

Jiaodong Dagu and the Concept of Aesthetic Harmony: Philosophical Reflections on Vocal Performance

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Abstract

As a living embodiment of the Chinese national spirit and folk wisdom, the cultural heritage of Jiaodong Dagu Art showcases to the world the diversity and adaptability of humanity's intangible cultural heritage. This paper takes the national intangible cultural heritage, Jiaodong Dagu Art, as its research object, exploring how its performing arts concretize the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of harmony, particularly the philosophical connotation of the Confucian "harmonious beauty".

Jiaodong Dagu Art originated during the Qianlong era of the Qing Dynasty and has a history of over 260 years. It was initially created and performed by blind artists, later evolving into a folk art form with a strong rustic charm, and is divided into three regional schools: Northern, Eastern, and Southern. This paper analyzes the structural composition of Jiaodong Dagu Art from three dimensions: vocal melody, performance mechanisms, and textual content. The rhythmic variations in Jiaodong Dagu Art's melodic system—such as the introductory melody, level melody, and fast beat—achieve a dynamic balance in emotional expression through the dialectical unity of pitch fluctuation and rhythmic control. Performance forms like the "partnership" model rely on coordinated interaction between the lead singer and accompanists, metaphorically reflecting the Confucian social ideal of "harmony between

ritual and music". Textual narratives, such as the retributive justice structure in "Zi Jinzhuo", reinforce ethical consensus and moral cultivation. The study further reveals that Jiaodong Dagu Art is not merely a folk art form, but also an artistic vehicle for the philosophical concept of "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity". During The War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, its function evolved from entertainment to a medium for revolutionary propaganda. In the digital age, the integration of rock elements into Jiaodong Dagu Art within contemporary intangible cultural heritage preservation reflects a creative transformation of the concept of harmony. This case offers an interdisciplinary perspective bridging aesthetics and philosophy for the study of folk performing arts, and provides insights for dissolving binary oppositions in global art ethics while promoting an ecological holistic turn.

Keywords: Jiaodong Dagu Art; "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity; Cultural Heritage; Intangible Cultural Heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

As a national intangible cultural heritage, the developmental journey of Jiaodong Dagu Art profoundly reflects the evolutionary path and current state of preservation of Chinese folk arts. Its creative transformation as an intangible cultural heritage also offers rich cultural significance for academic research. Placing Jiaodong Dagu Art within the philosophical framework of "harmonious beauty" advocated in works such as The Doctrine of the

Mean (Zeng Shen (2015) and Zhu Xi's (1983) Collected Commentaries on the Four Books, more effectively reveals its artistic essence and contemporary value. Jiaodong Dagu Art originated during the Qianlong era of the Qing Dynasty (1736-1795) and has a history of over 250 years. Initially created and performed by blind artists, it was historically known as "Blind Tune" or "Sightless Melody." Its performance format primarily features the Dagu, clappers, and three-stringed lute as accompanying instruments, combined with storytelling in local dialect, forming a folk art form with a strong rustic flavor. Throughout its historical evolution, Jiaodong Dagu Art has branched into three regional schools—Northern, Eastern, and Southern (Ji, 2014)—each distinguished by unique vocal and performance styles. For instance, the Northern School (Liang style) is characterized by resonant and melodious tones, the Eastern School (Peng style) by rustic and straightforward rhythms, and the Southern School (Xu style) by smooth and graceful melodies, reflecting the artistic diversity of the form (Yao & Zhang, 2021). During the Anti-Japanese War, Jiaodong Dagu Art underwent a critical transformation. Organizations of blind performers were restructured into the "Blind Artists' Anti-Japanese National Salvation Association" (Compilation Committee of Local Records, 2013). By adapting Dagu lyrics to promote revolutionary ideals, the art form evolved from folk entertainment into "revolutionary Dagu storytelling." It not only boosted public morale but also took on special tasks such as intelligence gathering, infusing the art with strong contemporary spirit and patriotic significance.

However, with the acceleration of social modernization, Jiaodong Dagu Art now faces severe challenges in transmission. Traditional performance settings are shrinking, veteran artists are passing away, and young audiences are declining (as shown in Table 1).

Nevertheless, its value as a microcosm of Jiaodong folk culture remains undiminished. Instead, under intangible cultural heritage protection policies, it has experienced a revival. For example, Qixia City has promoted projects such as archiving blind artists' works,

rescuing endangered repertoires, and training primary and secondary school teachers, driving its transition from "survival" to "revival." Meanwhile, Laizhou's innovative practices have integrated children's musical stage dramas with textbook content, achieving a creative transformation of this traditional art.

Table 1: Development Status of Jiaodong Dagu Art in China

Inheritance crisis	Protection and innovation measures	Key data/case
The old artistes are dying out and the ranks of the inheritors are dwindling.	Systematic archival arrangement and talent pipeline construction	There are only 5 artists left in Laiyang who are skilled in their craft, and they are all older. Jixian has established a profile for 21 blind artists and has conducted training for primary and secondary school teachers to cultivate new talent.
Traditional performance venues are shrinking and audiences are dwindling.	Cultural and tourism integration and media dissemination	Organize artists to participate in the shooting of TV programs such as "Wanxiang China" and "CCTV Art" to expand influence
The disconnection between art forms and contemporary aesthetics and education	Educational integration and creative transformation	Incorporate the classic repertoire "The People's Militia Hero Lin Huailong Lays Down His Rifle" into patriotic education in primary and secondary schools. Carry out "Intangible Cultural Heritage into Schools" activities, and cooperate with universities (such as Weifang University) for research. Create and rehearse new repertoires such as "The Ginseng Spirit".
Lack of long-term protection mechanism	Formulate top-level design and long-term planning	The Chinese cultural department has set up a special leadership group for protection and formulated a five-year protection plan that includes five major protection mechanisms.

Note: The above information and data are from the long-term field survey in the Jiaodong Peninsula of China and have been authorized by the interviewees

From the perspective of academic value, Jiaodong Dagu not only serves as a living specimen for the study of regional culture, but also as an important window understanding the evolution of Chinese folk art. As a national non-heritable project, its academic significance is firstly reflected in the potential of interdisciplinary research. From the perspective of musicology, the patterns such as "Qi qiang" ("Ping Qiang" ("Luo Qiang" and "Kuai Ban" in Jiaodong Dagu integrated local folk songs and external opera elements, forming a unique aesthetics of simplicity and imitation. On the folkloric level, it records the life rituals, linguistic habits, and social changes of the Jiaodong region, such as the traditional book "Zi Jinzhuo" and the new work "The People's Militia Hero Lin

Huailong Shoots Down", which together constitute the carrier of historical. However, the current academic research on it is still insufficient, and most of the results are concentrated on the description of superficial phenomena, lacking in-depth analysis music structure, dissemination mechanism and cultural ecology, which makes the systematic collation of literature data an academic blank that needs to be broken through urgently.

The artistic characteristics of Jiaodong Dagu music are highly integrated with the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of harmony, especially in the philosophy of "The beauty of moderation" as expounded in the book "Zhong Yong". The so-called "golden mean" refers to "moderation" and "impartiality" for the former, and "harmony" and "" for the latter, emphasizing that things reach the highest realm in dynamic equilibrium. The melody design of Jiaodong Dagu follows this belief exactly. For instance, the rhythm of the "three major tunes" is broad and the pitch is fluctuating, but it is regulated by a plain narrative method to control the excitement and relaxation, so that the emotional expression is moderate, neither excessive nor insufficient, and it shows state of "combining hardness and softness". Moreover, the shape of the sky being round and the earth being square in its accompaniment instruments symbolize the harmony of "Yin and Yang", and the form of combined singing and reciting in performance maintains the continuity of the story ("middle") and integrates the emotional rendering of music ("harm"), which as a whole constitutes a harmonious experience of "Edutainment" (as shown in Table 2). This aesthetic concept is more profoundly mapped in the social function of Jiaodong Dagu: during the war, it conveyed revolutionary passion and softened the sharpness of propaganda (returning to harmony) through the folk identity of blind artists, achieving a balance between political demands and artistic expression. In contemporary, the adherence to traditional innovation (such as Qixia maintaining the traditional vein and Laizhou exploring children's plays) reflects a modern interpretation of the "Dao"—neither too conservative leading to rigidity nor too innovative losing the source. In short, the interplay of trends, values, and philosophical significance of Jiaodong Dagu only provides theoretical support for the protection of intangible cultural heritage but also demonstrates the unique vitality of traditional Chinese culture in the context of globalization.

Table 2: The artistic characteristics of Jiaodong Dagu and the philosophical connotation of "the beauty of moderation"

Structural elements	Rigidity expression	Flexible expression	The way to achieve the "state of neutrality"	corresponding philosophical connotation
Core board type	Rap; the three main modes	Start the cavity; level the cavity	Transition by two-board, falling board, etc.	Joyful but not licentious; sorrowful but not hurtful; expressed in a moderate way is called harmony.

rhythmic characteristics	Fast, tense, and rigid; broad and free .	Steady; long; smooth	Rhythmic contrast of fast and slow; smooth transition	Dynamic equilibrium, diverse unity
Tone range and melody;	Broad range of tones, with great ups and downs	The tone is lyrical and euphemistic, close to spoken language.	The rise and fall of the pitch blends with the changes in the melody.	Mutual complementation of hardness and softness; harmony and beauty

The artistic characteristics of Jiaodong Dagu music are highly integrated with the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of harmony, especially in the philosophy of "the beauty of moderation" interpreted in the book "Zhong Yong". The so-called "the middle and the harmony" means that "The Mean" refers to moderation and, and "the harmony" refers to harmony and unity, emphasizing that things reach the highest realm in dynamic balance (as shown in Figure 1). The melody design of Jiaodong Dagu embodies this philosophy in practice. For example, the "three major tones" have broad and a wide range of tones, but through the adjustment of narrative flatness, the excitement and relaxation are regulated to express emotions that are neither excessive nor deficient, presenting a state of "combining hardness and softness". This aesthetic concept is more profoundly reflected in the social function of Jiaodong Dagu. The war, it not only conveyed revolutionary passion (breaking the routine) but also softened the sharpness of propaganda (returning to harmony) through the folk identity of blind, achieving a balance between political demands and artistic expression. In contemporary inheritance, the exploration of children's Dagu and other practices of adhering to the original and innovating Laizhou reflect the modern interpretation of "The Mean", which is neither too conservative to lead to rigidity nor too blindly innovative to lose the original source. In, the interweaving of the trend, value, and philosophical significance of Jiaodong Dagu not only provides theoretical support for the protection of intangible cultural heritage also demonstrates the unique vitality of traditional Chinese culture in the context of globalization.

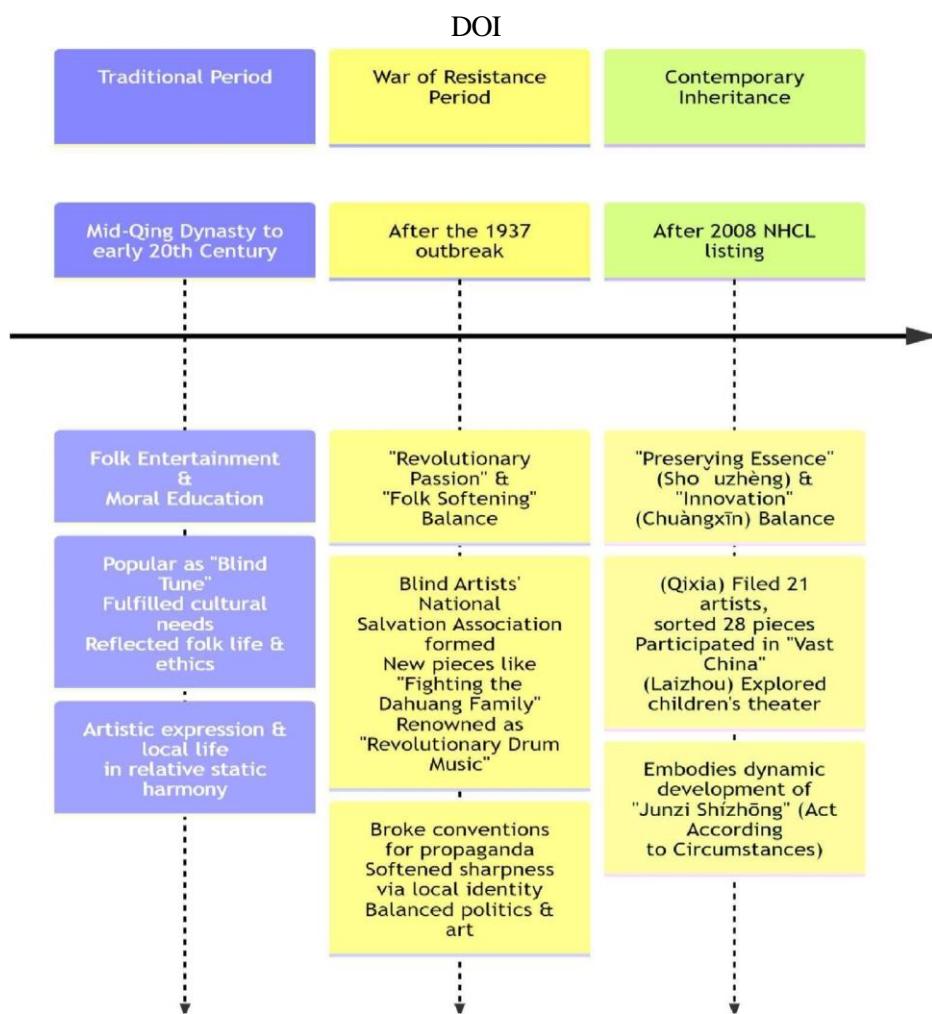


Figure 1: The history of the development of Jiaodong Dagu

The performing art of Jiaodong Dagu embodies the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of harmony in its musical structure, performance mechanism, and content, with its philosophical roots in Confucian "harmony of the mean" and "the unity of heaven and man", and its cultural logic originating from the ethical order Jiaodong regional society and the adaptability of folk art. This research question aims to analyze how Jiaodong Dagu, with its dynamically balanced tonal patterns, performance forms, and ethical narratives, embodies the aesthetics of harmony. Philosophically, the tonal patterns of Jiaodong Dagu conform to the principle of "ony" in the Doctrine of the Mean, achieving a balance between emotional expression and form through the dialectical unity of large pitch fluctuations and steady rhythm. The Dagu points, simulating instrumental timbre of wind and rain and the rustic atmosphere, reflect the concept of the unity of nature and humanity. In terms of cultural logic, as an entertainment and moral carrier in agricultural society, Jiaodong Dagu integrates local dialect tones and sister arts, constructing a metaphor of social order between the popular and the elegant. This article, through an inter perspective of musicology, philosophy, and folklore, reveals the aesthetics of harmony in Jiaodong Dagu's performance practice that has not been systematically elaborated, the gap in the crossresearch of folk art and philosophical aesthetics.

2. The artistic characteristics and historical evolution of Jiaodong Dagu

The artistic characteristics of Jiaodong Dagu are reflected in its "monologue and singingplaying integrated" performance mechanism and the tonal musical, presenting local flavor through flexible forms such as "single help" and "team up" and singing in high and soft tones. Its historical evolution, from the origin of blind peoples tune in the Qing Dynasty, to the transformation of "revolutionary Dagu" for anti-Japanese propaganda, reflects the dynamic development from folk art to cultural carrier.

2.1 Art form and performance mechanism

The artistic form and performance mechanism of Jiaodong Dagou profoundly reflect its flexibility and richness as a folk Quyi (folk vocal art) genre. Its performance styles are primarily divided into three versatile combinations: "solo performance" , "duet performance", and "group performance". Among these, "solo performance" refers to an artist performing alone, singing while self-accompanying on instruments, requiring simultaneous mastery of the three-stringed lute, the book Dagu, and the steel plates. This emphasizes the completeness of individual skill—for instance, holding the "sky plate" in the left hand and the "earth plate", rectangular) in the right hand to mark the rhythm, while the right hand wields a drumstick to strike the flat, round book Dagu (with a drum-edge diameter of approximately 21 cm and a height of 8 cm). This creates an integrated performance of "speaking, singing, and playing." However, due to its exceptionally high demands on the performer's rhythmic sense and coordination, this form has now become relatively rare."Duo performance" is a form of collaborative performance, where one person usually sings and plays the Dagu and clapper, while the other plays the threestringed instrument as accompaniment. The two enhance the narrative tension through the interplay of singing and instruments. For example, when expressing character dialogues or conflicts, the accompanist sim emotional fluctuations through techniques such as slides and tremolos. This form is the most common performance mode due to its flexibility and convenience."Multi-role" refers to a performance style where a team of three or more collaborates, with the lead singer playing multiple roles as needed by the, while the other members provide accompaniment or chorus. This style is commonly used in temple fairs, festivals, and other gatherings to create a lively interactive atmosphere on stage. For, in the performance of the traditional book "Purple Golden Bracelet," several artists present the ethical narrative of good and evil retribution through the vivid characterization of. The core artistic technique of Jiaodong Dagou lies in its integration of storytelling and singing to create atmosphere and depict characters. Its performance is based on colloquial narration, blended with melodic singing to set the scene and portray psychological activities. For instance, in the classic short piece "Liu Ling Gets Drunk", the performer first sets the scene through a steady, spoken narrative, then transitions into a vigorous, high-pitched singing style to vividly express the protagonist's unrestrained drunkenness, immersing the audience in the moment. Simultaneously, performers skillfully employ local dialect tones and onomatopoeia to mimic natural sounds—such as using drumbeats to imitate wind and rain, or the clashing of steel plates tense situations—thereby heightening the dramatic impact. This mode of "speech-like singing and song-like speech" preserves the approachability of folk tales while elevating emotional expression through music, aligning with the rural aesthetic of Jiaodong that finds "refined elegance within rustic simplicity". In terms of musical structure, Jiaodong Dagu belongs to the banqiang style , a system of musical patterns characterized by rhythmic and melodic variations . Its core patterns

include the Qiqiang (opening melody), Pingqiang (level/narrative melody), and Kuaiban (fast passage). These are supplemented by transitional patterns such as Erban , Beiqiang (sorrowful melody), and Luoqiang (concluding melody), which together form a dynamically balanced framework .The Qiqiang is typically used for introductions, featuring a slow, prolonged rhythm and a lyrical, subtle tone to set the atmosphere, as heard in the solemn opening of "The Purple Gold Bracelet".The Pingqiang serves as the primary narrative pattern; its steady, smooth rhythm and repetitive two-line structure (an upper line and a lower line) advance the story, emphasizing a colloquial style suitable for recounting plots. The Kuaiban is employed for climactic scenes or conclusions. Its rapid tempo and intense emotion, often delivered in a swift, tongue-twisting style, heighten conflict. For instance, in "The Battle of Shangying" , the Kuaiban mimics the fury of a storm during battle depictions, gripping the listeners' attention. Furthermore, the Beiqiang uses undulating melodies to express sorrow, while the Luoqiang concludes sections either decisively or with ornate flourishes, demonstrating a precise correspondence between the musical pattern and the dramatic emotion.

2.2 Historical origins and social functions

The historical origins and social functions of Jiaodong Dagu vividly reflect the dynamic evolution of this folk art form over more than 260 years in the Jiaodong Peninsula, transitioning from a means of livelihood for the blind to a tool for anti-Japanese propaganda and eventually to a contemporary intangible cultural heritage, particularly highlighting the variability of such heritage in tourism commodification (Junjie Su, 2019). Its origins can be traced back to the "Blind Tune" during the early Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty (around the mid-18th century), initially created and perpetuated by blind performers. As all singers were blind, it was also referred to as "Blind Tune" or "Blind Melody" . The earliest form consisted of simple combinations of rural folk tunes, which blind artists used to roam villages, earning a living by storytelling paired with divination. Performances primarily emphasized fortune-telling, with singing and narration playing a secondary role; instruments were limited to the sanxian (a three-stringed lute) and jiezi ban (clappers), resulting in straightforward rhythms and monotonous tonal patterns.

According to historical records, the blind artists' organization "Three Emperors Society" convened annually on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month to enforce discipline and penalize members who violated regulations, forming a stringent autonomous system . The emergence of Liu Xueyi, an artist from Rongcheng during the Qianlong era (mid-18th century), marks the approximate 260-year history of Jiaodong Dagu, as the genre's origins can be traced back to this period . Early repertoires predominantly reflected the lives of lower-class communities, featuring folk legends such as Jiang Taigong Selling Noodles and Han Xiangzi Seeking Enfeoffment. By the Jiaqing era of the Qing Dynasty, Shi Yuanlang from Zou County formally established the "Shimen" inheritance system, which systematized the Blind Tune. During the Daoguang to Tongzhi periods, Huang County artist Ding Wuchen incorporated local fishing chants, mountain songs, and folk melodies, creating a high-pitched yet melodious "Head Cavity" and a new narrative tune. This innovation transformed the musical structure from a linked-song system to a main-insertion song format, laying the foundational prototype for Jiaodong Dagu . The form of the steel clappers , known as Heaven-Earth Clappers , also originated from his refinements—the upper crescent-shaped "Heaven board" and the lower rectangular "Earth board" symbolizing the Three Emperors concept of "Heaven, Earth, and Man"

According to historical records, the blind performers' organization "Sanhuang Hui" (Three Emperors Society) would convene annually on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month to reinforce discipline and penalize members who violated regulations, thereby establishing a strict autonomous system. The emergence of Liu Xueyi, a performer from Rongcheng during the Qianlong reign, signifies that Jiaodong Dagu has a history of approximately 260 years. Early repertoire mostly reflected the lives of the lower classes, such as the folk tales "Jiang Taigou Sells Noodles" and "Han Xiangzi Seeks Investiture." By the Jiaqing period of the Qing dynasty, Shi Yuanlang of Zou County formally established the "Shimen" (Stone Gate) transmission system, which systematized the "Blind Tune." During the Daoguang to Tongzhi periods, Huang County performer Ding Wuchen incorporated local fishing chants, mountain songs, and folk melodies, creating the high-pitched and melodious "head cavity" and a new narrative style. This transformed the musical structure from a connected song narrative system to a main melody with inserted songs, laying the foundation for the prototype of Jiaodong Dagu. The form of the steel clappers (Heaven and Earth clappers) also originated from his improvements: the upper crescent-shaped "heaven clapper" and the lower rectangular "earth clapper," symbolizing the Three Emperors concept of "Heaven, Earth, and Humanity."

In the 1920s, blind artists across the Jiaodong region further integrated melodies from Eastern Drum, Laiyang Tanci, and Maoqiang opera, enriching their vocal styles and forming distinct schools named after counties, such as "Penglai Dagu" and "Fushan Dagu," reflecting regional differentiation. Following the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the social function of Jiaodong Dagu underwent a significant transformation: in 1937, driven by patriotic fervor, blind artists reorganized the "Three Emperors Society" into the "Blind Artists' Anti-Japanese National Salvation Society." In 1942, the Jiaodong Cultural Association promoted this transition, and the Blind Salvation Society became a vital force in anti-Japanese propaganda. For instance, Jiang Yan from Jingzibu, Qixia, persuaded the society's leader Dong Riqing to establish the "Blind Artists' Anti-Japanese National Salvation Society" in the Yashan base area, organizing artists to perform in rural villages. Liang Qianguang of the Beihai Theatre Troupe conducted training sessions for blind artists in Yanzikuang, Penglai, creating new works such as "Attacking the Dahuang Family" and "The Battle of Shangying." By incorporating elements of Peking opera and Yangge drum rhythms, he innovated the vocal style, forming the "Liang School Dagu Art," which inspired the masses with resounding steel clappers and combat narratives. His performance instruments were later collected by the Chinese People's Revolution Military Museum. In 1949, during Liang Qianguang's performance at the Qingdao Public Recreation Club, the Jiaodong Cultural Association officially unified the various regional names of the Dagu art, designating it "Jiaodong Dagu" based on its geographic prevalence, linguistic features, and artistic synthesis, marking the transition from disparate local terms to a standardized identity for this musical form.

Following the establishment of New China, Jiaodong Dagu transitioned from rural settings to urban stages. Artists like Liang Qianguang trained core practitioners from the masses, while the repertoire shifted toward celebrating socialist construction, with works such as "Liu Si Turns Over a New Leaf." By 2006, Jiaodong Dagu was included in the first national-level intangible cultural heritage list, transforming its social role into a vehicle for cultural transmission. In contemporary intangible cultural heritage preservation, Jiaodong

Dagu faces survival challenges: societal changes have reduced rural performance platforms, veteran artists are passing away or retiring, and youth succession is fragmented.

However, cultural authorities have implemented five-year protection plans, established leadership systems and talent mechanisms, and organized training workshops. They promote Quyi (folk vocal arts) entering campuses and scenic areas, while leveraging shortvideo platforms for innovative dissemination—such as rock adaptations like "Drunken Eight Immortals" incorporating electric instruments—ensuring Jiaodong Dagu continues to consolidate local identity and promote national spirit amid modernization.

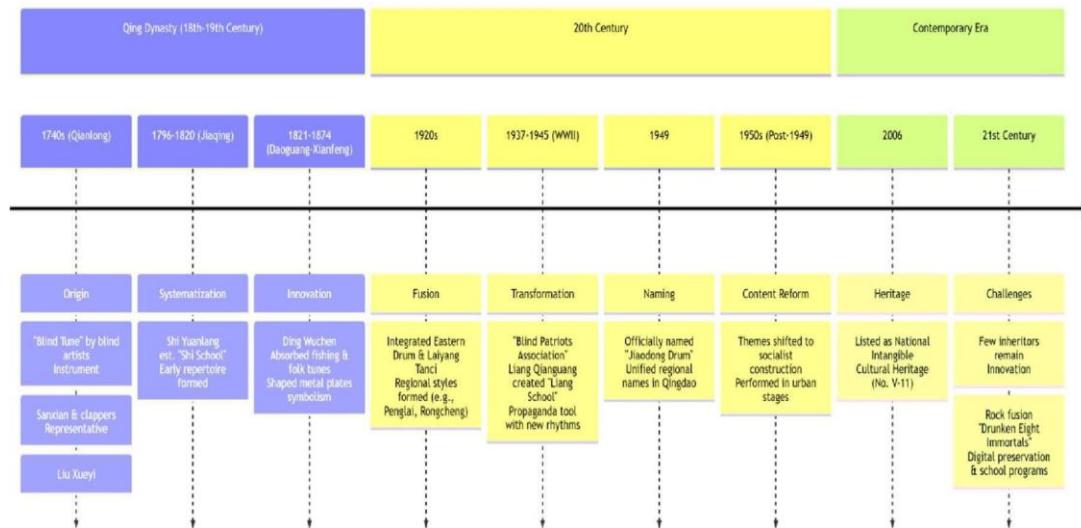


Figure 2: The process of the development history of Jiaodong Dagu

(Note: This chart shows the overall development process of Jiaodong Dagu, organized based on archival materials collected during the social survey in Jiaodong area.)

2.3 Regional schools and style variations

The regional schools and stylistic variations of Jiaodong Dagu profoundly demonstrate how the diverse cultural ecology of the Jiaodong Peninsula has shaped this folk vocal art. The three major schools—Northern, Eastern, and Southern, formed according to geographical distribution—exhibit distinct contrasts within the basic banqiang framework due to differences in dialectal tones, living customs, and influences from sister arts. Firstly, the Northern School is known for its high-pitched and melodious style, prevalent in the coastal areas of northern Jiaodong Peninsula, such as Penglai, Yantai, Huang County, and Muping. Representative artists include the "Liang school" founded by Liang Qianguang, as well as Zhou Dexiang and Wu Xianda. The Northern School's singing style is characterized by its soaring, vigorous, and intricately winding melodies, adept at using melodic variations to portray characters' personalities. For example, it vividly captures the intense emotions of battle scenes in works like "Attacking the Dahuang Family." Musically, the Northern School emphasizes the connection between the introductory melody and the level melody within the banqiang structure. Its melodies are highly expressive and rich with the local flavor of Jiaodong. This style is influenced both by the bold character of fishermen from the Bohai Bay region and by the passionate elements absorbed from the high-pitched singing of Peking Opera and the vigorous style of Xihe Dagu.

Second, the eastern style, characterized by its simple and colloquial nature, is prevalent in the eastern counties of Wendeng, Rongche, Weihai, and Rushao. The "Peng School" founded by

Peng Runzhi represents the eastern style, which is characterized by its simple and unadorned that closely resemble spoken language and storytelling. For instance, the narrative of "Jin Bao Chuan" emphasizes the local dialect's intonation with a plain rhythm, its singing style simplifies complex patterns, mainly consisting of two-board and fastpaced segments, focusing on the clarity of pronunciation and intonation. This style originates from pragmatic nature of the agricultural culture in the eastern part of the peninsula and is also influenced by the local fishing folk songs and the concise tradition of the eastern Dagu.

The Southern School, distinguished by its distinctive operatic flavor, prevails in the southern regions of Jiaodong Peninsula, including Laiyang, Qixia, Haiyang, and Jimo. Its early representative figure was Xu Shanghou, followed later by artists such as Zhang Zhenbao and Feng Yuxiang. The Southern school's singing style is characterized by its smooth, graceful melodies and extensive incorporation of elements from regional operatic forms like Maoqiao and Laiyang Tanci. For instance, in performances of "Zi Jinzhuo", the school adopts operatic techniques such as mournful weeping tones and spoken recitative, even breaking through the conventional banqiang structure by introducing qupai (labeled melodies) like "Manzhou Mi" and "Jasmine Flower" to form a main-insertion song structure. This innovation significantly enhances the dramatic tension of performances. This stylistic variation is closely related to the Southern school's geographical position in the hinterland of Jiaodong and its cultural environment, where frequent exchanges with itinerant opera troupes were common.

The divergence in musical styles is directly driven by differences among the three major dialects. The fluctuating tones of the Penglai dialect in the Northern school correspond to the dramatic melodic rises and falls in its singing style. The straightforward and plain Rongcheng dialect of the Eastern school reinforces the rhythmic sense of its narrative delivery. The soft and delicate Laiyang dialect of the Southern school contributes to the proliferation of operatic ornamentation. Meanwhile, cross-pollination with sister arts further solidified the distinctive characteristics of each school: the Northern school incorporated Peking Opera percussion patterns and Yangge rhythms during its refinement by Liang Qianguang; the Eastern school drew inspiration from the narrative conciseness of Zhouguzi; while the Southern school, through Xu Shanghou's active assimilation of the plaintive tones of Maoqiao and the lyrical flow of Tanci, developed an aesthetic realm of "refinement within popular appeal." This regional variation not only enriched the artistic expressiveness of Jiaodong Dagu but also reflected the cultural logic through which folk vocal arts achieve localized survival by reorganizing dialectal and artistic resources when adapting to different social ecologies.

3. Harmony in adaptability: the cultural logic and aesthetic presentation of "common in elegance" in Jiaodong Dagu

The aesthetic harmony theory in Confucian philosophy centers on the " beauty of moderation", emphasizing that emotional expression must adhere to the principle of moderation—"expressing emotions with due measure and restraint"—to achieve a dynamic equilibrium of strength and gentleness. This concept integrates with the cosmic worldview of "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity", pursuing the unity of natural laws and human creativity. It thereby forms the philosophical foundation for the aesthetic of "refined elegance within rustic simplicity" in folk arts such as Jiaodong . 3.1 The aesthetic ideal of "the beauty of the mean"

The core aesthetic ideal of Confucian philosophy, "the beauty of the mean", originates from the philosophical proposition of "the unex joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness are called the mean; if expressed, they should all conform to the proper measure, which is called harmony" put forward in the Doctrine the Mean, emphasizing the need to achieve a dynamic balance

state between emotional expression and artistic form. Its essence lies in the requirement that the intensity, rhythm, and content of emotional in artistic creation must conform to the principle of "moderation", neither indulging excessively nor suppressing insufficiently, so as to realize the unity of subject and object, ability and rationality, content and form. This balance criterion is specifically manifested in the comprehensive beauty quality of "combining hardness and softness"--the beauty of Yang and the of Yin permeate each other. For instance, Liu Xizai in the Qing Dynasty emphasized "the combination of the two qi of Yin and Yang" discussing calligraphy in his Book of Art, pointing out that art should have both the Yin softness of depression and the Yang hardness of vigor, forming the aesthetic of "graceful yet vigorous, graceful yet strong".

In traditional artistic practice, the "San Duan yi Pu San" structural paradigm of the Tang Dynasty Grand Suite stands as a quintessential exemplar of the "Beauty of mean." Its prelude begins with a freely rhythmic instrumental introduction, establishing a tranquil atmosphere. Upon transitioning to the song head, the tempo shifts to a slow, vocal section characterized by elongated melodies and restrained emotion. Progressing further into the section, the pace gradually accelerates through rhythmic variations such as false acceleration, true acceleration, and rolling cycles, building toward a climactic culmination. The piece concludes abruptly with the Rapid rhythm of cessation and final rolling, collectively forming a dialectical structural movement of "scattered inception—slow expansion—moderate pacing—rapid surge—scattered resolution."

This architecture not only aligns with the moderating principle of "expressing emotions with due measure and restraint" from the Zhongyong (The Doctrine of the Mean) but also achieves an equilibrium between emotional accumulation and release through well-paced rhythmic arrangements. For instance, the renowned Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers comprises 36 sections in total: 6 preludes for emotional, 18 song heads for narrative development, and 12 sections for The sublimation of emotion. As Bai Juyi notably observed, "As a piece approaches its end, the rhythms typically accelerate, yet only 'Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers' concludes with a prolonged, drawn-out tone." This deliberate use of a sudden, extended cadence avoids excessive emotional catharsis, perfectly embodying the Zhonghe ideal of "Joyful but not licentious, sorrowful but not hurtful".

This structural logic extends to other artistic domains: in calligraphy, Sun Guoting advocated for "thorough deliberation and a tranquil spirit, neither impulsive nor sluggish," emphasizing that the weight, speed, and urgency of brushstrokes must maintain mental composure. In painting, the balance of ink tonalities and compositional void-solid relationships pursues an equilibrium of "mutual emergence of void and solid," as seen in Song Dynasty landscape paintings where alternating depths of ink construct natural rhythms. These cases collectively demonstrate that the "Beauty of moderation" is not a rigid dogma but rather a dynamic regulation of opposing elements within artistic form—such as rhythmic tempo, pitch fluctuation, and ink density—ensuring emotional expression remains within the rational framework of "Moderation." This process ultimately culminates in an aesthetic realm characterized by the unity of heaven and humanity and the fusion of emotion and reason.

3.2 The harmonious state of "the unity of heaven and man"

"Unity of Heaven and Man", as the core harmonious realm of traditional Chinese philosophy, emphasizes the organic unity of human beings with nature and the universe, which is vividly reflected in the performance art of Jiaodong Dagu through the imitation of nature by rhythm, and the deep integration of the timbre of musical with the local flavor.

This philosophy stemmed from Dong Zhongshu's thought in the Han Dynasty that "the limits of heaven and man are combined into one" which requires the dialectical unity of the laws of nature and human expression in artistic creation. The instrument design of Jiaodong Dagu directly maps the cosmic view of "unity of heaven and man": its unique instrument, the "Sun and Moon Plate" (also known as the Heaven and Earth Plate), consists of an upper half-moonshaped "Heaven Plate" and a lower rectangular "Earth Plate," symbolizing the structure of the Three Sovereigns of Heaven, Earth, and Man, with the Emperor of Heaven above, the Emperor of Earth below, and man in the middle." When the artists swing the steel plates with their wrists, the clear sound produced not only simulates the natural rhythm (such as the sound of wind and rain, and the calls of birds and animals) but also implies the harmonious role of human beings in the relationship heaven and earth.

Rhythmically, the drumming of Jiaodong Dagu follows the imitation of natural phenomena, such as the hand drumming technique, which simulates the dynamics of wind and rain through dense and rapid "Dagu rolls"; or in narrative, the daily rhythm of neighborhood gossip is expressed through the slow and fast changes of the steel sound, making the artistic rhythm isomorphic to the natural life rhythm.

Musically, the "three-style" tunes imitate the rough flavor of folk songs with wide rhythms and a wide range of pitch, the extension of the drag tune is like the ups and downs of the sea waves, and the steady and long "Qi tune" echoes the slow rhythm of pastoral life. This kind of tone design draws on the natural rhyme of fishing shouts and folk songs along the Jiaodong coast, and transforms natural sounds into artistic language. The unity of the instruments and the flavor of the countryside is reflected in the construction of the accompaniment system. In the early days, blind artists only used three-stringed instruments and clapp, and then gradually integrated pipa, dulcimer and other instruments. Its timbre pursues "high, smooth and turn", which is in line with the geographical of the mountains and the sea in the Jiaodong Peninsula. For example, the glissando of the dulcimer simulates the howling of the sea wind and the granular feeling of the three-stringed instrument echoes the rhythm of farming work, which makes the music full of "sea flavor" and "earthy smell".

In terms of performance content, by combining narrative and singing to depict rural life (such as the folk custom scene of stealing rice cakes in "Tou Niangao" and the fishery narrative of "Big Crab"), the Jiaodong Dagu weaves natural images (such as seasonal changes and marine life) with stories, achieving mutual infiltration of humanistic emotions and natural ecology.

This harmony was not only in artistic form, but also extended to social functions. During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, blind artists set up the the Nation Society, propagated the resistance against Japan through drum books, and transformed natural rhythms into cries for national salvation. In short, with its comprehensive use of sound form and meaning Jiaodong Dagum lifted "the unity of heaven and man" from an abstract philosophy to a perceptible aesthetic experience, and became a model of the harmonious coexistence nature and human beings in folk art.

3.3 The adaptability of the concept of harmony in folk art

The adaptability of the concept of harmony in folk art is reflected in its ability to adjust according to different social strata and cultural environments. Unlike the ritual "elegance" in court music, folk art such as Jiaodong Dagum music emphasizes more on functionality and life-oriented "vulgarity with elegance" characteristics.

The harmonic expression of court music is philosophically grounded in the concept from the Book of "Li Ji•Yue Ji". It manifests the stability of the ruling order through strictly regulated

tonal systems (such as the twelve-tone temperament) and hierarchical orchestral arrangements (e.g., ranked ensembles of bells and chimes). Its performances were predominantly confined to ancestral temple rituals or court banquets, emphasizing the didactic function of "music conveying ethical principles." For instance, although the "scattered-slow-moderate-fast-scattered" structure of the Tang Dynasty "Mi Chang Yu Yi Qu" (A kind of opera name (embodied dynamic equilibrium, it consistently adhered to the framework of ritual propriety. Emotional expression was required to conform to the restrained principle of "sorrow without excessive anguish," ensuring that aesthetic formality remained aligned with ideological decorum.

The concept of harmony in folk art forms, epitomized by the Jiaodong Dagu, is rooted in the pragmatic logic of rural society. Its harmony does not stem from abstract rituals but is achieved through the integration of performance mechanism and daily life, realizing the transformation of "finding elegance in the vulgar". Firstly, the level of "vulgarity", the performance form is extremely simple, requiring only one or two people to perform with a drum, clapper, and three-string instrument ("single-player" or "duet" mode). The instrumentation highlights portability (e.g., a small drum with a diameter of 2 cm and a height of 8 cm), the lyrics are colloquial and rich in dialect and slang, and the content mostly reflects agricultural and fishing life, presenting a simple and rustic atmosphere as a whole.

Secondly, in its process of "elegant sublimation," Jiaodong Dagu achieves artistic refinement through its banqiang melodic structure. The lyrical prolongation of the qiqiang (opening melody), the steady narration of the pingqiang (level melody), and the intense conflict of the kuaiban (fast passage) collectively form an emotional rhythm characterized by the "equilibrium of strength and gentleness." This aligns with the "Zhongyong's principle" of expressing emotions with due measure and restraint. The Three Major Melodies, with their wide vocal range, emulate the style of mountain songs, while the Dagu rhythms' imitation of natural sounds subtly resonates with the philosophical concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity," thereby elevating secular themes to an aesthetic Sublimation. The core of this adaptability lies in folk art's creative response to resource constraints: while court music relied on institutional support, Jiaodong Dagu, operating within limited conditions, achieved harmony through individual artistry and collective collaboration. It even proactively adapted its function during social transformations—for instance, during the War of Resistance Against Japan, blind artists reorganized the "San Huang Hui" (A theatrical activity (into the "Blind Artists' Anti-Japanese National Salvation Society," creating new works such as "The Battle of Shangying." This transformed the aesthetics of harmony into a revolutionary discourse that unified the masses.

The "elegance among the vulgar" attribute of Jiaodong Dagu thus emerges. Its "vulgarity" ensures the artistic vitality diverse scenarios such as rural markets and festive temple fairs, while the "elegance", through the integration of musical routines and philosophical concepts, allows folk emotional expression to maintain while possessing transcendent aesthetic depth. This, in turn, provides a cultural logic for the "dynamic harmony" development path in the contemporary context of intangible cultural heritage protection.

4. The artistic paradigm of "the unity of heaven and man": the embodiment practice of Confucian harmonious aesthetics in Jiaodong Dagu

The unique drum shape, the imitation of the natural rhythm of drumming, and the integration of local flavor in the design of singing tone of Jiaodong Dagu music transform the

philosophical concept of "the unity of heaven and man" into perceptible artistic practice, and realize the embodiment of Confucian harmonious aesthetics in folk art.

4.1 Dynamic balance in singing styles

The dynamic balance in the singing tone of Jiaodong Dagu is reflected in its musical structure of patterns and tunes, which is realized through the dialectical of the fluctuation of intonation and the control of rhythm, achieving a free and easy expression of emotions. This characteristic is particularly evident in the classic piece "Liu Ling Tong" performed by Zhou Dexiang, the representative figure of the Northern School.

The singing tone system of Jiaodong Dagu Art is centered on the three major tones. The "Qi Qiang"(vocal tone) is characterized broad rhythm, wide range of tones, large fluctuations in pitch, and infinite extension, with a rough and high-pitched mountain song flavor. As the main narrative singing tone, "Ping Qiang" is repeated by singing up and down sentences, with a stable and smooth rhythm, emphasizing colloquial expression. In the performance of "Liu Ling Tong", Zhou Dexiang vividly depicts the dynamic balance through the instantaneous switch between the sad tone and the "Kuai Ban". The sad tone renders Liu Ling's decent sorrow after getting drunk with a long melody, and the sharp downward pitch simulates the low ebb of the character's mood, which is in line with the free extension of the three major tones. The "Kuai Ban", in the form of water flow board or running mouth board, accelerates the progress, with one plate the bottom, and the blind is urgent, showing the character's unrestrained nature at the peak of dramatic conflict. This switch of plate not only serves the narrative rhythm, but implies the emotional regulation criterion of "all things are in harmony when they are released" in the "Zhong Yong"(Book title).

Specifically, when the lyrics enter the section where Liu Ling instructs his last words , Zhou Dexiang uses the melancholic tonal contour to depict the character's playful and detached attitude towards, with a wide range of pitch and a free rhythm, imitating the bleak charm of folk songs. However, when the lyrics turn to the climax where Du Kang transforms Liuing into an immortal, the fast-paced rhythm, with its dense drumbeats and clanging steel plate sounds, creates a tense atmosphere, and the speed of the lyrics suddenly, reflecting the principle of "harmony between hardness and softness"—the balance between the high-pitched tones (hard) and the steady rhythm (soft).

This balance not only stems from the complementary nature of the panel design at the technical level , but is more rooted in the regional adaptability of the Jiaodong Dagu. The School naturally derived large fluctuations in intonation changes due to the ups and downs of the Penglai dialect tone, and the performers, through the stability of the "flat" implantation, avoided excessive emotional expression and made the artistic expression maintain local wildness without losing rational restraint.

Furthermore, the essence of dynamic equilibrium is the practice of Confucian "beauty of the mean" in folk narrative arts, and the Jiaong Big Drum realizes the reconciliation of individual emotion and social ethics through the dialectical movement of singing tones (such as the "retraction" of the tragic tone and the "release of the fast beat), just as "Liú Líng zuì jiǔ"(The name of the opera) finally attributes the indulgence theme of drinking to the moral sublimation of becoming immortal,reflecting the aesthetic logic of "common yet refined" in folk art.

4.2 Synergy of performance forms

The coordination of the performance form of Jiaodong Dagu is embodied centrally in the mode of teamwork between two performers. This form, through the cooperation between the main singer and the accompanist, not only constitutes a dynamic balance at the musical level, but also implies the Confucian concept of social order of "lǐ yuè xiāng hè (the harmony of ritual and music)".

Duo performance, as the most common form of Jiaodong Dagum performance, typically involves one person as the lead singer, striking the book and the steel plate , while another plays the three-stringed instrument for accompaniment, forming a collaborative mechanism of "speaking, singing, and playing. In specific practice, the lead singer controls the narrative progress through the rhythm of the drum and steel plate, such as simulating natural rhythms (like sudden rain or babbling brooks with alternating slow and fast drum patterns), while the accompanist echoes the emotional fluctuations of the singing with techniques such as glissando and tremolo of the three-stringed instrument For example, when performing the character's dialogue in "Liú Líng Zui Jiǔ"(Ping Opera repertoire), the three-stringed instrument mimics the state of drunkenness through leaps in high register, and the drum and clapper intensify the dramatic tension with dense strikes. This interaction not only ensures the coherence of the narrative but also achieves the unity of "sound emotion, and meaning" through the question-and-answer correspondence between instruments.

The philosophical core of synergy, rooted in Confucian rites and music, is exemplified by the Book of "Li Ji•Yue Ji", emphasizes that "music is the harmony of heaven and earth; rites are the order of heaven and earth." The jiaodong Dagu duo performance embodies this concept. The lead singer, symbolizing the normative and orderly nature of "rites," directs the narrative process, while the accompanist, with the flexible variations of the three-ed instrument, assists in emotional rendering, reflecting the harmonizing function of "music." Like the monarch-subject and father-son relationships in the social hierarchy, the two are interdependent and work together to maintain the harmony of the artistic whole. This synergy is not only reflected in the complementary instrumental configurations at the technical level, where the rich low of the book drum contrast with the clear high pitch of the three-stringed instrument, and the crisp tapping of the sky plate serves as a bridge interspersed between them but it also extends to the non-verbal communication of the performers, such as the lead singer and the accompanist adjusting the rhythm in real-time through eye contact and microexpressions, ensuring that improvisation remains within the framework of the bianqiang system, embodying the restraint and dynamic balance advocated by the Doctrine of the Mean "To express and all to be in harmony is called harmony."

Furthermore, the coordination of Jiaodong Dagu Art transcends artistic expression and becomes a microcosm of the ethics of Jiaodong society. During the Anti-Japanese War, the performance teams composed of blind artists, such as the Blind People's Anti-Japanese Rescue Federation, integrated individual skills into propaganda power. When performing works such as "Shangying Battle", the combination of the lead singer's passionate narration and the accompaniment's urgent string music not simulated the scenes of war but also strengthened the cohesion of the masses through artistic collaboration, reflecting the expansion of the concept of "ritual and music harmony" from personal cultivation to mobilization.

5. Philosophical reflection: harmony as the cultural support for the development of Jiaodong Dagu

The development of Jiaodong Dagu is culturally underpinned by the Confucian harmonious philosophy of the "Moderate Beauty" and "Harmony between Heaven and Humanity". Its performance mechanism materializes this philosophy through collaborative partnered performances and the dynamic equilibrium of the banqiang melodic structure. Historically, this aesthetic of harmony strengthened national identity, while under modern challenges, it achieves creative transformation via a "dynamic harmony" approach. This enables the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) to sustain vitality between tradition and innovation, offering Chinese wisdom to global art ethics.

5.1 The aesthetics of harmony and national identity of Jiaodong dagu art

The harmonic aesthetics of Jiaodong dagu profoundly reflects the philosophical ideology of "ritual and music harmony" in Confucianism, reinforces the cultural cohesion and collective memory construction of Jiaodong region through the synergy of its artistic form. In terms of performance mechanism, the "partners" form of Jiaodong Daguy implies the social order through the precise cooperation between the main singer and the accompanist. The main singer controls the narrative rhythm through the Dagu the steel plate, symbolizing the normative nature of "ritual". The accompanist echoes the emotional ups and downs with techniques such as sissando and tremolo of the three-string, reflecting the harmonizing function of "music". The relationship between the two is like the hierarchical relationship in Confucian ethics each performing its duties and depending on each other, forming a unity of "sound, emotion and intention". This collaboration is not only reflected in the complementary timbre of instruments on technical level, but also extends to nonverbal communication, so that the improvisation always conforms to the balance framework of the tonal system and practices the emotional regulation criteria of "occurring and in harmony" in the book of "Zhong Yong".

The social functions of harmonious aesthetics were particularly prominent during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. The blind artists transformed the traditional organization "Sān Huáng Huì" into "Blind Persons' War-Resistance and Rescue Congress", and compiled new repertoires such as "Shang Ying Battle", converting artistic synergy into revolutionary mobilization power. For example, Liang Qiangguang innovated the singing tune the blind training class held in Yanzi Kou of Penglai, and integrated combat narratives, making the Dagu rhythm echo with collective slogans, not only rendered the tense atmosphere of the battlefield but also stimulated the audience's antienemy sentiment through the "hard and soft complement each other" pattern changes. This performance mechanism not only reinforced group identity but also sublimated artistic activities into rituals that collective memories—performances in rural markets and festive temple fairs became the cohesion points of local feelings, and the audience consolidated their cultural belonging to the Jiaodong dialect living customs in the shared aesthetic experience.

5.2 Modernity Challenges and the Creative Transformation of the Concept of Harmony

The Jiaodong Dagu is facing a double dilemma of inheriting discontinuities and commercial pressures under the challenge of modernity. Although festivals centered on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) remain key attractions of tourism destinations, the persistent appeal of Chinese opera has declined sharply (Shanshi Li, 2025).

Relying on the concept of harmony, intangible cultural heritage has achieved creative transformation and wider dissemination through the adoption of digital media, video technology, and other modern approaches (Li Wenzhu, 2023). This strategy emphasizes the need for such heritage to find a balance between preserving its "original ecology" and

pursuing innovation. The challenges brought by modernity are reflected in the increasing fragility of the heritage transmission chain. Many forms of ancient tangible and intangible culture are now facing shortages of successors and a loss of traditional skills due to the impact of industrial civilization (Xia Zhonghua, 2024). For instance, there are currently only six remaining inheritors of Jiaodong Dagu capable of performing on stage, most of whom are elderly, creating a critical situation for the survival and continuation of this art form.

Meanwhile, globalization and consumerism have created the risk of excessive commercialization, such as the dilution of the unique tonal features of dialect in some adaptations to cater to the market, falling into the trap of superficiality of "knowing only the surface but not the essence". The crux of this contradiction in a rigid understanding of original ecology. If intangible cultural heritage is regarded as static specimens, emphasizing absolute authenticity, it will instead kill its vitality to adapt to life. On the other hand, if innovation is separated from cultural genes, it is prone to become rootless. For example, some operas blindly integrate popular elements to attract audiences, but lose the core narrative logic.

The practice of Jiaodong Dagu has demonstrated that innovation and heritage can coexist (As shown in Fig. 3 (. For instance, Peng Runzhi, the representative figure of the eastern school, maintains a simple and colloquial style while actively absorbing the rhythm of Peking Opera singing. By adhering to the principle of "protect, break, leave" (i.e., first guarding the traditional form, then breaking the rules, and finally creating an individual realm), he has achieved the integration of the flavor opera with the essence of drum books, embodying the dialectical wisdom of "harmony but difference". This case reveals the essence of the creative transformation of the concept of: transforming the Confucian balance norm of "harmony and beauty" and the ecological view of "the unity of heaven and man" into a dynamic adjustment mechanism, enabling nonheritage to find a fulcrum between "change" and "unchanged".

Specifically, the path of dynamic harmony contains three dimensions. First, on the technical dimension, the protection and activation are balanced through digital living and new media dissemination, such as the precise preservation of the melancholy music score of Zhou Deshuang, a representative of the northern school, by using 3D scanning, and the promotion of adapted works through short video platforms (Liping Fan, 2025), which enables the Jiaodong Dagu to transform the local stage to the virtual space. Second, on the educational dimension, a "dual-habitat" talent training system is constructed, which requires inheritors to master traditional skills and encourages them to learn modern design thinking, such as the university training class that combines Rhino modeling with the arrangement of drum points to cultivate successors with both craftsmanship and creativity. On the ecological dimension, the "non-legacy" cross-border integration is promoted, for example, the integration of Jiaodong Dagu with the cultural and industry, and the design of immersive experience items in the Yantai Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, so that tourists can feel the harmony of rhythm and natural rhythm in striking the by hand, to achieve the living inheritance of "seeing people, seeing things, and seeing life". Finally, the essence of the dynamic harmony path is the inherent requirement of intangible cultural heritage as a living culture-it is neither fossil preservation in a museum nor compromise of commerce without principles, but maintains its vitality through continuous re-creation, so the Jiaodong Dagu becomes a cultural bond connecting tradition and modernity, individuals and collectives in contemporary society.

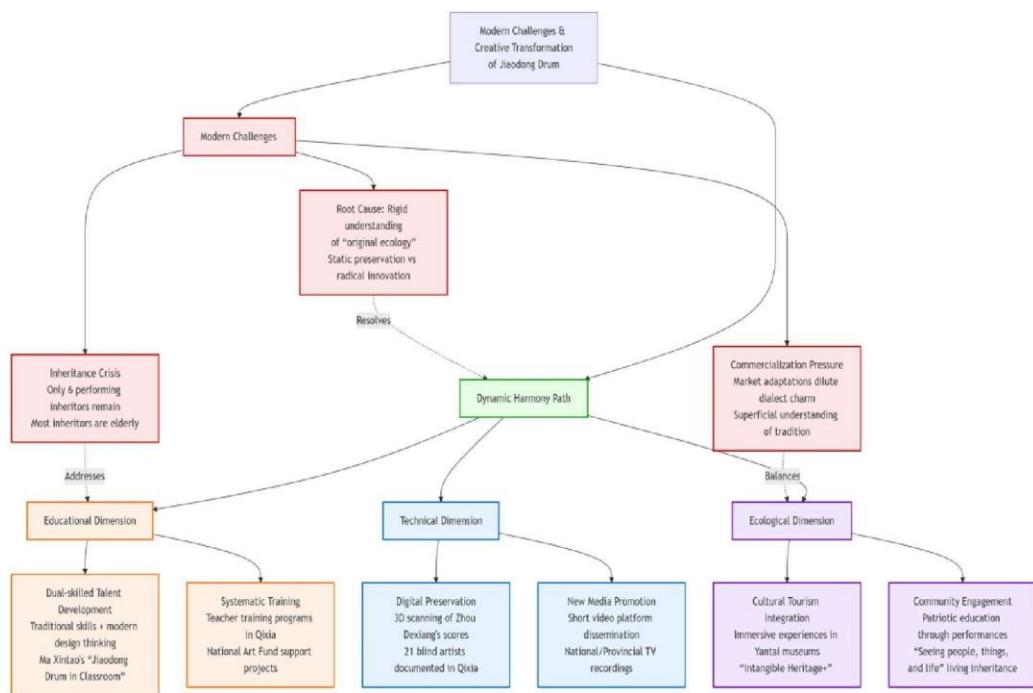


Figure 3: Modern challenges faced by the Jiaodong Dagu

5.3 Cross-cultural enlightenment: the contribution of the concept of harmony to the global art ethics

The contribution of Chinese harmonious concept to the global artistic ethics is reflected in its provision of a balanced perspective for the mining of the global art which is dominated by conflict aesthetics through its philosophical foundation of “the unity of heaven and man”.

This concept dissolves dualistic thinking with a holistic aesthetic paradigm, promoting an ecological turn in artistic ethics. Western performance theory has long been rooted in aesthetics, such as Aristotle's Poetics emphasizing the catharsis of tragedy through fear and pity, and Hegel's aesthetics where the dialectical conflict between subject and object constitutes the artistic drive. This tradition, centered on opposition and tension, has enriched dramatic expression but implicitly contains the logic of human domination over nature. In contrast, Chinese harmonious, with "the unity of heaven and man" as its core, like Zhuangzi's "the transformation of things" thought that blurs the boundaries between subject and object and Confucianism's "the music is in harmony with heaven and earth" regards art as the resonance of the cosmic order. This concept is embodied in the Dunhuangals—their color rhythm imitates the natural rhythm, and the flowing lines echo the vitality, making art an organic extension of the ecosystem rather than an isolated expression.

The distinctiveness of harmonious aesthetics is further reflected in its paradigm shift for global artistic ethics. First, it offers an ethical framework for protecting cultural diversity through the principle of “harmony but difference”, which resists the cultural homogenization implicit in Western universalism. Second, it broadens the scope of artistic creation from merely expressing human emotions to fostering care for the ecological community. Ancient texts such as the pre-Qin “Yue Shu” (Book of Music), which correlates musical order with the movement of celestial bodies, have inspired contemporary ecological art to create with natural materials and to emphasize sustainability. Third, at the level of technical ethics, the

Confucian concepts of benevolence and propriety help establish ethical boundaries for AI-generated art, guiding technological innovation to serve the symbiosis between humans and nature rather than disrupt or dominate it.

This contribution becomes particularly urgent in the context of contemporary global crises. The climate emergency and intensifying civilizational conflicts expose the inherent limitations of Western modernity, while Chinese harmonious aesthetics—rooted in the ecological wisdom that “all things grow in harmony without harming one another”—offers an alternative paradigm that infuses a sense of communal interdependence into global artistic ethics. It encourages a shift in art from representing conflict to envisioning and constructing modes of symbiosis. As Zong Baihua observed, harmony is not a static unity but “the dialectical movement of life and form.” Aesthetics, by shaping artistic worldviews of life, resonates with the cosmic rhythm of creation and thus provides the philosophical foundation for transforming global artistic ethics from a competitive model toward one grounded in collaboration and coexistence.

6. Conclusion

As a national intangible cultural heritage, Jiaodong Dagu music embodies the concept of aesthetic harmony through the three dimensions of singing, performance and text, making it an artistic carrier of the Confucian philosophy of "harmony and beauty", and this discovery has deepened the aesthetic connotation of folk art.

Its theoretical contribution lies in providing an interdisciplinary perspective of aesthetics and philosophy for the study of folk art, enriching the theoretical basis of "the of harmony" through empirical cases, such as the dynamic balance in singing tonal and rhythm control embodies the dialectical unity of pitch fluctuation and rhythm control, the coordination of performance metaphorizes the social order of "rites and music are in harmony", and the ethical narrative of the text reinforces the moral consensus. However, there are limitations in the current, such as the lack of cross-regional comparative studies, and empirical methods such as acceptance surveys need to be introduced in the future to quantify the transmission effect of the aesthetics of harmony, while combining the dynamic path of intangible cultural heritage protection to promote the creative of Jiaodong Dagu in the context of modernization.

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