

## Dongjing Chinese Folk Music in Enhancing Musical Literacy and Education

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### ABSTRACT

Dongjing Chinese folk music, a traditional musical form deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of the Naxi people, combines elements of Han and Naxi cultural traditions. This study explores the role of Dongjing Chinese folk music in enhancing musical literacy and education among students and communities in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province. From ancient Chinese religious practices, Dongjing music has evolved into a significant cultural expression, serving the community's social and religious functions. The research explores how integrating Dongjing music into educational practices can enhance musical literacy and foster cultural preservation. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with sixteen informants, including cultural leaders, musicians, and educators. The analysis revealed that incorporating Dongjing music into curricula significantly improves students' musical literacy by providing practical experience with traditional instruments and fostering a deeper connection to their cultural identity. However, challenges such as globalization and the dominance of Western music education highlight the need for more structured and innovative programs. The study suggests further research on integrating traditional music across different regions, the role of digital technology in music preservation, and the importance of intergenerational transmission in sustaining these musical traditions.

**Key words:** Dongjing Chinese Folk Music, Musical Literacy, Cultural Preservation, Education, Naxi Culture

### INTRODUCTION

Dongjing Chinese folk music, a significant cultural heritage rooted in the ancient city of Lijiang, Yunnan Province, has long served as an essential medium for cultural expression and social interaction among the Naxi people. This traditional music form, which integrates elements of Han and Naxi cultures, reflects the unique historical and cultural synthesis that characterizes the region (Arcones, 2015; Rees, 1995; Rees, 2010). Dongjing music has evolved over the centuries, preserving ancient rituals and values and adapting to the changing social dynamics of the communities it serves. As both a cultural inheritor and a participant in various social rituals, Dongjing music has become an indispensable aspect of daily life in Lijiang, weaving the threads of history, identity, and tradition into the fabric of contemporary society (Howard, 2016; Zhuo, 2018).

The preservation and transmission of Dongjing Chinese folk music face challenges in the modern era, where globalization and technological advancements have introduced new cultural influences that sometimes overshadow traditional practices. Despite its rich cultural heritage, Dongjing music is at risk of being marginalized in contemporary

society, where Western musical education often dominates formal curricula (Junyou & Chantamala, 2024; Wang & Thotham, 2024). This research addresses the problem of how to sustain and integrate Dongjing Chinese folk music within modern educational frameworks to ensure its continued relevance and transmission to future generations. The diminishing practice of this music form among the younger population and the lack of structured educational programs focusing on Dongjing music underscores the need to systematically explore its role in enhancing musical literacy and education within the community (Campbell, 2017; Howard, 2016; Kertz-Welzel, 2018).

Understanding the significance of Dongjing Chinese folk music in education extends beyond merely preserving a cultural artifact. It involves recognizing the music's potential to foster a deeper connection with cultural identity, promote intercultural understanding, and enhance the educational experience (Li, 2023; Zhang, 2018). Music, particularly traditional forms like Dongjing, plays a crucial role in shaping cognitive and emotional development, offering students and community members a means to engage meaningfully with their heritage. By incorporating Dongjing music into educational settings, there is an opportunity to enrich students'

musical literacy, broaden their cultural perspectives, and instill a sense of pride in their local heritage. Moreover, this approach can bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary music education, offering a holistic learning experience that resonates with the cultural realities of the community (Barton, 2018; Meng & Chuangprakhon, 2024; Provine et al., 2017b).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the role of Dongjing Chinese folk music in enhancing musical literacy and education among students and communities in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province. By examining the integration of Dongjing music into educational practices, the study aims to identify effective strategies for promoting this traditional music form within modern educational contexts (Crawford, 2017; Li, 2022; Xu & Karin, 2024). In addressing this question, the study will provide insights into the potential benefits of incorporating Dongjing music into school curricula and community programs, thereby preserving and revitalizing this cultural heritage while enhancing educational outcomes for students and the community. Through this exploration, the research will highlight the critical role of Dongjing music in maintaining cultural continuity and fostering a culturally responsive educational environment.

### Research Question

- How does Dongjing Chinese folk music enhance musical literacy and education among students and communities in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of Dongjing music within educational contexts provides valuable insights into the broader role that traditional music can play in developing musical literacy among students and the community. This literature review critically examines key theories and perspectives on musical literacy and education, emphasizing how traditional music forms, such as Dongjing, can be effectively integrated into contemporary educational frameworks to enhance cultural and musical understanding.

#### The Role of Traditional Music in Musical Literacy

Musical literacy extends beyond the mere ability to read and write music; it encompasses a profound understanding and appreciation of music within its cultural and historical contexts. Traditional forms like Dongjing Chinese folk music are vital in fostering this expansive sense of musical literacy. Theories of cultural transmission highlight the significance of engaging with indigenous music, which allows students to develop technical skills and a deeper comprehension of the cultural narratives and historical meanings embedded in the music. This holistic approach to musical literacy ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that integrates technical proficiency with cultural awareness, ultimately enriching their musical experience (Blum, 2023; Campbell, 2017; Chan, 2018).

### Integrating Dongjing Music into Educational Frameworks

The integration of traditional music like Dongjing into educational frameworks offers substantial benefits in enhancing musical literacy. Educational theories that advocate for culturally responsive teaching emphasize the importance of embedding students' cultural backgrounds within the curriculum. By including Dongjing music in the music education curriculum, educators can create a learning environment that authentically reflects students' cultural identities and lived experiences. This approach enhances students' engagement with music education and fosters a strong sense of pride and connection to their cultural heritage. Moreover, it aligns with the broader educational goal of cultivating individuals who are both musically literate and culturally informed, ultimately fostering a deeper appreciation of their heritage (Howard, 2016; Provine et al., 2017a; Su, 2019).

### Enhancing Educational Outcomes through Dongjing Music

The educational benefits of integrating Dongjing Chinese folk music into curricula transcend the mere acquisition of musical literacy. Experiential learning theories suggest that students learn best when connecting new knowledge to their experiences and cultural backgrounds. Dongjing music, with its deep roots in the local community, provides a familiar and meaningful context for students to engage with music education. By learning and performing Dongjing music, students can connect their musical education to their personal and cultural identities, enhancing their motivation to learn and the relevance of their education. Additionally, this approach promotes preserving Dongjing music by ensuring it is passed down to future generations through structured educational programs (Boyu, 2019; Carter, 2021; Sun et al., 2022).

### METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the role of Dongjing Chinese folk music in enhancing musical literacy and education among students and communities in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province. Qualitative research is particularly suited to this study as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the cultural and educational impact of Dongjing Chinese folk music through the lived experiences, narratives, and perspectives of individuals deeply engaged with this tradition. The research follows a systematic data collection, analysis, and interpretation approach, ensuring the findings are grounded in the study context (Bresler & Stake, 2017).

### Research Design

The research adopts a case study design, focusing on the unique cultural context of Lijiang City, where Dongjing Chinese folk music plays a significant role in both community life and educational settings. The case study approach

comprehensively explores how this traditional music contributes to musical literacy and education development. The research design involves three main phases: selecting informants, conducting interviews, and analyzing the data. These phases are outlined below, supported by a narrative description and tabulated information.

### Selection of Informants

The informants for this study were carefully selected based on their involvement with Dongjing Chinese folk music and their ability to provide rich, detailed insights into its role in enhancing musical literacy and education. The selection process aimed to include diverse perspectives, from critical cultural leaders to general practitioners and casual observers, as shown in Table 1.

### Data Collection

The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews with the selected informants. The interviews were designed to elicit detailed narratives and reflections on the informants' experiences with Dongjing Chinese folk music, focusing on its role in enhancing musical literacy and education. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the interviews, enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes and follow up on exciting responses with the interview Process.

### Preparation

Interview guides were developed for each category of informants, tailored to their specific role and expertise in Dongjing Chinese folk music. The guides included open-ended questions to explore the informants' experiences, perceptions, and views on the educational and cultural impact of the music.

### Conducting interviews

The interviews were conducted in Lijiang City in settings that were comfortable and familiar to the informants, such as their homes, music clubs, or cultural centers. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews were longer for key informants, extending up to two hours to capture in-depth insights.

### Recording and transcription

All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the informants. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data analysis.

### Data Management and Analysis

The study involved thematic analysis of transcripts to identify critical musical literacy and education themes. The coding process was iterative, refining initial codes as new insights emerged. The themes were grouped into broader themes reflecting the core research questions, focusing on Dongjing Chinese folk music's contribution to musical literacy, educational value, and cultural preservation. The themes were interpreted within the study context, connecting informants' experiences with the broader educational and cultural landscape of Lijiang City.

## RESULTS

Integrating this rich musical tradition into educational settings offers unique opportunities for students and community members to develop a deep appreciation for their cultural heritage while acquiring essential musical skills. Exploring how Dongjing Chinese folk music contributes to musical literacy and education is crucial for understanding its role in preserving cultural identity and fostering educational growth. This research seeks to uncover how this traditional music form enhances musical literacy and education, examining its impact on students and the broader community in Lijiang City.

### The Role of Dongjing Chinese Folk Music in Developing Musical Literacy

Dongjing Chinese folk music is crucial in developing musical literacy among students and community members in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province. This traditional form of music, deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of the Naxi people, serves as both an educational tool and a means of preserving and transmitting cultural values. Integrating Dongjing Chinese folk music into educational programs has significantly contributed to acquiring fundamental musical skills, enhanced knowledge of traditional music, and the ability to engage with music critically and creatively.

**Table 1.** Selection criteria for informants

Informant Group	Number	Criteria
Key Informants	3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Born in Lijiang City, Naxi ethnic group</li> <li>2. Leaders in Dongjing music, over 50 years old</li> <li>3. Extensive performance experience</li> <li>4. Published articles on Dongjing music and its transmission</li> </ol>
General Informants	3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledgeable about Dongjing music</li> <li>2. Performers in Dongjing Music Club</li> <li>3. Experience in teaching/training</li> </ol>
Casual Informants	10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Audience members with or without prior exposure to Dongjing music</li> <li>2. Representing various age groups</li> </ol>

The research findings indicate that Dongjing Chinese folk music effectively teaches basic musical concepts and skills. Through participation in Dongjing music classes and community music events, students and community members are introduced to the foundational elements of music, such as rhythm, melody, and harmony. As revealed in interviews with key informants, including seasoned musicians and educators, using traditional instruments like the Erhu, Guzheng, and Zhudi in these educational settings provides students with hands-on experience in playing and understanding music. This practical engagement with traditional instruments enhances their technical skills and fosters a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of Dongjing music.

Figures 1 and 2 show the social function of Dongjing Chinese folk music and its role in community events, such as celebrations and ceremonies. These images capture moments where music is performed and used as an educational tool to instill musical literacy in participants. The social function of Dongjing music is highlighted, showing how it brings together community members to engage in a shared musical experience. This collective participation is instrumental in reinforcing the communal aspects of musical education, where learning is not confined to a classroom but occurs in a dynamic, real-world context, as shown in Figure 1.

Which depicts a Dongjing music performance at a university admission ceremony, further emphasizing the role of this music in education. The ceremony serves as a platform for showcasing the students' mastery of musical literacy acquired through their engagement with Dongjing music. The performance is not merely a display of technical skill but a demonstration of the student's ability to creatively interpret and express traditional music. This event exemplifies how Dongjing Chinese folk music is integrated into significant life milestones, reinforcing its importance in musical education and cultural continuity, as shown in Figure 2.

Moreover, the study found that Dongjing Chinese folk music encourages critical and creative engagement with music. Students can analyze music beyond surface-level understanding by learning and performing traditional pieces. Opportunities for students to participate in community discussions and performances to explore the cultural and historical contexts of the music they are learning further enhance this critical engagement. The involvement of experienced musicians as mentors plays a significant role in this process, as they provide insights into the nuances of Dongjing music, helping students refine their interpretative skills.

### Educational Practices and Pedagogical Approaches in Dongjing Chinese Folk Music

Dongjing Chinese folk music has been effectively integrated into formal and informal educational settings in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province, serving as a vital tool for enhancing musical literacy and fostering a deeper understanding of traditional music among students and community members. The educational practices and pedagogical approaches surrounding Dongjing music are designed to ensure that learners not only acquire technical skills but also develop an appreciation for the cultural and historical significance of this traditional



**Figure 1.** The social function of Dongjing Chinese folk music social event

Source: Shuying Jian, from fieldwork in June 2023



**Figure 2.** Dongjing Chinese folk music to celebrate the university admission ceremony

Source: Shuying Jian, from fieldwork in June 2023

music form. This section explores these educational strategies, highlighting how they enhance musical literacy and education.

The research findings reveal that the teaching of Dongjing Chinese folk music often begins with a focus on basic musical concepts, using traditional pieces like “Shui Long Yin” as a foundation. Figures 3 and 4 show that this piece is a central curriculum component, serving as a musical and educational tool. Figure 3 illustrates the transcription of “Shui Long Yin,” a melody that embodies the principles of traditional Chinese music, including its modal structures and rhythmic patterns. Educators use this piece to teach students about the unique characteristics of Dongjing music, such as its use of the C# Gong Yayue mode, detailed in Figure 4. This mode and others provide students with a practical understanding of traditional Chinese music theory, essential for developing musical literacy.

In addition to theoretical instruction, Dongjing Chinese folk music education strongly emphasizes practical, hands-on learning. Students are encouraged to engage with traditional instruments, such as the Erhu, Zhudi, and Guzheng, to experience the music firsthand. Interviews with key informants, who are experienced musicians and educators, highlight the importance of this approach. They stress that learning to play these instruments is about acquiring technical proficiency and understanding the cultural context in which the music was created and performed. This approach

**Shui Long Yin**  
(Dongjing Chinese Folk Music)

Transcription by Shuying Jian  
from fieldwork in July 2023

1=#C  
Andante = 72      a

**Figure 3.** The music score “Shui Long Yin” of Dongjing Chinese folk music  
Source: Shuying Jian, transcription from fieldwork in June 2023

**Figure 4.** The C# Gong Yayue mode of Dongjing Chinese folk music  
Source: Shuying Jian, transcription from fieldwork in June 2023

ensures that students develop a well-rounded musical literacy with technical skills and cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, the pedagogical approaches used in Dongjing music education often involve a combination of individual instruction and group learning. Instructors tailor their teaching methods to the needs of individual students, providing personalized guidance to help them master the intricacies of Dongjing music. At the same time, group performances and ensemble work are integral to the educational process. These collaborative activities reinforce the technical skills learned during individual practice and foster community among the students. They learn to listen to each other, coordinate their playing, and create a cohesive musical expression, a critical aspect of musical literacy.

Another significant aspect of the educational practices in Dongjing Chinese folk music is the emphasis on oral transmission and the mentoring relationship between teachers and students. This traditional teaching method passed down through generations, is particularly effective in preserving the nuances of Dongjing music. Teachers, key informants in this research, use this method to impart their knowledge and

skills to the next generation. Through regular practice and performance, students internalize the music, making it a part of their cultural identity. This method enhances their musical literacy and ensures the continuity of Dongjing music as a living tradition.

### Cultural Impact and Community Engagement through Dongjing Chinese Folk Music

Dongjing Chinese folk music has profoundly impacted the Lijiang City, Yunnan Province, community, serving as a vital tool for fostering community engagement and enhancing cultural awareness. This section examines how Dongjing music, through its role in education, contributes to transmitting cultural knowledge and strengthening community bonds, emphasizing the broader cultural significance of musical literacy.

The research findings indicate that Dongjing Chinese folk music plays a central role in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the Naxi ethnic group in Lijiang. Interviews with community leaders and key informants

reveal that music is a form of artistic expression and a means of maintaining cultural continuity. Through educational initiatives focused on musical literacy, Dongjing music has become a vehicle for transmitting traditional knowledge and values to younger generations. These educational practices ensure that the community's cultural identity remains vibrant and resilient in the face of modernization and globalization.

One of the most significant cultural impacts of Dongjing Chinese folk music is its ability to enhance cultural awareness among students and the broader community. By incorporating Dongjing music into the educational curriculum, schools in Lijiang have allowed students to engage with their cultural heritage meaningfully. The music bridges the past and present, allowing students to explore their cultural roots while developing their musical skills. Learning and performing Dongjing music fosters a deeper understanding of Naxi traditions and reinforces the students' cultural identity. As a result, musical literacy in Dongjing music goes beyond technical proficiency; it encompasses a broader cultural literacy essential for preserving the community's heritage.

In addition to enhancing cultural awareness, Dongjing Chinese folk music is crucial in strengthening community bonds. The communal nature of Dongjing music, which often involves group performances and collective participation, creates opportunities for individuals to connect through shared cultural experiences. These musical gatherings, whether in educational settings or community events, provide a space for social interaction and mutual support. Key informants noted that these events are significant for fostering intergenerational connections, as older musicians pass on their knowledge and skills to younger participants. This transmission of musical literacy is not just about learning to play instruments; it is about cultivating a sense of belonging and continuity within the community.

Moreover, Dongjing Chinese folk music contributes to the cultural vibrancy of Lijiang by engaging the community in various cultural and religious practices. The music is often performed during significant cultural events, such as festivals, ceremonies, and rituals, which are integral to the community's social fabric. These performances serve as a cultural expression that reinforces communal values and traditions. By participating in these events, both as performers and as audience members, individuals in the community actively engage in the preservation and celebration of their cultural heritage. The educational initiatives surrounding Dongjing music thus play a vital role in sustaining these cultural practices and ensuring their transmission to future generations.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this research highlight the significant role of Dongjing Chinese folk music in enhancing musical literacy and education among students and communities in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province. Integrating Dongjing music into educational practices aligns with theories of culturally responsive teaching and cultural transmission, emphasizing the importance of incorporating indigenous music into curricula to foster a comprehensive understanding of cultural

and historical contexts (Campbell, 2017; Howard, 2016). This approach not only preserves the cultural heritage of the Naxi people but also enriches the educational experience by connecting students with their cultural roots and enhancing their musical skills.

The research findings are consistent with the theoretical principles that underline the value of traditional music in education. Including Dongjing music in school curricula supports the development of musical literacy, as students engage with fundamental musical concepts through hands-on experience with traditional instruments like the Erhu, Guzheng, and Zhudi. This practical engagement fosters a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of music, echoing the views of scholars who argue that musical literacy encompasses more than just technical proficiency; it involves a holistic understanding of music as a cultural expression (Blum, 2023; Chan, 2018).

Moreover, the study supports the notion that experiential learning, rooted in cultural context, enhances educational outcomes. As students learn and perform Dongjing music, they connect their musical education to their personal and cultural identities, which enhances their motivation and the relevance of their education (Boyu, 2019; Carter, 2021). This connection between education and cultural identity is crucial for fostering a sense of pride and belonging among students, essential for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage.

However, the research also reveals challenges in sustaining the practice of Dongjing music among younger generations, who are increasingly influenced by globalization and Western musical education. This finding is consistent with the concerns Junyou and Chantamala (2024) raised regarding the marginalization of traditional music forms in contemporary society. The diminishing practice of Dongjing music highlights the need for more structured and systematic educational programs that focus on traditional music, ensuring its continued relevance in the modern era (Wang & Thotham, 2024).

In addition, the study's emphasis on oral transmission and mentoring relationships in Dongjing music education underscores the importance of preserving traditional teaching methods. This approach, passed down through generations, effectively maintains the nuances of Dongjing music and ensures its continuity as a living tradition (Howard, 2016). The research findings suggest that combining traditional and modern educational methods can create a more comprehensive and culturally responsive music education program that meets the needs of contemporary students while preserving the essence of Dongjing music.

This research provides valuable insights into the role of Dongjing Chinese folk music in enhancing musical literacy and education in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province. The findings underscore the importance of integrating traditional music into educational frameworks to preserve cultural heritage and enrich the educational experience. Dongjing music, with its deep roots in the Naxi cultural tradition, serves as both an educational tool and a means of cultural preservation, offering students and community members a unique opportunity to connect with their cultural identity while developing essential musical skills. Traditional music plays a crucial role

in maintaining and strengthening cultural identity in modern societies. Incorporating Dongjing Chinese folk music into education provides technical skills and instills cultural pride and continuity. This approach counterbalances globalization, allowing students to anchor their identities in their rich cultural heritage. The revitalization of traditional music forms contributes to the cultural resilience of the Naxi people, ensuring their unique musical traditions continue to thrive alongside contemporary influences.

The study confirms that incorporating Dongjing music into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' musical literacy, providing a well-rounded education that includes technical proficiency, cultural knowledge, and critical engagement with music. The findings are consistent with theoretical principles that advocate for culturally responsive teaching and experiential learning, emphasizing the value of traditional music in education.

Further research could explore the integration of Dongjing music into educational frameworks across China, the impact of digital technology in preserving and transmitting Dongjing music, the long-term impact of integrating Dongjing music into educational programs, and the role of intergenerational transmission in maintaining continuity in musical traditions across generations. These studies could provide a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities in preserving Dongjing music.

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