

Music Literacy in the Preservation of Inner Mongolian Wedding Folk Songs

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ABSTRACT

Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs are vital to the region's intangible cultural heritage, reflecting the Mongolian people's history, values, and traditions. This study investigates music literacy in the preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Utilizing a qualitative ethnographic approach, the research focuses on the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, examining the integration of wedding folk songs into educational curricula to ensure their survival amidst globalization and urbanization. Data were collected through interviews with three key informants: scholars, folk musicians, and cultural practitioners, observations of wedding ceremonies, and document analysis. The findings underscore the critical role of music literacy in documenting, transmitting, and adapting these songs to contemporary contexts while maintaining their authenticity. Challenges such as generational disconnect, limited resources in rural areas, and declining Mongolian language proficiency were identified. Collaborative efforts between educators, musicians, and policymakers have shown promise, with instructional materials and digital archives enhancing accessibility and engagement. The study concludes that a multifaceted approach, incorporating education, technology, and community involvement, is essential for preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Future research should focus on digital innovations, bilingual education, and strategies to engage younger generations in cultural preservation.

Key words: Inner Mongolian Wedding Folk Songs, Music Literacy, Cultural Preservation, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Educational Integration

INTRODUCTION

Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs are a cornerstone of the region's cultural heritage, encapsulating the Mongolian people's rich history, traditions, and values. These songs, often characterized by their poetic lyrics and unique musicality, serve as more than just entertainment; they are a cultural expression of community bonding and celebrating life's milestones (Tang & Sornyai, 2023; Wang & Mao, 2024). Wedding folk songs, in particular, hold a special place in ceremonial practices, symbolizing familial unity and respect for cultural traditions. However, in an era marked by rapid social changes, urbanization, and the growing influence of globalization, these traditional art forms face significant challenges. As younger generations gravitate towards modern lifestyles and globalized culture, the continuity of these folk songs is increasingly at risk, raising urgent questions about their preservation and relevance in contemporary society (Dinh, 2023; Huang et al., 2024; Li & Chaiyason, 2024).

The declining reliance on oral traditions exacerbates the problem of the primary means of transmitting wedding folk songs. Inner Mongolia's rapid urbanization and the integration of global influences have created a disconnect between younger generations and their cultural roots. Moreover, the

diminished use of the Mongolian language among youth further complicates the transmission of these folk songs, as their poetic and cultural nuances often rely on linguistic proficiency (Erjian & Chuangprakhon, 2023; Okadigwe & Okeke, 2022). Compounding this is the limited incorporation of traditional music into formal education systems, leaving a gap in the systematic documentation and dissemination of these songs. This creates a pressing need for innovative approaches to safeguard the region's wedding folk songs while maintaining their authenticity and cultural significance (Garzoli & Hin-on, 2023; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023; Ye et al., 2023).

This study aims to investigate music literacy in the preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Music literacy, defined as the ability to read, interpret, and create music, can act as a bridge between oral traditions and modern educational practices. By equipping individuals with the skills to understand and document folk songs, music literacy can help mitigate the challenges of cultural transmission. Through qualitative methods, this study will examine existing practices and propose strategies to integrate music literacy into educational frameworks, ensuring these songs thrive in the evolving cultural landscape (Bresler, 2021; Williamon et al., 2021).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide practical solutions to the preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs, an essential component of the region's intangible cultural heritage. By emphasizing the integration of music literacy and education, the study addresses the immediate challenges of cultural preservation and highlights broader implications for cultural sustainability. This research contributes to the discourse on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, demonstrating how literacy and education can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. Moreover, it underscores the importance of nurturing cultural identity through systematic approaches, ensuring that these cherished traditions remain a vibrant part of Inner Mongolia's cultural narrative for generations.

Research Question

- How can literacy and education in music contribute to the effective preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The preservation of cultural heritage, particularly intangible cultural traditions such as music, requires deliberate and innovative strategies in the face of modernization and globalization. Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs represent a significant cultural practice, reflecting the region's values, history, and social dynamics. Traditionally passed down orally, these songs face challenges due to urbanization and changing social practices. This literature review explores the role of music literacy and education as essential tools for preserving these wedding folk songs, examining their historical significance, the challenges they face, and the theoretical frameworks that inform strategies for their preservation. It also incorporates comparative insights from other ethnic traditions and regions to contextualize the preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs.

Music Literacy and Cultural

Music literacy is the ability to read, interpret, and create music, which is crucial in integrating traditional practices with modern education systems. It facilitates intergenerational knowledge transfer and preserves musical traditions, especially in regions where oral traditions are the primary means of transmission. Music literacy allows for recording nuances in melody, rhythm, and lyrics, enabling future generations to learn traditional music in its authentic form (Bauer, 2020; Fan & Chuangprakhon, 2024; Yembuu, 2021). In Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs, music literacy preserves the unique characteristics of these songs, including love, respect, and community. It also fosters cultural pride and identity, allowing individuals to celebrate and sustain their heritage. Furthermore, music literacy can catalyze innovation, allowing traditional forms to evolve while retaining their essence (Cheng, 2023; Liu & Natayakulwong, 2023).

Inner Mongolian Wedding Folk Songs

Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs are integral to the region's cultural traditions, marking key moments in the event. Their poetic lyrics and distinct musical styles reflect weddings' emotional depth and social significance. Historically, these songs have been transmitted orally, leaving them vulnerable to modernization. The decline in Mongolian language use among younger generations and the increasing influence of globalized culture have exacerbated the challenges to their preservation. Music literacy can help document, teach, and adapt these songs to contemporary contexts, ensuring their survival for future generations (Sen & Sondhiratna, 2024; Yang, 2024; Zhang & Thotham, 2024). The integration of traditional music into education, such as Zulu izibongo and Indonesian gamelan orchestras, is a trend that preserves cultural heritage and promotes innovation. In South Africa, tshigombela and gamelan orchestras revitalize marginalized cultural forms, while Indigenous music facilitates cross-cultural exchanges in British Columbia. Strategies for integrating music into higher education include emotional connections, scientific techniques, and technology (Emberly & Davidson, 2011; Prest et al., 2022). These examples demonstrate how educational systems can preserve and evolve traditional art forms, ensuring their relevance in modern society.

Education as a Tool for Preservation

Education plays a central role in the systematic preservation of cultural traditions. By integrating Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs into formal music curricula, educational institutions can instill a deeper appreciation for these traditions among younger generations. Music education fosters technical skills while also cultivating an understanding of the cultural and historical contexts that give traditional music its significance (Crawford, 2020; Gaunt et al., 2021). Through school-based programs, students can learn to perform these songs and analyze and document them, ensuring accurate transmission. Educational initiatives can also inspire innovation, encouraging students to reinterpret traditional songs in ways that resonate with modern audiences. This dual approach to preserving the original while fostering creative adaptation ensures that Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs remain relevant and vibrant in an evolving cultural landscape (Miao & Zhang, 2024; Sosrowijaya, 2023; Zhang, 2024).

Theoretical Frameworks

The preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs can be understood through various theoretical lenses. Cultural sustainability emphasizes adapting traditional practices to changing social contexts, integrating tradition with modernity. Constructivist learning theory encourages active engagement in music education, fostering a deeper connection to cultural heritage through hands-on activities like singing, composing, and performing. Intangible cultural heritage emphasizes preserving practices that embody community identity. Comprehensive strategies are needed to preserve

traditions like Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs, including education, documentation, and community involvement. These theories contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the preservation of cultural heritage (Aktürk & Lerski, 2021; Stephenson, 2023; Wasela, 2023).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of music literacy and education in preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. The ethnographic approach integrates interviews, observations, and document analysis to comprehensively understand how cultural practices are maintained and adapted through music literacy. Informants were selected based on their expertise, experience, and contributions to the field, ensuring diverse and authentic insights into the research topic (Bresler, 2021; Williamon et al., 2021).

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach, enabling a deep exploration of the social and cultural contexts surrounding Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Focusing on the interplay between music literacy and cultural preservation, the study emphasizes how traditional practices are transmitted and adapted in modern educational frameworks.

Research Site

The study was conducted in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, focusing on cultural preservation and the performance of wedding folk songs. The sites included cultural centers, educational institutions, and wedding venues, which were chosen for their active involvement in documenting and teaching Inner Mongolian folk songs, exploring their integration into music education, and witnessing live performances, as shown in Figure 1.

Key Informants

Three key informants were selected based on their expertise, professional contributions, and direct involvement in preserving and performing Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. The criteria for selection included research experience, proficiency in traditional songs, and significant contributions to cultural dissemination, as shown in Table 1.

Data Collection

Data collection involved three primary methods: interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Each method provided unique insights into the challenges and opportunities for preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the three key informants focused on their experiences, challenges, and strategies for preserving wedding folk songs.

Table 1. Criteria of key informants

Informant	Role and Expertise
Scholar	Specialist in the history and musicology of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs
Folk Singer	Experienced performer of wedding folk songs with deep knowledge of traditional repertoire
Cultural Practitioner	Active participant in wedding ceremonies, integrating folk songs with cultural and educational practices

Field observations

Observations of wedding ceremonies provided a contextual understanding of how folk songs are performed, appreciated, and integrated into cultural practices.

Document analysis

Archival materials, including song lyrics, historical records, and government policies, were reviewed to understand the historical and contemporary contexts of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns related to music literacy, education, and preservation. The process involved initial coding, theme development, and interpretation to categorize data into meaningful themes. The aim was to understand how music literacy contributes to the preservation of wedding folk songs

RESULTS

The preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs, a cornerstone of the region's cultural heritage, relies heavily on the interplay of music literacy and education. These traditional songs embody the Mongolian community's values, emotions, and social customs, making their preservation a vital task amidst the pressures of modernization and globalization. This study explores the perspectives of key stakeholders, such as folk musicians, educators, and cultural practitioners, on how music literacy and education can contribute to sustaining this intangible cultural heritage. The findings highlight both the opportunities and challenges in this endeavor, focusing on the significance of music literacy, the role of education, the obstacles faced in preservation, and successful practices that can serve as a model for cultural sustainability.

Importance of Music Literacy

Music literacy was a critical factor in preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Informants consistently emphasized its role in documenting, standardizing, and facilitating the transmission of these cultural treasures. By providing a structured way to capture melodies, rhythms, and lyrical nuances, music literacy ensures that these songs remain accessible for future generations.

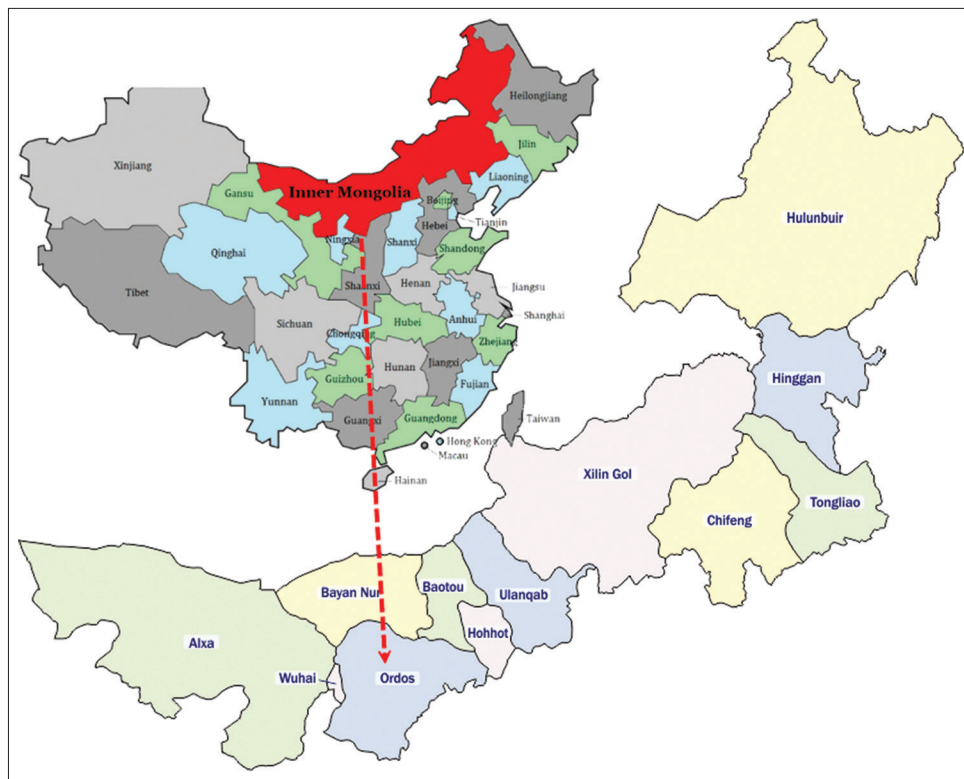


Figure 1. Ordos city of inner Mongolia
 Source: Chinafolio (n.d.) & d-map (n.d.)

Participants identified transcription into musical notation as a significant step toward preservation. Traditionally passed down orally, folk songs risk being altered or forgotten over time. Transcription transforms these oral traditions into tangible records, making them teachable and widely accessible, as shown in Table 2. One folk musician informant noted, “Music literacy allows us to preserve the essence of wedding folk songs. Without proper notation, their originality may be lost over generations.” Another music educator informant added, “Having these songs written in musical notation means they can be integrated into formal teaching systems, bridging traditional practices with modern pedagogy.”

Music literacy has also made Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs adaptable to contemporary contexts. Educators can use notation to reinterpret these songs, blending traditional and modern elements. This adaptability has widened the audience and reinforced their relevance in changing social contexts. An experienced wedding planner observed, “Literacy in music doesn’t just preserve the songs. It enriches their meaning by making them understandable to diverse audiences, including younger generations unfamiliar with oral traditions.” A folk singer highlighted an example: “In the past, the songs were passed down by memory. Today, we write them down, ensuring they are remembered and performed accurately.”

While the benefits are evident, challenges persist. Many rural musicians lack formal training in music literacy, making transcription and standardization efforts dependent on external support. Table 3 outlines these challenges and offers potential solutions.

Table 2. Impact of music literacy on accessibility

Aspect	Impact of Music Literacy
Educational Use	Enables inclusion of folk songs in school curricula for systematic teaching
Knowledge Transfer	Facilitates intergenerational learning and collaboration among musicians
Cultural Outreach	Makes the music accessible to non-native speakers and global audiences

Table 3. Challenges and recommendations in promoting music literacy

Challenge	Recommendation
Limited Formal Education	Provide workshops and training programs for musicians in reading and writing notation
Resistance to Notation Systems	Combine oral traditions with notational literacy to ensure cultural sensitivity
Inadequate Resources in Rural Areas	Fund distribution of musical scores and digital tools to underserved regions

Role of Education

The role of education in preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs is deeply intertwined with fostering music literacy. Educational initiatives have raised awareness, ensured systematic transmission, and created a bridge between generations. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher training and limited resources present significant barriers to these efforts.

Music literacy in education provides a foundation for understanding and preserving cultural traditions. Including Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs in school music curricula has enabled students to explore these songs' technical, emotional, and cultural dimensions. Educators have noted that literacy in music enhances students' ability to read notations, analyze compositions, and perform with an appreciation of the underlying cultural significance. One informant, a school music teacher, shared: "Teaching these songs through formal education allows students to develop a deeper connection to their heritage. Literacy helps them engage with the music, stories, and values these songs carry."

Dedicated folk music classes have further advanced the cause of preservation. These classes teach students how to read, interpret, and perform wedding folk songs, ensuring that the nuances of rhythm, melody, and lyrical expression are not lost. Educators have created a structured pathway for learning traditional music by incorporating music literacy into these specialized programs. An informant organizing folk music workshops remarked, "Music literacy transforms oral traditions into a more formalized learning system. This makes teaching more efficient and ensures consistency in preserving the musical structure."

Despite these advancements, the lack of qualified teachers trained in music literacy and traditional folk music poses a significant challenge. Informants emphasized the importance of providing educators with specialized training to ensure they have the skills to teach these songs' technical and cultural aspects. An experienced educator noted: "The effectiveness of music literacy education depends on the teachers. Unfortunately, few educators are musically literate and well-versed in Inner Mongolian traditions. This gap needs immediate attention."

Additionally, limited access to resources, particularly in rural areas, restricts schools' ability to implement comprehensive music literacy programs. Schools often lack musical instruments, notation materials, and textbooks, making providing students with a holistic learning experience challenging.

Informants suggested strategies to bridge these gaps, including developing teacher certification programs focused on folk music literacy and creating instructional materials tailored to Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Expanding funding for rural schools to acquire resources and train educators is also critical. One informant proposed: "Creating accessible teaching guides that integrate music literacy with the cultural context of wedding folk songs can help standardize education and make it more effective."

Challenges in Preservation

Significant challenges, including generational disconnect, limited resources, and the erosion of Mongolian language skills, hinder the preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. These barriers affect the literacy of younger generations and the ability to educate and pass down traditional music effectively.

Informants consistently highlighted that younger generations are becoming less familiar with traditional wedding folk songs. This disconnect is primarily attributed to urbanization

and the adoption of modern lifestyles, which often prioritize contemporary musical forms over traditional ones. One informant, a veteran folk musician, remarked: "The younger generation finds it difficult to connect with the old ways of music-making. Many don't see the value in learning these songs, as their lives are so far removed from the steppe traditions."

This lack of engagement significantly diminishes the opportunity for intergenerational music literacy, which relies heavily on oral transmission. Without actively involving youth in these traditions, the rich tapestry of wedding folk songs risks fading into obscurity.

Rural schools' inadequate resources further exacerbate the challenge of preserving wedding folk songs. Music literacy requires access to instruments, songbooks, and trained educators, yet many rural areas struggle with limited funding and infrastructure. An educator from a rural school noted: "We want to teach traditional songs, but we don't have proper materials or even the right instruments. It's almost impossible to make these lessons engaging or effective without these." This resource disparity limits opportunities to integrate traditional wedding folk songs into the formal education system, creating a significant barrier to fostering literacy in this cultural art form.

Another critical issue identified by the informants is the erosion of Mongolian language proficiency, particularly among younger generations. Traditional wedding folk songs are deeply rooted in the Mongolian language, and their lyrical content often embodies cultural nuances that are difficult to translate. One informant, a cultural historian, explained: "The decline in language skills is one of the biggest threats to our music. Without a strong grasp of the Mongolian language, it's challenging for young people to truly understand or appreciate the depth of these songs." This erosion of language skills affects the comprehension of song lyrics and impedes the ability to create new compositions that remain faithful to traditional themes and structures.

The challenges of preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs underscore the need for targeted interventions to address generational disconnect, improve resource availability, and strengthen Mongolian language education. These efforts are essential for fostering music literacy and ensuring the flourishing of this rich cultural heritage, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Key challenges in preservation

Challenge	Impact	Informant Insights
Generational Disconnect	Reduced interest among youth in learning traditional music	Younger generations don't see the value in old songs
Limited Resources	Inadequate access to instruments, songbooks, and trained educators in rural areas	We lack materials and tools to teach effectively
Erosion of Language Skills	Difficulty in understanding and appreciating the cultural depth of song lyrics	Without the language, the connection to our music is lost

Successful Preservation Practices

Collaboration initiatives, government support, and instructional resource creation have benefited efforts to preserve Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. These practices highlight the vital role of music literacy in bridging traditional and modern approaches, ensuring the survival and appreciation of these cultural treasures.

Collaboration has become a cornerstone of successful preservation practices, particularly between folk musicians and educators. Informants emphasized that the partnership between these two groups has fostered the development of educational materials that incorporate traditional music into formal teaching frameworks. A seasoned music educator explained: "By working with experienced folk musicians, we've created instructional materials that combine traditional lyrics and melodies with modern teaching methods. This helps students connect with their heritage while developing musical literacy." These collaborative efforts provide access to authentic resources and empower educators to teach traditional songs in ways that resonate with younger generations.

Government initiatives have played a pivotal role in supporting the preservation of Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. Policies and programs that promote intangible cultural heritage have provided financial backing and institutional resources for these efforts. An informant from a local cultural bureau noted: "Through subsidies and grants, we've supported community-based music classes and workshops that promote folk song literacy. These programs ensure that traditional music remains a vibrant part of our culture." Examples include establishing school heritage classes, funding public performances, raising awareness, and fostering appreciation for wedding folk songs.

One notable outcome of these collaborative and government-supported efforts is the creation of instructional materials designed to enhance music literacy. These resources often include songbooks with transcriptions, digital recordings, and lesson plans tailored for use in schools and community programs. A folk musician involved in these initiatives explained: "These materials ensure that even those without prior knowledge of Mongolian music can learn and appreciate wedding songs. It's a way to preserve the essence of our culture for future generations."

Additionally, incorporating modern technology into preservation practices has further enhanced music literacy. Digital archives and mobile applications allow students and enthusiasts to access wedding folk song recordings, lyrics, and notations. This accessibility facilitates broader engagement and ensures that these cultural artifacts are preserved in formats suitable for contemporary audiences.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study's findings underscore the significant role of music literacy in preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. This aligns with theoretical principles and previous research on cultural sustainability and constructivist learning. Music literacy facilitates the structured documentation and transmission of cultural traditions, ensuring their survival in the

face of modernization and globalization (Bauer, 2020). This research highlights its critical role in bridging oral traditions and formal education, supporting prior studies on integrating traditional music into educational frameworks (Miao & Zhang, 2024).

Cultural sustainability theory, which emphasizes adapting traditions to modern contexts without compromising authenticity, is reflected in the practices observed in this study (Stephenson, 2023). Transcribing wedding folk songs into musical notation has preserved their melodies, rhythms, and poetic essence, ensuring accessibility for future generations. However, some informants resisted integrating contemporary elements into traditional songs, underscoring the tension between maintaining authenticity and achieving relevance in modern settings (Ye et al., 2023).

Constructivist learning theory supports these findings by emphasizing active engagement and contextual learning in music education (Aktürk & Lerski, 2021). Educational initiatives incorporating Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs into school curricula enhance technical skills and foster a deeper cultural connection among students. These programs play a crucial role in conveying these songs' emotional and social significance, which resonates with the community's values and history.

Despite these successes, challenges persist. Generational disconnect, exacerbated by urbanization and shifting cultural priorities, has limited younger generations' engagement with traditional music. This finding is consistent with research by Erjian and Chuangprakhon (2023), highlighting the declining reliance on oral traditions. Additionally, limited resources, particularly in rural areas, pose barriers to implementing comprehensive music literacy programs. The lack of access to instruments, educational materials, and trained teachers underscores the importance of targeted interventions to address these gaps.

Efforts to preserve Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs have benefited from collaborative initiatives between educators, folk musicians, and government bodies. These partnerships have led to the creation of instructional materials, digital archives, and community-based programs, enhancing the accessibility and sustainability of wedding folk songs (Miao & Zhang, 2024). However, to overcome disparities and ensure long-term impact, these efforts require sustained investment and broader participation.

This study demonstrates that music literacy is vital in preserving Inner Mongolian wedding folk songs. It offers a systematic approach to documenting and transmitting these cultural treasures. By bridging oral traditions and modern education, music literacy ensures that wedding folk songs' poetic and musical nuances are preserved for future generations. Integrating these songs into school curricula has enhanced students' technical abilities and fostered a deeper appreciation for their cultural heritage.

The findings align with cultural sustainability theory, which advocates adapting traditions to contemporary contexts while maintaining authenticity (Stephenson, 2023). However, the study also reveals tensions between preserving the authenticity of traditional music and adapting it to

modern influences, reflecting the complex dynamics of cultural preservation in a globalized world. Challenges such as generational disconnect, resource limitations, and the erosion of Mongolian language skills highlight the need for targeted interventions to ensure the effective transmission of these traditions. Collaborative efforts among educators, musicians, and policymakers demonstrate the potential of combining traditional and modern approaches to sustaining cultural heritage. To scale these efforts, sustained investment and expanded participation are necessary.

Future research should explore digital innovations, such as mobile applications and virtual archives, to enhance music literacy and accessibility. Comparative studies on preservation strategies for other ethnic music traditions in China could provide insights into best practices and cross-regional collaborations. Investigating the impact of bilingual education programs on bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in transmitting traditional music would offer valuable perspectives. Additionally, further studies should focus on strategies to engage younger generations, fostering their interest in traditional music practices. Finally, assessing the long-term effects of government policies and funding initiatives on cultural preservation efforts would deepen the understanding of their effectiveness.

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