

Field Investigation on Eight Tones in Matang Village, Renhua County*

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Abstract—The Eight-tone Band (also called Matang Drum Band) of Matang village, Renhua county in Shaoguan city, Guangdong province is an active local eight-tone club. It has been providing the villagers with performance for happy occasions and funeral affairs since the 60s except during the Cultural Revolution. Their music can be divided to music for happy occasions and for funeral affairs, the former being joyous and cheerful and the latter sad and low-pitched. But with the development of the society, the Eight-tone Band is also changing.

Keywords—the Eight-tone Band; pattern of manifestation; music characteristics; status quo of inheritance

I. INTRODUCTION

Located in the north of Guangdong province and bounded by Hunan in the north and Jiangxi in the east, Shaoguan city borders by Heyuan, Huizhou, Guangzhou and Qingyuan in Guangdong province on the southeast, south and west respectively. Renhua County, Shaoguan city is located in the southern foot of Nanling mountains. The Danxia mountain area in Renhua is famous for its unique red rock landform, which is the location and naming place of the typical "Danxia landform" in China. As a place producing outstanding and talented people, Renhua County has many intangible cultural heritages. Rich in local characteristics, "Renhua eight tones" performs speech song in local dialect. It has formed a unique performance style and characteristics, with a certain historical, cultural, scientific research value. In 2011, "Renhua eight tones" was included in the third batch of intangible cultural heritage list in Shaoguan city.

II. GENRE OF "MATANG EIGHT TONES"

There is such a kind of folk music in Guangdong: it is not drama, Quyi (Chinese folk art forms), instrumental folk music, folk song and dance, but it does absorb the essence of

the above Guangdong folk art forms. It is the "eight-tone troupe". The so-called eight-tone music originally refers to the classification name of ancient Musical Instruments. Here it refers to a folk music activity, a pure instrumental form. The term "eight tones" first appeared in the Zhou Dynasty. At that time, instruments were divided into eight categories according to the different materials, namely "metal, stone, clay, leather, silk, wood, gourd, bamboo". Later, it was widely used to refer to musical instruments. Now the generally referred "eight-tone troupe" refers to a kind of rural folk music (including blowing, playing, drumming, singing), and "eight-tone music" is the music played by the eight-tone troupes. In the occasions like birthday celebrations, moving into the new house, weddings and funeral affairs, the village people will invite country artists to play "eight-tone music" for celebration. In addition, in the local sacrifice, dajiao (the special ritual of Taoists of saying Mass for the departed souls) and folk art performances, there are also performances of eight tone troupes.

Academically, eight-tone music all over the country is named with their place or ethnic names, like the "West Guangdong Eight-tone Music", "South of the Five Ridges Eight-tone Music" and "the Bouyei nationality Eight-tone Music" etc. The Matang eight-tone music which is also called Matang drum music is the folk co-organisms as old as the history of Matang. It combines the essence of many folk arts and is a company of folk beliefs, life customs, festivals and other activities.

The instruments of Matang eight-tone music are composed of eight kinds: drums, top cymbal, medium cymbal, small cymbal, big gong, small gong, suona and erhu. Among them, there are the gong and drum (11cm high, 22cm in diameter, 80cm in support); the top cymbal (31cm in diameter); small cymbal (19cm in diameter); big gong (33cm in diameter); small gong (22cm in diameter); suona (composed by tianxing, pipe, 7 sound holes in the left and one in the right, and the setting bowl made of copper, 11cm high, 22cm in diameter); erhu (canister, neck, skin, scroll, shaft, string, arch bar, bridge and bow hair, as well as appendages such as rosin). The Matang eight-tone music is mainly expressed in music and speech song. It is usually used in eight occasions: wedding, birthday party, moving into a new house, celebration of the birth of a baby when it is one month old; da jiao (the special ritual of Taoists of

*Fund projects: This study is a phased achievement of college student innovation project of 2018 (201810576096) — Report of the Field Investigation on Eight Tones in Matang Village, Renhua County; a phased achievement of the 2018 higher education teaching reform project of Guangdong province "cultivating music teaching research of folk song collecting practice that meets the needs of local innovative development"; a phased achievement of Shaoguan University 17th batch of education and teaching reform research key project (SYJY20161718) "Exploration and Practice of Folk Music Collecting Style Teaching Based on Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection in Northern Guangdong".

saying Mass for the departed souls) and xietu (a ceremony at the completion of a building or tomb); the eighth day of the fifth lunar month (birthday of the Dragon Mother) and the twelfth day of the eighth lunar month (Coronation Day of the Dragon Mother); worshiping ancestors (sweeping tombs); funeral affairs. The practical application of "Matang eight-tone" tunes are rich in content and deep in meaning, which has accumulated profound historical and cultural connotations and fully expressed the joys and sorrows of the common people in their daily life.

III. MUSIC FEATURES AND PERFORMANCE FORMS OF THE MATANG EIGHT-TONE MUSIC

Ma tang eight tones is a kind of folk music with rich rural temperament, which has been spread among the folk people by mouth and heart for more than 100 years. With distinct speech song in local dialect, unique performance style and characteristics, it has become a unique artistic work in the vast sea of folk music.

Its melodies for happy occasions includes start-up (opening-up) tune, prelude tune, walking tune, formal-bows tune (toasting tune), tune for showing gratitude to the host, in which the scale "sol" is dominant. With cheerful rhythm, uplifting mood, animated atmosphere and mainly umping tunes, such melodies are commonly used eight tones at weddings, birthday parties, moving onto a new house and the celebration of the birth of a baby when it is one month old. In a happy occasion, the members of the Eight-tone Band wear a uniform tang suit, or wear long sleeves and hats embroidered with the character "fu" or "dragon patterns", which represent blessings. Its playing forms are divided into two kinds: walking playing and sitting playing, the former used in wedding ceremony, wedding lament, getting on the sedan chair, and the formal three bows, the latter in the feast.

The rituals of the wedding are as follows:

- The bond usually arrive at the house of the host at about nine, and play the "start-up tune" after a short rest, showing the official start of the ceremony. The instruments are consist of suona, side drum, top cymbal, big gong and small cymbal with the side drum, big gong and small cymbal at the beginning and suona joined at last.
- When welcoming the bride, they play the "walking tone", which is cheerful and lively, bringing warm atmosphere. In a fixed formation, the band walk in front of the sedan chair in the sequence of drum, big gong, small gong, top cymbal, small cymbal, suona, and erhu.
- When the wedding lament is on, mournful tunes are played. As a rural custom, the wedding lament is mainly to thank the parents and other elders for the love and care received from childhood, and it is even said that only when the bride cries better can she lead a better life after marriage. Walking playing is also adopted here.

- When the bride gets on the sedan chair and she is carried forward, the bond plays the "walking tone", which is cheerful and lively, bringing warm atmosphere. In a fixed formation, the band walk in front of the sedan chair in the sequence of drum, big gong, small gong, top cymbal, small cymbal, suona, and erhu.
- The formal-bows tune is played when the new couple conducts the formal three bows. The suona is played first, with side drum, gong and the small cymbal joined later. The purpose of this tune is to set off by contrast a festive and lively atmosphere when the new couple conducts the ritual.
- At the feast, festive and jubilant tunes are played in the lively scene.
- In the evening song and dance will be performed (up to the host).

The melodies of funeral affairs include opening-up tune, walking tune, funeral tune, prelude drumming and condoling tune etc., full of rural rhythm. In a funeral affair members of the band are usually in white. The performance also has two forms of walking playing and sitting playing responding to different stage of the funeral. The ritual process of funeral affair is as follows:

- The Eight-tone Band reaches the house of the host at about five A.M. and sets about playing the start-up tune after a short rest. The start-up tune presents the official start of the ceremony as a universal tune for both happy occasions and funeral affairs. The instruments are consist of suona, side drum, top cymbal, big gong and small cymbal with the side drum, big gong and small cymbal at the beginning and suona joined at last. The whole tune lasts for 20 minutes.
- According to rural customs, the second step is to buy water from the riverside in the village. On the way to the river, they still need to play the "walking tone". The "walking tone" is also called "swinging tone", in which all the instruments are made up of suona, small drum, small cymbal and big gong. It is a repeated two-part structure. It is a tune used in funerals, and in the performance players will waddle their way. After arriving at the river, the host needs to burn joss sticks, set off firecrackers, and then fetch water, and at this time the Eight-tone Band play funeral tune. On the way back, they still play the "walking tone".
- After returning to the house of the host, they will begin to play "the prelude drumming". In the "prelude drumming" of the Eight Tones Band there are 18 accented beats consists of the instruments of side drum, big cymbal and small gong, small gong, mainly a steady rhythm at first, then an accelerated rhythm, and finally a return to the same pace. This tune lasts for 40 minutes.
- After dinner, it's the mourning time for the host family, and the eight tone troupe plays the "mourning

tune". Composed by a long tune and a short one, the mourning tune lasts for 1-2 hours (the length depends on the number of people of the host family).

After the condolence, the band needs to play or sing some music, usually with suona or erhu, to evoking the memory and gratitude of the offspring for the deceased. If the deceased is a man, the eight-tone troupe usually plays

songs about father, such as "Meng Jiangnv", "Camel Bells", "Father" and so on. If the deceased is a lady, the eight-tone troupe will usually play songs about the mother, such as "Mother's Kiss" and "ten months' pregnancy", which mainly express the toil of the ten-month pregnancy and remind the children to miss and appreciate the deceased. Such music has strong feelings and is often played by the eight-tone troupe. Part of the hand-written music scores can be seen in "Fig. 1".

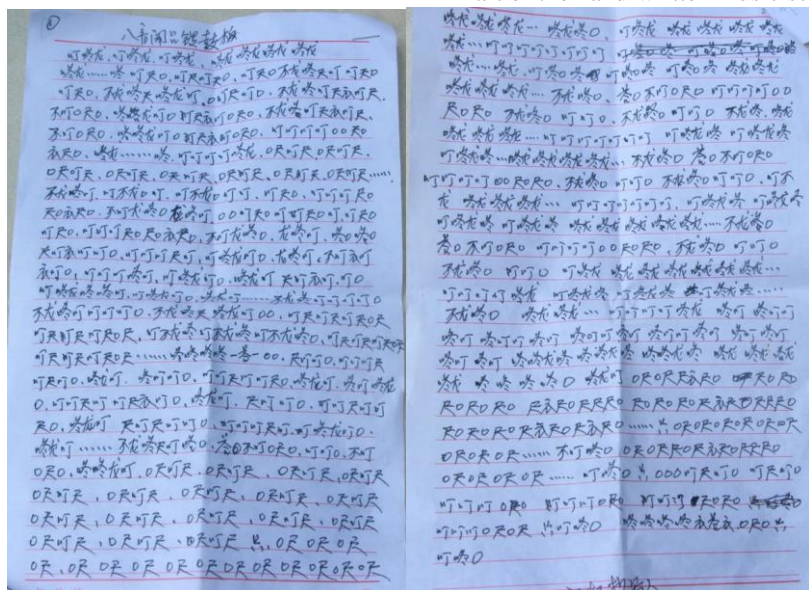


Fig. 1. Handwritten music score of members of the Matang Eight-tone Band.

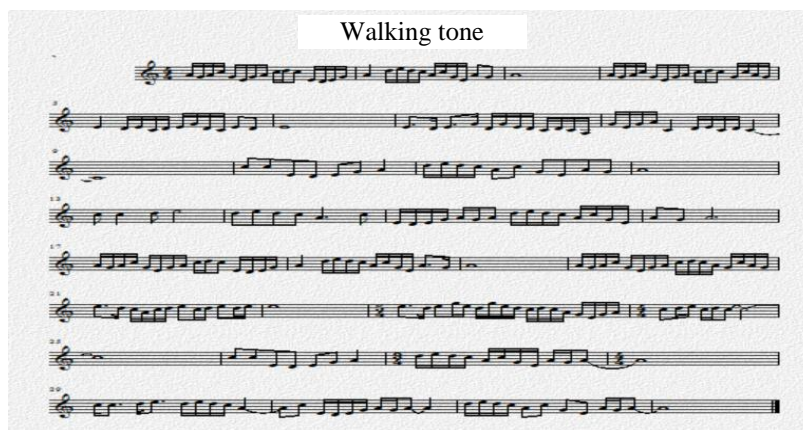


Fig. 2. One of the music score.

"Walking tone", as can be seen in "Fig. 2" is a piece of music played in the occasions of welcoming the bride and carrying the sedan chair, etc. in a wedding ceremony, which is cheerful and festive and creates a warm atmosphere. It is a commonly used tune in the eight tones. On the basis of the original music, this music score of walking tone is infused with music elements of the new era. After editing, the melody lines are smooth and catchy, which is more popular among the general public. But at the same time, traditional music is dying out.

IV. THE PRESENT SITUATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF MATANG EIGHT-TONE BAND

Founded in the 1960s, for decades, the Eight-tone Band has mainly been taking in work in happy occasions and funerals, from which the members earn service fee. But in recent years, the number of activities has fallen sharply. The band receives an annual average of about 7 activities, each bringing an income of about 2,000 Yuan. The separate shares of each member are usually used in personal cost. There are about 6 similar bands in the county, which have been receiving less and less activities like the Eight Tones Band.

At present, they mainly take in activities on funerals. With the development of society, people's use and love of traditional music gradually decrease. Especially for weddings, people increasingly accept modern wedding ceremonies. Therefore, activities for happy events are on gradual decrease and are on the brink of death. Days are nearly gone when hosts invited the bands to play for celebration on occasions "wedding, birthday, baby's completion of its first month of life and open of new shop". Coupled with the rise of modern pop music, most young people are keen on pop music, and same as any other village in China, Matang village sees only left-behind elderly and children. There is a fault in the performance and inheritance of eight tones, and the government has no relevant policies or funds to support the traditional music. The reduction of the number of activities has been forcing the eight-tone band members in constant change. In order to adapt to the development of the times and meet the needs of the masses, eight-tone tunes, music scores are also constantly changing. Therefore the traditional things are more and more difficult

to retain, the inheritance of the traditional music is more difficult, and the traditional eight-tone is facing a huge challenge!

In order to survive, in addition to activities in happy occasions and funerals, Matang Eight-tone Band often combine their music with local folk songs and appear in daily life of the masses and related competitions in the form of folk music accompaniment with their instruments. Because of this, the music of "Matang Eight-tone band" is constantly injecting new elements. The melody is richer in singing quality compared with the ancient "eight tones", and the overall music sense of the music is more contemporary, making it more easily accepted and sung by people. Such changes enrich the form and content of Matang eight-tone music and expand its audience, thus enhancing its own vitality. Yet they can also arouse some side effects: with the change of its content, form and living environment, it is likely to lead to the loss of its authenticity and the gradual extinction of its cultural significance.

TABLE I. LIST OF THE MATANG EIGHT-TONE BAND

Name	Gender	Age	Duty	wind instrument	present address
<i>Li Yide</i>	Male	69	team leader	organization	Matang village
<i>Tan Muyang</i>	Male	70	member	suona, erhu	Matang village
<i>Tan Wenhua</i>	Male	51	member	drummer, suona	Matang village
<i>Tan wenfa</i>	Male	71	member	drummer, cymbal	Matang village
<i>Zhou Qinming</i>	Male	67	member	side drum, big cymbal	Matang village
<i>Liu Dunyi</i>	Male	not quite clear	member	big cymbal	Matang village

The existing skills of the members (shown in "Table I") of the band were all learned from the village masters in 1984-1987. At present, none of the members of the band has an heir.

V. CONCLUSION

Born and raised in folk, although it cannot be said as an elegant art, the eight-tone music plays a decisive role and function in the daily life of the public, with their ubiquitous presence in folk marriage and funeral, worship, family activities and so on. But with the development of the times, the eight-tone music is undergoing great changes, from prosperity to decline, and even being endangered. When collecting folk songs, the authors were able to get in touch with many simple and versatile old artists who are doctors, workers, and more native farmers. In addition to performing, they spent more time working in the fields and running around for their lives, which did not affect their love for the traditional music. In the process of playing, with only simple communication between the eyes, they can very tacitly complete the performance. How long has it taken to build such tacit understanding among them? What they carry is an indispensable part of the treasure of Chinese civilization. But what makes people sad is that these old artists can't find a suitable successor with their music wealth accumulated in most of their lives. As a reflection of traditional culture, traditional music not only bears the historical memory of the survival and development of the Chinese nation, but also embodies the emotional identity of generations of Chinese

people. The cultural essence contained in it interprets the pure and fresh survival information of today's folk. Therefore the inheritance of the eight-tone music is the priority among priorities of the future survival and development of Matang eight tones. Relevant departments should all act for the inheritance of traditional culture.

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