

## Literacy Transmission of Chinese Folk Songs in Southern Shaanxi

Yang Wang, Awirut Thotham\*

College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Corresponding author: Awirut Thotham, E-mail: awirut.t@msu.ac.th

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### ABSTRACT

Southern Shaanxi, rich in folk song culture, faces significant challenges in preserving its musical heritage due to rapid modernization, technological advancements, and social changes. The primary objective is to investigate the educational literacy development and transmission processes of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi under contemporary status. The research site encompasses cities like Hanzhong and Ankang, with seven key informants, including folk song practitioners, educators, cultural experts, students, and community members, provided insights through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes related to educational literacy development, transmission processes, and cultural influences. The results indicate that integrating folk songs into educational curricula enhances language acquisition, critical thinking, emotional expression, and cognitive skills while revealing challenges such as the loss of traditional environments, the complexity of singing techniques, and economic constraints. The study suggests embracing technological innovations, fostering community involvement, and implementing supportive policies to sustain the transmission of Chinese folk songs and promote cultural literacy among younger generations.

**Key words:** Chinese Folk Songs, Musical Literacy, Cultural Heritage, Transmission Processes, Southern Shaanxi

### INTRODUCTION

Shaanxi Province, a significant birthplace of Chinese civilization, has a profound cultural heritage, particularly in its folk music traditions. The southern region of Shaanxi, encompassing cities like Hanzhong and Ankang, is especially rich in folk song culture. These songs, with their distinctive melodies and rhythms, are deeply rooted in the local people's daily lives and historical experiences (Hou, 2021; Wang, 2023; Xiang, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). The folk songs of Southern Shaanxi, such as the Zhenba and Ziyang folk songs, have been recognized as national intangible cultural heritage. Over the decades, these songs have been meticulously collected, preserved, and studied, reflecting the region's rich cultural tapestry and the artistry of its people. Despite this recognition and the cultural richness they represent, the transmission of these folk songs faces significant challenges in contemporary society (Tang, 2021; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023; Cao et al., 2024).

The transmission of folk songs in Southern Shaanxi has encountered numerous obstacles in recent years. Rapid social changes, technological advancements, and industrialization have led to a decline in traditional practices and a loss of the ecological environment that once nurtured these songs. Modern entertainment forms, such as online games, television, and social media have overshadowed traditional

arts, making it difficult for folk songs to capture the interest of younger generations (Wu, 2020; Rambarran, 2021; Gao & Karin, 2023). Furthermore, these folk songs' intricate melodies and demanding singing techniques significantly hinder their transmission. The economic benefits of folk songs are not immediately apparent, further hindering efforts to preserve and promote them. The generational gap between the older custodians of these traditions and the youth exacerbates these challenges, threatening the continuity of this cultural heritage (Howard, 2016; Lee, 2019; D'Amico, 2024).

The significance of investigating Southern Shaanxi folk songs' educational literacy development and transmission processes lies in addressing these multifaceted challenges. Understanding how to integrate these traditional songs into modern educational frameworks effectively can provide a sustainable path for their preservation. By embedding folk songs into school curricula and leveraging modern media, we can foster a deeper appreciation and engagement among young people (Bennett et al., 2017; Chen & Woramitmaitee, 2024; Gong et al., 2024). This approach helps preserve an important cultural heritage and enriches the educational experience, promoting cultural literacy and identity. Moreover, exploring the potential economic benefits and innovative transmission methods can create a supportive environment for these traditions to thrive. The study aims to bridge the gap between traditional cultural practices and contemporary

societal dynamics, ensuring that the rich legacy of Southern Shaanxi folk songs is not lost but continues to be a vibrant part of the region's cultural landscape (You, 2020; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the educational literacy development and transmission processes of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi under contemporary status. This involves examining the historical context and current practices of folk song transmission, identifying the challenges faced, and exploring effective strategies for their preservation and promotion. The research seeks to understand how educational institutions, government policies, and community efforts can collaboratively contribute to this process (Ho, 2018; Zhang, 2021). The study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the best practices for integrating folk songs into modern educational systems by analyzing case studies, conducting interviews with key informants, and reviewing relevant literature. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a framework that preserves these traditional songs and enhances their relevance and appeal in today's rapidly changing cultural landscape.

### Research Question

- How do the educational literacy development and transmission processes of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi function under contemporary status?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the transmission and preservation of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi covers various perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Scholars have examined the historical roots of these folk songs, tracing their evolution and significance within Shaanxi Province's cultural landscape. A key area of focus is the intersection of folk music transmission with educational practices and literacy development, especially in the face of contemporary challenges and opportunities.

### Historical and Cultural Perspectives

The historical and cultural significance of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi is a central theme in the literature. Researchers have delved into the origins of these songs, highlighting their role as oral traditions passed down through generations. These studies emphasize the connection between folk songs and local customs, rituals, and beliefs, illustrating how these musical narratives serve as repositories of cultural memory and identity. Cultural transmission theory is often applied to analyze how folk songs function as carriers of cultural knowledge and values, shaping individuals' understanding of their heritage and community (Xu & Pan, 2019; Zhang & Choatchamrat, 2023).

### Educational Integration and Literacy Development

Researchers have explored strategies for integrating folk songs into school curricula to promote literacy development

and cultural awareness among students. Theoretical perspectives such as sociocultural theory and constructivism are frequently employed to examine how learning environments and social interactions influence the acquisition of literacy skills through folk song engagement. Studies also investigate the cognitive benefits of music-based education, highlighting the potential of folk songs to enhance language acquisition, critical thinking, and emotional expression among learners (Li, 2022; Yang & Welch, 2023).

### Technological Innovations and Challenges

In the contemporary landscape, technological advancements present challenges and opportunities for transmitting folk songs. Researchers have analyzed the impact of digital media, social networking platforms, and online learning resources on folk song dissemination and audience engagement. Theoretical frameworks such as media ecology theory and digital humanities shed light on how these technologies reshape cultural practices, providing new avenues for preserving and sharing folk songs while raising concerns about authenticity, copyright, and cultural commodification (Meier, 2017; Hao, 2023).

### Community Engagement and Policy Implications

Community-based initiatives and government policies play a crucial role in supporting the transmission and sustainability of folk songs. Research examines the collaborative efforts of local communities, cultural institutions, and policymakers to preserve intangible cultural heritage, including folk music traditions. Theoretical perspectives such as cultural policy studies and participatory action research underscore the importance of inclusive, grassroots approaches to cultural revitalization, advocating for policies that safeguard folk songs' authenticity, accessibility, and intergenerational transmission (Gwervevende & Mthombeni, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

The literature review highlights the multidimensional nature of Chinese folk song transmission in Southern Shaanxi. By integrating historical, educational, technological, and policy-oriented perspectives, this review provides a comprehensive understanding of the educational literacy development processes in this cultural context.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate the educational literacy development and transmission processes of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi under contemporary status with key informants. Data collection methods include interviews, observations, and document analysis.

### Participant Selection

The participants in this study consist of seven key informants involved in the transmission and education of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi. This includes folk song practitioners, educators, cultural experts, students, and community

members. Purposive sampling will select participants based on their expertise, experiences, and involvement in folk song transmission and education.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The following data analysis methods were used in the current study:

#### ***Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to gather rich qualitative data regarding their perspectives, experiences, and practices related to folk song transmission and education. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

#### ***Observations***

Participant observations were conducted in educational settings, cultural events, and community gatherings where folk songs are transmitted and taught. Observations focused on interactions, teaching methods, learning experiences, and cultural contexts.

#### ***Document analysis***

Relevant documents, such as educational curricula, cultural policies, teaching materials, and historical records were analyzed to gain insights into formal and informal mechanisms of folk song transmission and education.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data gathered from interviews, observations, and document analysis. This process involved coding the data to identify patterns, themes, and categories related to educational literacy development, transmission processes, cultural influences, challenges, and opportunities. The analysis was iterative, allowing for the refinement and development of themes through constant comparison and triangulation of data sources.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study adheres to ethical guidelines regarding informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and respect for participants' perspectives and cultural values. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional review boards, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

### **Limitations**

While qualitative research provides rich insights, it may be limited in generalizability due to the specific context of Southern Shaanxi. Additionally, the researcher's subjective interpretations and biases may influence data analysis and

findings, mitigated through reflexivity and transparency in reporting.

## **RESULTS**

The research findings illuminate the multifaceted aspects of the educational literacy development and transmission processes of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi under contemporary status. By exploring how folk songs are integrated into educational curricula and community practices, the study reveals significant impacts on literacy development, the current state of folk song transmission, the challenges faced, and the innovative approaches implemented. This comprehensive examination provides valuable insights into folk song transmission's cultural, educational, and policy-related dimensions, emphasizing the importance of preserving and promoting this rich cultural heritage through strategic educational and community engagement efforts.

### **Literacy Development through Chinese Folk Song Education**

Integrating Chinese folk songs from Southern Shaanxi into educational curricula has significantly impacted literacy development among students. This approach helps preserve cultural heritage and enhances various literacy skills, including language acquisition, critical thinking, and emotional expression. The findings from this study indicate that folk song education enriches the educational experience and promotes comprehensive literacy development.

#### ***Language acquisition and comprehension***

Chinese folk songs' rhythmic and repetitive nature facilitates language acquisition and comprehension among students. Students enhance their vocabulary and grammar skills by engaging with the lyrics and melodies. Incorporating local dialects in these songs further enriches linguistic diversity, providing students a deeper connection to their cultural roots. This method allows students to grasp complex language structures more easily, improving their language proficiency.

#### ***Critical thinking and analytical skills***

Chinese folk songs often encompass rich narratives and complex themes that encourage students to engage in critical thinking and analysis. By interpreting the stories and messages within these songs, students develop their ability to analyze text and context critically. Classroom discussions around folk songs' meanings and historical contexts prompt students to think deeply about societal values, historical events, and human emotions, enhancing their analytical skills. This analytical engagement fosters a more comprehensive understanding of their cultural heritage.

#### ***Emotional and social development***

Engaging with Chinese folk songs in an educational setting supports students' emotional and social development.

The expressive nature of music allows students to explore and articulate their emotions, fostering emotional literacy. Through singing and performing folk songs, students build confidence and self-esteem. Collaborative activities, such as group performances and discussions around folk songs, promote social skills and teamwork. The communal aspect of folk song education helps develop empathy and understanding among students as they share and appreciate each other's cultural backgrounds and experiences.

### ***Cognitive benefits***

Our research findings indicated that music education, including studying Chinese folk songs, leads to cognitive benefits such as improved memory, attention, and spatial-temporal skills. Folk song's structured patterns and melodies enhance memory retention and cognitive processing abilities. Students participating in folk song education often demonstrate better academic performance in other subjects, suggesting that the cognitive skills developed through music education are transferable to broader learning contexts. This holistic development underscores the value of integrating folk songs into the educational curriculum.

### ***Implementation strategies***

Successful Chinese folk song education implementation requires strategic planning, including teacher training, curriculum development, and resource allocation. Educators must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach folk songs and integrate them into their lessons effectively. Developing comprehensive curricula incorporating folk songs into various subjects makes learning more engaging and meaningful. Providing resources such as songbooks, audio recordings, and performance opportunities supports the practical aspects of folk song education.

### **The Current Status of the Transmission of Chinese Folk Songs**

The transmission of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi has experienced significant transformations over the decades, reflecting broader social, technological, and cultural shifts. Initially, these folk songs thrived in their original ecological environments, deeply embedded in local communities' daily lives and labor. However, with the advent of modernization and technological advancements, traditional modes of transmission have been disrupted, necessitating new approaches to preserve and promote this cultural heritage.

### ***Traditional transmission methods***

Historically, the transmission of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi relied heavily on oral traditions and communal activities. Folk songs were passed down from one generation to the next through familial and social interactions, labor activities, and community gatherings. These songs were integral to various aspects of life, including agricultural work, festivals, rituals, and daily entertainment.

The close-knit nature of rural communities ensured that folk songs remained a vital part of cultural expression and heritage.

### ***Impact of modernization***

The rapid pace of modernization has significantly impacted the traditional transmission methods of Chinese folk songs. Industrialization and urbanization have altered the social fabric of rural areas, leading to the decline of communal labor practices and traditional gatherings where folk songs were commonly shared. The migration of younger generations to urban centers for better economic opportunities has further disrupted the intergenerational transmission of folk songs. As a result, the original ecological environments that nurtured these songs are increasingly disappearing.

### ***Technological advancements and new media***

Technological advancements and the proliferation of new media have introduced challenges and opportunities for transmitting Chinese folk songs. On the one hand, digital media, social networking platforms, and online resources have provided new avenues for disseminating and preserving folk songs. Audio and video recordings, online databases, and virtual performances have enabled reaching wider audiences and documenting folk songs innovatively. On the other hand, these technologies also pose challenges related to authenticity, intellectual property rights, and the risk of cultural commodification.

### ***Current efforts in preservation and promotion***

Despite the challenges posed by modernization and technological changes, concerted efforts to collect, preserve, and promote Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi continue. Local governments, cultural institutions, and community organizations have undertaken initiatives to document and archive folk songs. Projects, such as the compilation of songbooks, audio and video recordings, and establishing cultural centers dedicated to folk music are examples of ongoing preservation efforts. Folk song festivals, competitions, and educational programs have also been organized to promote awareness and engagement with this cultural heritage.

### ***Educational integration and community involvement***

Educational institutions play a crucial role in the contemporary transmission of Chinese folk songs. Integrating folk songs into school curricula helps ensure that younger generations are exposed to and appreciate their cultural heritage. Schools in Southern Shaanxi have incorporated folk song education into music and cultural studies programs, allowing students to learn and perform traditional songs. Community involvement is also vital, with local artists, musicians, and cultural practitioners actively teaching and promoting folk songs through workshops, performances, and cultural events.

### ***Challenges and opportunities***

A complex interplay of challenges and opportunities characterizes the current status of Chinese folk song transmission in Southern Shaanxi. While the erosion of traditional ecological environments and the impact of modernization pose significant hurdles, the resilience and adaptability of folk song traditions offer hope for their continued relevance. Embracing technological innovations, fostering educational initiatives, and encouraging community participation are key strategies for sustaining the transmission of Chinese folk songs. The ongoing efforts to document, preserve, and promote these songs highlight the evolving nature of cultural practices and the enduring importance of folk music as a living heritage.

### **Contemporary Challenges in the Transmission of Chinese Folk Songs**

Several challenges hinder the effective transmission of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi, presenting significant obstacles to preserving this cultural heritage. These challenges include the disappearance of the original ecological environment, the difficulty of singing folk songs, and the difficulty in generating substantial economic benefits from this intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, there is a lack of cultivation of localized aesthetic appreciation and insufficient fostering of cultural confidence. The absence of cohesive research teams and systematic development further exacerbate these issues, making addressing these challenges through coordinated efforts and innovative strategies imperative.

#### ***Disappearance of the original ecological environment***

The original ecological environment that once nurtured Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi is rapidly disappearing due to modernization and industrialization. Traditional agricultural practices and communal labor, which provided the context for many folk songs, have been replaced by mechanized and urbanized lifestyles. This shift has led to the loss of natural settings and social structures where folk songs were traditionally performed and transmitted. Without these environments, the organic process of folk song transmission is severely disrupted, posing a significant threat to the continuity of this cultural tradition.

#### ***High difficulty of singing folk songs***

The intricate melodies and demanding vocal techniques of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi pose a high difficulty for singers. Many of these songs require advanced pitch control, ornamentation, and breath support skills, which can be challenging for learners without extensive training. Additionally, the use of local dialects and specific vocal styles inherent to these folk songs further complicates their transmission. As a result, fewer individuals can master and perform these songs, leading to a decline in the number of proficient folk singers and a potential loss of this unique musical tradition.

#### ***Economic viability and support***

Generating substantial economic benefits from transmitting Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi remains a significant challenge. Preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage requires considerable time, effort, and financial resources. However, the economic returns from such investments are often limited and long-term, making it difficult to sustain funding and support for these initiatives. The lack of immediate economic incentives discourages individuals and institutions from engaging in preserving and transmitting folk songs, leading to a potential decline in interest and participation.

#### ***Lack of cultivation in localized aesthetic appreciation***

There is a noticeable lack of cultivation in localized aesthetic appreciation for Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi. Modern educational systems often prioritize standardized curricula, leaving little room for regional cultural education. This neglect results in a gap in understanding and appreciating the unique aesthetic values of local folk songs among the younger generation. Without fostering a deep connection to their cultural heritage, students may develop a sense of cultural detachment, further jeopardizing the transmission of folk songs.

#### ***Insufficient fostering of cultural confidence***

Cultural confidence plays a crucial role in the transmission of folk songs, yet there is insufficient fostering of this confidence among communities in Southern Shaanxi. Globalization and the influence of Western culture have led to a tendency to undervalue traditional Chinese cultural expressions. This lack of confidence in the worth and relevance of their cultural heritage discourages communities from actively engaging in preserving and promoting folk songs. Strengthening cultural confidence ensures that folk songs are valued and transmitted to future generations.

#### ***Absence of cohesive research teams and systematic development***

The absence of cohesive research teams and systematic development efforts further complicates the transmission of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi. While there are numerous individual efforts to collect and document folk songs, these initiatives often lack coordination and comprehensive planning. This fragmentation results in redundant work and inefficient use of resources. Moreover, without systematic development strategies, the research and preservation of folk songs may remain superficial, failing to address deeper issues related to transmission and sustainability.

In conclusion, the research findings illuminate the multifaceted aspects of the educational literacy development and transmission processes of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi under contemporary status. By exploring how folk songs are integrated into educational curricula and community practices, the study reveals significant impacts on literacy development, the current state of folk song transmission, the challenges faced, and the innovative approaches implemented, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of research findings

Topic	Summary
Literacy Development through Chinese Folk Song Education	Integrating Chinese folk songs into educational curricula has significantly impacted literacy development among students, enhancing language acquisition, critical thinking, emotional expression, and cognitive skills.
The Current Status of the Transmission of Chinese Folk Songs	The transmission of Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi has experienced significant transformations due to modernization, technological advancements, and ongoing preservation efforts.
Contemporary Challenges in the Transmission of Chinese Folk Songs	Several challenges hinder the effective transmission of Chinese folk songs, including environmental changes, technical difficulties, economic constraints, cultural appreciation gaps, and research fragmentation.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Integrating Chinese folk songs into educational curricula significantly enhances various aspects of literacy among students. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of folk songs facilitates language acquisition, aiding students in improving their vocabulary and grammar skills (Li, 2022). This finding aligns with sociocultural theory, which posits that social interactions and cultural contexts are crucial for language development (Yang & Welch, 2023). Additionally, incorporating local dialects in folk songs enriches linguistic diversity and fosters a deeper connection to cultural roots, promoting what can be termed “cultural literacy.”

Critical thinking and analytical skills are also developed through studying folk songs as students engage with the narratives and themes within the music. This analytical engagement supports constructivist principles, emphasizing the importance of active learning and interpretation (Xu & Pan, 2019). Emotional and social development, facilitated by the expressive nature of music and collaborative activities, further highlights the holistic benefits of folk song education. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating the cognitive benefits of music education, such as improved memory and attention (Yang & Welch, 2023).

The study reveals several contemporary challenges in transmitting Chinese folk songs, reflecting broader social and cultural shifts. The disappearance of the original ecological environment due to modernization disrupts traditional transmission methods, as these songs were historically embedded in communal labor and daily life (Tang, 2021). This environmental shift highlights the need for innovative approaches to sustain cultural practices in changing contexts. Due to their intricate melodies and demanding techniques, the high difficulty of singing folk songs poses a barrier to their transmission. This challenge underscores the importance of specialized training and the development of pedagogical strategies to make these songs more accessible to learners (Wu, 2020). Moreover, the lack of immediate

economic benefits from folk song preservation efforts further complicates sustainability, suggesting a need for policies that support cultural initiatives without relying solely on economic incentives (Bennett et al., 2017).

Technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges for the transmission of folk songs. Digital media and online platforms offer new avenues for disseminating and preserving these songs, aligning with media ecology theory, which explores how communication environments influence cultural practices (Hao, 2023). However, authenticity and cultural commodification issues must be addressed to ensure that these technologies support rather than undermine cultural heritage (Meier, 2017). Community involvement and supportive government policies are crucial for effectively transmitting folk songs. The collaborative efforts of local communities, cultural institutions, and policymakers can create a conducive environment for cultural preservation. Participatory action research and cultural policy studies emphasize the importance of grassroots approaches and inclusive policies to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (Gwervevde & Mthombeni, 2023).

This study highlights the potential of integrating folk songs into educational frameworks to promote literacy and cultural awareness. By embedding folk songs into school curricula, educators can foster a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage and enhance students’ literacy skills. This approach aligns with the principles of cultural transmission theory, which emphasizes the role of cultural artifacts in shaping individuals’ understanding of their heritage (Xu & Pan, 2019). Furthermore, exploring innovative transmission methods and potential economic benefits can create a supportive environment for these traditions to thrive.

In conclusion, the study on transmitting Chinese folk songs in Southern Shaanxi emphasizes the importance of educational literacy development in preserving cultural heritage. It suggests that integrating folk songs into education can enhance language acquisition, critical thinking, and emotional expression, fostering a deeper connection to cultural roots. However, challenges such as the disappearance of traditional environments, the difficulty of folk songs, and economic constraints hinder effective transmission. Strategies such as embracing technological innovations, fostering community involvement, and supporting policies are crucial for sustaining the transmission of these cultural traditions. Policymakers should implement supportive measures to preserve folk songs, addressing challenges like losing traditional environments and economic constraints. Future research should explore the impact of folk song education on different age groups and regions.

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