



Voice of Heritage: An Interdisciplinary Study of Liu Xiaoyan's Yu Opera Transmission

Yuan Chen¹ and Sarawut Choatchamrat²

^{1, 2}College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

¹Corresponding author e-mail: 66012051008.msu@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0972-2272>

²E-mail: sarawut.ch@msu.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9689-2477>

Received 23/05/2025

Revised 29/05/2025

Accepted 30/06/2025

Abstract

Background and Aims: Background and Aims: Yu Opera, originating in Henan Province, China, faces challenges in maintaining cultural relevance amid rapid urbanization and evolving entertainment preferences. Individual artists, notably Liu Xiaoyan, play a crucial role in preserving and innovating traditional arts. This study aims to examine Liu Xiaoyan's transmission of the artistic and cultural essence of Yu Opera through an interdisciplinary approach.

Methodology: Employing qualitative ethnographic methodologies, the research integrates field observations and semi-structured interviews with three purposively selected informants. The key informants targeted were Liu Xiaoyan, who provided insights into her artistic philosophy and methods, a professionally trained student educator, and a cultural outreach specialist. Key data collection tools included observation and structured interview forms. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes such as technique preservation, pedagogical innovation, emotional transmission, digital outreach, and cultural dialogue.

Results: Liu Xiaoyan effectively integrates traditional vocal and performance training with contemporary pedagogical approaches, using immersive stage performances as educational tools. Her structured mentorship emphasizes both technical mastery and emotional interpretation. Furthermore, Liu innovatively utilizes digital platforms like livestreaming and multimedia storytelling to attract younger audiences, demonstrating an effective blending of tradition and innovation.

Conclusion: Liu Xiaoyan's interdisciplinary transmission model successfully bridges traditional preservation with modern adaptation, highlighting the crucial role individual agency plays in cultural heritage sustainability. Her approach provides valuable insights for cultural educators and policymakers seeking effective methods to preserve intangible cultural heritage within rapidly modernizing societies.

Keywords: Yu Opera; Cultural Transmission; Interdisciplinary Approach; Heritage Education; Digital Media

Introduction

Yu Opera, a significant regional operatic tradition in China, is known for its expressive melodies, vivid storytelling, and robust vocal style. Originating from Henan Province, it embodies





the historical consciousness, moral values, and cultural aesthetics of the Central Plains (Chabrowski, 2022; Xue, 2023; Yu, 2024). Despite its evolution through performances in rural theaters, temple fairs, and formal playhouses, Yu Opera is struggling to retain relevance in the contemporary era of rapid urbanization, digital media, and shifting entertainment preferences. Within Henan, the sociocultural landscape significantly shapes Yu Opera's transmission practices, as regional identity, local community support, and government cultural policies actively influence artists' strategies for heritage preservation and promotion (Fu & Choatchamrat, 2024; Wu, 2023; Zhang & Natayakulwong, 2024). Specifically, provincial policies promoting intangible cultural heritage have created frameworks for financial and institutional support, which individual artists can leverage to maintain cultural practices.

Individual artists play a crucial role in preserving and innovating traditional forms in today's cultural landscape. Liu Xiaoyan, a nationally recognized artist and mentor, has mastered Yu Opera's classical techniques and taken proactive steps to transmit its core artistic and cultural values to new generations (Jia, 2024; Xing et al., 2023; Zhang, 2024). She designs inclusive teaching models, engages with digital platforms, and adapts traditional scripts to modern themes. However, there has been limited academic inquiry into the interdisciplinary nature of her transmission practices and their broader cultural impact, despite her widely admired contributions in artistic circles (Bloch, 2020; Pang & Sensai, 2025; Peiheng & Kaewbucha, 2025). An interdisciplinary approach, combining pedagogy, performance, and digital media, is essential to effectively address the complex demands of cultural transmission in contemporary contexts. Pedagogy ensures structured knowledge transfer, live performance reinforces embodied skills and cultural expressions, and digital media extends traditional art forms' reach to younger, digitally-native audiences, facilitating broader engagement and sustainability (Long & Yulia, 2025; Zheng et al., 2025).

The primary objective of this research is to examine Liu Xiaoyan's transmission of the artistic and cultural essence of Yu Opera through an interdisciplinary approach. Specifically, this study explores how she combines pedagogy, live performance, and digital innovation to ensure the continuity of Yu Opera in a rapidly modernizing world (Long & Yulia, 2025; Zhang & Sornyai, 2025; Zheng et al., 2025). This research is guided by the question: How does Liu Xiaoyan transmit the artistic and cultural essence of Yu Opera through an interdisciplinary approach? In addressing this question, the study aims to uncover the underlying pedagogical philosophies, performative techniques, and strategic innovations that characterize Liu Xiaoyan's practice. By focusing on a single, exemplary artist, the research provides a focused lens through which broader themes of cultural preservation, modernization, and educational methodology can be analyzed (Tao & Tao, 2024; Zhao, 2025).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the growing discourse on intangible cultural heritage transmission. Recent phenomena observed in Henan Province





reveal declining youth participation and audience engagement in traditional operatic performances, alongside rising competition from digital entertainment platforms (Wu, 2023; Zhang & Natayakulwong, 2024). Liu Xiaoyan's work offers a valuable case study of how traditional operatic forms can be preserved not only through repetition of the old but also through adaptation and reinvention (Huang et al., 2025; Yu & Choatchamrat, 2024; Yu et al., 2025). Her interdisciplinary strategy demonstrates how artists can respond creatively to the challenges of modern cultural engagement while remaining faithful to traditional roots (Chen et al., 2025; Leavy, 2020). Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of individual agency in heritage preservation and offers practical insights for cultural educators, arts administrators, and policymakers (Fang, 2024; He et al., 2025). In examining Liu Xiaoyan's model, this research provides a roadmap for the revitalization of traditional arts in other regions and disciplines, emphasizing that with thoughtful integration of tradition and innovation, cultural heritage can thrive across generations.

Literature Review

This literature review examines previous research relevant to the transmission and adaptation of traditional opera, emphasizing the critical role of artists as cultural transmitters who bridge past and present practices.

1. Theoretical Perspectives on Cultural Transmission

Cultural transmission refers to the methods and processes through which intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional opera, is passed from generation to generation. Traditional studies emphasized lineage-based learning, oral tradition, and master-apprentice relationships, focusing on the preservation of vocal techniques and performance codes. Recent studies have broadened this understanding, incorporating dynamic models that address sociocultural shifts, technological advancements, and institutional support (Marfán & Tiong, 2025; Okan, 2023). Embodied cognition and situated learning theories suggest that cultural knowledge, especially in performance arts, is actively constructed through social contexts, bodily practice, and lived experiences (Smithner, 2025). This literature helps contextualize Liu Xiaoyan's pedagogical strategies, which integrate traditional master-apprentice models with performance-based immersive learning.

2. Interdisciplinarity in Heritage Education and Practice

Interdisciplinarity involves blending methods and insights from multiple academic and practical disciplines to preserve and innovate cultural heritage. Prior research shows increasing recognition of interdisciplinary approaches, including music pedagogy, cultural studies, performance theory, and digital media, to effectively address modern preservation challenges (Guo & Karin, 2024; Malik, 2024). Studies highlight how contemporary artists utilize interdisciplinary





tools to enhance understanding of character development, vocal expression, and audience engagement (Xia et al., 2024). This body of research informs the current study's analysis of Liu Xiaoyan's methods, particularly how she employs interdisciplinary approaches, such as digital platforms and modern pedagogical techniques, to preserve and adapt Yu Opera.

3. The Artist as Mediator and Innovator

The concept of artists as mediators describes performers who actively bridge traditional heritage with contemporary contexts. Past studies indicate that artists engaging with modern themes, media, and reinterpretations of classical works effectively attract younger audiences and sustain cultural relevance (Cancellieri et al., 2022; Galeati, 2024). Researchers argue that traditional performers who adopt innovative approaches disrupt simplistic binaries between tradition and innovation, enhancing cultural vitality and broader public discourse around traditional arts (Farnsworth, 2020). This literature provides a conceptual foundation for examining Liu Xiaoyan's role as an innovator who transforms Yu Opera into a dynamic, living tradition, capable of resonating with contemporary audiences.

In summary, the reviewed literature establishes the theoretical foundation and interdisciplinary perspectives guiding this study, offering a conceptual framework for understanding Liu Xiaoyan's multifaceted role in Yu Opera's contemporary transmission.

Research Conceptual Framework

This study uses cultural transmission theory, performance studies, pedagogical theory, and digital and media studies. It combines these perspectives to understand Liu's role as a performer, educator, and innovator (An et al., 2025; Peng & Abd Rahman, 2024). The framework allows for a nuanced interpretation of her methods, including embodied performance, interactive instruction, and digital outreach, reflecting her interdisciplinary contribution to Yu Opera, as shown in Figure 1.



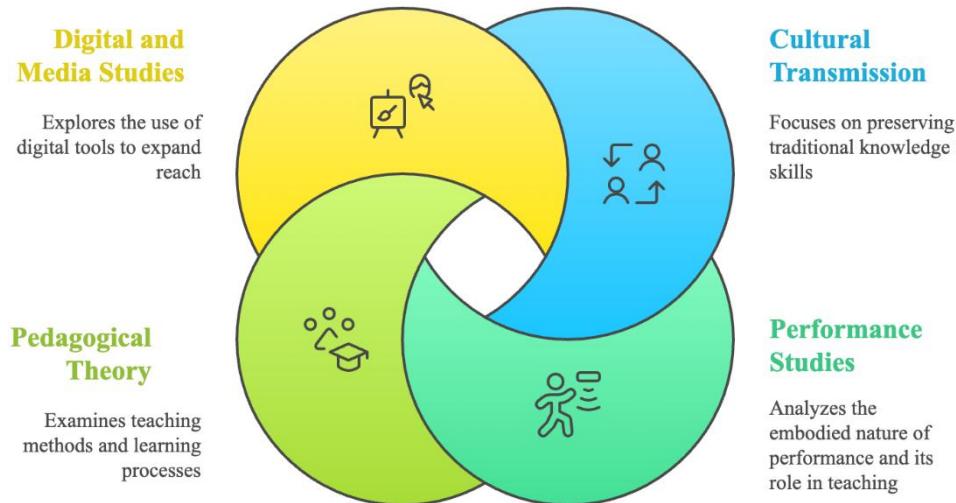


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

This study explores Liu Xiaoyan's interdisciplinary approach to transmitting Yu Opera, a traditional art form from Henan Province, China, facing modern challenges. Utilizing qualitative ethnographic methods, including interviews, observation, and media analysis, the research highlights Liu's strategies in balancing traditional pedagogy with innovative performance and digital outreach. Liu emphasizes rigorous foundational skills and immersive live performances to deepen students' cultural and emotional connections. Structured mentorship and digital tools like livestreaming further enhance Yu Opera's relevance among younger audiences. The research confirms theoretical perspectives that effective cultural heritage transmission requires integrating traditional methods with contemporary interdisciplinary practices. Liu Xiaoyan's approach demonstrates that tradition and innovation can coexist, underscoring individual artists' vital role in sustaining cultural heritage amid modernization.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology rooted in ethnomusicology and performance ethnography to investigate the transmission of Yu Opera by Liu Xiaoyan. Emphasizing direct engagement with teaching and performance environments, the research integrates field observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital content analysis (Berger & Stone, 2019; Guo et al., 2025; Qiu et al., 2024). The interdisciplinary nature of the study necessitates a methodological approach that captures both the traditional and evolving dimensions of Liu Xiaoyan's work.

1. Informant Selection and Sampling Method

The key informants targeted were Liu Xiaoyan, who provided insights into her artistic philosophy and methods. The second informant was a professional educator and student who



had received formal training from Liu Xiaoyan, contributing perspectives on pedagogical structures and learner engagement. The third informant was involved in cultural outreach and public engagement, offering a broader context on how Liu Xiaoyan's methods resonate with wider audiences.

2. Data Collection Techniques

The study involved eight months of fieldwork, including observation of Liu Xiaoyan's rehearsals, masterclasses, and public performances. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants, and contextual data were gathered from digital media archives and educational artifacts. Thematic analysis was done through recording, transcription, and translation of interviews, and performance clips, workshop flyers, and social media posts were reviewed to assess Liu Xiaoyan's outreach methods, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview of Data Collection

Method	Description	Purpose
Observation	Rehearsals, classes, live performances	Capture embodied techniques and stage interactions
Interviews	3 informants, multiple sessions	Understand internalized values and practices
Media Analysis	Video, audio, posters, social media posts	Examine digital engagement and documentation
Archival Materials	Educational curricula, performance scripts	Review pedagogical and artistic materials

This comprehensive data collection strategy facilitated a multi-angle view of Liu Xiaoyan's practice and her adaptation of traditional opera into contemporary frameworks.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once collected, the data were subjected to a coding and thematic analysis process to identify recurring motifs in teaching, performance, and audience interaction. Codes were developed around major themes: vocal technique, pedagogical innovation, emotional expression, media strategy, and cultural relevance. The data were interpreted using frameworks drawn from cultural transmission theory, performance studies, and digital media theory, as shown in Table 2.



**Table 2** Thematic Coding Categories

Code Name	Description
Technique Preservation	Retention of traditional performance skills and methods
Pedagogical Strategy	Approaches to instruction, student engagement, and mentoring
Emotional Transmission	Use of voice and gesture to express cultural sentiment
Innovation & Outreach	Integration of media and modern content into Yu Opera
Cultural Dialogue	Representation of heritage in a contemporary societal context

These coded themes form the analytical basis for the findings presented in the following section, which highlights how Liu Xiaoyan balances tradition and innovation in the transmission of Yu Opera.

Results

Xiaoyan's transmission of Yu Opera represents a dynamic, multifaceted model rooted in tradition yet oriented toward innovation. Her approach is not static preservation but a living, evolving process ensuring Yu Opera remains relevant in contemporary contexts. Interviews were conducted with three key informants: Liu Xiaoyan herself, a professionally trained student educator and a cultural outreach specialist, during fieldwork from January to August 2024. Five core dimensions of her transmission methodology emerged based on these interviews, observations, and digital media analysis.

1. Traditional Pedagogy and Foundational Skills

Liu Xiaoyan's pedagogy draws deeply from the classical structure of Yu Opera, emphasizing fundamental training in breath control, pitch accuracy, dialect articulation, and stage posture. In an interview conducted in March 2024, the student educator informant highlighted daily vocal warm-ups and dialect drills, noting Liu's training sessions as "a return to the roots," emphasizing emotional and cultural connections.

The foundation Liu emphasizes is not merely technical; it is also ideological. Her training programs are built on the principle that mastery of tradition is a prerequisite for meaningful innovation. This pedagogical stance is reflected in her insistence that students memorize and perform traditional works before engaging in reinterpretation. Table 3 below outlines the key components of her foundational curriculum.



Table 3 Key Components of Liu Xiaoyan's Pedagogical Training

Training Area	Description
Vocal Techniques	Emphasis on resonance, breath control, and glottal stops
Dialect Mastery	Focused training in Henan regional phonetics and lyric diction
Stage Posture	Traditional stance and gesture rehearsal
Rhythmic Precision	Use of percussive patterns in alignment with clapper-based rhythms
Emotional Channeling	Techniques for linking vocal delivery with embodied expression

2. Performance as a Teaching Tool

Performance is integral to Liu Xiaoyan's teaching. Observations from a pre-performance summer camp in April 2024 revealed Liu actively guiding students in immersive, realistic stage conditions. These experiences bridge theoretical training and practical application, preparing students for professional scenarios. In May 2024, the cultural outreach specialist confirmed that performances significantly deepen students' emotional attachment to Yu Opera and cultivate their sense of cultural responsibility.

**Figure 2** Liu Xiaoyan's Guiding Students through a Rigorous Pre-performance Summer Camp

Source: Provided by Liu Xiaoyan, from research fieldwork in April 2024

Beyond skill acquisition, Liu uses performance to cultivate cultural identity. Informants remarked that students develop a deeper emotional attachment to the art form after seeing audience reactions and internalizing the storytelling process. This practice instills a sense of duty to uphold and reimagine the heritage they perform.

3. Mentorship through Evaluation and Feedback

Liu Xiaoyan employs structured mentorship practices grounded in reciprocal learning. During the "Opera into Campus" student competition in April 2024, Liu provided detailed technical and

emotional critiques. The student educator emphasized, “She doesn’t just correct your form, she explains how your voice must carry the character’s heart.” Liu’s mentorship model involves structured feedback loops, encouraging students to self-assess and critically refine their artistry.



Figure 3 Liu Xiaoyan was involved as a judge in the student competition

Source: Provided by Liu Xiaoyan, from research fieldwork in April 2024

Her feedback loops are methodically structured. Students perform in small groups, receive live commentary, and are encouraged to self-reflect and revise. This mentorship model fosters independence while maintaining fidelity to tradition. Table 4 summarizes the key components of Liu Xiaoyan’s evaluative process.

Table 4 Liu Xiaoyan’s Mentorship and Evaluation Process

Stage	Activity	Objective
Initial Review	Performance observation	Baseline assessment of technical
Feedback Loop	Immediate vocal, gestural critique	Refinement of skill and emotional
Rehearsal	Repetition with correction	Internalization of corrections
Reflection	Self-assessment and peer review	Fostering critical artistic thinking

4. Interdisciplinary Integration and Outreach

Liu Xiaoyan integrates interdisciplinary practices, combining Yu Opera with contemporary performance arts and digital media. According to Liu herself in an interview in June 2024, collaborations with local universities and media agencies facilitated digital adaptations of traditional opera scenes. Informants highlighted Liu’s successful use of livestreams, short videos, and behind-the-scenes documentaries on platforms like WeChat and Douyin to attract younger audiences unfamiliar with opera.



These innovations extend Yu Opera's reach into digital public spheres. Liu Xiaoyan's use of livestreams, short videos, and behind-the-scenes documentaries has attracted new demographics. Informants noted that Liu Xiaoyan's WeChat and Douyin audiences now include younger viewers who previously had little exposure to opera. Her digital strategy is not merely promotional but educational, blending entertainment with cultural literacy.

5. Cultural Continuity and Innovation

Liu Xiaoyan treats preservation and innovation as complementary. The cultural outreach specialist, interviewed in July 2024, described Liu's subtle modifications of traditional performances to integrate multimedia without compromising core aesthetics. According to the educator interviewed, Liu's students become active creators, engaging critically and innovatively with tradition. Liu's interdisciplinary method ensures Yu Opera's evolution and sustained cultural relevance.

Liu Xiaoyan's approach enables a form of cultural continuity that is flexible and dynamic. Her students are not merely imitators; they are emerging creators who engage critically with tradition. By modeling this interdisciplinary methodology, Liu Xiaoyan ensures that the spirit of Yu Opera continues to evolve, inspiring a new generation while safeguarding its heritage.

Through this comprehensive transmission model, grounded in pedagogy, enriched by performance, guided through mentorship, and expanded via media, Liu Xiaoyan stands as a living conduit for Yu Opera's legacy.

Discussion

The findings of this study align consistently with existing theoretical principles regarding cultural transmission, performance studies, pedagogical innovation, and digital media engagement. Liu Xiaoyan's approach to transmitting Yu Opera exemplifies the effective combination of traditional heritage preservation with contemporary innovation. This method resonates closely with cultural transmission theory, which underscores the necessity of preserving traditional vocal techniques, dialect precision, and symbolic gestures through lineage-based teaching (Bloch, 2020; Chabrowski, 2022). Liu's rigorous adherence to foundational skill training not only maintains the artistic authenticity of Yu Opera but also cultivates an emotional and cultural connection among her students, reinforcing theoretical notions of embodied cognition and situated learning (Marfán & Tiong, 2025; Okan, 2023).

Moreover, Liu Xiaoyan's use of public performance as a central educational tool aligns strongly with principles in performance studies, wherein live performances are critical sites for knowledge transfer and cultural negotiation (Farnsworth, 2020; Smithner, 2025). This study further highlights that her immersive training methods, which include pre-performance camps and





simulated live-stage contexts, effectively translate theoretical learning into practical application. Such practices have proven successful in deepening students' emotional attachment and commitment to Yu Opera, supporting existing literature on the role of performance in cultural transmission and identity formation (Guo & Karin, 2024; Malik, 2024).

The structured mentorship and evaluative processes implemented by Liu Xiaoyan demonstrate clear consistency with contemporary pedagogical theories. By combining direct technical critique with reflective practice, Liu's mentorship model enhances learner autonomy and artistic critical thinking. This approach resonates with constructivist pedagogical frameworks, emphasizing hands-on learning, adaptive rehearsal, and self-reflection (Berger & Stone, 2019; Xia et al., 2024). Such methodologies are essential in adapting traditional art forms to contemporary educational contexts, ensuring their sustainability and continued relevance.

Liu Xiaoyan's interdisciplinary integration of digital media to expand Yu Opera's outreach also aligns with recent academic discourse on heritage education and cultural innovation. Her innovative use of livestreaming platforms, short-form digital content, and multimedia collaborations demonstrates a proactive response to the shifting preferences of younger audiences, echoing scholarly arguments advocating interdisciplinary strategies for effective cultural preservation (Cancellieri et al., 2022; Galeati, 2024; Pang & Sensai, 2025). By successfully attracting new demographics through digital strategies, Liu confirms the efficacy of blending traditional art with modern communication tools, ensuring the art form remains vibrant in the digital age.

Nevertheless, Liu Xiaoyan's model is not without its challenges. Institutional constraints such as limited funding for traditional arts education, lack of formal integration into mainstream academic curricula, and inadequate infrastructure for digital innovation may hinder scalability. Moreover, resistance from conservative sectors within the opera community, who may regard modern adaptations or digital outreach as threats to cultural authenticity, poses additional barriers to innovation. These challenges necessitate a balanced approach that respects traditionalist values while fostering creative evolution.

From a policy perspective, Liu's interdisciplinary transmission model has the potential to inform national strategies for intangible cultural heritage education. Her work underscores the need for more inclusive institutional frameworks that support artist-led, community-based education. Policymakers could adapt her model to develop funding mechanisms, interdisciplinary arts curricula, and digital heritage platforms that align with both cultural preservation and contemporary engagement goals. By formalizing such models within educational and cultural institutions, her approach could serve as a scalable template for revitalizing other regional art forms facing similar threats of decline.





In conclusion, Liu Xiaoyan's interdisciplinary transmission approach, integrating traditional pedagogy, performance immersion, structured mentorship, and digital innovation, effectively aligns with established theoretical frameworks across cultural studies and education. Despite practical limitations, her model remains a compelling case for how individual agency and adaptive strategies can sustain cultural heritage in modern contexts. Her work offers valuable insights not only for cultural educators and practitioners but also for policymakers seeking to embed living traditions into the evolving fabric of contemporary cultural life.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for Applying the Research Findings

1.1 Educational institutions should adopt Liu Xiaoyan's interdisciplinary model by integrating performance-based, mentorship-oriented, and digital media approaches into cultural heritage curricula to enhance student engagement.

1.2 Cultural policymakers and arts organizations could leverage digital platforms and multimedia collaborations, as demonstrated by Liu Xiaoyan, to attract broader, younger audiences and ensure the ongoing relevance of traditional art forms.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

2.1 Further studies should investigate audience reception and engagement metrics regarding digital transmission methods used by traditional opera artists to assess long-term effectiveness.

2.2 Future research could compare interdisciplinary approaches across different regional operatic traditions to identify common challenges, successful strategies, and opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration.

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