



Analysis of the Inheritance of Grand Song of Dong Ethnic Group and Its Effects on Individual Emotions

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Abstract. Dong, one of the most important ethnic minorities in China, has a rich musical and cultural tradition. Among music created by the Dong ethnic group, Grand Song holds significant symbolic values, recording profound messages about life and nature and providing its participants with deep emotional experiences. In today's digital world, where people have moved away from nature and where psychological stress has increasingly threatened people's health, traditional musical heritage such as Grand Song of Dong ethnic group starts to present its potential not only as a connector between humans and nature, but also as a novel therapeutic means. The purpose of this paper is therefore to discuss the inheritance of Grand Song and to explore its influence on individual emotions, thus revealing its potential values in the field of music therapy. The paper explains the cultural significance and psychological effects of Grand Song from three aspects: the regulating effect and positive influence of Grand Song on both listeners and singers, and its application in traditional cultural inheritance, which deepens the understanding of the cultural values of Grand Song and its potential for application in music therapy. This paper reveals the dual role of Grand Song in emotional regulation and cultural inheritance, providing a new perspective and theoretical support for music therapy and the protection of cultural heritage.

Keywords: The "Grand Song", cultural inheritance, music therapy

1 Introduction

Dong is among the many minorities that inhabit the south of China (Yang, Wall, and Smith, 2008). They call themselves 'gaeml,' which originally referred to 'people living in the mountains and covered by forests.' Therefore, the special living environment has nurtured the Dong people with unique cultures (Kun, 2016; Li and Wang, 2005). Among them, Grand Song, as an important component of Dong people's folk culture, is currently one of the most famous music traditions among ethnic minorities in China (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Grand Song of Dong ethnic group was added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2009 (UNESCO, 2009). Commenting on various topics such as the relationship between humans and nature, life and death in the chorus, Grand Song is

often used as a way to express and soothe emotions. Its singing also has special cultural and social significance. This review discusses the potential emotional effects of Grand Song of Dong ethnic group on its singers and listeners.

2 Literature Review

Grand Song of Dong ethnic group is called ‘Ga Lao’ in Dong language. ‘Ga’ means song and ‘Lao’ has the meaning of grandness, antiquity, and many voices. This unique folk music is distributed in the southeast of Guizhou Province and Sanjiang County of Guangxi Province of China, and its core area is located in Liping County, Congjiang County and Rongjiang County in the southeast of Guizhou Province (Huang, Peerapong, 2022). Since Grand Song of Dong ethnic group was discovered by musicians in the 1950s, it has steadily gained worldwide recognition for its unique musical beauty. The development of Grand Song is closely related to Dong people's special lifestyle, customs, and local language. The structure of Grand Song is rigorous, with rhyming lyrics and beautiful melodies. The lyrics often use metaphorical techniques, which have profound meanings. As the Dong ethnic group lacks written and musical records, the learning of Grand Song was entirely taught orally by ‘Sangga’ (which means song master) and handed down from generation to generation (Pan and Xia, 2013).

Grand Song of Dong ethnic group is a folk choir form with multiple voices and natural harmony, without conductor or accompaniment. Grand Song of Dong ethnic group creates music that harmonizes with nature by simulating the sounds of birds chirping, insects chirping, mountains flowing water, and other natural sounds, showcasing the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, as well as between humans (Song and Yuan, 2021). Grand Song of Dong ethnic group adopts the musical form like “many low tones and one high tone” that requires at least three or more voices to sing together. Each song consists of several sections, including an independent prologue, a middle section, and an epilogue, forming a structure that the beginning echoes the end. The singing occasions of Grand Song are very particular, usually only performed in the drum towers of Dong ethnic group’s villages during major festivals, collective gatherings, or welcoming guests. The singing form of Grand Song is a combination of solo singing and choir singing, with the main melody usually located in the low voice and the high voice being the development and derivation of the main melody. The random variation of high and low voice parts endows Grand Song of Dong ethnic group with rich and diverse forms, making it full of vitality.

As various psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety rapidly increase worldwide, researchers in various regions have never stopped searching for more ways to help people with psychological and mental distress. In recent times, seeking more new methods from traditional cultures has become a trend (Li et al, 2025; Zhang et al, 2025; Shahrajabian et al, 2021). Lyrics of Grand Song mainly describe the history of the Dong ethnic group, praise the concept of “harmonious unity between man and nature”, spread scientific knowledge, respect faithful love between men and women, and advocate social virtues such as being good to neighbors and respecting and loving the

elderly (Wu, 2008). In addition, because of the inclusion of various philosophical issues such as human, nature, and life in the chorus, Grand Song is often used as a way to express emotions, soothe emotions, and convey different views on life. Its singing has special cultural and social significance and potential to influence people's emotional states. Therefore, this article aims to explore the impact of listening to and singing Grand Song of Dong ethnic group on people's emotions from the perspectives of audience, singers, and traditional culture, discussing the potential of Grand Song.

3 The Emotional Influence of Grand Song on Listeners

Grand Song of Dong ethnic group is a type of music closely related to nature. Therefore, when listening to Grand Song, people easily feel peaceful and relaxed, as if they are in a mountain. Many mature research projects on the relationship between music and psychological mechanisms demonstrate that music is a natural art form for treating negative emotions. Our emotional state can also be infected and stimulated when we listen to beautiful music (Schaefer, 2017). For example, white noise relaxation has become popular in recent years (Kim et al, 2008). Although Grand Song of Dong ethnic group also imitates many natural sounds, compared to white noise, it is more melodic, which could affect the audience's physical and emotional states more.

Changes in individual emotions affect our sense of satisfaction and efficacy in life. One of the major functions of music is that it can arouse people's emotions (Juslin and Laukka, 2004). The rich harmony changes in Grand Song of Dong ethnic group can express different musical emotions, thereby mobilizing the audience's emotions. For example, in a classic Grand song of Dong ethnic group *Blossoms in Springing*, people tend to relax and feel the vitality of spring in a gentle chorus (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Blossoms in springing (selections)

In *Song of Cicada in May*, singers imitate different environmental sounds such as cicada sounds to make it easier for the audience to become calm (Figure 2).



Fig. 2. Song of Cicada in May (selections)

Therefore, Grand Song of Dong ethnic group can not only be an artistic listening, but more importantly, an expression of spiritual concepts and emotional states.

4 The Effect of Participating in Grand Song of Dong Ethnic Group on Singers' Mood

There is a very famous slang among the Dong people: 'Food nourishes the body; songs nourish the soul.' It can be seen that singing plays a very important role in Dong people's lifestyle, which is also proven by Ingram (2007) through the analysis of the language used by Dong people to describe singing as an everyday, natural, and typical human action. Therefore, participating in the choir of Grand Song can also have a positive effect on people's emotions and bodies. Singing itself is an activity that can promote human health comparable to sports such as swimming and rowing. In recent years, relevant studies have shown that people who frequently participate in choir singing usually have better performance in terms of cardiovascular function and other aspects (Ganzoni et al., 2020; Moss et al., 2018; Müller & Lindenberger, 2011). Singing has also been widely used as a rehabilitation method for elderly patients, respiratory diseases, spinal cord injuries, and other populations (Butler et al., 2001; Pentikäinen et al., 2021). Although there is no direct research to prove the health benefits of Grand Song of Dong ethnic group, because of their long melodic lines, singing Grand songs may have potential exercise advantages for various bodily functions compared to other forms of singing.

In addition, Grand Song of Dong ethnic group displays abundant and direct emotional expressions when it is performed. Research has found that during singing and choir, changes in pitch, sound intensity, and timbre can directly trigger autonomous physiological and emotional responses in the body through subcortical structures such as the brain and thalamus (Ahveninen et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2020). In the process of singing Grand Song of Dong ethnic group, many elements contained in the songs directly affect people's emotional expression, and as the pitch of the music changes, people's emotions also fluctuate accordingly. Therefore, Grand Song of Dong ethnic group not only has an impact on the human body through auditory and other sensory stimuli, but also can evoke and release emotional expressions through singing, directly affecting the psychological and physiological aspects of the human body. At the same time, the unique sound imitation related to nature in Grand Song of Dong ethnic group also allows singers to immerse themselves in the singing process and to enjoy richer feelings.

5 Cultural Inheritance and Modern Applications of Grand Song

The special attitude towards life and the philosophical relationship between nature and humanity in Grand Song of Dong ethnic group may have great potential to influence people's thinking. As mentioned above, Grand Song expresses cultural, natural, and life

concepts of the Dong ethnic group through lyrics, musical sounds, and musical concepts. It indicates the interdependence between people and their surrounding society. The knowledge recorded and passed down in the songs showcases how Dong people's lives are closely intertwined with their surrounding environment. For generations of Dong people, Grand Song is an important way to transmit and record important concepts. Nowadays, with the development of different technologies, dissemination and integration of various arts became easier. However, young Dong people seem to be unable to interpret the knowledge, philosophy, and culture contained in Grand Song. Therefore, how to better inherit culture and unleash the value of art itself has become an important issue in the research of Grand Song in recent years. Especially as people have increasingly diverse living habits, how to better integrate Grand songs into people's daily lives has become a very valuable topic. For example, could the content of Grand Song of Dong ethnic group be used to address problems such as emotional, psychological, and even mental problems faced by people in modern society? Could we refer to the long history of the Dong ethnic group to seek new perspectives and potential solutions to these problems? Therefore, when applying and utilizing the functional values of Grand Song of Dong ethnic group, it is necessary to tap into the potential of various cultural dissemination platforms, to better disseminate ethnic cultures such as Grand Song of Dong ethnic group.

6 Conclusion

With the deepening of urbanization in nowadays society, the gap between people and nature is drastically increasing. This led many people to have a need to go back to nature and integrate into it. Grand Song of Dong ethnic group and the beautiful environment where Dong people live have the potential to provide a way for people in modern society who are constantly under increasing pressure to reconnect with nature, relieve stress, and seek for positive emotions. Therefore, finding ways to preserve the millennia-old wisdom from Grand Song and the Dong people, helping it unleash its full potential in our modern world, becomes an important task on hand.

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