

Literacy Transmission Practices for the Preservation of Wuyue Ceremonial Chinese Folk Songs

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ABSTRACT

Wuyue ceremonial Chinese folk songs, historically performed during sacrificial ceremonies, represent a significant part of China's intangible cultural heritage. These songs are deeply rooted in ancient Chinese religious practices and are important for preserving cultural identity. This study investigates the literacy transmission practices that contribute to the preservation of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs. The research focuses on how written and digital forms of documentation can complement the oral traditions traditionally used to transmit Wuyue. The study was conducted in Qinghai Province, where Wuyue originated, involving three key informants, including cultural scholars, educators, and local performers deeply engaged in preserving Wuyue. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results highlight the declining prevalence of Wuyue due to modernization and generational disengagement. However, the shift towards literacy-based transmission, including written documentation and digital archiving, has played a crucial role in preserving Wuyue. Educational programs and digital platforms offer promising avenues for revitalizing this tradition. The study suggests further integration of Wuyue into formal education and the development of innovative digital strategies to engage younger generations. These findings provide valuable insights into balancing modernization with cultural heritage preservation.

Key words: Wuyue Ceremonial Folk Songs, Cultural Preservation, Literacy Transmission, Oral Tradition, Chinese Intangible Heritage

INTRODUCTION

The preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage has garnered increasing attention in the contemporary world, particularly in the context of traditional folk music forms. One such form is the Wuyue, a ceremonial Chinese folk song historically used in sacrificial ceremonies (Howard, 2016; Song et al., 2019; Wang & Ye, 2022). Wuyue represents an ancient musical expression deeply rooted in Chinese religious and social practices. These ceremonial songs, performed during sacrifices to communicate with the gods, hold a unique place in Chinese history. They reflect the complex relationship between culture, spirituality, and music, making their preservation vital to maintaining the cultural identity of the regions where they originated (Deng, 2020; Lidskog, 2016). However, with the rapid modernization of China and the shift in societal values, many traditional practices, including Wuyue, face the risk of extinction. This study seeks to investigate the literacy transmission practices that contribute to the preservation of Wuyue ceremonial songs and how these practices can be revitalized to ensure their sustainability for future generations.

The central problem confronting Wuyue and similar folk traditions is the significant decline in their transmission,

primarily due to changing societal priorities and the modernization of education systems. Traditionally, Wuyue was passed down orally from one generation to the next through performances and community events, such as sacrificial ceremonies and folk gatherings. However, traditional music forms are gradually marginalized as the education system increasingly focuses on literacy and modern knowledge (Campbell, 2017; Pitts, 2019; Wu & Xu, 2023). The absence of systematic documentation and formal education and the lack of integration of these songs into modern curricula exacerbates the decline. Additionally, younger generations are more inclined toward globalized music trends, often viewing Wuyue as outdated and irrelevant to contemporary life. This shift has led to a cultural gap, where the younger population is less familiar with or indifferent to the folk traditions that have shaped their heritage. Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive examination of the current literacy transmission practices and how these can be restructured to align with modern educational and cultural contexts (Chang et al., 2024; Gao & Karin, 2023; Minor, 2023; Zhang & Thotham, 2024).

The objective of this study is to investigate the literacy transmission practices for the preservation of Wuyue

ceremonial Chinese folk songs. While oral transmission has traditionally been the primary method of passing down Wuyue, this study focuses on how written and documented forms of literacy can play a role in preserving this cultural treasure. By examining Wuyue transmission's historical, cultural, and educational aspects, the study aims to identify effective literacy-based strategies that can contribute to the preservation and revitalization of these ceremonial songs. These strategies could include integrating Wuyue into formal education systems, using digital tools for documentation and dissemination, and developing comprehensive curricula that emphasize the cultural importance of folk music. Furthermore, the study will explore the potential of combining traditional oral methods with modern literacy practices to create a more sustainable model for Wuyue transmission (Chen, 2024; Breuer, 2001).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the broader field of cultural preservation, particularly in the context of Chinese folk music. Understanding how literacy transmission practices can support the preservation of Wuyue provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of maintaining intangible cultural heritage in an increasingly globalized and modernized society. Moreover, the study's findings could serve as a framework for the preservation of other endangered folk traditions, not only in China but also in other parts of the world where similar cultural erosion is taking place. By investigating the role of literacy in the preservation of Wuyue, this research highlights the importance of balancing modernization with cultural heritage conservation, ensuring that these ancient ceremonial songs remain a living, vibrant part of Chinese culture for future generations.

Research Question

- How do literacy transmission practices contribute to the preservation of Wuyue ceremonial Chinese folk songs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Wuyue ceremonial Chinese folk songs, which hold significant historical and spiritual importance, are at risk of being lost in the face of modern societal changes. The theoretical frameworks related to the literacy transmission practices that contribute to the preservation of Wuyue ceremonial songs. Three key areas will be discussed: oral tradition as a form of cultural transmission, the role of literacy in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and the intersection of modern educational practices with traditional folk music.

Oral Tradition and Cultural Transmission

The primary transmission mode for Wuyue songs, as with many traditional music forms, has historically been oral. Oral tradition, a cornerstone in the study of intangible heritage, emphasizes the role of communal memory, live performance, and generational transmission without reliance on written records. The theory of orality suggests that cultures with strong oral traditions, such as the rural communities

where Wuyue originated, depend on storytelling, singing, and communal activities to pass down knowledge and practices (Lowry, 1996; McLaren, 1998). In the case of Wuyue, these songs were often performed during sacrificial ceremonies, functioning as both a spiritual practice and a means of reinforcing social cohesion. However, oral transmission alone presents limitations, particularly in modern contexts where younger generations are increasingly disconnected from these traditions. The decline in the practice of Wuyue is partly attributed to the reduced frequency of communal gatherings and the shifting cultural priorities of younger individuals, who are more likely to engage with contemporary forms of music and entertainment (Mahuika, 2019; Tang, 2021).

Literacy and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

While oral tradition remains a vital aspect of Wuyue, literacy, specifically the documentation and recording of folk traditions, has emerged as a critical tool in the preservation of endangered cultural forms. Literacy transmission practices involve the use of written records, musical scores, and academic studies to document and disseminate folk songs. In the context of Wuyue, the shift from an exclusively oral tradition to one that incorporates literacy practices can provide a framework for safeguarding these songs for future generations. Literacy allows for the creation of permanent records, which can be archived, studied, and revived even in the absence of live performances (Duan & Choatchamrat, 2023; Gong et al., 2024; Wu & Chuangprakhon, 2024). Moreover, literacy-based transmission can expand Wuyue's reach beyond its traditional geographic boundaries, making it accessible to a global audience through publications, recordings, and digital media. The theory of literacy in cultural preservation posits that while oral traditions capture folk music's fluid and dynamic nature, literacy helps stabilize and preserve these traditions in the face of cultural erosion (Bronner, 2019; Iyengar & Smith, 2016). Digital preservation tools like the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Digital Pavilion and UNESCO's Digital Archive Initiative are enhancing the longevity of cultural practices like Wuyue. These platforms create interactive records, catalogue oral traditions, and preserve performance nuances. AI-driven music transcription software aids in automated documentation, but the challenge lies in balancing authenticity with literacy and digital tools (Thwaites, 2021; Zhu, 2024). In this context, the challenge lies in finding a balance between maintaining the authenticity of Wuyue as an oral art form and leveraging literacy to ensure its survival.

Integration of Modern Education and Folk Music Transmission

The intersection of modern education with traditional music transmission provides another theoretical lens through which the preservation of Wuyue can be examined. The theory of educational integration argues that when properly designed, formal education systems can serve as a vehicle

for the transmission of folk music traditions. Traditional music, such as Wuyue, is often excluded from school curricula, leading to a generational gap in knowledge and practice. However, the integration of folk music into the educational system offers a means to revitalize interest in these traditions among younger generations. This approach involves incorporating Wuyue into music education, developing teaching materials based on folk music, and promoting cultural literacy that values traditional forms alongside contemporary ones. Modern educational practices can also facilitate the development of new transmission methods, such as digital media, which provide students with greater access to traditional music archives (Crawford, 2017; Dorfman, 2022; Green, 2017). Emerging digital tools in educational settings, such as online music learning platforms and virtual reality (VR) enhanced performances, make traditional folk music more engaging for students. These technologies allow for immersive experiences, where students can “participate” in traditional Wuyue performances through virtual environments, thus bridging the gap between modern students and ancient traditions (Bauer, 2020; Sai, 2024). By combining traditional oral methods with written and recorded forms of transmission, schools can create a hybrid model of cultural preservation that resonates with both modern and traditional audiences. The educational approach, therefore, complements the literacy transmission practices and ensures that Wuyue continues to be an active and evolving part of Chinese cultural heritage.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the literacy transmission practices contributing to the preservation of Wuyue ceremonial Chinese folk songs. Qualitative research is well-suited for examining the complex cultural practices and deeply rooted traditions associated with folk music transmission. Through a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and document analysis, this study aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms of how Wuyue songs are passed down through generations and preserved in modern contexts (Erjian & Chuangprakhon, 2023; Kuang & He, 2022). This study follows the theoretical framework of ethnomusicology, which provides an interdisciplinary approach by integrating methods from anthropology, musicology, and sociology to analyze the cultural, social, and historical aspects of Wuyue ceremonial music.

Selection of Key Informants

Three key informants were selected for this study based on specific selection criteria that ensured their relevance and expertise in the preservation and transmission of Wuyue ceremonial songs. These criteria included:

- Extensive experience and involvement with Wuyue ceremonial folk songs, particularly in performance, education, or cultural research.
- A recognized role in the preservation and transmission of Wuyue traditions, whether through oral or literacy-based methods.

- Active participation in community or institutional efforts* to sustain and revitalize Wuyue traditions.
- A willingness and ability to provide in-depth insights into the practices and challenges of preserving Wuyue in modern contexts.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the five key informants. This interview format allowed for flexibility in exploring topics related to the research question while ensuring that the core themes of literacy transmission and Wuyue preservation were covered. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses about the informants’ experiences with Wuyue ceremonial songs, their methods of transmission, and the challenges they have encountered in preserving these songs.

Some of the key topics discussed during the interviews include:

- The role of oral tradition in transmitting Wuyue songs.
- How written and recorded materials contribute to the preservation of Wuyue.
- The impact of formal education and modern technology on Wuyue transmission.
- The balance between maintaining traditional practices and adapting to contemporary contexts.

Each interview was approximately one hour in length and was audio-recorded with the informants’ consent. These recordings were later transcribed for analysis.

Field Observations

In addition to the interviews, field observations were conducted at selected cultural events and educational settings where Wuyue songs were performed or taught. These observations provided valuable insights into how literacy and oral transmission practices coexist in real-world contexts. For example, observations were made during cultural festivals where Wuyue songs were performed by local singers, as well as in school settings where folk music was being taught as part of the curriculum.

Document Analysis

Document analysis involved reviewing relevant texts, including written records of Wuyue songs, music scores, archival materials, and educational resources. This step was crucial for understanding the extent to which Wuyue has been documented and preserved in written form. It also helped to identify gaps in the existing literature and highlight the importance of literacy in ensuring the long-term preservation of these songs.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification of recurring patterns and themes within qualitative data. The interview

transcripts, field notes, and documents were coded and categorized according to the main themes of the study, such as oral transmission, literacy-based preservation, and educational practices. By comparing the responses from different informants and the observations made in the field, the study was able to conclude how literacy practices contribute to the preservation of Wuyue.

RESULTS

The integration of literacy transmission practices into this process plays a crucial role in ensuring that these songs continue to thrive in contemporary times. This study focuses on how literacy, both in its traditional written form and modern digital formats, contributes to the preservation and continued transmission of Wuyue. The results presented in this section explore the current status of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs and the specific literacy practices that have been employed to safeguard and transmit this cultural treasure.

Current Status of Wuyue Ceremonial Folk Songs

The Wuyue ceremonial folk songs, deeply rooted in the ancient sacrificial practices of Chinese culture, represent a significant part of the country's intangible heritage. These songs, once central to various rituals aimed at communicating with spiritual forces, are now at a crossroads, facing challenges of modernity and evolving cultural priorities. This section delves into the current status of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs, particularly in Qinghai Province, where efforts to preserve these traditions have faced both obstacles and opportunities. The role of literacy transmission practices in preserving these folk songs has become increasingly important, especially as oral traditions wane and new methods of documentation and teaching emerge. The following analysis focuses on the prevalence of Wuyue in modern Chinese society, the settings in which these songs are performed, and the varying levels of engagement from different generations, with an emphasis on how literacy practices contribute to both the preservation and decline of this tradition.

Prevalence and performance of wuyue ceremonial folk songs

The prevalence of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs in modern Chinese society has significantly decreased over the past few decades. According to interviews with key informants, the practice of these songs is largely confined to specific festivals, religious ceremonies, and rural communities, where older generations maintain the tradition. A ceremonial space where Wuyue songs are still performed, often during significant cultural or religious events. However, such performances are becoming increasingly rare as younger generations migrate to urban areas, leaving behind the rural settings where these traditions were once integral to daily life. The decreasing frequency of Wuyue performances can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the influence of modern lifestyles, shifts in cultural values, and the growing

dominance of popular music and digital entertainment, as shown in Figure 1.

In some regions, such as Qinghai Province, where Wuyue originated, the songs are still performed during traditional festivals, particularly those related to agricultural rituals and religious events. However, even in these settings, the number of practitioners and audience members has dwindled. The ritual utensils used in a traditional Wuyue ceremony highlight the formality and reverence that once accompanied these performances. Today, such ceremonies are often seen as remnants of a bygone era, appealing more to cultural preservationists and historians than to the general public. This shift in perception has led to a gradual decline in the public practice of Wuyue songs despite efforts to maintain their relevance, as shown in Figure 2.

The role of literacy in preserving wuyue ceremonial folk songs

One of the most significant changes in the transmission of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs is the shift from oral to literacy-based methods of preservation. Traditionally, these songs were passed down orally from generation to generation, with little to no written documentation. However, as literacy rates have improved and modern education systems have expanded, the role of written and digital records in preserving Wuyue has become more prominent. This transition from oral tradition to literacy-based transmission has played a critical role in ensuring that Wuyue songs are not completely lost to time.

Literacy has allowed for the documentation of Wuyue songs in written form, providing a means for future



Figure 1. Wuyue ceremonial place
Source: Xin You, from fieldwork in January 2023

generations to access these cultural artifacts. Scholars and cultural preservationists have compiled textual records of Wuyue lyrics, musical compositions, and the associated ceremonial practices. A sacrificial scene during a Wuyue ceremony is an event that has been carefully documented to preserve its cultural significance. These written records not only serve as a repository of knowledge but also facilitate the teaching of Wuyue in academic settings, where students can learn about the history and performance of these songs without needing to rely solely on oral tradition.

The role of literacy in preserving Wuyue extends beyond mere documentation. Educational institutions have begun to incorporate Wuyue into their curricula, teaching students about the cultural and historical importance of these songs. This formalization of Wuyue into educational settings represents a significant departure from its traditional mode of transmission, where songs were learned through participation in ceremonies and community gatherings. By incorporating Wuyue into literacy-based education, schools and cultural organizations are helping to ensure that the songs remain accessible to future generations, even as oral traditions continue to decline.

Generational engagement with wuyue ceremonial folk songs

The level of engagement with Wuyue ceremonial folk songs varies significantly between younger and older generations. Older generations, particularly those living in rural areas, continue to practice and value these songs as an integral part of their cultural identity. For them, Wuyue represents a connection to their ancestors, their community, and their spiritual beliefs. Interviews with these practitioners reveal a deep sense of responsibility to preserve the tradition despite the challenges posed by modernization.

Younger generations, however, show less interest in Wuyue as they are more exposed to modern forms of entertainment and education. Many young people today are drawn to popular music genres such as rock, pop, and hip-hop, leaving little room for traditional forms like Wuyue. Moreover, the urban migration of younger individuals has further distanced them from the rural settings where Wuyue is traditionally practiced. A traditional sacrificial scene that is now primarily preserved through written and visual documentation rather than through regular community practice. This reliance on literacy for preservation, while crucial, has also created a disconnect between the tradition and its original oral transmission methods, as shown in Figure 3.

Despite this generational divide, there have been efforts to bridge the gap through literacy-based initiatives. Cultural organizations have created digital archives of Wuyue songs, allowing young people to access these cultural artifacts online. Additionally, music schools have begun offering courses on traditional Chinese music, including Wuyue, providing students with both theoretical and practical knowledge of these songs. While these efforts are still in their early stages, they represent a positive step toward re-engaging younger generations with Wuyue.



Figure 2. Wuyue ritual utensil

Source: Xin You, from fieldwork in January 2023



Figure 3. Wuyue sacrificial scene

Source: Xin You, from fieldwork in January 2023

Transmission Practices of Wuyue: Literacy as a Tool for Preservation

The transmission of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs has historically relied on oral tradition, with knowledge passed down through generations via participation in rituals and ceremonies. However, as the societal and cultural landscape of China has evolved, the preservation of Wuyue through oral methods alone has proven to be insufficient in maintaining the continuity and relevance of this ancient musical form. In response to these challenges, literacy-based practices have emerged as vital tools for the preservation and transmission of Wuyue. These practices, which include written documentation, educational programs, and digital archiving, have played a pivotal role in ensuring that Wuyue remains

accessible and relevant to future generations. This section examines the role of literacy in supplementing traditional oral methods, exploring how formal education and digital platforms are reshaping the transmission of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs.

Written documentation as a preservation strategy

One of the most significant shifts in the transmission of Wuyue has been the transition from oral to written forms of preservation. Historically, Wuyue songs were rarely documented, relying instead on community performances and personal memory to ensure their continuity. As literacy rates in China improved and more emphasis was placed on cultural preservation, scholars and cultural institutions began to document Wuyue songs in written form. This has allowed for the standardization and preservation of these songs, ensuring that their lyrics, melodies, and ritual contexts are recorded for posterity.

Written documentation serves multiple purposes in the preservation of Wuyue. Firstly, it provides a permanent record that can be used for both academic study and cultural education. In regions where oral traditions are weakening, written records act as a safeguard against the loss of important cultural knowledge. Additionally, these documents allow for the cross-generational transmission of Wuyue, as younger generations can access written materials that explain the historical and cultural significance of the songs. Figures 1 and 2, depicting ceremonial spaces and ritual utensils, illustrate how these songs are embedded in a broader cultural and spiritual context, which written documentation helps to preserve.

Furthermore, the use of written documentation has enabled Wuyue to be taught in academic settings, where students can study the lyrics and musical structure of the songs in a more formalized way. Educational materials, including textbooks and research papers, now include sections dedicated to Wuyue, providing a comprehensive understanding of its historical significance and its role in Chinese ceremonial practices. This integration of Wuyue into written curricula has expanded its reach, introducing the tradition to individuals who may not have been exposed to it through oral or familial transmission.

Educational programs and formalized learning

Educational programs, particularly those in schools and universities, have become one of the primary vehicles for the transmission of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs. By incorporating Wuyue into the music curricula of educational institutions, teachers and cultural preservationists are ensuring that the tradition is passed on to future generations through structured learning environments. These programs focus not only on the performance of Wuyue songs but also on their cultural, historical, and ritual significance, providing students with a well-rounded understanding of the tradition.

The role of literacy in these educational programs is twofold. Firstly, literacy enables students to engage with Wuyue songs on a textual level, studying the lyrics, musical

notation, and historical records associated with each song. This method of transmission allows for a more analytical approach to learning, as students can dissect the structure and meaning of the songs in ways that oral tradition does not always permit. Secondly, literacy facilitates the documentation of new interpretations and performances of Wuyue, allowing students to contribute to the ongoing evolution of the tradition. As Wuyue continues to be taught in formal educational settings, it benefits from a degree of intellectual rigor that ensures its preservation in both its original form and in modern interpretations.

The integration of Wuyue into formal education also addresses some of the challenges posed by modernization. In urban areas, where oral traditions may no longer be as prevalent, schools serve as the primary venue for the transmission of traditional cultural knowledge. By including Wuyue in the curriculum, educational institutions provide a space for students to connect with their cultural heritage in a way that is accessible and relevant to their modern lives. Additionally, Figure 3, which depicts sacrificial scenes during Wuyue ceremonies, are often used as educational tools to help students visualize the cultural context in which these songs were traditionally performed.

Digital platforms and the modern transmission of wuyue

In the digital age, the transmission of Wuyue ceremonial folk songs has expanded beyond the classroom and written texts to include digital platforms that make these songs accessible to a global audience. Digital archiving, online repositories, and multimedia platforms have all contributed to the preservation and dissemination of Wuyue, allowing individuals from all over the world to engage with this cultural tradition. These platforms have not only democratized access to Wuyue but have also provided new opportunities for innovation in how the songs are transmitted and experienced.

Digital platforms play a crucial role in preserving Wuyue by providing a space for the storage and sharing of audio recordings, video performances, and written materials. These platforms ensure that Wuyue is not only preserved in its original form but also remains relevant in a rapidly changing world. For example, online archives now host recordings of traditional Wuyue performances, making them accessible to scholars, students, and enthusiasts who may not have the opportunity to witness these performances in person. Additionally, social media and video-sharing platforms have allowed Wuyue practitioners to reach younger audiences, many of whom may have little exposure to traditional Chinese folk music.

The role of literacy in these digital platforms is evident in the way that Wuyue is cataloged, analyzed, and shared. Written descriptions of the songs, their cultural significance, and their historical context accompany audio and video recordings, providing users with a deeper understanding of the material they are engaging with. Moreover, digital platforms facilitate collaboration between Wuyue practitioners and scholars, allowing for the creation of new works that blend traditional and modern elements. This fusion of old and new is key to keeping Wuyue relevant to younger generations,

who may be more inclined to engage with the tradition if it is presented in a format that aligns with their digital consumption habits.

Literacy as a bridge between tradition and modernity

Literacy, in its various forms, serves as a bridge between the traditional oral methods of Wuyue transmission and the modern tools of preservation and dissemination. While oral traditions remain an important aspect of Wuyue, literacy-based practices have expanded the reach of these songs, ensuring that they are preserved not only for local communities but also for a global audience. By documenting Wuyue songs in written form, incorporating them into educational programs, and making them accessible through digital platforms, literacy has provided a means of preserving both the tangible and intangible elements of this cultural heritage.

The preservation of Wuyue through literacy-based practices has also allowed for the tradition to evolve in ways that oral transmission alone could not achieve. As Wuyue is taught in schools, recorded in archives, and shared online, it continues to adapt to the needs and interests of contemporary society. This adaptability is key to the survival of Wuyue, as it ensures that the tradition remains relevant to younger generations while still retaining its cultural and historical significance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the critical consistencies found in this study relates to the importance of oral tradition in cultural transmission, as Lowry (1996) and McLaren (1998) emphasized. The research confirms that once the backbone of Wuyue's preservation, oral methods are diminishing in their effectiveness due to modern societal changes as younger generations shift towards globalized music trends (Deng, 2020; Mahuika, 2019). This aligns with the theoretical framework of oral tradition, which suggests that while oral transmission fosters communal participation and memory, it is vulnerable to disruption when the social fabric weakens or shifts away from traditional practices. As highlighted in the theoretical perspectives, oral tradition thrives in close-knit communities but struggles to maintain relevance in more dispersed or modernized societies, as seen in the current status of Wuyue.

While the role of oral tradition remains vital for older generations, the transition to literacy-based methods is consistent with theories presented by Bronner (2019) and Iyengar & Smith (2016), which highlight literacy as a stabilizing force in preserving endangered cultural forms. This study supports the assertion that written and digital documentation are critical tools in the fight against cultural erosion, particularly for traditions like Wuyue that rely heavily on communal performance. The findings reinforce the theoretical perspective that literacy provides a more permanent, accessible, and geographically unbounded way of preserving intangible heritage. Written documentation allows for the preservation of the songs and the cultural context in which they are performed, thereby helping to counteract the limitations of oral transmission.

However, the study also reveals inconsistencies with specific theoretical perspectives, especially concerning educational integration. While Campbell (2017) and Green (2017) argue that integrating traditional music into formal education systems can revitalize interest, the study's findings challenge this by showing that such integration has been limited and has not yet effectively re-engaged younger generations with Wuyue. Despite efforts to document and teach Wuyue in educational settings, the study found that these initiatives have yet to gain widespread traction, particularly in urban areas where global music trends dominate (Wu & Xu, 2023). This suggests that the educational integration of traditional music requires more than just inclusion in curricula; it needs strategic alignment with students' cultural preferences and more innovative teaching methods, such as interactive and immersive learning technologies.

Moreover, the findings on digital platforms align with the theoretical perspectives of Dorfman (2022) and Crawford (2017), who emphasize the transformative potential of digital tools in cultural preservation. The research shows that digital platforms have expanded access to Wuyue, making it more accessible to younger generations and global audiences. However, this also reflects the limitation of theoretical perspectives that assume mere availability equates to engagement. While digital archives and recordings make Wuyue more accessible, the study reveals that passive access is insufficient to generate active cultural engagement. As shown in the interviews and field observations, the mere availability of Wuyue through digital archives is not enough to ensure active engagement. This finding adds nuance to the theory by highlighting the need for digital platforms to adopt interactive and socially engaging tools, such as social media integration or gamified learning experiences, to capture the interest of younger audiences.

Overall, the study suggests that while literacy-based practices have played a crucial role in preserving Wuyue, their success depends on broader societal changes, particularly in the educational and digital realms. This aligns with the theoretical principle that cultural preservation is not just about documentation but about creating relevance for future generations (Gao & Karin, 2023). The findings challenge and extend the existing theories by showing that successful cultural transmission in the modern era requires a multi-pronged approach, combining traditional, literacy-based, and digital methods with strategic educational and societal integration. This implies that for Wuyue and similar traditions to thrive, there must be a coordinated effort to make these practices accessible and engaging within contemporary cultural frameworks.

This research highlights the critical role of literacy transmission practices in the preservation of Wuyue ceremonial Chinese folk songs. While oral tradition remains integral to Wuyue's history, the shift towards literacy-based methods, including written documentation and digital archiving, is essential for its continued transmission. The findings of this study confirm that literacy provides a stable foundation for cultural preservation, offering a way to maintain Wuyue's rich history in the face of modern societal changes.

The study also underscores the need for educational reforms that integrate traditional folk music into formal curricula more effectively. While some schools have begun incorporating Wuyue into their music programs, these efforts remain limited, particularly in urban areas. Additionally, digital platforms have the potential to play a significant role, particularly in urban areas where modern music trends dominate. A potential strategy for re-engaging younger generations is to design culturally immersive music courses that blend traditional Wuyue practices with contemporary music genres, allowing students to experience Wuyue in a context that feels relevant to their lives. This could be achieved by collaborating with local cultural organizations and educators to develop music curricula emphasizing Wuyue's cultural and historical significance while offering creative outlets such as composition or performance that allow students to modernize these traditions.

Further research could explore these digital innovations and educational curriculum development to create a comprehensive strategy for preserving Wuyue. Incorporating cross-disciplinary approaches that combine music, technology, and education could strengthen Wuyue's academic and cultural transmission. Comparative studies between Wuyue and other endangered folk traditions could also offer valuable insights into how literacy-based and digital preservation methods have succeeded or failed in different contexts, helping to refine strategies for Wuyue's survival. Community-based approaches that actively involve local practitioners in designing and implementing these strategies would also ensure that preservation efforts remain grounded in the cultural roots of the tradition.

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