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Ethnic Identity Reconstruction among the Jing Ethnic Group in China: The Case of Đản Bâu

Li, Peilin

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**Ethnic Identity Reconstruction among the Jing Ethnic Group in
China: The Case of Đản Bàu**

Leiden University

MA thesis
Peilin Li
S3455157

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1. Introduction

Along the coastal border of Beibu Gulf in southern China lives a transnational ethnic group known as the Jing people, who have relied on fishing for generations. In 1887, following the signing of the Sino-French Border Treaty, which formally delineated the land boundary between China and Vietnam, the residents of Wutou Island (巫头), Wanwei Island (灣尾), and Shanxin Island (山心) transitioned from being part of Vietnam's majority ethnic group to becoming the Jing, a minority group within China. Over the past 137 years, with the end of World War II and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, their sense of identity has continually evolved in response to new cultural contexts.

Traditional Vietnamese musical performances are one way Vietnamese people have historically shaped and expressed their evolving narratives (Cannon 2016, 146-171). Similarly, the Chinese Jing, who share Vietnamese cultural roots, have drawn upon traditional Vietnamese music to articulate and reshape their identities. Among these musical traditions, the *Đàn Bầu*, a monochord instrument¹(figure 1) with profound cultural and historical significance, holds a particularly important role in the Jing ethnic group's identity expression.



Figure 1, *Đàn Bầu*

¹ According to He Zhengrong (2013) historical study on the origins of the *Đàn Bầu* among the Jing ethnic group in China, he classifies the *Đàn Bầu* as a type of flat-placed plucked string instrument.

This thesis explores how the Jing people, as a Vietnamese ethnic group within China, have reconstructed their identities in the modern era. A key focus is placed on the *Đàn Bầu* as a medium of identity expression across different contexts. Through a combination of fieldwork, secondary literature, and comparative analysis with Vietnamese diaspora communities abroad, this study examines how the *Đàn Bầu* serves as a visible, auditory, and sensory symbol of identity reconstruction. Additionally, it investigates whether parallels exist in the expressions of identity between the Jing ethnic group and other Vietnamese communities and seeks to understand the underlying reasons for any similarities or differences. This inquiry aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role of cultural artifacts, such as the *Đàn Bầu*, in navigating and redefining identity within transnational and cross-cultural frameworks.

1.1 Historical Background of the Jing Ethnic Group

The Jing ethnic group have a long history, tracing their ancestry back to the Baiyue, also known as the Hundred Yue or simply Yue. The Baiyue were various ethnic groups who inhabited the regions of Southern China and Northern Vietnam during the 1st millennium BC and the 1st millennium AD. They were known for their short hair, body tattoos, fine swords, and naval prowess. According to Huang Anhui's research (2010, 125-130), the ancestors of today's Jing community in China first arrived on the three Jing Islands in the early 16th century during the Ming Dynasty as they were tracking fish. Over time, they settled permanently, establishing families and communities. In 1958, based on their historical, linguistic, and cultural characteristics, lifestyle, and the preferences of the community, the State Council of China officially recognized them as the “京族 (Jing ethnic group)”.

The Jing people are the only Vietnamese minority in China. The three Jing Islands (figure 2&3) are located in Dongxing City, Guangxi Province, facing the South China Sea and separated from Vietnam by only a narrow waterway. Formed by

the accumulation of sand from the sea, these islands cover a total area of 26.83 square kilometers and lie close to the mainland. During low tide, it is possible to walk between the islands and the mainland. In the 1960s, land reclamation (figure 4) and the construction of seawalls permanently connected the islands to the mainland.



Figure 2&3, the three Jing Islands: Wutou Island, Wanwei Island, and Shanxin Island. Photos from Peilin Li took in the Jing museum.



Figure 4, land reclamation and the construction of seawalls.

Photos from Peilin Li took in the Jing museum.

Since the Chinese Jing ethnic group has not been culturally separated from Vietnam for a long time, and frequent trade exchanges along the coastal border, the Jing language spoken by the Jing people in China remains quite similar to northern Vietnamese dialects, allowing for mutual intelligibility in conversation. However, given the close relationship between the local Jing and Han populations, many Jing speakers are also fluent in local Cantonese. Consequently, modern Jing vocabulary includes many new terms borrowed from Cantonese or Mandarin, leading to some divergence from standard Vietnamese. This linguistic evolution has also inspired the creation of contemporary Jing *Đàn Bầu* music compositions.

1.2 The Origins of *Đàn Bầu*

The *Đàn Bầu* is crystallized in Jing mythology and folklore as a symbolic object onto which collective memories of the ethnic group are attached. There are many legends surrounding the origins of the *Đàn Bầu*. According to Chinese scholar Liu Yiwen (2020, 57), there are many folk tales about the origin of *Đàn Bầu* from the Jing ethnic group, but the most popular and beloved version is ‘a celestial instrument from the Dragon Official of the South Sea’. Jianling Qi has presented this story in detail in

2018, while the story has also been introduced in the Jing Museum as one of the sources of Đàn Bầu. This folk tale is about a shark demon, resentful after being rejected by the Dragon King's seventh princess, stole the centipede flute from the Dragon king and unleashed chaos in the Jing lands, causing widespread turmoil. Following the Dragon King's command, the seventh princess descended to earth with the celestial zither to subdue the shark demon. The string of this celestial zither was said to be made from the princess's hair—she had 99,999 strands of charming hair. Eventually, seeking revenge, the shark demon waited until the princess was asleep and broke the celestial zither's string, pulling out all her hair, until only one life hair remained. Choosing to sacrifice herself, the princess used her last strand of hair to restring the zither, thus ensuring its legacy.

In Jing mythology, the role of the Đàn Bầu symbolizes the ancestors' reverence and gratitude toward nature, embodying their experiences, mindset, and traditional aesthetic values. It also serves as a cultural pathway to understanding the psychological structure of Jing identity, recording their emotional and spiritual journey over centuries (Jianling Qi 2018, 21).

It is worth noting that there are also various origin legends about the Đàn Bầu in Vietnam. According to scholar Yiwen Liu (2010, 58), the following Vietnamese legend about the Đàn Bầu is particularly distinctive: In ancient Vietnam, a village was required to offer an eye as a sacrifice to the spirits each year. When the time came to fulfill this ritual, the villagers agreed to take the eye of the first person who entered the village. At that moment, a widow whose son had died in battle was approaching the village with her daughter-in-law. The widow entered the village first, and the villagers decided to take her eye. Upon hearing this, the devoted daughter-in-law pleaded with the villagers not to harm her mother-in-law, offering her own eye in exchange. The villagers accepted her offer, and thus the dutiful daughter-in-law was blinded. Her filial piety moved the Bodhisattva, who gifted her a musical instrument to support her livelihood. This instrument became known as the Đàn Bầu.

1.3 The Performance Techniques of Đàn Bầu

Although Đàn Bầu has only a single string, it offers a four-octave range, allowing flexible key changes and the ability to produce both an overtone and a fundamental tone at the same string position. The playing postures for the Đàn Bầu are similar in both China and Vietnam, generally including three styles: seated with legs flat on the ground or chair, cross-legged, and standing (Zhang Chan 2011, 40). Although Zhang Chan (2012, 15) suggests that subtle differences in the Đàn Bầu existed between China and Vietnam in ancient times, findings from my fieldwork in July 2024 provide a contrasting perspective. Based on an interview with Đàn Bầu expert Su Haizhen, mainstream thought among Chinese experts holds that the playing techniques and overall structure of the Đàn Bầu are consistent between the two countries. However, under the influence of modern technology, the Chinese Đàn Bầu has been modified to include additional features, such as amplifiers and Bluetooth connectivity, integrated into its base. These adaptations address the traditional Đàn Bầu's relatively low volume, making it easier to amplify the sound for larger audiences to hear clearly during performances.

Furthermore, Đàn Bầu is a beloved folk instrument among the Jing people, known for its rich timbre. Whether during festivals or after the seafood harvest season, people gather to sing improvised folk songs accompanied by its music.

1.4 Literature Review

My literature review examines earlier studies on the Đàn Bầu and its connection to the construction of contemporary identities among the Jing ethnic group along the China-Vietnam border. Drawing on research from area studies, anthropology, social sciences, it traces the evolution of scholarship on the Đàn Bầu and its cultural significance.

My review begins by exploring foundational studies on the Đàn Bầu, focusing on its historical folklore and cultural roles to provide a broader context for its importance

among the Jing. I then turn to research by foreign scholars on the Jing ethnic group, their cultural identity, and the Đàn Bầu as a medium of expression, highlighting the key arguments and gaps in their work. This is followed by an examination of studies conducted by Chinese scholars, which provide localized perspectives on the Jing ethnic group, the adaptation of Đàn Bầu in a Chinese context, and its role in contemporary identity construction.

By critically analyzing these studies, my review highlights how my research bridges existing gaps, focusing on the Đàn Bầu as both a symbolic and functional tool for identity reconstruction among the Jing. Additionally, I compare this with the Vietnamese diaspora's use of the instrument, offering new perspectives on the interplay between music, identity, and cultural adaptation.

Cannon is an authority on Vietnamese music and diaspora culture who in 2012 published a summary of previous articles about the Vietnamese diaspora, proposing that Vietnamese diaspora individuals do not merely engage with a single past; instead, they bring past life experiences to their current lives, further making new connections, that is, the reconstruction² of identity (Cannon, 2012). Cannon in his article “Awakening the Soul with the Left Hand: Narration and Healing in Vietnam’s Diasporic Traditional Music” (2021) discusses how Vietnamese musicians in the diaspora use the concept of *tâm hồn*, or “soul,” to articulate inner experiences and foster community cohesion. In the article “Virtually Audible in Diaspora: The Transnational Negotiation of Vietnamese Traditional Music” (2012) by Cannon, he critically analyzes how Nguyễn Vĩnh Bảo (a master musician), through the concept of “trans-nation” and theories of transnational competence, fosters a virtual diasporic community centered on the appreciation and performance of traditional Vietnamese music.

Lisa Beebe (2017), through her fieldwork in Vietnam from 2015-2017, concludes that the diaspora in Australia and Canada, the Đàn Bầu is a symbol of cultural pride, an embodied musical instrument that connects personal and national identities, and

² The reason for the reconstruction is that the Vietnamese diaspora needs a new identity related to the current country of emigration while retaining some traditional culture.

that adapts to evolving notions of ‘nationhood’ while allowing musicians and audiences to express their cultural heritage, as well as their personal and political concerns, in a way that is distinct from current politics of the state in a very different way. In Chapter 6 of Beebe's dissertation, she discusses the adaptability, experimentation, and change of the đàn bầu in diaspora, citing examples from Australia and Canada but not mentioning the border regions of southern China and Vietnam, and in this chapter, the role of music in community gatherings is emphasised and the ways in which musical works reflect the political concerns of particular diaspora organisations are explored. In this context, ‘Đàn Bầu’ becomes a focal point for examining how musicians and listeners interact with musical instruments as symbols of Vietnamese identity.

Russian scholar Starikova gained extensive primary material on the Đàn Bầu during her studies in Hanoi in 2007, analyzing its structural features and playing techniques. She briefly mentioned the Jing ethnic group in China and diaspora communities such as Canada as examples of how the Đàn Bầu serves as an ethnic symbol for Vietnamese abroad (Starikova, 2020). However, she did not conduct detailed fieldwork on the Jing ethnic group in China, merely drawing conclusions from literature review from before scholars, nor did she elaborate on the identity reconstruction process or the contemporary young generation's perspective on traditional instruments and Vietnamese national thought.

In addition, many scholars in China have conducted academic research on the Jing ethnic group's Đàn Bầu, I chose them as a discussion because they all had information in their articles that would be useful for me to carry out my research afterwards. For example, Zhang Can conducted a study in 2011 on the musical forms of the Đàn Bầu, which included an analysis of representative folk music pieces. His work analyzes the shared and unique aspects of Đàn Bầu music culture between the Jing people in China and Vietnam, offering valuable insights that enhance the understanding and development of Đàn Bầu music theory; Professors Zhou Jianxin and Lü Junbiao’s “From the Margins to the Forefront: Socio-Economic Cultural Changes in the Jing Ethnic Area of Guangxi” (2007) examines the real lives and

conceptual world of ordinary people of the Jing ethnic group in the midst of social transformation, understanding and experiencing the impact of social transformation on their lives and concepts from a local perspective. Although this book does not focus on the Đản Bàu as an instrument, it emphasises the importance of promoting the outstanding cultural heritage of the Jing ethnic group for the Chinese people. Lü Junbiao's "Folk Rituals and the Appropriation of State Power: A Case Study of the Sea Village Ha Festival" (2005) and "Folk Celebrations and the Construction of Transnational Ethnic Cultural Networks: A Case Study of Jing Ethnic People in Jiangping Town, Dongxing City, Guangxi" (2009) propose that the Jing ethnic group's Ha Festival involves a significant implantation of national symbols, which is both a result of national consciousness infiltrating the people life and reflects the people forces' attempt to use state power to integrate internal and external ethnic relations.

Overall, no scholar has truly conducted in-depth research linking this traditional instrument, the Đản Bàu, with the construction of new contemporary identities, so I will use my thesis to fill some of these academic gaps.

2. ĐÀN BẦU Use in Different Scenarios

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese government has renewed its emphasis on the folk music culture of ethnic minority regions. It has proactively sought out musical instruments and cultural inheritors from grassroots communities, regarding them as precious treasures of national heritage. Since the ĐÀN BẦU was added to China's first national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2006, ĐÀN BẦU is no longer a traditionally important festival found only in the Jing ethnic group. It has begun to feature frequently in various activities and festivals of the Jing, Han, and other ethnic groups, and has even played an important role in significant educational fields such as the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao). In recent decades, with the frequent use of the ĐÀN BẦU as a symbol of Jing culture, the ways in which the main inheritors of ĐÀN BẦU culture and related cultural participants identify with the culture, as well as their cultural roles, have undergone a series of changes alongside shifts in China's social and cultural context (Jianling Qi 2018, 43).

This chapter primarily introduces the use of the ĐÀN BẦU in significant contemporary Jing ethnic festivals and occasions, such as the Hà Festival. It also discusses how, since the early 21st century, the government has increasingly emphasized the preservation of the ĐÀN BẦU's heritage, implementing a series of measures to pass on the Jing ethnic group's ĐÀN BẦU art.

2.1 Use in Ha Festival

The Jing people worship the Sea God, so many of their festivals and ritual activities are related to this deity. Among these, the Ha Festival is the most grand annual event dedicated to worshipping the Sea God, also in Vietnam, the Ha Festival plays a similar role. During the sacrificial activities of the Ha Festival, the ĐÀN BẦU is an indispensable instrument in the “娛神(entertaining the gods)” segment. After the Jing ethnic group's Ha Festival was included in China's “First National List of

National Intangible Cultural Heritage” in 2006, the festival leveraged the *Đàn Bầu* in combination with tourism³ to enhance the socio-economic added value of the *Đàn Bầu*, facilitating its rapid integration into the modern market (Yiwen Liu 2020, 60). During the "entertaining the gods" segment of the festival, villagers parade the deity through the streets and along the beach in a lively procession. Along the route, *Đàn Bầu* musicians perform on the beach, Integrating the instrument’s sound with the rhythm of the ocean waves. Many visitors follow the procession or pause to enjoy the unique combination of scenic ocean views and the melodic tones of the *Đàn Bầu*. By utilizing festivals like the *Hà Festival*, local government and people have also built a brand effect for the Jing ethnic group’s *Đàn Bầu*. On July 14, 2024, I examined the appearances of the Jing people’s *Đàn Bầu* in sacred communal spaces—the *Ha Pavilion* (哈亭) and *Golden Beach* (金滩)—during the *Ha Festival*, and how these appearances influence the entire festival to understand its contemporary role and cultural significance.

The *Hà Festival*, also known as the *Singing Ha Festival*, where “*Ha*” means “song” in the Jing language, so “singing *Ha*” literally means “singing songs.” The *Ha Festival* is a cultural carrier for the Jing ethnic group and is closely related to their religious beliefs, social history, music and dance, cuisine, and traditional attire.

The *Ha Festival* is held at the *Ha Pavilion* (Figure 5). Each village inhabited by the Jing people has a *Ha Pavilion*. Besides serving as the venue for singing *Ha* songs, the *Ha Pavilion* enshrines statues and memorial tablets of deities collectively worshipped by the entire village, as well as ancestral tablets of various surnames. Therefore, the *Ha Pavilion* functions both as a place for entertainment activities and as a temple and ancestral hall. The *Ha Festival* activities generally last about a week and are roughly divided into four parts: “*迎神* (Welcoming the Gods)”, “*祭神* (Worshipping the Gods)”, “*坐蒙* (Sitting at the Feast)” and “*送神* (Sending Off the Gods)”. According to the Chinese scholar Qi Jianling’s 2018 study *古弦新韵* the *Ha Festival* not only comprises these four parts but also conducts various rituals over five

³ As a major festival for the Jing ethnic group, the *Ha Festival* is celebrated with grandeur by the seaside, attracting large numbers of visitors around the China each year.

days. However, during the my fieldwork in mid-July 2024, it was found that the total duration of the Jing people's Ha Festival ceremonies has been extended to eight days. This indicates that the timing of the four rituals in the Ha Festival can change over time and with social transformations. Moreover, subtle changes are also occurring in the role of the *Đàn Bào* within the festival's rituals.

As I mentioned earlier, the local government and community have integrated the Jing ethnic group's Ha Festival and the *Đàn Bào* into tourism initiatives to create a distinctive cultural brand, thereby driving local economic development. This strategy is evident in the extension of the Ha Festival ceremonies, which encourages tourists to prolong their stay in the area. Visitors typically come from other parts of China, but the festival has also attracted international attendees. For instance, during this year's Ha Festival, I interviewed a Vietnamese visitor who traveled specifically from Vietnam to experience the Jing Ha Festival, curious to compare its similarities and differences with the Ha Festival in Vietnam, given their shared cultural roots. I will explain this Vietnamese views about how *Đàn Bào* plays a role in China-Vietnam relations in Chapter Five.

Moreover, the *Đàn Bào*, which previously featured solely in the "entertaining the gods" segment, is now integrated into various parts of the festival that highlight local culture for tourists. Beyond enjoying *Đàn Bào* performances, visitors can actively participate in the "Sitting at the Feast" segment. For a fee of 200 yuan, they can savor a traditional Jing lunch, with a portion of the proceeds donated to support local cultural heritage. Tourists are often eager to contribute, knowing they are helping preserve Jing traditions. During the feast, they are treated to live *Đàn Bào* performances accompanied by Jing musicians, creating an intimate and immersive cultural experience that not only boosts local tourism revenue but also fosters a deeper appreciation for Jing heritage.



Figure 5, photo of Hating (哈亭) from Jianling Qi 2018, p63

The “娱神 (entertaining the gods)” ritual typically takes place after the “welcoming the gods” and “worshipping the gods” ceremonies⁴:

Following the sacrificial rites, the 桃姑 (Tao Gu) begin to perform songs and dances accompanied by instruments such as the Đàn Bàu and the Jing gong. During the Ha Festival, the Tao Gu offer their performances every morning and evening until the festival concludes. Specifically, the Jing songs and dances accompanied by Đàn Bàu musicians within the ritual space of the Ha Festival serve three cultural functions:

1. Strengthening blessings and ethnic cohesion through devout chanting and singing. The Đàn Bàu musicians, Tao Gu, and other clergy members of the Ha Festival collectively represent the Jing populace in expressing gratitude, repayment, and praise to the deities, as well as in praying for favorable weather and abundant fisheries.

2. Enhancing the function of warding off evil through solemn Đàn Bàu music and traditional Jing dances dedicated to the gods. These dances are rich in religious significance; using dance to honor the gods and praying for blessings and protection

⁴ Qi Jianling: 从“桃姑”到“哈妹”——京族妇女文化角色变迁的人类学考察 (From 'Tao Gu' to 'Ha Mei'—An Anthropological Study on the Cultural Role Changes of Jing Women), *Journal of Minzu University of China*, 2016, Issue 5.

against evil has become a longstanding tradition.

3. Educating clan members through the solemn content of songs and dances. In such dignified rituals, the Đàn Bầu musicians and Tao Gu not only carry out the ceremonies but also transmit the traditional culture of the Jing people. They shape individual behaviors and influence the conduct and character formation of other clan members.

According to Qi Jianling's thesis (2018), the role of the Đàn Bầu in the Ha Festival was primarily associated with the “娛神 (entertaining the gods)” segment. However, during my July 2024 fieldwork research, it was discovered that the appearances of the Đàn Bầu at the Ha Festival in recent years have been folklorized to increase their frequency and cater to the demands of mass tourism. After the opening ceremony of the Ha Festival, Đàn Bầu musicians have been performing the Jing ethnic group's intangible cultural heritage at Golden Beach (Figure 6). By blending the Đàn Bầu with the seaside scenery, it provides a visual impact for tourists, making it easier for them to associate the Đàn Bầu with the maritime culture that the Jing people have passed down through generations. Remarkably, in 2023, the number of Đàn Bầu artists participating in these exhibitions at Golden Beach reached as many as 100 (Figure 7). After completing the Đàn Bầu performances at Golden Beach in the morning, the artists proceed to the Ha Pavilion in the afternoon for subsequent performances. During this period, a large number of domestic and international tourists, along with local residents, gather at Golden Beach and the Ha Pavilion to watch the Đàn Bầu performances.

Comparing 2023 with 2024, I noticed a significant change: while the number of Đàn Bầu performers has decreased, the distance between the audience and the performers has become much closer. In 2023, there was a large group of Đàn Bầu musicians, and the audience was positioned on a platform in front of the beach to observe the performances. However, the platform's distance made it difficult for visitors to see how the Đàn Bầu is played using a single string, sparking their curiosity. As a result, many visitors, as shown in Figure 8, would leave the platform and move behind the performers for a closer look. This brought them dangerously close to the

waves, with some even wading into the water to watch, creating obvious safety risks.

This observation may explain why, in 2024, the local tourism and cultural bureau adjusted the number of Đàn Bầu performers and reorganized the setup, allowing visitors to approach the musicians more safely. This new arrangement not only satisfied the visitors' curiosity about the instrument but also addressed safety concerns, making the experience more engaging and secure for everyone involved. However, this change also had its drawbacks. Without a designated platform for the audience, visitors tended to unconsciously crowd closer to the Đàn Bầu performers, eventually creating a certain level of chaos. This disruption caused some performers to halt their planned repertoire midway to accommodate impromptu requests, such as interviews from television crews and hands-on demonstrations for curious visitors wanting to experience the Đàn Bầu themselves.



Figure 6, photo from Peilin Li in Golden Beach, 14 July 2024.



Figure 7, photo from social media WeChat Official Account: 青春防城港

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/IvYp5BSIL9eDyKtrHNOz5g>

I believe that compared to its previous role of “娱神 (entertaining the gods)” in the Jing people’s Ha Festival, the *Đàn Bầu* now plays a more significant role in entertaining the people. During the 2023 performance featuring one hundred *Đàn Bầu* players from the Jing ethnic group, the local tourism planning department provided a unified platform for tourists to watch. However, due to the distance being too great and space being limited, many tourists wished to experience the charm of the *Đàn Bầu* up close. As a result, they stood behind the musicians during the performance to observe and appreciate the instrument closely. In the 2024 *Đàn Bầu* performance, although the number of performers decreased, the “line” between the *Đàn Bầu* players and the tourists had disappeared. As seen in Figure 2, the distance between the tourists and the performance had shortened. After each *Đàn Bầu* performance, tourists could even personally try playing the instrument themselves (Figure 8). Through direct interaction with the *Đàn Bầu*, visitors transition from passive spectators to active cultural participants, bridging the gap between themselves and Jing culture. This immersive experience allows them to move beyond surface-level appreciation and engage with a new cultural identity, fostering a sense of emotional resonance and ethnic connection. These changes have further increased the visibility of the *Đàn Bầu* and promoted the traditional culture of the Jing ethnic group.



Figure 8, photo from Peilin Li in Golden Beach, 14 July 2024.

During the my fieldwork, an interview was conducted with a Vietnamese tourist who had traveled a long distance. He expressed that when he saw the Jing people wearing traditional attire, playing the Đàn Bầu, and conversing with him in Vietnamese, he felt a deep sense of familiarity and was reminded of Vietnam's Ha Festival, despite the significant differences between the Ha Festival rituals of the Jing people and those in Vietnam. Whether in the traditional sacrificial rituals of the Ha Festival or in the modern convergence of ethnic cultures, this festival evokes shared historical memories between the Jing and Vietnamese peoples. It not only strengthens the internal connections among the Jing people in China but also enhances external connections between Jing communities in China and Vietnam, forming a bond of identity recognition and consolidating the ethnic consciousness of all Jing people.

2.2 Use in the Han People's Kang Wang Festival

Generations of Jing people have inhabited the three islands of Wanwei, Shanxin, and Wutou in Jiangping Town, Dongxing City. Traditionally, the Jing people had minimal interaction with other ethnic groups in the region, and significant estrangement existed due to historical reasons such as changes in Sino-Vietnamese relations. However, this situation changed dramatically with the initiation of sea reclamation project. In an environment where people from all ethnic groups worked together in unity, they deepened their understanding and mutual recognition (Qi Jianling 2018, 77). Based on long-term symbiotic relationships and social integration, the ethnic boundaries between them began to shift from clear to blurred, and Jing culture started to merge with Han culture. The Kang Wang Festival serves as an excellent illustrative example of this phenomenon.

The Kang Wang Festival (Figure 9) is a grand traditional folk event of the Han people in Wandong Village, an interwoven Jing-Han community with a history spanning nearly 300 years. The festival is divided into two parts occurring at the beginning and end of the year. Initially, from the sixth to the sixteenth day of the first lunar month, there is a collective “prayer for blessings (祈福),” during which the community prays for peace and good fortune for the region, villages, and each household. Later, starting from the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month of the same year, there is a collective and individual “repayment of blessings (还福)”⁵, involving offerings of the five sacrificial animals. After the worship ceremonies, a Tea-Picking Opera is performed for the entire village as a form of entertainment to repay the gods (ibid., 78). In the end-of-year worship performances, an unprecedented event occurred: a performance of the Jing people's *Đàn Bầu* (one-stringed zither) was featured for the first time in history (Figure 10).

⁵ It means that if your wishes are granted this year, you need to come and thank the gods for their help and make offerings of divine food and tea and alcohol.



Figure 9&10, The Kang Wang Festival, photo from Qi Jianling 2018, 78.

In contemporary Jing-Han interwoven communities, the cultural role played by the Jing people's *Đàn Bầu* within the ritual spaces of other brotherly ethnic groups embodies multiple functions: promoting ethnic identity, fostering interethnic friendship, and facilitating the integrated development of national identity.

2.3 Use in Important Ceremonial Events

Previously experiencing a gradual decline, the *Đàn Bầu*—a traditional musical instrument of the Jing people—has, following its designation as a national intangible cultural heritage item, increasingly functioned as a tangible embodiment of Jing culture. The instrument has reemerged not only within communities and cultural contexts where Jing and Han peoples are integrated but has also been prominently featured in a variety of opening ceremonial events (Figure 11). Moreover, it has represented China's Jing culture in international performances (Yiwen Liu, 2020), thereby showcasing the unique heritage of an ethnic group that spans two nations.



Figure 11, Đàn Bàu in opening ceremonial event, photo from Peilin Li took in the Jing museum.

2.4 Đàn Bàu in Museum Exhibition

Museums embody collective memory through the display of historical artifacts, which are often intertwined with national discourses shaping identity construction⁶ (Zhang et al., 2018). Entrusted with the important task of protecting and transmitting the traditional culture of the Jing ethnic group, the Jing Ethnic Museum opened in August 2009⁷ (Ling Chen, 2009). As a significant representative of Jing traditional culture and one of the carriers witnessing Jing cultural history, the Đàn Bàu is the most indispensable exhibit in the museum, occupying nearly half of the exhibition space.

The museum showcases various Đàn Bàu instruments from ancient to modern times and from large to small (Figure 12&13&14), along with the history of the Đàn Bàu's transmission in the Jing region, musical scores, and more.

⁶ Zhang, Carol Xiaoyue, Lawrence Hoc Nang Fong, Shina Li, and Tuan Phong Ly, 2019. "National identity and cultural festivals in postcolonial destinations", *Tourism Management*, 73:94-104.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.01.013>

⁷ From PRC newspaper, website :

https://baike.baidu.com/reference/9284259/533aYdO6cr3_z3kATKLazP73MiiQZ9SqrSBWuRzzqIP0XOpS5vpTp0g5Zkv-_h3GA6Fs5dvLtUb2c-IFUJC6fUQeOgrGvF_wQ

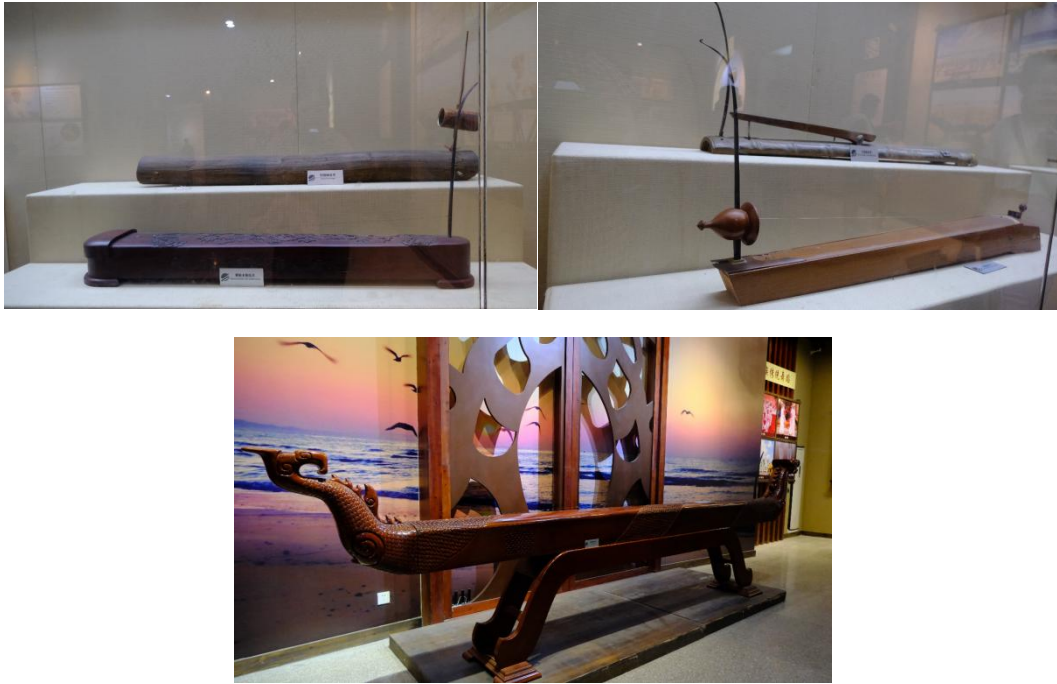


Figure 12&13&14, photos from Peilin Li took in the Jing museum.

2.5 Use in Jing Education

Establishing Public Welfare Classes Offering Free Đàn bầu Lessons

In 1999, Su Chunfa, an inheritor of the Đàn Bầu (one-stringed zither) art, committed himself to dedicating his life to the preservation and teaching of Đàn Bầu techniques, aiming to promote and revitalize Jing culture. At his own expense, he organized Đàn Bầu training classes and provided free instruction to children on the three islands inhabited by the Jing people. In 2008, the art of the Jing people's Đàn Bầu was listed as part of the first batch of intangible cultural heritage projects by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. In 2011, it was approved by the State Council for inclusion in the third batch of national intangible cultural heritage listings. Following the implementation of educational practice activities in Dongxing City, party committees and governments at all levels have shown great concern for the inheritance and development of Jing culture. The Municipal Propaganda Department secured special funds from higher authorities to support Su Chunfa in establishing a free Đàn Bầu training center for the Jing people, enabling more children who love

Jing culture to learn the art of the Đàn Bầu free of charge (Qi Jianling 2018, 89).

Meanwhile, local authorities have been actively taking measures, continuously investing funds in the preservation, inheritance, and development of the Jing people's Đàn Bầu art. In addition to offering Jing language courses and organizing Đàn Bầu interest classes at the only nine-year comprehensive Jing ethnic school and minority school in Fangchenggang City, a Đàn Bầu training base has been established within the Dongxing City Bureau of Culture and Sports (ibid., 90). Each year, the Fangchenggang City government hosts the Jing people's Ha Festival and the Sino-Vietnamese Border Jing People's Song Fair Day activities, where Chinese Jing Đàn Bầu masters exchange and refine their skills with Vietnamese folk artists. Government departments are increasingly emphasizing the protection and inheritance of the Jing people's intangible cultural heritage, widely conducting popularization activities in traditional Jing cultural education. In response to the current state of Jing cultural heritage, they continuously improve the teaching facilities of the Đàn Bầu art training base, regularly inviting expert instructors to provide lectures to teachers and outstanding students at the base, thereby enhancing the professional level of the educators (ibid., 91).

After the Đàn Bầu was introduced into Jing ethnic schools, the local government organized Đàn Bầu culture training for music teachers in Dongxing City in 2016. This was done to better research, protect, and transmit the national intangible cultural heritage—the Jing ethnic group's monochord culture—and to enhance the teaching level of art teachers. The training covered various aspects, including knowledge of the Jing Đàn Bầu and basic playing skills, integrating Jing ethnic characteristics into local classroom teaching.

Moreover, in recent years, the Guangxi Arts Institute has established a separate admission channel for students with special talents in the Đàn Bầu for the college entrance examination. An increasing number of students who study the Đàn Bầu have entered art colleges through this instrument.

2.6 Conclusion

Once on the verge of disappearing, the Đản Bầu has, following its inclusion in China's first National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, exemplified the Chinese government's renewed emphasis on preserving and promoting minority folk music cultures since the early 21st century. Today, Đản Bầu has not only been revitalized within the local community, but has also attracted numerous visitors from other region in China eager to experience it. For local residents, the Đản Bầu has evolved from a traditional Jing ethnic instrument into a tourism-oriented product that attracts visitors to Jing areas, promotes Jing culture, and boosts economic income. For outside visitors, by participating in and learning to play the Đản Bầu, they gain a deeper understanding of the Jing people's cultural history and the blending of Jing and Han traditions. Through my observations during the Jing Ha Festival, this cultural interaction is embodied in practices such as hands-on workshops where tourists learn to play the Đản Bầu, communal feasts where its music accompanies traditional meals, and live performances during local festivals like the Ha Festival, fostering a sense of cultural resonance and mutual appreciation between locals and visitors.

Now, the Đản Bầu plays a significant role in various activities and festivals of both the Jing and Han ethnic groups, and has even entered important educational fields such as the college entrance examination (GaoKao). The initiatives of local tourism, cultural, and educational departments play a significant economic and cultural role, ensuring the effective transmission and promotion of Đản Bầu art, further strengthening the Jing people's sense of identity and promoting integration among different local ethnic groups.

3. Language and Identity in Đàn Bầu Song Texts among the Jing Ethnic Group

Language and music play a central role in shaping cultural expression and identity, particularly for transnational communities like the Jing people, who inhabit the linguistic and cultural crossroads of China and Vietnam. Đàn Bầu is more than a tool for artistic expression—it is a vital part of how the Jing people connect with and redefine their identity. This chapter will explore the Đàn Bầu’s song texts, focusing on how language in these texts reflects and shapes the evolving identities of the Jing’s younger generations living along the Chinese-Vietnamese border, and highlight the Đàn Bầu song texts as a key site where language, music, and identity intersect. It aims to provide new insights into how the Jing people balance the preservation of cultural heritage with the realities of linguistic and social change.

3.1 Language Use in Đàn Bầu Song Texts

In the past, the folk repertoire of the Jing Đàn Bầu largely originated from traditional Vietnamese music. However, during its modern development, the Đàn Bầu gradually incorporated musical elements and folklore from the Han and Zhuang ethnic groups, evolving into a unique style that reflects the regional characteristics of the Jing community in China. Today, China has officially published instructional materials on the Đàn Bầu, such as *Đàn Bầu Tutorial* (独弦琴教程) by Chen Kunpeng and *Learn Đàn Bầu with Teacher Li Ping* (跟李平老师学习独弦琴) by Li Ping. The *Đàn Bầu Tutorial* includes a variety of compositions, ranging from adapted traditional Jing folk songs to newly composed Jing pieces and folk melodies from other Chinese ethnic groups. Notably, adaptations of folk songs dominate the repertoire, with 48 pieces accounting for 80% of the total (Zhang Chan 2011, 48-49).

The Đàn Bầu primarily serves as an accompaniment instrument during performances, often paired with song texts. During my interview with Jing Đàn Bầu musician Su Haizhen, I learned that many of the commonly performed pieces today

have been adapted through ongoing cultural exchanges in the everyday lives of the Jing and Han ethnic groups. For example, the Zhuang classic *The Folk Song Is Like a Spring River* (山歌好比春江水)(figure 15&16) has been rearranged to blend seamlessly with the Đàn Bầu. Performers sing the Zhuang song in Mandarin while accompanying themselves on the traditional Jing instrument. In addition to incorporating songs from other ethnic groups, the Jing have also adapted songs that celebrate Chinese national pride, such as *My Motherland* (我的祖国), for Đàn Bầu performance and singing.

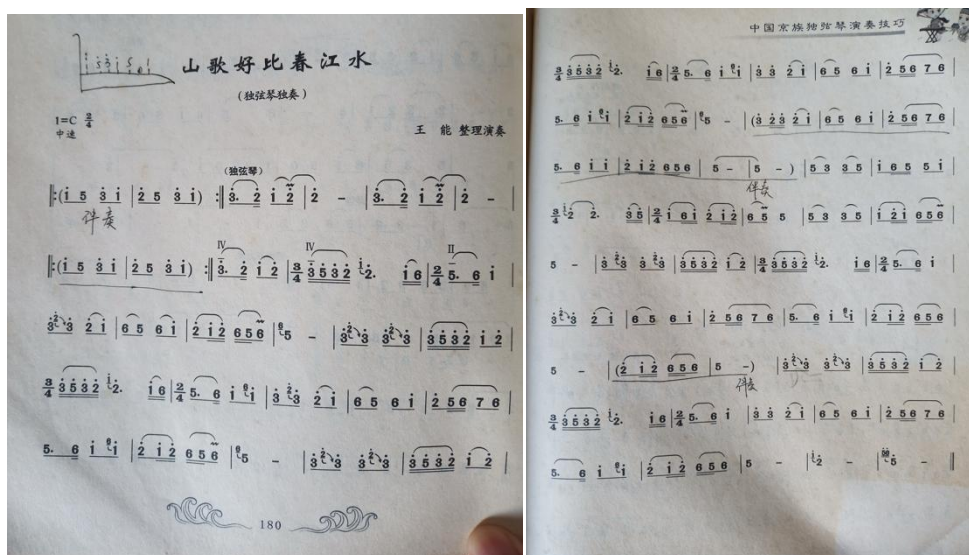


Figure 15&16, Figures 15&16 are the sheet music for *The Folk Song Is Like a Spring River*

Regarding bilingual song texts in Vietnamese and Chinese, Su noted that while some Đàn Bầu pieces still feature bilingual lyrics, their numbers are very limited. A notable example is the song *Crossing the Bridge as the Wind Blows* (过桥风吹 so called 京海琴韵). Beyond external cultural influences, Jing musicians also draw inspiration from their own community's fishing traditions. Representative compositions such as *The Four Seasons of the Fishing Village* (渔家四季歌) and *High Mountains and Flowing Water* (高山流水) show the fishermen life of Jing.

These examples illustrate the diversity and dynamism of language use in Đàn Bầu

song texts. On one hand, the integration of external cultural influences has driven a linguistic shift from Vietnamese to Chinese. On the other hand, inspiration from the Jing's traditional livelihood has imbued their music with a distinct cultural identity. This evolution of song text language is not only a reflection of cultural adaptation but also an important manifestation of the Jing people's efforts to reconstruct their identity in modern society.

3.2 Identity Shifts and Cultural Implications

It was not until the ethnic classification efforts of the 1950s that the Jing people formally established their cultural identity and political status as an ethnic group within China. Historically, they often existed as “others,” residing on the periphery of dominant local social structures (Jianling Qi 2018, 95).

Given the unique cross-border characteristics of frontier ethnic groups, the Jing people's ancestors have long lived in a state of uncertainty regarding their identity and social position. From a cultural and ethnic perspective, their familial and geographic ties to the Vietnamese Jing people across the border were replaced by formal international relations. While they sought to preserve their cultural traditions, the realities of their new environment necessitated cultural adaptation to reduce conflicts with local groups such as the Han and Zhuang peoples.

Preserving tradition is a symbol of cultural identity, but adapting to the environment is often necessary to secure political recognition within a modern nation-state (Zhou Jianxin and Lü Junbiao 2007, 288). In their early interactions with local Han, Zhuang, and other groups, the Jing people often adopted strategies to blur ethnic boundaries, allowing them to secure stable and favorable living conditions. However, during the 1970s, as relations between China and Vietnam deteriorated, the distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Jing people became a source of discrimination. This period profoundly affected their language, culture, and everyday lives, leading to a gradual loss of confidence in their traditional cultural heritage.

Since the 1980s, with the implementation of ethnic and religious policies, China's opening up to the world, and the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations, the Jing people have experienced a revival and reawakening of their ethnic consciousness. The cultural characteristics of the Jing ethnic group have been increasingly emphasized (Jianling Qi 2018, 95). This shift became particularly pronounced after the *Đàn Bàu* was included in China's first list of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, sparking a resurgence of ethnic pride among the Jing.

Today, the Jing people strive to avoid the awkwardness of ambiguous identity and actively seek to assert their voice and agency. In interviews, especially when interacting with media or academic research groups, Jing individuals often display a heightened awareness of their Chinese cultural identity and their desire to assert this identity confidently (ibid., 96). During my interviews with Jing individuals, I was struck by their strong emphasis on identifying with Chinese culture. When asked about potential identification with Vietnam, some interviewees even expressed offense, as they had never considered themselves as anything other than Chinese. They emphasized that the idea of being Vietnamese was irrelevant to their self-perception.

Furthermore, many Jing people sincerely expressed gratitude for China's prosperity and supportive policies, which they believe have significantly improved their quality of life compared to residents living just across the Vietnamese border. They regard this economic and social disparity as a testament to the advantages of their identity as Chinese citizens, reinforcing their sense of belonging to China. This narrative highlights how the Jing people's sense of identity has evolved through historical transitions and contemporary influences. The balance between preserving cultural traditions and adapting to political realities has been crucial in shaping their current ethnic identity and fostering a strong sense of cultural and national pride.

3.3 Identity and Language Proficiency in the New Generation

Due to their unique geographical location, Jing adolescents growing up on the three Jing Islands are typically trilingual, speaking Mandarin, local Cantonese, and Vietnamese. However, for Vietnamese, most Jing youth can only speak it conversationally, often restricted to communication with their elders at home, while lacking the ability to read or write in the language. Earlier generations of Jing youth were reluctant to speak Vietnamese in public for fear of discrimination by the Han majority (Jianling Qi 2018, 95). Additionally, Vietnamese is rarely used in school environments, further contributing to its marginalization in the daily lives of Jing adolescents.

Language plays a critical role in the formation and preservation of ethnic identity. Research indicates that for the first and second generations, their ethnic language serves as a key marker of identity. However, by the third and fourth generations, this connection often weakens (Martin, Arunachalam, and Forbes-Mewett 2023, 85-109). For the Jing ethnic group, Vietnamese is their mother tongue and serves as a core component of their cultural heritage. Its decline not only threatens linguistic diversity but also poses challenges to maintaining Jing identity.

Đàn Bầu music originates from Jing culture and is deeply rooted in the everyday life of the Jing people (Zhang Chan 2011, 59). It serves as an important medium where language and identity intertwine. Dr. Zhang Chan believes that in Đàn Bầu performances, the rhythm of the music, particularly the mixed beats, is clearly influenced by the culture of fishing. When the Jing people go fishing at sea, the rhythm of rowing varies in length and speed, and the singing rhythm adapts to the pattern of rowing, gradually forming a type of free rhythm characteristic of Jing melodies (ibid., 60). The use of Vietnamese in Đàn Bầu song texts serves as a powerful reminder of the Jing people's cultural heritage, even as proficiency in the language diminishes. This connection between language and music is central to understanding how language proficiency among the younger generation contributes to the negotiation of cultural identity.

Recognizing the importance of preserving ethnic languages, the Chinese government has taken steps to address the challenges facing Vietnamese within the Jing community. Concerned about the potential loss of the Jing language, the education authorities have introduced a range of supportive policies to integrate Jing cultural education into schools. For instance, schools in Dongxing City have introduced Vietnamese language classes starting from the third grade, marking a significant shift. This initiative aims to end the historical pattern of Jing students only speaking but not reading or writing in their native language. By institutionalizing Vietnamese as a regular subject, these efforts not only provide students with formal literacy in their ethnic language but also incorporate traditional Jing culture into the curriculum to prevent its extinction.

This effort to revitalize the Jing language, alongside the continued use of *Đàn Bầu* in cultural practices, highlights the interdependence of language and music in maintaining the group's cultural identity. The evolving language dynamics among Jing youth provide important insights into their processes of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation. Proficiency in Mandarin and Cantonese facilitates their integration into broader Chinese society, but greater attention should be given to the use of Vietnamese as the Jing people's mother tongue, as it plays a crucial role in shaping their ethnic identity.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the relationship between language and identity in the Jing community, focusing on the role of *Đàn Bầu* music and its connection to cultural transmission. It discussed the challenges faced by the younger generation in maintaining Vietnamese, their ethnic language, while adapting to Mandarin and Cantonese. Efforts by the education system, such as integrating Vietnamese language classes and opening of *Đàn Bầu* teaching classes, are highlighted as crucial in preserving linguistic heritage. The bilingual nature of *Đàn Bầu* lyrics reflects the

community's efforts to balance cultural adaptation with the preservation of their traditional identity. Language remains central to the Jing's negotiation of ethnic identity in a changing social landscape.

4. Vietnamese Traditional Music Usage and Identity Construction in the Vietnamese Diaspora and Jing

Since the onset of the globalization-driven waves of migration in the previous century, the Vietnamese diaspora has grown significantly, particularly in developed Western countries, with communities becoming increasingly diverse. Vietnamese diaspora communities around the world often use the performance or singing of Vietnamese music to alleviate feelings of homesickness, and the Đàn Bầu is one of the instruments they frequently use. However, despite this shared musical practice, the sense of ethnic identity in different diaspora contexts can vary significantly. This chapter will explore the use of traditional Vietnamese music and songs within the Vietnamese community in America, Canada and Australia, comparing the identity construction of Vietnamese diasporas in Australia with that of the Jing ethnic group in China. It also will explore the role of Vietnamese traditional music and instrument in helping diaspora groups maintain connections with their traditions while adapting to new cultural contexts, reflecting the unique social and political concerns of these communities. Drawing on the works of Cannon (2012&2021) , Lisa Beebe (2017) and Nguyen (2012), this chapter will analyze Đàn Bầu as a symbol of cultural pride in the Vietnamese diaspora and investigates how it links personal and national identities, while adapting to evolving notions of ethnicity in the diasporic context.

4.1 The Historical Background and Identity of the Vietnamese Diaspora

After the end of the war in 1975, political instability and threats of violence led to waves of approximately 1.6 million Vietnamese fleeing the country (Miller 2015). Today, the global Vietnamese diaspora numbers around 4 million, with half of them residing in the United States (ibid.). Large Vietnamese communities can also be found in countries outside Southeast Asia, such as Australia, Canada, and various Western and Central European nations (Beebe 2017, 133). The Vietnamese diaspora communities abroad are largely composed of people from South Vietnam, who left

their homeland with a deep resentment towards the communist regime in North Vietnam. As a result, their sense of identity and nostalgia for their homeland are complex. In contrast, the Jing ethnic group in China does not strictly qualify as part of the Vietnamese diaspora, as they have not changed their original place of residence. Instead, their shift in political status has led to a unique sense of identity that distinguishes them from overseas Vietnamese communities.

For Vietnamese Australians, the *Đàn Bầu* serves as a cultural vehicle connecting the past, celebrating the present, and exploring future possibilities (Beebe 2017, 135). This is largely because the *Đàn Bầu* is deeply rooted in Vietnam's pre-colonial and pre-communist history, allowing Vietnamese artists to express and preserve this historical narrative while maintaining a deliberate distance from the current sociopolitical order in Vietnam (ibid., 134). The 2016 Adelaide Vietnamese Traditional Music Festival showcased and preserved traditional Vietnamese music through concerts, forums, and workshops, strategically avoiding associations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and highlighting the performance politics within the diaspora. Melbourne artists Lê Tuấn Hùng and Đặng Kim Hiên combined Vietnamese instruments with Western musical styles to explore cross-cultural identities (ibid., 135). Their works, such as *Nostalgic Melodies* and *On Trembling Strings*, reflect their auditory memories of Vietnam and their lived experiences as mothers in Australia. Additionally, the Vietnamese diaspora in Canada used the Toronto Lunar New Year Festival to negotiate their identity, blending Vietnamese and Canadian cultures by performing the South Vietnamese and Canadian national anthems, creating new meanings through juxtaposition (ibid., 136).

In the United States, which hosts the largest Vietnamese immigrant population (over 50%), Vietnamese immigrants live at the intersection of mainstream American culture and Vietnamese culture. They are constantly seeking a balance and integration between these two cultures. This process of cultural fusion has given rise to a unique Vietnamese-American identity. This hybrid identity is characterized by a unique yet contradictory nature, where individuals neither fully belong to the United States nor to Vietnam (Nguyen 2012, 131-136). The formation of this hybrid identity stems from

the marginalization that Vietnamese Americans experience in American society. They neither fully assimilate into mainstream culture nor fully return to Vietnamese culture. This marginal position between two cultures has facilitated their exploration and negotiation of their own identity.

4.2 The Role of Vietnamese Traditional Music in Diaspora Communities

Whether in the Vietnamese diaspora communities in Western countries or in the Jing ethnic group communities in China, traditional Vietnamese music is often used as an important means of expressing ethnic identity. South Vietnamese immigrants maintain their connection to their homeland by learning and playing traditional Vietnamese instruments, such as the *Đàn Bầu*, reinforcing their ethnic identity through community activities and festivals, and incorporating music into daily life, such as playing at family gatherings, thus preserving their Vietnamese cultural traditions (Nguyen 2012, 112-121). However, despite being viewed as a key expression of cultural identity, the presence of Vietnamese music in these communities is not stable. The scarcity of such performances highlights the difficulties of maintaining and expressing Vietnamese identity in environments with higher levels of assimilation, such as in Western countries. Issues like fewer performances, low attendance, and the younger generation's lack of interest in traditional culture reflect the disconnect between the idealized concept of Vietnamese culture and the lived realities of community members.

Similarly, the Jing ethnic group faces comparable challenges. With the widespread use of smartphones and short videos, most of the leisure time of young people is occupied by video games and fast-paced videos, leaving them with little time to consider how to preserve traditional Jing music, let alone reflect on the relationship between traditional music and ethnic identity. In an interview with a 25-year-old Jing woman about identity, she told me she had never thought about the importance of Jing traditional music for their culture, believing that others would care for the preservation of traditional culture, and she didn't need to worry about it. And

those “others” are often the older generation of Jing musicians.

Moreover, during my fieldwork, I observed that during festivals like the Ha Festival, the majority of the audience were middle-aged individuals or children under 10 accompanied by their parents, while young people in their twenties were very few. This raises the question of how, when traditional music no longer serves as a means of identity expression for the younger generation, and is instead replaced by fast-paced “catchy” music from short videos, the damage to the original sense of ethnic identity is quite evident.

4.3 Comparison Between Vietnamese Diaspora and the Jing Ethnic Group

The Vietnamese diaspora and the Jing ethnic group, while sharing similar traditional cultural elements such as music, language, and clothing, exhibit significant differences in terms of identity and emotional connections to Vietnam. This chapter will compare the differences between Vietnamese diaspora and the Jing ethnic group in terms of living customs, culture, language, and identity, and explain the reasons for these differences.

Commonalities:

1. Whether among overseas Vietnamese diaspora communities or the Jing ethnic group, traditional music events often feature participants dressed in traditional Vietnamese attire—Áo Dài and Áo Gấm. These events are organized with the primary aim of promoting their ethnic culture and attracting external attention (Beebe 2017, 140), while also ensuring the preservation of their traditional heritage. For instance, the Jing ethnic group in China aims to attract members of other Chinese ethnic groups to visit their region and enjoy Đàn Bầu performances, thereby promoting tourism and raising awareness of Jing traditional culture. In contrast, Vietnamese communities in Western countries focus on using the Đàn Bầu to capture the attention of the broader society and engage the younger generation.

2. While contributing to the musical culture of their respective regions, they also

strive to preserve their linguistic traditions and cultural expressions, particularly through traditional music.

3. The older generation places more emphasis on preserving traditional culture, while the younger generation is more influenced by mainstream culture and tends to assimilate into the dominant society. According to Qi Jianling's fieldwork, for Jing youth born in the 1970s and some from the 1980s, there is a clear understanding of the historical reality of the Jing as a cross-border ethnic group. Many can recount migration stories passed down from older generations. However, their childhood memories are often marked by experiences of being derogatorily referred to as “安南崽 (Annam kids)” by local Han residents. Living in close proximity to Han communities, Jing youth typically used Vietnamese only within their homes, while their interactions with Han peers were conducted primarily in local Cantonese (Qi Jianling 2018, 95). For them in particular, actively integrating into Han society and speaking Mandarin or the local dialect became one of the conditions for avoiding marginalization.

Moreover, in 2001, the Chinese government intensified the promotion of Mandarin, further weakening ethnic languages and dialects, which contributed to the low prevalence of modern Vietnamese. Although the government later recognized the importance of preserving ethnic languages and cultures and introduced measures for their protection and inheritance, the prevalence of Vietnamese has not significantly improved. These linguistic influences have had further consequences for the younger generation—the children of these 1970s and 1980s-born Jing youth—who have grown increasingly unfamiliar with Jing language. For instance, during my fieldwork in July 2024, I conducted random interviews with five Jing youth aged 14–25. All five respondents reported minimal knowledge of Vietnamese, stating they primarily communicated with their grandparents in local Cantonese and could only manage simple greetings or numbers in Vietnamese.

For multicultural immigrant countries like the United States and Australia, young generations of Vietnamese face similar linguistic challenges. Even though Vietnamese may still be spoken at home, the influence of mainstream capitalist culture, as well as

the language used in schools and broader society, has led many Vietnamese youths to increasingly regard English as their primary language.

Differences:

The primary reason for the differences in identity between the Vietnamese diaspora and the Jing ethnic group lies in the distinct historical periods during which they separated from Vietnam's political control and society. As previously mentioned, the Jing ethnic group formally became part of China following the Sino-French Treaty of 1885, a period when Vietnam was under French colonial rule. In contrast, the Vietnamese diaspora, particularly from South Vietnam, left the country mainly due to dissatisfaction with North Vietnamese governance, often fleeing under coercive circumstances. Although both groups are ethnically Vietnamese, their attitudes toward Vietnam differ significantly. Furthermore, the Cold War aftermath highlights a stark contrast in the mainstream cultures and ideological systems they integrated into. Western countries like the United States, where many South Vietnamese immigrants settled, adopted capitalist policies that aligned with the political aspirations of these migrants. On the other hand, the Jing ethnic group became part of China, a socialist state. These differing ideological contexts have profoundly shaped their post-migration lives and identities.

1. In Australia, the legacy of anti-communist sentiment among Vietnamese communities strongly influences their political, social, and cultural activities. As a result, Vietnamese musicians in Australia are cautious about associating politically with the socialist state of Vietnam. In contrast, the relationship between the Jing ethnic group and Vietnam does not involve the political and ideological conflict of “communism.”

2. Vietnamese musicians in Australia incorporate traditional instruments such as the Đàn tranh, Đàn Bầu, and Đàn nguyệt into new compositions to express their identification with South Vietnam and nostalgia for their homeland (Beebe 2017, 146). While the Jing ethnic group also integrates new elements into their musical compositions, their creative works are often more grounded in the realities of daily life and performed on the Đàn Bầu. Unlike the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia, the

Jing's musical instruments are fewer in variety, and their compositions do not serve as expressions of nostalgia or political affiliation with South Vietnam. I believe that the contemporary Jing ethnic group is more susceptible to ideological influence from China primarily because they became part of China earlier than other Vietnamese diaspora communities joined Western countries. Additionally, their long history of interaction with local ethnic groups, such as the Han, has further facilitated their integration into Chinese society. This historical connection has made it emotionally easier for them to integrate into Chinese society. Additionally, during the period of French colonial rule, the Jing people had a weak sense of national and political identity with Vietnam. At that time, people primarily focused on food rather than political ideologies. Dr. Qi Jianling, during her fieldwork with the Jing people, discovered that when engaging with external interviews, particularly with media and academic research groups, the Jing people's awareness of emphasizing their Chinese cultural identity and securing their narrative agency becomes significantly heightened. During these interviews, the Jing people sincerely express their gratitude for China's prosperity, which has resulted in their standard of living being significantly higher than that of residents on the Vietnamese border (Qi Jianling 2018, 96).

In contrast, South Vietnamese immigrants differ significantly as their diaspora occurred after the Cold War, a period characterized by intense ideological awareness. By that time, those South Vietnamese who were able to emigrate had already transitioned out of the peasant class in terms of material conditions. These individuals were no longer merely seeking basic sustenance but rather spiritual and ideological fulfillment. Consequently, when they played instruments and sang traditional cultural songs, their expressions of nostalgia also carried richer political aspirations and emotional depth.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the historical background of Vietnamese diaspora communities in various regions and explored the role of music in shaping their

identity. It has also compared the cultural, linguistic, and identity-related differences between overseas Vietnamese communities and the Jing ethnic group in China, while explaining the historical and contextual factors behind these distinctions.

For Vietnamese diaspora communities, particularly in Western countries like Australia and the United States, the *Đàn Bầu* is closely tied to expressions of nostalgia and resistance against the historical narratives of the Vietnamese Communist Party. *Đàn Bầu* is utilized to construct collective memories of South Vietnam, blending traditional Vietnamese music with new cultural elements from their host countries. This approach aims to resonate with younger generations and preserve the uniqueness of Vietnamese cultural identity within a multicultural context. Such reinvention underscores the diaspora's need to reconcile political dissonance with cultural continuity.

In contrast, the Jing ethnic group in China does not associate the *Đàn Bầu* with resistance to Vietnam's Communist Party or a longing for their ancestral homeland. Instead, it serves as a symbol of cultural integration and ethnic identity. My findings indicate that the Jing people's prolonged integration into Chinese society, combined with their historical interactions with the Han majority, has fostered a dual identity. They embrace their ethnic traditions while also affirming their Chinese citizenship. Performances of *Đàn Bầu* during Jing festivals are less about asserting a distinctive political identity and more about celebrating their unique position within China's multi-ethnic framework.

5. The Role of the Đàn Bầu in Sino-Vietnamese Relations

5.1 The Role of Đàn Bầu in China-Vietnam Cultural Exchange

The historical interactions between China and Vietnam have been intricate and multifaceted. At times, the two nations have shared a bond akin to that of brothers, while at other times, conflicts have erupted between them. Specifically, in the context of the China-Vietnam border region, including the Jing ethnic group and other Chinese ethnic communities, there were two notable periods of heightened tension with Vietnam in modern history.

The first occurred after the Vietnam War, during which the China-Vietnam border experienced persistent disturbances, including grassroots conflicts. During conversations with my grandparents, I learned about certain aspects of that era's border disputes, details not commonly covered in official reports. For instance, local residents reportedly formed small groups to engage in stone-throwing skirmishes along the border. At that time, the Jing people, due to their historical association with the Vietnamese ethnic group, often faced discrimination from local Han and other ethnic groups. This led to their reluctance to speak Vietnamese or celebrate ethnic festivals, causing the development of the Đàn Bầu to regress during this period.

The second period was during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Chinese government implemented strict lockdown measures on border regions. Even a single reported case of the virus would result in a citywide lockdown lasting 14 days. During this time, incidents of Vietnamese individuals clandestinely crossing the border into Jing areas were reported, often prolonging the lockdowns and causing widespread frustration among local residents. During the pandemic, public performances and training classes for the Đàn Bầu were suspended, as the Chinese government enforced strict restrictions on gatherings in shared spaces. Consequently, the Đàn Bầu's role in Sino-Vietnamese cultural exchanges came to a temporary halt during this period.

In ancient Chinese historical records, such as *太乐令壁记* (around AD 465–520)(He Zhengrong 2013, 107) and *Tang Dynasty's Music Tribute of the Pyu*

Kingdom(Xu Xuya & Li Xiaoliang, 2004, 118-122), these are documented that the monochord from the ancient Pyu Kingdom (now central and southern Myanmar) was among the musical instruments presented as tributes to the Tang court. The Pyu's offering of musical instruments served dual purposes: on one hand, it was a strategic move by the Nanzhao King Yimouxun to express allegiance to the Tang Dynasty through the "barbarian" music of the Pyu Kingdom (ibid.). On the other hand, it reflected the Pyu Kingdom's efforts to establish diplomatic relations with the Tang court, aiming to break free from Nanzhao's control and improve its domestic political situation. Thus, the monochord has historically served as a bridge for fostering emotional and diplomatic connections with neighboring countries. In its modern cultural commodification, the monochord has given rise to performance troupes that operate on a group basis, continuing to sustain and promote cultural exchanges between China and other nations (Zhou Ru, 2022, 67).

San Yue San Festival (the third day of the third lunar month) is a significant traditional festival for the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi. In 2019, the "Jingmei Ensemble," a *Đàn Bầu* performance group from Dongxing City's Jingmei *Đàn Bầu* training class, performed the piece *过桥风吹*(*Crossing the Bridge in the Wind*) at the overseas venue of the Three March Three Festival at Hanoi University in Vietnam, fostering cultural exchange between China and Vietnam⁸. According to XBY, a member of the Jingmei Ensemble, Vietnamese audiences were familiar with the song because the melody is the same, and it is well-known in Vietnam, though the lyrics differ slightly. Despite the language barrier, the Vietnamese audience responded enthusiastically, with many joining in the singing. Through their shared understanding of the melody, the performers and audience experienced a sense of connection and familiarity (Zhou Ru, 2022, 67-68).

Historically, the Chinese Jing ethnic group and the Vietnamese have invited each other to celebrate the Ha Festival, where *Đàn Bầu* performances are integral to the rituals (ibid.). During my fieldwork in July 2024 at the Jing Ha Festival, I encountered

⁸ 明天,看广西最美丽的风情! (2019-04-03) <https://page.om.qq.com/page/O4M6ibBBPUIT1FTHc-zYQhQw0>

a Vietnamese YouTube blogger who shared his views on the Jing Ha Festival and the Đàn Bầu. He expressed enthusiasm about seeing Đàn Bầu performances at the Ha Festival in China, which reminded him of the Vietnamese Đàn Bầu and evoked a strong sense of ethnic connection with the Jing people who could play the instrument and speak Vietnamese. He appreciated that the Jing people have preserved their traditional culture and instruments, reflecting shared ethnic pride.

Additionally, I interviewed a Jing youth, Li Lujun, who plays the Đàn Bầu. He expressed great pride in being both Jing and Chinese. Although he does not speak Vietnamese, he and his friends often sing *过桥风吹(Crossing the Bridge in the Wind)* in both Vietnamese and Chinese while playing the Đàn Bầu, showcasing a blend of cultural traditions.

5.2 The Role of Đàn Bầu in Sino-Vietnamese Trade Exchanges

In the 1990s, the Jing community entered a period of commercial prosperity, engaging in extensive trade through the China-Vietnam trade network. Their transactions included a variety of goods such as seafood, daily necessities, hardware, and household appliances (Zhou Ru, 2022, 69). Meanwhile, with the growing popularity of the Đàn Bầu training programs in Dongxing City, the demand for Đàn Bầu surged, causing a supply shortage in the local market. To address this demand, many training programs collaborated with Vietnamese manufacturers, directly importing Đàn Bầu at prices ranging from 600 to 2,000 RMB, creating a new trade link between China and Vietnam (ibid.).

Jing Đàn Bầu musician SF further utilized his musical talents to foster cross-border trade with Vietnam. He recalled that when he played the Đàn Bầu during his business trips in Vietnam, it resonated strongly with the Vietnamese, evoking a deep sense of cultural connection (ibid.). These performances not only reinforced mutual cultural recognition between the two nations but also enhanced social interactions and cultural ties on the foundation of cross-border trade.

Moreover, the Chinese Đàn Bầu training market has gradually developed into a robust industry. Vietnamese-made Đàn Bầu, with its low production costs, has become a significant commodity in China-Vietnam trade (ibid., 70). By serving as a cultural bridge, đàn bầu music has not only brought the Jing and Vietnamese peoples closer together but also effectively promoted cultural exchange and cooperation, injecting new vitality into the economic and trade relations between the two countries.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has emphasized the critical role of the Đàn Bầu in the intricate history and evolving dynamics of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Whether performed during the Ha Festival in China or the overseas San Yue San festival, Đàn Bầu performances showcased their ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, fostering a shared identity and connection between the Jing people and the Vietnamese.

Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted the Đàn Bầu's significance beyond its cultural realm, extending to its impact on Sino-Vietnamese economic exchanges. The growth of Đàn Bầu training markets and partnerships with Vietnamese manufacturers illustrate its integration into cross-border trade networks. Especially, Jing musicians, such as SF, used the Đàn Bầu not merely as a tool for artistic expression but also as a medium to evoke cultural resonance with Vietnamese counterparts, promoting trade relations and strengthening cross-border interactions.

6. Conclusion

The Đàn Bầu, a significant symbol of Jing culture in China, has played a crucial role in reconstructing the modern identity of the Jing ethnic group through its integration into ethnic festivals, language, songs and other aspects. Once at risk of being lost, Jing Đàn Bầu performance techniques gained recognition and revival only after the instrument was designated as part of China's first national intangible cultural heritage list. Beyond serving as a cultural emblem, the Đàn Bầu has fostered cultural exchanges between the Jing and other ethnic groups and attracted domestic and international tourists to the Jing Ha Festival, boosting local tourism. In interactions during these festivals, particularly those involving young Jing artists, the Đàn Bầu has become a medium for showcasing the unique charm of Jing culture, further strengthening the community's collective identity.

The Vietnamese language plays a crucial role in shaping the ethnic identity of Jing youth. Bilingual Đàn Bầu lyrics, such as those in *过桥风吹* (*Crossing the Bridge in the Wind*) reflect the community's effort to balance cultural adaptation to mainstream Chinese society with the preservation of traditional identity. While the government's educational initiatives in the early 21st century introduced Vietnamese language courses into Jing courses to support the preservation of Jing linguistic heritage, the middle and younger generations continue to face challenges in their language choices. In addition to the discrimination suffered by the Jing people after the Vietnam War, the widespread use of Mandarin and local Cantonese has diluted the community's reliance on Vietnamese to some extent, further influencing the reconstruction of Jing ethnic identity.

The identity construction of the Vietnamese diaspora and the Jing ethnic group differs significantly. For the Vietnamese diaspora, the Đàn Bầu serves both as a means of preserving the collective memory of South Vietnam and as a tool to resist Vietnamese political narratives. The younger generation of the overseas Vietnamese community increasingly lacks familiarity with traditional Vietnamese culture,

including the Đàn Bầu, as mainstream Western modern culture continues to challenge their cultural distinctiveness. In contrast, for the Jing ethnic group, the Đàn Bầu primarily symbolizes cultural integration. Through long-term societal assimilation, the Jing people have embraced both their ethnic traditions and constructed a dual identity as Chinese citizens. Moreover, Jing youth performers willingly present Jing Đàn Bầu music during various festivals and in different regions, including Vietnam. This not only expresses their ethnic pride but also fosters cultural resonance with Vietnamese communities.

The Đàn Bầu has played a significant role not only in fostering cultural connections between China and Vietnam but also in facilitating economic interactions. With the expansion of the Đàn Bầu market, trade relations between the two countries have deepened. Particularly in cross-border trade, Jing musicians have utilized Đàn Bầu performances as cultural bridges, simultaneously advancing Sino-Vietnamese cultural exchange and driving the establishment of commercial networks.

Overall, this thesis has shown that Jing Đàn Bầu occupies a unique position in the preservation of Jing culture, language transmission, and transnational interactions. The identity of the Jing ethnic group is not merely a straightforward inheritance of cultural traditions but rather a complex and dynamic process. This process is shaped by historical and geopolitical factors and continues to evolve in the context of contemporary globalization and modernization. Đàn Bầu, as both a witness and a bridge in this transformation, serves as a vital link between Jing traditions and modern culture, as well as friendship between China and Vietnam.

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