

The historical development of maoshan haozi Chinese folk song in Jiangsu Province, China



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Abstract This study investigates the historical development of Maoshan Haozi, a traditional folk song originating from Xinghua City in Jiangsu Province, China. A qualitative research methodology was adopted, with field interviews and participant observations employed as the primary tools for data collection. Informants were interviewed on-site, and the data collected were systematically analyzed to uncover the transformation of this folk tradition. It has been found that Maoshan Haozi originated in the Neolithic era as rhythmic shouts used during collective labor, and over time, these evolved into musical expressions deeply embedded in agricultural life. Influences from successive waves of regional migration were absorbed, resulting in a unique blend of cultural elements that shaped Maoshan Haozi into a form marked by both strength and lyrical gentleness. Musically, Maoshan Haozi employs the pentatonic scale, structured melodies, distinct rhythms, and a call-and-response format. Based on musical structure and labor function, the songs have been classified into long and short forms as well as various types, such as Cheshui Haozi, Zaiyang Haozi, and Niu Haozi. As industrialization and urbanization progressed, Maoshan Haozi was adapted for stage performance, leading to changes in melody, tempo, vocal technique, and accompaniment. Despite its inclusion in the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2011 and ongoing educational initiatives, its sustainability remains challenged by generational gaps, reduced youth engagement, and concerns over cultural dilution through digital adaptation. Nevertheless, the preservation and revitalization of Maoshan Haozi have been facilitated through government support, community involvement, and integration into school curricula. This study contributes to ethnomusicological discourse by emphasizing the importance of adaptive strategies in maintaining the cultural integrity of traditional folk music within contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Maoshan Haozi, Folk song, historical, development

1. Introduction

Folk songs have been regarded as essential components of traditional Chinese music. Through them, the lifestyles, customs, and emotions of traditional working people have been expressed and passed down. As noted in the Overview of Traditional Chinese Music, folk songs have been categorized into mountain songs, ditties, and Haozi, on the basis of their different carriers. Labor Haozi—also known as “work chants”—has been widely used during collective labor to coordinate movement, build morale, and reflect the strength and rhythm of physical work. While “Yao Haozi” has been found mainly in the north, “Han Haozi” has been sung in southern regions. A strong sense of repetition and directness has characterized the form, which is often performed with a lead singer followed by a group response (Fu, 2020). Over time, Haozi evolved from simple rhythmic shouts into more structured forms with lyrical and melodic richness, representing the perseverance and optimism of working people (Zhou, 2003).

Maoshan Haozi is rooted in Maoshan town, Xinghua city, with origins tracing back over 4,000 years. It is believed to have emerged as a vocal tool to regulate breath and conserve energy during labor. For centuries, especially after the influx of northern migrants during the Han Dynasty and cultural integration during the Eastern Jin period, influences from both northern and southern folk traditions were absorbed. As a result, Maoshan Haozi developed a unique musical identity, combining simplicity with vitality. It has been classified by type of labor—such as Cheshui Haozi, Zaiyang Haozi, and Tiaodan Haozi—and by structure, including long and short forms. Among them, Zaiyang Haozi, Tiaodan Haozi, and Cheshui Haozi are considered the most influential (Zhu, 2020).

A peak in the recognition of Maoshan Haozi occurred in the 1950s. In 1954, representatives from Maoshan, including Zhu Xianglin, performed in Shanghai at a folk arts event coorganized by China, Germany, and France, receiving praise for their expressive and spirited performance. Later, during China’s first National Music Week in 1956, two Maoshan Haozi pieces—



"Little Sister" and "Three Flowers Apart"—were selected for national performance, further solidifying their cultural significance. The troupe was even invited to perform for national leaders, including Chairperson Mao Zedong (Dong, 2012).

However, the development of mechanization, industrialization, and urbanization has significantly challenged the survival of labor in Haozi. With changes in work environments and aesthetics, the traditional function of Maoshan Haozi has weakened. Although it was included in the third batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2011, challenges in transmission persist, including a declining number of practitioners and a lack of interest among younger generations. Public efforts such as training classes have not reversed this trend (Ji, 2000). Therefore, this study aims to explore the cultural value of Maoshan Haozi, examine its current challenges, and propose pathways for its sustainable transmission in modern society.

2. Research methods

This study adopted a qualitative research method in which information was collected through field surveys and a literature review. The historical development of Maoshan Haozi Chinese Folk Song in Jiangsu Province, China, was examined, its musical characteristics were analyzed, and guidelines for preservation and transmission were proposed. Xinghua city in Jiangsu Province was selected as the research site. Targeted interviews were conducted with key informants, including the national intangible cultural heritage transmitter Lu Aiqin, the provincial transmitter Zhang Weihua, the troupe head Cai Aifang, and the municipal transmitters Cai Jinyu and Sun Xiujuan. Informants were chosen on the basis of criteria such as native residency, more than 30 years of Maoshan Haozi performance experience, significant provincial or higher-level awards, leadership roles in local troupes, and recognition as intangible cultural heritage transmitters. The following four stages define the entire research process:

2.1. Step 1: Data collection

2.1.1. Secondary Data

Data related to the history, development, musical characteristics, conservation, and transmission of the Maoshan Haozi folk song were collected through a literature review. Local documents, academic research, and relevant audio-visual materials were emphasized.

2.1.2. Primary Data

Field data were gathered through direct observations during live performances to document musical characteristics and singing techniques. Interviews with inheritors and scholars were conducted to obtain detailed insights into the history, musical elements, and preservation practices related to Maoshan Haozi.

2.2. Step 2: Recording data

All audio, video, literature, and interview data will be recorded digitally. Audio and video files are securely stored on external hard drives or cloud storage and are systematically categorized by date, subject, and type. Documentation and survey materials will be archived electronically within a structured records management system organized by thematic categories.

2.3. Step 3: Preparation and analysis of data

The collected data are systematically organized within a data management system. The interview transcripts will be accurately transcribed and anonymized and matched with participant identifiers. Audio and video recordings are tagged by performance dates, locations, and performers for ease of reference during analysis. Qualitative methods, including thematic analysis, will be applied to the interview content, observational records, and literature. Historical archives, documents, and oral histories are analyzed to identify significant historical events, societal influences, and evolutions in musical features such as melody, rhythm, structure, lyrics, and singing techniques.

2.4. Step 4: Summarize, discuss the results, and present the data.

The results from the analysis are summarized, and key findings are thoroughly discussed. The cultural significance, current practices, and challenges facing Maoshan Haozi are presented comprehensively, highlighting important historical milestones and observing changes in musical characteristics. Recommendations for preservation and transmission strategies on the basis of these findings are as follows. The research site of the study is Xinghua city, Jiangsu Province, China.

3. Literature review

3.1. Historical background of Chinese Folksong in Jiangsu Province

Jiangsu Province, located in eastern China along the Yangtze and Huai Rivers, has been geographically and culturally divided into southern Jiangsu (Sunan) and northern Jiangsu (Subei). Owing to variations in terrain and regional lifestyles, folk songs have been classified into three categories: southern Jiangsu folk songs, northern Jiangsu folk songs, and Jianghuai folk songs (Ma, 2012) (Figure 1).

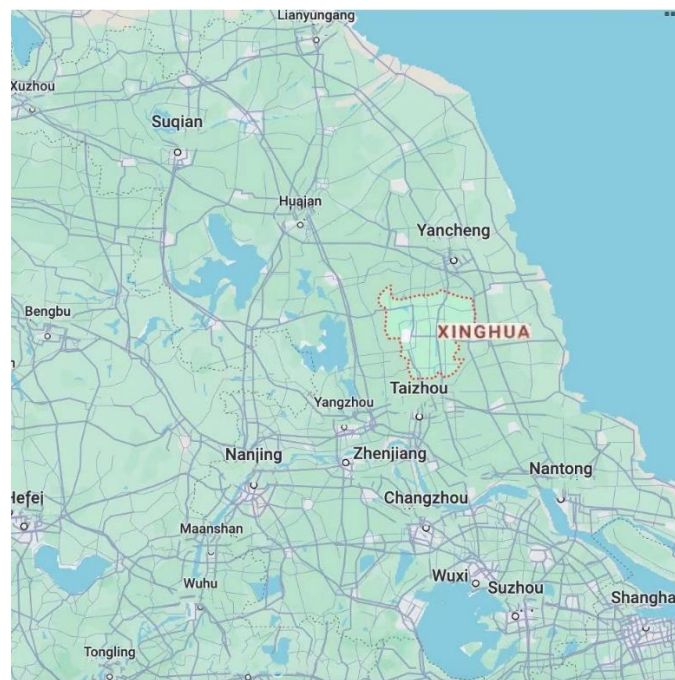


Figure 1 Research site Xinghua city, Jiangsu Province, China.

The intangible cultural heritage of Jiangsu folk songs has been recognized through several official declarations. The first batch included Wuge as folk literature, followed by Gaoyou and Haimen folk songs and Maoshan Haozi, Jinhu Yangge (Weecao Luogu), and Nanzha folk songs in subsequent batches. Since 2007, Jiangsu folk songs—including haozi and minor keys—have been added to the provincial intangible cultural heritage list, covering cities such as Suzhou, Wuxi, Yangzhou, Nantong, Nanjing, Zhenjiang, Huai'an, Yancheng, and Taizhou (Shan, 2002).

For thousands of years, folk songs have been regarded as the most significant form of musical expression for the working class. In earlier historical periods, when rural life dominated and technological development was minimal, folk songs were used as the primary form of musical communication, reflecting life attitudes and emotions. The vastness and diversity of rural China, along with its long history, has resulted in a unique richness in both the quantity and quality of folk songs. Although modernization and popular music have contributed to the decline of traditional folk culture, the distinctive forms and techniques embedded in folk songs have continued to reveal valuable insights into human social relationships and ways of life.

Efforts in the collection, research, and preservation of folk songs have been undertaken by dedicated music scholars since the last century. As a result, Chinese folk songs, including those from Jiangsu, have been preserved, studied, and passed down through generations (Shan, 2002).

Historically, Jiangsu has served as a cultural cradle with 13 historical and cultural cities. Bordering Zhejiang and other regions and lying between the Yellow Sea and Yangtze River, the province's unique geography and cultural interactions have shaped its artistic expression. Influenced by its refined cultural atmosphere, Jiangsu folk songs are characterized by elegance and delicacy, in contrast with the bold styles found in northern China (Miao, 2019).

3.1.1. Influence of different historical periods and cultures on folk music

Throughout history, three major waves of migration into Jiangsu Province have been identified. The first occurred at the end of the Western Han Dynasty, when wars involving the Xiongnu displaced many people from the Central Plains. Owing to its fertile plains and abundant waterways, Jiangsu was chosen as a primary resettlement area. The second migration followed the An Shi Rebellion in the late Tang Dynasty, and the third occurred from the Jingkang Rebellion during the Northern Song Dynasty to the fall of the Southern Song Dynasty. Each wave brought people from regions such as Shandong, Hebei, and Shaanxi into Jiangsu. With them, cultural practices, production modes, customs, and entertainment traditions were introduced. As a result, Jiangsu's folk music was deeply influenced, giving rise to stylistic diversity (Liu, 2005).

Planting songs in northern Jiangsu were analyzed in terms of composition and performance style. These songs were found to be shaped by long-term interactions between northern and southern folk musical traditions, serving as cultural records of social changes and evolving customs in Jiangsu (Qian, 2003).

Natural disasters and wars have rarely disturbed Jiangsu throughout history. Favorable geography and high agricultural productivity allowed people to enjoy peaceful and prosperous lives, shaping a gentle and refined local character. Within this environment, a graceful aesthetic emerged, and under such cultural richness, Jiangsu's elegant folk songs developed. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties through the Song and Yuan Dynasties, waves of cultural migration brought orthodox Chinese traditions to the region.

Following the An Shi Rebellion and the Jingkang Incident, China's economic and cultural center gradually shifted southward. Jiangsu's strategic location, urban development, and transportation network supported the flourishing of culture. Consequently, Jiangsu folk songs continued to evolve, forming the representative style of Jiangnan folk music. Well-known works such as "Jasmine Flower," "Scenery of Gusu," and "Meng Jiangnv" were composed and widely disseminated, characterized by delicate melodies and refined expression (Shang, 2023).

3.2. Characteristics of Jiangsu Folk Songs

Since many studies have provided general overviews of Jiangsu folk songs, only a brief summary is presented here. Jiangsu folk songs are typically categorized into three regional styles on the basis of geography and language: Jiangnan, Jianghuai, and northern Jiangsu. The Jiangnan region includes areas south of Danyang, such as Suzhou and Wuxi. Nanjing and Zhenjiang are classified under the Jianghuai region on the basis of their linguistic characteristics. Jianghuai includes cities such as Nanjing, Yangzhou, Taizhou, Yancheng, and Huaiyin. Xuzhou and Lianyungang in northern Jiangsu share musical traits with Shandong and are often grouped as Shandong-style folk songs. Therefore, studies tend to focus on the Jiangnan and Jianghuai regions, where linguistic and lifestyle differences have shaped distinct musical styles. These stylistic characteristics have been exemplified through the planting of seedling songs in Baoying and Jinhu (Shan, 2002).

The original forms of Jiangsu folk songs are characterized by simple structures and short melodic phrases, with vocal ranges limited to eight or nine degrees. When performed for extended periods, sound fatigue tends to occur, diminishing the singing effect. The development of traditional folk songs has also been hindered by the influence of foreign cultures and modern entertainment, leading to the decline of original ecological folk music (Wei, 2011).

As Jiangsu is composed largely of plains with dense waterways, the region has developed a strong rice cultivation culture. Consequently, labor songs such as those concerning the planting of seedlings in Haozi and the vehicle water in Haozi have been widely performed. These songs are most prominent in the Huaihe River Basin and Jianghuai Plain, including cities such as Nanjing, Zhenjiang, Yixing, Suzhou, Wuxi, and Changzhou. Unlike similar Haozi in other provinces, some Jiangsu variants retain the rhythmic intensity of typical Haozi, whereas others exhibit lyrical and melodic qualities resembling folk songs and minor keys. Such diversity has been observed in Zaiyang Haozi from areas such as Jinhu, Baoying, and Huaiyin (Ding, 2005).

The song "Pulling Roots and Luchai Flowers" has a typical folk structure with a prelude and multiple sections of unequal length. The opening eight bars serve as an introductory segment, preparing performers for vocal delivery (Miao, 2019).

The planting of Haozi seedlings in northern Jiangsu usually adopts a short, one-section format similar to that of folk songs and minor tunes in the Jianghuai River Basin. Variations occur through combinations of musical embellishments both inside and outside the melodic lines. Common structures include two-phrase and four-phrase forms (Qian, 2003).

3.3. The theory used in research

Ethnomusicology has been adopted as the core theoretical framework of this study. It has provided the foundation for analyzing Maoshan Haozi, a traditional form of folk music. Through this framework, the cultural background, musical form, and dissemination of Maoshan Haozi have been explored, while its development and preservation have been examined within a sociohistorical and cultural context.

Ethnomusicological fieldwork methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and a review of musical literature, have been applied. These methods have enabled the investigation of Maoshan Haozi's current role in contemporary society and the challenges it faces in terms of cultural sustainability.

As a theoretical discipline within musicology, ethnomusicology is concerned with the study of traditional music from various ethnic groups and their developmental forms. Fieldwork has been recognized as the primary method for acquiring research material. The subject of musical investigation is treated as a musical phenomenon and is studied within the natural and sociocultural environments of the corresponding ethnic group. Through such investigations, the ways in which individuals or communities construct, use, disseminate, and develop musical forms in alignment with their cultural traditions are examined. Consequently, the basic morphological features, patterns of variation, and cultural significance of the music are interpreted (Wu, 1997).

4. Results

4.1. Historical origins of Maoshan Haozi

According to Zhang Weihua, the provincial nongenetic transmitter of Maoshan, Maoshan Haozi is recognized as a unique folk-art form originating from Maoshan Town in Xinghua city, Jiangsu Province, China. Xinghua city is located in the central part

of Jiangsu Province and is characterized by low-lying terrain and a dense river network; thus, it is recognized as part of the Lixiahe region. Owing to inadequate water conservancy facilities in the past, the area was frequently affected by flooding during the rainy season, significantly impacting the lives of local inhabitants. Maoshan town, which has relatively high elevation, was established as a suitable place for human habitation. According to historical records such as the "Taizhou Chronicle," "Dongtai County Chronicle," and "Yangzhou Prefecture Chronicle," Maoshan was documented as standing 24 feet high with a circumference of 250 paces and was named after the fragrant grass (citronella) growing on the mountain. Maoshan is considered a branch of the Shugang Mountains in Yangzhou and is classified as a natural hill. Dams were constructed by ancient inhabitants around Maoshan town to prevent flooding, wasteland was reclaimed for cultivation, and Maoshan Ridge was formed, marking it as the earliest agricultural area in Xinghua (Figure 2).

During the exploration of Maoshan Haozi's historical origins, interviews were conducted with several local cultural researchers and transmitters, including Cai Aifang, the leader of the Maoshan Haozi Art Troupe and director of the Maoshan Cultural Station, and Lu Aiqin, a national-level intangible cultural heritage transmitter of Maoshan Haozi.

Leader Cai Aifang stated that the origins of Maoshan Haozi could be traced back to the Neolithic Age, where rhythmic shouting sounds were produced by early Maoshan residents to coordinate movements and enhance enthusiasm during productive labor. These rhythmic sounds gradually developed into the embryonic form of Maoshan Haozi, becoming integral to the daily lives of Maoshan residents. It was emphasized that Maoshan Haozi represents not only shouting during labor but also cultural transmission and expression, embodying respect for labor and enthusiasm for life.

The national-level transmitter Lu Aiqin added that archaeological discoveries in the 1950s, including stone arrows, stone axes, and other stone tools, revealed collective living and labor activities dating back approximately 4,200 years to the Neolithic Age. Given the absence of a developed writing system during that period, artistic expressions involved primarily collective oral creations. The rhythmic shouting produced by early residents during labor possessed a natural and healthy rhythm, subsequently evolving into the prototype of Maoshan Haozi. These songs remained closely connected to local life and labor, expressing emotions through lyrics utilized during work, labor organization, and motivational activities.

Furthermore, during historical periods such as the Three Kingdoms, the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and the early Ming Dynasty, Maoshan experienced significant migration, with northern gentry, Central Plains clans, and southern commoners having diverse cultural influences. Northern culture, blending farming and nomadic characteristics, is known for its growth and vitality. Central plain culture, positioned centrally within Chinese culture, promoted the ideas of "unification" and "harmony." In contrast, Wu culture, which represents the core of Jiangnan culture, was distinguished by elegance, subtlety, and delicacy. Under the influence of these diverse cultural elements from the north and south, Maoshan Haozi gradually evolved, establishing its characteristic fusion of strength and gentleness.

The Cultural Development of Maoshan Haozi : From Neolithic Roots to Cultural Fusion

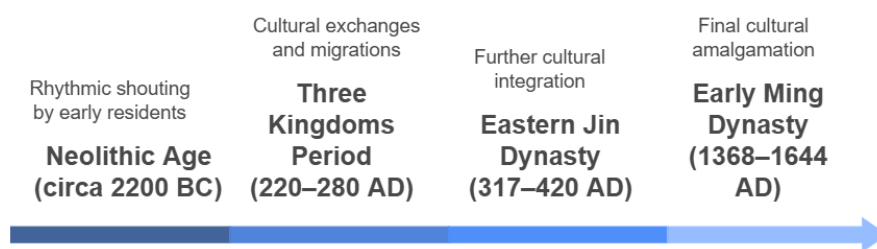


Figure 2 The Cultural Development of Maoshan Haozi.

4.2. Development through Historical Periods

The development of Maoshan Haozi can be observed in six aspects: melody, Runqiang, tempo, lyrics, singing style, and accompaniment. Taking Zaiyang Haozi "Xiao Meimei" as an example, through interviews conducted with the national-level transmitter Lu Aiqin and comparisons of audio recordings and musical scores collected from representative transmitters, it was found that "Xiao Meimei" has undergone two adaptations over time, resulting in three existing versions: 1) the version sung by older generations of Maoshan villagers, locally referred to as the "Old Haozi"; 2) the version adapted by Jiangsu musician Hou Chengjie and performed by Zhu Xianglin in 1956; and 3) the version adapted by local musician Ge Hong, performed by the national-level transmitter Lu Aiqin, commonly known as the "New Haozi".

4.2.1. Adaptation of Melody

Owing to the transition of Maoshan Haozi from the field to this stage, the 1956 version of "Xiao Meimei" performed by Zhu Xianglin was adapted. The original singing form was retained as much as possible, but the unison part was rearranged from a single voice to multivoice harmony, enhancing the melody's color and tension. In Lu Aiqin's adaptation of "Xiao Meimei," a

melodious introduction and lyrics were added at the beginning. These adaptations enriched the melody, making the piece more artistic and aligned with modern aesthetics.

4.2.2. *Run Qiang (vocal orchestration)*

In Maoshan, there is a saying, "Maoshan Haozi, Maoshan Tune," referring to the dialect and melodic style used in performing Maoshan Haozi. During interviews and studies, it was found that strict requirements for tonal inflections in Haozi were maintained by older generations in Maoshan, emphasizing, "Without a single bend (tonal inflection), it is not a Maoshan Haozi." This highlights the critical role of Runqiang in Maoshan Haozi, which determines its overall performance style.

In the "Old Haozi" version of "Xiao Meimei," extensive use of Runqiang was evident, especially in auxiliary words. However, reduced use of tonal inflections was observed in versions by Zhu Xianglin and Lu Aiqin. It was discovered through interviews with Lu Aiqin that early Zaiyang Haozi and Haocao Haozi performed in fields featuring no instrumental accompaniment and had relatively free rhythms. Some Cheshui Haozi only included gong and drum beats as interludes. Extensive Runqiang usage provided Maoshan Haozi with both functionality, such as labor songs, and artistic quality.

With societal changes, Maoshan Haozi increasingly transitioned to stage performances. To achieve better stage effects, live band and digital music accompaniment were introduced, structuring and compacting the rhythm compared with older versions, leading to a reduction in Runqiang use.

4.2.3. *Changes in tempo*

A comparison of the performance videos of "Xiao Meimei" revealed that the tempo of the "Old Haozi" version and Zhu Xianglin's 1956 version was considerably slower than that of Lu Aiqin's current version. Interviews with Lu Aiqin revealed that "Xiao Meimei," a Zaiyang Haozi, traditionally featured a more relaxed rhythm than did Tiaodan Haozi or Cheshui Haozi. Zaiyang Haozi performed in fields lacked accompaniment, with the lead singer determining the tempo and key, resulting in a flexible tempo. With societal development and accelerated life rhythms, tempo changes have adapted to modern aesthetic preferences. Additionally, since Maoshan Haozi is now primarily performed on stage, tempo adjustments also accommodate theatrical presentation requirements.

4.2.4. *Changes in Lyrics*

The development of Maoshan Haozi lyrics involves the practice of "writing new lyrics to old tunes," a method of creating or rewriting lyrics to match existing, well-known melodies. This method is widely used in literary and artistic creations. It typically involves reinterpreting or adapting existing musical works, particularly popular classical pieces, by maintaining original melodies while composing entirely new lyrics to express new themes, emotions, or stories. This practice enables audiences to experience freshness within familiar melodies and allows creators to exercise creativity on the basis of existing musical works, generating pieces with distinctive personal styles. This approach also represents cultural transmission and innovation. By rewriting lyrics, ancient melodies can be revitalized, aligning better with contemporary aesthetic and emotional needs while preserving traditional cultural and artistic values.

4.2.5. *Changes in Singing*

As society has developed, the functions and singing methods of Maoshan Haozi have evolved accordingly. According to an interview with Zhang Weihua, a provincial-level transmitter, before agricultural mechanization in the Maoshan area, local people were engaged in prolonged agricultural activities in open fields. Owing to the expansive outdoor environment, villagers needed to raise their voices for communication, resulting in their oral and pharyngeal muscles being exercised, which gradually developed a bright, high-pitched vocal quality.

Consequently, the older generation of Maoshan Haozi performers utilized shouting-style vocalization, primarily emphasizing the songs' social functions of coordinating labor and expressing joy. Today, lifestyle changes caused by agricultural modernization have reduced direct labor in fields, shifting performance from outdoor environments to indoor stages. When Haozi is currently performing, scientific vocal techniques and resonance methods are employed by singers, resulting in a sweeter and cleaner tone quality, thus emphasizing artistic quality.

With respect to pronunciation and diction, owing to the extensive promotion of Mandarin in primary and secondary education, the use and spread of local dialects have become somewhat restricted, leading to a blending of dialect and Mandarin. An analysis of collected performance video materials revealed that the national-level transmitter Lu Aiqin maintains the older generation's Maoshan dialect pronunciation, whereas pronunciations by the provincial-level transmitter Zhang Weihua and the municipal-level transmitter Sun Xiujuan reflect greater Mandarin influence.

4.2.6. *Changes in Accompaniment*

Maoshan Haozi originally emerged in agricultural fields as rural music created during labor activities, primarily functioning to motivate work and coordinate rhythms. Today, mechanization has reduced the necessity for manual labor in

fields, and these songs no longer serve their original purpose. However, the inherent musical sense of the Maoshan community persists, prompting villagers to transform cultural stations into new performance venues.

Following the trend of intangible cultural heritage preservation and Maoshan Haozi's inclusion in the third batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2011, participation in local government-sponsored performances and events increased significantly. Maoshan Haozi featured television interviews, promotional videos, documentaries, tourism festivals, and ceremonial events.

The shift in performance venues led to changes in instrumental accompaniment. Initially, Maoshan Haozi was performed purely vocally without instrumental support. Over time, aesthetic preferences evolved, and traditional cappellar performance appeared monotonous on stage without the natural acoustics of outdoor settings. Consequently, instrumental accompaniment was gradually introduced. Simple accompaniment was composed under the guidance of Maoshan Cultural Station staff, and local villagers with instrumental skills provided live musical support.

As stage performances became more frequent and involved more varied events, challenges emerged concerning accompanying band stability, ensemble coordination, and musicians' performance capabilities. Band members, often volunteers and amateur musicians with limited skill levels, faced difficulties maintaining consistent rehearsal schedules due to work obligations.

With rapid advancements in digital music technology, live instrumental accompaniment has increasingly been replaced by digital music tracks. Digital accompaniment offers diverse timbres, richer harmonic layers, and more stable rhythms, enhancing the overall musical expressiveness and impact.

Additionally, innovative methods of stage presentation have emerged. Contemporary Maoshan Haozi performances now integrate dance elements and recreate agricultural scenes, resulting in comprehensive performances that combine sound, dance, lighting, and scenery.

4.3. Significant Historical Events Influencing the Development and Preservation of Maoshan Haozi

In the winter of 1953, the representative transmitter Zhu Xianglin and others participated in a Chinese–German youth joint performance in Shanghai. The following year, cultural and artistic exchanges were conducted between Zhu and seven other Maoshan Haozi performers and a French song and dance troupe. In 1956, Zhu traveled to Beijing with the Jiangsu Song and Dance Troupe to participate in the first National Music Week, where Maoshan Haozi was selected for performance at Zhongnanhai for national leaders, including Chairperson Mao. In the same year, a silver award was received by Zhu for performing Maoshan Haozi at the World Youth Festival, and her performances were recorded and released as albums (Figure 3 to 5).

According to Zhang Weihua, a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage transmitter of Maoshan Haozi, in 1986, the first prize was won by the representative transmitter Shi Bin at the provincial "spring of the field" young farmer singers competition, marking another significant achievement for Maoshan Haozi. In 1997, a "Maoshan Haozi" competition was successfully held in Maoshan town, garnering significant media attention, including coverage by People's Daily.

In contemporary times, the vitality of Maoshan Haozi has been maintained. It frequently appears in local cultural activities and is involved in various cultural exchanges and exhibitions. Lu Aiqin, a national-level intangible cultural heritage transmitter of Maoshan Haozi, shared that in 2002, independent filmmaker Zhong Hua traveled to Maoshan Town to film "Haozi of Maoshan," capturing extensive footage of local social development, people's lives, and villagers performing Haozi. This film later received a major award at the 14th Marseille International Film Festival in 2008.

In 2003, a performance was conducted by CCTV's "Heart to Heart" art troupe in Xinghua, featuring Maoshan Haozi as a local specialty program. As recalled by Sun Xiujuan and Cai Jinyu, municipal-level intangible cultural heritage transmitters, in 2005, the Jiangsu Province Water Township Youth Competition Excellence Award was won by Lu Aiqin for her Maoshan Haozi performance. In 2007, Lu and two other Maoshan villagers performed alongside Taiwanese star Jay Chou and renowned CCTV host Dong Qing on the "Happy China Tour - Charming Taizhou" stage, receiving enthusiastic applause.

In the same year, the silver award was won by Maoshan Haozi in Jiangsu Province's "New Works of Mass Culture" competition, and performances were given at the "Watching Over Homeland and Third Jiangsu Cultural Relics Festival Opening Ceremony," receiving high praise from provincial leaders. On May 18, 2010, Maoshan Haozi was included in the third batch of national intangible cultural heritage items under the music category. Cai Aifang mentioned that in 2010, his family was invited to participate in CCTV's "Happy Family" program. In 2013, the National Niu Haozi Competition was attended by Zhang Weihua and Sun Xiujuan.

In 2015, school campus activities featuring Maoshan Haozi were filmed by Jiangsu Provincial Television. In 2018, Maoshan Haozi featured participation in CCTV's "Rural World" program. In the same year, Maoshan Haozi was performed by Lu Aiqin and others at the "Duotian Story Agricultural Products Sharing Event," which was broadcast on CCTV. In December 2019, a special episode featuring Lu Aiqin was filmed by the "People & Stories" program crew from CCTV's Science and Education Channel. In February 2023, Maoshan Haozi was invited to participate in the Taizhou City Rural Spring Festival Gala, which was live-streamed nationwide. In August 2024, Maoshan Haozi was invited to Yulin, Shaanxi Province, to participate in the National Folk Song Performance Exhibition, continuing its legacy and showcasing its unique charm to a wider audience.

In recent years, adaptations have been made to Maoshan Haozi to align with contemporary developments and to innovate and enrich their expressive forms, making them more appealing to wider audiences. Adaptations based on existing performance styles and inspired by stage presentation methods from other folk songs have been attempted, resulting in song-and-dance performances, duets, and theatrical shows, which have achieved favorable stage effects. Simultaneously, the integration of Haozi into educational settings has been successfully implemented, with 39 Maoshan Haozi companies compiled and printed under the promotion of the city government and education departments for singing among university, middle school, and primary school students. Annual events such as the "Xinghua Folk Song Festival" and the "Maoshan Haozi Singing Competition" are held by Xinghua city and Maoshan town to continually encourage broader participation, thereby expanding the transmission and influence of these songs.



Figure 3 National Intangible Cultural Heritage Awards for Maoshan Haozi.



Figure 4 Zhang Weihua and Sun Xiujuan participated in the National Cattle Song Competition.



Figure 5 "Duotian Story Agricultural Products Sharing Event" of globally important cultural heritage.

4.4. Challenges from Modernization and Cultural Shifts

The transformation from agrarian-based societies to industrialized and urban contexts has significantly impacted the relevance and function of traditional folk music, including Maoshan Haozi. As productivity improved and labor patterns shifted with mechanization, many traditional labor songs were removed from daily life. The rise of modern technology and automated

processes rendered the original functional context of Haozi obsolete, leading to its gradual disappearance from agricultural settings.

In urbanized environments, traditional folk culture faces increasing challenges from the combination of modernity and tradition. The cultural shift influenced by globalization and Western artistic concepts has weakened the position of indigenous forms such as Maoshan Haozi. This shift has resulted in a diminished understanding and appreciation of the deeper cultural and spiritual essence embedded in labor chants. While some efforts have been made to maintain Haozi through tourism or local cultural events, the original connection between the chants and their labor context has largely been lost.

Moreover, the influence of mass media and popular culture has contributed to the declining prominence of Maoshan Haozi. Its aesthetic style, rooted in communal labor and regional dialects, struggles to resonate with contemporary audiences, particularly younger generations. Although Maoshan Haozi was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage site in 2011, this symbolic recognition has not been sufficient to prevent its marginalization. The traditional handicrafts associated with these songs have also faded, reducing the practical relevance of the music.

The aging of cultural transmitters further exacerbates this issue. Most current practitioners are elderly, and there is a lack of interest among younger people. Public welfare training initiatives have seen limited success, resulting in a lack of successors to continue the tradition. Consequently, Maoshan Haozi now faces a critical juncture, where its survival depends on effective cultural revitalization strategies that can adapt to modern sensibilities while preserving its traditional essence.

4.5. Preservation Efforts and Intangible Cultural Heritage Status

4.5.1. Governmental and Community-Based Efforts in Preserving and Revitalizing Maoshan Haozi

Through a review of the medium- and long-term preservation plans for Maoshan Haozi, the overall preservation goal set by the Xinghua Municipal Government has been established as follows: prioritizing rescue, preservation-oriented strategies, building a scientific and effective preservation and transmission system, and improving the preservation mechanism. Various original Maoshan Haozi samples have been systematically collected and organized. Specialized research on Maoshan Haozi has been conducted, its historical and cultural heritage has been explored, and local traditional culture has been promoted. Transmitters of intangible cultural heritage have been cultivated at various levels, promotional performances have been organized, and the cultural support role of Maoshan Haozi in local socioeconomic development has increased. Theoretical research on Maoshan Haozi has been strengthened, dedicated research studies have been conducted, seminars have been held regularly, and advanced theories have been utilized to guide preservation and transmission efforts. Additionally, albums of Maoshan Haozi have been published, and a dedicated Maoshan Haozi website has been established, increasing awareness, familiarity, and affection toward Maoshan Haozi, thereby increasing the popularity of Maoshan town and contributing to local economic development through cultural soft power.

Great importance has been attached to the preservation and transmission of Maoshan Haozi by the Xinghua Municipal Government and cultural departments. Through the implementation of intangible cultural heritage surveys and application processes, Maoshan Haozi has been successfully included in the national intangible cultural heritage catalog. Moreover, financial support has been provided, and a transmitter system has been established, ensuring strong guarantees for the preservation and transmission of Maoshan Haozi.

4.5.2. Educational integration

The integration of Maoshan Haozi into school education has been promoted since 1998 to support intergenerational transmission and cultivate interest in traditional folk culture. The “Maoshan Haozi in Schools” initiative has been implemented through collaboration between local schools and cultural institutions, serving as a recognized model for intangible cultural heritage education.

Transmission centers have been established at Maoshan Central School and Maoshan Town Cultural Center, where instructions have been provided by recognized transmitters. Weekly music classes have been dedicated to teaching Maoshan Haozi, and traditional songs have been adapted into school-friendly versions. One of these, Happy Youth, received first prize at the Taizhou Student Art Exhibition, exemplifying how Haozi has been embedded into student life.

The initiative has also contributed to shaping campus identity and promoting holistic student development. Cultural transmitters have participated in educational activities, ensuring the authenticity of tradition. Diverse curricular models have been adopted, including integration into music classes, extracurricular programs, and public workshops. Localized textbooks such as Maoshan Haozi and Songs from Maoshan have been developed, and Haozi melodies have been used in daily school routines and children’s rhythmic exercises.

In 2023, strong support was received from municipal and educational authorities, and media coverage was provided. A newly composed song, The New Generation’s Red Scarf, was performed at major youth congresses, reinforcing Haozi’s relevance in contemporary settings.

These efforts have shown that school-based programs offer an effective platform for preserving Maoshan Haozi. However, continued participation from cultural transmitters remains essential. To address generational gaps and sustain student interest, further educational innovation and policy support are needed (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Maoshan Haozi into the campus report performance.

4.5.3. Role and Implications of Maoshan Haozi Recognition as a Part of China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage

4.5.3.1. Expanded Social Influence of Maoshan Haozi

Through the joint efforts of governmental departments and community organizations at various levels, the social influence of Maoshan Haozi has continually expanded. The awareness and appreciation of Maoshan Haozi have increased significantly, and its unique artistic charm has gained broader recognition. Maoshan Haozi has become a cultural symbol for Xinghua city, significantly contributing to enhancing the city's cultural influence.

4.5.3.2. Expanded Team of Transmitters

Through strengthened cultivation and management of transmitters, the number of Maoshan Haozi transmitters has expanded. Increasingly, younger generations have joined the ranks of transmitters, providing new vitality for their ongoing transmission and development. Currently, Maoshan Haozi has one national-level transmitter, one provincial-level transmitter, and two municipal-level transmitters.

4.5.4. Critical Review of Current Preservation Strategies and Assessment of Their Effectiveness

Although significant achievements have been made in the preservation and transmission of Maoshan Haozi, several challenges remain. With modernization accelerating, changes in rural labor practices have gradually reduced the traditional context in which Maoshan Haozi exists. Additionally, intangible cultural heritage transmitters typically receive limited financial compensation, leading younger generations to have minimal interest, causing an aging transmitter team and serious transmission discontinuity. Furthermore, while digital preservation provides new opportunities, issues related to copyright protection and data security have emerged.

Through collaborative efforts involving government agencies, community art groups, and educational institutions, considerable success has been achieved in preserving Maoshan Haozi. Nevertheless, addressing existing challenges, exploring innovative preservation and transmission methods, and increasing public awareness and participation are crucial for ensuring its continued vitality and development.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that Maoshan Haozi possesses deep historical and cultural roots, originating during the Neolithic era and evolving alongside agricultural practices in Jiangsu Province. This development aligns well with the ethnomusicological theories proposed by Merriam (1964) and Nettl (1983), who emphasize that musical traditions are

inherently linked to their sociocultural contexts. The formation of Maoshan Haozi has been influenced significantly by local sociogeographical factors and migratory waves from the Central Plains, resulting in a unique integration of northern vigor and southern delicacy, which is evident in its melodic structures, lyrical themes, and performance methods.

The analysis further underscores that globalization and the prevalence of mass culture have marginalized traditional folk music. With younger generations increasingly favoring Western-influenced music and digital entertainment, regional music forms such as Maoshan Haozi face reduced cultural relevance. Despite its recognition as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2011 and efforts to promote it through television, cultural festivals, and educational initiatives, Maoshan Haozi remains largely undervalued by contemporary audiences. This trend reflects a broader issue faced by intangible cultural heritage: symbolic recognition alone cannot ensure effective transmission. Jiang (2022) supported this notion, revealing similar declines in Jiangsu folk traditions such as "Da Liangpeng" and "Sa Tangzi Liao Zai Wai." Furthermore, Li (2020) emphasized disruptions in the traditional context of Jiujiang Labor Haozi due to industrialization, whereas Deng et al. (2024) highlighted that the sustainable preservation of intangible cultural heritage requires active community involvement alongside governmental support. and aligns with Askarova's (2021) research on Uzbek folk music, which noted similar transitions and loss of traditional context due to modernization and cultural commodification.

Another critical issue identified is the demographic imbalance among the current cultural transmitters of Maoshan Haozi. The study revealed that most recognized performers are over 60 years of age, with minimal participation from younger generations. Despite governmental initiatives to foster new practitioners, succession remains problematic. Without sustainable mechanisms for training younger transmitters, Maoshan Haozi risks becoming a "museumized" tradition—preserved formally yet devoid of active practice. Li's (2020) findings on Jiujiang Labor Haozi, as well as Mu's (2023) anthropological research on southern Sichuan salty workers' Haozi, similarly indicate disrupted transmission processes and declining authenticity due to changing socioeconomic contexts.

Finally, the study acknowledges that digital preservation efforts and performance innovations, including theoretical reinterpretations and educational integration, offer promising avenues. Nevertheless, significant challenges persist, particularly concerning intellectual property rights, data authenticity, and potential dilution of core artistic elements for broader appeal. Increased reliance on digital accompaniment and stylized presentations could gradually diminish the musical complexity and cultural depth historically inherent in Maoshan Haozi. These concerns are echoed by Yang (2022), who cautions against excessive digitalization of Yangzhou Zaiyang Haozi, and by Yin (2020), who emphasizes that shifting Haozi from their natural contexts to staged performances compromises their rhythmic spontaneity and emotional resonance. Zhu et al. (2024) similarly stressed maintaining a balance between preserving traditional authenticity and adapting to contemporary audience preferences, as observed in modern adaptations of traditional Chinese opera. Thus, the preservation of Maoshan Haozi necessitates a comprehensive approach addressing systemic issues, actively integrating traditional practices into modern life, incentivizing younger cultural bearers, and fostering intercultural dialogues through ethnomusicological methodologies.

6. Conclusions

This study revealed that Maoshan Haozi, a distinctive folk song tradition rooted in Jiangsu Province, has profound historical, cultural, and social significance. Tracing its origins in the Neolithic era, Maoshan Haozi emerged from agricultural labor and evolved through successive dynastic migrations and cultural exchanges. Its development across melody, rhythm, vocal technique, and lyrical content demonstrates both a strong regional identity and a dynamic responsiveness to changing societal contexts.

Despite its recognition as a national intangible cultural heritage, Maoshan Haozi faces existential challenges in the wake of modernization, urbanization, and globalization. The migration from fields to stages, the shift from communal labor to digitized performance, and the generational divide between aging transmitters and disinterested youth threaten the continuity of this living tradition. While preservation efforts—such as school-based integration, government support, and digital adaptation—have provided some resilience, they remain insufficient without deeper, sustained engagement.

The study underscores that symbolic recognition alone cannot ensure cultural sustainability. Maoshan Haozi must be reinvigorated through comprehensive strategies that balance authenticity with innovation. Educational programs should be expanded and adapted to modern learning environments, digital platforms must be managed with care to preserve artistic integrity, and young practitioners must be meaningfully included through mentorship, incentives, and cultural pride.

Ultimately, this research highlights the broader implications for intangible cultural heritage preservation in the 21st century. Through ethnomusicological analysis, Maoshan Haozi is positioned not only as a subject of scholarly inquiry but also as a cultural mirror reflecting the tensions and transformations of contemporary Chinese society. Future research and policy must work hand in hand to protect, revitalize, and transmit this rich tradition to future generations.

Acknowledgment

We sincerely appreciate all the individuals who generously shared their knowledge and insights for this research on Zhuang Opera. Their valuable contributions have been essential to the study.

We also extend their gratitude to the College of Music, Mahasarakham University, for its financial support, which made this research possible.

This research project was financially supported by Mahasarakham University.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants through interviews conducted specifically for the purpose of a review article. The study does not involve any form of experimental research on human subjects, nor does it include interventions, clinical trials, or data collection that could impact the participants' well-being. Instead, the research focused on analyzing and synthesizing existing knowledge on the basis of the participants' perspectives and experiences as they were shared during the interviews.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that they have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Funding

This research project was financially supported by Mahasarakham University. The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the administration for recognizing the importance of studying Maoshan Haozi and for their continuous support in advancing this research.

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