

## Literacy Transmission of Mulao Folk Songs during the Zoupo Festival in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China

Ying Wu and Pitsanu Boonsrianun\*

*College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand*

**Corresponding author:** Pitsanu Boonsrianun E-mail: pitsanu.b@msu.ac.th

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### ABSTRACT

The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China's Luocheng, northern Guangxi, and southeast Guizhou are the main distribution hubs for Mulao folk songs, which are a significant aspect of China's Mulao line customs heritage. The objective of this study was to investigate the literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. This is a qualitative study that includes relevant literature research, surveys, interviews, and transcriptions. In this study, the informants are categorized into two groups: two scholar informants and four informal informants. The result of this study shows that the Mulao Zoupo Festival in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, has transformed from a mate selection tradition to a platform for the literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs. This traditional folk activity promotes education, cultural exchange, and community engagement, fostering the preservation and promotion of Mulao culture and traditions. It underscores their commitment to maintaining their cultural legacy and encouraging community involvement through music and cultural enrichment. The study sheds light on the Mulao people's unwavering dedication to safeguarding cultural heritage.

**Key words:** Mulao Folk Songs, Literacy Transmission, Transmission Process, Guangxi, China

### INTRODUCTION

Mulao folk songs are an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Mulao people, a distinct ethnic group residing in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. These folk songs have been passed down through generations, reflecting the history, traditions, and cultural changes of the Mulao community. With their rich lyrical content and melodic expressions, Mulao folk songs encapsulate the national spirit, character, and aesthetic interests of the Mulao people (Tang, 2008; Wei, 2017; Wei, 2019; Wei, 2020). The significance of Mulao folk songs has been recognized through their official designations as intangible cultural heritage (Jackson, 2023). In 2010, they were listed as Guangxi-level intangible cultural heritage, and in 2021, they received national-level recognition. The preservation and transmission of Mulao folk songs today rely on various methods, including traditional festival transmission, social transmission, and school transmission. Among these, the Mulao Zoupo Festival holds a prominent position as a vital carrier for the transmission of Mulao folk songs (Wu, 2020; Ping & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

The Mulao Zoupo Festival, recognized as the fourth batch of intangible cultural heritage of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 2012, stands as a pinnacle event for the Mulao people. Celebrated annually during the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, the Zoupo Festival brings together people

of all ages, providing a platform for communal singing and fostering connections through music. The festival has evolved over time, not only serving as a traditional marriage and social festival for Mulao youth but also transforming into an essential cultural and entertainment festival for the broader Mulao community and other ethnic groups (Yuan, 2008).

The literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival is a key focus of this study. By examining the process and methods of literacy transmission, the study aims to shed light on how Mulao folk songs are preserved and passed down from one generation to another. The Zoupo Festival, with its cultural significance and community engagement, plays a crucial role in the transmission of Mulao folk songs, making it an essential research subject for understanding the dynamics of this cultural tradition (Wu, 2020; Yantian & Karin, 2022).

Understanding the literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival not only contributes to the documentation and preservation of Mulao culture but also provides valuable insights into the broader field of ethnic minority music development in China. By exploring the historical context, cultural significance, and transmission methods of Mulao folk songs, this research aims to enhance our understanding of the Mulao people's heritage and contribute to the broader knowledge of Chinese ethnic minority music.

The study delves into the literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. By examining the role of the Zoupo Festival in the preservation and dissemination of Mulao folk songs, the research aims to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of this unique cultural heritage and its impact on the Mulao community and Chinese ethnic minority music as a whole.

### Research Question

- How does the Zoupo Festival contribute to the literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The General Knowledge of Folk Songs in Guangxi, China

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in China is home to a vibrant tapestry of ethnic minority groups, each with their own distinctive folk song traditions. The Zhuang people, known for their expressive mountain songs, have a rich history of singing folk songs that dates back to ancient times. These songs, rooted in the Zhuang dialect, encapsulate the essence of their lives, thoughts, and emotions. The Yao people, on the other hand, have a remarkable song called the Pan King song, which is sung during their worship of the Pan King. Legend tells of the Yao tribe's struggle for survival, aided by the Pan King's divine intervention. In gratitude, the Yao people sing elaborate narrative poems, spanning thousands of lines, to honor the Pan King and commemorate their history and culture (Beauchamp, 2010; Bing, 2023).

Miao folk songs are characterized by their solo and antiphonal forms. When welcoming guests or narrating stories, Miao people sing solo songs with concise four-line, seven-word structures (Schein, 2000). In contrast, when young men and women meet, they engage in antiphonal singing, exchanging "Meeting Songs," "Greeting Songs," "Guessing Songs," and "Love Songs." These songs, influenced by Chinese culture, showcase the vivacity, subtlety, and deep emotions of the Miao people and are popular in areas where they interact with other ethnic groups. The knowledge of folk songs in Guangxi offers valuable insights into the diverse cultural heritage of the region. By understanding the distinct folk song traditions of various ethnic groups, we can gain a deeper appreciation for their history, customs, and artistic expressions. These folk songs not only serve as a form of entertainment but also play a significant role in preserving and promoting the unique identities and traditions of Guangxi's ethnic minorities (Qin et al., 2011; Ingram & Wu, 2017; Jin & Ibrahim, 2022).

### The General Knowledge of Mulao Folk Songs in Guangxi, China

#### *The origin of mulao folk songs*

The origin of Mulao folk songs is a complex and significant topic, encompassing factors such as their conception, formation, development, and decline, as well as their flow and

lineage. Based on Su Shaning's research, Mulao polyphonic folk songs are believed to have emerged during the Western Han Dynasty, took shape in the Tang Dynasty, and reached maturity in the Ming Dynasty (Mu, 1998). The Mulao people, originally part of the Ouyue group in the Baiyue branch of southern ethnic groups in China, gradually developed their polyphonic folk songs into a structured form with clear rhythm and continuous bass lines. Over time, the language of the songs shifted from the native Mulao language to the Chinese Tujia dialect (Guo et al., 2015).

#### *Classification of mulao folk songs*

Mulao folk songs are classified based on their content. Tang Daijun categorizes them into kaitan songs, gutiao songs, zoupo songs, koufeng songs, and lisu songs. Wu's classification in the book "Folk Literature of Chinese Minorities" includes gutiao songs, sui kouda, koufeng songs, and new folk songs. Teng Zhipeng, Liu Kai'e, and Mo Qiu summarize the types of Mulao folk songs into three categories: gutiao songs, sui kouda, and koufeng songs. Gutiao songs include mythological songs, historical story songs, and customs songs, while sui kouda includes zoupo songs, ritual songs, and life songs. Koufeng songs are further divided into Zheng Koufeng and Lan Koufeng (Liantao, 2012).

#### *Collection and arrangement of mulao folk songs*

Scholars began to take an interest in Mulao folk songs in the 1950s when extensive investigations were conducted in ethnic areas to study the social history and culture of ethnic minorities. The materials collected during this period, such as the report "Survey on the situation of Mulao people in Luocheng" and subsequent publications, introduced Mulao folk songs as part of the folk culture. However, the focus was primarily on the lyrics, and the music of Mulao folk songs received limited attention (Shih, 2007).

The collection and arrangement of Mulao folk songs continued in subsequent years. Various publications, such as the "Guangxi Volume of Chinese Songs Integration-Mulao Songs" and "Guangxi Volume of Chinese Folk Songs Integration-Mulao," mainly focused on organizing the lyrics and used materials compiled from different sources. In 2007, Long Dianbao, Huang Guiqiu, and Wu Daiqun published "Mulao Traditional Folk Songs," which exclusively documented Mulao folk songs. The book includes handwritten copies of songbooks passed down through generations and traditional folk songs transmitted orally by Mulao singers. It provides comprehensive information about the songs, including lyrics, content, form, characteristics, specific places of singing, customs, rituals, and cultural context. However, the emphasis is still primarily on the lyrics, and the music of the folk songs is given less attention.

### The General Knowledge of Mulao Zoupo Festival in Guangxi, China

The Zoupo Festival is a traditional festival celebrated by the Mulao people in Guangxi, China. It serves as a platform for

young locals to make friends through songs and is held twice a year during the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. The festival has a long history and has been a traditional marriage custom for Mulao youths. It features male and female duets and question-and-answer sessions using Mulao folk songs to convey love. The Zoupo Festival is a significant cultural event that preserves Mulao history, strengthens national identity, and serves as a symbol of Mulao culture. However, the festival's transmission and preservation face challenges due to external cultural influences (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013; Zhang, 2019; Baolong & Chonpairot, 2021; Jian et al., 2022). The music at the festival includes solos, antiphonal singing, and choruses, with simple melodies, pentatonic scales, and colloquial lyrics. The rhythm is free and moderate, and the performance does not involve instrumental accompaniment. Preserving the Zoupo Festival and its cultural heritage is of great importance in safeguarding the Mulao people's traditions and identity.

## Research Theory

### *Musicology*

Musicology provides a foundation for studying the historical development, cultural context, and musical characteristics of Mulao folk songs. It involves analyzing the origins, classifications, and structural elements of these songs (Daijun, 2015).

### *Ethnomusicology*

Ethnomusicology focuses on the social and cultural aspects of music. It examines how Mulao folk songs function within the community, their role in rituals and identity formation, and the cultural significance attached to them (Bingqing, 2020).

### *Fieldwork*

Fieldwork is essential for conducting firsthand research within the Mulao community. It involves direct observation, participant observation, interviews, and recordings during the Zoupo Festival. Fieldwork allows researchers to gather data on performance practices, transmission processes, and the lived experiences of Mulao people (Robey & Taylor, 2018).

### *Music analysis*

Music Analysis focuses on the detailed examination of musical elements such as melody, rhythm, structure, and vocal techniques in Mulao folk songs. It helps uncover patterns, variations, and stylistic features within the repertoire, providing insights into the aesthetics and musical intricacies of the songs (Keyan, 2017).

## METHOD

### Research Site

The primary focus of this research is the study of Guangxi Mulao folk songs, with a specific emphasis on Luocheng

Mulao Autonomous County in Hechi City, Guangxi. This particular research site has been selected due to its significant Mulao population, with more than 60% of Mulao individuals residing in Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County, Guangxi. Notably, three key transmitters of Mulao folk songs can be found here: Luo Zhoulan (a Guangxi-level transmitter of Mulao folk songs), Wu Haiyun (a county-level transmitter in Luocheng), and Yin Shengqian (also a county-level transmitter in Luocheng). By engaging in the narratives and performances of these three transmitters, a substantial amount of firsthand information can be collected, enriching the research.

Furthermore, Hechi City in Guangxi is home to two distinguished scholars specializing in Mulao folk song music and culture: Xie Shengju (a scholar of Mulao culture) and Tang Daijun (a researcher of Mulao music). Through their narratives and expertise, a more comprehensive understanding of the musical characteristics inherent in Mulao folk songs can be obtained, enhancing the depth of the research.

Additionally, despite Yizhou City, Liucheng County, and Huanjiang County not being recognized as traditional Mulao gathering areas, a small number of Mulao elderly individuals reside in these regions. Their narratives and personal accounts can provide valuable insights into the earlier forms of Mulao folk songs. It is worth noting that the residents in these areas have a genuine passion for the transmission of folk songs and embrace simplicity, contributing to the preservation and continuation of the Mulao musical heritage.

By focusing on these diverse research sites (Figure 1), this study aims to gather a wealth of firsthand information and perspectives on Guangxi Mulao folk songs. This comprehensive approach, incorporating transmitters, scholars, and elderly individuals, will enhance our understanding and documentation of the intricate musical traditions and cultural significance associated with Mulao folk songs.

### Key Informants

In this study, the informants will be categorized into two groups: scholar informants and informal informants.

### *Scholar informants, the individuals must meet the following criteria*

1. Possess a minimum of 30 years of research experience in the field of Mulao folk songs in Guangxi.
2. Have published at least 15 articles related to Mulao folk songs.
3. Be above the age of 50.
4. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the musical characteristics of Mulao folk songs.
5. Provide insights into the dissemination and transmission of Mulao folk songs.

These scholar informants have been carefully selected based on their extensive expertise and knowledge in the field, ensuring that they can provide valuable insights and contribute to the research objectives. Table 1 shows the background information of these informants.



**Informal informants, the individuals must meet the following criteria**

1. Possess over 40 years of experience in singing Guangxi Mulao folk songs.
2. Have received awards for their performances of folk songs.
3. Be above the age of 50.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the singing customs of Mulao folk songs in Luocheng.
5. Have insights into the transmission of Mulao folk songs in Luocheng.

Table 2 shows the background information of the informal informants in our study.

**RESULTS**

Mulao folk songs hold a cherished place among the Mulao people in Luocheng County, reflecting a rich musical heritage that has been passed down through generations. These

songs have been a beloved form of expression for the Mulao community, particularly during the festive occasions of the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. During these celebrations, the government orchestrates the participation of the majority of Mulao individuals in the vibrant Zoupo Festival, a grand traditional event where people don traditional attire and unite in singing Mulao folk songs. Through this research, a comprehensive examination will be conducted to understand the evolution and variations in the use of Mulao folk songs within the context of the Zoupo Festival. By analyzing these dynamics, a deeper understanding of the cultural significance and transformations of Mulao folk songs will be gained.

**The History and Singing of Mulao Folk Songs**

Mulao folk songs, as a representative of Mulao culture, hold a special place as a beloved art form among the Mulao people. The deep-rooted love for singing within the Mulao community has fostered the succession and transmission of



**Figure 1.** Map of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China  
Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), Solutions, E. D. (n.d.)

**Table 1.** Scholar informants

Scholar	Birthdate	Ethnicity	Affiliation	Research Focus
1 <sup>st</sup>	March 1957	Mulao	Former head of Propaganda Department, County Party Committee, Luocheng County, Guangxi	Mulao folk songs
2 <sup>nd</sup>	March 1971	Mulao	Associate Professor, Guangxi Hechi University	Mulao music research

**Table 2.** Informal informants

Informal	Birthdate	Ethnic	Background	Expertise
1 <sup>st</sup>	September 1963	Mulao	Guangxi level transmitter of Mulao folk songs	Transmitter of Guangxi Mulao folk songs
2 <sup>nd</sup>	November 1973	Mulao	County transmitter of Mulao folk songs	Transmitter of Mulao folk songs
3 <sup>rd</sup>	November 1966	Mulao	County-level transmitter of Mulao folk songs	Transmitter of Mulao folk songs
4 <sup>th</sup>	April 1971	Mulao	Guangxi Mulao Folk Singer	Mulao folk singer

Mulao folk songs throughout ancient times. This section of the study focuses on exploring the historical development and unique singing characteristics of Mulao folk songs.

### *The generation and development of mulao folk songs*

The origins of Mulao folk songs can be traced back to the “Liujiang people” who lived 30,000 to 50,000 years ago, sharing a connection with the Mulao tribe. During the late Paleolithic period, the “Liujiang People” led a primitive life-style, relying on gathering wild fruits, hunting animals, and fishing. In the subsequent Neolithic period, approximately 8 to 9 thousand years ago, agricultural practices and livestock breeding gradually emerged, albeit at a relatively limited scale. While the “Zhen Pi Yan people” relied on fishing, hunting, gathering, and slash-and-burn farming for their survival, these practices were complemented by early forms of agriculture. The communal strength of the tribe enabled them to confront natural disasters collectively and share the collective fruits of labor to sustain themselves.

### *The development of mulao folk songs*

The development of Mulao folk songs spans through different stages, each characterized by its own distinctive traits. These stages include the budding period, the peak period, the mature period, and the new period.

- 1) During the budding period of Mulao folk song development, the Mulao ancestors faced challenges in primitive society and had limited understanding of nature and themselves. Music played a significant role and was closely intertwined with witchcraft and religious practices. The Mulao ancestors believed in the presence of gods and spirits governing all aspects of life and production. Rituals, incantations, and songs were performed to seek divine blessings and overcome natural obstacles. Ancient incantations, songs, and witch dances constituted the core of Mulao music during this period. Like other ethnic groups, Mulao music encompassed song, dance, and instrumental music, serving as an integral part of religious, sacrificial, and life rituals. Music was a collective creation, reflecting the orality, collectivity, variability, and three-dimensionality of Mulao culture. The transmission of music followed a consistent pattern of learning and usage, ensuring its continuity across generations. Mulao music during this period instilled an optimistic and courageous spirit in the Mulao ancestors, nurturing a desire for goodness.
- 2) During the peak period of Mulao folk song development, the Mulao people embraced feudal society in the Tang and Song dynasties, influenced by the increasing presence of Han people from the Central Plains in Mulao ancestral settlements. The introduction of the “lijia system” and “bao soldier system” during the Ming dynasty further integrated Han individuals into the Mulao ethnic group. This interaction sparked the exchange of advanced farming techniques, economic trade, and cultural practices, profoundly shaping the region’s politics, economy, and culture. Mulao music flourished during
- 3) During the mature period of Mulao folk song development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China was undergoing significant social and cultural transformations as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. Intensified exchanges among ethnic groups deepened the cultural interactions among folk communities. Mulao folk songs, rooted in ancient musical traditions, experienced further expansion in content, giving rise to many festive and entertaining compositions. Embracing the changes of the times, Mulao folk songs acquired a standardized structure while showcasing mature development in subject matter, content, and categorization. Reflecting the social hardships and struggles against national resistance, new elements were incorporated into the songs. They were classified as “Folk Songs” based on their subject matter, inheritance methods, and singing style, encompassing three categories: “Gutiao songs,” “Sui Kouda,” and “Koufeng songs.” This period witnessed the expansion of folk song content and the addition of contemporary elements, leading to more refined classifications based on their themes and styles.
- 4) During the new period of Mulao folk song development, coinciding with the establishment of New China, the Mulao people fostered unity and progress with other ethnic groups. This transformative era had a profound impact on Mulao music. Thematically, it became closely intertwined with the prevailing political movements, reflecting the authentic experiences of the people and acquiring deeper political meanings. In terms of form, it embraced a wide spectrum of influences, assimilating the accomplishments of diverse ethnic groups while continuously pushing creative boundaries. The music embodied the vibrant spirit of the new China, exemplified by the renowned folk song masterpiece “Liberation Luocheng.” The collection and preservation of Mulao folk songs began in 1951 through the efforts of the Luocheng Culture Station and Culture Museum. Despite language, lifestyle, and environmental obstacles, a dedicated team ventured into Mulao villages, collecting the first significant batch of Mulao music materials since the founding of New China. In 1963, a team from Guangxi Arts College further contributed to this endeavor, effectively preserving the ecological essence of Mulao folk songs. In the 1980s, the increased attention towards minority music culture prompted the cultural department of Luocheng to organize comprehensive



collection and organization efforts in Mulao villages and towns. Notable contributions were made by He Yi and Tang Kezheng, who compiled numerous folk songs performed by Mulao singers. These valuable works can be found in publications such as the “Chinese Folk Songs Collection-Guangxi Volume,” “Chinese Folk Dances Collection-Guangxi Volume,” and “Mulao Music,” which were compiled and printed by the Cultural Bureau of Luocheng Mulao Autonomous County (Figure 2).

### The Singing of Mulao Folk Songs in Zoupo Festival

The Mulao Zoupo Festival holds great significance as the most grandiose traditional festival among the Mulao people. Annually, during the Spring Festival in February and the Mid-Autumn Festival in September, Mulao individuals don their traditional attire and unite in singing Mulao folk songs as part of the cherished Zoupo Festival. This section provides an analysis of the festival’s evolution, encompassing the development of the Mulao Zoupo Festival, the traditional Zoupo Festival, and the contemporary Zoupo Festival. By exploring these three dimensions, a comprehensive understanding of the festival’s progression is achieved.

### History and development of mulao zoupo festival

The origins of the Zoupo Festival are not extensively documented, and our understanding is primarily inferred from the evolution of Mulao people’s ethnic heritage and marriage practices. The Mulao Zoupo custom can be traced back to the Han Dynasty, developed during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, matured in the Song Dynasty, and thrived during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It represents an accumulation of the ancient Luoyue culture. The Mulao ancestors, as part of the Luoyue group, began using various means to court potential mates through singing and dancing during the Han Dynasty. The tradition of “choosing a mate through singing folk songs” emerged during this period. Historical records indicate that this custom was prevalent and well-established among Zhuang-Dong speaking groups by the Song Dynasty. With social development in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, monogamous marriages became more common, and the focus of the songs shifted to “love.” As society advanced, cultural refinement followed suit, and monogamy represented a shift from simple reproductive instincts to the pursuit of higher spiritual needs. The tradition of “choosing a mate through singing folk songs” became a distinctive characteristic of the nation’s traditional marriage culture, and it likely shares similarities with the folk music culture of the Mulao people, who formed their own distinct ethnicity during the Ming Dynasty.

Initially, the Zoupo Festival served as an occasion for young Mulao individuals to find potential marriage partners. Until the 1950s, Zoupo was a traditional social custom through which many Mulao youths met and fell in love, ultimately forming families. The festival featured duet performances of various folk songs, such as “Lanlu song,” “Tongnian song,” and “Songshuang song.” In the post-1950s era, the repertoire expanded to include not only love songs but also historical and life-related songs (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Singing of Mulao folk songs  
Source: Qin Feng



Figure 3. The Mulao People in 1984  
Source: Zhang Qijiang









Figure 4. Mulao Folk Songs in the Traditional Zoupo Festival  
Source: Luo Zhoulun

The Zoupo Festival has evolved from being solely a traditional marriage and social event for young Mulao individuals to becoming a significant cultural and entertainment festival for the entire Mulao community and even the local population of various ethnic groups. In the traditional Mulao Zoupo Festival, the focus is primarily on singing Mulao love

**Table 3.** Mulao Folk Songs in the Traditional Zoupo Festival

Song	Description
1. Lanlu Song	A significant Mulao folk song sung when young Mulao men and women gather in a grassy area. Male and female singers stand at different positions and block each other's way. It serves as the prelude to the Zoupo Festival, leading the singers to Pochang for the grand event.
2. Yaochang Song	The second song of the Zoupo Festival, wherein male singers enthusiastically invite female singers from across the street to join them. It is sung to create a passionate atmosphere during the festival.
3. Xunwen Song	Sung by a male singer who successfully attracts the girl he likes after singing the Yaochang song. The male singer praises the girl and seeks to understand more about her, including her home address, family situation, and mutual interest.
4. Wen Dingwu Song	A folk song where a man and a woman exchange love tokens after their initial communication, symbolizing their understanding of each other and expressing a desire for a deeper relationship.
5. Suan Rizhi Song	A folk song counting the days until the wedding, often sung by a girl longing for her boyfriend. It reflects her eagerness to see her boyfriend propose marriage soon.
6. Tongnian Song	A love song sung by girls to their boyfriends, expressing their yearning for their beloved.
7. Songshuang Song	A farewell song for lovers, expressing the sadness of a girl departing from her boyfriend.
8. Youyuan Song	A song celebrating the destined union of a young couple. It depicts the happy life of a married couple and often describes the details of their life, expressing their love for each other.
9. Wuyuan Song	A song portraying the unhappiness and dissatisfaction of a couple's life after marriage, reflecting concerns and regrets about their decision to marry without fully knowing each other.

**Table 4.** Mulao Folk Songs in Contemporary Zoupo Festival

Song	Description	QR code, for example
Welcome Song	A collective folk song performed by multiple Mulao singers at the beginning of the Zoupo Festival. It extends warm greetings to friends from distant places, praises the hometown and society, and welcomes and blesses all participants.	
Life Song	The Self-Reporting Song, a type of life song, involves a Mulao singer introducing themselves and their hometown. It reflects the singer's mood and participation in the Zoupo Festival, expressing pride in their identity, hometown, and the festival itself.	
Love Song	The Lanlu Song is a traditional love song performed at the start of the Zoupo Festival. It features two young singers, one male and one female from the Mulao ethnic group, singing Mulao folk songs together as they interact. It showcases cultural diversity within Mulao folk songs.	
Friendship Song	A folk song performed by two or more Mulao singers, conveying the beauty of friendship and imparting life lessons and social norms. Friendship songs hold educational significance, aiming to inspire and encourage listeners.	
Educational Songs	Mulao folk songs emphasizing national ideology and serving as a means of education. Typically sung collectively in a call-and-response format.	
Gutiao Songs	Mulao historical songs recounting historical events and featuring amusing lyrics. They hold cultural significance within the Mulao community.	



songs. The progression of the songs mirrors the journey of young people, starting from initial acquaintance to deepening connections, with the content of the songs reflecting this trajectory. However, as the festival's popularity has grown, it is no longer exclusive to young people, and participants of different ages now partake in the festivities. Consequently, the themes of the songs have expanded to include Gutiao songs, life songs, and Mulao folk songs that express love for the motherland and homeland. The Zoupo Festival has transformed into a more inclusive celebration, encompassing a wider range of themes and involving people of all ages.

### ***Mulao folk songs in the traditional zoupo festival***

The traditional Mulao Zoupo Festival, prior to 1984, was an informal gathering organized spontaneously by the Mulao people without a fixed time or location (Figure 4). It featured the singing of Mulao love songs that portrayed the journey from falling in love to marriage for Mulao youths. The sequence of songs in the festival included the "Lanlu song" or "Yaochang song" when a boy expresses interest in a girl, followed by the "Xunwen song" and "Wen Dingwu song" to establish a deeper connection. A date and place for the next meeting were set, accompanied by the "Suan Rizhi song." As their relationship developed, the couple sang the "Tongnian song" during dates and the "Songshuang song" when parting. If they wished to continue their relationship, they sang the "Youyuan song," otherwise, they sang the "Wuyuan song." Summary of the Mulao Zoupo Festival songs is presented in Table 3.

### ***Mulao folk songs in contemporary zoupo festival***

The contemporary Zoupo Festival differs from the traditional Zoupo Festival in terms of its organized nature, with the government taking charge of its planning. Specific dates and venues are determined, and the program order is carefully arranged. Hosts are also added to ensure a more structured event, resulting in a more orderly presentation of the Mulao folk songs throughout the festival. Additionally, modern performance equipment such as microphones, sound systems, and cameras are utilized. The repertoire of folk songs has expanded to include a wider range of topics and themes. Alongside the traditional love songs, Mulao Gutiao songs, educational songs, friendship songs, welcome songs, self-expression songs, and more have been incorporated. An analysis of the Mulao folk songs performed at the Zoupo Festival, held at Zoupo Square in Chenglong Hu Park, Luocheng County on September 10, 2019, is presented in Table 4.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The present study aimed to investigate the literacy transmission of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival in Luocheng, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. Through a qualitative approach that included literature research, surveys, interviews, and transcriptions, the study explored the historical development, cultural significance, and transmission processes of Mulao folk songs within the

context of the Zoupo Festival. The research findings shed light on the evolution of Mulao folk songs, the role of the Zoupo Festival in their transmission, and the impact of these songs on Mulao culture and identity.

Consistent with the literature review, the research findings confirm the historical and cultural significance of Mulao folk songs in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The study aligns with Tang Daijun's classification of Mulao folk songs into categories such as gutiao songs, koufeng songs, and zoupo songs (Tang, 2008). The research also supports the view that Mulao folk songs have evolved over time, incorporating influences from Han Chinese traditions and embracing contemporary themes and styles (Daijun, 2015). The study's findings corroborate the importance of the Mulao Zoupo Festival as a platform for the transmission of Mulao folk songs and its transformation from a traditional marriage custom to a broader cultural and entertainment festival (Wu Ying, 2020).

The research methods employed in this study, including fieldwork, interviews, and data analysis, proved effective in gathering firsthand information from various key informants. The inclusion of scholar informants with extensive research experience and informal informants with deep knowledge of Mulao folk songs ensured a comprehensive exploration of the topic. The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the cultural context, transmission processes, and musical characteristics of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival.

The research findings revealed that Mulao folk songs play a central role in the Zoupo Festival, reflecting the cultural heritage, social interactions, and emotional expressions of the Mulao community. The evolution of the festival from a traditional gathering for young individuals seeking marriage partners to a more inclusive celebration involving people of all ages aligns with the changing social dynamics and cultural aspirations of the Mulao people. The expansion of the song repertoire to include a wide range of themes, such as educational songs, friendship songs, and welcome songs, reflects the festival's aim to promote education, cultural exchange, and community engagement are consistent with the theoretical principles of musicology and ethnomusicology, which emphasize the study of the historical development, cultural context, and social functions of folk music (Bingqing, 2020). The analysis of Mulao folk songs in this study aligns with the principles of music analysis, exploring the musical elements, structures, and stylistic features of the songs (Keyan, 2017).

In conclusion, this study contributes to the documentation and preservation of Mulao culture and the broader understanding of ethnic minority music in China. The research findings support the significance of Mulao folk songs as a cultural heritage and the crucial role of the Zoupo Festival in their transmission. The evolution of the festival reflects the Mulao people's commitment to preserving their cultural legacy, fostering community involvement, and promoting cultural enrichment through music. By exploring the historical context, cultural significance, and transmission methods of Mulao folk songs during the Zoupo Festival, this study



enhances our understanding of Mulao culture and highlights the importance of safeguarding and promoting the diverse musical traditions of ethnic minority groups in China.

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