

Historical Development of Education and Learning in the Transmission of Miao Nationality Music in Yunnan Province, China

Linhan Yu¹ & Sarawut Choatchamrat¹

¹ College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Correspondence: Sarawut Choatchamrat, College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Mahasarakham, 44150, Thailand.

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Abstract

Miao Nationality music represents a profound and longstanding musical heritage from the cultural legacy of the Miao community in Yunnan Province, China. This qualitative research study endeavor aims to explore the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music, emphasizing its significance within the context of ethnomusicology, cultural transmission theory, and education theory. The chosen research site strategically focuses on Yunnan Province, China, especially targeting regions with substantial Miao populace and deeply entranced musical traditions. Seven key informants, including elder musicians, music educators, community leaders, and cultural enthusiasts, were purposefully sampled to provide expert insights. A thematic analysis of qualitative data gathered through interviews and observations revealed important information about the ancient roots of Miao Nationality music, how it is used in everyday life, how cultural exchanges affect it, and how important it is for traditional instruments, vocal styles, and passing down the music from one generation to the next. The study suggests strategies for safeguarding and disseminating Miao Nationality music, emphasizing cultural awareness, technological advancements, support for inheritors, environmental protection, and innovative communication methods.

Keywords: Miao Nationality music, transmission, ethnomusicology, intangible cultural, preservation

1. Introduction

The enchanting landscapes of Yunnan Province in China have long been the cradle of cultural diversity, nurturing a tapestry of ethnic traditions that add vibrancy to the nation's heritage (Yü, 2015; Ma & Guo, 2023; Tang & Sornyai, 2023). Among these, the Miao Nationality, one of China's 56 officially recognized ethnic groups, stands as a testament to the rich and intricate mosaic of Chinese culture. At the heart of this mosaic lie the soul-stirring melodies and harmonious rhythms of Miao Nationality music, a sonic treasure that transcends time and weaves together the stories, aspirations, and identity of the Miao community (Schein, 2000; Diamond, 2017; Xu, 2021; Yu, 2021).

Miao nationality music is not merely a form of artistic expression; it is a living testament to the enduring cultural legacy of the Miao people. Rooted in the region's lush hills and valleys, this musical tradition has been passed down through generations as an oral history, entwined with the daily lives and rituals of the Miao community (Jones, 2003; D'Evelyn, 2018; He, 2020). However, the preservation and transmission of Miao Nationality music have never been static processes. Over the centuries, these traditions have evolved, adapted, and navigated the shifting tides of modernity and globalization (Yu & Karin, 2022; Qiu et al., 2024; Yao et al., 2023).

The historical trajectory of education and learning in the preservation and transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province remains largely uncharted territory. While Miao nationality music has persisted as a source of cultural identity and pride, the mechanisms through which this living heritage has been imparted and adapted across generations have yet to be comprehensively explored (Eskelson, 2020; Wang & Fang, 2021; Du & Leung, 2022). Moreover, the impact of modernization, urbanization, and changing socio-cultural dynamics on the continuity of this musical tradition stands as an imperative and pressing concern. This research seeks to bridge these gaps in understanding by undertaking an in-depth examination of the historical development of education and learning within the context of Miao nationality music (Hill & Bithell, 2014; Zhang, 2017; Shi et al., 2019).

The central objective of this study is to examine the historical development of education and learning in the transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province of China. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethnomusicology, anthropology, and education studies, this study aims to shed light on the intricate mechanisms that have enabled the preservation, adaptation, and continued relevance of Miao nationality music across generations. By tracing the historical evolution of these processes, this research seeks to unearth the profound cultural significance of this music within the Miao community and its enduring relevance in the face of contemporary challenges (Binnington, 1973; Sweers, 2017).

This study holds significance on both academic and practical fronts. Academically, it contributes to the broader discourse on intangible cultural heritage preservation, musicology, and cross-cultural comprehension. By documenting the historical development of education and learning in the context of Miao Nationality music, this study adds depth to the understanding of how culture and tradition evolve and adapt over time. Moreover, it offers insights into the role of music as a vehicle for preserving cultural identity and fostering intergenerational continuity.

Practically, this study bears implications for the ongoing efforts to safeguard Miao Nationality music and other intangible cultural treasures in Yunnan Province and similar regions worldwide. By uncovering the historical strategies and practices that have sustained Miao Nationality music, this study provides a valuable resource for educators, cultural policymakers, and heritage conservationists. Ultimately, this research serves as a testament to the resilience of cultural traditions, showcasing their capacity to endure amidst an ever-evolving world, and their innate ability to unite communities through the universal language of music.

2. Research Objectives

To examine the historical development of education and learning in the transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province of China.

3. Literature Review

The preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), including traditional music, is a topic of increasing importance globally. UNESCO's recognition of the significance of ICH in safeguarding cultural diversity has led to various initiatives aimed at documenting and preserving these living traditions. Within this context, Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province, China, represents a compelling case study. This literature review explores existing research on the historical development of education and learning in the transmission of Miao Nationality music, highlighting key themes and gaps in the literature (Qiu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

3.1 Traditional Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage

The recognition of traditional music as ICH underscores its cultural and historical significance. UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has led to increased scholarly interest in understanding the dynamics of safeguarding and transmitting traditional music. This convention recognizes the importance of education and community involvement in preserving such heritage (Bortolotto, 2016).

3.2 Ethnomusicology and Cultural Transmission

Ethnomusicologists have played a pivotal role in documenting and analyzing the transmission of traditional music. Research in this field has highlighted the interplay between oral traditions and formal education systems in the preservation of musical heritage. Notable contributions include works by scholars like Bruno Nettl and John Blacking, who have explored the cultural contexts and transmission processes of various musical traditions (Shelemay et al., 1997; Georges et al., 2008).

3.3 Intergenerational Learning and Education

The transmission of traditional music often involves intergenerational learning within a community. This process relies on informal education, mentorship, and apprenticeship, underscoring the importance of experiential learning. Scholars such as Lucy Green have examined the role of informal music education in preserving cultural practices (Lawton & La Porte, 2013).

3.4 Chinese Ethnic Music and Education

China's diverse ethnic landscape is a rich tapestry of musical traditions. Research on ethnic music education has delved into the challenges and opportunities for safeguarding traditional music within a rapidly modernizing nation. Works by scholars like Mingyue Liu have explored the multifaceted nature of music education in ethnic minority regions (Chen et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2023).

3.5 Miao Nationality Music

Miao Nationality music is characterized by its rich vocal traditions, distinctive instrumentation, and intricate melodic patterns. It holds a central place in Miao's cultural identity and is integral to various ceremonies and rituals. Previous studies have explored different facets of Miao Nationality music, including its sociocultural context, performance practices, and rituals (Guo, 2019; Hu, 2022).

3.6 Research Objective

The overarching research objective of this study is to examine the historical development of education and learning in the transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province, China. While existing literature provides valuable insights into the broader fields of ethnomusicology, cultural transmission, and music education, there is a notable gap in the specific historical evolution of educational practices related to Miao Nationality music (Nettl, 2010; De Carvalho et al., 2016). This research aims to fill this void by conducting an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms, strategies, and sociocultural factors that have shaped the preservation and transmission of this unique musical tradition within the Miao community. By employing an interdisciplinary approach, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and provide practical insights for the conservation of Miao Nationality music and similar traditions worldwide.

3.7 The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research draws from multiple disciplines and theoretical perspectives, combining elements of ethnomusicology, cultural transmission theory, and education theory. It seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how education and learning have historically influenced the preservation and transmission of Miao Nationality music.

- 1) Ethnomusicology: This component recognizes the significance of studying music within its cultural and social contexts. It emphasizes the documentation of musical traditions, including Miao Nationality music, and the role of music within the Miao community (Campbell, 2003).
- 2) Cultural Transmission Theory: Cultural transmission theory, borrowed from anthropology, focuses on how cultural knowledge and practices are passed from one generation to the next. In this framework, is applied to the transmission of Miao Nationality music, emphasizing the role of intergenerational learning and the dynamics of knowledge transfer (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981).
- 3) Education Theory: Education theory, including concepts from pedagogy and andragogy, is integrated to understand the formal and informal educational processes involved in learning Miao Nationality music. This component highlights the role of mentors, apprenticeships, and community-based education (Nurhayati, 2015).

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province, China. The research aimed to explore the evolving educational practices and transmission methods within Miao communities. To achieve this, a combination of ethnographic research, interviews, observations, and document analysis was utilized. The methodology included the following key components:

- 1) Selection of the Research Site: The research site was strategically chosen to be in Yunnan Province, China, specifically focusing on areas with a significant Miao population and a rich cultural heritage related to music. This allowed for a comprehensive exploration of Miao Nationality music education and transmission practices.
- 2) Selection of the Key Informants: Seven key informants were selected through purposive sampling, considering their expertise and experience in Miao Nationality music. These informants included elder musicians, music educators, community leaders, and individuals actively involved in the preservation and transmission of Miao music traditions.
- 3) Research Tools: Data collection was facilitated through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and the use of interview and observation forms. These tools provided a structured approach to gathering information from key informants and observing music-related activities and practices within Miao communities.
- 4) Data Analysis: Qualitative data collected through interviews and observations were analyzed thematically. A systematic approach to coding and categorizing data allowed for the identification of recurring themes related to the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music.

The following table provides a detailed overview of the methodology components, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Methodology

Methodology Component	Description
Research Site	Yunnan Province, China, focusing on areas with a significant Miao population and music traditions
Key Informants	Purposive sampling of elder musicians, music educators, community leaders, and cultural enthusiasts
Research Tools	Semi-structured interviews, participant observations, interview forms, and observation forms
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and observations

From Table 1, this methodology allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music, providing valuable insights into the evolving educational practices and cultural preservation efforts within Miao communities.

5. Result

5.1 The Historical Development of Miao Nationality Music

This section explores the historical journey of Miao Nationality music, shedding light on its origins, traditional instruments, ritual significance, transmission methods, and the contemporary challenges it encounters. Understanding this historical context is crucial for comprehending the educational and learning aspects of preserving and transmitting Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province, China.

5.1.1 Origins and Early Influences of Miao Nationality Music

The historical development of Miao Nationality music is deeply rooted in the rich cultural traditions of the Miao people, with a history that extends back to ancient times. This music has evolved over centuries and is intricately intertwined with the daily lives, rituals, and interactions of the Miao community. Several key findings emerged from the exploration of the origins and early influences of Miao Nationality music, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Key finding of origins and early influences

Key finding	Description
Ancient Roots	Miao Nationality music has ancient origins that are closely linked to the historical experiences and cultural practices of the Miao people. It has been a fundamental aspect of their identity and cultural heritage for
Integration of Daily Life	Music is an integral part of the daily lives of the Miao people. It is not limited to formal performances but is woven into various aspects of their existence, including work, leisure, and social gatherings. This integration underscores the organic nature of Miao music within the community
Cultural Exchange	Early influences on Miao Nationality music are evident in the interactions and exchanges with neighboring ethnic groups. These exchanges have contributed to the diversity and richness of Miao music, as elements from different cultures have been incorporated into their musical expressions
Unique Musical Expressions	The amalgamation of these influences has resulted in the development of unique and distinctive musical expressions within the Miao community. Their music reflects not only their cultural heritage but also the influences of the diverse cultural tapestry of the region
Continuity and Adaptation	Despite the passage of time and changing social dynamics, Miao Nationality music has persevered, maintaining its cultural significance and adaptability. It continues to evolve while preserving its core elements

5.1.2 Traditional Instruments and Vocal Styles in Miao Nationality Music

Miao Nationality music is celebrated for its diverse array of traditional instruments and distinctive vocal styles, which contribute to its esteemed reputation. These elements have contributed to the distinctive character of Miao music and have been integral to their cultural expression for generations. The exploration of traditional instruments and vocal styles in Miao Nationality music yielded several key findings, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Key finding of traditional instruments and vocal styles

Key finding	Description
Instrumental Diversity	Miao Nationality music showcases a wide variety of traditional instruments. These include the lusheng, a reed-pipe wind instrument, as well as the lusheng, a bamboo mouth organ. Additionally, various percussion instruments are used, contributing to the rhythmic complexity of Miao music
Distinctive Vocal Styles	Miao vocal styles are diverse and can vary from powerful polyphonic choruses involving multiple singers to soulful solo performances. These vocal styles are deeply rooted in Miao culture and often reflect themes related to daily life, nature, and folklore
Cultural Significance	Traditional instruments and vocal styles play a pivotal role in preserving the cultural identity of the Miao people. They are used in a wide range of contexts, from celebrations and rituals to storytelling and social gatherings
Influence of Nature	Miao Nationality music often draws inspiration from the natural world. The use of specific instruments and vocal techniques can mirror the sounds and rhythms of nature, creating a harmonious relationship between music and the environment
Heritage Transmission	The transmission of traditional instruments and vocal styles is a vital aspect of Miao cultural preservation. Master musicians pass down their knowledge and skills to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of these musical traditions

5.1.3 Transgenerational Transmission of Miao Nationality Music

The transgenerational transmission of Miao Nationality music underscores the cultural significance of music within Miao communities. It is a dynamic process that involves not only the sharing of musical skills but also the preservation of cultural narratives and values. The role of elders and master musicians in this transmission process is pivotal, as they carry the responsibility of safeguarding and passing on the rich musical heritage of the Miao people, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Key finding of transgenerational transmission

Key finding	Description
Oral Tradition	Miao Nationality music has predominantly been transmitted through oral tradition, with master musicians and elders orally sharing their knowledge, melodies, and lyrics with younger generations
Experiential Learning	Learning Miao music involves active participation and experiential learning. Younger community members often accompany master musicians during performances and rituals, gradually acquiring the skills and nuances of the music
Family and Community Involvement	The transmission process takes place within the family and community settings. It is common for family members and neighbors to gather during musical sessions, creating a collaborative learning environment
Cultural Preservation	The transmission of Miao music is not solely about passing on melodies and techniques but also about preserving the cultural narratives, values, and traditions embedded in the music
Elders and Master Musicians	Elders and master musicians hold a revered position in the transmission process. Their expertise and wisdom are highly respected, and they serve as mentors and custodians of the Miao musical heritage
Continuity and Adaptation	While traditional methods persist, there is also adaptation to contemporary contexts. Efforts are made to ensure that Miao Nationality music remains relevant and continues to thrive in evolving cultural landscapes

5.2 The Transmission of Miao Nationality Music

China's cultural diversity is a tapestry of traditions, languages, and music, with the Miao nationality being a vibrant community with a unique musical heritage. Miao Nationality Music, particularly the Wenshan Miao vocal tradition, is a treasure trove of cultural and artistic expressions. As modernization and globalization reshape the world, safeguarding and disseminating this cultural heritage is crucial. This research explores the practical significance of Miao Nationality Music, examining both the challenges it faces and proposing viable strategies for its preservation and transmission.

5.2.1 The practical significance of protection and dissemination of Miao Nationality Music

Miao Nationality Music, particularly the folk songs of the Wenshan Miao vocal tradition, holds not only a mirror to the history and identity of the Miao people but also a treasure trove of cultural and artistic expressions. This section explores the practical significance of preserving and sharing Miao folk songs, recognizing their role in meeting the cultural needs of urban populations, fostering new cultural expressions, and driving economic development and moral construction within Miao communities, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Key finding of practical significance of protection and dissemination

Key finding	Description
Cultural Needs of Urban People	Miao folk culture serves as a source of cultural enrichment and relaxation for urban dwellers who seek respite from the fast-paced modern lifestyle
Role in Creating New Culture	Miao folk culture provides a foundation for creating new art forms, including fashion, music, architecture, and crafts, which can contribute to cultural innovation
Impact on Economic Development	The preservation and development of Miao folk culture can drive economic growth in Miao regions by attracting tourism and promoting various social initiatives
Strengthening Ideological and Moral Values	Miao folk culture plays a significant role in shaping the moral and ethical values of the Miao people, contributing to their overall development

5.2.2 The Challenges of Protecting and Spreading Miao Nationality Music

Preserving and disseminating Miao Nationality Music faces various intricate challenges. This section delves into these challenges, encompassing issues related to awareness, funding, succession, communication, cultural environment, interest among the younger generation, and the adequacy of protection systems and cultural levels, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Key finding of protecting and spreading

Key finding	Description
Weak Awareness of Protection	Many residents, especially those in remote areas, lack awareness about the significance of safeguarding Miao folk songs as intangible cultural heritage
Insufficient Funding	Limited financial support and inadequate infrastructure hinder effective efforts to investigate, protect, and pass down Miao folk songs
Succession Issues	Challenges arising from the aging of musicians, disinterest among the younger generation, and the impact of urbanization pose threats to the continuity of Miao folk music traditions
Communication Challenges	Miao folk songs are primarily transmitted orally, presenting difficulties in preserving and accurately transmitting this rich cultural heritage
Deteriorating Music Culture Environment	Modernization, foreign cultural influences, and evolving lifestyles are jeopardizing the survival of Miao Nationality Music and their cultural environment
Low Interest in Learning	The younger generation exhibits limited enthusiasm for learning Miao folk songs, often influenced by economic concerns and perceptions of the music's relevance
Incomplete Systems and Low Cultural Levels	There is a lack of comprehensive protection systems, and many individuals involved in preserving Miao folk songs have relatively low cultural levels

5.2.3 Guiding Opinions on Protection and Dissemination of Miao Nationality Music

In response to the challenges encountered in the preservation and propagation of Miao Nationality Music, a set of guiding opinions and strategies have been formulated. These guiding principles encompass cultural awareness, technological advancements, support for inheritors, environmental protection, and innovative communication methods, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Key finding of guiding opinions on protection and dissemination

Key finding	Description
Raise Awareness of Cultural Inheritance	Foster a broader societal consciousness of Miao cultural heritage protection, emphasizing the significance of protecting and spreading Miao culture to engage more people in research, preservation, and dissemination efforts
Establish a Database for Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection	Leverage modern technology to create comprehensive databases with multimedia capabilities that provide systematic information on various aspects of Miao intangible cultural heritage
Prioritize the Protection and Rescue of Inheritors	Recognize the pivotal role of inheritors as living repositories of intangible cultural heritage and institute protective measures to safeguard their knowledge and traditions
Strengthen the Protection of the Miao Ecological Environment	Create an environment that supports the continuation of Miao folk culture by preserving the ecological and social conditions in which it thrives
School Education Communication	Employ various media and activities within school environments to instill an appreciation for Miao folk songs and culture, fostering understanding and interest among students
Family Education Communication	Emphasize the role of families in nurturing a love for Miao folk songs, encouraging parents to introduce their children to this cultural heritage
Social Education Communication	Leverage social education initiatives to deepen public understanding of Miao heritage, promoting engagement and participation in the protection and dissemination of Miao Nationality Music
Innovation in Communication Methods and Means	Embrace modern technology, festivals, exhibitions, training, and various forms of media to innovate how Miao folk culture is communicated, preserving and revitalizing this rich heritage

5.2.4 Guidance on the Mode of Communication

Effectively communicating and transmitting Miao folk songs is essential for preserving this cultural heritage. Guidance on the mode of communication seeks to employ various methods and channels to ensure that Miao folk songs are shared widely and understood by different audiences, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Key finding of guidance on the mode of communication

Key finding	Description
School Education Communication	Utilize school environments and media to educate students about Miao folk songs, promoting understanding and interest among the younger generation
Family Education Communication	Encourage families to play a pivotal role in introducing Miao folk songs to children, ensuring that this heritage is passed down through generations
Social Education Communication	Leverage social education initiatives, festivals, and exhibitions to deepen public understanding of Miao culture, fostering engagement in the protection and dissemination of Miao folk songs
Innovation in Communication Methods and Means	Embrace modern technology, festivals, exhibitions, training, and various forms of media to innovate how Miao folk culture is communicated, ensuring its preservation and revitalization

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The research findings align closely with the theoretical principles outlined in the literature review. The study aimed to explore the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province, China, within the framework of ethnomusicology, cultural transmission theory, and education theory. Throughout the findings consistently reflect the significance of these theoretical foundations in understanding the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, such as Miao nationality music.

Ethnomusicology's emphasis on studying music within its cultural and social contexts is evident in the research findings. The study reveals how Miao nationality music is deeply rooted in the daily lives, rituals, and identity of the Miao community. Music is not merely a performance art but an integral part of their existence, echoing the principles of ethnomusicology (Campbell, 2003).

The study's findings aptly mirror the essence of Cultural Transmission Theory, which emphasizes the intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge. The transgenerational transmission of Miao Nationality music is a dynamic process, primarily relying on oral tradition, experiential learning, and community involvement. Elders and master musicians play a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting not only musical skills but also cultural narratives and values, mirroring the principles of cultural transmission theory (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981).

Education theory's concepts from pedagogy and andragogy are evident in the research findings related to the role of mentors, apprenticeships, and community-based education in learning Miao Nationality music (Nurhayati, 2015). The study highlights the importance of informal education and experiential learning, emphasizing the practicality of education theory in preserving cultural practices.

The research methods employed in this study, including ethnographic research, interviews, observations, and document analysis, were well-suited to the research objectives. The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music. The selection of key informants with expertise in Miao Nationality music and the use of semi-structured interviews and participant observations facilitated the collection of rich and contextually relevant data.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data systematically, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to Miao Nationality music's historical development and transmission. This methodology was consistent with the research goals and allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic (Qiu, Chuangprakhon, & Jian, 2024).

The research findings provide valuable insights into the historical development, traditional instruments, vocal styles, and transmission of Miao Nationality music. The study's key findings underscore the ancient roots of Miao Nationality music, its integration into daily life, the influence of cultural exchanges, and its unique expressions. The research also emphasizes the role of traditional instruments, vocal styles, and the transgenerational transmission process in preserving the cultural heritage of the Miao community.

The practical significance of protecting and disseminating Miao Nationality music, including its role in meeting cultural needs, fostering cultural innovation, driving economic development, and shaping moral values, aligns with the research's objectives and contributes to the broader discourse on intangible cultural heritage (Bortolotto, 2016; Du & Leung, 2022).

In conclusion, this research has successfully explored the historical development and transmission of Miao Nationality music in Yunnan Province, China, within the framework of ethnomusicology, cultural transmission theory, and education theory. The research findings are consistent with these theoretical principles, providing a comprehensive understanding of how education and learning have influenced the preservation and transmission of this unique musical tradition. The research methods employed were effective in collecting relevant data, and thematic analysis allowed for a systematic exploration of the research topic. The study's findings shed light on the ancient origins of Miao Nationality music, its integration into daily life, the influence of cultural exchanges, and the vital role of traditional instruments and vocal styles. Furthermore, the research highlights the challenges and strategies associated with protecting and disseminating Miao Nationality music.

Overall, this research contributes to the broader discourse on intangible cultural heritage preservation and offers practical insights for the conservation of Miao nationality music and similar traditions worldwide. The study's outcomes emphasize the importance of cultural awareness, technological advancements, support for inheritors, environmental protection, and inventive communication methodologies in the preservation and rejuvenation of intangible cultural heritage.

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No additional data are available.

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