

## Guidelines for Literacy Transmission of Changde Sixian Opera in Schools and Educational Institutes

Haixia Sun\*, Khomkrich Karin

College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Corresponding author: Haixia Sun, E-mail: haixiasun.msu@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

Changde Sixian Opera is a cherished intangible cultural heritage traditional folk opera known for its vibrant melodies. The objective of this study is to propose guidelines for the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within schools and educational institutes. The study was conducted in Changde City, Hunan Province, and enlisted two key informants, including experienced Changde Sixian performers and educators. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study unearthed a multifaceted integration of Changde Sixian into primary and secondary education, higher education, community activities, television programming, and professional performance groups. The research findings underscore the importance of educational institutions in preserving and transmitting Changde Sixian Opera while emphasizing the need for ongoing strategies to address declining interest among younger generations, ensuring the continued vibrancy of this cultural treasure.

**Key words:** Sixian Opera, Cultural Heritage, Literacy Transmission, Preservation, Educational Institutions

### INTRODUCTION

Changde Sixian Opera, a vibrant intangible cultural heritage of China, has been a symbol of cultural identity for the city of Changde (Pang et al., 2016; Haiyan, 2019). With its unique musical and theatrical elements, Changde Sixian Opera has captivated generations with its charm. However, in the face of modernization and changing cultural landscapes, the preservation and transmission of this precious art form face significant challenges. As a result, the need for comprehensive guidelines to facilitate the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within schools and educational institutes has become increasingly crucial (Fan & Niyomsilp, 2022; Gao & Karin, 2023; Qiu et al., 2024).

Changde Sixian Opera, also known as “Sixian,” is a traditional folk opera characterized by its vibrant melodies, distinct regional flavors, and rich cultural heritage. Originating in Changde, Hunan province, this art form has been passed down through generations, bridging history, culture, and contemporary society. The cultural significance of Changde Sixian Opera lies in its artistic value and its role as a reservoir of local history and identity (Shen & Tian, 2015; Jie & Ping-heng, 2023).

In recent years, there has been growing concern about the sustainability of Changde Sixian Opera as it faces several challenges. These challenges include declining interest among younger generations, a shortage of well-trained

performers, and limited educational resources. Furthermore, the integration of Changde Sixian Opera into formal education systems and cultural institutions remains underdeveloped (Jiang, 2011; Haili, 2016; Weimin, 2018).

The research problem addressed in this study is the absence of comprehensive guidelines for the literacy transmission of the Changde Sixian Opera within schools and educational institutes (Xin, 2022). While the Changde Sixian Opera is considered a valuable cultural asset, its inclusion in educational curricula and institutional programs is sporadic and often lacks standardized teaching materials and approaches. This gap in educational strategies hinders the effective transmission of Changde Sixian Opera to new generations (Zwane & Malale, 2018; Zhang & Choatchamrat, 2023; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023; Chung, 2024).

The primary objective of this research is to propose guidelines for the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within schools and educational institutes. These guidelines aim to provide educators, institutions, and policymakers with a structured framework for integrating Changde Sixian Opera into formal education, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of this cultural treasure among students and the broader community.

This study holds significant implications for preserving and revitalizing the Changde Sixian Opera. Educators can create a more structured and practical approach to teaching this art form by establishing comprehensive guidelines. Furthermore,

the research findings can serve as a valuable resource for educational institutions, helping them incorporate Changde Sixian Opera into their programs and curricula. Ultimately, this study contributes to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its continued relevance and vitality in contemporary society (Kurin, 2007; Stefano, 2021; Li, 2023).

### Research Question

- How can comprehensive guidelines for the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within schools and educational institutes be developed to preserve and promote this intangible cultural heritage effectively?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural identity of communities and nations worldwide. Changde Sixian Opera, a prominent form of ICH, has captivated the attention of scholars, policymakers, and educators due to its historical significance and unique artistic expression (Chen, 2017; Liu & Wang, 2019). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in transmitting and preserving Changde Sixian opera within the educational context, particularly in schools and educational institutes.

Changde Sixian Opera is a distinctive genre of traditional Chinese music and performing arts that reflects the rich cultural heritage of Changde City, Hunan Province. It encompasses various artistic elements, including music, vocal techniques, storytelling, and theatrical performances (Wu & Zhang, 2018). However, despite its cultural significance, there is a pressing need to develop comprehensive guidelines for the literacy transmission of the Changde Sixian Opera within educational settings.

This study draws upon several theoretical frameworks to guide the development of guidelines for the literacy transmission of the Changde Sixian Opera. The first theoretical foundation is the UNESCO definition of intangible cultural heritage. This perspective emphasizes the importance of safeguarding traditional cultural practices and knowledge, acknowledging the role of education in this process (UNESCO, 2003). Within this framework, educational institutions, including the Changde Sixian Opera, are essential to transmitting and preserving ICH.

The second theoretical approach is the pedagogical approach to arts education. By adopting principles from arts education theories (Feldman, 2018; Eisner, 2002), arts education emphasizes the integration of creative expression, cultural appreciation, and skill development, aligning with the multifaceted nature of Changde Sixian Opera.

Lastly, this study incorporates sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to understand the role of social interactions and collaborative learning in transmitting cultural practices. This perspective underscores the significance of peer and mentor relationships in acquiring knowledge and skills related to Changde Sixian Opera (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

By synthesizing these theoretical foundations, this study seeks to propose guidelines that are not only culturally sensitive but also pedagogically effective for the literacy

transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within schools and educational institutes.

## METHOD

### Selection of Key Informants

Key informants were selected based on their expertise and involvement in transmitting Changde Sixian Opera. The selection criteria included individuals with significant experience in teaching, performing, or researching Changde Sixian Opera and educators and administrators in the chosen educational institutions. Two key informants were chosen through purposive and snowball sampling, ensuring representation from various institutional roles.

### Selection of Research Site

The research site selection process involved identifying educational institutions in Changde City, Hunan Province, China, where Changde Sixian Opera is being taught or preserved. A purposive sampling approach was employed to ensure that a diverse range of schools and educational institutes, including primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, were included in the study. Additionally, consideration was given to the institutions' historical significance and contributions to Changde Sixian Opera education, as shown in Figure 1.

### Research Tools

A mixed-methods research approach was employed to gather comprehensive data for the development of guidelines. The following research tools were utilized, as shown in Table 1.

### Data Analysis

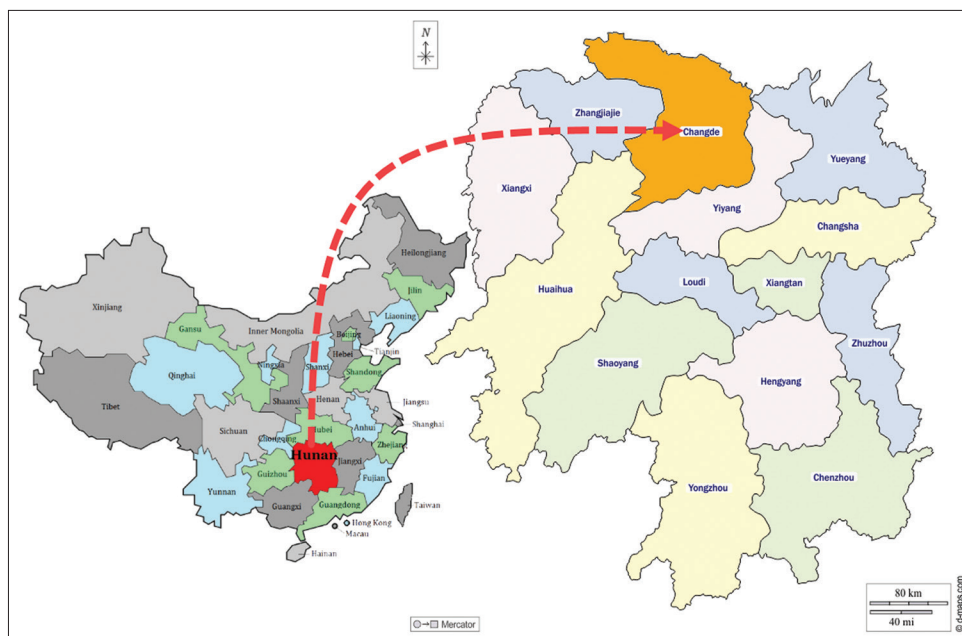
Data analysis followed a systematic approach to ensure rigor and reliability. The qualitative data was obtained from interviews and observation. Themes and patterns related to challenges, best practices, and recommendations for literacy transmission were identified.

## RESULTS

Education plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, making it vital to integrate the protection and transmission of culture into educational institutions. This study outlines guidelines for the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera in schools and educational institutes, emphasizing the importance of primary and secondary education, higher education, community involvement, television programs, and professional performance groups. Figures depicting various aspects of Changde Sixian integration and transmission are included to provide visual context.

### Inheritance Begins with Education: Changde Sixian Enters Campuses

The renowned Enlightenment thinker, Zheng Guanying, wisely remarked, "If you want to educate its people and



**Figure 1.** Map of research site  
Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), D-map (n.d.)

**Table 1.** Research tools

Research Tools	Description
Semi-Structured Interviews	In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants. Interview questions were designed to elicit insights into their experiences, challenges, and perspectives on the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within educational settings.
Observation	Observations were administered to educators, students, and practitioners involved in Changde Sixian Opera Education.
Document Analysis	Relevant documents, such as curriculum materials, historical records, and educational policies related to Changde Sixian Opera, were analyzed to gain insights into the existing educational framework and practices.

become its beauty, you must learn.” Education plays an irreplaceable role in a country’s cultural development, and schools serve as the cradle of culture, shaping the spiritual civilization of cities and nations. Integrating cultural heritage into campus education significantly impacts its reach and influence. In the case of Changde Sixian, education in schools and educational institutes has played a crucial role in its preservation and transmission.

### Primary and Secondary Education

The saying “education starts from the baby” underscores the importance of primary and secondary education in shaping worldviews, values, and aesthetics. Changde Sixian, as a treasured cultural heritage, has been gradually integrated into primary and secondary education in Changde. Circular teaching and promotional activities have been conducted in local primary and secondary schools. For example, Changde Beizheng Street Primary School offers Changde Sixian classes where students learn instrument playing and repertoire singing, as shown in Figure 2.

Supporting textbooks like “Primary School Students Learn to Sing Changde Sixian,” published by Nanfang Publishing House and edited by Chu Lihua, Kong Yongping,

and Xu Zepeng, complement these classes. These textbooks provide insight into Changde Sixian’s history, artistic characteristics, and fundamental knowledge. Students from Changde Sixian classes have participated in provincial and municipal cultural performances and even been invited to renowned TV programs, such as “Brilliant Chinese,” elevating Changde Sixian’s national recognition.

### Higher Education

Colleges and universities are vital in shaping cultural environments and cultivating elite talents. The inheritance and protection of Changde Sixian extend to various institutions in Changde. For instance, Hunan University of Arts and Sciences offers elective courses taught by Ms. Shen Xiaohui, a national Changde Sixian inheritor. The collaboration between the Wuling District government of Changde City and Hunan University of Arts and Sciences has led to the establishment of Changde Sixian talent training classes for new students in the Academy of Arts and Communication.

District and county vocational colleges under Changde’s jurisdiction also offer Changde Sixian courses, emphasizing professional training. This comprehensive approach ensures Changde Sixian’s vitality across all educational levels,





**Figure 2.** Changde Sixian Enters Primary School  
Source: Haixia Sun, from fieldwork in June 2023

providing an exceptional environment for its continued development, as shown in Figure 3.

### Creating a TV Column: Changde Sixian on Screen

Changde Sixian, deeply rooted in local culture, represents a significant facet of Changde's identity. To promote and preserve this cultural treasure and establish Changde City's unique cultural image, Changde TV Station initiated the TV program "I Love Changde Sixian." This program delves into the historical origins of Changde Sixian, showcases its inheritors, introduces its artistic characteristics, and presents both traditional and contemporary songs, as shown in Figure 4.

This dedicated TV column for an intangible cultural heritage project demonstrates Changde City's commitment to preserving Changde Sixian. It bolsters the confidence of Changde Sixian inheritors and reinforces its connection with Changde's cultural identity. This initiative promotes Changde Sixian and enhances the city's cultural brand and image. Furthermore, it provides local TV stations an effective strategy to engage local audiences through cultural content, strengthening Changde Sixian's regional cultural presence.

### Integration with Daily Life: Changde Sixian in the Community

For intangible heritage to remain "alive," it must resonate with the masses and be an integral part of their lives. Changde Sixian's primary function is entertainment, but its relevance has evolved with changing times and preferences. Changde Sixian has gradually become a part of community cultural activities to maintain its contemporary vitality. Various communities, including those in the Wuling District, have incorporated Changde Sixian into events such as the "hundred group competition." Additionally, Changde Sixian classes are offered in community centers, where professional instructors guide the elderly in learning Changde Sixian, as shown in Figure 5.

This approach seamlessly integrates Changde Sixian into the lives of residents, forming a vital aspect of the community's cultural fabric. It ensures that Changde Sixian remains relevant in contemporary society, contributing to its continued cultural development.



**Figure 3.** Changde Sixian Enters Colleges and Universities  
Source: Haixia Sun, from fieldwork in June 2023



**Figure 4.** Changde Sixian on TV  
Source: Haixia Sun, from fieldwork in June 2023



**Figure 5.** Changde Sixian Enters the Community  
Source: Haixia Sun, from fieldwork in June 2023

### Incorporating with Classroom Instruction

The utilization of the "oral teaching" method serves as an effective means to transmit the essence of traditional Chinese music while fostering a direct and profound connection between educators and learners. This approach allows students to immerse themselves in the world of Changde Sixian through verbal and non-verbal communication, thereby

enriching their comprehension of this cherished folk art. Within higher education, the inclusion of Changde Sixian folk artists within classroom settings affords students the invaluable opportunity to grasp this art form in its most authentic and unadulterated state.

To nurture students' appreciation for music and enhance their vocal prowess, music classes must strike a harmonious balance between cultivating aesthetic sensibilities and developing performance skills. Introducing students to a repertoire that includes traditional and modern Changde Sixian compositions and the auditory experience of listening to performances by accomplished maestros helps achieve this equilibrium. These pedagogical practices give students an initial sensory grasp of Changde Sixian while also instilling in them the significance of music appreciation and the techniques vital to proficient performance.

Fostering a holistic musical environment involves seamlessly integrating elements from society and folklore. This multifaceted approach necessitates active engagement in a diverse range of cultural activities. By merging small-scale classroom sessions with larger, more inclusive gatherings, students can engage in substantive discussions regarding Changde Sixian, visit performance ensembles, and partake in enlightening exchanges with accomplished performing artists, composers, and theoreticians. Regularly hosting cultural events such as the "Sixian Art Festival" and "Sixian Culture Week" is an integral component of this multifaceted educational strategy, enabling students to develop a comprehensive and profound appreciation for Changde Sixian.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research findings from this study provide valuable insights into the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly exemplified by Changde Sixian Opera, aligning with the theoretical principles outlined by UNESCO (2003). Education emerges as a crucial component in safeguarding traditional cultural practices and knowledge, a notion corroborated by the integration of Changde Sixian into primary, secondary, and higher education settings. The literature review underscores the importance of embedding ICH within educational contexts, a sentiment echoed by the study's findings, which reveal the successful incorporation of Changde Sixian into curricula and cultural activities at various academic levels.

Furthermore, the research results resonate with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), emphasizing the pivotal role of social interactions and collaborative learning in cultural transmission. Including Changde Sixian artists within educational settings aligns with this framework, providing students with authentic exposure to the art form and mentorship opportunities. However, despite these efforts, challenges such as declining interest among younger generations persist, warranting further exploration and innovative strategies to address this issue effectively.

Moreover, while the study demonstrates the successful integration of Changde Sixian into educational institutions, ongoing evaluation and adaptation of teaching methods are essential to ensure these programs' continued relevance and

effectiveness, consistent with the dynamic educational strategies advocated in the literature (Gao & Karin, 2023). In conclusion, this research contributes to preserving Changde Sixian Opera, a significant form of ICH, by offering practical guidelines for educators, institutions, and policymakers. The findings consistently support UNESCO's framework for safeguarding ICH and emphasize the pivotal role of educational institutions in achieving this goal. By integrating Changde Sixian into educational settings, its cultural significance and relevance are upheld, aligning with broader efforts to preserve and revitalize intangible cultural heritage worldwide.

In conclusion, this study addressed the pressing issue of preserving and transmitting the Changde Sixian Opera, a significant intangible cultural heritage in Changde, China. Through theoretical principles and a comprehensive literature review, the research developed guidelines for the literacy transmission of Changde Sixian Opera within educational institutions. The results indicate that educational institutions, from primary schools to universities, play a crucial role in preserving and promoting this cultural heritage. The findings consistently support UNESCO's framework for safeguarding ICH and emphasize the importance of educational institutions in achieving this goal. Furthermore, they align with sociocultural theory, highlighting the role of social interactions and mentorship in cultural transmission.

Overall, this study contributes valuable insights into preserving intangible cultural heritage and offers practical guidelines for educators, institutions, and policymakers interested in safeguarding and promoting cultural treasures like the Changde Sixian Opera in the modern world. Integrating this rich cultural heritage into educational institutions ensures its continued relevance and significance in contemporary society, aligning with the broader goal of preserving and revitalizing intangible cultural heritage on a global scale.

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