

From The Perspective Of Chinese Confucianism Ritual, The Folk Music Style And Aesthetic Characteristics Of "Poya Songbook" In Southwestern China

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Abstract:

The "Poya Songbook" in southwest China exists in 81 different forms of symbols. However, in the symbolic representation, 81 different symbolic patterns represent 81 different poems and lyrics, which are influenced at a radial distance of 5 km. The purpose of this study is to explore the ritualistic characteristics of Confucianism established by 81 songs, and to study the traditional and poetic classical aesthetic characteristics of Poya Songbook under the narrative structure of Chinese "Li" through musical melody and notation analysis. The special traditional theatrical elements of lyrical content and melodic continuous narrative Qupai Liantao (Zhugong Diao) are obtained. The research method is a combination of ethnomusicology and history. Data collection includes participatory observations, interviews, field surveys, and literature and historical documents. The results show that the aesthetic characteristics are derived from the ritual social function requirements of "Li" and "Yue" of Confucianism in the Western Zhou Dynasty of China. The style of folk music has a narrative and the poetic nature of traditional Chinese aesthetics, and the relevant differences in socio-cultural and environmental backgrounds are also one of the reasons for the differences in style.

Keywords: Chinese Confucianism; ritual; ethnic minority; Chinese classical aesthetics; Poya Songbook; Southwest Zhuang nationality.

1. Introduction

The intricate tapestry of human civilization is woven through the interplay of cultural symbols, a perspective epitomized by Ernst Cassirer's assertion that man is inherently an animal of symbols (1985, *An Essay on Man*, Shanghai Translation Publishing House). In this context, music serves as a profound medium through which cultures express their essence, and in China, the historical narrative of music unfolds within the diverse voices of

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its people. Among the numerous ethnic minorities contributing to China's cultural mosaic, the Zhuang people stand out as a vibrant community with a deep-rooted tradition of celebrating life through song.

Chinese folk songs, with their extensive history and rich cultural nuances, find their roots in the collective experiences of various societal groups, including those at the grassroots level. A pivotal milestone in this cultural journey is the ancient anthology "The Book of Songs," particularly the section known as "Guofeng," considered the earliest collection of folk songs in ancient China. Within this cultural milieu, the Zhuang people, China's most populous ethnic minority, have sustained a distinctive tradition of "advocating Yue Sheng (Yue Ren Song)" and nurturing a culture of song from childhood.

At the heart of Zhuang folk music lies the Poya Songbook, named after its discovery in the Poya Village of Funing County, Yunnan Province, China. Comprising 81 symbols, each representing a song, this unique graphic text encapsulates the sounds, shapes, and meanings of Zhuang love songs, meticulously narrating the entire arc of a love story—from initial acquaintance to intimate companionship (Liu Bingshan, 2009: 50-51). By delving into this process, it becomes evident that the Poya Songbook, with its amalgamation of picture symbols, poetry, melody, and propagation, serves as a profound paradigm for interpreting Zhuang nationality and symbol culture, offering insights into the intricate nuances of Zhuang people at a micro level (Stewart J. (ED), 1996: 312-314).

Moreover, the Poya Songbook, an integral facet of Zhuang folk songs in Funing county, represents a distinctive cultural phenomenon. Beyond its role as a repository of traditional customs, it acts as a living testament to the Zhuang ancestors' affinity for song, preserving their cultural expressions through graphic texts. Within its pages, one discovers a rich tapestry of cultural connotations that vividly articulates the Zhuang people's perspectives on life, love, and marriage, especially as perceived by the younger generation.

While the Poya Songbook provides a captivating window into Zhuang culture, this research endeavors to explore its multifaceted dimensions, drawing connections between the folk music style, aesthetic characteristics, and the broader philosophical perspective of Chinese Confucianism ritual. As we embark on this exploration, it becomes imperative to identify the gaps in existing studies that our research aims to address.

2. Research Objectives

The function of music in a particular human society is the human need for aesthetics and aesthetic expression, and it is always attached to the living needs of national culture. First, we should turn our attention to the influence and effect of verbal symbols and non-verbal symbols on cultural transmission. In terms of language, at least music is considered one of the important tools for communicating with emotions. Verbal symbols and non-verbal symbols are the main means of cultural communication and transmission in human society. The inheritance of non-verbal symbols includes all human and environmental stimuli in the scenario, except for verbal stimuli, all of which have potential informational value to both

the sender and the receiver of the information. The content of Poya Songbook is precisely a collection of verbal symbols (lyrics, poems) and non-verbal symbols (patterns, melodies). Of course, verbal symbols or non-verbal symbols are the musical symbols (the final form of which is singing) for the overall presentation of the Poya Songbook. Music has a strong particularity (non-semantic, non-physical) (Lange, 1986: 36-38), so only when music and the state behind it are placed in its cultural context and the interpretation system of the cultural symbols that it depends on can they be related, and then the ultimate function and significance of music can be fully demonstrated. In fact, judging by the age, the patterns are at least a thousand years old, the origin of the patterns in such a historical context must have been influenced by the relevant social environment and historical requirements of a thousand years ago.

The form of music that arises from cultural interaction is the music of a particular social group as a means of expression. China is a state of etiquette, which is both self-identification and evaluation by others. "Li", as the basic concept of Confucianism, and even as the core concept of Chinese culture and society, has deeply rooted in the Chinese land for thousands of years. In Chinese culture, there is a long and deep tradition of academic discourse about "Li", that is, "Li Xue". "Li Xue" is mainly about the text interpretation of the three Li's ("Li Ji", "Yi li", "Zhou Li"), in the three Li's, "Li Ji" and "Yi li" provide detailed norms and corresponding explanations for all life rituals such as coronation, wedding, funeral, etc., although initially mainly involve in aristocratic rituals, but after the Song Dynasty, "Li" extended the ordinary people, these rituals have a profound influence in society (Peng Lin, 2004: 60-96). Since the beginning of the Western Zhou Dynasty in ancient China, "ritual" has merged with related words such as "ceremony" and "etiquette", so the word "ritual" emerged in the Chinese vocabulary.

The essence of ritual is to disseminate culture, the essence of dissemination is the circulation of information, and information can only be disseminated by means of symbols. In fact, information first appears as a symbol, or the external form of information is some kind of symbol. There is no information in the world that exists without symbols. Symbols always carry some kind of information. In the field of the use of Poya Songbook, its main practical function is to choose mates on the basis of songs, express their minds through singing to each other in the "Gan Long Duan", so as to confirm the relationship. Therefore, from the perspective of its function, it can be treated as some kind of deformation of "ritual".

In the nearly half-year field investigation in Poya Village, Funing County, "ritual" was a commonly mentioned content in Poya Village, and the people we visited never mentioned the thoughts of Confucius or Zhu Xi, and the author did not encounter local ritual books, but they were all very clear about the rituals that they need to comply with in their lives. For the locals, "ritual" is not an abstract philosophical concept, but exists in the current environment, and the "ritual" with the interactive nature of the folk always continues.

The reason why the Poya Songbook is based on the ritual concept of Confucianism, ancient China seems to have long explained the art form under the Confucian culture of music: "Rise in poetry, stand in ritual, and succeed in music" ("Lunyu·Taibo"), Poya Songbook is derived from the performance art form it presents, i.e. the expression of love song

(Buwafen). The existing research on 81 songs by musicologists is not comprehensive and detailed. The melodic texture used in the singing was only summed up into six to eight songs, but the author found in the field work that the melody used in different lyrics and emotional expressions has small changes in rhythm, pitch, strength and so on. This makes it possible to summarize 81 songs (see Figure 1) into a “play” component through such variations and sections.



Chinese Drama is divided into two parts in the historical evolution: the script and the song, all scripts have their own national characteristics from content to form, and have the characteristics of both form and spirit, and the likeness of spirit is dominant, with virtual methods to reflect the reality, while performing, music is essential, and then it is often called opera. According to research, Confucius' re-disciple Gongsun Nizi wrote the most important music theory book of Confucianism in the late Spring and Autumn Period, called “Yue Ji”, poetry, tells the ambition; songs, chants the sound; dance, shows the appearance, meaning that “poetry” is used to describe the content of thought, “song” is the voice that expresses the content of thought, “dance” is the shape of poetry. Songs, dance, and music combine to form “Yue”.

The history of drama in China began with the folk song and dance “Chen Feng East Gate” in the Spring and Autumn Period of the Western Zhou Dynasty, and it’s the folk song and dance of love between men and women. In addition to the singing part, the original drama also mixed with narrative “Ke Bai” fragments, which are represented by characters like Paiyou, who are mercurial and humorous. Later, in the tragedy the East China Sea Huanggong, some characteristics of drama were identified: contradictions, lines, props, etc., and these essential factors of drama laid the foundation and model for the stability of later drama.

The appearance of “play” is to show the conflict in the story, with the intention of spreading

(Wang Yuanlu, 2013: 58). From this alone, it is possible to determine the separation of the say and the sing parts of Poya Songbook in successive episodes presenting elements of the “play” (Wang Yuanlu, 2013: 60). Improvisational adjustment of performance according to different situations and other factors explain the cultivation of Confucian rites and the actual function of music in the Poya Songbook (see Figure 2), and the main embodiment of the role is also precisely displayed in the daily life of all aspects of the objects and events.

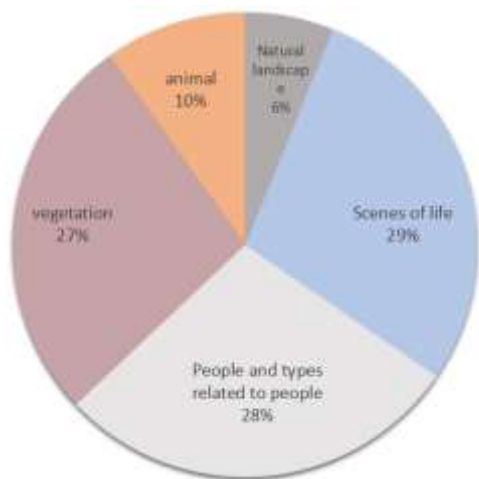


Figure 2 The Cultivation of Confucian Rites and the Actual Function of Music in the Poya Songbook

As a result, at least three main sets of questions and some further thinking emerged:

- 1) How are the symbols and music, music and rituals reflected in the process of symbol transmission in the Poya Songbook? Is it caused by some fundamental structural factors that exist in the social structure? Is it caused by people's ability to imitate thinking or other national socio-cultural structures?
- 2) Can we separate the whole pattern of what we call aesthetic attitudes and behaviors in the broadest sense? Can the aesthetic concept formed by Poya Songbook be simply regarded as the expression of special existence such as symbolic concreteness, semanticity of language and music, and ritual conception in drama?
- 3) We call Poya Songbook a ritual act under Confucian ritual, but is it actually a special aspect of art and culture? Is it isolated in a particular way from other aspects of the socio-cultural system? Does it serve a special purpose in a special state in a special vocabulary?

In response to the above problems, the author believes that the characteristics of Poya Songbook are: documentary, musical and poetic, and through the development of form, meaning, sound and drama, it clearly explains the comprehensive form of Chinese classical art aesthetic. The interpretation of this comprehensive form under the sight of semiotics is: the symbol is the carrier of information, it can represent something, but not the thing itself, it is artificially prescribed, it is the special mark used by human beings to refer to the world. After the “annotation” in the Pierce System, the “intrinsic meaning” in the Baldu System was formed, and the pattern became an alternative symbol for the form of the “Poya

Songbook". This has also become the artistic expression of poetic thinking, so it has become the core of empathy, which exists in the kernel movement of the sound and is the internalization process of inner emotion (Roger, 2011).

3. Research method

Based on the above research results and other facts, the results of the research can be used to observe the formation of the musical narrative structure of the 81 songs performed by the social groups in the development of the form, meaning, sound, and drama in Poya Songbook. The research team focused on the analysis of the Poya Songbook "Qupai Liantao" (Zhugong Diao). From the perspective of cultural symbol, the two subcultural phenomena formed in the Poya Songbook are the aesthetic means of Chinese classical art and the Fu, Bi and Xing method of Chinese traditional poetic lyrics. These two subcultural phenomena still maintain the pursuit of poetic and "dramatic" elements in the current Chinese Zhuang region. This may have been due to the requirements of its functional implementation.

It becomes very important to understand this. Specifically, the research team is eager to understand why primitive folk music such as Poya Songbook is still popular in such ethnic minority areas under the impact of the current multi-cultural and artistic environment, and why primitive folk music even occupies an important position in important times such as festivals, e.g. the Song Festival, and sacrifices, especially in Southwest China's Funing County area. It is strange that the musical features and styles of these two subcultures presented in the Poya area contain the metaphor and melody of the lyrics that Zhuang people have in their communication as the structure of the "opera" form "Yue".

From the perspective of the ritual conception of Poya Songbook, in Poya Village, Funing County, the gathering place of Zhuang people, the singing performance of music presents two kinds of artistic aesthetics: 'the form of ritual view drama' and 'the structure of Qupai Liantao'. Related to both, it is important to understand whether the Confucian ritual system and the "dramatic" elements of Chinese classical music poetic thinking play a role in determining the qualitative of traditional Zhuang music such as the Poya Songbook. In addition, it's necessary to reveal why the Poya Songbook uses graphic symbols to include songs, words, and meanings.

4. Research theories

The core of research theory - extension of ancient Chinese dramatic elements existing as "ritual" and "ceremony"

The expression of ancient Chinese traditional art mainly exists in the form of "singing, dancing and music". It is also "a routine behavior that symbolizes or expresses something else, and is thereby associated with individual consciousness and social organization respectively." The art form becomes a ritual through performance and transmission, expanding into a universal category, resulting in the text of the original normative behavior becoming the behavior itself and becoming a carrier for expressing more important things.

Why is Poya Songbook more appropriate as a form of drama? The reason is that it has a

story that starts and ends, and two characters who have a beginning and an end. From the dramatic structure of the Poya Songbook, it is neither "Zhe" nor "Chu", and it is a form of "continuous play" from the beginning to the end (Huang Qingyin, 1996). There is no curtain, time, and space conversion during the performance, but only the singing, reading, and emotional transmission of the two singers. This form is very similar to traditional Chinese "Southern Opera". Gradually, ritual performances were formed between the melody and the script. Ritual is no longer a text, but "a routine behavior that symbolizes or expresses something else, and is thereby associated with individual consciousness and social organization respectively." Such a conventional behavior in Poya Songbook can be interpreted as the form of antiphonal songs and duals in Gan Long Duan, which has been further transmitted from national folk custom to the link between people's livelihood and personal habits.

Extension of research theory - as an extension of the content of "poetic thinking" in Chinese classical music aesthetics

The word "poetic" is derived from the Italian scholar Vico's "New Science" in the 18th century, which explains "poetic thinking" as follows: "Poetic thinking, also known as primitive thinking, means the special way of thinking that human beings have in childhood. It is characterized by the confusion of the subject and the object, using imagination to transition subjective emotions to objective things, so that objective things become the carrier of subjective emotions, thus creating a subjective realm of mind and object integration.

In the 20th century, the cultural system elaborated in ethnic minority music performances in ethnomusicology has been eroded by the current multi-ethnic culture and information network of the times. The embodiment of traditional Chinese aesthetics has been continuously improved. But no matter how it changes, the expression of "poetic thinking" has always survived in the creation of lyrics and texts of ethnic minorities. A typical characteristic of poetic thinking is to create the realm that situations blend together. In the creation of poetry, the realm is not water without a source or a tree without roots, the creation of the realm must have two elements of subjective emotions and objective objects, and place the emotions onto the appearance, so that the appearance carries the emotions, and do not differentiate the subject and the object, and integrate mind and the object to create the realm.

In Poya Songbook, from the lyrics "at night, the bright moon is shining, the bright moon is like a mirror (tonight, the moon is as bright as a mirror, and it is shining brightly.); "Open into bow elastic brocade, bow elastic brocade and flower (like cotton in bud, your skin is whiter than cotton);" "Mouth pink grasshopper lychee, feet and hands white as the banana heart (your lips are as red as the fried grasshopper, as pink as lychee, and your hands are as white as a banana heart)" (Liu Bingshan, 2009), 81 different songs express a large number of poetic thinking in the "simile" and "metaphor" in the lyric performance, the metaphor is exactly the technique of "Fu, Bi and Xing" in Chinese poetic style. The author thinks that the creation of metrical poetry is also inseparable from poetic thinking, and it even can be said that poetic thinking is the basic way of thinking in the creation of metrical poetry.

The source of the music ontology of the research object - use of “Qupai Liantao” tune style method in the melody

There are three Zhuang branches in Funing County, namely Butu, Bunong and Busha. Poya Village belongs to the Butu branch, and the songs they sing and keep having the oldest melody. With five words as one sentence, more than ten sentences or even dozens of sentences as a song, and the songs have been passed down to the present by oral and heart teaching, and the singing method is flexible when singing antiphonally. According to statistics, there are two or three thousand songs in the Butu branch, and the number is huge. In ancient China, in order to make the melodies of the opera correspond to the plots described, it's necessary to match many different melodies in the same tune to connect in accordance with the plot and narrative (aside or libretto), so as to represent a complete story. The melodic body adopted by Poya Village is collectively called "Fen" (Zhuang pronunciation, means songs), which can be subdivided according to different performance forms and uses as: Fen Guomang, Fen Biaoguai, Fen Dalao, Fen Bei, Fen Bulan, Fen Nong, Fen Zhou, Fen Leye, etc.(Liu Bingshan, 2009). Because Poya Songbook uses the love songs to express feelings, so when singing, through Fen Bei(the spoken parts)to collectively recollect the lyrics, the tone of this "Nian" is not only different from the their normal tones, but also different from the tone of the singing, it is a similar "chant" tone between the two. As an emotional preparation before the song is sung, it also provides an overview of the storyline that forms a prospect between the previous song and the next song. The singing of "Fen" is almost always preceded by a Chenci. A total of six regular melodies (but there are more than six) were collected, and through singing, they were replaced and transformed between each other's melodies. The source of the melody can be roughly thought of as two aspects: Funing Zhuang Opera and practical folk songs and mountain songs (Quan Ying, 2013). More because the singer in order to express the lyrics and emotions of the characteristics of the love song, so in the choice of singing melody will also choose a strong habit, familiar melody.

5. Results

The examination of the Poya Songbook provides a captivating perspective on Zhuang culture, instigating a thorough investigation into its multifaceted dimensions. This research endeavors to establish correlations among the folk music style, aesthetic characteristics, and the broader philosophical foundations of Chinese Confucianism ritual. In the pursuit of this exploration, we meticulously scrutinize existing studies, discerning gaps that our research aims to address. Drawing from empirical data, our initial focus shifts towards comprehending the profound influence of verbal and non-verbal symbols on cultural transmission within the Poya Songbook.

Firstly, Verbal and Non-Verbal Symbols in Cultural Transmission: In the realm of human society, verbal and non-verbal symbols emerge as pivotal tools for cultural communication. Recognizing music as a language conveying emotions, we reveal the Poya Songbook as a repository of verbal symbols (lyrics, poems) and non-verbal symbols (patterns, melodies). Delving into the thousand-year-old patterns, we acknowledge their historical context, shaped by the social environment and historical requirements of bygone eras. Our

exploration unveils the need for a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between verbal and non-verbal symbols in the context of the Poya Songbook. The age-old patterns, with their historical influences, necessitate further examination to discern the nuanced interplay of social dynamics and musical expression.

Secondly, Confucian Ritual Influence on Music: Rooted in the Chinese concept of "Li" from Confucianism, the Poya Songbook emerges as a form of cultural ritual, providing a means for individuals to choose mates based on songs. Our research delves into the historical discourse of "Li Xue," revealing the profound influence of Confucian rituals on ordinary people's lives, extending beyond aristocratic ceremonies. The intricate connection between the Poya Songbook and Confucian rituals calls for an in-depth exploration. The existing research on 81 songs by musicologists lacks comprehensive detailing, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced understanding of melodic variations in different emotional expressions.

Thirdly, Drama and Symbolic Expression in Music: The historical evolution of drama in China, intertwined with folk songs and dances, finds expression in the Poya Songbook. We delve into the separation of saying and singing parts, identifying elements of drama and improvisational adjustments that reflect the influence of Confucian rites on the music's practical function. The exploration of the Poya Songbook reveals a rich tapestry of drama and symbolic expression. The integration of drama elements calls for a deeper examination to understand the intricate relationship between symbols, music, and rituals in the Poya Songbook.

The research contributes novel insights into the multifaceted dimensions of the Poya Songbook. While acknowledging its documentary, musical, and poetic characteristics, we recognize the imperative to delve deeper into the form, meaning, sound, and drama. The Poya Songbook, viewed through the lens of semiotics, emerges as a carrier of information and a unique expression of Chinese classical art aesthetics. Our findings underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of the Poya Songbook's role, signaling further avenues for exploration in the intricate interplay of symbols, music, and rituals within this cultural phenomenon.

6. Discussion

According to the results of the research and discussion, we can conclude that: the tradition of "Confucianism" and "Li" has basically been text-centered since ancient China. Mostly contemporary scholars in China believe that the development of "Confucianism" and "Li" is not limited to the classical text itself (the lyrics and Yunzhe of Poya Songbook), in the long history of practice, the textual "Li" has always maintained a complex interactive fusion relationship with its foundation, i.e. the specific ritual practice. Poya Songbook is a very magical existence, firstly, it is a musical symbol. And symbols are a form of language, and it substitutes various meanings and then evokes emotions and feelings that attract action (Mi Guangen, Quan Ying, 2014: vi). And the original purpose of music is for ceremony or to convey information, Poya Songbook appears as a form of functional music performance

in the Zhuang area of Funing County, and also plays a role as a medium to spread aesthetic expression in the Zhuang area of Funing County. As a continuation of the aesthetic function of the poetic thinking of ancient Chinese art, Poya Songbook inherited narrative method of the combination of Qupai Liantao and poetic lyrics. Thus, the according to the field data obtained by this research can be simultaneously understood as:

- 1) Due to its functional function, Poya Songbook has more elements of the "Confucian rites" ritual view in its performance and singing. The contents of these ritual views in the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties of China have gone through the flow of culture and commerce, so as to constitute the display in works.
- 2) The use of melody, improvised selection at the same time, more in line with the Yunzhe mood and temperament in the lyrics, which confirm that the Qupai Liantao in the Poya Songbook and the most primitive traditional Chinese rap echoes each other. Lyrics and musical symbols constitute the meaning of the morphological symbols.
- 3) The use of lyrics, waist and foot rhymes, head and tail rhymes, and the use of question sentences in the Poya Songbook adopts the expression of Fu, Bi and Xing" requirements in traditional Chinese poetic thinking. Metaphors and suggestions make the lyrics elegant and full of the elegance of life.

The term "Li" has become the subject of the ceremony to a certain extent in the long river of mass inheritance and grinding. Therefore, Poya Songbook is not just a songbook, but essentially a physical display of symbols in the ceremony (Lu Guomin, 2011), which should belong to the folk expression of the ceremony. Poya Songbook of Funing County, Yunnan Province still has an important function and status in its social function. Aesthetic taste of Yunnan Zhuang folk music has also changed with the development of communication. This change is due to the existence of different artistic styles in the national culture, resulting in the emergence of new national music styles to adapt to their respective environments. The author believes that communication and inheritance are two different directions, and only by grasping the fundamental and basic inheritance methods of the nation will it not follow the current, and continue to carry forward the valuable history and culture of the nation in the tradition (Zhang Shiya, 2006). Therefore, it is hoped that further relevant studies can be carried out in the near future to explore the typical differences of Zhuang folk music from the perspective of musical form or style.

7. Recommendation for Further Study

The current research on the Poya Songbook inadequately addresses the relationship between symbols, music, and rituals in the context of symbolic transmission. A more profound exploration is necessary to discern whether fundamental structural factors or socio-cultural structures contribute to this complex interplay. In highlight of the findings, three central sets of questions emerge:

- 1) How are symbols, music, and rituals reflected in the process of symbol transmission in the Poya Songbook?

- 2) Can the aesthetic attitudes and behaviors formed by the Poya Songbook be separated into a comprehensive pattern?
- 3) Is the Poya Songbook truly a ritual act under Confucian ritual, or does it serve a distinct purpose in the socio-cultural system?

These questions pave the way for further exploration, indicating gaps in current understanding and suggesting the need for a nuanced interpretation of the Poya Songbook's role within the socio-cultural system.

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