



Investigating the Transmission Process of Taoist Funeral Music in the Context of Education and Instruction in Guizhou Province, China

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Abstract

Taoism, deeply rooted in Chinese culture, is a testament to the nation's heritage and serves as a central element within the broader Chinese civilization. Taoism's rich tradition encompasses funeral ceremonies, a crucial facet of human culture that bids farewell to the departed and honors their memory. The objective of this study is to investigate the transmission process of Taoist funeral music within the context of education and instruction in Guizhou Province, China. The research site, Zunyi City in Guizhou, is strategically located, sharing its borders with Sichuan Province, the birthplace of Taoism, making it an ideal setting for this investigation. Key informants include scholars, casual informants, and general informants, carefully selected based on their expertise and experience in Taoist funeral music. Data analysis relies on qualitative methods, including observation and interviews, to extract rich insights. The results reveal a multifaceted transmission process, including private transmission, accumulation of practice, scripted guidance, oral and heart instruction, and imitation. This study underscores the importance of preserving and transmitting this musical heritage and suggests strategies for its continued safeguarding, particularly in the face of modernization challenges.

Keywords: Taoism, funeral music, transmission, Guizhou Province, cultural heritage

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1. Introduction

Taoism, deeply intertwined with the historical and cultural heritage of China, is a repository of the nation's rich heritage (Adshead, 2016; Litzinger, 2000). It represents the essence of local culture and stands as a pivotal element within the broader spectrum of Chinese civilization. Moreover, Taoism holds the distinguished position of being the state religion of China, a tradition that has endured for approximately 1900 years (Goossaert, 2020). In contemporary China, Taoism takes on two distinct forms, with the Quanzhen

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Church and the Zhengyi Church as its primary factions. Quanzhen Taoist priests are known for their unwavering adherence to stringent rules and regulations. These Taoist clergy, often referred to as Huo Ju Taoist priests, boast a considerable following, comprising both devout believers and semi-professional adherents. The ideological tenets of Quanzhen Taoism delve deep into the origins of Taoism itself, tracing its lineage to pre-Qin philosophical thought. It underscores the practice of dual cultivation, emphasizing the harmonious integration of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism into the fabric of life (Liu, 2012; Hui, 2020).

Funeral ceremonies constitute an integral facet of human culture, serving as a solemn rite to bid farewell to the departed and provide a sanctuary for the souls of the deceased. These rituals are steeped in human emotions, anchored in the concepts of sacrifice and remembrance. Across different regions, funeral customs manifest in various forms, encompassing earth burial, cremation, water burial, and more. In the context of Chinese society, Taoist altars, Buddhist altars, and other forms of witchcraft sects play pivotal roles in organizing funeral ceremonies. These ceremonies encompass various stages, including death rites, funeral proceedings, memorial services, and the final journey of burial (Weller, 2000; Davis, 2001; Chau, 2019).

The concept of the "belief system" holds profound significance in Chinese traditional rituals and religious practices. It exerts a guiding influence on the structure and conduct of these rituals throughout their historical evolution. This concept broadly encompasses belief as a cognitive aspect and ritual as a behavioral aspect. Sound and music emerge as pivotal mediums and means to amplify and perpetuate the ambiance and spirit of these ceremonies. Consequently, for researchers delving into Chinese ritual music, the triad of belief, ritual, and music forms an inseparable whole. Over the course of decades, research into ritual music has significantly expanded the boundaries of academic discourse. This exploration has ushered in a new era in the investigation of theoretical methodologies. Scholars increasingly recognize the imperative of comprehending the belief system from the vantage point of musicology. This approach allows for a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the underpinnings of traditional Chinese music (Cao Benye, 2010; Mu, 2012; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

Since the 1980s, a cohort of Chinese traditional music scholars, equipped with deep-rooted local academic traditions, has tapped into the reservoirs of international ethnomusicology and other related humanities and social science theories. This fusion of knowledge has yielded essential academic concepts and practical experiences in the realm of ritual music. As a result, the academic sphere now boasts a burgeoning theoretical framework and practical methodology for dissecting the Chinese belief system and the regulatory framework governing ritual music. Against the backdrop of this vibrant academic atmosphere, research and exploration of traditional culture have emerged as pivotal pursuits in China's domestic social science landscape (Yung, 2019; Yao et al., 2023).

Taoism, as an indigenous religion deeply embedded in the heartland of China, represents the essence of Chinese traditional culture. This cultural heritage has persevered through the crucible of history, continually absorbing the rich essence of China's fertile soil. Through integration and crystallization, Taoism has blossomed into China's national religion, imprinting its influence on the nation's politics, economy, and culture. Its historical genesis traces back to the pre-Qin era, with formal institutionalization occurring during the middle and late Eastern Han Dynasties. This heritage, spanning nearly two millennia, distinguishes Taoism as the sole religion founded by the Chinese people within China. It is often referred to as a local religion, serving as one of the three spiritual pillars of the ruling class, alongside Confucianism and Buddhism (Zhang, 2015; Wright, 2020).

In sum, while Taoism as a state religion has been the subject of extensive study by experts and scholars over the years, scant attention has been paid to the enduring tradition of Taoist funeral music still reverberating in Guizhou, China. The inhabitants of Zunyi City in Guizhou Province, China, embrace Taoism as a way of life. They have been steeped in the melodic strains of Taoist funeral music since their formative years, bearing witness to the vivid tapestry of Taoist rituals. This profound personal connection resonates with the field of ethnomusicology. As China advances steadily toward modernization, the traditional beliefs of the local populace in Taoism have shown signs of waning, endangering the transmission of Taoist funeral music (Xin et al., 2022; Wang & Chuangprakhon, 2023). The urgency of preserving and transmitting this musical heritage cannot be overstated. It is against this backdrop that the study of Guizhou Taoist funeral music has emerged as a fervent research pursuit. The objective of this study is to investigate the transmission process of Taoist funeral music within the context of education and instruction in Guizhou Province, China.

2. Literature review

2.1 Historical Overview of Taoism in Guizhou

Taoism, an indigenous Chinese religion, has played a significant role in shaping the socio-political landscape and cultural tapestry of ancient China. As the only religion with roots deeply embedded in Chinese soil, it is often referred to as a local religion. Taoist priests uphold the tenets and practices of this ancient faith, which are central to Taoist belief. These rituals address the spiritual and psychological needs of followers, including commemoration of the deceased, prayers for a fruitful life, and the expulsion of malevolent forces (Berling, 2005).

Taoism's presence in Guizhou can be traced back to the Tang and Song Dynasties, when it was introduced through the efforts of rulers and leaders. Two prominent factions, Zhengyi and Quanzhen, were instrumental in its propagation. During the Southern Song

Dynasty, Taoism found fertile ground in northern Guizhou, with the establishment of significant Taoist temples such as Wenchang Temple in Zunyi, Zhaohua Temple in Wuchuan, and Tongzi Chongde Temple. The burial of numerous artifacts, including statues and symbols, in the tombs scattered across northern and eastern Guizhou offers insights into the deep-rooted presence of Taoism in the region.

During the Yuan Dynasty, Taoism continued to thrive in Guizhou, with practitioners venturing into local communities, seamlessly blending with folk customs. Taoist monks delved into the realms of medicine and specialized in mystical arts, such as fu (Taoist talismans). The Ming Dynasty witnessed an exponential expansion of Taoism's reach in Guizhou, with the belief in Taoism permeating among local officials and the gentry, resulting in the construction of Taoist temples across the province. One prominent family, the Yangs, emerged as fervent Taoists, with their contributions leaving a lasting impact on the spiritual landscape of northern Guizhou (Skar, 2003; Valussi, 2017).

The Ming Dynasty also saw the proliferation of the Quanzhen and Zheng schools of Taoism, each amassing a considerable following and wielding significant influence across the province. This historical overview underscores the enduring presence and profound impact of Taoism in Guizhou Province.

2.2 Research Theory Used

The study of funeral music in the context of education and instruction in Guizhou Province, China, draws upon two key theories:

2.2.1 Ethnomusicology, which emerged in the late 19th century, is a field of study that centers on the investigation and comprehension of folk music across diverse social systems and developmental stages. Ethnomusicology employs anthropological methods to delve into the intricate relationship between folk music and broader culture. In this context, it places particular emphasis on understanding the profound significance of funeral music beyond its conventional role (Campbell, 2003).

2.2.2 Aesthetic theory, originating from ancient Greece and formalized in the 18th century, delves into the essence of art and philosophy. Within the framework of this study, aesthetic theory serves as a tool to unravel the wisdom and philosophical elements embedded in funeral music. It facilitates an exploration of the ethical values, interpersonal communication, and aesthetic significance inherent in these rituals. Moreover, Chinese aesthetics, deeply intertwined with morality, ethics, and politics, further enhances the comprehension of the cultural and artistic dimensions of funeral music (Katz, 1994).

These two theories, ethnomusicology, and aesthetic theory, provide the theoretical underpinnings for our examination of the transmission process and educational aspects of Taoist funeral music in Guizhou Province. They illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of this intricate cultural phenomenon.

3. Method

3.1 Research site

Rationale: Zunyi City, situated in the northern region of Guizhou Province, China, has a deep-rooted connection with Taoism, which plays an integral role in the lives of its inhabitants. Taoist rituals are sought after, whether in times of celebration or adversity, making Zunyi a quintessential representation of Guizhou's Taoist funeral music tradition. The choice of Zunyi as our research site stems from the desire to conduct on-site investigations and subsequently document the functions, characteristics, and transmission processes of Guizhou's folk Taoist funeral music.

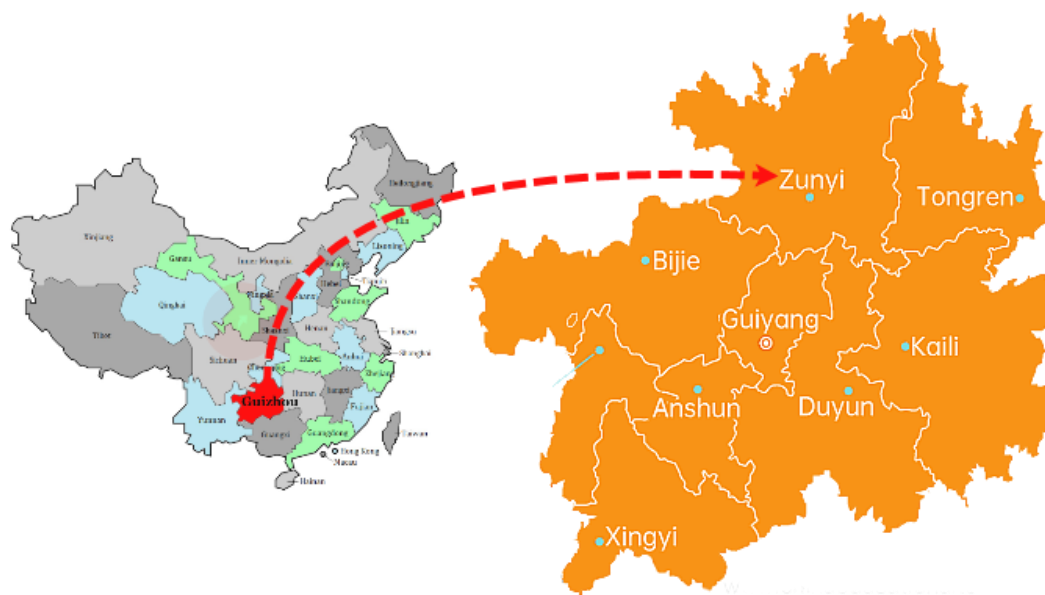


Figure 1. Map of Zunyi City, Guizhou Province, China
 Source: *ChinaFolio* (n.d.), *China Educational Tours* (n.d.)

Geographically, Zunyi is strategically located, sharing its borders with Sichuan Province, which holds the distinction of being the birthplace of Taoism and a bastion of Taoist culture that has permeated throughout the nation's history. During the Song Dynasty, waves of immigrants from Jiangxi, Hunan, and Sichuan provinces, driven by conflict and military actions, settled in Zunyi. This influx contributed significantly to the proliferation of Taoism in the region. Notably, the Song Dynasty bestowed special recognition on Taoism in Bozhou (now Zunyi), further fostering its growth and facilitating its amalgamation with Buddhism. This historical amalgamation eventually extended to the masses, solidifying Taoism's influence on secular life and development in Zunyi.

3.2 Key informants

In this study, categorize key informants into three groups: scholars, casual informants, and general informants. These categories will be defined by specific criteria, as outlined below.

Table 1. Categories and Selection Criteria for Key Informants

Informant	Selection Criteria	Number of Informants
Scholar	1) Over 20 years of experience in Taoist funeral music 2) Published at least 20 articles 3) Aged 50 years or older 4) Profound knowledge of music analysis 5) Received recognition/ prizes from Government/ Organizations	Three (3)
Casual	1) Over 20 years of experience in Taoist funeral music performance 2) Born or currently residing in Zunyi 3) Aged 50 years or older 4) Received recognition/prizes from Government/Organizations	Two (2)
General	1) Over 10 years of experience in Taoist funeral music performance 2) Born or currently residing in Guizhou 3) Received recognition/prizes from Government/Organizations	Five (5)

These categories and criteria have been established to ensure a diverse and comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences among our informants.

3.3 Research tools

3.3.1 Observation Method: This method entails immersive experiences and direct engagement with cultural contexts and communities. It provides researchers with a deep understanding of the transmission process in the education and instruction of Taoist funeral music (Huang, 2021).

3.3.2 Interview Method: Through interviews with individuals who have close ties to the historical development of education and instruction in Taoist funeral music, researchers can collect firsthand accounts and personal experiences. These interviews capture narratives, diverse perspectives, and individual stories, enhancing the overall comprehension of Taoist funeral music (Wan, 2021).

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis in this study will primarily employ a qualitative approach. Qualitative data collected through interviews and observations will be analyzed thematically. This thematic analysis will involve systematically identifying, examining,

and interpreting recurring patterns, themes, and narratives within the information provided by key informants. Researchers will closely scrutinize the narratives and diverse perspectives shared by these informants, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the transmission process in the education and instruction of Taoist Funeral Music in Guizhou Province, China. This qualitative method aims to capture the richness and complexity of the subject matter, providing valuable insights into the cultural and educational aspects of Taoist Funeral Music.

4. Result

After conducting extensive field investigations and reviewing a substantial body of relevant literature, it has become evident that a comprehensive analysis of the transmission of Guizhou Taoist funeral music presents a formidable challenge. The subject matter is intricate and multifaceted, demanding careful consideration. Considering these complexities, the author chose to focus on three case studies: the Renhuai Sa Weng Taoist Altar, the Water Changsha Town Royal Temple, and the Tongzi County King Temple. Several important things about how Guizhou Taoist funeral music is usually passed on have been found through in-depth longitudinal and horizontal analyses of these cases.

The study explores the transmission of Taoist knowledge through masters, focusing on the musical heritage of Hu Zhenyuan, Wang Yiling, and Changsha Town. Hu Zhenyuan, born in 1942, began his Taoist journey at 20 and began studying under his master, Hu Shouyi. Despite interruptions during the Cultural Revolution, he resumed his studies in 1974. In 1980, he earned the qualifications to establish an independent portal and lead a Taoist temple. His disciples, including Hu Changqing, have dedicated years to mastering Taoist skills, exemplifying the enduring tradition of master and zongmen transmission. The study highlights the importance of preserving and transmitting knowledge and skills through personal demonstration and behavior.

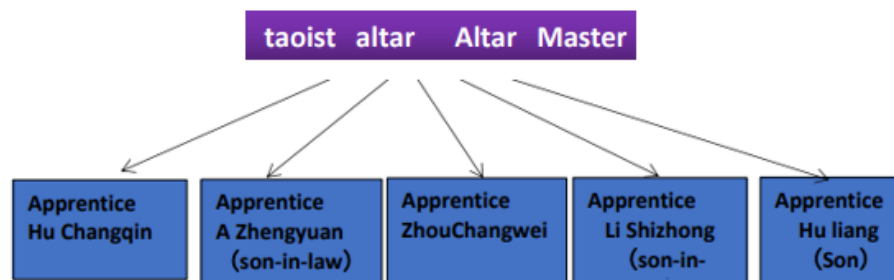


Figure 2. SaWeng sect Hu Zhenyuan Taoist altar Master-student relationship

Hu Zhenyuan, a renowned Taoist practitioner, was born in 1942 and currently lives in Tangziping, Lianhe Village, Hema Town, Renhuai City, China. He began his Taoist

journey at the age of 20 under the tutelage of his master, Hu Shouyi. However, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1974 led to significant limitations, forcing him to continue his studies in secrecy and on a small scale. In 1974, he resumed his apprenticeship under the guidance of his master, Hu Shouyi. By 1978, he had a new mentor, Li Dexiang, and by 1980, he had attained the qualifications to establish an independent Taoist portal.

Hu Zhenyuan's extensive lineage includes numerous disciples with intricate Taoist skills and knowledge. He was fortunate to have two influential teachers: the transmission teacher and introduction teacher, Hu Shouyi, and the protective teacher, Li Dexiang. Li Dexiang has presided over more than 800 funeral temples throughout his 61-year career. Hu Changqing, born in 1969, is the master of the SaWeng sect, taking charge of the Taoist altar's affairs.

Ao Zhengyuan, Zhou Changwei, Li Shizhong, and Hu Liang have all dedicated 30 years to learning Taoist skills but have not completed their apprenticeships. The SaWeng sect is categorized under ZhengYi Taoism and stands apart from ordinary Taoist disciples in several ways. Members of the SaWeng sect are allowed to marry and have families, do not reside within Taoist temples, and come together for activities such as chanting.

The lineage's history spans over two centuries, tracing its origins back to the Qing Dynasty and encompassing 14 generations. The current master is the 13th generation represented by Hu Zhenyuan, and the teachings have spread beyond Guizhou, with disciples sent to instruct in Emei Mountain, Sichuan Province.

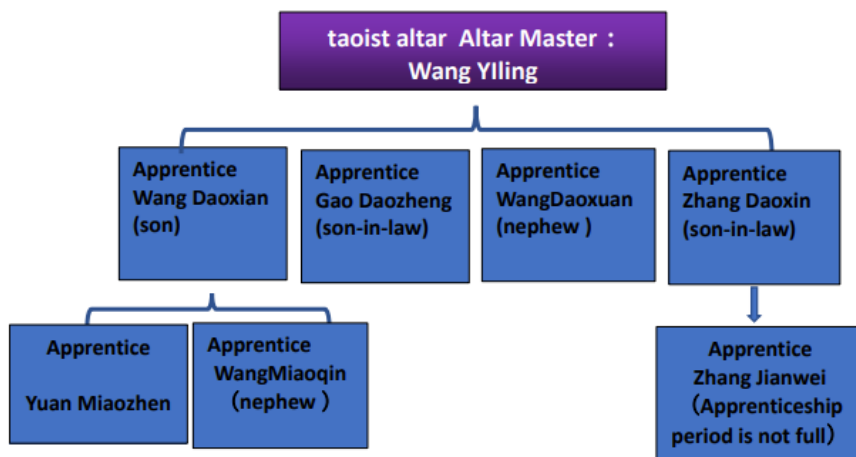


Figure 3. Chishui City, Wang Yiling Taoist altar Master-student relationship

Hu Zhenyuan, a renowned Taoist practitioner, was born in 1942 and currently lives in Tangziping, Lianhe Village, Hema Town, Renhuai City, China. He began his Taoist journey at the age of 20 under the tutelage of his master, Hu Shouyi. However, the Cultural

Revolution from 1966 to 1974 led to significant limitations, forcing him to continue his studies in secrecy and on a small scale. In 1974, he resumed his apprenticeship under the guidance of his master, Hu Shouyi. By 1978, he had a new mentor, Li Dexiang, and by 1980, he had attained the qualifications to establish an independent Taoist portal.

Wang Yiling, a male of Han nationality, currently 85 years old, was born in 1938 in Chi Shui City, Changsha Baiyun Township. At the age of 12, he embarked on his journey to learn Taoist skills under the guidance of a master. Remarkably, he has maintained uninterrupted engagement in temple activities since the age of 83. However, this lifelong dedication has left a visible mark—his right hand's knuckles have undergone substantial deformation due to years of scripture copying, which has posed persistent physical challenges. Presently, due to his advanced age and associated health issues, the responsibility for overseeing Taoist altar activities has predominantly shifted to his disciples, Wang Daoxian and Gao Daozhen.

Wang Daoxian, a male of Han nationality, aged 55, was born in 1968 in Baiyun Township, Changsha Town, Chishui City. His journey into Taoist skills commenced at the age of 12 under the tutelage of his father, Wang Yiling. By the age of 20, he had assumed significant responsibilities, and he has since presided over more than 600 Taoist altars.

Gao Daozhen, also a male of Han nationality, aged 57, was born in 1966 in Changsha Town, Chishui City. His initiation into Taoist skills occurred at the age of 17, under the guidance of his father-in-law, Wang Yiling. He commenced teaching at the age of 30 and has dedicated four decades to the practice.

Zhang Daoxin, a male of Han nationality, aged 50, was born in 1973 in Baiyun Township, Changsha Town, Chishui City. At 17, he began learning Taoist skills from his father-in-law, Wang Yiling, and officially retired at 35, accumulating 33 years of experience.

Wang Daoxuan, a male of Han nationality, aged 57, was born in 1966 in Baiyun Township, Changsha Town, Chishui City. He embarked on his journey to learn Taoist skills at the age of 14 under the guidance of his uncle, Wang Yiling, and completed his training at 22. Over the years, he has presided over more than 600 Taoist altars.

Yuan Miaozen, a male of Han nationality, aged 57, was born in 1966 in Baiyun Township, Changsha Town, Chishui City. He is Wang Yiling's great-grandson and initiated his Taoist journey at the age of 12, under the instruction of Wang Yiling's disciple, Lian Shouxuan. Subsequently, he transferred to Wang Daoxian as his teacher, accumulating 45 years of experience.

Wang Miaoqing, a male of Han nationality, aged 42, was born in 1981 in Baiyun Township, Changsha Town, Chishui City. He embarked on his journey to learn Taoist skills at 14, studying under Wang Yiling, and has continued for 28 years.

Zhang Jianwei, a male of Han nationality, aged 24, was born in 1999 in Baiyun Township, Changsha Town, Chishui City. At 19, he initiated his studies under the

guidance of Zhang Daoxin and has been practicing for 5 years, although he has not yet completed his apprenticeship.

The Taoist altar in Chishui City, China, has been analyzed based on interview data. The lineage of Taoist funeral skills is traditionally passed down to male practitioners, with strict requirements for apprentices. The primary recipients are family members and village members. Each individual must pay reverence to three teachers: a recommended teacher, a transmission teacher, and a guaranteed teacher. The current Taoist monks are elderly, emphasizing the need to pass on these skills to younger generations. Zhang Jianwei, a 24-year-old Taoist practitioner, has become highly skilled and has a growing demand for his artistic talents in painting and selling divine artifacts online.

The transmission of Guizhou Taoist funeral music is multifaceted, encompassing various elements such as transmission concepts, transmitters, transmission content, transmission modes, and transmission systems. It involves a combination of traditional methods like private transmission, practice accumulation, scripted guidance, oral and heart instruction, and imitation to preserve and transmit this unique musical tradition.

Table 2. Summary of the results of this study

Transmission Methods	Description
Private Transmission	The transmission of Guizhou folk Taoist funeral music heavily relies on private transmission from master to disciple. The master selects specific individuals to become secret apprentices, providing in-depth teachings and core skills. Traditionally, only male disciples are accepted, differing from Quanzhen Taoism, which accepts both male and female disciples in music instruction.
Accumulation of Practice	Folk Taoist funeral music is often learned through practical experience, where members of the Taoist altar participate in ritual music performances alongside experienced "Gao Gong" (Taoist altar Altar Master). Apprentices gradually acquire the necessary musical skills by observing and participating in these performances.
Scripted	"Scripted" involves the strict adherence to Taoist texts that record music and ceremony procedures. The text guides personnel, scene arrangement, chanting content, and altar singing methods. Taoist monks must hold the text during ceremonies. "Subject" refers to the recitation of Taoist funeral ceremony rules, order, and norms.
Oral and Heart Instruction	This method involves direct oral guidance and personal demonstration by teachers to students, emphasizing a deep understanding of the teachings. It is a traditional Chinese method of knowledge and skill transmission. Guizhou folk Taoist funeral music is primarily passed down through oral instruction.
Imitation	Imitation refers to the practice of secretly learning musical performance skills from other Taoist groups and then incorporating them into the altar team's music performances. This informal learning process lacks a mentor-student relationship, set structure, or written records. It is characterized by observing and replicating without formal instruction.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The investigation into the transmission process of Taoist funeral music in Guizhou Province, China, has shed light on a rich cultural tradition deeply intertwined with Taoism and the belief system. The research findings have illuminated several key aspects that resonate with established theoretical principles in the fields of ethnomusicology and cultural studies.

One notable aspect is the enduring influence of Taoism in Guizhou Province, tracing its roots back to the Tang and Song Dynasties. This historical continuity is consistent with the idea that Taoism has played a significant role in shaping the cultural and religious landscape of ancient China (Berling, 2005). Moreover, the proliferation of Taoism during the Ming Dynasty and its impact on local officials and the gentry aligns with the concept that Taoism has permeated secular life and development in the region (Skar, 2003).

The choice of research methods, including observation and interviews with key informants, is consistent with established practices in ethnomusicology and cultural studies (Campbell, 2003). These methods have allowed for an immersive exploration of the transmission process and have provided valuable firsthand accounts and perspectives.

The results of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of the transmission of Guizhou Taoist funeral music. The use of private transmission, accumulation of practice, scripted guidance, oral and heart instruction, and imitation as methods of transmission aligns with the complexity of traditional Chinese knowledge and skill transfer (Liu, 2012). Furthermore, the emphasis on mentorship and the master-student relationship in preserving and passing down this unique musical tradition reflects the significance of personal demonstration and behavior in education and instruction (Hui, 2020).

The study of Taoist funeral music in Guizhou Province, China, has provided valuable insights into the cultural heritage and transmission of this ancient tradition. The research has consistently highlighted the enduring presence of Taoism in the region, tracing its roots back centuries, and its profound influence on both religious and secular aspects of life. The methods employed in this research align with established principles in ethnomusicology and cultural studies, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the transmission process.

The results of this study emphasize the multifaceted nature of the transmission of Guizhou Taoist funeral music, incorporating various methods and emphasizing the importance of mentorship. This underscores the significance of preserving and transmitting this musical heritage in the face of modernization's challenges.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the intricate relationship between belief systems, rituals, and music in Chinese culture and highlights the importance of safeguarding and passing down these traditions for future generations.

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