

The Cultural Treasures of Baima Tibetan Folk Songs in Gansu Province, China, as a Resource for Literacy Education in Chinese Music History

Jing Tang and Phiphat Sornyai*

College of Music, Maharakham University, Thailand

Corresponding author: Phiphat Sornyai, E-mail: phiphat.s@msu.ac.th

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ABSTRACT

Baima Tibetan folk songs are an integral part of the Baima Tibetan music culture. They are performed in diverse styles, including solo, duet, lead singing, round singing, and chorus. The objective of the study was to explore the significance of Baima Tibetan folk songs as a resource for literacy education in Chinese music history. By engaging with key informants divided into three groups - scholar informants, casual informants, and general informants. The result of this study reveals that ritual music holds deep roots in religious beliefs and is performed during sacrificial ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, and funeral ceremonies. Dance music culture reflects the collective nature and community cohesion of the Baima people, with dances like the fire circle dance serving as prominent expressions. Folk songs encompass a wide range of themes, including labor, wine, wedding, and love, showcasing the diverse musical expressions within Baima Tibetan society. The unique rituals, dances, and songs of the Baima people contribute significantly to the preservation and celebration of their rich cultural heritage. This study highlights the educational potential of Baima Tibetan folk songs as valuable resources for promoting literacy and understanding in the context of Chinese music history.

Key words: Cultural Treasures, Baima Tibetan Folk Songs, Literacy Education, Chinese Music History, Gansu

INTRODUCTION

Music is not merely a form of entertainment; it is a powerful medium that carries the essence of a culture, encapsulating its history, values, and traditions. As an ancient and diverse civilization, China boasts a rich musical heritage that spans thousands of years. Exploring the intricate tapestry of Chinese music history allows us to unravel the threads of its cultural fabric and gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese people and their unique worldview. However, the preservation and study of this vast musical heritage pose significant challenges, particularly in the realm of literacy education. Literacy education plays a pivotal role in fostering a comprehensive understanding of a nation's cultural heritage (Hung, 1985; D'Evelyn, 2018). It equips individuals with the tools to critically engage with historical texts, musical compositions, and artistic expressions, enabling them to appreciate the depth and complexity of a society's musical traditions. In the context of Chinese music history, literacy education provides a foundation for exploring ancient texts, deciphering musical notation systems, and analyzing the cultural contexts that shape musical compositions (Volk, 2004; Pine & Yu, 2012).

Within the realm of Chinese music history, the Baima Tibetan people offer a fascinating case study. The Baima

people, residing in remote regions of China, possess a distinctive musical culture that is deeply rooted in their religious beliefs, community traditions, and daily lives. However, due to various factors such as the absence of a written language, cultural assimilation, and the influences of modernization, their musical traditions face the risk of being lost and forgotten. Recognizing the educational potential of Baima Tibetan folk songs, this study seeks to explore their significance as a resource for literacy education in Chinese music history (Rees, 2001; Kolas & Thowsen, 2005; Rees, 2010; Kehoe, 2015; Jicuo & Karin, 2022; Juan et al, 2023).

Baima Tibetan folk songs serve as windows into the cultural heritage of the Baima people, reflecting their spiritual beliefs, historical narratives, and social customs. These songs accompany various aspects of life, including labor, wine, wedding, and love songs, providing a multi-faceted view of the Baima community and its unique musical expressions. By analyzing the content, themes, and artistic techniques employed in these folk songs, we can uncover valuable insights into Baima history, values, and traditions, making them invaluable resources for literacy education (Rees, 2010; Sangmu, 2016).

In addition to their cultural significance, Baima Tibetan folk songs offer linguistic and musical learning opportunities (Dinnerstein, 2013; Roche, 2020). As a primarily oral

culture, the Baima people have passed down their musical traditions through generations via oral transmission. By engaging with these folk songs, learners can develop their listening skills, phonetic awareness, and vocabulary in the Baima language. The songs also provide a platform for exploring the musical elements of rhythm, melody, and harmony, fostering musical literacy and appreciation (Kardos, 2012; Zhou, 2022; Li, 2023).

Furthermore, Baima Tibetan folk songs can be examined within the broader context of Chinese music history. By comparing and contrasting these songs with other regional and historical genres, learners can develop a nuanced understanding of the diverse musical landscape of China. They can explore the influences of different ethnic groups, geographical variations, and historical periods on musical compositions, tracing the evolution of Chinese music throughout time.

The study of Baima Tibetan folk songs as a resource for literacy education in Chinese music history presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between cultural preservation and educational advancement. By integrating these songs into literacy curricula, educators can create dynamic and engaging learning experiences for students, fostering a deeper appreciation for Chinese music and culture. The incorporation of Baima Tibetan folk songs as a pedagogical resource not only enriches the study of Chinese music history but also supports the preservation and revitalization of the Baima people's cultural heritage.

Research Question

- How can Baima Tibetan folk songs be effectively incorporated into literacy education in Chinese music history to promote cultural understanding and preserve the musical heritage of the Baima people?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Baima Tibetan Folk Songs: Cultural Significance and Characteristics

The Baima Tibetan people have a rich musical heritage, with their folk songs playing a significant role in their cultural expression. In this literature review, we will explore the historical and cultural context of Baima Tibetan folk songs, examine their themes, lyrics, and poetic devices, and discuss the musical instruments and vocal styles associated with these songs (Campbell, 1995; Dinnerstein, 2013; Cheng, 2014; Liao, 2014; Li, 2017; Li, 2021).

Historical and cultural context

The Baima Tibetan people have a long history and a unique cultural identity. Situated in remote areas, their way of life has been largely influenced by their geographical isolation. The Baima people have managed to preserve their cultural traditions, including their folk songs, which have been passed down from generation to generation. These songs are deeply intertwined with the daily lives, rituals, and beliefs of the Baima community.

Themes, lyrics, and poetic devices

Baima Tibetan folk songs cover a wide range of themes that reflect the various aspects of Baima life. These songs are often associated with labor, wine, weddings, love, and other significant events in the community. The lyrics of Baima folk songs are characterized by their simplicity, vivid imagery, and profound emotional expressions. They convey the joys, sorrows, and aspirations of the Baima people, providing insights into their cultural values and experiences. Poetic devices are skillfully employed in Baima folk songs to enhance their artistic and expressive qualities. Metaphors, similes, alliteration, and repetition are frequently used to create rhythmic patterns and evoke emotional responses. These poetic devices not only add aesthetic appeal but also serve as mnemonic devices, aiding in the oral transmission and preservation of the songs.

Musical instruments and vocal styles

The musical accompaniment of Baima folk songs involves a variety of traditional instruments, each contributing to the unique soundscape of the music. Commonly used instruments include the Tibetan lute (pi'pa), bamboo flute (xiao), two-stringed fiddle (erhu), and hand drum (paigu). These instruments provide melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic support, enriching the overall texture of the songs. Vocal styles in Baima folk songs exhibit a distinct regional flavor. The singing techniques employed by Baima performers are characterized by melismatic ornamentations, varying vocal timbres, and a unique vocal range. The use of throat singing, with its guttural and harmonic overtones, adds a mesmerizing quality to the vocal performances. The vocal styles, in conjunction with the instrumental accompaniment, create a captivating musical experience that resonates with the Baima community and reflects their cultural identity.

In conclusion, Baima Tibetan folk songs hold immense cultural significance within the Baima community. They serve as a repository of historical narratives, cultural values, and emotional expressions. The themes, lyrics, and poetic devices employed in these songs provide valuable insights into the cultural traditions and experiences of the Baima people. The musical instruments and vocal styles associated with Baima folk songs contribute to the unique sonic landscape and enhance the overall artistic quality of the music. Understanding the cultural significance and characteristics of Baima Tibetan folk songs is essential for appreciating their cultural heritage and exploring their potential as a resource for literacy education in Chinese music history.

Literacy Education in Chinese Music History

Literacy education plays a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, including Chinese music history. In this literature review, we will explore the current challenges and limitations of literacy education in Chinese music history, examine the role of folk songs in enhancing literacy, and discuss the importance of cultural

diversity in Chinese music history education (Reimer, 1989; Chang, 2018; Smits, 2000; Zhang, 2020).

Current challenges and limitations

Despite the rich musical traditions and vast historical knowledge in Chinese music history, there are several challenges and limitations in its literacy education. One of the key challenges is the limited availability of comprehensive and accessible resources that cater to the needs of learners and educators. The scarcity of textbooks, instructional materials, and teaching methodologies specific to Chinese music history hinders the effective teaching and learning of this subject. Furthermore, the emphasis on rote memorization and examination-oriented approaches in traditional education systems often neglects the development of critical thinking, creativity, and cultural appreciation. This narrow focus restricts students' ability to engage deeply with the historical and cultural significance of Chinese music and limits their overall literacy in this field.

The role of folk songs in enhancing literacy

Folk songs have the potential to enhance literacy in Chinese music history education. Folk songs embody the cultural expressions, values, and historical narratives of different regions and ethnic groups in China. By incorporating folk songs into literacy education, students can develop a deeper understanding of Chinese music history, its diverse styles, and the social contexts in which they originated. The study of folk songs enables students to engage with authentic primary sources, analyze lyrics, explore musical structures, and investigate the historical and cultural contexts of these songs. This process cultivates critical thinking skills, fosters cultural appreciation, and nurtures a sense of identity and pride in students' own heritage. Additionally, folk songs provide a medium for language development and literacy skills. Through singing, students can improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and oral communication abilities in Chinese. The poetic nature of folk songs introduces students to various literary devices, such as metaphor, imagery, and symbolism, fostering their literary appreciation and language proficiency.

Importance of cultural diversity in Chinese music history education

Cultural diversity plays a crucial role in Chinese music history education. China is a diverse country with numerous ethnic groups, each possessing its unique musical traditions. It is essential for literacy education in Chinese music history to embrace this cultural diversity and provide students with opportunities to explore the music and traditions of various ethnic groups. By studying the music of different regions and ethnicities, students gain a broader perspective of Chinese music history and recognize the contributions of diverse communities. This inclusivity promotes intercultural understanding, respect, and appreciation, fostering a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of China's musical heritage.

In conclusion, literacy education in Chinese music history faces challenges and limitations, including limited resources and an examination-oriented approach. However, incorporating folk songs into literacy education can enhance students' understanding, critical thinking skills, and language proficiency. Embracing cultural diversity in Chinese music history education ensures a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of China's rich musical traditions. By addressing these areas, literacy education in Chinese music history can become more engaging, effective, and culturally enriching for students.

Research Theory

The research theory for this study is based on the premise that integrating folk songs into literacy education in Chinese music history can enhance students' cultural understanding, critical thinking skills, and language proficiency. By utilizing folk songs as authentic primary sources, students can explore the historical and cultural significance of Chinese music, develop their literacy skills, and cultivate a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity. The study aims to examine the role of folk songs as a valuable resource for literacy education in Chinese music history and assess their impact on students' learning outcomes.

According to Anderson and Campbell (2010), incorporating cultural diversity, including folk songs, into music education can foster intercultural understanding and appreciation. Yang and Welch (2016) suggest that folk songs play a significant role in developing students' literacy skills in the context of Chinese music education. Yang and Welch (2014) conducted a case study in a Chinese classroom and explored the potential of folk songs in literacy education, highlighting their positive impact on students' engagement and language development. Similarly, Li (2022) conducted a case study in a Chinese primary school, demonstrating the integration of Chinese folk songs into literacy education and its positive effects on students' cultural understanding and language acquisition. Law and Ho (2011) emphasize the enhancement of language proficiency through folk song activities in Chinese music education. Rohan (2011) conducted a case study highlighting the fostering of cultural appreciation using folk songs in Chinese music education.

METHOD

Key Informants

In this study, the key informants were divided into three groups. These informants were interviewed to gain insights into the conservation status and existing issues pertaining to the study subjects. A specially designed questionnaire was employed to gather firsthand information from the informants (Table 1).

Research Tools

Based on the research objective of the study, the corresponding research tools include:

Table 1. Conservation and development of baima tibetan music culture

| Informant Group | Criteria |
|--------------------|--|
| Scholar Informants | Individuals with more than 5 years of research experience and expertise in Baima Tibetan music culture |
| Casual Informants | Individuals involved in the conservation and performance of Baima Tibetan music for more than 3 years during national ceremonies |
| General Informants | Individuals over 60 years old, residing in local Baima Tibetan villages |

Document analysis

This research tool involves the examination and analysis of existing documents, texts, publications, and other written materials related to the research topic in the context of studying Baima Tibetan music culture.

Field research

Field research involves conducting firsthand investigations and observations in the natural settings or cultural contexts relevant to the research topic for studying Baima Tibetan music culture.

Interview method

The interview method involves conducting structured or semi-structured interviews with individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic in the context of studying Baima Tibetan music culture.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a research tool that involves the use of a set of structured questions to collect data from a targeted sample of individuals in the context of studying Baima Tibetan music culture.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conservation of Baima Tibetan music culture in the Gansu region. Literature data were examined to supplement the analysis of the collected data. The data obtained from interviews and field surveys were analyzed to identify instances of alienation and partial disappearance of Baima Tibetan folk songs, with the aim of improving their transmission and promoting innovation. Due to the diverse nature of data collection methods and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, field surveys were significantly hindered. Consequently, innovative, and internet-based approaches, including field surveys, interview questionnaires, video conferencing interviews, and indirect observations, were employed to overcome these challenges.

RESULTS

Music Culture History of Baima Tibetan (1970s to 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, 2008 to Present)

Wen County, in the border area of Ganchuan, is located in the southernmost part of Gansu Province, bordering Qingchuan County. Historically, the Baima people established Yinping State in this region. Wenxian was an ancient settlement during the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Qin periods for the ancient Di and Qiang peoples. During the Western Han Dynasty, Emperor Gaozu Liu Bang designated it as the “Yinping Road.” In the Three Kingdoms period, it became Yinping County of the Wei state. During the Shu Han period, it was established as Wen County, and in the seventh year of the Shu Han era, Zhuge Liang sent troops to pacify Wu, incorporating Yinping and two other counties into the Liang state. In the Jin Dynasty, Fufeng, Ping, and the Di people from Beijing returned to Longyou, with Yinping and Wudu being attached to their own ethnic groups, contrary to the old land. Wenxian County was historically part of the Di people’s territory, as documented in the “Book of the Later Han Dynasty” and the “Biography of the Southwest Yi Dynasty.” In the Tang Dynasty, Tubo was absent, and various ethnic minority groups integrated. The “Book of the Later Han Dynasty” and the “History of the Di” mention that Baima Di was established in the sixth year of Emperor Wudi and was divided into the west of Guanghan, which was regarded as Wudu. The “Pingwu County Annals” in Sichuan state that the Baima Tibetans are not Tibetan but belong to the Di nationality. The “Wenxian Annals” records that there is an ancient Baima valley 50 miles southwest of the county. Prior to the Tang Dynasty, the nation structure of the Sichuan-Gansu border was relatively stable, and this region served as the settlement area for the family people. As early as the Western Zhou Dynasty, the Di people lived in what is now Gansu and Sichuan provinces. The Di people had a large population and significant influence, reaching their peak during the Two Jin Dynasty. However, their power gradually declined, and they withdrew from the stage of history, resulting in limited records about the Di nationality and the Baima people in later historical documents. The name “Baima Tibetan” was given to them by the Chinese government in the 1950s, replacing the previous designation of “Baima.”

During the period of reform and opening up from 1978 to the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, the Baima Tibetans primarily inhabited Wen County in Gansu Province and Pingwu County in Mianyang City, Sichuan Province. The earliest research on Baima folk music can be traced back to 1975 when Yang Yusheng, the Cultural Director of Mianyang, collected and organized Baima music, publishing “Collection of Folk Songs in the Mianyang Area” and “Discussion on Baima Tibetan Folk Songs in Pingwu County” (Yusheng, 1983). These early theoretical studies on Baima music included 62 local folk songs, providing valuable information for the study of Baima music. With the advent of the reform and opening up era, more researchers began to focus on the study of Baima music. Xiao Changwei’s (1983) paper on the classification of Baima songs, labor songs, wine songs, and

the analysis of circle dances, Cao Gai dances, and twelve-phase dances in “Pingwu Baima Tibetan People’s Music Investigation” expanded the research scope of Baima music. In 1987, Yang Mingjian’s paper “Baima Wonderful Songs Attract Attention: A Preliminary Study of Baima Folk Songs in Gansu” primarily documented the original musical forms of Baima folk songs, and the content of the songs indirectly reflected the real-life portrayal of the Baima people after the reform and opening up (Chuan & Binhua, 2011). The study of Baima music culture experienced a qualitative leap throughout the 20th century, and after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, scholars paid more attention to the transmission and preservation of Baima music culture. The research extended to the Baima people’s rituals, music, and transmission, shedding light on their cultural history and the influence of integration with other ethnic groups during the late Qing and early Republican periods.

In conclusion, the Baima Tibetan people have a rich history, with their roots tracing back to the Di people of ancient times. They have their own tribal language and unique music culture. However, due to their remote locations and underdeveloped transportation and economy, the conservation and transmission of their music culture face challenges. It is crucial to preserve and transmit the music culture handed down by our ancestors, particularly within the context of China’s rich cultural heritage. The Baima Tibetan music culture in Gansu Province, centered in Wen County, possesses a relatively intact musical transmission due to its mountainous location and distance from urban areas. Music culture is an integral part of Baima life, revealing their history and living conditions across generations. The study of Baima music culture has gained increasing attention since the 1970s, and the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 further spurred interest in the conservation and transmission of Baima music (Table 2).

Music and Culture Classification of the Baima Tibetan People

The music culture of the Baima Tibetan people can be classified into three main types: ritual music culture, dance music culture, and folk songs. Each type holds significant cultural and historical significance within their community (Table 3).

As shown in Table 3, the unique music culture of the Baima Tibetan people holds great significance within the broader context of traditional music culture. Its conservation and preservation are crucial in order to safeguard their heritage. Since traditional folk songs, dances, and musical instruments are closely intertwined with sacrificial rituals, wedding ceremonies, funeral rituals, and dance music

culture, this chapter will focus on introducing the ritual music culture (sacrificial ceremonies, marriages, and funeral ceremonies) and the ritual procedures of dance music culture.

Baima tibetan ceremony and music culture

The Baima Tibetan people have their own unique cultural practices and religious beliefs. They worship various deities such as family gods, mountain gods, stone gods, field gods, earth gods, tree gods, and water gods. Their religious festivals include the Dragon God Sacrifice on February 2nd (also known as the Cow God), the Home God Sacrifice on March 3rd, the Mine God Sacrifice on May 5th and June 6th, the PanHu (Baima Ancestor God) Sacrifice on July 15th, the Feng Ye and Pediatric Ye (Ghosts) Sacrifice on August 15th, and the Soil Lord Empress (the Soil Goddess) Sacrifice on September 9th and September 15th. These festivals involve prayers, drum beating by teachers, and the ritual slaughter of white sheep.

Sacrifice to the mountain god

Cao Gai Ceremony: The “Cao Gai” ceremony, also known as the “Mask Dance,” holds religious significance among the Baima Tibetan people. It is related to the legend of Ber’s “sacred mountain.” According to the legend, a Baima Tibetan individual prayed to the sacred mountain to cure malaria. During the prayer, they encountered a fierce monster but managed to escape. Since then, the Baima Tibetans have regarded the monsters as the “embodiment” of the sacred mountain. To seek the blessings of the sacred mountain, the Baima Tibetans created “Cao Gai” masks as representations of the gods. The “Cao Gai” ceremony is a religious ritual that aims to exorcise evil spirits, demons, and bring good fortune for the upcoming year.

The Baima Tibetan Township in Pingwu County celebrates the “Cao Gai” ceremony from the fifth to the sixth day of the first lunar month. The main sacrificial ceremony takes place in the village center. The ceremony begins on the fifth day and continues until the next morning, involving the slaughter of animals for worship. Throughout the night, the villagers gather around bonfires, performing the fire circle dance until early morning. On the sixth day, the “Cao Gai” participants travel through the village, driving away evil spirits and ghosts. They visit each household, offering drinks and concluding the ceremony. This ritual is performed every three years, with the third year also including the worship of the highest mountain god in the Baima area, known as the “Baima Master.”

Table 2. Conservation and development of baima tibetan music culture

| Historical Period | Key Events | Research Focus |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1970s to 2008 | Reform and opening up | - Collection and analysis of Baima folk songs - Classification of Baima songs and dances - Exploration of musical forms and cultural significance |
| 2008 to Present | Wenchuan earthquake | - Impact of the earthquake on Baima music culture - Conservation and preservation of Baima music - Influence of integration with other ethnic groups |

Wedding ceremony

The wedding customs of the Baima Tibetan people in Wenxian County, Gansu Province, are distinctive. In ancient times, marriages were arranged by parents, but nowadays, the Baima people have more freedom in choosing their partners. They practice monogamy and forbid intermarriage with outsiders or other Tibetan groups. Within the Baima community, individuals are free to choose their partners, and intermarriage is allowed after three generations. When a Baima man is interested in a woman, he expresses his love through beautiful songs. Once the time is right, the young man seeks the assistance of a matchmaker (Table 4).

As shown in Table 4, on the second night, the bride and groom sit facing the God Rabbit, and singers chant blessings for them. A respected man performs the “King Kong Pout”

while singing, holding a handle with a head, arm, and three-pronged sword-like weapons. This ritual signifies blessings and protection from disasters. On the morning of the third day, a marriage ceremony takes place. The newlyweds kowtow to the ancestral tablet, then turn to the new guests and matchmaker to offer their respects. The groom’s parents sit on the threshold, symbolizing wealth preservation. The woman’s relatives accompany the man’s relatives until they leave the village, marking the end of the wedding ceremony.

Funeral ceremony

The Baima people have three funeral customs: earth burial, water burial, and cremation. The cemeteries feature well-organized tombs, often specific to their respective clans. The burial customs alternate depending on the seasons (Table 5).

Table 3. Music and culture classification of the baima tibetan people

| Music Culture Type | Description |
|----------------------|--|
| Ritual Music Culture | Ritual music culture among the Baima Tibetan people is extensive and profound, derived from their religious beliefs. It involves singing and dancing performances that take place before sacrifices or during worship ceremonies. The rituals are deeply rooted in their spiritual practices, and the music serves as a means of expressing their devotion and reverence. |
| Dance Music Culture | Dance music culture is a significant aspect of the Baima Tibetan community, characterized by its collective nature. Men, women, and children participate in various dance forms, showcasing their unity and sense of belonging. Notable dances include the fire circle dance, torch welcome, and other traditional dances. These dances not only provide entertainment but also reinforce their cultural identity and strengthen the bonds within the community. |
| Folk Songs | Folk songs play a vital role in the Baima Tibetan music culture, accompanying different aspects of life. They encompass labor songs, wine songs, wedding songs, love songs, and more. The repertoire includes solo, duet, lead singing, round singing, and chorus performances. Unique singing styles such as walking, kneeling, and even running add to the diversity. Folk songs reflect the rich expressions of the Baima people’s daily experiences, and they are indispensable in preserving their cultural heritage. |

Table 4. The traditional baima tibetan wedding customs involve four procedures

| Procedure | Description |
|-------------------|---|
| Matchmaker | The Baima man informs his parents and invites a male matchmaker to the woman’s home with a pot of honey wine at dusk. After the woman’s parents seek their daughter’s consent, they drink and agree, and the matchmaker returns with the wine. |
| Agreement | After the woman’s family agrees, a period of time passes before the man’s family chooses an auspicious day. An elder from the man’s side acts as the matchmaker, accompanied by the man’s uncle and another person. They carry two pots of wine and a pig’s head as marriage gifts to the woman’s family. The time for drinking the wine is predetermined and should not be changed easily. The “Know the Wine” ceremony is a public celebration where the agreement of marriage is announced. |
| Marriage Proposal | The man’s family seeks the presence of the village’s “Ben Bo” (Master Benjiao) to fix the wedding date and informs the woman’s family. On the designated day, the young man, accompanied by three elders, brings pork, green wine, clothes, white masks, and other betrothal gifts on horseback to the woman’s home. They discuss the marriage and ask “this wave” to finalize the wedding date. Along the way, they receive a warm reception from the villagers, who sprinkle ashes on them and silently wish them a long and fulfilling life. |
| Wedding | Weddings typically last three days and three nights, occurring in the twelfth lunar month or the middle of the first lunar month. The first day is celebrated on the 22 nd day of the lunar calendar, symbolizing double happiness. On the first day, a man and a woman chosen by the groom’s side go to the bride’s home to escort her. The person picking up the bride must be married and have children, while the woman selects 12 to 15 “new guests” to accompany the bride. As the bride enters the village, three earth cannons are fired, and the groom’s closest relatives welcome the bride and new guests into their home. In the evening, singers from the village gather in the courtyard while the new guests (except the bride) are confined to the hall, surrounded by chili sticks and tobacco smoke. |

As shown in Table 5, the music used during Baima Tibetan funeral ceremonies is relatively simple. The singers, known as “Bai Mo” or “Taoist priests,” perform ancient sacrificial tunes. These songs are characterized by their freedom from rhythm constraints, allowing singers to improvise and use simple sounds such as “oh” and “ah.” The songs performed can be categorized as “funeral songs,” “prayer songs,” “sacrifice songs,” and “soul-stirring songs.”

The baima tibetan dance music culture

The “Chi Ge Zhou” dance festival is an important annual ritual performed by the Baima community in the first lunar month to honor their ancestors and pay homage to the mountain god. Retaining its original form over centuries, it takes place predominantly in twelve natural villages in Tiilou Township, Longnan. The dance integrates singing, dancing, and sacrificial activities, reflecting the historical, religious, folk, and artistic facets of Baima’s culture.

The structured “Chi Ge Zhou” dance comprises three parts: male face dance, female face dance, and the Chi Ma dance. Participants represent key figures from Baima’s mythology: the four sons of the Baima ancestor Dama (“Chi Brother”), Bodhisattvas (“Chi M”), and “Chi Ma,” whose comedic performance adds humor to the event.

A critical scene, “Autumn Day,” mirrors the “Chi Brother’s” power, and the dance moves from house to house, symbolizing the warding off of misfortune and welcoming of peace. The festival culminates on the 16th lunar day with a community feast and is preserved as a state-level intangible cultural heritage, celebrated as a distinctive Baima sacrificial dance.

The performance starts on the 13th lunar day, with a nine-member dance troupe performing set dance steps, moving from east to west across the village, greeted at each house with offerings of food and drink. The celebrations conclude on the 17th lunar day with a communal feast. The

“Chi Brother,” “Chi M,” and “Chi Ma” performers each exhibit distinctive dance movements, adding a unique element to this vibrant cultural tableau (Table 6).

As shown in Table 6, the Ritual Process of Huo Quan Wu, apart from the traditional mask dance, the Baima people also celebrate with the energetic Fire Circle Dance or “Huo Quan Wu”, known as “stay boat” in the Baima language. This dance, also referred to as the “round yuan dance”, serves as a favorite form of collective entertainment among the Baima people. It is often described as “yellow hair and white head all drunk dance”, and “hand in hand to complete the journey” by past literati.

According to Baima legend, the origin of the Fire Circle Dance dates back to a time when their ancestors were forced to migrate due to attacks from soldiers. The Baima people held their ground in the mountains for seven days and seven nights. On the eighth day, they rested and lit a bonfire to ward off the cold winter night. However, an attack occurred during the night, from which they were saved by a white rooster that woke them up. To commemorate this event, which took place on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, the Baima people designated this day as the beginning of the Fire Circle Dance Day, establishing it as a traditional Baima anniversary.

The Torch Festival begins on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month. Boys from the village collect firewood early in the morning, which is placed on the side of a large field for the Fire Circle Dance. The festival lasts until the 17th day of the first lunar month. Every evening after dinner, young men and women collect firewood from house to house to the beat of drums and songs. The hosts generously provide wood, and once a bonfire is lit in the field, the villagers dance the Fire Circle Dance and sing wine songs, forming a large circle around the fire. This dance is the most common way for the Baima people to relax and celebrate the festival, perfectly combining “fire” and “dance” (Figure 1).

The Fire Circle Dance, also known as “ao clothes bar” in the Baima language, is an ancient recreational dance with

Table 5. The baima people have three funeral customs

| Funeral Ceremony | Description |
|------------------|--|
| Earth Burial | The Baima people practice two types of earth burial: “limb burial” and “straight limb burial.” The former is more commonly followed and resembles Han burial customs. Well-organized tombs are found in cemeteries specific to their respective clans. |
| Cremation | Cremation is a prevalent funeral practice among the Baima people, typically conducted during the winter months from December to February. A designated cremation ground is used, where the body of the deceased is tied, placed on a woodpile, and burned. The firewood for the cremation is contributed by both men and women from the entire village. |
| Water Burial | Water burial is primarily performed for infants who pass away before their first year. The baby’s body is placed in a basket and thrown into a river. The Baima people believe that the infant’s soul should not be buried with other souls to avoid bringing misfortune. Water burial is considered a way to abandon disaster and bring peace to the departed infant. |

Table 6. The baima tibetan dance music culture

| Role | Dress | Dance Characteristics |
|---------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Chi Brother | Adorned as the mountain god | Vigorous with sword and dust |
| Chi M (Bodhisattva) | Dressed as Bodhisattvas | Light and graceful |
| Chi Ma | Face painted with pot ink, adorned in rags | Improvisational, humorous |

religious undertones, celebrated during festivals. It holds an equally important status and value as the “Chi Ge Zhou”. It was initially used to greet the fire god, drive away pests and wild boars, and gradually evolved into a recreational activity combined with “Chige day”. The Baima people sing and dance “Chi Ge Zhou” in the shanzhai field, and the Fire Circle Dance is inherently connected to fire. The Baima people light a torch on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month to greet the grain god, hoping for a bountiful harvest and protection against pests and beasts.

The performance of the Fire Circle Dance in Wenxian County, Ganchuan border area, emphasizes neat formation and coordinated dance steps. The formations can be either single or double circles, with participants holding hands and dancing counterclockwise (Figure 2).

The Fire Circle Dance is a collective song and dance activity that encourages participation from all, regardless of gender or age. Participants move in one direction, hand in hand, and often sing while dancing. The dance steps are simple, consisting of walking three steps and then kicking a leg, with occasional variations. The dance concludes with a faster pace and more vigorous steps, resembling the Tibetan Guozhuang dance in its simplicity and grandeur.



Figure 1. Chi Ge Zhou Wu
Source: Jing Tang



Figure 2. Huo Quan Wu
Source: Jing Tang

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research conducted on Baima Tibetan folk songs and music culture provides valuable insights into the historical and cultural significance of this unique musical tradition. The literature review presented an overview of the Baima Tibetan people’s rich musical heritage, exploring the themes, lyrics, poetic devices, and musical instruments associated with their folk songs (Yang & Welch, 2014). It also discussed the challenges and limitations of literacy education in Chinese music history and highlighted the potential of integrating folk songs into education to enhance cultural understanding and literacy skills (Li, 2022). The research methods employed in this study, including document analysis, field research, interviews, and a comparative approach, allowed for a comprehensive examination of the conservation and development of Baima Tibetan music culture (Anderson & Campbell, 2010).

The results of the research shed light on the music culture history of the Baima Tibetan people, from the period of reform and opening up in the 1970s to the present, with a specific focus on the impact of the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. During this time, there was an increased emphasis on the collection, analysis, and classification of Baima folk songs, as well as the exploration of their cultural significance. The research also highlighted the rituals and ceremonies associated with Baima music culture, such as the Cao Gai ceremony, wedding ceremonies, and funeral customs. These rituals reflect the deep spiritual beliefs and practices of the Baima Tibetan people and contribute to the preservation of their cultural heritage.

The findings of the research are consistent with existing theoretical principles and previous studies on Baima music culture. Scholars have emphasized the importance of preserving and transmitting the music culture of ethnic minority groups, such as the Baima Tibetan people, as a means of safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting intercultural understanding (Anderson & Campbell, 2010; Yang & Welch, 2016). The integration of folk songs into literacy education has been recognized as a way to enhance students’ cultural understanding, critical thinking skills, and language proficiency (Yang & Welch, 2014; Li, 2022). The research results further support these principles by demonstrating the cultural significance of Baima folk songs and their potential as a valuable resource for literacy education in Chinese music history.

The research concludes that the Baima Tibetan people have a unique music culture that plays a significant role in their cultural expression and identity. The conservation and preservation of their music culture face challenges due to their remote locations and limited resources. However, efforts to study, document, and promote Baima music culture have increased since the 1970s and have been further intensified after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. The Baima people’s rituals, dances, and folk songs are integral to their daily lives and provide insights into their history, beliefs, and experiences. The research highlights the importance of preserving and transmitting their music culture to ensure the continuity of their cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the research on Baima Tibetan folk songs and music culture provides valuable insights into the historical, cultural, and artistic dimensions of this distinctive musical tradition. Building upon existing theoretical principles and previous studies, it underscores the importance of preserving ethnic minority music cultures and integrating folk songs into literacy education. To ensure the enduring preservation and appreciation of Baima Tibetan music culture, it is essential to recognize and address the challenges faced by the Baima Tibetan people. This can be achieved through the implementation of various strategies and initiatives, including policy changes to protect intangible cultural heritage, the development of educational programs that incorporate Baima folk songs into the curriculum, documentation and archiving efforts, community engagement through festivals and workshops, and fostering collaboration and networking among stakeholders. By embracing these approaches and fostering innovative solutions, we can secure the legacy of Baima Tibetan music culture and celebrate its rich cultural heritage for generations to come.

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