

Article

The Development and Application of Hainan Li and Miao Folk Songs and Musical Instruments Resources in Early Childhood Music Education

Yue Liu ^{1,*}¹ Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

* Correspondence: Yue Liu, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

Abstract: The folk songs and ethnic musical instruments of the Li and Miao ethnic groups in Hainan represent distinctive intangible cultural heritage, characterized by simple melodies, lively rhythms, and unique timbres that align perfectly with the musical perception and cognitive developmental needs of children aged three to six. These traditional elements serve as exceptional local resources for early childhood music education, offering a rich auditory and cultural experience. Systematically developing and integrating Li and Miao folk songs and instruments into modern kindergarten music curricula not only significantly enriches educational content and enhances children's foundational musical literacy and aesthetic appreciation, but also facilitates the dynamic, living preservation of indigenous ethnic culture during crucial preschool years. Consequently, this integration fosters children's profound sense of cultural identity, belonging, and national confidence from an early age. This paper critically examines the specific artistic features and pedagogical educational value of Li and Miao folk songs and traditional instruments. Furthermore, it identifies current practical challenges and pedagogical barriers in their application within contemporary early childhood music education settings. To address these issues, the study proposes a highly comprehensive development and implementation framework. This strategic framework covers meticulous resource selection, age-appropriate content adaptation, interactive activity design, innovative teaching methodology, specialized teacher training programs, and robust home-kindergarten collaboration. Ultimately, this research provides essential theoretical insights and highly actionable guidelines for optimizing local music education practices across Hainan's kindergartens.

Keywords: folk songs; musical instruments; music education; early childhood; cultural heritage; resource development

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1. Introduction

As China's Traditional Culture Inheritance and Development Project progresses, the integration of local cultural resources with preschool education has garnered significant attention [1]. Hainan, a region deeply influenced by the Li and Miao ethnic groups, boasts a rich heritage of folk songs and musical instruments that reflect its unique cultural identity. Li folk songs are distinguished by their themes rooted in daily life and their simple, memorable melodies, which make them accessible and engaging for young learners. Traditional instruments such as the Li dingdong wooden clapper, single-log drum, nose flute, and mouth bow produce crisp and distinctive tones that are easy for children to appreciate and interact with. Similarly, Miao mountain songs are renowned for their high-pitched, melodious qualities, while instruments like the lusheng and mangtong offer vibrant ethnic characteristics. These cultural elements hold intrinsic value for fostering musical appreciation and creativity in early childhood education, providing a foundation for children to explore diverse artistic expressions.

The "Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6" emphasize the importance of incorporating local cultural resources into art education to enable young children to perceive, discover, and express beauty. Despite this directive, many kindergartens in Hainan continue to rely heavily on standardized music curricula, which limits the integration of Li and Miao folk songs and musical instruments into educational practices. The absence of a systematic, gamified, and age-appropriate teaching framework has hindered the effective utilization of these high-quality ethnic cultural resources [1]. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive research aimed at developing and implementing structured approaches to incorporate Hainan's Li and Miao folk songs and musical instruments into early childhood music education. Such efforts would not only enrich the educational experience but also preserve and promote the region's cultural heritage, offering both theoretical insights and practical applications for advancing preschool education.

2. The Artistic Characteristics of Li and Miao Folk Songs and Instruments, and Their Value in Early Childhood Music Education

2.1. Artistic Characteristics of Li and Miao Folk Songs

The melodies of Li and Miao folk songs are characterized by their simplicity and narrow vocal ranges, making them particularly accessible for young children [2, 3]. These songs predominantly utilize pentatonic scales, which are marked by gentle melodic fluctuations and a high degree of repetition. This lack of complex modulations ensures that the melodies are easy for children to comprehend and internalize. The rhythms are distinct and deeply rooted in daily life, often reflecting two- or three-beat patterns that align with labor activities, festive celebrations, and traditional games. These rhythmic patterns create a dynamic and engaging auditory experience, encouraging children to imitate and express themselves musically. The lyrics are straightforward and imbued with a natural, childlike charm. They frequently depict vivid imagery of natural landscapes, labor scenes, and folk games, using colloquial language that is easy for young learners to understand and remember. The performance styles are highly flexible and improvisational, allowing for adaptation into children's singing games or situational performances. These can take the form of duets, choruses, or lead vocals, further enhancing their appeal and versatility in early childhood music education.

The emotional expressions in Li and Miao folk songs are genuine and deeply resonant, often reflecting the joys and sorrows of daily life. These songs vividly portray scenarios such as labor, marriage, and rituals, with pure and heartfelt emotions. For example, the Li ethnic group's "Mountain Cutting Song" features a lively rhythm that conveys the hope for a bountiful harvest and the joy of labor, while the Miao ethnic group's "Flying Song" uses high-pitched melodies to express love for life and longing for distant relatives. Such sincere emotional expressions can easily resonate with young children, helping them to develop emotional sensitivity and understand various emotional contexts. Additionally, these songs often carry distinct themes with profound educational value. Many Li and Miao folk songs encapsulate ethnic historical memories, moral principles, and value systems [4, 5]. They celebrate virtues such as diligence, bravery, unity, mutual assistance, respect for elders, and care for the young. These themes are conveyed through vivid lyrics and pleasant melodies, subtly imparting moral education and cultural values to children. As children enjoy the musical beauty of these songs, they also gain an initial understanding of positive cultural values, which can help foster good behavioral habits and value orientations. This dual role of aesthetic enjoyment and moral education makes these folk songs a valuable resource in early childhood music education.

2.2. Artistic Characteristics of Li and Miao Musical Instruments

The musical instruments crafted by the Li and Miao ethnic groups are notable for their use of natural materials and simple structures, making them highly accessible for early childhood learning [5, 6]. Materials such as bamboo and wood are commonly

employed to create instruments like dingdong wood, single-log drums, bamboo tube drums, and lusheng, which are characterized by intuitive designs that encourage young learners to engage with music. These instruments produce crisp and distinctive timbres, with the nasal flute offering soft tones, dingdong wood providing clear resonance, single-log drums delivering steady beats, and lusheng emitting bright melodies. Such auditory qualities are particularly effective in capturing the attention of children and fostering their interest in musical exploration. Additionally, the straightforward performance techniques—such as percussion, blowing, and plucking—ensure that these instruments are easy to master, making them ideal for children's initial musical experiences and ensemble practices. By combining simplicity with rich tonal diversity, these instruments serve as excellent tools for nurturing musical skills in young learners.

The musical instruments of the Li and Miao ethnic groups are distinguished by their unique ethnic characteristics and child-friendly designs, which contribute to their appeal among young learners [7]. For example, single-log drums often feature intricate totem motifs, such as representations of the sun and frogs, reflecting the cultural heritage of these communities. Bamboo tube drums are constructed from interconnected bamboo tubes of varying lengths, while the lusheng flute is designed to resemble the tail feathers of a phoenix, adding a visually captivating element that sparks children's curiosity. These narrative-rich designs not only attract attention but also encourage children to explore the cultural significance of the instruments. Furthermore, some of these instruments have practical origins rooted in daily life. For instance, the dingdong wooden clapper was historically used by Li ancestors for communication, while bamboo tube drums may have evolved from common household items like cooking utensils or containers. This connection between musical instruments and everyday life provides children with a tangible understanding of how music intersects with real-world contexts, fostering a deeper appreciation for the cultural and functional aspects of these creations. By bridging the gap between music and daily experiences, these instruments offer an engaging and educational introduction to the world of music.

2.3. Core Values in Early Childhood Music Enlightenment Education

Perceptual value in early childhood music education plays a crucial role in helping young children develop the ability to distinguish timbre, rhythm, and melody. This process fosters their musical auditory perception and enhances rhythmic awareness, laying a foundation for future musical development. Aesthetic value is equally significant, as it allows children to experience the simplicity and beauty inherent in ethnic music, cultivating an early appreciation for artistic expression. Expressive value encourages children to confidently convey their emotions and imagination through singing, instrumental performance, and rhythmic movements, promoting emotional and creative growth [8]. Cultural value introduces children to local traditions and heritage, fostering a sense of ethnic identity and belonging to their homeland. Creative value supports improvisational composition, rhythmic games, and instrument modification using simple folk songs and instruments, stimulating innovation and problem-solving skills in young learners.

3. Practical Challenges in Developing and Applying Li and Miao Folk Songs and Musical Instruments in Early Childhood Music Education

3.1. Fragmented Resource Mining with Lack of Systematic Organization

Kindergartens often rely on fragmented online resources or excerpts of Li and Miao folk materials, which lack systematic categorization and organization. The musical instrument resources available are primarily display-oriented and fail to provide age-appropriate, safe, and pedagogically optimized adaptations for regular classroom use. Existing research on Li and Miao folk songs and instruments predominantly focuses on adult music studies or academic domains, leaving early childhood music education with limited compiled resources or theoretical frameworks. Many valuable folk songs and nursery rhymes are transmitted orally among a small number of traditional artists,

without standardized musical notation or textual documentation, which places them at risk of extinction over time [9, 10]. Furthermore, essential aspects such as traditional instrument-making techniques and performance methods are not adequately adapted for early childhood educational contexts. This creates significant challenges for kindergartens, which struggle to access well-structured, age-appropriate teaching materials. Consequently, they often resort to fragmented and improvised approaches rather than implementing a coherent system to introduce Li and Miao musical culture effectively. Addressing these gaps requires a systematic effort to preserve, adapt, and integrate these cultural elements into early childhood education frameworks.

3.2. Insufficient Content Adaptation, Lacking Child-Friendly Adaptations

Traditional folk songs often feature rigid lyrics and extended verses, which can be challenging for young children to engage with effectively. Additionally, the instruments associated with these songs are often oversized and impractical for children to handle, leading to diminished interest and engagement during music education sessions. For example, dialectal vocabulary and historical references embedded in certain Li and Miao folk songs frequently surpass the cognitive understanding of children, making it difficult for them to connect emotionally with the material. Furthermore, the intricate melodic structures and rhythmic variations of these songs often conflict with children's natural physical activity patterns and limited attention spans, resulting in boredom and learning obstacles. Instruments such as single-log drums and dingdong wooden instruments are typically bulky and difficult for children to manipulate, posing potential safety risks and limiting opportunities for independent exploration and hands-on practice. Moreover, the storytelling styles of folk songs are often tailored to adult audiences, lacking interactive and child-friendly elements that could enhance engagement. The advanced instrumental techniques required for these songs demand significant professional training, further complicating their integration into early childhood music education [11]. These factors collectively hinder efforts to foster children's interest and appreciation for ethnic music through traditional folk songs and instruments.

3.3. Monotonous Teaching Formats with Insufficient Gamification and Contextualization

The primary teaching methods in kindergartens predominantly rely on "appreciation + follow-along singing" and "instrument observation," which lack the integration of interactive elements such as games, rhythmic movements, handicrafts, and performances. This traditional approach places an excessive focus on knowledge transmission rather than fostering experiential learning, which is a cornerstone of early childhood education. Teachers often demonstrate significant professional deficiencies in ethnic music literacy. For instance, many kindergarten educators are unfamiliar with the folk singing techniques, instrumental performance skills, and cultural contexts of the Li and Miao ethnic groups. They also lack the ability to adapt folk songs, provide basic instrumental instruction, and design engaging activities. These shortcomings lead to common challenges, including reluctance to teach, inadequate instructional quality, and suboptimal teaching outcomes. Furthermore, support mechanisms remain insufficient, with limited collaboration among kindergartens, families, and communities. Some kindergartens have not incorporated Li and Miao music into their curriculum planning due to a lack of academic research support, funding, and environmental resources. Families also exhibit limited awareness of Li and Miao folk songs and instruments, which hinders the establishment of a family-based cultural inheritance. Additionally, social resources, such as folk artists and cultural centers, are not effectively coordinated with kindergartens, further exacerbating the issue.

4. Strategies for Child-Friendly Development of Hainan's Li and Miao Folk Songs and Musical Instruments

4.1. Establish a Hierarchical and Categorized Resource Repository

By age group: Small class activities should focus on introducing simple rhythms paired with short folk songs that are easy to grasp. These can be complemented by

distinctive timbres and percussion instruments that are straightforward to play, such as ding-dong wooden clappers. For middle class students, the curriculum can include complete short folk songs, enabling them to play or perform using simple instruments. Large class students can engage with classic folk song excerpts, which allow for basic arrangement and small ensemble performances, fostering creativity and teamwork. By genre: Folk songs can be categorized into labor songs, game songs, custom songs, and nature songs, each reflecting unique cultural elements. Musical instruments can be divided into percussion instruments like single-log drums, wind instruments such as small reed pipes and basic nose flutes, and plucked instruments like mouth bows [12]. Multimedia resource development is essential, involving the collection of audio recordings, videos, musical scores, images, and animations to create digital resource packages tailored specifically for kindergartens. These resources can enhance accessibility and engagement, ensuring that children interact with the material in a dynamic and educational manner.

4.2. Children-Friendly Adaptation of Folk Songs

Simplifying the melody and structure of folk songs can make them more accessible to children. This involves shortening musical phrases to ensure they are easier to remember, reducing the vocal range to suit young voices, and repeating the core melody to reinforce familiarity. Optimizing the lyrics is equally important; replacing complex or obscure vocabulary with playful and engaging language can capture children's attention while preserving the traditional ethnic aesthetics of the songs. Incorporating rhythmic recitation, such as nursery rhyme patterns, can further facilitate children's ability to imitate and sing along. Additionally, creating action charts with illustrations that depict melodic progression and rhythmic patterns can significantly reduce the learning difficulty, making the process more interactive and visually engaging for young learners [13].

Integrating interactive gameplay into folk song adaptations can enhance children's learning experience. For instance, combining performances with role-playing and physical activities, such as simulating woodcutting motions in "Woodcutting Song" or designing a "rice pounding relay" mini-game for "Rice Pounding Ballad," allows children to learn through play. This approach helps them retain knowledge more effectively and fosters a deeper emotional connection to the content [14]. Diversifying singing formats, including chorus singing, duet singing, and lead vocals, encourages expressive participation. Simple body percussion, such as clapping, leg tapping, or stomping, can be incorporated as accompaniment to boost engagement and rhythm. Connecting the songs to daily life experiences is also crucial. Selecting themes related to children's everyday surroundings, such as nature songs, can guide them to observe flora and fauna in their environment. Linking lyrics to real-world objects helps children immerse themselves in the song's context, sparking enthusiasm for active learning and fostering a stronger appreciation for traditional folk culture.

4.3. The Educational Adaptation of Musical Instruments

Size optimization involves designing compact musical instruments with rounded edges and lightweight materials, making them more suitable for young learners [15]. Performance simplification focuses on streamlining playing techniques to emphasize rhythmic expression rather than technical complexity, ensuring accessibility for beginners. DIY instrument accessibility encourages the creation of imitation instruments using everyday materials such as bamboo tubes, cardboard boxes, straws, and bottle caps. This approach democratizes musical participation by enabling children to craft and play their own instruments, fostering creativity and engagement. Visualized notation employs color-coded symbols and rhythmic patterns to simplify the understanding of musical concepts, making them more intuitive for young learners. This method bridges the gap between abstract musical theory and practical application, enhancing the learning experience.

Material playfulness emphasizes crafting musical instruments from vibrant, tactile, and eco-friendly materials. For example, coconut shells can be polished into small drums

adorned with Li-Miao ethnic patterns, preserving their natural textures while stimulating children's curiosity through visual and tactile engagement. Functional integration combines multiple simple playing mechanisms into a single instrument. For instance, instruments that produce both percussion and vibration effects can mimic the polyphonic ensembles of the Li-Miao culture, allowing young learners to explore diverse timbres within a single device. This approach simplifies ensemble practice while enriching musical layering. Contextual connection adapts instruments to reflect themes from Li-Miao folk songs. For example, bamboo tubes can be transformed into "water flutes" to simulate the sound of flowing water in songs depicting "rice field labor." This visual and auditory analogy helps children intuitively connect musical performances with imagery from rural life, deepening their understanding of cultural and musical contexts. By integrating these elements, the educational adaptation of musical instruments fosters a holistic and immersive learning experience for young learners.

4.4. Simplification of Cultural Connotations

Extracting cultural narratives from folk songs and musical instruments and adapting them into age-appropriate folk tales or game scenarios for young children can serve as an effective educational tool. For example, stories like "The Firewood-Carrying Dance and the Story of Dingdong Wood" or "The Lusheng and Miao Village Festivals" can be creatively reimagined to foster a synchronized enlightenment of "music + culture." By presenting these narratives in a playful and engaging manner, children can develop an early appreciation for the cultural significance embedded in traditional music and folklore. This approach not only enhances their understanding of cultural heritage but also nurtures their creativity and imagination through interactive storytelling and play.

Integrating cultural elements such as traditional Li and Miao festivals and labor scenes into music game design provides a dynamic way to engage children with ethnic traditions. For instance, during "Rice-Pounding Song" instruction, children can simulate rice-pounding motions with wooden sticks, allowing them to experience the rhythmic cadence of the melody while gaining an appreciation for the agricultural wisdom of the Li people. Role-playing activities, such as "March 3rd Song Duets," can further immerse children in ethnic celebrations by having them wear simple Li brocade head ornaments and play traditional instruments like the reed pipe (lusheng). These activities create a festive and interactive environment that fosters cultural immersion [16]. Additionally, visual aids such as picture books and animations can transform the animistic worldview of folk songs into playful expressions, such as "raindrops singing" or "trees clapping hands." By interpreting cultural concepts through familiar childhood imagery, abstract ethnic symbols become tangible and participatory experiences. This approach helps children develop a sense of familiarity and cultural identity through musical activities, ensuring that traditional cultural elements are both preserved and made accessible to younger generations in an engaging and meaningful way.

5. Application Paths of Li and Miao Folk Songs and Musical Instruments in Early Childhood Music Enlightenment Education

5.1. Integration into Routine Music Activities

Singing activities incorporate adapted children's folk songs such as "Wuzhi Mountain Ballad" and "Li Family Children Love Singing," utilizing techniques like duets, round singing, and performance singing. These are further enriched with actions and scenarios to enhance children's engagement and enjoyment. Rhythm activities focus on traditional instruments like clappers and single-log drums, integrating interactive games such as rhythm imitation, rhythm passing, rhythm chain, and body percussion to develop rhythmic awareness and coordination. Instrumental performance activities are structured progressively, starting with small-class percussion ensembles, advancing to middle-class melodic wind instruments, and culminating in large-class simple polyphonic ensembles, fostering teamwork and musical collaboration. Appreciation sessions combine the unique timbres of traditional instruments with excerpts from folk songs, guiding children to

identify emotions, visualize cultural scenes, and articulate their feelings, thereby deepening their understanding and connection to the music.

5.2. Integration into Regional Activities and Daily Life

The Music Area is designed to feature Li and Miao musical instruments, musical scores, and folk song audio recordings, providing an environment that supports children's free exploration of these cultural elements. The Performance Area offers Li and Miao costumes and props, enabling children to engage in folk song performances and small instrument shows, fostering a deeper connection to the cultural heritage. Life activities are enriched by playing Li and Miao folk songs during morning routines, before meals, and during outdoor activities, creating an immersive cultural atmosphere. Themed comprehensive activities include the "Li and Miao Music Paradise" Theme Week, which integrates singing, musical instruments, dance, handicrafts, and painting to provide a holistic cultural experience. Additionally, the "I Am a Little Heritage Holder" exhibition allows children to showcase their skills by singing folk songs and playing homemade instruments, promoting active participation in cultural preservation. Festival-integrated activities, such as ethnic music games and experiences during the March 3rd Festival, further enhance the cultural immersion and engagement of children.

The Educational Zone incorporates rhythm puzzle cards and melody sequencing cards inspired by Li and Miao folk songs, allowing children to explore rhythmic patterns and melodic variations through interactive, hands-on activities. In the Art Zone, children are guided to create simple musical instruments, such as "ding-dong" wooden clappers and nose flutes, using natural materials like coconut shells, bamboo tubes, and wooden pieces. They can also draw characters and scenes from Li and Miao folk songs, transforming their musical perceptions into visual artistic expressions. During transitional activities, such as queuing or waiting periods, teachers can lead children in reciting short lyrics or rhythmic phrases from Li and Miao folk songs, such as "Ding-dong, ding-dong, mountain springs sing," seamlessly integrating musical elements into fragmented moments of the day. Outdoor activities combine Li and Miao folk melodies with traditional sports games, enhancing physical coordination and cultural appreciation. For instance, during "bamboo pole dancing," children can jump to the lively rhythms of folk songs, or they can perform stretching exercises that mimic Li and Miao dance movements, ensuring their body movements are closely synchronized with the musical rhythms. These activities not only promote physical development but also deepen children's understanding and appreciation of Li and Miao cultural traditions.

5.3. Collaborative Application of Home and School Resources

Parent-child folk song learning activities can be implemented by distributing simplified sheet music and audio recordings, which encourage families to engage in singing sessions together. Parent-child instrument crafting initiatives can involve collaboration with families to create replicas of traditional instruments from the Li and Miao ethnic groups, fostering hands-on cultural engagement. Family music sharing sessions provide opportunities for children to perform folk songs and showcase their crafted instruments at home, promoting cultural appreciation within the family unit. Environmental immersion can be achieved through thoughtful kindergarten design, such as the installation of a Li and Miao folk song culture wall and an instrument display corner. Dedicated listening and performance areas for ethnic music can be established indoors, while outdoor spaces can be utilized to create ethnic music game zones, enriching the learning environment and encouraging active participation.

Parents can be invited to participate in an "Ethnic Music Open Day" event, where families engage in interactive activities such as Li and Miao folk song duets and instrumental ensemble performances. These activities enhance understanding and appreciation of ethnic music culture while fostering family bonding. An online home-kindergarten music exchange group can be established to share videos and audio recordings of children's ethnic music learning experiences at the kindergarten. This platform can encourage parents to provide feedback on their family music activities,

promoting positive interaction and shared experiences in music education. Community resources can also be leveraged to invite Li and Miao folk artists to visit kindergartens and conduct ethnic music workshops with parents and children. These workshops allow parents to experience the charm of ethnic music firsthand, thereby motivating them to actively support and participate in their children's early exposure to ethnic music education. Such initiatives strengthen the connection between home and school, enriching the cultural and educational experience for children and their families [14].

6. Conclusion

The folk songs and musical instruments of the Li and Miao ethnic groups in Hainan represent invaluable cultural assets that can significantly enrich early childhood music education. These elements are imbued with unique regional characteristics, profound artistic value, and substantial educational potential. By scientifically developing and integrating these cultural resources into music education, educators can not only diversify teaching content but also enhance children's musical perception, creativity, and performance skills. Furthermore, this approach fosters a deep connection to ethnic culture, embedding it into the consciousness of young learners and ensuring the dynamic preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage. Such integration also supports the cultivation of a culturally enriched and musically literate generation, capable of appreciating and innovating upon traditional art forms.

Current challenges in utilizing these cultural resources include fragmented availability, limited adaptations for young learners, overly simplistic formats, and a lack of adequately trained teaching staff. Addressing these issues requires a systematic approach, such as creating tiered resource libraries that categorize and preserve these materials, adapting content to be more engaging and age-appropriate, and developing gamified systems that make learning interactive and enjoyable. Additionally, strengthening teacher training programs is essential to equip educators with the skills to effectively incorporate these resources into their curricula. Collaboration among families, schools, and communities is also critical to ensure a holistic approach to cultural preservation. Kindergartens should adopt child-centered methodologies that prioritize local cultural contexts while fostering joyful musical experiences. By doing so, children can develop a strong foundation in musical literacy and grow into cultural ambassadors who actively contribute to the preservation and innovation of traditional heritage. This initiative not only supports the safeguarding of Hainan's ethnic culture but also advances the quality and inclusivity of preschool education, paving the way for a more culturally aware and musically enriched society.

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