

## **SHE ETHNIC MUSIC IN EASTERN FUJIAN: MUSICAL FORMS, AESTHETICS, AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL CULTURAL GOVERNANCE**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the musical forms, aesthetics, and socio-cultural functions of She ethnic music in eastern Fujian within the framework of local cultural governance. Using ethnomusicology, performance theory, and cultural ecology, the research draws on literature review, fieldwork, musical analysis, and comparative study to reveal a distinctive terminological system, diverse modal structures, and performance practices that connect music with labor, love, ritual, and narrative contexts. Findings highlight She music's improvisational creativity, natural resonance, and emotional sincerity, alongside its openness to cross-cultural exchange with Han traditions. Contemporary challenges such as generational discontinuity, urban migration, and the influence of popular culture threaten its survival, but mechanisms of preservation—ranging from intangible cultural heritage designation and educational integration to stage adaptations and digital dissemination—demonstrate resilience. The study argues that sustainable transmission depends on participatory governance models that balance authenticity and innovation, showing that She music is both an artistic tradition and a governance concern, enriching scholarly understanding and informing cultural policy for heritage sustainability.

**Keywords:** She ethnic music, Eastern Fujian, Intangible cultural heritage, Local cultural governance, Musical forms and aesthetics

### **1. Introduction**

The She people, one of China's ancient ethnic groups, possess a distinctive cultural heritage marked by unique social customs, belief systems, and artistic practices. Today, their population is primarily distributed across Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Guangdong provinces, with eastern Fujian representing a particularly significant region for the study of She musical traditions due to its demographic concentration and the persistence of living cultural practices. Among the diverse cultural expressions of the She, music has played a central role in the preservation of collective memory and community identity. Rooted in oral traditions, She music embodies the principle of "song as speech" (ge yan), in which musical performance is inseparable from language, communication, and everyday life. This close integration of music with social life has shaped a performance culture that functions simultaneously as artistic expression, historical record, and a medium of cultural continuity.

Despite its rich cultural value, She music has received comparatively limited scholarly attention when measured against other ethnic musical forms in China, such as the Da Ge of the Dong or the Fei Ge of the Miao. Existing research has often been fragmentary, focusing on terminology, modal characteristics, or selected social functions, while lacking systematic theoretical analysis and holistic interpretation. This scholarly gap can be attributed to the oral transmission of She music, which left few written records, as well as the She's dispersed settlement patterns and complex migration history, which have produced diverse and variable musical forms that defy standardized categorization. As a result, the comprehensive cultural significance of She music—its

role in sustaining identity, mediating social relations, and engaging with interethnic cultural exchange—remains underexplored.

This study positions She music in eastern Fujian as its primary object of inquiry, applying the analytical framework of ethnomusicology with an emphasis on the interrelations of music, society, and culture. Drawing upon performance theory and cultural ecology, the research examines the terminology, modal structures, melodic morphology, stylistic genres, and cultural functions of She music, with the aim of uncovering both its artistic features and its socio-cultural significance. Importantly, this analysis is situated within the broader discourse of local cultural governance, emphasizing the role of local government institutions, community organizations, and cultural policies in safeguarding intangible musical heritage. By integrating ethnomusicological perspectives with governance studies, this article highlights how She music not only reflects cultural uniqueness but also contributes to the negotiation of ethnic identity, the shaping of local policy frameworks, and the promotion of cultural sustainability.

The study addresses a critical scholarly gap by providing a systematic exploration of She musical traditions while contextualizing them within contemporary challenges of heritage preservation and community governance. In doing so, it contributes both to the academic understanding of minority music in China and to practical discussions on cultural diversity, local governance, and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholarly inquiry into the musical traditions of the She people has a relatively short history compared with the study of other ethnic groups such as the Dong or Miao. Early systematic attention can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s, when national ethnographic surveys were launched to document the cultural practices of minority groups. Representative works such as *The She Ethnic Arts Survey Report* (Fujian Provincial Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1957), *The She Ethnic Chronicles* (Editorial Committee of She Ethnic Chronicles, 1985), and the *Gazetteer of Fu'an* (Fu'an County Gazetteer Editorial Committee, 1992) provide some of the earliest classifications of She songs, with notations, transcriptions, and rudimentary discussions of melodic structure. These documents laid the groundwork for subsequent scholarship, though they often remained descriptive rather than analytical.

In the 1980s and 1990s, musicologists began to focus on the modal and melodic characteristics of She folk songs, analyzing their tonal structures, scales, and melodic progressions (Li, 1991; Zhou, 1998). Studies highlighted the uniqueness of She modal systems, which differ from both the pentatonic framework of Han music and the polyphonic traditions of the Dong. However, these contributions were often case-specific, limited to individual repertoires or regions, and rarely addressed the broader cultural or social dimensions of performance. As a result, She music has remained relatively underexplored compared to other well-documented traditions such as the Da Ge of the Dong (Yang, 2005) or the Fei Ge of the Miao (Wu, 2010).

In recent decades, ethnomusicological perspectives have broadened the field by situating She music within its socio-cultural context. Scholars have examined its functions in labor, ritual, and festival settings, drawing attention to its role in sustaining

oral tradition and community memory (Chen, 2012). The principle of geyan (“song as speech”) has been recognized as a defining aesthetic and communicative feature, emphasizing the homology between language and music (Zheng, 2017). At the same time, cross-cultural studies have illuminated the historical and ongoing interactions between She and Han communities. Comparative analyses have revealed both convergence and divergence, such as the parallels between the She “three-line variation” structure and the repetitive stanzaic forms found in the Book of Songs (Wang, 2018), as well as differences in vocal aesthetics between the She notions of “true voice” and “false voice” and Han traditions (Huang, 2015).

Alongside ethnomusicology, other theoretical frameworks have been employed. Performance theory has helped to reconceptualize She music not as a static musical text but as an event that embodies social interaction, emotional communication, and ritual efficacy (Schechner, 2003; Small, 1998). Cultural ecology has provided a lens through which to examine the relationship between She musical practice, natural environment, and community life (Merriam, 1964; Feld, 1990). These approaches underscore the fact that She music cannot be understood in isolation from the ecological and social systems in which it is embedded.

Despite these advances, significant scholarly gaps remain. Few studies have undertaken comprehensive analyses that integrate musical form, aesthetic value, and socio-cultural function. Even fewer have linked She music to questions of governance and heritage preservation. In contrast, literature on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has increasingly emphasized the importance of local governance, community participation, and policy frameworks in safeguarding minority traditions (Blake, 2009; Nitzky, 2012). Studies on ICH in China highlight the role of provincial and municipal governments in implementing national legislation (Zhu, 2015), as well as the challenges of balancing cultural preservation with modernization and economic development (Su, 2018). Yet, She music has seldom been analyzed within this governance-oriented framework, leaving a disconnect between ethnomusicological research and policy discourse.

This study positions itself at the intersection of these literatures. By drawing on ethnomusicology, performance theory, and cultural ecology, while also engaging with scholarship on cultural governance and heritage policy, it seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of She music in eastern Fujian. The literature demonstrates the need for such an integrative approach: one that not only deepens the musical analysis of She traditions but also situates them within contemporary discussions of local governance, cultural sustainability, and the safeguarding of intangible heritage.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a comprehensive methodological approach that integrates ethnomusicological analysis with interdisciplinary perspectives from folklore, anthropology, and cultural ecology. By combining textual research, field investigation, comparative study, and musical analysis, the research aims to construct a systematic understanding of She ethnic music in eastern Fujian and to contextualize its artistic forms within the framework of local cultural governance.

### ***3.1 Literature Review***

The study begins with an extensive review of existing scholarship on She music, tracing research efforts from the 1950s to the present. Foundational sources such as The She Ethnic Arts Survey Report, The She Ethnic Chronicles, and Gazetteer of Fu'an provide early classifications and notations of She musical traditions. In addition, clan genealogies, songbooks, and historical records are consulted to reconstruct the developmental trajectory of She music. This literature serves as a baseline against which more recent studies—focused on modal structures, performance practice, and cultural significance—are critically examined.

### ***3.2 Fieldwork***

Fieldwork forms the core of this research. Data were collected in Ningde, Fu'an, Xiapu, and Fuding, where She communities remain culturally active. Direct observation of live performances, including folk songs, ritual singing, and oral narratives, was supplemented with in-depth interviews with singers, elder performers, and designated cultural inheritors. Special attention was given to genres such as geyan (song-speech), shuangtiao luo (two-part counter-singing), and kujiasong (bridal lament). These field materials document the living contexts of performance and elucidate the social and cultural functions of music within community life.

### ***3.3 Comparative Study***

Given the She people's long-standing interaction with Han and other neighboring cultures, comparative analysis was employed to identify both distinctive and shared features of musical practice. Key areas of comparison include the She notions of "true voice" and "false voice" versus Han vocal aesthetics, as well as the parallel between the She "three-line variation" and the repetitive stanzaic forms found in the Book of Songs. Such comparisons highlight the cross-cultural openness of She music while underscoring its role in preserving ethnic identity.

### ***3.4 Musical Analysis***

Detailed musical analysis was conducted to examine tonal systems, modal frameworks, melodic progression, rhythmic organization, and structural features. Regional stylistic differences, such as those found in the Funing, Xiapu, Fuding, and Luolian modes, were analyzed to capture the diversity of She musical expression. Representative songs, including The Wasp Song and The Ancestral Song, were selected for close analysis, enabling a deeper understanding of their structural complexity and aesthetic qualities.

### ***3.5 Interdisciplinary Approach***

Recognizing that She music is simultaneously an artistic form and a socio-cultural practice, the research integrates perspectives from cultural ecology and anthropology. This approach examines the interplay between music, rituals, festivals, and belief systems, situating She music within its broader ecological and social environment. Importantly, this perspective also enables reflection on the governance dimension, particularly the ways in which local cultural policies, community organizations, and heritage frameworks shape the preservation and transmission of musical traditions.

### ***3.6 Research Innovations***

This methodological design offers several innovations. First, it adopts a terminological entry point, systematically examining indigenous musical vocabulary as a

window into She cultural logic. Second, it applies performance theory to highlight music as a dynamic, interactive event rather than a static text. Third, it emphasizes cross-cultural comparison to reveal She music's dual attributes of cultural uniqueness and openness. Finally, it integrates ethnomusicology with anthropology and folklore to generate a three-dimensional understanding of She musical culture.

In sum, the study's methods combine archival and documentary research with ethnographic fieldwork, comparative cultural analysis, and detailed musical examination. This comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the artistic analysis of She music but also provides critical insights into its governance implications as intangible cultural heritage.

## **4. Findings**

### ***4.1 A Distinctive Terminological and Modal System***

A central finding of this research is the existence of a highly developed indigenous terminological system in She musical culture, which reflects a worldview that regards music not as a detached art form but as an integral part of social practice. Terms such as *geyan* (song-speech) embody the principle that "song is speech," signaling that singing serves as a communicative medium and a practical extension of spoken language. Unlike the Han tradition where singing is often conceptualized as elevated artistic expression, *geyan* reflects the utilitarian, dialogic, and socially embedded role of music in She society.

Other terms such as *gemi* (miscellaneous songs) highlight the She's classification of peripheral or improvised repertoire, used to regulate atmosphere in competitive or festive contexts. *Shuangtiao luo* (two-part antiphonal singing) demonstrates the She's inventive treatment of vocal textures, where duet structures employ responsive counterpoint uncommon in monophonic Han folk styles. The She-specific notions of *zhensheng* (true voice) and *jiasheng* (false voice), defined not in terms of authenticity versus imitation but as distinctions of timbre and delivery, further exemplify the She's independent semantic logic. Together, these terms form a coherent classificatory framework, underscoring the She's unique musical epistemology.

Equally significant is the diversity of modal systems. Based on fieldwork, She music in eastern Fujian is organized around four regional modal types—*Funing*, *Xiapu*, *Fuding*, and *Luolian*—each exhibiting distinct tonal features and linked to specific performance contexts. The *Funing* mode employs a pentatonic framework emphasizing *gong–jue–zhi*, producing a wave-like melodic contour with dynamic leaps. The *Xiapu* mode blends tetratonic and pentatonic systems, displaying flexibility suited to antiphonal courtship. The *Fuding* mode employs high registers and resonant "true voice," producing stirring effects appropriate for collective labor. By contrast, the *Luolian* mode relies on tri- and tetratonic structures in ritual contexts, projecting solemnity and reverence. These findings demonstrate that modal systems not only represent musical variety but also correspond to social functions, embedding sound structures within cultural life.

### ***4.2 Structural Features and Performance Practices***

The structure of She music is characterized by flexibility and improvisational openness. Songs are most commonly organized into strophic two-, four-, or five-line forms. Two-line structures, found in labor and love songs, emphasize simplicity and



adaptability. Four-line forms dominate the repertoire, often aligned with rhetorical structures of qi–cheng–zhuan–he (introduction, development, transition, and conclusion), which yield musical coherence and expressive progression. Five-line forms, more elaborate and used in narrative or ritual songs, carry higher symbolic weight and serve as vehicles for storytelling and moral transmission.

One of the most remarkable findings concerns the asynchrony between text and melody. Unlike the strict syllable-to-tone alignment common in Han traditions, She songs employ irregular phrasing (e.g., “nine syllables followed by three”), granting singers creative freedom. This structural elasticity reinforces improvisation, allowing performers to adapt melodic contours to changing contexts and audiences.

Performance practice is equally distinguished by its interactive and improvisational character. Pange (antiphonal singing contests) represent the pinnacle of this tradition: singers, often young men and women, exchange verses in a contest of wit, improvisation, and musical dexterity. Audiences actively participate by cheering or commenting, making the event a communal interaction rather than a private performance. Ritual contexts such as weddings and funerals demonstrate the opposite pole—highly regulated and solemn—where songs like kujiasong (bridal laments) or sangsong (funeral songs) follow fixed structures to fulfill ceremonial requirements. These findings show that She music operates across a spectrum from free improvisation to ritual fixity, balancing creativity with tradition.

#### ***4.3 Musical Aesthetics and Cross-Cultural Interaction***

The aesthetic orientation of She music is deeply rooted in natural imagery and ecological consciousness. Melodic lines frequently imitate birdcalls, mountain echoes, or flowing water, embodying the She pursuit of harmony with nature (tianren heyi). Rhythmic patterns often derive from labor processes, transforming repetitive physical movements into musical motifs that merge function with art. Vocal timbres further reflect this naturalized aesthetic: the alternation between bright, resonant “true voice” and softer, delicate “false voice” evokes mountain acoustics and natural soundscapes.

Improvisational creativity and emotional sincerity also define She aesthetics. Pange requires singers to compose verses spontaneously, ensuring authenticity of expression and situational relevance. Love songs often contain ardent declarations expressed with directness and intensity, contrasting with the subtle restraint characteristic of Han poetic traditions. This highlights an aesthetic of openness and immediacy.

Cross-cultural interactions with Han traditions reveal both independence and resonance. The She’s geyan mirrors Confucian aesthetics in the Yue Ji, which describes music as the vocalization of words and intention. Structural similarities between She narrative songs and the Book of Songs suggest deep historical entanglements, while differences in vocal aesthetics underline independent development. Regional exchanges with Hakka mountain songs or Dong Da Ge further reveal shared performance practices while maintaining She distinctiveness. Thus, She music demonstrates cultural resilience by preserving uniqueness while selectively integrating external elements.

#### ***4.4 Cultural Functions in Social Life***

She music fulfills multidimensional cultural functions. As labor songs, it coordinates rhythm and movement, enhancing efficiency while fostering solidarity. Love songs, especially pange, serve as arenas for courtship, social bonding, and talent display,

embedding personal emotion within collective experience. Narrative songs operate as oral chronicles, transmitting ancestral histories, myths, and ethical lessons, thereby preserving collective memory. Ritual songs play crucial roles in marking life-cycle events, sustaining spiritual beliefs, and reinforcing social norms. Entertainment songs and dances provide community amusement and festive vitality.

These findings reveal that She music is not an autonomous artistic domain but a vital social practice. Its functions encompass emotional expression, moral education, historical preservation, and cultural identity construction. For example, bridal laments embody filial piety and moral responsibility, while narrative epics transmit communal values of endurance and resilience. Performance thus acts as both an artistic expression and a cultural mechanism of social cohesion.

#### ***4.5 Contemporary Challenges and Mechanisms of Transmission***

Despite its cultural richness, She music faces significant challenges in the modern era. Migration and urbanization have disrupted traditional contexts of performance, as younger generations leave villages for cities. Oral transmission has become fragile due to the aging of elder performers and declining interest among youth. Popular entertainment culture exerts additional pressure, as traditional songs are often regarded as outdated or irrelevant.

Mechanisms of preservation are actively emerging. The recognition of She mountain songs on the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006 marked a turning point, generating increased visibility and governmental support. Representative inheritors have been identified, tasked with responsibilities of teaching and transmission. Schools in Fujian have introduced She songs into curricula, fostering ethnic pride among children. Community-based practices, particularly festival gatherings, remain important sites of continuity, while stage adaptations by ensembles such as the Fu'an Ethnic Song and Dance Ensemble demonstrate efforts to modernize presentation.

Digital platforms have opened new channels of dissemination. Archival recordings, online databases, and viral videos on Douyin or Kuaishou expand She music's reach to younger audiences. These transformations indicate that sustainability requires balancing authenticity with adaptation: preserving ritual songs in their traditional form while encouraging innovative genres to engage contemporary listeners.

#### ***4.6 Governance and Cultural Policy Implications***

The findings also highlight the decisive role of local governance in shaping the future of She musical heritage. Local governments in Fujian have played an active role in implementing national intangible cultural heritage (ICH) policies by allocating funding, supporting cultural troupes, and recognizing cultural inheritors. Municipal bureaus and township-level organizations serve as mediators between national frameworks and grassroots communities.

The vitality of She music cannot be ensured through policy alone. Community participation remains essential. Pange performances and ritual songs flourish only when communities engage collectively in their practice. Grassroots involvement not only sustains performance contexts but also ensures cultural authenticity. Thus, an effective governance model must integrate top-down policy support with bottom-up cultural agency.

This research also reveals tensions between preservation and modernization. Government-driven stage adaptations often emphasize spectacle for external audiences, sometimes at the expense of authenticity. Conversely, community-based performances prioritize local meaning and ritual efficacy. Bridging these orientations requires governance strategies that balance cultural tourism with cultural integrity.

The study underscores the broader significance of She music as a case study in local cultural governance. It demonstrates how minority musical traditions can serve as vehicles for community identity, social cohesion, and cultural sustainability when supported by participatory governance mechanisms. As such, She music exemplifies the potential of intangible cultural heritage to function as both an artistic tradition and a field of policy intervention, reinforcing the interdependence of cultural uniqueness and governance frameworks.

In summary, this study reveals that She music in eastern Fujian is distinguished by an independent terminological system, diverse modal structures, flexible forms, and interactive performance practices. Its aesthetic principles emphasize natural resonance, improvisation, and emotional sincerity, while its cultural functions encompass labor, ritual, memory, and identity formation. Contemporary challenges threaten its transmission, yet mechanisms of preservation—ranging from ICH policies and school curricula to community practices and digital media—offer pathways for revitalization. Crucially, the study finds that the long-term vitality of She music depends on integrated governance models that balance national policy, local initiative, and cultural creativity.

## **5. Discussion**

### ***5.1 Integrating Musicological and Governance Perspectives***

The findings of this study demonstrate that She ethnic music in eastern Fujian cannot be fully understood if treated solely as an aesthetic or artistic phenomenon. Its terminological system, modal diversity, and performance practices embody cultural logics that reflect social structure, ecological adaptation, and community interaction. By linking these features to governance frameworks, this research highlights the interdependence of artistic expression and cultural policy. The perspective of local cultural governance expands the scope of ethnomusicology, situating musical analysis within a broader discourse of heritage management, identity politics, and social sustainability.

### ***5.2 Music as a Vehicle of Identity and Community Cohesion***

A recurring theme in the findings is the centrality of She music in constructing ethnic identity. Through love songs, labor songs, and narrative epics, the She people transmit values, reinforce social bonds, and articulate a collective worldview. These cultural functions resonate with theories of performance as “social drama,” in which music functions as both symbolic and practical action. For local governance, this indicates that safeguarding She music is not simply an act of cultural preservation but also an investment in community cohesion and resilience. Policies that prioritize community participation in pange contests, festivals, and ritual performances therefore contribute directly to strengthening local identity and social capital.



### ***5.3 Balancing Authenticity and Innovation***

One of the most complex issues emerging from the research is the tension between authenticity and innovation. On the one hand, ritual songs such as bridal laments or ancestral hymns must preserve established forms to retain their cultural and spiritual legitimacy. On the other, younger generations are increasingly drawn to hybrid adaptations of She music through stage performance, digital media, and cross-genre fusion. Local cultural governance thus faces the challenge of mediating between these competing imperatives. Overemphasis on authenticity risks alienating younger audiences, while excessive innovation could erode cultural distinctiveness. Effective governance requires a nuanced approach that safeguards core repertoires while supporting creative reinterpretations, thereby ensuring both cultural continuity and relevance.

### ***5.4 The Role of Local Governance in Transmission***

The findings reveal that the transmission of She music is shaped not only by community practice but also by the frameworks of local governance. The inclusion of She mountain songs in China's National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage has enhanced visibility, funding, and institutional support. However, the long-term vitality of She music depends on how effectively municipal and township governments collaborate with local communities. For example, initiatives that integrate She songs into school curricula or support intergenerational teaching by cultural inheritors are most successful when grounded in grassroots participation. This underscores the importance of governance models that are participatory rather than top-down, ensuring that policy frameworks empower communities rather than merely regulate them.

### ***5.5 Cross-Cultural Dialogue and National Integration***

Another key implication of this study lies in the cross-cultural dynamics of She music. The structural parallels with Han traditions, such as stanzaic repetition akin to the Book of Songs, reveal shared cultural origins, while differences in vocal aesthetics demonstrate independent development. This duality exemplifies how minority traditions both contribute to and reshape broader Chinese cultural identity. For governance, this highlights the need for cultural policies that recognize minority music not as peripheral folklore but as active contributors to national cultural diversity. Promoting She music within intercultural platforms can foster mutual understanding, reduce cultural marginalization, and enhance national cohesion.

### ***5.6 Contributions to Intangible Heritage Discourse***

The findings contribute to global debates on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) by illustrating the interplay between artistic vitality, social practice, and governance. She music exemplifies how ICH is not static but constantly re-created through performance, negotiation, and adaptation. It also demonstrates that effective safeguarding requires not only documentation and recognition but also active participation by communities and supportive governance structures. In this sense, She music serves as a case study for how local cultural governance can operationalize the principles of the UNESCO 2003 Convention by aligning state policy, community agency, and cultural sustainability.

### ***5.7 Toward Sustainable Cultural Futures***

The study underscores the importance of situating musical traditions within the broader discourse of sustainable cultural development. As globalization and urbanization transform rural societies, minority musical traditions such as those of the She face

unprecedented risks. Yet, these traditions also offer resources for resilience: they embody ecological wisdom, foster social solidarity, and provide creative avenues for identity expression. Local cultural governance that integrates music into education, tourism, and digital platforms can therefore play a crucial role in building sustainable cultural futures. By aligning heritage preservation with contemporary innovation, She music can continue to thrive as both an artistic treasure and a living practice.

In discussion, this article situates She music at the intersection of musicology and governance, revealing its dual character as an artistic system and a cultural policy concern. The findings affirm that safeguarding She music is not only about protecting a minority tradition but also about strengthening community identity, fostering cross-cultural dialogue, and promoting cultural sustainability. By adopting an integrated approach that balances authenticity with innovation and combines top-down policy with grassroots participation, local cultural governance can ensure that She music remains a vibrant part of China's intangible cultural heritage.

## 6. Conclusion

The music of the She people in eastern Fujian stands as a distinctive component of China's diverse musical heritage, shaped over centuries by cultural tradition, ecological adaptation, and social practice. This study has examined She music through the integrated perspectives of ethnomusicology, performance theory, cultural ecology, and governance studies, yielding several important conclusions.

The melodic, rhythmic, and modal features of She music are deeply embedded in everyday life and natural surroundings. Labor songs reflect rhythms derived from agricultural activity, love songs echo natural landscapes and birdcalls, and ritual music embodies solemnity, spirituality, and cosmological beliefs. These findings confirm that She musical forms are not arbitrary artistic choices but expressions of social practice and cultural worldviews, reinforcing the idea that She music is inseparable from the lived realities of the community.

Performance emerges as the central arena in which She music operates. Antiphonal pange contests serve simultaneously as entertainment, social interaction, and mechanisms of courtship. Narrative songs transmit collective memory and historical identity, while ritual songs strengthen religious faith and uphold social order. Thus, She music functions as both an aesthetic phenomenon and a cultural practice, producing meaning at multiple levels and reinforcing social cohesion.

The aesthetics of She music are characterized by natural imitation, improvisational creativity, and emotional sincerity, forming what may be called a "nature–emotion paradigm." At the same time, centuries of interaction with Han and neighboring cultures have fostered openness and adaptability. Structural parallels with the Book of Songs and resonances with Confucian thought illustrate shared cultural frameworks, while She-specific vocal aesthetics underline independent development. This cycle of maintaining uniqueness, absorbing external influences, and reinventing identity has been the driving force behind the vitality of She musical traditions.

Like many minority traditions, She music faces acute pressures from modernization, migration, and popular culture. Generational discontinuity and declining performance contexts place many repertoires at risk of disappearance. Yet, significant progress has

been made through intangible cultural heritage (ICH) initiatives, educational integration, stage adaptations, and digital dissemination. The challenge lies in achieving a balance: safeguarding authenticity in ritual and heritage contexts while encouraging innovation in stage and media adaptations to ensure relevance for younger generations.

This research emphasizes that the sustainability of She music cannot be understood apart from local cultural governance. Government initiatives—such as ICH recognition, funding support, and curricular integration—provide institutional backing, while community practices sustain the music as a living tradition. The findings highlight the importance of participatory governance models that bridge state policy and grassroots initiative. Balancing cultural tourism with authenticity, fostering educational programs, and supporting digital dissemination represent crucial governance strategies. She music thus illustrates how local governance frameworks can play a decisive role in sustaining minority cultural traditions while contributing to broader goals of cultural diversity and social resilience.

By adopting an interdisciplinary framework, this study contributes to the scholarly literature on ethnic minority music while extending ethnomusicology into dialogue with governance and cultural policy. The findings enrich academic understanding of the She community, enhance local identity and pride, and offer practical insights for cultural policymakers. On a broader scale, She music demonstrates the coexistence of local distinctiveness and universal significance, serving as a valuable case for examining the plurality of human musical cultures and the role of governance in safeguarding them.

Looking ahead, sustaining She musical traditions requires strengthening interdisciplinary academic research, expanding educational initiatives to cultivate new inheritors, promoting innovation in dissemination through digital platforms, and encouraging active community participation to preserve the music as a living practice. International exchange and cultural diplomacy can further extend the reach of She music, situating it within global discourses on cultural diversity and heritage sustainability.

In conclusion, She music of eastern Fujian is not only an artistic expression but also a cultural system and a field of governance practice. It represents the spiritual homeland of the She people, a testament to the resilience of oral tradition, and a vivid expression of China's cultural diversity. Confronted with contemporary challenges, the dual path of preservation and innovation remains essential. Only through careful balance—between authenticity and adaptation, tradition and modernization, policy and community agency—can She music achieve continuity from past to present to future, securing its place as an irreplaceable component of both China's national heritage and the world's musical legacy.

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