

A Qualitative Case Study of Musical Activities among Retired Senior Citizens in China

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Abstract. Musical engagement has received increasing global attention for its role in supporting the physical and psychological well-being of retired senior citizens. However, empirical research focusing on why retired senior citizens in China choose music as part of their post-retirement life, and how it affects them, remains limited. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the musical experiences of four retired individuals in Guangzhou, China. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. The findings indicate that retired senior citizens participate in musical activities to relieve negative emotions, rebuild social connections, and pursue personal interests that were previously unmet. Participation contributes to reduced loneliness and anxiety, as well as improved self-confidence and sense of self-worth, while excessive involvement may lead to physical strain or fatigue. In addition, the study suggests that emerging music-related technologies can help reduce participation barriers and support more inclusive engagement among older adults. Based on these findings, practical recommendations are proposed, including support from government, families, and community resources.

Keywords: Retired senior citizens; China; musical activities; physical and mental health; qualitative case study; music technology; social participation.

1. Introduction

Retirement is a significant turning point in life, marking the transition from being an active contributor to the workforce to transitioning into later adulthood. This transition is often accompanied by challenges such as declining physical functions, weakened social connections, and a sudden slowing down of pace of life, which can easily lead to psychological voids and health crises. Therefore, the physical and mental health of retired senior citizens is the foundation for achieving a high quality of life in later years. With the accelerating process of population aging, how to maintain the well-being of retired senior citizens has become a global social concern.

Studies have shown that musical activities have positive effects on the physical and mental health of retired senior citizens. In China, the government has also introduced a number of policies to promote the development of musical activities among senior citizens. Article 3 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly* explicitly grants senior citizens the right to “participate in social development and share development achievements,” providing a fundamental legal basis for elderly musical activities. The State Council's *Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy and Enhancing the Well-being of senior citizens (2024)* includes “developing music-related content industries for senior citizens” in national strategies and proposes specific measures such as supporting cultural exchange among elderly groups and promoting the integration of music with health and eldercare industries.

Participation in musical activities not only promotes physical health and delays the decline of bodily functions and cognitive abilities but also enables retired senior citizens to rediscover their self-worth and improve their sense of well-being. Therefore, musical activities play an irreplaceable role in improving the quality of life and promoting the physical and mental health of retired senior citizens. However, existing studies still have limitations when exploring the effects of musical activities, especially regarding their potential negative impacts, which require further investigation.

This study is informed by the perspective of active aging, which emphasizes participation, well-being, and social engagement in later life.

1.1. Research Aims and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the musical life experiences of retired senior citizens in China. The study is guided by two research questions:

1. What are the reasons that retired senior citizens in China choose music as their primary retirement activity?
2. What are the impacts of participating in musical activities on the physical and mental health of retired senior citizens in China?

1.2. Literature Review

Musical activities refer to comprehensive artistic practices centered on music, carried out through performance, creation, appreciation, or education. According to differences in form, musical activities among senior citizens in China can be categorized into four types:

First, **performance-based activities**, such as choirs, instrumental ensembles, and square dancing. Researchers particularly emphasize that choral activities can significantly enhance senior citizens' sense of group belonging [1].

Second, **creative activities**, including improvisation and song adaptation. Some researchers point out that such activities help stimulate cognitive vitality among senior citizens [2].

Third, **appreciation-based activities**, such as attending concerts or listening to recordings. Duan (2025) found that such activities have a unique effect in alleviating anxiety [3].

Fourth, **educational activities**, including vocal training and music theory instruction. Some scholars argue that such structured learning activities can effectively delay cognitive decline among senior citizens [4].

2. Reasons Why Retired Senior Citizens Choose Music as a Primary Activity

In China, the reasons why retired senior citizens choose music as their primary retirement activity are multifaceted, mainly involving psychological health, physical health, social interaction, and cultural identity.

In terms of psychological health, musical activities can effectively alleviate depression and anxiety, improve sleep quality, and promote positive emotional experiences [5]. At the same time, participation in collective musical and dance activities can enhance physical activity levels and improve overall physical health [6].

At the social level, musical activities provide an important platform for retired senior citizens to expand their social networks, reduce loneliness, and enhance their sense of social participation and self-worth [7]. In addition, music—especially local traditional music—can evoke cultural identity and emotional resonance, satisfying older adults' attachment to local culture and spiritual needs [8]. From a socio-psychological perspective, activities such as square dancing also provide a sense of belonging after role transition and become an important way for senior citizens to actively cope with aging [9].

3. Effects of Musical Activities: International Perspectives

3.1. Types of Musical Participation

The types of musical activities that individuals engage in throughout their lives vary significantly, and there may be a connection between “early-life musical participation” and “later-life musical

participation.” Studies have shown that “active musical participation in early life” is correlated with “musical participation in later life” [10]. Other studies suggest that musical participation in later life may be even more significant than in earlier decades [11].

Older adults with different early musical experiences tend to make different choices regarding musical activities in later life. Many senior citizens report that their parents loved music, that they created music at home with family members, or that they participated in musical activities during their school years. A particularly notable finding in the literature is the strong connection between “later-life musical participation” and participation in traditional music ensembles (such as bands, choirs, and orchestras) during schooling. Many senior citizens participate in the same types of musical groups in later life as they did during their school years [10].

Although some senior citizens report having discontinued musical participation and later returning to it, more individuals—especially those with strong musical abilities—report continuous engagement throughout their lives. The literature also indicates that some individuals begin musical participation for the first time in later life: some join traditional ensembles, while others choose self-directed learning, independent music creation [12], or taking lessons.

Among healthy and independent senior citizens, the most common forms of musical engagement are “singing” and “music listening.” Other forms include playing instruments, taking private lessons, dancing to music, directing ensembles, and composing, although these occur less frequently. Research also shows that the most popular forms of regular group participation are choirs and instrumental ensembles [13].

3.2. Negative Effects on Physical and Mental Health

Research indicates that aging leads to changes in both physical and psychological functioning, which affect not only cognitive processes but also attitudes toward learning. These age-related changes have contributed to stereotypes portraying senior citizens as experiencing functional decline and becoming a burden to society. However, with advances in healthcare and increased health awareness, such perceptions are gradually changing. Recent studies suggest that many senior citizens experience delayed functional decline and are able to maintain a high quality of life until late stages [14].

Moreover, not all age-related changes are negative. Certain abilities, such as problem-solving, may improve with age, and wisdom and some forms of creativity have been shown to increase [14]. The human body reaches peak physical maturity around the age of 25, after which gradual decline begins. This decline affects multiple systems, including the brain, neuromuscular system, circulatory system, sensory organs, and internal organs [15].

For senior citizens, unavoidable physical decline creates challenges in musical participation. Declines in vision and hearing may lead to difficulties in reading musical notation and maintaining pitch accuracy. Reduced elasticity of the vocal cords may result in narrower vocal range, reduced volume, and poorer tone quality. Declines in psychomotor abilities may lead to slower processing speed and reduced endurance, making it more difficult to learn new musical skills. As a result, older learners may lack confidence while simultaneously maintaining high expectations, which may lead to anxiety and hinder learning [14].

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach based on the framework proposed by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018). Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. The researcher conducted interviews with participants, observed their musical activities, and explored their reasons for participation and perceived impacts on physical and mental health.

4.2. Participants and Context

Through purposive sampling, four retired senior citizens who participated in musical activities were selected as research participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Background Characteristics and Musical Engagement of Senior Citizen Participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Origin	Age	Occupation before Retirement	Type of Musical Activity	Music Type
Mr. Meng	Male	Henan	62	Civil servant	Traditional ensemble performance	Quhu (traditional instrument from Henan)
Ms. Liao	Female	Guangdong	79	Factory worker	Square dancing; opera listening	Dance; Cantonese opera
Mr. Chen	Male	Guangdong	81	Soldier	Listening to opera in public square	Cantonese opera
Ms. Zhao	Female	Hunan	72	Doctor	Community square dancing	Dance

4.3. Case Descriptions

(1) Mr. Meng, aged 62, has been retired for two years. Before retirement, he worked as a civil servant. After retiring, Mr. Meng found a *quhu* teacher and began learning the instrument. He told us that he had been exposed to music in his teenage years, but due to family financial constraints, he was unable to pursue it further at that time. After retirement, he decided to resume his long-held musical aspiration by learning the *quhu*. His family supported and understood his decision, which allowed him to become more fully engaged in the learning process. He reported that since he started learning the instrument, he has met like-minded friends, no longer experienced the sense of loneliness and psychological pressure that followed retirement, and has begun to enjoy life more, with an increased sense of self-identity.

(2) Ms. Liao, aged 79, worked as a factory worker before retirement. In the early period after retirement, she was in relatively good physical health and frequently participated in square dancing with other older adults in the community. However, around the age of 70, her health began to decline, making it difficult for her to sustain prolonged outdoor activities. In addition, due to both physical condition and past experiences, she developed an anxiety disorder. As a result, she reduced her participation in square dancing and instead chose to stay at home, listening to traditional opera through the radio or mobile phone and singing along. She used this form of musical engagement to relieve psychological anxiety and cope with physical discomfort. Ms. Liao explained that through listening to and singing opera, her anxiety has been alleviated, and she is now able to face her physical and psychological health challenges more positively.

(3) Mr. Chen, aged 81, is a retired soldier. Recently, he experienced serious lower back problems and underwent surgery; he now relies on a wheelchair for mobility. As his children are at work during the day and his spouse is not by his side, he often feels lonely at home. To cope with this, Mr. Chen chooses to go downstairs in his wheelchair to a local square where an opera group performs. He explained that he goes there every day to listen to the performances, and occasionally the group members hand him a microphone and invite him to sing along. Gradually, he no longer feels lonely, his mood—previously affected by illness—has improved, he smiles more often, and his physical condition, particularly his back, has been recovering day by day.

(4) Ms. Zhao, aged 72, worked as a doctor before retirement. Due to family needs, she moved to the city where her children work to help take care of her grandchild. During the daytime, when her children are at work, she stays at home with her grandchild. The repetitive and monotonous daily

routine led her to start bringing her grandchild to the community activity center, where she participates in square dancing with other older adults who are also caring for children.

These four retired senior citizens have different life experiences and participate in different types of musical activities. The diversity among participants enhances the validity and richness of the research findings.

4.4. Procedure

Considering participants' physical conditions, each participant was interviewed twice, with each session lasting approximately 25 minutes. Additionally, two participants were observed during their musical activities to better understand their experiences.

All interviews were recorded with participants' consent, and confidentiality was ensured.

4.5. Research Methods

4.5.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

The core advantage of semi-structured interviews lies in their ability to balance the systematic nature of structured interviews with the flexibility of unstructured interviews. This approach ensures a clear research direction while allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' authentic thoughts and complex experiences. Semi-structured interviews are highly flexible and adaptive. Instead of relying on a fixed script, researchers use a pre-prepared interview guide, which allows them to adjust the sequence of questions according to the natural flow of conversation and to ask follow-up questions based on participants' responses. This enables deeper exploration of unexpected but important topics that may arise during the interview process. Furthermore, researchers can adapt their questioning strategies and language according to participants' backgrounds, thereby improving communication effectiveness. This method is particularly suitable for studying complex, dynamic, or underexplored phenomena [16].

At the same time, semi-structured interviews facilitate the collection of rich and in-depth qualitative data. Participants are able to provide the context and reasoning behind their responses, enabling researchers to understand not only "what" is happening, but also "why." Open-ended questions encourage participants to express their feelings, revealing underlying attitudes that may not be apparent in surface-level responses [17].

The researcher conducted two one-on-one interviews with **Mr. Meng** on December 10 and December 25, 2025, at the location where his ensemble rehearses. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes. Two interviews were conducted with **Ms. Liao** at her home on December 28, 2025, and January 4, 2026, with her husband present during the sessions; each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. One interview was conducted with **Mr. Chen** on January 8, 2026, in the public square he frequently visits; the interview lasted approximately 35 minutes. One interview was conducted with **Ms. Zhao** at her home on January 15, 2026, with her grandchild present; the interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

A segment of the interview guide is presented as follows:

1. How old are you this year? How long have you been retired?
2. What was your main occupation before retirement?
3. What types of musical activities do you currently participate in?
4. How often do you participate in musical activities each week, and how long does each session last?
5. When did you first become involved in music? Were there any significant changes or turning points before and after retirement?
6. Have musical activities brought any pressure or difficulties?

4.5.2. Non-Participant Observation

Non-participant observation, also referred to as external observation, is a research method in which the researcher remains outside the activities or group being observed and systematically records and analyzes participants' behaviors and performances from an observer's perspective. Its core advantage lies in the methodological principles of "detachment" and "non-intervention" [18].

Non-participant observation has high ecological validity and allows for the collection of natural and authentic data. Since the researcher does not intervene in or influence the observed setting, participants' behaviors can unfold in their natural state. This effectively avoids the "Hawthorne effect" and "social desirability bias." At the same time, this method enables the capture of unfiltered real-life behavior, making it particularly suitable for studying situations where there may be discrepancies between actual behavior and self-reported data [19].

The researcher conducted two observation sessions of **Mr. Meng** and his ensemble during rehearsals on December 10 and December 25, 2025, without any intervention. Each observation lasted approximately 40 minutes. One observation session was conducted on January 8, 2026, in the public square where **Mr. Chen** regularly attends opera performances, observing his behavior while he watched the opera troupe. This observation was also conducted without intervention and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

5. Findings

Based on the research questions, the findings are presented from two aspects: first, the reasons why retired senior citizens choose music as a primary activity after retirement; second, the effects of participating in musical activities on their physical and psychological well-being.

5.1. Reasons

5.1.1. Alleviating negative emotions (loneliness, anxiety, and loss) and filling psychological voids

After retirement, senior citizens often experience a shrinking social network and a shift in identity from being "workers" to a more passive role, which may lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and a loss of self-worth. Musical activities help redirect attention and provide emotional release, functioning as a form of psychological adjustment.

Mr. Meng noted:

"After retirement, I suddenly felt uncomfortable. I had less contact with colleagues, which made me feel lonely, and my health also declined. After I started playing the Quhu, I no longer felt depressed, and my sense of loneliness basically disappeared." (*Personal interview*)

Ms. Liao, who developed anxiety after retirement, described the benefits of musical engagement:

"The doctor suggested that I find something to do to bring some enjoyment and ease my anxiety."

"In the past, I often thought about previous experiences and felt restless. After listening to opera, I feel less irritated, and my insomnia has improved." (*Personal interview*)

These examples indicate that musical activities can effectively alleviate negative emotions experienced after retirement.

5.1.2. Meeting social needs and rebuilding social connections

After retirement, the original workplace-based social network gradually weakens, and senior citizens need alternative ways to establish social connections. Musical activities—such as square dancing, opera groups, and ensemble participation—serve as important social platforms built around shared interests.

All four participants reported expanding their social networks and forming meaningful relationships through musical activities. (*Personal interview*)

Mr. Chen stated:

“Everyone in the opera group is retired, and we have shared topics. After activities, we talk about our lives and families, which makes us happy. I feel more comfortable with them than with younger people.” (*Personal interview*)

Observation notes also showed that Mr. Chen actively interacted with others during performances, maintaining a positive emotional state. (*Field observation notes*)

Mr. Meng similarly explained:

“By learning the Quhu and participating in musical gatherings, I made like-minded friends. My life after retirement has become more fulfilling. Practicing and performing with others is much better than staying at home alone.” (*Personal interview*)

Thus, musical activities help senior citizens rebuild social connections and satisfy their social needs.

5.1.3. Fulfilling previously unmet musical interests

Due to work, family responsibilities, and limited resources earlier in life, many participants were unable to fully pursue their interest in music. Retirement provides an opportunity to revisit and fulfill these long-standing aspirations.

Mr. Meng recalled:

“I liked music since I was young, but I didn’t have the conditions to learn it. After retirement, I finally had the time to pursue this interest.” (*Personal interview*)

Ms. Liao also stated:

“When I was younger, I liked listening to opera, but I had many children and no time. Now I can finally enjoy it.” (*Personal interview*)

5.1.4. Being more relaxing and health-friendly than other activities

Senior citizens tend to avoid activities that are stressful, sedentary, or physically demanding. Musical activities are perceived as low-pressure, relaxing, and beneficial to both physical and mental health.

Ms. Liao explained:

“I don’t enjoy playing cards because it makes me tense and requires sitting for long periods. Listening to opera and dancing, however, makes me feel better and is healthier.” (*Personal interview*)

Mr. Meng also noted that his family supported his participation in music because it was more beneficial than other leisure activities. (*Personal interview*)

5.2. Impacts

5.2.1. Positive Impacts

1. Physical Aspects

(1) Alleviating physical discomfort and promoting recovery

For retired senior citizens, the decline of physical functioning is a natural part of aging, and the onset of illness can be particularly distressing. Participation in musical activities can help exercise bodily functions and effectively alleviate physical discomfort.

Mr. Meng stated:

“Playing the *quhu* requires the left hand to press the strings and the right hand to control the bow. The stimulation from pressing the strings has a good massaging effect on the body and nervous system. After each performance, I feel refreshed and energized.” (*Personal interview*)

During *quhu* performance, coordination between both hands is required, which helps improve finger flexibility and overall physical functioning.

(2) Improving sleep quality and alleviating insomnia

Ms. Liao reported that she had long experienced insomnia after retirement, but her condition improved after engaging in musical activities.

She explained:

“I used to suffer from long-term insomnia—I couldn’t sleep at night, and even during the day I still couldn’t fall asleep. After listening to opera, I sleep less during the day, and my insomnia at night has improved. When I can’t sleep, I listen to soothing music for about an hour, and gradually I am able to fall asleep” (*Personal interview*).

2. Psychological Aspects

(1) Reducing loneliness and anxiety and stabilizing emotions

All four participants reported experiencing loneliness and anxiety after retirement, which were alleviated through musical activities.

Ms. Zhao stated:

“After communicating with other senior citizens in the community, I learned more about what is happening around us and about customs from different places. I also made close friends. I feel less lonely, and I can better understand my children’s efforts. Emotionally, I am able to comfort myself.” (*Personal interview*)

Mr. Chen said with visible joy:

“When I stay at home alone, I feel very lonely. Being with the opera group, we have shared interests—we sing and chatting together. Of course, I feel much happier. It’s much better than staying at home alone.” (*Personal interview*)

(2) Enhancing self-confidence and sense of self-worth, and reshaping perceptions of retirement

After retirement, some older adults experience a decline in confidence due to disengagement from social roles and difficulty in finding personal value. The interview results indicate that all four participants improved their sense of self-identity and confidence through musical participation.

Mr. Meng stated:

“When I first started learning the *quhu*, I hit a bottleneck and didn’t feel like practicing. But after overcoming it, I became more and more interested. My skills and expressiveness improved, and I became increasingly confident. Before retirement, I thought retirement meant just eating and waiting for the end of life. Now I feel that ‘the sunset is beautiful, even though it is near dusk.’ I have a new understanding of retirement.” (*Personal interview*)

5.3. Negative Impacts

5.3.1. Increased physical burden

Balancing musical activities with daily responsibilities may lead to fatigue, and excessive participation may even harm physical health.

When participating in square dancing while taking care of her grandchild, Ms. Zhao had to constantly ensure the child’s safety and could not fully engage in the activity. The dual responsibilities increased her physical burden.

She explained:

“While dancing and participating in this musical activity, I also have to take care of my grandson and make sure he doesn’t fall or get hurt. This definitely increases physical fatigue because I cannot fully immerse myself. Taking care of a child comes with responsibility—I must prioritize the child before my own interests, so it certainly has an impact.” (*Personal interview*)

Mr. Meng, due to his strong enthusiasm for *quhu* and ensemble activities, often practiced beyond his physical limits, sometimes even rehearsing on an empty stomach, which placed additional strain on his health.

He noted:

“Sometimes we play for too long. At my age, I really can’t handle more than three hours. Sometimes we even skip breakfast — we gather in the morning and rehearse until noon before eating. That’s not good for the body.” (*Personal interview*)

5.3.2. Psychological discomfort caused by differences between traditional and modern art forms

When rehearsing newly adapted opera pieces, Mr. Meng and other ensemble members felt that the new versions lacked the expressive quality and melodic appeal of traditional pieces. This mismatch with their aesthetic expectations led to psychological discomfort, and in some cases, reluctance to perform the new pieces. (*Field observation*)

Mr. Meng stated:

“When we rehearse newly adapted opera pieces, some of them are heavily modified from traditional ones. We are very familiar with the original pieces, but after adaptation, they feel uncomfortable. The new versions are not as expressive, not as melodic, and simply not as good as the original ones. At those moments, I feel a bit uncomfortable and don’t want to perform the new pieces.” (*Personal interview*)

5.3.3. Constraints due to concerns about disturbing others

Concerns about noise disturbance in community square dancing—such as loud music affecting other residents’ rest—limit the time and flexibility of participation.

As Ms. Zhao explained:

“Sometimes we worry about disturbing others if the music is too loud, especially in the evening when people are resting or when it might affect children. As a result, the time we can go out to dance or listen to music becomes quite limited.” (*Personal interview*)

5.3.4. Frustration caused by age-related physical decline

During ensemble rehearsals, some senior citizens experienced difficulty keeping up due to declining vision (making it hard to read musical scores) or reduced finger flexibility. After rehearsals, they often appeared discouraged and frustrated and sometimes apologized to other members for slowing down the group due to their mistakes. (*Field observation*)

These findings indicate that age-related physical decline can influence not only senior citizens’ performance in musical activities but also their confidence and willingness to participate. Such challenges highlight the need for more adaptive and supportive approaches to help senior citizens remain engaged in music.

6. Discussion and Implications

This study examines the reasons for and impacts of musical participation among retired senior citizens in the Chinese context.

The findings indicate that one of the primary motivations for participation is to alleviate negative emotions, such as loneliness, anxiety, and a sense of loss, thereby filling psychological voids. This finding is consistent with previous studies [4].

This may be attributed to the relatively monotonous nature of post-retirement life, the transformation of social roles, and the shrinking of social networks, which limit opportunities for communication and interaction. As a result, senior citizens require spaces or platforms for emotional expression and social engagement. Group-based musical activities provide precisely such opportunities. All four participants reported that their social networks expanded through musical participation, allowing them to develop friendships based on shared interests.

For example, Mr. Meng was able to consult his teacher, interact with fellow musicians, and collaborate with others while learning the *quhu* (a traditional bowed string instrument from Henan), thereby alleviating his sense of loneliness after retirement. Similarly, Mr. Chen established connections with members of an opera troupe through regularly attending performances in a public square, singing together and engaging in casual conversations after performances. This expanded his social network and reduced the loneliness he experienced after retiring from the military. These findings suggest that group-based musical activities are worthy of further promotion among retired senior citizens.

In addition, the study found that some senior citizens choose music listening (particularly opera) as a way to alleviate anxiety and insomnia. In this study, Ms. Liao, who is already in advanced age, is no longer able to physically participate in musical performance or interactive activities. Instead, she has adopted a more accessible form of musical engagement—listening to and singing along with opera—which has also produced positive outcomes. This suggests that diverse forms of musical activities should be provided to accommodate retired senior citizens at different stages of aging.

Notably, retired senior citizens in China tend to prefer traditional musical activities, such as Chinese opera and traditional instrumental music. This contrasts with findings from international studies, where senior citizens more commonly engage in activities such as guitar playing, ukulele, and social dancing [12]. This difference may be explained by the cultural and historical context of this generation. The participants in this study grew up during the 1980s and 1990s, when traditional opera and local instrumental music were dominant forms of popular entertainment in China. These art forms were deeply embedded in festivals, community life, and everyday cultural practices, forming a strong sense of cultural identity and collective memory. For instance, Ms. Liao recalled traveling long distances to attend opera performances during her youth, while Mr. Meng was influenced by the rich regional opera culture of Henan from an early age. Such deeply rooted cultural experiences make traditional music a primary choice in their later-life musical engagement.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that fulfilling previously unmet musical interests from earlier life is another important motivation for participation, which is consistent with international research [10]. During the study, two participants noted that retirement provides the ideal opportunity to revisit and realize musical interests that were constrained during their younger years. Mr. Meng, for example, had a strong interest in music during childhood but was unable to pursue it due to financial limitations; after retirement, he immediately began learning the *quhu* to fulfill this long-standing aspiration. Similarly, Ms. Liao had limited time to pursue her interest in opera during her youth due to family responsibilities, and retirement allowed her to compensate for these missed opportunities. Therefore, for retired senior citizens with early musical interests, retirement offers an optimal period to pursue and realize their musical aspirations.

In addition, one of the most important reasons why retired senior citizens in China participate in musical activities is that such activities are perceived as more relaxing and more beneficial to physical and psychological health compared to other forms of leisure. This finding is consistent with domestic research [9]. For senior citizens, maintaining physical and psychological well-being is a priority, and activities that are stressful, sedentary, or physically demanding are generally avoided. The musical activities reported in this study—such as playing the *quhu*, listening to opera, singing, and square

dancing—are characterized by low pressure, relaxation, and health benefits. These activities allow for physical movement without excessive strain, making them particularly suitable for senior citizens.

The findings also demonstrate that participation in musical activities enhances self-confidence and a sense of self-worth among retired senior citizens, thereby reshaping their perceptions of retirement. This is consistent with previous research [6]. Retirement may lead to a decline in confidence due to disengagement from social roles and difficulty in finding personal value. However, in this study, all four participants reported improved self-identity and confidence through musical engagement. For example, Mr. Meng stated that he previously viewed retirement as “waiting for the end of life,” but now believes that “the sunset is infinitely beautiful, even though it is near dusk,” reflecting a renewed understanding of retirement. These findings suggest that musical participation plays an important role in enhancing senior citizens’ self-confidence and sense of value.

However, the study also identifies several negative impacts associated with musical participation. These include increased physical burden, fatigue resulting from balancing activities with daily responsibilities, and potential health risks due to over-participation. In China, many retired senior citizens take on caregiving responsibilities for their grandchildren, which may limit their ability to fully engage in musical activities. For example, Ms. Zhao reported that when participating in square dancing while caring for her grandchild, she needed to constantly ensure the child’s safety and could not fully immerse herself in the activity. This dual responsibility increased her physical burden. This finding extends existing international research.

The widespread involvement of senior citizens in grandchild care in China can be understood as a continuation of Confucian family ethics and traditional values, as well as a practical response to contemporary social pressures. On the one hand, cultural norms emphasizing filial piety, family responsibility, and intergenerational bonding encourage senior citizens to view childcare as a natural obligation. On the other hand, younger parents often face demanding work schedules and high childcare costs, making intergenerational support a practical necessity. This reflects a form of family cooperation shaped by emotional, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

In addition, excessive participation in musical activities may lead to physical overload. For instance, Mr. Meng, due to his strong enthusiasm for the *quhu* and ensemble activities, often engaged in rehearsals that exceeded his physical capacity, sometimes even practicing on an empty stomach, which placed strain on his health.

Furthermore, differences between traditional and modern artistic forms may lead to psychological discomfort. The study found that the introduction of newly adapted musical forms could create tension among older participants. For example, when rehearsing newly adapted opera pieces, Mr. Meng and his ensemble members felt that these new versions lacked the expressive quality and melodic appeal of traditional pieces, leading to psychological discomfort and even resistance. This may be attributed to the long-established aesthetic frameworks and cognitive patterns formed through prolonged exposure to traditional art forms. When new adaptations deviate from these expectations, they may create a sense of cognitive dissonance, resulting in discomfort. Moreover, traditional pieces carry collective memory and cultural identity, and resistance to new forms may reflect an effort to preserve these values and a sense of belonging. Therefore, the tension between traditional and modern artistic forms is an important issue to consider in senior citizens’ musical participation.

Additionally, the study found that concerns about noise disturbance may limit participation in outdoor musical activities. Retired senior citizens often worry that loud music may disturb other residents and affect their rest, leading to restrictions on activity time and reduced flexibility. For example, Ms. Zhao reported that although she usually participates in square dancing after dinner, concerns about disturbing others significantly limit the time available for such activities. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers address this issue by implementing supportive measures, such as designating specific time periods and spaces for community-based musical activities or providing senior citizens with noise-reduction equipment (e.g., directional speakers or silent headphones) to minimize disturbance.

Finally, building on these findings, it becomes clear that while musical activities bring many benefits, age-related physical limitations may create barriers that affect senior citizens' confidence and long-term participation. This finding is consistent with international research [14]. Therefore, it is important to explore practical ways to reduce these barriers and create a more supportive environment. One possible approach is the use of music-related technologies. For example, simplified digital interfaces, adjustable tempo, and visual rhythm guidance can help senior citizens engage at a comfortable pace. Interactive systems, such as touch-based or motion-controlled tools, can also lower technical barriers and make participation more accessible [20][21].

At the same time, online platforms and virtual music communities offer alternative ways for social interaction, especially for those with limited mobility. These technologies can help senior citizens stay connected, reduce frustration caused by physical limitations, and maintain confidence in their musical engagement.

Overall, music technology can serve as a supportive tool to make participation more inclusive and sustainable.

7. Conclusion

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to explore the musical activities of four retired senior citizens in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China. The findings indicate that retired senior citizens choose music as a primary activity after retirement for several reasons, including alleviating negative emotions associated with retirement, meeting social needs and rebuilding social connections, and fulfilling previously unmet musical interests and aspirations from earlier life.

Participation in musical activities was found to alleviate physical discomfort and support physical recovery among retired senior citizens. At the same time, it helped reduce feelings of loneliness and anxiety, stabilize emotional states, enhance self-confidence and a sense of self-worth, and reshape individuals' perceptions of retirement.

However, the negative impacts of musical participation should not be overlooked. Some participants experienced increased physical burden due to the need to balance musical activities with daily responsibilities, leading to fatigue. In addition, age-related physical decline—such as reduced vision and decreased bodily functioning—may result in frustration during participation and subsequently reduce confidence.

This study provides a valuable empirical contribution to the international literature on musical engagement in later life. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size is relatively small, and the duration of the study is limited. Future research could expand the sample size and adopt mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this topic. Additionally, extending the research period and conducting longitudinal studies would allow researchers to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences.

Finally, although music-related technologies are mentioned, their application is not explored in depth. Future research may further examine how such technologies can support senior citizens' participation in musical activities.

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