



Constructing Cultural Identity through Zhuang Folk Songs in Guangxi, China

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Abstract

Background and Aim: As the largest ethnic minority group in China, the Zhuang people possess a rich musical tradition, with folk songs (Zhuang Folk Songs) serving as a vital vehicle for cultural expression and heritage. In the context of rapid modernization and cultural transformation, these songs not only preserve ancestral memory but also articulate evolving identities within the community. This study aims to explore the construction of cultural identity in contemporary Zhuang folk songs by (1) identifying their linguistic, musical, and symbolic elements, (2) analyzing how these elements contribute to the articulation of collective identity, and (3) interpreting the multidimensional structure of identity as embedded in the performance and reception of Zhuang musical practices. **Materials and Methods:** This study takes six new Zhuang language songs and six Zhuang popular music songs as samples, and comprehensively uses literature analysis, field observation (such as the "March 3rd" ceremony in places like Mashan and Napo in Guangxi), and in-depth interviews (with folk artists and creators) to collect empirical data. The collected data were classified and sorted out, and analyzed in combination with the identity theory.

Results: Language identification is the core symbol of emotional connection. Most songs take the Zhuang language as the main language and convey the mother's concern for her children and grandchildren through the Zhuang language lyrics. The familiar pronunciation and intonation directly evoke the audience's sense of cultural belonging. 2. Musical style recognition showcases a dialogue between tradition and modernity. It is mainly reflected in aspects such as element inheritance and musical instrument innovation. 3. Folk customs and historical identity are the concretization of cultural roots. 4. Emotional value recognition becomes the resonance field of collective consciousness. 5. The identification of regional and cultural symbols demonstrates a dual anchoring of space and symbols.

Conclusion: Zhuang folk songs, through multi-dimensional cultural coding such as language, music, and folk customs, form a hierarchical structure of "surface symbol identification - middle identity identification - deep value identification". They are not only the "audio archives" of Zhuang's historical memory, but also the emotional bond of contemporary ethnic cohesion. The research emphasizes that in the wave of commercialization, it is necessary to safeguard its cultural core, promote creative transformation based on "identity", and achieve the modern inheritance of national culture.

Keywords: Zhuang Folk Songs; Cultural Identity; Guangxi

Introduction

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is located in the southwestern border of China and is one of the five regional autonomous regions for ethnic minorities in China. The Zhuang ethnic group is the largest ethnic minority other than the Han people in China. They mainly live in various parts of Guangxi. During their long-term production and life, they have formed their own unique culture and civilization.

Zhuang folk songs are the treasures of Zhuang culture, which can be traced back to the shouts during hunting in the primitive society of the Zhuang people. Although Shouting cannot be regarded as a song, it undoubtedly gave birth to the seeds of Zhuang ethnic folk songs. The true sense of Zhuang folk songs should have originated from the productive labor and sacrificial activities in the primitive society of the Zhuang people, which can be seen from the customs and habits of ethnic minorities. The ancient song and the hydrangea of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi have been passed down for a long time. The Zhuang people have long been renowned for their "good songs", and the Zhuang ethnic area has long enjoyed the reputation of being a "sea of songs" (Huang, 2016). The Zhuang people are good at expressing their lives and feelings through mountain songs. Zhuang folk songs have a long history. The Zhuang people have been





singing them since Pangu created the world. Almost everyone is good at singing, and they have almost reached the point of "expressing themselves through songs".

Zhuang folk songs play multiple roles in Zhuang society. It is an important way for the Zhuang people to express their emotions and thoughts. Whether it is young men and women expressing their love through love songs or venting the fatigue from work through labor songs, folk songs provide people with a platform to freely express their inner emotions. Zhuang folk songs also play an important role in education and cultural inheritance. It is not only a way for the older generation to educate the younger one, but also conveys the ethics, morality, and social norms of the Zhuang ethnic group through the form of "teaching through songs" (Gao, 2015). Meanwhile, Zhuang folk songs also play an important role in social interaction, such as making friends, choosing a partner, and engaging in social entertainment activities through folk songs (Zhao, 2009).

Zhuang folk songs contain the vast and rich Zhuang culture and history (Li, 2016). Studying Zhuang folk songs is conducive to our better understanding of Zhuang culture and the unique identity of the Zhuang people, and is beneficial for us to implement the policy of ethnic diversity and protect the diverse ethnic cultures.

At present, the main Zhuang ethnic songs that are widely circulated mainly fall into two categories: one is the new Zhuang language songs; the other is Zhuang ethnic pop songs. Zhuang language new songs, also known as Zhuang ethnic new music, the term "Zhuang language New Songs" emerged in 2006 and has been in use ever since. Its main feature is that it is a variety of musical works sung in the language of the Zhuang ethnic minority, not limited to the form and style of singing. Any song sung in the Zhuang language is generally called "New Zhuang Language Song". Zhuang ethnic pop songs incorporate traditional mountain songs from the Zhuang region with elements of popular music (such as bass, guitar, synthesizer, drums, and other Western instruments, as well as jazz and hip-hop popular style types), making them an innovative form of ethnic pop songs.

More and more new songs in the Zhuang language and Zhuang pop music are created and released, and the Zhuang characteristics contained therein are preserved and promoted. Studying the recognition of Guangxi Zhuang folk songs in the new era is conducive to a better understanding of Zhuang music and lays a foundation for the further development and inheritance of Guangxi Zhuang folk songs.

This study will conduct a systematic review of 12 Zhuang folk songs (6 new Zhuang language songs and 6 Zhuang popular music songs), analyze and summarize the identity characteristics of Zhuang folk songs in the new era through the analysis of two types of songs, and clarify the fundamental characteristics in the development and inheritance of Zhuang folk songs.

Objectives

1. To identify the linguistic, musical, and symbolic elements present in Zhuang folk songs.
2. To analyze how these elements contribute to the construction of cultural identity among the Zhuang ethnic group.
3. To interpret the multidimensional structure of identity as expressed through Zhuang musical practices in contemporary contexts.

Literature review

1. The Development and classification of Zhuang folk songs

The traditional singing of Zhuang folk songs mainly relies on word-of-mouth and personal instruction by singers. However, nowadays, young Zhuang people, influenced by Han culture and under the pressure of life, have no interest in learning songs and are fond of pop songs. Some of them can't even speak their own ethnic language. With the successive deaths of veteran singers, many beautiful and melodious folk songs have also passed away, becoming extinct masterpieces. The inheritance and protection of national music culture are now an urgent matter. Driven by a strong sense of ethnic protection





and ethnic self-awareness, contemporary young Zhuang people have explored and created a new form of music - new Zhuang folk songs - to inherit their mother tongue and develop Zhuang song culture.

With the development of The Times and the progress of society, the traditional inheritance methods have gradually failed to meet the needs of modern people. Zhuang folk songs are facing the crisis of inheritance interruption. It is particularly important to choose an appropriate way to inherit and protect the Zhuang folk songs. Due to the influence of language, singing methods, urbanization, and Han culture, traditional Zhuang folk songs have gradually lost the attention of young people (He & Fu, 2013). Some Zhuang ethnic music creators, out of their love for ethnic music, have perfectly integrated with contemporary popular music without destroying the original ecological characteristics of traditional folk songs (Wang, 2019). In the 1960s and 1980s, during the development of ethnic folk song culture, mass culture began to rise. People had the opportunity to receive various information and knowledge about mass culture and Western culture, which led to young people not being very identified with folk songs in the traditional sense and being more identified with popular music.

This gave rise to Zhuang ethnic pop music:

Zhuang popular music can be divided into two stages. It emerged in the middle of the 20th century and flourished in the 21st century.

The first stage: The 1950s - 1980s. In her article "Review and Reflection on the Study of Zhuang Music in the Middle of the 20th Century", Gao Min(2015) mentioned that in the middle of the 20th century, Zhuang music developed from arrangement to composition. In the early 1950s, Zhuang composer Wei Wei adapted and composed widely popular Zhuang folk songs, ushering in a new era of Zhuang song composition in Guangxi, such as "Liao Luo Mountain Song" (a female quartet). However, the characteristics of music development and research during this period were as follows: the development was relatively slow, and many issues, such as social history, culture, educational background, the natural geographical environment of the Zhuang ethnic group, and ethnic language, hindered the development of society. The development of music requires a strong cultural awareness of the ethnic group. Insiders and outsiders should cooperate to jointly explore, sort out, study, and create Zhuang music, and formulate long-term plans. Education and talent cultivation are major plans. It is necessary to cultivate bilingual and dual-sense talents in the study of Zhuang ethnic music. Zhuang ethnic music talents who understand the Zhuang language are capable of composition, scriptwriting, and performing.

In the second stage, from the 1980s to the 21st century, pop music began to develop after the 1980s. The rise of pop music in the Chinese mainland was from 1986 to 1990. Cui Jian's song "Nothing" sparked a pop music craze in the Chinese mainland, and a diversified development pattern emerged with three major styles: local style, Hong Kong style, and rock style. Therefore, during this period, the younger generation of people began to receive all kinds of mass cultural information. In 2001, the website owner, Liao Hanbo (Hongmianshu), launched the Zhuang Online website, marking the beginning of Zhuang popular music. It promotes Zhuang culture from three aspects: "Zhuang Studies", "Zhuang Literature", and "Zhuang folk songs". There is also the Liao People's Home Forum, where netizens can post their unique opinions. This feat has presented Zhuang culture to everyone directly and clearly. And guide the Zhuang people to have a deeper understanding of Zhuang culture and form a sense of national identity. During this period, several Zhuang music creators and Zhuang pop bands emerged one after another, such as Li Wei, Lu Yi, Halaoli Band, Aotu Band, and Benongliao Band. In October 2004, the original Zhuang language album "Yin Tuo Luo" created by Li Wei was released and has since attracted attention from all walks of life. Since then, one batch after another of outstanding original bands and singer-songwriters have begun to break the silence of Zhuang pop music. Through the special topic column on the website, netizens can listen to the works of each musician and experience the charm of their respective hometown cultures. Through their lyrics and their musical creation behaviors, it is reflected that this nation has a deep love for traditional culture (Sun, 2014). Musicians in Guangxi also have their own original music and can, like other ethnic minorities, have their own market. These achievements all indicate that the early development of the new music of the Zhuang ethnic group was good. Especially, the initial popular songs in the Zhuang language were mainly





cover versions, which were simply post-processed through mixing software for netizens to share. The Halaoli Band is a leading figure in the development of Zhuang ethnic pop music. With the dissemination of their album works, the online click rate has gradually increased. Not only did the grassroots make efforts for the new music of the Zhuang ethnic group, but Fan Simm also created a large number of new Zhuang folk songs such as "Beautiful Zhuang Village", "Red Cotton Trees in March", "Life is as Beautiful as the Rosy Clouds", and "100 Folk Songs of the Zhuang Ethnic Group in China", which also created miracles for this period. These newly created folk songs are related to mainstream consciousness. They do not express personal emotions but express the consciousness of the country and politics, and are created to serve the country. Furthermore, the biggest difference between new folk songs and pop music lies in the disparity in singing styles. Second, there are differences in cultural concepts behind it. Third, the differences in the positions of performance. The musical works created by Van Siem are more from the perspective of the country and the government, while the form of pop music pays more attention to the expression of personal emotions. He does not serve for individual spiritual thoughts, so the subject aspect of his creation is different.

2. Theory of cultural identity

Cultural identity is the answer to "who we are". Edward Hall proposed that cultural identity includes three types: shared cultural identity (based on common history and values), differential cultural identity (contrast with other cultures), and comprehensive cultural identity (dynamic integration of new elements). Based on this, Chinese scholar Wang Pei integrated multiple theoretical frameworks of social psychology, cultural psychology, and cognitive psychology, and carried out innovative development in the context of the study of Chinese native culture, proposing a hierarchical structure model of cultural identity at three levels. The hierarchical structure model of cultural identity takes "from the surface to the core and deepening layer by layer" as its core, pointing out that cultural identity can be divided into three major levels: cultural symbol identity, cultural identity, and value culture identity. Cultural symbol identification (surface) refers to an individual's recognition of the concrete and perceptible symbol system in a nation's culture, including explicit carriers such as language, clothing, art forms (such as folk songs and dances), and festival rituals. Cultural identity (middle level) represents an individual's conscious confirmation of their identity as a member of their own cultural group, which is manifested as recognition of group belonging, role norms, and social interaction (Hu Fa-Wen, Wang Pei, & Li Li-Ju, 2014). Value cultural identity (deep level) represents an individual's internalization and practice of the core values of the national culture (such as ethics, cosmology, and moral standards), forming a stable psychological structure.



Conceptual Framework

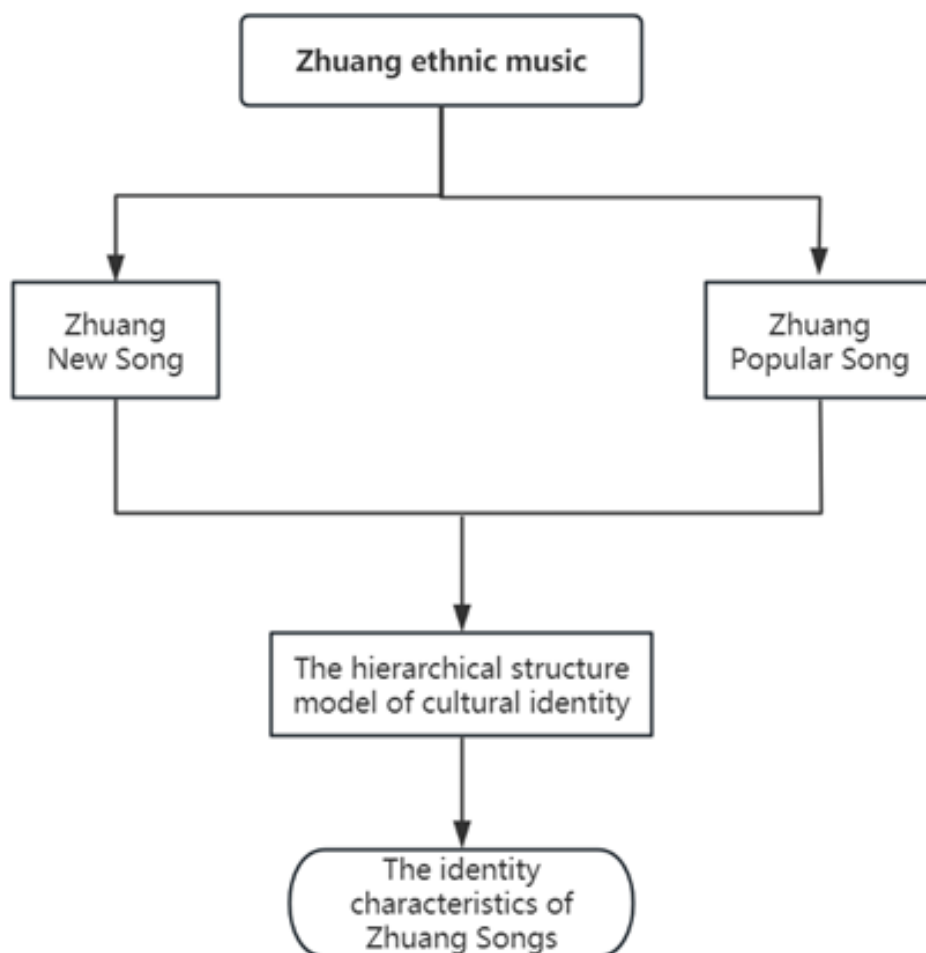


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Huaize Li (2025)

Methodology

Sampling: A sampling study was conducted on Zhuang ethnic songs, with a total of 12 Zhuang folk songs selected for research, including 6 new Zhuang language songs and 6 Zhuang popular music songs. The main research methods are:

1. Literature research: Through literature analysis, the characteristics of Guangxi Zhuang folk songs and the folk customs of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi are studied.
2. Observation Method: The sampled Zhuang ethnic songs were observed both online and offline. The online observation mainly involved observing the performance audio and video of the related songs, while the offline observation involved visiting cultural centers and museums in major Zhuang people's gathering areas, such as Mashan County and Napo in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and



conducting observations and collecting data during important festival ceremonies such as the "March 3rd" festival.

3. Interview method: Through various forms of individual and group interviews with folk singers, composers of Zhuang ethnic songs, and management of Zhuang ethnic song inheritance and protection institutions, understand the creative ideas of Zhuang ethnic songs and lay a foundation for further sorting out the recognition of Zhuang folk songs.

4. Data analysis: Conduct a preliminary classification and sorting of the collected data, further analyze the characteristics of the identity of Zhuang folk songs derived from the observation in combination with the identity theory, and then comprehensively analyze and summarize the composition and structure of the identity of Zhuang folk songs in combination with the interview content.

Results

1. Language identification

Among these 12 songs, many are sung in the Zhuang language, such as "Mother's Prayer", "Bainong as Many as Stars", "Drunk in the Zhuang Village", "Chasing the Sun", "Bainong Deep Affection", etc. Take "Mother's Prayer" as an example. The entire song is mainly in the Zhuang language. For Zhuang listeners, the familiar Zhuang language lyrics instantly bring them closer to the song. The unique vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in the Zhuang language carry the historical memory, life experience, and emotional world of the Zhuang people for thousands of years. When they heard the mother's concern for her children and grandchildren far away expressed in the Zhuang language in the song, that sense of belonging and identity from the bottom of their hearts was strongly aroused, as if the story in the song were happening right beside them and they were part of it.

The song "Benong Duo Ru Xing" is based on the Zhuang language and also incorporates Chinese, Lao, and Thai, but the use of the Zhuang language remains the core. The Zhuang language word "Benong" frequently appears in songs. The profound friendship it contains is a vivid manifestation of the Zhuang culture's emphasis on family affection, friendship, and community relations. For the Zhuang audience, the pronunciation and meaning of the word "Benong" are full of a sense of warmth. It is like an emotional bond that closely connects them with their own ethnic group and strengthens their identification with their Zhuang identity.

2. Recognition of musical style

(1) Inheritance of traditional musical elements

Traditional musical elements such as Zhuang mountain songs and Liao songs have been widely passed down in Zhuang folk songs, becoming an important part of the unique musical style of Zhuang folk songs and also an important manifestation of the cultural identity of the Zhuang people. The melody of "Flying Song of the Earth" draws on the essence of Zhuang ethnic folk songs, featuring a wide range and significant melodic fluctuations, brimming with an unrestrained quality. This melodic style is like the free living state of the Zhuang people on the vast land, and is in line with the personality traits of the Zhuang people. The song has a lively and rhythmic rhythm, echoing the rhythms of traditional Zhuang ethnic dances, such as the Zhuang Bronze Drum Dance. The lively and vigorous rhythm of the song is reflected in "Flying Song of the Earth". When the Zhuang people hear this song, the familiar melody and rhythm instantly evoke their memories of the ethnic music culture, making them feel as if they were in the traditional festival celebrations or the working scenes in the fields of the Zhuang people, and strengthening their identification with the traditional music of the Zhuang people.

"Mountain Songs Bring Out the Moon" incorporates elements of the Zhuang ethnic mountain songs. Its rhythm is lively, and the variations in intervals are rich in ethnic characteristics. Some gentle glissando and unique pitch trends in songs are common musical expression techniques in Zhuang folk songs. The application of these elements endows the song with a distinct Zhuang ethnic music style, evoking a strong resonance among the Zhuang people upon hearing it. For instance, in the part of the song that depicts the romantic feelings of young men and women, the ups and downs of the melody are exactly





the same as the way emotions are expressed in Zhuang ethnic folk songs. This enables the Zhuang people to deeply feel the unique charm of their own ethnic music culture when enjoying the song, and further enhances their sense of identity with their ethnic culture.

(2) The Application of Traditional Musical Instruments

The application of traditional Zhuang Musical Instruments, such as the Tianqin and the magu hu, in Zhuang folk songs adds a strong ethnic flavor to the songs and is also an important aspect of the recognition of the Zhuang musical style. In "Mother's Prayer", the accompaniment of the song employs the traditional Zhuang ethnic instrument "Tianqin", which is on the verge of being lost. The Tianqin has profound historical and cultural connotations in Zhuang culture. Its unique timbre and performance style make the Zhuang people associate the traditional rituals, festival celebrations, and other cultural scenes of the Zhuang ethnic group when they hear the songs. The sound of the Tianqin is like the call of the national culture. The way it combines with modern electro-acoustic bands not only showcases the ancient roots of the Zhuang ethnic music culture but also reflects its development awareness of keeping pace with The Times, further strengthening the Zhuang people's identification with their own ethnic music culture.

3. Identification with folk culture

(1) Presentation of traditional festivals

The traditional festivals of the Zhuang ethnic group are an important part of the Zhuang folk culture. They are vividly presented in Zhuang folk songs, enhancing the Zhuang people's identification with their own ethnic culture. "Drunk in the Zhuang Village" centers around the traditional Zhuang festival "March 3rd". The song depicts the lively scene on this day when the Zhuang people beat gongs and drums, men, women, and children wear new clothes, and welcome the festival with cheerful songs.

(2) The manifestation of the custom of hospitality

The traditional custom of the Zhuang people being warm and hospitable is also fully reflected in Zhuang folk songs, becoming an important part of the identification of Zhuang folk culture. The "Zhuang People's Wine Offering Song" unfolds around the traditional custom of the Zhuang people treating guests with wine. The lyrics, such as "The Zhuang people sing when offering wine, and the mountain songs are accompanied by wine" and "When guests arrive at the door, three bowls of welcoming wine are offered", vividly depict the scene of the Zhuang people warmly entertaining guests. This custom of entertaining guests with wine and songs is an important manifestation of the social etiquette of the Zhuang ethnic group and also a way for the Zhuang people to express friendliness and enthusiasm. When the Zhuang people hear this song, they will naturally associate it with the scene of receiving guests at home, feel the unique charm of their ethnic culture, and thus be more determined to identify with their own ethnic culture.

4. Historical identification

(1) Exploration of the Origin of Ethnic Groups

The exploration of the origin of the nation in Zhuang folk songs reflects the Zhuang people's traceability and identification with the historical source of their own nation. In "Chasing the Sun", the lyrics "When we were children, we asked the old man where we Zhuang people came from. The old man told us that we were like the colorful clouds in the sky, drifting with the sun" explore the origin of the Zhuang people in this poetic and romantic way. This description of the origin of the nation is brimming with the mystery and romance of the ethnic group, enabling the Zhuang people to remember their roots and enhancing their sense of national pride and identity. It is not only a trace of the history of the nation, but also a cultural inheritance, enabling the Zhuang people to have a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of their own nation in the process of learning about the origin of their own nation.

(2) Presentation of Historical Development

The Zhuang Song also showcases the production and lifestyle of the Zhuang people during the historical development process, reflecting the recognition of the historical development process of the Zhuang people. Also in "Chasing the Sun", "When they see mountains, they cultivate dry land; when they encounter caves and fields, they cultivate paddy fields; they build houses at the foot of the mountains and gather them into villages, with their descendants living and multiplying" describes the production and





lifestyle of the Zhuang people during the historical development process. These lyrics showcase the hard work and generational inheritance of the Zhuang people on this land, allowing people to feel the continuity of ethnic development. When the Zhuang people hear such lyrics, they can associate them with the struggle history of their predecessors, realize that they are part of the historical development of their own nation, and thus enhance their sense of identity with the historical development of their own nation.

5. Emotional value recognition

(1) The emphasis on family affection and friendship

In Zhuang culture, family and kinship are highly valued, and this emotional value is fully reflected in Zhuang folk songs. "Mother's Prayer" centers on a mother's concern for her children and grandchildren far away. The mother's unease, inner fear, and worry in the song not only reflect the long-term influence of the traditional religious concepts of the Zhuang ethnic group, but also embody the traditional ethical concepts of the Zhuang family. In the cultural genes of the Zhuang ethnic group, which have a strong sense of motherhood, the love and responsibility of mothers are manifested to the fullest. This depiction of family affection can strongly resonate with Zhuang listeners, allowing them to find the reflection of their own family life in the songs and realize that this emotion is a unique spiritual wealth bestowed upon them by Zhuang culture, further strengthening their identification with Zhuang culture.

"Deep Affection in a Warm and Cheerful Style" showcases the profound friendship of the Zhuang people towards their friends. In the song, "When you come to our village, everyone is like brothers and sisters." The lyrics, such as "Today we all come to meet, let's toast three cups of wine," express a warm welcome and best wishes to friends. The term "Beinong" reflects the strong sense of family affection and unity in Zhuang society. It not only represents the connection of family and blood ties, but also symbolizes the close bond among the entire Zhuang group. Expressing this emotion through songs has further strengthened the sense of identity and cohesion among the Zhuang people.

(2) Yearning for a better life

The Zhuang folk songs generally express the Zhuang people's yearning for a better life, which is also an important aspect of the emotional value recognition of the Zhuang people. "Beautiful and Magical Place" depicts the beautiful scenery and unique culture of the Zhuang and Yao villages. The lyrics "The Red River flows in the sky, nine thousand mountains dance like giant dragons, and the forest sea surges with green waves" showcase the magnificent natural landscapes of the Zhuang region. The lines "The sound of the copper drums evokes the long-lasting sentiments of ancient times, and the Zhuang brocade weaves the beautiful hopes" reflect the rich cultural heritage of the Zhuang ethnic group. The lines "The sun is an ideal, the moon is hope, bringing happiness and good fortune to brothers of all ethnic groups" and "The mountains are the backbone, the great rivers are the wings, supporting the prosperity and strength of the Zhuang Yao Village" express the Zhuang people's yearning for a better life and their beautiful wish for unity, harmony and common prosperity. When the Zhuang people enjoy this song, they can feel their love for their hometown and their longing for the future. This emotion is in line with their deep pursuit of a better life in their hearts, thereby enhancing their identification with their own ethnic culture.

"Zhuang Girl" expresses the Zhuang people's love for life by presenting various life scenes and emotions related to singing among Zhuang girls. Zhuang girls sing in various life scenarios, such as labor and entertaining guests. Their singing runs through the four seasons of the year, demonstrating their use of singing to record life, pass on culture, and express their love for life and expectations for a bountiful harvest. This positive attitude towards life is an important manifestation of the emotional values of the Zhuang ethnic group. It also enables the Zhuang people to find emotional resonance in songs and further identify with their own ethnic culture.

6. Regional identity

(1) Depiction of natural landscapes

The depiction of the natural landscapes of the Zhuang ethnic group in the Zhuang folk songs has aroused the Zhuang people's love for their hometown and their sense of identity with this land. In "Chasing the Sun", the lines "The mountains are high, the fields are vast, the water is clear, ducks play in the rice



fields without a trace, water buffaloes gnawing on the ridges, the rain floats on the cliffs" vividly depict the idyllic landscape of the Zhuang ethnic group. Elements such as high mountains, vast fields, clear water, ducks, rice seedlings, and water buffaloes outline a peaceful and harmonious rural picture. These familiar scenes are the regional characteristics of the Zhuang people's life, which can evoke their deep attachment and love for their hometown, make them proud to live in such a beautiful place, and strengthen their sense of regional belonging.

"Song Comes from the Li River" takes the Li River as its backdrop and blends the singing with the mountains and waters of the Li River. The Li River is a highly representative natural landscape of the Zhuang ethnic area. The scene of singing between mountains and waters depicted in the song, "Singing mountain songs here and responding there," showcases the unique regional customs of the Zhuang ethnic area. The landscape of the Li River has become an important symbol of Zhuang culture, representing the harmonious coexistence of the Zhuang people with nature and enhancing their identification and pride in the regional culture of their hometown.

(2) A symbol of regional culture

Some elements in Zhuang folk songs have become symbols of regional culture, further strengthening the regional identity of the Zhuang people. In "Beautiful and Magical Places", the Red River and Jiwan Mountain are typical geographical indications of the areas where the Zhuang people live in concentrated communities. The depiction of these iconic landscapes in the song immediately evokes images of their hometown in the minds of the Zhuang people when they hear the song, thus generating a strong sense of belonging. These natural landscapes are not only regional symbols but also the support of the Zhuang people's lives. They are closely linked to the production and life as well as folk traditions of the Zhuang people, becoming an important part of regional culture and deepening the Zhuang people's identification with the regional culture of their own ethnic group.

7. Cultural symbol recognition

(1) Material cultural symbols

Some material and cultural symbols of the Zhuang ethnic group frequently appear in Zhuang folk songs, becoming important identifiers of Zhuang cultural identity. The song "Flying Song of the Earth" contains many cultural images of the Zhuang ethnic group, such as "Sea of Songs", "Zhuang Brocade", "bronze Drum", etc. Zhuang brocade, as a traditional handicraft of the Zhuang ethnic group, is colorful and exquisitely patterned, symbolizing the wisdom and creativity of the Zhuang people. The song mentions "Zhuang brocade", allowing the Zhuang people to directly feel the unique artistic charm of their own ethnic group and recognize that it is one of the important symbols of Zhuang culture, thereby enhancing their sense of identity with their national culture.

The "bronze drum" holds an important position in Zhuang culture. It is often used in important occasions such as sacrifices and celebrations, representing the historical and cultural inheritance of the Zhuang people. In the song "A Beautiful and Magical Place", the lyrics "The sound of the copper drum evokes the ancient sentiment" have evoked the Zhuang people's memories of their ancestors and traditional customs, making them deeply realize the significance of the copper drum in their ethnic culture and strengthening their identification with Zhuang culture.

(2) Intangible cultural symbols

In addition to material cultural symbols, the intangible cultural symbols of the Zhuang ethnic group are also profoundly reflected in Zhuang folk songs. In the song "Mountain Song Brings Out the Moon", "Blowing wood leaves" is a traditional folk art of the Zhuang ethnic group and also a symbol of Zhuang culture. In the life of the Zhuang ethnic group, blowing wood leaves is often used to express emotions and convey information, and it is a way for young Zhuang men and women to communicate. The song mentions "The Elder Brother blowing wood Leaves", which evokes the memories of the Zhuang people of their unique cultural customs and enhances their sense of belonging and identity with their ethnic culture.





"Songs Come from the Li River" takes the duet of Zhuang ethnic folk songs as its core content. The duet of Zhuang ethnic folk songs is an important form of expression of the Zhuang ethnic intangible culture. The line "Sing mountain songs, one side sings and the other side responds" in the song directly presents the traditional form of the Zhuang ethnic group's mountain song duets. This form has a long history in the Zhuang areas and is an important way for the Zhuang people to exchange emotions, convey information, and display wisdom. The application of this form in songs reflects respect and inheritance for the traditional Zhuang ethnic group's mountain songs, enabling the Zhuang people to feel the unique cultural charm of their own nation when they hear the songs and enhancing their recognition of the intangible cultural symbol of mountain song culture.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the hierarchical structure model of the three-level cultural identity, the cultural identity of Zhuang Folk Songs echoes the hierarchical structure model. Firstly, at the symbolic identity level, it is a concrete expression of the cognitive dimension. Zhuang Folk Songs builds the foundation of cultural cognition through language symbols and musical symbols: 1. Language symbols: Zhuang language lyrics such as "Mother's Prayer" directly convey the unique kinship terms of the ethnic group (such as "Benong") and daily expressions, forming cultural recognition at the auditory level, corresponding to the recognition and memory of the language symbol system in the cognitive dimension. 2. Musical Symbols: "The Flying Song of the Earth" extracts the interval trends (large jumps), rhythm patterns (dotted notes), and the timbres of traditional Musical Instruments (Tianqin, maguhu) from Zhuang ethnic folk songs, transforming abstract cultural elements into perceptible auditory symbols and completing the construction process of "cultural symbols → cognitive schemas".

At the level of identity recognition, achieve a two-way resonance of emotions and belonging. Zhuang folk songs activate emotional identification and strengthen ethnic identity through folk narratives and regional connections: 1. Folk emotional resonance: "Drunk in the Zhuang Ethnic Area" recreates the scene of the "March 3rd" song fair ("beating gongs and drums, singing to welcome guests"), evoking the collective memory of the Zhuang people for the festival rituals and triggering emotional identification - individuals relive cultural experiences through music and form an identity confirmation of "I am a Zhuang ethnic person". 2. Regional Identity Anchoring: "Songs Come from the Li River" takes the Li River landscape as its backdrop, binding regional landscapes (such as "Nine Thousand Mountains" and "Red River") with cultural practices (duets of mountain songs), making "Zhuang Ethnic Group" a spatial symbol of emotional attachment, corresponding to the potential intention of "maintaining the uniqueness of regional culture" in the behavioral intention dimension.

At the level of value recognition, it demonstrates the deep condensation of will and ethics. The Zhuang Song internalizes its cultural core through historical narrative and value transmission: 1. Inheritance of historical will: "Chasing the Sun" traces the history of production and life with the lyrics of "cultivating mountains and tilling paddy fields", transforming the struggle of the ethnic group into musical historical memories, fostering a collective will of "tenacity and diligence", and corresponding to the progressive dimensions of cognition - emotion - will - from "knowing history" to "identifying with history" and then to "inheriting the spirit of history". 2. Internalization of ethical values: "Mother's Prayer" interprets the Zhuang people's worship of motherhood and family ethics through the image of a mother, while "Deep Affection in Chanting" conveys the concept of community unity through the act of "offering three cups of wine", embedding values such as "filial piety" and "good-neighborliness" into the melody, achieving a leap from "cultural cognition" to "behavioral norms", which aligns with the profound requirements of value and cultural recognition.

The identity feature of the Zhuang song also provides certain supplements to this model. The first is the complementarity between the horizontal dimension and the vertical hierarchy. The first type of model reveals the psychological occurrence process of identity from dynamic dimensions such as cognition and emotion, and the second type of model analyzes the deep evolution of identity from the hierarchical





structure of symbols to values. In the grand anthem, language cognition (the symbolic layer) serves as the foundation for emotional identification (the identity layer), and emotional identification in turn provides psychological preparation for the internalization of values (the value layer), forming a dual identification path of "dimensional progression → hierarchical deepening".

It can be said that this hierarchical model has strong practical guidance, especially in aspects such as the inheritance of ethnic culture, brand building, and folk song education, which can provide progressive strategies and offer operational paths for the modern inheritance of ethnic minority cultures. However, at the same time, this model assumes a unidirectional linear progressive structure, ignoring the possible interwoven interactions among various levels in reality. For instance, the ethical values of Zhuang folk songs (the core layer) may inversely influence the creation of musical symbols (the expression layer). For example, in "Mother's Prayer", the worship of motherhood not only reflects value recognition but also shapes the uniqueness of musical expression. However, this nonlinear interaction has not been fully explained in the model.

Zhuang folk songs, as the "audible carrier" of Zhuang culture, fully reflect the theoretical framework of the dual model of cultural identity: completing cognitive enlightenment through symbols such as language and music, activating emotional belonging through folk customs and regional narratives, and ultimately achieving value internalization through historical and ethical narratives. This multi-dimensional identity mechanism not only explains why Zhuang folk songs can maintain ethnic cohesion across eras, but also provides a path reference for the modern inheritance of minority cultures from "symbol protection to value innovation" - only by preserving cultural recognition in the cognitive dimension, strengthening the sense of identity in the emotional dimension, and adhering to the core ethics in the value dimension, Only in this way can the sustainable construction of national cultural identity be achieved.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of these 12 Guangxi Zhuang folk songs, it can be known that Zhuang folk songs contain rich cultural identity in multiple dimensions such as language, musical style, folk culture, history, emotional values, region, and cultural symbols. These cultural identities are interwoven and influence each other, jointly constituting the unique charm of Zhuang culture. Zhuang folk songs, as an important carrier of Zhuang culture, not only inherit the history and culture of the Zhuang people, but also unite the national sentiments of the Zhuang people, enhancing the cohesion and sense of identity of the nation. In modern society, greater emphasis should be placed on the inheritance and development of Zhuang folk songs, fully exploring the cultural identity value contained in Zhuang folk songs, allowing Zhuang folk songs to shine even more brightly in the new era, and promoting the prosperity and development of Zhuang culture. The three-level model has strong explanatory power in analyzing and explaining the cultural identity of the Zhuang Song, but it also has certain limitations. Interdisciplinary theories need to be supplemented to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the responsible cultural phenomenon.

Recommendation

At present, the commercialization process of Zhuang folk songs is developing rapidly. When creating songs with a large number of Zhuang elements, attention should be paid to protecting the identity of Zhuang culture, so that Zhuang folk songs can further develop based on preserving the cultural essence:

1. Innovation at the symbol level: Based on retaining core symbols such as the Zhuang language and Tianqin (for instance, the "new singing of old voices" in "Mother's Prayer"), expand the cognitive range through popular arrangements and attract the younger generation to enter the "entrance" of cultural identity.
2. Value layer persistence: Strengthen the musical expression of deep-seated values such as "family ethics" and "harmony between man and nature" (such as the ecological image in "Beautiful and Magical Place"), avoid cultural hollowing out caused by excessive commercialization, and ensure the effective transfer of identification from "surface symbols" to "deep-seated values".





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