



# A Literature Review on the Theme of Female Music in the Accompanying Marriage Songs in Jiahe County, China

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**Abstract:** The accompanying marriage songs in Jiahe County (hereinafter referred to as JHAMS) are rare female music examples in Chinese folk wedding rituals. They are particularly precious and special for Chinese music research, which does not pay much attention to gender research. This paper uses a qualitative systematic literature review method to search, screen, classify, analyse, and compare the existing gender research literature on JHAMS. It is found that the proportion is only 10.53%, and the research topics are mainly “female psychology” and “female roles.” It can be seen that further increasing and deepening the gender research on JHAMS has important exploratory significance and academic value.

**Keywords:** JHAMS, Female music, qualitative systematic literature review, gender research

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## 1. Introduction

The JHAMS are an ancient Han folk song in Jiahe County, Hunan Province, China, which mainly reflects the marriage customs of women. In Jiahe County, on the eve of a woman’s wedding, the bride’s family will invite female relatives and female friends from the neighbourhood to sing with the bride. It is both a farewell and a blessing. It is also a folk ritual activity for women’s weddings. It is an art complex that integrates poetry, song, dance, and drama (Hunan Provincial Department of Culture). In 2006, JHAMS was identified as the first batch of intangible cultural heritage list items in Hunan Province. On May 24, 2021, JHAMS was further included in the fifth batch of representative items of China’s national intangible cultural heritage. This marriage custom has a long history. By the Tang and Song Dynasties (Around the 7th to the 13th centuries AD), its artistic expression form had been very perfect (Wen, 2009; Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009). “Jiahe wedding songs are the most mature, ancient, perfect, and distinctive artistic expression of human emotions in the Chinese nation’s marriage activities.” (Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009)

From the perspective of the singing content and performance form, JHAMS is a lyrical folk song and dance drama that mainly reflects women’s marriage customs. What attracts the world’s attention is that it is a kind of female music that is completely created, sung, and passed down by women (He, 2018; Jiang, 2012; Xiao, 2009; Wang, 2008; Li, 2005).

As female music, JHAMS has created a female music behavior model, namely female creation, performance, and inheritance. In a male-dominated society, JHAMS seems to have broken away from the shackles of male power. Men have become the others, and women are the absolute controllers of this musical behavior. Traditional JHAMS reflect women’s strong sense of resistance and spirit of striving for independence, and the expression is very straightforward and undisguised. JHAMS is a way for Jiahe women to express their emotions and respond to male dominance through music.

JHAMS seems to answer the many questions Nettl asked about women’s music research. For example: What has been the role and the contribution of women, in the world’s musical cultures? In what way have women affected the development of all musical life in human societies? How have women reacted musically to male domination? (Nettl,2010) As a Chinese female music, JHAMS is extremely precious in Chinese culture and music, which have always been dominated by men. Its research value is self-evident.

## 2. Method and Analysis

### 2.1 Research Method

The research object belongs to the discipline of ethnomusicology, so this paper mainly adopts the qualitative systematic literature review method (Tawfik, G.M. et al. 2019). The following steps were strictly followed: Step 1: clarify the research question, using gender, female music, and women’s music as search keywords; Step 2: formulate a search strategy, mainly using CNKI as the retrieval platform; Step 3, literature screening, selecting female music content from the existing literatures; Step 4: data extraction and analysis, including longitudinal summary and horizontal comparison; Step 5: review

writing; Step 6: feedback and revision.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

Data on the CNKI shows that, JHAMS' academic research started in 2005 and is still continuing and deepening. There are 38 articles, which are divided into eight categories.

**Table 1. Distribution of Research Theme**

NO.	Theme	Number of Literatures	Percentage
1	Comprehensive Research	4	10.53%
2	Music Analysis Research	6	15.79%
3	Ritual Research	2	5.26%
4	Comparative Research	3	7.89%
5	Social and Cultural Research	3	7.89%
6	Research on the Inheritance and Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage	14	36.85%
7	Literature Review	2	5.26%
8	Gender Research	4	10.53%
	Total	38	

The classification data shows that the most papers are on the theme of Research on the Inheritance and Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, accounting for 36.85%, followed by Music Analysis Research, accounting for 15.79%, and the research papers on the theme of Gender Research are the same as the Comprehensive Research papers, accounting for 10.53%. There are 4 articles on the theme of gender research, of which 3 are on the theme of "female psychology" and 1 is on the theme of "female role."

There are four articles based on gender theme, namely, Wang Weiwei (2008), "From Music Matters to Female Psychology," Xiao Mei (2009), "Female Psychology Reflected in JHAMS Music Form," Yang Jiaoli and Liu Linfang (2015), "The Expression of Female Psychology in Folk Marriage Customs Culture: JHAMS Research," and He Weijing's (2019), "Female Roles in JHAMS".

Wang (2008) focused on the transformation of the female roles of Jiahe women and the female psychology it embodies. The content and emotions of JHAMS reflect the status of women in society at that time and their true views on marriage and society. JHAMS has quietly changed in modern weddings, and it is more used to adjust the atmosphere of the wedding. Xiao (2009) believes that JHAMS is the bride's emotional confession to her relatives, friends and sisters before getting married, and her concerns about the change of identity and role after getting married. The female psychology mainly includes the sadness of parting, the worries about the future, and the unfairness of fate. These contents are a true portrayal of the bride's life role transformation. Yang & Liu (2015) believe that the lyrics of JHAMS fully express the various emotions and feelings of female at marriage, reflecting the social status and circumstances of female for thousands of years. JHAMS truly records the entanglement of various complex emotions of female at the moment of marriage, such as praise, blessing, gratitude, resentment, accusation, curse, expectation and worry. JHAMS is a dual portrayal of women's life circumstances and social status. He (2019) mainly analyzed the female characteristics in the JHAMS ritual procedures and the female consciousness reflected in the musical structure. And discussed the impact of the change of female roles on the development of JHAMS from the perspective of the dynamic development of female roles. It is believed that female culture is the core of the emergence and development of JHAMS. The ritual links, singing content, musical structure and other aspects of JHAMS have changed with the changes of female roles.

## 3. Research Findings

### 3.1 More Descriptive and Less Analytical

Wang (2008), Xiao (2009), Yang and Liu (2015) all analyse female psychology in traditional JHAMS and summarise and describe it from the lyrics of traditional JHAMS. The analysis and conclusions are basically the same. The female psychology in traditional JHAMS mainly includes several emotions: sadness, longing, worry, resentment, dissatisfaction, etc., and the reason for the above psychology is the unequal status of Jiahe women in marriage and society. Specifically, Wang Weiwei's article briefly introduces and analyses the melody, rhythm, form, tonality, auxiliary words, and auxiliary intonation of the music part, but it only stays at the level of traditional musicology analysis. There is no in-depth study of the

relationship between female psychology and music and no explanation of how Jiahe women express psychological emotions through specific musical forms and styles. Xiao Mei's article briefly summarises the psychological emotions reflected in the transformation of female roles (daughter and wife) in the lyrics. However, this article is a very short introductory article with only about 1,200 characters in the whole text. Yang Jiaoli and Liu Linfang's article is mostly descriptive, with little analysis content, and the content and views are basically the same as the above two articles.

### **3.2 Music Analysis not Linked to Culture**

He Weijing (2019) has a deeper exploration than the previous three articles. She mainly studies from the perspective of female roles in traditional JHAMS, trying to analyse how women express emotions and feelings through music. However, this article still has some regrets. First, the analysis of female musical characteristics is not comprehensive. Traditional JHAMS has seven links, and the content and style are very different. The article only analyses the music of the second link in the ceremony. Although the "feminine ending" is mentioned in the analysis of the fourth link music, it is not discussed in detail, and the typical female music techniques and characteristics (including the lyrics) are not sorted out, summarised, and summarized. Second, the female psychology and emotions in the song are simply attributed to the unequal social status of women and the tradition that marriage is generally decided by parents, without analysing how women express themselves through music based on such a cultural background or what kind of musical language is used to express emotions and respond to male power.

## **4. Conclusion**

### **4.1 Lack of Female Music Research Habits in China**

Nettle emphasized that women in music research or women's music research has only recently become the most cutting-edge topic in ethnomusicological discourse (Nettl,2010). James said in summarizing the feminist music research in the past two decades of the 21st century: "feminism, both in general and in relation to music scholarship, has evolved to the point that a comprehensive overview is impossible in anything less than an encyclopedia." (James,2020,p.1). It can be seen that women in music and gender studies in music have become a topic of great concern in the field of modern humanities and even in the entire discipline.

However, such a proposition that has attracted widespread attention in the international music community has a completely different situation in China. Chinese women have experienced more than two thousand years of male oppression, and women have always been dependent on male power. Logically speaking, women should have deep resentment. In the late Qing Dynasty (around 1840), China's gender issues and women's liberation movement began to emerge. "But at this time, gender issues never appeared in a form separated from other movements, but were linked to China's national crisis of anti-aggression." (Dong, 2009, p. 167). At this time, China's women's liberation movement did not form a direct confrontation with men, society, or the country. On the contrary, due to the sense of national crisis of being colonised, women more often reflected their own value of existence by negotiating and making concessions with male groups, society, the country, and the nation. From this perspective, China has never formed an independent feminist movement.

Especially after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, women's issues rose to the level of national ideology and were included in national issues. Gender equality became a basic national policy of our country. In the years that followed, the country promulgated a series of laws and regulations to strive for gender equality at the political and economic levels. "The situation of Chinese women being suppressed for more than 2,000 years seems to have been completely released overnight. The achievements of the Western feminist movement for more than 200 years seem to have been achieved in China in just a few decades." (Song, 2011, p. 176). Based on the above political background, Chinese female music scholars rarely have female experience and viewpoints. In addition, most of the people involved in Chinese music research are men, so they are even less likely to examine music from a female perspective. Therefore, the Chinese music community is actually very unfamiliar with Western feminist music research and social gender music research trends, and they don't pay much attention to them.

It was not until the end of the 20th century that scholars introduced the relevant theories of feminist music research to China and began to try to use feminist theories to study the issue of Chinese women's music. Yang Mu observed the achievements of Chinese folk music circles and found that the subject of gender is often marginalised by the mainstream discourse in society, and under this influence, we often habitually ignore many musical and cultural phenomena that can be used as research topics (Yang, 2009). Zheng Su said in an interview that he chose to use feminist and sexist perspectives to examine Chinese music in the mid-1990s. The first reason was that he saw that this field was still blank in China at that time(Zheng, 2009).

Since 2010, the Chinese music community has seen explosive growth in the study of women's music, but it has never attracted the attention of academic authorities. Since 1980, the Seminar on Chinese Ethnomusicology has been held every two years, and held for 22 sessions by 2023 (Liu, 2021). I have reviewed the topics of the 22 sessions, and after 42 years of academic seminars, there are no conference topics on women's music research. As the most authoritative academic conference on Chinese traditional music and ethnomusicology, the topic of women's music research has always been a marginalised field. It can be seen that the big academic background factor is the fundamental reason for the comparative lag of gender research in China.

## 4.2 The Academic Research on JHAMS Started Relatively Late

JHAMS began its academic research in 2005, but it has a long history of collection and collation work. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the collection and rescue of Jiahe local art and culture were carried out from national to local levels, and the folk songs of Jiahe County were collected and organised about four times. The first was winter 1951–1953, the second was winter 1957–summer 1958, the third time was in the winter of 1978–May 1979, the fourth time was 1986(Li, 2014).

Based on four field trips to traditional JHAMS scores, a series of score collections were compiled and published, such as Selected Jiahe Folk Songs in 1956, Collection of Chinese Folk Tales (Hunan Volume) · Jiahe County Data Book in 1986, Collection of Chinese Folk Songs · Chenzhou Region Volume in 1989, Collection of Chinese Folk Songs Hunan Volume in 1999, etc. Some internal documents were also produced, such as Jiahe Folk Songs by Wang Jizhou (2014), JHAMS by Li Bitumen (2014), JHAMS by Guo Qiuzhi (2014), and Jiahe Folk Songs by the Jiahe Folk Songs Editorial Committee (2014).

The Hunan Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List: I records that There are about 2,000 JHAMS songs still passed down orally, and more than 1,300 of them have been collected and organised, accounting for nearly 60% of the total number of Jiahe folk songs and ballads that have been collected and organised.(Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, 2009). Although these results are still relatively preliminary data collection and sorting work, they have preserved much of the first data, so they have important historical value. Although there is a long-standing collection foundation, it is regrettable that academic research on JHAMS did not begin until the 21st century, missing many golden opportunities for empirical research and field investigations and also causing historical defects in today's gender research.

## 4.3 Statement and Discussion

As Joseph Kerman said, we can't just stop at the statement of musical facts; we must interpret the meaning of the historical facts and texts that have been sorted out clearly, The academic orientation of musicology should be music criticism that integrates historical research and music analysis (Sun, 2003). The greatest feature and value of JHAMS is that it is a unique female music culture, a kind of music that is created, sung, and passed down entirely by women. At the same time, the female independence consciousness and spirit highlighted in the songs are also very unique and rare. The accompanying marriage songs or the weeping marriage songs in other parts of China require women to follow the "three obediences and four virtues" etiquette constructed by the male power of Chinese feudal society and rarely touch on the content of the feudal marriage system. "But in JHAMS, there are almost no songs that reflect obedience to the patriarchal marriage system. Instead, there are many Scolding Matchmaker songs and other songs that curse marriages to allude to and criticise the feudal marriage system. This is also the biggest difference between the two types of music." (Li & Chen, 2010, p. 13). As Small said, in the world of Jiahe County women, JHAMS is no longer just a song in the sense of music, "music is a kind of weapon to defend the central expressive interests of a society." (Nettl, 2010, p. 247).

The "Aphasia" state of Jiahe men in the wedding songs seems to contain a profound interpretation of Koskoff's interpretation of performance: "Music performance can also provide a context for behavior that challenges or threatens the established social and sexual order." (Koskoff, 2014, p. 40). JHAMS is actually a complaint and challenge to male power by Jiahe women. "All people who resist inequality based on gender are feminists." (Koskoff, 2014, p. 7). If from this point of view, Jiahe women are well-deserved and brave "feminists."

In the perspective of "feminist ethnomusicology" (Wrzen, 2015, p. 468), JHAMS should be studied in the following dimensions: Musicological analysis cannot stop at the traditional methods of empirical investigation and style analysis but should use the research ideas of "new musicology" (Sun, 2003, p. 45) to explore the cultural significance of musical works or musical phenomena and deeply interpret the gender significance of the symbols and rhetoric in the musical form. For contextual analysis, "Music in culture" or "music as culture" (Merriam, 1977, p. 202, 204), we need to further analyse the elements with typical female music characteristics in a broader cultural context, analyse the impact of cultural context on this female music form, and determine how it is expressed in musical form. In transformation analysis, we should examine and analyse the impact of cutting-edge topics such as "human mobility", "power", "technology", "media", "policy", "com-

mercialization”, “consumption”, and “tourism” on JHAMS.

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