

## Guidelines for Literacy Transmission of Shan'ge Folk Songs in Guizhou Province, China

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### ABSTRACT

Nestled within the captivating landscapes of Guizhou Province, China, Shan'ge folk songs, a cherished tradition of the Yi ethnic group, embody a rich cultural heritage. This study aims to investigate the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou, with a focus on Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, and the Yi community, while proposing guidelines for their transmission through education and literacy initiatives. Nine key informants, including local musicians and community members, were interviewed, and field observations were conducted. Thematic coding and comparative analysis were employed to analyze the data. The result of this study shows that the enduring cultural significance of these songs, serving as cultural beacons, rituals, and oral history repositories, remains consistent, but challenges such as urbanization, changing lifestyles, and language shift threaten their transmission. We conclude by suggesting guidelines that encompass integrating Shan'ge folk songs into school curricula, fostering community-based learning, and leveraging digital tools to ensure their continuity. In embracing these strategies, Shan'ge folk songs can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, honoring the past while safeguarding their future.

**Key words:** Shan'ge Folk Songs, Guizhou Province, Yi Ethnic Group, Cultural Preservation, Education, Transmission

### INTRODUCTION

Nestled within the captivating landscapes of Guizhou Province, a hidden treasure of cultural heritage beckons: the enchanting tradition of Shan'ge folk songs. Guizhou, renowned for its ethnic diversity, is home to a tapestry of traditions woven by various ethnic groups (Oakes, 1997; Bliss, 2004; Shi & Nicolas, 2023; Zhang & Wu, 2023). Among these, the Shan'ge folk songs stand as a testament to the rich cultural heritage, especially within the vibrant context of Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, and the Yi ethnic group. In this study, we embark on a journey to investigate the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province, focusing on Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, and the Yi ethnic group, and propose guidelines for their transmission through education and literacy (Schimmelpennynck & Kouwenhoven, 1988; Liu, 2003; Chien, 2009; Stock, 2023).

Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, situated in the heart of Guizhou Province, is a region teeming with the cultural vibrancy of the Yi ethnic group. Within the mosaic of ethnicities that call this area home, the Yi people have cherished the tradition of Shan'ge folk songs for generations. These songs, characterized by their lyrical beauty and emotive storytelling, serve as cultural beacons, illuminating the lives, values, and history of the Yi people in Panzhou County, Lupanshui City (Mackerras, 1984; Wu, 2000; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Wu, 2016; Ban, 2020).

The Yi ethnic group, known for its distinct customs and traditions, has relied on Shan'ge folk songs to pass down their unique cultural expressions. These songs have played pivotal roles in celebrating love and courtship, honoring ancestral spirits, and marking significant life events. The oral tradition of Shan'ge folk songs has been a vital component of the Yi people's identity, fostering a sense of community and continuity (Yasushi & Santangelo, 2011; Tian, & Woramitmitree, 2023; Fang & Chuangprakhon, 2024)

However, Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, like much of Guizhou Province, is witnessing rapid social transformations driven by urbanization, technological advancements, and modernization. The profound impact of these changes on the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs calls for a comprehensive examination (McLaren & Zhang, 2017; Wu & Wong, 2017).

The core objective of this research is to investigate the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs within the context of Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, and the Yi ethnic group in Guizhou Province. Building on this understanding, we aim to propose guidelines for their effective transmission through education and literacy initiatives (Jirajarupat & Yinghua, 2023; Ping & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

This study holds significant cultural and educational value as it sheds light on the intricate interplay between tradition and change. By investigating the status of Shan'ge

folk songs within the Yi ethnic group of Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, we contribute to the broader discourse on cultural preservation and revitalization in Guizhou Province (Hang et al., 2023; Zhou & Chuangprakhon, 2023).

Our research endeavors to offer concrete guidelines for the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs through education and literacy, ensuring that this priceless cultural heritage remains vibrant and relevant in the lives of the Yi people and beyond. Ultimately, this study seeks to honor the past while safeguarding the future of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province, encapsulating the resilience and spirit of its people.

### Research Question

1. In the face of modernization and evolving social dynamics, what is the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs among the Yi ethnic group in Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, Guizhou Province?
2. How can we formulate practical guidelines for preserving and transmitting this cultural treasure through education and literacy programs?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Tradition of Shan'ge Folk Songs among the Yi Ethnic Group in Guizhou Province, China

It represents a unique cultural heritage that has been the subject of scholarly interest and cultural preservation efforts. This literature review examines key themes and relevant research in the field, providing valuable insights into the context and significance of Shan'ge folk songs.

1. Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Song: Shan'ge Folk Songs in Guizhou: Guizhou Province, located in southwestern China, is renowned for its remarkable cultural diversity, exemplified by a tapestry of ethnic groups, each with its unique traditions and heritage. Among these vibrant cultures, the Yi ethnic group in Panzhou County, Lupanshui City has long been celebrated for its rich tradition of Shan'ge folk songs. These songs, deeply rooted in the collective memory of the Yi people, serve as a repository of cultural, historical, and emotional narratives (Fan, 2020).
2. Shan'ge Folk Songs as Cultural Vessels: Shan'ge folk songs, often referred to as "mountain songs" or "folk songs of the hills," are an integral part of the Yi ethnic group's cultural identity. These songs are characterized by their poetic lyrics, melodious tunes, and deep emotional resonance. Historically, Shan'ge folk songs have played multifaceted roles within the Yi community. They have been used to commemorate life events, express love, and courtship, narrate legends, and maintain a connection with ancestral spirits. The versatility of Shan'ge folk songs in encapsulating the essence of Yi culture makes them invaluable cultural vessels (Widman, 2019).
3. Challenges in Preservation: Despite their significance, Shan'ge folk songs face an uncertain future. Rapid urbanization, modernization, and shifting demographics

are exerting pressure on the traditional way of life in Guizhou Province. As the younger generation gravitates toward contemporary forms of entertainment and communication, the transmission of these oral traditions is at risk. Elders, who are the traditional bearers of Shan'ge folk songs, are gradually diminishing in number, leaving a widening gap in knowledge transfer (Widman, 2019).

4. Education and Literacy as Catalysts for Preservation: Recognizing the importance of Shan'ge folk songs as cultural treasures, numerous scholars, cultural enthusiasts, and policymakers have advocated for their preservation. In this context, education and literacy have emerged as potential catalysts for ensuring the survival and continuity of these traditions. A strategic approach to incorporating Shan'ge folk songs into formal and informal education systems is crucial to engaging and inspiring the younger generation (Wu & Bhengsri, 2023).
5. Integrating Shan'ge Folk Songs into Education: Several studies have explored the integration of Shan'ge folk songs into educational curricula. These initiatives range from introducing courses in Yi culture and traditional music at primary and secondary schools to establishing dedicated majors at universities. Such endeavors aim to impart knowledge of the cultural significance of Shan'ge folk songs while nurturing a new generation of performers and enthusiasts (Liu et al., 2022).
6. Challenges and Opportunities: The successful integration of Shan'ge folk songs into educational systems is not without its challenges. Issues such as curriculum development, teacher training, and resource allocation must be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives. Additionally, innovative approaches, including the use of new media and technology, can broaden the reach of Shan'ge folk songs beyond the classroom (Du & Leung, 2022).

In conclusion, as Guizhou Province undergoes rapid transformation, the preservation of its cultural heritage, particularly the Shan'ge folk songs of the Yi ethnic group, is of paramount importance. Education and literacy programs have the potential to serve as vital tools for transmitting these traditions to future generations. This literature review underscores the significance of Shan'ge folk songs within the context of Guizhou's diverse cultural landscape and sets the stage for the investigation and proposed guidelines in this study.

### Research Theory

Musicology and ethnomusicology are two distinct fields of study that employ various theories and approaches to understand and analyze music. While musicology typically focuses on Western classical music and its historical and analytical aspects, ethnomusicology broadens the scope to include music from diverse cultures around the world. The theories used in these fields help researchers explore the multifaceted nature of music and its role in society. Here, we present a summary of some of the key theories associated with musicology and ethnomusicology, as shown in Table 1.

**METHOD**

**Selection of Research Site**

Guizhou Province, China, was chosen as the primary research site due to its rich cultural heritage and significance in the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs. Within Guizhou, the research primarily focused on specific regions known for their strong tradition of Shan'ge folk songs, such as Panzhou County, and Lupanshui City. Several Yi ethnic communities within Guizhou Province were selected to ensure a diverse representation of Shan'ge folk song practices., as shown in Figure 1.

**Selection of Key Informants**

A purposive sampling method was employed to select key informants who were knowledgeable and experienced in the practice and transmission of Shan'ge folk songs. These informants included local musicians, cultural experts, elders, and community members with expertise in Shan'ge folk songs.

**Research Tools**

1. Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to gather qualitative data on the history, cultural significance, and contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs. Semi-structured interviews allowed for open-ended discussions and the collection of personal narratives.
2. Field Observation: Extensive fieldwork involved participant observation during Shan'ge folk song performances, festivals, and community gatherings. Observations were recorded in field notes, documenting musical styles, rituals, and social contexts.

**Steps to Data Analysis**

The research methodology employed for investigating the contemporary status and proposing guidelines for the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province, China, involved a systematic approach to data collection and

**Table 1.** The research theory used

| Field                           | Introduction  | Key Theories and Approaches  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Musicology<br>(Kramer, 2003).   | Musicology is the scholarly study of music, with a focus on Western classical music traditions. It delves into the historical, structural, and cultural aspects of music to understand its development and meaning                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Historical Musicology</li> <li>- Analytical Musicology</li> <li>- Music Theory</li> <li>- Cultural Musicology</li> </ul>  |
| Ethnomusicology<br>(Rice, 2013) | Ethnomusicology is the study of music in its cultural context, encompassing music from various regions and traditions worldwide. It examines how music is created, performed, and understood within specific cultural communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural Theory</li> <li>- Participant Observation</li> <li>- Postcolonial Theory</li> <li>- Performance Theory</li> <li>- Globalization and Transnationalism</li> <li>- Applied Ethnomusicology</li> </ul> |



**Figure 1.** Map of Liupanshui city, Guizhou Province, China  
Source: Chinafolio (n.d.) & China discovery (n.d.)

analysis. This process aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Shan'ge folk songs and their transmission, culminating in practical guidelines for their preservation and promotion, as shown in Table 2.

## RESULTS

### The Contemporary Status of Shan'ge Folk Songs in Guizhou Province, China

The contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province paints a complex and evolving picture. These traditional songs, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the Yi ethnic group, continue to hold immense cultural significance. However, they face numerous challenges in the modern era. This section delves into the findings of our research, shedding light on the current state of Shan'ge folk songs, their cultural importance, transmission challenges, and potential avenues for revitalization.

1. **Enduring Cultural Significance:** Shan'ge folk songs have not lost their cultural relevance. They remain a cherished part of the Yi community's identity, connecting individuals with their rich heritage. During our fieldwork, we encountered numerous instances where Shan'ge folk songs played pivotal roles in various aspects of community life, as shown in Table 3.
2. **Challenges in Transmission:** Despite their enduring cultural importance, Shan'ge folk songs face

**Table 2.** Steps to data analysis

| Step                               | Descriptions   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Data Collection                 | Conducted interviews, gathered field notes, and collected audio-visual recordings of Shan'ge folk song performances in the selected communities  |
| 2. Transcription and Documentation | Audio recordings were transcribed, and field notes were organized to create a comprehensive dataset  |
| 3. Thematic Coding                 | Qualitative data obtained from interviews and field notes were analyzed using thematic coding. Themes related to the history, cultural significance, transmission challenges, and contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs were identified    |
| 4. Comparative Analysis            | Cross-case analysis was performed to identify commonalities and differences among the selected research sites and key informants   |
| 5. Interpretation                  | Researchers interpreted the findings within the context of existing literature on Shan'ge folk songs, music transmission, and cultural preservation  |
| 6. Report Writing                  | The research findings were compiled into a comprehensive report, which included an overview of the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province and proposed guidelines for their transmission through education and literacy |

significant challenges in transmission, particularly to younger generations. Several factors contribute to the precarious state of these traditional songs, as shown in Table 4.

In conclusion, Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province, China, stand at a crossroads. While their cultural significance remains unwavering, the challenges posed by modernization and changing lifestyles threaten their survival. This research sheds light on the enduring importance of these traditional songs and highlights the urgent need for their transmission to younger generations.

**Table 3.** Themes related to the cultural significance of shan'ge folk songs

| Theme                     | Descriptions  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Ritual and Ceremony       | Shan'ge folk songs continue to be integral to significant life events, including weddings and funerals. Their use in these rituals underscores their cultural importance and their role in preserving traditions                          |
| Identity and Belonging    | These songs serve as a source of cultural identity and belonging for the Yi community. They provide a sense of continuity and connect younger generations to their roots  |
| Oral History Preservation | Shan'ge folk songs act as repositories of oral history, preserving narratives, legends, and ancestral knowledge. The songs encapsulate the collective memory of the community, ensuring that stories are passed down through generations. |

**Table 4.** Challenges in the transmission of shan'ge folk songs

| Challenge                  | Descriptions  |
|----------------------------|---|
| Urbanization and Migration | Younger members of the Yi community have increasingly moved to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities. This migration has disrupted the traditional transmission of Shan'ge folk songs, as rural communities are depopulated                        |
| Changing Lifestyles        | Modern lifestyles, with their focus on technology and entertainment, have drawn younger generations away from traditional practices like singing Shan'ge folk songs. The allure of digital media and pop culture has diminished interest in these traditional songs |
| Language Shift             | Many young Yi individuals are gradually shifting away from their native language to Mandarin Chinese. Since Shan'ge folk songs are primarily sung in the Yi language, language shift poses a significant barrier to understanding and passing on these songs        |
| Lack of Formal Education   | Shan'ge folk songs have not been integrated into formal educational curricula, leading to a limited understanding of these songs among younger Yi individuals. This knowledge gap hampers their transmission  |

**Guidelines for the Transmission of Shan'ge Folk Songs through Education and Literacy**

The transmission of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province faces numerous challenges, particularly in the context of changing lifestyles and the migration of younger generations to urban areas. As these traditional songs hold immense cultural significance for the Yi ethnic group, it is imperative to devise effective strategies to ensure their continued transmission. In this section, we propose a set of guidelines aimed at leveraging education and literacy initiatives to revitalize the tradition of Shan'ge folk songs.

1. **Enduring Integration into School Curricula:** One of the primary strategies for the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs involves their integration into formal school curricula at the primary and secondary levels. This approach recognizes the pivotal role that schools can play in introducing younger generations to these traditional songs, as shown in Table 5.
2. **Community-Based Learning:** While formal education is a crucial avenue for the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs, community-based learning initiatives also hold significant promise. Elders and traditional musicians within the community possess invaluable knowledge and expertise in these songs, making them essential contributors to this approach, as shown in Table 6.
3. **Digital Archiving and Dissemination:** In the digital age, leveraging technology for the preservation and dissemination of Shan'ge folk songs is crucial. Establishing digital archives and utilizing online platforms can help reach wider audiences, including tech-savvy youth, as shown in Table 7.

In conclusion, the guidelines proposed for the transmission of Shan'ge folk songs through education and literacy initiatives provide a multifaceted approach to addressing

**Table 5.** Guidelines for Integrating Shan'ge Folk Songs into School Curricula

| Guideline                         | Descriptions   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Curriculum Development            | Develop a comprehensive curriculum that includes the history, cultural significance, and performance of Shan'ge folk songs. This curriculum should be designed in collaboration with traditional musicians and educators |
| Teacher Training                  | Provide training to teachers to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach Shan'ge folk songs effectively. Training should encompass both theoretical and practical aspects of these songs              |
| Inclusive Learning Environment    | Create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where students of all backgrounds, including those from the Yi ethnic group, can engage with Shan'ge folk songs without discrimination                           |
| Regular Performance Opportunities | Organize regular opportunities for students to perform Shan'ge folk songs within the school and community settings. These performances can foster a sense of pride and accomplishment among students                     |

the challenges faced by this traditional art form. By integrating these songs into school curricula, fostering community-based learning, and leveraging digital tools, we can ensure that Shan'ge folk songs not only endure but also thrive in the modern age. These strategies recognize the importance of inclusivity, intergenerational interaction, and the preservation of oral history in the transmission process. As we embrace the digital era, technology becomes a powerful ally in preserving and disseminating these invaluable cultural treasures. Shan'ge folk songs are not just a reflection of the past; they are a living tradition that can continue to resonate with future generations, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

**Table 6.** Guidelines for community-based learning of shan'ge folk songs

| Guideline                       | Descriptions   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Elder Involvement               | Encourage active participation of elders and experienced traditional musicians in the community in teaching Shan'ge folk songs. Their expertise is crucial in passing down the tradition           |
| Interactions Across Generations | Facilitate interactions between younger community members and elders during song sessions and workshops. This fosters intergenerational transmission and strengthens community bonds               |
| Preserving Oral History         | Encourage community members to share stories and narratives associated with Shan'ge folk songs. This practice helps preserve oral history and cultural context, enriching the learning experience  |
| Establishing Song Clubs         | Establish and support song clubs or cultural associations within communities where members can gather regularly to practice and perform Shan'ge folk songs. These clubs serve as hubs for learning |

**Table 7.** Guidelines for digital archiving and dissemination of shan'ge folk songs

| Guideline                       | Descriptions   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Digital Archiving               | Create comprehensive digital archives of Shan'ge folk songs, including audio recordings, transcriptions, translations, and contextual information. Ensure these archives are accessible online |
| Online Learning Resources       | Develop online resources such as video tutorials, interactive learning modules, and multimedia presentations to engage learners and provide in-depth insights into Shan'ge folk songs          |
| Social Media Engagement         | Utilize social media platforms and online communities to share Shan'ge folk songs, host virtual events, and encourage discussions. Social media can serve as a dynamic tool for dissemination  |
| Collaboration with Tech Experts | Collaborate with tech experts to develop user-friendly apps or platforms dedicated to Shan'ge folk songs. These digital tools can enhance accessibility and user engagement                    |

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research presented in this study delves into the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province, China, with a specific focus on Panzhou County, Lupanshui City, and the Yi ethnic group. The investigation sought to shed light on the cultural significance of Shan'ge folk songs, the challenges they face in the modern era, and propose guidelines for their transmission through education and literacy initiatives.

The research findings consistently underscore the enduring cultural significance of Shan'ge folk songs within the Yi ethnic group in Guizhou Province. These traditional songs continue to be an integral part of the community's identity, connecting individuals to their rich heritage. The songs play pivotal roles in various aspects of community life, from rituals and ceremonies to preserving oral history and fostering a sense of belonging. This consistency with previous research aligns with the notion that Shan'ge folk songs act as cultural vessels, encapsulating the essence of Yi culture (Widman, 2019; Tian & Woramitmaitee, 2023).

While the cultural significance of Shan'ge folk songs remains intact, the research highlights consistent challenges in their transmission. The impact of urbanization, changing lifestyles, language shifts, and the lack of formal education on Shan'ge folk songs pose significant barriers to their continuity. These findings are consistent with prior research that has documented the challenges faced by traditional folk music and cultural practices in the face of modernization and urbanization (McLaren & Zhang, 2017; Wu & Wong, 2017; Hang et al., 2023).

The suggested guidelines for transmitting Shan'ge folk songs through education and literacy programs are in harmony with research indicating that formal education can have a significant impact on preserving and rejuvenating traditional music. Through the integration of these songs into school curricula, the provision of teacher training, and the establishment of inclusive learning environments, there exists an opportunity to captivate younger generations and close the knowledge divide. This approach aligns with previous studies that have advocated for the integration of traditional music into educational systems (Liu et al., 2022; Du & Leung, 2022).

In addition to formal education, the research emphasizes the importance of community-based learning. Involving elders and experienced traditional musicians in teaching Shan'ge folk songs fosters intergenerational transmission and strengthens community bonds. The creation of song clubs and cultural associations within communities aligns with the idea that local communities can be hubs for learning and preservation. This approach is consistent with studies highlighting the role of community involvement in cultural transmission (Fang & Chuangprakhon, 2024; Wu & Bhengsrri, 2023).

The proposed guidelines also recognize the importance of technology in preserving and disseminating Shan'ge folk songs. Digital archiving, online learning resources, social media engagement, and collaboration with tech experts align with the contemporary era's reliance on digital tools. These

strategies are consistent with the idea that technology can broaden the reach of traditional music and engage tech-savvy youth (Schimmelpennynck & Kouwenhoven, 1988; Zhang & Wu, 2023).

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the contemporary status of Shan'ge folk songs in Guizhou Province, China, and proposes practical guidelines for their transmission through education and literacy initiatives. The cultural significance of these songs within the Yi ethnic group remains unwavering, but they face challenges due to modernization and changing lifestyles. The proposed guidelines, consistent with previous research in related fields, offer a multifaceted approach to address these challenges and ensure the continuity of Shan'ge folk songs. By integrating these songs into formal education, fostering community-based learning, and leveraging digital tools, this study aims to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. Ultimately, the research honors the past while safeguarding the future of Shan'ge folk songs, encapsulating the resilience and spirit of its people.

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