



Cultural Education and Instruction of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong

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Abstract

Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs is an ancient and cherished folk music tradition rooted in the heart of Guangdong Province, China. The objective is to explore the cultural education and instruction of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, China. Meizhou, often celebrated as the "hometown of folk songs," serves as a research site, providing a vibrant backdrop for investigation. Through a diverse array of key informants, including three scholars, three casual informants, and five general informants. Data analysis combines qualitative research methodologies, including observational protocols and interview questionnaires, to provide a nuanced understanding of how these songs are nurtured, taught, and cherished within the cultural and educational landscape of Guangdong. The results highlight the dynamic nature of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, their ability to evolve with the times, and their continued relevance, even in contemporary contexts. This study underscores the importance of both formal and informal education in safeguarding cultural heritage and offers suggestions for further research and action.

Keywords: Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, cultural education, transmission, preservation, Guangdong Province

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1. Introduction

Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs, like harmonious threads woven into the fabric of time, tell a tale of cultural fusion and evolution. These melodies, born from the traditions of the Central Plains and nurtured by the migrating communities along the Yangtze River, resonate with history's rich tapestry. Infused with the enchanting influences of Yao and She folk songs during their settlement, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs blossomed during the Song and Ming dynasties, acquiring distinct characteristics and captivating styles (Sung, 1994; Jin, 2011). Within the realm of Lingnan music, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs stand as ancient luminaries celebrated both locally and globally for their soulful folk compositions. As an exclusive subgenre of Chinese Han folk music, these songs represent

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not only a cultural treasure but also a cherished chapter in Chinese folk music and folklore. Their inclusion in China's initial list of world intangible cultural heritages in 2006 serves to further emphasize their significance (Wang, 2007; Leo, 2015; Idema, 2015).

Since the dawn of China's reform and opening, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs have transcended linguistic barriers, serving as cultural ambassadors that convey local sentiments, nurture friendships, and foster closer cooperation and development between Meizhou and the global community. Their artistic allure, a universal language, has been instrumental in connecting hearts and minds across borders, reaffirming the timeless role of music as a unifying force (Bian & Pikulsri, 2020; Qiu & Qiu, 2022).

Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs, often characterized by their feather-like melodies, share an undeniable kinship with similar folk songs found south of the Yangtze River. Intriguingly, their harmonious cadences resonate even further, connecting with numerous ethnic minorities in the southern regions, where folk songs bear striking resemblances to the melodious Hakka style. While the cultural significance of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs is beyond question, comprehensive research and education are paramount to their preservation and propagation. Historical research endeavors, at times, have failed to take a holistic view, neglecting the intricate historical and social contexts that have nurtured these songs (Cheung, 2004; Sun & Chen, 2023; Xie & Boonsrianan, 2023).

In recognition of this, a strong commitment to bridging this gap drives our current study. By immersing ourselves in field investigations and conducting in-depth research, we aim to shed light on the history and development of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. Our goal is to uncover hidden narratives and cultural subtleties that imbue these melodies with profound meaning. The objective of this study is to explore the cultural education and instruction of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, China. Through this endeavor, we seek to rekindle appreciation for Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs among a broader audience. Only through a comprehensive understanding of education and instruction can we ensure the enduring legacy of these songs, captivating hearts, and inspiring future generations.

2. Literature review

2.1 Chinese Mainland Hakka Mountain Songs

Dong Xiaomei and Luo Gangqin (2021) discuss the protection and preservation of Hakka Mountain songs in Guangdong and Jiangxi from the perspective of intangible cultural transmission. These songs, often referred to as the "heavenly sound" of the Book of Songs, have a rich history spanning over a millennium. The authors conducted detailed investigations into Jiangxi Hakka Mountain songs and identified outstanding issues in their documentation. They propose "live protection" measures to ensure the continuity and vitality of this cultural heritage.

Li Qiuyu (2021) delves into the inheritance and development of Guangdong Hakka Mountain songs. This traditional and ancient art form has faced challenges in adapting to changing times. Li's work emphasizes the need to uphold the humanistic spirit and cultural value of Guangdong Hakka Mountain songs. Through this exploration, the aim is to chart a course for the continued development and inheritance of this significant cultural heritage in Guangdong.

2.2 Overseas Hakka Mountain Songs

Liu Fulin (2022) investigates the spread of Hakka Mountain songs in Singapore and Malaysia. These songs traveled with Hakka people who migrated to the Nanyang region. While it was believed that there was a hiatus in the singing of Hakka Mountain songs after 1951 due to bans and suspensions, Liu's extensive data collection reveals that this cultural tradition did not fall into oblivion. Instead, Liu argues that political, economic, and educational changes after the 1960s played a significant role in the decline of Hakka Mountain songs in the region.

Lee Ming-Chao (2019) focuses on the development of Hakka popular songs in Taiwan and Malaysia, particularly after the 1970s. His study takes two albums, "No Favor" and "Pasar Scenery," as the starting point for research and spans four decades of Hakka music in both regions. Lee emphasizes that while contemporary Chinese music has influenced both Taiwanese and Malaysian Hakka music, their performance and musical styles have diverged. Taiwan emphasizes cultural heritage, tradition, and innovation, while Malaysia's Hakka music leans towards contemporary popular pop songs. The only commonality lies in the influence of local social environments on the content of their music.

Conclusion: Exploring Cultural Education and Instruction. In the context of exploring the cultural education and instruction of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, China, this literature review provides valuable insights into the broader realm of Hakka Mountain songs. The studies discussed here underscore the importance of protecting, preserving, and promoting this cultural heritage, both within China and among overseas Hakka communities. As we endeavor to explore the cultural education and instruction of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong, it is imperative to draw from the lessons learned in safeguarding Hakka Mountain Songs in other regions and understanding the evolving dynamics of this traditional art form. Our objective is to contribute to the continued vitality and appreciation of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs by examining how they can be effectively incorporated into educational and instructional contexts in Guangdong Province, China.

2.3 Research Theory Used

In our quest to explore the cultural education and instruction of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, China, the choice of a qualitative research methodology becomes paramount. This approach empowers us to delve deeply into the intricate dynamics of education and instruction surrounding this unique cultural heritage. By adopting a qualitative lens, we aim to provide a nuanced and holistic understanding of how Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs are nurtured, taught, and cherished within the cultural and educational landscape of Guangdong Province, China. Through this exploration, we aspire to contribute to the continued vitality and appreciation of this rich cultural legacy, ensuring its enduring presence in educational and instructional domains (Chen-Hafteck, 2007; Chai et al., 2022; Guan & Matsunobu, 2022).

3. Method

3.1 Research site

Meizhou, nestled in the heart of Guangdong Province, serves as a cultural epicenter where Hakka communities have thrived for generations. Often hailed as the "hometown of folk songs," Meizhou has been a nurturing ground for the vibrant tradition of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs. These songs, sung in the distinctive Hakka dialect, resonate with nearly 5 million residents in Meizhou and extend their melodic embrace to Hakka communities both within the northeastern reaches of Guangdong Province and overseas.



Figure 1. Map of Meizhou City, Guangdong Province, China
 Source: *China Folio* (n.d.), Sun et al. (2018)

Meizhou stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of these songs. Meizhou's unique position as the "hometown of folk songs" and its thriving Hakka communities provide a fertile ground for our inquiry into the education and instruction surrounding this rich cultural heritage. To delve into how Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs are imparted, preserved, and cherished within the educational and instructional contexts of Guangdong.

3.2 Key informants

In this study, categorize key informants into three groups: scholars, casual informants, and general informants. These categories will be defined by specific criteria, as outlined below.

Table 1. Categories and Selection Criteria for Key Informants

Informant	Selection Criteria
Three (3) Scholar informants	1) Native of Meizhou 2) Rich Knowledge of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs 3) Over 40 Years of Experience 4) Recipient of Highest Awards 5) Inheritor of Tradition
Three (3) Casual informants	1) Native of Meizhou 2) Proficiency in Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs 3) Extensive Work Experience 4) Age Between 30 and 45 5) Affiliation with a Professional Theater Company 6) Singer or Actor
Five (5) General informants	1) Participation in Field Research 2) Employment at Dapu County Cultural Center 3) Attendance at Cultural Events

These categories and criteria have been established to ensure a diverse and comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences among our informants.

3.3 Research tools

3.3.1 Observational Protocol: This method involves immersive experiences and active participation within the cultural contexts and communities associated with Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs. It facilitates researchers' profound insights into the processes of education and instruction surrounding these songs.

3.3.2 Interview Questionnaire: By conducting interviews with individuals closely linked to the historical development of education and instruction in Chinese Meizhou Hakka

Mountain Songs, researchers can gather firsthand accounts and personal narratives. These interviews serve as conduits for capturing diverse perspectives, individual stories, and invaluable insights into the world of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis has illuminated the intricate landscape of cultural education and instruction surrounding Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province. Through the lens of education and instruction, we have uncovered a dynamic process that combines formal and informal approaches to pass down this invaluable cultural heritage. The significance of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs transcends mere artistic expression; it is deeply rooted in preserving Hakka identity and heritage. Key informants, chosen with precision, emerge as essential conduits for this cultural transmission. Moreover, the involvement of casual informants from professional theater companies highlights the fusion of tradition and contemporary performing arts. As we navigate this rich tapestry, it is evident that Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs serve as both a local treasure and a global cultural bridge, reaffirming their pivotal role in education and instruction.

4. Result

4.1 The History of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs

4.1.1 During 265-618 the early stages of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, the influence of the "Book of Songs" was prominent. Comparative analysis by Huang Huoxing revealed that Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs comprehensively inherited the artistic style and lyric writing techniques of the "Book of Songs." This style, often referred to as the "style of the fifteen countries," can be traced back to the folk songs of fifteen northern regions mentioned in the ancient "Book of Songs."

4.1.2 The period between 618 and 1271 witnessed the Hakka ancestors' migration and prolonged contact with Jiangnan folk songs in the Yangtze River basin. This interaction led to the formation of a distinctive folk song style in Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs. Observations by figures like Huang Zunxian and Li Tiaoyuan noted the resemblance of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs to Jiangnan Zi night songs and reading songs.

4.1.3 The period between 1271-1912 Ming and Qing Dynasties marked the emergence of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, with significant migrations from the Fujian area to Meizhou. This period also witnessed the blending of Central Plains culture and indigenous culture, especially in the border regions of Guangdong Province. Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, therefore, evolved as a product of this cultural integration. Additionally, legends such as the one involving the singing girl Liu Sanmei in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties contribute to the folklore surrounding Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs.

These historical developments illuminate the deep-rooted history of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs and their multifaceted origins, encompassing influences from the "Book of Songs," Jiangnan folk songs, and cultural integration. These factors collectively enrich the cultural education and instruction associated with Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, aligning with our research objective.

Table 1. Historical timeline of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs

Timeline Period	Description
265-618	Influence from the "Book of Songs" with the artistic style and lyric writing techniques known as the "style of the fifteen countries"
618-1271	Influence of Jiangnan folk songs in the Yangtze River basin, leading to the formation of a unique folk song style within Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs
1271-1912	Emergence and evolution of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, marked by migrations from the Fujian area, cultural integration, and the development of a unique cultural heritage.

4.2 The Development of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs

4.2.1 The period between 1912-1926, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs retained strong traditional characteristics, particularly in song structure and rhetoric. These songs aimed to showcase ancient Han culture, continuing a fine tradition with a strong folk charm. Most people transmitted Meizhou Hakka Mountain song culture through oral tradition, often singing songs during agricultural work or rest periods to alleviate fatigue. These songs were sung in duets, creating pleasant and engaging scenes. The themes often reflected people's aspirations for a better life, freedom, and a break from feudal ideals, resulting in the banning of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs by the rulers of the time.

4.2.2 The period between 1926-1949, this period witnessed significant political and economic changes in Meizhou city. Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs also underwent transformations in themes and singing forms while retaining their traditional tunes. In the era of revolutionary warfare, folk songs started incorporating revolutionary themes. Due to an influx of people into towns, singers gathered in fixed locations to sing songs, leading to improvised forms like "tail to tail." Singing folk songs publicly was still considered immoral, so singers mostly sang while working alone in the mountains. Singers of this period often faced discrimination and did not have costumes for performances.

4.2.3 The period between 1949-1976, following the founding of the People's Republic of China, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs were allowed to be publicly performed and promoted. Various troupes and artists emerged, fostering the development and cultural dissemination of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. The government supported the creation of "new folk songs" with political themes, resulting in songs that differed in tune from traditional Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. The traditional songs were restricted, and their performance venues and content were regulated. The government encouraged "new

folk songs" while discouraging traditional songs, causing the latter to decline. However, traditional Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs remained popular among ordinary people and returned overseas Chinese.

4.2.4 The period between 1976-2022, the cultural department of Meizhou initiated folk art exercises and festivals, promoting folk song activities. Systematic research, collection, and publication of Hakka Mountain songs were carried out. The government organized competitions and leagues to commend accomplished singers. Despite these efforts, the enthusiasm for folk songs waned as the economy improved, leading to the decline of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. Singers, unable to access traditional songs, resorted to simpler, unmodified tunes, weakening the artistic quality of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. Singing behavior became unregulated, with a wide age range of singers participating in loosely organized activities. These singers performed purely for personal entertainment, and the tradition saw a decline in prominence.

This historical overview showcases the evolving development of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs over the years, reflecting the cultural, political, and societal changes that have shaped this unique folk-art form.



Figure 2. Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs troupe

Table 2. Development of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs

Timeline Period	Description
265-618	Characteristics of Hakka Mountain songs influenced by "Book of Songs." Hakka ancestors' migration introduced these songs to the Yangtze River basin
618-1271	Interaction with Jiangnan folk songs shaping the style of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. Further migrations of Hakka people and integration of Central Plains culture. Legend of Liu Sanmei associated with early Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs

1271-1912	Yuan to Qing: Further migrations of Hakka people and integration of Central Plains culture. Legend of Liu Sanmei associated with early Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs
1912-1926	Strong traditional characteristics with a focus on ancient Han culture. Songs spread orally among ordinary people during agricultural work
1926-1949	Transition to revolutionary themes and improvised forms like "tail to tail." Singers face discrimination, and costumes for performances are absent
1949-1976	Government support for "new folk songs" and restrictions on traditional songs. Traditional songs remain popular among ordinary people and overseas Chinese
1976-2022	Cultural department initiatives, competitions, and folklore preservation efforts. Decline in the prominence of traditional Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs

In exploring the cultural education and instruction of Chinese Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, China, this study has traced the historical development of these unique folk songs across various periods. From their ancient origins influenced by the "Book of Songs" and migrations of Hakka ancestors to their interaction with Jiangnan folk songs and integration of Central Plains culture, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs have evolved over centuries. The timeline reveals the impact of political, societal, and economic changes on these songs, from revolutionary themes to government support for "new folk songs." Despite efforts to preserve them, traditional Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs have seen a decline in prominence in contemporary times. This exploration sheds light on the rich cultural heritage of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs and the challenges they face in the modern era, emphasizing the importance of cultural education and instruction to ensure their continued legacy.

4.3 Transmission Process: Education and Instruction

Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs are a cultural heritage that has been deeply rooted in Meizhou's history. Primary and secondary schools, like Meizhou City Elementary School, have integrated the songs into their curricula through dedicated music classes. These classes nurture students' musical sensibilities and develop their ability to discern fundamental elements of music. Teachers also use creative methods to foster a deep connection with the songs, enhancing their understanding of their cultural significance. Performance activities within these classes encourage teamwork, coordination, and collective pride.

Higher education institutions, like Guangdong Jiaying College, have recognized the importance of the songs and integrated them into their academic offerings. The Conservatory of Music's "Hakka Music Culture" course combines Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs, Guangdong Han music, and Guangdong Han opera, fostering students' appreciation for the songs and enriching their musical knowledge. Special music concerts featuring Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs engage students and deepen their connection to the traditional music form.

Informal transmission channels also play a crucial role in the preservation of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs. Zhao Wenyou, a local leader, has established seasonal classes for Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs during winter and summer breaks, providing young learners with a platform to reconnect with their cultural heritage and learn the Meizhou dialect.



Figure 3. Zhao Wenyou course

Tong Aina highlights a noteworthy aspect of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs' adaptability and continued resonance with evolving audiences. She observes that the traditional lyrical content of these songs may not always align with the preferences of the younger generation. In response to this generational shift, many singers have undertaken the task of modernizing the lyrics, ensuring they reflect contemporary life and experiences. An illustrative example of this innovative adaptation occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mountain Opera Troupe in Meizhou composed songs that galvanized communities, fostering unity and resilience in the face of the epidemic. This adaptation showcases the dynamic nature of Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs, demonstrating their ability to evolve and remain relevant by addressing current themes and concerns.



Figure 4. Tong Aina course

In conclusion, Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs, deeply rooted in tradition, exhibit a remarkable capacity for innovation and relevance, allowing them to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. This adaptability ensures that these cultural treasures continue to captivate audiences and serve as a source of unity and inspiration in ever-changing times.

Discussion and conclusion

The exploration of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs and their cultural education and instruction in Guangdong Province, China, reveals a vibrant tradition deeply intertwined with history and evolving in response to contemporary challenges. This discussion will analyze the findings, linking them to the theoretical principles presented in the literature review and assessing their consistency.

The historical review of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs underscores their multifaceted origins, combining influences from the "Book of Songs," Jiangnan folk songs, and cultural integration during different periods. This historical evolution is consistent with research by Dong Xiaomei and Luo Gangqin (2021), who emphasize the importance of understanding the historical context for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The rich historical background of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs provides a strong foundation for their cultural education and instruction.

The formal transmission of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs through primary and secondary schools, as well as higher education institutions, aligns with the theoretical principle that formal education plays a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage (Chen-Hafteck, 2007). The integration of these songs into curricula not only imparts musical skills but also fosters cultural understanding and pride. Guangdong Jiaying College's emphasis on the "Hakka Music Culture" course exemplifies the role of higher education in nurturing cultural appreciation and literacy.

The informal transmission channels highlight the dynamic nature of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs, as seen in Zhao Wenyong's seasonal classes and singers' efforts to modernize lyrics (Hsu, 2014). This adaptability, catering to evolving audiences and addressing contemporary themes, ensures their continued relevance. Tong Aina's example of songs composed during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies the songs' ability to bridge tradition and modernity, consistent with the idea that cultural forms can evolve while maintaining their core identity (Leo, 2015).

Despite efforts by the government, institutions, and individuals, Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs faces challenges, especially in the face of economic improvement. This aligns with the broader challenge of maintaining traditional cultural forms in the modern world (Wang, 2007). The decline in traditional Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs, as

described in the historical overview, underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to ensure their preservation.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the cultural education and instruction of Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs in Guangdong Province, China. The historical evolution of these songs, their formal and informal transmission, and their adaptability all contribute to their enduring significance. While formal education initiatives and informal transmission channels play crucial roles, there is a need for continued efforts to address the challenges facing the preservation of traditional Meizhou Hakka Mountain songs.

Consistent with the theoretical principles discussed in the literature review, formal education and informal transmission are vital to cultural preservation. However, the decline in the prominence of traditional songs underscores the need for innovative approaches to engage younger generations and adapt to changing societal dynamics.

In summary, Meizhou Hakka Mountain Songs represent a cultural treasure that bridges tradition and modernity, and their preservation requires a multifaceted approach involving education, community engagement, and adaptability. These songs continue to be a source of pride and cultural identity in Guangdong Province, China, and their legacy should be cherished and safeguarded for future generations.

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