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Bridging the Gap Between Embodiment and Vocal Ornamentation: Teacher Mobility Dilemmas and Digital Retention Mechanisms in Rural Intangible Cultural Heritage Music Education under the UGS Collaboration Model

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Abstract: Rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) aesthetic education universally faces the structural dilemma of "abundant hardware but scarce software, and the presence of teachers without actual inheritance." Based on a three-year field investigation in Guangning County, Guangdong Province, this study reveals that while teaching-intern-led placement can trigger a short-term boom in aesthetic education activities, the periodic rotation of teachers inevitably leads to a phenomenon of intermittent course discontinuity — periodic breaks in ICH teaching caused by rotating teaching interns. Empirical data further reveal asymmetrical gaps in the inheritance outcomes of different ICH projects: lion and drum dances, characterized by significant embodiment, possess lower learning thresholds and are thus easily retained locally. In contrast, Hakka folk songs highly rely on dialectal tones and vocal ornamentation (Runqiang) — a type of tacit vocal technique. Once professional teachers withdraw, their inheritance chain is highly susceptible to interruption. Consequently, within the University-Government-School (UGS) collaboration framework, this study proposes digital retention as an institutional patch. By constructing "minimalist and rural-adaptive" offline resource packages and micro-course libraries, the tacit knowledge carried by teaching interns is transformed into reusable digital assets for local teachers, thereby driving a paradigm shift in ICH inheritance from "individual-dependence and mobility" to "resource accumulation and localized rootedness.".

Keywords: Rural ICH Music; Embodied Cognition; Vocal Ornamentation (Runqiang); UGS Collaboration; Digital Retention.

1. Problem Statement: Intermittent Course Discontinuity under the Teaching-intern Placement Mechanism

With the issuance of the Notice on Comprehensively Implementing the Aesthetic Education Infiltration Action in Schools [1], the downward transfer of aesthetic education resources to the county level has become a clear national policy orientation. Against this backdrop, Guangdong Province, drawing on the Bai-Qian-Wan Project (Guangdong's provincial initiative for county-level rural revitalization), has been promoting local universities to provide vertical aesthetic education support to rural primary and secondary schools. However, due to the long-standing structural shortage of music and art teachers in county-level rural areas, the implementation of rural ICH aesthetic education is highly dependent on university teaching interns and short-term volunteer teaching forces [2].

Empirical research indicates that this support model, driven primarily by external resource input, has significant limitations. Specifically, while teaching interns are on duty, ICH music courses and extracurricular activities are carried out in an orderly manner. However, once the teaching staff withdraws at the end of the semester, the relevant courses rapidly fall into discontinuity. It is important to note that this discontinuity does not manifest as the direct cancellation of aesthetic education courses in the timetable, but rather as a substantial hidden loss of resources — namely, the ICH teaching tasks originally undertaken by music majors are forced to be managed by local non-music teachers. Constrained by their lack of music theory and specialized ICH skills, the alternative teaching by local teachers often degenerates into audio playback or self-study, thereby severing the substantive chain of ICH inheritance.

Based on this, this study focuses on two core research questions (RQs): First, within the same county and campus aesthetic education system, why do different ICH music projects exhibit significant differences in their capacity for inheritance and survival? Second, how can mechanisms be designed to solidify the tacit experiences carried by short-term teaching interns into stable and sustainable localized teaching assets?

2. Theoretical Perspective and Research Design

(1) Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Embodied Cognition theory, ethnomusicological Vocal Ornamentation theory, and UGS collaborative education theory to construct a multi-dimensional analytical framework.

1. Embodied Cognition: This theory emphasizes that cognitive activities are rooted in bodily perception and muscle memory [3]. Lion and drum dance projects are centered on physical rhythms; their learning process relies on visual imitation and bodily coordination, resulting in highly explicit knowledge and low cognitive load.

2. Vocal Ornamentation (Runqiang): As a core

morphological feature of traditional Chinese vocal music, vocal ornamentation refers to micro-level processing methods such as breath control, portamento, and dynamic fluctuations attached to dialectal tones [4]. As a typical form of tacit knowledge, it is difficult to transmit completely through jianpu (numbered musical notation) or text, thus presenting a high technical barrier.

3. UGS Collaboration Theory: Existing UGS aesthetic education studies mostly focus on the "talent input" phase from universities to the grassroots level [5]. This study expands the application boundary of this framework, extending tripartite collaboration to the accumulation of tacit knowledge and the localized retention of teaching assets, thereby strengthening the long-term resource-building function of the collaborative mechanism.

(2) Research Methods and Sample Overview

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing the triangulation of multi-source evidence to analyze the current status of ICH aesthetic education. Over a period of three years, the research team conducted fieldwork in 6 towns in Guangning County, including Gushui and Zhouzai, selecting 7 core investigation sites (covering the County Education Bureau and several rural central primary schools). Regarding data collection, the team conducted over 150 semi-structured in-depth interviews with principals, local part-time teachers, and teaching interns until data saturation was achieved. This was supplemented by longitudinal tracking of school timetables and teaching records from three years before and after the rotation of teaching interns to dynamically observe the trajectory of course continuity. Additionally, a textual analysis of physical materials, including performance videos, award certificates, and school-based teaching plans, was conducted to achieve cross-verification.

3. Field Findings and Attribution Analysis: The Asymmetrical Gaps in Inheritance

Guangning County is rich in ICH resources, possessing representative projects such as the municipal-level "Guangning Mountain Lion Dance" and Hakka folk songs. The field investigation revealed a significant asymmetrical phenomenon: the survival rate of lion drum projects is extremely high, while Hakka folk songs face severe risks of discontinuity.

(1) The Embodied Dividend of Lion Drums: Sustainable Retention with Low Thresholds

The inheritance of lion and drum dances features distinct embodied characteristics. Although local teachers generally lack music reading skills and systematic musical training, they can still guide students through basic rhythm practices via visual observation and physical imitation. Taking Gushui Town Central Primary School as an example, against the backdrop of multiple rotations of teaching interns, the school has relied on a three-tier training system — "interest initiation, backbone cultivation, and school-level team" — to continuously advance the lion drum curriculum, and was awarded second place in Group A (Traditional Southern Lion) at the Guangdong Provincial Primary School Dragon and Lion Dance Championship. This case demonstrates that ICH projects dominated by physical movements still possess strong capacity for self-sustained local transmission in the absence of continuous professional music teachers.

(2) The Vocal Ornamentation Barrier of Hakka Folk Songs: Inheritance Discontinuity under High Thresholds

In stark contrast, the inheritance of Hakka folk songs faces an extremely high technical barrier. Its artistic core is deeply embedded in the phonetic tones and vocal ornamentation of the local Guangning dialect. Unlike singing jianpu straightly according to Mandarin pronunciation, the original singing relies on dialectal tones superimposed with portamento, grace notes, and breath variations, presenting a completely different musical morphology.

Survey data indicate that the vast majority of local part-time teachers have never received specialized training in dialectal vocal music or traditional vocal ornamentation, generally harboring a fear of "not daring to teach and not knowing how to teach." As a part-time music teacher at a central primary school pointed out in an interview: "I can roughly hum the tune of the folk song, but I can't sing the dialectal turns accurately, so I dare not teach it. Usually, I just play the recorder for the children." Once the teaching interns with vocal capabilities withdraw, and in the absence of standardized audio demonstrations and micro-course support, local teachers are left with no choice but to avoid teaching folk songs. Tracking data indicates that the discontinuity rate of folk song courses approaches 100%. This indicates that ICH projects highly dependent on live singing experiences will rapidly lose their carriers for active campus inheritance once the inheritors leave.

(3) Underlying Mechanism: The Conflict Between Teacher Mobility and the Long-term Nature of ICH Tacit Knowledge

The asymmetry in the inheritance outcomes of the two types of ICH essentially stems from the structural conflict between the periodic mobility of teaching interns and the long-term nature of inheriting ICH tacit knowledge. The traditional UGS support model focuses on the "short-term input of human resources," while neglecting the media retention of tacit knowledge such as teaching experience and singing techniques. Under the premise that teaching materials and demonstration audio-visual resources have not been digitally and standardly accumulated, ICH teaching is highly bound to specific individuals, making course discontinuity an inevitable outcome.

4. Mechanism Reconstruction: Digitalization as an Institutional Patch for UGS Collaboration

Under the realistic constraint that short-term teacher rotation is difficult to completely eliminate, this study proposes that the digital literacy advantages of young teaching interns should be fully utilized [6]. Digital retention should be established as an institutional supplementary mechanism within the UGS collaborative system to fill the teaching resource vacuum during the teacher handover phase.

(1) Constructing "Minimalist and Rural-adaptive" Offline Digital Resource Packages

Given the objective constraints of unstable network signals and outdated equipment in rural schools, digital construction should not pursue high-computing complex systems, but should follow the principle of minimalism and adaptation to grassroots scenarios [7]. The research team designed and applied a combined scheme consisting of an offline U-disk resource package and a lightweight WeChat mini-program. This scheme contains three major functional modules: First, a vocal ornamentation demonstration library, where teaching

interns record step-by-step teaching videos on dialect articulation and breath control for Guangning Hakka folk songs; Second, a visualized atlas of lion drum rhythms, transforming complex drum beats into animated rhythm diagrams; Third, printable school-based teaching handouts. This low-threshold resource package enables newly arrived teaching interns to quickly continue the teaching progress of their predecessors upon arrival, effectively avoiding the waste of resources caused by repeated baseline surveys and lesson preparation.

(2) Institutionalizing and Normalizing the Resource Accumulation Process

Digital resources cannot remain merely at the level of private handovers among interns; they must be embedded into the operational mechanism of UGS tripartite collaboration. Within this framework, universities (U) are responsible for content production and version iteration; local governments (G) rely on education bureaus to coordinate and integrate the construction of ICH digital resources into the assessment of rural aesthetic education teaching and research; primary and secondary schools (S) organize local teachers to conduct daily teaching based on the resource packages. Simultaneously, by linking performance events and new media communication, a virtuous closed loop of "normalized course offerings — empowered inheritance through performance events — dissemination via digital media" is formed.

5. Conclusion, Research Limitations, and Future Prospects

(1) Research Conclusions

The empirical case of Guangning demonstrates that to solve the dilemma of "course discontinuity upon teacher departure" in rural ICH music, it is insufficient to rely solely on increasing teacher quotas or extending teaching-intern placement durations; it is necessary to leverage digital media to reshape the carriers of ICH inheritance.

The theoretical contributions of this study are twofold: First, it distinguishes between two forms of ICH knowledge, revealing the threshold differences in campus inheritance between embodied ICH and vocal-ornamentation-dependent ICH, thereby explaining the internal mechanism of asymmetrical inheritance outcomes. Second, it expands the functional boundary of UGS collaborative aesthetic education [5], positioning digital retention as an institutional patch and extracting an operational model of "field demand mapping + digital resource accumulation + tripartite long-term collaboration." The transition from "substitution" to "rootedness" signifies not merely an extension of support duration, but more importantly, the local accumulation of teaching assets. This model not only provides a replicable solution for aesthetic education in underdeveloped rural counties in China but also offers a practical path with a youth perspective for the active campus inheritance of traditional music ICH in the digital era.

(2) Research Limitations and Future Outlook

This study has certain limitations. First, the research sample is concentrated in rural primary schools in Guangning County, and the research scenario is limited to the realm of campus aesthetic education, not yet covering the native folk inheritance field. Second, the research relies primarily on qualitative data and lacks quantitative evaluation for long-term tracking; thus, it is currently unable to verify the long-term stable effects of digital resource packages on folk song teaching. Future research could expand the sample scope, conduct comparative analyses across different counties and ICH types, and continuously track the effectiveness of resource package usage to further optimize the content design and assessment mechanisms of digital teaching resources.

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