

## Preservation and Promotion of Literacy through Performing Arts Education of Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing Province, China

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### ABSTRACT

Chuanjiang Haozi, a distinctive form of folk music originating from the Yangtze River Basin in Chongqing, China, serves as a unique cultural treasure, blending utility with artistic expression. This study aims to investigate the preservation and promotion of literacy through performing arts education in Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing Province, China. Through a comprehensive research approach, including interviews with key informants who are inheritors of this art form, this study delves into the preservation and promotion strategies for Chuanjiang Haozi. The research site encompasses the Chuanjiang River system, spanning Chongqing and Sichuan, where this art form has deep historical roots. The two key informants were interviewed to gather essential information for this study, including prominent inheritors of Chuanjiang Haozi, providing valuable insights into its cultural significance and preservation challenges. The data analysis process involves transcription, coding, categorization, and theme identification, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The research results advocate for a multifaceted approach, including the establishment of digital museums, festival tourism, legal support, and funding for inheritors, to ensure the continued preservation and promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi. These strategies aim to integrate tradition with modernity, safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage for future generations.

**Key words:** Chuanjiang Haozi, Performing Arts Education, Preservation, Promotion, Cultural Heritage

### INTRODUCTION

Chuanjiang Haozi, a type of folk music that Chuanjiang boatmen created within the vast Yangtze River Basin of China served as a tool to coordinate their physical movements during strenuous tasks. Its roots run deep in the heart of Chongqing, China, and the Yangtze River Basin of Sichuan (Jin, 2011; Chabrowski, 2013a). What began as a practical aid has evolved into a nuanced art form, seamlessly blending utility with artistic expression. Chuanjiang Haozi transcends its initial role of coordinating actions; it is also a vessel through which boatmen articulate their innermost thoughts and emotions. This cultural gem encapsulates the wisdom born from generations of Chuanjiang boatmen and stands as a pillar of the rich cultural heritage of the Chuanjiang River system (Chabrowski, 2015; McLaren, 2017; Li, 2020).

However, the complete replacement of wooden boats with motorized ones because of the relentless march of scientific and technological advancement has rendered boatmen useless in their traditional function as the driving force behind these vessels. As these boatmen retire, they take with them a piece of history, and Chuanjiang Haozi inexorably edges closer to becoming a relic of the past (Chabrowski,

2013b; Ye et al., 2018; Lin & Hirunruk, 2022). The topographical features and water dynamics of its surroundings have shaped “Chuanjiang Haozi” into a variety of artistic expressions. Certain Haozi compositions are distinctively characterized by the size of the water flow and the boats they accompany. Confronted with torrents, Haozi rhythms resonate with a radical and vigorous tempo, while gentler currents elicit gentler, mellower melodies. Over time, these compositions have come to be distinguished by their magnitude and intensity (Siyong, 2015; Wang, 2021; Chen, 2022).

Chuanjiang Haozi boasts a lineage steeped in history. Throughout the ages, the regions of Chongqing and Sichuan have capitalized on their watery highways, a fact well-documented in numerous historical accounts. Recent archaeological finds, such as Neolithic “stone anchors” and Eastern Han Dynasty “Terracotta figures of trackers,” unearthed along the riverbanks, bear witness to the enduring significance of river transport. The confluence of human geography, local traditions, the natural grandeur flanking the Sichuan River, and the age-old practice of employing songs to enhance the toil of shipping have all been enduring themes in the folk songs and verses of literary luminaries like Du Fu and Li Bai (Byrnes, 2018).

In academic circles, Chuanjiang Haozi is unanimously hailed as a cultural treasure enshrined in the annals of the Yangtze River waterway transportation history. It serves as an ode to the lives of boatmen who valiantly navigated treacherous waters, their struggles immortalized in each melodious note. Most compositions have soaring, passionate melodies, which define their diverse repertoire. Its very existence embodies the unyielding resolve and unique character of the toiling masses in the varied river basins of the Chuanjiang River. Faced with the perils of a hostile natural environment, they have displayed unwavering fortitude, audacity, and a wry sense of humor (Nie et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022).

Today, Chuanjiang Haozi is recognized as a cornerstone of China's national intangible cultural heritage, and its salvation hinges on its continued transmission and revitalization as a performing art form. To this end, the objective of this study was to investigate the preservation and promotion of literacy through performing arts education in Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing Province, China.

### Research Question

- How can performing arts education be leveraged to effectively preserve and promote literacy within the context of Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing Province, China?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Historical Background of Chuanjiang Haozi

The Chuanjiang River, stretching over 1000 kilometers from Chongqing to Yichang along the Yangtze River, has a rich historical background deeply intertwined with Chuanjiang Haozi. Navigating the Chuanjiang River has always been a formidable challenge, characterized by treacherous reefs, perilous shoals, and swift currents. In the era of wooden boat shipping, boatmen faced the daunting task of manually pulling boats upstream, often requiring great physical exertion and coordination. To boost morale and synchronize their efforts, boatmen crafted a unique form of ballad known as Chuanjiang Haozi (Siyang, 2015).

Chuanjiang Haozi has a long history, and its dissemination closely followed the flow of the Yangtze River. Originating as a traditional music form in Sichuan and Chongqing, it emerged from the daily lives and labor of boatmen navigating the challenging riverways. Due to the rugged terrain and complex water systems in Sichuan and Chongqing, wooden ships were essential for both cargo transport and passenger travel. Chuanjiang Haozi, therefore, evolved as a folk singing tradition led by a boat puller and echoed by other crew members to coordinate their actions and rhythm during navigation (Jinhua, 2020).

This art form is deeply rooted in the boatmen's experiences, forged through their struggles and hard work against the river's hazards. It boasts a diverse repertoire, characterized by high energy, passionate tunes, and harmonious choral singing alongside the lead performer. Depending on the

river's water flow, the risks posed by reefs, and the paddling rhythms, boat-pulling foremen would create various Haozi with distinct rhythms, tones, and emotional qualities (Jinhua, 2020). Chuanjiang Haozi is, thus, not only a traditional folk music but also a genre of labor music closely associated with boatmen's experiences and livelihoods (Wu & Bhengsri, 2023; Duan & Choatchamrat, 2023).

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chuanjiang Shipping experienced a period of rapid growth, but the boat pullers who once battled rapids and sang Chuanjiang Haozi have gradually faded into history. To ensure the protection and continuity of this rich cultural heritage, Chuanjiang Haozi was designated as China's national intangible cultural heritage. The origins of Haozi can be traced back to the development of the salt industry in ancient China. The labor culture surrounding Haozi extends to various aspects of life, with coolie porters, loggers, and boatmen singing their respective Haozi songs during their collective labor efforts. Haozi songs are often characterized by rhythmic chants like "yo," "wen," "hey," and "ho," which arise naturally as a means for laborers to work together and synchronize their actions (Minjuan, 2016).

In the case of Chuanjiang Haozi, its roots may be connected to the salt industry of the ancient Ba State, where salt played a crucial role in the economy. Salt transportation heavily relied on riverboats due to the limited shipbuilding capabilities of the time, and these large vessels were propelled by manual labor. It is plausible that Chuanjiang Haozi emerged during this period as a form of folk song to uplift spirits and harmonize labor rhythms. In essence, Haozi songs were born out of necessity, serving to bolster morale and unify labor rhythms (Minjuan, 2016).

### Research Theory

1. Folklore culture is a social science that investigates folk customs, traditions, and related phenomena. It encompasses traditional customs, beliefs, folk narratives, proverbs, and more. The concept of "artistic folklore" promotes the interpretation of art within the broader context of cultural life (Qiu et al., 2022).
2. Musicology focuses on studying all aspects of music, including historical and contemporary compositions and behaviors. This approach includes studying physiological, creative, performance, aesthetic, acceptance, and learning behaviors related to music. Musicology seeks to understand the causes and contexts behind these expressions, emphasizing the role of individuals and societies (Kerman, 2009).

## METHOD

### Research Site

The Chuanjiang River is also known as the Great River. It is divided into two main sections: the upper reaches, which span 384 kilometers from Yibin to Chongqing, and the lower reaches, covering 660 kilometers from Chongqing to

Yichang. The region is rich in mountains and rivers, with the Yangtze River dominating the system. The Chuanjiang Haozi originated from the activities and traditions associated with these waterways and has spread widely throughout the tributaries of the river, as shown in Figure 1.

### Key Informants

This study relies on follow-up interviews with two key individuals to gather essential information for the research. Here are the details of the key informants, as shown in Table 1.

### Research Tools

**Interview Questionnaire:** An interview questionnaire is a structured tool employed in qualitative research for conducting individual interviews with key informants. Its objective is to systematically gather comprehensive information, insights, and viewpoints directly from individuals possessing expertise or experience relevant to the research subject. In this context, it is tailored for collecting qualitative data from key informants, including representatives from the Chuanjiang Haozi Performing Arts, pertaining to the Preservation and Promotion of Literacy through Performing Arts Education of Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing Province, China.

### Data Analysis

Each step in the data analysis process is critical in uncovering insights related to the research topic, from data collection to the presentation of findings and implications, as shown in Table 2.

## RESULTS

Chuanjiang Haozi, a traditional Chinese folk dance, has been recognized as an intangible cultural heritage in Chongqing and Sichuan. Protected inheritors have conducted extensive research, including visits to various counties and cities, in-depth interviews, and meticulous documentation. The large-scale landscape drama “Impression·Wulong” showcases the folk customs and traditional culture of the Bayu area, emphasizing the need to safeguard and propagate the rich folk culture embedded in Chuanjiang Haozi.

Experts and scholars have also conducted research on the preservation and promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi, advocating for the enhancement of digital collection methods and financial and protective support for song inheritors. The “Intangible Cultural Heritage Law” enacted in China in February 2011 has laid a robust legal foundation for the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, enhancing public awareness, and playing a constructive role in the preservation and promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi.

### Preservation Strategy for Chuanjiang Haozi

Chuanjiang Haozi, an intangible cultural heritage, has been recognized for nearly a decade and is now being studied from various angles. Traditional museum collection methods have failed to preserve the intangible aspects of this art form, leading to the development of digital collection models that use high-tech technologies to organize and store audio, video, and image materials related to intangible cultural heritage. These technologies enable rapid and secure resource retrieval, allowing for the visualization of the essence of Chuanjiang Haozi in a virtual space.



**Figure 1.** Map of Chuanjiang River  
Source: Chinafolio (n.d.), Yangtze River Cruise (n.d.)



**Table 1.** Key informants

Key informants	Background and Contribution
Informer 1	A Han ethnic male is the designated inheritor of Chuanjiang Haozi since 1987 when a shipping company appointed him to learn from the accomplished Chuanjiang Haozi artist Wang Banggui. Proficient in performing 26 distinct Qupai of Chuanjiang Haozi, along with their corresponding Haozi renditions, has been instrumental in preserving this cultural heritage. He is also the founder of the Chuanjiang Haozi Federation and the Chuanjiang Haozi Inheritance and Learning Center, where he has mentored numerous music enthusiasts and educators. His significant contributions led to his recognition as a representative inheritor of China's fifth batch of national intangible cultural heritage projects in 2017
Informer 2	He is a skilled Chuanjiang Haozi performer and holds the distinction of being the youngest director responsible for its repertoire. With a background in composition from the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, he has actively contributed to the preservation and advancement of Chuanjiang Haozi. His noteworthy achievement involves adapting and enhancing the original musical production "Chuanjiang Haozi," a successful 2018 performance featuring a captivating narrative spanning five distinct chapters. What sets him apart is his ability to seamlessly fuse music theory with Chuanjiang Haozi, making a significant contribution to its cultural innovation and reinvention.

**Table 2.** Data analysis

Data Analysis Steps	Description
1. Data Collection	Gather qualitative data from interviews, field observations, and relevant documents
2. Data Transcription	Transcribe interview recordings and convert observations into written text
3. Data Coding	Assign descriptive codes to segments of data, identifying themes and patterns
4. Data Categorization	Group coded segments into broader categories based on commonalities
5. Theme Identification	Identify recurring themes and subthemes within the data, highlighting key concepts
6. Data Triangulation	Validate findings by comparing and cross-referencing data from multiple sources
7. Contextual Analysis	Interpret data within the cultural and historical context of Chuanjiang Haozi
8. Findings Presentation	Report results clearly, possibly using visual aids to illustrate key findings
9. Implications	Discuss the implications of the findings for the preservation and promotion of literacy

Preserving "Chuanjiang Haozi" differs significantly from conserving traditional cultural relics, as it requires safeguarding the carriers of this heritage, such as singers proficient in the art form, and digitally collecting the music they perform. Community museums, which are smaller, community-focused museums, prioritize humanistic care and strong connections with residents. They foster active public participation through activities like enlisting volunteer guides, organizing expert lectures, and inviting intangible cultural heritage inheritors for performances and cultural exchanges.

1. Digital museums can play a pivotal role in bridging the gaps between community and traditional museums by establishing digital virtual museums that showcase the entire lifecycle of Chuanjiang Haozi, including living conditions, artist profiles, communication methods, and folk lifestyles. Through dynamic digital design, these digital museums present the essence of Chuanjiang Haozi to the audience on computer terminals, allowing people to discover intricate details within the art form that might otherwise go unnoticed.
2. Festival tourism mode plays a positive role in the preservation and development of Chuanjiang Haozi. This model revolves around cyclically scheduled performances unique to specific regions, aligning with the nation's strategy for sustainable growth. Innovation in this domain plays a critical role in advancing national progress and societal development. Three key facets of

innovation in festival tourism mode include theme innovation, thinking innovation, and practice innovation.

3. The Chinese government enacted the first "Intangible Cultural Heritage Law" in 2011, providing a much-needed legal basis for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The law mandates that intellectual property rights associated with intangible cultural heritage must adhere to relevant laws and administrative regulations. The establishment of an item directory system underscores the value of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, including intangible cultural heritage items of immense significance, contributing to the gradual formation of an intangible cultural heritage preservation system with distinct Chinese characteristics.
4. Funding for inheritors is essential for the continuity and development of intangible cultural heritage. The Chinese government extends preferential treatment to organizations and individuals connected to intangible cultural heritage, providing subsidies to facilitate smooth preservation activities. However, for inheritors who fail to fulfill their obligations or lose their ability to pass on their heritage, competent cultural authorities reserve the right to revoke their inheritor status and select new, qualified inheritors.

### Promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi Development

Chuanjiang Haozi, a treasure of Chinese culture, continues to thrive due to its significant musical and cultural value.

However, various challenges threaten its preservation and promotion. To address these challenges effectively, the following suggestions are presented, as shown in Table 3.

The integration of tradition and modernity not only rejuvenates Chuanjiang Haozi but also contributes to the revival of national music. It is crucial for all citizens to actively participate in preserving this intangible cultural heritage and ensure its continued cultural significance for generations to come,

### Specific Spread Process of Chuanjiang Haozi

Wulong District, located in the southeast of Chongqing City, boasts rich tourism resources, including the “World Natural Heritage” Karst Furong Cave and the “National 5A Tourist Attraction” Tiansheng Sanqiao. In May 2022, Wulong District entered into a strategic cooperation agreement with the National Multifunctional Economic and Trade Platform of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This partnership aims to further internationalize Chongqing’s tourism industry by leveraging the platform’s multifunctional capabilities and Wulong District’s abundant resources. The collaboration seeks to create an international tourism brand, infuse cultural and tourism innovation into the sector, and enhance the global appeal of Wulong’s tourism offerings (Jiupai News, 2022).

“Impression·Wulong,” an immersive live-action performance, enlists the artistic consultancy of Zhang Yimou, renowned for his role as Chief Director of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Over 100 talented actors deliver emotionally charged performances against the backdrop of Wulong’s breathtaking natural heritage site and the unique customs of the Bashu region, all within a one-minute show. This performance serves as the tourism flagship of Wulong District and Chongqing City. The theater is strategically located in Taoyuan Grand Canyon, approximately 9 kilometers from Fairy Mountain Town. The canyon, with its “U” shape and a 180-meter height difference, features a mystical distant mountain landscape, imposing nearby mountains, and tranquil ravines. The theater’s location not only preserves the ecological

balance but also offers an excellent venue for performances. Designed to accommodate around 2,700 spectators, the theater seamlessly integrates the stage with the audience seating, creating a zero-distance interaction between actors and viewers.

“Impression·Wulong” is built around the intangible cultural heritage of “Chuanjiang Haozi.” The performance begins with an introduction to “Chuanjiang Haozi” and uses heartfelt recitation and dubbing to evoke the audience’s memories of Chuanjiang culture, immersing them in the region’s rich history. The live show incorporates elements of Chongqing’s local culture, including pole lifting, hot pot symphonies, the spirit of trackers, marriage ceremonies, and displays of filial piety. State-of-the-art on-site 3D lasers and fantasy lights cooperate to vividly showcase the depth of Chinese history and culture. The performance celebrates the indomitable spirit and respect for traditional values among the Chinese people, exemplified by the virtue of cherishing the young. Through continuous practice and refined performances, the entire repertoire elevates the culture of Chuanjiang Haozi. It brings to life the distinctive humanistic aspects of Chongqing, offering a vibrant interpretation of Bayu culture. The performance conveys the spirit of perseverance, unity, cooperation, tenacious struggle, optimism, and open-mindedness that defines the Bayu people. The legacy of the trackers is etched into the mountain’s stone walls, destined to be passed down through the generations, as shown in Figure 2.

This initiative showcases how Wulong District combines preservation, promotion, and performing arts education to enhance its tourism industry and share its cultural heritage with a global audience.

The performance “The Song of the Great River” marked an innovative approach to presenting Chuanjiang Haozi. Unlike traditional short performances, this was an original ecological interactive experience drama lasting 60 minutes, divided into acts and an epilogue. It portrayed a wooden boat’s journey along the Yangtze River, encountering challenges like dangerous shoals and battling the elements. The drama celebrated the courage of boatmen in conquering nature and their wisdom in harmonizing with it.

The play was characterized by audience participation, with singing and physical interaction between actors and

**Table 3.** Summary of the promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi development

Strategy	Description
Create a Haozi Music Culture Festival	Implement a music tourism cultural festival that combines Chuanjiang Haozi with local intangible cultural heritage and natural scenery. Feature authentic live performances and immersive experiences
Build a New Type of Science and Technology Museum	Establish a digital museum using advanced technology to systematically manage and store multimedia materials related to Chuanjiang Haozi. Offer immersive experiences through 3D modeling and virtual reality technology
Blend Traditional Art with Modern Music	Fuse Chuanjiang Haozi with elements of popular music to create a new genre with Bayu characteristics. Collaborate with contemporary musicians and celebrities to bring Chuanjiang Haozi into the mainstream



**Figure 2.** The impression wulong performance



**Figure 3.** The song of the great river performance

viewers. This interactive aspect deepened the audience's understanding of Chuanjiang Haozi, allowing them to experience the struggles and determination of boatmen and trackers. The play maintained the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage while incorporating modern elements like choreography, lighting, and multimedia technology to recreate the boatmen's lives and their fight against nature.

"The Song of the Great River" achieved significant success in spreading Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing and was planned to be a cultural tourism highlight in Chongqing's future. The goal was to eventually promote a national tour of the performance, as shown in Figure 3.

These strategies focus on the preservation, promotion, and education of Chuanjiang Haozi, ensuring its cultural significance and relevance in contemporary society.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion will critically analyze the research results in the context of the introduction, literature review, and research methods. It will assess whether the research outcomes are consistent with the theoretical principles outlined in the literature review and provide references for further exploration.

The introduction highlighted the significance of Chuanjiang Haozi as an art form that evolved from a practical aid for boatmen to a cultural treasure. It emphasized the importance of its preservation and promotion through performing arts education. The literature review underscored the historical background of Chuanjiang Haozi and the relevance of folklore culture and musicology to its study.

The research methods section provided insights into the research site, key informants, research tools, and data analysis steps. Key informants, including inheritors of Chuanjiang Haozi, were interviewed to gather essential information.

The research results align with the theoretical principles presented in the literature review. They reveal a comprehensive strategy for the preservation and promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi, combining traditional and digital approaches. The integration of digital museums, festival tourism, legal support, and funding for inheritors aligns with the broader framework of intangible cultural heritage preservation in China (Chongqing Municipality, n.d.).

Furthermore, the promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi development, as suggested in the results, resonates with the concept of revitalizing traditional art forms by blending them with modern elements. This approach is consistent with the idea of cultural innovation and ensuring the relevance of intangible cultural heritage in contemporary society (Chabrowski, 2013a; Kerman, 2009).

While the research results provide a comprehensive strategy for the preservation and promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi, there is a need for further exploration of the challenges and potential barriers to implementing these strategies. Theoretical principles suggest that the successful preservation of intangible cultural heritage often faces obstacles related to funding, community engagement, and changing cultural landscapes (Rees, 1998; Qiu et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the research on the preservation and promotion of literacy through performing arts education in Chuanjiang Haozi in Chongqing Province, China, has provided valuable insights into strategies for safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage. The results are consistent with the theoretical principles outlined in the literature review, emphasizing the importance of combining traditional and digital approaches to preservation and the need for legal support and funding for inheritors.

However, the research should be expanded to address potential challenges and barriers to implementation. This would ensure a more holistic understanding of the preservation and promotion of Chuanjiang Haozi and its relevance in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing efforts to protect and revitalize intangible cultural heritage in China, ensuring that treasures like Chuanjiang Haozi continue to enrich the cultural tapestry of the nation.

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