

## Yu Shuxi's Biography and Transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese Folk Singing in the Context of Literacy

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Yu Shuxi in the transmission and preservation of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, an intangible cultural heritage, within the context of literacy and education. By analyzing the cultural significance and pedagogical practices of Yu Shuxi's artistry, the research explores the impact of traditional folk arts on literacy development and cultural identity formation. Utilizing qualitative methods, including interviews with key informants and field observations in Baofeng County, Henan Province, the study captures the intricate relationship between individual biographies and broader educational practices. Data analysis reveals how Yu Shuxi's life story and teachings in Pingdiao Sanxianshu contribute to cultural preservation and literacy skills among learners, emphasizing the need for integration of traditional arts in modern education. The results indicate the potential of such arts to enhance critical thinking, linguistic abilities, and cultural literacy. Consequently, the research suggests collaborative measures across educational institutions, governmental policies, and community efforts to ensure the viability and relevance of traditional folk arts like Pingdiao Sanxianshu in contemporary society, maintaining their legacy for future generations.

**Key words:** Cultural Heritage, Literacy Education, Pingdiao Sanxianshu, Yu Shuxi, Traditional Arts Preservation

### INTRODUCTION

China's rich cultural heritage encompasses a myriad of traditions, arts, and practices that have endured through centuries, shaping the nation's identity, and fostering a sense of cultural continuity. Among these treasures is Pingdiao Sanxianshu, a provincial-level folk art Intangible Cultural Heritage originating from Baofeng County, Henan Province (Howard, 2016; Liu et al., 2020; Carrai, 2021). This unique art form combines storytelling with melodious singing, accompanied by string instruments, creating a captivating narrative experience deeply rooted in Chinese folklore. At the heart of Pingdiao Sanxianshu's preservation and transmission is Yu Shuxi, an esteemed artist and provincial inheritor renowned for his mastery of this traditional art. However, in the evolving landscape of literacy and education, traditional folk arts like Pingdiao Sanxianshu face challenges in maintaining relevance and accessibility, highlighting the need for comprehensive research and analysis (Lufkin, 2016; Yang & Welch, 2016; Jincheng et al., 2023; Zhao & Sornyai, 2024).

China's rapid modernization and globalization have led to shifts in cultural consumption patterns and educational priorities, posing challenges to the preservation and transmission of traditional art forms. Traditional folk arts such as Pingdiao Sanxianshu often struggle to find integration

within modern educational frameworks that emphasize digital literacy, and global perspectives (Zhang, 2017; Dreyer, 2018; Zhang & Choatchamrat, 2023). This juxtaposition creates a dilemma wherein the cultural heritage embodied in Pingdiao Sanxianshu risks being overshadowed or marginalized, particularly among younger generations who may lack exposure to or appreciation for traditional art forms. The research problem thus centers on the intersection of Pingdiao Sanxianshu with literacy practices, educational strategies, and cultural preservation initiatives in contemporary Chinese society (Westerlund & Partti, 2018; Campbell & Lum, 2019; Wu & Chuangprakhon, 2024).

The primary objective of this study is to investigate Yu Shuxi's Biography and Transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese Folk Singing within the Context of Literacy. By analyzing these aspects, the research seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between traditional folk arts, literacy practices, and educational strategies, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of Pingdiao Sanxianshu in cultural heritage preservation and transmission. Additionally, the study aims to identify challenges, opportunities, and best practices for integrating Pingdiao Sanxianshu into modern literacy initiatives, fostering cultural appreciation, creativity, and critical thinking among learners (Zimmerman et al., 2015; Alivizatou, 2016; Testa, 2016).

This research holds significance on multiple fronts. Firstly, it contributes to the scholarly understanding of Chinese folk arts and their pivotal role in cultural preservation and transmission. By examining Yu Shuxi's Biography and Transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, the study sheds light on effective teaching methodologies, repertoire curation, and cultural engagement strategies within educational contexts (Yang et al., 2018; Charbonneau et al., 2024; Li & Choatchamrat, 2024). Secondly, the research informs educational practices by advocating for the inclusion of traditional arts in literacy education, promoting cultural diversity, empathy, and aesthetic appreciation among students. Thirdly, the study has broader societal implications, advocating for the recognition and preservation of intangible cultural heritage as a vital component of national identity and global cultural heritage, thus ensuring the enduring legacy of Pingdiao Sanxianshu amidst contemporary challenges (Goldberg, 2021; McCandlish & McPherson, 2021; Settini, 2021; Pepler et al., 2022).

### Research Question

- How does Yu Shuxi's Biography and Transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese Folk Singing contribute to literacy practices and cultural preservation within educational contexts?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Preservation and transmission of traditional folk arts significantly contribute to cultural heritage and educational enrichment, particularly within the realm of literacy development. This study delves into the biography and transmission methods of Yu Shuxi regarding Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese Folk Singing, aiming to understand their impact on literacy within the broader cultural context.

### Cultural Transmission and Identity Formation

Cultural transmission is integral to identity formation and community cohesion. Pingdiao Sanxianshu's transmission, facilitated by figures like Yu Shuxi, not only preserves cultural heritage but also shapes individuals' sense of identity, fostering a deeper connection to their linguistic and cultural roots (Ferguson et al., 2016; Lidskog, 2016; Gelman & Roberts, 2017).

### Folk Arts and Literacy Skills

Research has shown that engagement with traditional folk arts enhances literacy skills, including language proficiency, critical thinking, and creative expression. Through the study of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, learners develop nuanced linguistic abilities and cultural literacy, contributing to a holistic approach to education that values both traditional and contemporary forms of expression (Cheng et al., 2022; Shi & Nicolas, 2023).

### Educational Implications of Folk Singing Transmission

Understanding the educational implications of folk singing transmission is crucial in designing effective literacy

programs. By studying Yu Shuxi's methods, educators can glean insights into incorporating cultural heritage into literacy curricula, promoting multilingualism, cultural diversity, and a deeper appreciation for traditional art forms among learners (Bond, 2017; Campbell & Lum, 2019; Yang & Welch, 2023).

### Socio-Cultural Significance of Folk Singing

Folk singing, such as Pingdiao Sanxianshu, serves as a repository of cultural knowledge, reflecting historical narratives, social norms, and values. Examining Yu Shuxi's biography and transmission practices sheds light on how these folk traditions contribute to social cohesion, intergenerational learning, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, all of which are pertinent to literacy and educational contexts (Lebaka, 2023; Zhang & Wu, 2023; Huang, 2024; Sun et al., 2024).

### METHOD

#### Selection of the Informants

The study of Yu Shuxi's biography and Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese folk singing in the context of literacy focuses on the selection of key informants to gain valuable insights into the cultural heritage and artistic practices. The criteria for selecting informants are stringent, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, its history, development, and the contributions of key figures like Yu Shuxi while meeting specific criteria for authoritative perspectives, as shown in Table 1.

#### Selection of the Research Site

The selection of the research site for investigating Yu Shuxi's biography and transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese folk singing in the context of literacy is crucial for understanding the cultural and historical context of this traditional art form. Baofeng County, situated in Henan Province, China, serves as the ideal research site due to its rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted connection to Pingdiao Sanxianshu, an intangible cultural heritage with a history spanning over four centuries. Yu Shuxi, a prominent figure in the preservation and transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, has significant ties to Baofeng County, making it a pivotal location for studying his biography and teaching methods within the literacy framework, as shown in Table 2.

#### Research Tools

The research on Yu Shuxi's biography and transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese folk singing in the context of literacy employs various research tools and steps to gather comprehensive data and insights. These tools and steps include observation, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires, each serving specific purposes in exploring the life, artistry, and cultural significance of Yu Shuxi and Pingdiao Sanxianshu, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 1.** Criteria for selection of the informants

Informant	Description
Three key informants	This study focuses on key informants of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, including Yu Shuxi, who have made significant contributions to its preservation and transmission, providing valuable insights for the research endeavor.
Three casual informants	The study selects casual informants familiar with Pingdiao Sanxianshu within the local community, aiming to provide a broader perspective and firsthand experiences, enhancing the richness of data gathered for this study.
Three general informants	General informants from diverse backgrounds contribute to the transmission and development of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, offering unique insights into challenges and opportunities in this traditional folk singing art form.

**Table 2.** Criteria for selection of the research site

Research Site	Baofeng County, Henan Province, China
Location	Southwest region of Henan Province, under the jurisdiction of Pingdingshan
Cultural Heritage	Rich history and profound cultural heritage, particularly in Pingdiao Sanxianshu
Artistic Inheritance	Yu Shuxi is a key inheritor of Pingdiao Sanxianshu in Baofeng County
Local Mass Foundation	Deeply rooted cultural practice with strong community engagement
Cultural Relevance	Pingdiao Sanxianshu aligns with local beliefs and serves as entertainment

**Table 3.** Research tools and steps

Research Tool	Description
Observation	Conducted fieldwork to observe Yu Shuxi and Pingdiao Sanxianshu, gathering valuable information for this study
Focus Group	Selected interview subjects included Yu Shuxi's family, Pingdiao Sanxianshu inheritors, performers, and villagers, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of Yu Shuxi and Pingdiao Sanxianshu
Interview	Interviewed relevant informants to delve into Yu Shuxi's life history, learning, performance, and the transmission and development of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, with flexible interview formats to capture nuanced insight
Questionnaire	Utilized questionnaires to gather data on representative Pingdiao Sanxianshu works sung by Yu Shuxi, aiding in the analysis of widely circulated and beloved works across different performance periods

### Data Analysis

The data analysis involves a comprehensive approach encompassing qualitative methods. The qualitative analysis aims to identify recurring themes related to Yu Shuxi's life, Pingdiao Sanxianshu, and its transmission. Additionally, content analysis of collected materials such as videos, photos, books, and news provides rich insights into the cultural and historical context. Analyzing questionnaire responses aids in understanding public perception and preferences

regarding Pingdiao Sanxianshu's works sung by Yu Shuxi. The integration of these analytical approaches ensures a holistic understanding of the research topic, contributing to the investigation's objectives within the context of literacy and education.

## RESULTS

### Yu Shuxi's Biography

Yu Shuxi's biography encapsulates a captivating narrative of resilience, cultural dedication, and artistic brilliance that spanned over a century. Born in the scenic Gengzhuang Village of Henan Province, China, on December 28, 1921, Yu Shuxi's life intertwined with the vibrant heritage of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, a cherished form of Chinese folk music. His ethnicity as a Han Chinese person deeply rooted him in the traditions and customs of his region, shaping his identity and artistic endeavors. Despite the passage of time, Yu Shuxi remained steadfast in his commitment to preserving and promoting the rich tapestry of Quyi, solidifying his legacy as a living symbol of cultural heritage.

#### Early life and family heritage

Yu Shuxi's upbringing was imbued with the essence of Sanxianshu, thanks to his elder brother, Yu Shucheng, a revered local artist in the genre. Although the family genealogy had been lost, the tradition of using generational titles like "Xue, Fu, Shu, Pan" persisted, symbolizing the enduring familial connections within the Shuxi lineage. This familial backdrop provided Yu Shuxi with a strong foundation and early exposure to the intricacies of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, igniting his passion for music and performance, as shown in Figure 1.

#### Personal life and artistic journey

As Yu Shuxi matured, his stature in the world of Pingdiao Sanxianshu grew exponentially. His performances became a testament to his artistic prowess, blending soulful melodies with intricate rhythms that resonated deeply with audiences. Beyond his musical talents, Yu Shuxi's personal life reflected resilience and grit. His marriage to Cai Shurong and their nurturing of three sons exemplified the values of family, hard work, and dedication, highlighting the multidimensional aspects of his character beyond the spotlight of the stage.

### *Adversity and historical context*

Yu Shuxi's life unfolded against significant historical events, including the Japanese invasion and subsequent liberation. These tumultuous periods not only shaped the course of history but also infused Yu Shuxi's performances with profound emotion and meaning. His experiences during these challenging times mirrored the resilience of the human spirit, a theme that often found poignant expression in his music and storytelling, resonating deeply with audiences across generations.

### *Cultural ambassadorship and mentorship*

A defining aspect of Yu Shuxi's life was his role as a cultural ambassador. He dedicated himself to promoting Pingdiao Sanxianshu as more than just an art form but as a living embodiment of China's rich cultural heritage. His performances transcended mere entertainment, serving as bridges to bygone eras and preserving traditions for future generations. In his later years, Yu Shuxi embraced mentorship, passing down his knowledge and passion to aspiring artists, ensuring the continuity and vitality of Pingdiao Sanxianshu's legacy, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 1.** Yu Shuxi

Source: Ke Liu, from fieldwork in October 2022



**Figure 2.** Yu Shuxi teaching the student of Pingdiao Sanxianshu  
Source: Shuo Wang, from fieldwork in April 2015

### *Legacy and recognition*

Yu Shuxi's passing marked the end of an era but also underscored the enduring legacy of a cultural titan. His contributions to Pingdiao Sanxianshu were nationally recognized, earning him accolades and honors as a guardian of intangible cultural heritage. His life's work continues to inspire and educate, serving as a beacon of cultural pride and artistic excellence. Through official recognition and ongoing efforts to preserve his legacy, Yu Shuxi's impact on Chinese folk music remains indelible, ensuring that his contributions remain etched in the annals of cultural history for generations to come, as shown in Figure 3.

### **Preservation Measures for Pingdiao Sanxianshu**

Pingdiao Sanxianshu, a longstanding art form within Baofeng County Quyi Art Center, faces challenges as time progresses. It holds significant cultural value as part of Quyi culture and Henan Province's intangible heritage, necessitating comprehensive measures to safeguard its existence. Local regulations and policies play a crucial role in enhancing public understanding and promoting Pingdiao Sanxianshu's protection across society. Collaborative efforts between the National Cultural Department and the Civil Affairs Department are necessary to provide policy and economic support aligned with national guidelines. Local governments must tailor protection policies to local realities, fostering public appreciation through various forms of publicity, such as theatrical performances, lectures, seminars, and community engagement. These initiatives not only enrich people's lives but also contribute to a broader understanding and research space for Pingdiao Sanxianshu.

The protection of Pingdiao Sanxianshu's inheritors, particularly folk artists, is paramount. Recognizing both representative and ordinary inheritors ensures cultural continuity. While representative inheritors receive financial backing, ordinary inheritors play a significant role in influencing public perceptions of traditional music. Balancing support for all



**Figure 3.** Yu Shuxi's certificate of recognition  
Source: Jiye Chen, from fieldwork in November 2023

inheritors acknowledges their collective impact on Pingdiao Sanxianshu's preservation. Financial sustainability is crucial for Pingdiao Sanxianshu's promotion and research. Current funding shortages hinder progress, emphasizing the need for increased investment from provincial financial departments. Diverse fundraising channels involving enterprises, institutions, and individuals can bolster financial support, ensuring Pingdiao Sanxianshu's long-term viability.

Establishing a robust research team is pivotal for comprehensively understanding Pingdiao Sanxianshu. Collaborating with universities engages young talents, facilitates modern documentation techniques, and fosters deeper insights into Pingdiao Sanxianshu's intricacies. This interdisciplinary approach ensures a systematic and comprehensive record of Pingdiao Sanxianshu's heritage, enhancing its protection and transmission.

In conclusion, Yu Shuxi's biography and transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu Chinese folk singing in the context of literacy requires collaborative efforts across sectors, financial sustainability, protection of inheritors, and robust research initiatives. These measures are essential for safeguarding Pingdiao Sanxianshu and preserving its cultural legacy amidst evolving societal contexts.

## Literacy Transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu

### *Transmission of master and apprentice*

The master-apprentice transmission model in Pingdiao Sanxianshu encapsulates a profound literacy in artistic heritage and pedagogy. Through structured apprenticeship processes, aspiring artists gain not only technical skills but also a comprehensive understanding of cultural norms and responsibilities. The "Red Sticker" exchanged during apprenticeship symbolizes contractual literacy, delineating expectations, ethical conduct, and mutual obligations between masters and apprentices. This literate framework ensures the continuity and integrity of Pingdiao Sanxianshu across generations, as shown in Figure 4.

### *Transmission of government*

The establishment of the Rap Culture Ecological Protection Experimental Zone exemplifies a government-led literacy initiative in cultural preservation and environmental stewardship. By integrating literacy in cultural heritage with ecological sustainability, this zone fosters a holistic approach to safeguarding Pingdiao Sanxianshu and related intangible cultural assets. The inclusion of literacy-focused programs, such as script creation and talent cultivation, underscores the government's commitment to nurturing a literate ecosystem for Pingdiao Sanxianshu's transmission.

The government's implementation opinions articulate a comprehensive literacy strategy for supporting the transmission and development of traditional Quyi, including Pingdiao Sanxianshu. Emphasizing literacy in cultural education, talent cultivation, and market expansion, these opinions aim to cultivate a literate society proficient in the appreciation and preservation of Pingdiao Sanxianshu. Through



**Figure 4.** Student pupils bow before studying  
Source: Shuo Wang, from fieldwork in March 2022

literacy-driven initiatives, such as multimedia dissemination and educational outreach, the government seeks to enhance public literacy in traditional Chinese folk arts.

### *School-based transmission and folk interaction*

Since the beginning of Quyi art performances, schools have been integral in providing a stage for students to practice annually. Each academic year, classes organize events aligned with their studies' professional characteristics, offering students opportunities for practice and performance. Students specializing in Pingdiao Sanxianshu primarily focus on singing this genre. Additionally, the college's faculty predominantly comprises folk artists who actively engage students in cultural performances and interactions with seasoned artists. These engagements facilitate students' learning, where they showcase their skills, receive feedback, and engage in interviews and recordings with folk artists. This educational approach embodies a dynamic literacy cycle, starting from formal education, integrating folk observations, and learning, and culminating in a deeper understanding of tradition through practical experiences.

### *Integration of traditional music in education*

Pingdingshan University's Pingdiao Sanxianshu course serves as a case study of integrating traditional music into practical education. While students may not master numerous pieces in their limited study period, the curriculum emphasizes shaping students' cultural values of respect and inheritance. Additionally, it enhances their appreciation for traditional art forms, fostering literacy in traditional cultural values and artistic expressions. Despite the potential for career shifts post-graduation, exposure to Pingdiao Sanxianshu establishes a solid groundwork for understanding artistic principles and enables students to explore various art forms beyond their academic tenure. This approach highlights the enduring nature of literacy in traditional music education, advocating for continuous learning and development beyond formal education.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study vis-à-vis the biography and transmission of Pingdiao Sanxianshu by Yu Shuxi represent a microcosm of the broader challenges and opportunities within the realm of preserving intangible cultural heritage in educational contexts. As observed, the narrative of Yu Shuxi's life and artistic journey is intertwined with the fabric of Pingdiao Sanxianshu, epitomizing a cultural literacy that is deeply embedded in the heritage of Baofeng County (Howard, 2016). The study reaffirms the role of cultural transmission as pivotal for identity formation, with Yu Shuxi's biography serving as a testament to the potency of individual contributions in preserving cultural narratives (Ferguson et al., 2016; Gelman & Roberts, 2017).

Engagement with traditional folk arts like Pingdiao Sanxianshu not only fosters linguistic and creative expression skills but also enhances critical thinking—a claim that finds resonance with the educational implications highlighted within the research (Cheng et al., 2022; Shi & Nicolas, 2023). Yu Shuxi's pedagogical approach, which focuses on experiential learning through storytelling and music, aligns with contemporary educational strategies that emphasize holistic development and the integration of cultural heritage into modern curricula (Bond, 2017; Campbell & Lum, 2019). Yu Shuxi's role as a cultural ambassador, particularly through the master-apprentice model, elucidates the importance of personalized, hands-on approaches to education that are central to the effective transmission of knowledge and skills. The study's findings are consistent with the theoretical principles that stress the role of mentorship and structured, ethical apprenticeship in cultural learning (Yang & Welch, 2016; Westerlund & Partti, 2018).

The life and work of Yu Shuxi are emblematic of the vitality of traditional folk arts as vessels of intangible cultural heritage. This study validates the cultural and educational significance of Pingdiao Sanxianshu and underscores the essential role of figures like Yu Shuxi in preserving these art forms through times of cultural and societal change (Li & Choatchamrat, 2024; McCandlish & McPherson, 2021). The strategies and challenges of integrating Pingdiao Sanxianshu into contemporary education systems underscore the necessity for a dynamic approach that respects the integrity of traditional art forms while embracing modern pedagogical practices (Peppler et al., 2022; Settimini, 2021). The protective measures and initiatives taken by local governments and communities highlight the collective effort required to sustain such cultural practices (Liu et al., 2020; Carrai, 2021).

To preserve the legacy of Yu Shuxi and Pingdiao Sanxianshu, a multi-faceted approach that involves the participation of educational institutions, government policies, community involvement, and the dedication of cultural inheritors is indispensable. The continued promotion of these cultural practices not only honors their historical significance but also ensures their perpetuation for future generations to appreciate and learn from. Therefore, as the study concludes, it not only contributes to the academic understanding of cultural preservation but also calls for active and ongoing engagement with intangible cultural heritage

within literacy and education contexts (Goldberg, 2021; Zimmerman et al., 2015).

In conclusion, the integration of Pingdiao Sanxianshu into educational curricula offers significant benefits for enhancing literacy outcomes and enriching educational experiences. This traditional art form promotes not only linguistic skills but also critical thinking and cultural empathy among students. By incorporating these techniques, music educators can provide students with a holistic learning experience that bridges traditional and contemporary educational content. However, challenges such as curricular constraints, resource limitations, and possible lack of interest among students accustomed to modern digital media present potential obstacles. To address these criticisms, policymakers must support initiatives that train educators in traditional arts, ensure adequate resources are allocated, and implement educational campaigns that highlight the value of cultural heritage. Additionally, integrating these arts into multidisciplinary subjects could make learning more relevant and engaging for students, thus overcoming resistance to traditional methods. By adopting these strategies, the educational system can overcome the barriers to incorporating Pingdiao Sanxianshu and ensure its benefits are fully realized within the modern educational landscape.

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