

## Preservation of Shiping Folk Songs in Weiyuan County, China

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### ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study focuses on the preservation of Shiping Folk Songs in Weiyuan County, China, with an emphasis on education, literacy, and the critical role of diverse stakeholders. The study emphasizes the region's cultural relevance as well as educational programs, highlighting the critical role of schools in promoting cultural literacy and ensuring the preservation of Shiping Folk Songs. In addition, the research investigates the roles of Hakka folk musicians and singers in the transmission and development of this national folk music tradition. Government policy and assistance have been recognized as critical components for managing budgetary restrictions and executing preservation and development programs. The participation of local higher education institutions and cultural research units in the preservation of Shiping folk music is also carefully investigated, highlighting their critical significance in furthering cultural heritage. This multimodal approach emphasizes the interplay of education, literacy, and preservation in maintaining the vibrancy of Shiping Folk Songs, providing significant insights into the long-term preservation of this cultural asset.

**Key words:** Education, Preservation, Literacy, Shiping Folk Songs, Weiyuan

### INTRODUCTION

Shiping Folk Songs are a unique form of folk music that has endured in Weiyuan County, located in Sichuan Province, China. The songs are generally known as "Shiping Mountain Songs" due to their origin in the Shiping Mountain region and their significance to the local population. "Shiping Folk Songs" are part of the Han folk song tradition in terms of its cultural history. Moreover, as these songs have been transmitted and refined within the Hakka community, a subset of the ancient Han ethnic group, they are also regarded as emblematic of the legacy and progression of Hakka folk music in Sichuan Province. Hakka folk songs have been recognized as "living fossils" of old Han folk tunes. "Shiping Folk Songs" are classified as rudimentary traditional music and are predominantly prevalent in the hilly areas of southern Sichuan, where the Hakka ethnic group is concentrated. The Ministry of Culture formally categorized them as "South Sichuan Folk Songs" in 2008, acknowledging their importance (Tang, 2022; Sha et al., 2022).

The migration of the Hakka people to Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty led to the dissemination of "Shiping Mountain Song" in the southern districts of Sichuan, creating a historical tradition that spans over 400 years. The Hakka community in Sichuan predominantly comprises Hakka individuals originating from Guangdong, Fujian, and Jiangxi provinces. Thus, the "Shiping Folk Songs" may be attributed to the Hakka folk songs of "Min, Yue, and Gan" (abbreviations for

the aforementioned three provinces) that emerged during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Gao & Karin, 2023; Hou & Seekhunlio 2023).

The Hakka folk songs of "Min, Yue, and Gan" date back at least 2000 years and are those of the northern Han ethnic group that Han people brought with them when they migrated south from the Central Plains. The presence of Hakka people in Sichuan is the ultimate culmination of Han immigrants from the Central Plains in terms of the importance of large-scale immigration flows. Consequently, Sichuan Hakka folk songs, namely "Shiping Folk Songs," epitomize the final phase of the widespread cultural movement of Hakka folk songs (Liu & Zou, 2001).

Wang Chunling's research on Hakka family trees provides insights into the ancestry, geographical spread, movement, and cultural practices of the Sichuan Hakka dialect. Mr. Cui Rongchang's scholarly work, "Hakka Dialects in Sichuan," thoroughly examines the phonology, sound alterations, vocabulary, and grammar of Hakka dialects in Sichuan. This research significantly impacts the understanding of Hakka "Shiping Folk Songs." It provides a necessary theoretical basis for scholars investigating the significance of these tunes (Wang, 2018).

In February 2011, the song "Shiping Folk Song" was duly acknowledged and included to the "Representative Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection List of Sichuan Province," so gaining the necessary protection it merited. Nevertheless, there is a significant lack of comprehensive

theme study about the historical and cultural background, successors, musical creations, lyrics, and other aspects of the “Shiping Folk Songs.”

This study aims to thoroughly understand the current research on “Shiping Folk Songs” and actively seeks to remedy the existing deficiencies in these studies. Our primary focus is to improve education and literacy surrounding this cultural treasure, while also actively participating in the careful preservation of the “Shiping Folk Song” for the benefit of future generations.

### Research Question

- What roles does literacy play in the preservation of Shiping Folk Songs in Weiyuan County, China?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Hakka Immigrant History Influencing Shiping Folk Song

The Hakka culture of Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi, as well as the Guangfu culture and Chaoshan culture, all have their origins in the Central Plains. Confucian ideals have a significant influence on Hakka culture, whereas Guangfu and Chaoshan cultures have a close connection to maritime traditions. Scholars agree that these cultures’ distinctive traits are a result of the variations in their ecological environments (Chen, 2009).

Researchers express skepticism towards specific stereotypes, such as the belief that “Hakka individuals prioritize justice over profit, hold literature and martial arts in high regard, and have a less advanced sense of commerce,” while “Guangfu individuals prioritize profit over justice, emphasize individualism, and possess a strong sense of commerce.” The Chaoshan people are believed to possess a dual nature since they strive to maintain a balance between justice and profit while also engaging in the pursuit of immediate benefits (Chen, 2012; Liu, 1997).

The cultural evolution and ideological formation of different ethnic groups occur through a process of seeking shared values while maintaining distinctiveness. This component of the topic pertains to the examination of “the economic incentives behind Hakka migration to Sichuan” (Huang & Lai, 2015).

The book “Sichuan Hakka Folk Culture,” edited by Liu Yizhang and Zou Yiqing and published by Sichuan People’s Publishing House in March 2001, offers a fresh perspective on the development of “Hakka cultural tourism resources.” This study examines the Hakka folk culture in Sichuan by focusing on the Hakka people residing in Luodai old town in Dongshan, Chengdu. According to the book, Sichuan’s interior position and well-preserved agricultural culture, along with the strong unity of Hakka families, contribute to the distinct closed characteristics of Hakka culture in this region. Consequently, the Hakka minority in Sichuan has maintained a somewhat rudimentary cultural framework. The “original” element symbolizes a precious asset in Sichuan’s Hakka culture, underscoring the need for education, literacy,

and preservation in protecting this cultural legacy (Liu & Zou, 2001; Sun, 2000).

### Cultural Richness and Preservation of Hakka Shiping Folk Song

The scholarly monograph “Hakka Music Culture in Jiangxi” by Huang Yuying, published in June 2014 by People’s Music Publishing House, examines the idea of “Mountain Songs.” “Mountain songs” broadly refer to folk tunes spontaneously composed by individuals living in hilly areas. These songs cover a wide range of topics and have a basic style that is strongly linked to dialect norms, providing a real depiction of people’s lives. According to the book, “Jiangxi Hakka folk songs encapsulate the essence of Hakka folk songs for the entire Hakka community, particularly within its ‘Mountain songs’” (Huang, 2017).

The notion of “Hakka Mountain Song” is addressed in the scholarly book “Hakka Folk Song Culture” by Hu Xi Zhang, published by Guangdong People’s Publishing House in November 2013. It is divided into “big mountain songs” and “small mountain songs,” with the former containing text, tone, and mountain song activities. This research takes a wide view of “mountain songs,” comprising music, lyrics, and related folk cultural practices. It also emphasizes the literary quality of Hakka folk song lyrics, shedding light on the study of Hakka mountain songs (Hu, 2013).

Hu Xi Zhang goes on to say that the linguistic, rhetorical, and tonal characteristics of mountain songs represent the original ecological style of Hakka folk songs. Newly composed folk songs, on the other hand, lack the vividness and simplicity of language, rhetoric, and melody, as well as the cultural depth found in Hakka traditional “Mountain Songs.”

Jiang Xie’s “The Musical Interpretation of Lingnan Hakka Music,” published in September 2017 by Fujian Education Publishing House of Straits Publishing Group, uses the ethnomusicological perspective of American scholar Merriam’s “conceptualization about” “music”—“behavior in relation to music”—and ““music sound” to investigate the cultural phenomenon of Hakka music in Guangdong. It focuses on “prominent Hakka musicians in Lingnan, such as Rao Jinxing and Li Jiujiào” (Jiang, 2017).

“Hakka Music Dissemination” by Feng Guangyu investigates the confluence of Central Plains immigrant music and indigenous music, illustrating how various ethnic groups affect each other’s folk tunes. He contrasts Hakka Mountain Songs with the music of the She ethnic group in Zhejiang Province to emphasize their reciprocal influence, with a focus on the effect of She folk songs on Hakka “Mountain Songs” in the Central Plains. This research demonstrates the ongoing and complicated nature of cultural contact between nearby ethnic groups (Feng, 1999).

### The Preservation of Shiping Folk Song

The Hakka people, who migrated from the ancient Central Plains to southern China due to historical conflicts and natural disasters, have a significant presence in regions adjacent to Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong. Some migrated to

Taiwan and beyond. They form a distinct Han ethnic group. Hakka music, a vital component of their culture, encompasses various genres, with ritual music being paramount. This cultural heritage has persisted for centuries, tracing the Hakka group's migration from the Central Plains to Jiangxi, Gansu, Fujian, and Taiwan. Today, Hakka customs continue to thrive, with Taiwan alone home to over 4.2 million Hakkas. Recognizing the role of music as part of culture, this project emphasizes the importance of education, literacy, and preservation in safeguarding Hakka cultural traditions (Xiao, 2023).

In "Research and Analysis on the Development of Shiping Folk Songs," Luo Jian dives into the cultural features of Shiping Folk Songs, notably in terms of historical inheritance and cultural asset conservation. This page also suggests several ways for preserving and promoting the growth of Shiping folk music. Furthermore, Luo Jian's work titled "Research on the Inheritance and Development of Shiping Folk Songs in Weiyuan County" goes deeper into the cultural essence, present condition of inheritance, and future growth methods for Shiping Folk Songs. Luo Jian offers unique views and viewpoints on the safeguarding of "Shiping Folk Song," as well as valuable lessons and proposals for consideration. To improve the preservation of Shiping Folk Songs' musical culture, a comprehensive assessment of various factors is required, including the current quantity and state of these songs, the ecological environment (both human and natural), the role of inheritors, local government policies, the effectiveness of existing measures, and their implementation (Luo, 2019).

### Research Theory

The study of Shiping Folk Song in Weiyuan County, China, utilizing ethnomusicology as a framework, gives unique insights into its cultural value, historical foundations, and preservation measures. This study emphasizes the necessity of education and literacy in actively maintaining and conveying this live cultural legacy to future generations. It asks for joint preservation efforts to guarantee that Shiping Folk Song continues to thrive and play an important part in Hakka culture and the identity of Weiyuan County (Rice, 2010; Jones, 2003).

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology for doing ethnomusicological research on Shiping Folk Song in Weiyuan County, China, employs a multi-faceted approach with an emphasis on education, literacy, and preservation. The following is an outline of the research methodology:

#### Literature Review

The first step entails a thorough examination of available literature and resources on Shiping Folk Song, with a focus on pedagogical and historical factors. Historical records, scholarly papers, fieldwork reports, and any other written or recorded sources are all included. This phase's goal is to lay

a firm foundation of knowledge on the subject, adding to educational resources for future generations.

#### Fieldwork and Data Collection

Getting in touch with local cultural departments and pertinent connections is critical for getting access to the local community and its musical traditions, as well as encouraging cultural literacy. Fieldwork will be carried out in Weiyuan County in order to collect firsthand data, such as recordings, films, pictures, and interview notes. This stage guarantees that authentic and primary research materials are acquired for preservation and instructional purposes.

#### Data Organization

After gathering field data, materials will be organized in a methodical manner. Recordings, films, photographs, and interview notes will be meticulously cataloged and arranged for easy access throughout the analysis phase. Future academics and fans will benefit from this well-organized data.

#### Analysis and Classification

The second step of research is organizing, analyzing, and summarizing all collected literature and materials with a focus on cultural heritage preservation. The Shiping Folk Songs will be categorized and structured in order to allow for an in-depth case study. This phase aims to find patterns, motifs, and cultural subtleties in music in order to contribute to cultural preservation initiatives.

#### Conclusion and Synthesis of Data

The investigation will culminate with a summary of the contrasts between this study and previous ones, with an emphasis on educational and preservation elements. Data analysis will be utilized to reach persuasive findings on the cultural relevance and evolution of Shiping Folk Song, therefore enhancing cultural literacy and preservation initiatives.

Strict academic standards and ethnomusicological concepts will serve as the technique's guides throughout the study process. This involves keeping ethical factors in mind when performing fieldwork, guaranteeing the authenticity of materials acquired, and employing systematic data analysis methodologies. The study's goal is to give a thorough and analytical investigation of Shiping Folk Song while also supporting education, literacy, and cultural preservation.

### RESULTS

#### Literacy for the Preservation of Shiping Folk Song in Weiyuan County

The present state of music instruction in schools and its impact on promoting cultural literacy in the region where Shiping Folk Song flourishes in Weiyuan County. This inquiry is a crucial first step in debating the safeguarding, advancement, and conservation of the "Shiping Folk Song."

The research has shown that Shiping Folk Song has created specialized “teaching points” within nearby primary and secondary schools. These educational programs offer a hopeful opportunity to cultivate future custodians of Shiping Folk Song, guaranteeing the safeguarding of this cultural gem.

Significantly, in the Shiping Mountain region, there are two educational institutions that have established teaching centers specifically dedicated to Shiping mountain songs: “Shiping Primary School” and “Guanyingtian Town Central School.” These institutions have a crucial role in fostering education and cultural literacy by offering students the chance to interact with the abundant cultural history of Shiping Folk Song. In addition, the Weiyuan Branch of Neijiang Radio and Television University has established a “teaching site” for Shiping Folk Song at Shiping Primary School, strategically positioned. The cooperative partnership between primary schools and universities maximizes the utilization of teaching resources and simplifies the availability of education in distant regions, hence augmenting cultural literacy and the preservation of knowledge (Figure 1).

Yang Junming, a crucial source in this study, has amassed more than ten years of experience working at “Shiping Primary School” and has been instrumental in advancing cultural education and literacy. His proficiency in classroom pedagogy pertaining to Shiping Folk Songs has made a substantial contribution to the conservation and advancement of this cultural heritage. It is crucial to acknowledge that schools play a vital role in fostering cultural heritage, advancing cultural literacy, and aiding the conservation of local customs. Shiping Primary School and Guanyingtian Town Central School have important roles in promoting education, enriching cultural knowledge, and safeguarding the valuable cultural heritage of Shiping Folk Song for future generations. This research emphasizes the crucial significance of education and literacy in the thorough conservation of “Shiping Folk Song” (Figure 2).

### Preservation and Promotion of Shiping Folk Songs by Hakka Folk Musicians

An essential aspect of studying the preservation, education, and advancement of “Shiping Mountain Song” involves examining the contribution of Hakka folk musicians and singers in the transmission and promotion of national folk music culture.

Zeng Dehua is an enthusiast of Shiping Folk Songs and actively engages in the cultural preservation and promotion of Shiping folk music. He regularly and sporadically leads the “Shiping Folk Song Culture Publicity Team” in organizing “Shiping Folk Song Performance” events, which successfully captivate numerous spectators who delight in the festivities. A multitude of individuals progressively engage in the activities, actively partake in rehearsals, and purposefully enhance their singing and performance aptitudes. The Shiping folk song art possesses a profound influence on people’s sentiments due to its inherent aesthetic notion. The incorporation of creative aesthetics into the social practices of the Hakka people not only enhances their spiritual and cultural experiences but also plays a significant role in

preserving, spreading, and advancing the art of Shiping Folk Songs, which is well-received and embraced by contemporary society (Figure 3).



**Figure 1.** Scenes inside shiping primary school – The red slogan on the teaching building reads: “Sing shiping folk songs and preserve folk culture.”

Source: Xiujian gong



**Figure 2.** Propaganda wall of shiping folk song culture

Source: Xiujian gong



**Figure 3.** Hakka folk sichuan opera actor performs a scene titled “Hire permanent labor”

Source: Xiujian gong

Folk musician Xu Pengyang is very passionate about folk music culture. In addition, he has established a “family band” to provide free performances at community nursing homes. Through this endeavor, he not only enriches himself with the aesthetic value of music but also endeavors to share the cultural significance of music with others. The family of Xu Pengyang has given rise to five accomplished musicians who excel in both instrumental music and vocal performances. Each of them was an exceptional folk music artist, and their societal impact was far-reaching, effectively facilitating the dissemination of Hakka music culture. Furthermore, Xu Pengyang established “Xu’s Strumming Qin Hall,” attracting students and members of the community who were interested in acquiring expertise in Ruan Xian and Erhu playing. The social endeavors of these folk music performers successfully facilitated the preservation and propagation of Hakka music traditions in southern Sichuan. It is crucial to thoroughly comprehend and give careful consideration to the significance of folk musicians and enthusiasts of song and dance in preserving and spreading the cultural heritage of Shiping Folk Songs (Figure 4).

Hakka folk drama exerted a significant artistic impact on peasant culture throughout history, nearly reaching the status of the most prominent musical art form that appealed to people’s appreciation for music and Taoism. In contemporary society, the presence of this particular form of Sichuan opera is hardly observed in rural regions. However, it has not vanished entirely and continues to thrive in urban and suburban locales, namely within restaurants and cultural entertainment establishments. Additionally, many youths also appreciate partaking in this customary art form following their evening meal, allowing them to encounter the aesthetic gratification derived from traditional folk song and dance art. Furthermore, it serves as a means to preserve, spread, and advance Hakka music in Shiping by utilizing the talents of folk singers and dancers to showcase the cultural significance of Pingshan music (Figure 5).

### The Role of Government Support, Education, and Literacy of Shiping Folk Songs

The key method for tackling the financial constraints of conserving and developing Shiping folk music is to seek policy assistance from the governments of Weiyuan County and Neijiang City. Understanding the Weiyuan County government’s position on the conservation and promotion of ‘Shiping folk song’ is critical for ensuring effective answers to difficulties linked to its preservation and growth. The government’s financial assistance is critical in studying the unique issues faced in maintaining and developing Shiping Folk Songs, enabling the establishment of exact preservation and development strategies.

While the administrations of Weiyuan County and Neijiang City actively promote the preservation and growth of Hakka folk music culture, there have been implementation challenges and occasions when regulations have not been adequately implemented. Clear duties, well-defined tasks and objectives, and precise implementation are required to



**Figure 4.** Xu pengyang performs songs with another folk erhu aficionado  
Source: Xiujian gong



**Figure 5.** Hakka sichuan opera actor Liu mingyang and his wife performing the comedy  
Source: Xiujian gong

handle these problems. Government policies and financial resources may be used to improve community cultural activities, improve individuals’ social and cultural lives, and foster the preservation and transmission of Shiping folk music culture in everyday life. This method also allows for the establishment of a cultural tourism industry that highlights the particular local characteristics of Shiping folk music while also promoting worldwide exchanges of Hakka culture. These efforts include a variety of social programs focused on maintaining local culture.

Sufficient financing allows for the efficient use of new media technologies, notably AI developments, in the preservation and dissemination of Shiping Folk Songs. These technologies have the potential to greatly increase the worldwide impact of Shiping folk music culture. Using modern scientific and technical approaches not only assures the effective preservation and transmission of Hakka folk song culture but also raises the skill level and artistic attractiveness of Shiping folk song performances. This complete approach emphasizes the significance of education, literacy, and preservation in preserving the vibrancy of Shiping Folk Songs.

### Education Institutions in the Preservation of Shiping Folk Songs

The significance of local higher education institutions and cultural research departments in the conservation and advancement of Shiping folk music cannot be overstated. These establishments, such as universities and cultural research centers, provide a substantial contribution to the development of the local culture. In areas where Shiping Folk Songs are widespread, higher education institutions and cultural research organizations play a crucial role in promoting the protection and development of Shiping Folk Songs. In order to achieve this objective, it is crucial to utilize the material, human, and intellectual resources that are present at colleges and research institutions to aid in the conservation and advancement of Shiping folk music.

The Weiyuan Branch of Neijiang Radio and Television University can be a vital asset in the preservation of Shiping folk melodies. Utilizing the educational benefits of a radio and television university, one might endeavor to enhance knowledge regarding the national cultural worth and cultural heritage significance of Shiping Folk Songs. Implementing educational and artistic initiatives centered on Shiping Folk Songs with a successful target audience of locals, particularly middle-aged and elderly people who have a deep appreciation for Hakka folk music, can achieve this.

Neijiang Normal University, a prestigious local institution located in the Hakka region, namely in Weiyuan, has the capacity to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Shiping Folk Songs. Shiping Folk Songs and dances may be studied and performed by using the knowledge and skills of university teachers and doing research. College educators may actively participate in the preservation and advancement of Hakka folk culture, particularly Shiping folk music, through cultural study. Music departments may contribute by fostering music talents who can excel in the mastery of Shiping Folk Songs, thereby generating further successors to the Shiping folk song tradition and music educators. Several college faculty members have previously published pertinent research articles on Shiping Folk Songs, illustrating that research serves as a means of preserving and passing along cultural heritage.

By incorporating Shiping Folk Songs into the curricula of colleges and universities as a component of local folk culture, this artistic expression may maintain its vitality and significance in modern society, fostering inventive progress. Integrating talent resources from higher education institutions may significantly improve the creative innovation and quality of Shiping folk song music. The effective advancement of Shiping folk song art relies on research-driven conservation and education-based inheritance.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion and conclusion of the study on the preservation of Sichuan Shiping Folk Songs in Weiyuan County, China, emphasize the significance of different stakeholders in protecting this invaluable cultural legacy, such as local communities, governments, educational institutions, and

cultural research organizations. Wang Chunling's study on "Sichuan Hakka Dialect" focuses on the origin, pronunciation, vocabulary, and other elements of the dialect. This preservation initiative aligns with her work. She extensively examines the origins, distribution, migration, and traditional traditions of the Sichuan Hakka dialect, providing insight into its cultural qualities and significance via comparative examination (Wang, 2018).

Furthermore, Cui Rongchang's monograph, "Hakka Dialects in Sichuan," improves our understanding of Hakka culture and heritage. He meticulously examines the phonology, sound shifts, rhyme coordination, homophone lexicon, entries, and diverse grammatical illustrations of Hakka dialects in several locations in Sichuan, including Chengdu Hexing, Neijiang Weiyuan, Nanchong Yilong, and Xichang. This comprehensive investigation highlights the phonetic and lexical characteristics of Sichuan Hakka dialects (Cui, 2012). These efforts and studies emphasize the need for conserving and advocating for the cultural legacy of Sichuan Shiping Folk Songs and Hakka dialects. This enhances our comprehension of the region's cultural variety and linguistic customs.

Within the domain of music, both communities and government institutions acknowledge the abundant heritage that prevails. This viewpoint corresponds with Feng Guangyu's claim that the fusion of Central Plains immigrant music and indigenous music is a slow and complex process. Music from many ethnic groups intertwines, merges, and reciprocally impacts each other, culminating in a cultural fabric where components are shared and traded. The relationship is reciprocal, with mutual support and interdependence. Mountain songs are commonly performed among many ethnic populations (Fang, 1999).

Feng Guangyu performed a persuasive comparison to exemplify the principle of reciprocal learning and sharing of folk tunes among distinct ethnic groups. He compared the musical melodies of the Yao people's mountain song from Jiangxi, titled "Hanging on the Head with Pearls," with the Hakka people's mountain song from Jiangxi, titled "Brother hasn't been here for a long time." This comparative investigation provides compelling evidence of the interconnectedness between music and cultural interaction among diverse ethnic populations.

In conclusion, the study on the preservation of Sichuan Shiping Folk Songs in Weiyuan County, China, highlights the importance of various stakeholders in safeguarding this cultural heritage. Local communities, governmental entities, educational institutions, cultural research units, and passionate individuals are all involved in preserving and promoting this cultural treasure. Schools like Shiping Primary School and Guanyingtian Town Central School have established specialized teaching points to nurture cultural literacy and knowledge preservation. Hakka folk musicians and singers have also contributed to the transmission and promotion of national folk music culture, particularly in the context of Shiping Folk Songs. Government support is crucial for overcoming financial constraints and promoting cultural tourism and the use of modern media technologies. Local higher

education institutions and research units also contribute to cultural preservation and promotion.

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