

Integrating Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into Education for Cultural Protection and Literacy Development

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ABSTRACT

Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, a traditional Chinese performing art rooted in Hubei Province's cultural heritage, embodies intricate shadow play, music, and storytelling. This research aims to explore the efficacy of integrating Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into education for cultural protection and literacy development among students. Conducted in Qianjiang City, the birthplace of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, the study employs a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on ethnomusicology, historical theory, and the anthropology of music. Two key informants, selected for their expertise and local cultural ties, provide insights into the historical development, artistic characteristics, and cultural resilience of this shadow puppetry. Through a meticulous analysis of historical aspects, artistic features, props, and cultural practices, the research uncovers the rich tapestry of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry. Findings suggest that despite challenges such as declining popularity and economic factors, the art form has persisted, showcasing adaptability through reforms and innovations. Recommendations include curriculum development, community engagement, and awareness initiatives to strengthen the role of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry in literacy programs and cultural preservation.

Key words: Chinese Shadow Puppetry, Preservation, Literacy Development, Performing Arts, Education Integration

INTRODUCTION

Shadow puppetry, an ancient and captivating form of traditional Chinese performing arts, holds profound cultural significance, weaving tales of history, folklore, and artistic expression. Among its rich tapestries, Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry stands as a unique embodiment of Hubei Province's cultural heritage. This research delves into the exploration and integration of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into education, aiming to contribute to cultural protection and literacy development (Xia et al., 2023).

Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, originating in Qianjiang City, Hubei Province, has deep roots in the region's cultural history. Recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage, it encapsulates the essence of local traditions, offering a unique blend of artistic expression through shadow play, music, and storytelling (Liu & Hu, 2021; Tang, 2021). However, like many traditional art forms, Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry faces challenges in the modern era, with the risk of fading into obscurity. Recognizing its cultural significance, this research endeavors to explore innovative ways to preserve and promote this ancient art form (Yao, 2021; Duan & Choatchamrat, 2023; He & Sornyai, 2023; Wu & Bhengsri, 2023).

The research site is strategically chosen in Qianjiang City, Hubei Province, the birthplace, and cultural nucleus of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry. Qianjiang City serves as the backdrop for the original performances, preserving the oldest music and maintaining the most traditional performance modes (Thrasher, 1981; Tian, 2021). The declaration of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006 solidified Qianjiang City's status as a bastion for this art form. The city not only hosts shadow puppet performances in daily life and festivals but also boasts a community with a broad mass base and a profound cultural foundation (Rollins, 2019; Zhao, 2021; Han & Li, 2023).

In the face of modernization and evolving cultural landscapes, Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry confronts the challenge of sustaining its relevance and appeal (Guo, 2006). The decline in traditional art appreciation, coupled with changing entertainment preferences, poses a threat to the vitality of this cherished cultural gem. As such, the research problem centers on exploring ways to integrate Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into educational frameworks, envisioning a strategy that aligns cultural preservation with literacy development. The primary objective of this study is to explore the efficacy of integrating Jiang Han Ping Yuan

Shadow Puppetry into education for cultural protection and literacy development among students (Chen, 2007; Baker, 2013; Hatzigianni et al., 2016; Wang, 2023).

This paper unfolds in several sections, beginning with a review of relevant theories such as ethnomusicology, historical theory, and the anthropology of music, establishing a theoretical foundation for the research. The subsequent section details the existing literature related to Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, providing insights into prior studies and perspectives. The heart of the research lies in the methodology section, outlining the research scope, process, and tools. The findings are presented through interviews, observations, and questionnaires, contributing to an in-depth understanding of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry (Nettl & Bohlman, 1991; Merriam, 2013; Berger & Stone, 2019).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the gap between traditional cultural art forms and contemporary educational practices. By integrating Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into education, the study aims to not only safeguard cultural heritage but also enhance literacy skills among students, fostering a holistic approach to education that intertwines cultural preservation with academic development (Erjian & Chuangprakhon, 2023; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023). As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, this research seeks to illuminate a path where tradition and education harmoniously coexist, ensuring the legacy of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry endures for generations to come.

Research Question

- How is Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry integrated into education for cultural protection and literacy development among students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature surrounding Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry provides a rich tapestry of insights, shedding light on the historical, cultural, and artistic dimensions of this traditional Chinese performing art. The following review synthesizes key studies that have delved into the unique characteristics, challenges, and cultural significance of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, culminating in an understanding of its integration into educational frameworks.

Historical Perspective

Liu's (2020) exploration of digital protection for Hubei Province's shadow puppets lays the groundwork for understanding the historical context of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry. Highlighting its designation as a national intangible cultural heritage, Liu emphasizes the need for innovative approaches in the contemporary era. Yang's (2009) examination of the traditional characteristics and modern innovations of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry provides historical context, tracing its roots and evolution. Yang underscores the importance of adapting to contemporary needs while preserving the essence of this ancient art form.

Xu's (2017) historical analysis of the Ming and Qing Dynasties elucidates the unprecedented development of shadow puppets during this period, emphasizing the cultural amalgamation that gave rise to the unique style of Hubei Province shadow puppetry. Kang's (2010) documentation of Buddhism and the development of Chinese shadow puppetry, set the stage for understanding Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry within the larger context of Chinese cultural heritage.

Integration into Contemporary Education

The literature review extends beyond the confines of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry itself to encompass studies related to the music culture of Hubei Province. Yu's (1997) *Mayong* and shadow play in traditional Malay music, provided a backdrop for the integration of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into contemporary education.

Jonathan and Beverley's (2022) guide to ethnomusicology ethics and research signals the importance of ethical considerations in researching traditional art forms, offering a framework for responsible and culturally sensitive inquiry. These collective works lay the foundation for the current study, framing the exploration of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry's integration into education for cultural protection and literacy development.

Research Gaps and Significance

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the historical and artistic dimensions of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, there is a noticeable gap concerning its integration into contemporary education. The significance of this study lies in bridging this gap and envisioning a future where traditional art forms like shadow puppetry actively contribute to cultural preservation and literacy development in educational settings. As the literature review has demonstrated, Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry is not only a cultural artifact but a living tradition, and its integration into education could serve as a beacon for the revitalization of traditional arts in the modern age.

Research Theory

The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating key theories from ethnomusicology, historical theory, and the anthropology of music. These theoretical frameworks collectively inform an in-depth exploration of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, its cultural significance, historical evolution, and potential educational integration.

1. **Ethnomusicology:** Focuses on understanding music within its cultural and social contexts. Emphasizes ethical considerations in research and analysis. Analyzes musical elements, performance styles, and socio-cultural contexts of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry. Explores the role of music in cultural practices and its evolution over time (Berger & Stone, 2019).
2. **Historical Theory:** Examines the historical evolution and development of cultural practices and art forms.

Explores the impact of historical events on the trajectory of cultural elements Traces the origins and historical milestones of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry. Explores its resilience, adaptation, and continuity through different historical periods (Merriam, 2013).

3. Anthropology of Music: Studies the cultural and social aspects of music, focusing on its roles in community practices, rituals, and identity formation. Explores how music reflects and shapes societal structures Investigates the social functions of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry within local communities. Explores its contribution to cultural identity and community cohesion (Nettl & Bohlman, 1991).

METHOD

Selection of Research Site

The research site selection is a pivotal step in ensuring a comprehensive understanding of Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry. Qianjiang City, Hubei Province, stands as a cradle for this traditional art form, offering a rich cultural backdrop and historical relevance, as shown in Table 1.

Selection of Key Informants

The two key informants play a critical role in providing first-hand insights into Jiang Han Ping Yuan's shadow puppetry. Selected based on their expertise, longevity in the field, and deep-rooted connections to the local culture, these informants are essential witnesses and practitioners, as shown in Table 2.

Research Tools

The utilization of observation forms, interview forms, and questionnaires serves as fundamental research tools in gathering diverse and comprehensive data regarding Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry. Each tool offers unique avenues to collect, analyze, and interpret information, as shown in Table 3.

Steps to Data Analysis

The process of data analysis forms the backbone of the research, allowing for the systematic interpretation and synthesis of collected information. This section delineates the steps involved in handling and interpreting data, as shown in Table 4.

RESULTS

Historical Development of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry

Concept of jiang han ping yuan shadow puppetry

An ancient traditional art, finds its roots in central and southern Hubei Province and is particularly popular in areas like Mianyang, Tianmen, Qianjiang, Jianli, Honghu, Jingshan, Gongan, and more. The art form shares consistent artistic characteristics across these regions, as shown in Figure 1.

Table 1. Criteria for the selection of a research site

Criteria	Rationale
Historical	Origin and cultural significance
Cultural	Preservation of traditional performance practices
Geographical	Central location in Hubei Province

Table 2. Criteria for the selection of key informants

Criteria	Rationale
Expertise & Experience	Comprehensive knowledge and extensive experience
Local Cultural Ties	Strong connections to the region's cultural heritage
Representativeness	Recognition and status within the puppetry community

Table 3. Research tools

Research Tools	Purpose
Observation Form	Capture historical aspects, performances, and relevant materials
Interview Form	Gather diverse perspectives from inheritors, artists, leaders, and enthusiasts
Questionnaire	Obtain structured insights on historical development, musical characteristics, and preservation strategies

Table 4. Steps to data analysis

Step	Descriptions
Data Organization	Categorization and structuring of collected data
Pattern Identification	Recognition of common themes and patterns
Comparative Analysis	Comparison between different data sets
Interpretation and Conclusion	Drawing insights and forming conclusions

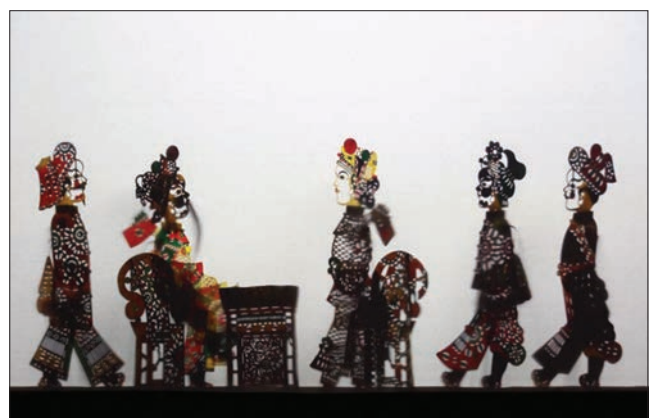


Figure 1. Simanchuge stills
Source: Haiteng Yu (fieldwork in March 2023)

Artistic characteristics of jiang han ping yuan shadow puppetry

Cultural Appreciation: Hubei shadow puppets enjoy widespread admiration for their finely crafted features, vivid shapes, graceful singing, and distinct primitive Chu culture style. As an integral part of Chinese shadow puppetry, Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry carries regional characteristics. Its singing styles during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties encompassed Han, Chu, Qin, and Sichuan, evolving into what became known as Danxi shadow puppetry. During the Ming-to-Qing transition, the Qianjiang and Mianyang regions developed unique aesthetics in shadow puppetry, performance, language style, song tune, and Tongzi tune.

Musical Repertoire: The arias of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry predominantly consist of singing tunes and Yugu tunes. The “Jiming Tune” in the Song Tune Shadow Puppetry, originating from the “Songs Besieged on All Sides” of Chu State in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, stands as a “living fossil” in traditional Chinese music. With roots in beggar songs, Yuguqiang boasts various modes and strong local flavor, resulting in a repertoire of up to 300 pieces. During performances, artists dynamically develop plots and portray characters, integrating singing, acting, reading, and fighting into the unique art form.

Props and stage of jiang han ping yuan shadow puppetry

Shadow Puppetry Props: For a successful performance, a shadow puppetry troupe must possess a complete set of props, including a Dan box divided into two large wooden boxes for holding shadow puppetry and supporting tools. Essential elements include three small boxes—the head box, dressing up the first positive character, dressing down the first negative character, and a girl role—all with corresponding heads. A shadow puppetry performance requires a complete set of shadows, with a minimum of 50 and ideally 70, with each puppet having three matching heads to convey dramatic roles.

Operational Techniques: Manipulating shadow puppets requires strict adherence to rules. While laymen find it amusing, experts emphasize the importance of specific postures aligning with the character’s identity, age, and emotions. Different postures for standing, walking, sitting, and lying contribute to the nuanced portrayal of characters on the puppetry screen.

Stage Setting: The stage’s most crucial prop is a curtain shelf—a wooden frame wedged into a rectangular frame with an empty transparent white curtain for shadow puppetry display. Historical lighting settings using oil lamps evolved into electric lamps, and contemporary performances feature additional audio equipment, including amplifiers, loudspeakers, and microphones, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Folk culture of jiang han ping yuan shadow puppetry

Cultural Resilience: Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, a folk art handed down through generations, remains popular across urban alleys, mountains, rivers, and plains—a



Figure 2. Backstage
Source: Haiteng Yu (fieldwork in March 2023)



Figure 3. On stage
Source: Haiteng Yu (fieldwork in March 2023)

cherished local play for people of all ages. Despite advancements in contemporary entertainment, shadow puppets continue to be an indispensable cultural and entertainment element in the lives of folk people in Hubei.

Cultural Practices: The art form has created numerous fine works, embodying the industrious, brave, and unyielding spirit of the Chinese people, spreading through the ages. Rooted in ancient traditions, shadow puppetry intertwines with folk religious beliefs and customs, particularly in temple fairs and community village meetings. These customs involve thanking gods through shadow puppetry performances, preserving cultural richness, and expressing gratitude.

Sacrificial Rituals: Every year, during the season of offering sacrifices to the gods, people invite shadow puppetry performers to showcase their art, symbolizing a plea for good weather, bountiful harvests, and overall good fortune. The process of villages scrambling for the shadow puppetry box during these occasions underscores the cultural enthusiasm and competition for cultural richness.

In summary, this study explores the Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry, an ancient traditional art form from central and southern Hubei Province. Originating from the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, it features finely crafted features, vibrant shapes, and graceful singing. The art form includes singing tunes and Yugu tunes, with up to 300 pieces. Props

and techniques are essential for successful performances, and the art is deeply intertwined with religious beliefs and customs. Despite modern advancements, it remains an integral part of Hubei's cultural entertainment.

Protection and Promotion Strategies for Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry

Factors affecting development

The decline of Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry is attributed to shifts in social values. The traditional art form, deeply rooted in historical narratives and cultural expressions, encounters challenges in adapting to contemporary culture. Factors such as reduced audience numbers, declining troupes, and an incongruence with modern youth's aesthetic preferences contribute to the art form's waning popularity.

1. **Creator's Perspective:** Artists face challenges aligning creative inspiration with evolving aesthetics and cultural trends.
2. **Economic Factors:** Improved living standards lead to diversified entertainment choices, impacting the demand for shadow puppetry.
3. **Cultural Mismatch:** The grassroots nature of shadow puppetry contrasts with the artistic preferences of today's youth, hindering resonance.

Evolution of troupes

The organizational structure of shadow puppet theater troupes has undergone significant changes. Originally private, voluntary entities, troupes faced challenges with leadership and sustainability. Economic difficulties led artists to explore alternative industries, contributing to the gradual decline of shadow puppetry in the face of new technologies and entertainment forms.

1. **Shift in Dynamics:** The Folk Shadow Puppet Association, initially a mass organization, faced leadership challenges.
2. **Economic Impact:** Market forces and financial constraints led artists to leave collective troupes for alternative industries.
3. **Technological Influence:** The advent of film, television, and new entertainment options posed challenges to traditional shadow puppetry.

Reform and innovation

To counteract the challenges, artists and troupes-initiated reforms and innovations, injecting new life into Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry. These efforts included the incorporation of Yugu Qiang's singing style, adapting plays to contemporary aesthetics, and enriching the repertoire and singing styles.

1. **Form Transformation:** Traditional narrative styles shifted to speaking styles, attracting increased audience engagement.
2. **Repertoire Expansion:** Lengthier tracks and captivating stories adapted from romance novels and legends enhanced audience interest.

3. **Singing Style Enrichment:** New tones emerged, combining original singing tunes with influences from folk songs and music.

Successor cultivation

Recognizing the critical need for succession, artists actively sought to cultivate new generations of shadow puppetry performers. Despite challenges in attracting apprentices, the persistence of shadow puppet artists in passing on their skills to family members has contributed to the continuation of the art form.

1. **Stringent Requirements:** Artistic stunts demand high proficiency in voice, literary creation, quick thinking, and stable personalities.
2. **Diminished Interest:** The younger generation exhibits less interest in and understanding of shadow puppetry, posing challenges for succession.

Growth of theater organizations

Since 1950, the number of shadow puppet troupes in Hubei has grown, playing a crucial role in the art form's promotion. Regional troupes, such as those in Tianmen and Xiantao, have significantly contributed to the cultural enrichment of their communities through innovative plays and performances.

1. **Tianmen Troupe Growth:** Over the decades, the number of troupes in Tianmen has multiplied, indicating sustained interest and engagement.
2. **Xiantao's Artistic Contributions:** Xiantao City's shadow puppetry team led in creating traditional and modern plays, earning recognition, and spreading cultural enjoyment across Hubei.
3. **Cultural Policymaking:** The findings emphasize the importance of informing cultural policymakers and institutions about the challenges faced by Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry, necessitating tailored support and recognition.
4. **Community Engagement:** The research underscores the need for actionable steps in community engagement to revive interest, enhance awareness, and ensure the continued protection and promotion of this traditional art form.

Integration of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into Education

The research delves into the untapped potential of integrating Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into educational frameworks, aiming to contribute to cultural preservation and literacy development. As an ancient traditional art form deeply rooted in Hubei Province's cultural heritage, shadow puppetry presents a unique opportunity to enrich educational experiences and foster a deeper understanding of cultural traditions among students.

Examination of existing educational initiatives

The study meticulously examines current educational initiatives that incorporate Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow

puppetry. These initiatives range from informal presentations by shadow puppet artists to more structured curriculum integration. The findings reveal the diverse methods used to introduce students to this cultural treasure, with some institutions adopting comprehensive modules to integrate shadow puppetry across various subjects, as shown in Figure 4.

Perspectives from educators, students, and community members

Insights gathered from educators, students, and community members offer a multifaceted view of the integration's impact. Educators acknowledge the potential for increased cultural understanding and engagement, while students often express enthusiasm for the visually captivating and interactive nature of shadow puppetry. Community members recognize the educational value of preserving traditional arts for future generations.

Identification of challenges and opportunities

The research brings to light both challenges and opportunities tied to integrating Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry into education. Challenges include potential resistance to unconventional teaching methods and the necessity for specialized training for educators. Opportunities arise in fostering creativity, instilling cultural pride, and providing a dynamic platform for literacy development, all of which align with the strengths of shadow puppetry.

Recommendations for curriculum development

In light of the findings, the research proposes specific recommendations for curriculum development. This may involve creating standardized modules that seamlessly integrate shadow puppetry into subjects like history, language arts, and performing arts. Furthermore, the research suggests offering professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their ability to incorporate this traditional art form effectively.



Figure 4. Elementary school students learn shadow puppetry
Source: Haiteng Yu (fieldwork in March 2023)

Strengthening the role of jiang han ping yuan shadow puppetry in literacy programs

The research underscores the potential for Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry to significantly contribute to literacy programs. By leveraging its storytelling and visual elements, shadow puppetry can make learning more engaging and culturally enriching. This implies the need for collaborations between educational institutions and cultural preservation bodies to design and implement effective literacy programs that integrate shadow puppetry.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Consistent with the theoretical principles of ethnomusicology, historical theory, and the anthropology of music, the study successfully contextualizes Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry within its cultural and social dimensions. Ethnomusicological insights guide the analysis of musical elements, performance styles, and socio-cultural contexts (Berger & Stone, 2019). Historical theory is applied to trace the origins and milestones of shadow puppetry, exploring its resilience and adaptation over time (Merriam, 2013). The anthropology of music framework illuminates the cultural and social aspects of the art form, emphasizing its role in community practices and identity formation (Nettl & Bohlman, 1991). The consistent alignment with these theoretical perspectives strengthens the theoretical foundation of the study.

The literature review presents a comprehensive survey of scholarly works, tracing the historical evolution of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry and its cultural roots. Key studies by Liu (2020), Yang (2009), and Xu (2017) contribute valuable insights into the historical context, traditional characteristics, and the amalgamation of cultural elements that define this unique art form. The integration of broader studies on Hubei Province's music culture and ethical considerations in ethnomusicology (Yu, 1997; Jonathan & Beverley, 2022) enriches the contextual understanding, emphasizing the need for responsible inquiry.

The research results align with the existing literature, providing a nuanced understanding of Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry's challenges and cultural significance. The factors affecting its development, evolution of troupes, reform efforts, and successor cultivation resonate with the broader discourse on the preservation of traditional arts in the face of modern challenges (Tang, 2021; Rollins, 2019). The emphasis on community engagement and cultural policymaking is consistent with the need for collaborative efforts to ensure the survival of cultural heritage (He & Sornyai, 2023).

In conclusion, the study makes a significant contribution to the understanding and preservation of Jiang Han Ping Yuan shadow puppetry. By synthesizing historical, cultural, and educational dimensions, the research not only illuminates the unique characteristics and challenges of this ancient art form but also proposes strategies for its protection and promotion. The integration of shadow puppetry into education emerges as a viable pathway for cultural preservation and literacy development. The research findings, supported by a robust methodological approach and consistent with

theoretical frameworks, pave the way for future endeavors aimed at revitalizing traditional arts in the modern age. As Jiang Han Ping Yuan Shadow Puppetry stands as a living tradition, its continued integration into education could serve as a beacon for the broader revitalization of traditional arts across diverse cultural landscapes.

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