

Preservation and Literacy Transmission of Xinyang Folk Songs by Fu Dakun in Henan, China

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the preservation and literacy transmission of Xinyang Folk Songs by Fu Dakun in Henan, China. Fu Dakun, a well-known figure in the field of Xinyang Folk Songs, has played an important role in preserving this cultural heritage. His father and grandfather guided his education, performance, and training from when he was born in 1949 until 1965. His commitment to preserving Xinyang Folk Songs persisted even as he worked as a farmer from 1980 to 1990. In 1990, he formed a folk song-singing ensemble to ensure these songs were passed down to future generations. Fu Dakun's intense training enabled him to master conventional voice techniques while establishing his unique style. With over 50 years of practical experience, he broadened the repertoire of Xinyang Folk Songs while retaining their traditional spirit. He received distinguished titles and honors for his significant contribution to the organization of folk song collections. Fu Dakun's dedication to training new generations of folk singers strengthens his contribution to preserving Xinyang Folk Songs. The paper also addresses the broader context of cultural preservation, highlighting the significance of government policies in promoting such projects.

Key words: Preservation, Literacy Transmission, Xinyang Folk Songs, Fu Dakun

INTRODUCTION

The Xinyang region is located in the southern part of Henan province. The region is known for its abundant heritage of traditional songs and varied customs, remarkably conserved throughout history. Local folk song inheritors lead a dual existence, as they fulfill both social and professional responsibilities apart from their singing pursuits, thereby making singing not their primary vocation (Liang, 2013).

The folk song inheritors have been influenced by various variables in recent years, such as political, economic, and cultural forces. Although they possess a profound inclination to safeguard and transmit their cultural legacy through vocal performances, they encounter many obstacles. Economic constraints often impede their ability to successfully inherit folk tunes. Moreover, the influence of foreign cultures, evolving audience tastes, and changes in performance locations present numerous cultural challenges. Consequently, the preservation and transmission of folk songs encounter substantial challenges. The Xinyang Folk Songs were officially designated as the second group of national intangible cultural treasures in 2008. After this acknowledgment, the state has assumed the forefront position in safeguarding and conserving traditional songs, incorporating them within the wider context of social welfare measures (Chen, 2011).

Xinyang Folk Songs, which exemplify the abundant folk song legacy of the Xinyang region in Henan Province, have experienced notable achievements and the rise of

several vocal ensembles over the course of their evolution. Nevertheless, with the progress of society and the rapid pace of modernization, especially in the era of digital technology, the social dynamics of local communities have undergone a transformation. The traditional cultural fabric, which people traditionally depended on for their livelihoods, has undergone a transformation due to the impact of market forces and foreign cultures (Deng & Zhang, 2021).

There is an increasing fascination with the resurgence of traditional culture, indicating a desire to reconnect with one's origins. Nevertheless, preserving the genuineness and significance of traditional culture in light of swiftly evolving societal patterns has emerged as a significant obstacle. Traditional folk melodies, which have been transmitted orally for generations, are now facing a crucial challenge of inheritance in the midst of this changing social environment. Immediate focus and preservation measures are necessary to ensure the safeguarding of our indigenous cultural heritage. Xinyang Folk Songs owe their existence and growth mostly to the collective experiences and creative endeavors of individuals. Essentially, the conservation and dissemination of folk songs are closely connected to the presence and progress of the folks who uphold them—the populace. Thus, ensuring the protection and advancement of folk music requires a significant emphasis on those who will inherit it (Liu, 2021).

Fu Dakun, hailing from a lineage of folk singers, mastered preserving and performing Xinyang Folk Songs.

He acquired these songs from his father and, by engaging with mountain folk singers, achieved mastery of over 300 Xinyang Folk Songs. His vocal performances stand out for their proficiency, sincerity, and overt regional flair. Fu Dakun was acknowledged as a prominent inheritor of regional intangible cultural assets initiatives, established a folk song ensemble, and provided training to numerous vocalists. His endeavors have significantly contributed to preserving and transmitting Xinyang Folk Songs (Guocheng et al., 2023).

This study focuses on Fu Dakun, the successor of Xinyang Folk Songs, with a particular emphasis on examining his history, individual accomplishments, and his crucial role in safeguarding and passing on this cultural legacy. The examination incorporates the life experiences of Fu Dakun, which play a significant role in enhancing the literacy of the folk song culture. Moreover, it explores his educational process of acquiring knowledge about Xinyang Folk Songs, which is essential for the preservation and literacy transmission of this cultural expression to future generations.

Research Question

- How has Fu Dakun contributed to preserving and transmitting Xinyang Folk Songs in Henan, China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

General Knowledge of Xinyang Folk Songs

There is a compelling story surrounding the origin of Xinyang Folk Songs. According to this myth, the Dongyi tribe, who lived in the Huai River Basin, worshipped birds as their sacred symbol and believed that bird songs were the divine utterances of the gods. A member of this tribe's lineage initially imitated the tunes of avian creatures, and to their surprise, the stone walls reacted to his vocalizations. The discovery of this new link filled him with enthusiasm, allowing him to shape the songs based on his own artistic vision. This individual is revered as the inaugural Xinyang folk vocalist, and his resounding voice resonating through the rocks signifies the commencement of Xinyang's earliest folk melody (Guo, 2021).

Presently, the ancient types of folk music, such as gongs and drums singing and chariot water singing, continue to preserve the fundamental characteristics of the Six Dynasties period. Throughout the Song and Yuan eras, Xinyang Folk Songs assimilated elements from both classic Chinese opera and folk art. During the Ming and Qing periods, Xinyang experienced a significant growth in the number and popularity of folk music troupes. Despite the downfall of the feudal kingdom and the formation of the People's Republic of China, Xinyang's singing and dancing customs flourished, giving rise to a multitude of revolutionary historical songs and making appearances in Beijing on several occasions (Fang, 2019).

The Evolution of Xinyang Folk Songs

Xinyang Folk Songs demonstrate notable variety and a comprehensive structure. Folk songs can be classified into over

ten various categories, such as love songs, children's songs, historical folk songs, and peddling songs. Each category represents a particular historical period and has a significant cultural background. Xinyang Folk Songs can be categorized into five distinct genres: haozi, field songs, folk songs, ground lanterns, and xiaodiao (Wei, 2018; Yan et al., 2023). Over a long period of evolution, Xinyang Folk Songs have acquired several fundamental characteristics:

1. The integration of local culture, which has influenced the music, resulting in a combination of traits from both southern and northern folk songs,
2. The increasing reliance on folk music and local customs as they shape people's everyday routines in response to societal progress,
3. The development of procedural attributes influenced by diverse song contents and structures,
4. The coexistence and reciprocal impact of foreign and native folk tunes, resulting in their flourishing and mutual advancement,
5. The presence of numerous genres, a diverse array of types, and a substantial quantity of songs all contribute to a vast and varied repertoire, and
6. A wide range of melodies, predominantly based on the national five-tone mode and including modifications such as changing palace and Qing Angle, resulting in a diverse collection of songs.

The characteristics of Xinyang Folk Songs demonstrate their cultural importance and historical development, highlighting their depth and diversity.

Xinyang Folk Song Classification

Xinyang Folk Songs exemplify the abundance of Han folk music and its profound association with ancient traditional culture. This musical tradition includes various forms, providing a diversified spectrum of genres within a comprehensive framework. Xinyang Folk Songs encompass many themes and can be categorized into several basic types, such as chants, folk songs, Tian Ge (field songs), custom songs, minor melodies, light songs, children's songs, and peddling songs. Furthermore, they include supplementary genres such as folk songs about revolutionary history and modern folk songs, culminating in a grand total of more than ten separate categories (Wang, 2018).

Chants are distinguished by their potent and expressive attributes, while folk songs showcase vibrant and prolonged melodies. Field songs frequently emphasize humor, but minor tunes generate a feeling of delicacy and nuance. Revolutionary historical folk songs are characterized by intense passion, while children's songs are filled with enthusiasm. Each category exhibits its own distinctive aesthetic, offering a vibrant and genuine representation of the lives, experiences, thoughts, and goals of individuals from various eras and areas within Xinyang. These songs are an engaging and essential documentation of societal practices and cultural manifestations (Xie, 2017).

The folk songs of the Xinyang area are characterized by their intricate composition, often exceeding the average

duration of traditional folk songs. Their compositions mostly consist of multi-segment structures, usually three to four lines and sometimes extending to five lines, with stanzas above and below. Generally, the beat in these traditional tunes maintains a moderate pace. For example, numerous folk songs utilize either four- or two-beat rhythms, although narrative folk songs generally adhere to a four-beat pattern. On the other hand, certain folk songs utilize non-standard rhythms, such as those with eight or nine beats. These compositions generally consist of multi-stage structures, frequently using individual and many melodies in their vocalization (Li, 2016; Ye et al., 2023).

Research Theory

The study of the preservation and literacy transmission of Xinyang Folk Songs by Fu Dakun in Henan, China, was approached through various ethnomusicological theories. These theories offer insights into how the cultural context, oral tradition, environmental factors, performance practices, social roles, and modern media influence the preservation, literacy transmission, and ongoing cultural significance of these songs. By integrating these ethnomusicological perspectives, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of how Xinyang Folk Songs, as practiced by Fu Dakun, are preserved, passed on, and transmitted through literacy to enrich their cultural milieu (Boyu, 2019; Harrison, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

Key Informants

The selection criteria for designating Fu Dakun as the main informant are as follows:

1. Fu Dakun was born into a family that specializes in folk songs, and he commenced his education in Xinyang Folk Songs under the guidance of his father when he reached the age of 16.
2. Fu Dakun has a high level of skill in singing over 300 Xinyang Folk Songs, including lamp songs, ritual songs, haozi, and other genres. These songs demonstrate a wealth of substance and a wide range of structures.
3. In May 2018, Fu Dakun received official recognition as a member of the fifth group of inheritors of national intangible cultural assets.
4. Fu Dakun has made substantial contributions to the preservation, transmission, and advancement of Xinyang Folk Songs (Figure 1).

Fu Dakun, hailing from a lineage of traditional vocalists in Xinyang City, acquired proficiency in more than 300 Xinyang Folk Songs starting at the age of 16. He is renowned for his proficient and genuine singing technique. Fu Dakun founded the "August Osmanthus Everywhere Open Art Troupe," which gained local recognition and made appearances on the well-liked CCTV television program "Folk Songs China." In 2008, Fu Dakun's rendition of the Xinyang Folk Song received official recognition as a national intangible cultural treasure. Also, Fu Dakun plays a crucial role in their preservation and transmission.



Figure 1. Fu Dakun

Source: Yibin Zhang

Data Collecting

1. Carry out thorough on-site research in Xinyang, Henan, to personally watch and engage with Fu Dakun and other individuals who have inherited folk songs. This includes engaging in performances, interviews, and casual talks to collect qualitative data.
2. Perform comprehensive interviews with Fu Dakun and other pertinent individuals to collect oral accounts concerning the conservation and dissemination of Xinyang Folk Songs. Gather their individual accounts and first-hand encounters.
3. Conduct an in-depth examination of the available archives, records, and historical documents pertaining to Xinyang Folk Songs. This may encompass archival audio recordings, textual artifacts, and official records relating to intangible cultural heritage.
4. Conduct participant observation during live performances, cultural events, and gatherings when Xinyang Folk Songs are performed. This facilitates a direct comprehension of the songs' significance in the local culture.

Data Analysis

The researchers organized and analyzed the gathered data, including both qualitative information, using appropriate research software and procedures. Furthermore, they analyzed and explored the consistent patterns, trends, and repeating themes related to the preservation and literacy transmission of Xinyang Folk Songs by Fu Dakun. Finally, they utilized suitable qualitative analysis methods to obtain significant insights from the data.

RESULTS

Preservation of Xinyang Folk Song Heritage by Fu Dakun

Fu Dakun, born in 1949 in Shuangpu Town, Shangcheng County, Henan Province, is a renowned figure in the history of Xinyang Folk Songs. He began learning these songs in 1965 under the guidance of his father and grandfather and continued

to actively participate in their preservation until 1980. Between 1980 and 1990, he worked as a farmer while collecting, organizing, singing, and inheriting Xinyang Folk Songs. In 1990, he founded the folk song-singing ensemble, leading the way in passing on these songs to future generations.

Fu Dakun's humility and desire to learn set him apart, learning from his family and the wider community. His rigorous training allowed him to master traditional vocal skills and establish a distinct personal style. With over 50 years of practical singing expertise, Fu Dakun has broadened his repertoire and program variety while maintaining the traditional core. He has received prestigious titles and awards, including "Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Project Xinyang Folk Song Inheritor" and "National Representative Inheritor of Xinyang Folk Song." His role in organizing "Chinese Folk Songs Integration in Shangcheng County, Henan Province—Songs," a compilation of 600 songs, emphasizes his commitment to preserving and transmitting Xinyang Folk Songs (Figure 2).

Nurturing the Roots of Xinyang Folk Songs Heritage

The preservation and development of Xinyang Folk Songs is inextricably tied to talent cultivation. Talent is the central component of this folk performance art, and without outstanding inheritors, the full creative potential of these songs cannot be achieved.

In China, familial links have been emphasized, resulting in a social system built on family units. Family lineage inheritance is especially common in businesses needing specific expertise. The author's inquiry and visits revealed that many inheritors continue to rely on the traditional family-style master-apprentice system for enlightenment, much like Fu Dakun, who comes from a family with roots in Xinyang Folk Songs. Fu Dakun's contributions to transmitting and maintaining this cultural heritage are significant. He founded and led the folk song-singing ensemble in Shuangchunpu Town, Shangcheng County, beginning in 1990. This ensemble has about 30 performers and staff members with a repertoire of over 2000 folk song programs. Fu Dakun has also arranged over 30 sessions of Xinyang folk song training classes, with the primary goal



Figure 2. Fu Dakun with the Xinyang Folk Songs Band
Source: Yibin Zhang

of training over 100 folk singers. He extensively arranged and hosted the Xinyang Folk Singer Grand Prix, where he discovered and coached over 200 Xinyang Folk Song performers.

Fu Dakun has played a critical role in improving the local folk song transmission mechanism by building a five-level network that includes townships, villages, groups, families, and folk singing groups. This effort made a substantial contribution to the preservation and development of local Xinyang Folk Songs. After taking on the position of inheritor of the intangible cultural legacy of Xinyang folk melodies, Fu Dakun continued to participate in preservation and literacy transfer programs. He actively contributed to the development of the Xinyang Folk Song Training Base, identifying potential inheritors and developing new generations of folk singers. These actions show his dedication to the preservation of this cultural treasure.

Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage for Education in China

The State Council issued the "Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture" in 2017. This declaration highlights the paramount importance of safeguarding and promoting exceptional traditional Chinese culture. These endeavors are crucial in protecting China's cultural heritage, improving the people's cultural knowledge, preserving the security of national culture, strengthening the cultural impact of the nation, and facilitating the modernization of the national government structure and capacities.

The primary goals stated in these opinions encompass the smooth incorporation of exceptional traditional culture into national education and the safeguarding and continuation of cultural heritage. In order to accomplish these objectives, particular tactics have been suggested, such as enhancing and broadening the cultural environment on campus and advocating for the incorporation of diverse art forms like opera, calligraphy, fine art, and traditional sports in educational establishments. The primary objective is to highlight the accomplishments of traditional cultural education, in line with the overarching goal of safeguarding and transmitting China's abundant cultural legacy (Figure 3).

The Organization and Collection of Folk Song Materials

In 1978, Fu Dakun, Shi Tijie, and others, along with cultural workers from Shangcheng County, set out on a self-funded expedition to collect, arrange, edit, and publish "Selected Folk Songs of Shangcheng." This project was carried out under the auspices of the Shangcheng County Cultural Museum and included around 300 folk tunes. In 1989, they continued their commitment by contributing to the collecting and organizing "Chinese Folk Songs Integration—Henan Shangcheng County Volume—Food Songs," a project that included 600 songs. This compilation is a relatively thorough and standardized integration of folk tunes from Shangcheng County, with the province's highest acceptance rate and the renowned first medal for exceptional social science achievements in the region.



Figure 3. Xinyang Folk Musician
Source: Yibin Zhang

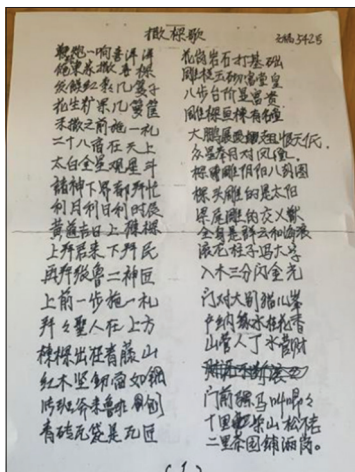


Figure 4. Folk Song Materials
Source: Yibin Zhang

Fu Dakun reminisced on his journey, adding, “Since I formed the theater group, I’ve always worked on the front lines. At the time, my salary was quite low, and I couldn’t even rely on the troupe’s earnings to live a regular existence. However, with the country’s support, Xinyang folk music has acquired popularity.” His goal is to give more people the opportunity to learn about and appreciate Xinyang folk tunes, encouraging a deeper knowledge of this cultural treasure (Figure 4).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study’s discussion and conclusion on Fu Dakun’s preservation and literacy transmission of Xinyang Folk Songs in Henan, China, provide important insights into the critical role that dedicated individuals like Fu Dakun have in protecting and preserving cultural heritage. Fu Dakun’s continuous commitment to Xinyang folk tunes demonstrates the importance of enthusiastic successors in preserving and propagating traditional cultural manifestations (Wong, 2020).

Fu Dakun’s extensive trip, which spanned several decades, exemplifies the complex challenge of preserving tradition while realistically conveying literacy. With a

collection of over 300 Xinyang Folk Songs, he exhibits his dedication to preserving the richness and diversity of this cultural tradition. His outstanding knowledge of traditional singing talents exemplifies the significant devotion required to preserve these cultural traditions (Li, 2013; Seeyo et al., 2023). Fu Dakun, the head of the folk song-singing ensemble, has actively conserved and promoted Xinyang folk music. His training of over 100 folk singers promotes preserving this musical heritage and ensures that future generations have the necessary knowledge and skills to protect it (Geng & Chen, 2006; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

Moreover, Fu Dakun’s work highlights the complex interplay between cultural preservation and societal change. By fostering and promoting Xinyang folk music, he preserves a treasured component of local identity and promotes communal solidarity and pride. These cultural activities anchor shared experiences and beliefs, instilling a sense of belonging and continuity throughout generations (Yi & Chen, 2014). In this sense, preserving intangible cultural heritage becomes more than just a tool to protect the past; it also enhances and empowers communities in the present (Shepherd, 2009).

Furthermore, Fu Dakun’s tale emphasizes the significance of government backing and legislative frameworks in aiding cultural preservation efforts. Individual passion and knowledge are important drivers of preservation activities. However, institutional support and resources are critical for scaling up these initiatives, guaranteeing broader access to cultural heritage materials, and creating sustainability in cultural stewardship operations. Fu Dakun’s experiences show how important government policies and interventions can be in enabling and improving cultural preservation initiatives at both the local and national levels (Zhou, 2009; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023).

Finally, Fu Dakun’s efforts encourage thought on the junction between tradition and modernity in cultural preservation. As he navigates the constraints of urbanization and shifting audience preferences, he demonstrates the adaptation required to make classic art forms viable in modern situations (Mu & Aimar, 2022). This dynamic connection between tradition and innovation demonstrates the durability of cultural heritage and its ability to develop while keeping its essence. Fu Dakun’s ability to handle these challenges demonstrates the need to include continuity and change in cultural preservation initiatives.

In conclusion, the case of Fu Dakun exemplifies how individuals can function as cultural torchbearers, actively contributing to the preservation and transmission of traditional folk melodies. In conjunction with governmental policies and assistance, their endeavors are crucial in guaranteeing these cultural assets’ perpetuation and enduring impact on the lives of forthcoming generations. Fu Dakun’s narrative underscores the significance of cultivating and commemorating cultural legacy, ultimately cultivating a more profound admiration for human creativity’s varied and opulent fabric. As Fu Dakun has shown, the preservation and dissemination of Xinyang folk melodies serve as acts of cultural guardianship and cultural enhancement for a larger society.

The preservation of Xinyang folk songs by Fu Dakun plays a pivotal role in protecting and conserving the region’s cultural heritage. His unwavering commitment guarantees

the perpetuation of these customs and fosters the growth of up-and-coming individuals. Future endeavors should prioritize digitization, education, and community engagement to enhance the promotion and preservation of Xinyang folk songs.

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