Music of Panwang Festival ceremony in northern Guangdong Province China

YiFei Liu¹,², Krisada Daoruang³*

¹Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Bangkok, Thailand
²Shaoguan College, Shaoguan, China
³Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract: The purpose of this research is to study The Historical Background of the Panwang Festival and its Ceremonial Music Characteristics in the Yao Region of Northern Guangdong Province, China. Use qualitative research processes along with field studies. Data were collected through interviews and literature research. The history and current situation of the Yao ethnic group and their ancestor worship ceremony, the Panwang Festival, in Ruyuan County, northern Guangdong, China, are discussed, and the characteristics of the ceremonial music of the Panwang Festival are analysed. The research found were: 1) Geographical Characteristics and Ethnic History of the Yao Ethnic Area in Ruyuan County, Northern Guangdong Province. 2) History and content of the "Panwang Festival" rituals in the region. 3) Characteristics of musical instruments, songs and singing in the "Panwang Festival" ceremonies of the region. It reveals the geographical features, history and humanity of the Yao region in northern Guangdong as well as the unique musical style and cultural connotations of the Panwang Festival ritual music in the region. The aim is to better understand and pass on the Yao music culture, to excavate and reveal its cultural connotations and values, to promote cross-cultural exchanges and academic co-operation, and to contribute to the protection and development of Yao music culture.

1. Introduction

In the traditional cultural system of ethnic minorities, festival ceremonies are the most important activities in their daily lives, and they are their way of manifesting their ethnic identity, cultural identity. (Zhao, SF. 2020)¹

The traditional festival culture is the epitome of the local cultural system, and it is the presentation of the relationship between man and nature, man and man, man and god, etc., which local residents thinking under the accumulation of long-term survival experience, props. (Qin, MY & Jirawat, Vongphantuset. 2022)²

The Yao people of northern Guangdong have lived in the steep mountainous terrain of Lingnan since ancient times, and their rich cultural resources of ethnic minorities have been well preserved and continued due to the closed environment. Through their language, beliefs, customs and habits, it can be seen that the collective memory of the ethnic group is well preserved. The Worship of Pan Wang by the Yao People in Northern Guangdong has undergone an evolutionary process from primitive to civilised, with sacrificial rituals as the main mode of expression, enabling future generations to better understand the origin and development of the ethnic group. (Li, BF. 2018)³ With the listing of the "Yao Panwang Festival" as the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage, the Panwang Festival Ceremony pays more attention to the excavation and restoration of the cultural and artistic characteristics of the festival, and thus satisfy to a wider extent the public's psychological demand for the aesthetics of artistic and cultural diversities. (Zhang, XH. 2014)⁴

For the Yao, the Panwang inheritance is diverse in terms of ritual knowledge, textual accounts, and oral transmission, and there are multiple elements of inheritance. These elements are intricately and non-contradictorily fused into a whole, forming the basis of a ritual that has been passed down from generation to generation. (Tsutako Hirota. 2014)⁵

The Yao people are an ethnic minority with a long history and a unique culture in southern China, and the "Guoshanyao" of Ruyuan County in northern Guangdong is the most culturally representative branch. Music is often the mirror of a nation's culture, and the ceremonial music of this Yao region has unique stylistic features and cultural connotations, and is an important part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Yao people.

2. Information of Yao Groups and the
Yao Panwang Festival in Ruyuan County, Guangdong Province, China

Ruyuan County is located in the northern part of Guangdong Province, Shaoguan City, the western part of the city, east of Shaoguan City, Wujiang District, west of Qingyuan City, Yangshan County, south of Qingyuan Yingde City, north of the border with the city of Lechang, the north-west corner of the Yizhang County, Hunan Province, China, one of the three ethnic minority autonomous counties in Guangdong Province. As show in figure 1.

Figure 1: Ruyuan County on the map of Guangdong
Figure Source: https://www.poi86.com

The Ruyuan Yao is one of the four major branches of the Yao people in China, and is known as the "Guo Shan Yao", with Ruyuan County in Guangdong Province as its center of distribution. Their language belongs to the Yao branch of the Miaoyao language of the Sino-Tibetan language family, and their language is widely distributed among Yao people all over the world. There are Yao people who speak "Mian" language in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Yunnan, Thailand, and the United States, France, Canada, etc. They call themselves "Mian". The Yao people of Ruyuan call themselves "Mian" or "Youlu" or "Yilu". In old China, the Yao people, unable to endure the discrimination and oppression of the rulers, hid their families in the mountains and lived a hard life of nomadic farming and living in the mountains. As show in figure 2.

Figure 2: Yao ethnic group in Ruyuan County
Figure Source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/HA9dy77TY5VtMAWnYuC5A

The Yao people believe that the ancient Chinese myth of "Pan Wang" is their ancestor. Pangwang Festival, also known as Taigong Wish, Jumping Pangwang, Jumping Pangwang, Sacrificing Pangwang, Sacrificing Pangwang, Tuning Pangwang, Pangwang Festival, Playing Pangwang, Playing Boring, Worshiping the King, Jumping King, Tuning King, Hui Lang, Jumping Drum Hall, Jumping Ancient Hall, Juggling Song Hall, also known as Returning the Wish of Pangwang Huang and Playing Pangwang Jai, is a festival of worship for the Yao people, which has a theme of worshipping the gods and remembering their ancestors. As show in figure 3.

Figure 3: Statue of PanWang
Figure Source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/UqhynXaYwfWWwShDHHmz1A

On the eve of the Yao Panwang Festival, the Yao people will choose a spacious place as an altar to hang the statues of the gods, with the biggest one in the centre being the statue of Panwang, and the statues of Zhenwu, Gongcao, Tiangong, and Earth Mother to the left and right. At the beginning of the festival, the Yao tribal elders will offer offerings such as pig's head, glutinous rice, chicken and wine in front of the idol. People face the idols and bow their heads in silent
prayer to show their respect and remembrance. As shown in figure 4.

![Figure 4: Panwang Festival Ritual FigureSource:https://www.ddgx.cn/show/42-4741.html](https://www.ddgx.cn/show/42-4741.html)

The Yao tribal elders will sound a musket three times, followed by firecrackers, and in the sound of the firecrackers, the Yao people will sing the Panwang song and dance the Panwang dance. This is one of the important activities of the Yao Panwang Festival, in which people will put on the traditional Yao costumes, imitate the posture of their ancestors Pan Geng and Pan Gu, and dance various dances rich in ethnic characteristics. During the sacrificial ceremony, the Yao people will also pray for good weather conditions and a good harvest in the coming year. They will pray to the statue of Pan Wang to bless the production and life of the Yao family and pray for the peace and health of their families.

### 3. Music characteristics of Pan Wang Festival ceremony in northern Guangdong Province China

#### 3.1 Musical Instruments Commonly Used in Ceremonies

Originating from the Tang Dynasty in China, the Yao big drum is a folk musical instrument created by the Yao ancestors in their long-term production and life. The body of the drum is made of wood, painted with national totem patterns and tied with a red silk about 20cm wide. The upper and lower ends of the drum are covered with cowhide or pigskin, and the joints are inlaid with iron nails, with a drum diameter of 90-120 cm and a drum height of 50 cm to 80 cm. The Yao big drums were initially used in rituals, ceremonies and other activities, and later gradually evolved into an indispensable part of the life of the Yao people. In Yao traditional culture, the big drum is regarded as a sacred object, with a very high status and sacred significance. The Yao big drum is an important part of Yao culture, which contains the history, beliefs, customs and other cultural connotations of the Yao people. In Yao traditional culture, the drum represents unity, strength and sanctity. In ritual activities, the Yao people will communicate with the gods and send messages by beating the big drums. In addition, big drums are also used to celebrate harvests, festivals and other occasions, which is one of the important ways for Yao people to express their joy and pray for happiness. The Yao big drums have unique artistic characteristics, with fine craftsmanship, beautiful modelling, strong sound and fast rhythm. The drums are played in various ways, either solo, ensemble or with dancing. During the performance, the drummers will show a strong sense of rhythm and rhyme by striking the drum surface, the drum edge and the change of drumsticks, etc. At the same time, the performance of the drum is also related to the drums. At the same time, the performance of the drums is also closely related to the art forms of the Yao people, such as songs, dances and poems, and is an important part of the Yao culture. As shown in figure 5.

![Figure 5: The Yao big drum](https://www.ddgx.cn/show/42-4741.html)

The Yao small long drum is a percussion instrument that provides drumming rhythms for the Panwang Festival ceremonial activities. It is made of lightweight paulownia wood, 2 feet 3 inches long, with the waist of the drum in the middle as thin as the palm of an average adult's finger, and the two ends are rounded and the size of the drum is like one, which is hollowed out and covered with high-quality animal skins, which can be struck with a clear and crisp sound. The body of the drum is painted in red or yellow, with a contrasting tortoise shell pattern, the lace is decorated with undulating and orderly "dog's tooth flowers", and the animal skin is decorated with a circle of golden yellow flower spikes to add colour. The Yao small long drum is divided into two ends, the upper end is wide and the lower end is narrow, implying that the upper part is the sky and the lower part is the earth, and the reason why the middle part of the drum is hollowed out is similar to the metaphor of heaven and earth communicating with each other and looking at each other, and the Yao people use the snare drum to connect the heaven and earth and the gods, and the modelling characteristics of the small long drum not only reflect the Yao people's worship of the gods and the spirits, which in turn reflects their admiration for the gods even more, but also demonstrates the stylistic beauty of the Yao small long drum. As shown in figure 6.
3.2 Sacrificial Songs in the Ceremony

The song "The Birth of Pan Wang", which must be sung at the ritual ceremony of the Yao Pan Wang Festival in Ruyuan County, shows the image of a brave, wise and benevolent leader through the legendary story of Pan Wang. The lyrics depict how King Pan led the Yao people to become strong, defeated foreign enemies and defended their homeland, and how he taught farming, hunting, weaving and other techniques to the Yao people, leading them to live a happy life. These descriptions not only show the heroic image of King Pan, but also express the Yao people's admiration and gratitude to King Pan. Secondly, the lyrics of the song also convey the feelings of reverence and gratitude for life. It is written in the lyrics: "King Pan came out of the world, and the Yao people were saved. After a thousand years of suffering, they set up their foundation. We do not forget the well-driller when we eat water, and we do not forget King Pan's grace when we are happy." As shown in figure 7.

These lyrics express the Yao people's value of life and their gratitude to Pan Wang. They are thankful for the happy life that King Pan has brought them, and at the same time, they remember King Pan's kindness and are willing to pass it on from generation to generation and never forget it. Finally, the lyrics of the song also convey the feeling of inheriting and promoting the national culture. The lyrics read: "King Pan came out of the world, culture rose. The Yao people, remember it in their hearts." These lyrics express the Yao people's love for and inheritance of their national culture. They cherish their traditional culture and are willing to carry it forward so that more people can understand and know the Yao culture. The melodic line of this song has a lot of ups and downs and uses a lot of high and low notes, showing the unique style of Yao music. At the same time, the melody also uses a lot of decorative notes, such as glissando and trill, making the whole song full of rhythmic beauty. The melodic progression of the song is mostly in second and third degree, which can show the characteristics and beauty of Yao music. The song also uses some fourth and fifth degree progressions, which makes the melody of the whole song more colourful. The melody and lyrics are very tightly combined, with each lyric corresponding to a melodic line, which enables the listener to better understand the emotions and meanings expressed in the song. The song also employs some techniques where the melody and lyrics complement each other, making the whole song more expressive.

3.3 Singing Characteristics of Ceremonial Songs

When singing ritual songs for the Panwang Festival, singers use a combination of true and falsetto voices to make their voices strong and penetrating as well as soft and melodious. True voice means singing in the original voice, and falsetto means using the head cavity, nasal cavity and mouth to make the voice high and passionate or soft and lyrical. The singer will also use vibrato, glissando and other techniques to make the song more distinctive. Vibrato refers to the control of breath and throat vibration, resulting in a trembling effect, often used to express excitement, sadness and other emotions; glissando refers to the control of the movement of the throat, resulting in a sliding effect, often used to express soft emotions. The use of these techniques not only enhances the rhythm and expressiveness of the song, also demonstrates the singer's singing ability and artistic charm. The songs in the rituals of the Yao Panwang Festival have a unique singing voice, which is different from the bright and sweet Han Chinese folk songs, and also different from the high-pitched and impassioned Tibetan folk songs. Its voice has a primitive and rough breath, both deep and powerful feeling and soft and lyrical atmosphere. This unique way of voice expression makes the
Panwang Festival Festival Songs have more flavour and characteristics of Yao culture when sung.

4. Summary and outlook

Overall, through the in-depth study of the ritual music of the Panwang Festival of the Yao ethnic group in northern Guangdong, we have become more aware of the unique value and significance of this intangible cultural heritage. In the future, we hope that more scholars and practitioners will pay attention to this field and contribute to the preservation and inheritance of the ritual music of the Panwang Festival of the Yao ethnic group in northern Guangdong, as well as to the prosperity and development of the multiculturalism of the Chinese nation.

References


