

The Types, Functions, and Significances of Mulao's Folk Song of China

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

RECEIVED: 19-Aug-22

REVISED: 20-Nov-22

ACCEPTED: 27-Dec-22

PUBLISHED: 30-Jun-23

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Citation: Ying Wu and Pitsanu Boonsrianan (2022). The Types, Functions, and Significances of Mulao's Folk Song of China. *Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res.* 5 (1), 56–62. <https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2023.v5.n1.id1182.p56>



ABSTRACT

Mulao is an ethnic minority living only in Guangxi and their folk songs have many types and functions. The basic song types include ancient bars, freely answer, and breeze. Those songs have many functions, such as cultivating and strengthening people's national identity, spreading inter-personal communication, expressing experience and emotion, making intelligent games, relaxing, and entertaining. Mulao's folk song also has three levels of contemporary significance: comprehensively representing their national life, enhancing national cohesion, and embodying ethnic communication and unity. In addition, sharing those folk songs with other ethnicities shows that the elements of the Chinese nation are in harmony since ancient times.

Keywords: Mulao's folk song, types, functions, culture, regional style, inherit

Introduction

Mulao folk songs are the true portrayal of Mulao national culture and the folk culture text created and inherited by Mulao people in the long historical process. For a nation without a written language, the folk songs that are sung orally almost bear the whole of the national culture and spiritual life, and their importance is self-evident for the nation. However, due to the small population and cultural output of the Mulao nationality, the folk songs of the Mulao nationality have never been known by the public, and academic circles have rarely studied them. Therefore, this paper makes some investigations on the types of Mulao folk songs, analyses the performance purposes and functions of different types of Mulao folk songs, and explores the social significance of various types of Mulao folk songs.

The Classification of Mulao Folk Songs: Based on the Previous Research and National Custom

Although there are few achievements in the study of Mulao folk songs, the academic circles paid early attention to Mulao folk songs. In the 1980s, Mulao folk songs were recorded in some national literature studies. At the same time, some scholars have collected and sorted out Mulao folk songs, and these works are related to the classification of Mulao folk songs.

Chinese National Folk Literature, published in 1987, is the earliest work on Mulao folk songs. In this book, Baoyutang and Wushengzhi wrote a chapter on 'Mulao folk literature', which divides Mulao folk songs into four categories: 'ancient songs', 'casual answers', 'oral style', and 'new Folk Songs'.

In the same year, Longdianbao edited the Luocheng ballad collection, which is divided into nine kinds of Mulao songs: 'labour song', 'current politics song', 'ritual song', 'love song', 'life song', 'oral style song', 'historical legend song', 'children's song', and 'other Ballads', including birds, animals, insects and fish songs, riddles, etc. In 1992, the Guangxi volume of the collection of Chinese ballads, still written by Bao Yutang and others, was divided into eight categories: ancient songs, labour songs, current politics songs, ritual songs, love songs, life songs, history/legend/story songs, and children's songs. In 1993, Long Dianbao, Wushengzhi, and Guo Wei co-wrote the history of Mulao literature, which includes the classification of Mulao ballads in the second to fifth parts. The second part of 'Medieval Literature' divides the ballads into 'folk songs', 'bitter songs, material songs, children's songs', and 'narrative songs'. The ballads of Part III 'modern and ancient literature' include 'farming songs', 'bitter songs', 'children's songs', 'custom songs', 'love songs', and 'narrative songs'. Modern literature is divided into 'farming songs, custom songs', 'children's songs, bitter songs, love songs', and 'historical songs and current political songs'; 'contemporary literature' only lists 'new folk songs'.

After entering the new century, the greatest achievement in the study of Mulao folk songs is the publication of Mulao ancient songs. The song set is divided into eight categories: 'Kaitan song', 'gutiao song', 'walking slope song', 'oral style song', 'etiquette and customs song', 'Mulao language ancient song', 'Zhuang language love song', and 'other songs' (Jiang, 2019).

In addition, there is a method of dividing by sentence pattern and word number. According to Mr. Long Dianbao's description, the so-called sentence-style song is divided into 'two-sentence song', 'three-sentence song', 'fourteen sentences song', and so on according to the sentence number of each song. Word count songs are not only named by the number of words in each sentence but also by the number of words in the whole song. Sentence-style songs and word count songs can be crossed. Each sentence-style and word count song rhymes differently. Even the same 'six sentence 31-word song' has three rhyme formats. According to the collected ballads, according to the sentence pattern and word number, there are 44 kinds of songs and 90 forms (sentence pattern) of Mulao ancient songs. It can be described as complicated.

As discussed above, it can be seen that the researchers have not formed a unified opinion on the types of Mulao folk songs, and even a single researcher has different classifications on different occasions. In fact, it is

impossible to achieve perfect harmony in the classification of Mulao folk songs. How is the song 'coming to the slope on August 15' categorized, 'Life song', 'love song', or 'slope song'? Is a 'meet song' classified as a 'love song', or is it specifically put into the category of 'Zhuang love song' (because this song is sung in Zhuang)? Such situations can be found everywhere in Mulao songs. It can also be said that overlapping is unavoidable.

So, how to determine the name and classification of Mulao songs? It is convenient for us to understand and grasp the whole situation. The classification should be concise and general. Starting from this requirement, it is not suitable to divide the types of Mulao songs by sentence patterns or word numbers. Of course, the Mulao people also speak of 'Sentence song' and 'Word song', but they only refer to a song in this way on specific and accidental occasions. Moreover, the original folk things are characterized by frankness and freedom. How a singer sings a sentence or a song depending largely on his/her convenience. In this way, logically speaking, it is difficult to differentiate Mulao songs from sentence patterns and word numbers. Mr. Guo Wei mentioned that 42 song names and 78 sentence patterns were recorded in the history of Mulao literature, while 44 song names and 90 sentence patterns were recorded in the ancient song of Mulao. This situation means that sentence pattern and word number are not appropriate as the division criteria.

In addition, the authors investigated and examined the Mulao songs for different purposes, and determined some type names with strong epochal and ideological characteristics, such as 'current politics song', 'labour song', 'life song', and other titles, as well as 'love song' and 'children's song', which also have a modern sense. This seems to be worth discussing (Su, 2014).

Just as the commentators pointed out, in ethnological research, there is no strict academic standard for the naming of traditional cultures. However, in this case, there is another basic principle that is used, that is, 'to be established by convention'. This principle is also applicable here. That is to say, our classification and naming of Mulao song types should conform to the cognitive habits of the people of this nation, and we should use the appellation of Mulao people as much as possible. In fact, the above preliminary research also follows this principle to a certain extent.

Then, on the premise of respecting national traditions and on the basis of previous studies, we believe that Mulao folk songs can be simply classified into three categories: 'Ancient rules', 'Casual answers', and 'Oral style'.

In fact, this is basically a return to the practices of Baoyutang and Wushengzhi, but the 'New Folk Songs' they set up are deleted. Since 'New Folk Songs' are classified according to different times, and in terms of content and function, each new folk song can still be classified into the above-mentioned three categories, so it does not need to be listed separately. Second, every author and his works, whether or not they take 'gutiao', 'casual answer', or 'oral style' as first-class type names, cannot but use a lot of words to introduce and describe them. In fact, these three types of names can actually merge and integrate almost all Mulao songs, for example, Chinese National Folk Literature includes 'bitter songs', 'love songs' (including 'walking slope songs' and all other marriage customs songs), 'production and labour songs', 'custom songs', 'winding songs', and riddle songs' and other subcategories in the 'casual answer'. Third, it is true that the Mulao people refer to their own national songs and the most commonly use the following three expressions: 'Ancient rules', 'Casual answers', and 'Oral style'.

The Basic Functions of Mulao Folk Songs

Malinowski once pointed out that 'an object becomes a part of the culture, only where it is used in human activities, only where it can meet human needs'. According to this view, the reason why Mulao folk songs are popular among Mulao people is that they can meet their needs in some aspects, that is, Mulao songs have their specific functions (Fan, 1985).

First, let us consider the 'Ancient rules'. In our view, the main function of the ancient Tiao song is to implement traditional education, cultivate, and form ethnic identity. The so-called 'ancient articles', in which 'ancient' is connected with 'reason', is to sing the heroic deeds, folk stories, legends, etc. of historical figures. Each 'article' (each story) is very long, ranging from a dozen to hundreds of sentences. Myths, historical stories, legends, heroic deeds, etc. are mixed in many nationalities, that is, they are commonly referred to as 'myth historization' or 'historical mythologization', which is the case for the Chinese nation, and the 'gutiao' in Mulao folk songs is also a product of this kind.

There are several points to pay attention to about the gutiao song. First, each capital of the ancient song has relatively fixed lyrics, which cannot be fabricated casually. Lyrics content is about the origin and changes of the nation and the history of the nation. For example, the ancient and modern duet says about the history of the whole (Chinese) nation from 'who cast the placenta of

the ancient family' to 'because of the revolutionary party, the feudal dynasty went to the west'. Second, the ancient song is conducted in the form of a question-and-answer duet competition. If one party is not right, it will be a loss. Otherwise, the whole ancient song must be recorded clearly; the gutiao song is generally very long. This means that people should be very familiar with the history of the whole nation. Third, gutiao songs are usually sung when relatives and friends get together at a wedding, birthday, when moving to a new house, or on other festive days, and the singing world (song hall) opens at night. At this time, other affairs are put aside. Men and women, old and young, sing to each other. On the one hand, it is fun, and on the other hand, it also has the intention of spreading the national historical story in the ancient article to as many people in the family as possible.

The ancient songs let people know that they all belong to one ancestor, have the same past memory, and have the tradition of common worship. In other words, these things are the symbols they share, including the values contained therein. These things are commonly referred to as 'culture'. As a nation, it is 'manifested in the common culture', so these things make them form a consensus: they are of the same origin, are a family, and are one. They share weal and woe with destiny and must survive and continue together. The ancient Tiao songs played a role in making the Mulao people recognize and maintain them as a bond of a specific nation (Li, 1997).

Of course, morality and ethics, customs, or some common sense in daily life, as well as some characteristics of lifestyle, also have the function of connecting and condensing groups. The folk songs in the ancient articles also convey a lot of content that the Mulao people are different from other ethnic groups. These contents have accumulated the wisdom and talents of the Mulao people, with their way of thinking and emotional attitude, which also make them different from other tribes or ethnic groups.

The second category is 'Casual answers'. Casually, it is sung on weekdays when driving along the polder, going uphill, visiting relatives and looking for friends, or working in production. It can also be sung on auspicious days such as marriage. 'Answer casually' literally means to answer by singing. Therefore, this kind of song has no fixed lyrics and libretto, but is improvised and sung on site. It is a form of performance that tests people's adaptability and talent and wisdom.

If the ancient article focuses on talking about the ancient, then the casual answer is mainly about the

present. It is the product of the daily life of the Mulao people and also serves their current real-life practices. In order to complete the marriage event in life, young men and women naturally want to talk about love, that is, the so-called 'going downhill'. When they meet each other for the first time, if they are interested in each other, they can sing the song of blocking the way or the song of walking slope to invite the other to sing to test. Both sides are optimistic, so they sing 'ask for things' and 'calculate the day', the second time they meet, they sing shoudeng song, jieshuang song, and tongnian song. When saying goodbye, they sing 'temporary separation' or 'I was flustered when I went the same year' to show reluctance. To express the feeling of missing, cacia song, Miss Li Tao, etc. are sung. The whole process of the wedding ceremony is accompanied by singing. Before the bride goes out, she sings 'the cry song of the bride' and 'the cry song of the bride's dress'. Bridesmaids also have 'bridesmaids accompany sigh song'. When they come to the door, a group of young men in the village sing the song of the new man entering the house to congratulate the new man and his host. During the worship, everyone sings 'worship song' and 'wedding song'. During the banquet, 'song of thanks' is sung, and after the banquet, 'wedding song' is sung in front of the song hall after marriage. When a child is born, songs at the full moon banquet, such as 'ginger wine song' and 'He Sheng Prince's wedding song' are sung. Mulao people used to call these songs 'ginger wine song' and 'he Jiang wine song'. Similarly, during ceremonies of birthday and house building, 'birthday song' and 'house rising song' are sung accordingly. (Note: The names of the songs quoted in this paragraph are all from the ancient song of Mulao nationality by long Dianbao.)

In addition to festivals and celebrations, Mulao people also record their observations and experiences in their daily life. When they work, they sing 'farming song' and 'season duet', which tell about their production practices and living customs throughout the year. At the same time, they also record labour knowledge and seasonal knowledge. In their spare time, they use ballads to tell stories about people around them or folk rumours from other places, such as 'ten regrets of long-term workers' and 'Li Qing kills children'. They sometimes sing 'the song of pregnancy in October' and 'the bitter song of daughter-in-law', lamenting the hardships of upbringing and the difficulty of life. Sometimes they sing songs such as 'little cat's eye is green', 'moon light', or some riddles to teach children to play. (Note: The song titles quoted in this paragraph are all from the Luocheng ballads collection by long Dianbao.)

As discussed above, the main function of the 'casual answer' is to carry out interpersonal communication, participate in group activities, transfer practical experience, and express life emotions (Wu, 2020).

Finally, the 'Oral style'. There are two kinds of oral styles: the 'positive' and the 'bad'. The one that persuades people to be kind, with mild and elegant lyrics is positive, for example, the song 'I advise you not to smoke today. Smoking is neither fragrant nor sweet; smoking can't fill your stomach. How much money is wasted in a year!'. It criticizes social evils, mocks the evil deeds of the wicked, and the lyrics are vulgar. The tone is sharp. For example, 'don't shout about the rich, you are a tiger, I have a knife; one day, things will change, cut your skull to make drums'. There are no fixed lyrics in the tone, and they are usually edited and sung on the spot when the singing world is set up. In order to win, both sides improvise, fabricate at will, suppress, and belittle each other, and even sarcastic words come into play. Sometimes singing in competition may look like everyone is scolding. Of course, it is collective entertainment. After all, it is just verbal bravado. We are not as vulgar and vicious as scolding our enemies. The purpose of sarcasm and derogation is to make the other party admit defeat because they cannot open their mouths.

We have discussed above the functions of various types of Mulao songs, which need to be explained. Just as Mulao songs are mixed in types, their functions are also intertwined. According to the view of the functional school, culture exists to meet various needs.

It is not simple or single. We generally say that folklore has four functions. We talk about folklore as a whole rather than one-to-one correspondence. Therefore, we say that different Mulao songs have their own functions, which are only relative, and refer to their main aspects (Zeng, 1998).

The Significance of Multitype Mulao Folk Songs

'The important work of anthropology is to study the function of culture'. Malinowski's view is enlightening, but not enough. We have discussed the types and functions of Mulao folk songs. But, why did Mulao folk songs form such forms and play these functions? What value and significance do the various types of Mulao songs and their functions contain? As Croce said, all history is contemporary history. The purpose of studying history is to serve the present. As a folk custom and tradition, the Mulao song is a part of history. Therefore, for the purpose of

grasping the present and building a new contemporary culture, we also need to think about the contemporary significance of Mulao songs. In our opinion, the meaning of Mulao folk songs includes the following three levels:

First, the Mulao songs reflect and show the life of the Mulao people in a three-dimensional and comprehensive way, and strengthen the national centripetal force and cohesion of the Mulao people.

When discussing the types of Mulao songs, we observe that there are many subtypes of Mulao songs under the 'Ancient rules', 'Casual answers', and 'Oral style'.

The contents of these sub-types of ballads include national history and current real life. Some are used to teach about tradition and ethics and some are used for playing and entertainment. Mulao people like singing. They not only sing at New Year's festivals, weddings, funeral celebrations, and other ritual activities but also use ballads to engrave life and years on ordinary days. They use the way of antithesis to complete the major missions and affairs in life, such as love and marriage and building houses. They also use singing to sigh about their personal misfortune and the difficulties of life. A song 'sigh for loneliness' or 'four years without rice to eat the south wind' attracted each other's tears and infinite sympathy. In the Mulao songs, we can hear the heroic deeds, folk stories, and legends of historical figures. We can also appreciate the Mulao people singing production, life, love, and scenery. We can also see their dues and compete bravely in entertainment competitions. In short, a picture of Mulao people's life is displayed through ballads.

Folk culture records life and folk custom is also an integral part of people's real life. The Mulao song is the product of the spiritual and cultural activities of the Mulao people, and it is an important part of their daily life. The material level and spiritual level of Mulao people's life are coordinated, occurring and developing at the same time.

Life is accompanied by songs, which makes Mulao people find their spiritual home and feel a sense of belonging. This group, which had no national identity for a long time, was officially named 'Mulao Nationality' with the approval of the State Ethnic Affairs Committee in 1956 and became one of the members of the big family of the Chinese nation. Now, although the national assimilation (Sinicization) is becoming more and more profound, a Mulao compatriot will be in high spirits as long as he talks about 'Yifan Festival'. When I heard the Mulao song, I was elated and deeply moved by a sense of closeness and

national pride that arise spontaneously, which shows the great significance of Mulao songs in national cohesion.

Secondly, Mulao songs embody the exchange and unity among all ethnic groups.

Mulao people live in Luocheng, Hechi, and Guangxi. Guangxi is a multiethnic area, and many ethnic groups such as Han, Zhuang, Yao, Dong, and Miao still live in and around Luocheng. People of all ethnic groups live next to each other, and there is no boundary or estrangement between them. Although they often talk about 'Han', 'Mulao', and 'Yao', they know that they have some special customs and habits, and it seems that they have a strong sense of nationality. But in fact, when people of different nationalities are together, on the one hand, they respect each other's customs, and on the other hand, they are always very friendly and unrestrained. People of all ethnic groups work and live together, communicate and cooperate with each other, share the same feelings, and are close to each other, which is fully shown in their folk customs, stories, and ballads, that is, their culture.

Mulao people have no written language—words. Mulao songs used to be passed down by word of mouth and continued from generation to generation. But at the same time, such long articles as gutiao, such as the ancient and modern duet, which is 152-sentence long (each four sentences is called 'Tiao', that is, 'gutiao'), are written on paper, and use Chinese characters. Secondly, in Mulao songs, those stories and characters not only belong to their own nation (such as 'Jia', 'Po Wang', etc.) but also belong to other nations. For example, 'Zhao Jinlong of bazhai village' is about the deeds of Dao Guang, Ren Chen, Nian Gui, and Zhao Jinlong who fought against the Qing Dynasty and finally failed. Zhao Jinlong's brother and sister are actually Yao people in Southern Hunan. The lyrics 'Jin Long was originally in Yongzhou Prefecture and lived in Jianghua county', and the Qing court 'sent troops to guard everywhere and killed thousands of Yao soldiers' can be proved. The lyrics also say that in front of strong enemies, 'brothers work together', 'everyone is brave', and resist tenaciously. This song confirms that Mulao, Yao, and other people of all ethnic groups have a long history of solidarity in their daily lives.

In addition, we should also note that Mulao songs are not necessarily sung in the Mulao language, but mostly in the 'Tuguai dialect' of the local Han nationality. At the same time, among the 'love songs' of the Mulao nationality, there are some songs that are sung in the Zhuang language. For example, 'now that you have told your sister, don't talk to others if you have anything...'. The 'Lian

love song' that this group of men confided to the women, expressed their sincere love and longed for eternal unity in this life and the afterlife. The original oral text was in the Zhuang language, and the Chinese language we see now was translated by researchers from the singer's manuscript or live singing. This situation shows that Mulao and the Han and Zhuang people live in harmony for a long time, with common customs and close cultural exchanges.

Third, Mulao folk songs show that all ethnic groups share the same root and the Chinese nation has been a harmonious family since ancient times.

At the ceremony of the Mulao Yifan Festival (approved by the State Council and listed in the first batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2006), Shigong wore a Nuo mask which says 'King Pan, which is also called 'panlonggu' or 'Pangu'. Yao people are also called 'King Pan'. In fact, they are all 'Pangu' in the myth of the founding of the world in the Han nationality. At the Yifan Festival, Shigong also sang 'the song of the old woman king' ('drowning the Tianmen gate'), saying that 'there is no place to drown the Tianmen gate, and tens of thousands of people have been drowned; all the people in the world have died, except Fuxi brothers and sisters. Fuxi brothers and sisters refer to Fuxi and Nuwa, which are the characters in the myth of the Han nationality and are the ancestors of the nation. According to the myth of Han nationality, Nuwa kneaded earth to make people. According to the story of Powang of Mulao nationality, all the people in the world drowned. Only one or two children of Powang, Fuxi, and Nuwa, survived. Their brothers and sisters married and gave birth to a fetus like a wax gourd. They cut the wax gourd into 360 pieces, which became 240 men and 120 women. Then they got married and had children, and then they had 'mothers, children, and grandchildren' from all over the world. In fact, many of the same information and symbols still exist in the variation of the story.

In fact, there are many symbols, events, or factors of Han and other ethnic cultures in Mulao folk songs. Only in the ancient and modern duet, there are mythical figures such as Pangu, Fuxi Nuwa, Shennong, Han Xiangzi, and Yang Jian, as well as famous figures from all dynasties in history such as Liu Bang, Xiang Yu, Li Shimin, Cheng Yaojin, Xue Rengui, Fan Lihua, general Mu Guiying of the Yang family, and Song Jiangli. Some songs refer to historical figures alone and are usually well known to people of all ethnic groups, such as Meng Jiangnu, Liangshanbo and Zhu Yingtai, Zhu Maichen, and so on. Liangzhu story, although it was first seen in

the ancient books of the Han nationality (Tang Liang Zai Yan 'ten Daos and four Fanzhi'), all ethnic groups such as Zhuang, Miao, and Mulao have oral traditions, which are more complex, especially Mulao. In the four ancient songs, Liang Zhu and his wife not only died of love but also went to heaven: Bao Gong judged the case and Huanyang became a loving couple. Later, Yingtai was ordered to go to Liaoyang to rescue Shan Bo, the husband and wife of the number one scholar, 'save the country, save the husband and protect the emperor', and build a meritorious career. The same is true of the Guangxi celebrity 'Liusanjie', who has been famous for thousands of years. It is found in the folk customs of Han, Zhuang, Yao, and Mulao. Is the third sister a strong woman born in Yizhou? Or is she longer than Mulao sister in Luocheng Lantian village? In fact, this is not important. What is important is that this image is loved by all and this folk culture is shared by people of all ethnic groups (Wang, 2016).

British anthropologist Raymond Firth said, 'a nation is a group of people with the same social characteristics'. The so-called same social characteristics of the folk culture refer to the tradition, that is, the signs, symbols, schemas, events, etc. in the folk culture. We often say that 56 nationalities are one family. This is by no means an analogy! Because as the Mulao song shows, our Chinese nation shares the same cultural tradition, and we are of the same origin! Mulao folk songs give us the greatest enlightenment, and its most far-reaching significance lies in this.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the teachers and experts who have given me guidance and help during the writing of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article. This article is the sole work of the authors and has not been presented or published elsewhere.

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