

Approaches for Sustainable Preservation of Heze String Music

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Abstract

This study delves into the cultural, educational, and technological intersections of Heze String Music, a rich traditional art form deeply rooted in Chinese history. While the intricate sounds of the Heze instruments once reverberated primarily within confined cultural spaces, there is a pressing need for its integration into contemporary education systems to ensure its continuity. Through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and immersion in both urban and rural settings, the researcher explored the current developmental trends of Heze String Music, its reception among the youth, and its adaptive strategies for survival in a rapidly modernizing world. Key findings reveal a dual challenge: maintaining the authenticity of the music while adapting to modern pedagogical techniques and digital platforms. Educational institutions play a pivotal role in this endeavor, offering structured curricula designed to foster appreciation and skills in Heze music. Community-based programs and digital engagements further bolster efforts to bridge the generational divide, ensuring the music remains resonant in today's digital age. This study underscores the significance of evolving traditional art forms through modern education paradigms, highlighting the holistic benefits of such integrative approaches.

Keywords: Heze String Music, Culture Bearers, Youth, Innovative, Sustainable

Introduction

The pursuit of preserving and adapting traditional cultural expressions, such as Heze String Music, amidst the rapidly changing global dynamics, constitutes a noteworthy scholarly and practical quest. Heze String Music denotes a genre performed on plucked and string instruments, frequently referred to as 'silk strings' or 'string tuning' (Chen and Liu, 2013). Possessing a rich historical lineage, it acts as a cultural repository and was initially used to accompany Chinese folk rap performances. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1912), Heze String Music witnessed a significant increase in popularity in Heze, especially when paired with *Qinzheng Qingqu* accompaniments (Duan, 2018). As time progressed, Heze String Music extended beyond its original scholarly class and became prevalent among the broader populace. This evolution was accompanied by a transition in performance style: from an ancillary role to an independent, distinct instrumental ensemble format (Wang, 2022). The refined musical form of Heze String Music is commonly referred to as '*yayue*,' and due to its extensive historical development, it also carries the designation of 'ancient music' (Qi, 2019). As the melodious strains of Heze String Music echo, they encapsulate and evoke a myriad of time-honored traditions, painting a vivid tapestry of the region's rich cultural lineage.

Nonetheless, the trajectory of Heze String Music extends beyond academic discourse; it is an active and pulsating tradition at a crucial juncture. In an epoch dominated by digital media and where patterns of cultural consumption are rapidly evolving, this quintessential musical form faces the potential peril of fading into oblivion. This predicament precipitates pressing inquiries about cultural durability: How can the authenticity and profound heritage of Heze String Music be conserved while simultaneously ensuring its resonance and relevance for the younger generation? In what manner can the subtle allure of this musical genre continue to captivate audiences whose aural preferences are incessantly molded by the digital, interconnected milieu? Confronting these inquiries transcends the realm of mere cultural conservation; it delves into discerning the influential capacity of music and its imperative role in the perpetuation and transformation of society. Consequently, this inquiry is of paramount importance as it scrutinizes the contemporary methodologies for the sustainable preservation of Heze String Music, highlighting the criticality of such an investigation. The import of this research is manifold: it stands to shape cultural policy, direct the endeavors of practitioners, and actively involve communities, thereby facilitating not just the survival but the flourishing of Heze String Music in the modern age.

This exploration is committed to articulating the utility and efficacy of diverse preservation tactics, stressing their relevance to culture bearers, music educators, and policy framers. By discerning the critical intersection of tradition and contemporaneity, this study aspires to unveil strategies poised to invigorate Heze String Music through innovative pedagogy, digital preservation, and transcultural partnerships, thus accruing benefits for the art form and its audience alike. Thereby, this paper endeavors to present a strategic framework for the enduring preservation of Heze String Music, with the potential to extend its insights to safeguard other imperiled cultural heritages globally.

Developmental Trends of Heze String Music

During its initial development, Heze String Music was primarily enjoyed by literati in intimate gatherings for entertainment. These social events typically took place in the living rooms or courtyards of intellectuals, where participants would convene to play music and exchange ideas. Over time, Heze String Music captured the interest of the broader population, leading to considerable changes in its performance venues and techniques. Additionally, it began to

be performed in public settings, such as temple fairs and grand festivals (Cao, 2017). Heze String Music repertoire includes ten sets of ancient songs, predominantly adopting the '*Baban* (eight strong beats)' set form, colloquially known as *Peng Baban*¹ among the local populace. It is important to note that regional variations exist within Heze, each with its distinctive nomenclature for string music; it is referred to as *Peng Baban* in Shandong, 'Henan *Bantou* song' in Henan Province, 'Thirteen Lines' in Beijing City, and 'Chaozhou fine music' in Guangdong Province. Despite these linguistic differences, the performance style and content of string music substantially vary across these regions (Gao, 2021).

As national efforts to preserve traditional string music intensify, Heze String Music has become a central focus. Endangered traditional music ensembles now have opportunities for revival, and accomplished Heze String Music artists have started training apprentices. However, the preservation of this cultural heritage faces significant challenges due to the passing of elderly culture bearers involved in Heze String Music. This unfortunate circumstance has led to a gradual decline in the knowledge of traditional performance techniques and ancient songs, thereby exacerbating the complexities of preservation. In response, the Heze Mass Art Museum launched a project in 2007 to catalog historical documents, musical repertoires, and notable figures associated with Heze String Music (Heze Municipal Bureau of culture, 2007). The museum then proposed Heze String Music for recognition as a 'National Intangible Cultural Heritage' to the Ministry of Culture, contributing significantly to its preservation, development, and innovation. In 2011, Heze String Music was included in the third group of national intangible cultural heritage application projects, designating it as a protected element within national folk cultural heritage (Sun, 2020). The same year, Heze city established the *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society dedicated to uncovering, collecting, organizing, and rearranging folk songs, musical scores, string music, *guzheng* music, and related content, with a special emphasis on preserving the city's unique singing passages and musical notations. To further raise awareness and popularity of Heze String Music, the Shandong Provincial Government organized a cultural tour, the 'Cultural Project Social Office,' across various cities in 2012 to promote the *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society and the Heze String Music repertoire.

Youth Engagement

The origins of Heze String Music trace back to the *Qinzheng Qingqu* period (1368-1644), where it was first associated with scholars but subsequently disseminated to the peasant class (Cao, 2017). Similarly, in a parallel vein, *Shandong qinshu*, as documented by Ge (2014), originated within elite circles and subsequently permeated the wider populace. Over time, this once vibrant folk art form has seen a declining presence, resulting in its limited existence in contemporary settings.

Duan (2018) lamented the imminent risk facing Heze String Music, attributing its endangered status to the absence of thorough documentation, which is integral for the transmission of its intricate artistic practices across generations. This perspective finds resonance in Chen (2013) examination of the traditional music, *Jiaodong dagu* (drum) in China, where he underscores the crucial role of documentation in ensuring preservation.

¹ *Peng Baban* is a term deriving from traditional Chinese music, particularly prevalent in Heze String Music. This term refers to a specific musical structure that is distinguished by its unique composition and rhythm.

Huo and Zhang (2019) delved deeper into the multifaceted challenges encumbering the progression of Heze String Music. Key among these are the inevitable aging and eventual passing of skilled folk artists, compounded by the waning enthusiasm of younger audiences towards this traditional form. Similar challenges have been documented in the context of the *Jiangnan sizhu* instrumental ensemble tradition by Witzleben (1995), highlighting the persistent concern of engaging contemporary youth. A noticeable gap in literature is evident; while abundant studies chronicle the historical trajectories of Heze String Music, scant research concentrates on the contemporary tribulations encountered by its practitioners.

The concern becomes particularly poignant when considering the demographic implications for the art form. The aging cohort of seasoned musicians faces palpable challenges in transferring their profound knowledge and finely honed skills to a new generation. This intergenerational disconnect has the potential to disrupt the continuity of a cultural treasure, with younger aspirants lacking both exposure and mentorship (Qi,2020; Wang,2000; Cheng,1981; Duan,2018).

Given these circumstances, there emerges a pressing academic and cultural imperative to directly address these hurdles. Solutions must be proactively sought to not only champion the preservation of Heze String Music but to rejuvenate it by making it relevant and accessible to contemporary youth. Such endeavors would not only salvage the art form but potentially enrich it by merging the wisdom of tradition with the vibrancy of modern interpretation.

Strategies for Adaptation and Innovation

Cao (2022) embarked on a comprehensive exploration of recent additions to the Heze String Music ensemble, casting a keen eye on attributes like instrument characteristics, ensemble configurations, and evolving performance styles. The study drew attention to both traditional staples and innovative compositions, paralleled with an insightful examination of the shifting identities of Heze String Music's culture bearers. Historically anchored in its traditional repertoire, the art form is witnessing a palpable shift towards novel compositions and interdisciplinary collaborations, enabling a fusion of innovation while retaining its foundational characteristics. Although Cao's work underscored the proliferation of new ensemble repertoire stemming from novel instrument integrations, the modifications rendered to traditional Heze String Music merit a more meticulous investigation. An extension to this research could delve into the interplay between contemporary compositions and their antecedents within Heze String Music, and how these new iterations cater to the evolving aesthetic inclinations of the younger demographic.

Wang (2022), in a distinct yet interconnected discourse, dissected the intricacies of the *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society. The focal points spanned music's structural evolution, form transitions, and contemporary influences. Traditional anthems coexist with avant-garde compositions, the latter often weaving local musical legacies with contemporary integrations. While Wang spotlighted new adaptations like Villager Harmony, Opera Rhyme, and Su Di Moon, the analysis seemed surface-level, lacking profound depth. A conspicuous lacuna exists, particularly in the domains of music theory and technology, despite the burgeoning enthusiasm of the youth towards Heze String Music.

Gao (2020) investigated the current state of string music within academia, emphasizing the importance of its research, conservation, and pedagogy in tertiary institutions. The paper's advocacy converged on the symbiosis of theoretical probing and performative praxis. It underscored the imperative of harmonizing time-honored musical genres with the pulsating rhythms of modernity, facilitated through synergies between culture bearers, contemporary

composers, and artistic collectives. Although championing the transformative potential of novel performance modalities and eclectic compositional methods, the paper's appraisal of Heze University's endeavors in mainstreaming string music on campus seemed cursory. Notably absent were empirical evaluations gauging the initiatives' impacts and efficacies. Lastly, Cao (2017) exposition cursorily touched upon the innovative compositions within Heze String Music, detailing how folkloric elements were ingeniously reimagined and supplemented. Yet, this exploration felt fleeting, providing only a glimpse without the depth warranted by such significant adaptations. The portrayal of Heze String Music's culture bearers, especially in their roles as youth mentors, appears fragmented and lacking in the extant scholarly literature.

Methodology

Research Sites

The counties of Yuncheng and Juancheng in Heze City served as the study's "field." A 16-string *guzheng* from the Wanli (1573-1620) era of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) has been preserved in Yuncheng County (Wang, 2000). This instrument's entire preservation serves as a foundation and point of comparison for tracing the development of Heze String Music. Additionally, the majority of the Heze String Music culture bearers reside in the counties of Yuncheng and Juancheng (Heze Municipal Bureau of culture, 2007).

Data Triangulation and Initial Reconnaissance

In terms of data triangulation, three research instruments will be employed: participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The primary objective of utilizing these instruments is to procure the data necessary to address all the research questions comprehensively. A significant portion of the data collected for this study was obtained through field investigation. In the first stage of fieldwork, the researcher visited the performance site of Heze String Music to determine the performance schedule. Subsequently, visits were made to the Heze City Library, Heze City Mass Art Museum, and Heze City Cultural Bureau to obtain data on Heze String Music.

Participatory Observation

In the second and third stages, a participatory observation was carried out to study these ensembles. By engaging in daily rehearsals, substantial field notes were recorded, leading to a deeper understanding of the Heze String Music score. Participation in Heze String Music performances fostered a positive relationship between the researcher and Heze string performers. As pointed out by Barz & Cooley (2008), human relationships can affect the quality and meaning of fieldwork research.

Interviews and Oral Histories

Extensive interviews were conducted with the conductor and members of the *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society. During participatory observation, the researcher engaged orchestra members in conversation to forge a close bond and improve the research's objectivity and accuracy. The *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society has some younger members in their twenties and thirties. The researcher followed cultural bearer Su Bendong and others, diving into their unique experiences and backgrounds in Heze String Music.

Ethnographic Fieldwork: Heze String Music Ensembles

The researcher dedicated considerable time to the Heze String Music Ensemble, undertaking five field trips to acquire proficiency in Heze String Music from its cultural custodians. During these visits, the researcher observed how the musicians communicated with one another, any improvisational elements, and any discrepancies between the information provided about traditional music in oral or written sources and the actual situation.

Rural Fieldwork: Exploring Folk Ensembles

In the fourth phase of the fieldwork, the researcher visited villages in Heze City's Yuncheng and Juancheng counties. Here, intimate knowledge about the dynamics of these groups, their musical choices, and the rich traditions they uphold was gleaned.

Educational Institutions and Heze String Music Propagation

In the fifth stage of the fieldwork, the researcher approached music departments and faculties that offered Heze String Music courses. The researcher interviewed Heze university students to further understand the perception and propagation potential of Heze String Music in educational settings.

Development of instrument

Within the rich tapestry of Heze String Music lies a diverse assemblage of unique instruments. Of particular note is the *ruyigou*, an instrument that commands special attention due to its distinguished presence. Celebrated for its elaborate playing techniques and its profound tonal depth, the *ruyigou* demands significant expertise and dedication to truly master. As noted by the culture bearer, Zhang Xiaochen: "the looming challenge is that as the primary stewards of Heze String Music age and depart, the *ruyigou* stands on the precipice of oblivion". Currently, there exists a concerning scarcity of proficient players equipped with the skills to bring out its sophisticated subtleties.

Simultaneously, the rapid pace of modernization, coupled with leaps in instrument technology, has thrust Heze String Music into a maelstrom of challenges and metamorphoses. Progressive practitioners at the forefront of this musical tradition have pioneered a range of innovative playing techniques. These include sophisticated plucking styles, harmonization, and percussive interactions with the instruments, broadening the auditory palette beyond the traditional sonic boundaries. The elaborate nature of age-old instruments stands in stark contrast to contemporary predilections for streamlined, straightforward musical expressions. Recognizing the evolving cultural zeitgeist and with a commitment to engaging younger audiences, culture bearers of Heze String Music have embarked on a meticulous path of adaptation and reinvention with respect to their instruments. For example, the classic Heze *guzheng*, once limited to 16 strings, has undergone a transformation to feature 21 strings, enhancing its tonal range and versatility. Furthermore, instruments such as the *erhu* and *ruangonghu* have been seamlessly integrated, providing alternatives to the traditional playing modalities of the *ruyigou*. These inventive inclusions not only enrich the ensemble's instrumental repertoire but also infuse Heze String Music with a wider and more dynamic range of performance techniques. As a result, the ensemble configurations have grown in scale and scope, granting emerging music aficionados a plethora of avenues for instruction and artistic expression.



Figure 1: (From left to right) 1) A 16-string *guzheng* made during the Wanli period (1573-1620) and 2) The culture bearer Zhang Xiaochen exhibited the traditional Heze String Music instrument known as *ruyigou* to the visiting audience (photograph by Zhao Ting Ting, 2023)

Pedagogical Strategies for Promoting Heze String Music

Attracting a younger audience is paramount for the preservation and rejuvenation of traditional art forms, such as Heze String Music. In today's era, characterized by a myriad of digital media and entertainment avenues, this endeavor becomes increasingly intricate. To this end, educational initiatives and the institutionalization of these art forms stand out as pivotal mechanisms to pique the interest of younger demographics. The efficacy of institutionalization is underscored by the systematic instruction of traditional genres such as *Shandong guzheng* music, *Jiangnan sizhu* music, and *Shandong qinshu*. This structured approach guarantees their continued relevance and fosters enduring appreciation (Wang, 2013; Ge, 2014; Witzleben, 1995). By assimilating Heze String Music into formal educational curricula, an opportunity arises to resonate with and enthuse the modern youth, thereby securing the legacy of this cherished art form.

Community-Based Programs and Their Role

To further cultivate the cultural enrichment of local residents and propagate the distinctive musical and artistic heritage of Heze City, a commendable event titled "High-Quality *Quyí* Programs Exhibition' in *Mudan* District, Heze City, enhancing community engagement and delight" was held at the scenic Youth Lake Park on September 12, 2023. This park, besides serving as an oasis for citizens seeking relaxation, acts as a pivotal hub for cultural exchanges within the community.

To ensure the optimal delivery of the performance, the Heze String Music Ensemble undertook a preliminary rehearsal at the Heze Culture Center, commencing precisely at 2:30 p.m. on three consecutive days. After the rehearsal's conclusion, ensemble members dined and then made preparations for the upcoming performance by adjusting their makeup, tuning their instruments, and donning their performance attire. However, the day was marred by overcast conditions, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the outdoor event's feasibility. This climatic unpredictability induced considerable anxiety among the artists, as they yearned to present an impeccable performance to the expectant audience.

Anticipating a substantial turnout, the event organizers meticulously arranged white seating for attendees. Punctually at seven o'clock, the performance commenced. In defiance of the less-than-ideal weather, the audience's fervor was palpable, filling every seat and prompting

numerous attendees to resort to standing. An estimated congregation of over five hundred individuals was in attendance, predominantly consisting of middle-aged and elderly individuals. Culture bearer Bi Mei stated, "I hope the nation can introduce more policies to support the excellent folk music culture of Heze String Music, enabling it to have more opportunities to showcase on the global stage and promote Heze String Music."

To glean insights into the younger demographic's perception of the Heze String Music, the researcher undertook impromptu interviews with selected young attendees. The feedback garnered was overwhelmingly positive, with these young spectators extolling the performance. Such accolades not only underscore the universal allure of Heze's music and art culture across age cohorts but also spotlight the profound societal impact and inherent value of such events. Beyond the traditional academic presentation format, live performances, community activities, and various festival celebrations constitute alternative, yet effective, channels for younger audiences to encounter and understand folk art forms.

Xinyi, a student majoring in the *erhu* at Heze College's School of Music, expressed a pronounced enthusiasm and interest in the instrument played by the inheritors of Heze String Music—the *leiqin*. She elaborated on her observations, stating, "Upon my first encounter with the *leiqin*, I noticed numerous similarities with the *erhu*, which I am well-acquainted with. However, the *leiqin*'s neck is noticeably longer, and its tonal range is more expansive. Given the opportunity, I am keen to delve deeper into understanding and learning it."

In contrast, Junbo, a student from Heze City's First Middle School, while not particularly familiar with the music itself, was profoundly intrigued by the visual elements of the performance, especially the attire. He remarked, "I am not well-versed in this musical form, yet the performers' attire undeniably left a lasting impression on me."

Meanwhile, Danni, from Heze Vocational College, looked at this musical form from a broader perspective of intangible cultural heritage, noting, "Heze boasts a rich array of intangible cultural assets. Among these diverse heritages, Heze String Music stands out as one of the most admired and cherished forms of Intangible Cultural Heritage."

Collectively, these responses emphasize the pivotal role of educational and cultural backgrounds in shaping the younger generation's perceptions and evaluations of particular artistic and cultural expressions.



Figure 3: (From left to right) 1) The *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society contributed to the 'High-Quality *Quyi* Programs Exhibition' in Mudan District, Heze City, enhancing community engagement and delight and 2) The audience assembled on-site (photograph by Zhao Ting Ting, 2023)

Curriculum Design and Implementation in Schools

In order to promote exemplary musical culture and perpetuate folk arts, the city of Heze established the *Lu-Zheng* Art Museum in 2021. Simultaneously, to enhance university students' appreciation and understanding of traditional culture and foster their innovative cultural awareness, the *Lu-Zheng* Art Innovation Workshop was inaugurated at Heze University. Today, students visited the Heze Cultural Center to observe the rehearsal of the Heze String Music Ensemble. Through this observation, they gained firsthand insights into the intricacies and execution of the Heze String Music form.

After the observation session concluded, the students engaged in a comprehensive dialogue with the esteemed culture bearer, Hu Huashan. Presented with various academic inquiries from these intellectually curious students, Hu Huashan displayed tremendous patience and a vast reservoir of knowledge, providing thorough responses. These answers afforded the students a deeper understanding of the nuances in Heze String Music and its profound cultural significance.

In addition, Hao Hongmei, a faculty member at Heze University and a culture bearer, provided the students with an authentic *guzheng* instructional experience. This interactive segment deepened the students' comprehension of *guzheng* artistry, grounding their theoretical knowledge in practical application.

Hu Huashan, the culture bearer of the *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society, commented, "Since the inception of the intangible cultural heritage conservation initiatives and with the state's support, there has been a noticeable increase in individuals engaging in Heze String Music studies. Significantly, this musical tradition has been integrated into university curricula since 2015. From that year onward, each year witnesses an addition of over a dozen students to the Heze String Music Ensemble. A substantial fraction of these students continue their engagement with the music post-graduation." Given Hu Huashan's advanced age and consequent infrequent visits to the school, he emphasized the need for younger faculty members to immerse themselves in the tradition, thereby becoming instrumental in perpetuating and disseminating Heze String Music.



Figure 4: (From left to right) 1) Culture bearer Hao Hongmei provided on-site instruction for young audiences in the art of *Ruangonghu* performance and 2) Culture bearer Hu Huashan was interviewed by students from Heze University (photograph by Zhao Ting Ting, 2023)

Digital Platforms and Online Engagement

The utilization of digital platforms as a means to attract a younger audience is widely acknowledged as a highly effective strategic paradigm. Through meticulously designed interactive online courses, video tutorials, and tailor-made promotional campaigns for social media platforms, this approach not only disseminates high-quality educational content but also incorporates specific elements of entertainment. This integrated and diversified content

distribution strategy is particularly well-suited for a younger generation that is highly acquainted with digital technology. Consequently, it constitutes an innovative model that offers young people a novel, multidimensional channel for encountering and understanding Heze String Music.

Su Bendong, President of the *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society, underscored the importance of leveraging contemporary digital platforms to promote traditional art. He noted that if traditional music persistently upholds its archaic and refined essence, it risks limiting its audience base. This is especially evident among younger listeners, who often show tepid interest in traditional compositions. To address this, I have integrated the traditional pieces of Heze String Music with the theme song of the 'Landlord Game', which has garnered considerable appreciation from the youth." Cultural conservator Kong Lushun further remarked, "We currently reside in an era dominated by the internet. My father, despite being in his 70s, engages with platforms like *Douyin* (Tiktok) daily. We are actively employing online platforms to offer web-based instruction, performances, and lectures, which significantly heightens our engagement with, and allure to, the younger demographic."

On May 9th and 16th of 2023, culture bearer Su Bendong hosted two specialized lectures, focusing on "The Historical Origins and Current Status of Heze String Music in Shandong" and "Common Musical Instruments and Representative Pieces in Heze String Music of Shandong," respectively. These lectures not only comprehensively deconstructed the unique cultural context and historical backdrop of the Heze region but also examined the real-world application of Heze String Music within the realm of folk culture heritage, including its variety of traditional and characteristic musical instruments. Importantly, the lecture structure incorporated multimedia elements such as video sharing and live demonstrations, along with a Q&A segment, providing students with a holistic, multidimensional learning experience. This enabled them to gain an in-depth understanding and firsthand exposure to this particular cultural phenomenon of Heze String Music. This approach not only exemplifies the diversity and complexity of cultural dissemination in the digital age but also highlights the successful integration of traditional cultural education with modern educational technology (see figure 5).



Figure 5: (From left to right) 1) The *Qinzheng Qingqu* Ancient Music Society was invited to conduct online lectures on Heze String Music for students at the Central Conservatory of Music and 2) Faculty and students of the Central Conservatory of Music (Photograph by Su Bendong, 2023)

Discussion

The interviews offer a comprehensive look into the diverse perspectives surrounding the cultural and artistic significance of Heze String Music. From culture bearers like Bi Mei, who

wish for more national policies to bolster and promote this traditional art form on the world stage, to the younger generation like Xinyi and Junbo, who demonstrate a blend of both appreciation for and curiosity about the music and its associated aesthetics, the narratives converge on a single theme: the importance of preserving, understanding, and propagating Heze String Music.

It is evident that there is a broad admiration for this traditional art form, but there is also a recognized challenge. As noted by Zhang Xiaochen, there is an impending risk associated with the potential fading of this musical tradition as its primary stewards age. This sentiment is further underscored by Hu Huashan's observation on the significant increase in youth engagement and integration of the musical tradition into academic curricula. While this might indicate an encouraging trend, Hu Huashan's mention of his own aging and the subsequent impact on his capacity to contribute underscores the importance of the younger generation in continuing this legacy.

Furthermore, the use of modern digital platforms, as emphasized by Su Bendong and culture bearer Kong Lushun, demonstrates an adaptive approach to engage the current generation. By intertwining traditional compositions with contemporary elements, like the 'Landlord Game' theme, they are strategically appealing to the younger demographic while simultaneously preserving the essence of the traditional art.

In sum, while the enthusiasm and respect for Heze String Music are palpable across different age groups and backgrounds, the overarching sentiment stresses the need for adaptive strategies and support—both institutional and technological—to ensure the continued relevance and endurance of this rich cultural legacy in the contemporary era.

Conclusion

In the fast-paced modern world, the importance of preserving traditional art forms cannot be overstated. This study, focused on the integration of Heze String Music with contemporary methodologies, illuminates a path forward for other traditional art forms facing similar challenges. Through extensive research methodologies, ranging from ethnographic fieldwork to participatory observations, a clear image emerges of the crucial role that educational institutions, community programs, and digital platforms play in ensuring the continuation of Heze String Music.

Youth engagement, as the paper underlines, is paramount. It is the youth that stands as the bridge between the past and the future, and their engagement with traditional music ensures its continuity in an ever-evolving cultural landscape. This is particularly evident in the successful strategies of adaptation and innovation, where the music has been introduced to younger audiences through modern means, from integrating with popular game theme songs to the use of digital platforms like *Douyin* (TikTok).

Furthermore, the pedagogical strategies identified highlight the need for an innovative approach to teaching traditional art forms. Rather than relying solely on conventional methods, the incorporation of Heze String Music into school curriculums, community programs, and online engagements showcase the adaptability required in modern education paradigms.

However, as with any traditional art form, the looming challenge remains the preservation of authenticity while adapting to modern tastes and technologies. The comments from various culture bearers and educators emphasize the delicate balance required in ensuring that the core essence of Heze String Music is not diluted.

"Integrating Tradition with Modernity" underscores the delicate, yet achievable, balance between safeguarding the essence of traditional art forms and ensuring their continued relevance in a rapidly evolving world. The journey of Heze String Music, as charted in this paper, serves as both an inspiration and a roadmap for the harmonious melding of the old with the new.

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