Resonating Culture: Ethnomusiccological Theories Unveiling *Zhuhu* Music in Yangxin Tea-picking Opera of China

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Abstract

More than a century ago, the enchanting tea-picking songs enjoyed widespread popularity among the residents of Yangxin in China. These songs served as a source of entertainment within the tea plantation quarters. Folk music artists subsequently reworked these melodies, transforming them into short tunes for collective singing and dancing during the Lantern Festival. The integration of Huangmei tea-picking opera with the "lantern opera" further shaped the musical identity of Yangxin tea-picking opera. This research aims to analyze the features of zhuhu music and its contribution to the musical culture of the Yangxin community, with a particular emphasis on analyzing the music's characteristics and its cultural significance. The study will also delve into the evolving status of zhuhu music within contemporary Yangxin society. Employing an ethnographic research design, I combines participant observation and interviews with her own field experiences to provide a comprehensive account of traditional zhuhu performance practices in Yangxin tea-picking opera. Through a musicological analysis of zhuhu's repertoire, the paper uncovers the uniqueness of zhuhu music and traces changes in its traditional form, style, and function, linking these shifts to broader socio-cultural transformations. In approaching the study of this musical performance, I draw upon theories from the field of ethnomusicology. Building on my preliminary investigation of zhuhu music, I shaped the study by considering theoretical insights from various scholars and incorporating my perspectives. The paper will discuss pertinent theories applied to analyze the music of zhuhu as it accompanies Yangxin tea-picking opera. This research not only contributes to ethnomusicological theory and methodology but also deepens our understanding of the musical culture surrounding Yangxin tea-picking opera in China.

INTRODUCTION

The Yangxin tea-picking opera, a traditional performance rich in distinctive features, holds significant popularity in Yangxin County, Hubei Province. Designated as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008, it earned the moniker "a unique camellia blooming in southeast Hubei." Acknowledged as a cultural gem in Yangxin County, it boasts invaluable cultural significance (COMI, 1998).

Over a century ago, the modest inhabitants of Yangxin used to sing tea-related songs and melodies during their labor, which eventually evolved into small tunes. Folk artists later composed these tunes into a form of entertainment called "lantern play," where people would sing and dance together during the Lantern Festival. The infusion of Huangmei tea-picking opera elements into the "lantern opera" gave rise to the distinct characteristics of Yangxin tea-picking opera. Over time, this folk tradition expanded and laid the groundwork for the opera to transition onto the stage, becoming a local cultural phenomenon. During festive occasions such as New Year's celebrations, clan ceremonies, temple fairs, and various joyous events, it became a customary practice in Yangxin Countryside to invite opera teams to perform tea-picking opera (YXCC, 1993).

In 1965, Yangxin County established a professional tea-picking opera troupe, replacing the traditional accompaniment of gongs and drums with silk strings. Initially featuring the trumpet-shaped "*Chahu*" as the main instrument, it later switched to *Gaohu* in 1970. *Gaohu* replaced *Chahu*, and *Pipa* took the place of *Liuyeqin*.

Presently, the accompaniment band for Yangxin tea-picking opera comprises the "three big pieces": *Gaohu*, *Erhu*, and *Pipa*.

Historically, limited documentary material was available on Yangxin tea-picking opera, with brief articles and communications dominating over academic papers. Scholarly interest only gained momentum after 2000, focusing primarily on singing style changes, inheritance, dissemination, survey reports, and cultural geography. Notably, there remains a substantial gap in analyzing and researching the role and status of the main protagonist in Yangxin tea-picking opera, warranting further in-depth exploration.

This paper aims to explore theoretical approaches in the ethnomusicological study of zhuhu music in Yangxin tea-picking opera in China, utilizing theories from the field of ethnomusicology. These theories were employed to analyze the music of zhuhu as it accompanies Yangxin tea-picking opera. In this research, "Zhuhu" denotes a group of stringed instruments utilized in the Yangxin tea-picking opera. Specifically, within this study's framework, "Zhuhu" represents the primary accompanying stringed instrument in the Yangxin tea-picking opera. Presently, among the Yangxing society in China, Gaohu—a type of spike-fiddle instrument—is employed as the zhuhu in the Yangxin tea-picking opera.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the ensemble of the Yangxin tea-picking opera accompaniment band, the *Zhuhu* has emerged as a crucial ally in the evolution of Yangxin's tea-picking opera singing. Throughout this journey, it has collectively weathered the regulatory influences of history, region, language, and culture, adapting and continually adjusting to the demands of the times. From a pragmatic standpoint, the vocal expression of the opera, when accompanied by the *Zhuhu*, relies on the instrument's indispensable support and assistance, encompassing voice practice, singing, and stage performance. The robust development of *Zhuhu* can be attributed to its nature as a bowed string instrument, devoid of taste or scale restrictions, allowing for flexible note melody performance. Paired with its unique timbre, the *Zhuhu* excels at replicating human voice and opera vocal effects, seamlessly aligning with the practical and musical aspects of opera singing, presenting the quintessence of Chinese sound, rhyme, tune, emotion, and beauty. Practicality is embedded in sound, rhyme, and tone, while musicality is manifested through emotion and beauty.

The collaboration between *Zhuhu* and vocal elements is highly intricate, effectively conveying the emotions of opera music and reflecting the distinct personality of each folk opera character. The main *Zhuhu* player, as a significant inheritor and practitioner, holds a crucial role in preserving the rich essence of traditional opera and music. In the traditional context, the *Zhuhu* player in Yangxin tea-picking opera significantly influences the opera actors, with a notable role, function, and elevated status. However, within the contemporary cultural landscape, the impact of *Zhuhu* players on the actors has diminished, and their role, function, and status are gradually diminishing.

To comprehend the characteristics and elements of *Zhuhu* music in Yangxin tea-picking opera, it is essential to explore its functions, symbolism, and representation in Yangxin society. Additionally, investigating the roles and status of *Zhuhu* music in contemporary Yangxin society is crucial for understanding its evolving dynamics.

This study contributes both theoretically and practically. The theoretical aspect enriches the study of Yangxin tea-picking opera, creating new dimensions for its accompanying music and offering support for the protection of intangible cultural heritage in the southeastern region of Hubei Province. It also aids in promoting the revival of traditional culture in Yangxin, contributing to the theory and methods of ethnomusicology and deepening our understanding of Chinese traditional music culture. On a practical level, this research benefits society, enhances knowledge for fellow researchers and students, and contributes to the safeguarding of cultural heritage.

RESEARCH METHODS

The primary goal of my research is to perform a comprehensive examination of *zhuhu* music in Yangxin tea-picking opera through both textual and contextual analyses. By scrutinizing the distinctiveness of *Zhuhu* music, the research aims to chart the shifts in its traditional form, including changes in status, style, and function, and to connect these transformations with the broader socio-cultural changes prevalent in society. (1) To undertake a musicological analysis of *Zhuhu* in the repertoire of Yangxin tea-picking opera, (2)

To carry out a contextual analysis of *Zhuhu* music within the context of Yangxin tea-picking opera, (3) To analyze the evolving status of *Zhuhu* music in v.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to study the textual and contextual aspects of *zhuhu* music in Yangxin tea-picking opera, I considered using some relevant theories in the field of ethnomusicology. Based on my preliminary research on this musical event activity, I began the research by taking into account some suggestions from prominent experts and scholars in this field.

First, I used the theories of "Norms of musical style" by Mantle Hood (1971) and "Chinese Musical Form System" theory by Liu (1998) to address Research question 1.

Mantle Hood had proposed the theory of "Norms of musical styles" (1971). Hood believed that the norms of musical styles reflected the expectations and shared understanding of music within a society and culture. These norms not only encompassed the characteristics of the music itself, such as music structure, performance techniques, and presentation styles, but also included the social and cultural factors behind the music styles. He argued that the norms of musical styles were transmitted and shaped within music communities through a process of socialization.

Mantle Hood's (1971) "Norms of musical styles" theory, Figure 1 showed that the theory was based on musical norms to perform a musical analysis of the *Zhuhu* music, covering various aspects of the tuning system, scales, modes, orchestration form, text, rhythmic design, melodic contour, harmonic outline, rhythmic character, melodic character, harmonic character, and dynamic character.

In this research, the following 9 elements from the "Norm of musical styles" theory were selected to analyze *Zhuhu* music in Yangxin Tea-picking opera.

I. Tuning system: Analyzed the tuning and pitch system used in the *Zhuhu* music, including whether it adopted a specific tuning, such as the pentatonic or heptatonic scale, and observed the distribution and treatment of pitches.

II. Scales: Analyzed the types of scales used in the *Zhuhu* music, examining specific scale patterns such as major or minor scales, pentatonic scales, heptatonic scales, etc., and observed their application in the music.

III. Modes: Analyzed the types of modes used in the *zhuhu* music, determining whether it used the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale (*gong, shang, jue, zhi, yu*) or incorporated other modal elements.

IV. Orchestration: Investigated the use and combination of the *zhuhu* with other instruments in the *zhuhu* music, analyzing their roles and the balance and layers of their sounds.

V. Form: Analyzed the overall structure of the *Zhuhu* music, observed the arrangement and organization of the overture, interludes, and singing sections, and analyzed their relationships and developments.

VI. Text: Analyzed the relationship between the *Zhuhu* music and the lyrics of Yangxin tea-picking opera, observed the content and expression of the lyrics, as well as the integration of music with the plot.

VII. Rhythmic patterns: Analyzed the rhythmic patterns and changes in the *Zhuhu* music, including rhythmic characteristics and styles. Observed the strength, speed, and treatment of rhythm, as well as the stability and variability of rhythm. Studied the rhythmic patterns, changes, and layers in the compositions and their contributions to the overall music.

VIII. Melodic contour and character: Analyzed the development and characteristics of the melodic contours in the *zhuhu* music, observed the use of motifs, intervals, and repetitions, as well as the leaps and bounds in the music, and analyzed their characteristics and styles. Observed the rise and fall of the melody, changes in pitch, and examined their impact on the emotional expression of the work.

IX. Dynamic character: Analyzed the dynamic characteristics of the *Zhuhu* music, such as volume changes, timbre changes, and expressiveness in the musical works of *Zhuhu*.
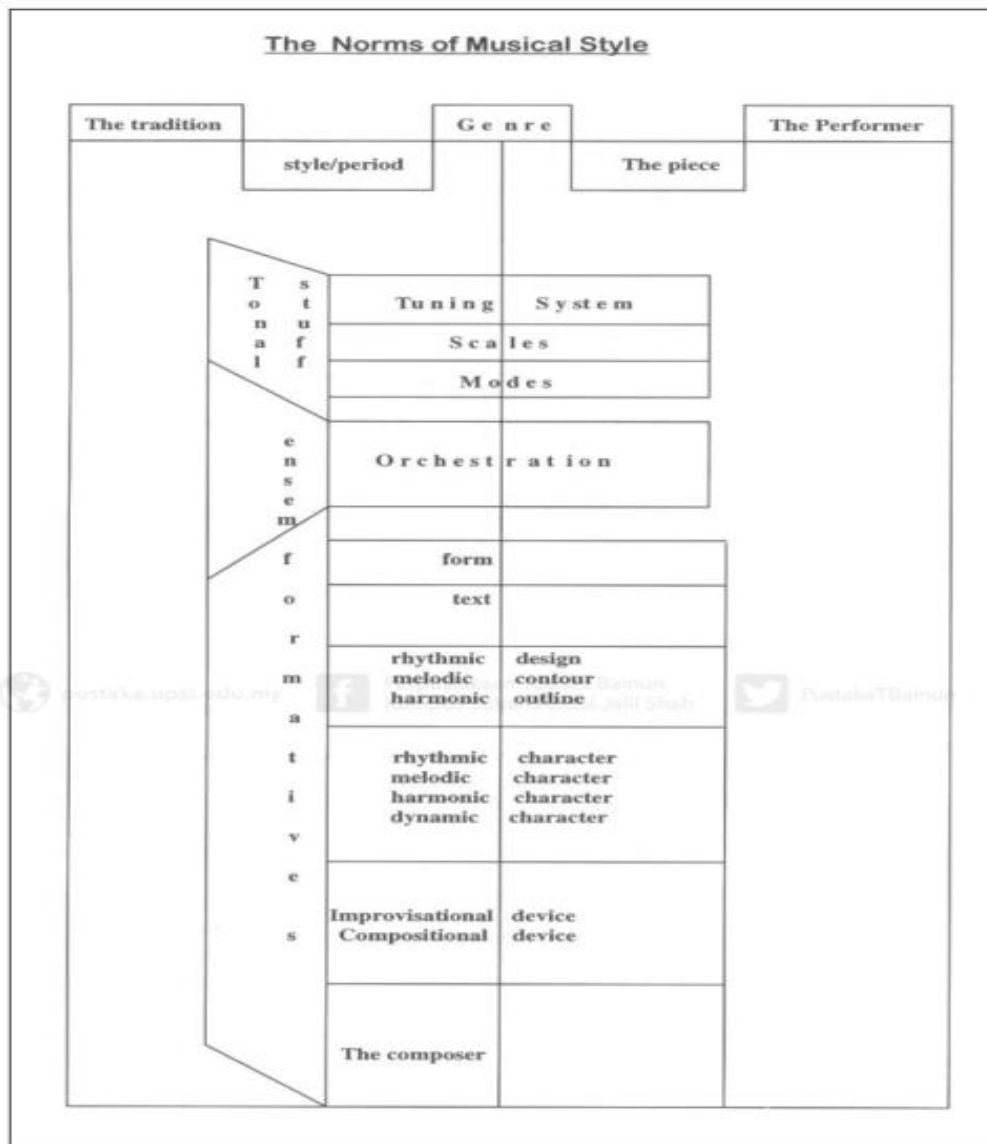
Figure 1: "The Norms of Musical Style" By Mantle Hood (1971)

However, this theory was based on Western music elements, which might not have been suitable to analyze all styles of music from outside Western culture. Therefore, it needed to be combined with the local "Chinese Musical Form System" theory by Liu Chenghua (Liu,1998).

To make the research more comprehensive, Liu Chenghua's points of view (Liu, 1998) were also adopted. He argued that specific characteristics of the formation system of Chinese music could be expressed in four main aspects: vocal tune in music, pentatonic in tone, horizontal linearity in texture, and non-uniformity in rhythm. The *Zhuhu* music was analyzed from these four aspects.

I.   Vocal tune in music: The vocal nature of tonality was one of the most important and prominent features in the Chinese music system, extensively employing tonal elements. The term "tonal elements" referred to a specific pattern of sound processes intentionally utilizing certain variations in pitch, dynamics, and timbre linked to particular musical expressive intentions. The *Zhuhu* music of Yangxin tea-picking opera had distinct vocal characteristics. Tonal elements were created through techniques such as singing, vibrato, glissando, and percussive sounds in the performance of the *Zhuhu* instrument, as well as techniques like overlapping vocal lines and vocal growls in the theatrical performances. Various effects of *tremolo*, *glissando*, and percussive sounds used in the *Zhuhu* music were analyzed, causing changes in pitch and dynamics. Whether or not these tonal elements were used could determine the style of a piece of music.

II.   Modal composition: It was the second important feature of the Chinese music system, referring to the organization of tones in terms of pentatonicism. Unlike Western music, the essential characteristic of modal composition in Chinese music was pentatonicism, with five pentatonic modes: *gong, shang, jue, zhi,* and *yu*. The pentatonicism of modal composition referred to the most fundamental movement patterns of tones and was not equivalent to the pentatonic scale. The five-tone system could be composed not only of the five pitches gong, *shang, jue, zhi,* and *yu* but also of partial tones and the five main pitches together, such as bian gong, shang, jiao; bian zhi, yu, gong; bian gong, shang, qing jiao, etc. The Chinese music system had not only the pentatonic scale but also various forms of heptatonic scales due to these two situations. This was the difference between the heptatonic scales in the Chinese music system and those in the Western music system. Therefore, an analysis was conducted to determine which modes and scales were used in the *Zhuhu* music, and which mode dominated. These modes and scales were used to express certain emotions, roles, and the expressiveness of the music.

III. Vocal tune on the texture: The Chinese music system exhibited horizontal linearity in texture, emphasizing the horizontal unfolding of each voice's melody. In Chinese music, the majority of pieces were monophonic. In this type of composition, texture and melody coincided, with the texture being the horizontal unfolding of the melody in a single voice. This was a pure horizontal linearity in texture. In Chinese music, if it was a multi-voice texture, it was not like the tonal music commonly used in Western music, but rather polyphonic music. Polyphony referred to two or more melodies undergoing specific ways of intertwining and interacting with each other. In the *Zhuhu* music of the Yangxin tea-picking opera, the *Zhuhu* music was monophonic, so the texture was portrayed as linear. Even in the accompanying vocal music, emphasis was placed on the horizontal development of each voice part's melody, usually played by other voice parts to accompany the main instrument. The coordination between instruments and voice parts created a rich musical texture. This horizontal combination not only added depth to the music but also enhanced its expressiveness.

IV.   In terms of rhythm: There were two types of rhythms in music: isochronous (regular) rhythm and anisochronous (irregular) rhythm. Isochronous rhythm had a regular sense of meter and could be played with a beat. Anisochronous rhythm, on the other hand, was irregular and uneven, and could not be played with a steady beat. In modern music, it was often referred to as "freely paced". In isochronous rhythm, there were two subtypes. One was the regular and uniform appearance of strong and weak beats according to the division of measures, which could be called "functional isochronous rhythm". The other was the cyclic repetition of strong and weak beats without the restrictions of measure lines and without fixed rules, which could be called "non-functional isochronous rhythm". These two different rhythmic patterns were also an important difference between the Chinese and Western music systems.

In the *Zhuhu* music of the Yangxin tea-picking opera, the rhythm changes were very flexible and diverse. There were even and regular arrangements of strong and weak beats, and sometimes other changing rhythms were added. The use of anisochronous rhythm could bring more changes and vitality to the music. The *Zhuhu* performer controlled the rhythm according to the vocal music, using a lot of "anisochronous rhythm" (i.e., freely paced rhythm). One type was commonly seen in the beginning and ending sections of the music, and sometimes in the middle sections. There were also arrangements of uniform and regular strong and weak beats, but they often incorporated other variable rhythms to make the music more free and varied. Another type was the abundant use of "non-functional isochronous rhythm". This rhythm had a distinction between strong and weak beats and therefore had measure lines, but the position of strong and weak beats in each measure was not fixed.

Second, I will use the theory of the "Tripartite Model" theory and "Music personnel and cultural research model" to solve my research question 2. "Merriam's tripartite model is an analytical approach used to understand the role of music in culture. This model, proposed by American musicologist Alan P. Merriam (1964), aims to reveal the multifaceted impact of music in culture. The model consists of three core dimensions: firstly, 'Analysis of Music's Sounds' focuses on the structure and sound elements of music. Secondly, 'Conceptualization about Music' examines the symbolic significance and cognitive aspects of music within a

culture, as well as how people understand music. Finally, 'Behavior in Relation to Music' investigates the role of music in social and cultural activities. By integrating these three dimensions, this model helps gain a deeper understanding of how music reflects and shapes culture, as well as its role and significance in society. This theoretical model (see Figure2) provides a powerful tool for researchers to comprehensively understand the cultural dimensions of music.
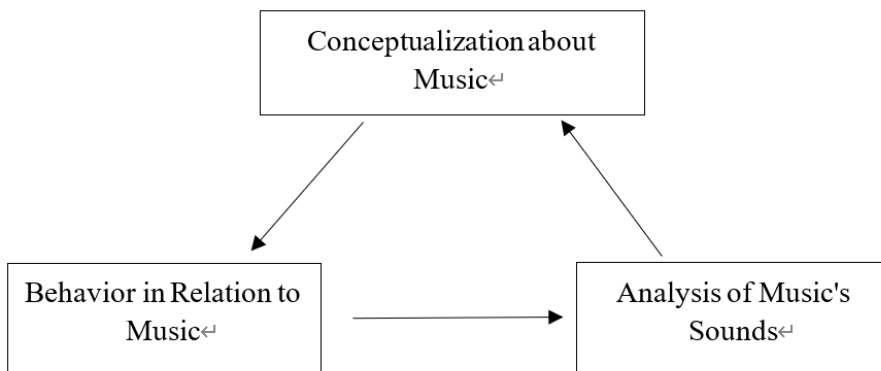

Figure 2: "Tripartite Model" by Alan P. Merriam (1964)

However, as my research focused on the subject "*Zhuhu* music in Yangxin Tea-Picking Opera," which falls under Traditional Chinese music, I also incorporated the theory of Chinese scholar Luo Qin, known as the "Music Personnel and Cultural Research Model" (Luo,2010), along with the theories of the two Western scholars mentioned earlier. This theoretical model, proposed by Luo Qin, is based on the Western theories of Alan P. Merriam and Timothy Rice, offering a suitable framework for exploring the intricacies of Chinese native music culture (Refer to Figure 3).
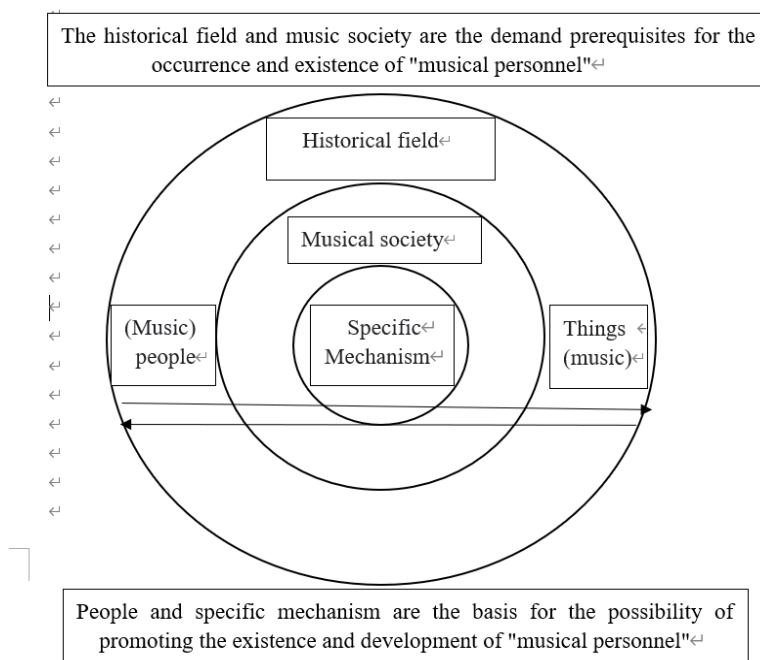

Figure 3: "Music Personnel and Culture Research Model" theory by Luo Qin, 2010

Luo Qin had highlighted in his model that the primary focus is on "Musical personnel" associated with music, encompassing the life and activities of individuals. This concept manifests in people and their associated elements (music). These include:

i. People: Referring to individuals linked to the investigated music objects, involving decision-making, creation, performance, management, audience, and thinkers, among others.

ii. Things (music): Pertaining to matters related to the discussed music objects by people, encompassing works, performances, and associated consumption and operational activities.

iii. Culture: The term "cultural" environment in this model holds three meanings. Firstly, at the macro-level, it involves the historical field with both a diachronic process and the objective existence of past history itself, serving as a significant temporal and spatial force in the relationship between music personnel and culture. Secondly, at the middle level, it refers to music society, denoting the geographical, material, and social space within a specific society or region under particular historical conditions. This society has musical attributes directly linked to the study's object - music personnel. Thirdly, at the micro-level, it points to specific mechanisms directly influencing, promoting, and supporting music personnel. These mechanisms exhibit functionality, diversity, pluralism, particularity, and complexity, incorporating factors such as ideology, dominant power, activities, or events (Luo Qin, 2010).

The interaction between music personnel and culture is shaped, encouraged, and supported by specific mechanisms formed in the music social environment under the influence of specific historical fields. The concept of "music society" is crucial in this model, representing the specific social environment influenced by a historical context. It encompasses geographical, material, and social space, acting as the society in which music personnel live within the broader historical framework. This society possesses musical attributes, directly impacting music personnel, and consists of their survival and cultural identity category (Luo , 2010).

In this study, I incorporated the perspectives of three scholars, emphasizing *Zhuhu* music, aiming to uncover how *Zhuhu* music and Chinese Yangxin society are affected, encouraged, and sustained by specific mechanisms within the music social environment influenced by specific historical fields. Simultaneously, I sought to explore the interactions among people, mechanism environment, and things (music). My focus was not solely on the musical aspect of *Zhuhu* music but also on its cultural context among the people of Yangxin in China. Following this model, I established three main objectives for the study as outlined above.

Third, I applied the theories of Luoqin's "Music personnel and cultural research model "and John Blacking's "Musical Culture Change" theory (1977) to address research question 3.

Primarily, considering *Zhuhu* music as a significant component of Yangxin tea-picking opera culture, my examination of this issue drew upon Luoqin's thoery (Luo,2010) "Music personnel and cultural research model", Luo elucidating the intricate relationship between music and culture. This topic has consistently been a focal point in ethnomusicology's evolution. The idea underscores the inherent link between music and culture, necessitating in-depth exploration to comprehend their interconnectedness.

Moreover, the theory of musical change emerged in the field of ethnomusicology toward the end of the 20th century, offering a crucial perspective to explain the phenomena of music and dance. This perspective mandates long-term, continuous observation and analysis of the research object's evolution from the past to the present, unveiling the multi-dimensional internal relationship between music and culture within the ongoing societal observation. It also explicates the causative factors behind musical change (Yu Yuan, 2023). Simultaneously, John Blacking (1977) highlighted the importance of "music change" in terms of sound innovation, the relationship between music, thought, and creative change, micro and macro research in musical change, as well as considering other cultural contacts and interpretations.

Investigating music as a culture, I recognized that the role and status of *Zhuhu* music in the cultural context of Yangxin tea-picking opera's musical event are dynamically evolving. Therefore, my focus in this research centered on studying cultural change, synonymous with music and cultural change. Regardless of one's perception of culture, human experiences undergo transformations. In exploring this matter, I applied Alan Merriam's notions regarding cultural change. Merriam (1964) posited that "ethnomusicology needs a theory of change that can be applied to both internal and external factors," framing musical change as a result of a balance between stability and continuity (referred to as "internal change") and external contact interference.

Internal changes typically follow a paradigm entrenched in a culture and can thus be somewhat predictable based on the culture's musical concepts, change concepts, socio-technology, social structures, and more. The outcomes of external contact may be influenced by numerous variables, but predictions about such outcomes can be made to some extent through various cross-cultural relationships (Merriam, 1964).

To expand my investigation into the musical changes of the *Zhuhu* in Yangxin tea-picking opera, particularly delving into the evolving roles and status of the *Zhuhu* in contemporary society, the history of the *Zhuhu*'s evolution, playing techniques, musical styles, dominance in the orchestra, and changes in the accompaniment space, I embraced Bruno Nettl's perspective (1996) on this subject. Nettl perceives music and

culture as an integrated system, where components of the music system may undergo changes in various ways and at different rates. These components might represent cultural elements, and culture, in turn, shapes music. In essence, cultural changes dictate musical transformations.

To fortify my analysis, I also considered utilizing Alan Lomax's Cantometrics analysis to address all three of my research objectives. Alan Lomax (1968) contended that Cantometrics analysis substantiated his initial hypothesis that a society characterized by sexual restrictions and severe punitive measures correlates with heightened vocal tension. Singing together in groups, tonal coherence, and the potential for polyphonic singing are associated with fewer restrictions on women. Multi-part singing is prevalent in societies where genders maintain a complementary relationship. Lomax termed this system "cantometrics," defining it as "the measure of song, or song as a measure of culture" (Lomax, 1989).

As illustrated in Figure 2 below, Alan Lomax delineated 36 cantometric characters across 10 categories of song style factors. All these characters and factors are correlated with three main categories of social structure factors to examine their interconnections. Additional findings include a strong correlation between phrase length and articulation accuracy, as well as the degree of ornamentation with social stratification. It was observed that the explicitness or information load of songs fluctuates based on the economic productivity level of the subsistence system.
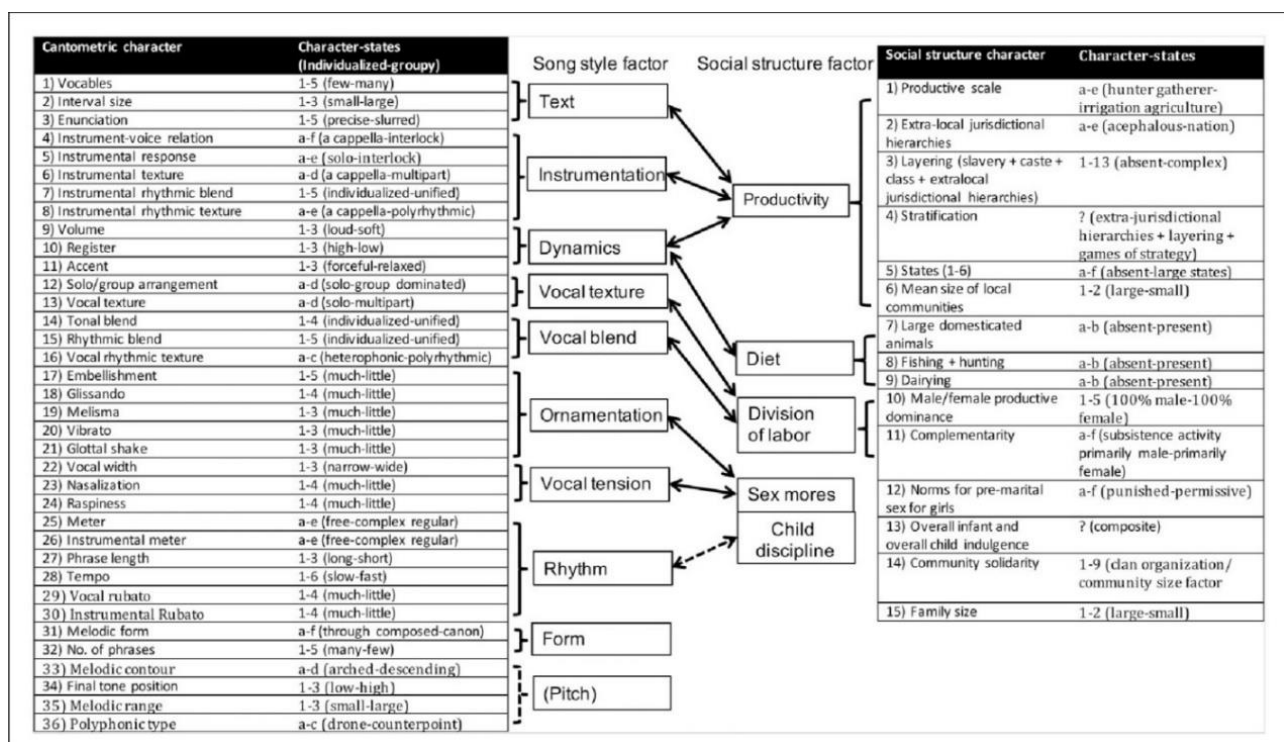

Figure 4: Summary of features of song style and social structure classified by Alan Lomax (1968)

Grounded in Alan Lomax's Cantometrics theory, this study selected relevant cantometric characters based on song style factors and mapped them to corresponding social structure factors and character states. This approach aimed to analyze the relationship between *Zhuhu* music and the socio-culture of Yangxin society. However, the selection of cantometric characters and social structure factors for analysis was contingent on the recorded and collected *Zhuhu* music repertoire obtained during fieldwork. It was understood that not all cantometrics and social structure factors might be employed in the analysis of *Zhuhu* music repertoire.

By amalgamating Cantometrics theory with other pertinent theories, the research aimed to elucidate and depict *Zhuhu* music as either "in culture," "is culture," or "as culture" among the people of Yangxin, China. Consequently, the theoretical framework, as illustrated in Figure 4 below, emerged from this discussion. This framework utilized two theories to address research question 1, one theory for research question 2, and two theories for research question 3. Lastly, Alan Lomax's Cantometrics theory was applied to analyze across all three research questions.
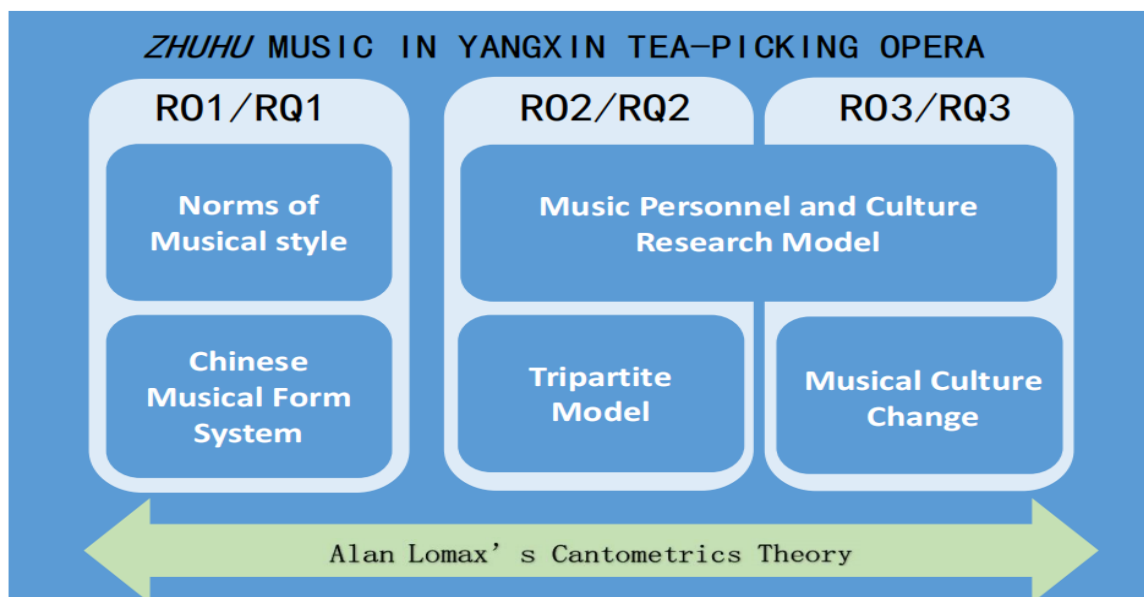
Figure 5: Theoretical Framework

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon the context of *Zhuhu* music in Yangxin Tea-Picking Opera, the incorporation of six key theories—Norms of Musical Style, Chinese Musical Form System, Tripartite Model, Music personnel and cultural research model, Musical Culture Change and Lomax's Cantometrics theory—ensures the acquisition of reliable data, robust analysis, and effective tools for data analysis. Employing this comprehensive approach, the research aims to fulfill its objectives, delving into a profound understanding of the musical culture surrounding Zhuhu music in Yangxin Tea-Picking Opera in China.

The transformation brought about by modernization and the influence of Western music culture, disseminated through various media, has significantly altered the musical landscape of *Zhuhu* in Yangxin tea-picking opera. The dominance of *Zhuhu* and the evolving space for accompaniment music have shifted in alignment with Western music culture, particularly popular music. Historical records indicate that traditional music still finds a place in certain ceremonies within Yangxin County society. However, there is a growing disregard for this cultural heritage, and to some extent, this tradition faces the risk of fading away in the societal consciousness. Therefore, it is imperative for the government and local authorities to prioritize the preservation of this traditional music culture.

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