

## Educational and Literacy Dimensions of Putian Coastal Folk Songs in Fujian Province, China

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the educational and literacy dimensions embedded within Putian coastal folk songs in Fujian Province, China. The study investigates the cultural significance and historical development of these folk songs, employing research methods from musicology and ethnomusicology. With a particular emphasis on the coastal region of Putian, the research aims to uncover the educational value and literacy aspects of these traditional musical compositions. The findings reveal the existence of approximately 196 recorded musical works, with nine songs emerging as the most popular in the region. The article also highlights the list of recognized heirs associated with Putian coastal folk songs. Additionally, the study explores the diverse cultural influences that have shaped Putian's music, including the ancient Minyue culture, the introduction of Han culture from the Central Plains, and the assimilation of Arab, Persian, and European cultural elements. By analyzing the educational and literacy dimensions of Putian coastal folk songs, this research contributes to understanding how music can serve as a catalyst for education and literacy promotion within cultural contexts.

**Key words:** Putian Coastal Folk Songs, Education, Literacy, Fujian Province, Cultural Heritage

### INTRODUCTION

Putian, a city with a rich history and diverse cultural traditions, encompasses a vibrant tapestry of traditional art forms, including folk songs, dances, and wood carving, that play a vital role in its cultural fabric. Among these cultural treasures, Putian folk songs stand out as a unique and significant phenomenon deeply ingrained in the traditional heritage of the region. These songs not only reflect the invaluable cultural memory of the ethnic group but also exemplify the process of cultural inheritance from one generation to the next. As the classics of Putian, these songs have attracted the attention of many experts and scholars and will continue to have a positive impact on the future development of Putian culture (Mair et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2013; Pang, 2015; Yan & Yifei, 2019).

This article explores the educational and literacy dimensions inherent in Putian's coastal folk songs within the context of Fujian Province, China. Putian's cultural dynamics are shaped by a fusion of coastal and inland influences, resulting in a diversified and unique cultural identity (Dean, 1998; Chan et al., 2006; Clark, 2018). The city's historical background reveals a confluence of ancient Fujian and Vietnam cultures, along with the assimilation of Han culture from the Central Plains. Over time, Putian has experienced the gradual penetration of various foreign cultures, such as Arab, Persian, and European, leaving a distinctive imprint on its cultural landscape (Clark, 2006; MaJin, 2013; Song, 2022).

The geographical location of Putian, situated by the sea with mountains to the northwest, has contributed to its indigenous cultural practices (Clark, 1995; Menegon, 2020; Wu & Wu, 2021; Dean, 2022). Ancient Minyue culture, characterized by snake worship, has left a profound impact on subsequent generations. As people from the Central Plains migrated south during the Han Dynasty, Putian retained its indigenous beliefs while integrating diverse religious beliefs from the Han people (Katz, 2008; Tho, 2018; Katz, 2021). Festivals, customs, and rituals have endured over centuries, reflecting a blend of ancient traditions and contemporary practices. The natural beauty and diverse landscapes of Putian, coupled with its emphasis on education and promotion of cultural values, have nurtured a range of folk arts (Guozhen, 2009; Yan & Li, 2023).

Putian's folk music, deeply influenced by its unique cultural background, encompasses a blend of inland and coastal styles, giving rise to a distinct coastal music culture (Zhang, 2020; Liu, 2022). Festivals like the Lantern Festival, Tomb Sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and New Year's Eve are celebrated with traditions reminiscent of those in the Central Plains, interwoven with coastal cultural elements. Marriage customs, longevity customs, burial customs, and various aspects of daily life bear the remnants of ancient Central Plains culture, promoting values of respect, virtue, industry, thrift, and mutual assistance. The rich historical and cultural accumulation has also nurtured traditional local art forms, such as Puxian Opera and Shi Yin

Ba Yue, which permeate festivals, weddings, birthdays, and other folk activities (Yan & Chonpairot, 2021; Yantian & Karin, 2022; Juan et al., 2023).

The evolution of Putian's folk arts can be traced back to the migration of literati from the Central Plains during the Jin Dynasty, bringing with them music and drama that gradually transformed into the present-day Putian folk art, infused with coastal local color. The Tang Dynasty witnessed the prevalence of songs, dances, music, and hundreds of operas in Putian, while the Ming and Qing Dynasties showcased a rich variety of folk music and dance, including the renowned "Shi Yin Ba Yue" and the Nine Carp Dance. These cultural exchanges and influences have contributed to the formation of unique artistic features, distinctive regional folk cultural characteristics, and significant cultural values in Putian's coastal folk music, including "Shi Yin Ba Yue," "Bangu Dong," and "Puxian opera," which have become treasured gems within the realm of Putian's coastal folk music arts (Dean, 2011; Zhuo & Zhuo, 2018; Weimin, 2022).

The preservation and study of Putian's folk songs are of paramount importance as they represent a profound cultural legacy that has survived the test of time. The researchers intend to examine the history and analyze select songs of coastal folk tunes from Putian, Fujian Province, China, within the framework of education and literacy studies. By exploring the educational and literacy dimensions of these folk songs, this study aims to deepen our understanding, promoting further development, and broaden the knowledge base surrounding Putian's folk music. The findings of this research will contribute to future studies, amplifying their social impact and significance in preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

### Research Question

- How do the educational and literacy dimensions of Putian coastal folk songs contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in Fujian Province, China?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cultural and Artistic Dimensions of Putian in Fujian Province

Putian, a city in Fujian Province, China, has a rich historical background and unique geographical characteristics. This literature review covers various aspects of Putian, starting with its historical development, including early civilization, cultural and educational progress, and economic growth during different dynasties. The review also delves into Putian's geography, highlighting its coastal location, subtropical climate, mountainous terrain, and agricultural resources, as well as the abundant marine life in its coastal area. Additionally, the review presents social demographic information, such as population size, gender composition, age distribution, and educational level, underscoring the ongoing improvement in the quality of the population. Throughout the review, the cultural significance of Putian

is emphasized, particularly in relation to the local drama of Xinghua Opera and the utilization of the unique Xinghua dialect in Putian's folk songs and artistic expressions (Cartier, 2001; Wei & Huang, 2018; Zheng, 2019).

### Cultural and Artistic Dimensions of Putian in Fujian Province

Understanding the cultural and artistic landscape of a region requires a comprehensive knowledge of its natural environment. Putian, being a coastal city, has been greatly influenced by its coastal surroundings, shaping its culture and art forms. The unique geographical location and cultural heritage of Putian give rise to distinct characteristics in language, customs, diet, and folk art. The evolution of the Puxian dialect over thousands of years blends ancient Central Plains and Minyue pronunciations, incorporating modern vocabulary and local dialects while retaining phonetic features of ancient and middle Chinese. Putian's customs, originating from the ancient Central Plains culture, emphasize harmony, respect for elders, diligence, thrift, and altruism, but also carry negative elements of superstitious beliefs and gender discrimination. The city's religious beliefs revolve around Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the influential "Mazu belief" centered on the heroic fisherman Lin Moniang. Mazu temples have proliferated, attracting millions of followers nationwide. Putian's artistic traditions encompass vibrant and varied folk dances categorized into three types, including the captivating "Jiu Li Deng Wu," the lively "Jiu Lian Deng Wu," and the symbolic "Bai Zong Jiao." The city is renowned for its intricate Putian wood carving, characterized by an artistic belief in abundance and prosperity. Traditional folk musical instruments and Putian Opera (Puxian Opera) further enrich the artistic landscape of Putian (Donghua, 2009; Han, 2022; Zuowang, 2021; Hua, 2022; Yiping, 2013).

### Putian Coastal Folk Songs

Putian's long-standing tradition of coastal music holds a significant place in the world of folk songs. This literature review delves into the evolution and characteristics of Putian's coastal folk songs, examining their historical context and the influence of cultural and governmental efforts. The roots of these songs can be traced back to ancient times when music played a vital role in various activities such as sacrificial ceremonies, hunting, and courtship. The Book of Songs, an early compilation, provides a realistic portrayal of the social life and struggles of the working people during that era. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Chu Song introduced a sense of fantasy and passion, laying the foundation for the romanticism found in Chinese folk songs. During the Song Dynasty, coastal music became a popular form of entertainment, combining poetry recitation and rap performances. The Qing Dynasty witnessed a peasant uprising in Putian, leading to the emergence of songs that expressed the sentiments and struggles of the people. Coastal music relied on oral transmission, with melodies and lyrics passed down through generations. Recognizing the value of Putian's coastal folk songs, the Putian government established the Putian Folk

Song Class in 1970, offering comprehensive instruction to preserve and promote this rich heritage. The government's support also included the establishment of a cultural center in 1949, which fostered the growth of new cultural activities. By 1985, Putian had become a thriving cultural hub with various artistic troupes, performers, and clubs. The government's initiatives have contributed to the preservation and promotion of Putian's coastal folk songs, enhancing the cultural and artistic atmosphere of the region (Yuanheng, 2015; McLaren, 2017).

## Research Theory

### Musicology

Encompasses various theoretical subjects that examine music and its related phenomena. It includes fields such as music aesthetics, music history, music ethnology, music psychology, and music pedagogy. These disciplines explore different aspects of music, such as its relationship with ideology, materials and characteristics, musical form and composition, and performance theory (Central Conservatory of Music Distance Education Network, 2015). In this study, the researchers employed musicological knowledge to analyze the singing of Putian coastal folk songs, particularly in relation to opera.

### Ethnomusicology

A branch of musicology that focuses on the study of traditional music from different countries around the world. It examines how specific musical traditions are constructed, utilized, disseminated, and developed within their respective cultural contexts. By investigating the basic characteristics, survival principles, and cultural characteristics of traditional music, ethnomusicology integrates music within the natural and social cultural environments of a particular country (Guodong, 1997). The researchers drew on the principles of ethnomusicology to analyze the fundamental characteristics and cultural significance of Putian coastal folk songs.

## METHOD

### Key Informants

The research methodology employed for this study involved key informant interviews with individuals who possess significant knowledge and experience in Putian's coastal folk songs. Three key informants were selected for this study. The criteria for selecting these key informants were provided by Hang Jing, the heirs of Chinese intangible culture, and are as follows:

Criteria for Selecting Key Informants:

1. Native of Putian who has lived and grown up in the city.
2. Familiarity with the performance forms of Putian coastal folk songs.
3. Representative inheritor of intangible cultural heritage.
4. Extensive performance and organizational experience, along with local research background.

5. Proficiency in the contemporary coastal music of Putian. The Key Informant Profiles are presented in Table 1.

### Research Tools

The research tools employed in this study include interviews, questionnaires, and observations. These tools were carefully selected to gather comprehensive data and insights.

Interviews were conducted with three key informants. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a combination of predetermined questions and open-ended discussions. The interviews aimed to explore their experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding the cultural heritage and significance of Putian's music.

The questionnaires included a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions to collect data and personal opinions. Covered topics such as cultural heritage awareness, music preferences, experiences with Putian's folk songs, and the perceived impact of government initiatives.

The researchers observed and documented the presence of beautiful music in the square at night, capturing the atmosphere and the engagement of folk music lovers. These observations provided insights into the community's participation, the emotional connection to the music, and the impact of Putian's folk songs on festive occasions.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed a qualitative research process, incorporating interviews, questionnaires, and field observations. Through careful analysis of the collected data, the researchers gained valuable insights into the cultural and artistic dimensions of Putian. The interviews provided in-depth information and perspectives, while the questionnaires allowed for and qualitative data analysis. Field observations directly observed and documented cultural activities. The iterative data analysis process involved reviewing, coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data to support the research objectives and enhance the understanding of Putian's cultural heritage.

**Table 1.** Key informant profiles

Key Informant	Profile
1 <sup>st</sup>	- Inheritor of Putian coastal folk songs (specifically "Bangu Dong") - Introduced "Bangu Dong" to the local community and taught heirs of Putian's coastal music
2 <sup>nd</sup>	- Vice President at a central opera in Fujian Province - Recipient of the 17 <sup>th</sup> Chinese "Wenhua Award" and the prestigious Plum Blossom Award for exceptional contributions to Chinese drama performance
3 <sup>rd</sup>	- A music enthusiast who appreciates Putian folk song performances - Expresses a love for Putian's cultural heritage and music



## RESULTS

### Origin and Itinerary of Putian Coastal Folk Songs in Ancient Times (Before 1949)

Putian, known as “a famous state of literature and a coastal Zou Lu,” has a rich history of folk culture and music development. From the Tang Dynasty to the early Republic of China (618-1911 AD), mass cultural activities in Putian were organized by urban and rural communities and clan clans, with village leaders coordinating activities between villages. The Tang Dynasty marked the emergence of “hundreds of operas” in Putian, as evidenced by literary records. In the second year of Xiantong (861 AD), a renowned monk and mage from Fuzhou visited Putian, prompting the rehearsal of hundreds of operas to welcome their arrival. The Song Dynasty witnessed a significant cultural advancement in Putian, attracting talented individuals and fostering a vibrant literary community. The literati of this period engaged in the study of music, poetry creation, and musical composition during their leisure time, gradually making Putian folk music an integral part of mass cultural activities. The local government registered various theatrical troupes and collected opera donations, indicating the popularity of these cultural performances. The festive occasions such as the Spring Festival, the Lantern Festival, and other major celebrations witnessed the approval and organization of mass cultural activities by Putian’s government and county yamen to maintain order in the city. These festivities included dragon dances, lion dances, “Nine Carps,” “Brown Sedan,” “Lantern Festival,” and other folk activities. It was customary for affluent families to hire theatrical troupes for wedding and birthday celebrations. Even today, in the author’s hometown, theatrical troupes are invited to perform at clan ancestral halls during festivals.

During the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China (late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century), welcoming gods became the main folk cultural activity. In the early years of the Republic of China (1912 AD), the local government primarily focused on collecting opera donations and did not actively manage the cultural activities of the urban and rural masses as seen in previous dynasties. However, in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Republic of China (1927 AD), the newly established Putian County Government under the Kuomintang attempted to ban urban and rural activities related to welcoming gods. Nevertheless, this ban was rejected by the masses and could not be effectively implemented. These historical developments illustrate the deep-rooted nature of traditional Putian music culture in the lives of the local population.

### Modern Development of Coastal Music in Putian (1949-1979)

The period from 1949 to 1979 witnessed the development of Putian folk culture and music from the founding of New China to the reform and opening up era. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Putian set up the People’s Cultural Center and the Hanjiang Branch as functional departments for cultural management. Mass cultural activities were brought under regular management, and efforts were made to change customs, eliminate

superstitions, and prohibit activities related to welcoming gods and illegal religious practices. New forms of mass literary and artistic activities emerged, including Yangge dance, waist drum dance, and street propaganda drama. Additional activities such as puzzles, ball games, and tug of war were also introduced.

During this period, night schools for farmers and winter schools were established, launching a mass campaign to eliminate illiteracy. These schools not only provided education but also organized various musical entertainment activities. Relevant departments started rectifying the content of “Puxian Opera,” creating and arranging new plays, and establishing new “Puxian Opera” troupes.

Literary and artistic propaganda teams were mobilized in urban and rural areas and schools to promote cultural propaganda in coordination with political movements such as land reform, the suppression of counterrevolutionaries, and the resistance to U.S. aggression and aid to Korea. From 1954 onwards, films gained popularity, rural clubs emerged, and mass cultural activities expanded to include newspapers, books, and more.

In 1958, during the people’s commune movement, urban and rural cultural stations and entertainment departments experienced rapid development. Cultural stations (cultural centers) were established in all city communes, and most villages set up clubs, with Xianyou County having one in each village and 425 in Putian County. In October of the same year, ancient costume dramas were discontinued as per the notice of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Commune cultural stations established literary and artistic propaganda teams and amateur troupes to perform modern plays, aligning with the socialist education movement in rural areas.

From 1970 to 1979, Putian County had seven troupes and a cultural team, totaling more than 400 performers according to personal records by Mr. Huang Wendong. There were 28 cultural stations, over 300 ten-tone eight bands, more than 70 literary and artistic propaganda teams, and independent choruses in factories and schools.

### Modern and Contemporary Development of Putian Coastal Folk Songs (1979-1991)

After the implementation of the reform and opening up policy in 1979, Putian experienced further development in its folk culture and music. Television became a prominent medium for family music and cultural activities, while “karaoke” dance halls and other entertainment venues continued to emerge in both urban and rural areas. Building upon the foundation of traditional folk beliefs centered on Mazu, the county’s relevant departments organized numerous academic seminars and music exchange activities related to Mazu culture. Each year, a series of Mazu cultural events took place on March 23 (Mazu’s birthday) and the ninth day of September (Mazu’s death anniversary) in the lunar calendar.

In 1987, on the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mazu’s death, a significant commemorative event was held throughout urban and rural areas to honor Mazu. Meizhou Temple attracted over 30,000 visitors during this period. As Meizhou Island

**Table 2.** Top 9 popular works of putian coastal folk songs

<b>At present, the nine Putian coastal folk songs are the most popular</b>			
<b>Song Selected</b>	<b>Included content</b>	<b>Song title</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Bangu Dong	It is a form of rap art in the coastal areas of Putian.	- Yi Duo Jiao: A piece that tells a love story. - Chu Hai Ge: A song that portrays the life of Putian fishermen when they venture out to sea. - Zuo Shi: A composition intended for performances during festivals or ceremonies. -	3
Shi Yin Ba Yue	The coastal area of Putian is home to a variety of musical instruments and encompasses the art of singing and performing.	- Lan She Xiang: A composition depicting a love story. - Tong Ren Hao: A repertoire performed during wedding ceremonies. - Jiang Shan Xing: Songs sung while working.	3
Puxian opera	Puxian Opera: formerly known as "Xinghua Opera," is a popular form of musical performance in the coastal areas of Putian, Fujian Province.	- Shi Liu Hong: A song that praises Putian culture. - Chun Cao Chuang Tang: A story about a girl's battle of wits and courage. - Da Ai Ma Zu: A tribute to the coastal goddess MaZu.	3

was designated as a tourism economic development zone, Mazu cultural activities became an integral part of the region's folk cultural events. Putian's music compositions, such as "Bangu Dong," "Shi Yin Ba Yue," and "Puxian Opera," produced numerous works that revolved around the sea culture and its association with Mazu.

#### **Development of Contemporary Putian Coastal Folk Songs (1991-2022)**

Since 1991, Putian's coastal music has undergone continuous reform and improvement, achieving significant advancements in organizational construction, talent training, repertoire creation, and comprehensive art. It has established its distinct identity within the realm of traditional folk songs. The performances of Putian coastal folk songs have garnered wider recognition, leading to increased popularity for the artists.

Under the guidance of Fujian Province, actors from various cities were selected for centralized training, with special emphasis on vocal music instruction provided by experienced teachers. With the growing influence of Putian coastal folk songs, the number of folk ensembles has significantly increased. According to statistics from the Fujian Provincial Bureau of Culture, in 1995, there were 238 registered folk ensembles operating under the supervision of local cultural authorities, employing over 7,000 individuals.

During the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Putian's coastal music experienced rapid development. The folk songs ventured abroad, with performances held in Asia, America, and Europe, receiving warm appreciation. After witnessing a performance of Putian coastal folk songs, Dai Jiezi, a renowned Japanese folk dancer, exclaimed, "Your performance is so beautiful. Your folk music is so beautiful." The Grenoble city government in France hosted a grand reception, presenting the city's Medal of Honor to artistic director Yuan Xuefen and the city's Honorary Citizen Medal to the three troupe leaders, highlighting the international recognition of Putian's coastal music.

In the present era, after the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Putian artists have exhibited bold innovations, breaking free from traditional norms and conservatism in Chinese music. This has allowed for the emergence of distinct personality and characteristics in Putian music, drawing strengths from diverse influences. With the continuous advancement of science and technology, notable developments can be observed in stage design. Scenic elements now incorporate realistic or vivid props, enhancing the three-dimensional landscape, and even incorporating real water, rain, and spray paint to convey storyline nuances. Lighting has undergone significant improvements, offering a broader range of tones, rendering the stage more captivating, and integrating computer-controlled lighting for enhanced flexibility. In the realm of dance, Putian artists fearlessly embrace modern elements, employing a fusion of imagery and abstraction to deliver captivating performances.

During this period, Putian coastal folk songs expanded their reach across the nation and were included in China's national intangible Cultural Heritage list, solidifying their cultural significance and ensuring their preservation for future generations.

Currently, there are approximately 200 traditional folk songs that have been passed down in Putian. Among them, nine songs are frequently performed and widely sung in the region (Table 2).

#### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The present study aimed to explore the educational and literacy dimensions of Putian coastal folk songs in Fujian Province, China, with a specific focus on its coastal folk songs. The research findings are consistent with the literature, which highlighted the rich historical background and unique geographical characteristics of Putian, as well as the cultural significance of its music and artistic expressions (Cartier, 2001; Wei & Huang, 2018; Zheng, 2019).

Through key informant interviews, questionnaires, and observations, the research obtained valuable insights into

the origin and development of Putian coastal folk songs. The historical analysis revealed that the cultural activities in Putian were organized by urban and rural communities, with various traditional performances and rituals taking place during festive occasions (Clark, 1995; Dean, 1998). The establishment of cultural centers and the promotion of mass cultural activities by the government further contributed to the preservation and dissemination of Putian's cultural heritage (Katz, 2008).

The research results also shed light on the modern and contemporary development of Putian coastal music. The period from 1949 to 1979 witnessed the establishment of cultural institutions, the introduction of new forms of mass literary and artistic activities, and the expansion of music education programs (Guodong, 1997). The reform and opening up policy since 1979 further fueled the development of Putian's folk culture and music, with increased recognition and international appreciation for its performances (Juan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the research highlighted the continuous innovation and advancements in Putian coastal folk songs in the contemporary era. The integration of modern elements, such as stage design, lighting, and dance techniques, has allowed for the revitalization of traditional music and the creation of unique performances (Hua, 2022). Putian coastal folk songs have also gained national recognition and have been included in China's national intangible Cultural Heritage list, ensuring their preservation for future generations (Yan et al., 2023).

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and artistic dimensions of Putian in Fujian Province, with a particular focus on its coastal folk songs. The research findings have been consistent with the literature review, demonstrating the rich historical background, unique geographical characteristics, and cultural significance of Putian's music and artistic expressions.

The research methodology, including key informant interviews, questionnaires, and observations, has proven effective in gathering valuable insights and data. The analysis of the collected information has revealed the origin and development of Putian coastal folk songs, spanning from ancient times to the modern and contemporary era.

The research has contributed to the preservation and promotion of Putian's cultural heritage, highlighting the continuous innovation and advancements in its coastal folk songs. The findings support the theoretical principles of musicology and ethnomusicology, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and artistic landscape of Putian. Overall, this study provides a foundation for further research and exploration of Putian's cultural and artistic dimensions, contributing to the broader field of Chinese traditional music and cultural studies.

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