

## Preservation and Transmission Guidelines of Salar Vocal Folk Music

Yujuan Wu, Sayam Chuangprakhon\*

*College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand.*

**Corresponding author:** Sayam Chuangprakhon, E-mail: sayam.c@msu.ac.th

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### ABSTRACT

The Salar vocal folk music is a unique intangible cultural heritage of the Salar ethnic minority in Qinghai Province, China. The objective of this interdisciplinary study is to investigate the role of education and literacy in the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China. The research site, Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, serves as a cultural epicenter where Salar traditions have thrived for centuries, providing an authentic setting for immersive fieldwork. Key informants include Salar musicians, educators, community leaders, and government officials who play vital roles in the preservation and transmission of this heritage. Data was collected through participant observation, interviews, and documentation of Salar vocal folk music performances. Musicological analysis and preservation and transmission theory were applied to the data, revealing the historical roots, cultural significance, and current challenges faced by Salar vocal folk music. The study culminates in guidelines for the preservation and transmission of this tradition, emphasizing government support, modernization, education, innovation, diverse communication, and legal safeguards.

**Key words:** Salar Vocal Folk Music, Cultural Heritage, Education, Literacy Studies, Preservation, Transmission

### INTRODUCTION

Qinghai, a cherished and enchanting situated in western China on the northeastern part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, often referred to as the “roof of the world,” boasts a unique geographical advantage. It is renowned as the “Water Tower of China” as it gives birth to the Yangtze, Yellow, and Lancang rivers. Amidst this diverse and culturally rich landscape resides the Salar ethnic group, a significant minority in Qinghai Province, holding a distinctive position within its multicultural tapestry (Tane et al., 2016; Han, 2018; Wang & Zhang, 2022; Tingyu, 2023).

The Salars, primarily concentrated in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, have a migration history spanning more than 700 years, originating from Central Asia. As devout followers of Islam, their faith has significantly influenced their cultural identity, making them a precious part of the Muslim culture in China (Israeli, 2002; Rohlf, 2016; Stewart, 2016).

Despite having their language, the Salars do not possess an indigenous writing system, resulting in limited historical records in ancient texts. As a result, the transmission of Salar culture primarily relies on the passage of folk music from one generation to the next. Salar vocal folk music serves as a living repository of their culture, documenting their historical journey, cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and social structure (Rui, 2022; Chen, 2023; Wang & Chuangprakhon,

2023). Given their migratory history and interactions with diverse ethnic cultures, Salar music stands as a testament to the richness of their intangible cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the scarcity of documented materials on Salar music culture remains a persistent challenge. The preservation of traditional Salar music is vital for the continued vitality of the Salar culture (Yang, 2020; Erjian & Chuangprakhon, 2023; Chen et al., 2023).

In the face of modernization, Salar vocal folk music culture is undergoing a profound transformation. Traditional practices, clothing, language, and customs are gradually modernizing, leading to the gradual erosion of cultural traditions and rituals (Jing, 1991; Keating, 2016; Li & Ismail, 2022). Moreover, the number of proficient folk artists well versed in traditional songs is dwindling, making it increasingly challenging to find individuals with deep expertise in Salar musical traditions. This concerning trend has raised alarm and prompted critical reflections on how to urgently protect and preserve Salar’s vocal folk music culture. The significance and influence of Salar vocal folk music extend beyond being part of traditional Chinese culture; it is an invaluable treasure within the Chinese national music culture. Given the pressing challenges associated with the inheritance and protection of traditional folk music culture, it is imperative to adopt feasible policies and measures that align with the economic and social development of Salar vocal folk music culture (Imjai et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2021;

Champadaeng et al., 2023; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023).

In summary, the Salar ethnic group boasts a rich and captivating culture and heritage, yet the younger generation appears to be gradually losing touch with it. The traditional heritage of Salar art, culture, and music is at risk of fading away. Consequently, this study aims to explore ways to develop and protect this cultural heritage through research, knowledge collection, and an in-depth analysis of Salar music culture. This research will focus on the role of education and literacy studies in the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China, to formulate guidelines for its sustainable safeguarding and promotion.

### Research Question

- How can education and literacy contribute to the effective preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China?
- What guidelines can be developed to ensure its sustainable safeguarding and promotion?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Role of Education and Literacy Studies in the Preservation and Transmission of Salar Vocal Folk Music

Education and literacy studies play a pivotal role in the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the context of ethnic minority communities. In the case of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China, understanding how education and literacy initiatives can contribute to the safeguarding and promotion of this unique cultural tradition is of utmost importance.

- 1) **Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage through Education:** Education has been recognized as a powerful tool for preserving and transmitting intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes the role of education in raising awareness and promoting the importance of cultural practices. This convention encourages educational programs that foster a sense of identity and belonging among communities (UNESCO, 2003). In the case of Salar vocal folk music, integrating educational efforts into the preservation strategy can help ensure its continuity (Kurin, 2007).
- 2) **Literacy Studies and Documentation:** Literacy studies are essential for documenting and archiving traditional cultural practices. In the absence of a written script for the Salar language, the preservation of Salar vocal folk music heavily relies on oral transmission. However, literacy studies can facilitate the creation of written materials, including song lyrics, musical notations, and scholarly publications, which can serve as valuable resources for both researchers and practitioners. Additionally, the development of literacy skills among community members can empower them to actively participate in the documentation and preservation of their cultural heritage (Tang & Sornyai, 2023).

- 3) **Interplay of Education and Cultural Transmission:** The interplay between formal education systems and traditional cultural transmission is a complex but critical factor in the preservation of Salar vocal folk music. The younger generation's access to quality education can either facilitate their engagement with their cultural heritage or lead to its neglect. Therefore, understanding how formal education can be aligned with the transmission of Salar music traditions is essential. This involves curriculum development, teacher training, and the integration of cultural content into educational programs (Hou & Seekhunlio, 2023).
- 4) **Community Involvement and Ownership:** Successful preservation initiatives often involve the active participation of the community. Empowering Salar communities to take ownership of their cultural heritage and actively engage in its transmission is a key element of any preservation strategy. This can be achieved through community-based education programs, workshops, and cultural events that encourage the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills (Wang et al., 2010).
- 5) **Government Support and Policy Frameworks:** Government support and policy frameworks play a crucial role in promoting the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. In the case of Salar vocal folk music, government agencies at the provincial and local levels can provide financial resources, infrastructure, and legal protections to ensure the sustainability of these traditions. The development of comprehensive guidelines and policies specifically tailored to the preservation of Salar vocal folk music is essential (Kuang & He, 2022).
- 6) **Challenges and Opportunities:** It is important to acknowledge the challenges and opportunities that education and literacy studies bring to the preservation of Salar vocal folk music. Challenges may include balancing traditional and modern educational priorities, addressing language barriers, and ensuring the inclusivity of all community members. Opportunities lie in the potential for educational institutions to serve as hubs for cultural revitalization, where the transmission of Salar music is integrated into the broader curriculum (Yang & Welch, 2016).

In conclusion, the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China, can greatly benefit from an interdisciplinary approach that combines education, literacy studies, and community engagement. This literature review highlights the significance of education and literacy studies in the context of intangible cultural heritage and provides a foundation for subsequent research into the development of guidelines for the safeguarding of Salar vocal folk music.

### Research Theory

Used the interdisciplinary fields of musicology, preservation, and transmission theory. These theoretical frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the dynamics at play in safeguarding this unique cultural tradition, as shown in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the research theory, rooted in musicology and preservation and transmission theory, provides a multifaceted approach to examining the role of education and literacy studies in the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music. It enables a comprehensive exploration of both the cultural and technical aspects of this musical tradition while also addressing the practical challenges and opportunities associated with its continuity within the Salar community in Qinghai Province, China.

**METHOD**

**The Research Site Selection**

The research site selected for this study is Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, situated in the Haidong City of Qinghai Province, China. Xunhua County is renowned for its significance as the primary residence of the Salar ethnic minority community, making it a crucial location for investigating the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music.

Xunhua County, within the larger Haidong area of Qinghai, is characterized by its unique cultural landscape, rich in Salar traditions and heritage. The county serves as a

cultural epicenter where the Salar people have nurtured and celebrated their distinctive musical traditions for centuries.

The choice of Xunhua County as the research site allows for immersive fieldwork and data collection within an authentic Salar cultural setting. Researchers will have the opportunity to engage closely with the Salar community, including Salar musicians, educators, community leaders, and government officials, all of whom play vital roles in the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music.

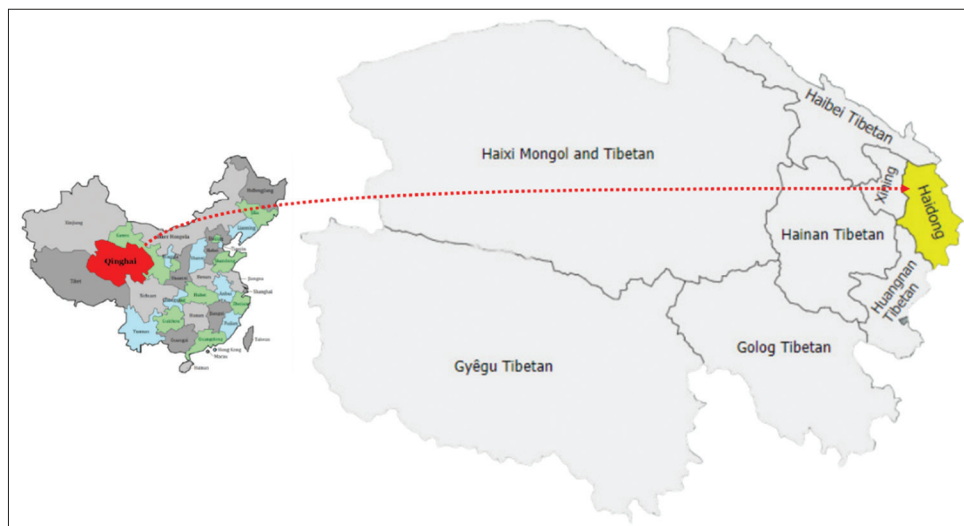
The selection of Xunhua County as the research site enables a comprehensive exploration of the current state of Salar vocal folk music, existing educational initiatives, and the broader cultural context within which these traditions are sustained. The county’s vibrant cultural environment and active community participation make it an ideal location to examine the intricate dynamics between education, literacy studies, and the preservation of Salar musical heritage within Qinghai Province, as shown in Figure 1.

**The Research Process**

Integrates principles from ethnomusicology, musicology, and preservation and transmission theory. To achieve the

**Table 1.** The research theory used

Research Theory	Description
Musicology (Kuttner, 1964)	Complements the research by providing a more specialized focus on the musical aspects of Salar vocal folk music. This framework involves the analysis of musical structures, melodies, rhythms, and instrumentation. Musicological approaches enable researchers to delve into the technical aspects of Salar music, including its scales, tonalities, and variations. By examining the musical intricacies of Salar vocal folk music, this research can identify the core elements that need preservation and transmission, ensuring the integrity of the music itself
Preservation and Transmission (Tang, 2021)	This is central to this research as it addresses the practical aspects of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This theory acknowledges that the continuity of cultural traditions, such as Salar vocal folk music, depends on effective preservation and transmission strategies. It considers the role of formal and informal education in this process, emphasizing the need for literacy studies to document and archive cultural practices. Preservation and transmission theory also highlights the importance of community involvement, government support, and policy frameworks in ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage



**Figure 1.** Map of Xunhua county, Haidong city of Qinghai province, China  
Source: Chinafolio (n.d.)

research objective, a comprehensive and interdisciplinary research methodology is essential, as shown in Table 2.

This comprehensive research methodology, guided by principles from musicology, and preservation and transmission theory, ensures a holistic investigation into the role of education and literacy studies in the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China.

**RESULTS**

**History and Evolution of Salar Vocal Folk Music**

The history and evolution of Salar vocal folk music provide critical insights into the unique cultural heritage of the Salar ethnic group in Qinghai Province, China. The investigation into the preservation and transmission of Salar

vocal folk music has revealed a multifaceted narrative that spans centuries, encompassing cultural, historical, and social dimensions.

- 1) Ancient Roots in the Yuan Dynasty: The research findings indicate that the Salar people’s presence in Qinghai and Gansu provinces can be traced back to the Yuan Dynasty. This historical context underscores the deep-rooted nature of Salar culture and its enduring connection to the region.
- 2) Cultural Significance: Salar vocal folk music emerges as a vital component of China’s multi-ethnic music tapestry. Its unique artistic characteristics, including its compatibility with various artistic forms and marginal genre characteristics, highlight its cultural significance. However, due to the absence of a written script for the Salar language, historical documentation

**Table 2.** The following steps outline the research process

Step	Descriptions
Step 1: Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct an extensive literature review to gather existing knowledge on Salar vocal folk music, education, literacy studies, and preservation and transmission theory</li> <li>- Identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities related to the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music</li> <li>- Analyze previous research to inform the research framework</li> </ul>
Step 2: Fieldwork and Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct fieldwork in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, China, the primary residence of the Salar community</li> <li>- Engage in participant observation to immerse in the Salar musical culture, attend performances, and interact with community members</li> <li>- Interview Salar musicians, educators, community leaders, and government officials to gain insights into the current state of Salar vocal folk music and existing education initiatives</li> <li>- Document Salar's vocal folk music performances, collecting audio and video recordings, musical notations, and song lyrics</li> </ul>
Step 3: Musicological Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilize musicological methods to analyze the technical aspects of Salar vocal folk music, including scales, tonalities, variations, and compositional structures</li> <li>- Identify the core elements of Salar music that require preservation and transmission</li> </ul>
Step 4: Documentation and Archiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply preservation and transmission theory to create written materials, such as songbooks, musical notations, and scholarly publications, based on the collected data</li> <li>- Develop an archive of Salar vocal folk music, ensuring accessibility for future research and community use</li> <li>- Collaborate with local experts to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity in the documentation process</li> </ul>
Step 5: Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborate with the Salar community to develop community-based education programs focused on Salar vocal folk music</li> <li>- Conduct workshops and cultural events that encourage intergenerational knowledge transfer</li> <li>- Empower community members to actively participate in the documentation and preservation of their cultural heritage</li> </ul>
Step 6: Policy and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage with local and provincial government agencies to advocate for policies and resources dedicated to the preservation of Salar vocal folk music</li> <li>- Collaborate with policymakers to develop comprehensive guidelines and frameworks tailored to the unique needs of Salar cultural preservation</li> </ul>
Step 7: Analysis and Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyze the research findings, considering the interplay between education, literacy studies, and the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music</li> <li>- Formulate recommendations for effective strategies and guidelines for preserving and transmitting Salar music within the Qinghai Province context</li> <li>- Highlight the role of education and literacy studies in achieving these goals</li> </ul>
Step 8: Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publish research findings in academic journals and present them at relevant conferences and seminars</li> <li>- Share recommendations with local and provincial authorities, educational institutions, and Salar community leaders</li> <li>- Promote awareness of the importance of Salar vocal folk music preservation among the broader academic and cultural communities</li> </ul>



- relies heavily on oral literature, myths, folklore, and music.
- 3) **Influence of Cultural Interactions:** The study reveals that Salar traditional folk music has evolved under the influence of neighboring Tibetan, Han, and other ethnic groups. This intercultural interaction has contributed to the formation of distinct Salar vocal folk music. The music can be broadly categorized into religious and folk genres, with religious music featuring elements of Central Asian culture.
  - 4) **Impact of Islam:** The research highlights the significant impact of Islam on Salar vocal folk music. Islamic traditions and rituals have influenced the tone and content of religious music, reflecting the complex interplay between faith and cultural expression.
  - 5) **Language and Lyrics:** Salar vocal folk music incorporate not only the Salar ethnic language but also Chinese and Tibetan languages. This linguistic diversity enhances the ethnic and local flavor of the lyrics, demonstrating the influence of neighboring cultures on Salar music.
  - 6) **Preservation Factors:** The simplicity of musical forms, limited musical genres, the distinctiveness of ethnic characteristics, and the geographically isolated living environment have played pivotal roles in preserving traditional Salar music. Furthermore, the unique social structure of the Salar community contributes to the stability, development, and inheritance of their cultural heritage.
  - 7) **Music as a Cultural Record:** Music emerges as an invaluable tool for recording Salar history, culture, and societal dynamics. It serves as an invisible text that not only preserves the Salar people's rich heritage but also offers a means to explore and analyze their cultural identity and traditions.
  - 8) **The Changing Landscape:** In the wake of modernization, Salar vocal folk music faces significant challenges and changes. Many aspects of traditional life are undergoing

modernization, leading to the gradual fading of customs and practices. Additionally, the dwindling number of proficient folk artists poses a threat to the preservation of this cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the research findings illuminate the intricate tapestry of Salar vocal folk music, its historical depth, and its role as a cultural repository. Understanding this heritage is vital for developing effective guidelines for its preservation and transmission, especially in the context of education and literacy studies within Qinghai Province, China.

### Current Status of Salar Vocal Folk Music

The status of Salar vocal folk music presents a complex picture of challenges and opportunities in the preservation and transmission of this cultural tradition within Qinghai Province, China, as shown in Table 3.

The findings in Table 3 underline the complex nature of preserving Salar vocal folk music and highlight the need for comprehensive efforts involving government support, innovative approaches, and cultural engagement to safeguard this cultural heritage.

### Guidelines for the Preservation and Transmission of Salar Vocal Folk Music

The following guidelines have been developed based on the research findings to support the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music in Qinghai Province, China, as shown in Table 4.

These guidelines in Table 4 serve as a strategic roadmap for the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music, emphasizing the importance of government support, modernization, education, innovation, diverse communication, and legal safeguards. Implementation of these measures is crucial for the continued vitality of this cultural heritage.

**Table 3.** Key findings from interviews and observations

Key Findings	Implications for Preservation and Transmission
Cultural Vulnerability	Salar culture, including its folk songs, faces the risk of assimilation and gradual disappearance within a diverse society. Protection of intangible cultural heritage is essential
Decline Factors	Multiple factors contributed to the decline of Salar vocal folk music, including a failure to adapt to changing times, limited successors, a lack of innovative talent, and insufficient use of modern technology. Addressing these issues is critical
Impact of Modernization	Rapid modernization, the influence of multimedia entertainment, and evolving audience preferences present significant challenges to the continued development of Salar vocal folk music. Innovations must align with contemporary tastes
Government and Financial Support	Adequate government support, both financially and through publicity, is vital for preserving Salar vocal folk music. Increased investment and recognition are necessary
Aging Inheritors and Lack of Talent	An aging generation of artists and a shortage of young talents willing to engage in Salar folk song preservation pose a threat to cultural continuity. Efforts should focus on attracting and training young talents
Regional and Economic Factors	Economic disparities and regional limitations affect the protection and development of Salar cultural heritage. Strategies should address these disparities and encourage local engagement
Cultural Quality and Innovation	Enhancing the cultural quality of Salar folk song artists and fostering innovative talent is essential for the development of this art form. The integration of modern technology should be explored to align with contemporary audience preferences

**Table 4.** Guidelines for the preservation and transmission of salar vocal folk music

Guidelines	Implications for Preservation and Transmission
1. Government Support and Protection	Government commitment and investment are essential for safeguarding Salar vocal folk music. This includes funding, expert involvement, and support for research and innovation
2. Comprehensive Protection Strategies	Utilize a combination of traditional and modern methods to protect Salar vocal folk music. This includes audio and video recording, modern technology (e.g., mobile Internet and VR), and the introduction of popular elements while preserving tradition
3. Academic Inheritance and Development	Establish talent training programs that encompass teaching, research, arrangement, creation, and performance. Incorporate Salar music knowledge into educational curricula, from primary to university levels. Cultivate new talent and protect existing inheritors
4. Innovative Musical Creation	Ensure that Salar folk songs align with contemporary preferences and societal themes while maintaining cultural authenticity. Identify and cater to different audience groups to create engaging works
5. Diversified Communication	Channels Broaden the dissemination of Salar vocal folk music through various channels such as theaters, rural venues, schools, civic squares, and online platforms. Utilize modern media and technology
6. Legal Framework for Cultural Heritage	Protection Establish a comprehensive legal framework to protect Salar vocal folk music's intangible cultural heritage, addressing the impact of urban development and ensuring cultural preservation in changing times

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research presented here focuses on the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music within Qinghai Province, China, and examines the role of education and literacy studies in safeguarding this unique cultural heritage. The discussion will encompass key findings, their alignment with theoretical principles, research methods, and the broader implications for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

The deep-rooted origins of Salar vocal folk music, which date back to the Yuan Dynasty, highlight its historical and cultural significance. This historical context aligns with the theoretical principle that the continuity of cultural traditions depends on effective preservation and transmission strategies (Tang, 2021). The study's findings highlight the influence of neighboring cultures and Islam on Salar vocal folk music, emphasizing the complexity of cultural interactions in shaping musical traditions (Israeli, 2002). This interplay of cultures reinforces the importance of community involvement and ownership, another key principle in preserving intangible cultural heritage (Kurin, 2007).

The research methods employed in this study, including fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and documentation, align with the interdisciplinary approach necessary for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of preserving Salar vocal folk music (Tang & Sornyai, 2023). Musicological analysis and preservation and transmission theory provided a comprehensive framework for examining both the cultural and technical aspects of this musical tradition. The use of these theoretical frameworks is consistent with research in the field of ethnomusicology (Kuttner, 1964).

Turning to the research results, the study underscores the vulnerability of Salar culture, including folk songs, to assimilation and gradual disappearance within a diverse society. This finding is consistent with the global concern for the protection of intangible cultural heritage (Kurin, 2007). The impact of modernization, multimedia entertainment, and evolving audience preferences presents significant challenges, mirroring the broader challenges faced by traditional cultural forms in the modern world (Kuang & He, 2022).

The developed guidelines for the preservation and transmission of Salar vocal folk music offer practical strategies in line with the research findings. The many problems found in the research can be solved with help from the government, broad protection strategies, academic inheritance and development, new musical creation, a variety of communication channels, and a legal framework for protecting cultural heritage (Tang, 2021; Kuang & He, 2022). These guidelines provide a roadmap for the continued vitality of Salar vocal folk music.

In conclusion, this research underscores the vital role of education and literacy studies in preserving and transmitting Salar vocal folk music within Qinghai Province, China. The study has shed light on the historical and cultural significance of Salar music, revealing its deep-rooted origins and complex cultural interactions. Interdisciplinary research methods, based on musicology and the theory of preservation and transmission, have made it possible to look at the problems and chances of preserving this intangible cultural heritage.

The findings of the study emphasize the vulnerability of Salar vocal folk music to cultural assimilation and modernization. However, the guidelines formulated based on these findings offer a strategic roadmap for its preservation, emphasizing the importance of government support, modernization, education, innovation, diverse communication, and legal safeguards. These recommendations align with theoretical principles in the field of cultural heritage preservation and provide a concrete framework for ensuring the continued existence of Salar vocal folk music.

In the broader context of intangible cultural heritage preservation, this research serves as a valuable case study, illustrating the importance of education and literacy studies in safeguarding the rich tapestry of cultural traditions that enrich our global heritage.

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