



The contemporary status and learning among the Shifan music troupe in Putian, Fujian, China

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Abstract

This study focuses on the contemporary status and learning among the Shifan music troupe in Putian, Fujian, China, employing qualitative research methods such as interviews and observations. By exploring the multifaceted roles and adaptations of traditional Shifan music, the research uncovers its significance in various contexts, emphasizing the balance between tradition and adaptation. Initially composed of amateur enthusiasts, the organizational structure of Putian's "Shifan" music has evolved to encompass a wide range of social events. The study identifies four primary scenes where traditional Shifan music thrives and explores its multifaceted role in bridging tradition and modernity. Additionally, the research delves into various transmission methods, including family inheritance, private art teaching, and oral transmission, highlighting the adaptability of Shifan music. Overall, the study underscores the importance of Shifan music in preserving local traditions while embracing change and highlights its continued utilization in a variety of cultural and social contexts.

Keywords: Shifan music troupes, Putian, China, contemporary status, learning

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1. Introduction

Putian Shifan music, often referred to as Shiyin music, is a well-known form of musical expression. The local ambiance and distinctive ethnic musical elements of this cultural expression make it very appealing and greatly cherished by the residents of Putian as well as neighboring communities (Lian, 2013). Putian Shifan Music continues to preserve a variety of historic traditional instruments as well as the enduring presence of Putian opera cards and folk music cards (Zheng, 2010). Huangshi Huiyang Shiyin and Hanjiang Wen Shiyin are recognized as national intangible cultural heritage projects in China. These two forms of folk music hold significant impact within the realm of Chinese folk music. Nevertheless, the preservation and safeguarding of Shifan music have emerged as

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significant concerns since the turn of the millennium. This article primarily examines and explores the current state of Putian Shifan music while also conducting an analysis and investigation of its constituent aspects. To enhance the preservation and safeguarding of China's national-level intangible cultural assets, as well as to furnish researchers with a future reference and foundation for the study of Shifan music (Lin, 2007).

The folk music of Putian has a rich and extensive historical background. The practice gained popularity throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, particularly in the region of Putian. Shifan, sometimes referred to as Shifan, is a prevalent kind of folk music originating from Putian, a region situated in Fujian Province. This musical style mostly consists of ensembles, including silk strings and wind instruments. However, the city of Putian has not only a diverse range of musical genres but also a distinctive assortment of musical instruments, contributing to the distinctiveness of Putian's folk music. According to the findings of local scholars, the development of Putian Shifan music can be categorized into two distinct periods. During the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the original ensemble of instruments employed in this genre consisted of ten distinct types, including Sheng, Xiao, Qu Di, Wanhua, Laohu, Pipa, Sanxian, Bajiaoqin, Danpigu, Tanban, and Yunluo (Ye, 2007).

The folk music of Putian possesses a rich and extensive historical background. The practice gained popularity throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, particularly in the region of Putian. Shifan, sometimes referred to as Shifan, is a well-recognized kind of folk music originating from Putian, a region situated in Fujian Province. This musical tradition predominantly features the utilization of silk strings and wind instruments in its composition. Nevertheless, the city of Putian has not only a diverse array of music but also a distinctive assortment of musical instruments, contributing to the development of a distinct folk music tradition in the region (Weng, 2004).

The music of Putian Shifan, which has been officially designated as an intangible cultural asset of Fujian Province, holds significant importance in the realms of learning and education. It serves as a distinctive platform through which one may explore the diverse cultural fabric of the province. The traditional music genre discussed herein primarily incorporates silk, bamboo, and wind instruments. It not only exemplifies its classical aesthetic but also embodies the distinctive attributes of Putian's local culture. Consequently, it serves as a valuable asset for educational endeavors focused on fostering cultural consciousness and safeguarding heritage. This study aims to examine the contemporary status and learning among the Shifan music troupe in Putian, Fujian, China. study into the current state of this music genre, the importance of its preservation, and the potential opportunities for its future growth. and understanding of this valuable cultural heritage within the context of learning and education.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Historical evolution of Putian "Shifan" music*

The cultural heritage of Fujian, which sprang from the ancient Baiyue civilization, has discernible influences from the Central Plains culture, albeit emerging at a later stage in history compared to the Central Plains region. Putian "Shifan" music, alternatively referred to as "Shiyin," is a multifaceted traditional art form that encompasses instrumental, vocal, and performative elements. The aforementioned activity has great importance in the lives of the residents of Putian, serving as a vital source of spiritual nourishment and contributing to the revival of regional culture as well as the broader sustainable development of the local cultural landscape. The art form under consideration emerged during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279 AD), underwent further development in the subsequent Yuan and Ming Dynasties, and reached its full maturity during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912 AD). The musical tradition of Putian "Shifan" has been officially recognized and included in the initial compilation of the national intangible cultural heritage expansion lists (Lian, 2012; Li, 2018).

The musical tradition of "Shifan" in Putian, which emerged during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, encompasses the practice of congregating in designated "Shifan Rooms" for the purpose of leisure and enjoyment. Over the course of its development, this artistic form has seen significant transformations, manifesting itself in the works of two prominent schools, namely Nanyang and Beiyang. Additionally, it has actively engaged in national performances and cultural exchanges, further contributing to its evolution. Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China has acknowledged Putian's "Shifan" music as a designated "National Folk Music Town" and has subsequently included it in the fourth installment of the national intangible cultural heritage list. Music is an embodiment of a vibrant folk culture that possesses distinct regional attributes (Zheng, 2006; Xiao, 2014).

2.2. *Basic Knowledge of Putian Shifan Music*

Shiyin, sometimes referred to as Shifan, encompasses a wide range of artistic expressions, including instrumental music, vocal music, and performance. It is characterized by the utilization of a ten-instrument ensemble. The classification of this musical tradition is based on regional distinctions, resulting in two main categories known as "Wen Shifan" and "Wu Shifan," both characterized by the utilization of distinct musical instruments. In Putian County, there is a collection of traditional musical instruments known as "Wen Shi Fan. This collection comprises instruments such as Danpi, Tanban, Yun Gong, Xiqin, Sihu, Chihu, Sanxian, Bajiaoqin, Jiu Xian Qin, Sudi,

and "Wen Shifan" in Xianyou County. In the region of Hanjiang, the level of popularity for "Wen Shifan" is somewhat lower when compared to other geographical locations. The zither, an old musical instrument, underwent a transformation, resulting in a modified version capable of pulling, playing, twisting, and plucking, which was afterwards given the name "Wen Zhenqin". Prominent melodies encompass "Beitai makeup", "Litchi Tower", "Fenghezi", "Shangxiaolou", "Pipa Ci", "General Order", "Guoshanhu", and "Loutaihui". The musical instrument accentuates the rhythmic pattern of "three, five, seven" and may be performed in both seated and standing positions (Weng, 2010).

2.3. Putian Shifan Music Society

The city of Putian, situated in a region known for its rich cultural heritage, has a notable level of economic advancement attributed to its favorable geographical features and temperate climatic conditions. The people of Putian exhibit a duality in their character that includes strength without aggression and adherence to Confucian values without giving in to corruption. The acceptance of immigrants from the Central Plains region exemplifies a display of self-sufficiency and perseverance. The residents of Putian have demonstrated a willingness to establish educational institutions encompassing music programs and possess a profound admiration for the rich heritage of traditional Chinese music. The Putian folk songs exhibit a lack of development, although instrumental ensemble forms like "Wen Shi Fan" and "Pu Xian Opera" enjoy significant popularity. (Chen, 2009).

2.3.1. Putian Religious Culture and Shifan Music

Putian music is characterized by a strong emphasis on aesthetic values, which serves to enhance individuals' spiritual well-being and elevate their overall quality of life. The performances of "Shifan" and "Eight Music" are frequently associated with traditional practices, although their connection to specific rites is not inherently strong. Putian boasts a robust cultural legacy within the Central Plains region, with a diverse array of sacrifice rituals, musical performances, and traditional dances. The musical genre known as sacrificial music is traditionally performed during the month of December and is characterized by its adherence to twelve distinct rhythms. Despite its adherence to rigid palace sounds, sacrificial music can also be categorized into expressions of both pleasure and melancholy (Lin, 2013).

2.3.2. Putian Opera Performance and Shifan Music

Putian opera and "Shi Fan Ba Yue" are examples of traditional Chinese music that possess a lengthy historical lineage, an extensive repertoire, and a unique style of performance. Putian opera, which emerged during the Tang Dynasty, boasts a profound musical heritage and exhibits remarkable vocal prowess. The Xinghua dialect region of Fujian Province and its adjacent counties are renowned for their widespread usage of this

particular dialect. The opera genre has a vast repertoire of more than 1,000 distinct operas, which serve as valuable repositories of Tang and Song Daqu, Gunan Opera, and traditional melodies. The lyrical elements found in Putian opera are frequently intertwined with the narrative, much like the Su school love play that emerged during the early Qing Dynasty. The musical tradition of Putian Opera can be traced back to its diverse origins, which include elements of witchcraft, Baixi Opera, as well as local music, singing, and dance (Zheng, 2006).

2.3.3. Chinese folk culture and Shifan music

In rural regions, the elderly population frequently nurtures literary abilities such as "Shifan Ba Le" and Quyi, although younger generations tend to lag behind owing to occupational commitments or the demands of public exposure. In order to tackle this issue, Putian City has employed "Shifan and Eight Music" as a medium for promotion, showcasing a wide range of vibrant performances that embody the unique local attributes. The initiative has garnered significant admiration and commendation from both leaders and members of the community, therefore enhancing the cultural landscape of rural areas and fostering the promotion of rural culture. Additionally, it contributes to the restoration of rural dwellings, the advancement of civilization, scientific development, and the enhancement of the ideological, cultural, and moral aspects of the rural population (Weng, 2013).

3. Method

3.1. Research site

This research focuses on investigating the present-day status and educational aspects within the Shifan music troupe located in Putian, Fujian, China. The research site for this study is the Shifan music troupe in Putian, which serves as a representative example of the broader context of Shifan music in the region. Through a comprehensive examination of the troupe's activities, practices, and educational efforts, this study aims to shed light on the current state of Shifan music in Putian and the ways in which learning and education contribute to its continuation and development.

3.2. Key informants

In accordance with the criteria set forth by Huang Dandan, an esteemed advocate of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, key whistleblowers have been carefully selected for their pivotal roles in the preservation and advancement of Putian Shifan music. Xu Xiaodong and Huang Fu'an emerge as standout choices due to their status as inheritors, extensive folk music experience in Putian City, proficiency in Shifan instruments, and profound insights into Shifan music. Li Weiquan and Chen Hairong likewise epitomize

these criteria, contributing their expertise, unique perspectives, and passion for ten types of music. Additionally, Xu Lixian and Hu Longxin, chosen for their appreciation of ten types of music and foundational understanding of Putian Shifan music, provide valuable insights that collectively enrich the study's exploration of this intricate musical tradition.

3.3. Research Tools

The research methodology employed in this study primarily encompasses interviews and observations as key tools. To gather comprehensive research data, a systematic approach was undertaken, involving the creation of questionnaires and accompanying interview and observation forms meticulously tailored to the research subjects. The iterative refinement process included four critical stages: first, submitting the instruments to the advisor for scrutiny; subsequently, incorporating edits in accordance with advisor feedback; third, subjecting the tools to expert evaluation for meticulous examination; and finally, making further adjustments based on specialist recommendations before deploying them for effective fieldwork implementation.

3.4. Data collection

The data collection process for documentation and related research is structured around distinct themes. The first theme explores the historical and contextual evolution of Shifan music in Putian, tracing its origins and developmental trajectory. The second theme provides a comprehensive overview of Shifan music in Putian, encompassing its diverse genres, instruments, and cultural significance. The fieldwork phase involves immersive investigation, employing conversation and observation methods to glean authentic insights from key participants. Additionally, visual and audio documentation techniques, including photography and recording, coupled with precise measurements using rulers, facilitate the accurate capture of musical performances and instrument details. This meticulous approach ensures a well-rounded comprehension of Putian's Shifan music, fostering the preservation and understanding of this cultural heritage.

3.5. Data analysis

The data analysis process involves the systematic review, categorization, and interpretation of collected information from interviews, observations, and documents. Themes related to Shifan music in Putian are identified, enabling the extraction of insights, patterns, and cultural significance. Qualitative and quantitative methods are employed to distill meaningful conclusions and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Putian's Shifan music.

4. Result

4.1. The Current Practices of Shifan Music in Putian, Fujian, China

The organizational structure of Putian's "Shifan" music originally comprised amateur enthusiasts, including urban residents, rural farmers, literati, intellectuals, and individuals from political, religious, and business circles. Initially focused on entertainment, performances lacked monetary compensation. However, as "Shifan" music gained prominence in various social events, it began to be utilized for money during lantern festivals, temple fairs, celebratory occasions, weddings, and funerals.

Through an amalgamation of literature reviews and extensive field interviews, it delineates four pivotal scenes where traditional Putian "Shifan" music finds its expression: temple fair folk activities, ancestral worship ceremonies, traditional funerary rites, and mass entertainment events. The contemporary application of Putian's Shifan music in temple fairs epitomizes its multifaceted roles. Rooted in the historical tradition of "temple fairs" dating back to the Tang Dynasty, these events were characterized by sacrificial offerings, music performances, and ceremonies. In the multifarious belief landscape of Putian, each village boasts its own "Shifan" music band. Amidst periods of respite, villagers congregate in temples for leisure, conversation, and music, where "Shifan" performances play an integral role.



Figure 1. Activity of the "Pinghaiwei City God" Parade Temple Fair in Putian, Fujian
Source: Xiaomei Ye

Famous for its literary heritage, Putian has been a beacon of cultural excellence with a robust musical foundation. The rich tapestry of temple fairs held on significant festivals, such as the Lantern Festival, symbolizes the harmonious blend of folk art, cultural beliefs, and festivities. Notably, the Putian Mazu Temple Fair, a renowned event, encompasses various performances and rituals. In these festivals, the "Shifan" band

holds a prominent position, marching alongside revered deities during processions, underscoring the deeply ingrained significance of its music in local traditions. In these dynamic temple fair celebrations, "Shifan" music bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, enriching the cultural fabric while also serving as a medium for learning and education. It encapsulates the spirit of the community, evoking a sense of continuity and shared heritage that resonates through the passage of time.



Figure 2. Putian Mazu Temple Fair God Driving Cruise Activity Chart
Source: Xiaomei Ye

4.2. The Adaptation of Shifan Music in Putian, Fujian, China

Putian's "Shifan" music holds a multifaceted role, extending beyond participation in ritual activities to encompass various life events such as weddings, funerals, relocations, and celebrations. These occasions are elevated by the inclusion of "Shifan" music performances, adding a ceremonial ambiance and amplifying the impact of the events. The most pronounced manifestation of this practice is observed in ancestral worship ceremonies, a tradition deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. In Putian, these ceremonies thrive with diverse forms based on village customs, and the "Shifan" band, situated behind the central sacrificial act, enhances the proceedings. Akin to the "wandering gods" practiced during temple fairs, ancestor worship rituals feature indoor "Shifan" performances to solemnly honor tradition.

Traditional funeral ceremonies maintain their significance in various corners of Putian, and local "Shifan" bands play a role in these events as well. Funeral "parade" ceremonies accompanied by the band's music create a meaningful farewell process. The consistency in musical style between these ceremonies and temple fairs underscores the

enduring cultural influence of "Shifan" music. In the realm of mass entertainment, urban areas host "Shifan" bands primarily focused on stage performances. These non-profit organizations prioritize self-entertainment, emphasizing aesthetic value through music. Unlike ceremonial contexts, stage performances exhibit "Shifan" music's artistic versatility, highlighting its capacity for aesthetic enjoyment.

Present-day Putian is infused with the vibrant presence of "Shifan" music troupes. These groups are pervasive across districts, counties, villages, communities, and even residential areas. Nightly gatherings of enthusiasts playing, singing, and performing "Shifan" music contribute to lively cultural landscapes. Public spaces like Putian Municipal Plaza feature regular "Shifan" music performances, offering engaging experiences for audiences. Moreover, local government initiatives extend "Shifan" music's reach through rural programs, delivering enriching performances and fostering learning and education in remote areas. The diverse contexts in which Putian's "Shifan" music flourishes reflect its adaptive versatility, serving as a bridge between tradition and contemporary life. In ceremonial, communal, and artistic settings, "Shifan" music imparts cultural continuity, entertainment, and educational enrichment.

4.3. The Transmission Method of Shifan Music in Putian, Fujian, China

The essence of Putian's "Shifan" music reflects the accumulation of national folk thought within the context of long-term production, labor, and life practices. This musical humanistic spirit encapsulates the values, emotions, interests, and group consciousness of the local population, making it a soulful embodiment of the local humanistic ethos and the very core of the regional culture. Initially, "Shifan" music in Putian was employed for "wandering gods," weddings, funerals, and other related occasions, shaping its early practice. The historical and cultural backgrounds of Putian's "Shifan" music have an impact on it, showcasing a variety of transmission methods throughout various developmental stages. Analyzing the quality structure and transmission methods reveals the close relationship between the music's style formation, higher performance skills, and the nuances of its inheritance. Understanding this not only unveils the organizational structure and economic status of "Shifan" band inheritors in Putian but also underscores the broader impact of their contributions. Putian's "Shifan" music is nurtured through two crucial channels: the "Music Club" and the "Music Hall," which facilitate collective learning and inheritance. The "Shifan" music club trains performers in music and instrumental skills, while the "Music Hall" focuses on actors specializing in "Shifan" and "Bayue" performances. Traditionally, these halls were organized through voluntary fundraising and played an essential role in transmitting knowledge. These institutions played a pivotal role in fostering skills and ensuring the continuation of diverse instrument proficiency among apprentices.

In the post-reform era since 1978, shifting societal dynamics have influenced the modes of "Shifan" music's inheritance. Foreign cultural influence, disappearing rehearsal venues, and decreasing demand have transformed the landscape. While specialized folk artists have declined, women have increasingly joined "Shifan" bands, helping maintain and transmit the tradition in the modern rural context. Moreover, family inheritance, private art teaching, and oral transmission have all significantly contributed to the continuation of "Shifan" music. Within the family inheritance model, skills are passed down through generations, preserving instrument-making skills and performance techniques. This personalized approach imparts expertise while emphasizing cooperation within a band setting. Outstanding artists have emerged from private art teaching, which emphasizes one-on-one instruction. In both family inheritance and private art teaching, fostering talent and promoting mastery hold precedence over financial considerations.



Figure 3. Putian City Community Square "Shifan" Music Lovers' Performance
Source: Xiaomei Ye

Oral transmission remains a cornerstone of "Shifan" music's inheritance. Masters impart their expertise to apprentices through a combination of experiential knowledge, style mastery, and performance techniques. This approach encourages innovation and creativity, allowing performers to infuse their unique expression into the music. While notation is generally absent, mastery of instrument techniques and performance dynamics is integral to this oral tradition. Putian's "Shifan" music showcases a resilient inheritance pattern that encompasses learning, instruction, and education. This multifaceted approach underscores the significance of this folk music genre in preserving cultural heritage while adapting to changing times and needs.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The exploration of the contemporary status and learning within the Shifan music troupes in Putian, Fujian, China, reveals a rich tapestry of cultural heritage, transmission methods, and adaptability. This discussion delves into the findings to underscore the role of learning, instruction, and education in the preservation and evolution of Putian's Shifan music.

Putian's Shifan music has proven remarkably adaptive, finding its place on various occasions such as temple fairs, weddings, funerals, and stage performances. These distinct contexts not only reflect the versatility of Shifan music but also emphasize the significance of learning, instruction, and education. Apprenticeship models, family inheritances, and private art teachings have been instrumental in passing down skills and techniques, ensuring the perpetuation of this cherished cultural tradition. consistent with the theoretical principles identified in the literature review (Jin, 2011; Jing, 1991; Seekhunlio & Chuangprakhon, 2022). The "Music Club" and "Music Hall" have historically played essential roles in the development of Shifan music performers. These institutions, aligned with the values of learning and education, have provided platforms for aspiring artists to acquire instrumental skills and performance techniques. In addition, they have fostered a sense of community, enriching the learning experience through shared insights and collaborative practices (Seeyo et al., 2023; Kolb, 2014; Yang & Welch, 2014).

Oral transmission remains a hallmark of Shifan music's inheritance. This form of education marries experiential knowledge with an intuitive understanding of style and performance dynamics. This mode not only ensures the continuity of traditional tunes but also encourages performers to infuse their unique creativity and expression, thereby adding a contemporary dimension to the ancient melodies. (Hill, 2009; Thrasher, 2016; Li, 2022). The changing landscape of Shifan music's inheritance, especially with the inclusion of women in the learning process, underscores the adaptive nature of cultural transmission. Women's involvement not only addresses inheritance gaps but also aligns with a broader goal of preserving cultural heritage. Their engagement has led to a sustainable learning ecosystem, ensuring the survival of Shifan music in the face of evolving societal dynamics (Wai Yin & Shu Yun 2004; Wang, 2021). As Putian embraces modernity, Shifan music's role has expanded to include stage performances and entertainment events. This contemporary integration demonstrates the inherent adaptability of traditional art forms. As a result of learning, instruction, and education models that facilitate its transition into contemporary contexts, "Shifan" music troupes' participation in public settings and cultural events attests to its continued relevance.

In conclusion, the contemporary status and learning within the Shifan music troupes in Putian exemplify the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation. The various

modes of learning, including institutional training, private art teaching, and family inheritance, are essential in preserving and perpetuating the intricate melodies and rhythms that define Shifan music. The adaptability of Shifan music across diverse contexts highlights its enduring significance, while the inclusion of women and integration with modern platforms ensure its resonance with new generations. Through learning, instruction, and education, Putian's Shifan music continues to bridge the past and the present, enriching the cultural landscape and contributing to the narrative of cultural continuity.

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