

## Literacy Preservation and Transmission of Youyang Chinese Folk Songs

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### ABSTRACT

Youyang folk songs represent a significant component of China's intangible cultural heritage from Youyang County in Chongqing Municipality, China. The study objective is to analyze the education literacy in preserving and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, China. The research content encompasses various aspects, including integrating folk songs into educational curricula, artistic engagement in rural communities, government initiatives for transmission enhancement, and preservation through publication and book distribution. The research site primarily focuses on Youyang County, renowned for its cultural heritage and ethnic traditions. Three key informants include governmental bodies, educational institutions, private organizations, and individual custodians involved in preservation efforts. Data analysis involves qualitative methods such as document analysis and interviews with stakeholders. The research results highlight a concerted effort from stakeholders to preserve and transmit Youyang folk songs, emphasizing the importance of legislative support, increased funding, and community involvement in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Suggestions for further improvement include strengthening legislative support, increasing funding for preservation efforts, and enhancing community involvement in protecting intangible cultural heritage.

**Key words:** Youyang Folk Songs, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Preservation, Transmission, Chongqing

### INTRODUCTION

Preserving and transmitting cultural heritage is critical in maintaining a society's identity and continuity, particularly in rapid societal changes and modernization. In the context of Chinese cultural heritage, Youyang folk songs stand as a testament to centuries-old traditions and narratives unique to the region (Bleibleh & Awad, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). Situated within the cultural tapestry of Chongqing Municipality, these folk songs encapsulate the essence of Youyang's rich cultural heritage and historical significance. However, the sustainability of Youyang folk songs faces challenges due to demographic shifts among custodians, changing societal norms, and the encroachment of modern lifestyles (Tang, 2021; Zeng & Onlamul, 2023).

Youyang, nestled in the southeastern part of Chongqing Municipality, China, is celebrated for its diverse cultural landscape, characterized by the coexistence of the Tujia and Miao ethnic groups (Pan, 2020; Chawla, 2023). Against this backdrop, Youyang folk songs have flourished as a profound expression of local identity, encompassing many themes, melodies, and performance traditions. Rooted in the region's historical narratives, agricultural practices, and spiritual

beliefs, these folk songs are invaluable repositories of intangible cultural heritage transmitted orally across generations (Schippers, 2015; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023; Wu & Xu, 2023; Qiu et al., 2024).

Despite their cultural significance, Youyang folk songs confront threats to their continued existence. The advancing age of custodians and dwindling interest among younger generations pose significant challenges to preserving and transmitting these cultural treasures (Rössler & Lin, 2018; Sun et al., 2024). Moreover, the diminishing emphasis on education literacy within the context of cultural heritage preservation exacerbates these challenges, jeopardizing the future vitality of Youyang folk songs. Thus, there is an urgent need to investigate the role of education literacy in safeguarding and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs (Gay, 2015; Zhang, 2021).

The study objective is to analyze the education literacy in preserving and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, China. By examining the intersection of education literacy initiatives and the conservation of intangible cultural heritage, this study seeks to uncover insights into the challenges, opportunities, and best practices to ensure the continuity of

Youyang folk songs amidst contemporary cultural dynamics (Wuebold et al., 2022; Shi & Nicolas, 2023; Yang, 2023).

The findings of this research hold significant implications for academic scholarship and cultural policy-making. By illuminating the influence of education literacy on preserving Youyang folk songs, this study can inform the development of targeted interventions to revitalize and sustain intangible cultural heritage in Chongqing Municipality and beyond. Furthermore, this research contributes to a broader discourse on safeguarding cultural diversity in an increasingly globalized world by underscoring the intricate connections between education, culture, and identity.

### Research Question

- What is the role of education literacy in preserving and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, China?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Preservation and transmission of Youyang Chinese folk songs within Chongqing Municipality, China's cultural context, are multifaceted processes influenced by various theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. This literature review synthesizes critical theories and research relevant to analyzing education literacy in this domain.

### Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory posits that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. Applied to the preservation and transmission of Youyang folk songs, this theory emphasizes the role of education literacy in facilitating intergenerational learning and cultural continuity. It suggests that individuals acquire the knowledge and skills associated with folk songs through social interactions within their communities (Thomas et al., 2016; Van Voorhis & Salisbury, 2016).

### Cultural Ecology

Cultural ecology examines the interaction between culture and the environment, highlighting how human societies adapt to ecological conditions. Within the context of Youyang folk songs, cultural ecology provides insights into how socio-environmental factors shape preservation efforts and transmission dynamics. It underscores the importance of understanding the environmental and socio-economic contexts in which folk songs are created, performed, and passed down through generations (Creanza et al., 2017; Sng et al., 2018).

### Policy Frameworks

The preservation of intangible cultural heritage, including folk songs, is influenced by governmental policies and regulatory frameworks. Policy analysis offers insights into the role of education literacy in advocating for heritage conservation, shaping institutional support, and fostering community

engagement. It examines how educational policies, cultural heritage, and community development impact the preservation and transmission of Youyang folk songs (Barmania & Reiss, 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

### Community of Practice

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's concept of a community of practice emphasizes social interaction and shared learning in cultural transmission. Education literacy is pivotal in nurturing communities where knowledge and traditions associated with Youyang folk songs are preserved and transmitted. It highlights the importance of active participation and collaboration within communities of practitioners, including custodians, musicians, scholars, and enthusiasts (Cantor et al., 2015; Farnsworth et al., 2016; Pyrko et al., 2017).

### Globalization

Globalization impacts the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, presenting challenges and opportunities. Education literacy is crucial in navigating globalization's effects, such as cultural homogenization and digitalization, while leveraging global networks for heritage promotion. It examines how globalization influences the dissemination, reception, and transformation of Youyang folk songs and how education literacy can mitigate negative impacts and harness opportunities for cross-cultural exchange (Alivizatou, 2016; Dippon & Moskaliuk, 2020; Eichler, 2021).

In conclusion, the integration of various theoretical perspectives forms a robust framework for in-depth analysis of education literacy concerning the preservation and transmission of Youyang Chinese folk songs in Chongqing Municipality, China. Synthesizing insights from social learning theory, cultural ecology, policy frameworks, communities of practice, and globalization offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping heritage conservation efforts.

## METHOD

### Selection of Key Informants

Understanding the perspectives and experiences of key informants is crucial for gaining insights into the preservation and transmission of Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, China. Therefore, selecting three key informants plays a significant role in this study, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the education literacy involved in this cultural heritage preservation effort, as shown in Table 1.

### Selection of Research Site

Preservation and transmission of traditional folk songs are crucial for maintaining cultural heritage, particularly in Youyang County, Chongqing Municipality, China, renowned for its rich musical traditions, notably the Youyang Chinese folk songs. However, demographic shifts and changing

societal dynamics pose challenges to their sustainability. Thus, this study aims to analyze education literacy in preserving and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, addressing concerns about the future of this invaluable cultural heritage, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2.

**Research Tools**

Practical research tools are essential for collecting data and gaining insights into the education literacy involved in preserving and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, China. Therefore, selecting and developing appropriate research tools, including interview forms, observation forms, and questionnaires, are critical aspects of this study, as shown in Table 3.

**Data Analysis**

In the data analysis phase of the study, collected data from interviews, observations, and questionnaires will be systematically analyzed to fulfill the research objective of analyzing the education literacy in the preservation and transmission of Youyang Chinese folk songs within the cultural context of Chongqing Municipality, China. Qualitative data from interviews and observations will be thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related

to education literacy strategies employed by custodians and practitioners. Additionally, quantitative data from questionnaires will be analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to uncover trends, correlations, and associations between different variables related to folk song preservation and transmission. By triangulating qualitative and quantitative data, this comprehensive analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of education literacy practices in the context of Youyang Chinese folk song heritage preservation.

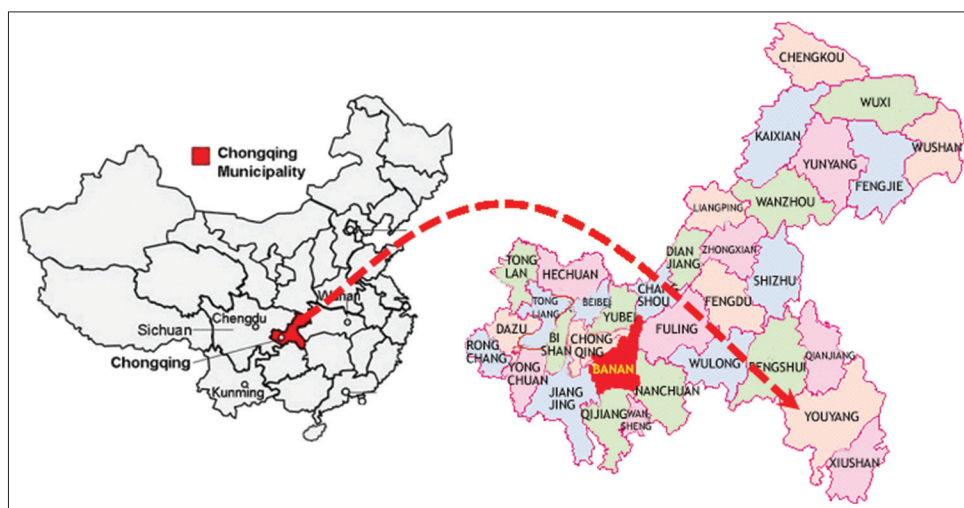
**RESULTS**

**Integration of Youyang Folk Songs into Educational Curricula**

In recent years, the preservation of Youyang folk songs has seen a significant boost through the establishment of various training programs and initiatives. These efforts, orchestrated by entities such as the National Art Fund, governmental bodies at different levels, private cultural institutions, and the custodians themselves, highlight a concerted effort to safeguard this cultural heritage. For instance, since 2009, Youyang County has pioneered the “Pendulum Dance Training Class,” aiming to cultivate skills and knowledge related to folk songs. Simultaneously, the Youyang Cultural Center annually organizes lectures on folk songs, offering training in singing techniques. Additionally, municipal and county-level non-genetic inheritance education bases and

**Table 1.** Selection of three Key Informants

Key Informant	Background	Role in Folk Song Preservation
1 <sup>st</sup> informant	Renowned custodian of Youyang folk songs	Actively involved in mentoring young talents and organizing cultural events
2 <sup>nd</sup> informant	Experienced performer and custodian	Recognized for her contributions to preserving and promoting Youyang's musical heritage
3 <sup>rd</sup> informant	Emerging talent in Youyang folk songs	Represents the younger generation's interest in traditional music and its preservation efforts



**Figure 1.** Map of research sites in Youyang County, Chongqing Municipality, China  
Source: Istanbul City Guide (n.d.)

intangible cultural heritage schools have been established, focusing specifically on Youyang folk songs. Moreover, grassroots-level cultural and artistic groups have been formed and supported to promote rural arts.

Education, particularly within schools, is pivotal in disseminating Youyang folk songs to the broader public. Specialized folk art courses have been introduced, with Youyang folk song classics compiled into bilingual vernacular teaching materials catering to Tujia and Chinese languages. These materials are integrated into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools across the county, ensuring that students are exposed to the rich musical heritage of Youyang. Furthermore, some schools have incorporated the Tujia language, folk songs, and pendulum dance into their educational programs. Recognizing the vital role of folk artists as custodians of local ethnic culture and the burgeoning demands of local ethnic tourism, academic institutions and authorities frequently invite folk artists to conduct in-classroom sessions. This interactive approach is a primary method for safeguarding and transmitting local folk art. For example 2016, Youyang Heishui Town Center Primary School enlisted Xiong Zhenglu, the inheritor of Youyang Folk Songs, to teach its students the “Ala Tune.” Such immersive demonstrations by folk artists provide students with a vivid education in local ethnic culture, fostering a deeper connection to their cultural heritage and instilling a sense of identity and

pride in the rich history and culture of the Chinese nation, as shown in Figure 2.

Integrating Youyang folk songs into educational curricula, training institutions, and scholarly discourse underscores a profound commitment to preserving national heritage and facilitating sustainable development. Various folk workshops, inheritance bases, and training centers have been established with the backing of relevant governmental departments. Noteworthy examples include the “Ridu Culture Communication Limited Liability Company,” the “Youyang Ziyue Miao Culture Communication Limited Liability Company,” and the “Youyang Folk Song Inheritance Training Center.” These initiatives ensure the continuity of Youyang’s musical traditions and foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of its cultural significance among the younger generation. Through collaborative efforts between educational institutions, governmental bodies, private organizations, and individual custodians, Youyang folk songs continue to thrive as an integral part of China’s rich cultural tapestry, inspiring pride and identity among its people.

### Artistic Engagement in Rural Communities

In the past decade, the “Art in the Countryside” movement has emerged as a grassroots artistic endeavor to rejuvenate vernacular culture in rural areas. The outcomes of these creative initiatives have been remarkably positive. For example, the “Return to the Countryside” Earth Art Season in June 2019 in Youyang, themed “Seclusion,” brought together artists worldwide alongside local folk artists and craftsmen. Together, they reconstructed local rural culture and traditions through art, grounding their creations in the geographical and cultural context of Youyang. This approach has resulted in art that resonates with and is relatable to the local farming communities, as shown in Figure 3.

The success of artistic engagement in rural areas can be attributed to the skillful connections forged between individuals, local culture, art, and contemporary society. Equally significant is the deep respect and preservation of local natural aesthetics, rural history, cultural heritage, consumer preferences, beliefs, rituals, folk art, and aesthetic psychology.

**Table 2.** Selection of the research site

Aspect	Details
Research Site	Youyang County, Chongqing Municipality, China
Rationale	Renowned for its rich musical traditions, particularly the Youyang Chinese folk songs
Significance	Represents a focal point for studying the preservation and transmission of traditional music
Cultural Context	Chongqing Municipality's unique cultural landscape provides insights into regional heritage
Accessibility	Relatively accessible for research purposes, facilitating data collection and fieldwork

**Table 3.** Research tools

Research Tool	Description	Purpose
Interview Form	A structured questionnaire designed to gather detailed information from key informants regarding their experiences, perspectives, and practices related to Youyang folk song preservation	To elicit in-depth insights into the education literacy strategies employed by custodians and practitioners in preserving and transmitting Youyang Chinese folk songs
Observation Form	Guided template for recording observations made during fieldwork, including details on performances, mentorship activities, community events, and other relevant cultural practices related to Youyang folk songs	To document firsthand observations of the preservation and transmission processes, including interactions between custodians and apprentices, as well as the cultural context in which these activities occur
Questionnaire	Structured set of questions administered to participants to collect quantitative data on their demographics, level of involvement in folk song activities, attitudes towards cultural heritage, and perceptions of education literacy efforts	To gather quantitative data on various aspects of participants' engagement with Youyang folk songs, their perceptions of education literacy initiatives, and the effectiveness of preservation and transmission efforts



**Figure 2.** Students' chorus of Youyang folk songs  
Source: Can Fan, from fieldwork in May 2022



**Figure 3.** The Opening Ceremony of the Youyang Rural Art Season  
Source: Can Fan, from fieldwork in November 2023

Most importantly, this approach regards residents as active participants in the artistic process.

In particular, young people have been drawn back to the countryside from urban centers after experiencing artistic interventions in rural areas. Integrating art and rural development is a crucial component of rural revitalization, significantly contributing to cultural revitalization. Non-material heritage, serving as a repository of rich historical and cultural traditions, is pivotal in this cultural revitalization.

Ethnic culture has been systematically integrated into performance activities, promoting the integrated development of cultural tourism. For instance, Gongtan Town in Youyang County hosts the “Tima Ancient Song” stage performance, which showcases various forms of local folk culture and art, including Youyang folk songs and ancient songs. This performance is a crucial attraction in the local Gongtan Ancient Town scenic area, captivating tourists and offering them a glimpse of Youyang’s intangible heritage, as shown in Figure 4.

### Government Initiatives for Transmission Enhancement

Nestled in the heart of the Wuling Mountains in Chongqing, Youyang spans an area of 5,173 square kilometers and serves as a vibrant hub for the Tujia and Miao ethnic groups in southeast Chongqing. The region is rich in ethnic cultural resources, housing four national-level intangible cultural heritages and over 200 municipal and county-level intangible cultural heritages. Youyang has earned titles such as



**Figure 4.** Tima Ancient Song Performed in Gongtan Ancient Town  
Source: Can Fan, from fieldwork in May 2022

the “Hometown of Chinese Pendulum Dance” and the “Birthplace of Chinese Tujia Culture,” highlighting its strategic significance due to its cultural value, geographical location, and resource protection.

In 2020, the Youyang County Culture and Tourism Commission issued the “Youyang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Inheritance Recognition and Management Approach” to fortify intangible cultural heritage’s preservation, transmission, and utilization. This document outlines criteria for identifying and managing representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. Youzhuang Town currently boasts one municipal-level representative inheritor and eight county-level representative inheritors, with the town government leading efforts to organize training for intangible cultural heritage projects like Dongdong Qin and Youyang folk songs.

Members of the Youyang People’s Congress delegation conducted extensive visits and research to enhance intangible heritage protection and inheritance, putting forward recommendations such as the need for legislation on supernatural heritage protection, the establishment of a dedicated department, comprehensive documentation of rich folk intangible cultural heritage, and classification and grading of protection efforts. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of equipping the protection process with recording instruments and photographic equipment to create enduring records for successful inheritance and promotion. Furthermore, they advocated for increased personnel and funding to protect intangible heritage to serve as the soul of rural revitalization.

Recognizing the vitality of local folk song culture, Ran Yihua submitted a proposal to strengthen the protection and inheritance of Youyang folk songs. The County Culture and Tourism Commission actively adopted these recommendations, initiating efforts to conduct resource censuses and compile, research, create, and edit Youyang folk songs. They sought to nurture and develop a team dedicated to inheriting Youyang folk songs and actively build a display platform for these cultural treasures. The government-sponsored collection and creation of Youyang folk songs have garnered recognition and awards in cultural events organized by Chongqing Municipality, the Poverty Reduction Original Songs Collection Competition, and the 17<sup>th</sup> Western China Folk Songs Song Festival.

These comprehensive measures undertaken by the government have substantially contributed to transmitting and

promoting Youyang folk songs. As these efforts continue to gain momentum, Youyang folk songs are poised to flourish and play an instrumental role in fostering the national consciousness of the local population.

### Preservation through Publication and Book Distribution

The preservation and safeguarding of Youyang folk songs owe much to the concerted efforts of various organizations and publishers, including Chongqing University Press, China Theater Publishing House, Chongqing Publishing House, Chongqing Youyang Tourism Bureau, Sichuan Folk Song Publishing House, and Guizhou People's Publishing House. These entities have played a central role in producing and disseminating many books, audio-visual materials, and CD-ROMs dedicated to Youyang folk songs. Their collaborative efforts have been pivotal in safeguarding and preserving this intangible cultural heritage, as shown in Figure 5.

These published resources serve as invaluable reservoirs for the inheritance, protection, innovation, and development of Youyang folk songs. While unearthing, recording, exploring, and researching this culturally rich heritage, a generation of scholars emerged as key contributors. Building upon the legacy of these eminent experts, subsequent generations of scholars have joined the ranks, forming an ever-expanding research community committed to preserving and advancing Youyang folk songs. Their collective dedication ensures that this cherished intangible cultural heritage thrives and continues to inspire future generations.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, such as Youyang folk songs, require comprehensive efforts involving various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, educational institutions, private organizations, and individual custodians. Integrating Youyang folk songs into educational curricula has been critical in safeguarding this cultural heritage. Through specialized folk art courses and bilingual teaching materials, students in primary and secondary schools across Youyang County are exposed

to the region's rich musical traditions (Alivizatou, 2016). Moreover, incorporating Youyang folk songs and the Tujia language into educational programs promotes cultural heritage and fosters a sense of identity and pride among students (Shi & Nicolas, 2023).

Artistic engagement in rural communities has also played a significant role in rejuvenating vernacular culture. Initiatives like the "Art in the Countryside" movement have brought together local folk artists, craftsmen, and international artists to reconstruct local rural culture through art (Bleibleh & Awad, 2020). The success of these initiatives is attributed to the deep respect for local cultural heritage and the active participation of residents in the artistic process (Pyrko et al., 2017).

Government initiatives have been instrumental in enhancing the transmission and preservation of Youyang folk songs. Policies and programs issued by the Youyang County Culture and Tourism Commission aim to identify representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and provide support for training and resource censuses (Eichler, 2021). Additionally, the active involvement of the Youyang People's Congress delegation in advocating for legislation and increased funding demonstrates a commitment to protecting intangible heritage as a vital aspect of rural revitalization (Qiu et al., 2024).

The preservation of Youyang folk songs has also been supported by publication and book distribution efforts. Collaboration between various organizations and publishers has produced books, audio-visual materials, and CD-ROMs dedicated to Youyang folk songs, serving as invaluable resources for inheritance and protection (Dippon & Moskaliuk, 2020). Moreover, the contributions of scholars in unearthing, recording, and researching this cultural heritage have ensured its continued preservation and advancement (Creanza et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the preservation and transmission of Youyang folk songs require collaborative efforts from multiple stakeholders. Educational institutions play a crucial role in integrating folk songs into curricula, while artistic engagement in rural communities revitalizes vernacular culture. Government initiatives provide policy support and funding for preservation efforts, while publication efforts ensure the availability of resources for inheritance and protection. By leveraging these strategies, Youyang folk songs continue to thrive as an integral part of China's cultural heritage, inspiring pride and identity among its people.



**Figure 5.** Selected Youyang folk songs  
Source: Can Fan, from fieldwork in May 2022

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