From Oblivion to Reappearance: A Multi-Faceted Evaluation of the Sustainability of Folk Music in Yunnan Province of China

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Abstract
The Southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan is the home to a plethora of traditional music, folk songs, and ethnic musical instruments with 24 local folk music items included in the national intangible cultural heritage list and extended list. In this article, the authors intend to delve into the issue of Yunnan folk music protection from the perspective of cultural sustainability theory. With an in-depth qualitative analysis of the data on the protection of 24 folk music items of Yunnan, the achievement, impact, and challenges of the current safeguarding efforts are revealed. The findings suggest that: 1. Government agencies at all levels have a dominant influence on the protection effort. 2. The local community, musicians, culture bearers, troupes, clubs, and social organizations form the “brick and mortar” of the folk music sustainability system. 3. The current reappearance or resurface of certain folk music items is a significant step toward truly reviving the folk music items in the future.

Keywords
intangible cultural heritage, folk music, Yunnan, sustainability, safeguarding

Introduction
Folk music is one of the most prevalent forms of oral tradition which dates back to the primitive era of hunter-gatherers. As the carrier for the folk legend, history, and life, folk music sustains cultural tradition which is passed down through generations. With the paradigm shift in economic development mode and social structure as well as the emergence of modern media and entertainment, folk music is gradually losing its glamor and glory and is forced to give way to modern music. The fading or even endangered folk music tradition has gained great traction since the 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. To rescue and revive various forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) including folk music, the UNESCO adopted a series of ICH protection policies and regulations through the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. Since then, countries around the world have generated ICH lists at international, national, and regional levels, and the number of items on the lists is continuously expanding (UNESCO, 2015). China, with its rich cultural resources and tradition, currently has 42 representative items which entered the UNESCO ICH list, including 12 items of folk music (UNESCO, 2021). In addition, China has also evaluated, selected, and announced four batches of national-level ICH lists in 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2014. The lists include a total of 1,372 items covering the genres of folklures, folk dance, folk songs, opera, acrobatics, fine arts, and folk cultural customs (IhChina, 2021).

Yunnan, a Southwestern province of China featured by diverse ethnic groups and cultures, is home to a plethora of traditional music, folk songs, and ethnic musical instruments. A total of 24 Yunnan folk music items have been selected and included in the national ICH list and extended list (IhChina, 2021). In the last two decades, government agencies, social enterprises, and international foundations have put great efforts in the recording, compiling, archiving, education, promotion, and transmission of Yunnan folk music (Su, 2019). However, the folk music in Yunnan is geographically scattered in different regions of the province with varying degrees and modes of production and dissemination, popularity, and viability. Current studies on folk music in Yunnan have mostly focused on individual items only, and there

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lacks an overall analysis of the landscape of local folk music and its protection. Therefore, it will be necessary to examine the current safeguarding measures of the 24 folk music items of Yunnan to evaluate the sustainable development of folk music in the province. The unique experience and practices in the safeguarding measures of Yunnan are worth introducing and may provide useful references for policymakers, practitioners, international cultural preservation academics, and educators in music and ICH-related fields.

In this article, the authors intend to delve into the issue of Yunnan folk music protection from the perspective of cultural sustainability theory. With an in-depth qualitative analysis of the data on the folk music of Yunnan, the achievement, impact, and challenges of the current safeguarding effort are revealed. In the following sections, a literature review will be presented and the background of ICH and folk music protection in China and Yunnan will be provided. The research methods and results will be discussed in detail in the next sections, and key research findings will be summarized in the conclusion part.

**Literature Review**

**Cultural Traditions in China**

China had by and large been a unified country with a uniform cultural tradition until the 19th century. Although in history, the country was conquered by and under the rule of the Mongolian and the Manchu, the external cultures were successfully mingled with and assimilated into the Chinese civilization. However, starting from the middle of the 19th century, the degradation of the dynasty system and the Western invasion had brought about a profound impact on the Chinese cultural traditions. The elites of China began exploring a way out for the Chinese nation and cultural tradition. The New Culture Movement (1915–1923), the learning of Western philosophy and ideas, and the notion of “Total Westernization” were all early attempts to revise and re-invent Chinese culture. Since then, the Chinese culture has entered a long journey of pendulum movement, at the core of which is the dilemma between Chinese culture versus Western culture and Chinese tradition versus modernity (J. Zhang, 2017).

During the Cultural Revolution, the traditional culture was deemed against modernity and most of them were categorized as outdated remnants of the feudal system. During this period of time, the traditional Chinese culture was faced with a critical crisis and the traditional values and beliefs were largely discarded. Then in the 1980s, with the Root Seeking Movement and mass reflections on the movements of the 60s and 70s, traditional values were recovered to a certain extent. At the same time, the international society started to pay more attention to cultural diversity which is the repercussion brought about by the decolonization movement. It was against this background that the UN proposed the ICH protection scheme. In China, with the opening up of the country, the influence of the Western civilization once again triggered the discussion on the choice of development path for China. The market economy became an important force affecting Chinese culture and tradition (Li & Duan, 2018, Qiao, 2009). Starting from 2013, cultural self-awareness and self-confidence have become the new orientation of Chinese culture in the 21st century.

As a matter of fact, Culture is not a static notion (Chan, 2018, Creutzenberg, 2019). The livelihood and vitality of Chinese culture lie in its ability to learn, absorb, and mingle with other cultural influences. In the pendulum movement between the two extremes of Chinese versus Western and tradition versus modernity, the Chinese cultural values and traditions have also undergone reforming and reshaping. It is both difficult and impossible to restore the “original Chinese culture” as the definition and connotation of Chinese culture and tradition have changed greatly over time. However, in this process, the culture and tradition of China are also able to sustain the changes and survive multiple crises in history.

**Cultural Sustainability**

Titon (2009) first proposed the concept of cultural sustainability when analyzing music culture protection. The term refers to “a field of inquiry and action that flows from the demands of ethical scholarship and activism and takes seriously both the challenges of cultural work and its necessity in a changing and uncertain world” (Mason & Turner, 2020). Titon (2015) points out that the sustainability intervention should be guided by four major principles from conservation biology: diversity, limits to growth, interconnectedness, and stewardship. He further offered “resilience” and “adaptive management” as improved sustainability strategies.

Soini and Dessein (2016) proposed an eight-dimensional conceptual framework for analyzing cultural sustainability: definition of culture, culture and development, the value of culture, culture and society, culture and nature, policy sectors, modes of governance, and research approach. They argue that the interpretation and implementation of the eight dimensions in sustainability intervention may differ based on the understanding of the relationship between culture and sustainability.

**Music and Sustainability**

Folk music forms a key component of cultural sustainability (Wolcott, 2016). The extant research studies have investigated music and sustainability from the perspective of its key stakeholders, the relationship between music and cultural sustainability, the main drivers, and factors for the sustainability of music, as well as possible routes for future safeguarding efforts.

One of the main research foci in ethnomusicology is the quest for models to properly describe and dissect music
sustainability, an all-encompassing and somewhat vague field of study. In the analysis of the ecology of music sustainability practices worldwide, Schippers (2010) proposed a five-domain model of the musical ecosystem which includes systems of learning music, musicians and communities, contexts and constructs, regulations and infrastructure, as well as media and the music industry. Grant (2016) added documentation and archiving as two new elements to the model. B. Y. Zhang et al. (2015) further identify transmission (group heritage, family heritage, and apprenticeship), academic research, institution, infrastructure, and regulation as other key factors affecting the sustainability of traditional music. Drummond (2016) pinpointed the contemporary concerns for safeguarding music tradition as funding, education (of performers and audiences), repertoire renewal, and new media (such as live streaming).

Other researchers put emphasis on searching for feasible ways to achieve or improve music sustainability including festivals and related heritage (Cheung, 2020; Maharjan & Barata, 2020); innovation, collaboration between selected culture bearers and researchers in the academia, indigeneity of cultural expressions and illustrations, and adaptability and relevance to current interests of indigenous people and consumers of indigenous culture (Chan, 2018); multicultural library (Civallero, 2007); social production system and commercial production system (Almond & DeJordy, 2012); and intellectual property rights protection (Qing & Zheng, 2018).

To clarify and better understand the concepts and theories in the literature regarding the sustainability of music, we represent the key findings of the studies in the following conceptual diagram (Figure 1).

In the next section, the overall current condition of folk music protection in Yunnan will be analyzed from the perspectives of national and provincial policies, institutions, and infrastructure.

**Setting the Scene for Folk Music Protection in Yunnan**

**Policy Framework**

As one of the oldest civilizations in the world, China is a treasure house for countless traditional arts and crafts as well as abundant intangible cultural heritage. Historically, China has maintained an elaborate and well-functioning system for intangible cultural heritage production, transmission, and
In 1997, the State Council of China promulgated the Regulations on Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts (State Council of China, 1997), marking the first national policy step toward the protection of cultural heritage. In 1998, advised by the Central Government, Yunnan Provincial Government took the lead and enacted Regulations on Protection of Folk and Ethnic Traditional Culture of Yunnan Province as the first provincial policy in China for safeguarding local traditional culture. After UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, the Chinese government responded actively to the new UN policy framework by approving the Convention in 2004. In the next year, the Opinions on Strengthening the Protection Work of National Intangible Cultural Heritage and Provisional Measures for the Application and Assessment of National-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage were both promulgated by the State Council of China, laying the foundation for the selection and inclusion of ICH items in national lists. In 2011, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People’s Republic of China was adopted at the 19th Session of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People’s Congress of China and officially enacted in June of the same year (Meng, 2019).

At the provincial level, the local government enacted Recognition and Management Measures for Representative Intangible Cultural Heritage Bearers of Yunnan Province in 2012, the Yunnan Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Regulation in 2013, and the Opinions of Yunnan Provincial People’s Government on Further Strengthening the Protection Work of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2018, aiming to provide policy guidance for safeguarding ICH at the provincial level (YNICH, 2021).

In addition, at the township and county level, mainly driven by the local Bureau of Culture, a number of detailed regulations and rules have been enacted which govern the management of ICH protection work at the grassroots or community level. The three-layered policy framework forms the basis of the normative system of ICH protection in Yunnan.

**Institutions and Infrastructure for ICH Protection**

As stipulated by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People’s Republic of China: the State Council and Central Government are the main driving force for legislation and overall design of policy in ICH protection; at the executive level, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is the competent authority in charge of the protection and preservation work for ICH in China; the ICH protection and preservation work at the government level above county is overseen by the culture agency of local government; at the township or county level, various local administrative agencies, social enterprises, civil groups, and culture bearers are responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the ICH protection work (B. Y. Zhang et al., 2015). The four levels of the ICH public administration system form the backbone of a top-down governance structure that ensures the proper implementation of and conformity to the ICH-related laws, regulations, and policies.

At the society level, there are numerous universities, research institutes and centers, training schools, folk culture clubs, folk art performance troupes, and other forms of social organizations dedicated to safeguarding and promoting ICH. It should be noted that such institutions and organizations quite often exert extended influence over very large and diverse audiences and are carrying out the nitty-gritty details of the protection work.

In terms of infrastructure, the hardware of ICH protection in China is composed of a network of museums, libraries, concert halls, culture transmission and training centers, digital storage and archive, musical instrument factories, and even local courtyard and squares. These venues where ICH-related activities take place and the media where ICH is recorded provide important physical support to safeguarding ICH. The “soft measures” of ICH infrastructure include traditional culture bearers, craftsmen, families, folk artists, singers, dancers, and their traditional way of production, preservation, and transmission of ICH.

**Folk Music Safeguarding in Yunnan Province**

As a flagship province in the protection of ICH, Yunnan is the most culturally diverse region in China with 25 ethnic minority groups, each of which has largely maintained its individual, unique cultural characteristics. Dubbed as the Kingdom of Fauna, Flora, and Non-Ferrous Metals, Yunnan presents highly contrasting climates, terrains, and living environments with the iceberg-covered mountain ranges in the north and a moist, subtropical plateau in the south of the province. Traditionally, different ethnic groups tend to gather around a certain habitat and build their community around it. This scattered pattern in the distribution of ethnic groups provides small “pods of communities” which are, to a large extent, insulated or semi-insulated from external influences, which helps explain the diversity of culture and customs within a comparatively small province. Most ethnic groups produce and preserve their own music tradition through rituals, festivals, and performances.

In modern times, just as most of the ancient culture and music in other parts of the world, the local folk music in Yunnan is inevitably affected by contemporary culture. The change in the pace and style of life, improvement in living standards, and development in technology and entertainment have all brought a huge impact on the traditional way of producing and enjoying music. The folk music, which used to be so prevalent and permeated every aspect of ancient life of the local ethnic groups, is now only played on very limited occasions by the elderly. When the last few senior performers of a certain folk music pass away, this treasure of folk art will be forever forgotten and lost.
The local government agencies are fully aware of the urgency of safeguarding the disappearing or endangered folk music in Yunnan and have taken multiple measures to address this problem. In addition to the formal policies and regulations, provincial, township, and county governments have included folk music protection in their annual work plan and agenda and reported their work in ICH protection on the official websites. The competent local authorities for safeguarding ICH also invest in ample funds to promote the work of folk music training and performance. With the concerted efforts, currently, most of the folk music items in Yunnan are not endangered. An increasing number of students are also learning folk music under the guidance of the local folk culture bearers.

To better understand, analyze, and evaluate the sustainability of folk music in Yunnan, the authors intend to collect data on the safeguarding efforts of Yunnan based on the 24 folk music items included in the national ICH list and extended list. The following research design and process were conducted to find out the information needed.

**Research Methodology**

**Theoretical Framework**

For this research, the safeguarding measures outlined in Figure 1 are used as the basic framework for analysis. They are music education; documentation and archiving; group heritage, family heritage, and apprenticeship; academic study; funding; repertoire renewal; festivals; innovation; libraries and museums; cooperation of social and commercial production systems; intellectual property rights.

**Research Design**

In the study, the authors intend to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1.** What types of folk music safeguarding measures are adopted in Yunnan Province?
- **RQ2.** How do such measures influence the sustainability of folk music in Yunnan?

This research is an exploratory study toward understanding the overall landscape of folk music protection and sustainability in Yunnan. Therefore, besides following the 11 elements in the theoretical framework, the author also examined the data on folk music safeguarding and looked for new patterns and themes that emerged from the data analysis.

The sample of the study includes the 24 items listed in the national ICH list and extended list, the genre of which is divided into song and dance (2), opera (6), vocal music (3), instrument performance (3), and dance (10). Dance is also included as most of the dance is accompanied by music. The 24 items include 5 from multiple ethnic groups, 7 from Yi ethnic group, 2 from Bulang ethnic group, 2 from Naxi ethnic group, 2 from Bai ethnic group, and 1 from each of the Zhuang, Dai, Hani, Pumi, Lahu, and Wa ethnic group.

To obtain the most up-to-date and comprehensive data on the research topic, the author collected news reports, white papers, government reports, testimonials of the local folk musicians, and research studies on folk music in Yunnan Province from January 2020 to December 2021. The data were mostly collected from authoritative sources including websites of national and provincial news websites, official websites of the government agencies and ICH protection organizations, digital libraries, and academic journal databases. The total word counts of the collected textual data amounted to over 160,000. In addition, the authors have resided in Yunnan for over 3 years and have traveled to multiple ethnic minority regions within the province. The authors also conducted participant observation and kept a research log to record the results of the observation. By attending symposiums, and consulting experts and scholars, the authors have gained valuable insights into the folk music protection scenario in Yunnan. The information and knowledge acquired through participant observation and academic events and consultation provide useful supplements, pointers, verification, and triangulation when analyzing the textual data.

As most of the data collected are qualitative in nature (mainly in textual format), and due to the inductive nature of the study, content analysis was adopted as the main research method. The three general approaches to content analysis are 1. Conventional content analysis where no preconceived categories are used and researchers need to find new categories from the data analysis. 2. Directed content analysis the purpose of which is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. 3. Summative content analysis which uses a summative approach starting with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Based on this classification, our study falls into the type of directed content analysis.

In directed content analysis, the categories identified from the existing theoretical framework are used as the initial coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The data are then coded based on the initial categories. The part of data that cannot be coded is identified and either put into an initial category or a new category. The coding process may continue iteratively until no new categories emerge.

Following the above protocols in directed content analysis, the author hired two librarians from the local folk culture research center as annotators for the content analysis of the textual data collected. In the first step, both annotators were trained to use the 11 categories in the theoretical framework to conduct initial coding for the data. Annotators completed the coding independently and compared their coding results to find discrepancies and new categories, and then discussed and reached a consensus to resolve the differences in their
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Results and Discussion

Overall Picture

The list of the 24 folk music items in our sample is presented in Table 1 with their serial number in the ICH list and extended list, respective name, ethnic group, genre, and region:

Comparison of Safeguarding Measures

The results of the content analysis revealed that besides the 11 categories obtained from the theoretical framework, another 19 new categories were identified (with several new categories representing the initial category of “innovation”). They are: folk art week, grand performances, competitions, and exhibitions; promotion of folk music through social organizations, amateur groups, performance troupes and clubs; selection and support for Folk Music Culture Bearers; regular or frequent small-scale performances for the locals; compilation, production, and publication of folk-music-related works; wide-spread transmission in the daily life of the locals; establishing folk music transmission and inheritance centers or bases; listed as a competent local authority for ICH protection; folk music census and survey; enacting local folk music protection work plan and/or regulations; providing training classes and sessions for folk music; expanding the base of folk music players; international exchanges; construction, renovation, and protection of venues for folk music; applying for multiple folk music items to be included in ICH list; providing training for the folk music culture bearers; awarding the title of “Hometown for the Ethnic Culture”; transmission by new media; establishing schools or offering academic disciplines in folk music; transmission by music instrument. The frequency ranking of the 30 folk music safeguarding measures is presented in Table 2 below:

Based on this frequency ranking, the safeguarding measures are further divided into the following four groups:

- Most common safeguarding measures (frequency $\geq 20$
- Common safeguarding measures ($10 \leq$ frequency $< 20$)
- Less common safeguarding measures ($5 \leq$ frequency $< 10$)
- Uncommon safeguarding measures (frequency $< 5$)

Table 1. General Information of the 24 Folk Music Items in the Sample.

| Serial No. | Name                             | Genre                  | Region(s) in Yunnan                  | Ethnic Group       |
|------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 222 IV-78  | Huadeng Opera                    | Opera                  | Kunming, Mile, Yaoan, Yuanmou       | Multiple groups    |
| 226 IV-82  | Zhuang Opera                     | Opera                  | Wenshan                             | Zhuang             |
| 592 II-96  | Yaoan Plateau Vocal Music        | Vocal Music            | Yaoan                               | Multiple groups    |
| 612 II-113 | Yi Ethnic Folk Songs             | Vocal Music            | Wuding                              | Y                  |
| 613 II-114 | Bulang Ethnic Folk Songs         | Song and Dance         | Menghai                             | Bulang             |
| 627 II-128 | Dongjing Music                   | Instrument Performance | Tonghai                             | Multiple groups    |
| 658 III-61 | Dai Elephant-foot Drum Dance     | Dance                  | Luxi and Xishuangbanna              | Dai                |
| 667 III-70 | Yi Ethnic Da Ge                  | Dance                  | Weishan                             | Yi                 |
| 668 III-71 | Yi Ethnic Dish Serving Dance     | Dance                  | Nanjian                             | Yi                 |
| 669 III-72 | Yi Ethnic Tiger Sheng Dance      | Dance                  | Shuangbai                           | Yi                 |
| 670 III-73 | Yi Ethnic Left-foot Dance        | Dance                  | Mouding                             | Yi                 |
| 671 III-74 | Harvest Dance                    | Dance                  | Honghe                              | Hani               |
| 672 III-75 | Yi Ethnic Dance with Sanxian Instrument | Dance                  | Mile and Stone Forest              | Yi                 |
| 673 III-76 | Naxi Ethnic Remeicuo Song and Dance | Song and Dance             | Old Town of Lijiang                  | Naxi               |
| 674 III-77 | Bulang Ethnic Bee-barrel Drum Dance | Dance                  | Shuangjiang                          | Bulang             |
| 675 III-78 | Pumi Ethnic Cuocuo Dance         | Dance                  | Lancang                             | Pumi               |
| 676 III-79 | Lahu Ethnic Lusheng Dance        | Dance                  | Lancang                             | Lahu               |
| 733 IV-132 | Yunnan Opera                     | Opera                  | Kunming and Yuxi                     | Multiple groups    |
| 736 IV-135 | Wa Ethnic Qing Xi Opera          | Opera                  | Tengchong                           | Wa                 |
| 737 IV-136 | Yi Ethnic Opera                  | Opera                  | Dayao                               | Yi                 |
| 738 IV-137 | Bai Ethnic Opera                 | Opera                  | Dali                                | Bai                |
| 1075 II-145| Midi Folk Songs                  | Vocal Music            | Midu                                | Multiple groups    |
| 1082 II-152| Naxi Ethnic White Sand Fine Music | Instrument Performance | Old Town of Lijiang              | Naxi               |
| 1258 II-164| Jianshuai Bai Ethnic Music        | Instrument Performance | Dali                                | Bai                |
Most Common Safeguarding Measures

Performance, competitions, and exhibitions. For the four most common safeguarding measures, except for “promotion of folk music through social organizations, amateur groups, performance troupes, and clubs”, the rest are all part of the content of the Provisional Measures for the Application and Assessment of National-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage, which indicates that government policies have provided the greatest support for the main safeguarding measures.

Social enterprises. In addition, social enterprises, be them semi-official or non-official, have effectively enhanced the sustainability of folk music among the general public. It’s interesting to note that both the first measure and the second measure rank at the top in frequency (21), demonstrating the equivalent power of “high culture” and “grass-root culture” in promoting folk music. The folk-art week, grand performances, competitions, and exhibitions are usually able to reach a greater, more diverse audience, and lead to an intensive impact on folk music:

Table 2. Frequency Ranking of the Safeguarding Measures for the 24 Folk Music Items in Yunnan.

| Folk music safeguarding measures                                                                 | Frequency |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Folk art week, grand performances, competitions, and exhibitions                             | 22        |
| Promotion of folk music through social organizations, amateur groups, performance troupes, and clubs | 22        |
| Repertoire renewal                                                                           | 21        |
| Selection and support for Folk Music Culture Bearers                                         | 21        |
| Regular or frequent small-scale performances for the locals                                   | 18        |
| Funding                                                                                       | 17        |
| Documentation and archiving                                                                   | 17        |
| Compilation, production, and publication of folk-music-related works                          | 17        |
| Wide-spread transmission in the daily life of the locals                                      | 16        |
| Establishing folk music transmission and inheritance centers or bases                        | 15        |
| Transmission by apprenticeship                                                                | 14        |
| Introducing folk music in schools and universities                                           | 13        |
| Festivals                                                                                     | 12        |
| Listed as a competent local authority for ICH protection                                      | 11        |
| Cooperation of social and commercial production systems                                      | 11        |
| Folk music census and survey                                                                  | 10        |
| Enacting local folk music protection work plan and/or regulations                             | 10        |
| Providing training classes and sessions for folk music                                       | 9         |
| Expanding the base of folk music players                                                      | 9         |
| International exchanges                                                                       | 9         |
| Research cooperation and scientific research work                                            | 8         |
| Construction, renovation, and protection of venues for folk music                             | 8         |
| Applying for multiple folk music items to be included in the ICH list                         | 7         |
| Transmission by family                                                                        | 7         |
| Providing training for the folk music culture bearers                                         | 6         |
| Awarding the title of “Hometown for the Ethnic Culture”                                      | 3         |
| Transmission by new media                                                                     | 3         |
| Establishing schools or offering academic disciplines in folk music                          | 2         |
| Transmission by music instrument                                                             | 2         |
| Intellectual property rights protection                                                      | 1         |

I only play Da Ge as a hobby, and I could never imagine that I would be invited to perform Da Ge abroad.

- Participant 1, Culture Bearer for Yi Ethnic Da Ge Dance

But the regular and frequent performances, training, learning, and practices of folk music happening among social organizations, amateur groups, performance troupes, and clubs are also an indispensable part of promoting folk music:

Whenever there is a wedding ceremony or when a new house construction project is completed, we would always go to perform. We just want to help Yi ethnic people to continue their happiness and further promote and disseminate Yi Ethnic Opera, letting everybody know that ethnic culture is just around us.

- Participant 2, Chuxiong Yi Ethnic Opera Troupe

Folk music culture bearers. What’s worth mentioning is that the folk music culture bearers play a central role in the preservation and transmission of folk music. The folk
music culture bearers are individuals with proven talent and mastery of a folk music item. They are then selected, nominated, and granted the title by the national, provincial, or regional government. Folk music culture bearers’ responsibility and work tasks include but are not limited to providing training and education on folk music, organizing events for promoting folk music, operating the local folk music transmission and inheritance centers or bases, recruiting apprentices, producing new folk music, as well as collecting, translating, and compiling folk music melody and lyrics. At least one culture bearer has been selected for almost every one of the 24 listed folk music items. In some counties and townships where the ICH infrastructure, organization, and resources are limited, the culture bearers have become the pivot for safeguarding folk music.

Repertoire renewal. Repertoire renewal is another effective way to revitalize folk music. For the most popular and sustainable folk music items, for example, Mido vocal music, Huadeng Opera, and Yi ethnic folk songs, the repertoire has kept expanding for many years, resulting in a rich resource base for folk music to thrive. What’s more, the new choreography, TV, or movie production based on folk music also inject new impetus into the old cultural forms of folk music and bring them closer to modern life.

Common Safeguarding Measures

The 13 common safeguarding measures are also included in the stipulations in the national, provincial, and regional legal and policy documents.

Funding. It must be pointed out that funding and subsidy provided from all levels of government agencies are the main financial resources for folk music protection work. For example, Chuxiong Yi Ethnic Minority Autonomous Prefecture, home of multiple folk music items, has received and allocated a total of RMB 30 million as a special fund for ICH safeguarding work from 2010 to 2016 (D. H. Zhang, 2016).

Folk music transmission and inheritance centers. Another critical measure is the establishment of folk music transmission and inheritance centers or bases, which usually are supported by funding and human resources to carry out safeguarding activities. For a few of the endangered folk music items, the centers or bases are the only places where the folk music performance or training takes place. Most of the local culture bureaus are now listed as a competent local authority for ICH protection, which also indicates that policy and financial support will ensue afterward, but their work must also be supervised and inspected.

Small-scale performances for the locals. For the “regular or frequent small-scale performances for the locals,” they are usually voluntarily organized by the local performance troupes. Such performances are often staged at special occasions such as festivals, wedding ceremonies, banquets, or funerals. These prevalent performances also led to “widespread transmission in the daily life of the locals,” where the folk music has become a part of lifestyle, thus continuously gaining momentum and vitality.

Apprenticeship. In addition, apprenticeship has played a key role in the transmission of folk music tradition. Most of the folk music culture bearers have started recruiting promising apprentices to pass down their own performance skills and talent in folk music.

The transmission (of folk music) starts with children. I will go to the local schools in my spare time to select some kids who like Left-Foot Dance. And I will completely pass down my talent and skills to them. I want to keep Left-Foot Dance. It was passed down by our ancestors and I will continue to do so for many generations in the future.

- Participant 3, Left-Foot Dance Culture Bearer

Cooperation of social and commercial production systems. The cooperation of social and commercial production systems is another important support for the sustainable development of folk music. The commercial performance has indeed been a part of the tradition of folk music. Although different schools of researchers may disagree on the value or necessity of commercial production for folk music, commercial performances, or cooperations seem to have brought some benefits and support for folk music:

Our troupe has more than 20 performances each year, and we usually make about 2000 Yuan for each performance.

- Participant 2, Chuxiong Yi Ethnic Opera Troupe

A local performance troupe for Lahu Lusheng Dance has staged about 500 performances since 2013, while disseminating folk music, their work also brought about another good outcome for the village: poverty alleviation. With a total income of RMB 1.8 million, the village where the troupe started has shed off its title of “poverty-stricken village.”

Less Common Safeguarding Measures

The eight less common safeguarding measures usually require a huge amount of funding as well as prolonged time, sometimes even a span of generations, to implement or complete. Again, among them, international exchanges, transmission by family, and providing training for the folk music culture bearers are innovative measures of the locals to enhance the influence of folk music. The rest of the measures are government-funded safeguarding approaches.
Training classes and sessions. The rising trend of providing training for folk music is an effective way to transmit the knowledge of folk music, especially for the younger generation:

Now the young people under 30 only know some simple steps and have no idea about how to play flute and Sanxian.

- Participant 4, Culture Bearer of Yi Ethnic Dance with Sanxian Instrument

Realizing the severe condition for protecting the Yi Ethnic Dance with Sanxian Instrument, the culture bearer and the folk music transmission and inheritance centers provided textbooks, courses, and performances in the local kindergarten, primary schools, and high schools.

Construction, renovation, and protection of venues for folk music. Another strategy that is worth mentioning is “construction, renovation, and protection of venues for folk music.” The venues for folk music performances, events, or activities are essential for the sustainability of folk music. Squares, courtyard, town centers, and many other types of spatial locations are where most folk music gather an audience, stage performance, and create an ambiance specific to the event. With the development of rural infrastructure and architecture, such physical spaces are being rendered into tall buildings, roads, or residential houses. By constructing, renovating, or protecting the venues for folk music, the physical media for performance is preserved, solidifying the soil for folk music to blossom.

Transmission of folk music by family. Transmission by family is another mechanism to pass down folk music, a tradition shared by many countries in the world. This safeguarding measure is especially effective as it is mingled with the bond of the family. It also has mutually enhancing power with all other family traditions:

My family has passed down Left-Foot Dance for five generations. Our family also has the mission to transmit the Dance. I will continue to pass down whatever my parents gave me. I cannot see it lost in my generation.

- Participant 3, Left-Foot Dance Culture Bearer

Uncommon Safeguarding Measures

Hometown for the Ethnic Culture and IP rights protection. In the group of five uncommon safeguarding measures, only two of them: awarding the title of “Hometown for the Ethnic Culture” and intellectual property rights protection were government-led strategies and the rest are unique local ways of folk music protection.

Transmission by new media. The unique local ways of folk music protection, although very uncommon, offer interesting and innovative ideas and practices for safeguarding measures. Transmission by new media, especially live streaming, seems to have a positive effect on increasing the influence of local folk music. Several types of vocal music in our sample have enjoyed great popularity even outside of Yunnan due to their vast dissemination on social media and live streaming platforms.

Establishing schools and academic disciplines in folk music. Establishing schools or offering academic disciplines in folk music has great potential to solidify folk music. Admittedly, proper funding and a large enough student base are two prerequisites for the success of such programs. Still, it is a further step toward the promotion of folk music education.

Transmission by musical instrument. Transmission by a musical instrument is another quite fascinating and novel measure. For both Elephant-Foot Drum Dance and Bee-Barrel Drum Dance, the transmission and preservation of the related folk music have been quite successful due to the strong production facilities. The drums produced by the local craftsmen or small-scale factories are shipped to various places in China and other countries, revitalizing the folk music carried to all corners of the world.

Conclusion

By relating back to the theoretical framework that we proposed at the beginning of this article, we may find the following interesting connections between the theories and our findings.

Safeguarding Measures Theories and Yunnan Music ICH Protection Practice

As the data suggested, music education, documentation and archiving, group heritage and apprenticeship, funding, repertoire renewal, festivals, innovation, libraries and museums, cooperation, and social and commercial production systems are all theoretical safeguarding measures applied successfully in Yunnan music ICH protection.

However, one safeguarding measure in the theory that does not seem to apply very well in general to the case of Yunnan is intellectual property protection. Although there are complete legal and policy frameworks governing intellectual property rights protection, the application of them in the folk music area is still quite new and immature. The main issue has to do with the difficulty in identifying and confirming ownership of intellectual property rights. Most of the local folk music production and creation comes from folk musicians who quite often improvise dances, lyrics, and music which are then widely disseminated and reused, even for commercial purposes. Most of folk music forms are not recorded in any format either at the time of creation or later.
Therefore, traditionally, folk music is for a large part regarded as created by the general public of one or several ethnic group(s). However, with the development of intellectual property rights protection, it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of intellectual property rights protection applications in this area in the future.

**Innovative Safeguarding Measures**

The cases of Yunnan in this study also present other more innovative measures to safeguard folk music. One of them is the protection of the physical aspect of folk music. By renovating and preserving the venues for folk music performance and with transmission by instrument, the intangible heritage is preserved through the maintenance of tangible media, which in turn further enhances the livelihood of folk music.

In addition, there are multiple safeguarding measures which are internally organized instead of externally intervened. For instance, the grand performances, competitions, and exhibitions; promotion of folk music through social organizations, amateur groups, performance troupes, and clubs; widespread transmission in the daily life of the locals; folk music transmission and inheritance centers or bases; as well as folk music cultural bearers are all deeply interwoven with the people and the culture where folk music originated from. Instead of viewing safeguarding measures as an external intervention or a “treatment” done to the “patient” of folk music and its related people and culture, these innovative measures come from and act on the everyday life of the culture and the people. The people from which folk music originated are the main entity for carrying out the safeguarding measures. Folk music becomes a lively and current part of people’s life and achieves great sustainability in this environment. In terms of the authorities, by providing legal and policy framework, financial support, infrastructure, human resources, and administration, government agencies set up a solid “stage” for civil society, and social enterprises to “perform.”

**Connection With the ICH Discourse**

In China, the ICH discourse is dominated by the government at all levels. As the most important stakeholder and leading force in ICH protection, the government determines and guides the official discourse related to ICH. However, at the grassroots level or among the masses, the discourse shifts from formal protection to the daily routine or everyday life of the people. For the same folk music item, it may be listed as a very high-profile cultural tradition on the government-led ICH list, but it is at the same time a very familiar thing in the life of the people who live with it. It is due to this duality of ICH discourse that the safeguarding guarding measures also exhibit a dual feature.

**Implication and Limitation of the Study**

Yunnan Province has achieved quite successful safeguarding results in the protection work for folk music items, most of which are not endangered now. The unique experience and practices in the safeguarding measures are worth introducing and may provide useful references for policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and educators in music and ICH-related fields. Although the current efforts seem to have only enabled the reappearance or resurfacing of certain folk music items, the awareness of such items among the general population has been improved and the knowledge of them is accumulating. It is a significant step toward truly reviving all the folk music items in the future when folk music in Yunnan will enjoy great popularity.

Due to time constraints and limited research resources, this study only provided a snapshot of the overall landscape of folk music protection and sustainability in Yunnan Province. The author does not intend to claim that this is an exhaustive study that encompasses all aspects of the topic. Further research projects which focus on longitudinal development, comparative studies, and fieldwork will be meaningful exploration that will both enhance and expand the results of this study.

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