

# The Place Reconstruction, Government Practice, and Ethnic Identity of Chinese Folk Song *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*

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## Abstract

The research focuses on elucidate the musical and cultural connotations embodied in the place reconstruction, governmental practice, and ethnic identity associated with the Chinese local folk song *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, through the integration of diachronic and synchronic studies. This study is based on Tuan's (1977) theory of "place and space" and used the ethnographic fieldwork method of ethnomusicology to conducted research. The findings indicated:

- 1) The "local knowledge" embedded in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* exhibits diachronic development. Characterized by ethnic integration, folklore, lyrical content, and symbolic elements, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* exemplifies local features that evoke a "sense of place," grounded in experiences, self, and ethnic traits.
- 2) Owing to the role transformation of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, the local distinct identity of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has been brought outstanding via the creation of cultural symbols as well as Innovative practices of local government, which achieved acceptance and recognition from local government, ethnic group, and so forth and so on. Thus, the traditional symbol meaning of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has been extended through synchronic exploration.
- 3) The crux of ethnic groups' shifting identification with *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* lies in the interaction and integration of "self" and "the other" within the local context. This research extends the theoretical understanding of the dynamic evolution of "human-land" relationships through the interplay of diachronic and synchronic mechanisms in local reconstruction. This study not only advances theoretical understanding of how music culture influences the dynamics of "human-land" relationships, but also fosters interdisciplinary dialogue and enhances comprehension of folk music's role in modern societies, particularly at the nexus of globalization and localization. The integration of this theoretical framework with empirical research provides a valuable reference for investigating musical and cultural phenomena in other regions.

**Keyword:** Zhangjiachuan Hua'er, Place Reconstruction, Government Practice, Ethnic Identity, Self, The other.

## Introduction

*Hua'er* (literally "Flowers") is a folk song with love as its main content that is popular in parts of northwest China (Li, 2013). It is not a simple regional folk song but a traditional cultural carrier with a robust cultural model. It has institutional solid inheritance and patterning and expands traditional concepts and local knowledge through continuous copying, inheritance, and dissemination (Zhou, 2015).

*Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is a valuable cultural heritage formed in the course of long-term production and practice by the ancestors living in the Zhangjiachuan Hui Autonomous County (ZHAC) region. ZHAC is located in the southeastern part of Gansu Province in China, which is an important birthplace of pre-Qin culture and also a necessary route of the ancient Silk Road. *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* can be traced back as far as the Song and Yuan Dynasties, and due to its unique location, many foreign traders came to settle here (Sun, 2016).

In the long process of historical development, the effective integration of multiple elements eventually drove the formation of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* (Ma, 2017). In November 2019, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* was listed as China's national ICH, and in July 2021, the Regulations on the Protection and Inheritance of the *Hua'er* of ZHAC in Gansu Province, which were declared by the Zhangjiachuan Cultural and Tourism Bureau, were approved, which signaled that the *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has gradually become a unique regional music culture symbol.

## Statement of Problem

The community represented by ZHAC develops ICH with *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* as the core, which promotes the development of local society and economy (Ma, 2017). Meanwhile, by relying on the inheritance and development of ICH, various forms of non-heritage practice activities concerning the consciousness of the Chinese national community are carried out. This enables folk music to be continuously recreated in different communities and groups during cultural adaptation, providing people with a sustained sense of identity and enhancing respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (Xiao, 2013). On the one hand, in the context of Chinese ideology, the "Stage reality" constructed through symbolic creation, local narratives, and the weaving of meanings not only meets the government's demand for traditional culture but also seals the "objective reality" in the historical state to a certain extent (Burns & Novelloi, 2008). The local characteristics of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has continuously evolved in the process of government practices. Therefore, how to contemplate the process and mechanisms behind the *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s place reconstruction within an evolving context has emerged as a new proposition.

On the other hand, ethnic culture, as one of the core contents of the production of "place" (Jean et al., 2001), which not only unites geopolitical and consanguinity, but also connects people and places with their emotions and identities, is the key to the perspective of "place" in ethnic areas (Wei & Yang, 2022). In the context of national ideology, the traditional *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is constantly wrapped in capital instrumental rationality, and the "place" it carries is no longer just an independent connection between ethnic groups' experiences, emotions, and places, but is constituted by the combined efforts of multiple subjects (Cai & He, 2016). In this regard, ethnic groups should be regarded as entities in a specific local context, and the local music to which they are attached and the construction of their "place" should be explored, which is of great theoretical and practical significance for

clarifying the interaction between the shaping of ethnic groups' consciousness, their identity, and governmental practices, but the existing research lacks the exploration of the related issues.

### **Literature Review**

Music has historically functioned as a sacrificial element, creating a centralized political order through its profound alignment with symbols of power (Attali, 1985). Geertz (1983) proposed the concept system of "local knowledge," which is a response to the notion of "globalization" based on economic "integration" worldwide and dialogue with essential concepts such as "discourse," "text," "postmodern," etc. Contemporary music often heralds the potential for a new political and cultural paradigm. Additionally, the multidimensional space that music constructs connects people and places, embedding a sense of community that provides local identities with stabilizing significance for residents within their locales (Wang & Zhang, 2017).

### **Music and Place**

Firstly, in the empirical study of music and "the other," Zhang (1986) argued that there is a simple one-to-one correspondence between song styles and political and economic systems around the world, while Blacking (1973) believed that musical behaviour is a form of human nature, that musical differences do not lie in its complexity, and that musical evaluation systems and value judgments are determined by different socio-cultural. His psychological consistency is an attack on the "low to high" cultural hierarchy of cultural evolutionists. Xiao (2013) takes *Hua'er* in Lin County as a case study and believed that *Hua'er*, which has entered the mainstream cultural discourse, is constantly strengthening its "local cultural concept" through analysis and construction and is a tool for serving the economy and political propaganda of "the other." Secondly, in terms of empirical research on music and place, Duffy (2000) contended that music plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to comprehend, experience, and interpret their surroundings, thereby shaping local identities through emotional engagement across various media, environments, and settings. Qiao (2009) argued that the search for different cultural differences and historically accumulated regional characteristics through music is a necessary way to study human culture, and Huang, Zhu, & Huang (2010) believed that the relationship between music and the region is one of multiple musical and cultural identities and expressions, multiple musical and historical memories and narratives, and multiple musical and cultural identities and expressions. knowledge view and methodology of place. Yang (2021) argued that regional music should be categorized into primary, secondary, and regenerative, which is the concept of a large "cultural circle," and that the research perspective should be shifted from regional to trans-regional to seek cultural integration.

### **Music and Identity**

Firstly, in terms of music and cultural identity within the national context, Seeman (2012) by traced the impact of the national cultural policies of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the Ottoman urban style, and found that the adaptation of musical styles to new cultural patterns is not always compliant, and conflicts and contradictions also ensue. Djumaev (2005) argued that in the contemporary era, new cultural forces attempt to reconstruct a lineage of ancient and modern national music, where "musical heritage" becomes a tool for ethnic mobilization. Secondly, in terms of music and ethnic identity, as Roy (2017) revealed, in the musical creations of the "third gender" individuals *jalsā* in South Asia,

hījrā "becomes" nirvė (liberated) during a marginal period, allowing the values associated with hījrā to be manifested, thereby completing social transformation and self-understanding, while Dueck (2011) suggested that conflict may be a resource for musical composition, a cosmopolitanism that points inward, to cohesion between subsections of a diverse social group, and outward, to broader inter group identities.

Existing studies rarely consider the interconnections among music, politics, place, and identity concurrently, and there is a notable scarcity of theoretical reflection on the spatial dynamics among governmental practices, place reconstruction, and identity within the realm of music culture. Additionally, research that delves into the role of specific regional music cultures in defining cultural spaces, forming mature concepts, and examining local impacts is limited. Furthermore, past research on music has predominantly focused on its form, phenomena, and functions, with only minimal exploration of the complex socio-cultural relationships between ethnic groups, "self" and "the other," in a diverse context. Thus, there is a need for more comprehensive and in-depth studies in these areas.

### **Research Objectives**

This paper explores the musical culture of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, focusing on the local and spatial dimensions influenced by government practices, ethnic groups, and local culture. It aims to:

- 1) examine textual representations and local characteristics within "local knowledge" of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* ;
- 2) analyze the expression of changes in ethnic identity in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* during local restructuring dominated by national ideology, and how government practices and "state intervention" influence the creation and development of traditional folk song.
- 3) discuss the diachronic and synchronic place reconstruction to enhance community participation, improve local cognition, and strengthen both emotional belonging and the conceptual identity of the ethnic group. This balance promotes the integration of the local "self" with the government's "the other," indirectly fostering the preservation and inheritance of traditional culture.

### **Research Questions**

The study takes *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* as a case study to empirically analyze the government practice, place reconstruction, and ethnic identity interaction mechanism of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. The following questions are answered:

- 1) What local characteristics are exhibited by *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* as a cultural vehicle within the context of "local knowledge?"
- 2) How do governmental practices contribute to the place reconstruction of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, and what impact do these practices have on cultural reconstruction in this region?
- 3) How does place reconstruction affect the ethnic identity through *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*?

### Methodology

This study will utilize the methodology of ethnography in anthropology, and this study was based on fieldwork research. Firstly, the structure of the article posits that "space and place" are interdependent: the security and stability of "place" illuminate the openness, freedom, and threats of space, and vice versa. Space, a more abstract concept than "place," transforms from chaos to order as we become cognizant of its aspects and ascribe values to it, becoming a "place" (Tuan, 1977). Moreover, "place" is more than mere physical structures; they are microcosms of individual and collective human experiences, encapsulating interpersonal relationships and symbolizing human struggles and aspirations (Song, 2014). The concept of "placefulness" emerges from the triple attributes of materiality, function, and meaning, which are often interpreted through texts and symbols, and both described and constructed (Massy, 1991). The theory of "place and space" articulates how spaces, through human experience and affective cognition, transform into "place" - centers of perceived value that enrich our identity and significance. These transformations give rise to socio-culturally significant localities of identity (Zhang et al., 2020). This framework of spatial values, "sense of place," and experiential perceptions provides a unique reference for the core issues of this study.

Secondly, this study approaches the structure of "space and place" through the interactive unity of diachronic and synchronic perspectives, employing multiple analytical strategies and frameworks. At the diachronic level, individual memories crystallize into "place," while local history aggregates into collective memories (Wang et al., 2020). Different "place" evoke distinct psychological responses in people based on their memories and experiences (Relph, 1976), contributing to the "local knowledge" surrounding *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. A key argument in the "local knowledge" discourse system of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* revolves around the "interpretation" of "descriptiveness" of cultural events as symbols. This study integrates region music culture into the respective social systems, including the formation of political, economic, and power structures and the reshaping of societal thoughts. It aims to uncover the "invisible" everyday cultural events hidden in our daily lives, reveal their original meanings, and thus establish the position of certain types of culture and art within the social "network of meanings."

At the synchronic level, the humanist view of "place" describes it as a dynamic interaction between humans and their environment, where humans actively shape local characteristics and imbue "place" with a distinct spirit (Pan, 1996). Locality, differentiated by unique historical accumulations and social constructions (Gao & Qian, 2016), is dynamic, continuously created and redefined (Spooner, 2000). Cultural identity within these "place" is marked by traditional unity and distinctiveness from other groups (Qian & An, 2020). Furthermore, place-based ethnic identity is seen as a psychological phenomenon comprising belonging, positive evaluations, emotional experiences, interests, perceptions, and involvement (Li & Wen, 2016; Naran, 2000), emphasizing differences until they coalesce into a collective identity (Ai, 2009). Thus, ethnic group identity is interdependent with theories of "place and space," evolving as groups reconfigure their "sense of place" (Stedman, 2002)."

Taking the aforementioned perspectives into account, this study utilizes "place and space" theory as its foundation, exploring the theoretical connotations and related discourse on the governmental practice and ethnic identity of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* in relation to local identity through both diachronic and synchronic lenses. It constructs a research and analysis



framework based on the aforementioned logical correlations and the content characteristics (Figure 1). Specifically, this study employed "place and space" theory to explore the process of place reconstruction from a diachronic viewpoint. Ethnic groups develop stable psychological emotions and identities within the social structures of their locales, thereby cultivating a deeply ingrained "self" that becomes continuously rooted in the mind. These identities are expressed through textual, symbolic, and other representations (Bai et al., 2017), contributing to a localized "sense of place." Conversely, from a synchronic perspective, it explores how the traditional local social structure is dissolved and reconstructed. This process is influenced by interactions with "the other," affecting local specificity and fostering new emotional preferences, psychological belonging, or identity through engagement with plurality and object interaction practices. Cognitive and behavioral involvements are shaped by the melding of "self" and "the other" within localities, ultimately forming an ethnic identity based on a reconfigured "place" (Massey, 1995).

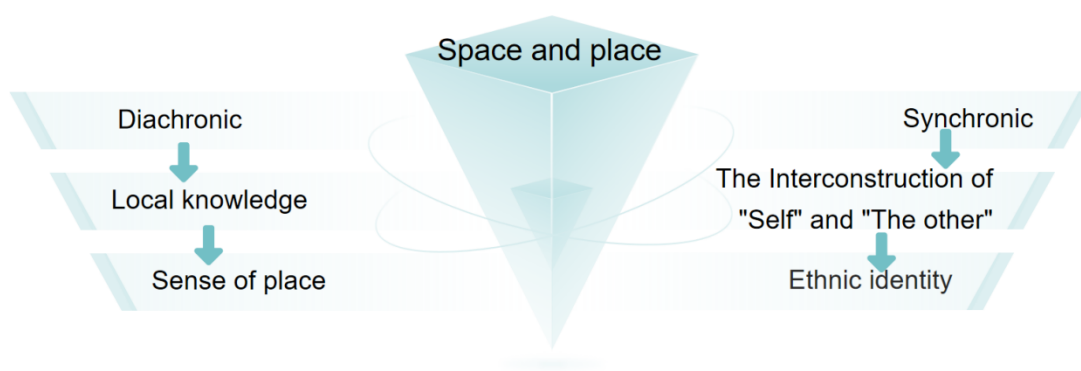


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

## Location and Sample Selection

### Location of the Study

The study was conducted in ZHAC in southeastern Gansu Province, China. The main sampling areas were the ZHAC Cultural Center, Dianzi, Fuchuan, and Tianwan Village in ZHAC. The Zhangjiachuan County Cultural Centre (ZCCC) is an important place for local cultural promotion and transmission, and all social activities of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* are initiated by the local cultural center, which is the main department of government practice, and sampling of administrators and scholars was conducted here. Sampling in other villages targeted local *Hua'er* singers and inheritors. In terms of case typicality, the ZHAC region is currently a region with high awareness of *Hua'er* culture, and the government practice effect of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is obvious, which is the key to selecting it as an object in this paper.

### Sample Selection

The data collection method employed participatory observation and in-depth interviews. The researcher conducted fieldwork in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* on three separate occasions: from December 29, 2022, to January 13, 2023; February 27 to March 28, 2023; and May 18 to May 31, 2023. During these periods, detailed observations of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*-related texts, symbols, and social activities were made. Data were recorded effectively using image capturing techniques. Additionally, government administrators, inheritors of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, and local scholars were chosen as typical representatives. Semi-structured, in-depth

interviews focused on governmental practices, place reconstruction, and ethnic group identity were conducted, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes each, using sampling and snowballing methods until data saturation was achieved. A total of 31 valid interview samples were collected (Table 1). Ultimately, the data gathered from observations, collected lyrics, and audio recordings of interviews were compiled into the required textual information for the study.

Table. 1

*Basic information of the subjects of interview*

NO	Gender	Age	Identity	Interview time	NO	Gender	Age	Identity	Interview time
101	M	45	Administrator	Jan, 2023	119	M	50	Administrator	Mar, 2023
102	F	42	Administrator	Jan, 2023	120	F	61	Fuchuan Villager (Inheritor)	Apr, 2023
103	M	56	Dianzi Villager (Inheritor)	Jan, 2023	121	F	39	Fuchuan Villager (Inheritor)	Apr, 2023
104	F	58	Dianzi Villager (Inheritor)	Jan, 2023	122	F	58	Nianwan Villager (Inheritor)	Apr, 2023
105	M	47	Tianwan Villager (Inheritor)	Jan, 2023	123	M	34	Nianwan Villager (Inheritor)	Apr, 2023
106	M	60	Tianwan Villager (Inheritor)	Jan, 2023	124	M	40	Dianzi Villager (Inheritor)	Apr, 2023
107	M	43	Fuchuan Villager (Inheritor)	Jan, 2023	125	F	35	Dianzi Villager (Inheritor)	May, 2023
108	F	40	Fuchuan Villager (Inheritor)	Jan, 2023	126	M	32	Dongshan Villager (Inheritor)	May, 2023
109	M	53	Local scholar	Jan, 2023	127	F	53	Administrator	May, 2023
110	F	39	Hua'er Singer	Feb, 2023	128	F	35	Hua'er Singer	May, 2023
111	M	55	Hua'er Singer	Feb, 2023	129	M	44	Hua'er Singer	Jun, 2023
112	F	38	Administrator	Feb, 2023	130	M	42	Local scholar	Jun, 2023
113	M	42	Administrator	Mar, 2023	131	M	41	Administrator	Jun, 2023

The analysis method is textual analysis. Based on the analytical framework constructed in the previous section, the researcher categorized, summarized and interpreted the textual data,

abstracted the core concepts of the study, and deciphered the logical relationship between the concepts, to ultimately extend and improve the theoretical connotations involved in the analytical framework. In order to enhance the credibility of the research findings, the researcher went to the case study sites from June 8 to 13, 2023, to conduct supplementary research, with the purpose of matching the preliminary findings with the text of the interviews, and completing the missing information in order to enhance the comprehensiveness and reliability of the findings.

### **The Government Practice and Place Reconstruction of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* Diachronic: *zhangjiachuan hua'er* under the influence of "local knowledge"**

"Local knowledge" encompasses not only specific skills or knowledge about a region but also reflects the deeper meanings, values, and worldviews of that region's culture. Within Geertz's (2008) framework, interpretive analyses of culture, which emphasize understanding the symbols and meanings inherent to a culture, are crucial. This approach, known as "thick description," delves into the cultural contexts and meanings behind social behaviors. It involves not only documenting and analyzing local practices and knowledge but also gaining a deeper understanding of how this knowledge is generated, transmitted, and sustained within specific cultural and social structures (Wang, 2007). These aspects distinctly characterize *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, highlighting its local significance and uniqueness. Using this analytical framework, the embedded local knowledge in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is explored from a diachronic perspective, focusing on ethnic integration, folklore, lyrics, and symbols in the ZHAC region.

The essence of folk music arises from the distinct emotional experiences it provides, contrasting sharply with those of everyday life. The appeal of folk music depends largely on the value individuals derive from it (Levinson, 2014). As Tuan (1977) highlighted, "space and place" are crucial constructs of our world, and understanding the significance of a "place" demands a profound appreciation of "sense of place." This concept, a core aspect of human geography, delves into the dominant meanings of "place" and the quality of geographic experiences (Entrikin, 1976). In the context of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* culture, practitioners perceive and feel this art form as a vivid expression of "sense of place," which they explore to discover personal experiences and values.

Firstly, ethnic and cultural integration is the most important culture landscape of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s place representation, which is a form of fusion between the Hui and Han people of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* constructed as a group by geopolitical and consanguinity relationship. The existence of the *Hua'er* is more like a "living fossil" that records the historical changes of China's western border and the evolution of Chinese culture (Li, 2013).

In December 2022, I officially entered ZHAC and conducted fieldwork on *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. During the days I spent with the local people, I found that in ZHAC region, the people who sang *Hua'er* were mainly distributed in the east, north and west. Wang Yuke, then vice chairman of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* Folk Art Association, told me the main reason for this phenomenon was the cultural fusion between ethnic groups caused by geopolitical nature. In the western part of ZHAC, most of the residents are Hui ethnic people. Historically, the Hui people here primarily engaged in commerce and travel, trading in leather goods and daily necessities, commuting between Gansu's Linxia, Qinghai, Ningxia, and other places. Therefore,



the introduced *Hezhou Hua'er* is more prevalent here. In contrast, Zhangmianyi Township in the north of the county was formerly under the jurisdiction of Zhuanglang County, Pingliang City. There was more interaction with the people of Zhuanglang County, resulting in similar styles of *Hua'er* singing. The town of Gongmen in the eastern part of the county borders Long County in Shaanxi Province, and is heavily influenced by Shaanxi's Qinqiang (an opera style popular in northwest China, possibly originating in Ming dynasty folk music) and Xiaoqu (Regional Folk Songs of China). (Interviewee: Fuchuan Villager-I07). The superficial reason for this phenomenon lies in the influence of historical population migration and geographical factors. However, at a deeper level, it is the result of cultural integration and mutual penetration among different ethnic groups and regions.

Secondly, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* serves as a carrier for the perception of ethnic identity and cognizance of the origin and development of the ethnic group, and the folklore matters it contains are also one of the important ways of presenting place. In terms of daily life, clothing, food, housing, and transportation are often closely related to the living habits of groups within a particular town. For example, in the past, ZHAC people used to wear "绾绾领 (Wǎn Wǎn collar)" cotton clothes, that is, the women used fine threads to embroider all kinds of exquisite patterns on the collar. Local villagers say that only a skilled daughter-in-law can do it, and they are often proud to wear it. "In the old society, women had to learn to embroider and make clothes from a young age. When I was a child, I learned to sing with my grandmothers, *Hua'er* lyrics: 七岁八岁跟娘转, 十二留头进绣房; 一学巧手者把花扎, 二学剪裁缝衣裳. (The lyrics mean: At seven or eight years old, I relies on my parents; by twelve, it's time to become independent. First, learn to embroider, then learn to make clothes). (Interviewee: Fuchuan Village-I08)." In terms of commerce and labor, the culture of "脚户 Jiǎohù" and the activities of "麦客子 Mài kè zǐ" also carry the unique folkloric characteristics of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, and are important carriers of the spread and evolution of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. "脚户 Jiǎohù" is a term from the past in the northwest plateau area where transportation was inconvenient, and production and trade relied entirely on donkeys and mules for transportation. The animals used to transport goods required people to lead them, and these individuals were called "脚户 Jiǎohù" (Zhou & Ding, 2006). "Eating is for nourishing the body, while singing is for nourishing the soul. In the past, transportation was not developed, in and out of ZHAC goods relied on livestock to pack, people back. The road is very hard, a trip out of the door is heart-breaking, sometimes on the road homesick, cannot help but tears flow, made up to sing some songs can make the heart feel better, see what can sing what, see a good scenery immediately can make up and sing, sung by the guys haha laugh (Interviewee: Dianzi Villager-I01)." "麦客子 Mài kè zǐ" is a hired laborer who harvesting wheat for his employer. Singing *Hua'er* while laboring has become a normal part of the Mài kè zǐ's life, *Hua'er* lyrics: 眼看南山的麦黄了, 小哥哥要赶麦场了; 一天走的冤枉路, 黑了睡的麦草铺。豆子一把麦一把, 麦客子活不到人一搭; 粮食一把糠一把, 麦客子活在人底下. (The lyrics mean: Seeing that the wheat in the southern mountains is about to ripen, I'm going to harvesting wheat; every day I have to walk dozens of miles up the mountain, and at night I sleep directly on the wheat, the life of "Mài kè zǐ" is so hard). In the harsh environment of migration for survival, life is extremely unstable, and they experience hardships. All of these accumulate into a profound sense of sorrow, which eventually merges into folk songs focusing on love (Xi, 1988). The people of ZHAC have different habits and choices regarding clothing, food, shelter, transportation, production, and lifestyle compared to other regions. These

habits and choices are also imbued with corresponding regional cultural characteristics, thereby contributing to the diversity of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. The author contends that the evolution of folk music serves as both a method and a pathway through which individuals experience and express their "sense of place," thereby facilitating the development of this sense among cultural practitioners.

Furthermore, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er's* lyrics contain place mainly in terms of production life, social structure, consciousness and beliefs, and value orientation. As some lyrics convey the belief in the integration of "human-land" relationship within the ethnic group, their core idea expresses reverence for nature, identification with society, and longing for a better life. Through the organization of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er's* lyrics, the content is roughly divided into five categories: love songs, life songs, current affairs songs, and miscellaneous songs, which also reflect the life of Zhangjiachuan people. Love songs are the unchanging theme of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. *Hua'er* lyric: 想你想得真恹惶, 眼泪流了两大缸; 一缸给你洗衣裳, 一缸泡茶你尝尝. (The lyrics mean: I really miss you so much that my tears flowed in two big tanks, one tank for you to wash your clothes, and the other tank for you to make tea). "What we love singing the most are love songs, the more we sing, the more we want to keep going, just can't stop (Interviewee: Dianzi Villager- 103)." This segment of the lyrics reflects the local people's sincere and fervent feelings towards love. *Hua'er* lyrics: 天上的神仙到凡间, 云头儿落在大关山; 关山顶上用目看, 山清嘛水秀赛江南。天上的神仙到凡间, 云头儿落在张家川; 张家川的地面走一遍, 凡人的日子赛神仙. (The lyrics mean: Guan Mountain possesses such breathtaking beauty that even the gods are drawn to its vistas, and the vibrant lives of the people of ZHAC are the envy of deities). This part of the lyrics reflects the community's values of reverence for nature and preservation of the ecosystem; *Hua'er* lyrics: 北斗七星三四点, 明月亮, 一月里能圆上几天? 一青一黄又一年, 少年人, 人世上能欢上几天? (The lyrics mean: Life is short, cherish the moment). This part of the lyrics reflects the philosophy of life. In addition, since *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has been listed as a ICH, there have been numerous current affairs songs, and some of the lyrics characterize the place of the Hui and Han people in obtaining their identity as well as in conveying their ideological values. such as *Hua'er* lyrics: 十五的月亮圆又明, 满天都是发光的星星; 党是灯塔引路人, 回汉拉手同前进. (The lyrics mean: The Communist Party is like the moon, we are like the stars, we are united around the moon, the Hui and Han peoples are one family). From the lyrics of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, it can be seen that the formation of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* and the geographical environment, humanistic environment, social environment, and historical transmutation are closely linked, and the living space of folk music is integrated with the ecological environment on which it is formed and spread.

The Lyrics of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, as a linguistic symbol, is a carrier for the perception and development of ethnic identity, "when I was young, I followed my elders to learn how to sing *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, there was no songbook, it was all passed down by word of mouth from my elders, and most of the people of my generation can't read or write, so I can also learn about my old ancestors through singing *Hua'er*" (Interviewee: local resident-I29). Local people's valuable experiences of place and environment can be brought to life here through *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* texts.

According to the discussion above, the local knowledge embodied in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* carries a distinctive symbolic meaning, which is manifested through the cognitive and

emotional experiences of ethnic group interacting with the place. This interaction reshapes ethnic group's attitudes and lifestyles by infusing environmental experiences with personal meanings and values. The concept of a "sense of place" refers to the subjective experience of the qualities and character of a place, which shapes ethnic group emotions and identities linked to that place (Butz & Eyles, 1997). It also captures the deep emotional bonds formed through the interaction between ethnic group and their environment, reflecting a culturally and socially transformed "human-land" relationship (Tuan, 2011). Furthermore, diachronic studies provoke philosophical reflections on the "existence of human beings" as influenced by the evolution of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, prompting individuals to contemplate the characteristics and significance of human existence in relation to societal changes, particularly through the creation of folk songs.



Figure 2: Fieldwork of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*

### **Synchronic: Government Practice and Place Restructuring Creating Local Cultural Symbol**

In early March 2023, during my second fieldwork in ZHAC, I was invited by the director of the ZCCC to observe the fourth ZHAC *Hua'er* Singers Competition, participated in fieldwork activities with *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* inheritors, and joined the ZHAC's exhibition and performance of ICH. The county cultural department has been diligently organizing various activities in alignment with national policy directives regarding the inheritance and development of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. "In recent years, the state has significantly emphasized the ICH program. Our localities are tasked with crafting a cultural identity endowed with local characteristics while implementing these policies. This sequence of cultural exhibitions, somewhat of a recent invention, has been imbued with manifold local significances (Interviewee: Administrator-I01)." As a contemporary and local cultural mechanism, its profound significance resides in articulating the essence of local culture, organizing local cultural notions, and fostering the identity of these concepts, all the while permeated with the expression of a national consciousness within Chinese national culture. "The state currently prioritizes the development and inheritance of ICH, viewing the safeguarding and promotion of national traditional culture as an element of cultural 'Soft Power' to sculpt its



cultural image, affirm self-national identity, augment national pride, and enhance its overall international competitiveness. Gaining global recognition and prestige through our traditional cultural resources is a strategy of modern national power(Interviewee: Local scholars-I09)." In this context, the political implications of protecting traditional folk culture by the modern nation-state have been elevated to a "State" concern in terms of "promoting China's national culture." The local cultural authorities leverage this as a means to showcase the local government's efforts in safeguarding folk culture on behalf of the nation, while simultaneously achieving the objective of establishing a cultural symbol for the region and fostering local economic development.



Figure 3: Zhangjiachuan Hua'er Government Practice (photographed by the author)

### Innovation of Zhangjiachuan Hua'er under Government Practice

The research revealed that government intervention in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has not compromised its cultural core. Instead, it has enriched the tradition by incorporating additional lyrics into the existing melodies, thereby enhancing the cohesion and mutual identity oneself with among various ethnic groups. According to a *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* Inheritor, "I used to sing a lot of traditional *Hua'er* songs, but ever since it became a national intangible cultural heritage, the lyrics have slowly started to change. The other day, the county cultural center invited me to an event, and the leader told me, 'Whatever's going on in China this year, just sing about that.' I can even make up the lyrics on the spot (Interviewee: Nianwan Villager-I22). "

Furthermore, government practices surrounding *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* respect its local characteristics. While government intervention has altered the lyrics of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, the original essence, form, and style of singing remain intact. Currently, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* enthusiasts are primarily found in the eastern, northern, and western regions, each with its distinct regional flavor. Government actions do not dilute these identities but instead enhance them, establishing the music's place as a "local identifier." As the ZCCC's director notes, "Heritage is dynamic; innovation is essential but should not alter the fundamental style and melodies of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. Innovation aims to adapt to contemporary needs while

preserving local characteristics" (Interviewee: Administrator-I25). Additionally, under government stewardship, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has strengthened the bond between the Hui and Han ethnic groups, serving as a testament to the collective wisdom and cultural integration of these communities. This policy has facilitated increased cultural interaction and exchange among these groups in the ZHAC region. "Nowadays, there are more activities at the cultural center, so we Han and Hui people get to meet up more often. We can chat and exchange ideas. Everyone sings together, and over time, we've all gotten closer (Interviewee: Dianzi Villager-I25)."

Therefore, under governmental practices, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has evolved into an effective medium for propagating national ideology and fostering national integration, all while preserving its distinct local essence. This approach seeks to balance heritage conservation with practical utility. Additionally, value innovation, safeguarded by *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s cultural genetics, facilitates its recognition by "the other" beyond the ethnic "self." This process not only sustains the multifaceted values of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* among local communities but also fosters the appreciation and identification with local music across diverse entities, thereby enriching the cultural significance of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*.

### **The Place Reconstruction and Ethnic Identity of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* Cognition and value choices**

The research indicates that government interventions significantly influence the core values and perceptions of various ethnic groups, making the allegiance to *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* by different communities a prominent feature amidst internal diversities and divisions. Specifically, the Hui inhabitants of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s western regions assert the authenticity and purity of their *Hua'er* renditions, stating, "For generations, our exclusive focus has been on *Hua'er*. We do not engage in any other musical forms; our *Hua'er* shares its roots with that of *Hezhou Hua'er* (Interviewee: Dianzi Villager-I04)." Conversely, Han Chinese residents in the eastern and northern areas maintain that their execution of *Hua'er* is equally genuine, reflecting a longstanding tradition: "In addition to *Hua'er*, we perform local *Xiaoqu*, adhering to the authentic *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* style, as passed down from my great-grandfather (Interviewee: Fuchuan Villager-I20)." This search for and adaptation of traditional resources is ongoing within each ethnic group, as they strive to construct their distinctive local identity and ethnic identity. However, governmental efforts have led to an inadvertent assimilation of these diverse practices, fostering acceptance of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s plurality. This diversity has evolved into the "local identifier" for the community's perception of *Hua'er*.

The ethnic communities in question do not find themselves antiquated amid the surges of market forces but exhibit an open disposition towards modern culture, notwithstanding its appropriation by authoritative power. For these communities, traditional *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* transcends mere musicality to embody functional dimensions such as romantic discourse, entertainment, emotional conveyance, and even indoctrination. Post-government intervention, the communal interpretation of this musical genre progressively embraced a paradigm intertwining capitalistic values, consciousness, and quotidian existence. "As long as the cultural centre calls us to go there is some funding, and sometimes the travelling expenses to and from are reimbursed, but we are willing to go even if they (the officials) don't pay us (Interviewee: Fuchuan villager-I21)."

The identity of the ethnic towards *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* reflects a symbiotic relationship. Through participation in ICH activities, *Hua'er* singing contests, and training sessions, the residents foster a sense of belonging and identity within their ethnic group. This engagement allows them to consciously adopt new values, buoyed by the confidence and pride derived from their connection to *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. "The national policy has been commendable, leading to a notable evolution in the lyrics of *Hua'er* songs in recent years. I find myself able to effortlessly create new Lyrics and tunes, I'll sing you one now: 三月里发芽四月里长,向日葵离不开太阳.二十大精神指方向,新农村要建成小康. (The lyrics mean: The sunflower sprouts in March and matures in April, and it is inseparable from the sun. Just as we can't live without our country, the spirit of the Twentieth National Congress has shown us the way, and the new countryside is about to be built into a well-off countryside). (Interviewee: Dianzi Villager-I24)."

### Emotional Belonging and Experience

The ethnic group's identification with *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is intertwined with the boundaries of power and local cultural interactions, gradually aligning with the government's constructed ideal image while maintaining the reality of the "self." The "self" identity of the ethnic group is continuously linked with the "self" identity within the government's "the other" place, and the shift in the ethnic group's psychology also drives the change in their sense of belonging and emotional experience: Firstly, governmental behaviour have led to an increased engagement in *Hua'er* singing, fostering ethnic integration and preserving the social structure locally. This development serves as a concrete foundation for ethnic groups to maintain their cultural memories and emotional ties to *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. "*Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has really changed a lot these years. Before, everyone just entertained themselves at home, but after the government stepped in, people started to gather more often. You know, after spending so much time together, the Hui and Han folks got to know each other well, and their cultures have started to mix and pass on," as noted by an administrator (Interviewee: Administrator-I31). Secondly, the ICH industry has enhanced the perceived value and sense of belonging associated with *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. This applies to both staged performances and daily leisure activities, which have become voluntary and conscious efforts by the community to promote local ICH culture. Residents actively participate in these social activities for personal fulfillment, as one Tianwan villager expressed: "I'm really up for joining in these kinds of things. It's not about showing off or anything; I just love the buzz, you know? Keeps me busy and gives me something to do (Interviewee: Tianwan Villager-I05)." Furthermore, the government's representation of "the other" intersects with the community's sense of "self." The dynamic of constructing a "sense of place" through interaction between the subject and object also reinforces the ethnic group's cultural identity and cohesion.

### Individual Behaviour and Identity Involvement

The interviews revealed that the cultural significance of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* under ethnic group and government practices reflects the convergence of multiple identities of ethnic groups. First, the economised and politicised *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is filled with local government discourse. *Hua'er* encountered the impact of a more enlightened "civilisation", namely globalisation and the market economy, and the context of "economic nationalisation" provided an explanatory framework for individuals' motivations. Ma Chunhui is the chairman of the *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* Folk Association, but he is also a primary school teacher. "I get



research funding for the projects I'm applying for at my school, and the government also funds our association. So, for instance, we can use the *Hua'er* Association to help out with the *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* events the government holds every year. Plus, our members do charity performances for the country when there's a special occasion (interviewee: Local scholars-I30)." The effect of his behaviour is to make individual survival wisdom and coping strategies visible in the interchange of state and personal information. Ma Yongfeng, a genuine farmer who grew up learning to sing *Hua'er* from his cousin, has ventured into the restaurant business in recent years. Beyond his entrepreneurial endeavors, he holds a significant role as the "spokesperson" for *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. He has represented ZHAC on multiple television programs and in June 2023, was sent by the ZCCC to Lanzhou University of Arts and Science to attend a month-long *Hua'er* training class organized by Gansu Province. Ma also engages with audiences through live streaming platforms like Tiktok or Kwai App, which not only generates personal income but also expands his influence. "Making money is great, of course, but it's not a big deal if I don't. What really matters to me is doing something for *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, you know? I just hope more people get to hear my songs (Interviewee: Nianwan-I23)." The effect of Ma's behaviour is that more people will devote themselves to the behavioural activities of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. This illustrates how individual behaviour and a sense of belonging can mitigate the emphasis on financial motives within the ethnic group, subsequently influencing the everyday practices of those who uphold the *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* heritage. In the interplay between cultural identity and financial interests, the ability to perform *Hua'er* garners more recognition from ethnic group than the capability to generate income.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The place reconstruction of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* emerges from a complex, multifaceted process involving various social forces. This study adopts Tuan's framework for discursive analysis, examining the dialectical and interactive relationships between "place and space" to elucidate how the practices associated with *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* shape its spatial order and confer specific values and meanings. From a methodological perspective, as Marcus (2015) suggested, the nature of the research subject dictates the choice of methodology. In the study of traditional Chinese music, the diversity and intersectionality of research methodologies are not only academic objectives but also essential pursuits, especially as the scope of the research subject continues to expand.

In terms of ethno-regional systems, both traditional and contemporary local music, influenced by globalization and various contexts, form complex social systems that defy simple generalization from a single, objective standpoint of structure and de-structuring. Previous research on folk music often disconnects different styles or types from their specific spatio-temporal and cultural contexts, instead emphasizing a misleading universality (Yang et al., 2021). It is therefore more insightful to understand the dynamics of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* by considering the involvement of multiple actors and the multidimensionality of the interplay between "traditional place" and "reconstruction place."

Building on an analysis of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* within the frameworks of "place and space," this article delves into the dynamics and mechanisms of interaction between governmental practices, local reconstruction, and ethnic identity in the contemporary era. The study reveals that *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has continued to evolve diachronically, embodying a regional

musical characteristic that resonates with the cognitive and emotional experiences of the ethnic group. It represents a "sense of place" that profoundly influences their attitudes and lifestyles. Presently, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* not only meets the spiritual needs of ethnic groups beyond their material existence but also underscores significant "human-land" relationships and "place" relevance.

This paper analyzes the *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* based on the foundations theory of "place and space," and reveals the interactive mechanism between the governmental practice, place reconstruction and ethnic group identity of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* under synchronicity (Figure 1). Firstly, the local knowledge embodied in *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has perpetuated its diachronic development characteristics. In aspects such as ethnic integration, folklore, lyrical content, and symbolic elements, it still manifests as a regional musical trait. This trait is fundamentally based on the cognitive and emotional experiences of individuals, reshaping their attitudes and ways of life into a profound "sense of place." Currently, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* continues to meet the spiritual needs of ethnic groups beyond their material existence, carrying distinct human-earth relationships and local significance.

Secondly, From a synchronic perspective, the place reconstruction of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is significantly influenced by governmental practices. Initially, the creation of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s local cultural symbols involves the collaborative efforts of the ZHAC's cultural department and various ethnic groups within governmental frameworks (the other). This collaboration fosters a network of relationships that effectively safeguards folk music and enhances the ethnic group's "sense of place" (self) through governmental support. Moreover, the emphasis on protecting and innovating *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*'s cultural heritage has broadened its local identity. Despite the transformation of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* into an instrumental product by governmental practices propelled by power and capital, it has not deviated from its essence over extensive periods of intervention. Instead, grounded in its cultural gene, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has progressively evolved through tolerance, adjustment, and innovation. This process of continual reflection and reconstruction has enabled *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* to earn the acceptance and identification of multiple subject across various contexts.

Thirdly, in the process of the dual mechanism of place reconstruction, *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* has changed the value perception, emotional belonging and choice behaviour of ethnic groups. The essence of the ethnic group's identity change towards *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* is the association and fusion of their own "self" identity and the "self" identity of the government's "the other" place. Firstly, the instrumental rationality of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* fosters a psychological transformation within the ethnic group, marked by self-awareness, self-recognition, and self-confidence, thereby reinforcing their "self" identity. This empowerment motivates residents to actively engage with the governmental system. Secondly, government practices involving ethnic group participation have facilitated the inheritance of *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*. These practices have not only deepened the cultural belonging and ethnic cohesion of the groups but also enhanced their understanding of regional characteristics. Moreover, they have preserved a vibrant living atmosphere and strengthened the deep historical memories and emotional consolidation of the ethnic groups. Through *Zhangjiachuan Hua'er*, the ethnic group have achieved a sense of belonging and emotional experience, as well as mutual recognition. In the end, the reshapener of

*Zhangjiachuan Hua'er* achieves a dual victory for individual and national identities in the transformation of the economic value of traditional culture. In the interaction between the local government, representing the state, and individual *Hua'er* singers, the individuals express the national will, while the local government shapes these singers in accordance with that will. Throughout this process, the relationship between "self" and "other" undergoes no significant changes. Cultural values are more likely to gain community acceptance than economic benefits, and the singing behavior of residents, driven by hobbies and interests, is characterized by tolerance and coexistence.

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