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RITUAL AND GENDER IN JIAHE
ACCOMPANYING
MARRIAGE SONGS IN CHINA: AN
ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL STUDY



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CHENG RONG



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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR DOCTOR OF PHILSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs of the Han ethnic minority in southern China, focusing on their ritual, performance, and gendered dimensions. These songs, traditionally performed by women during marriage rituals, function as both expressions of sorrow and blessings for the bride. Previous Chinese research has largely emphasized preservation and documentation, while international ethnomusicology has highlighted music as a social and performative practice. However, little work has critically examined Jiahe marriage songs through a gendered ethnomusicological lens. Drawing on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork, this study employed participant observation, interviews with singers and community members, and musical analysis of recorded performances. The analysis demonstrates that Jiahe marriage songs are not merely ritual laments but complex performative acts that negotiate women's identities and agency within a patriarchal society. The songs create a liminal space in which women express both conformity to cultural expectations and subtle resistance to gendered restrictions. The findings extend existing scholarship by showing how ritual music operates simultaneously as heritage preservation, emotional expression, and social negotiation. The study contributes theoretically by bridging Chinese folkloristic approaches with international theories of ritual, performance, and feminist ethnomusicology. Empirically, it provides the first in-depth ethnomusicological account of Jiahe marriage songs. Practically, it offers insights for cultural preservation policies, emphasizing that such traditions should be valued as dynamic, living practices rather than static relics.



RITUAL DAN GENDER DALAM NYANYIAN PENGIRING PERKAHWINAN JIAHE DI CHINA: SATU KAJIAN ETNOMUZIKOLOGI

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti nyanyian pengiring perkahwinan Jiahe dalam kalangan etnik Han di selatan China dengan memberi tumpuan kepada aspek ritual, persembahan, dan gender. Nyanyian yang lazimnya dipersembahkan oleh wanita dalam upacara perkahwinan berfungsi sebagai ekspresi kesedihan pemisahan dan doa restu kepada pengantin. Penyelidikan terdahulu di China lebih menekankan aspek dokumentasi warisan, manakala etnomuzikologi antarabangsa menonjolkan muzik sebagai amalan sosial dan performatif. Namun, masih kurang kajian yang menilai nyanyian ini secara kritikal melalui kerangka etnomuzikologi feminis. Berasaskan kerja lapangan etnografi selama dua belas bulan, kajian ini menggunakan pemerhatian penyertaan, temu bual bersama penyanyi dan anggota komuniti, serta analisis muzik daripada rakaman persembahan. Analisis menunjukkan bahawa nyanyian perkahwinan Jiahe bukan sekadar ratapan ritual, tetapi juga tindakan performatif yang merundingkan identiti dan agensi wanita dalam masyarakat patriarki. Ia mewujudkan ruang liminal yang membolehkan wanita menzahirkan kepatuhan kepada tradisi serta penentangan halus terhadap batasan gender. Dapatan ini memperluas perbincangan akademik dengan menegaskan fungsi ganda nyanyian sebagai warisan budaya, ekspresi emosi, dan perundingan sosial. Dari segi teori, kajian ini menghubungkan pendekatan folkloristik China dengan teori antarabangsa tentang ritual, persembahan, dan etnomuzikologi feminis. Dari segi empirikal, ia menyediakan dokumentasi etnomuzikologi pertama tentang nyanyian perkahwinan Jiahe. Secara praktikal, ia memberi implikasi terhadap pemeliharaan budaya dengan menekankan tradisi ini sebagai amalan hidup yang dinamik, bukan sekadar peninggalan statik.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	The American Academy of Religion
AD	Anno Domini
BC	Before Christ
CCTV	China Central Television
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSP	The Cultural Systems Paradigm
CPC	The Communist Party of China
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
ICTM	The International Council for Traditional Music
IPR	Interview Protocol Refinement
QR	Quick Response
TV	Television
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization





LIST OF APPENDIXES

- A Letter of Appointment
- B Interviewer Informed Consent
- C Interview Records
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as the foundational introduction to the research on Jiahe accompanying marriage songs, a traditional Han Chinese wedding music ritual from Hunan Province, China. It outlines the research background, problem statement, objectives, theoretical frameworks, key definitions, and limitations. The chapter begins by contextualizing the study within global feminist musicology and ethnomusicology, highlighting the distinct development of gender-aware music



research in China. It introduces the Jiahe songs as a female-dominated, ritualistic practice and identifies gaps in existing scholarship, particularly the lack of integrated analysis of its process of ritualization, musical features, and gendered dimensions. The study employs a hybrid theoretical approach, combining Cao Benye's "sounds in ritual" framework with Ellen Koskoff's feminist ethnomusicology to analyze the interplay between values, process of ritualization, and music. Definitions of key terms such as "ritual," "women's music," and "feminist music" are clarified to situate the study within a culturally specific discourse. Finally, the chapter acknowledges limitations related to historical sources and contemporary focus while emphasizing the research's theoretical and practical significance.



1.2 Research Background

Influenced by the feminist movement and related academic thought, research on women in music emerged as a significant trend in American musicology around the 1970s. "Significant research in the related fields of women in music, women's music, and gender studies in music began to spring powerfully onto the American and Western European intellectual scene in the late 1970s." (Nettl, 2010, p. 410). Koskoff (2000) divides 20th-century feminist music scholarship into three overlapping historical periods, each characterized by distinct research and analytical paradigms. Researchers of the first wave focused primarily on collecting, documenting, and





recording women's music, with their studies predominantly addressing Western art music. This work began in 1970 and continues to be published to this day. The second wave of scholarly research was primarily influenced by history, anthropology, and folklore studies. Scholars began to place women's musical creation within a broader context, examining the connections between female and male musical creation and extending beyond the scope of women's music to include considerations of gender relations. This wave began in the late 1980s and continues to this day. The third wave, influenced by postmodern fields such as feminist theory, queer studies, and cultural performance studies, semiotics, and psychoanalysis, focuses on understanding the relationship between social structures and musical structures from a gendered perspective.



James (2020), summarizing nearly two decades of feminist music research in the 21st century, states: "Feminism, both in general and in relation to music scholarship, has evolved to the point that a comprehensive overview is impossible in anything less than an encyclopedia." (p. 1). She notes that post-feminism and popular feminism are particularly representative of this period, with academic focus extending to issues such as precarious labor, transgender studies and transgender feminism, digital technology, as well as sexual assault and harassment. Research on women in music and gender in music has become a prevalent analytical framework in contemporary academic fields.





Ethnomusicology has long provided a central theoretical framework for the study of women's music. In the 1950s, the discipline's focus shifted from Europe to North America under the influence of Boasian cultural relativism. Subsequently, a significant number of ethnomusicologists began exploring topics related to women, gender, and music. Employing fieldwork methods, they produced a rich body of ethnographic work, exemplified by titles such as *Music, Gender, and Culture* (Herndon & Ziegler, 1990), *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Danielson, 1997), *Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings* (Sugarman, 1997), and Koskoff's (2014) *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writings on Music and Gender*.



Research from this period is characterized by a strong anthropological perspective, following Merriam's (1964) "music in culture" paradigm—or what may be termed the study of women's music within culture. Rather than focusing solely on categorizing the forms and structures of music specific to an ethnic group or gender, scholars examined the societal content that generates these musical phenomena. They sought to connect music, dance, and gender to broader geographic, social, customary, political, and cultural contexts through the analysis of specific rituals, festivals, and other communal activities.

Internationally, feminist ethnomusicology exhibits two primary research orientations. The first examines women's roles and perspectives within musical and





ritual contexts—often from the standpoint of the researcher or an implied academic audience. The second emphasizes the viewpoints of the specific ethnic or racial groups involved, focusing on how these communities themselves experience and interpret the performance and outcomes of their rituals (Xiang & Yi, 2022).

The former approach emphasizes the agency of female performers and interprets their musical behavior within ritual frameworks, while the latter prioritizes the holistic integrity of the ritual itself, often without explicit attention to gender. Thus, women's musical behaviors often play a constitutive yet overlooked role in communal and ethnic ritual constructions. For example, among the Baka people, the women's *dibongku* dance is not accorded primary significance within the ritual context; instead, community members emphasize the ritual as a vehicle for expressing macro-cultural concepts such as shared beliefs and symbols. In such cases, fine-grained gender distinctions tend to hold greater importance within the researcher's analytical framework than within the community's own understanding. Globally, gender-oriented research in ethnomusicology increasingly aligns with the cross-cultural perspective advocated by Koskoff (2014, 1987).

This topic, which has attracted widespread attention in the international music community, presents a markedly different situation in China. During the late Qing Dynasty (from around 1840 onward), gender issues and related movements for women's liberation began to emerge in Chinese society. However, as Dong (2009)





notes, "gender issues at this time never appeared in isolation from other social movements; rather, they were intimately tied to China's national crisis and resistance against foreign aggression." (p. 167).

At that time, Chinese women did not constitute a force that directly confronted men, society, or the nation-state. Instead, shaped by the consciousness of national colonization and crisis, women often expressed their identity through negotiation and compromise with male groups, society, and the nation. Or, as Song (2011) argues, "Women were not conceived as a entity opposed to men in the radical feminist sense, but rather as social beings capable of interaction and negotiation with society, the state, the nation, and even male collectives" (p. 168).



From the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, women's issues in China remained within the purview of the state. Particularly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, these issues were elevated to the level of state ideology and incorporated into national discourse. Gender equality became a fundamental national policy. In the following years, the state promulgated a series of laws and regulations aimed at achieving political and economic equality between men and women. Backed by legal frameworks and substantial support from the state and society, Chinese women experienced transformative changes in their social status. "It seemed as though thousands of years of oppression against Chinese women were overturned overnight, and what Western feminist movements achieved





over two centuries appeared to have been accomplished in China within just a few decades." (Song, 2011, p. 176). "Yet, the ideological narrative of gender equality also negated the legitimacy of gender consciousness, creating a mythical era devoid of gender differences." (Lin, 2006, pp. 50-51).

Based on the political background mentioned above, Song (2011) argues that within the tradition of musicological research in mainland China, most leadership positions are held by men. These male leaders are unlikely to examine musical developments entirely from a female perspective, while most female scholars seldom incorporate distinctly female experiences and standpoints (Song, 2011). Here, "experiences and standpoints" refer to women's lived experiences and their attitudes in the struggle for equality and power. When introducing the term "feminism," mainland scholars generally contend that current studies on women no longer focus solely on activism but have expanded to encompass a comprehensive understanding of gender and social sexual relations (Tian, 2006). Therefore, Chinese academics agree that translating "feminism" emphasizes its theoretical dimensions rather than its activist connotations.

In 1997, an article titled *Academic Achievements of Feminism and Its Situation in Musicology (Parts 1 and 2)* by Bowles and Jin was published in the *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*. This marked the first introduction of Western feminist musicology to mainland China. Subsequently, Zheng (1999) published *New*





Developments in Ethnomusicology and Feminist Research in the Last Decade, Tang (2003) released *Gender and Music*, and Sun (2003) contributed *Academic Trends in Contemporary Western Musicology*. Additionally, scholar Zhang (2003) from Taiwan translated McClary's seminal feminist work, *Feminine Endings*, into Chinese.

In China, the early research on women in music did not originate directly from Western feminism or gender theory, but was closely linked to the study of traditional Chinese music and, since the 1980s, ethnomusicology. In the early 2000s, Professor Cao Benyeh (2006) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong introduced a tripartite framework—"Ideology, Process, Product" (p. 7)—by integrating anthropological theories and methods with the study of traditional Chinese ritual music. This approach facilitated the localization of ritual music research within ethnomusicological methodology.

As Western feminist gender theory began to gain attention in mainland China, a number of ethnomusicologists specializing in ritual music—such as Yang Minkang, Qi Boping, Liu Guiteng, and Xiao Mei—observed, through their fieldwork, a significant number of ritual practices across Han and ethnic minority regions that either worship female deities or involve active female participation. Examples include Han Chinese rituals such as Guanyin Temple Fairs and Mazu Ceremonies, as well as ethnic practices like the Miao People's Sister's Day Festival, the Tujia people's "Crying Weddings," and the Bai People's Benzhu Worship. These ritual activities





hold substantial significance for the study of ethnic beliefs, cultural transmission, and women's identity formation.

With the development of ritual music research in China, topics concerning women's ritual music began to attract scholarly attention around this period. Works such as *Music Features and Social Implications of Tujia Weeping Wedding Songs* (Yu, 2002), *Female Roles, Musical Behaviors, and Symbolic Significance in Folk Ritual—Based on the Sacrifice to the Lord Ritual of the Bai Nationality in China* (Zhou, 2005), *Yin-Yang Drummers: In the Space of Order* (Wu, 2007), and *A Comparative Study of Shaman Music: The Identity and Gender of Ritual Practitioners* (Xiao, 2012) reflect this growing interest. Initially, the integration of ritual music and gender theory emphasized thick description of ritual spaces, with a primary focus on the sounds (ritual music) within these ceremonies. During this phase, gender was often incorporated as one aspect of the ritual process rather than being systematically examined in relation to musical practices, and there was limited in-depth exploration of the connections between social gender and music.

Influenced by anthropology, research on ritual music has increasingly emphasized fieldwork-based case studies. The examination of women's ritual music, in particular, has shifted toward micro-level case analyses, which have become a mainstream approach to exploring gender theory within ethnomusicology. Representative works include: *Female Roles, Musical Behaviors, and Symbolic*





Significance in Folk Ritual—Based on the Sacrifice to the Lord Ritual of the Bai Nationality in China (Zhou, 2005), *A Woman's Musical World: An Investigation into the Female Muqam Performers in Yili County's Hami Muqam from a Gender Perspective* (Wang, 2013), and *The Role and Representation of Women in Ritual Music: Observations from the Sacrifice to the Dragon Ritual of the Flower Waist Yi in Shiping, Yunnan* (Yao & Su, 2013). These studies situate female identities within specific ritual contexts and employ women's behaviors to interpret changes in ritual soundscapes. With a particular focus on the symbolic meanings and social values attached to female roles in ritual settings, this body of work constitutes an important strand of research on gender in ritual music.



In summary, the localization of contemporary women's music research in China is profoundly shaped by ethnomusicological theories of ritual music. Studies on gender rituals are primarily grounded in musical practices, employing specific ethnic groups or musical activities as case studies. This line of inquiry focuses on comparative analyses of sounds (ritual music) and bodies (ritual gender), exploring patterns of gender and women's roles, symbolic meanings, and cultural values within specific socio-ritual contexts.

Most research in this domain centers on near-faith religious rituals, whereas studies on near-secular rituals remain relatively underdeveloped. As of 2023, the Traditional Music Society of China has convened 22 conferences over the past 42





years (Liu, 2021), yet none have featured a theme specifically dedicated to women's music research. This continued absence reflects the marginalized status of the topic within the field.

The Jiahe accompanying marriage songs are an ancient Han Chinese folk tradition originating from Jiahe County, Hunan Province, China, which primarily reflects women's marital customs. Performed on the eve of the bride's wedding, these farewell songs are sung by female relatives and friends who gather to accompany her. This tradition is highly comprehensive, integrating poetry, song, dance, and drama into a cohesive artistic form (Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009). It has developed a rich set of ritual procedures and structures (Jiang, 2012; Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009; Li, 2005).

With a long history, the Jiahe wedding songs had already matured as early as the Tang and Song dynasties (7th to 13th centuries) (Wen, 2009; Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009). This art form, having been transmitted for over a thousand years, is particularly notable as a female-dominated ritual music tradition—encompassing creation, performance, participation, and transmission (He, 2018; Jiang, 2012; Xiao, 2009; Wang, 2008; Li, 2005).

Traditionally passed down within the female community of Jiahe, the wedding songs were seldom documented in historical records. It was not until the mid-20th



century, through the Chinese government's initiatives to collect folk music, that these songs began to gain external attention. After half a century of collection and systematization, over 1,300 songs have been documented (Jiahe County Government, 2023), accounting for nearly 60% of the total folk songs and ballads collected and organized from Jiahe (Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009).

In 2006, the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs were included in the first batch of Hunan Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) projects. On May 24, 2021, they were further listed as a representative item in the fifth national batch of ICH of China. To date, it remains the only wedding music tradition included in China's national ICH list. Many experts in the Chinese musicological community regard the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs as the most mature, ancient, perfected, and distinctive artistic expression of marital customs within the Huaxia ethnic tradition (Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009).

However, academic research on the song ritual began relatively late. It was not until 2005 that the first scholarly studies on this tradition started to be published. Between 2005 and 2024, only about 40 academic papers have been produced, addressing areas such as musical analysis, ritual studies, comparative research, socio-cultural context, ICH transmission, women's musical perspectives, and comprehensive thematic studies.



Given that this musical tradition has been passed down for over a thousand years and comprises more than a thousand individual pieces, the current output of merely 40 papers is evidently insufficient. Furthermore, many of these publications remain largely descriptive, with only around 10 offering in-depth academic analysis. In terms of research focus and content, only four articles specifically address female-related themes, concentrating primarily on female psychology and social roles. Additionally, just two papers focus on the ritual aspects, mainly documenting and analyzing the structure of the rituals.

The Jiahe wedding song ritual represents both a form of ritual music and a type of female-centered ritual music tradition. Existing research has not yet situated it within the comprehensive tripartite framework of "conceptualization–behavior about music–music itself" (Merriam, 1964, pp. 32–35). Furthermore, there has been insufficient attention paid to the interplay between Sounds in Ritual, Process of Ritualization, and Values (Cao, 2016, 2017). Moreover, few studies have adopted approaches that treat music as culture—"to study music as culture" (Merriam, 1964, pp. 32–35)—or that situate music within its cultural context in order to study music in its cultural context (Hood, 1971, 1982).

There are three justifications for selecting the Jiahe wedding song ritual as a research subject.





First, it represents the most exemplary form of music associated with Chinese marriage customs. In certain regions of China, it is traditional to perform singing rituals during women's weddings. However, in terms of procedural complexity, song quantity, artistic quality, and structural integrity, the Jiahe wedding song tradition is unparalleled by any other regional form (Department of Culture of Hunan Province, 2009). It is regarded as the most complete and socioculturally significant wedding song tradition of the Han Chinese people (Department of Culture of Hunan Province, 2009). Moreover, it remains the only nuptial music tradition included to date in China's national ICH list.



Secondly, there is a significant research gap in gender-focused studies within this area. Gender studies in China developed much later than in European and American countries, and gender issues in traditional Chinese music have long been overlooked by the mainstream musicological academia. This oversight is equally evident in the limited literature on the Jiahe wedding songs from a gender perspective. Strengthening gender-focused research on this tradition may help answer fundamental questions regarding women's roles in music culture, such as: "What has been the role of women, and the contribution of women?" and "How have women reacted musically to male domination?" (Nettl, 2010, p. 405). As society evolves and women's social status gradually improves, further questions arise concerning the Jiahe wedding songs: What musical characteristics define them in the contemporary context? What are the characteristics of a ritualized performance process and what gender





cultural implications does it express? These questions remain underexplored and merit further scholarly attention.

Moreover, the tradition faces severe challenges and difficulties in terms of inheritance and safeguarding. According to Article 4 of *the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the protection of intangible cultural heritage shall emphasize its authenticity, integrity, and inheritability (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2011). However, field research and interviews reveal that the Jiahe wedding songs encounter considerable obstacles in practical preservation efforts. Practitioners and performers are aging rapidly, and the absence of younger participants has become a critical issue. It is especially common for brides nowadays to be unable to perform the songs during the ritual, leading to a gradual erosion of the tradition's distinctive cultural features. As a result, there is a growing gap between the current state of the Jiahe wedding songs and the legal requirements for heritage preservation.

This situation also partially contradicts the guidelines outlined in *the Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which emphasize the principle of "effective protection," call for strengthened training of inheritors, enhanced public participation, and guaranteed sustainable development of ICH (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Therefore, in-depth research on the Jiahe wedding songs is not only instrumental in





revealing their cultural value but also crucial for identifying viable and sustainable approaches to their preservation and transmission.

1.3 Problem Statement

In the broader context, gender research in Chinese music has evolved alongside the study of Chinese ritual music. Research on Chinese rituals has predominantly centered on near-religious types, while studies on near-secular rituals have emerged later and remain relatively underdeveloped. Regarding the current state of research on the Jiahe accompanying marriage song ritual, scholarly attention is relatively recent. Existing studies primarily focus on isolated dimensions of the ritual, addressing either the analysis of the music itself or the structure of the ritual. This segmented approach often results in examining the ritual through fragmented perspectives rather than as an integrated whole. Furthermore, from a gender perspective, there is a notable lack of interpretation of female roles and psychology within a broader socio-symbolic and gendered framework.

The Jiahe accompanying marriage songs represent a female-dominated secular music ritual that establishes a distinct model of musical behavior, from which dominant social males and patriarchal authority are excluded. Within this model,





women's musical practice operates beyond the constraints of patriarchy, rendering men the "Other." As a female musical ritual, it encompasses two essential dimensions: first, it is a form of women's music; second, it is a type of ritual music. These two aspects are inseparable and constitute an integral whole. Although existing studies have produced relevant or adjacent findings pertaining to each dimension, most analyses have yet to address its fundamental nature. Significant gaps remain in terms of research scope, depth, and perspective.

As a form of ritual music, these songs constitute an integrated whole consisting of three dimensions: values, the process of ritualization, and sounds in ritual (music).

Ritual music is an integral part of ritual behavior. To fully understand ritual music, it must be approached within the cognitive framework in which it exists and the broader environmental and semantic context embodied by the ritual. The connections and interactions among values, process of ritualization, and music are essential to comprehending the meaning and significance of ritual music within its ecological setting. This should serve as the central theoretical framework for studying ritual music (Cao, 2017). Research on ritual music should not be limited to analyzing only one aspect, such as music or the process of ritualization alone. As a form of female ritual music, its study must be understood through all societal dimensions of gender, which is crucial for interpreting musical culture. In any society or social group, nearly every relationship and development in music can be viewed as a function or expression of power relations—that is, inequalities between the dominant and the





marginalized, or the center and the periphery (Nettl, 2010). Ultimately, these are tied to a society's conceptions of gender, power, and values. If we do not view women, men, and rituals as interacting within a broader social, economic, and political world, we cannot fully understand women's ritual and ceremonial roles (Koskoff, 2014).

In response to the research gaps in both gender studies and ritual studies regarding the subject of this research, this study draws on Cao Benye's theory of ritual studies. It also adopts perspectives from feminist ethnomusicology, employing Ellen Koskoff's cross-cultural dimensions of gender, power, and values to analyze and interpret its gendered culture. Furthermore, with regard to specific research questions, the study will expand its reference to include key theories and methods such as Hood's (1971) "norms of musical style," and McCollum and Heber's Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology, among others. The aim is to understand the cultural characteristics of this musical ritual within its broader ecosystem and to contribute a valuable case study of women's ritual music.

Although Jiahe accompanying marriage songs have been recognized as an important cultural expression of the Han people, existing scholarship remains largely descriptive. Chinese folklorists have primarily focused on collecting texts and melodies as heritage documentation, often treating the songs as static cultural relics (Li 2005; Jiang 2012). In contrast, international ethnomusicology emphasizes music as social practice (Nettl 2005; Seeger 2015) and highlights gendered dimensions of



ritual performance (Koskoff 2014; Sugarman 1997). Despite these advances, Jiahe marriage songs have not been critically analyzed through the lenses of performance and gender.

This gap is significant because these songs are not only ritual expressions of sorrow and blessing, but also performative acts through which women negotiate their roles in a patriarchal marriage system. Without a critical ethnomusicological study, the complexity of Jiahe women's voices risks being overlooked. This thesis addresses this gap by analyzing Jiahe accompanying marriage songs through the combined perspectives of ritual theory, performance studies, and feminist ethnomusicology.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

1.4.1 Research Objectives

1. To examine how the structure, performance, and gender order are constructed during the ritualization process of the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs.
2. To analyze the typical musical characteristics, thematic concepts, and emotional expressions in the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs.
3. To interpret the symbolic meanings of the songs as both cultural expression and social negotiation.



1.4.2 Research Questions

1. How do Jiahe women shape role structures and participant interactions through what kinds of ritualization processes and behaviors?
2. What are the typical characteristics of the musical elements, lyrical themes, and emotional expressions in the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs?
3. Why is the participation of female performers in these rituals significant to the negotiation of gender and cultural identity in contemporary Jiahe society?



1.5 Theories and Theoretical Framework



Four theories have been directly relevant and critically instructive to this study. To ensure an international perspective, this research draws extensively on renowned Chinese ritual music theory while integrating authoritative Western feminist ethnomusicology theory. Furthermore, to accommodate the need for documentation and oral history, historical ethnomusicology has been incorporated; and to address the demands of musicological analysis, musical style analysis has also been employed. What follows is a necessary introduction to each of these theories, culminating in the construction of a theoretical framework diagram.





1.5.1 Sounds in Ritual Theory

The concept of sounds in ritual was developed by Cao Benye's research team at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which consisted primarily of Chinese scholars. Their work built on the results of the Chinese Traditional Ritual Music Research Programme, launched at the same university in 1993. The theory of sounds in ritual integrates anthropological and other interdisciplinary theoretical approaches with the fundamental context of traditional Chinese ritual music. It incorporates both synchronic and diachronic perspectives through fieldwork and historical investigation, focusing on Taoist and folk ritual music practices in China. With ritual music as its central research subject, and supported by extensive case studies and practical experience, the team proposed a ternary theoretical model tailored to the study of Chinese ritual music. This framework has, to some extent, guided and advanced the study of ritual music within Chinese musicology (Cao, 2017, p. 6).

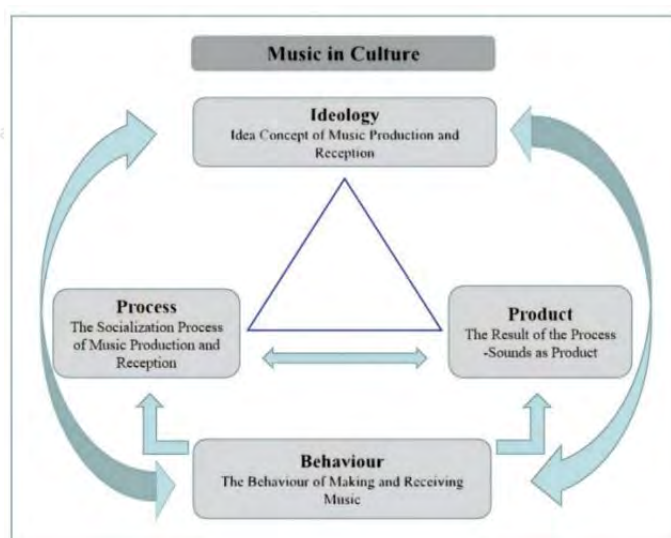
According to Cao Benye (2017, p. 7), the research object of ethnomusicology is "music in culture," with its core proposition focusing on "how people make and receive music" within a cultural-ecological context. Like other humanities and social sciences that study human culture, ethnomusicology seeks to understand the "Ideology" and "Behaviour" associated with musical production and reception. "Behaviour" can be broken down into "Process" (the socialization of music) and "Product" (the sounds of socialized music), which interact with each other.



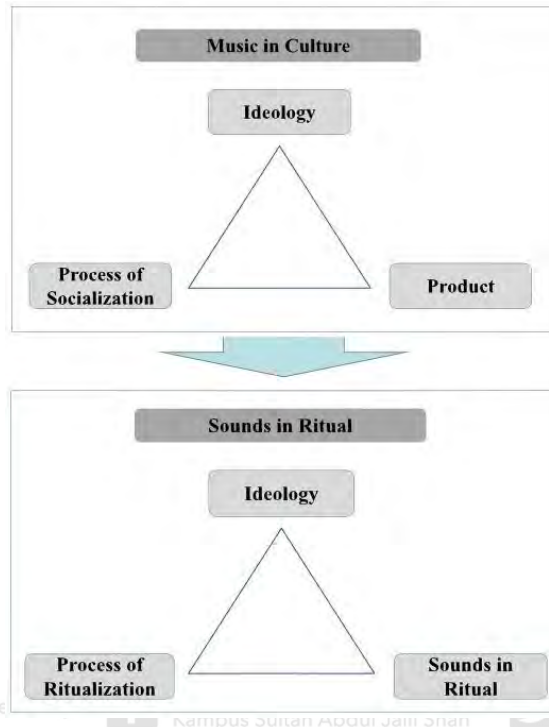
"Ideology," in turn, serves as the underlying motivation or core meaning behind musical behavior, process, and product. This leads to a ternary structural model: "Ideology" – "Process" – "Product" (see Figure 1.1). Understanding music's meaning within a cultural and ecological environment requires examining the dynamic relationships among these three components. This framework forms the foundation of ethnomusicological research into "music in culture."

Figure 1.1

Music in Culture by Cao Benye (2017, p. 8)



And the theoretical model of "Sounds in Ritual" is deduced from the parent model of the triple structural theory of "music in culture" (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2*"Sounds in Ritual" Theoretical Model by Cao Benye (2017, p. 8)*

According to Cao Benye (2017, p. 8), ritual within Chinese cultural history encompasses multiple traditions and carries ideological connotations characterized by both "Near-Faith" (Figure 1.3) and "Near-Secular" (Figure 1.4) attributes. In "Near-Faith" ritual traditions—such as religious and folk belief systems—the core ideology is "cosmology." This refers to how a nation or ethnic group conceptualizes the structure and operation of their ecological environment, as well as their perceived roles, status, and interactive relationships within it. On the other hand, "Near-Secular" ritual traditions, which include systems of etiquette and custom, are centered on social values within traditional Chinese culture. These values often incorporate authoritative or prescribed elements. It is important to note that, in traditional Chinese culture, there

is no clear boundary between "Near-Faith" and "Near-Secular" ritual systems. The two often interact and overlap in practice.

Figure 1.3

"Near" Faith Ritual Theoretical Model by Cao Benye (2017, p. 9)

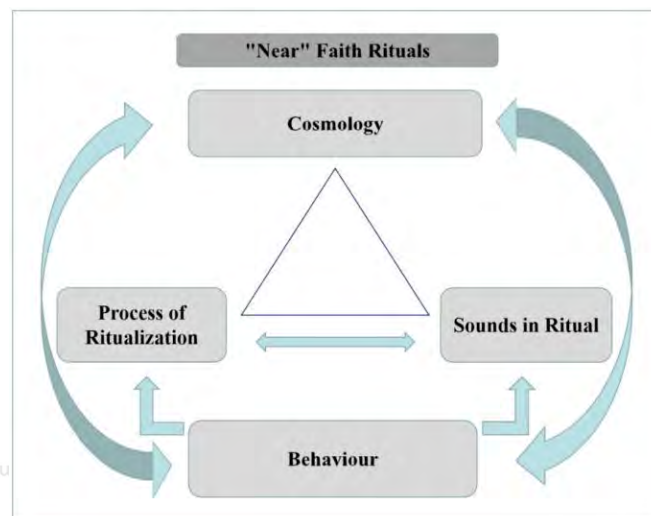
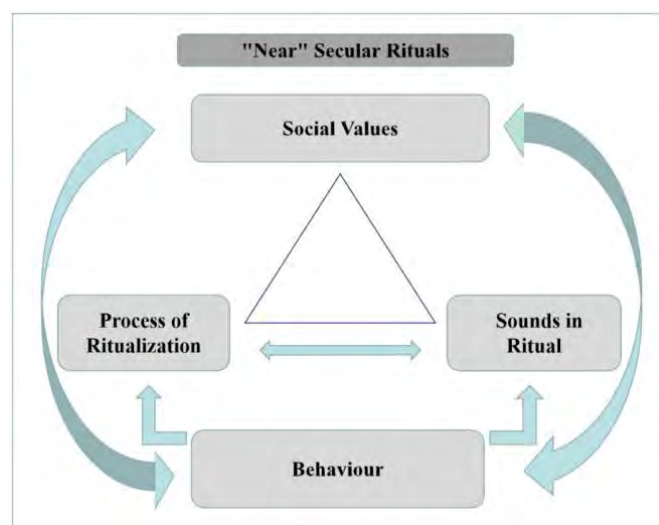


Figure 1.4

"Near" Secular Ritual Theoretical Model by Cao Benye (2017, p. 9)





Within this theoretical framework, the concept of *sounds* encompasses all auditory phenomena—whether audible or inaudible—present in ritual practices, including what is conventionally understood as music. Owing to methodological constraints, current ethnomusicological research on sound within belief systems has so far focused mainly on two categories: instrumental sounds and vocal sounds.

Instrumental sounds refer to music produced by instruments. Vocal sounds encompass a spectrum of utterances—from speech and recitative to singing—representing varying degrees of musicality. Cao Benye suggests that between the linguistic and the musical lies a continuum of vocal expressions. It should be noted that this study focuses exclusively on the *musical* dimensions of these sounds within the theoretical framework. Non-musical vocal or instrumental expressions fall outside its scope.

1.5.2 Feminist Ethnomusicology Theory

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians defines feminist music research as including, among other approaches, the anthropology-influenced study of musical behavior (Ke, 2015). This strand focuses on objectively examining and describing the actions and lived experiences of female musicians—such as composition, performance, career choices, and family life—within specific cultural contexts,





carrying strong sociological implications. A key representative of this theoretical approach is Ellen Koskoff (1987), one of the earliest and most influential scholars to address gender issues in the field of ethnomusicology.

A key representative of this theoretical approach is Ellen Koskoff, one of the earliest and most influential scholars in ethnomusicology to address issues of gender. In 1987, she edited the seminal essay collection *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, which includes 16 articles examining musical practices among women in Tunisia, India, Brazil, Malaysia, and the United States. These essays engage with themes such as gender, identity, and power, focusing particularly on the roles and identities of women in folk and ritual music contexts. Central to this approach is the aim to understand music within its cultural framework. Subsequent works, such as Keeling's *Women in North American Indian Music* (1989), Ruth Solie's *Musicology and Difference* (1993), and Moisala and Diamond's *Music and Gender* (2000), have continued to expand and deepen this feminist ethnomusicological theory and methodology.

In 2014, Ellen Koskoff published another major work entitled *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writings on Music and Gender*. As noted by Louise Wrazen (2015, p. 468), "This volume represents 40 years of research and writing by one of the most influential ethnomusicologists in the discipline." Koskoff advocated for the integration of gender as a fundamental component of ethnomusicology and continues





to energize the field through her subsequent publications, teaching, professional engagements, and new research. Her work underscores a conceptual model in which ethnomusicology should incorporate key cultural concepts such as power, gender, music, and values.

We should begin to construct a model that incorporates cultural concepts of power, gender, music, and value. For example, If we see human societies ranging on a social continuum from total oppression to total equality, value existing on a separate continuum from high to low, and gender-related behaviors existing on a third dimension of relative maleness to femaleness, then we have created a multifaceted model for the discussion of music activity, one that is sensitive to the complexities of social contexts. Within this framework, we can begin to answer some of the questions of why correlations seem to exist. First, between gender-status asymmetry and resulting gender-related music behaviors and, second, between social deceptions surrounding music and the maintenance of order. Aside from the obvious need in the future to collect data from female informants or to look toward symbolic action or language, such as ritual, myth, or metaphor, for relevant information about gender ideologies, we must also begin to address the valuative role that music and its performance play in defining and reflecting established social and sexual orders and in acting as an agent in maintaining or changing such orders. It is my hope, then, that the issues raised here will encourage future exploration of the complex and ever-changing processes that affect both gender and music making. (Koskoff, 2014, p. 43)

Ethnomusicology (or the anthropology of music) has long been the most widely adopted theoretical framework in studies of women and music. Since the 1970s, a growing number of ethnomusicologists have engaged with topics related to women's musical practices, employing fieldwork methodologies and producing a substantial body of ethnographic literature. Feminist ethnomusicology is deeply influenced by anthropological approaches, particularly the perspective of *"music as*





culture" (Merriam, 1977, pp. 202, 204)—that is, the study of women's music within its cultural context. Rather than merely categorizing musical forms or structures within specific ethnic or gender frameworks, scholars focus on understanding the cultural, social, and political phenomena that shape musical practices. They examine how music and dance, as well as the roles of men and women, are intertwined with local and broader contexts—including geography, society, customs, politics, and culture—often through specific events such as rituals and festivals. Feminist ethnomusicology can also be understood as a mode of writing that situates intimate details of individual lives within wider frameworks. It places personal musical experience at the center of a set of concentric circles intersecting with national politics, aesthetic discourse, and issues of musical value.



Specifically, this study primarily draws on two perspectives from Koskoff's *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Women's Musical Roles in Ritual Life* and *Cross-Cultural Studies of Gendered Performance Contexts*, using them as analytical frameworks.

1.5.3 Historical Ethnomusicology Theory

The theories and methods of historical ethnomusicology not only provide multi-angled and multi-layered analytical frameworks for ethnomusicological research, but also foster a deeper understanding of musical history and cultural





transformation. By integrating interdisciplinary approaches, utilizing secondary sources and oral history, incorporating global perspectives, and analyzing musical archives, these theories and methods establish historical ethnomusicology as a vital tool for the study of music history (Rice, 2013; Hebert & McCollum, 2014; Davis, 2015).

Hebert and McCollum (2014), in their co-authored work *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, emphasize historical ethnomusicology as a field that integrates historical and ethnomusicological approaches. It examines musical change and continuity through time, focusing on the evolution of musical cultures and the dynamic interplay between music and its socio-historical contexts. The field extends beyond merely documenting specific musical traditions; it also investigates the interactions among musical practices across different temporal and spatial settings. Advocating a fundamentally interdisciplinary framework, historical ethnomusicology synthesizes methodologies from history, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sociology (Hebert & McCollum, 2014).

In *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, Hebert (2014) advances a theoretical framework for the historical analysis of secondary data, emphasizing the use of pre-existing historical records, documents, and archives in the study of music history. Secondary data encompass materials such as historical texts, newspaper articles, musical scores, and audio recordings—all previously compiled and preserved





sources. By synthesizing such data from diverse origins, researchers can construct a holistic understanding of past musical practices. These materials aid in reconstructing the historical contexts and socio-cultural environments in which music was created and experienced. Rather than serving as passive records of the past, secondary data require critical reinterpretation to uncover embedded musical meanings and social significance. However, due to potential biases and fragmentation within these sources, it is essential to triangulate them with other research methods to ensure analytical rigor and validity.

Nettl (2010) once presciently observed: "In fact, the world's societies produce recordings and publications of their own; it is possible that in the future the armchair will become part of our furniture" (p. 9). Clearly, Nettl's foresight has proven accurate. Secondary data now form the foundational material for much of contemporary ethnomusicological research and have become an indispensable component of the discipline.

Whitehead, Professor and Director of the Cultural Systems Analysis Group, Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland, considers that:

In the more open-ended and discovery oriented approaches to ethnography and qualitative methods, secondary data analysis are important in exploring research assumptions (which some researchers refer to as early hypothesis), or to generate research questions to be further explored. For all research approaches, secondary data analyses help in identifying gaps in what is known about particular research topics, and suggesting the specific methods that



might be used to secure the most valid data related to the questions or topics of interest. (Whitehead, 2005, p. 3)

In his work, Jonathan McCollum (2014) advanced a theoretical framework integrating oral history and musical practice, emphasizing the role of oral historical materials in supplementing and corroborating music-related information found in conventional historical records. Oral history involves conducting interviews with participants and witnesses to gather their recollections and accounts of past musical practices. These narratives offer valuable perspectives drawn from individual and collective memory, aiding researchers in comprehending the subjective experiences and socio-cultural contexts embedded in musical activities.

While oral history provides firsthand insights and personal viewpoints, it is also subject to limitations such as selective memory and narrative bias. Thus, McCollum advocates for triangulating oral histories with other forms of historical documentation to enhance their reliability. When critically employed, oral history can fill gaps in the archival record, elucidate details of musical practices absent in written sources, and contribute to a more nuanced and vivid understanding of historical music-making.

Oral history can be defined as "in-depth biographical interviewing, typically with individuals who have been excluded or marginalized within conventional historical narratives. Its aim is to capture, through detailed narration, the meanings that interviewees attribute to their life experiences" (Sarkar, 2012, p. 578). According to



Mahua Sarkar, oral history is "particularly useful in illuminating how people relate to certain aspects of social life or major historical events. As a result, it has frequently been employed in studies of genocide, war, migration, working-class community histories, aging populations, and especially in the field of women's history" (Sarkar, 2012, p. 578). In recent years, oral history methodologies have played an increasingly significant role in the field of ethnomusicology (Stock, 2001).

1.5.4 The Norms of Musical Style Theory

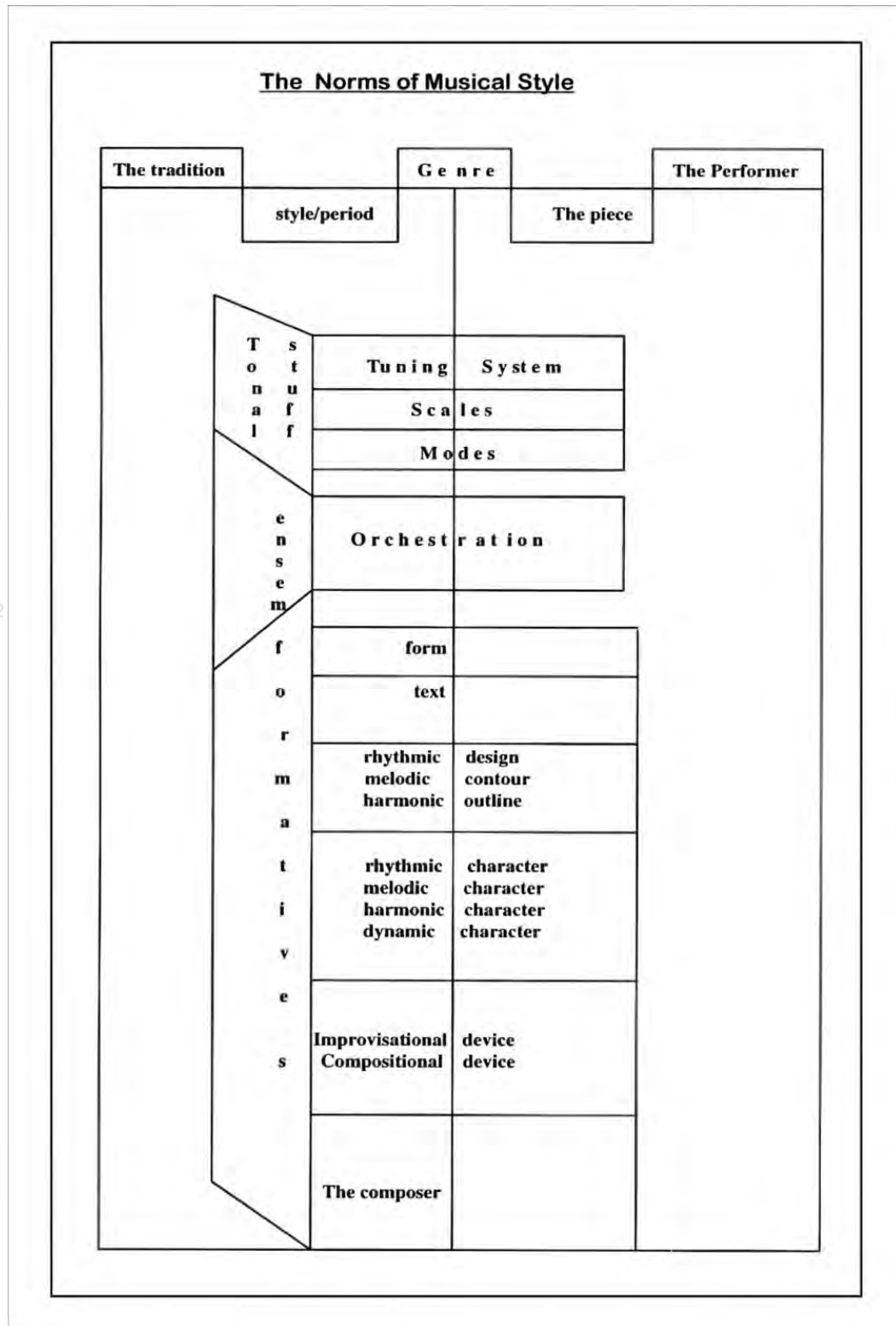
Mantle Hood's Norms of Musical Style theory, proposed in the 1960s, primarily focuses on the norms of musical style, specifically how particular musical styles are formed and adhered to within a culture. This theory is an important theoretical and methodological framework in the field of ethnomusicology. Hood defined musical style norms as the standards and conventions within musical practice, which include aspects such as pitch, rhythm, melody, harmony, and form. This theory provides a method for analyzing how music serves as a cultural expression. Observations of musical practice, documentation, and analysis of these norms offer practical methodological tools. Hood believed that musical style is not only a means of cultural expression but also an integral part of cultural identity.





Mantle Hood's Norms of Musical Style" theory provides a crucial framework for understanding the normative aspects of musical styles. His theory emphasizes the formation, stability, and evolution of musical style norms, as well as the influence of cultural contexts. Scholars such as Merriam (1964) and Blacking (1973) have supported, critiqued, and expanded upon Hood's theory, further enriching the understanding of musical style norms.

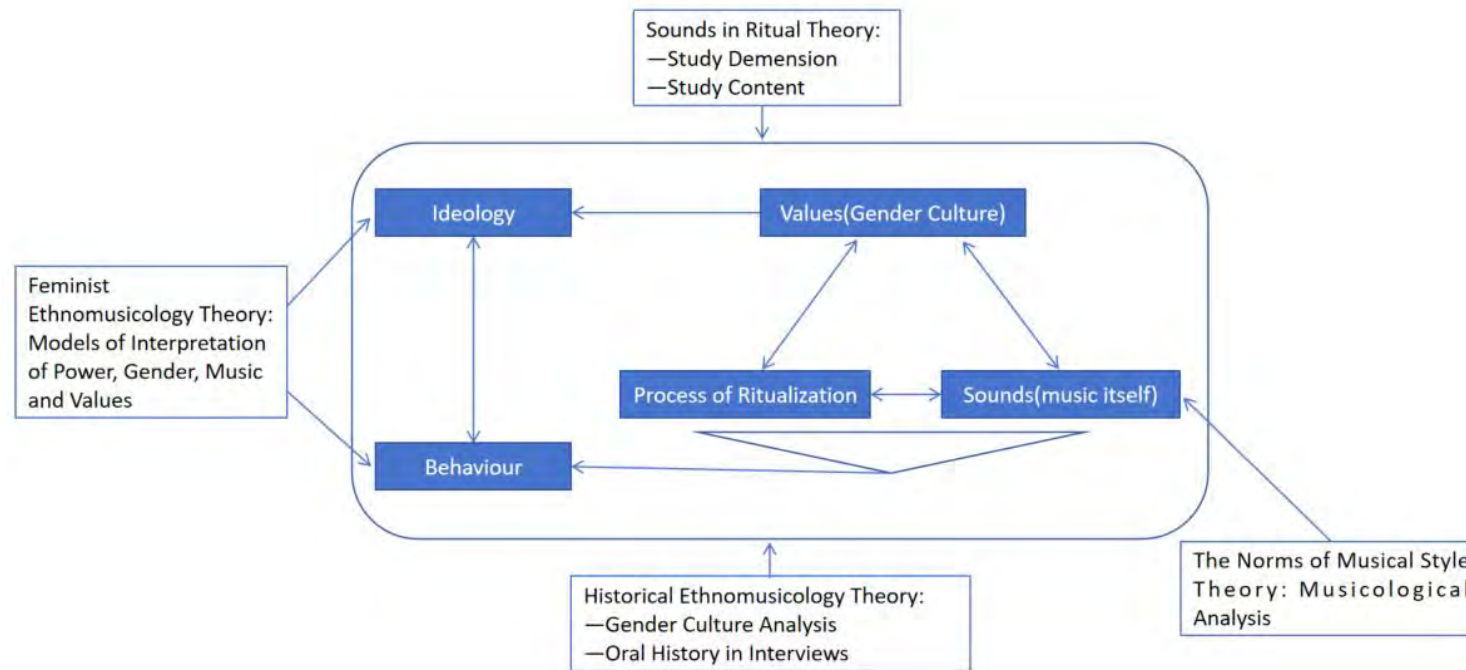


**Figure 1.5***"The Norms of Musical Style" by Mantle Hood (1971)*

1.5.5 Theoretical Framework of Research

Figure 1.6

Theoretical Framework of Research





Given that this study focuses on Chinese ritual music, it primarily adopts the well-established and renowned Chinese theoretical framework of sounds in ritual. This theory provides a three-dimensional research structure—values, process of ritualization, and sounds (music)—that guides the analytical scope of this study. Furthermore, it offers essential reference guidelines for the specific content of each dimension.

Given that the subject of this study is a rare example of female-centered musical ritual in China, and considering the relatively recent development and theoretical underdevelopment of research on women's music in the Chinese context, this study employs well-established and influential theories of feminist ethnomusicology. Through a cross-cultural perspective, it analyzes and interprets key issues such as power, gender, music, and values.

This study draws upon relevant historical sources and addresses historical issues in interviews. To support the analysis and interpretation, it adopts a historical ethnomusicology framework, providing a historiographical foundation. In the musicological analysis, the study applied the Norms of Musical Style Theory to conduct a comprehensive analysis of key features in 24 sample songs.

The theoretical foundation and framework of this study are characterized by the following aspects: First, it incorporates both Chinese ritual music theory and



internationally-informed feminist ethnomusicology, achieving a integration of Chinese and Western perspectives. Second, it emphasizes the examination of music's contemporary relevance while utilizing historical documents and oral history materials to facilitate comparative analysis across time, thereby integrating synchronic and diachronic dimensions. Third, it interprets the ideology of rituals (e.g., values, gender culture) while also analyzing the socialization process of ritual behavior and the music itself, enabling a dialogue between ideology and practice.

1.6 Operational Definition

1.6.1 Ritual

The Jiahe accompanying marriage songs possess a highly formalized structure. Over centuries, this folk wedding musical activity has evolved into a fixed procedure that may be termed a musical ritual. However, the word ritual is often habitually and superficially associated with religious or faith-based connotations. Clearly, the musical ritual of Jiahe is not a near-faith ritual but a near-secular one. Nonetheless, the term ritual is retained for two reasons: first, in accordance with conventional academic usage, and second, because in contemporary scholarship, the concept of ritual already encompasses connotations related to folk customs.



The study of ritual music in Europe and America originally emerged from ethnological and anthropological approaches to ritual, focusing primarily on sonic forms, cultural meanings, and social functions. British anthropologist Frazer (1922) viewed ritual as the substance and core structure of folk belief, through which people establish an atmosphere and create musical environments in performance to achieve spiritual solace. Frazer thus emphasized the functional role of ritual music within performative contexts, arguing that it helps shape ambience and provide emotional comfort.

Gaster (1954), in turn, proposed that myth narrates the acts of ancient gods, while ritual enacts such narratives. Clearly influenced by mythological studies, Gaster regarded ritual music as a form of mythological performance. American anthropologist Geertz (1973, p. 113) described ritual as a "cultural performance"—a demonstration, realization, and visualization of belief. Similarly, Bauman (1975) treated ritual performance as a distinct artistic mode of communication, a contextualized behavior that conveys meaning related to its situation. For Bauman, ritual music constitutes a communicative practice deeply intertwined with ritual beliefs (concepts), cultural background, social institutions, and cultural identity. The study of ritual music has thus developed through the interdisciplinary engagement of ritual studies and ethnomusicology.





Ritual music research emerged as a field of study at the intersection of ritual studies and ethnomusicology. It was first formally introduced during the inaugural "Ritual Symposium" held at the 1977 meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), an international association of scholars in religious studies (American Academy of Religion, 1977). Ritual Studies itself originated that same year through a dedicated research group established within the AAR. Thus, early scholarly work on ritual music focused primarily on the symbolic, functional, behavioral, and performative aspects of music within religious activities.

Since the 1980s, research on ritual music has expanded beyond religious activities. Xue Yibing (2003, p. 33) defined ritual music within three key attributes: "artistic effect," "social value," and "cultural belonging." Focusing on the efficacy of ritual music, he conceptualized it as sound that serves a functional role within ritual contexts. His definition highlights the shared characteristics of ritual music as a form of traditional music, without overemphasizing the distinct religious or cultural particularities of traditional ritual practices.

Professor Cao Benye of The Chinese University of Hong Kong proposed that ritual music refers to "all sounds—audible and inaudible, near-music and far-music—that carry specific meaning for insiders within ritualized behavior, including what is generally understood as music" (Cao, 2017, p. 11). His definition is notably broad, extending beyond religious music within belief systems. He further





suggests that ritual possesses an ideological core characterized by both "near-faith" and "near-secular" attributes. Sun Maoli (2017, p. 56) reconsidered ritual music from the perspective of systematic Western ethnomusicological theory and the "music-in-culture" standpoint, explicitly introducing the concept and categorization of non-religious "secular" ritual.

Professor Yang Minkang (2022, p. 203) has addressed a wider spectrum of rituals—such as those marking birth, coming of age, marriage, and funerals—categorizing the study of such folk musical activities as "ceremonial music research." He observes that over the past four decades, ritual music studies in China have shifted from an initial focus on religious music to a broader scope encompassing religious, ceremonial, and folk contexts (Yang, 2020, p. 409). Yang emphasizes that the field now attends not only to ritual music within faith systems but also to generalized forms of ritual music beyond religious frameworks.

The stylized activities and behaviors in the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs can be regarded as a form of typical folk wedding *ceremonial* music. Although traces of religious belief and culture are present within the event, they are not prominent. In terms of its content and meaning, the term *ceremony* might seem more appropriate. Nevertheless, in light of established academic conventions and the continually expanding scope of the term ritual, this study continues to employ the word *ritual*.





1.6.2 Values and Gender Culture

In this study, "Values" specifically denotes social values. It is derived from the concept of "ideology" within the "ideology-behaviors" framework and is further differentiated in this context (see Figure 1.1). According to the "sounds in ritual" theory, the ideology associated with the "near-faith ritual" type is termed "Cosmology," while that corresponding to the "near-secular ritual" type is referred to as "social values." Therefore, the term "ideology" in this study pertains specifically to the dimension of social values. For the sake of conciseness, this study uses "Values" to represent this concept. Values constitute a broad and comprehensive system encompassing myriad aspects. The concept of "gender culture" in this research focuses specifically on the manifestation of values in the dimension of gender. In other words, the gender culture discussed herein essentially reflects social values pertaining to gender perspectives.

1.6.3 Process of Ritualization

The Process of Ritualization is a term derived from anthropology, sociology, and behavioral studies. It refers to the social process by which certain behaviors or activities, through repetition, formalization, and symbolization, gradually acquire ritual characteristics and meanings (Hagedorn, 2020; Kapchan, 2018; Clayton, 2016;





Grimes, 2014; Bell, 1992). Its core emphasis lies in the dynamic transition from ordinary behavior to ritual behavior. In musical rituals, ritualization essentially involves a comprehensive process including formalization, meaning assignment, functional construction, contextual specialization, transmission mechanisms, and somatic experience, through which ordinary musical behavior is transformed into ritual practice with cultural depth and social function (Kapchan, 2018; Clayton, 2016; Turino, 2008). This process preserves traditional stability while allowing evolution within specific cultural logics, ultimately making music an indispensable component of ritual (Clayton, 2016; Turino, 2008; Xue, 2003).



Therefore, the ritualization process examined in this study primarily includes core aspects such as the structure of ritual performance, forms and props of performance, and the gender order of participants (Hagedorn, 2020; Kapchan, 2018; Xue, 2003).

1.6.4 Accompanying and Weeping Marriage Songs

In regions such as Guangdong and Fujian among the Hakka people, parts of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou among the Han people, as well as the Tujia, Lao, Miao, and Zhuang peoples in Hunan and Hubei, and ethnic groups including the Naxi, Yi, Pumi, and Mosuo in Shangri-La City, Yunnan, wedding music rituals characterized primarily





by weeping and singing are performed when a bride leaves her home. Since such performances are dominated by vocal expressions of lamentation, this wedding music ritual is commonly referred to as Weeping Marriage, and the songs themselves are generally termed Weeping Marriage Songs.

In the Jiahe accompanying marriage song ritual, there is a segment known as *Weeping Marriage Songs*. The songs in this segment are predominantly performed in a style where weeping blends with singing and often substitutes for singing, conveying strong emotion. The lyrics are frequently improvised by the performers and encompass themes such as lamenting to one's parents, mutual weeping between mother and daughter, crying to one's elder brother and his wife, bidding farewell to sisters, grieving with female friends seeing off the bride, and addressing the sedan-chair carriers, among others (Jiahe County Chronicle Compilation Committee, Hunan Province, 1993). Hence, the *Jiahe Accompanying Marriage Songs* are sometimes also referred to as the *Jiahe Weeping Marriage Songs* or the *Jiahe Accompanying and Weeping Marriage Songs*. According to the *Jiahe County Chronicle*: Days before the wedding, the bride would weep upon seeing any family member. She would weep while being dressed, and weep again when entering the bridal sedan chair. Once her voice turned hoarse, her female companions would weep on her behalf (Feng & Li, 2007).





However, the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs differ from the weeping marriage songs in other regions. The entire musical ritual process and singing program consist of many movements. First, after dinner on the evening before the bride's wedding, the soothing and tranquil Seating Arrangement Songs are sung, similar to the overture in operas, dance dramas, other theatrical works, as well as vocal and instrumental suites. Next, the female companions sing the lively and spirited Playful Songs. Then, the lead singer performs a slow and elongated narrative Long Songs, after which participants take turns singing the brisk and humorous Interactive Songs Challenge. As dawn approaches, the women sing and dance to perform the cheerful Accompanying Marriage Songs. When the groom's wedding sedan chair arrives, the bride comes out to sing Weeping Farewell Songs, using weeping in place of singing and blending weeping with singing. After the bride enters the sedan chair, her female companions sing the soothing and heartfelt Bride Send-off Songs, accompanying her until the Youqin Pavilion, where the singing stops. Three days after the wedding, the groom brings the bride back to her parental home, and the sisters-in-law and sisters of the bride's family sing teasing and blessing Unaccompanied Songs to the groom. At this point, the entire procedure of the Accompanying Marriage Songs ritual is concluded.

Thus, the *Weeping Farewell Songs* constitute only one segment within the complete procedural structure of the *Jiahe Accompanying Marriage Songs*. Although this segment and its songs are highly expressive and emblematic, they do not





represent the entirety of the Jiahe wedding music ritual. Using the concept of *Weeping Farewell Songs* to define the traditional Jiahe wedding music ritual is overly restrictive and fails to capture the full richness of this musical tradition. The concept of *Accompanying Marriage Songs* offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the complete practice, avoiding a reduction of the tradition to merely its weeping characteristics due to terminological limitations. Furthermore, this broader term helps to distinguish the Jiahe tradition from other wedding music rituals in China. For these reasons, this study employs the term *Accompanying Marriage Songs* rather than *Weeping Farewell Songs*.



1.6.5 Traditional

The term "Traditional Accompanying Marriage Songs" appears frequently in this study, and its meaning depends heavily on context. Firstly, in some instances, it refers specifically to the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs of the past, in contrast to contemporary versions, and is explicitly called traditional Jiahe accompanying marriage songs. Secondly, it is also used as a general term referring to the practice as it exists today—not merely as a historical relic—but as a living tradition that has been continuously inherited and performed over a long history. In this usage, traditional describes its historical nature and enduring characteristics rather



than denoting a past temporal period. This term, particularly when used extensively in interviews, should therefore be interpreted according to its specific discursive context.

1.6.6 Bridal Female Singers

The term *Bridal Female Singers* refers to the group of female singers who accompany and sing with the bride throughout the ritual proceedings. This is a collective term for all performers other than the bride herself.

1.6.7 Singing Team Leader

The *Singing Team Leader* is a member of the *Bridal Female Singers* and is typically the only one in a given ritual. In addition to performing songs, she is also responsible for communication, organization, and managerial tasks, such as gathering the bridal singers, communicating with the bride and her parents regarding the duration of the ritual, compensation, the number of performers, and other logistical matters.



1.6.8 Lead Singer

The *Lead Singer* is a member of the *Bridal Female Singers* and is typically the most skilled and experienced performer in the group. During the performance, she is responsible for selecting the songs, determining the tone, and setting the tempo, thus guiding the musical execution. The roles of Lead Singer and Singing Team Leader may be fulfilled by the same person or by two different individuals.

1.6.9 Female Music and Feminist Music



An "-Ism" denotes a concept, a complete system of thought and belief, or alternatively, distinct approaches to achieving various objectives. When a political theory carries the suffix "-ism," it typically encompasses three interrelated dimensions: ideology, movement, and institutional structure. Feminist theory in Europe and the United States has evolved over more than two centuries of feminist activism. At its core lies women's critique of and resistance to patriarchal social systems, marking it explicitly as a form of sexual politics. As Li Xiaojiang (2005) observes, in Europe, the journey from middle-class women's awakening to the feminist movement led to the emergence of women's liberation—a movement centered on women themselves. It was initiated by educated middle-class women who developed gender consciousness





during the ascendance of the bourgeoisie. Nearly all feminist theoretical schools arose in the West under the banner of opposing male dominance (Li, 2005).

Feminist academic research extends the feminist movement into the academic sphere and is inherently rebellious. The initial goal of feminist music was to rethink male-centered music culture from a female perspective, uncovering the historical, social, and cultural roots of women's subordination. "Feminist music" refers to musical works created from a distinctly feminist viewpoint, with feminist consciousness as their core value. It often carries a subversive tone and a clear gender stance. The creators of such works can be either women or men (Song, 2011).



This study defines traditional Jiahe accompanying marriage songs as women's music rather than feminist music, because these songs did not engage with the core concerns of feminist music. Before the mid-20th century—a period corresponding to feudal society in China, when these songs were primarily performed—gender inequality was mainly manifested through tangible disparities in everyday life. These included significant gaps between men and women in rights such as education, property disposal, voting and being elected, and employment. Under the slogan of "equality between men and women," women struggled to secure basic rights in practical contexts (Dong, 2009). Although some feminist ideas existed during this time, they did not develop into a broader movement or systematic framework. Most importantly, they lacked a clear agenda of "sexual politics."





Although the women and music in traditional Jiahe accompanying marriage songs demonstrate a strong awareness of resistance and unique forms of defiance—creating a rare paradigm of female musical practice within wedding rituals—they ultimately did not develop into a political movement characterized by binary opposition. While these songs and the women who performed them engaged with marital issues, their discourse remained largely within the realm of female consciousness and resistance. They fell short of deeper critical engagement with or opposition to the institution of marriage, gendered social identities, and patriarchal power—or such dimensions were altogether absent. The practice of traditional Jiahe accompanying marriage songs existed in a form of social concealment. These female-centered musical activities excluded male participation. Although this created a distinct cultural space for women, it also isolated them from the male-dominated social structure they might otherwise confront. As a result, this form of "resistance" lost its clear object of opposition, turning instead into a kind of self-contained expression within a closed environment—an implicit avoidance of direct confrontation with the very patriarchy it might challenge. Thus, traditional Jiahe accompanying marriage songs represent a form of stubborn resilience within compromise. For these reasons, they cannot be fully regarded as feminist music.

The modern Jiahe accompanying marriage songs after the 1950s still cannot be called feminist music. In the 20th century, China experienced a series of violent revolutions, such as the Hundred Days Reform in the late Qing Dynasty that broke the





people's old ideas, the Opium War that opened China's borders, the Xinhai Revolution that created the new regime of the Republic of China, and the May Fourth Movement that introduced new ideas. The Anti-Japanese War against the invasion of foreign enemies, the Cultural Revolution, reform and opening up after the founding of New China, etc.—each revolution is accompanied by fierce ideological collisions.

In the fierce revolutionary wave, the earliest scholars who discussed the female issue and proposed the liberation of female were almost all male: Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Shen Yanbing, Cai Yuanpei, Zhang Wentian, Lu Xun, and other scholars all explored the realistic way of female liberation by putting themselves in their shoes. In the entire liberate female (female as the object) movement since then, the female issue has always been an important aspect of the Chinese democratic revolution movement. For Chinese females, the revolution is a blessing from heaven, and it has brought great benefits to them:

"No Binding the Foot" liberated their bodies; "Prospering Women's School" liberated their hearts; "Abolished Arranged Marriages" freed them to fall in love; "Practise Monogamy" freed them from slavery; And "equal pay for equal work" improved their lives. "Women's participation in politics" improves their political status, And "men and women are equal" legally guarantees that they become independent, inviolable personalities with civil rights and obligations, just like men. (Yi, 1999, p. 64)

Although the feminist movement is in full swing in European and American countries, it has always been in a marginal state and has not been brought into the





mainstream of society. Different from European and American countries, from the beginning of the 20th century to the present, the issue of female in China has always been in the country's field of vision, and the government has successively issued many laws and regulations to protect female rights. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the female issue rose to the level of national ideology and was included in the national agenda. Equality between male and female became a basic national policy in our country. In the following years, the state promulgated a series of laws and regulations to strive for equality between male and female at the political and economic levels. Due to the legal ideology and more state and social support, the status of Chinese females in social life has undergone earth-shaking changes. The achievements of the feminist movement in the West for more than 200 years seem to have been achieved in China in a few decades. Of course, this does not mean that this can easily change the inherent gender awareness that has been in people's minds for thousands of years, as well as the social and power structures that have created this awareness.

The women's movement in China has always been combined with social revolution and has never been led by women. The lack of a background of struggle has caused the "liberated" female consciousness to quickly dissolve in the national crisis and merge with the national ideology. It recognizes the "greater self" and ignores the "small self," voluntarily abandons the female position, and rarely criticizes the patriarchal culture itself: as women born in the "new society," it is under their banner that we have avoided nearly two hundred years of collective struggle by feminists and have also reduced the gender anxiety that is difficult to resolve among many Western women. (Li, 2005, p. 21)



The Chinese female liberation movement is always intertwined with the class struggle revolution, and even the awareness and actions of Chinese females are always driven and stimulated by the social revolution that transcends gender (Wang, 2004). Since the problem awareness generated by the female liberation movement in China was based on the gender culture crisis transformed from the nation-state crisis, the gender culture crisis did not constitute an independent problem awareness (Dong, 2009). Today, because the country's highest law has stipulated the legal status of female, Chinese females surrounded by official discourse do not have much femininity, and female research subjects have also lost their true thinking about their own identity and value:

Since China's female liberation movement has always been subordinate to the major theme of national liberation, when national consciousness and class consciousness become the objects of social attention, female consciousness is submerged under these grand narratives and disappears invisibly. After liberation, the ideological narrative of "equality between male and female" canceled the legitimacy of the existence of "female consciousness," creating a mythical age of "no gender difference." The reawakening of female consciousness marks a new era. After a tortuous few decades, "female consciousness" has become more blurred and illegible. (Lin, 2006, p. 50-51)

Since liberated Chinese females have always rebelled against the old society together with progressive male thinkers, feminism's questioning and critical spirit of the entire culture is not common in Chinese academic circles. Moreover, in the tradition of musicology research in mainland China, most of the leading positions are held by male, and they are unlikely to examine music development from a female



perspective, and most female scholars rarely have female experience and viewpoints. Therefore, even when some scholars are aware of the development of feminist music, few actually take it seriously (Song, 2011). Chinese music has long been used as a tool for political speech, and music activities and evaluation systems naturally reflect revolutionary tendencies. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the phenomenon of politicization and neutralization of music that existed as early as the revolutionary period intensified in the subsequent social changes. characteristics, the female consciousness is relatively solidified.

Feminist music requires the practices of feminist discourse and depends on women's active participation and opportunities for gendered dialogue. Within China's academic context, the primary audience for such discourse is Chinese female intellectuals, whose support is crucial for the development of feminist music criticism in the country. However, the value judgments and aesthetic preferences of Chinese female scholars are deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, resulting in a more reserved and conservative gender consciousness. When Western feminist theories were introduced into China, the Confucian principle of the "golden mean" and general reticence on sexual matters made Chinese scholars less receptive to the more radical and rebellious strands of feminist music. For this reason, this study characterizes Jiahe accompanying marriage songs as "women's music" rather than "feminist music."





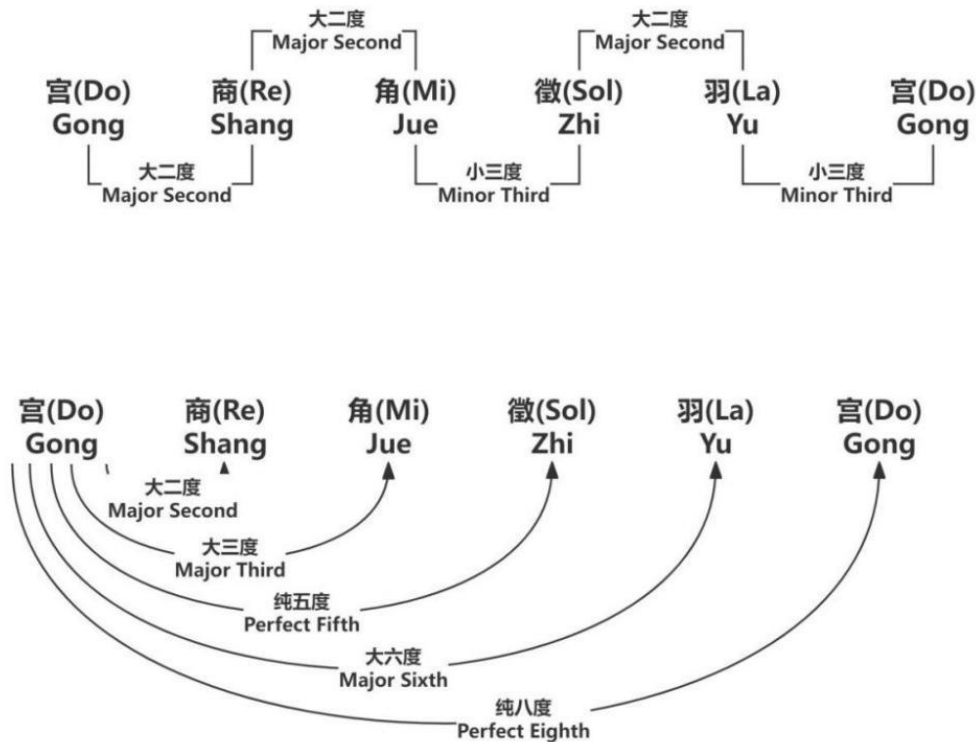
1.6.10 Chinese Pentatonic Scale

The pentatonic scale is a musical system in ancient Han Chinese tonality (Tian, 2018; Yuan, 2000; Wang, 1999). It is a scale composed of five notes (rather than seven) (Li & Li, 2006; Jiao, 1998). The pentatonic scale is arranged based on perfect fifth intervals and consists of five notes. This scale is unique to China and can also be referred to as the Chinese folk scale (Liang, 2015; Shao, 2012; Chen, 2011; Tong, 2004). The five notes are named as follows: Gong /gʊŋ/, Shang /ʃaŋ/, Jue /dʒwɛ/, Zhi /tʂɿ/, and Yu /y/.



The relationships between the degrees of the pentatonic scale can be represented by the following five notes, typically denoted as: Do (Gong), Re (Shang), Mi (Jue), Sol (Zhi), and La (Yu) (Guo, 2012). The specific pitches of these notes can vary across different modes, but the fundamental interval relationships they follow within the pentatonic scale are relatively fixed (Figure 1.7).



Figure 1.7*Degrees Relationship Chart of the Pentatonic Scale*

Gong: The fundamental pitch of the pentatonic scale, equivalent to the "tonic" or "root note" in Western scales. It provides a stable pitch foundation for the entire scale. In traditional Chinese music, Gong is often used to define the beginning or ending of a **melody** and to provide stability in harmony.

Shang: A note that is a major second above Gong, meaning the interval relationship is a whole tone. Shang is commonly used as a decorative or transitional note in melodies, adding richness to the musical line.



Jue: A note that is a major third above Gong, meaning the interval relationship is a major third. Jue is often used in melodies to enhance expressiveness, particularly in climactic parts of the music.

Zhi: A note that is a perfect fifth above Gong, meaning the interval relationship is a perfect fifth. Zhi is commonly used in harmony to increase stability and a sense of consonance in the music.

Yu: A note that is a major sixth above Gong, meaning the interval relationship is a major sixth. Yu is used in melodies to express subtle emotional variations, especially towards the end of the music.

The pentatonic scale in traditional Chinese music consists of five distinct modes, each with its unique arrangement of notes and expressive characteristics. Here are some examples:

The Gong mode, where Gong is the tonic of the scale, is equivalent to a C major scale missing the IV and VII degrees. For example: In the C Gong scale, where Gong = C (I), the scale structure is as shown below.



Figure 1.8

C Gong Scale

宫调式

结构: 大二 大二 小三 大二 小三

Gong Scale

宫调式

结构: 大二 大二 小三 大二 小三

Scale Structure

Major Second	Major Second	Minor Third	Major Second	Minor Third
--------------	--------------	-------------	--------------	-------------

The Shang mode, where Shang is the tonic of the scale, is equivalent to a Dorian

scale missing the III and VI degrees. For example: In the D Shang scale, where Shang = D (I), the scale structure is as shown below.

Figure 1.9

D Shang Scale

商调式

结构: 大二 小三 大二 小三 大二

Shang Scale

商调式

结构: 大二 小三 大二 小三 大二

Scale Structure

Major Second	Minor Third	Major Second	Minor Third	Major Second
--------------	-------------	--------------	-------------	--------------

The Jue mode, where Jue is the tonic of the scale, is equivalent to a Phrygian scale missing the II and V degrees. For example: In the E Jue scale, where Jue = E (I), the scale structure is as shown below.

Figure 1.10

E Yu Scale

角调式



结构: 小三 大二 小三 大二 大二

Jue Scale

角调式



结构: 小三 大二 小三 大二 大二

Scale Structure	Minor Third	Major Second	Minor Third	Major Second	Major Second

The Zhi mode, where Zhi is the tonic of the scale, is equivalent to a Mixolydian scale missing the III and VII degrees. For example: In the G Zhi scale, where Zhi = G (I), the scale structure is as shown below.

Figure 1.11

G Zhi Scale

徵调式

结构: 大二 小三 大二 大二 小三

Zhi Scale

徵调式

结构: 大二 小三 大二 大二 小三

Scale Structure

Major Second	Minor Third	Major Second	Major Second	Minor Third
--------------	-------------	--------------	--------------	-------------

The Yu mode, where Yu is the tonic of the scale, is equivalent to an Aeolian scale missing the II and VI degrees. For example: In the A Yu scale, where Yu = A (I), the scale structure is as shown below.

Figure 1.12

A Yu Scale

羽调式

结构: 小三 大二 大二 小三 大二

Yu Scale

羽调式

结构: 小三 大二 大二 小三 大二

Scale Structure

Minor Third	Major Second	Major Second	Minor Third	Minor Third
-------------	--------------	--------------	-------------	-------------

In the pentatonic scale, Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, and Yu are the names of the five notes and represent the five distinct Scale. For example, in the E Gong scale, E is the tonic (I), and the scale is arranged according to the Gong Scale structure.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

Ritual music is an exceptionally rich concept, and research in this field similarly encompasses a broad range of topics. Given the scope of this study, as well as the researcher's time and capacity, it is necessary to set appropriate boundaries for the content examined herein.

1.7.1 Contemporary and Traditional

Although Jiahe accompanying marriage songs is a traditional folk song with a long history, there are extremely limited historical documents recording it. Only brief and sporadic descriptions can be found in the Jiahe County Annals, with merely indirect mentions in other historical texts. Furthermore, according to staff from the Jiahe County Cultural Center, the center's archives suffered a fire in the 1980s, which destroyed a large number of precious original materials collected in the mid-to-late 20th century. As a result, this study faces a severe scarcity of historical sources. Given



these limitations, the research primarily adopts a synchronic perspective, focusing on field investigations and observations of contemporary rituals. It does not delve deeply into historical ethnomusicological verification or conduct systematic comparisons between past and present. Discussions regarding the historical context rely mainly on existing academic research, the limited surviving historical records, and oral accounts obtained from interviews with practitioners and informed individuals.

1.7.2 Sounds-Music-Accompanying Marriage Songs



According to the concept of "sounds" in the theory of *sounds in ritual*, "sounds" refer to all audible and inaudible sounds produced in ritual activities, which include music in the general sense. Here, "music" primarily denotes instrumental sounds and vocal expressions. Jiahe bridal escort songs are a form of music performed without instrumental accompaniment; therefore, the study of instrumental music falls beyond the scope of this research. Furthermore, although present-day Jiahe bridal escort song rituals incorporate minor elements from non-bridal escort music—such as Chinese Contemporary Art Songs, Jiahe Folk Songs, Jiahe Opera, and Chinese Contemporary Pop Songs—these constitute only a small proportion. This study focuses exclusively on the analysis of the bridal escort songs within the ritual context and does not examine other musical forms.





1.7.3 Non-Singing Techniques

In the musicological analysis, the focus has been placed solely on examining musical style, and the vocal techniques of the performers have not been included.

1.7.4 Non-Dance

In the ceremonial performance, there exists content related to bridal escort dances, but aspects concerning dance performance techniques fall outside the scope of this study.



1.8 Significant of the Study

1.8.1 Theoretical Significance

China's engagement with gender studies in music remains relatively young and emergent. The Jiahe accompanying marriage song ritual represents a musical tradition rich in social and gendered significance. Through close analysis, this study brings into focus the gender ecosystem within which Jiahe women articulate their identities, and examines how they employ music to express emotion and negotiate relations with men. These insights further deepen the theoretical discourse surrounding the Jiahe



ritual tradition. At the same time, this research adds a compelling micro-case study on women's music to the growing body of Chinese ethnomusicology.

1.8.2 Practical Significance

In the context of contemporary postmodern culture—marked by interwoven aesthetic diversity, extensive commercialization and commodification of art, and a prevailing tendency toward flattened aesthetic experiences—the transmission and development of Jiahe accompanying marriage songs face formidable challenges. Research on this song ritual offers a critical lens through which to examine its preservation and innovative potential, thereby providing valuable guidance for practical efforts.

1.9 Summary

In summary, this chapter establishes a comprehensive framework for examining the Jiahe accompanying marriage songs as both a musical tradition and a gendered cultural ritual. It underscores the necessity of integrating Chinese and Western theoretical perspectives to fully appreciate the tradition's cultural and social dimensions. By delineating the research objectives and questions, the study aims to

explore how women shape ritual roles through ritual performance, analyze the musical and emotional characteristics of the songs, and interpret their symbolic meanings in gender negotiation. The theoretical fusion of ritual studies and feminist ethnomusicology offers a nuanced tool for decoding the complex interactions between sound, structure, and society. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the marginalized status of women's music research in China and positions this study as a critical step toward recognizing such traditions as dynamic, living practices rather than static cultural relics. Ultimately, it sets the stage for deeper empirical analysis and cultural preservation efforts.