

Enhancing Education and Literacy through the Transmission of Tibetan Folk Music Performing Art in Qinghai Province, China

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: June 30, 2023

Accepted: August 18, 2023

Published: October 31, 2023

Volume: 11 Issue: 4

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: This research project was financially supported by Mahasarakham University.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to propose guidance for the transmission of Qinghai folk music to the new generation, within the context of education and literacy studies. The sample group for this study consisted of three distinct groups of individuals chosen as key informants for the field research. These groups consist of two informants who are Music and Dance Artists, two informants who are performance artists and general informants. Based on the research, the following strategies are recommended for the transmission of Qinghai folk music to the new generation: utilizing the family institution, organizing social activities, creating a folk music curriculum, organizing international music festivals, and establishing a cultural center. These strategies aim to preserve and promote Qinghai folk music heritage and enrich education and literacy by incorporating cultural traditions into educational practices. This research contributes to the field of education and literacy studies by showcasing novel methodologies and creative applications of theories in transmitting cultural heritage through folk music. By emphasizing the importance of cultural transmission, this study emphasizes the transformative power of Tibetan folk music in fostering educational development, literacy skills, cultural awareness, and artistic expression.

Key words: Tibetan Folk Music, Cultural Preservation, Transmission Process, Qinghai Province, China

INTRODUCTION

Qinghai Province, known for its vastness, abundant resources, and diverse ethnic groups, has been a convergence point where cultures intermingle (Rossabi, 2004; Davis, 2012; Fei & Fei, 2015; Fei, 2017). Over centuries, numerous ethnic groups, including the Han culture of the Central Plains and the cultures of western ethnic minorities, have coexisted in this region. Within the historical development of these ethnic groups, they have created a rich tapestry of colorful and diverse folk songs, occupying a significant position among the national folk songs of China, and representing a unique art form (Stewart, 2009; Stewart, 2016; Ptackova, 2019; Mattern, 2020). This article provides a brief overview of the genres and styles of Tibetan music, exploring the reasons behind the present-day "Tibetan songs fanaticism" and the relevance of Tibetan music to the contemporary era.

Qinghai Tibetan music is characterized by its melodious tunes, wide range, unique style, and captivating essence that evokes a yearning for freedom. When one listens to the high-pitched, crisp, bright, and pure Tibetan songs, it feels as if they are transported to the breathtaking Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, a beauty that defies expression in words (Wong, 2011; Jabb, 2013; Jabb, 2015; Makley, 2018).

The evolution of Qinghai Tibetan music has witnessed a transition from its early stages of original ecological singing

to the integration of world music influences. Music works thoroughly express the compassion and benevolence advocated by Buddhism. They convey a caring attitude towards sentient beings, harmony with nature, reverence for the natural world, and a profound understanding of life, showcasing an optimistic and open-minded outlook. For instance, the artistic conception depicted in the song "A Sister Drum," which yearns for the solemnity and purity of the lofty Buddhist realm while embracing the pleasures of everyday life, resonates strongly with listeners (Jabb, 2011; Howard, 2016; Zhang & Inkhong, 2022; Jicuo & Karin, 2022; Qifei & Chuangprakhon, 2022; Ning, 2023).

After years of development, Qinghai Tibetan music has undergone significant changes in form and style, with related research making notable progress (Postiglione, 2008; Fuquan & Karin, 2021). However, existing studies often remain superficial and one-sided, necessitating further in-depth exploration and refinement. In the 1960s, Tibetan music gained popularity nationwide, with Tibetan musicians such as Caidan Zhuoma stepping onto the stage of Chinese folk music (Yuan, 2008). With the advent of reform and opening, improvements in education and economic development, the music creation scene in Tibetan areas gradually expanded and flourished (Stirr, 2008; Mu et al., 2019). By the 1990s, Tibetan music encompassed elements of tradition, fashion,

and popularity, becoming an integral part of the cultural and entertainment life of Tibetan regions, bridging the gap between ethnic groups. Presently, a wave of “Tibetan music culture fever” is sweeping across the nation and beyond, characterized by a wide range of singing, large-scale ensembles, multiple awards, expanding influence, and international performances. This music craze serves as a companion to the domestic and international “Tibetan songs fanaticism,” showcasing the unique artistic charm of Tibetan music and emerging as a product of the close integration of economy and culture (Ellwanger, 2005; Connor III, 2007; Morcom, 2011; Tian, 2013; Fuming, 2019).

Today, both the preservation of the original ecological elements and the fusion of Tibetan music with popular elements are progressing rapidly, giving rise to numerous exceptional Tibetan singers. The blending of national and popular music, along with its integration into world music, serves as a testament to the progress of Tibetan culture, demonstrating that “the national is the world.” However, it is crucial to acknowledge that contemporary Tibetan music is primarily driven by commercial interests, with profit as the main objective. While commercialized Tibetan music does promote Tibetan music culture and attract wider attention and understanding, the extent to which it retains the authentic ethnic essence of Tibetan music warrants reflection (Tian, 2013; Hu, 2021; Juan et al., 2023).

Objective and Research Question

This study aims to provide guidance for the transmission of Qinghai folk music to the new generation within the context of education and literacy studies, ensuring its preservation amidst the evolving dynamics of cultural expression. By enhancing education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art, this research endeavors to promote cultural enrichment and foster a deeper understanding of Tibetan heritage.

- How can the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province be effectively enhanced to promote education, literacy, and the preservation of cultural heritage?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tibetan Ethnic Group in Qinghai Province

The Tibetan ethnic group in Qinghai Province is primarily concentrated in the five Tibetan autonomous prefectures of Haibei, Hainan, Huangnan, Yushu, and Guoluo, as well as in Tianjun and Dulan counties in Haixi Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Tanggula Mountain in Golmud City. Additionally, there are Tibetans living in the eight agricultural counties of the Haidong region and Xining City. Among the ethnic minorities in the province, Tibetans have the largest population and the widest distribution (Fischer, 2008; Lee et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2021; Fu et al., 2022).

Geographically, Qinghai Tibetan areas can be divided into three major regions: Qingnan, the lake area, and the agricultural area. Animal husbandry serves as the primary

industry in the Qingnan and surrounding lake areas. These areas are characterized by steep terrain, thin air, low air pressure, strong sunlight radiation, and significant temperature variations between day and night. Rainfall is concentrated in summer, while winters and springs are relatively dry. The average annual temperature ranges from -5°C to 3.7°C , with the hottest month averaging around 14°C and the coldest month averaging below -20°C . This unique alpine climate defines the region’s agricultural practices, characterized by agriculture or semi-agriculture and semi-pastoralism (Cun & Wang, 2010; Li et al., 2013; Yin et al., 2013).

Tibetan songs and dances in Qinghai are closely intertwined with folk songs, although they have undergone a gradual evolution over time. Initially, the two were separate entities, with singing preceding dancing. During grand ceremonies held by local Tibetan governments, folk singing and dancing teams known as “Zuo Ba Xi Ma” would perform. The “Zuo Ba” referred to the dance team at the front, while “Xi Ma” denoted the backing vocals behind the dance team. Over time, the songs and dances merged, resulting in a custom where dance is an integral part of singing, and singing is intertwined with dance (Morcom, 2015; Morcom, 2018).

Tibetan folk dances possess multiple styles, captivating and colorful, with a long-standing history, making them a cherished aspect of Tibetan culture. These dances reflect traditional values, with ancestors expressing their most exhilarating emotions through hand and foot movements. Amdo Tibetan folk dances have endured over time and retain their cultural significance, representing the deep-rooted customs of the region (Morcom, 2015; Morcom, 2018; Chen & Chonpairot, 2022).

Religious beliefs, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, significantly influence the content and form of Tibetan songs and dances. Religious elements are intricately woven into the performances, aligning with the Buddhist concept of “right-handedness” as the ultimate authority. Many dances are performed from the right side to adhere to this religious principle. For instance, “Guozhuo,” a form of singing and dancing in a circle, reflects the Tibetan concept of cyclic reincarnation. The circular dance symbolizes the Tibetan nation’s pursuit of a perfect spirit and life, representing the connection between the past and future, history and myths, life and dreams, and life and death. The dance unites people, merging villages into a cohesive nation within the perfect circle, signifying the Tibetan people’s way of communicating with gods and having a dialogue with heaven and earth (Lhalungpa, 1969; Kolås, 1996; Warner, 2013).

The lyrics of Tibetan songs and dances also contain religious content, with the lyrics of “Mani Ge” consisting entirely of six-character mantras that directly reflect Tibetan people’s beliefs. The formation and route of dances also reflect religious concepts, aligning with the direction of prayer wheels and temples in daily life. Tibetan dance not only showcases the unique body language constructed by Tibetan culture but also embodies the framework of its mainstream consciousness influenced by Buddhist culture. Devout believers approach Buddhist monasteries with reverence, step by step, as they progress toward the deities in their hearts. Tibetan dance employs postures and movements such as chest-shaking, knee-trembling, bending, and rounding, symbolizing the

metaphorical meaning of the religious “round and round” concept in circle dances (Nepal et al., 2020; Jin, 2022).

Tian Liantao discusses Reba, a large-scale folk song and dance performance art of the Tibetan ethnicity with a long-standing tradition. Reba can be classified into wandering Reba and settled Reba. Wandering Reba primarily exists in the Qamdo area of Tibet, characterized by highly technical and artistic performances. It encompasses various elements such as Reba Zhuo (music and dance), Reba Harmony (singing and dancing), small dramas, juggling, qigong performances, Kaxia (crosstalk-like performance), and dances featuring yaks and deer. Settled Reba, also known as Leba or Laba, is prevalent in the Tacheng areas, encompassing Weixi County, Shangri-La County, Yulong Naxi Autonomous County in Lijiang City, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan. Settled Reba performances bear distinct religious sacrificial characteristics, differing in form from wandering Reba (Wong, 2016; Liu, 2019).

Tibetan folk music exhibits different morphological characteristics based on the three Tibetan dialect areas: Wei Zang, Kang, and Amdo. The distribution of Tibetan folk music with diverse morphological characteristics aligns closely with the distribution of Tibetan dialects, giving rise to three major Tibetan music color areas. Analyzing the regional characteristics of Tibetan folk music necessitates an understanding of the dialect divisions and the historical, social, and natural conditions that influenced their formation. Folk music in the Kang and Wei Zang dialect areas, primarily populated by agricultural communities, features colorful collective folk songs and dances. In contrast, the Amdo color area, with a scattered population, lacks collective singing and dancing traditions. The unique geographical conditions of the Kang dialect area influence the tonality of folk songs within that region (Stanley & Chung, 1995; Stirr, 2008; Wong, 2016; Liu, 2019).

Overall, the literature demonstrates the cultural richness and diversity of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province. These artistic expressions are deeply rooted in Tibetan society, influenced by religious beliefs, geographical characteristics, historical development, and linguistic diversity. Understanding these aspects is crucial for enhancing education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting the holistic development of individuals in Qinghai Province, as shown in Table 1.

Theoretical Background

The study focuses on enhancing education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province, China. This topic can be approached from the perspectives of musicology and music ethnology. These two disciplines provide valuable frameworks for analyzing the musical characteristics, cultural context, and educational implications of this unique art form.

Musicology

Musicology, as a branch of music studies, focuses on the systematic analysis and interpretation of music. It encompasses

Table 1. The summary of Tibetan ethnic group in Qinghai province, China

Topic	Main Points
Tibetan Ethnic Group in Qinghai	Tibetans are the largest ethnic group in Qinghai, dispersed across various prefectures and counties.
Geographical Regions	Qingnan, lake area, and agricultural area with distinct climatic and economic characteristics.
Tibetan Songs and Dances	Initially separate, they evolved to become intertwined, with dance becoming an integral part of singing and vice versa.
Influence of Religion	Tibetan Buddhism influences the content, form, and religious elements in Tibetan songs and dances.
Qinghai Tibetan Reba	Wandering and settled Reba performances, differing in form and religious sacrificial characteristics.
Tibetan Folk Music Color Areas	Wei Zang, Kang, and Amdo dialect areas, each with unique folk music characteristics and influences.

various subfields, such as music theory, music history, and music sociology, which can be applied to the study of Tibetan folk music (Tagg, 2019).

Music ethnology

Music ethnology involves studying the beliefs, customs, rituals, and everyday practices associated with music in a particular community or ethnic group. It provides insights into the transmission methods, learning processes, and community participation in the preservation and dissemination of this musical (Rice, 2019).

By combining the perspectives of musicology and music ethnology, researchers can develop a comprehensive framework for studying the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a holistic examination of both the musical and cultural dimensions of this art form, shedding light on its educational potential and its role in promoting literacy within the Tibetan community.

METHOD

Key Informants

In alignment with the research objectives, the researcher has chosen three distinct groups of individuals to serve as key informants for the field research. These groups comprise two informants who are Music and Dance Artists, two informants who are performance artists, and general informants. The criteria used for selecting these informants are outlined as follows:

1. They are individuals who were born and raised locally in Qinghai and belong to the Tibetan ethnic group.
2. They possess a deep understanding of the culture and development of Qinghai Folk Music.

3. They are recognized as representative inheritors of National Intangible Cultural Heritage projects as announced by the Ministry of Culture of China.
4. They have extensive experience in Qinghai folk music, often characterized by their advanced age and many years dedicated to the practice and performance of this art form.

Research Tools

To obtain comprehensive and detailed data for the study, a combination of interviews and observations was employed as research tools. These research methods provided a robust and comprehensive data collection process, enabling the researcher to obtain detailed insights into the transmission and preservation of Tibetan folk music in Qinghai Province. The research methods used are as follows:

Interviews

Structured or semi-structured interviews were conducted to facilitate direct interaction with key informants, including two informants who are Music and Dance Artists, and two informants who are performance artists, all of whom possess profound knowledge of Tibetan Folk Music Performing Art.

Observations

This approach allowed the researcher to gather firsthand data by observing the musical elements, performance techniques, and the overall ambiance of these musical events.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, the collected data from interviews and observations will be transcribed and reviewed, followed by coding to identify key themes and patterns. Through thematic development and interpretation, the researcher will analyze the relationships between themes and draw meaningful insights from the data. Triangulation of data sources will ensure reliability and credibility. The synthesized findings will be reported, providing a comprehensive understanding of the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province. The data analysis will contribute to enhancing education and literacy by uncovering valuable insights into the cultural significance, transmission methods, and educational implications of Tibetan folk music in the region.

RESULTS

The field investigations conducted on the folk music of Qinghai Province have provided valuable insights into the preservation and transmission of this cultural heritage. Through interviews with local singers and folklorists, the researcher has gained a deeper understanding of the historical process and the important foundations for the preservation of folk music. The informants shared their perspectives on the natural preservation methods employed in Qinghai.

The first informant highlighted that local folk songs are deeply rooted in the heritage of the region, originating from the ancestors who continuously innovated and spread the music based on the circumstances of their time and environment. This dynamic nature of folk music allowed it to evolve and adapt to different eras.

The second informant emphasized the presence of fixed tunes and improvised lyrics in Qinghai's folk songs. The tunes, known to have various forms, are accompanied by lyrics improvised in the local dialect. These lyrics are often influenced by the scenes, development, and changes occurring in the local context. The content of the songs reflects the evolving social and cultural landscape, ensuring relevance and resonance with the times.

The third informant highlighted the traditional method of oral transmission in the preservation of Qinghai's folk music. While some songs had specific music scores, many were passed down through word of mouth. Over time, these songs have been transmitted from generation to generation, carrying the collective memories and cultural heritage of the local community.

Based on the interviews with these informants, it is evident that the folk songs of Qinghai have a rich history, deeply rooted in the traditions and experiences of their ancestors. The transmission of these songs becomes crucial to ensure their continuity and preservation for future generations.

In the context of enhancing education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province, the research findings emphasize the importance of preserving and transmitting folk music within the local community. By understanding the historical process and natural preservation methods, efforts can be made to develop effective strategies for the transmission of folk music, fostering cultural appreciation and enriching education and literacy.

The insights obtained from these interviews contribute to the broader goal of promoting the significance of Tibetan folk music and integrating it into educational programs. By recognizing the cultural value and historical context of these songs, educators and policymakers can incorporate folk music into curricula, language instruction, and cultural activities. This approach will enhance students' understanding of their local heritage, promote literacy through the exploration of song lyrics, and foster a sense of cultural identity and pride.

Furthermore, the research findings underscore the need for cultural institutions, such as museums or cultural centers, dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Qinghai's folk music. These institutions can serve as hubs for learning, research, and community engagement, providing resources and platforms for individuals of all ages to study, appreciate, and actively participate in the transmission of folk music, as shown:

1. Folk music in Qinghai has been preserved through natural methods such as innovation and adaptation by ancestors.
2. Qinghai's folk songs feature fixed tunes and improvised lyrics, reflecting the changing local context and cultural development.

3. Oral transmission has been a significant means of preserving folk music, passing it down from generation to generation.
4. Preserving and transmitting folk music is crucial for maintaining cultural heritage and ensuring its continuity.
5. Integrating folk music into education can enhance literacy, cultural appreciation, and students' understanding of their local heritage.
6. Establishing cultural institutions and resources dedicated to the preservation and promotion of folk music is essential.

The research findings shed light on the preservation and transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province, with a focus on enhancing education and literacy. Family preservation emerges as a crucial method, as it cultivates a love and understanding of folk music from a young age. Key informants emphasize the role of families in preserving, studying, and transmitting folk music to future generations. Encouraging parents to enroll their children in folk music lessons, exposing them to live performances, and fostering an appreciation for neighborly songs contribute to the preservation and inheritance of this art form.

Social activities also play a significant role in the preservation of folk music. Advantages include the utilization of songs in religious rituals, where they enhance the sacredness and longevity of ceremonies, and the ability of songs to convey historical stories, impart life knowledge, and promote moral values. However, a disadvantage arises from the inherent variation in individual interpretations during the transmission of music through social activities, resulting in changes to musical elements such as tunes, melodies, and rhythms. This alteration may lead to the loss of the original essence of many Qinghai folk songs. To address this, integrating folk music into various activities, such as religious rituals and storytelling, can serve as a guideline for preserving and integrating folk songs into the daily lives of Qinghai residents in a sustainable manner.

Notably, the research did not include interviews with cultural professionals in Qinghai. The researcher acknowledges that cultural reforms have brought about changes that hinder the new generation's understanding of folk songs. Language alterations, in particular, have created barriers to comprehending the beauty conveyed through song lyrics. Therefore, it is essential to teach folk music in local schools, using the native language as a bridge for children to understand the meanings of folk songs and fully appreciate the beauty of this art form. The research also reveals a lack of comprehensive folk music curriculum in Qinghai's education system, highlighting the need for the development of courses and performances across different educational levels, from kindergarten to secondary school, to foster a deep understanding of local folk music among children.

Interviews with musicians and performers emphasize the importance of creating an environment conducive to folk music-related activities. Suggestions include organizing exhibitions, international folk music festivals, and contests to provide opportunities for the new generation to experience various

styles of folk music and recognize its cultural significance. Additionally, the establishment of a dedicated cultural center for folk music is recommended. This center would serve as a repository of knowledge, offering learning resources, research materials, and interactive experiences for children and the general public to explore the history, basics of performing folk instruments, and singing of folk music. By implementing these guidelines, the conservation and transmission of Qinghai folk music can be effectively supported.

In conclusion, the research findings highlight the significance of family preservation, integration of folk music into social activities, education reform, creation of folk music-related events, and the establishment of a cultural center to enhance education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province. By embracing these guidelines, the rich cultural heritage of Qinghai's folk music can be preserved, appreciated, and passed down to future generations, as shown in Figure 1.

From Figure 1, the following points can be summarized:

1. Use the family institution: Utilize the family as a platform to impart knowledge of folk songs to children, emphasizing the importance of family involvement in preserving and transmitting this cultural heritage.
2. Organizing social activities: Incorporate folk music into various social activities, such as religious rituals, to ensure its continued presence and significance. Folk songs should be valued not only as a means of entertainment but also as a medium for storytelling, reflecting diverse cultural backgrounds.
3. A folk music curriculum: Develop a comprehensive folk music curriculum that caters to different age groups, ranging from kindergarten to high school. This ensures that children receive structured education and exposure to folk music throughout their educational journey.
4. Organized international music festivals: Organize international music festivals that specifically celebrate folk music, providing a platform for artists and enthusiasts to showcase their talents and exchange cultural experiences.
5. A cultural center has been established: Establish a dedicated cultural center where the public can access resources, engage in learning activities, and deepen their understanding of folk music. This center serves as a hub for exploration, research, and appreciation of this cultural art form.

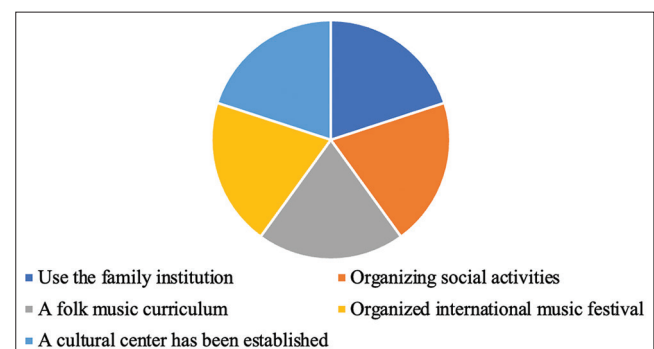


Figure 1. The way to transmission of Qinghai folk music

By implementing these initiatives, the goal of enhancing education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province can be effectively pursued.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study has provided valuable insights into preserving and promoting this cultural heritage while enhancing education and literacy. Consistent with the research objectives, the findings have shed light on the various aspects of preserving and transmitting folk music within the local community. This discussion will analyze the research results in relation to the theoretical principles and literature reviewed, followed by a conclusion summarizing the key findings and their implications.

The literature review revealed the cultural richness and diversity of Tibetan folk music in Qinghai Province, deeply influenced by historical, geographical, and religious factors. The research findings have consistently shown that folk music in Qinghai has a rich history and is deeply rooted in the traditions and experiences of its ancestors. The transmission of folk music has relied on natural preservation methods, such as innovation, adaptation, and oral transmission. These methods align with the theoretical principles of music ethnology, which emphasize the role of cultural practices, beliefs, and everyday experiences in the preservation and transmission of music (Rice, 2019). The research results reinforce the understanding that folk music is not merely a form of entertainment but a medium through which cultural values, historical narratives, and spiritual beliefs are communicated.

Furthermore, the research findings are consistent with the theoretical principles of musicology, as the study explored the musical characteristics and analyzed the transmission methods of Tibetan folk music (Tagg, 2019). The interviews and observations conducted during the research process provided firsthand data on the musical elements, cultural context, and educational implications of folk music in Qinghai Province. By employing musicological and ethnological perspectives, the research has contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art.

The research results also align with the theoretical principles of cultural preservation, emphasizing the importance of transmitting cultural heritage within the local community. The findings emphasize the pivotal role of family institutions in cultivating a love and understanding of folk music from a young age. This aligns with the concept of intergenerational transmission, which posits that cultural knowledge and practices are passed down from older generations to younger ones (Howard, 2016). The research underscores the significance of integrating folk music into social activities, such as religious rituals and storytelling, to ensure its continued presence and relevance. This aligns with the idea that cultural practices are sustained and perpetuated through communal activities and shared experiences (Rossabi, 2004).

The research findings also revealed areas where the current educational system in Qinghai Province falls short in terms of preserving and transmitting folk music. The lack of a comprehensive folk music curriculum and language

barriers hindering the understanding of song lyrics were identified as challenges. These findings align with the theoretical principles of education and cultural policy, emphasizing the importance of incorporating cultural heritage into educational programs and addressing the needs of diverse learners (Davis, 2012; Fei & Fei, 2015). The research underscores the need for educational reforms that include folk music education at different educational levels, fostering a deep understanding of local folk music among children.

In conclusion, the research study on enhancing education and literacy through the transmission of Tibetan folk music performing art in Qinghai Province has provided valuable insights into the preservation and promotion of this cultural heritage. The research findings consistently align with theoretical principles in music ethnology, musicology, cultural preservation, and education. The study emphasizes the pivotal role of family institutions, social activities, and education in preserving and transmitting folk music. The establishment of cultural institutions, such as a dedicated cultural center, is recommended to further support the preservation and promotion of folk music. By implementing the research findings, Qinghai Province can enrich education, foster cultural appreciation, and ensure the continuity of Tibetan folk music for future generations.

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