

Promoting Education and Literacy through the Preservation of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs

Wenxing Wang, Narongruch Woramitmaitee*

College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Corresponding author: Narongruch Woramitmaitee, E-mail: narongruch.w@msu.ac.th

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ABSTRACT

Yongning River Boatman Work Songs are traditional folk music from the Yongning River region, performed by boatmen for practical purposes during laborious tasks. The study's objective is to investigate the promotion of education and literacy through the preservation of the Yongning River Boatman Work Song. Three key informants, including an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage, an academic expert, and a cultural heritage preservationist, provide comprehensive insights into this multifaceted topic. Data was analyzed thematically using a mixed-methods approach, including in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations. The findings highlight the transformative power of these songs as educational tools, bridging the past and present, fostering cultural identity, and enabling multifaceted learning. Additionally, community collaboration among local individuals, cultural centers, educational institutions, and government authorities plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting these songs. Successful initiatives for engaging the younger generation ensure the intergenerational transmission of this cultural heritage. This research suggests that cultural preservation, education, and community involvement are intertwined elements that can enrich education and enhance literacy while safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Key words: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Education, Literacy, Cultural Preservation, Community Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Music has always been vital in transmitting culture, history, and knowledge within societies. In education and literacy studies, the preservation and promotion of traditional music can be a powerful tool for enhancing educational experiences and literacy skills (Patterson, 2015; Campbell, 2017; Duan & Choatchamrat, 2023). This study delves into the fascinating world of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs, exploring their potential to promote education and literacy while safeguarding an essential aspect of intangible cultural heritage (Tzima et al., 2020; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

The Yongning River, a significant tributary of the upper Yangtze River in China, has been a historical crossroads for cultural exchange and trade among Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan Provinces (Mansfield & Walters, 2007; Kim, 2018; Pan, 2020). At its heart lies the tradition of boatman work songs, which once provided the rhythm and melody of the shipping industry along the Yongning River. These songs served as a form of entertainment and practical tools for coordinating laborious tasks during river transport (Cecelski, 2001; Jun, 2016; Yang, 2023).

The research background highlights the rich cultural heritage of the Yongning River and the endangered status of its

boatman work songs, while the research problem underscores the need to preserve and promote this cultural treasure in the context of education and literacy (Kim, 2019; Gao & Karin, 2023; Zhan & Hirunrux, 2023). However, the march of time and modern transportation methods have threatened the preservation of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs. As the older generations of boatmen, who were the primary custodians of this musical heritage, pass away, there is an urgent need to protect and promote these songs for the benefit of future generations (Weissman, 2006; Rahaman, 2015; Khan, 2017).

This study aims to investigate the promotion of education and literacy through the preservation of the Yongning River Boatman Work Song, which can contribute to the promotion of education and literacy. By examining these songs' historical, cultural, and educational significance, we aim to uncover how they can be harnessed as a valuable resource for enhancing educational experiences and literacy skills. This investigation will explore the methods and strategies employed to safeguard this intangible cultural heritage, ensuring its continued relevance in contemporary educational settings (Massing, 2018; Harmoko, 2021; Yan & Chiou, 2021).

In the following sections, we will delve deeper into the challenges faced in preserving Yongning River Boatman

Work Songs, the measures taken by various stakeholders, and proposed guidelines for promoting these songs in educational settings. Ultimately, this research seeks to illuminate the potential of cultural preservation to enrich education and enhance literacy, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the intersection between heritage and learning (Li, 2022; Shi & Nicolas, 2023).

Research Question

- How can the preservation and promotion of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs be effectively integrated into educational contexts to enhance literacy skills and promote cultural education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The preservation and promotion of traditional music, such as the Yongning River Boatman Work Songs, play a significant role in fostering education and literacy while safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This literature review explores the intersection of ethnomusicology, cultural heritage education, and their implications for promoting education and literacy through the preservation of traditional music.

Ethnomusicology as a Framework

Ethnomusicology, a multidisciplinary field, provides a robust framework for understanding traditional music's cultural, historical, and educational dimensions (Merriam, 1964; Hebert & McCollum, 2014). Previous research demonstrated that ethnomusicologists employ diverse methodologies, including fieldwork and interviews, to document and preserve traditional musical practices (Hood, 1982). This documentation is invaluable for preserving traditional music forms' historical and cultural significance. The study of ethnomusicology emphasizes the contextualization of music within its cultural milieu (Nettl, 2005). In the context of the Yongning River Boatman Work Songs, this perspective aids in comprehending how these songs were performed, their cultural meanings, and their role in the daily lives of boatmen. This knowledge enhances the preservation efforts and informs educational strategies.

Cultural Heritage Education and Literacy

Cultural heritage education is closely linked to literacy development and cultural awareness. UNESCO recognizes the importance of using cultural heritage as a tool for literacy and education (UNESCO, 2005). Traditional music, as an integral part of intangible cultural heritage, holds the potential to enhance literacy education.

The study has shown that exposure to traditional music and cultural practices positively impacts students' cultural awareness, engagement, and understanding (Titon, 2008). Integrating traditional music into educational curricula enriches the learning experience, making it culturally relevant and engaging for students. This aligns with the research

objective of investigating the promotion of education and literacy by preserving Yongning River Boatman Work Songs.

Implications for Study

This literature review underscores the significance of ethnomusicology and cultural heritage education in preserving and promoting traditional music like the Yongning River Boatman Work Songs. The research objective, to investigate the promotion of education and literacy through their preservation, aligns with the multidisciplinary approach of ethnomusicology and the educational benefits of cultural heritage preservation. The study explores how traditional music can be integrated into literacy education, enhancing cultural awareness and engagement among students. Drawing on ethnomusicology methodologies and insights, it seeks to document, analyze, and understand the cultural and educational aspects of the Yongning River Boatman Work Songs.

METHOD

Selection of Key Informants

Three key informants have been selected to provide comprehensive insights into the preservation and promotion of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs, as shown in Table 1.

Selection of Research Site

The research site for this study is Naxi District, Luzhou City, Sichuan Province, China. Naxi District is the birthplace of the Yongning River Boatman Work Songs and holds a rich cultural heritage related to this traditional music form. The selection of this site is crucial to investigate the promotion of education and literacy through the preservation of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs in its authentic cultural context, as shown in Figure 1.

Research Tools

The research employs a mixed-methods approach to gather and analyze data. The following research tools will be used, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Key informants

Key Informants	Description
1 st informant	Representative inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Sichuan Province; Personal experience with Yongning River Boatman Work Songs; Knowledge of historical, cultural, and educational aspects of songs
2 nd informant	Academic expert in music and Chinese language and literature, Scholarly insights on educational implications of preserving traditional music
3 rd informant	Involved in collecting and preserving information about Yongning River Boatman Work Songs, Practical role in safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting education

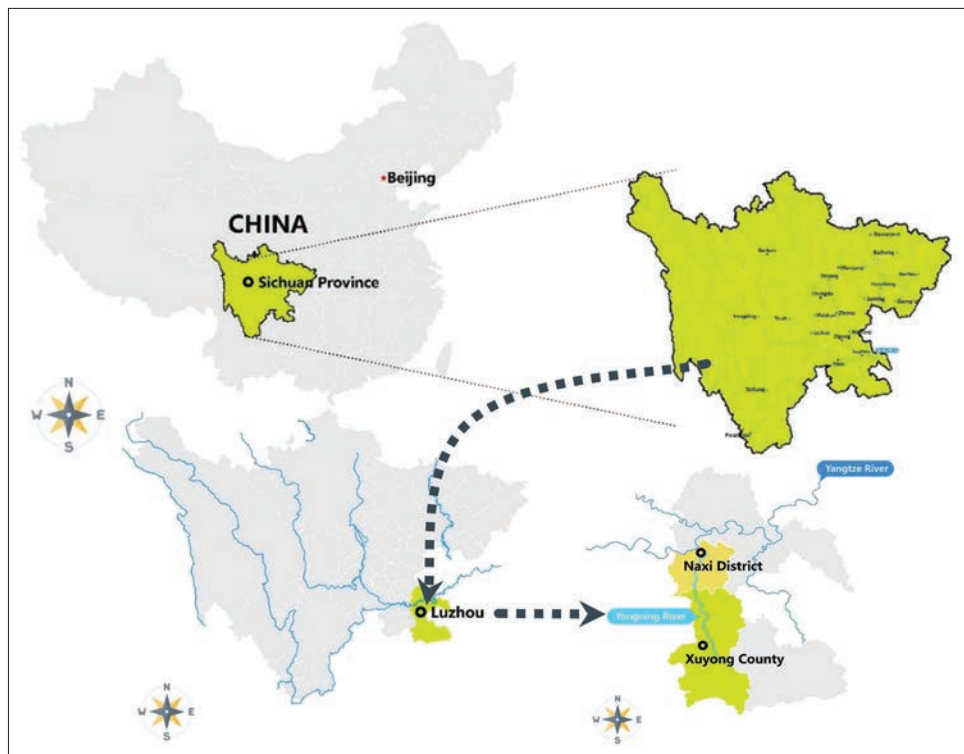


Figure 1. Map of research site
Source: Wenxing Wang, drawn in May 2022

Table 2. Research tools

Research Tools	Description
In-depth Interview	Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the key informants to gather qualitative data. These interviews will explore the historical, cultural, and educational aspects of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs. Detailed notes and audio recordings will be used for transcription and analysis.
Document Analysis	Relevant documents, publications, and records related to Yongning River Boatman Work Songs will be reviewed. This includes historical records, educational materials, and government initiatives. Document analysis will provide additional context and background information.
Observations	Observations of local cultural activities and events related to Yongning River Boatman Work Songs will be conducted to understand their role in promoting education and literacy. Field notes will be taken to document observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will follow a thematic approach. Qualitative data from interviews, document analysis, and observations will be transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes. These themes will revolve around the preservation, promotion, and educational aspects of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs. Comparative analysis will be conducted to identify patterns and relationships within the data.

RESULTS

The Yongning River is a crucial tributary of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, serving as a significant shipping channel connecting Yunnan Province and Guizhou Province. Originating from Jianshanzi, at the junction of southwest Luzhou City and Yunnan Province, the Yongning River has great geographical significance. It was one of the four major freight terminals during the Qing Dynasty, connecting Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan Provinces. Numerous ships constantly arrived and departed from this port, creating a bustling atmosphere. The dock witnessed the loading and unloading of cargo, with boatmen resting along the riverbank. The most heard Yongning River Boatman Work Songs in this area included “Zhuang Cang Hao Zi” and “Yan Bao Bao Hao Zi”, as shown in Figure 2.

Cultural Heritage as an Educational Tool for Preservation and Promotion

One of the pivotal findings of this research centers on the invaluable role played by Yongning River Boatman Work Songs as educational tools, facilitating a profound connection to cultural heritage. These songs, originating from the rich tapestry of the past, have transcended their historical context to become powerful instruments for education and cultural preservation.

These songs have found a new lease on life in education through meticulous preservation efforts and community engagement. This transformation has been characterized by the following key insights, as shown in Table 3.

The research underscores the transformative power of using Yongning River Boatman Work Songs as educational

Table 3. The critical finding of cultural heritage as an educational tool

Key findings	Description
Bridging Past and Present	Yongning River Boatman Work Songs offer a unique window into the region's cultural heritage. By immersing learners in these songs' melodies, lyrics, and stories, a bridge is built between the past and the present. This bridge allows for a deeper understanding of the historical, social, and economic contexts in which these songs originated.
Fostering Cultural Identity	Education through these songs has instilled knowledge and fostered a sense of cultural identity among learners. Students, young and old, have gained a renewed appreciation for their cultural roots and a sense of pride in their heritage.
Multifaceted Learning	These songs offer a multifaceted learning experience. Students learn about music and delve into history, language, and the traditional way of life along the Yongning River. The interdisciplinary nature of this educational approach enhances the depth of understanding.
Preservation Through Education	Teaching and learning these songs have inadvertently become an act of preservation itself. As new generations embrace the songs, their continued transmission and survival are secured.
Community Involvement	Schools, cultural centers, and local communities have played pivotal roles in using these songs as educational tools. Collaborative efforts among these stakeholders have not only revitalized the songs but have also fostered a stronger sense of community.

**Figure 2.** Yongning River, Xu Yong Dock

Source: Wenxing Wang, from fieldwork and drawn the map in March 2023

tools. These songs have deepened the connection to cultural heritage and become a testament to the enduring legacy of this rich tradition. Through education, these songs are not merely preserved; they are cherished, understood, and celebrated by new generations, as shown in Figure 3.

Community Collaboration for Preservation and Promotion

This topic discusses the importance of collaborative efforts involving local individuals, cultural centers, educational institutions, and government authorities in preserving and promoting these songs. The preservation and promotion of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs are not solitary endeavors but the result of collaborative initiatives that have brought together various stakeholders within the community. This section sheds light on the significance of community collaboration in conserving and propagating these cultural gems, as shown in Table 4.

**Figure 3.** Yongning River Boatman Work Songs Promotion Academy

Source: Wenxing Wang, from fieldwork and drawn the map in March 2023

In summary, the preservation and promotion of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs have been made possible through the involvement of local individuals, cultural centers, educational institutions, and government authorities. This collaborative approach has safeguarded these songs and fostered a more profound sense of community and cultural pride, as shown in Figure 4.

Intergenerational Learning for Preservation and Promotion

This topic focuses on successful initiatives aimed at engaging the younger generation, ensuring the continued

transmission of these songs, and enriching the cultural knowledge of the community. One of the critical factors in the preservation and promotion of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs is the active engagement of the younger generation. This section explores the strategies and initiatives that have successfully involved younger individuals, ensured the intergenerational transfer of these songs, and contributed to the cultural enrichment of the community (Table 5).

Successful initiatives to engage the younger generation have played a crucial role in preserving and promoting Yongning River Boatman Work Songs. Through formal

Table 4. The key finding of the community collaboration

Key findings	Description
Local Individuals	Local individuals are at the heart of the preservation efforts, particularly those who possess the knowledge and skills to perform these songs. The dedication of individuals like Mr. Shaowen Wang, a representative inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage, has been instrumental. His commitment to teaching and passing on these songs to younger generations exemplifies the importance of local expertise.
Cultural Centers	Cultural centers within the region have played a pivotal role in providing a platform for preserving these songs. For instance, the Naxi District Cultural Center has undertaken recording work, organized meetings, and collaborated with local residents to ensure the songs' continued existence. Their commitment highlights the role of cultural institutions in safeguarding cultural heritage.
Educational Institutions	Schools have embraced these songs as valuable educational tools. Educational institutions have facilitated intergenerational learning by incorporating them into curricula and extracurricular activities. Students have had the opportunity to engage with these songs, bridging the generation gap and ensuring their transmission to future generations.
Government Authorities	Government authorities at both provincial and local levels have recognized the importance of these songs as intangible cultural heritage. They have established projects, allocated resources, and standardized the management of representative projects, such as the Yongning River Boatman Work Songs. This government support has been crucial in ensuring the songs' continued protection and dissemination.
Collaborative Synergy	The synergy among these stakeholders has been remarkable. Collaborative meetings, data collection, and preservation efforts have thrived due to the combined dedication of local individuals, cultural centers, educational institutions, and government authorities. This collaborative spirit has not only preserved the songs but has also strengthened the sense of community within the region.

Table 5. The key finding of the intergenerational learning

Key findings	Description
Incorporation into School Curricula	Educational institutions have played a significant role in introducing these songs to the younger generation. By including Yongning River Boatman Work Songs in school curricula, students have had the opportunity to learn about and appreciate this cultural heritage. This integration into formal education has ensured that younger individuals have regular exposure to these songs.
Extracurricular Activities	Beyond formal education, extracurricular activities have been instrumental in engaging students. Schools and cultural centers have organized workshops, clubs, and events where students can actively participate in learning and performing these songs. These activities have not only enhanced cultural knowledge but have also encouraged a sense of belonging among the youth.
Instructorship by Inheritors	The inheritors of these songs, such as Mr. Shaowen Wang, have taken on the role of instructors for the younger generation. Their expertise and dedication in passing the songs to the youth have been invaluable. Personalized instruction and mentorship have fostered a deeper connection between the generations.
Digital Media and Technology	Recognizing the digital age preferences of younger individuals, efforts have been made to leverage technology. Audio and video recordings, online platforms, and social media have been used to disseminate the songs and engage with a tech-savvy audience. This approach has made the songs more accessible and relatable to younger learners.
Cultural Festivals and Events	Cultural festivals and events celebrating these songs have attracted the younger generation's participation. These occasions provide a platform for showcasing the songs in a vibrant and contemporary context, making them appealing to a broader audience. The lively atmosphere fosters a sense of enthusiasm and connection among attendees.
Interactions with Elders	Intergenerational learning has been further facilitated through interactions between younger individuals and elders who have preserved these songs. The exchange of knowledge, stories, and experiences has bridged the generation gap and ensured that the cultural heritage is passed on with authenticity.



Figure 4. The Staff members of the Naxi District Cultural Center have convened a meeting
Source: Wenxing Wang, from fieldwork and drawn the map in March 2023



Figure 5. Transmission to the local students during the instructional session
Source: Wenxing Wang, from fieldwork and drawn the map in March 2023

education, extracurricular activities, mentorship, technology, cultural events, and intergenerational interactions, the songs have found resonance among the youth, securing their continued transmission and enriching the community's cultural fabric, as shown in Figure 5.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study's first key finding highlighted the significant role of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs as educational tools, bridging the past and present, fostering cultural identity, enabling multifaceted learning, and inadvertently contributing to their preservation. This finding aligns with the theoretical principles discussed in the literature review regarding the educational potential of intangible cultural heritage (Duan & Choatchamrat, 2023; Kim, 2019). These songs have become powerful vehicles for transmitting historical, social, and economic knowledge of the region, consistent with the idea that cultural heritage can serve as a

means of education (UNESCO, 2005). The study also shows how education and preservation can become intertwined, emphasizing that teaching and learning these songs themselves contribute to their safeguarding.

Furthermore, the engagement of schools, cultural centers, and local communities in using these songs for educational purposes demonstrates the practical application of theories discussed in the literature (Shi & Nicolas, 2023). As highlighted in this study, collaboration among these stakeholders strengthens the sense of community and collective responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage (Massing, 2018). This finding is consistent with the notion that community involvement is vital for preserving intangible cultural heritage (Rahaman, 2015).

The second key finding regarding community collaboration emphasizes the crucial roles played by local individuals, cultural centers, educational institutions, and government authorities in preserving and promoting these songs. This collaborative approach echoes the literature's emphasis on multi-stakeholder involvement in safeguarding cultural heritage (Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023; Yan & Chiou, 2021). Local individuals' dedication and cultural institutions' support align with the idea that inheritors and cultural centers are critical for heritage preservation (Kim, 2018).

Government authorities' recognition of these songs as intangible cultural heritage and their role in standardizing management and providing resources reaffirms the importance of government support in cultural heritage protection (Gao & Karin, 2023). This aligns with the theoretical framework that emphasizes the significance of policy and institutional support in safeguarding cultural heritage (Kim, 2018; Rahaman, 2015).

The collaborative synergy observed in this study highlights the effectiveness of collective efforts in preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage, aligning with the theoretical framework emphasizing the benefits of collaborative initiatives (Yang, 2023). The study's findings underscore the importance of community engagement and the need for a multi-dimensional approach involving various stakeholders to ensure the long-term sustainability of cultural traditions.

The third key finding regarding intergenerational learning emphasizes the importance of incorporating songs into school curricula, organizing extracurricular activities, mentorship by inheritors, leveraging digital media, and hosting cultural events. These strategies have successfully engaged the younger generation and ensured the continued transmission of the songs. This aligns with the literature's emphasis on the role of education in preserving intangible cultural heritage (Tzima et al., 2020; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

Incorporating these songs into formal education and extracurricular activities reflects that educational institutions can act as crucial platforms for heritage transmission (Hood, 1982). The mentorship provided by inheritors highlights the significance of passing down knowledge from one generation to the next (Patterson, 2015). Digital media and technology use aligns with contemporary approaches to engage tech-savvy younger generations (Li, 2022).

Cultural festivals and events have attracted the younger generation, emphasizing the importance of presenting heritage in a contemporary and appealing manner (Tzima et al., 2020). Lastly, intergenerational interactions have bridged the generation gap, allowing for the authentic transmission of cultural heritage, consistent with the theoretical principles discussed in the literature (Kim, 2019; Shi & Nicolas, 2023).

In conclusion, this study has explored the preservation and promotion of Yongning River Boatman Work Songs in Naxi District, Luzhou City, Sichuan Province, China. It has provided valuable insights into the educational, collaborative, and intergenerational aspects of cultural heritage safeguarding. The findings of this research are consistent with established theoretical principles and align with the existing literature on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage through education and community involvement.

Yongning River Boatman Work Songs have demonstrated their potential as powerful educational tools, bridging the past and present, fostering cultural identity, and facilitating multifaceted learning. The collaboration among local individuals, cultural centers, educational institutions, and government authorities has underscored the significance of collective efforts in heritage preservation. Additionally, successful initiatives to engage the younger generation have ensured the continued transmission and enrichment of cultural knowledge.

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