

A Literacy Study on the Houba Folk Song of the Tujia from Shi San Village in Chongqing, China

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ABSTRACT

A Literacy Study on the Houba Folk Song of the Tujia from Shi San Village in Chongqing, China Shi San Village, which is recognized as the “birthplace of folk songs,” has a rich history of Houba folk song that chronicle the cultural evolution and daily lives of the Tujia people over thousands of years. This study examines the historical development of Houba folk song across five distinct periods and explores their four primary social functions: cognitive and educational, entertainment, etiquette and communication, and cultural transmission. The research employs a literature review, fieldwork, and interviews with key informants, including inheritors of Houba folk song and cultural officials. Findings indicate that while the historical evolution of Houba folk song aligns with existing literature on Tujia music culture, documentation specific to Shi San Village is significantly lacking. This study addresses this gap by providing detailed insights into the unique historical and cultural context of Houba folk song. In addition, the study identifies current challenges in the transmission of Houba folk song, such as limited accessibility, insufficient publicity, and the impact of modern music preferences. It proposes several strategies to enhance the preservation and transmission of Houba folk song, including integrating them into school curricula, publishing teaching materials, improving infrastructure, and leveraging social media for broader dissemination. By documenting the historical and social significance of Houba folk song and proposing practical solutions for their preservation, this study contributes to the safeguarding of this intangible cultural heritage, ensuring its continued relevance and appreciation for future generations.

Key words: Houba Folk Song, Tujia Culture, Shi San Village, Cultural Transmission

INTRODUCTION

Shi San Village, located in Xiao Nanhai Town, Qianjiang District, Chongqing, is a matriarchal village of the Tujia ethnic group with a history spanning thousands of years. The social structure of the village is centered on matrilineal kinship, with women playing a pivotal role in maintaining social relations. The village preserves ancient matrilineal culture, respecting women who lead and manage the community, thus earning the moniker “Shi San Village in a Thousand Years, Mysterious Daughter Valley” (Han & Li, 2020; Song, 2007; Su, 2021). It is recognized as one of the “Top Ten Destinations in Chongqing to Escape the Summer and Cool Down,” “China’s Most Beautiful Village,” “China’s Livable Village,” “National Ethnic Minority Characteristic Village,” and “China’s First Tujia Ecological Museum. The villagers of Shi San Village have a longstanding tradition of creating and singing folk songs. Over millennia, they have produced a vast repertoire of folk songs, collectively known as “Houba folk song.” Due to this rich history, Shi San Village is often referred to as the “birthplace of folk songs.” These songs are deeply rooted in the villagers’ daily lives and reflect their

ideological and living conditions, making them an indispensable part of their cultural heritage. In this matriarchal society, the development and performance of folk songs are highly valued, and village leaders, who must be women, are expected to possess strong abilities in creating and singing Houba folk song. Houba folk song are unique as they originate from a matrilineal social context, differing from other folk songs by documenting the production, life, and cultural exchanges of Shi San Village inhabitants. These songs arise from the villagers’ needs for communication and emotional expression, encompassing various types such as life songs and labor songs (Peng & Peng, 1989; Xiao & Wang, 2021; Yang, 2019). Since 2007, Houba folk song have been included in the first batch of Chongqing’s intangible cultural heritage (Chongqing’s national intangible cultural heritage list, 2007). Despite this recognition, there has been a lack of systematic efforts to collect and organize these songs. Previous attempts to record the songs were incomplete, resulting in scattered and unclassified fragments. Consequently, the academic, historical, and humanistic value of Houba folk song remains underexplored (Zhang, 2020; Meng, 1993).

Currently, fewer villagers are willing to sing folk songs, with a noticeable shift towards popular music. Young people show little interest in learning and preserving traditional folk songs. While some individuals continue to create new folk songs, the efforts of a few are insufficient to sustain the tradition, risking the disappearance of these cultural treasures in the near future (Xiong, 2009; Xiao, 2017). The declining interest in becoming inheritors of Houba folk song poses a significant challenge to their preservation (Xiao & Wang, 2022; Xiang, 2021; Yang, 2018). Informant interviews reveal that existing data on Houba folk song are minimal and lack depth, hindering their application in national intangible cultural heritage initiatives. There is an urgent need for a systematic and comprehensive collection and study of these songs to ensure their preservation and transmission. To address these challenges, this study employs qualitative research methods, including fieldwork and interviews, to investigate the history, development, social functions, and transmission of Houba folk song. By collecting and organizing relevant data, the study aims to explore effective strategies for integrating traditional Chinese folk music into modern education and provide practical suggestions for local government efforts in preserving Houba folk song. The research seeks to support the application of Houba folk song as national intangible cultural heritage and contribute to the field of musicology for those interested in further study.

Research Questions

This study addresses two primary research questions. First, it seeks to explore the history and development of the Houba folk song of the Tujia from Shi San Village in Chongqing, China. This involves investigating the origins, evolution, and significant milestones of the Houba folk song over the centuries, documenting how the socio-cultural dynamics of the village have shaped these songs. Second, the study examines the social function and transmission of the Houba folk song within the Tujia community. This includes analyzing the roles these songs play in the villagers' daily lives, their contributions to social cohesion and cultural identity, and the methods through which these songs are taught and passed down through generations. By addressing these questions, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance and sustainability of the Houba folk song tradition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shi San Village

Shi San Village epitomizes the natural scenery and cultural characteristics of the Tujia ethnic group. The Tujia people are primarily distributed in the high mountains of the Wuling range, spanning the borders of Hunan, Hubei, Guizhou, and Chongqing (Hou, 2017). In Chongqing, there are 37,109 permanent ethnic minority populations, with the Tujia being the most populous ethnic minority, numbering approximately 1,398,707 people and accounting for 72.2% of the ethnic minority population (Dong, 2021). Shi San Village

is celebrated as one of the most well-preserved and largest original Tujia settlement zones in China.

Shi San Village comprises several smaller villages, including Xuatang Village, Xiongjia Village, Wafang Village, Daughter's Village, Shoushou Village, Hejia Village, Laoxiong Village, Zhangjia Village, Longxu Village, Zhoujia Village, Dawan Village, Xiangjia Village, and Tanjia Village. The cultural tapestry of the village is rich with Dam folk songs, waving dance, stilted buildings, and other folk traditions. The village has leveraged its natural and cultural resources, coupled with government initiatives on poverty alleviation, to build a scenic spot that exemplifies traditional folk customs and natural beauty. This effort was recognized when Shi San Village was selected in the first batch of national minority characteristic villages in 2014, became a national livable village in 2015, and was rated as a national "4A" scenic spot in 2017 (Zhang, 2020).

The tourism development strategy for Shi San Village aligns with the rural revitalization agenda, adhering to principles that emphasize small-scale development, integration with nature, and preservation of cultural heritage. This strategy strictly prohibits the demolition of traditional structures, deforestation, and ecological destruction. Instead, it focuses on preserving historical culture and civilization, protecting traditional villages, and maintaining the natural landscape of mountains, water, fields, forests, and roads. There is a strong emphasis on building cultural and ecological protection areas, safeguarding existing cultural and ecological resources, and maintaining the rural living environment essential for the survival of folk culture (Zhang, 2020).

Shi San Village is renowned as the "birthplace of Chinese folk song," where singing is an integral part of daily life for men, women, and children. Folk songs are sung during work, leisure, and even disputes. According to the Qianjiang District Cultural Committee, hundreds of songs have been documented in the village's musical canon. Maintaining its matriarchal traditions, the village places a high value on the role of women, who lead the community and must excel in singing folk songs to be considered for leadership roles (Dai, 2019).

Houba Folk Song

Houba folk song encompass a variety of folk songs from Shi San Village in Xiaonanhai and are notable for being part of the first batch of intangible cultural heritage lists at both municipal and district levels. These songs originate from the daily production, life, and emotional communication needs of the villagers, with lyrics often being improvised. To promote and sustain these folk song activities, Shi San Village has established cultural infrastructure such as a folk song square, an antithetical song corridor, and a folk song inheritance base. These initiatives not only enhance the cultural depth of the village as a scenic spot but also encourage residents and visitors to engage in singing Houba folk song (Qianjiang Cultural Tourism, 2022).

Houba folk song are described as originating from labor and embodying a harmonious blend of labor rhythm, artistic rhythm, and sound. These songs reflect various life scenes

of the Tujia people, showcasing their joy amidst hardship, expressions of love, and hospitality (Hou, 2017).

The villagers of Shi San Village are renowned for their singing and dancing abilities. In this community, not being able to sing folk songs often subjects families to lighthearted ridicule from others. The lyrics of Houba songs are diverse and context-specific: lovers sing love songs; friends gather to sing fun and ancient songs; elders educate the youth with advisory songs; field laborers sing labor songs; housework is accompanied by life songs; women sing, cry, and perform marriage songs during weddings. Additionally, welcome songs are sung for visiting guests, and even disputes are often expressed through folk songs (Liu, 2019).

Research Theory

In this study, the researcher applied the following theoretical frameworks: ethnomusicology and historical musicology. (1) Ethnomusicology involves the investigation and study of the musical characteristics of different nationalities, countries, and regions. It explores the connections between this music and geography, history, and other cultural contexts. This discipline includes compiling national or regional music records and drawing conclusions related to music (Cai, 2007). The term “ethnomusicology” designates a particular method of study, focusing on the cultural background of any nation to understand and observe its musical characteristics (Zhang, 2020). Ethnomusicology, as a theoretical subject under musicology, studies the traditional music of various ethnic groups worldwide by considering the members of the ethnic group. Its basic feature is to place the existing traditional music of a certain ethnic group within the specific natural and social-cultural environment of that group. It analyzes how the members of the ethnic group, whether individuals or groups, construct and use this music according to their cultural traditions. This investigation encompasses the dissemination and development of the music and elaborates on the basic characteristics, survival rules, and cultural traits of the ethnic group (Wu, 2023). (2) Historical musicology is the science of studying issues related to the history of music and the changes in music over time. This includes the evolution, development, and laws governing the content and form of music, as evidenced in musical treatises. Historical musicology is a branch of human cultural history, parallel to literature, fine arts, dance, and other historical disciplines (Cai, 2007). By applying these theoretical frameworks, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Houba folk song of the Tujia people in Shi San Village. Ethnomusicology allows for an understanding of the cultural and social contexts in which these songs are embedded, while historical musicology provides insights into the historical evolution and development of these musical traditions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of Research Site

The research was conducted in Shi San Village, located in Xiaonanhai Town, Qianjiang District, Chongqing,

China. Shi San Village is an International AAAA Tourist Scenic Spot situated in Xinjian Village, Xiaonanhai Town, Qianjiang District, Chongqing City. The village is adjacent to Xiaonanhai Earthquake Site Park to the east, Bamian Mountain Natural Scenic Area to the south, Wuling Mountain connected via Cizhu Creek to the west, and Yu'e Shengjing Jigong Mountain to the north. It is approximately 30 kilometers from the main urban area of Qianjiang and spans an area of 6.5 square kilometers. The village comprises 13 typical Tujia courtyards, housing more than 200 households and nearly 1,000 Tujia people.

Figure 1 shows the location of Qianjiang District in the southeast of Chongqing. Shi San Village is situated within this district.

Figure 2 illustrates the layout of Shi San Village, showing the 13 villages that form Shi San Village along the mountain road. This area is renowned as the birthplace of Houba folk song. The researcher has conducted multiple visits to this location for fieldwork, interviews with informants, and the collection of audio and video recordings of Houba folk song. In conducting this research, the chosen site of Shi San Village provided a rich and authentic context for studying the Houba folk song. The village's geographical and cultural significance offered a unique opportunity to gather in-depth insights into the traditional music practices of the Tujia people.

Selection of Key Informants

In line with the research objectives, informants were categorized into three groups: key informants, main informants, and general informants. The selection criteria for key informants included individuals who have lived in Shi San Village for more than 30 years, possess extensive experience in singing Houba folk song, and are recognized as experts or scholars in this field. These individuals were crucial for providing deep, contextual insights into the traditions and nuances of Houba folk song. The main informants were



Figure 1. Map of qian jiang district

Source: <https://iao.bangkok.go.th/content-detail/12329>



Figure 2. Map of shi san village
 Source: Hongwei xiao & Zirui wang (December, 2021)

selected based on their active engagement in work related to Shi San Village or Houba folk song, their contributions to the preservation and transmission of these songs, and their ability to provide relevant information that aligns with the research objectives. This group primarily included individuals who play a significant role in promoting and maintaining the cultural heritage of Houba folk song within the community. General informants were identified based on their role as inheritors of Houba folk song or as members of performance teams. These informants could provide practical assistance in collecting and documenting the songs. Their involvement ensured a comprehensive collection of data, capturing the lived experiences and practices associated with Houba folk song. Based on these criteria, the researcher selected seven informants, as detailed in Table 1. These informants, ranging in age from 35 to 75, included renowned artists, academic researchers, and local experts. Their collective knowledge and experiences were instrumental in understanding the historical development, social functions, and transmission of Houba folk song. This diverse group provided a rich source of information that significantly contributed to achieving the research objectives.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study employed multiple methodologies to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the history, development, social function, and transmission of Houba folk song. Initially, the researcher visited the Chongqing Library, the Intangible Heritage Office of the Chongqing Cultural Tourism Commission, and the Xiaonanhai Town Cultural Station. These visits were crucial for collecting and reviewing documents related to Houba folk song, thus providing a foundational understanding of their historical context and evolution. Subsequently, an extensive online search for information related to Houba folk

Table 1. Key informants

| No | Name | Gender | Age | Group |
|----|---------|--------|-----|--------------------|
| 1 | ** Tian | Female | 74 | Key Informants |
| 2 | * He | Male | 48 | |
| 3 | * Wei | Male | 45 | |
| 4 | * Wang | Male | 39 | Main Informants |
| 5 | ** Chen | Male | 48 | General Informants |
| 6 | ** Lan | Female | 35 | |
| 7 | ** Li | Female | 50 | |

song was conducted. This online research served to gather additional data and cross-reference information obtained from physical sources, thereby enriching the overall dataset. Following this, the researcher undertook field visits to Shi San Village. Participation in various festivals and customary activities during these visits facilitated the collection of diverse Houba folk song materials. Moreover, visits to local schools were conducted to investigate how Houba folk song are being transmitted to the younger generation, offering insights into the current state of cultural preservation and education. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including the inheritors of Houba folk song, the Director of the Intangible Heritage Office of the Chongqing Cultural and Tourism Commission, the Secretary of Shi San Village, and members of the performing team. These interviews provided personal perspectives and detailed information on the practices, challenges, and strategies related to the preservation and transmission of Houba folk song. By integrating these diverse data collection methods, the study performed a thorough and detailed analysis of the Houba folk song, covering their historical development, social functions, and mechanisms of transmission. This comprehensive approach ensured a rich and nuanced understanding of the subject.

Data Management

The researcher classified, sorted, and summarized all the collected data to prepare for subsequent data analysis. This process ensured that the data were organized systematically and could be easily accessed and analyzed. (1) Literature: The collected documents related to Houba folk song were classified, sorted, and summarized. This step was crucial in understanding the history, development, and transmission of Houba folk song. By organizing the literature, the researcher could identify patterns, significant events, and key influences that shaped the evolution of these folk songs over time. (2) Interviews and Questionnaires: The data gathered from interviews and questionnaires were meticulously organized. This process facilitated the study of the social function and transmission of Houba folk song. By systematically managing this qualitative data, the researcher ensured that insights from informants could be effectively analyzed to understand how Houba folk song are integrated into the community's social fabric and how they are passed down through generations. Overall, carefully managing literature and interview/questionnaire data provided a solid foundation for the in-depth analysis required to meet the study's objectives. This structured approach enabled the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the cultural significance and prospects of Houba folk song in Shi San Village.

Data Analysis

For the first research objective, the researcher employed literature review and interview methods to gather relevant materials and conduct an in-depth analysis of the history and development of Houba folk song. By analyzing historical documents and synthesizing information from interviews with key informants, the researcher identified that the history of Houba folk song can be divided into five distinct periods. The development of Houba folk song in each period was summarized, providing a comprehensive overview of their evolution over time. For the second research objective, the researcher again utilized literature review and interview methods to investigate the social functions and transmission mechanisms of Houba folk song. This approach allowed the researcher to explore how these songs serve various social functions within the Tujia community and how they are transmitted across generations. The data collected from literature sources and interviews were analyzed to identify five critical social functions of Houba folk song, shedding light on their role in the community's cultural and social life. By integrating findings from literature reviews and interviews, the researcher understood the historical development and the social functions of Houba folk song. This comprehensive analysis provided valuable insights into the cultural significance and sustainability of Houba folk song in Shi San Village.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The History and Development of Houba Folk Song

Houba folk song have a history spanning thousands of years, reflecting the life and development of the Tujia people in

Shi San Village. Despite periods of social turmoil and war, these songs have survived due to the Tujia people's ability to adapt, absorb, integrate, and innovate within a multicultural context. The resilient nature of the Tujia community has allowed them to preserve their musical traditions even in challenging times.

Researchers have identified that the history and development of Houba folk song can be divided into five distinct periods, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 summarizes the history and development of Houba folk song; from this, we can draw the following conclusions.

From ancient times to the Zhou dynasty (Ancient Times - 221 BC)

During this period, Houba folk song were primarily composed of the Ba people's speculations on the origin of humanity, legends of mythological stories, and records of natural disasters. Additionally, the bravery and war achievements of the Ba people's army were celebrated in these songs. The king named the area inhabited by the Ba people "Bazi country" in recognition of their military prowess. Representative songs from this era include Creation Song, Waving Hand Song, and Gourd Song, which praised ancestors and soldiers.

From the "Great Unity" of the Qin dynasty to before the opium war (221 BC – 1840 AD)

During the "Great Unity" period of the Qin Dynasty, the Ba people were allowed to administer their own country due to the trust the king had in them. However, during the Han Dynasty, the increasing power of the Ba people led the king to send an army to destroy Bazi country, forcing the Ba people to migrate westward to the Wuling Mountains (present-day Chongqing, Guizhou, Hunan, and Hubei). The Ba people who settled in the Qianjiang district of Chongqing called their area "Shi San village." In the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties, the Ba people once again pledged allegiance to the king, helping win many wars. Famous poets admired and wrote lyrics for Ba people's bamboo songs during this period. The Tujia people of Shi San village began to refer to their folk songs as "Houba folk song." In 1616 AD, the Qing Dynasty's policy of "Gai Tu Gui Liu" led to external cultural influences on Shi San village. Themes of migration and homesickness were prevalent in Houba folk song during this period, with representative songs including Bamboo Song and Ti Ma Song.

From the opium war to before the founding of the people's republic of China (1840 AD – 1949 AD)

The Opium War in 1840 marked the beginning of China's transformation into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The subsequent war against Japan brought further suffering and poverty to the Tujia people of Shi San village. Houba folk song from this era reflect themes of war, poverty, and suffering, alongside praises for the Red Army and significant

Table 2. The history and development of houba folk song

| Time Period | Historical Context | Development Focus | Representative Songs |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
| Ancient times - 221 BC | Ancient times Zhou Dynasty | Origin of human beings Legends of mythological stories Records of natural disasters War achievements | Creation song Waving hand song Gourd song |
| 221BC-1840AD | Qin Dynasty “Great Unity” “Gai Tu Gui Liu” | Migration Homesickness | Bamboo song Ti Ma song |
| 1840AD-1949AD | Opium War War of Resistance Against Japanese war | About war About poverty About suffering Praise the Red Army | Opium bitter song The bitter of long-time worker The suffering of being single Xie Tang song Ten times embroider Red Army all over the world |
| 1949AD-2000AD | The founding of the People’s Republic of China | Praise the Communist Party Praise the great men Praise the national heroes | Singing about the Communist Party Welcome song Love song |
| Since 2000AD | Developed tourism; Houba folk song in the list of Chongqing Intangible Cultural Heritage; | Praise the motherland Praise the Glorify the Communist Party Praise the happy life Praise the beautiful love | Be Pregnant song The moon shines brightly Quarrel song |

Source: Yuzhu Zhou (June, 2023)

leaders. Representative songs from this period include Opium Bitter Song, The Bitter of a Long Time Worker, Xie Tang Song, and Ten Times Embroider Red Army All Over the World.

From the founding of the people’s republic of china to 2000 (1949 AD – 2000 AD)

The establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 brought renewed vitality and hope to the people. The Tujia were recognized as an independent ethnic minority on January 3, 1957. During this period, the themes of Houba folk song evolved to include praises for the motherland, the Communist Party of China, national unity, and aspirations for a better life. Representative songs from this period include Singing about the Communist Party, Welcome Song, and Love Song.

In the new era (Since 2000 AD)

Since 2000, Shi San village has preserved the oldest Tujia ecological culture, and the tourism industry has flourished, improving the villagers’ quality of life. In 2007, Houba folk song were included in Chongqing’s list of intangible cultural heritage, which greatly stimulated the villagers’ desire to create new Houba folk song. The themes of these songs in the new era include praise for the glory of the Communist Party, the motherland, national heroes, a happy life, and beautiful love. Representative songs from this period are Be Pregnant, The Moon Shines Brightly, and Quarrel.

These conclusions illustrate the resilience and adaptability of Houba folk song, which have continually evolved to reflect the historical, social, and cultural changes experienced by the Tujia people of Shi San village.

The Social Function and Transmission of Houba Folk Song

To understand the social functions of Houba folk song, the researcher visited the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office of the Chongqing Municipal Cultural and Tourism Commission and conducted an interview with the director, Haitao Wang. This information was combined with insights from musicians during fieldwork. The study identified four primary social functions of Houba folk song, as detailed in Table 3.

The social functions of houba folk song

The researcher visited the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office of the Chongqing Municipal Cultural and Tourism Commission to gather data on the social functions of the Houba folk song. The researcher conducted an interview with the director of the Office of Intangible Cultural Heritage. By combining this information with the accounts of musicians during fieldwork, the researcher determined that Houba folk song have four distinct social functions, as shown in Table 3. Table 3 summarizes the four social functions of Houba folk song:

1. **Cognitive and Educational Function:** Houba folk song serve an essential cognitive and educational purpose by recording information about human origins, natural landscapes, and other aspects of the world. This has provided generations of Tujia people with a foundational understanding of their environment and history. Additionally, these songs embody traditional Chinese virtues and life philosophies, thereby reflecting their educational value.
2. **Entertainment Function:** The entertainment function of Houba folk song is evident in their ability to enrich the

Table 3. The social functions of houba folk song

| Function | Embodiment |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Cognitive and Education | 1. Helps villagers understand humans, nature, and life 2. Spreads traditional virtues of the Chinese nation and conveys life philosophies |
| Entertainment | 1. Enriches the spiritual world 2. Eases villagers' moods and eliminates fatigue 3. Enlivens the atmosphere of activities |
| Etiquette and Communication | 1. Spreads customs and etiquette requirements 2. Facilitates communication and exchange |
| Cultural and Transmission | 1. Spreads excellent Tujia culture 2. Transmits the art of folk songs |

Source: Yuzhu Zhou (July, 2023)

spiritual lives of the villagers. These songs provide enjoyment during leisure time, uplift spirits during work, enhance festive atmospheres, and help adjust emotions during times of sorrow, thereby serving as a crucial source of entertainment.

3. **Etiquette and Communication Function:** Houba folk song also play a vital role in festivals and rituals, facilitating social interactions and promoting etiquette among villagers. By communicating through song, villagers can bridge distances, make interactions more personal and direct, and enhance social cohesion. This reflects the etiquette and communication functions of these songs.
4. **Cultural and Transmission Function:** With a history spanning thousands of years, Houba folk song have borne witness to the cultural and historical changes in Shi San Village. They accompany the lives of villagers, preserving and transmitting the Tujia cultural heritage. As an intangible cultural heritage, these songs possess strong cultural and transmission functions, ensuring the continuity of traditional folk song art.

The importance of preserving and transmitting Houba folk song is emphasized through fieldwork and interviews. The research identified several challenges in the transmission process, including a decline in the younger generation's interest in traditional songs and a lack of systematic preservation efforts. Existing transmission methods primarily involve oral traditions and community events, which are becoming less effective over time.

The transmission of houba folk song

As an intangible cultural heritage, Houba folk songs have chronicled the history and development of Shi San Village, capturing the thoughts and lives of its inhabitants for millennia. These songs are a vital part of Tujia music culture, possessing significant value for preservation and transmission. Nevertheless, the process of transmitting these songs has encountered considerable obstacles. Without effective interventions, this ancient musical tradition is at risk of disappearing. This section examines the importance of protecting and

transmitting Houba folk song, the challenges faced in this process, and provides recommendations for improvement.

Existing transmission mechanisms for houba folk song

To safeguard and transmit the invaluable intangible cultural heritage of Houba folk song, the Shi San Village Committee, Qianjiang County Government, Chongqing Culture and Tourism Commission, and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office have collaboratively implemented several protective and transmission measures. These measures, collected and organized by the researcher, include the following components:

- a. **Establishment of Infrastructure:** To support the transmission of Houba folk song, government funding has facilitated the construction of key infrastructure in Shi San Village. This includes a folk song duet pavilion, a folk song reading room, and a Tujia folk opera house. These facilities provide essential venues for the performance and preservation of Houba folk song.
- b. **Houba Folk Song Competitions and Festival Activities:** With governmental support, Shi San Village has hosted various competitions and cultural events, such as the Runner's Festival, folk song competitions, and village leader conferences. These events attract numerous tourists, thereby enhancing the visibility and appreciation of Houba folk song.
- c. **Government Incentive Mechanisms:** The government has bolstered the preservation efforts by improving the village's infrastructure and providing financial incentives, including rewards and subsidies, to inheritors and members of the Houba folk song performance team. These incentives play a crucial role in sustaining the tradition and encouraging active participation in cultural preservation.
- d. **Utilization of Social Media:** By disseminating videos of Houba folk song on social media platforms, villagers and the secretary of Shi San Village have garnered millions of followers. This digital engagement has introduced Houba folk song to a wider audience, thereby increasing their popularity and ensuring their continued relevance in contemporary culture. Collectively, these efforts significantly contribute to the protection and transmission of Houba folk song, ensuring that this rich cultural heritage remains vibrant and continues to be cherished by future generations.

Problems and course of transmission

In 2007, the Qianjiang County government re-planned and developed Xiaonanhai and Shi San Village into tourist attractions to boost tourism. Promoted under the theme "Mysterious Daughter Valley, Shi San Village for Thousands of Years," the initiative aimed to attract tourists. However, tourism development has been lukewarm, and the village's popularity and economic benefits have not significantly improved. During fieldwork in Shi San Village, villagers expressed concerns to the researcher about the declining interest in singing Houba folk song. They noted that enthusiasm

among the villagers is waning, and the transmission of folk songs has encountered substantial obstacles. The researcher identified several current issues hindering the transmission of Houba folk song:

- a. **Inconvenient Transportation:** Shi San Village is located in the Wuling Mountains. While driving to the Xiaonanhai National Geological Park is straightforward, reaching Shi San Village requires an additional 20-minute drive along a mountainous road, which lacks proper signage and often gives the impression that no further attractions exist. The road conditions, including areas with stone slides, further complicate access.
- b. **Lack of Publicity:** Despite extensive publicity for Xiaonanhai Geoparks, there is minimal promotion of Houba folk song and Shi San Village. This lack of visibility contributes to the low popularity of Houba folk song.
- c. **Discrepancy between Publicity and Reality:** In 2007, the Qianjiang District government promoted Shi San Village as “Mysterious Girl Valley” due to its historical matrilineal traditions. However, during the researcher’s visit, there was little evidence of this matrilineal heritage. Some villagers supported the matrilineal tradition, while younger villagers were less inclined to uphold it, leading to a lack of unified cultural ideology. Additionally, folk songs reflecting matrilineal society are rare, weakening the unique appeal of the village and potentially disappointing tourists.
- d. **Impact of Pop Music:** According to a local informant (He, 2023), the traditional transmission of Houba folk song involves preserving the original songs without adaptation. However, modern pop music, which is more fashionable and contemporary, has influenced villagers, especially the youth. Young people prefer learning pop music over the traditional and conservative Houba folk song.
- e. **Insufficient Innovative Ideas:** Due to its remote location, the villagers of Shi San Village have limited contact with the outside world. This isolation hampers their ability to keep up with contemporary developments, resulting in a lack of innovative ideas in folk song creation. Consequently, the newly created folk songs do not appeal to younger generations.
- f. **Demanding Selection of Inheritors:** The selection criteria for inheritors of Houba folk song are stringent, requiring not only a love for singing but also excellent singing techniques and songwriting abilities. These high standards discourage villagers with limited vocal capabilities from participating in the transmission of Houba folk song, thereby reducing overall enthusiasm.
- g. **Impact of COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted all sectors, including the tourism industry of Shi San Village. The lack of tourists resulted in no performances and, consequently, no income. This financial strain diverted villagers’ focus towards earning a livelihood, significantly diminishing their passion for creating and transmitting folk songs.
- h. **Inadequate Government Incentives:** Young people in Shi San Village are curious about the outside world and

prefer to work elsewhere to earn money. They perceive the process of learning and transmitting folk songs as time-consuming and financially unrewarding. Despite obtaining certificates, the financial returns are minimal, prompting them to seek employment opportunities outside the village. To address these challenges, it is essential to enhance transportation infrastructure, increase publicity for Houba folk song, align promotional themes with actual cultural practices, integrate modern elements to attract younger audiences, and provide adequate government incentives to sustain the tradition of Houba folk song.

Suggestion of transmission

- a. **Integrate Houba folk song into School Curricula:** Houba folk song can be introduced as part of the intangible cultural heritage curriculum in Xiaonanhai Town Primary School and Qianjiang Middle School. Inheritors of Houba folk song can visit these schools weekly to teach students. They can develop teaching and assessment plans tailored to the students’ needs and organize Houba folk song competitions. This approach not only popularizes Houba folk song but also identifies and nurtures potential future inheritors among the students.
- b. **Publish Folk Song Teaching Materials:** The principal of Xiaonanhai Primary School has previously compiled some Houba folk song into a book titled “Newly Compiled Houba Folk Song,” as shown in Figure 3. Although the book contains only lyrics and no melodies, it significantly aids the dissemination of Houba folk song. During fieldwork, the researcher collected 28 Houba folk song with both lyrics and melodies. These melodies can be recorded and included in textbooks, serving as school-based teaching materials.
- c. **Repair Roads and Add Signage:** Improve the infrastructure by repairing sections of the highway where rocks have fallen and adding signage promoting Houba folk song and Shi San Village along the route. This will enhance accessibility and awareness for tourists.
- d. **Strengthen Publicity:** Increase promotional efforts by highlighting Houba folk song as a unique cultural feature. Publicity should not be limited to Xiaonanhai Town but should extend to Qianjiang District, Chongqing, and



Figure 3. Book of houba folk song
Source: Yuzhu zhou (August, 2023)

even nationwide. This broader reach can significantly boost the popularity of Houba folk song.

- e. **Align Slogans with Actual Cultural Practices:** As the “Millennium Daughter Valley,” Shi San Village must unify the thoughts and understanding of its villagers regarding their matriarchal heritage. Increase cultural products and songs that reflect matrilineal traditions to align with the promotional theme and meet tourist expectations.
- f. **Enhance Innovation in Houba folk song:** Encourage innovation in folk songs by modernizing old songs without altering their original essence. This approach can infuse traditional songs with contemporary relevance, making them more appealing to younger audiences.
- g. **Adjust Selection Criteria for Inheritors:** Broaden the criteria for selecting inheritors. Selection should not be limited to residents of Shi San Village or those with high levels of singing techniques. Anyone who loves Houba folk song and is willing to contribute to their transmission should be eligible to participate.
- h. **Open Village Leader Competitions to the Public:** Invite the public to participate in the village leader selection competitions. This event can attract visitors from various regions, allowing them to experience Tujia folk customs, listen to Houba folk song, and vote for their favorite candidates. Such engagement can foster a sense of belonging among tourists and create direct connections between Shi San Village and its visitors.
- i. **Clarify Transmission Responsibilities:** Emphasize that the preservation and transmission of Houba folk song are collective responsibilities of the villagers. As the birthplace of these songs, the pride of Shi San Village lies in its cultural heritage. Encouraging villagers to actively sing, cherish, and protect these songs is crucial for their continued preservation and transmission.
- j. **Utilize the Internet and Social Media:** Leverage the power of social media by creating a dedicated public account and social media profiles for Houba folk song, managed by designated personnel. Regularly release promotional videos and folk song performances. Encourage villagers to create personal social media accounts to further publicize Houba folk song and enhance their popularity. By implementing these suggestions, the preservation and transmission of Houba folk song can be significantly improved, ensuring the continuation of this rich cultural heritage for future generations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Shi San Village is renowned as the “birthplace of folk songs” due to its rich tradition of Houba folk song, which have a history spanning thousands of years. These songs have documented the production, lives, and cultural evolution of the Tujia people in Shi San Village. As history has progressed, the thoughts and lives of the Tujia villagers have changed, and this is reflected in the evolving characteristics of Houba folk song across different historical periods. This study examines the history and development of Houba folk song across five distinct periods, highlighting

their adaptability and resilience. Houba folk song serve four primary social functions: cognitive and educational, entertainment, etiquette and communication, and cultural transmission. These functions underscore the multifaceted role that Houba folk song play in the lives of the Tujia people. They are not only a source of entertainment and a means of preserving cultural heritage but also serve educational purposes and facilitate social interactions and communication within the community. These functions have helped sustain the relevance and importance of Houba folk song throughout the centuries. The first research objective focused on the history and development of Houba folk song. The findings related to the ancient period up to 1840 AD align with existing studies on the history of Tujia folk music, such as “Research on the History of Tujia Folk Music Culture” by Su (2021) and “History Draft of Ancient Music of China’s Ethnic Minorities” by Sun (2020). Since the establishment of Shi San Village, the villagers have named their creations Houba folk song. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the specific history and development of folk songs in Shi San Village. This study fills that gap by providing in-depth research on this subject. The second research objective was to explore the social functions and transmission of Houba folk song. The study’s conclusions regarding social functions, the roles of inheritors, and existing inheritance methods are consistent with previous research. For instance, Guixiang Tian, the fifth-generation inheritor of Houba folk song from Hejiazhai, has been actively preserving and transmitting these songs since she became an inheritor at the age of 48 (Qian, 2020). However, there is a lack of literature on the specific methods of transmission for Houba folk song. Based on the research findings and personal insights, this study proposes new suggestions and methods for the effective transmission of Houba folk song. In conclusion, this study contributes significantly to the understanding of Houba folk song by documenting their historical development and elucidating their social functions. It also addresses the challenges in the transmission of these songs and offers practical recommendations for their preservation. By integrating historical analysis with contemporary observations, this research provides a comprehensive overview of Houba folk song and their enduring significance in Shi San Village. The proposed measures for enhancing the transmission and preservation of these songs aim to ensure that this rich cultural heritage continues to thrive for future generations.

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