

From Labor to Heritage: Reinterpreting the Performance Field of the Chuanjiang Haozi in Contemporary Contexts

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of Chuanjiang Haozi from a traditional labor song to an intangible cultural heritage, tracing its evolution across various performance fields. Initially, it functioned primarily in labor, enhancing teamwork and providing spiritual solace during strenuous tasks. With its recognition as a cultural heritage in 2006, it has adapted to modern settings, diversifying its performance contexts. The stage field fosters innovation by reinterpreting the song for contemporary audiences, incorporating modern artistic elements while retaining its cultural essence. The educational field plays a crucial role in passing down the art form, emphasizing technical skills and cultural understanding, thereby ensuring its intergenerational transmission. The study reveals how Chuanjiang Haozi thrives in its original stage and educational fields through qualitative research methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews. These fields support its preservation and evolution, enabling the song to maintain its relevance in modern society while preserving its cultural identity. Its adaptability across multiple contexts demonstrates the dynamic nature of cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Chuanjiang Haozi; Recontextualization of tradition; Performance field; Intangible cultural heritage; Cultural sustainability.

1. Introduction

In contexts marked by rapid economic development and globalization, intangible cultural heritage is a vital repository of collective identity and social memory. In China, where modern influences often overshadow traditional practices, the designation of cultural expressions as intangible cultural heritage offers a framework for their preservation and revitalization (Ma & Guo, 2024). One such form, the Chuanjiang Haozi (川江号子, Sichuan river work song), represents a rich yet underinvestigated aspect of Chinese musical identity. Its terminologies comprise two distinct components. Haozi refers to a category of Chinese labor songs traditionally sung by laborers to alleviate fatigue and foster a sense of unity in their work rhythm. In contrast, Chuanjiang designates a specific geographical area, specifically a section of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in Sichuan Province, China. Thus, the Chuanjiang Haozi is a labor song by workers in the Sichuan region's waterway transportation. This connection between its music, social function, and geographic origin underscores its cultural significance in labor and social groups.

Historically, the Chuanjiang Haozi was performed by laborers engaged in water transportation activities such as loading, navigating, and unloading cargo. Its primary function was to facilitate labor processes and mitigate the monotony associated with these tasks (Mclaren, 2017). Its musical structure is marked by a choric and vigorous rhythmic pattern, serving not only as a practical tool for coordination among workers but also as a profound expression of cultural identity. This form of music embodies the collective spirit and resilience of water transport workers, highlighting their shared experiences and groups bonds.

However, modernization and industrialization have dramatically altered labor practices in China, particularly affecting traditional water transport methods. As mechanization increasingly replaces manual labor, the once-prevalent roles of human workers along the waterways have steadily declined (Yang & Chonpairot, 2023). This shift toward mechanized transportation diminished the need for these labor songs. Consequently, the relevance and cultural significance of the Chuanjiang Haozi has undergone a profound transformation. What was once a vital tool for fostering community and easing labor burdens has become less prominent in contemporary society, resulting in a disconnection between the song and its historical context of use. As younger generations become distanced from these labor practices, the cultural heritage embodied in the Chuanjiang Haozi risks fading into obscurity, raising important questions about heritage preservation and the future of traditional music forms in an industrialized world. This decline highlights the need for scholarly attention to the implications of such cultural shifts and strategies to revitalize and sustain these important cultural expressions.

In 2006, the Chuanjiang Haozi was officially recognized as part of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage, marking a significant transition from a traditional labor song to a recognized cultural heritage of humanity. This designation aims to preserve

the song's historical importance; however, existing research results demonstrated an insufficient focus on its recontextualized changes. While recognition is essential in promoting cultural heritage, it raises important questions about how the Chuanjiang Haozi is performed and accessed in contemporary settings. Despite its heritage status, limited scholarly attention has been given to understanding how this tradition adapts to various modern contexts or the implications of these adaptations for cultural identity.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the different performance fields of the Chuanjiang Haozi in contemporary society?
- 2) What are its performance characteristics in these different fields?
- 3) What is the purpose and significance of the derivative field?

These questions examine the shifts in performance practices and the broader social dynamics that influence its evolution.

Corresponding to these research questions, the primary objectives of this study are:

- 1) To identify the various contemporary performance fields of the Chuanjiang Haozi;
- 2) To analyze its characteristics and adaptations across these diverse fields;
- 3) To investigate the deeper reasons and purposes of the performance field's evolution.

Investigating the performance fields of the Chuanjiang Haozi reveals crucial insights into the dynamics of cultural heritage in today's society. This tradition has significantly adapted across various contexts, reflecting broader social changes. These transformations provided clues about the processes of culture that have undergone significant adaptation, providing a richer understanding of how traditions can be preserved and revitalized despite rapid modernization.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the performance field of the Chuanjiang Haozi, a traditional labor song that has undergone significant transformation in contemporary contexts. The researcher immersed herself in the social context of this cultural expression and comprehensively recognized its performance field.

Two data collection methods were adopted; one utilized participant observation as a primary data collection method, providing an opportunity to witness the various performance fields firsthand and shedding light on how they continue to resonate within communities today. In the words of Musante and DeWalt (2010), participant observation enables the researcher to gather rich data grounded in the lived experiences of individuals within their cultural context. This immersive approach facilitated the capture of subtle interactions, social dynamics, and the emotional

connections that performers and audiences have with this culture. In parallel, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the distinctive experiences and insights of individuals actively involved in the performance and preservation of the Chuanjiang Haozi. These interviews deepen the understanding of its cultural significance and highlight the diverse perspectives that inform its modern interpretations.

During the study, the sites of participant observation were diverse, encompassing its original labor settings, stage performances, and presentations in educational institutions (school and community workshops). Each offered unique insights into the contemporary performance of the Chuanjiang Haozi. The researcher navigated these varied environments and adopted dual identities: that of an insider familiar with the cultural context and an outsider striving to remain objective and analytical (Milligan, 2016). Being an insider in original labor settings allowed the researcher to establish rapport and gain trust among participants, facilitating open conversations about the song's significance in their daily lives. Observing the organic interactions and the informal performances enriched the understanding of how the Chuanjiang Haozi serves as a vessel of cultural exchange, communal bonding, and identity affirmation. Conversely, in more formal environments, such as stage performances and school presentations, the researcher assumed the role of an outsider. This perspective enabled a critical analysis of how the song is traditionally framed versus its adaptations within contemporary contexts. Watching performances in educational settings provided insightful contrasts between amateur interpretations and professional renditions, allowing the researcher to explore how the preservation of the Chuanjiang Haozi adapts to modern cultural narratives while honoring its historical roots. Through this dual lens, the researcher could synthesize subjective experiences with objective insights, enriching the study's findings.

In addition to participant observation, the researcher conducted a series of semi-structured interviews, which provided valuable information that could not be gleaned from mere observation. These interviews were designed to delve deeply into the personal narratives and insights of those engaged with the Chuanjiang Haozi, highlighting aspects of its cultural transformation and enduring significance. To ensure flexibility and accommodate various needs, this research employed both face-to-face and online interview formats, allowing for a rich diversity of voices, including those participants who were geographically remote or faced logistical challenges.

The study's sample selection was guided by purposive sampling, ensuring that only individuals directly connected to the Chuanjiang Haozi were included. To achieve this, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established, as shown in the **Table 1**.

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study.

Interviewee group	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Cultural bearer	Individuals with a documented history (minimum 5 years) in performing or transmitting the Chuanjiang Haozi. Recognized by community peers as custodians of tradition.	Those with only occasional or superficial involvement in the Chuanjiang Haozi. New enthusiasts without established experience.
Educator	Professors, workshop leaders, or trainers actively engaged in teaching the cultural heritage of the Chuanjiang Haozi. Participants with formal or informal educational roles focusing on traditional arts.	Individuals are not directly involved in educational activities concerning Chuanjiang Haozi.
Official practitioner	Individuals employed or designated by cultural agencies, government bodies, or arts organizations to manage or promote Chuanjiang Haozi initiatives. Those with official roles in policy or administrative support related to the heritage.	Community volunteers or activists without formal recognition by an organization or lacking an official mandate.
Audience	Regular attendees at Chuanjiang Haozi performances, public cultural events, or educational programs. Individuals who actively engage with or express interest in the heritage through participation or feedback.	Casual observers without consistent engagement in events or those who do not interact with the heritage beyond a one-time visit.

The aim was to capture diverse perspectives, and participants were categorized into four distinct groups: cultural bearers, educators, official practitioners, and audiences. Cultural bearers—those who have inherited or maintained traditional performance practices—were chosen because their expertise in oral traditions provides invaluable insight into the song’s evolution. Educators were selected for their role in integrating the Chuanjiang Haozi into curricula and community programs, offering perspectives on how the song is being taught and adapted for new generations. Official practitioners, including cultural administrators and event organizers, were included as they oversee the art form’s institutional support and public promotion. Audiences who regularly attend performances also offer a valuable

perspective on how the song resonates with contemporary communities. Individuals who did not have direct exposure to or meaningful involvement with the Chuanjiang Haozi were excluded.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the opportunity to withdraw at any time without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and securely storing all research data. Ethical guidelines outlined by established organizations such as the American Psychological Association (2019) were adhered to, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all respondents were preserved throughout the study.

In the analysis process, Bourdieu's (2002) Field Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the performance field of the Chuanjiang Haozi, highlighting the intricate relationships among various stakeholders, power dynamics, and cultural practices. His theory examines the dynamics of social life through the concept of fields, which are distinct arenas of social practice characterized by their norms, rules, and hierarchies. In this theory, a field is viewed as a space where individuals and groups compete for various forms of capital, such as cultural, social, economic, and symbolic, that influence their power and status within that field. The concept of the field enables the researcher to navigate the complex context in which the Chuanjiang Haozi performed, identifying the distinct rules, norms, and hierarchies that govern interactions among performers, educators, and audience members. Central to this analysis is the role of cultural and social capital, as individuals leverage their unique assets to assert their positions within the field, thus illustrating how tradition is both upheld and contested in contemporary cultural expressions. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory elucidates the power relations among various actors, revealing how institutional support and community initiatives can influence cultural forms' preservation, transformation, and overall authority, such as the Chuanjiang Haozi. This theoretical lens captures the interplay between tradition and modernity, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how the Chuanjiang Haozi navigates the evolving cultural heritage landscape in today's society.

3. Finding and Discussion

The investigation revealed that the Chuanjiang Haozi had significantly diversified its performance fields due to the active promotion of China's intangible heritage policy. This policy has transformed how this traditional labor song is perceived and performed, facilitating its adaptation to contemporary cultural contexts. Through analysis, this study identified three distinct performance fields for the Chuanjiang Haozi, each defined by its unique functions and purposes. One is the original performance field, which centers around traditional contexts where the Chuanjiang Haozi is performed in natural settings. The second category, the stage

performance field, involves scripted and choreographed adaptations meant for theatrical presentations or cultural showcases, where the song's essence is preserved while catering to modern audiences. Finally, the educational performance field encapsulates initiatives to teach and transmit this tradition, promote its cultural significance, and engage younger generations through workshops and school programs. These findings underscore the song's adaptability and illustrate the broader impact of heritage policies in fostering a vibrant cultural landscape that respects tradition while embracing innovation.

3.1 Original Field

In the original (or natural) field, the Chuanjiang Haozi serves a unique and significant function as a form of labor song. This historically rooted singing practice acted as a vital tool for coordinating teamwork and enhancing labor efficiency among water transportation workers in the Sichuan region, and it also provided spiritual solace amidst harsh working conditions. Before the widespread adoption of mechanization in China (circa 1970), transportation in Sichuan heavily relied on natural environmental resources, particularly its abundant rivers and the associated skills of boat navigation, with wooden vessels serving as the primary means of water transportation. The winding and intricate waterways of the rivers in the Sichuan region facilitated convenient transportation for local inhabitants and enriched their labor and daily lives. This distinctive natural environment and set of working conditions fostered the emergence and persistence of Chuanjiang Haozi, embedding it organically into the everyday experiences of local workers (Ding, 2024).

During the labor process, the Chuanjiang Haozi functions as a form of musical expression and a profound connection between the workers' minds and bodies. This traditional labor song is characterized by its distinct linguistic and musical style, often rooted in simple and direct Sichuan dialect lyrics, which vividly depict the workers' daily experiences and inner emotions. At a time when most labor activities were heavily dependent on physical strength and teamwork, the rhythmic beats and dynamic melodies of the Haozi became an essential spiritual pillar for the boatmen enduring harsh working conditions. Through collective singing, workers could focus their attention, regulate their emotions, and strengthen the cohesion of their group, providing motivation to overcome the monotony and hardships of their labor. As the boatmen rowed their oars or loaded and unloaded cargo, the rhythm of the Haozi synchronized seamlessly with their physical movements, enhancing the efficiency and vitality of the labor process.

Li Wenguang, a Chuanjiang Haozi cultural bearer, shared in the interview: "I was only 17 years old when I worked as a boatman in 1947, and at that time, there always had to be a Haozi singer on board. Singing the song was an indispensable part of the boat-pulling process." Reflecting on this, he noted that the role of the Haozi singer required not only a vast knowledge and memorization of lyrics but also exceptional

vocal abilities. The clarity and power of one's voice directly impacted the other workers' enthusiasm. "The song had to be loud to motivate everyone and energize the work" (personal communication, August 18, 2024). For this reason, Haozi singers were typically young and middle-aged, as they possessed both the physical stamina and the necessary experience for the role. Older boatmen, lacking physical strength, often could not carry out the intense labor required for this task.

Despite a strong desire to engage with and experience the authentic performance context of the Chuanjiang Haozi, the researcher faces significant challenges and transformations brought about by industrialization. The scenes of manual labor and wooden boat transportation, which once characterized the region, have nearly disappeared due to modernity's erosion of traditional labor methods. As steamships and mechanized transport became widespread, the original performances of the Haozi gradually faded into the annals of history. However, when scholars, researchers, and journalists seek to study or document the song, local cultural bearers are often eager to arrange a replica traditional performance for them. These performances, which recreate this past cultural form, offer a vivid glimpse into the past, as shown in the **Figure 1**.

Figure 1

Li Wenguang and his team reenact the Chuanjiang Haozi in its original performance field.



Note. The figure shows the song they sang while pulling the boat. Li, who is wearing red cloth, was the singer and was responsible for leading the workers in singing while pulling the boat.

Source: photographed by the author on March 6, 2025, Luodu, Yuechi County, Sichuan Province.

Noteworthy, the performance of the Chuanjiang Haozi does not persist throughout the boat journey; its role is primarily concentrated at key moments that require collective labor. As illustrated in the interviewee's description, singing typically occurs during labor-intensive tasks such as loading and unloading cargo and pulling or pushing the boat. Additionally, singing the Haozi becomes essential when navigating rapids, hidden rocks, or other potential hazards that could compromise the vessel's safety (personal communication, August 19, 2024). During these critical moments, the boatmen must synchronize their efforts and coordinate their movements to ensure the boat can safely pass through the dangerous areas. In this context, the Haozi is a crucial tool for fostering teamwork, motivating workers to unite, and generating collective strength in the face of challenges. Even when the boat reaches calmer, more expansive waters, the song may not cease. In these relatively relaxed stretches of the journey, the Haozi continues to function as an effective means of alleviating labor stress. Its melody boosts morale and encourages workers to maintain a positive mindset and sustained enthusiasm for their tasks.

During the performance of the Chuanjiang Haozi, the singer's voice is intricately linked to the rhythm of the workers' movements, creating a unique interactive dynamic. Each time the singer completes a line of lyrics, the other workers shout the slogan "Hai oh", an emotional call-and-response and a rhythmic chant that strengthens the team's cohesion and collaborative spirit. This synchronized exertion fosters a strong sense of group identity among the boatmen, enhancing work efficiency. Furthermore, the repeated singing subtly cultivates the workers' sensitivity to time and their coordination during labor. The constant repetition of the melody and rhythm allows workers to maintain focus and unity, ensuring that their actions align seamlessly with the overall pace, resulting in smooth and efficient labor. This interactive mode of engagement boosts productivity and creates a harmonious working environment, enabling the boatmen to find joy and a sense of fulfillment amidst the challenges of their labor.

In this arduous labor environment, the income of the Haozi singer is typically about 20% higher than that of regular boatmen, reflecting the unique role and responsibilities they undertake on the boat. However, as noted by some interviewees, the position is far from easy despite the perception that the singer's task is primarily directing labor through song. An experienced singer remarked, "Singing may seem simple, but during rapids or when hidden rocks appear, the level of tension we experience is unimaginable" (personal communication, August 18, 2024). In addition to maintaining emotional and tonal stability during the performance, the singer must be constantly aware of their surroundings to ensure the boat's safe navigation. The high-risk nature of the wooden boat transport industry presents numerous challenges, including changes in the natural environment, hidden rocks, fluctuating water levels caused by weather changes, and even the threat of bandits or criminal activities. Thus,

the Haozi is the sound of labor and a genuine expression of the workers' struggle for survival under harsh conditions. The notes of the song carry their voices, embodying their perseverance in daily tasks and their yearning for a safer life. Another boatman stated, "Whenever I sing the Haozi, it is as though I am battling nature itself; behind these songs lies our unity and resistance" (personal communication, August 18, 2024). This highlights how this music form shapes the collective fate and values of the boatmen on a spiritual level, symbolizing unity and embodiment of indomitable strength in the face of adversity. The music provides courage and the belief in continued effort during difficult moments, reflecting the group's resilience and persistent pursuit of life even in the most challenging circumstances.

The original performance field of Chuanjiang Haozi provides the singers with a wealth of creative material, much of which is drawn from the boatmen's experiences on the rivers. The challenges and emotions they encounter while navigating turbulent waters, enduring vast mountain ranges, and coping with climate change inspire the continuous generation of new lyrics. Its theme can be broadly categorized into labor, narrative, and emotional songs, as shown in the **Table 2**.

Table 2

Types of Chuanjiang Haozi.

Type	Description	Example
Labor Songs	It is a labor command designed to coordinate boatmen's collective tasks, ensuring rhythm and synchronization during activities like pulling or pushing the boat. These short, simple songs with slogan-like lyrics help maintain focus and motivation under tough conditions.	<i>Pulling Boat Song</i> (拉纤号子) <i>Paddle Song</i> (槽号子)
Narrative Songs	It conveys local customs, traditions, and folklore, reflecting the boatmen's experiences during the journey. These songs depict landscapes and everyday scenes, documenting the cultural characteristics of Sichuan and contributing to the transmission of local culture.	<i>Jialing River Scenery</i> (嘉陵风光) <i>Boating Anecdote</i> (行船逸闻)
Emotional Songs	It expresses the boatmen's longing for loved ones, conveying their emotional world and care for friends. These songs offer spiritual solace and comfort amidst their hard labor.	<i>My Heart Belongs to the Boatman</i> (心中只有拉船郎) <i>The Love of a Punter</i> (纤夫的爱)

Each performance of the Haozi is often infused with personal and collective experiences, with lyrics that recount the hardships of life, acknowledge the value of

labor, and highlight the importance of camaraderie. These songs, woven with stories and history, make the Haozi a means of transmitting collective memory through music, thus becoming an indispensable part of boatmen's culture. However, following the acceleration of mechanization in China after the 1970s, the construction of hydropower stations on rivers, and the spread of roads and railways in the Sichuan region, the high cost and danger associated with wooden boats hastened their decline. Gradually, mechanized boats replaced the traditional wooden ones. After official shipping companies were established, older boatmen were assigned various roles. The Haozi singers, known for their knowledge of the river, were often selected as captains for the new motorboats, and as a result, the practice of Haozi singing quietly faded from public view (Chabrowski, 2015).

3.2 Stage Field

The process of modernization and the impact of foreign cultures have profoundly affected the continuity of traditional cultures, with Chuanjiang Haozi facing the risk of extinction in the rapidly developing societal context. China has gradually developed relevant policies to preserve its intangible cultural heritage. In 2004, based on the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003*, China enacted the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China*, marking a new stage in the institutionalization and rule of law in traditional cultural protection and reflecting the country's emphasis on safeguarding its cultural heritage. This law outlines the roles and responsibilities of national and local governments in protecting intangible cultural heritage and highlights the critical role of communities and local organizations in its transmission, laying the foundation for cooperation at various levels. The policy offers systematic support for the protection of diverse traditional cultures. In the preservation efforts, national and local governments have employed various methods, including financial investment, policy support, and talent development, to facilitate the shift from static cultural protection to dynamic transmission (Bodolec. 2012).

In 2006, Chuanjiang Haozi was recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage, injecting new vitality into its protection and innovation (Ding, 2024). The national-level intangible cultural heritage status brought broader attention and resource support, allowing it to be showcased and transmitted on a larger platform. China's intangible cultural heritage policies promote the recontextualization of Chuanjiang Haozi and have facilitated its transformation from a traditional labor song into a precious cultural heritage. While enhancing the significance of this culture in contemporary society, these policies have also led to the creation of a new performance space—the stage presentation. In this new cultural context, its performance is no longer confined to the daily labor activities of boatmen but is presented through diverse stage displays, highlighting its profound cultural significance and historical value.

In this new form of stage performance, Chuanjiang Haozi is often integrated with modern stage arts, resulting in performances that combine singing, dancing, and narrative elements—such as stage plays and popular singing. This trend reflects a reexamination and reinterpretation of traditional art in modern culture while also providing Haozi with a broader platform for display.

Research found that through creative choreography, performers combine traditional Haozi singing with modern dance, lighting, and orchestral music, creating a unique audiovisual experience that enhances the audience's sense of participation and aesthetic engagement. Taking inheritor Cao Guangyu as an example, he successfully adapted traditional elements of Chuanjiang Haozi into the stage play *Chuanjiang Haozi: A Real Boatman's Voyage*. The play, 60 minutes in length, is divided into five acts and an epilogue. It vividly reenacts a journey from the Chao Tian Men dock along the Yangtze River, passing through the Three Gorges, encountering dangerous shoals, and depicting the boatmen's struggle against the river's forces as they courageously overcome obstacles to reach their destination. The play's plot is dramatic and exhilarating, celebrating the boatmen's courage in conquering nature and their wisdom in achieving harmony. In this production, Cao meticulously designed the overall staging, integrating the singing of the Haozi into the storyline and performance, thereby constructing a narrative-driven performance form. His approach not only incorporates traditional musical expression but also includes modern dance and orchestral ensemble, enhancing the emotional expression of the Haozi through expressive dance movements and enriching the music's emotional power with a diverse range of instruments. This multi-layered approach allows the audience to deeply experience the profound cultural heritage of Haozi through both visual and auditory senses, as shown in the **Figure 2**.

Figure 2

A stage performance of Chuanjiang Haozi starring Cao Guangyu.



Note. The performance is directed by Xia Xiaotang, performed by the Chuanjiang Haozi Old Boatmen Art Troupe, and played by the Sichuan Philharmonic Orchestra.

According to Cao, his creative philosophy aims to rejuvenate the past Chuanjiang Haozi in the modern era. He emphasizes that combining traditional art with contemporary elements is a respect for history and an exploration and attempt at future cultural development. Cao's successful practice has set a crucial precedent for applying Haozi in modern stage arts, reflecting the strong adaptability of traditional culture in contemporary society and demonstrating its vast potential for survival and growth. Moreover, this innovative approach to stage performance has gradually attracted the attention of many Haozi performers, who are adopting and practicing Cao's ideas to promote the prosperity and development of Haozi in the new era, as shown in the **Figure 3**. This trend further showcases the transformation and vitality of traditional art forms in the modern context.

Figure 3

Stage performance of Chuanjiang Haozi by other cultural bearers.



The stage performance retains the fundamental rhythms and melodies of the Chuanjiang Haozi while incorporating them into a rich artistic narrative. Through the actors' reenactment of historical scenes, the audience is immersed in the deep cultural and historical contexts, experiencing it firsthand. This fusion model has made Haozi more diverse in form, making it more accessible to a broader audience, particularly younger generations. While enjoying the performance, modern audiences experience the allure of traditional culture and connect with it through innovative expressions, sparking broader interest and attention—especially among the younger generation—towards Haozi. This, in turn, promotes the transmission and revival of the culture.

In contemporary popular music creation, some professional musicians have actively drawn upon elements of Chuanjiang Haozi, including its unique narrative themes and singing style, to create new popular music works. This phenomenon validates the re-creation and transformation of traditional culture within a modern context, reflecting contemporary musicians' attention to and respect for local culture. For both musicians and listeners, the story themes of Haozi are rich in regional characteristics, focusing on the lives, emotions, and interpersonal relationships of boatmen during their journeys. These stories are both authentic and vivid, deeply imbued with laborers' wisdom and hard work. This sincere narrative approach effectively resonates with the audience, evoking emotional responses. As modern society rapidly develops, traditional labor life has become a distant part of people's daily experience. However, reintroducing these stories into musical works undoubtedly injects new narrative elements and emotional depth into popular music.

The narrative elements of traditional Chuanjiang Haozi have the power to touch

deep emotional chords, allowing audiences to enjoy the music and reflect on their thoughts and feelings about their hometowns and labor. For example, the popular music work *Chuanjiang Haozi*, created by renowned Chinese singer Tan Weiwei and her music team, is a powerful embodiment of this trend. In the *Singer 2024* program on Mango TV, Tan performed this song as part of her competition repertoire, showcasing the successful fusion of Haozi with modern pop music. She combines traditional musical elements with contemporary arrangement techniques, preserving the charm and rhythm of Haozi while incorporating modern pop music characteristics, making the song both spiritually rich with the essence of the traditional work and aligned with the aesthetic preferences of contemporary listeners. During the performance, Tan delivered a powerful rendition with her emotionally charged voice, perfectly conveying the meaning and emotional depth of Haozi. As the audience enjoyed the performance, they felt the strong musical impact and gained insight into the deep understanding of life, labor, and interpersonal relationships that the song conveys. This modern interpretation of traditional culture enriches the expressive forms of popular music and offers a new direction for the inheritance of traditional Haozi.

3.3 Educational Field

In the original performance context of *Chuanjiang Haozi*, those who mastered the singing techniques were typically boatmen with specific musical talents. Over time, through their daily labor, they gradually developed the unique, expressive form and vocal skills characteristic of *Chuanjiang Haozi*. Their singing style, sense of rhythm, and deep understanding of the lyrics developed through repeated practice and effort. Interestingly, these individuals were not professional musicians or music educators; they had not received formal music training and lacked any awareness of teaching or passing down these skills. In their minds, Haozi was not merely an artistic expression but also a tool to reflect labor life, enhance team cooperation, and boost morale. Consequently, their singing naturally integrated into daily labor rather than being viewed as a skill to be formally taught. In this context, Haozi transmitted generations naturally as the work progressed, forming a central part of the boatmen's shared culture, yet it was not systematically recorded or passed down. This phenomenon reflects the characteristics of traditional oral arts and collective culture in the society of the time, emphasizing the creativity and participation of the laborers themselves, even though they may not have been aware of the cultural heritage they were preserving.

In this traditional method of transmission, *Chuanjiang Haozi*'s learning was not achieved through a systematic teaching model; instead, it relied on spontaneous comprehension and imitation of others' performances. As Haozi performer Li stated, "When we were working on the boat, we did not specifically learn how to sing, and there were no dedicated teachers; we learned it on our own" (personal communication,

August 18, 2024). This reflects the reality of how many laborers learned Haozi. Through hearing and observing others and performing it live, they gradually absorbed and internalized the rhythms and techniques during their work. The lyrics of the songs were often improvised, stemming from the laborers' daily experiences and insights. Through sharing and communicating with fellow workers, "if other workers liked it, I would keep it and turn it into a song" (personal communication, August 18, 2024). This process of improvisation and collective participation allowed the content of Haozi to be closely connected to the laborers' lives, showcasing their deep emotions and reflections on life.

With the development of the times and the emphasis on sustainable transmission in intangible cultural heritage policies, cultural bearers in contemporary face new challenges. Li further points out, "However, now, as a bearer, one needs to learn systematic singing techniques and teaching abilities to teach more people how to sing" (personal communication, August 18, 2024). This suggests that, although the traditional method of oral transmission has primarily facilitated the inheritance of Chuanjiang Haozi, in the modern context, bearers must also acquire more structured teaching methods to effectively pass this cultural heritage on to the next generation of performers.

In contemporary times, as an essential form of intangible cultural heritage, the need for sustainable transmission of Chuanjiang Haozi has led to the gradual emergence of new educational and performance spaces—schools and cultural centers. This shift reflects the growing emphasis on preserving traditional culture as more people recognize that this traditional art form is not only a testament to history but also a vital carrier of cultural identity. Consequently, integrating education and performance practice has become one of the most effective means of preserving Haozi, highlighting the proactive efforts of communities and society in promoting cultural transmission.

Research has shown that in recent years, the widespread establishment of schools, community cultural centers, and related artistic groups has allowed Chuanjiang Haozi to find new spaces for survival and development in modern society. These educational settings have become central hubs for learning and performing Haozi and provide participants with rich resources and creative opportunities, as shown in the **Figure 4**. In these environments, participants can acquire the singing techniques of Chuanjiang Haozi and also gain a deeper understanding of its cultural background, historical context, and unique position within local society. One participant stated, "In the cultural center, the teacher not only teaches us how to sing but, more importantly, helps us understand the stories and emotions behind these songs" (personal communication, August 20, 2024).

Figure 4

Participants practice Chuanjiang Haozi at the Cultural Center.



Note. The figure shows the cultural bearer teaches the students how to sing and perform the Chuanjiang Haozi as they imitate the movements of rowing a boat while singing. Participation in these activities is voluntary and free of charge.

Source: photographed by the author on August 21, 2024, in Yuechi County Cultural Center, Sichuan Province.

In addition to cultural centers, schools serve as another important space for the performance and transmission of Chuanjiang Haozi, playing an increasingly significant role. For example, the Sichuan Conservatory of Music has taken proactive steps by inviting cultural bearer Cao Guangyu to offer courses on the culture and singing techniques of Chuanjiang Haozi in 2024. This initiative provides students valuable opportunities to understand and learn about the art form, enhancing their comprehension and mastery of this traditional cultural practice. In the course, Cao employs systematic teaching methods to combine the historical background, cultural connotations, and vocal techniques of Chuanjiang Haozi, helping students gain a deeper appreciation for the unique charm of this traditional art.

The course content covers various aspects of Chuanjiang Haozi, including basic knowledge, analysis of classic works, and practical training in singing techniques. This enables students not only to master the relevant theoretical knowledge but also to experience its cultural spirit through singing practice. Students have widely embraced the course, with many participants expressing a deep interest in Haozi after completing the lessons. One musicology student stated, “During the process of learning Haozi, I deeply felt the beauty and power of this art form. It allowed us to connect more deeply with local culture and made me cherish my cultural roots even

more” (personal communication, November 15, 2024). Through this solid course participation, students improved their singing techniques, strengthened their sense of connection to local culture, and found a link to their cultural identity. Moreover, this teaching model in schools has created an excellent platform for promoting and disseminating Haozi. The systematic approach to teaching makes it easy for students’ learning outcomes to be showcased through graduation performances, cultural events, and other forms, further expanding the influence of Chuanjiang Haozi, as shown in the **Figure 5**.

Figure 5

Course completion performance of Chuanjiang Haozi by students of the Sichuan Conservatory of Music.



On the one hand, establishing school platforms and cultural centers has made the transmission of Chuanjiang Haozi more systematic and standardized. In the traditional oral transmission model, learning was often informal and spontaneous. However, professional guidance and teaching methods are effectively implemented in educational fields. This means that learners receive carefully designed course content and, under the guidance of professional instructors, can systematically understand and master the singing techniques and stylistic features of Haozi. Furthermore, these institutions regularly organize practical activities, performances, and competitions, motivating learners to deepen their understanding and interest in this traditional art through participation and exhibition. On the other hand, establishing educational and performance spaces has injected new vitality into the transmission of Chuanjiang Haozi. In these fields, young learners can combine theory and practice through

various forms of performance, exploring space for self-expression. With the introduction of diverse performance formats and educational content, Haozi is being continuously reinterpreted in a more modern way within schools and cultural centers. This enables it to meet the aesthetic demands of modern audiences and promotes the integration of traditional music forms with new artistic elements, revealing a richer cultural value.

3.4 Multiple Orientations of Performance Fields

Nowadays, Chuanjiang Haozi, as a unique form of intangible cultural heritage, exhibits a multifaceted functional orientation in its performance fields, shaped by social development and cultural changes. Its functions are endowed with distinct significances and values in different fields.

In the original performance field, the functions of Chuanjiang Haozi reflect a dual orientation of labor and entertainment, deeply embodying its multiple values within a specific historical context. According to Bourdieu's (2002) fields theory, we can analyze the complexity and dynamism of this field in greater depth. Bourdieu argued that a field is a specific space formed by social relationships, where participants, based on their economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, create an interactive network governed by specific rules and structures. In the traditional performance field of Chuanjiang Haozi, this interaction involves the exchange of sounds and rhythms and the construction of social relationships, emotional bonds, and shared cultural memories. As a work song sung by boatmen during their journeys, it boosted morale and coordinated work rhythms while also adding enjoyment to monotonous labor. During long hours of strenuous work, the sound of the songs provided spiritual comfort and motivation, fostering a sense of cooperation. Many boatmen would sing in unison to strengthen team cohesion and improve work efficiency. In this context, Haozi became a form of cultural capital, entertainment, and a key medium that connected laborers to their work.

In such a field, the performance is participatory, with boatmen being both the audience and active participants. This dual identity infuses the performance of Chuanjiang Haozi with vibrant interactivity, breaking down the traditional boundaries between the audience and the performer. In the shared labor process, boatmen communicate their emotions, exchange experiences, and create a unique social mechanism through singing. In this process, participants express themselves through music and collectively construct a sense of group identity and awareness. The interactions among participants strengthen their bonds, making each participant an integral part of this cultural activity. Over time, the boatmen passed down their life experiences and emotions through Haozi to the next generation, establishing an oral tradition of knowledge transfer. Throughout this process, the songs' content, form, and vocal techniques continuously evolved, and these changes, in turn, influenced the cultural identity and social structure of the boatmen community.

In the stage performance field, the function of Chuanjiang Haozi has undergone a significant transformation. It has moved away from its traditional role as a labor song tied to specific labor contexts and has been imbued with richer artistic expressions, becoming a form of local cultural art that can be appreciated and experienced by a broader audience. Its evolution now focuses primarily on cultural display and aesthetic orientation. Specifically, on the stage, Haozi is presented through professional production, choreography, and interpretation, forming a highly artistic showcase. In this field, performers are no longer just laborers; they have evolved into artistic performers who play a vital role in cultural presentation and aesthetic experience. In this context, its performance incorporates vocal singing and other performing arts, such as dance and theater, creating a complex and integrated artistic expression. This transformation allows the participatory and interactive nature of the performance to be maintained and deepened on an artistic level.

This shift means that Chuanjiang Haozi, on the modern stage, is an appreciation-oriented performance that satisfies contemporary audiences' increasingly diverse aesthetic demands. It is well spread through audience participation and resonates emotionally with the audience through this interaction. Bourdieu, in his field theory, emphasized that "actors in a field often reshape their strategies according to the rules of the field" (Bourdieu, 2002), suggests that the solidification of Chuanjiang Haozi's artistic form is shaped not only by the artistic talents of the performers but also by the shared influence of the audience's demands and expectations for cultural experience. At the same time, the commercialization and marketization trends of stage performances have also contributed to the modern transformation of Haozi. In order to attract audiences and meet market demands, performance groups may incorporate modern music elements and contemporary dance forms into the show, allowing it to retain its cultural roots while adding fashionable and popular elements. Such changes have enriched its forms of expression and effectively expanded its audience base, breathing new life and vitality into this local traditional art in modern society.

In the educational field, Chuanjiang Haozi focuses on cultural dissemination and the transmission of heritage. As globalization continues to drive cultural exchange, awareness of traditional cultural preservation has grown across various sectors of society, leading to this culture being gradually integrated into the educational systems of schools and cultural centers. The learning process is now crucial for cultivating cultural confidence and transmission. In this field, the curriculum emphasizes the systematic teaching of techniques and stresses understanding cultural context and emotional experience. This model highlights the comprehensive nature of performing arts education, where learners, through a combination of theoretical study and hands-on practice, can fully master the singing techniques of Haozi, including rhythm, tone, and performance style. Simultaneously, learners are guided to understand its historical origins, cultural significance, and multiple meanings in social life. Learners

acquire technical knowledge and engage with the human emotions and social values embedded in this art form.

Courses often combine actual performances and practical activities, providing learners with opportunities for active participation and closely linking the learning process to local cultural practices. This experiential learning approach encourages learners to connect with Chuanjiang Haozi emotionally and fosters deep interaction between students and teachers, creating an environment conducive to cultural transmission. Within Bourdieu's (2002) field theory framework, the educational field is viewed as a social space where Chuanjiang Haozi, a form of cultural capital, is imbued with new life and meaning. Learners are not passive recipients but active participants and creators in this field. Throughout this process, learning Haozi becomes a complex interaction that intertwines personal development with cultural transmission, subtly promoting the development and revitalization of local culture.

4. Conclusion

The recontextualization of Chuanjiang Haozi in contemporary times has facilitated its transformation from a labor song into an intangible cultural heritage, broadening its performance fields and providing diverse support for its sustainability. The original field preserves its core traditions, allowing it to maintain its cultural identity amidst the rapid changes in the social environment. This preservation ensures that the art form remains grounded in its historical and cultural context, thereby protecting its essence and connection to past generations' labor practices and cultural memories. In this traditional field, Haozi remains a living testament to the community's cultural heritage, fostering a sense of continuity and cultural pride.

In contrast, the stage performance field has become a dynamic space for ongoing artistic innovation. Here, the Chuanjiang Haozi is reinterpreted and adapted to suit the evolving aesthetic preferences of modern audiences. The stage allows for experimentation and creative reconfiguration, enabling Haozi to adjust its artistic characteristics in response to shifts in popular taste and cultural trends. As a result, the art form retains its relevance, drawing in new audiences while preserving its original charm. Through this constant adaptation, it continues to captivate audiences, enhancing its appeal and expanding its influence in contemporary entertainment.

The educational field plays a crucial role in supporting the intergenerational transmission of Chuanjiang Haozi. In educational settings such as schools and cultural centers, the learning process becomes a key mechanism for passing down the technical skills and the cultural values associated with Haozi. This formalized educational structure ensures that this cultural form's knowledge, history, and cultural significance are conveyed to future generations. As students engage with the art form, they acquire singing techniques and gain a deeper understanding of its cultural and historical roots. Through this, Haozi's cultural continuity is reinforced, and its transmission is supported by a structured framework that fosters a connection between

past, present, and future generations.

In conclusion, Chuanjiang Haozi's recontextualization in multiple performance fields—traditional, stage, and educational—has created a multifaceted framework for its sustainable development. Each field contributes to its preservation and evolution: the original field ensures the art form remains in its traditional essence, the stage field fuels innovation, and the educational field supports intergenerational transmission. These diverse fields enable Chuanjiang Haozi to thrive in the modern world, ensuring its continued relevance while maintaining its deep cultural roots.

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