

Innovative Analysis of Oral Folklore Recording Methods in Ethnomusicology at Universities in the Digital Age

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Abstract: Traditional Chinese ethnic music has a long history and profound heritage; it is an important treasure of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. In traditional ethnic music, there are not only tangible elements such as notation, instruments, and documented literature, but also a large amount of orally transmitted folklore. Due to the lack of physical carriers and effective recording methods, traditional oral folklore has faced many limitations in its inheritance and development. With the advent of the digital age, rare opportunities have emerged for the preservation and development of oral folklore, but at the same time, it also faces certain risks and challenges. Based on the perspective of university ethnomusicology, this paper focuses on the recording methods of oral folklore. It first briefly elaborates on the traditional recording methods of oral folklore, analyzes the transformations and challenges brought by new technologies and approaches in the digital era, and, in combination with practical cases, explores the digital innovation practices of folklore recording methods in terms of platforms, recording techniques, and model methodologies.

Keywords: digital age; university ethnomusicology; oral folklore recording; methodological innovation

1. Introduction

Oral folklore is an important component of traditional Chinese ethnic music and also a significant form of ethnic cultural inheritance. Oral folklore reflects the sincere musical emotions of the general public, carries the historical memory of different communities, and demonstrates the outstanding historical and cultural traditions of the Chinese nation as well as the unique charm of Chinese ethnic music. In the new era, strengthening the protection and inheritance of oral folklore in ethnic music has become a key mission for university ethnomusicology. In recent years, with the rapid development of information technology and the comprehensive arrival of the digital age, people's modes of production and life have undergone profound changes, which have also had a far-reaching impact on cultural transmission and exchange. The quiet emergence of the digital age and the rapid development of information technology have significantly transformed people's lifestyles, communication models, and paths of cultural dissemination, while also driving a revolutionary change in the recording methods of oral folklore. Digital technologies such as the Internet, multimedia, big data, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence provide more accurate and efficient methods and carriers for diverse and dynamic oral folklore. This paper attempts to explore the innovative practices of recording methods for oral folklore in the digital age, aiming to further promote the effective protection, inheritance, and development of ethnic music, and to provide more driving force for the creative transformation and innovative development of China's outstanding traditional culture.

2. University Ethnomusicology and Oral Folklore

University ethnomusicology is a discipline that studies music within the traditional customs of various ethnic groups. In the traditional music of China's many ethnic groups, a large portion is created, performed, and transmitted orally. Orality is a fundamental attribute of traditional Chinese music and an important characteristic of Chinese ethnic music. Oral folklore refers to cultural traditions that are transmitted, spread, and preserved through oral means. From the perspective of ethnomusicology, it mainly refers to various cultural forms such as folk songs, dramas, and quyi (traditional Chinese folk arts), which are spontaneously and improvisationally created by the people, represent collective memory, and are passed down orally among the populace. Therefore, oral folklore is characterized by orality, collectivity, improvisation, variability, and the mode of transmission "from mouth to heart." The oral folklore within Chinese ethnic music has a long history. After years of inheritance and development, it has formed unique musical forms. For example, the Bonan ethnic group's oral folklore "Hua'er" features melodies that are both sharp and delicate, reflecting their active involvement in material trade along the Sichuan-Tibet route; Yi ethnic minority folk songs are led by village elders during weddings, funerals, and sacrificial ceremonies, with improvised lyrics, forming the Ten-Month Pregnancy Song through repetitive chanting; the Mosuo people's Jiacaoqua expresses the community's shared cosmology and labor scenes through improvisational singing. These are all

invaluable traditional cultural resources that deserve to be preserved, transmitted, and promoted for generations. In the digital age, the use of new recording methods not only facilitates the better preservation and inheritance of traditional oral folklore, but also allows these artistic treasures to be presented to the public in more intuitive and accessible ways. This enables them to radiate new brilliance in the contemporary era, provide more diverse cultural products to the general public, and better meet people's spiritual and cultural needs.

3. Traditional Ethnomusicological Methods for Recording Oral Folklore

3.1 Fieldwork Method

The fieldwork method refers to the systematic collection of social behavior and cultural practices through observation, interviews, recordings, and other means. Traditionally, the fieldwork method has been the primary approach for recording oral folklore in ethnomusicology. Recorders immerse themselves in ethnic communities, engage in face-to-face communication with local people, participate in folk activities, and collect and document cultural resources. The advantage of the fieldwork method lies in its ability to deeply explore and restore the original state of folk art, preserving its authenticity and richness of content. However, its disadvantages include significant limitations in time and space, low efficiency due to manual recording, and the risk of omissions or variations during long-term oral transmission. In fast-paced rap or complex choral scenes, it is easy to miss key elements or become overwhelmed by multiple simultaneous dynamics.

3.2 Oral History Method

The oral history method refers to the documentation of content conveyed orally by individuals or groups. In practice, this can involve inviting folk artists or ethnic musicians to recount their creative processes, performance experiences, and reflections on ethnic music as a means of recording oral folklore. The advantage of the oral history method is that it is more emotionally vivid and humanized. However, similar to the fieldwork method, it relies on the limited memory retained in the minds of predecessors and tends to be highly subjective. It cannot fully reflect the collective picture of a community and requires further organization, refinement, and verification in post-processing.

3.3 Folklore Gazetteer Recording Method

The folklore gazetteer recording method involves extracting information related to oral folklore in ethnic music from local folklore gazetteers. These gazetteers may contain content such as lyrics, melodies, social contexts, and functional uses of ethnic music. For example, a local folklore gazetteer might document sacrificial practices, including ritual procedures, cultural background, and role arrangements—elements that fall under the category of oral folklore. However, the content in folklore gazetteers is primarily described in written form and cannot present sound, imagery, or other oral folklore formats.

In addition, traditional methods for recording oral folklore also include the use of audio and video recordings as forms of information technology, and these have begun to be gradually integrated into fieldwork practices. Nevertheless, the overall scope of application remains limited, and the resulting achievements are still not abundant.

4. Innovations and Challenges in Oral Folklore Recording Methods in University Ethnomusicology in the Digital Age

4.1 Advantages of Digital Tools and Technologies Empowering Oral Folklore Recording Methods

With the advent of the digital age, the use of various advanced digital technologies and devices has brought revolutionary changes to the recording of oral folklore, significantly improving both the quality and efficiency of documentation. First, the application of various advanced sensors and recording devices—such as high-definition video cameras, intelligent audio recorders, VR/AR technologies—allows for higher quality and more comprehensive capture of on-site sounds and visuals. Compared with traditional recording methods, these tools can restore the original appearance of oral folklore more vividly and authentically, while also greatly enhancing recording efficiency. Second, the application of various cloud storage systems enables the storage of vast amounts of oral folklore data. With the support of intelligent systems, such data can be automatically categorized and annotated, facilitating secondary retrieval, research, and teaching. Empowered by new technologies, university-based ethnomusicology research can transcend spatial and regional limitations, actively promoting the dissemination of ethnic music and expanding the scope of research in the field. Third, the establishment of various ethnic music education and exhibition platforms allows for the secondary processing of diverse oral folklore content. Through online courses and social media platforms, these materials can be widely disseminated, helping broader audiences understand ethnic music and Chinese traditional culture, and injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of oral folklore.

4.2 Problems and Challenges Brought by the Digital Age to Oral Folklore Recording

While the development and application of various digital technologies have innovated the methods of oral folklore recording and improved quality and efficiency, they have also brought certain problems and challenges to the work of recording ethnic music oral traditions. First, there are high economic costs and technical barriers. Procuring various advanced digital devices, developing big data platforms, and training personnel all require substantial funding, which places considerable pressure on university budgets. Moreover, the application of various digital platforms and innovative recording methods requires interdisciplinary talent proficient in both ethnomusicology and information technology, raising the threshold for documentation work. Second, data security and copyright protection become concerns. In the digital era, as large volumes of oral folklore data related to ethnic music are uploaded to cloud servers and shared online, issues such as data security and the protection of ethnic residents' privacy may arise. In the future, as oral folklore continues to develop, unauthorized public dissemination of folk artists' works may also involve problems related to copyright, portrait rights, and more. Third, the digital era may trigger a crisis in the inheritance of traditional skills and folk transmitters. To cater to audience demand, cultural products increasingly favor brevity and speed, making it difficult for younger generations to focus and immerse themselves in learning ethnic music. This poses a risk of disruption in the transmission of oral folklore memory. For example, some ancient vocal techniques, musical customs, and cultural traditions passed down orally may vanish as elder transmitters pass away and younger people show little interest in learning. In addition, there is a need to remain cautious about the issues of excessive packaging and over-editing brought by digital technologies, which may compromise the authenticity and simplicity of oral folklore, leading to a loss of its original folkloric character. It is essential to find the right balance in the use of technology.

5. Innovative Practices in Oral Folklore Recording Methods in University Ethnomusicology in the Digital Age

5.1 Promoting the Integration of Various Digital Collection Devices and Recording Methods

In the digital age, when universities organize fieldwork, oral interviews, and other methods to record oral folklore, they should not only continue using traditional pen-and-paper documentation but also make full and effective use of various digital and information-based collection devices. By innovatively promoting the organic integration of multiple recording methods, the quality and efficiency of documentation can be significantly improved. It is essential to make full use of drone aerial photography, vertical high-definition video cameras, multi-channel audio recording equipment, and other tools to document the entire process of ethnic music and oral folklore activities. This should include preparations, the overall on-site environment, the cultural ambiance, the full course of musical performances, and audience participation. Efforts should be made to ensure the purity and clarity of vocals and instrumental sounds, as well as a complete representation of the natural setting and social space, thereby providing solid support for subsequent research. Using camera lenses to capture the details of folklore activities and the expressions and movements of participants allows for an authentic documentation of the form and atmosphere of the folklore. During interviews, a combination of video recording and traditional note-taking can accurately depict details such as tone, intonation, and speech rhythm, thus restoring the original appearance of oral folklore as fully as possible and ensuring alignment between oral content and visual information, while preserving multi-channel materials.

5.2 Applying VR/AR Technology to Achieve Immersive Recording and Transmission

VR/AR technology refers to virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, which aim to create immersive virtual environments that give users a lifelike experience. Applying VR/AR technology to the recording of ethnic music and oral folklore can provide singers, folk artists, and narrators with immersive scenarios that enhance artistic expression and improve recording quality.

For example, when recording a particular ethnic song, a folk artist can wear VR/AR equipment to feel as if they are performing live in an ancient tribal setting. The resulting performance is more evocative and meaningful, and interactions with audiences become more natural and realistic—all of which contribute to a more accurate restoration of the original folklore. AR is regarded as an effective tool for preserving history, enhancing user experience, and promoting active learning. It can assist recording efforts by overlaying virtual information on real-world scenes. For instance, during fieldwork activities, AR technology can provide real-time access to information about ethnic musical instruments or settings. Combined with big data systems, it can also display stories of famous figures, historical legends, and other resources, supporting the recording and follow-up research of oral folklore. Moreover, VR/AR technologies can also play a positive role in the inheritance and promotion of oral folklore in university ethnomusicology. Students, by wearing wearable devices, can immerse themselves in the world of ethnic culture. While learning ethnic music techniques, they can simultaneously experience the charm of eth-

nic culture and oral folklore. This not only increases learning interest but also integrates ideological and political education into the curriculum.

5.3 Exploring the Application of Crowdsourcing and Collaborative Recording Models

In the digital age, crowdsourcing and collaboration have become important means of cultural exchange and dissemination. Universities should actively explore the application of crowdsourcing and collaborative models, making full use of their online platform advantages to initiate ethnic music and oral folklore recording projects, and fully mobilize societal forces to participate in the recording process. Firstly, universities can use online platforms to recruit volunteers with basic qualifications from across society—such as ethnic music enthusiasts or cultural workers from ethnic regions. After appropriate training, these volunteers can assist in or independently undertake certain oral folklore documentation tasks. Through crowdsourcing, more social resources can be engaged to better advance the recording of oral folklore. Secondly, universities should strengthen pragmatic cooperation with relevant cultural and research institutions, as well as other universities. This includes regularly organizing oral folklore documentation seminars and technical exchange meetings to learn from each other, share financial, technological, and research achievements, broaden the scope of oral folklore recording, and improve both the quality of documentation and the influence and reach of ethnic culture.

5.4 Enhancing the Integrated Use of Recorded Information through Big Data and AI

With the rise of the digital age, big data and artificial intelligence technologies—represented by tools such as ChatGPT, DeepSeek, and OpenAI—have rapidly developed and deeply integrated into various industries, greatly improving the efficiency of production and daily life. These new technologies can likewise be applied to the recording and deep processing of ethnic music and oral folklore. Firstly, audio recognition technology can quickly extract information such as lyrics and rhythmic patterns from video and audio recordings, automatically classify and store it, and facilitate subsequent research. Image recognition technology can analyze performers' costumes, props, and body language to document specific characteristics. Secondly, it is recommended that relevant departments take the lead in establishing, in cooperation with universities and institutions, a large database and smart sharing platform for ethnic music and oral folklore. This platform should collect regional, ethnic, and lifestyle-related musical works and integrate cultural background and folklore resources, building digital models and allowing access across computers, smartphones, and other devices. Finally, by using big data and artificial intelligence algorithms, patterns and characteristics of oral folklore can be summarized and analyzed, generating research reports and exploring the application of oral folklore in ethnic music performances and cultural arts events. This will also enrich the available resources for related academic research.

5.5 Strengthening Cultural Copyright Management and Ethical Governance

In the digital age, it is essential to strengthen the protection of online cultural resources such as ethnic music and oral folklore. Measures should include the enhancement of network firewalls, regular virus scans and cleanups, and the optimization of cybersecurity environments to prevent data breaches. The use of smart contracts and blockchain technology should be actively promoted. During the recording process, agreements with oral folklore bearers and local residents regarding copyright ownership, usage scope, and revenue distribution should be established in advance and embedded into smart contracts. These contracts can be automatically executed during future use of the materials, thereby fully safeguarding the legal rights and interests of all parties and preventing copyright disputes. In addition, an Oral Folklore Ethics Review Committee should be established. Before recording begins, participants must be fully informed about the purpose and intended use of the project to ensure informed consent. During the documentation process, the customs and personal wishes of all ethnic communities must be fully respected, and an atmosphere of equality and harmony should be actively fostered.

6. Conclusion

With the full advent of the digital age, revolutionary innovations have emerged in the methods used by university ethnomusicology to document oral folklore. Supported by various information technologies, recording quality and efficiency can be significantly enhanced, research perspectives expanded, and the dissemination power of traditional Chinese culture improved. However, everything has two sides. The hidden costs of technology, information security risks, copyright ownership issues, and ethical considerations that accompany digital technologies must not be overlooked. Universities should proceed based on their actual conditions, adhering to the principle of “do what is possible within one's means.” They must focus on both technology and talent, find a balance between innovation and inheritance, and better harness the empowering potential of technology to promote the high-quality development of oral folklore documentation.

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