

HOW A SONG CAN BE EXHIBITED IN A MUSIC MUSEUM

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the folksongs of people living in Napo, Nanning, and Funin in Guangxi Autonomous Region and Yunnan province. The study was initiated with the experience of working at the new Music Museum of the city of Nanning established within the campus of Guangxi Arts University. Since this is a Music Museum, arrangements were made to exhibit a sample repertoire of folksongs from this region in addition to all the interesting musical instruments. This was a very difficult task as it is a well observable fact that a song does not exist in a single version as it moves from one place to another, and changes all the time. This paper is about the experiences during this particular activity and how these difficulties had to be mastered. There might be others who face the same difficulties. As such, this paper may help find solution for the problems encountered by other music museums. Technically, this is the elaboration about a topic strongly connected to live interviews and personally collected statistics that were found through an intense personal presence in the mentioned area. The reference style had to be adapted to these circumstances. In order to make information traceable, many parts of the references carry translations in square brackets behind the transliteration. Also, Chinese names are left as a whole despite starting with the family name, the middle name and given names are tremendously important for identification. Name characters are presented in square brackets. Material can be obtained upon request made per email to the author.

Keywords

Music museum, Ethnic representation, Zhuang songs, Exhibits, Historical context

Introduction

When studying ethnomusicology, the main focus to be followed was on Zhuang songs of Napo and Funin County in Guangxi and Yunnan respectively. The geographical location of Guangxi is close to that of ASEAN countries, and there are obvious similarities between cultures. Therefore, cultural exchanges such as music and dance in ASEAN countries were always a feature of the university's curriculum. The Guangxi Arts University has a museum under the theme of traditional music in Guangxi on its campus. At the same time, a musical instrument exhibition hall had also been set up to showcase some of the musical instruments from ASEAN countries. What makes this museum different from other museums is that there are "dynamic" performances in addition to "static" exhibits. In most museums, like the National Palace Museum in China or in various provincial museums, visitors can only enjoy the exhibits through a glass, view some introductions through a visual machine, carry out some interesting interactive games, such as 3D puzzles, watch holographic videos, wear headphones and listen to various music clips. In the Guangxi Music Museum, visitors can directly enjoy live performances in which some local instruments

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are played. Typically, the museum cooperates with the university curriculum to offer an Indonesian Gamelan course for first-year students who took ethnomusicology. Randy Gevengk (2019) who is from West-Indonesia, is the teacher of this course and he contributed vastly to introduce this initiative. On this basis, when visitors come to the museum, they get to listen to live music. Gevengk has been working in the museum for one and a half years. He has led the students to participate in important events held in many schools, including exchanges with other schools in China. He said that museums can serve as a place for the collection and protection of art and cultural heritage. They can also be used as a resource for scientific literature and other research materials. In the Guangxi Music Museum, visitors can learn about the music culture of many countries. In addition, the museum can also be used as a learning space for ethnomusicology students.

The music culture of Guangxi is the main theme of the museum, so one may see the performances of musical instruments found in Guangxi, such as the gu hu and ma shan drum during a visit to it. In fact, in addition to musical instruments, local live music and opera are also featured in the Guangxi's Music Culture Section of the museum. As such, the museum exhibits songs in addition to interesting musical instruments. Nevertheless, there are challenges faced during this process. Knowing that a song does not exist in a single version and that a song moves from one place to another while changing all the time, it is challenging to find a compromise. This paper is about these difficulties which may have arisen in places meant for similar purposes.

What is Meant by Ethnic Representation?

Before asking question, let us take a look at the objectives and scope of the data collection. The research population with whom a survey was shared were Zhuang people who are mainly distributed in Guangxi, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou, and other provinces of China and Vietnam. They are regarded as a regional cultural community centered on 'rice culture'. Napo County, Baise City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is adjacent to Funing County, Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province Prefecture (Kaup, 2003).

The two counties are located in the special geographical zone of the border between Guangxi and Yunnan, which also shows that borders between provinces are rather administrative than cultural. There are also multi-ethnic settlements, meaning that there is more than one group inhabiting the same area. They have accumulated musical experiences over a long period of time. Considering the social resources taken as a whole that are not only self-invented, Zhuang songs are an important part of this vast culture. Since the Yuan Dynasty, the two counties have been divided into different administrative regions; nevertheless, the two places have the same living history. Each song has both regional and social variability since people move and settle in different places. The Zhuang song lyrics record the history of the Zhuang living in this area, perpetuate the Zhuang culture, and express the feelings of the Zhuang people in general. It seems to have far-reaching significance for promoting the Zhuang group and inheriting a Zhuang culture of which one might be convinced today.

The Napo Zhuang songs were listed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of China in May 2006. Music scholars, anthropologists, and linguists working on the topic of song researches, all have carried out serious research on Zhuang songs (Huang Yongcha, 1983; Huang Ge, 1990; Pan Qixu, 1991; Zhou Guowen, 2005; Fan Ximu, 2006). There are also studies on the singing methods of Zhuang songs, but these focus only on the description of the text. There is no way for people to directly hear the voices of Zhuang songs through words and their melody. In a museum related to music, especially in a museum with the theme 'Music in Guangxi', one is expected to get the feeling that musical instruments produce wonderful sounds, then the next step is probably for the visitors to get the chance to actually listen to the people

who live in Guangxi and witness their vocal talents. As far as it is known, there is no other Chinese music museum that teaches people to sing songs. Zhuang songs are sung in the Zhuang language, so can people who visit the museum understand what a Zhuang song means?

The problem appears not only in this context. Identity issues are a burning problem in any museum. The layers of ‘identifiers’ for different ethnic or cultural groups diminish. the more specific a museum becomes. In such a context, the noteworthy problem is to define the authority that considers any feature as being ‘correct’. Therefore, museums bear a big part of the responsibility in order to define the showcased items as showcase-worthy.

There is a scheme given in a not yet outdated paper (Jähnichen 2014, 2016):

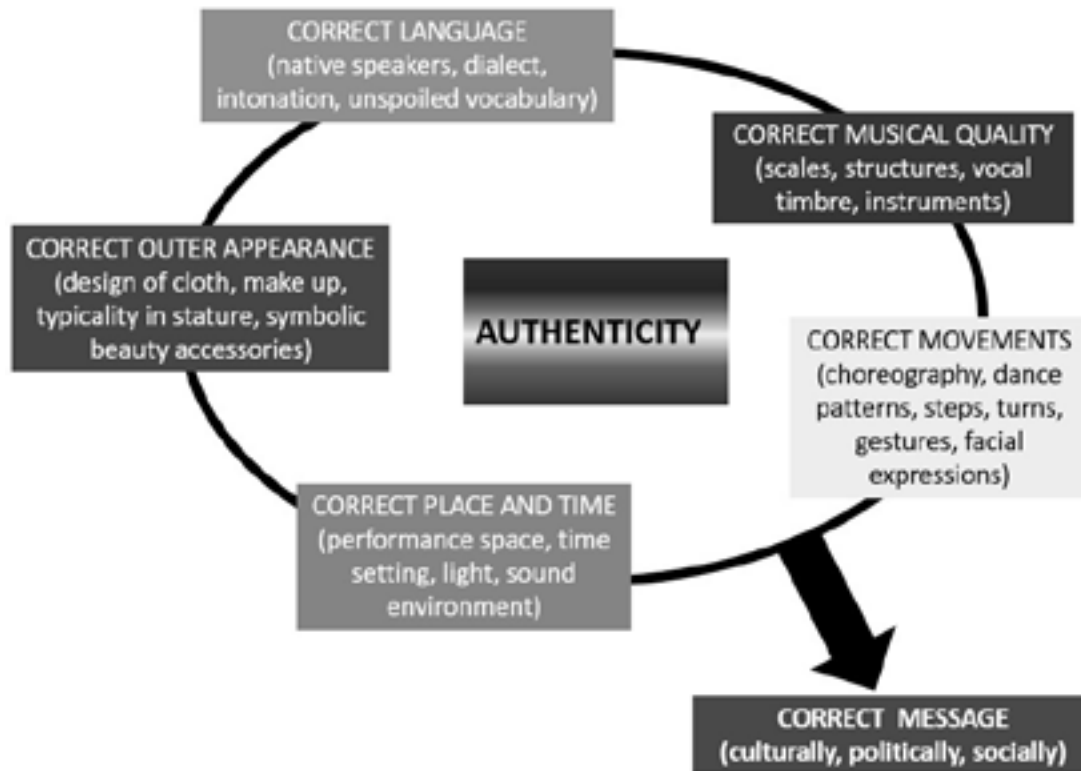


Figure 1: Scheme regarding features of an “authentic” display of people’s cultural identity (Scheme by courtesy of Gisa Jähnichen, 2014/2016).

The scheme lists the way in which specific identity features are developed over time. It assigns language as an important feature. Museums may be able to cover the three upper-most layers yet aim at conveying the most basic message. This seems to be rather impossible without destroying other necessary knowledge such as the place, time and ideas of movements. This situation leads to the following claim that a language is very important to the attachment? of any culture. Language seems to be one of the most outstanding features in this circle. Language may have to carry all the functions of identifying a culture in case of need (Kaup, 2003). And with this, the problems start because languages also change over time. New terms are invented, regional differences have to be considered, youth language, academic language, or ritual language have to be acknowledged; all these parts have their own life and their own time of use.

Zhuang songs emerge from a wide range of regional content and a variety of singing occasions. The fact that one’s own pre-education in this regard is strongly reflected in choices that are offered through visitation to a museum cannot be emphasized enough. Therefore, one can see how crucial is the perception of ‘correctness’. In terms of content regarding past times, which have to be clearly defined,

Zhuang songs are not only present in love marriages and labor processes, but also include myths and legends, ancestral achievements, astronomical geography, celebrations, greetings, and many other items. Singing occasions are also spread across the coastal areas, indoor festival gatherings, and daily meetings, and can also be used during various banquets. According to a number of researchers (Huang Yongcha, 1983; Huang Ge 1990; Pan Qixu, 1991; Fan Ximu, 2006), the Zhuang songs can be divided into five types: 'fwen[fw:n¹];sei[sei¹];ga[ka¹];beij[pei³];luenx[lwən⁴]. These different names are different for each Zhuang dialect. As per the proper title of the specific native word of the song, these titles all refer to the proprietary event 'song' (Wang and Johnson, 2008).

During the conversation with the singers, when they were asked about the Zhuang songs and their special features, the basic tunes of their songs appeared to be the most notable feature. Funing's two self-chosen counties² singers have noticed that the Zhuang songs have long been in the lives of the Zhuang people yet some parts of those songs are already missing nowadays. When there are any differences in a tune, some singers (Lin Zhi, 2016-2017) pointed out that they may know that it is the average tone, because they listen with their local experience. In practice, one can still find people who know all the elements of the song expressions that were used in previous decades. Those characteristics are seemingly typical for Zhuang songs but again, there is an unclear definition of place and time in producing those songs that are making the current issues among the Zhuang people rather difficult to accept on a local level.

Discussion

Communication is an important means of inheriting a people's cultural heritage. It is precisely because people continue to spread and innovate on this basis that culture can continue and human civilization continues to progress in many different directions. Therefore, communication is an important means of also ensuring the inheritance of social understanding. The inheritance of intangible cultural heritage also needs to rely on communication since it is part of it. This doubling of the functional features of communication is making a precise explanation of song uses difficult. A music museum communicates music, which is part of the communication in other contexts. The first step may start with the significance of 'time'.

One has to be aware of being only able to show the past of a song, its use in a certain time frame, and by people of a specified place. This is very important to the accuracy of an exhibit. However, it is also known that this accuracy as with many other songs has the current context. Many of them might be used in popular music or in functions that were not known in the past.

So now, the question still remains: how can a song be exhibited? How is it possible to exhibit a song to visitors in a short time given this particular occasion while being in the Music Museum? This seems to lead back to a time prior to an electronically enhanced way of human communication. One could simulate an experience without relying on any electronic products, just on people's singing to let the others hear the sound, a melody, a symbol of this kind of song. As a museum's guide in this matter it has to be pointed out that this does not depend on having lived in Guangxi since childhood. Even after four years of local experience, it might be necessary to deeply study all the songs. Nonetheless, nobody can fully understand Zhuang songs as can be seen from the following example. It is very difficult to get the entire meaning behind a song from its context. The following example illustrates this problem:

2. A county is a sub-level of a population unit. People are self-organised. They choose their best singers by themselves.

谱例1

探情歌

(论央)

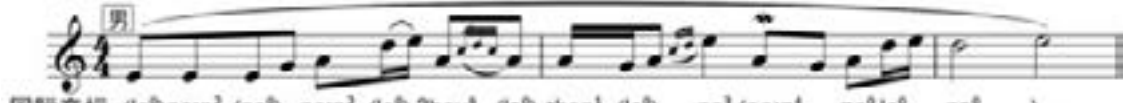
演唱者: 梁有强 衣飞琼

译配: 刘敬柳

记谱: 林芝

*1st. Pitch = $\sharp f$

J=55



国际音标: (le^o)na:n² (na^o) na:n² (le^o)ʔbau⁴ (lo^o) than¹ (le^o) na³ (no:ŋ⁴ ŋa^ole^o no^o).
 壮文: (le) nanz (na) nanz (le) mbouj (lo) raen (le) naj (nuengx nga le no).
 直译: 久 久 不 见 脸 ,



la:³ no:ŋ⁴ (li^o) pja:k¹⁰pai¹ (le^o) ja⁴ (lo^o ei^o i^o) mi³ (lo^o) ma²,
 laih nuengx (li) byag bae (le) yah (lo ei yi) miq (lo) ma,
 认为 妹 离 去 婆 婆 不 来 ,



(li^o) van² (du^o) tsan² (na^o) tsu^o than¹ (le^o) tha¹ (lo^o) hui² (ja^o) maw³ (no^o ui^o)
 (li) ngoenz (ndu) caenz (na) couh raen (le) da (lo) hoiz (ya) moq (no ui'yi)
 日 现在 就 见 眼 次 新 .



(no:ŋ⁴ ŋa^o no^o). (le^o) na:n² (nou^o) lai¹ (ja^o) mi³ (le^o) than¹
 (nuengx nga no). (le) nanz (nou) lai (ya) miq (le) raen
 久 多 不 见



(ma^o) la:ŋ² (le^o) pai¹ (ja^o) ta:u⁴ (la:ŋ² ŋa^o da^o). (hei^o) na¹ (le^o) pi⁴ (le^o) ŋaŋ²
 (ma) langz (le) bae (ya) dauq (langz nga ndw). (hei) naj (le) heix (le) nyaengz
 郎 去 回 , 盼 兄 还



pan² (le^o)ʔbau⁴ (li^o) je^o hei^o lo⁴ (a^o) mi³, (le^o) hau³ (le^o) no:ŋ⁴ (a^o) tha³ (le^o) ki³
 baenz (le) mbauq (li yw hei) rox(a) miq. (le) hauj (le) nuengx (a) caj (le) geij
 成 小伙 或 不 , 给 妹 等 几



(ja^o) pi¹ (lei^o) ʔjou³ (a^o) pjou³ (no^o ei^o i^o la:ŋ² ŋa^o ne^o). (ne^o no^o o^o hui^o lo^o)
 (ya) bi (lei) youq (a) byouq (nw ei yi langz nga ne). (ne no o hui lo
 年 在 空 .

Figure 2: Example of a Zhuang song text and melody collected in 2016. (Transcription by the author).

Outlook

This is a song collected during a data search in Napo County. After leaving Napo, the recordings were put in order and the song melodies were transcribed in 5-line staff-notation. The lyrics were transcribed with Zhuang language employing phonetic signs (Bauer, 2000). During and after this data collection, I recorded more than 100 hours of Zhuang songs with video and audio devices. Approximately 20 music scores were created.

The transcriptions were done following a specific understanding of songs, and the modification of the melodies were followed according to how they were perceived. The perception of songs in the mind of the transcribing person has not yet been researched much until now. That is the weakest point of this research. Lack of consistency in the use of terms, language, and sources of knowledge is another point that has to be worked out. One starting point could be the acknowledgment of all knowledge contributors in a flexible way. Any recording is made at a specific time and at a specific place. So, these data are often underestimated when it comes to sound and audiovisual recordings that are presented in museum contexts. Visitors should get an idea of such changes.

Only by being honest in admitting what the issues are and being transparent with the visitors, any exhibition can have an effect with regard to educational and cultural understanding. By doing so, a museum of music can inspire people and make them become more creative and open-minded.

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APPENDIX

List of personal interviews available as video recordings upon request to the author

Lin Zhi. (2016-2017). Personal Interviews with the following persons in Guangxi and Yunan, recorded as video (private collection) and with notes taken:

Luo Jingchao, male, Napo County, Baise City, Guangxi Province, born in October 1958. He began to learn Zhuang songs at the age of 14. Information about this interview: Time = 5:00 pm, 14 February, 2017; Location = "Sensitive Rock" Square, Napo County. 罗景超 [Luo Jing Chao]. 中国非物质文化遗产项目“那坡壮族民歌”国家级传承人·男·广西百色市那坡县·生于1958年10月·14岁开始学习壮族民歌。

Ceng Jing E, female, Beidou Village, Pingmeng Town, Napo County, Baise City, Guangxi Province, born in August 1971. She is in the seventh generation of a family of Zhuang singers. She began to learn Zhuang songs from her mother at the age of 8. Information of this interview: Time = 7:00 pm, 20 October, 2016; Location = Ceng Jing E's house, Napo County. 岑金娥 [Ceng Jing E]. 家族第七代壮族民歌传人, 女·广西百色市那坡县平孟镇北斗村·生于1971年8月·8岁开始向母亲学习壮族民歌。

Zhai Mingyue, male, Dongbo Township, Funing County, Yunnan, born in December 1962. He is in the third generation of a singer family. He started studying at the age of 10. Information of this interview: Time = 10 April 2017; Location: Guichao Town, Funing County. 翟明跃 [Zhai Ming Yue]. 家族第三代歌师·男·云南富宁县洞波乡·生于1962年12月·10岁开始。