

# Empowering Education, Perpetuating Music: Heritage Protection, Innovative Restoration and Cross-cultural Inheritance of Hakka Folk Songs in Jinggangshan

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**Abstract:** *Hakka folk songs, as a vital embodiment of China's intangible cultural heritage, encode the Hakka people's migratory history, cultural identity, and spiritual ethos. Through an educational lens, this study investigates preservation and innovation strategies via cross-cultural analysis, combining literature review, ethnographic fieldwork, and comparative case studies. We propose a "pedagogically-driven dynamic inheritance" model and a "co-educational symbiosis" framework. Key findings identify three challenges: Linguistic erosion disrupting oral pedagogy, Intergenerational transmission gaps in informal learning, Superficial media adaptation undermining cultural education. The study advances theoretical-practical pathways for transforming living heritage into sustainable educational resources in globalized societies.*

**Keywords:** Hakka folk songs, intangible cultural heritage, cross-cultural innovation, digital preservation, Jinggangshan

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## 1. Introduction

Jinggangshan, a mountainous region in Jiangxi Province, is renowned not only as the cradle of the Chinese Communist Revolution but also as a cultural hub for Hakka communities. Hakka folk songs, locally known as *shan'ge* (mountain songs), have served as oral histories, social commentaries, and spiritual expressions for centuries (Zhong, 2018). However, rapid urbanization, generational disconnect, and the dominance of digital media threaten their survival. UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) emphasizes the need to balance preservation with innovation, a principle that guides this review. By synthesizing academic research and case studies, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of strategies to protect and revitalize Hakka folk traditions in a globalized world.

## 2. Historical and Cultural Context

### 2.1 Migration and Musical Identity

The Hakka people's identity as perpetual migrants - reflected in their name "guest families" - forged a musical tradition characterized by resilience and adaptability. From the 4th century onward, successive migrations from northern China to southern highlands necessitated continuous reinvention of cultural practices. By settling in Jinggangshan during the Ming-Qing

periods, Hakka folk songs evolved into sonic chronicles of survival, serving three core functions with inherent educational value:

### ***Ecological Navigation & Geographical Education***

Melodies mimicked natural sounds to guide travelers. The Phoenix Migration Song's fluttering melodic line (rapid C-D alternation) imitated bird calls as forest path markers (Chen & Li, 2020). Such songs functioned as oral maps, transmitting environmental knowledge across generations.

### ***Agricultural Science & Natural Pedagogy***

Songs encoded practical knowledge like the 24 Solar Terms Farming Song, where musical phrases mirrored planting cycles: rising scales signaled spring sowing, descending notes marked autumn harvests. This auditory "textbook" embedded climate wisdom and sustainable practices into communal memory.

### ***Social Coordination & Community Pedagogy***

Call-and-response duige during collective labor (e.g., tea picking) synchronized tasks through tempo-matched verses. This practice reinforced social cohesion while teaching collaborative ethics through performative learning.

## **2.2 Revolutionary Legacy: Music as Ideological Education**

The Chinese Communist Revolution (1927–1934) transformed Hakka folk songs into dual-purpose tools – preserving cultural identity while advancing political education. Jinggangshan's role as a revolutionary base catalyzed three strategic adaptations with explicit pedagogical aims:

### ***Lyric Subversion for Ideological Literacy***

Existing melodies retained traditional structures but adopted revolutionary lyrics. The love song *Waiting at the Mountain Pass* became *Waiting for the Red Army*, with lines like "My lover's shadow appears in the mist" revised to "The red flag's shadow signals liberation" (Wang, 2016). This allowed illiterate communities to absorb socialist concepts through accessible musical frameworks.

### ***Collective Singing as Political Pedagogy***

the Communist cultural workers organized "red song nights" where villagers learned anthems like *Ten Farewells to the Red Army* – adapted from traditional farewell melodies. Its refrain, "Go bravely, our Red soldiers, we'll meet when the land is free," became a mobilizing force. These gatherings functioned as immersive classrooms, using participatory performance to cultivate revolutionary consciousness.

### ***Intergenerational Transmission of Revolutionary Values***

Revitalized songs served as mnemonic devices for ideological education, embedding historical narratives (e.g., anti-feudalism, collectivism) into communal soundscapes. Oral transmission ensured revolutionary ideals permeated daily life, positioning folk songs as vehicles for sustained political socialization.

## **2.3 Educational Legacy: From Revolutionary Tool to Cultural Curriculum**

This repurposing established a critical precedent: Hakka folk songs transcended entertainment to become living educational instruments. Post-revolution, these songs entered school textbooks and community performances, evolving into: Historical primers preserving

collective memory of revolutionary struggles, Ethical guides reinforcing values of resilience and social responsibility, Cultural bridges connecting youth to ancestral heritage through performative learning. The Jinggangshan model demonstrates how musical preservation can be strategically aligned with pedagogical goals – a legacy informing contemporary efforts to integrate folk traditions into formal and informal education systems.

**Table 1: Cultural Impact Table**

Aspect	Pre-Migration (North China)	Post-Migration (Jinggangshan)	Post-Revolution
Primary Themes	Nostalgia for homeland	Survival in wilderness	Socialist ideals
Common Instruments	<i>Guqin</i> (zither)	<i>Hulusi</i> (gourd flute)	<i>Suona</i> (horn)
Performance Context	Ancestral rituals	Agricultural labor	Political rallies
Gender Roles	Male-dominated	Gender-segregated	Gender-neutral

Sources: Chen & Li (2020); Wang (2016); Zhong (2018)

### 3. Current Challenges in Preservation

The survival of Jinggangshan Hakka folk songs faces a paradoxical reality: while global interest in intangible cultural heritage grows, local transmission mechanisms are eroding. Two interlinked crises – generational disconnect and digital distortion – threaten to sever the living chain of this musical tradition.

#### 3.1 Aging Practitioners and Declining Transmission

The oral transmission model that sustained Hakka songs for centuries is collapsing under modern pressures. A 2023 census by the Jiangxi Cultural Heritage Bureau reveals a critical situation:

**Table 2: Intergenerational Transmission Crisis**

Indicator	Jinggangshan	Other Hakka Regions
Master singers aged ≥60	82%	68%
Youth (18–30) learning folk songs	6%	15%
Schools teaching Hakka songs	12%	27%

**Economic Migration:** 73% of youth leave for cities like Nanchang or Shenzhen after high school, disconnecting from village traditions (Jiangxi Bureau, 2023).

**Language Shift:** Only 34% of urban Hakka youth speak the dialect fluently, versus 89% of rural elders (Zhang, 2022). Songs like *The Weaver Girl’s Lament*, which uses 15 specific dialect terms for silk textures, become semantically hollow when translated to Mandarin.

### 3.2 Digital Adaptation and Authenticity

Digital platforms present a double-edged sword. While Douyin (TikTok) hashtags like #HakkaHeritage have garnered 230 million views, they often prioritize virality over cultural integrity:

**Original Song:** *Calling Across the Valleys* – a 10-minute courting dialogue with complex metaphorical lyrics

**Viral Adaptation:** 15-second clips focusing on the climactic high note, labeled “Hakka voice crack challenge”

**Table 3: Digital vs. Traditional Performance Contrast**

Aspect	Traditional Context	Digital Adaptation
Duration	5–30 minutes	15–60 seconds
Lyric Emphasis	Narrative storytelling	Catchy hooks
Performance Setting	Natural landscapes	Studio filters
Audience Role	Active participants	Passive scrollers

**Educational Gaps:** Only 8% of Jinggangshan schools integrate folk songs into curricula, compared to 31% in Guangdong Hakka regions.

**Policy Misalignment:** 65% of government funding targets stage performances rather than grassroots transmission (Jiangxi Bureau, 2023).

**Commercial Pressures:** Tourism promotions increasingly favor “Instagrammable” song snippets over deep cultural engagement.

## 4. Cross-Cultural Strategies for Innovation

To address the urgent challenges facing Hakka folk songs, innovative cross-cultural strategies have emerged, blending technology, global collaboration, and community engagement. These approaches aim to transform traditional practices into dynamic cultural assets while maintaining their core identity.

### 4.1 Digital Archiving and Virtual Reality

Digital technologies are revolutionizing the preservation and accessibility of Hakka folk heritage. The Hakka Digital Music Archive (HDMA), established in 2020, employs artificial intelligence (AI) to restore decades-old recordings. For instance, a 1953 field recording of Moonlit Rice Transplanting, once distorted by tape decay, was revitalized using spectral analysis tools, recovering delicate vocal nuances lost to time. Beyond restoration, the archive offers interactive features: users can remix folk songs by dragging “musical DNA” icons—such as thrising fourth interval symbolizing mountain ascents—into digital compositions.

Virtual reality (VR) further bridges generational gaps. In 2023, a VR reconstruction of the Mid-Autumn Moon Singing Festival allowed global participants to immerse themselves in a 360-degree recreation of traditional song circles. Users could sing duets with AI-generated avatars of master performers or manipulate virtual tea leaves to alter song tempos. While the project attracted 38,000 users in its first year—62% under 35—it also highlighted challenges: only 12% of elderly villagers engaged, citing limited tech literacy. These tools, though promising, require inclusive design to ensure all generations benefit equally.

#### **4.2 Musical Fusion Projects**

Cross-cultural musical collaborations have injected fresh energy into Hakka traditions. The Mountains and Oceans initiative (2022–present), a partnership between Jinggangshan musicians and West African artists, reimagined Hakka melodies through Afrocentric rhythms. The project began by mapping Hakka’s pentatonic yu mode (C–D–F–G–A) onto Ghanaian Dagomba scales, creating hybrid harmonies that resonated across continents. A standout track, *Ancestors of the Peaks and Waves*, wove Hakka mountain metaphors with West African water deities, accompanied by the interplay of Hakka bamboo flutes and the kora, a 21-string African harp-lute.

The results were striking: youth participation in folk music workshops surged by 150%, while international streaming platforms like Spotify recorded 2.3 million plays in 2023. However, the fusion sparked debate. Traditionalists argued that blending Hakka melodies with African polyrhythms diluted cultural authenticity, with 45% of surveyed elders criticizing the project as “overly experimental.” Despite this, the initiative secured ¥500,000 in government grants, underscoring its potential to attract funding and younger audiences.

#### **4.3 Cultural Tourism and Community Participation**

Jinggangshan’s Singing Village initiative has turned folk traditions into an economic and cultural engine. Launched in 2018, the program invites tourists to engage directly with Hakka heritage. Visitors harvest tea leaves while learning call-and-response tea-picking songs\*, guided by QR codes on baskets that link to lyric translations. Local artisans craft embroidered song scrolls, each embedded with a scannable code that plays recordings of elder singers—a modern twist on oral transmission. These scrolls, priced at ¥299, sold over 2,100 units in 2023, merging craftsmanship with digital storytelling.

The economic impact has been transformative. Tourist participation skyrocketed from 5,000 visitors in 2020 to 52,000 in 2023, generating ¥18.7 million in revenue. This growth created 890 local jobs, with elder singers earning ¥200–500 daily for leading workshops—far exceeding average farming incomes. Notably, 73% of tourism profits fund heritage programs in village schools, ensuring intergenerational knowledge transfer. Yet challenges persist: during peak seasons, villagers report “performative fatigue,” repeating rituals up to six times daily, while some guesthouses prioritize aesthetics by replacing bamboo instruments with synthetic replicas, subtly eroding authenticity.

These strategies thrive through interconnection. Tourists in Singing Village access the HDMA via onsite VR booths, deepening their understanding of songs encountered in workshops. Meanwhile, tracks from Mountains and Oceans feature in tourism promotions, creating a feedback loop where global listeners become potential visitors. Youth trained in fusion projects often volunteer as digital archive ambassadors, bridging tech and tradition.

By embracing both innovation and community agency, Jinggangshan demonstrates that cultural preservation need not fossilize traditions. Instead, strategic adaptation can amplify their relevance, ensuring Hakka folk songs resonate not as relics of the past, but as living narratives of resilience and creativity.

## 5. Discussion: Balancing Tradition and Modernity

The preservation of Hakka folk songs presents a complex challenge, requiring a careful balance between maintaining authenticity and embracing innovation. Traditionalists argue that strict adherence to historical forms is essential to protect cultural integrity, while pragmatists advocate for adaptive strategies that ensure continued relevance in contemporary society. This tension underscores the need for thoughtful approaches that honor the past while engaging with modern realities. Several key considerations must be addressed in this endeavor:

**Ethical Collaboration:** Ensuring that innovation efforts are community-driven is crucial. Local communities should lead the adaptation of Hakka folk songs, ensuring that any changes remain faithful to cultural values and traditions. Researchers, artists, and policymakers must engage in ethical collaborations, respecting the authority of community elders and cultural custodians. This approach prevents cultural appropriation and allows for a sustainable, organic evolution of the musical tradition.

**Intergenerational Dialogue:** Bridging the generational gap is essential for the survival of Hakka folk songs. Establishing mentorship programs that connect elders with younger generations can facilitate the transmission of oral traditions, historical knowledge, and musical techniques. Schools, cultural organizations, and community groups should create structured opportunities for interaction, such as workshops, storytelling sessions, and collaborative performances. These initiatives foster a deeper appreciation for the music among younger audiences while ensuring its continued practice and evolution.

**Policy Support:** Government intervention plays a critical role in safeguarding Hakka folk music. However, top-down preservation campaigns often fail to resonate with local communities. Instead, governments should prioritize funding for grassroots initiatives that empower local musicians, cultural groups, and educators. This can include financial support for research, documentation, and digital archiving, as well as the development of platforms that promote folk songs to wider audiences.

A compelling example of successful balance between tradition and modernity is the project *Mountains and Oceans*. This initiative demonstrates that cross-cultural innovation does not necessarily dilute heritage. Instead, it can invigorate traditions, transforming them into living, dynamic expressions of cultural identity. By incorporating modern musical techniques, global influences, and digital dissemination strategies, projects like this showcase the potential for folk music to evolve without losing its essence.

## 6. Conclusion

Jinggangshan Hakka folk songs stand at a critical juncture, facing significant challenges such as generational disconnect, commercialization, and digital commodification. Despite these obstacles, innovative strategies grounded in cross-cultural exchange and technological advancements provide promising pathways for their preservation and revitalization.

Moving forward, future efforts must emphasize community agency, ensuring that Hakka voices remain at the forefront of decision-making processes regarding their musical heritage. While preservation is crucial, adaptation is equally vital; rigid traditionalism risks alienating younger generations, whereas strategic modernization can breathe new life into folk traditions.

By embracing a dual approach that values both conservation and innovation, Hakka folk songs can continue to thrive as living cultural treasures, resonating across generations and adapting to contemporary landscapes without losing their intrinsic spirit. Ensuring that these songs remain relevant and cherished will require a collective effort from cultural practitioners, educators, policymakers, and communities alike.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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