

Brief Discussion on the Function of Padding Syllables in Chinese Hakka Folk Songs: A Case Study of "Fame of Hakka Folk Songs"

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Abstract: After a group of Hakka people migrated to Meizhou at the end of the Qing Dynasty in China, Hakka folk songs began to circulate widely in areas such as Meizhou. Rooted in the soil of real life, these songs represent oral creations by the masses and possess unique artistic characteristics. The tonal language of folk songs, based on the intonation of the Hakka language, gives rise to a distinctive vocal art form. As a type of migratory culture, Hakka folk songs have been introduced into various areas, continually enriching and developing amidst long-term labor and life. Through their blending with local cultures, they have formed a uniquely enchanting style.

1. Introduction to Hakka folk songs

The Hakka is the only ethnic group in China not named after a geographic region. ^[1]Hakkas are distributed throughout southern China and some regions of Southeast Asia, making them one of the most widely dispersed ethnic groups in the world. They are primarily concentrated in areas such as South Fujian, West Guangdong, Central and South Jiangxi, and Taiwan. Hakkas have their own language, culture, and customs, earning them the distinction of being referred to as "China's fifth largest ethnic group". Historically nomadic, they have preserved many traditional customs and food cultures, such as steamed rice dumplings and stewed meat. In modern times, Hakkas play a significant role in society, with a strong emphasis on education in their regions. Hakka regions often take pride in scholarly pursuits, having produced numerous top scholars from ancient times to the present.

Folk songs are a type of Chinese folk song, originating as an impromptu singing art form among laboring people in the fields. Characterized by their unrestrained and hearty emotion, simplicity, and free rhythm, the unique flavor of folk songs arises from the padding syllables and embellishments at the beginning, end, transitions, and conclusion of the melody, enhancing the freedom of its language and form. The widespread popularity of folk songs is primarily due to the arduous labor and heavy taxation of the past, which left the working people with few forms of entertainment. They often used folk songs as a means to alleviate fatigue from intense labor, express yearnings for a better life, and communicate with and command livestock in the field. The lyrics are typically improvised by the singer.

Hakka folk songs constitute a distinctive genre of folk song in Southern China, tracing their origins back to the Tang Dynasty through the Song and Yuan periods. The name "Hakka Mountain Song" is derived from its place of origin—Hakka settlements in provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian, and Jiangxi—and it is widely sung in Southern Fujian, Canton, and other Hakka regions. Sung primarily in the local Hakka dialect, these songs are renowned for their beautiful melodies and emotionally rich, philosophical lyrics. In modern society, Hakka folk songs serve as vital cultural symbols of the Hakka ethnic group, featuring on the list of national intangible cultural heritage and encapsulating the spirit of Hakkas dispersed worldwide. Over time, these songs have evolved into accompaniments for dance performances. In contemporary society, Hakka folk songs have seen even broader dissemination and development, including promotion through print media and new media, as well as the incorporation of pop music elements. While maintaining traditional characteristics, continuous innovation fosters the transmission and promotion of Hakka culture. Furthermore, the tradition of Hakka folk songs often being orally taught aids in memorization and performance, with the role of padding syllables becoming increasingly significant. As modern music elements are incorporated, these padding syllables continue to evolve and innovate, representing an important form of expression combining Hakka culture with modern aesthetic tastes. Hakka folk songs, unlike the sweet softness of the Wu dialect, carry their own unique charm. The Hakkas often liken their songs to the food they eat—sticky rice products described as "round and full," referring to the doughy, chewy texture that sticks to the teeth. This metaphor is later used to describe the smoothness and unique charm of Hakka folk songs.

Padding syllables are the syllables added to songs, carrying no literal meaning but enhancing the rhythm and aesthetics. They enrich the song's rhythm, amplify the music's emotional impact, express emotions, and highlight cultural characteristics. Examples include sounds like "Lai", "Wa," "Ai," etc. These padding syllables are not fixed phrases but rather change and innovate according to the situation and needs of the song. Although most padding syllables are mostly without literal meaning, they occasionally serve to subtly convey emotions or supplement the emotions or tones in the lyrics.

2. Research on Functions of Padding Syllables in Hakka folk songs

Hakka folk songs extensively incorporate padding syllables, most of which originate from the Hakka language and align with the linguistic characteristics of the Hakka ethnicity. The padding syllables in Hakka folk songs are frequently used by the laboring masses. At the beginning of the song or at transition points, padding syllables are often employed to draw audience attention, while a single syllable typically marks the sentence's end. The padding syllables in Hakka folk songs serve the following functions:

2.1. Accentuating Beautiful Melodies

One reason for the use of padding syllables in Hakka folk songs is their capacity to complete the melody without abrupt breaks, thereby enhancing the song's beauty. In Hakka folk songs, padding syllables are commonly used to emphasize the melody and emotional expression of the song, thereby highlighting its unique characteristics and allure. For instance, syllables such as "Ai-hey" and "Oh-hey" effectively convey the elegance and momentum of Hakka mountain song melodies, allowing the audience to experience the essence and charisma of the song more deeply. At the same time, padding syllables in Hakka folk songs also serve to complete the song's melody and extend its melodic smoothness.

2.2. Highlighting Emotional Expression

In "The Famous Hakka Folk Song," padding syllables also play a role in highlighting emotional expression. For instance:

Hi: This padding syllable, heard at the beginning and end of the song and at certain turning points, originates from a Hakka word denoting regret and complaint, making the song's emotional expression more complete.

Wow: This word is typically used to express urgency and the desire for a response, such as in "Liu-wow" and "Liu-deng" (implying 'come along, come first').

Through the description of scenes and events and the incorporation of emotional expressions and value concepts, these padding syllables enrich the entire song, making it more vivid. As listeners engage with the music, they gain a better appreciation of the power of the song's emotional resonance.

2.3. Enhancing Artistic Effect

In "The Famous Hakka Folk Song," padding syllables function to amplify the artistic impact of the piece. Specifically, they contribute in the following ways:

Heightening Rhythmic Sense: Hakka folk songs are renowned for their unique rhythm and cadence, and padding syllables substantially enhance this rhythmic sense. For instance, syllables like "ah ah" mimic the sound of the traditional Hakka bamboo clapper, lending an enriched rhythmic quality to the entire song.

Elevating Emotional Expression: Padding syllables express complex emotions in a simple yet vivid manner.^[2] For example, "Ayo-ayo" could reflect sensations of pain or fatigue, whereas "Ya-ya Yo-yo" can convey feelings of delight and surprise.

Intensifying Visual Description: Through evocative metaphors and symbolism, padding syllables offer a more vivid visual experience for the listener. For instance, "hei hei deng dang" can effectively depict the sound of a bell, while "ding dong dang dang" can illustrate the chime of a bell.

In essence, padding syllables in Hakka folk songs play a vital role. Not only do they augment the artistic impact of the music, but they also render the entire song more lively and vivid, successfully capturing the audience's attention.

2.4. Supplementing Lyric Meaning

Padding syllables in Hakka folk songs are frequently used to supplement the meaning of the lyrics, aiding those unfamiliar with the language, such as the elderly, women, and children, to better comprehend the song's meaning, making the song simpler and easier to understand. For example:

"Nuo," one of the most representative padding syllables in the Hakka language, can complete the implied disapproval or regret within the lyrics.

"Gei" functions as an auxiliary word to supplement the lyrics in the song.

Thus, Hakka folk songs can weave subtle and straightforward dialogues or stories using minimal lyrics and auxiliary words, reducing the complexity of the song's transmission and accentuating the regional characteristics and unique style of the song.

3. Analysis of Types and Characteristics of Padding Syllables in "The Famous Hakka Folk Song"

3.1. Sound-related Padding Syllables

"The Famous Hakka Folk Song" is a classic among Hakka folk songs, encapsulating a variety of sound-related padding syllables. These are syllables that are uttered purely for their sound, devoid of any specific meaning. The following instances can be observed within the song:

"Yo-ho": This padding syllable can be heard at the beginning and the end of the song, as well as at various turning points. It mimics the unique timbre of the Suona, a Chinese wind instrument, grabbing the audience's attention and infusing the song with a distinct folk music flavor.

"Da": This word is frequently employed to emphasize emotions, with the implication of a pause, simulating the sound of bamboo percussion instruments.

"Nuo": This padding syllable imitates the sustained tone of string instruments, contributing an exclamatory emotional tone while preserving the melody's continuity.

These sound-related padding syllables not only enrich the musical elements of the song but also render it more illustrative and lively, showcasing the unique charm of Hakka folk songs. ^[3]

3.2. Meaning-supplementing Padding Syllables

In Hakka folk songs, meaning-supplementing padding syllables refer to those that augment the latent semantics within the lyrics or supplement the implications of the lyric's meaning. For instance:

"Gei": The use of "Gei" in the song functions as a supplementary auxiliary, subtly conveying a sense of emphasis.

Song "Na": The syllable "Na" in the song covertly suggests an implication of pointing, supplementing the lyrics by suggesting that the scene does not occur on-site but has happened previously or in a distant place.

"Ya-ma": The term "Ya-ma" is not a commonly used padding syllable in Hakka dialect. It is an exclamatory particle prevalent in Chinese operas within the Hakka region, indicating that the lyrics are in the progressive tense, thus supplementing the temporal aspect of the lyrics.

These padding syllables enhance the completeness of the lyrics, imparting them with a lively and pictorial sense, thereby making it easier for listeners to envision the scenes depicted in the lyrics.

4. Conclusion

Hakka folk songs, a form of folk music passed down and performed by the Hakka people, are inherently imbued with the distinct features of Hakka culture. An in-depth examination of padding syllables provides a more nuanced understanding of the connotations and characteristics intrinsic to Hakka culture.^[4] These syllables occupy a special position and role within Hakka folk songs, serving to intensify the musical rhythm, enhance emotional expression, and amplify the artistry of vivid descriptions. Thus, the study of these syllables also offers insights into the unique attributes and allure of Hakka folk songs as a musical art form. Hakka folk songs, an orally transmitted form of folk music, rely heavily on padding syllables as pivotal elements for song memorization and singing. Through scholarly exploration of these syllables, one can better comprehend the methods of cultural transmission and historical shifts of Hakka folk songs, thereby providing a reference for the preservation and inheritance of Hakka folk song culture.^[5] The padding syllables found within Hakka folk songs represent a distinctive and vital element of folk music. Their investigation holds significant research value for a profound exploration of Hakka culture and musical art forms, as

well as the promotion of cultural heritage preservation. [6]

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