

Xiaodiao Chinese Folk Song Literacy in Cultural Heritage Education

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ABSTRACT

Xiaodiao Chinese folk songs, a subgenre of northern Shaanxi folk music, hold significant cultural and historical value, serving as a medium for oral storytelling and the preservation of regional identity. This study examines the role of Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy in fostering cultural heritage education. Conducted in Yanchuan County, Shaanxi Province, the research employs qualitative methodologies, including fieldwork, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with five informants such as folk musicians, educators, and cultural heritage practitioners. Thematic analysis reveals that while Xiaodiao is a valuable tool for intergenerational knowledge transfer, its sustainability is threatened by limited educational resources and declining interest among younger generations. Findings suggest that integrating Xiaodiao into school curricula, utilizing digital platforms, and fostering community-based learning initiatives could revitalize interest and engagement. The study underscores the need for interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, ethnomusicologists, and policymakers to develop comprehensive strategies for preserving Xiaodiao and other forms of Chinese folk music. Future research should explore comparative studies with other regional folk traditions and assess the long-term impact of Xiaodiao literacy programs in cultural education.

Key words: Cultural Transmission, Traditional Music Education, Folk Song Pedagogy, Oral Heritage, Northern Shaanxi Music

INTRODUCTION

Folk music has long served as a fundamental medium for the transmission of cultural heritage, shaping the identity and historical consciousness of communities worldwide. Among the diverse folk traditions in China, Xiaodiao, a distinctive subgenre of northern Shaanxi folk songs, plays a crucial role in preserving the oral history, customs, and social experiences of the people of Yanchuan County. Characterized by its expressive melodies and deeply evocative lyrics, Xiaodiao reflects the emotions, struggles, and aspirations of the local community, making it a significant component of Chinese musical and cultural heritage (Howard, 2016; Wang & Thotham, 2025). However, in the face of rapid modernization, shifting cultural preferences, and changing social dynamics, the transmission of Xiaodiao is under threat. The younger generation is increasingly disconnected from traditional folk music, preferring contemporary popular genres. As a result, Xiaodiao faces the risk of fading from public consciousness, prompting concerns about the sustainability of this valuable cultural resource. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, educators, researchers, and cultural preservationists have begun advocating for the integration of Xiaodiao into formal cultural heritage education, ensuring its continuation through structured learning and engagement

(Bond & Worthing, 2016; Childs-Helton, 2016; Sen & Sondhiratna, 2024).

Despite the growing awareness of the importance of folk music preservation, the role of Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy in fostering cultural heritage education remains an underexplored area. Folk song literacy goes beyond mere performance; it involves understanding the historical, linguistic, and artistic elements embedded in the music. Xiaodiao's distinct poetic structure, regional dialects, and narrative-driven lyrics make it a valuable educational tool, providing insight into the socio-cultural fabric of northern Shaanxi (Broomhead, 2018; Jian et al., 2024; Meng Zhang, 2024). However, traditional methods of oral transmission are proving insufficient in the modern era, and the lack of systematic educational programs further exacerbates the challenge. Future generations may lose access to this rich cultural tradition without intentional efforts to incorporate Xiaodiao into academic and community-based learning. This study, therefore, investigates how Xiaodiao folk song literacy can be effectively integrated into cultural heritage education to promote historical awareness, musical appreciation, and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Campbell et al., 2016; Hao, 2023).

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy in fostering

cultural heritage education. By analyzing the cultural significance, educational value, and pedagogical applications of Xiaodiao, this study seeks to determine how folk song literacy contributes to cultural preservation and education. The research will explore methods of incorporating Xiaodiao into educational curricula, the benefits of learning traditional folk music in developing cultural identity, and the potential challenges in its transmission. Through literature review, field studies, and interviews with educators and folk musicians, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Xiaodiao can be utilized as an educational tool (Bresler, 2021; Bond, 2017; Wang & Thotham, 2024; Wei & Thotham, 2024).

The significance of this research extends beyond preserving Xiaodiao as a musical form; it highlights the broader importance of folk song literacy in cultural heritage education. Understanding Xiaodiao provides a gateway to exploring local history, linguistic diversity, and artistic traditions, enriching students' cultural literacy and appreciation for intangible heritage. Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of music in fostering a sense of identity and community cohesion, demonstrating how folk songs can connect individuals to their heritage in a rapidly changing world. Furthermore, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in the fields of ethnomusicology, education, and cultural studies by advocating for policies and initiatives that support folk music preservation and education (Becker, 2019; Bennett & Janssen, 2016; Lomax, 2017). By fostering an interdisciplinary approach, this study underscores the need for collaboration between educators, cultural institutions, and policymakers to ensure the sustainability of traditional folk music in both academic and community-based settings. Ultimately, by promoting Xiaodiao folk song literacy, this research aims to inspire a renewed appreciation for traditional music and its potential to enrich cultural education in contemporary society.

Research Question

- How does Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy contribute to the fostering of cultural heritage education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating folk music into cultural heritage education has been widely recognized as crucial for preserving traditional music while fostering historical awareness and cultural identity. Folk songs, as an essential component of intangible cultural heritage, serve as a repository of historical narratives, regional dialects, and communal values. This literature review examines the cultural significance of Xiaodiao, the concept of folk music literacy in education, and the theoretical framework for integrating Xiaodiao into contemporary cultural heritage education. Additionally, international perspectives on folk music literacy and policy-driven strategies for preservation provide broader insights into the sustainability of traditional music education worldwide.

Xiaodiao as a Cultural Artifact

Xiaodiao is a cultural artifact that encapsulates people's lived experiences, emotions, and historical narratives in Yanchuan County, Shaanxi Province. Its lyrical content often reflects themes of love, labor, nostalgia, and social struggles, offering a glimpse into the daily lives of northern Shaanxi's rural communities. Unlike highly structured classical Chinese music, Xiaodiao is characterized by its melodic simplicity and narrative-driven lyrics, making it an accessible cultural expression (Lufkin, 2016; Xiaozhi, 2024). However, its adaptability has made it vulnerable to erosion in its authenticity and traditional form. Historically, Xiaodiao was performed in communal settings like agricultural festivals and family celebrations, but urbanization and younger generations' migration to cities are diminishing these traditions. Researchers and cultural preservationists advocate for educational interventions that integrate Xiaodiao into formal learning environments, framing it as an artifact of cultural heritage rather than just an entertainment form (Ho, 2018; Norton & Matsumoto, 2018; Zhang & Bhengsri, 2024). International efforts to preserve folk music traditions, such as those in Norway and Sweden, emphasize the integration of folk songs into national curricula to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity. In the United States, folk music archives and performance-based initiatives, like the Smithsonian Folkways, ensure oral tradition continuity.

Folk Music Literacy in Education

Folk music literacy involves a comprehensive understanding of a song's historical, social, linguistic, and artistic dimensions, including its musical structure, thematic elements, poetic composition, and cultural significance. Teaching folk music in academic settings enhances students' appreciation of their heritage and fosters their ability to critically engage with historical narratives embedded in traditional songs. Several educational approaches support the incorporation of folk music literacy into school curricula, including experiential learning, comparative analysis, and digital technology (Hou & Seekhunlio, 2023; Xiaozhi, 2024). Experiential learning allows students to interact with folk musicians, participate in traditional singing techniques, and explore the contextual background of songs. Comparative analysis highlights the universal function of folk music in storytelling and cultural preservation. Digital technology and multimedia resources have emerged as vital tools for promoting folk music literacy, providing accessible materials for students to explore Xiaodiao beyond the classroom. This shift towards digital education ensures folk music literacy remains relevant in the modern age, attracting younger generations with limited interest in traditional music (Bauer, 2020; Dowling, 2016; Shi, 2021). Internationally, music education policies promote folk music literacy to foster cross-cultural understanding. In Australia, Indigenous song traditions are included in school programs, strengthening cultural appreciation and reconciliation. UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage framework encourages integrating folk music into educational settings for sustainable cultural development.

Theoretical Framework for Cultural Heritage Education

The study of Xiaodiao folk song literacy in cultural heritage education aligns with various theoretical frameworks in music education, ethnomusicology, and cultural preservation. The Cultural Transmission Theory explains how traditions, beliefs, and artistic expressions are passed down through generations, with oral tradition being the primary method. However, due to limitations in informal knowledge transfer, educational institutions must actively preserve Xiaodiao as a living tradition (Guo et al., 2020; Shi & Nicolas, 2023). The Heritage Education Theory emphasizes the role of education in safeguarding cultural heritage, encouraging active participation, interpretation, and critical reflection. This approach helps students learn to sing and analyze folk songs and explore their socio-historical implications, linguistic elements, and artistic evolution. The Multiliteracies Approach provides a modern perspective on folk song literacy, recognizing that literacy extends beyond traditional reading and writing to include visual, auditory, and digital literacies. By incorporating multimedia tools, digital storytelling, and creative adaptations, educators can make Xiaodiao more accessible and engaging for contemporary learners, ensuring its continued relevance in the digital age (Chan, 2018; Qu & Xiao, 2020; Yan & Chiou, 2021). Global policy initiatives, such as the European Union's Creative Europe program, have reinforced the value of traditional music in fostering cultural literacy. The African Union's cultural policies emphasize folk music as a tool for intergenerational dialogue and identity preservation, showcasing another approach that could be beneficial for Xiaodiao's sustainability.

METHOD

The qualitative methodology includes examining academic sources, policy documents, and previous research on Xiaodiao and folk music literacy. Fieldwork and interviews are conducted with five informants, including folk musicians, educators, and cultural heritage practitioners in Yanchuan County (Bresler, 2021; Tracy, 2024). Content analysis is conducted to assess the educational potential of selected Xiaodiao songs. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Xiaodiao literacy in cultural heritage education.

Research Site and Informants

The research was conducted in Yanchuan County, Shaanxi Province, a culturally significant region known for its rich tradition of northern Shaanxi folk songs, including Xiaodiao. This site was chosen due to its active folk music scene and long-standing traditions of Xiaodiao transmission, making it ideal for examining the intersection of folk song literacy and education. Five informants were selected based on their expertise in Xiaodiao performance, research, and audience reception to ensure a diverse and well-rounded dataset. These informants were classified into three categories: scholar informants, casual informants, and general informants, representing different perspectives on Xiaodiao transmission and education, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Key Informants and their categories

Category	Selection Criteria
Two Scholar Informants	Over 30 years of performance experience, award recipients, or scholars with extensive research in Xiaodiao folk songs
Two General Informants	Folk music enthusiasts with in-depth knowledge of Xiaodiao history and cultural significance
One Casual Informants	Performers with at least 10 years of experience and recognition in folk music

Data Collection

The study employed multiple data collection techniques to obtain in-depth insights into Xiaodiao literacy and its role in cultural heritage education. The methods included literature review, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and archival research, is shown in Table 2.

Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to Xiaodiao literacy and cultural heritage education. The process involved transcription and organization of data, thematic coding of key themes, comparative analysis of insights from different sources, and interpretation and synthesis. The process aimed to categorize major topics such as educational value, cultural transmission, and modernization challenges. The findings were integrated into broader discussions on folk music literacy and cultural heritage education, forming conclusions on Xiaodiao's contribution to cultural literacy and educational frameworks. The study aimed to identify the key roles Xiaodiao plays in cultural heritage education, the challenges it faces, and strategies for its preservation and modernization.

RESULTS

The findings highlight how Xiaodiao is a crucial educational tool while revealing barriers that hinder its integration into formal education settings. By examining perspectives from educators, folk musicians, and cultural practitioners, this study provides insights into the effectiveness of Xiaodiao as a pedagogical resource and the necessary steps for its sustainable preservation. The results are categorized into three key themes: Xiaodiao as a tool for cultural transmission, its role in enhancing music and linguistic literacy, and its transmission and education challenges.

Xiaodiao as a Tool for Cultural Transmission

Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy plays a critical role in fostering cultural heritage education, particularly in the transmission of historical narratives, linguistic identity, and communal values. Educators and folk musicians emphasized that Xiaodiao is more than a musical genre; it is an oral archive that encodes the traditions, emotions, and wisdom of northern Shaanxi communities. Literacy in Xiaodiao

Table 2. Data collection methods

Method	Description	Purpose
Literature Review	Examined books, academic papers, and government reports on Xiaodiao and folk music literacy	Provided a theoretical foundation and contextual background for the study
Semi-Structured Interviews	Conducted in-depth interviews with five key informants (folk musicians, educators, and cultural heritage practitioners)	Gathered firsthand knowledge on the educational significance of Xiaodiao
Participant Observations	Attended live performances, rehearsals, and educational sessions in Yanchuan County	Documented performance techniques, audience engagement, and pedagogical strategies
Archival Research	Collected historical recordings, lyrics, and scores of Xiaodiao songs	Analyzed lyrical themes, musical structures, and changes in performance style over time

involves not only the ability to perform and interpret the music but also an understanding of its historical context, poetic language, and melodic structures, making it an invaluable tool for cultural education. Interviews with informants indicated that Xiaodiao literacy aids in bridging generations by passing down knowledge in a structured yet emotionally engaging way, ensuring that younger learners can actively connect with their heritage through music.

As shown in Table 3, informants described how Xiaodiao literacy contributes to cultural transmission by reinforcing knowledge of regional dialects, storytelling techniques, and ethical values embedded in the lyrics. One scholar informant explained that many Xiaodiao songs serve as historical records, describing past agricultural practices, local festivals, and communal struggles. The literacy aspect allows performers and listeners to engage critically with these texts, analyzing their social relevance and learning about the moral and ethical principles embedded within.

One casual informant, a folk singer with over ten years of performance experience, noted that Xiaodiao literacy plays a crucial role in preserving the Shaanxi dialect and poetic expressions that are gradually fading in daily conversation. Through structured learning and repetition of Xiaodiao lyrics, students develop a deeper appreciation for the linguistic richness of their cultural heritage, reinforcing their identity and sense of belonging. This aligns with the broader goal of cultural heritage education, where literacy serves as both a tool for knowledge transmission and a means of fostering cultural pride.

Beyond linguistic literacy, Xiaodiao fosters musical literacy by teaching learners how to recognize and reproduce pentatonic scales, rhythmic structures, and expressive techniques characteristic of northern Shaanxi folk music. A general informant, who specializes in studying folk song culture, emphasized that Xiaodiao literacy trains students to develop an intuitive understanding of musical phrasing and tonal modulation, which are essential skills for both performance and music appreciation. As shown in Table 4, Xiaodiao's role as an educational tool extends beyond history and language, enhancing broader artistic and interpretative skills.

Despite its significant role in cultural transmission, informants also pointed to challenges in promoting Xiaodiao literacy, particularly in engaging younger generations who are more inclined toward contemporary music genres. A scholar informant highlighted that one of the primary difficulties is

Table 3. Xiaodiao literacy and its role in cultural transmission

Theme	Informants' Perspective on Xiaodiao Literacy
Oral History Preservation	Xiaodiao literacy helps retain local history by embedding it in music. Songs describe past events, agricultural traditions, and historical migrations
Linguistic and Dialectal Awareness	Understanding Xiaodiao lyrics enhances literacy in regional dialects, preserving linguistic diversity and unique phonetic expressions
Moral and Ethical Education	Many Xiaodiao songs carry moral lessons about honesty, perseverance, and social responsibility, strengthening ethical literacy

Table 4. Xiaodiao literacy and its contribution to musical understanding

Element	How Xiaodiao Literacy Enhances It
Rhythm and Meter Recognition	Xiaodiao's flexible rhythm and varying tempo teach students to adapt to different musical structures
Melodic and Harmonic Awareness	The pentatonic scale in Xiaodiao improves students' ability to recognize traditional Chinese music elements
Expressive Techniques	Learning Xiaodiao introduces students to vocal ornamentation, emotional expression, and storytelling through music

the lack of formalized Xiaodiao literacy curricula in schools, making it harder for students to access structured learning resources. Without systematic instruction, the ability to decode and appreciate the literary and musical components of Xiaodiao remains limited to those with direct exposure to folk music traditions.

A casual informant proposed that integrating Xiaodiao literacy into primary and secondary school curricula could enhance cultural heritage education by offering students an immersive, interactive learning experience. Educators could design lesson plans that combine historical storytelling, linguistic analysis, and musical practice, ensuring that students acquire comprehensive literacy skills that extend beyond mere memorization of lyrics. Table 5 shown the proposed

strategies to strengthen Xiaodiao literacy in cultural heritage education.

The findings highlight that Xiaodiao literacy is an essential component of cultural heritage education, facilitating the preservation of history, language, and musical traditions. By incorporating oral tradition, dialectal knowledge, and musical expression into structured educational settings, Xiaodiao literacy can ensure that this folk tradition remains a living, evolving art form rather than a relic of the past. The insights gathered from informants confirm that educational initiatives promoting Xiaodiao literacy not only sustain cultural traditions but also empower students with a multifaceted understanding of their heritage. Moving forward, further collaboration between folk musicians, educators, and policymakers will be crucial in creating an effective framework for the transmission of Xiaodiao in modern educational contexts.

The Role of Xiaodiao in Enhancing Music and Linguistic Literacy

Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy plays a crucial role in fostering cultural heritage education by preserving historical narratives, social values, and linguistic traditions. As a form of oral tradition, Xiaodiao embodies the lived experiences of northern Shaanxi communities, encoding knowledge through lyrical storytelling and melodic structures. Folk musicians and educators emphasized that Xiaodiao literacy involves not only the ability to sing and interpret songs but also the comprehension of their historical context, poetic language, and expressive techniques. The integration of Xiaodiao into cultural heritage education ensures that younger generations acquire a deeper understanding of their heritage through structured learning. The findings reveal that Xiaodiao literacy acts as a bridge between generations, providing an immersive and participatory means of transmitting cultural knowledge.

A key aspect of Xiaodiao literacy is its role in preserving oral history. Many informants highlighted that Xiaodiao songs function as historical records, recounting traditional agricultural practices, significant local events, and regional customs. Figure 1 shown the transcription of “The Young Widow Visits the Grave,” a well-known Xiaodiao song that reflects themes of loss and resilience within traditional society. The lyrics and melody of this song encapsulate the

emotional depth of the Xiaodiao tradition while providing insights into the struggles faced by individuals in historical Yanchuan County. By studying and performing such pieces, students engage with history in a dynamic way, strengthening their ability to interpret and internalize cultural narratives. Folk musicians in the study noted that literacy in Xiaodiao helps learners grasp the evolution of societal values over time, reinforcing their connection to the past while fostering a sense of cultural identity.

Another critical component of Xiaodiao literacy is its contribution to linguistic preservation. The distinct dialect and poetic expressions embedded in Xiaodiao songs offer a means of reinforcing regional language literacy. Informants explained that many younger generations are losing familiarity with the northern Shaanxi dialect due to modernization and urbanization. Xiaodiao serves as an accessible and engaging tool for maintaining dialectal literacy, as students learn traditional pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary through song. Figure 2 presents the C Zhi pentatonic mode, which characterizes Xiaodiao melodies and contributes to the distinct tonal qualities of the songs. The rhythmic and melodic structure of Xiaodiao enhances linguistic literacy by reinforcing prosody, rhythm, and phonetic awareness. Teachers integrating Xiaodiao into language education observed that students develop stronger oral skills and a heightened appreciation for their linguistic heritage.

Beyond linguistic and historical literacy, Xiaodiao fosters musical literacy by providing a framework for understanding traditional Chinese music theory. The pentatonic scale used in Xiaodiao, as depicted in Figure 2, introduces learners to fundamental concepts of pitch, scale structure, and melodic phrasing. The repetitive yet expressive nature of Xiaodiao melodies allows students to develop an intuitive grasp of musical form, dynamics, and rhythmic flexibility. Informants noted that Xiaodiao literacy enhances students’ ability to interpret expressive techniques such as ornamentation and vibrato, which are characteristic of northern

Table 5. Strategies to strengthen xiaodiao literacy in education

Strategy	Expected Outcome
Curriculum Integration	Formalizing Xiaodiao literacy lessons in schools fosters structured learning and long-term retention
Interactive Learning Approaches	Encouraging students to create their own Xiaodiao-inspired compositions enhances creative literacy
Use of Digital Platforms	Digital archives and online Xiaodiao workshops expand accessibility for younger learners

The Young Widow Visits the Grave
Yanchuan Folk Songs

Moderato

1. qing tian (na) lan tian lao lan ou he (na) tian (ai) sha ren bu guo na
 2. nu jiao ni jia li wu gong ao yao (na) nong (ai) shui jiao ni chu men shi
 3. gou li tou li laixiechui gu ao he (na) shou (ai) chui de le la ba zi

lao tian (ai) hai ye [crying] sha le na pang ren zan bu guan yo
 gan sheng (ai) hai ling zong yi wei ni neng zheng duo shao yo
 dao de (ai) hai gu chui gu shou ni zou ni lu yong

sha le nu de zhang (ai) [crying] fu wo shi ke lian [crying]
 shui zhi dao ni chu (ai) men (za) jiao le (he) ming
 ni guan lao niang (ai) ku yo zhang fu

Figure 1. The song “The Young Widow Visits the Grave”
Source: Xiaolei Su, transcription from fieldwork in July 2024

Figure 2. The mode of the C Zhi Pentatonic
Source: Xiaolei Su, 2024

Shaanxi folk singing. By incorporating Xiaodiao into formal music education, students gain exposure to traditional Chinese musical elements that are often overlooked in contemporary curricula.

Despite the educational value of Xiaodiao literacy, the study identified several challenges in its transmission. Informants pointed out that younger audiences increasingly favor mainstream and digital music genres, leading to a decline in interest in traditional folk music. Additionally, the lack of standardized teaching materials for Xiaodiao literacy has limited its integration into formal education. Folk musicians expressed concerns about the gradual disappearance of Xiaodiao due to the aging population of traditional performers and the scarcity of structured learning opportunities. To address these challenges, educators suggested that Xiaodiao literacy should be incorporated into school programs through interactive approaches, such as workshops, performances, and digital resources. The findings underscore the importance of adapting Xiaodiao literacy to contemporary educational settings to ensure its continued relevance and accessibility.

Challenges in Transmission and Education

Xiaodiao Chinese folk song literacy plays a crucial role in fostering cultural heritage education by preserving oral traditions, linguistic expressions, and musical knowledge. Literacy in Xiaodiao extends beyond the ability to read and write—it encompasses an understanding of its historical narratives, regional dialects, and musical structures, all of which contribute to a deeper appreciation of cultural heritage. Informants, including folk musicians and educators, emphasized that Xiaodiao serves as a bridge between generations, enabling young learners to connect with the past through musical storytelling. One folk singer noted that Xiaodiao songs are “living documents” of northern Shaanxi’s rural history, reflecting the struggles and aspirations of local communities. Through Xiaodiao literacy, students gain insight into agricultural life, traditional customs, and historical events, ensuring that these cultural elements remain relevant despite rapid modernization.

Beyond historical transmission, Xiaodiao literacy strengthens linguistic and musical competencies, reinforcing cultural identity. Informants highlighted that the preservation of regional dialects within Xiaodiao lyrics is crucial for linguistic literacy, as it enables younger generations to engage with traditional expressions and pronunciation. A music educator observed that Xiaodiao lyrics introduce students to poetic language, metaphorical expressions, and tonal variations unique to northern Shaanxi. Similarly, musical literacy is enhanced through Xiaodiao’s use of the C Zhi pentatonic scale, which serves as an accessible framework for understanding traditional Chinese melodic structures. One informant, a composer and folk music researcher, explained that the repetitive phrasing and melodic contours in Xiaodiao help students develop an intuitive grasp of rhythm, phrasing, and tonal progression. By incorporating Xiaodiao into formal music education, students not only gain technical skills but also cultivate an appreciation for their region’s artistic traditions.

Despite its educational significance, the study found that Xiaodiao literacy faces several challenges in contemporary cultural transmission. Informants noted that younger generations increasingly favor mainstream popular music over folk traditions, leading to a decline in interest in Xiaodiao. Additionally, the lack of structured teaching materials and standardized curricula limits its integration into schools, making it difficult for educators to systematically incorporate Xiaodiao into music or language lessons. A scholar specializing in northern Shaanxi folk music expressed concern that, without institutional support, Xiaodiao risks being marginalized in cultural education programs. Furthermore, limited government funding for folk music preservation hinders the development of comprehensive educational initiatives. To address these challenges, educators and cultural heritage practitioners must advocate for the inclusion of Xiaodiao in national education policies, develop engaging pedagogical approaches, and leverage digital platforms to enhance accessibility. Through strategic efforts, Xiaodiao literacy can continue to serve as a vital tool for cultural transmission, ensuring the preservation and appreciation of northern Shaanxi’s rich musical heritage.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of Xiaodiao folk song literacy in cultural heritage education, reinforcing its significance as both a musical and linguistic tool for preserving intangible cultural heritage. The study reveals that Xiaodiao serves as more than just a musical expression; it functions as a vehicle for oral history, cultural identity, and educational engagement. The research aligns with Cultural Transmission Theory, which emphasizes the role of traditions in passing down knowledge through intergenerational learning (Guo et al., 2020; Shi & Nicolas, 2023). Informants indicated that Xiaodiao is deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of northern Shaanxi communities, encapsulating historical narratives, ethical values, and regional dialects within its lyrical and melodic structures. This supports prior studies on folk music literacy, which argue that traditional songs are critical in preserving historical consciousness and reinforcing linguistic heritage (Broomhead, 2018; Norton & Matsumoto, 2018). However, the study also identifies challenges in sustaining Xiaodiao literacy, particularly in the face of modernization and shifting cultural preferences, raising concerns about its long-term viability.

Despite the educational value of Xiaodiao, the study found that its transmission is increasingly hindered by a lack of structured teaching resources and the diminishing presence of traditional folk musicians. These findings are consistent with research on folk music preservation, which suggests that traditional oral transmission methods are no longer sufficient in the digital age (Howard, 2016; Campbell et al., 2016). While Xiaodiao has historically been passed down through informal performance settings, the decline of these communal traditions necessitates new pedagogical approaches. The study’s findings support the Heritage Education Theory, which argues that formal educational institutions must actively engage in the preservation

and promotion of cultural heritage (Yan & Chiou, 2021). Informants suggested that integrating Xiaodiao literacy into primary and secondary school curricula could provide students with structured exposure to folk music, reinforcing both linguistic and musical literacy. However, existing educational frameworks in China largely prioritize Western classical music over traditional genres, presenting a barrier to the systematic incorporation of Xiaodiao in formal learning environments (Bond, 2017; Wang & Thotham, 2024).

The study also highlights the potential of digital technology as a means of revitalizing Xiaodiao literacy and engaging younger audiences. Informants noted that younger generations are increasingly drawn to contemporary music genres, making it essential to adapt folk music pedagogy to align with modern learning preferences. This is consistent with the Multiliteracies Approach, which advocates for integrating visual, auditory, and digital learning tools into music education (Chan, 2018; Qu & Xiao, 2020). Digital archives, interactive learning apps, and online Xiaodiao workshops could serve as effective platforms for enhancing accessibility and engagement. Similar findings have been documented in research on folk music education, where digital tools have successfully expanded access to traditional music resources (Bauer, 2020; Shi, 2021). Nevertheless, a significant challenge remains in ensuring the authenticity of digital adaptations, as excessive modernization may dilute the traditional essence of Xiaodiao (Meng Zhang, 2024). Future studies should explore how digital platforms can balance authenticity with innovation to effectively transmit Xiaodiao in contemporary educational settings.

While this study contributes to the discourse on folk music literacy, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted within a specific cultural and geographical context Yanchuan County, Shaanxi Province which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other regions with different folk traditions. Additionally, the study's qualitative approach, while rich in depth, could benefit from complementary quantitative analysis to measure the effectiveness of Xiaodiao literacy programs. Future research should explore comparative studies between Xiaodiao and other regional folk music traditions to assess the universality of folk song literacy as an educational tool. Moreover, longitudinal studies examining the impact of Xiaodiao literacy initiatives on student engagement and cultural awareness would provide further insights into its pedagogical value.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of Xiaodiao folk song literacy in cultural heritage education, promoting historical awareness, linguistic preservation, and musical appreciation. However, challenges in its transmission necessitate innovative educational strategies. Integrating Xiaodiao into formal curricula and using digital tools can ensure its sustainability as a living tradition. Structured Xiaodiao literacy programs should be incorporated into primary and secondary school curricula, integrating music education with history and language studies. Government-supported initiatives, such as folk song training workshops and collaborations with local artists, can further reinforce its educational impact. Interdisciplinary collaboration among

educators, ethnomusicologists, and cultural heritage practitioners is crucial for preserving traditional music. Schools can partner with cultural organizations and universities to create Xiaodiao heritage projects, ensuring Xiaodiao remains an evolving, participatory art form.

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