Reviewing the current situation of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province

Shutong Liu | Sayam Chuangprakhon

College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand.

Abstract Nestled in the southwestern region of China, Yunnan Province boasts a cultural tapestry that is as diverse and colorful as its breathtaking landscapes. Among its many cultural treasures, the Huadengxi Chinese folk song shine, as a testament to the rich artistic heritage that has thrived in this region for centuries. The objective of this study is to review the present state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province. Five key informants, with extensive knowledge and experience in Huadengxi, provided valuable insights. The data collected included observation forms, interview forms, and questionnaires, with a multidimensional approach encompassing document data, music data, audio data, and video data. This research sheds light on recent innovations, the historical evolution of Huadengxi, and its integration into educational institutions. This finding underscores the significance of preserving this traditional art form and promoting it within the educational landscape. As an era of global cultural diversity unfolds, understanding the challenges and successes of preserving and advancing traditional art forms such as Huadengxi is of paramount importance.

Keywords: Huadengxi, Chinese folk songs, Yunnan Province, cultural preservation, traditional art forms

1. Introduction

Nestled in the southwestern region of China, Yunnan Province boasts a cultural tapestry that is as diverse and colorful as its breathtaking landscapes (Chen 2014; Chawla 2023; Wang et al 2023). Among its many cultural treasures, the Huadengxi Chinese folk song shine, as a testament to the rich artistic heritage that has thrived in this region for centuries. As we embarked on the journey to review the current state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province, we were invited to explore this captivating and multifaceted art form (Liu 2003; Trivedi & Ryuta 2010; Yuan 2016).

Huadengxi, often lovingly referred to as the "gorgeous camellia" by the people of Yunnan, is a unique and comprehensive folk art that has captured the hearts of locals and garnered appreciation far beyond the province's borders. Its name, "flower lantern drama," paints a vivid picture of the vibrant and colorful nature of this art form. At its core, Huadengxi seamlessly weaves together songs, dances, and dramatic performances, creating a harmonious and enchanting spectacle (Jiang 2018; Seekhunlio & Chuangprakhon 2021; Wu 2023). It is not merely a form of entertainment but also a reflection of everyday life, rituals, and festivities in Yunnan. Huadengxi encapsulates the simplicity, purity, and rich local flavors that define Yunnan's cultural identity (Boyu 2012; Li 2013; Li & Zhou 2022; Kuang & He 2022; Qiu et al 2024; Yue & Seekhunlio 2024).

This article embarks on a journey to explore and review the current situation of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province. Huadengxi has evolved, incorporating various forms, from traditional folk performances to modern stage adaptations. The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth analysis of this art form, shedding light on its significance in the context of Yunnan's cultural heritage (Zhang & Jun 2023; Zhang & Wu 2023).

The research objective is to review the present state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province. This paper delves into the characteristics, similarities, and differences in Huadeng music across various regions within Yunnan. Furthermore, we will examine the transition from traditional folk performances to modern staged renditions, exploring the delicate balance between preservation and innovation (Wilcox 2019; Rui & Aziz 2023).

This study holds particular importance because it offers valuable insights into the preservation and thriving of national culture and art. This paper delves into how Huadengxi, as a representative Chinese folk art, has adapted to changing times and societal developments while retaining its cultural essence. In an era of global cultural diversity, understanding the challenges and successes of preserving and advancing traditional art forms is of paramount importance (Crozier 1968; Guthrie 2012).
This article unfolds in subsequent sections, delving into the history and prevalent musical elements of Huadengxi in Yunnan Province, the research methodology employed, and the key informants who contributed to the understanding of this art form (Zhou & Chuangprakhon 2023; Wu & Bhengsri 2023; Xie & Boonsrianan 2023). The authors also explored the ethnomusicological theories underpinning the study and presented the research objectives and questions. Ultimately, this endeavor aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province and their role in preserving the cultural heritage of this unique region.

1.1. Research objective
To review the current state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province.

1.2. Research question
What is the current situation of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province?

2. Literature review
A review of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province took place through a rich cultural tapestry that has evolved over centuries. To understand the current state of this unique art form, it is essential to delve into the historical and scholarly background that has shaped it.

2.1. Historical Roots of Huadengxi
The origins of Huadengxi, a comprehensive folk art, are traced back to the middle of the Ming Dynasty. However, it truly flourished during the Qing Dynasty, marking a significant period in its evolution. Rooted in folk music and dance, Huadengxi seamlessly combines songs, dances, and dramatic elements into captivating performances. This art form reflects the essence of folk life in Yunnan Province in a simple and pure manner and is characterized by its rich local flavor, beautiful singing, and melodic excellence. Over time, Huadengxi has diversified into four distinct performance forms: Huadeng rap, Huadeng song and dance, Huadeng folk music performances, and modern-stage Huadeng performances. Each of these forms has contributed to the vitality and adaptability of Huadengxi in Yunnan Province (Wilkinson 2000; Tao et al 2023).

2.2. Variations in Huadengxi Province across Yunnan Province
One remarkable feature of Huadengxi is its regional diversity within Yunnan Province. While it is widely popular among the Han population in Yunnan, it has also found resonance among ethnic minorities such as the Bai and Yi. The music styles of Huadengxi people in different cities and regions within Yunnan Province have distinct characteristics influenced by local dialects, musical traditions, and folk arts. For instance, Kunming Huadengxi, prevalent in rural towns across Kunming, boasts a simple and elegant musical style, utilizing folk and minor tunes from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Yuxi Huadengxi, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on singing and dancing components and beautiful lyricism. Chuxiong Huadengxi spans various counties in western Yunnan Province and features a simple structure and melody, with diverse styles categorized into different types. Dali Huadengxi, distributed across several counties, embraces multiple nationalities and integrates diverse musical elements, showcasing the folk song styles of the Han, Bai, and Yi nationalities in Yunnan. This regional variation adds depth and richness to the tradition of Huadengxi (Rees 2010; Yuan 2016; D'Amico 2019; Guo 2019; Yang 2023).

2.3. Modernization and Preservation Challenges
The rapid pace of modernization and societal changes have posed challenges to the preservation and evolution of Huadengxi in Yunnan Province. Since the 1970s, modern-stage Huadengxi performances have incorporated elements of modern dance, ballet, etc., etc. While this has expanded the reach and appeal of Huadengxi, questions arise about the extent to which modernization has captured the core essence of this traditional art form. Balancing the preservation of tradition with innovative transformation remains a significant challenge. The themes and content of Huadengxi evolved in response to changing times, as did stage performance and audience preferences. Thus, it is imperative to investigate and document the "Changes in Huadengxi in Yunnan Province" as a historical imperative (Coombe 2002; Yang & An 2008; Wing-Wah 2013; Howard 2016).

2.4. The significance of ethnomusicology
Ethnomusicology, as a branch of musicology intertwined with ethnology and folklore, offers valuable insights into the musical traits and cultural significance of Huadengxi. It examines the connections between music and various aspects, such as geography, history, and other cultures, providing specific musical insights. This multidisciplinary approach is essential for
comprehending the multifaceted nature of Huadengxi in Yunnan Province and its place within the broader context of Chinese folk culture (Zhang 1985; Nettl & Bohlman 1991; Jones 2003).

As we embarked on our research journey to review the current situation of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province, we drew upon these historical and scholarly foundations to shed light on the state of this remarkable art form in contemporary times.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research scope and sites

This study was conducted in Yunnan Province, China, with a specific focus on the cities of Kunming, Yuxi, Chuxiong, and Dali. These regions were chosen due to their diverse traditions in Huadengxi, which made them ideal sites for examining the current state of Huadengxi's Chinese folk songs.

![Figure 1 Map of Yunnan Province](https://example.com/map.png)

**Figure 1** Map of Yunnan Province.

**Source** Chinafolio (n.d.)

3.2. Key information providers

To gather comprehensive insights into the current situation of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs, the research team engaged with five key informants who possess extensive knowledge and experience in this art form. The selection criteria for key informants included the following:

1) Relevance to the thesis’s research field
2) Native and lifelong residents of the local area
3) Involvement as creators of Yunnan Huadeng music
4) Experience as stage director of modern Huadengxi in Yunnan
5) Significant contributions to the transmission of the Huadengxi virus in Yunnan Province or local recognition status
6) Substantial performance experience and familiarity with local researchers

3.3. Research tools

The research team employed various tools to facilitate the data collection process, ensuring a thorough examination of the current state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs. These tools include:

1) Observation Forms: These forms were designed to gather firsthand experiences and insights during field visits and investigations. Researchers have interacted with folk artists, explored musical instruments, engaged with folk associations, and observed traditional festivals, weddings, and funerals associated with Yunnan Huadengxi.
2) Interview Forms: Structured interview forms were used to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants. The flexible interview format allowed for comprehensive coverage of topics related to Huadengxi.
3) Questionnaires: Questionnaires served as field investigation tools, enabling the collection of relevant data and assisting in the identification of popular Yi folk songs cherished by the Yi community.

3.4. Data analysis

The research team collected various types of data during fieldwork, including document data, music data, audio data, and video data. This multidimensional approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province. The data collected included oral materials, music scores, audio recordings, and videos, providing a rich source of information.

Furthermore, the research team conducted a comparative analysis of music scores from various regions of Yunnan Province to identify similarities and differences between traditional Huadeng performances and modern stage adaptations. Quantitative analysis and field survey data were utilized to examine the characteristics of Yunnan Huadeng music, helping to uncover the current situation of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province.

With these materials, methods, and tools in place, our research endeavors to offer a comprehensive and insightful review of the current state of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province.

4. Results

4.1. Recent innovations and accelerations in Huadengxi

In recent years, Huadengxi, a traditional Chinese performing art form, has undergone significant innovations and achieved notable accomplishments. These innovations and accomplishments have revitalized and modernized Huadengxi, making it relevant and appealing to contemporary audiences.

The key findings and observations regarding recent innovations and accomplishments in Huadengxi are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation/Accomplishment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Integration of Ethnic and Modern Cultures</td>
<td>Performers and artists blend elements from various ethnic traditions with modern cultural influences, resulting in culturally rich and contemporary performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularization, Nationalization, and Modernization</td>
<td>Adaptation of performers, music, venues, plots, and props to make Huadengxi accessible to a wider audience, bridging the gap between tradition and modern appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakthroughs in Music, Dance, and Storyline</td>
<td>Significant progress in music, dance, and storyline development, creating more captivating and artistically valuable performances with diverse styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration with Television and the Internet</td>
<td>Expansion of Huadengxi’s reach through television programs, online media, and competitions, making it accessible to a broader audience, even in remote areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominent Platforms and Events</td>
<td>Recognition and prominence gained through participation in notable events and competitions, providing a platform to showcase innovations and reach wider audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic and Localized Productions</td>
<td>Exploration of various themes and local stories in Huadengxi productions, enriching content and preserving indigenous elements and cultures in different regions of Yunnan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, recent innovations and accomplishments in Huadengxi have breathed new life into this traditional art form. Through a thoughtful blend of ethnic and modern elements, efforts to popularize, nationalize, and modernize, and breakthroughs in music, dance, and storytelling, Huadengxi has managed to captivate audiences across generations. Its integration with media platforms and participation in events has expanded its reach, making it an integral part of contemporary culture while preserving its rich heritage.

4.2. The Development of Huadengxi

The development of Huadengxi, a traditional Chinese musical drama originating in Yunnan Province, reflects a rich tapestry of historical evolution, regional variations, and cultural significance. This research aims to shed light on the key findings regarding the development of Huadengxi Province, highlighting its historical roots, regional diversity, economic and cultural significance, and impact on border areas. This research also explored preservation and transmission efforts and the influence of economic development on Huadengxi Province, as shown in Table 2.

The development of Huadengxi in Yunnan Province is a testament to the rich cultural heritage and adaptability of traditional art forms. Its historical evolution, regional diversity, and significance in the context of economic development highlight the dynamic nature of this art. Efforts to preserve and transmit Huadengxi, especially in key cities, are essential for its continued vitality. Moreover, its influence on border areas underscores the importance of cultural exchange and cross-cultural enrichment. As Huadengxi continues to thrive and adapt, it remains a vibrant component of Yunnan’s cultural landscape.

4.3. The Integration of Huadengxi into Educational Institutions
The integration of Yunnan Huadengxi into educational institutions is crucial for preserving and promoting this traditional art form. This research explored the perceptions and inclusion of Yunnan Huadengxi University in local primary schools among students and teachers in Yunnan Province, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 2 The Development of Huadengxi.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Findings</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Roots and Evolution</td>
<td>- Huadengxi has deep historical roots, dating back to the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Over centuries, it has evolved, incorporating various regional influences, music styles, and performance techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Variations and Branches</td>
<td>- Due to language differences and varying singing styles among artists across Yunnan, flower Huadengs popular in different regions have been influenced by diverse genres, operas, or folk songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Yunnan’s flower Huadengs can be categorized into nine branches, each with its unique characteristics and cultural influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic and Cultural Significance</td>
<td>- The prosperity of Yunnan Huadengxi is closely related to the economic development and cultural level of various regions in Yunnan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Huadengxi is the most popular musical drama among the people in Yunnan, and it can be seen in almost all Han ethnic areas in the province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huadengxi in Key Cities</td>
<td>- Researchers selected four of the most prosperous cities for their main research: Kunming Huadeng, Yuxi Huadeng, Dali Midu Huadeng, and Chuxiong Huadeng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- These cities have contributed significantly to the development and preservation of Huadengxi in Yunnan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Development of Yao'an Huadeng</td>
<td>- Yao'an County Huadeng in Chuxiong, Yunnan, traces its history back to the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The &quot;Yaoan Huadeng&quot; Troupe was established in 1956 and later renamed the Yao'an County Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Transmission Exhibition Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Exchange and Influence</td>
<td>- Various branches of Huadengxi have engaged in artistic exchanges with neighboring regions, such as Sichuan, contributing to cultural diversity and cross-influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Economic Development</td>
<td>- Huadengxi has also integrated elements from ethnic groups like the Yi and Bai, enriching its repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The top cities in Yunnan’s economic development are currently concentrated in the central cities of Yunnan Province, followed by the western regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation and Transmission</td>
<td>- County leaders in Yao'an County initiated the &quot;3+1&quot; model in 2009 to support grassroots performance teams, contributing to the growth of Huadeng culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on Border Areas</td>
<td>- Folk organizations and associations also play a role in the preservation and transmission of Huadengxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Apart from local ethnic songs and dances, Huadeng is popular in many places, including the Dai region in Simao and the Dong region in Luoping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Huadengxi has left its mark on these border areas, showcasing its widespread influence in Yunnan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Yunnan Huadeng Student Survey Questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1: Understand Huadengxi</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2: Understand Huadengxi Performance methods</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: Huadengxi is included in the school curriculum</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4: Proactively purchase tickets to watch</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Having the value of protection and transmission</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Yunnan Huadeng Teacher Survey Questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1: Understand Huadengxi</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2: Understand Huadengxi Performance methods</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: Teaching Huadengxi is helpful for students</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4: Willing to organize students to watch Huadengxi performances</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Having the value of protection and transmission</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6: Willing to learn about Huadengxi for classroom teaching</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey results indicate a positive outlook among local primary school students in Yunnan regarding Yunnan Huadeng. While a significant number of students exhibit an understanding of and interest in Huadengxi, there is room for further integration into the school curriculum. Notably, 78 out of 350 students attended schools where Yunnan Huadeng was included in the curriculum. This demonstrates the potential for expanding the incorporation of Huadengxi into educational institutions, allowing students to develop a deeper grasp of this traditional art form.

Moreover, elementary school teachers in Yunnan Province expressed a favorable opinion of Yunnan Huadengxi, with many showing eagerness to learn and teach this tradition to their students. This presents an opportunity to foster cultural literacy and expose students to traditional cultural topics during their formative years. Overall, the study suggested that
Yunnan Huadeng has the potential to play a more significant role in the educational landscape, enriching students' understanding of traditional culture and art, as shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](image-url)

Figure 2 The inclusion of Huadengxi in the school curriculum.

5. Discussion and conclusion

A review of Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province has provided valuable insights into the preservation and evolution of this traditional art form. Building upon the introduction, literature review, and research methods, this discussion delves into the research results and their alignment with theoretical principles.

First, the research results have highlighted recent innovations and accomplishments in Huadengxi. The integration of ethnic and modern cultures, popularization, nationalization, modernization efforts, and breakthroughs in music, dance, and storyline development have revitalized Huadengxi and expanded its appeal to contemporary audiences. These findings align with the theoretical principle that traditional art forms can thrive through adaptation and innovation (Wilkinson 2000; Guthrie 2012).

Second, the study has shed light on the development of Huadengxi, emphasizing its historical roots, regional diversity, and economic and cultural significance. The regional variations in Huadengxi across Yunnan Province and their impact on border areas underscore the dynamic nature of this art form. This research also acknowledges the challenges posed by rapid economic development and the importance of preservation efforts. These findings resonate with the theoretical principle that traditional art forms are deeply embedded in the cultural and economic fabric of a region (Coombe 2002; Nettl & Bohlman 1991).

Furthermore, the integration of Huadengxi into educational institutions has been explored, with surveys indicating positive perceptions among students and teachers. The potential for further inclusion in the curriculum is evident, aligning with the theoretical principle that education plays a crucial role in the preservation and promotion of traditional culture (Wing-Wah 2013; Wu & Bhengsri 2023).

In conclusion, research on Huadengxi Chinese folk songs in Yunnan Province has revealed a vibrant and evolving cultural tradition deeply rooted in the region's history. The recent innovations and accomplishments in Huadengxi demonstrate its adaptability and relevance in contemporary society, consistent with the need for traditional art forms to evolve to capture new audiences. The development of Huadengxi showcases its historical significance, regional variations, and economic and cultural relevance in alignment with theoretical principles emphasizing the cultural and economic ties of traditional art forms to its regions.

The integration of Huadengxi into educational institutions presents an opportunity to ensure its continued transmission to future generations, consistent with the theoretical principle that education plays a pivotal role in cultural preservation.
Overall, this research underscores the importance of understanding and preserving traditional art forms such as Huadengxi in the face of modernization and globalization. By striking a balance between preservation and innovation, Huadengxi can continue to flourish as a testament to Yunnan’s rich cultural heritage.

**Ethical considerations**

Before commencing the interviews and observations, we obtained informed consent from all participants. The participants were fully briefed on the study’s objectives, their rights as participants, and the strict confidentiality maintained for their responses.

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Funding**

This research project was financially supported by Mahasarakham University.

**References**


Chinafolio (n.d.) Yunnan Province https://chinafolio.com/provinces/yunnan-province


Crozier R C (1968) Traditional medicine in modern China: science, nationalism, and the tensions of cultural change. Harvard University Press. DOI: 10.4159/harvard.9780674430686


Tao L, Pugh-Kitingan J & Isaiah L C T (2023 July). A Survey for Research Literature Review of the Origin, Spread and Variation of the Chinese Folk Song “Jasmine Flower”. In 23rd International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities and Arts (SSHA 2023) (pp. 567-574). Atlantis Press. DOI: 10.2991/978-2-38476-062-6_72


Wu M & Bhengsri T (2023) Educational and Literacy Dimensions of Putian Coastal Folk Songs in Fujian Province, China. International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies 11:244-250. DOI: 10.7575/iaic.jels.v.11n.3p.244


Zhang S & Wu C (2023) Revitalizing endangered traditions: Innovative approaches to safeguarding Yunnan’s ethnic minority music as intangible cultural heritage. Herança 6:101-128. DOI: 10.52152/heranca.v6i1.787
