

Original Paper

English Publicity of Chinese Folk Songs—With the *Tea Picking Dance* as an Example

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Abstract

Chinese folk songs have unique inheritance and dissemination value. While actively developing the local dissemination of folk songs, we should constantly expand the transmission of Chinese folk songs overseas and enhance the international influence of Chinese folk song culture. Utilizing folk song micro-lesson to popularize the knowledge of Chinese folk songs, conducting surveys and analyzing the attitudes of international students from different countries towards four folk song micro-lesson videos, we have obtained over 30 valid survey data. The survey found that 96.77% of respondents believe that this series of micro-lesson plays a certain role in spreading Chinese folk songs, and the majority of the audience is interested in folk song micro-lesson and willing to share them. Micro-lessons of folk songs is one of the media for disseminating Chinese folk songs and folk song culture in the new era, providing a reference for the new approach to the external dissemination of Chinese culture.

Keywords

Chinese folk song, micro-lesson, folk song culture, international dissemination

1. Introduction

Chinese folk songs possess a rich cultural heritage and historical value, exerting a significant influence on national cultural confidence and contributing to the construction of collective memory and the promotion of national culture.

By utilizing folk songs as carriers of Chinese culture and employing micro-lesson methods to disseminate knowledge about folk songs, interested foreign friends can truly understand and appreciate Chinese folk songs, thereby facilitating the international dissemination of Chinese folk songs and

Chinese culture on the global stage. The micro-lesson dissemination of Chinese folk song culture provides a valuable reference for the inheritance of folk songs and traditional music culture in China.

2. Definition of Chinese Folk Song

China is a country with a long history and diverse ethnic groups. Throughout the history, numerous excellent folk songs from different regions and of different ethnicities have been passed down, representing the living conditions and cultural treasures of the Chinese nation (Jiang, 2014). Folk songs have a deep-rooted origin, with ancestors singing during activities such as hunting, carrying, worship, rituals, and courtship since primitive society. The earliest collection of Chinese folk songs can be found in the *Book of Songs*, specifically the “Guo Feng” section, which gathers folk songs from approximately fifteen vassal states during the early Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period (11th century BC to 6th century BC). These songs reflect the real life of the working people of that era and embody the voices and emotions of the traditional Chinese laboring class. As time has passed, Chinese folk songs have showed their unique charm in various historical periods, with a wide range of themes and content. At present, there is a relatively clear definition of folk songs. Professor Zhou Qingqing, a specialist in ethnic music at the Central Conservatory of Music, defines folk songs as songs orally created by the working people in social practice (Zhou, 1993). Professor Jiang Mingbei, a specialist in ethnic music at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, points out that folk songs are gradually formed and developed through long-term and extensive improvisation, as well as oral transmission among the masses (Zhang, 2016). These concise and clear concepts summarize the generation, development, content, and dissemination methods of Chinese folk song culture. Chinese folk songs continue to flourish through the passage of time, rejuvenating through the test of years.

3. Development of Chinese Folk Song Culture

Emotions take shape through words, but we often fall short of words. Hence, there are sighs and laments, which are proved inadequate in fully expressing the emotions and give birth to songs. Chinese folk songs, originating from primitive society, possess a rich history and wide-ranging influence. Following the course of history, Chinese folk songs have transitioned through various names: “feng” (also known as Guofeng, it is the folk poetry of various vassal states from early Zhou to Spring and Autumn) and “ci” (known as Chu Ci, it is the first collection of romantic poetry in the history of Chinese literature, and is said to be a new poetry style created by Qu Yuan) in ancient times, “shi” (such as Yue Fu Poetry, the poems collected by Yuefu, a specialized organization of music, dance and singing teaching institutions) during the Han Dynasty, and “qu” (such as Yuan Sanqu, a form of performance characterized by comical humor, developed into a form of opera in the Yuan Dynasty) later on. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, new terms like “shange”, “huagu” and “liqu” emerged. The line “Your collar is green while my heart is tranquil.” from the *Book of Songs* describes the

yearning between lovers. The phrase “let out a long sigh to hide my tears, lamenting the great hardships of the people’s lives” from Chu Ci expresses the lamentations of intellectuals who care deeply about the people’s hardships. The Yue Fu Poetry of the Han Dynasty includes verses like “Regions in the south of the Yangtze River has once again reached the suitable season for lotus picking, with lotus leaves floating out of the water, squeezed and stacked, fluttering in the wind.”, narrating the laborious lives of ancient Chinese people and painting vivid pictures of the beautiful scenery in the southern regions of China. Traditional Chinese folk songs reflect the level of social productivity and cultural development at the time, portraying the actions and thoughts of ancient Chinese people in their daily lives, governance and labor work. They laid a solid foundation for the subsequent development of folk songs.

The modern development of folk songs began with the New Culture Movement. Influenced by this movement, folk songs broke away from classical Chinese and increasingly adopted vernacular language (Sun, 2018). During this period, many composers incorporated revolutionary and popular elements into various musical genres, making anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism the dominant themes in folk song creation. Songs like “Song of Cloth Selling” and “Ask” fully embody the progressive patriotic ideas present in art songs during the May Fourth Movement. During the New Democratic Revolution, the War of Resistance Against Japan, and the period of Chinese National Liberation, numerous folk songs emerged that called for unity against foreign aggression, opposition to civil war, and resistance against national oppression. Examples include “Osmanthus Blooming in August” and “Song of Guerrillas”.

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, oppressed peasants and workers rose to become masters of their own destinies, marking a new era in the development of folk songs. A plethora of songs emerged that praised the motherland, and Chairman Mao, such as “I Love Beijing Tiananmen” and “The East Is Red”. During the period of reform and opening up and modernization, with deepening economic and cultural development and expanding openness, Chinese folk songs found new avenues for growth and exuded vitality. New songs emerged that reflected the new life brought about by reform and opening up, such as “The Story of Spring” and “China in the Lights”, which depict the progress of Chinese socialism with distinctive characteristics and the vibrant development in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects since the reform and opening-up. Chinese folk songs are deeply rooted in the splendid culture of the Chinese nation spanning thousands of years, telling the stories of ordinary people and emanating the fragrance of Chinese culture and history.

4. Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Folk Songs in External Dissemination

Traditional Chinese folk songs have a rich history spanning thousands of years. In the early stages, these songs were primarily transmitted orally, occasionally with the involvement of literati who would meticulously organize and promote the lyrics and melodies. However, over time, many of these folk songs have vanished, and a significant portion lacks musical notation, rendering them unable to be

preserved and passed down to future generations. An exemplary piece of this heritage is the “King of Qin Breaking Up Battle Arrays”, an illustrious song and dance composition from the Tang Dynasty that eulogizes the triumph of Emperor Taizong in unifying China. This song gained considerable popularity in its time, even extending its reach beyond the dynasty’s borders. Historical accounts reveal that when the revered monk Xuanzang arrived in India, the local monarchs displayed great curiosity and admiration for this composition. After Master Xuanzang arrived in India, the King of Magadha, Rajyavardhana, had asked him about the “King of Qin Breaking Up Battle Arrays” when he met with him. He said, “I heard that your country has a dancing song called the ‘King of Qin Breaking Up Battle Arrays’. I wonder who the King of Qin is and what great deeds he did to earn such praise.” The King of Kamarupa, Kumarajiva, was also quite interested in this song. He once asked Xuanzang, “Many Indian countries now have songs that praise the ‘King of Qin Breaking Up Battle Arrays’ of China. I have heard of it for a long time. Is it from your great country?” Xuanzang replied, “Indeed, this song is a beautiful expression of your Majesty’s virtue.” Kumarajiva said in surprise, “I did not expect that such a great person was from this country. I have long admired your culture, but the mountains and rivers have made it impossible for me to visit” (Chen, 2000). Regrettably, the musical score of “King of Qin Breaking Up Battle Arrays” has since been lost in China, highlighting the urgency to prevent the disappearance of such resounding echoes of ancient Chinese folk creativity from the annals of history. It is evident that solely relying on oral transmission does not facilitate the long-term preservation of musical scores, while written records alone fail to capture the nuances of melody and vocal techniques. Both methods present limitations when it comes to promoting Chinese renowned songs abroad.

In contemporary times, the appearance of various media platforms such as radio, television, and the internet has facilitated the extensive dissemination of Chinese folk songs. With just a simple tap or click, an array of folk songs can be readily accessed. However, the profusion of folk song information does not inherently guarantee the authentic propagation of Chinese folk music beyond its borders. It is important to note that many of these songs are performed in Chinese, composed with distinct regional flavors in terms of lyrics and melodies. This poses a challenge for foreign listeners who lack familiarity with the cultural nuances, impeding their ability to fully grasp the essence of the songs. For instance, the song “Tea Picking Dance” is sung in the Wu dialect of the Zhejiang province, exuding a harmonious, lively, and captivating ambiance. Yet, even if faithfully translated and performed in English, the original charm and profound cultural connotations associated with tea picking may be lost in translation. Additionally, a significant barrier lies in the dearth of English adaptations and corresponding musical arrangements for many traditional Chinese folk songs, making the arduous task of translating them one by one all the more daunting.

5. Advantages of Spreading Chinese Folk Songs through Micro-lessons

Micro-lessons can not only facilitate a better understanding and preservation of Chinese folk songs but also prevent the precious and splendid Chinese culture from fading away in the long river of history.

Micro-lessons have the characteristics of being short in duration, concise in content, and less constrained by time and space, making them more suitable for the fast-paced lifestyles of modern young people. Presenting these lessons in a brief and vivid animated format can spark the interest of the younger generation. By breaking through the limitations of time and space, micro-lessons can spread rapidly and allow people from different times and regions to learn about Chinese folk songs.

In summary, micro-lessons can inherit and innovate Chinese folk songs in their unique way, enabling the younger generation to have a deeper understanding of Chinese folk songs so that it will not be forgotten with the passage of time. Micro-lessons bridge the gap in time, allowing us to engage in face-to-face conversations with our ancestors and immerse ourselves in the unique melodies, singing styles, and regional characteristics of Chinese folk songs. Micro-lessons provide an effective means to express and preserve these elements.

6. Case Study on Folk Song Cultural Teaching and Dissemination through Micro-lessons

In China, many traditional cultures have been showing a trend of decline in recent years, including the traditional folk song culture. This micro-lesson is set against this backdrop. We have selected the representative tea-picking dance from the folk songs as the teaching theme, aiming not only to familiarize students with the dance music itself but also to deepen their impressions of traditional folk song culture through this lesson. We hope to enhance their interest and contribute to the inheritance of traditional culture in our own way.

6.1 Teaching Objectives

Through the micro-lesson teaching of the traditional Chinese folk song “Tea-Picking Dance” from Zhejiang, we intend to let students understand the stylistic features of the tea-picking dance, grasp the emotions and connotations conveyed by the tea-picking dance, experience the uniqueness of Chinese folk songs, and feel the charm of Chinese folk songs. We hope to stimulate students’ curiosity and make them actively interested in learning about Jiangnan folk songs and even Chinese folk songs. In addition, through the micro-lesson teaching, students will understand the lyrics, melody, and singing style of the tea-picking dance, and sing the tea-picking dance with a cheerful and lively emotion; experience the joy of the girls picking tea while singing.

6.2 Teaching Steps

The micro-lesson teaching is separated into 5 steps, and we will teach the students step by step. The 5 steps are, introduction, background information, lyrics interpretation, meaning of the song and the relationship with Chinese tea culture. We believe such teaching method can help students understand the teaching subject from different dimensions, hence promoting their comprehension.

6.2.1 Introduction

The presenter introduces the folk song “Tea-Picking Dance” as a popular folk song in Zhejiang province and plays a video excerpt of the performance of “Tea-Picking Dance” on CCTV, so that the students can have a general impression of the song. The following is its English lyrics.

The Tea Picking Dance

*The stream is clear and the water is flowing.
What a beautiful scenery on both sides of the stream!
Brothers,
you plant rice seedlings laboriously in the soil;
Sisters,
you are busy picking tea in the east and west mountains.
The seedlings are planted happily;
picking tea makes the heart blossom.
The seedlings are planted evenly and quickly;
the mountain is fragrant with tea.
We pick the tea tirelessly to see who will pick the most tea,
and dare to compete with God for the splendour of spring.
The stream is clear and the water is flowing.
The people on two sides of the stream are busy picking tea.
Elder sisters,
picking tea is like nodding chicks;
younger sisters,
picking tea is like fish diving over nets.
Row by row,
pack picked leaves in the basket.
Thousands of strands of new tea send out faint scent.
Come to pick tea quickly and economically,
and send green new tea to urban and rural areas.
Pick tea from left to right,
with both hands and eyes together;
It's like two roosters fighting for rice.
Two tea lounges are hung on both sides,
and tea picking with both hands should be split up.
Pick it for a while and then again, without dizziness.
More and more, faster and faster,
we harvest dragon well tea year after year.*

6.2.2 Background Introduction

The presenter introduces the author Zhou Da Feng and the background of “Tea-Picking Dance”, and briefly explains the folk song knowledge such as the song’s genre, style, and mode.

6.2.3 Lyrics Interpretation

The presenter first introduces the characteristics of the lyrics, such as borrowing from Yue opera

singing style and singing in Wu dialect. Then, the presenter starts from the beginning, middle, and end of the lyrics, introducing the rhetorical techniques and rhythm used in the lyrics.

6.2.4 Introduction to the Significance of the Song

The use of the Wu dialect in the tea-picking dance adds a Zhejiang regional flavor and language characteristic to the song. The borrowing from Yue opera in terms of composition, melody, and lyrics also broadens the creative approach of ethnic vocal works.

The presenter introduces the world-class honors that “Tea-Picking Dance” has received, such as being selected as an excellent teaching material for the “Asia-Pacific style” by UNESCO, and its performance at the G20 Hangzhou Summit, marking its global recognition.

6.2.5 Relationship with Chinese Tea Culture

The presenter introduces China’s long history of tea picking and its influence on tea culture worldwide and explains that tea songs are a traditional folk song and dance genre derived from tea production and tea drinking cultural themes.

6.3 Teaching Content

The teaching content of the micro-lesson will focus on showcasing the unique beauty of the tea-picking dance music as a traditional Chinese folk song. Starting from the creative background, the micro-lesson will gradually delve into the following focal points mentioned above: background understanding, lyrics display and characteristics introduction, significance, and the connection between the music and tea culture. The aim is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding and leave a lasting impression by enriching the teaching content.

Background of “Tea-Picking Dance” includes reasons for creation, composition time, author introduction, composition process and geographical information. “Tea-Picking Dance”, originally a folk song from Zhejiang Province, was composed by Zhou Dafeng in 1958 as the theme song and dance music for the Yue opera “Before the Rain”. It was later adapted into a dance piece titled “Tea-Picking Dance” based on the song. Mr. Zhou Dafeng was inspired by the local tea-picking culture while living in Taishun County, Zhejiang Province. Based on this inspiration, he created the nine-act Yue opera “Before the Rain” in just three days. Later in November 1987, “Tea-picking Dance” was selected as a music teaching material for the Asia-Pacific region at the 12th UNESCO Expert Meeting on Music Teaching Materials in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Presentation of lyrics and introduction to their characteristics includes borrowing from Yue opera art, singing in Wu dialect, and sweet and melodious melody. We will give detailed introduction to the depiction of the tea fragrance and beautiful scenery in the first two lines of the lyrics, the portrayal of the girls’ joyous mood while picking tea in the middle, and the expression of the joy of the laboring people’s harvest in the final part. Furthermore, we will expand on the metaphorical and other rhetorical techniques used in the lyrics, as well as the local melodic and rhythmic characteristics of the song.

As to the significance of “Tea-Picking Dance”, we find that the use of Wu dialect in the tea-picking dance brings the song closer to the common people, reflecting the clear and melodious local

characteristics and demonstrating humanistic features. Therefore, it has formed a unique style of folk song. Moreover, since “Tea-Picking Dance” borrows from Yue opera in terms of composition, melody, and lyrics, its creation also broadens the creative ideas of ethnic vocal works. In addition, its performance at the G20 Hangzhou Summit in 2016 became a symbol of its global recognition, which is of great significance for the internationalization of Chinese folk songs.

The relationship between “Tea-Picking Dance” and Tea Culture is also one of the focal points of the micro-lesson. China is the hometown of tea and the birthplace of tea culture. The discovery and utilization of tea in China has a history of more than 4,700 years and has remained prosperous and renowned worldwide. “Tea-Picking Dance” is not only a carrier of Chinese folk song culture but also a carrier of Chinese tea culture. Through songs conveying emotions and tea bringing people together, “Tea-Picking Dance” has remained enduring and rejuvenating on the land of China.

6.4 Teaching Reflection

In order to further understand the effectiveness and situation of micro-lesson folk song teaching in international communication, the research group conducted a questionnaire survey among international students in different universities (including Indonesia, South Korea, and other countries and regions) after playing a series of four self-produced micro-lesson videos on folk songs: Zhejiang folk song “Tea-Picking Dance”, Jiangsu folk song “Jasmine Flower”, Kazakh folk song “In That Distant Place”, and Tibetan folk song “Heavenly Road” (total duration approximately 17 minutes and 35 seconds). See the attached Appendix.

Based on the collected data, through analysis, it can be concluded that 77.42% of foreign audiences find this series of micro-lesson videos easy to understand, 90.32% of the audience believes that this series of micro-lessons helps them understand traditional Chinese folk songs, 87.10% of the audience finds the production quality of this series of micro-lessons to be good, 83.87% of the audience finds the teaching explanation in the video to be lively and interesting, 96.77% of the respondents believe that micro-lesson videos have a certain impact on the dissemination of Chinese folk songs, 80.65% of the respondents are willing to share the micro-lesson videos with their friends or family, and 90.32% of the respondents are interested in the teaching methods of folk song micro-lessons. Some respondents also provided suggestions for improvement regarding this series of micro-lesson videos (such as improving sound quality, enhancing emotional appeal, integrating with disciplinary teaching, etc.).

Based on the above data, we can see that Chinese folk songs have a great appeal to foreign audiences. With the development of modern communication media, micro-lesson teaching has expanded the channels for the dissemination of folk songs to some extent. The lively and interesting teaching explanations in micro-lesson videos attract foreign audiences to watch and share them. Most foreign audiences are interested in the teaching methods of folk song micro-lessons.

7. Conclusion

Chinese folk songs are the product of the Chinese people's historical and practical experiences. They teach people skills for production and living, impart common values and beliefs of our nation, and reflect the characteristics of the times. They are a gemstone in human music culture and possess unique value in terms of inheritance and dissemination. Micro-lesson teaching of folk songs breaks through the limitations of traditional media for spreading folk songs and, through vivid and meticulous teaching explanations, uses modern micro-lesson production methods to spread traditional folk song culture from multiple levels, perspectives, and dimensions, achieving a progressive effect on dissemination and enhancing the social, aesthetic, and artistic value of traditional folk song culture.

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Appendix

Feedback on the International Dissemination of Folk Song Micro-course Teaching

1. Have you watched this micro-course video? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
A. Yes	23	74.19%
B. No	8	25.81%

Number of valid responses for this question 31

2. If you have watched this micro-course video, do you find the content easy to understand? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
A. Very easy to understand	5	16.13%
B. Quite easy to understand	19	61.29%
C. Average	7	22.58%

D. Not easy to understand 0 0%

Number of valid responses for this question 31

3. Do you think the content of this micro-course video is helpful for you to understand Chinese folk songs? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Very helpful for understanding	5	16.13%
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B. Somewhat helpful	23	74.19%
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C. Not very helpful	3	9.68%
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D. Not helpful	0	0%
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Number of valid responses for this question 31

4. Do you think the duration of this micro-course video is appropriate? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Very appropriate	13	41.94%
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B. Somewhat too long	15	48.39%
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C. Too short	3	9.68%
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D. Too long	0	0%
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Number of valid responses for this question 31

5. How do you rate the production quality of this micro-course video? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Very good	8	25.81%
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B. Good	19	61.29%
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C. Average	4	12.9%
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D. Not very good	0	0%
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Number of valid responses for this question 31

6. Do you find the presentation style of this micro-course video engaging and interesting? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Very engaging and interesting	9	29.03%
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B. Quite engaging and interesting	17	54.84%
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C. Average	4	12.9%
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D. Not very engaging and interesting	1	3.23%
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Number of valid responses for this question 31

7. What do you think is the impact of this micro-course video on the dissemination of Chinese folk songs? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Very impactful	11	35.48%
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B. Somewhat impactful	19	61.29%
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C. Not very impactful 1 3.23%

D. Not impactful 0 0%

Number of valid responses for this question 31

8. Would you be willing to share this micro-course video with your friends or family? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Yes	25	80.65%
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B. No	6	19.35%
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Number of valid responses for this question 31

9. What do you think are the areas for improvement in this micro-course video? [Fill-in-the-blank question]

10. Are you interested in the teaching method of folk song micro-courses? [Single choice question]

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
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A. Very interested	12	38.71%
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B. Somewhat interested	16	51.61%
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C. Not very interested	2	6.45%
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D. Not interested	1	3.23%
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Number of valid responses for this question 31