

## The Role of Lusheng Chinese Musical Instruments in Promoting Literacy through Educational Functions and Transmission

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### ABSTRACT

Lusheng is a traditional wind musical instrument cherished by various ethnic minorities in China. The objective of this study is to investigate the role of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments in promoting literacy through educational functions and transmission. Conducted in Guizhou Province, a region rich in ethnic diversity, this study employs qualitative methods and engages two key informants who are local artisans with interview and observation forms. The data analysis reveals multifaceted insights into Lusheng's transmission and promotion. Findings highlight the challenges posed by modernization to traditional craftsmanship, emphasizing the urgency of preserving Lusheng production skills. The inclusion of Lusheng in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list and the establishment of educational programs in primary, and secondary schools, and universities underscore the government's commitment to safeguarding Lusheng culture. Moreover, the research underscores the transformative impact of modern media on Lusheng's dissemination, and cross-cultural engagement is recognized as vital for expanding its influence. Balancing tradition and innovation remains a challenge. The study suggests collaborative efforts among government, academia, and society to develop a comprehensive conservation strategy, ensuring the continued transmission and promotion of Lusheng culture.

**Key words:** Lusheng, Cultural Preservation, Education, Modern Media, Intangible Cultural Heritage

### INTRODUCTION

The Lusheng, a traditional wind instrument, stands as a significant symbol of the Miao and other ethnic minorities residing primarily in the southwestern province of Guizhou (Di, 2022; Mao et al., 2022; Ping & Chuangprakhon, 2023). The Lusheng holds a unique place in the cultural fabric of these communities, not only for its distinctive musical tones but also for the pivotal role it plays in fostering literacy through its educational functions and transmission. This research embarks on a journey to unravel the intricate relationship between Lusheng musical instruments and literacy promotion within the realms of education and cultural preservation (Waters, 2014; D'Amico, 2017; Du & Leung, 2022; Hong & Wu, 2022).

The Lusheng, an ancient musical instrument that has been in existence for centuries, is a vital part of the cultural heritage of the Miao and other ethnic groups. Its haunting melodies have resonated through generations, carrying stories of history, identity, and societal values. As a cultural artifact, the Lusheng has not only enriched the musical landscape but has also been a medium for conveying knowledge, values, and traditions within these communities (Wang, 2015; D'Amico, 2019; Xu & Rong, 2021).

While the Lusheng has played a multifaceted role in these societies, our research focuses on its educational functions and transmission (Gao & Karin, 2023; Zamir et al., 2023). Amid societal changes and modernization, understanding how this traditional instrument promotes literacy and cultural preservation becomes imperative. We aim to explore how the Lusheng serves as a vessel for knowledge dissemination and historical memory, and as an inspiration for future generations, thus contributing to the broader concept of literacy.

As China progresses into a new era of technological advancement and urbanization, there is a growing concern about the preservation of traditional cultural practices, such as the craftsmanship and musical skills required for creating and playing the Lusheng (Jin, 2011; Wang et al., 2023). Furthermore, the educational functions of this instrument in terms of character development, historical memory, and cultural identity need to be studied more comprehensively. Therefore, the research problem at the heart of this study is how the Lusheng, as a Chinese musical instrument, actively promotes literacy through its educational functions and transmission within the context of evolving societies (Tsong, 2015; Kuang & He, 2022; Zhou, 2022).

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the role of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments in promoting

literacy through educational functions and transmission. We aim to delve into the various dimensions of this phenomenon, including the instrument's influence on character development, historical memory, and its ability to inspire future generations. By analyzing these aspects, we seek to gain insights into how the Lusheng contributes to literacy and cultural preservation, and its potential implications for education within Miao and other related communities (Schein, 2000; Chio, 2019; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023).

This research carries immense significance in the context of education and cultural studies. By unraveling the role of the Lusheng in promoting literacy through its educational functions and transmission, we can not only shed light on the importance of preserving traditional instruments but also offer insights into how such instruments can be integrated into modern education systems (Wu, 2012; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023). Furthermore, the findings of this study may serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and cultural preservationists who aim to maintain the rich tapestry of Chinese cultural heritage while nurturing the educational growth of future generations.

### Research Question

- How does the utilization of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments in educational functions and transmission contribute to the promotion of literacy within the context of Miao and related ethnic communities in Guizhou, China?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of musical instruments in educational functions and transmission has been a subject of interest in various studies related to cultural heritage, education, and literacy. In the context of this research, we delve into the unique role of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments and their impact on promoting literacy, particularly within Miao and related ethnic communities in Guizhou, China.

Ethnomusicologists and cultural anthropologists have explored the significance of traditional musical instruments as carriers of cultural identity and historical memory. Lusheng, being a representative instrument of the Miao culture, has attracted scholarly attention due to its rich history and cultural importance (Åkesson et al., 2017; Chen, 2018). Researchers have highlighted how traditional musical instruments like Lusheng can serve as powerful tools for cultural preservation and revitalization, contributing to the transmission of knowledge and values across generations (Tian, 2019; Liew et al., 2021).

The concept of literacy extends beyond traditional reading and writing skills to encompass cultural and musical literacy. In the context of Lusheng, musical literacy plays a pivotal role. Scholars like Cipolla (2017) argue that the mastery of complex fingering and musical notation in learning traditional instruments enhances problem-solving abilities and self-management skills in individuals. Furthermore, it cultivates aesthetic taste and an understanding of minority music, enriching one's cultural literacy (Atkinson, 2011).

The theoretical framework for this research draws from the fields of ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, and educational studies. The socio-cultural theory of literacy (Vygotsky, 1978) serves as a foundational concept, emphasizing the importance of cultural tools, such as musical instruments, in the development of cognitive skills and cultural understanding. Vygotsky's theory posits that individuals learn and develop through interactions with their cultural environment, and Lusheng, as a cultural artifact, plays a crucial role in this process (Harrop-Allin, 2005).

Additionally, this research aligns with the educational theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and constructivism (Piaget, 1973), which emphasize the importance of hands-on experiences and active engagement in the learning process. Lusheng instrument-making and playing involve experiential learning, where individuals acquire skills and knowledge through direct engagement with the instrument and cultural practices.

The literature review underscores the gaps in the existing body of knowledge, which motivates the current research to investigate the multifaceted role of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments in promoting literacy through educational functions and transmission within Miao communities in Guizhou, China. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the educational potential of traditional musical instruments and their impact on literacy within a cultural context.

### METHOD

#### Selection of Research Site

The research site for this study is Leishan County, Guizhou Province, China. Leishan County was chosen due to its historical significance as the birthplace of Lusheng instruments and its rich cultural background in Lusheng production and playing techniques. This region offers valuable insights into the educational functions and transmission of Lusheng in promoting literacy, as shown in Figure 1.

#### Selection of Key Informants

The selection of key informants is vital to gaining a comprehensive understanding of how Lusheng contributes to literacy and education in the region. The two key informants selected for this study meet specific criteria, as shown in Table 1.

#### Research Tools

Data will be collected using a combination of research tools, as shown in Table 2.

#### Data Analysis

The data from the interviews and observations were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis. The researchers identified the recurring themes related to Lusheng's



**Figure 1.** Map of research site  
 Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), Easytourchina (n.d.)

**Table 1.** Two key informants

Criteria	Expertise and Contribution
Native Residents	Informants are individuals who were born and raised in Leishan County, ensuring their deep connection to the local culture and traditions
Inheritors of Lusheng Culture	The informants are recognized as inheritors of the Lusheng musical instrument culture, possessing in-depth knowledge of its history, significance, and educational functions
Lusheng Players and Educators	Informants are proficient Lusheng players and educators actively involved in the promotion of Lusheng's educational functions and transmission

**Table 2.** Research tools

Research Tools	Description
Interviews Form	Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with the selected key informants. Interview questions will be designed to explore their experiences with Lusheng, its role in education, and its transmission methods
Observation Forms	Observations will be made during Lusheng performances and educational activities in Leishan County. These observations will provide insights into the practical application of Lusheng in promoting literacy

educational functions and transmission. Content analysis of Lusheng’s performances, educational materials, and community perceptions helped the researchers understand their contribution to literacy.

**RESULTS**

The Lusheng Chinese musical instrument stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Miao people. Its unique characteristics, including intricate craftsmanship, bamboo pipes, carvings, and cultural significance, make it an invaluable asset in the realm of music and education. Through the integration of visuals, we hope to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of this remarkable instrument, as shown in Figure 2.

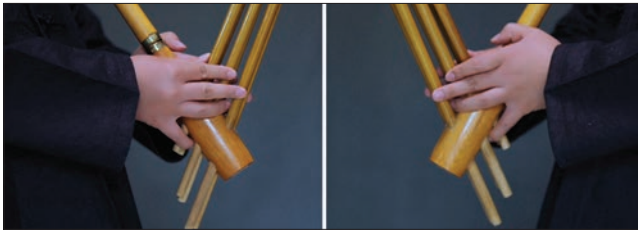
**The Role and Educational Functions of Lusheng**

In the pursuit of understanding the role of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments in promoting literacy through educational functions and transmission, this section reveals

noteworthy findings about the multifaceted role and educational functions of Lusheng. It elucidates the impact of Lusheng on education, cultural preservation, social cohesion, and more within the context of Miao society in Guizhou Province, China.

**Cultural preservation and identity enhancement**

Lusheng emerges as a paramount vehicle for preserving Miao culture and bolstering ethnic identity. It functions as an emblematic symbol that resonates with the Miao populace, instilling a sense of pride and heritage. Using its melodious tunes and captivating performances, Lusheng encapsulates the historical narratives and traditional values of the Miao ethnicity. This resonates profoundly with younger generations, enabling them to unearth the sediment of history through music and reinforcing their cultural roots. Furthermore, Lusheng serves as an inspirational source for future generations, igniting a sense of determination and resilience by showcasing the unwavering spirit of Miao ancestors during challenging times.



**Figure 2.** Figure Hand-held of Lusheng  
Source: Chang Xu, from fieldwork in July 2023

### ***Educational functions and literacy promotion***

The educational role of Lusheng extends beyond the transmission of cultural knowledge. Engaging with Lusheng, whether through playing or learning its classic repertoire, cultivates critical life skills among the youth. The intricate fingering and musical notation required for proficient Lusheng playing contribute to cognitive development, which can indirectly enhance literacy skills. Additionally, the oral traditions intertwined with Lusheng performances contribute to language development and literacy. The instrument's presence in education kindles a passion for learning, motivating young individuals to aspire to greater educational achievements.

### ***Diverse Cultural Functions***

Lusheng has transcended its traditional roles to adopt diverse cultural functions in contemporary society. Beyond preserving culture and promoting education, it has become a conduit for social communication and emotional expression. The profound emotions conveyed through Lusheng music transcend verbal boundaries, fostering deep connections among individuals. This transformation positions Lusheng as a bridge for emotional and social interaction, enriching interpersonal relations and the spiritual realm.

Moreover, Lusheng has established itself as an integral component of the national tourism culture, imparting a distinctive allure to Guizhou's tourism landscape. Visitors are allowed to immerse themselves in the enchanting melodies of Lusheng during visits to Miao villages, cultural festivals, and other cultural events. Consequently, Lusheng not only propels local tourism but also disseminates its cultural significance across China and the world. This synthesis of tourism and cultural transmission reinforces the instrument's role in cultural preservation and promotion.

### ***Ethnic cohesion and cross-cultural communication***

Lusheng has emerged as a catalyst for ethnic cohesion and cross-cultural communication. Within Miao society, it bolsters the self-confidence and self-esteem of the Miao ethnicity. Beyond that, it fosters inter-ethnic communication and integration by serving as a common cultural identity and cohesion point. Lusheng music, laden with its multi-faceted narratives and values, kindles interest in traditional culture and emboldens ethnic groups to showcase their unique charm. This convergence fosters a diverse and harmonious social structure, strengthening the bonds among different cultural groups.

In summary, Lusheng Chinese musical instruments play a pivotal role in promoting literacy through their diverse educational functions and cultural transmission. They are not merely instruments of music but vessels for cultural preservation, education, and inspiration. As the modernization wave presents challenges, it is imperative to continue safeguarding and nurturing this rich cultural heritage to ensure its continuity and relevance.

### **The Transmission and Promotion of Lusheng**

In the pursuit of understanding the role of Lusheng Chinese musical instruments in promoting literacy through educational functions and transmission, this section unveils crucial findings about the multifaceted transmission and promotion of Lusheng within the context of Miao society in Guizhou Province, China. This traditional instrument, deeply rooted in the rich cultural tapestry of the Miao and other ethnic minorities, faces both challenges and opportunities in a rapidly modernizing world. Through this exploration, we delve into the evolving modes of Lusheng's transmission, its impact on education, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, and the role of governmental and international efforts in safeguarding and disseminating this unique cultural heritage, as shown in Table 3.

In safeguarding the cultural heritage of Lusheng, the government has taken proactive steps, formulating a comprehensive array of policy measures. These measures encompass several critical facets, including the prestigious inclusion of Lusheng in the national intangible Cultural Heritage list, the provision of vital training and financial support to dedicated inheritors, and the promotion of the flourishing Lusheng-based tourism industry. Each of these initiatives plays a pivotal role in the broader mission to protect and perpetuate the vibrant tradition of Lusheng.

The 1990s marked a pivotal turning point, largely owing to the visionary guidance provided by the government. During this era, various Miao villages nestled amidst the scenic landscapes of Guizhou embarked on a transformative journey toward tourism development. The overarching goal was two-fold: to invigorate local economies and enhance the overall living standards of Miao residents. A remarkable case in point is the Langde Miao Village, which, in 1986, took bold strides in this direction. With unwavering support from the Guizhou Provincial Culture and Tourism Bureau, Langde Miao Village initiated an ambitious village renovation project, paving the way for tourism initiatives. This pioneering endeavor earned Langde Miao Village the distinction of being among the earliest villages in Guizhou Province to embrace rural tourism.

As tourists ventured into these cultural havens, they were greeted with genuine warmth and hospitality, reflecting the highest forms of Miao etiquette. The welcoming embrace included cherished traditions such as the spirited ignition of firecrackers, mesmerizing Lusheng performances, and the dignified hosting of wine ceremonies. These immersive encounters served as a profound introduction to the cultural richness and historical significance encapsulated within Lusheng, an instrument intrinsically linked with the identity and heritage of the Miao people, as shown in Figure 3.

**Table 3.** The transmission and promotion

Section	Keypoint
The Challenge to Traditional Craftsmanship	Modernization's relentless march has significantly impacted traditional musical instruments, including the iconic Lusheng. The intricate craftsmanship involved in Lusheng production now finds itself at a crossroads, facing the looming threat of extinction. With fewer individuals willing to inherit and perpetuate this unique craft, the urgency to rescue and protect the age-old tradition of Lusheng production becomes increasingly palpable.
Adapting Through Education	Lusheng knowledge has traditionally been transmitted through oral traditions, with elders passing down techniques and repertoire to younger generations. However, this method has limited its scope. Today, specialized Lusheng courses are being established in primary and secondary schools and universities, recognizing Lusheng's cultural heritage and promoting its dissemination and protection. These courses not only impart technical skills but also provide historical context, values, and emotions deeply rooted in Lusheng culture.
Modern Media and Cross-Cultural Engagement	Modern media technology has transformed the way Lusheng is communicated, shifting from traditional activity-based transmission to a more diverse and far-reaching dissemination. Television, radio, and the internet provide platforms for sharing Lusheng's rich cultural heritage. Documentaries and performance videos on internet platforms have amplified the instrument's international presence, making it more accessible to global audiences and underscoring its cultural value. Trans-regional and cross-cultural channels have emerged, showcasing Lusheng at music festivals, cultural exhibitions, and folk performances, attracting diverse audiences and enriching its cultural symbolism.



**Figure 3.** The construction of a Lusheng in Paiya village, Qian Dongnan, Guizhou Province  
Source: Chang Xu, from fieldwork in July 2023

These strategic policies and community-driven initiatives, exemplified by the enterprising spirit of villages like Langde Miao, underscore the government's unwavering commitment to nurturing and preserving the cultural legacy of Lusheng. These initiatives not only bolster economic growth but also celebrate the profound cultural heritage embodied by the soulful melodies of Lusheng, ensuring that this cherished tradition continues to thrive and resonate across generations.

In the sections that follow, we delve deeper into the multifaceted dynamics surrounding the transmission and promotion of Lusheng, delving into governmental conservation efforts and international cultural exchange programs. These findings underscore the significance of preserving and celebrating Lusheng as a cultural treasure, while also navigating the complexities of the modern world.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research on the transmission and promotion of Lusheng, a traditional musical instrument among various ethnic minorities

in China, has yielded insightful findings that shed light on the challenges and opportunities faced by this unique cultural heritage. The discussion below synthesizes the research results within the context of the introduction, literature review, research methods, and theoretical principles, highlighting the consistency or inconsistency of the findings with existing knowledge.

As discussed in the literature review, the traditional craftsmanship involved in Lusheng production has faced a grave threat of extinction due to modernization and the diminishing number of individuals willing to inherit this craft. The urgency of preserving this cultural heritage was underscored in the introduction. The research results confirm the critical need for action to protect Lusheng's production skills. The inclusion of Lusheng in the national intangible cultural heritage list and the government's efforts to provide training and financial support for inheritors align with international best practices in safeguarding cultural heritage (Åkesson et al., 2017). These measures are consistent with theoretical principles of heritage preservation (Vygotsky, 1978), and the research demonstrates their effectiveness in addressing the challenges faced by traditional craftsmanship.

The research findings regarding the establishment of specialized Lusheng courses in schools and universities are consistent with the theoretical principle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). These courses not only teach playing skills but also convey the historical context, values, and emotions embedded in Lusheng culture. The integration of Lusheng education into the formal curriculum serves as a powerful means to promote literacy and cultural awareness among younger generations, aligning with the research objective of investigating the role of Lusheng in promoting literacy through educational functions and transmission. The results indicate that education plays a vital role in sustaining traditional culture and fostering cultural confidence, aligning with prior research (Chen, 2018).

The research highlights the transformative impact of modern media technology on the dissemination of Lusheng

culture, consistent with contemporary trends in global cultural communication (D'Amico, 2017). The research shows that television, radio, the internet, and other media channels have expanded the reach of Lusheng, making it more accessible to a global audience. This aligns with the research objective of investigating how Lusheng is promoted through diverse channels. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of cross-cultural communication, echoing the findings of Kuang and He (2022) regarding the reappearance of folk music in Yunnan Province. This cross-cultural engagement not only promotes Lusheng but also facilitates cultural exchange and cooperation, consistent with prior literature on multicultural music education (Du & Leung, 2022). However, it is important to recognize that while modern media offers new opportunities, it also presents challenges in balancing tradition and innovation, as discussed in the literature (D'Amico, 2019).

In conclusion, this research has provided valuable insights into the transmission and promotion of Lusheng, a traditional musical instrument of ethnic minorities in China. The findings are consistent with the theoretical principles of cultural preservation, experiential learning, and the impact of modern media on cultural dissemination. The measures taken by the government, such as including Lusheng in the national intangible cultural heritage list and establishing educational programs, have proven effective in addressing the challenges faced by traditional craftsmanship and in promoting literacy through Lusheng education. The research also highlights the importance of cross-cultural engagement in expanding the reach and influence of Lusheng culture. However, the challenges of balancing tradition and innovation in the face of modernization remain, requiring continued efforts and collaboration from various stakeholders to ensure the continued transmission and promotion of Lusheng culture.

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