

Preservation and Transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, China

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province. The study employed a qualitative research method, which involved conducting interviews and making observations. Furthermore, it used ethnomusicology theory. The study results are as follows: The preservation of Jinqian Ban involves systematic documentation of its repertoire, institutional support, and recognition of its practitioners. Efforts include recording songs, archiving performances, and providing platforms for musicians through governmental and community initiatives. Transmission strategies emphasize education, with Jinqian Ban incorporated into school curricula and university programs to engage younger generations. Collaboration between expert inheritors and music educators ensures the continuity of traditional teaching methods, while school-based activities cultivate a broader base of practitioners and enthusiasts. Publicity efforts, including competitions, exhibitions, and digital media, enhance the visibility and appeal of Jinqian Ban. Additionally, integrating the art with local tourism highlights its cultural heritage, offering new opportunities for performers and expanding its audience. This research underscores the importance of a collaborative, multifaceted approach in preserving and transmitting Jinqian Ban, ensuring its relevance in contemporary contexts while maintaining its authenticity. Through these efforts, Jinqian Ban continues to thrive as a symbol of Sichuan's rich cultural legacy.

Key words: Preservation, Transmission, Jinqian Ban, Cultural Heritage, Chengdu

INTRODUCTION

Jinqian Ban, a significant traditional folk art rooted in Sichuan Province, embodies Chinese regional art heritage's cultural essence and aesthetic values. As a distinctive art form combining speaking, singing, and instrumental accompaniment, its vibrant rhythms and engaging narratives have captivated audiences for centuries. Recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008, Jinqian Ban is critical in preserving and transmitting the artistic traditions of China's past (Ni, 1991; Tang, 2021).

Despite its historical and cultural significance, Jinqian Ban faces numerous challenges in modern times. The declining number of inheritors, the erosion of traditional repertoires, and the lack of effective dissemination channels threaten its survival (Du, 1993; Chang et al., 2024). These challenges are emblematic of broader issues confronting traditional folk arts in an era of rapid societal transformation and cultural globalization. If Jinqian Ban does not actively work to preserve and transmit this heritage, modern entertainment forms may eclipse it (Zhong, 2020; Chen & Sensai, 2024).

The preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban requires a multidimensional approach, encompassing educational initiatives, documentation, and performance innovations. Integrating Jinqian Ban into formal and informal educational

settings can inspire younger generations to engage with the art form (Gong et al., 2024). Systematic documentation of its techniques, repertoires, and historical development is essential to safeguarding its legacy. Additionally, revitalizing performances through modern media and creative adaptations can increase public interest and ensure the art form's relevance in contemporary society (Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023; Luo, 2018; Wang, 2022)

The research aims to highlight strategies for its preservation and transmission. The importance of collective efforts to protect the Jinqian Ban as a cultural treasure; the preservation and transmission of the Jinqian Ban are not merely about saving a traditional art form. They are about preserving a piece of history, culture, and identity. By understanding and supporting the sustainability of Jinqian Ban, society gains invaluable insights into the richness and diversity of Chinese folk culture. This effort also highlights the broader importance of cultural heritage preservation to foster cultural continuity and identity in an ever-changing world.

Research Question

- How can the preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Origin of Jinqian Ban

Various legends and historical anecdotes steep the origins of Jinqian Ban. Its name supposedly derives from its resemblance to a sword, reflecting an ancient tale of Mengchang, who, during the Warring States Period, ordered his servants to use two swords to create sounds for relaxation while studying. Another legend attributes the origin to the Tang Dynasty, when Prime Minister Wei Zhi, tasked with appeasing a troubled emperor, struck a golden board to create a soothing sound (Bao & Boonsriana, 2024).

The first documented reference to Jinqian Ban appears in the Qing Dynasty, notably in Chengdu Tongjian, which features illustrations of a street performance labeled as “Daliensan,” named for its three bamboo boards (Fu, 1987). Over time, artists refined the design, carving spaces in the boards and inlaying copper coins or metal to produce a richer, resonant sound. Eventually, these innovations led to the name “Jinqian Ban,” which endures today (Shen & Xianyi, 2022).

The instrument evolved from metal plates to a series of four bamboo boards, known as Lianhua boards, before forming three bamboo boards. This transition reflects the symbolic Three Talents (Tian, Di, and Ren), inspiring folk artists to nickname it Sancai Ban. The boards developed into today’s form through further artistic experimentation, incorporating copper coins to enrich their tonal quality (Chang & Seekhunlio, 2024; Shi & Nicolas, 2023).

The Historical Development of Jinqian Ban

First stage: Pre-late qing dynasty

Jinqian Ban emerged during the Qing Dynasty and was influenced by earlier folk arts like Guzici, Changzhuan, and Zhugongdiao from the Song Dynasty. These traditions contributed to its narrative and musical complexity. Performances during this period were street-based, featuring Quan Shi Wen, a mix of poetry and song with simple content. Notable artists like Yongchang Yang and Xingwu Zhang incorporated Sichuan opera, martial arts, and rhythmic structures, transitioning performances from streets to teahouses, thereby establishing Jinqian Ban’s foundational style (Yang & Chonpairot, 2024; Pak-sheung, 2020).

Second stage: Late qing dynasty to the republic of china

This was the golden era of Jinqian Ban, marked by widespread popularity. Associations and annual gatherings emerged, and the repertoire broadened to encompass longer narratives such as San Da and Wu Pei. Oral transmission became the primary method of passing down the art. Three major schools—Hua, Qing, and Za—emerged, each with distinct styles: Hua focused on intricate board-playing techniques, Za emphasized flexible storytelling, and Qing prioritized slow, refined performances. These developments solidified Jinqian Ban as a significant folk art (Chen, 2013; Lindorff, 2004).

Third stage: From the founding of new china to the present

After 1949, Jinqian Ban saw a revival through government-supported initiatives, with organizations like the Sichuan Folk Art Troupe promoting the art. However, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) caused significant setbacks, with many classic pieces lost. Master performer Zhongxin Zhou, who innovated new repertoires and theoretical works and earned the prestigious Peony Award in 2006, spearheaded a recovery in 1978 (Lam, 2008).

Despite these efforts, modernization and Zhou’s death in 2013 have contributed to the decline of art. China added Jinqian Ban to its list of intangible cultural heritage in 2008. However, challenges such as dwindling practitioners, a shrinking repertoire, and waning audience interest underscore the urgency of preservation efforts (Ho & Law, 2012).

The General Knowledge of Chinese Traditional Folk Art in Speaking and Singing

Chinese traditional folk art, particularly in speaking and singing, plays a significant role in developing Chinese literature and art. It represents a unique combination of oral literature and singing, shaped by regional folk traditions, local dialects, and diverse cultural influences. This art form has evolved over centuries, creating over 400 styles across China, each reflecting regional characteristics and strong chanting elements (Xiao, 1999).

Examples of prominent speaking and singing arts include Dongbei Dagu, Jingyun Drum, Henan Zhuizi, Pingxiang Chunluo, and Shandong Kuaishu. These forms typically combine speech, singing, and simple accompaniment, often featuring local dialects and themes from folklore or history. Instruments such as bamboo boards, string instruments, and percussion are common, and performances emphasize storytelling, rhythm, and expressive delivery (Meng, 2022; Wang, 2022).

Jinqian Ban shares similarities with forms like Shandong Kuaishu and Sichuan Qingyin, blending narrative and music to convey stories and emotions. Folk traditions such as Guzici, Changzhuan, and Zhugong Diao from the Song Dynasty and Sichuan Opera have deeply influenced it. This interaction with other folk arts and cultural elements has shaped its distinctive style and contributed to its evolution (Ye et al., 2023; Sha et al., 2022).

Speaking and singing arts have common characteristics: reliance on speech and song for expression, the ability to adapt to diverse roles, simplicity in performance, and creative flexibility. Performers must master speaking, singing, and imitation to portray characters and narratives vividly. These traits make speaking and singing arts entertaining and an essential medium for cultural transmission, providing valuable references for the study of Jinqian Ban and other folk traditions (Zou, 2023).

Research Theory

This study explores the preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban, a traditional folk art in Chengdu City, Sichuan

Province, utilizing ethnomusicology as its primary theoretical framework. Ethnomusicology, which examines music in its cultural and social context, provides an essential perspective for understanding how Jinqian Ban functions within the community, its historical evolution, and its challenges in modern society. By investigating Jinqian Ban through an ethnomusicological lens, this study seeks to capture not only the technical and aesthetic aspects of the art form but also its cultural significance, modes of transmission, and potential avenues for preservation (Wang, 2022; Nettle, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

The study on the preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and ethnomusicology research methods. This methodology is designed to capture the cultural, social, and artistic dimensions of Jinqian Ban while addressing the challenges of its preservation and transmission in the modern era (Figure 1).

Ethnomusicology Fieldwork

Ethnomusicology fieldwork is a core component of this study, providing in-depth insights into the cultural context and social significance of Jinqian Ban. The researcher will conduct field observations at various music performance venues, including teahouses, community centers, and cultural festivals in Chengdu, to observe the art form’s performance styles, audience engagement, and interactions between artists and spectators. Observing these performances firsthand will allow for an analysis of Jinqian Ban’s artistic elements, traditional techniques, and its role in local communities.

Interviews with Key Informants

To gather insights from those directly involved in Jinqian Ban, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with key informants, including Jinqian Ban performers, cultural experts, educators, and government officials. These interviews will explore topics such as the history of Jinqian

Ban, transmission methods, challenges faced by practitioners, and the impact of modernization on the art form. Interviewing both older and newer generations of artists will provide a multigenerational perspective on the evolution of Jinqian Ban and its preservation needs.

Archival Research

Historical documents and archives will be used to trace the development of Jinqian Ban over time. Sources such as Chengdu Tongjian, early records, illustrations, and texts on Jinqian Ban from the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China period will provide context for understanding its origins, transformations, and the influence of socio-political changes on its practice. Archival research will also focus on previously documented performances, music notation, and descriptions, which can help reconstruct traditional elements that may have faded or evolved.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

- Data Collection: Gathering qualitative data through interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions with Jinqian Ban practitioners, cultural leaders, educators, and community members.
- Content Analysis: Analyzing the collected data to identify recurring themes, such as the challenges of oral transmission, the role of education, and the impact of modernization.
- Comparative Analysis: Comparing Jinqian Ban with other traditional folk arts in China to highlight common challenges and unique opportunities for preservation.

RESULTS

Preservation of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan

Preserving the Jinqian Ban, a significant traditional folk art in Chengdu, Sichuan, requires comprehensive efforts to document, support, and sustain both the art form and its practitioners. With roots in oral tradition and a lack of formal written records, preserving Jinqian Ban involves a strategic

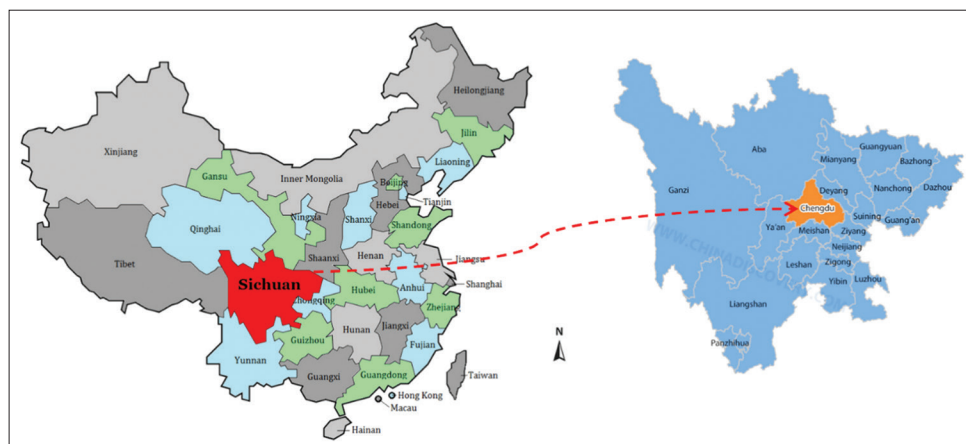


Figure 1. Chengdu location map
 Source: China folio & China discovery (n.d.)

approach that balances documentation, institutional support, and the welfare of its musicians. The following sections outline the key areas of preservation efforts.

Preservation of the songs of jinqian ban

One of the most essential steps in preserving the Jinqian Ban is systematically recording and documenting existing songs and performances in their original and complete forms. Without such efforts, the risk of losing this rich cultural heritage becomes inevitable, especially as many songs have already vanished with the passing of older generations of artists. Since oral tradition has primarily passed down Jinqian Ban, the absence of written records exacerbates the threat to its continuity.

To protect and develop Jinqian Ban, it is essential to preserve its core songs. Specialized organizations gather experts, scholars, and field workers to conduct thorough investigations, gather public information, and engage with older Jinqian Ban artists. These interactions allow the documentation of songs that remain in living memory and the arrangement of songs still intact, capturing their musical and narrative essence for future reference. Furthermore, these organizations should record and archive the performances, capturing the musical composition and the cultural and stylistic nuances that define Jinqian Ban. Future generations can access Jinqian Ban by compiling these collected materials into comprehensive resources like books, digital recordings, and other media.

Establishing institutional support for jinqian ban preservation

Institutional support is fundamental for the sustainable development of Jinqian Ban. Relevant government departments, cultural centers, music schools, and research institutes are critical in this process. With consistent governmental backing, preservation efforts can ensure long-term impact. Firstly, the government should designate specialized personnel and resources to support Jinqian Ban, allocating funds as part of fiscal expenditures to facilitate necessary equipment, recording materials, and research. Further, government incentives can mobilize social organizations, encouraging them to contribute financially to the preservation of Jinqian Ban and thus widening their support base.

In addition to securing funds, collaboration with cultural institutions is vital. By partnering with educational, cultural, and artistic institutions, the government can foster a network that aids the organization, preservation, and promotion of Jinqian Ban. This collaborative effort would involve compiling collected songs, oral histories, and videos by experienced inheritors or experts and transforming these materials into publicly available books, digital archives, or audio-visual resources. The broad distribution of these materials ensures wider accessibility, allowing the public, researchers, and enthusiasts to engage with and learn about Jinqian Ban. In this way, institutional support is the backbone of Jinqian Ban preservation, enabling the art form to remain vibrant and accessible.

Preservation of jinqian ban musicians

Preserving the Jinqian Ban musicians themselves is a central focus of preservation efforts. Musicians are the lifeblood of Jinqian Ban; thus, their welfare and recognition are crucial to sustaining this art form. One way to protect Jinqian Ban musicians is for the government to formally recognize and publish a list of designated inheritors, identifying outstanding folk artists and awarding them titles, honors, and financial support. Such recognition validates these artists' contributions and helps ensure their continued involvement in Jinqian Ban, creating a sense of pride and motivation within the community (Figure 2).

Furthermore, by establishing platforms for musicians to perform, the government can provide a steady source of income and stability, allowing them to dedicate themselves to Jinqian Ban without the pressures of financial insecurity. Cultural and artistic practice spaces—such as theaters, cultural centers, and community gatherings—serve as valuable venues for musicians to showcase their talents, keeping the art form alive in public consciousness. Adding Jinqian Ban to the intangible cultural heritage list in 2008 has already provided a framework for governmental support, and by expanding this framework to include job security, promotion opportunities, and performance venues, Jinqian Ban musicians are more likely to continue their craft with confidence and creativity.

Another essential element is encouraging musicians to engage in outreach activities and workshops. Combining performance with educational initiatives allows artists to introduce Jinqian Ban to younger audiences, fostering an appreciation of the art form while training potential future practitioners. This approach aligns with long-term preservation goals by creating a self-sustaining cycle of transmission where musicians perform and act as cultural educators.

Preserving Jinqian Ban involves showcasing its practical applications through specific musical pieces, such as San Da and Wu Pei, and highlighting the Jinqian Ban instrument, a three-board tool inlaid with copper coins that enhances performance with its unique sound. Demonstrating traditional playing techniques and iconic repertoire helps connect audiences to the art's cultural and narrative richness.



Figure 2. Jinqian ban performance

Source: Lijun Huang, from fieldwork in January 2024

Combining traditional practices with innovative strategies, such as interactive performances, educational workshops, and digital media, ensures that Jinqian Ban remains culturally relevant while preserving its authenticity. These efforts attract new audiences, provide hands-on learning opportunities, and expand the art form's reach, ensuring the art form continues to thrive and inspire future generations.

Transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan

Expanding the development of professional teams

The transmission of Jinqian Ban requires a strategic approach to building professional teams capable of sustaining and promoting this traditional art form. The government must play a central role by introducing supportive policies and allocating resources to enhance Jinqian Ban education and training infrastructure.

One essential strategy is to incorporate Jinqian Ban into formal education systems. Education policies should encourage schools to offer Jinqian Ban-related courses and programs, fostering an environment where this traditional art can thrive. Schools should receive sufficient human, material, and financial resources to support professional development, teaching management, and faculty training. By integrating Jinqian Ban into the curriculum and establishing dedicated programs, schools can cultivate a steady pipeline of talented individuals committed to the art form's continuation.

The quality of teaching staff is critical to the success of such initiatives. The foundation of an excellent teaching team is indispensable to producing skilled students. With their existing musical expertise, music teachers can become instrumental in the transmission of Jinqian Ban. However, this requires targeted efforts to train and equip them with specialized knowledge and techniques unique to this art.

The traditional oral transmission and "heart-to-heart teaching" methods of Jinqian Ban emphasize close, direct interaction between master and student. To preserve this approach, collaboration between schools and expert inheritors is vital. Experienced Jinqian Ban practitioners can be invited to train music teachers, offering hands-on guidance and deepening their understanding of the art form. By doing so, schools can ensure that their teaching staff not only acquire technical proficiency but also internalize the cultural and emotional nuances of Jinqian Ban.

School-based transmission of jinqian ban

The preservation and growth of Jinqian Ban depend on cultivating skilled practitioners and building a broad, enthusiastic base of young learners. Integrating Jinqian Ban into school curricula helps students develop an appreciation for this traditional art form, fostering a deep understanding of its cultural and artistic significance. Effective school-based programs must consider different student groups' age and learning preferences, designing courses and activities that promote engagement and participation. By introducing Jinqian Ban into the educational system, schools can help build a foundation for its future by expanding its reach and nurturing potential talent.

Introducing Jinqian Ban at the primary school level is particularly effective, as younger students typically have more flexible schedules, allowing for practice and engagement outside of class hours. Some primary schools in Chengdu have already offered Jinqian Ban courses, where students can voluntarily register to learn this traditional art. Schools frequently organize art performances, giving students the chance to showcase their skills on stage, boosting their confidence and enhancing their appreciation for the performance art. This early exposure is instrumental in building a strong, motivated base of young learners who can carry the tradition forward (Figure 3).

At the university level, the "Money Board into Campus" initiative can significantly broaden Jinqian Ban's reach. This program encourages college students to explore Jinqian Ban's historical and cultural background, deepening their understanding of its artistic and intrinsic value. By cultivating awareness and enthusiasm for traditional Chinese arts, this initiative aims to foster a new generation of Jinqian Ban enthusiasts and potential inheritors, contributing to this cherished folk art's sustainability and future vitality.

Strengthening publicity efforts

To increase awareness and appreciation of Jinqian Ban, diverse and effective promotional strategies are essential. First, relevant government and cultural organizations can organize competitions, exhibitions, and Quyi music festivals. These events offer public performance opportunities, allowing people to experience Jinqian Ban firsthand and fostering a deeper connection with the art form.

The transmission of Jinqian Ban relies on the active involvement of various social sectors, including the education system, businesses, social organizations, and online media. These groups can contribute by organizing Sichuan-themed cultural activities, public performances, and innovative online events related to Jinqian Ban. Community centers can also hold regular teaching sessions, allowing more people to learn and engage with Jinqian Ban directly.

Additionally, dedicated television programming on Jinqian Ban could significantly boost its visibility. A TV



Figure 3. School-based transmission of jinqian ban
Source: Lijun Huang, from fieldwork in November 2023

show focused on Sichuan folk arts, including Jinqian Ban, could provide an in-depth look at traditional cultural practices, giving viewers a more systematic and accessible introduction to Jinqian Ban and other folk arts.

Integrating jinqian ban with tourism

Combining Jinqian Ban with local tourism can effectively highlight Sichuan's unique cultural heritage, offering tourists a richer, more immersive experience. By weaving elements of Jinqian Ban into the tourism experience, visitors gain a broader understanding of the region's history, customs, and artistic traditions. This integration can also create new platforms and opportunities for Jinqian Ban performers, bringing their art to more extensive and diverse audiences.

Local tourist attractions could schedule regular Jinqian Ban performances to achieve this, showcasing traditional culture in an authentic setting. Offering tourists the chance to witness live performances elevates the tourism experience. It supports the ongoing preservation and promotion of Jinqian Ban, ensuring its relevance in modern cultural landscapes.

DISCUSSION

The preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, reflect the opportunities and challenges of sustaining traditional art forms in a rapidly modernizing society. The results highlight the critical importance of documentation, institutional support, education, public engagement, and integration with contemporary sectors like tourism. These efforts collectively safeguard Jinqian Ban while fostering its relevance in contemporary contexts.

The preservation strategies for Jinqian Ban emphasize the importance of systematically recording and archiving its musical and cultural components. The lack of formal written records and reliance on oral tradition pose a significant challenge, especially as older practitioners pass away (Guangguo et al., 2024; Zhang & Choatchamrat, 2023). Establishing specialized organizations for documentation, coupled with governmental and institutional support, is vital. These efforts guarantee the preservation of Jinqian Ban's rich repertoire, stylistic nuances, and historical significance for future generations.

Institutional backing is another cornerstone of preservation. By providing financial resources, organizing collaborative projects, and promoting the development of educational materials, the government and cultural organizations create a sustainable framework for preserving Jinqian Ban. Recognizing and supporting practitioners as cultural ambassadors through honors, financial assistance, and performance platforms reinforces their role in safeguarding this art form (Zhang et al., 2022).

The transmission of Jinqian Ban hinges on two critical factors: cultivating skilled practitioners and broadening public engagement. Educational initiatives, particularly those targeting schools and universities, play a vital role in achieving these goals. By introducing Jinqian Ban into school curricula, primary schools lay the foundation for early exposure, while university programs expand the art form's reach among young adults (Hou & Seekhunlio, 2023; Yu &

Choatchamrat, 2024). These initiatives also address dwindling interest among younger generations, ensuring a steady talent pipeline.

The integration of Jinqian Ban with local tourism highlights its potential as a cultural asset that benefits both the performers and the broader community. By showcasing Jinqian Ban in authentic settings, such as heritage sites and cultural festivals, tourism initiatives provide artists with expanded opportunities to perform while exposing tourists to Sichuan's unique cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The preservation and transmission of Jinqian Ban in Chengdu highlight the need for a balanced approach that safeguards its cultural heritage while adapting it to modern contexts. Critical efforts include systematically documenting and archiving its repertoire, providing institutional support, and recognizing and supporting its practitioners. Integrating Jinqian Ban into education ensures its transmission to younger generations, while public engagement through festivals, performances, and digital media broadens its appeal and visibility. Additionally, combining Jinqian Ban with tourism showcases its cultural significance and provides new opportunities for performers and audiences alike.

These efforts demonstrate that preserving Jinqian Ban requires collaboration among government bodies, cultural institutions, educators, and the community. By blending traditional practices with innovative strategies, Jinqian Ban can maintain its authenticity, remain culturally relevant, and inspire future generations to carry forward this rich heritage.

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