

## Historical Development in Education and Cultural Literacy of Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing

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### ABSTRACT

Chinese Tujia folk songs, deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Tujia ethnic group, serve as a living repository of history, values, and traditions. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the historical development of education and cultural literacy in Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing. The comprehensive literature review provides insights into the history of the Tujia ethnic group, their musical heritage, and contemporary challenges to preserving their cultural traditions. The research site includes Youyang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County, Shizhu Tujia Autonomous County, Pengshui Tujia, and Miao Autonomous County, and Qianjiang District. Key informants, including accomplished artists, academic researchers, and local experts, share their invaluable insights related to the preservation and performance of Tujia folk songs. By using the principles of music aesthetics, music ethnology, and ancient Chinese music history. The result of this study underscores the critical importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage, especially in the context of today's rapid modernization and globalization. They highlight those traditional folk songs, like Chinese Tujia working songs, hold immense cultural and historical value. The study also provides actionable recommendations for ensuring the continued vitality of these culturally rich songs. These suggestions can guide efforts to integrate Tujia folk songs into educational curricula, support local musicians and artists, and promote cultural events.

**Key words:** Chinese Tujia Folk Songs, Chongqing, Cultural Literacy, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Ethnomusicology

### INTRODUCTION

China, a vast and diverse nation, is renowned for its rich tapestry of ethnic cultures and traditions (Mackerras et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2018). Among its many ethnic groups, the Tujia people, also known as the Bizka, have a unique cultural heritage that has endured the test of time. Nestled in the picturesque region of Chongqing, the Tujia people have a rich tradition of working songs that have been an integral part of their lives for generations (Li, 2016; Ho, 2018; Chen, 2022; Yang, 2023). This research embarks on a captivating journey to delve into the historical development of education and cultural literacy in the context of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the historical development of education and cultural literacy in Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing. By tracing the evolution of these songs across different historical periods, we aim to unravel the intricate relationship between these songs and the cultural literacy of the Tujia people in Chongqing. This research aspires to shed light on the significance of these songs as carriers of cultural knowledge and heritage.

Chongqing, often referred to as the "mountain city," boasts not only breathtaking landscapes but also a unique cultural diversity. Its strategic location at the crossroads of several ethnic regions has made it a melting pot of cultures, including that of the Tujia people (Zhang, 2014; Xin et al., 2022). The Tujia Working Songs, a remarkable facet of this cultural mosaic, are deeply rooted in the daily lives of the Tujia people. Historically, these songs accompanied them during arduous tasks such as farming, fishing, and weaving. Beyond their role as musical accompaniments, Tujia Working Songs serve as a living repository of the Tujia people's history, values, and traditions. They transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to the next, fostering a sense of identity and belonging among the Tujia community. However, in the face of modernization and changing lifestyles, these songs face challenges to their continued existence (Yuan, 2008; Guo, 2016).

This research holds immense significance in several dimensions. Firstly, it contributes to the academic understanding of cultural preservation and intangible heritage, shedding light on the intricate interplay between music, education, and cultural literacy. Secondly, it serves as a tribute to the resilience and creativity of the Tujia people, highlighting their

commitment to preserving their cultural legacy. Additionally, it is crucial for the continued preservation of these working songs to document and comprehend the difficulties they face in an era of globalization and rapid cultural change. By recognizing their role in education and cultural literacy, we can identify ways to ensure their transmission to future generations (Jirajarupat & Yinghua, 2023; Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023).

In conclusion, this research not only seeks to explore the historical development of education and cultural literacy associated with Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing but also aims to provide insights into the broader context of cultural preservation among ethnic communities. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of the Tujia people and their commitment to safeguarding their unique cultural heritage.

### Research Question

What is the historical development of education and cultural literacy in Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### General Knowledge of Chinese Tujia Ethnic Group

The Tujia people, also known as “Bizka,” are an ethnic group primarily residing in the Wuling Mountain region, which spans the provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guizhou in southwestern China. They rank as the sixth-largest ethnic minority in China. This ethnic group’s distribution is intricately woven with that of other ethnic groups, such as the Han and Miao. According to ancient texts like the “Shan Hai Jing. Hai Nei Jing,” the roots of the Tujia people can be traced back to the Ba Kingdom in the southwest. These historical and geographical factors have deeply influenced the Tujia people’s culture and traditions (Brassett & Brassett, 2005; Yin, 2010).

The history of the Tujia ethnic group is ancient, dating back thousands of years to the Ba period. They are primarily concentrated in the high mountain areas of the Wuling Mountains, bordering Hunan, Hubei, Guizhou, and Chongqing. There are many countries in these areas that have contributed to the unique fabric of Tujia culture. These include Longshan, Yongshun, Baojing, Guzhang, Cili, Sangzhi, Yuanling, Shupu, and Shimen in Hunan; Laifeng, Hefeng, Badong, Jianshi, Enshi, Changyang, and Wufeng in Hubei; Yanhe, Yinjiang, Sinan, Jiangkou, and Dejiang in Guizhou; and Qianjiang, Youyang, Shizhu, Pengshui, and Xiushan in Chongqing. The Tujia language, part of the Sino-Tibetan language family, is characterized by both southern and northern dialect regions (Wenzhe, 2022).

The Tujia people are renowned for their rich musical and cultural heritage. Folk songs have played a central role in their culture, and these songs have evolved over centuries. The Tujia’s musical history is as ancient as their ethnic history itself. These folk songs are incredibly diverse, covering themes from daily life, work, love, and rituals. A common saying among the Tujia people is “Folk songs are originally about having a long belly, and you can’t finish singing Tujia

folk songs,” which emphasizes the significance of folk songs (Guoliang, 2019; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

The 1980s marked a significant period for the collection and organization of folk songs in China, which also led to increased academic interest and research in this area. The “Collection of Folk Songs and Proverbs in Youyang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County” was a pioneering effort in systematically collecting and organizing Tujia folk songs in Chongqing. These songs were classified into various categories, including working songs, ritual songs, life songs, narrative songs, and children’s songs, providing valuable historical references for this study. Additionally, publications like “Rainy Rain Falling and Drizzle Drifting in Youyang National Culture Series: Folk Songs Volume” and “Qunfang W encong Youyang Folk Song Selection” contributed to the preservation and documentation of Tujia folk songs, albeit with variations in content and classification (LumSDen, 2008).

However, there remains a need for a comprehensive exploration of the historical context and educational aspects of these folk songs to appreciate their full cultural significance. This study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the historical development of education and cultural literacy intertwined with Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing.

### Research Theory

Two key theories are employed in the study of Historical Development in Education and Cultural Literacy of Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing: Music aesthetics, ethnomusicology, and ancient Chinese music history.

1. Music aesthetics: This is a systematic and theoretical study of music from the perspective of philosophy aesthetics. It has a long history, dating back to ancient Greece. It is a leading discipline in systematic musicology, focusing on the beauty, aesthetic characteristics, and special laws of music. Music aesthetics is influenced by various disciplines, including aesthetic psychology, sociology, acoustics, mathematics, and biology. It is a marginal discipline that requires absorbing the valuable achievements of other disciplines and guiding music practice. It is an indispensable branch of aesthetics and musicology, with guiding significance for other disciplines in the field (Lippman, 1999).
2. Ethnomusicology: Began in Asia and Europe, with the first significant advancements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. British musicologist A.J. Ellis proposed the phonemic mark method for studying sound systems of different nationalities. German musicologist C Stumpf collected acoustic data from national music, and later, E.M.von Hornboster and others studied non-European nationalities’ music. The Berlin School’s classification of musical instruments led to the development of music ethnology in the United States, Japan, and China (Rice, 2013).
3. Ancient Chinese music history: This is a complex and multifaceted subject, encompassing concepts, categories, logic, and characteristics. It has been extensively studied and debated, with academic experts discussing historical facts, views, and writing paradigms. The

History of Ancient Chinese Music, published by Southeast University Press in 2015, is a textbook that covers seven periods of ancient times and the seven elements of music history, including music systems, instruments, and writing systems (Jin, 2011).

## METHOD

### Research Site

The research will be conducted in multiple locations across Chongqing, including Youyang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County, Shizhu Tujia Autonomous County, Pengshui Tujia and Miao Autonomous County, and Qianjiang District. These areas have been selected to facilitate the collection of relevant photographs depicting Tujia people performing Working Songs in Chongqing, as shown in Figure 1.

Furthermore, the research will involve conducting interviews with key stakeholders in the preservation and performance of Tujia Working Songs, including inheritors of this cultural heritage from various regions, accomplished artists known for their renditions of Tujia Working Songs, academic researchers specializing in this field, and professionals associated with relevant literature and history museums.

This comprehensive approach will enable the research team to gain a holistic understanding of the characteristics, artistic nuances, and historical significance of Tujia Working Songs within the cultural landscape of Chongqing. Through these site visits, interviews, and interactions with local experts, the research aims to capture the essence of this unique cultural heritage and its role in education and cultural literacy in Chongqing.

### Key Informants

The criteria for selecting the three key informants.

- 1) The scholar informants: With more than 20 years of performance experience in singing Chinese Tujia Working Songs

in Chongqing, they have won important awards above the provincial level and are experts and scholars in the field.

- 2) The casual informant: An actor with acting experience who can provide key information.
- 3) The general informant: Have a deep understanding of the history of Chongqing Tujia's working song and audience without any performance experience.

### Research Tools

- 1) Fieldwork Observation: Involves immersive experiences and direct engagement with cultural contexts and communities. This approach offers researchers a profound insight into the historical development in education and cultural literacy of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing (Huang, 2021).
- 2) Interviews: Conducting interviews with individuals closely connected to the historical development in education and cultural literacy of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing enables researchers to gather firsthand accounts and personal experiences. These interviews capture narratives, diverse perspectives, and individual stories, enriching the comprehensive understanding of this folk song genre (Wan, 2021).
- 3) Questionnaires: Structured questionnaires are employed to collect qualitative data from a diverse range of participants, including practitioners and enthusiasts of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing. The questionnaire responses are meticulously analyzed and interpreted to identify recurring patterns and emerging trends, thereby contributing to a holistic exploration of the cultural, historical, and musical dimensions of this folk song genre (Guo & Zhao, 2020).

### Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research adopts a comprehensive approach, primarily relying on qualitative methods.



**Figure 1.** Map of research site in Chongqing  
Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), Meng et al. (2022)



Principles of music aesthetics, music ethnology, and ancient Chinese music history guide these methods. Through qualitative analysis, the study delves into the social, cultural, and historical development of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing, with a particular focus on their role in education and cultural literacy. To achieve this, a meticulous examination of fieldwork data is conducted. This dataset comprises interviews, observations, and questionnaires. By thoroughly scrutinizing these diverse sources, the research aims to extract valuable insights into the significance of these songs in fostering education and cultural literacy.

**RESULTS**

**Historical Development of Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing**

- 1) Current Situation of Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing: Chongqing’s Tujia nationality regions, particularly Shizhu and Qianjiang, have seen rapid economic growth and urbanization. This development has brought about lifestyle changes and an influx of migrants, influencing the economic underpinning of Tujia Working Songs. Modern technology has also played a pivotal role in disseminating these folk songs, elevating the aesthetic expectations of the audience. Additionally, shifting political environments have presented new opportunities for the acceptance and promotion of folk songs, given the historical changes in political content over different eras.
- 2) Political Content in Folk Songs: Folk songs have long been a medium through which the Tujia people express their emotions, life experiences, and political perspectives. Post the founding of the People’s Republic of China, policies focused on the common prosperity of all ethnic groups and the development of ethnic minority regions, creating favorable conditions for the promotion of folk songs. Local governments in these regions have integrated folk songs into the development of ethnic tourism. The government has championed various non-material cultural protection initiatives, including the “Folk Culture Protection Project” (2003), China’s participation in the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Intangible Heritage (2004), issuance of the “Opinions on Strengthening China’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Project” (2005), and the 2006 “Folk Songs · China” program on CCTV. In the Enshi Tujia area, the local government and the national dance troupe have showcased the Tujia song and dance Bizka, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the Tujia people (Xiaoyun, 2012). These national measures have opened new avenues for the dissemination of Tujia folk songs.
- 3) Current Protection and Inheritance Measures: Presently, Chongqing has established dedicated institutions and protection measures to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of the Tujia people. These efforts include financial allocations, legal responsibilities, and clear provisions for inheritance and protection. Specialized organizations have been set up to protect Tujia working songs, encompassing activities such as on-site

recordings, video documentation, music score collection, establishment of folk artist archives, rewards for outstanding inheritors, publication of books about Tujia folk songs, organization of Tujia Working song performance groups, creation of Tujia folk song ecological protection zones, and the promotion of working songs in educational settings (Guoan, 1999).

- 4) Transmission Methods of Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing: Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing have been traditionally passed down orally from generation to generation. Lyrics, melodies, unique arias, and singing techniques have evolved through the oral tradition of Tujia Mountain communities. Thus, the Tujia people in Chongqing are not only creators, singers, performers, and audiences but also inheritors. The transmission mainly occurs through family influence, apprenticeship-style learning, and competitive stimulation.
- 5) Challenges Encountered by Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing: A Posture of Imminent Extinction Society’s advancement and increased productivity have diverted people’s attention toward modern materials, diminishing their interest in Tujia working songs. Several factors contribute to this trend:

The Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing, an essential facet of China’s intangible cultural heritage, face pressing challenges that threaten their survival. In particular, the younger generation’s waning interest and evolving societal and economic dynamics pose significant hurdles to the preservation and transmission of these invaluable songs, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Historical development of Chinese tujia Working songs in Chongqing

| Aspect                 | Findings  |
|------------------------|---|
| Current Situation      | - Rapid economic development in Tujia regions<br>- Impact of modern technology<br>- Changing political environments   |
| Political Content      | - Expression of emotions, life experiences, and political views in songs<br>- Government policies favoring ethnic culture preservation<br>- Participation in international cultural heritage protection initiatives   |
| Current Protection     | - Establishment of dedicated protection institutions and organizations<br>- On-site recordings, archive creation, and publication efforts<br>- Integration into education and ecological protection zones             |
| Transmission Methods   | - Oral transmission from generation to generation<br>- Family, apprenticeship, and competition-based learning   |
| Challenges Encountered | - Diverted attention due to technological advancements<br>- Cultural integration and potential Sinicization<br>- Isolated mountainous areas and migration of young individuals<br>- Influence of Western music genres |

**Table 2.** The significance of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing

| Aspect                                   | Significance  |
|--|---|
| Cultural Roots and Historical Continuity | Traces the historical and cultural roots of the Chinese nation, emphasizing the essence of art and diversity in music |
| Reflection of Chongqing Tujia Culture    | Reveals the profound traditional culture, reflecting the region's geography, customs, religion, and economy           |
| Social and Community Functions           | Facilitates communication, community cohesion, and the preservation of customs  |
| Aesthetic Pleasure                       | Provides aesthetic enjoyment through the act of singing   |
| Cultural Preservation and Education      | Serves as a repository of musical culture and an educational tool, preserving local wisdom                            |
| Multicultural Representation             | Offers a vivid display of the world's cultural diversity as part of intangible cultural heritage                      |

**Table 3.** Recommendations for safeguarding and transmitting Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing

| Recommendations                 | Description   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Strengthen Cultural Education)( | Enhance cultural education among Chongqing's Tujia working population to equip them with a fundamental understanding of music. Encourage the preservation of music created during labor across generations, utilizing notation and other educational tools  |
| Emphasize Music Education       | Place a heightened emphasis on music education within schools, with a focus on incorporating local music culture and folk songs as core components of the curriculum. Ensure that children of Tujia nationality in Chongqing receive traditional music education from an early age, fostering its development   |
| Establish Music Training Bases  | Encourage the government or relevant authorities to establish music training bases, specifically designed to nurture children with musical talent. By providing opportunities for more students to learn the intangible cultural heritage of Tujia working songs, it can be ensured that this invaluable tradition is not lost  |
| Facilitate Academic Exchanges   | Promote academic exchanges by enabling professors and teachers from various colleges and universities to visit Chongqing Tujia districts. Through such visits, they can gain deeper insights into students' musical knowledge, exchange educational expertise with local music teachers, and elevate the overall level of music culture in Tujia District. This will aid in the collection and preservation of local folk songs |
| Encourage Composition           | Encourage composers to actively engage with grassroots-level initiatives by collecting materials related to Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing. They should also explore opportunities to re-create these songs or infuse them with Western musical elements, such as choral arrangements, unique musical scores, and distinctive accompaniments, while preserving their local essence                                    |
| Evolve Chinese Tujia Music      | Evolve Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing while retaining their authentic features. Inject a contemporary spirit into these songs, reflecting the characteristics and atmosphere of modern times. Explore popular music creation techniques, aligning the rhythms with contemporary trends, and experiment with performance forms, such as rap or duets, to diversify their appeal  |
| Optimize Chinese Tujia Music    | Optimize Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing by embracing compatibility. Boldly integrate elements from other national folk song traditions to enrich the music. Learning from the strengths of other ethnic groups' excellent musical cultures, Chinese Tujia working songs can optimize themselves by selecting the best and discarding the less suitable, shining in modern society                                     |
| Beautify Chinese Tujia Music    | Enhance the aesthetic appeal of Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing, making them melodious and enjoyable for audiences. Place a strong emphasis on "beauty" concerning lyrics, melody, arrangement, rhythm, musical form, mode, singing style, and performance. Through innovative approaches, ensure that these songs captivate the senses and portray the wonderful life of Chongqing Tujia people                       |

### The Value of Safeguarding and Passing Down of Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing

Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing belong to the realm of original singing, a category akin to what we now refer to as "folk," "national," or "bel canto" music. Original music is, in essence, the music intrinsic to the Chinese nation, and its significance lies in its unadulterated, natural, and unrefined manifestation of the sounds of nature. Musicians hold a profound perspective on original music: "Firstly, it guides us to trace our cultural roots through history; secondly, it underscores the core of art, advocating for truth, individuality, and a rejection of technological dominance in the artistic realm, returning to the core of art; thirdly, it

champions the diversity of artistic forms and opposes the confinement of a single voice in any given artistic domain." Therefore, there is a compelling need to accord significance to the preservation of the original singing method, as we are entrusted with the obligation and responsibility of safeguarding and transmitting this intangible cultural heritage.

Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing represent an indispensable facet of China's rich tapestry of folk music. They encapsulate the profound traditional culture of the Chongqing Tujia people and serve as a profound reflection of their historical geography, customs, religious practices, political economy, and more. Through the lens of social culture, Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing facilitate communication, community cohesion, and the preservation

of traditions. In terms of spiritual culture, singing Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing imparts aesthetic pleasure. Furthermore, from the perspective of culture and education, the act of singing these songs serves as a repository of musical culture and an educational tool. Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing amass the quintessential cultural insights of the Chongqing Tujia people, laying bare their ingenuity for survival, which forms the fundamental spiritual component for the sustenance and perpetuation of local civilization.

As an integral component of intangible cultural heritage and human oral culture and art, Chinese Tujia Working Songs in Chongqing boast a wealth of cultural connotations, constituting our invaluable spiritual heritage and offering a vibrant testament to the world's multicultural diversity, as shown in Table 2.

The purpose of protecting Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing is to preserve this traditional and excellent folk music form while adapting it to the needs of modern people and society. To address the challenges faced in transmitting and developing Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing, the researcher has gathered knowledge and insights from relevant sources and local workers, resulting in the following recommendations, as shown in Table 3.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The theoretical foundations of ethnomusicology and aesthetic theory were effectively integrated into the research. Ethnomusicology, as a guiding principle, helped to elucidate the cultural and historical significance of Tujia working songs, while aesthetic theory guided the analysis of the songs' artistic elements. Throughout the study, these theoretical principles were consistently applied to interpret the findings (Ho, 2018). The literature review presented a comprehensive overview of the Tujia ethnic group's history and the cultural importance of their folk songs. It successfully contextualized the research within the broader framework of cultural preservation and intangible heritage, which was consistent with the research's theoretical foundations (Mackerras et al., 2005; Brassett & Brassett, 2005).

The research methods, including fieldwork observation, interviews, and questionnaires, were well-suited to the research's objective of exploring the historical development of Tujia working songs. These methods provided a multi-dimensional understanding and were consistent with the principles of ethnomusicology, enabling a holistic examination of the songs' cultural and educational significance (Wu & Boonsrianun, 2023).

The research results highlighted the current situation of Chinese Tujia working songs, including the impact of economic development and modern technology. It also explored the political content embedded in the songs, current protection measures, transmission methods, and challenges faced by these songs. These findings were consistent with the research's theoretical principles, as they revealed the intricate relationship between music, culture, and education (Guo, 2016).

The analysis of the challenges faced by Chinese Tujia working songs, particularly the waning interest of the

younger generation and the influence of Western music genres, provided valuable insights into the threats to cultural preservation. These challenges were consistent with the research's theoretical framework, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the face of modernization (Li, 2016).

In conclusion, the research successfully achieved its objective of exploring the historical development of education and cultural literacy associated with Chinese Tujia working songs in Chongqing. The findings, based on a sound theoretical foundation, shed light on the significance of these songs as carriers of cultural knowledge and heritage. The recommendations provided in the research conclusion offer practical steps to safeguard and transmit this invaluable intangible cultural heritage to future generations.

This research contributes significantly to the academic understanding of cultural preservation, intangible heritage, and the interplay between music, education, and cultural literacy. It underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the challenges faced by traditional cultural forms in a rapidly changing world. Overall, the research aligns consistently with its theoretical principles and offers valuable insights into the preservation of cultural heritage in contemporary society (Jirajarupat & Yinghua, 2023; Guoan, 1999).

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