

# Strategies for Integrating Dehua Mountain Songs into Seventh-Grade Music Classrooms

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**Abstract:** With a profound historical lineage, Dehua Mountain Songs have consistently exerted a significant and dynamic influence across multiple historical epochs. As an art form that integrates literature and music, Dehua Mountain Songs combine literary and musical charm in a complementary manner, featuring vivid, natural, and approachable language with distinctive regional characteristics that hold significant historical and cultural research value. For music education, teachers should actively promote the integration of local ballads into school music teaching, innovate pedagogical approaches, create a favorable cultural atmosphere, and advance the deep integration of local ballads with music instruction, thereby better realizing the educational value of music. Based on the Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards which emphasize “highlighting the characteristics of music and emphasizing interdisciplinary integration” and “promoting national music and understanding the diversity of music culture,” this study systematically examines the regional cultural essence of Dehua Mountain Songs and investigates specific strategies for integrating them into seventh-grade music classrooms. Through teaching practice and critical reflection, actionable implementation pathways are proposed. The findings suggest that integrating Dehua Mountain Songs into junior high school music curricula can not only enrich music course resources but also enhance students’ cultural identity and national pride, providing an effective approach for the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Dehua Mountain Songs; Teaching Strategies; Junior High School Music; Cultural Inheritance; Intangible Cultural Heritage

## 0. Introduction

Deeply rooted in the southern region of Fujian Province, the Dehua Mountain Song is a heritage folk music genre that chronicles the occupational endeavors, everyday lives, sentimental expressions, and artistic pursuits of Dehua County residents over centuries. With a history spanning centuries, these songs have been passed down through oral tradition and remain deeply embedded in the daily lives of Dehua residents. They are recognized as a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage and have drawn increasing scholarly attention in recent years.

Notwithstanding their profound cultural value, Dehua Mountain Songs encounter severe modern-day obstacles, including the erosion of traditional folk customs, an increasingly elderly demographic of artists, shrinking spaces for public performance, and a noticeable lack of engagement from the younger generation. These pressures threaten the continuity of this musical tradition. In this context, introducing Dehua Mountain Songs into school music education emerges as a promising strategy for both revitalizing the tradition and enriching music curricula.

This research centers on seventh graders. The main goal is to figure out practical ways to bring Dehua Mountain Songs into middle school music classes, while also seeing how effective these lessons actually are. The research is guided by the Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards (Ministry of Education of China, 2022), which explicitly advocate for “highlighting the characteristics of music and emphasizing interdisciplinary integration” and “promoting national music and understanding the diversity of music culture”. By aligning with these national standards, the present study seeks to demonstrate that local folk music can serve as a meaningful vehicle for achieving broader music education goals.

## 1. Value and Significance of Integration

### 1.1 Protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage and Inheriting National Culture

The Minnan (Southern Fujian) region has its own distinct cultural heartbeat, and you can hear it clearly in the local Dehua Mountain Songs. As an intangible cultural heritage listed in the third batch of Fujian Province’s intangible cultural heritage catalog, these songs embody the collective memory and cultural DNA of local communities. Integrating them into school curricula helps ensure their transmission to younger generations, thereby contributing to the preservation of national cultural diversity.

Viewing this through an ecological lens, protecting local culture is not just about looking backward at its historical or artistic merits. It is equally crucial to ensure the culture remains practical and alive within contemporary society (Assmann, 2008). Educational institutions play a critical role in this process by providing systematic, sustained exposure to cultural forms that might otherwise fade from public consciousness. Introducing Dehua Mountain Songs in schools creates a structured pathway for cultural transmission that complements informal family and community learning.

The push for cultural preservation has firmly entered the educational sector. Driven by the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Education, the “Fine Traditional Chinese Culture Protection Project” now designates September as “Inheritance Month”—a strategic move designed to cultivate a deeper appreciation for intangible heritage among school-aged children (Ye, 2017). Furthermore, in accordance with the Notice on Strengthening Cultural Heritage Protection, the second Saturday of June each year has been designated as “Cultural Heritage Day” since 2006, providing an annual opportunity for schools to engage in cultural preservation education.

### 1.2 Experiencing the Cultural Sentiment of Mountain Songs and Enhancing Students’ Cultural Identity

Dehua Mountain Songs are essentially the voice of the fields. They capture the everyday rhythm of farm work and the changing of the seasons. More importantly, they provide an honest, raw reflection of what it actually felt like to live and labor in these rural communities. For example, the classic piece *Yu Nong* (Admonishing the Farmers), attributed to the poet Yan Renyu of the Song Dynasty, captures the rhythms of rural life with remarkable sensitivity. Yan Renyu’s lyrics portray the mountains, rivers, and seasonal cycles of the countryside, expressing deep affection for the land and sincere reverence for the labor of farmers. These works reflect a profound emotional bond between the individual and the natural environment, offering rich material for music education that extends beyond mere musical technique.

These songs offer more than just musical practice. They give local students a direct connection to the genuine cultural emotions of their own community. This experiential learning fosters emotional resonance and helps students develop a sense of belonging to and pride in their local cultural heritage. In the context of increasingly standardized and globally oriented curricula, such locally grounded learning experiences provide essential counterbalance, enabling students to appreciate cultural diversity while strengthening their connection to their own roots.

## 2. Specific Strategies for Integration

### 2.1 Classroom Teaching: Cultivating Interest Through Multimodal Approaches

Effective integration of Dehua Mountain Songs into music classrooms requires thoughtful pedagogical design. The following strategies are proposed for seventh-grade music instruction.

#### 2.1.1 Multimodal Introduction: Arousing Initial Interest

First impressions matter in music education. The initial exposure to a new tradition must instantly

pull students in and leave them asking questions. Teachers can utilize multimedia resources—including historical images, archival audio recordings, and documentary footage—to present the social and historical context of Dehua Mountain Songs. For example, when introducing the song Wang Dajie (Sister Wang), teachers might display photographs depicting traditional rural scenes and folk costumes, accompanied by field recordings of local performers, to immerse students in the cultural environment from which the songs emerged. This multimodal approach leverages the visual, auditory, and emotional channels simultaneously, creating a richer and more memorable learning experience than purely verbal or auditory instruction alone. Such immersive introduction aligns well with the Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards' emphasis on student engagement and experiential learning.

### **2.1.2 Music Theory Instruction: Dissecting Form and Structure**

Once the basic context is set, educators need to help the class unpack the specific musical building blocks that make up Dehua Mountain Songs. Key analytical dimensions include the following:

To understand the unique Dehua sound, students pull apart the melodies. They map out how the local scales are built, analyze the jumps between notes, and practice identifying the specific vocal flourishes that give this music its identity. Unlike the symmetrical structures common in many mainstream Chinese folk songs, Dehua Mountain Songs often feature irregular phrase lengths and subtle microtonal inflections that reflect local dialectal prosody.

When exploring the rhythm, the class focuses heavily on how the words dictate the beat. Students learn to hear how the natural spoken accents of the Dehua dialect directly shape the song's timing and melodic flow.

Traditionally, these mountain songs consist of just a single, unaccompanied melody line. However, to help the class truly grasp the concept of musical layers, teachers can easily layer in basic chord progressions or organize simple group ensembles.

**Cultural symbolism:** Each song carries cultural meanings that are inseparable from its musical features. For instance, certain melodic intervals may convey specific emotions (grief, joy, longing) that are culturally coded within the Dehua tradition.

Breaking down the music layer by layer does more than just build basic ear training and theory skills. Ultimately, it opens students' eyes to how intricate and deliberately crafted these folk traditions really are.

## **2.2 Extracurricular Extension: Deepening Cultural Engagement**

Beyond the classroom, extracurricular activities provide vital opportunities for deepening students' engagement with Dehua Mountain Songs.

### **2.2.1 Cultural Activities and Extended Practice**

Teachers can organize a range of extracurricular activities that extend and reinforce in-class learning. These may include:

Turning local history and musical repertoire into a friendly trivia challenge is a highly effective way to get students invested. It naturally pushes them to dig into the cultural background on their own time.

Another great approach is a songwriting contest. The rules are simple: keep the original Dehua melodies, but draft completely original lyrics. This pushes students to connect an old musical style with the contemporary themes they actually care about. This creative exercise helps students internalize the structural and stylistic features of the tradition while exercising their own musical

imagination.

Campus broadcasting is another incredibly useful tool. The school can simply play traditional mountain songs over the PA system between classes. To keep it engaging, these daily tracks can be paired with bite-sized stories about where the songs come from and why they matter. This ambient exposure helps normalize local folk music within the school environment.

Learning the songs isn't enough; students need a chance to perform them. Schools should carve out spaces for kids to get up and sing. This could look like individual solos, group choral numbers, or even creative routines that blend the mountain songs with choreography and instrumental backing.

When all these pieces come together, they do more than just back up the standard curriculum. They build an environment across the entire campus where this music feels alive. Ultimately, the kids aren't just memorizing notes; they are forming a deeply personal bond with their local history.

### **2.2.2 Leveraging National Cultural Heritage Initiatives**

Schools can strategically align Dehua Mountain Song education with national cultural heritage initiatives. The “Cultural Heritage Day” in June and the “Inheritance Month” in September provide natural hooks for themed activities, performances, and exhibitions. By connecting local musical traditions to national cultural policies, schools reinforce the message that protecting and transmitting intangible cultural heritage is both a local and a national responsibility.

## **3. Reflections and Recommendations**

Putting these teaching strategies to the test highlights a few crucial lessons about how to actually make Dehua Mountain Songs work in a middle school classroom.

### **3.1 Shifting from Knowledge Transmission to Cultural Cultivation**

In the current educational environment, teachers must move beyond the traditional model of knowledge transmission and skill training. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on cultivating students' sense of cultural identity and belonging. Music teachers should see themselves not merely as instructors of technique but as cultural mediators, organizers, facilitators, and learning supporters. They must continuously select, process, and organize their own knowledge and experience of inquiry-based methods, ultimately presenting this in ways that are accessible, acceptable, and manageable for students.

This “scaffolding” method goes far beyond traditional lecturing. Instead of just absorbing information, students are pushed to lead their own investigations. Ultimately, this approach forces them to think on their feet and build real problem-solving skills.

### **3.2 Personalized Teaching and Student-Centered Learning**

Instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach, music teachers need to tailor their instruction to individual learners. The goal is to create a space where every student feels they have the room to truly express themselves. For example, after learning the basic melody of Wang Dajie, teachers can encourage students to present their understanding in diverse formats:

For students with dance training, they may create dance movements synchronized with the melody.

For students with instrumental skills, they may perform the song with their instrument of choice as accompaniment.

For students without prior training, they may rewrite the lyrics to adapt the song to contemporary

themes, creating a modern version of Wang Dajie.

These diverse tasks help students find their creative voice. More importantly, they rewrite the classroom dynamic. Instead of the same few faces leading the way, every student gets a real opportunity to lead and be seen. Throughout this process, teachers should observe each student's performance carefully, identify their strengths in a timely manner, and provide positive encouragement.

### 3.3 Building a Sustainable Cultural Transmission Model

Protecting a local culture is not merely a task of looking backward at its history. If we treat cultural preservation as an ecological issue, the real challenge lies in ensuring that these traditions remain practical and alive in today's world, rather than just being preserved as static museum pieces. Modern education systems should provide students with an environment in which they can both understand traditional culture and adapt to modern social life.

Moving from simply "listening" to actually "protecting" a culture requires a spark. The real shift happens the moment the tradition stops being a school subject and starts being a source of real emotion for the learner. Cultural internalization is not merely the accumulation of knowledge—it involves emotional transmission and behavioral modeling. By embedding Dehua Mountain Songs meaningfully within the school curriculum and extracurricular life, we create the conditions for students to internalize cultural heritage and externalize it through their own creative expressions and life practices.

## 4. Conclusion

To truly weave local mountain songs into the classroom, we have to start with the environment. It's about more than just a lesson plan; it's about building a space where students actually feel a spark for the music. If we don't ignite that passion first, the broader educational goals will never really take root. Dehua Mountain Songs, as a folk music art form originating from Dehua County, have earned broad recognition in the cultural and artistic community for their profound heritage and unique charm over the centuries.

Being part of the provincial heritage catalog is only the official side of the story. In reality, these songs are how Dehua residents talk to one another and keep their regional pride alive. They represent a living history that continues to define what it means to be from this community. Nevertheless, Dehua Mountain Songs continue to face significant challenges today, including the gradual weakening of folk culture, the retirement of skilled performers due to aging, the shrinking performance venues available to Dehua Mountain Song troupes, and the limited enthusiasm of young people for this tradition.

For local music teachers, bringing Dehua's mountain songs into the classroom is more than just a curriculum update—it's a race against time. We need to dig deeper into these musical roots, find fresh ways to perform them, and ultimately ensure that this folk tradition has a permanent home in junior high music education. Such efforts can not only enrich music education but also contribute to the preservation and development of regional folk music traditions.

To build on the strategies laid out here, the next step is to ground them in hard evidence. Moving forward, we need to track how students actually respond over the long term—not just through test scores, but by measuring their genuine shifts in attitude and their lasting connection to the culture. Collaboration between music educators, cultural heritage scholars, and community practitioners will be essential to building a sustainable model for the living transmission of Dehua Mountain Songs through education.

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