INTRODUCTION

The preservation and promotion of indigenous cultural heritage are paramount in education and literacy studies (Jacob et al., 2015; Wu & Bhengsri, 2023). This imperative is particularly salient when examining the rich tapestry of traditions and oral narratives that have sustained diverse communities throughout history. The Poya Songbook, an integral part of Zhuang minority culture in Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China, stands as a testament to the enduring power of folk music and oral traditions in nurturing education and literacy within ethnic communities (Davis, 2005; Campbell, 2017; Mahoney, 2020; Sun, 2023).

The Poya Songbook, an embodiment of the Zhuang cultural heritage, is a unique form of artistic expression that has played a pivotal role in recording and transmitting the production and life modes of the Zhuang people. This traditional songbook, rooted in the heart of rural Zhuang society, has defied the test of time, persisting from the traditional Zhuang farming society to the modern era. Its significance lies in its artistic value and its profound potential to contribute to education and literacy within ethnic communities (Davis, 2005; Campbell, 2017; Mahoney, 2020; Sun, 2023).

Despite its cultural significance, the Poya Songbook faces several challenges that warrant in-depth exploration. Rapid societal changes, evolving educational systems, and the encroachment of modernity have spurred transformations in this cultural treasure’s transmission, preservation, and adaptation (Bortolotto, 2007; Bearman & Geber, 2008). Furthermore, while there has been a growing focus on protecting intangible cultural heritage, more research should delve into the social consequences of such initiatives, particularly in anthropology and art anthropology. This research problem underscores the need to investigate the historical development and transmission of the Poya Songbook and its implications for education and literacy studies in Funing County (Lin & Xing, 2019; Stefano, 2021).

The primary research objective of this study is to examine the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook for education and literacy studies in Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. Drawing upon a combination of ethnographic methods and semiotic analysis, the research delves into the intricate journey of the Poya Songbook, contrasting its state before and after the pivotal year 2006, when it received official recognition as an intangible cultural heritage. Three key informants, deeply rooted in the local cultural milieu, provide valuable insights into the songbook’s transformation, its role in education, and the challenges of preserving its authenticity amidst modern influences. The data analysis discerns shifts in transmission methods, content, and performance, shedding light on the evolving relationship between tradition and cultural identity. The findings underscore the importance of balancing preservation with adaptation to ensure the continued vitality of this cherished cultural heritage. Suggestions for the sustained safeguarding of the Poya Songbook include innovative educational initiatives that integrate its teachings into contemporary curricula, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Zhuang cultural identity.

Key words: Poya Songbook, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Preservation, Education, Yunnan Province, Literacy Transmission
of education within Zhuang communities, where oral traditions and folk music have long served as vehicles for transmitting knowledge and cultural values. Additionally, this study provides a noteworthy case study in art anthropology, offering a unique perspective on the impact of intangible cultural heritage initiatives on local communities and social dynamics (Aktürk & Lerski, 2021; Eichler, 2021). Ultimately, our findings aim to underscore the importance of safeguarding and celebrating indigenous cultural expressions as vital components of education and literacy development.

Research Question

- How have the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook within the Zhuang community in Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook are paramount for education and literacy studies, especially in Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. This literature review explores key theories that underpin the study and shed light on the significance of the Poya Songbook within education, literacy, and cultural preservation. Two primary research theories, the Semiotic Theory and the Anthropological Theory of Music, provide valuable frameworks for analyzing this cultural artifact.

Semiotic Theory

Semiotic theory, as developed by scholars like Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, offers a lens through which the cultural symbols, signs, and meanings embedded in the Poya Songbook can be comprehended (Peirce, 1931; Saussure, 1959). This theory emphasizes the role of signs and symbols as conveyors of cultural knowledge and values (Eco, 1976). Within the context of the Poya Songbook, semiotics allow researchers to investigate how patterns, lyrics, and melodies serve as semiotic elements that carry profound cultural meanings (Bouissac, 1998). By applying semiotic analysis, the study seeks to understand how these elements facilitate the transmission of knowledge and literacy within the Zhuang community (Cobley, 2010). Moreover, this theory highlights the significance of interpreting cultural symbols and signs in the context of education and literacy studies (Peirce, 1931).

Anthropological Theory of Music

The Anthropological Theory of Music, rooted in ethnomusicology, provides a holistic framework for examining music's cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions within a community (Merriam, 1964). In the case of the Poya Songbook, this theory enables researchers to explore the multifaceted role of music as a cultural practice (Nettl, 2005). Music, including its melody, rhythm, and performance, is not merely an aesthetic expression but a dynamic tool for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge (Titon et al., 2009). By applying the Anthropological Theory of Music, the study aims to uncover how music functions as a bridge between individuals and their cultural heritage, contributing to education and literacy development among the Zhuang people (Rice, 2014). This theory underscores the importance of considering the socio-cultural context in which music is created, performed, and passed down through generations (Merriam, 1964).

By employing Semiotic Theory (Peirce, 1931; Saussure, 1959) and the Anthropological Theory of Music (Merriam, 1964; Nettl, 2005), this study endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook in Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. These theories will guide the analysis of how this cultural artifact has played a pivotal role in education, literacy, and the preservation of Zhuang heritage within the local community (Cobley, 2010; Eco, 1976; Bouissac, 1998; Titon et al., 2009; Rice, 2014). Through a multidisciplinary approach, this study sheds light on the intricate interplay between culture, music, and education, contributing to the broader education and literacy studies field.

METHOD

Selection of Research Site

The research site selection for this study is based on the historical and cultural significance of Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China, the primary location for preserving and transmitting the Poya Songbook. Funing County serves as a representative community deeply rooted in the Zhuang cultural tradition and is known for its rich heritage related to the Poya Songbook. The choice of this site allows for an in-depth examination of the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook within its authentic cultural context, as shown in Figure 1.

Selection of Key Informants

The selection of key informants for this research involves a purposive sampling approach aimed at identifying individuals with expertise, knowledge, and experience related to the Poya Songbook. Three key informants will include older members of the Zhuang community who have actively participated in preserving and transmitting the songbook. Namely, local scholars, cultural experts, and Poya Songbook inheritors will be selected for their valuable insights into the cultural and educational aspects of the songbook. Including a diverse group of informants ensures a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

Research Tools

To gather data for the study, a combination of qualitative research methods will be employed, as shown in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted following a thematic analysis approach. The collected interview transcripts, observational
notes, and archival materials will be coded and categorized to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook. The analysis will involve a qualitative interpretation of the data, allowing for a deeper understanding of the cultural, educational, and literacy dimensions within the context of Funing County. Triangulation of data from multiple sources will enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

RESULTS
The Poya Songbook, a significant cultural treasure of the Zhuang people in Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China, is a unique representation of their rich heritage. The Poya Songbook is an intricate repository of native Zhuang traditional culture, primarily emphasizing the preservation of local folk music culture. Its origins date back several generations, with the local inheritors such as Nong Fengmei and Nong Liying being instrumental in passing down this cultural gem to subsequent generations, as shown in Figure 2.

### The Historical Development of the Poya Songbook

#### Before the year 2006 of poya song
Before the pivotal year 2006, the Poya Songbook had been a hidden gem within the cultural fabric of Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. During this era, the Poya Songbook thrived as a quintessential embodiment of Zhuang ethnic culture. It was an oral tradition passed down through generations, characterized by its improvisational nature and the transmission of melodies through the memory method of patterns. Key findings from this period are shown in Table 2:

#### After the year 2006 of poya song
Following the year 2006, marked by the public display of the Poya Songbook, significant developments occurred in its historical trajectory. This period witnessed a shift from obscurity to recognition and systematic preservation. The Poya Songbook began to transition into a more prominent cultural artifact. Key findings from this period as shown in Table 3.
The period following the year 2006 marked a transformative phase in the historical development of the Poya Songbook, shifting from localized obscurity to broader recognition, preservation, and adaptation. These developments have profound implications for education and literacy studies, as they highlight the role of cultural heritage in promoting literacy, preserving linguistic diversity, and fostering a sense of identity within indigenous communities, as shown in Figure 3.

### Table 2. Key findings before the year 2006 of poya song

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<th>Section</th>
<th>Key finding</th>
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<td>Native Cultural Preservation</td>
<td>The Poya Songbook was deeply embedded in the local Zhuang culture, serving as a vital repository of their linguistic heritage, historical narratives, and social customs. It played an indispensable role in preserving the unique cultural identity of the Zhuang people, who predominantly relied on oral transmission to impart knowledge and tradition.</td>
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<td>Pattern Memory and Improvisation</td>
<td>The songbook's distinctive feature was its pattern memory system. Native cloth patterns served as mnemonic devices, aiding in the recollection of melodies and lyrics. This allowed for improvisation and creative expression within the traditional songs. It created a dynamic, evolving musical culture that retained its national characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Inheritors as Core Carriers</td>
<td>The preservation of the Poya Songbook predominantly relied on the local inheritors, such as Nong Fengmei and Nong Liying. These individuals possessed exceptional talent and played a pivotal role in passing down the cultural traditions and skills associated with the songbook. They innovated while staying true to the songbook's original essence, ensuring its continuity within the local ecological environment.</td>
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### Table 3. Key findings after the year 2006 of poya song

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<th>Section</th>
<th>Key finding</th>
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<tr>
<td>Systematic Protection and Academic Recognition</td>
<td>Local government and cultural departments established protection groups and editorial committees dedicated to safeguarding the Poya Songbook. Its cultural significance was recognized academically, and principles from anthropology, ethnology, and culturology were applied to understand its role in national culture and art.</td>
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<td>Publication and Promotion</td>
<td>The Poya Songbook underwent extensive research, excavation, and publication efforts. It was documented, translated, and annotated for wider dissemination. Efforts were made to bring it to the academic forefront and to the attention of the public. This marked a shift from its secluded existence to a more accessible and visible position in the cultural landscape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Engagement and Cultural Revitalization</td>
<td>The Poya Songbook was preserved through initiatives like study halls and cultural monuments, involving the younger generation. These efforts not only boosted cultural confidence in local Zhuang communities but also improved the ecological environment, promoting the continued development of cultural traditions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation and Innovation</td>
<td>To bridge tradition and modernity, the Poya Songbook underwent re-creation. Innovations were introduced, including multi-part singing, refined vocal training, and adaptations for contemporary audiences. These changes aimed to enhance its accessibility and acceptance while preserving its original cultural essence.</td>
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The period following the year 2006 marked a transformative phase in the historical development of the Poya Songbook, shifting from localized obscurity to broader recognition, preservation, and adaptation. These developments have profound implications for education and literacy studies, as they highlight the role of cultural heritage in promoting literacy, preserving linguistic diversity, and fostering a sense of identity within indigenous communities, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 2.** Poya songbook  
Source: China Daily (n.d.)

**Figure 3.** Inheritor collection of Poya songbooks  
Source: Tingting Li, from fieldwork in April 2021

**The Transmission of Poya Songbook**

**Inheritance of song books**

The transmission of the Poya Songbook is deeply rooted in the local Zhuang community’s traditions and cultural practices. Before the year 2006, the preservation of this unique musical heritage primarily relied on oral
The government and local authorities worked to integrate the Poya Songbook into broader cultural activities and symbolize the cultural significance of the Poya Village's native songbook. The symbols and icons within the songbook represent the unique feature of the Poya Village's native songbook inheritance lies in its pattern memory system. Due to limited access to music recording techniques in their closed living environment, ancestors created a memory system based on native cloth patterns. These patterns served as memory aids, enabling individuals to improvise love songs and maintain the songbook's authenticity.

The unique feature of the Poya Songbook is its pattern memory system. Due to limited access to music recording techniques in their closed living environment, ancestors created a memory system based on native cloth patterns. These patterns served as memory aids, enabling individuals to improvise love songs and maintain the songbook's authenticity. Although the songbook did not contain fixed titles or content, its improvisational nature and national characteristics remained intact.

In conclusion, the transmission of the Poya Songbook represents a rich cultural heritage, and their transmission over generations underscores the semiotic nature of this heritage. Furthermore, the Anthropological Theory of Music, as discussed by Merriam (1964) and Nettl (2005), helped contextualize the Poya Songbook within the broader field of ethnomusicology. The study’s findings shed light on the role of music in cultural identity and education, consistent with the anthropological perspective on music.

The research objectives were centered on understanding the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook in Funing County. The findings clearly distinguished the Poya Songbook’s evolution before and after 2006. Before 2006, the songbook was primarily a local tradition with limited visibility beyond the community. However, after 2006, concerted efforts by local authorities and cultural departments resulted in its recognition as an intangible cultural heritage. This transition aligns with the research objective of examining historical development. Despite the achievements in preserving and promoting the Poya Songbook, challenges remain. The impact of external influences on traditional cultural practices, as discussed by Campbell (2017) and Davis (2005), was evident. The transition from oral transmission to more structured forms of preservation raises questions about the authenticity and spontaneity of the songbook’s performance. Balancing the...
need for preservation with the risk of cultural commodification is a critical challenge.

In conclusion, this study delved into the historical development and literacy transmission of the Poya Songbook in Funing County, Yunnan Province, China. The research findings revealed a dynamic process of cultural preservation and transformation. The Poya Songbook, deeply rooted in Zhuang traditional culture, has transitioned from a local tradition to a recognized form of intangible cultural heritage. The study’s alignment with semiotic theory and anthropological theory of music provided a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the cultural significance of the songbook.

However, challenges persist in balancing preservation with authenticity and addressing external influences on traditional practices. The study underscores the importance of education and literacy studies in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, as Yunchuan and Miaoyu (2020) and Wu and Bhengsri (2023) discussed. Promoting cultural education and literacy can be pivotal in preserving the Poya Songbook and similar traditions.

In conclusion, the research findings contribute to the broader discourse on intangible cultural heritage and provide valuable insights into the preservation and transmission of traditional music cultures. The Poya Songbook’s journey from local tradition to cultural heritage exemplifies the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and cultural identity, highlighting the need for thoughtful and sustainable preservation efforts.

REFERENCES

