is made by Ning Qing)

The WeChat subscription account of "Guangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage" is very worthy of reference in terms of clear functions, rich menus, novel forms, strong interest and interaction.

4. Explore new ways to integrate culture and tourism

Cultural and tourism integration means that tourism experience is used as a carrier of cultural dissemination and derivative development, so as to realize coordinated development of culture and tourism. In recent years, local government attaches great importance to construction of spiritual civilization and actively advocates traditional virtues. Thus, activities of married women visiting their parents have sprung up in various townships. In 2019, local people spontaneously organized the activity of "visiting parents in Spring Festival" and invited more than 300 married women of Zhuang to return to their parents' homes in Nazhi Township and Xialao Township, Tian'e County. On the day of the activity, armed with bamboo baskets containing red eggs, rice dumplings and apples, the married women of Zhuang dressed in black national costumes made of homespun fabric with embroidered lace sewn by their mothers and a blue plaid headband, were led by an eight immortals suona team in a long line and went back to their parents' homes in a great excitement. Villagers also organized a variety of folk activities, such as eight immortals wind and percussion music, folk songs, long table banquet, making glutinous rice cakes and rice dumplings, attracting nearly 100 folk scholars and tourists from inside and outside the district to watch and experience local folk customs. In the simplest way, common people pass on Chinese traditional filial piety virtue, and stimulate their enthusiasm to excavate and inherit national culture, which has been widely concerned by all walks of life. In addition to the above activities, the eight immortals suona team has been invited by the government for many times to participate in special festivals such as Frog Festival of Zhuang in Tian'e County (Frog Festival of Zhuang is a folk sacrificial activity.), Sanbao Tung Flower Festival, Longtan Pearl Plum Festival, and Tonggu Folk Song Art Festival. The author suggests that, in combination with local characteristic festival activities and under the support and guidance of local government, a "folk instrumental music" competition should be held to mobilize enthusiasm of musicians and arouse people's cross-cultural identity, self-identity, ethnic identity and social identity for the "eight immortals" wind and percussion music. Relying on three characteristics of "Hongshui River, original ecology, longevity and health", we can create a boutique tourism line with "farming culture, idyllic scenery, village relics and folk customs". Cultural exhibition and eco-tourism development are combined and planned to form a platform to display local characteristics of cultural tourism. Exhibitions such as "Intangible Cultural Heritage into Campus", "Intangible Cultural Heritage into Scenic Spots" and "Intangible Cultural

Heritage into Villages" can also be held to promote influence of the eight immortals wind and percussion music in a variety of ways, enrich people's spiritual and cultural life, and drive development of local ethnic culture and ecological tourism.



Figure 2: "Married women visiting their parents" in Laiting, Nali, Nazhi

Source: Luo Sheng, 2018

Conclusion

With the progress of the times and the development of economy, people have an increasingly rich cultural life, diversified aesthetic concepts and varied social needs. The eight immortals wind and percussion music of Zhuang in Guangxi, China have been affected to varying degrees and are facing crisis of inheritance. This paper holds that exploring and identifying representative inheritance groups of intangible cultural heritage is beneficial to bring into play initiative of the groups. Inner vitality of the eight immortals wind and percussion music can be stimulated by novel dissemination strategies in diversified dissemination patterns. The eight immortals wind and percussion music can be transformed and developed innovatively in the integration and co-creation mode of intangible cultural heritage and eco-tourism.

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