

Transmission strategies and success factors of intangible cultural heritage: A case study of Taiyuan Luogu drum music art

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transmission strategies and success factors of Taiyuan Luogu Drum Music Art, a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) facing an existential crisis due to rapid urbanization. The research was conducted to address the academic gap between historical documentation and the practical organizational management required for the art form's contemporary survival. Utilizing a qualitative case study design focused on the Tai Zhong Luogu Performing Art Troupe in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province, data were collected through four phases of fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews with key transmitters and direct observations of rehearsals. The findings reveal a significant shift from informal, family-based transmission to a professionalized model of an art troupe. Key results indicate that success is driven by three pillars: professional positioning that rebrands folk ritual as high-value art, a standardized pedagogical system for technical precision, and a modern administrative framework that separates management from artistic execution. Additionally, the strategic use of ICH status as symbolic capital and the integration of multicultural elements were critical to market adaptation. These findings are important because they provide a replicable framework for cultural administrators and educators to transform fading traditions into sustainable, professionalized enterprises. The study concludes that the survival of ancient rhythms in the 21st century depends on balancing historical integrity with strategic organizational innovation.

Keywords: Taiyuan Luogu, intangible cultural heritage, transmission strategies, professionalization, Shanxi folk music.

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INTRODUCTION

Taiyuan Luogu, a profound ensemble of traditional folk percussion instruments including the Tanggu, Nao, and Bo, stands as a majestic cornerstone of Chinese musical heritage. Inscribed on the second batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2008, it is more than a mere musical performance; it is a cultural totem primarily popular in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province (Beibei, 2024; Howard, 2016). Historically, this art form, often hailed as the best Gu (drum) in the world, served as an indispensable medium for expressing communal identity, joy, and spiritual devotion during major festivals and

agricultural rites. The Sanjin land, known as the cradle of Chinese drum culture, has nurtured Taiyuan Luogu into a sophisticated representative of the Jin cultural spirit (Xu et al., 2018; Zhang and Moonswan, 2025). However, as the pulse of the traditional farming era fades amid the rapid rhythms of modern urbanization, this vibrant heritage confronts an unprecedented existential crisis.

A precarious crisis of succession characterizes the contemporary landscape for Taiyuan Luogu. Despite its esteemed reputation and national recognition, the transition from a traditional agrarian society to a market-

driven industrial economy severed many of the organic ties that once sustained folk arts. Younger generations, driven by the pressures of modern career paths and the allure of globalized pop culture, are increasingly distancing themselves from the rigorous, time-consuming mastery required for traditional percussion (Frenneaux, 2025; Linaberry, 2021; Mitchell, 2024). Such an attitude has resulted in a significant loss of talent and an aging practitioner base, with the average age of skilled performers continuing to rise while the number of youth entrants declines. If the way Taiyuan Luogu is passed down remains informal and outdated, the deep cultural meanings and distinctive rhythms that make it unique could be weakened or even lost (Fox, 2021; Smith et al., 2015; Zhang, 2024).

While previous academic literature has extensively explored the historical lineage, classification, and musicological nuances of Shanxi's percussion arts, there remains a conspicuous academic gap regarding the operational sustainability of these forms in the 21st century. Most researchers have concentrated on the 'what and the when,' documenting instruments and historical milestones; however, few have examined the organizational how and why of contemporary survival (Morgenstern, 2018; Sun and Wang, 2024). There is a lack of rigorous inquiry into how traditional art forms can adapt their modes of transmission to align with contemporary socioeconomic structures. This manuscript addresses this critical gap by shifting the focus from passive documentation to active management, examining the intersection of ancient artistic tradition and modern, professionalized administration (Chao and Nicolas, 2024; Jahangiri et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). It seeks to understand how cultural heritage can move beyond the status of a museum piece to become a viable, living enterprise.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the transmission strategies and identify the key success factors of Taiyuan Luogu Drum Music Art within the specific context of the professionalized art troupe model. By focusing on the Tai Zhong Luogu Performing Art Troupe, this study investigates how systematic organizational positioning, leadership, and multicultural exchange function as vital life-support systems for the art. The research articulates a crucial transition: the transformation of folk art from a fading, ritualistic practice into a vibrant, sustainable professional enterprise (Nogales-Muriel, 2024; Singh, 2024). This study posits that the survival of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the modern era is not merely a matter of artistic preservation but of strategic innovation and organizational resilience.

Ultimately, this study serves as both an educational and managerial framework, providing insights that extend beyond Shanxi Province. By identifying the mechanisms

that allow Taiyuan Luogu to thrive in a competitive cultural market, the research provides a replicable model for other heritage arts facing similar extinction threats worldwide. It emphasizes that an ancient rhythm can continue to echo in the modern world only if it is supported by a robust organizational framework and a flexible means of transmission (Lamaro et al., 2025; Pereira et al., 2023). Through this lens, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational sociology and cultural administration, ensuring that the best drum in the world remains a resonant symbol of human creativity and communal resilience for generations to come.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a qualitative case study design, selected for its ability to provide a comprehensive examination of intricate sociocultural phenomena (Maponya, 2020; Qian et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). This design enables the capture of rich, descriptive data that quantitative methods might overlook. The primary research site was Taiyuan City, the capital of Shanxi Province, China. Purposely selected as the administrative and cultural hub of the Sanjin region, Taiyuan provides an authentic environment where Taiyuan Luogu originated and continues to thrive. By focusing on the Tai Zhong Luogu Performing Art Troupe within this specific geographical context, the study ensures that the findings are grounded in the art form's actual social and cultural ecosystem.

Fieldwork phases and data collection

To ensure the longitudinal validity and depth of the findings, the data collection process was meticulously structured into four distinct phases of fieldwork. This progressive approach allowed the researcher to transition from a broad contextual understanding to a detailed analysis of specific transmission mechanisms and success factors, as shown in Table 1.

Informant classification and sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to identify informants with in-depth firsthand knowledge of Taiyuan Luogu's operations. To achieve data triangulation and minimize individual bias, informants were selected from different roles within the artistic and administrative hierarchy. The classification of these participants ensures that the data reflect a multidimensional perspective on the transmission process, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. The four phases of fieldwork and data collection activities.

Phase	Strategic focus	Primary activities and methods
Phase I	Contextual immersion	Conducting initial site visits to Taiyuan City; establishing rapport with the art troupe; and reviewing historical archives, national heritage dossiers, and video recordings of folk percussion
Phase II	Narrative gathering	Conducting semi-structured interviews with representative transmitters to capture the history of organizational evolution and the transition from folk ritual to professional ensemble
Phase III	Practical observation	Engaging in non-participant observation during intensive rehearsal sessions and major public performances to document real-time pedagogical interactions and ensemble management
Phase IV	Data triangulation	Cross-checking interview transcripts with observed practices; conducting follow-up discussions with practitioners to verify the identified success factors and transmission strategies

Table 2. Categorization and profile of informants.

Informant category	Roles in the research	Criteria for selection
Key Informants	Representative transmitters	Individuals with provincial or national accreditation who hold primary authority on artistic standards and management vision
Casual Informants	Active practitioners	Experienced troupe members and senior apprentices who are directly involved in the daily implementation of transmission strategies
General Informants	Stakeholders and learners	Junior apprentices, local cultural officials, and community members who provide feedback on social impact and educational efficacy

Instrumentation and observational procedures

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol, designed with open-ended questions to elicit detailed narratives while maintaining focus on the research objective. The protocol was divided into three thematic modules: 1) Organizational History, investigating the shift from rural folk groups to a professionalized troupe; 2) Training Methods, focusing on the formalization of drum music pedagogy; and 3) Collaborative Practices, examining how multicultural exchange facilitates sustainability.

Complementing the interviews, Direct Observation was employed as a critical tool for capturing "tacit knowledge." The researcher utilized an observation checklist during rehearsals to document how rhythmic nuances are communicated and how ensemble discipline is maintained. Observations during public performances provided insights into "Success Factors" related to audience engagement and the integration of modern performance styles.

Data analysis and theoretical framework

Following data collection, the researcher employed Content Analysis to synthesize the findings. This involved transcribing audio recordings, coding key segments of text, and identifying recurring themes. The analysis was guided by a multi-disciplinary theoretical lens to ensure a robust interpretation of the organizational success, as shown in Table 3.

Ethical considerations and data integrity

Adherence to strict ethical protocols was a cornerstone of this study. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board. All participants received a clear explanation of the research goals and signed an Informed Consent form, which emphasized the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any stage. To maintain data integrity, the researcher engaged in member checking by sharing preliminary findings with the primary transmitters.

Table 3. Data analysis framework and coding procedure.

Analysis stage	Procedure	Objective
Step 1: Coding	Labeling transcripts with tags such as Leadership, Training Discipline, and Market Adaptation	Segmenting raw data into manageable units of meaning
Step 2: Thematic clustering	Grouping codes into categories like Professionalized Operational System and Multicultural Integration	Identifying the core pillars of the transmission strategy
Step 3: Synthesis	Integrating themes into a final model of Active Professionalization for Taiyuan Luogu	Determining the key success factors of the art troupe

RESULTS

The findings of this research illustrate a profound transformation in the survival and transmission of Taiyuan Luogu. Through qualitative analysis, it was discovered that the art form has successfully navigated the pressures of modernization by adopting a professionalized organizational structure. The results are categorized into two primary sections: the structural formation of transmission strategies and the identified key success factors.

Transmission strategies and current formation

The study reveals that the transmission of Taiyuan Luogu has evolved from a decentralized, informal, family-based teaching model to a centralized, systematic Art Troupe Model. This transition represents a shift from a spontaneous folk ritual to a managed cultural enterprise.

Professional positioning: Redefining value

A primary strategy identified is Professional Positioning, which redefines Taiyuan Luogu from a rural sacrificial rite into a high-value performing art. This shift allows the art form to balance commercial viability with the preservation of cultural integrity. By entering the professional art market, the troupe secures both financial stability and social prestige. One representative transmitter (Key Informant) emphasized this transition during an interview:

"In the past, we played only for the gods or at village funerals. Today, we play on the grand stages of international theaters. We are no longer just 'drummers'; we are cultural representatives. This professionalism is what keeps our members proud and committed."

Structured training system: Pedagogical formalization

To ensure technical precision across a large ensemble, the troupe has shifted from oral-only, spontaneous teaching methods to a Structured Training System. This formalization involves the codification of rhythmic patterns and a hierarchical learning process. Central to this system is the standardization of drum mnemonics, such as the "Kuai Liushui" (Fast Flowing Water) pattern, where basic strokes like "Dong" (center hit) and "Da" (rim hit) are strictly codified to prevent individual variation. An apprentice (Casual Informant) reflected on the efficiency of this modern system:

"The training is now very disciplined. We have a clear curriculum that starts from basic strokes to complex ensemble coordination. Before, you might learn a piece differently depending on which master taught you. Now, our 50-person ensemble sounds like one single instrument because the teaching is standardized."

Modern operational framework: Institutional guarantee

The research finds that success is heavily reliant on a Modern Operational Framework. By establishing a management hierarchy, the troupe separates administrative tasks (marketing, logistics, and scheduling) from artistic ones. This provides a "stable environment" where transmitters can focus exclusively on their role as educators and performers. A troupe administrator (Key Informant) noted the importance of this separation:

"A master should not have to worry about booking a hotel or selling a ticket. We manage the business so the artists can focus on the art. This professional management is why we can sustain long-term tours and maintain such high-performance standards."

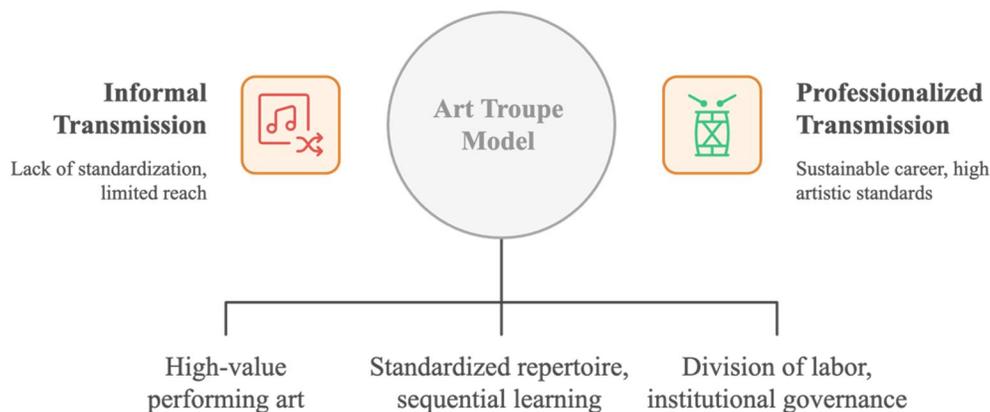


Figure 1. Professionalizing Taiyuan Luogu drum art.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the current formation relies on three pillars: rebranding the art, standardizing the pedagogy, and establishing an administrative guarantee. This model ensures that the "Soul" of the music is protected by a professional "Body."

Key success factors

The second dimension of the results identifies the specific drivers that enable Taiyuan Luogu to thrive in a competitive modern cultural landscape.

Cultural identity as core competitiveness: Leveraging ICH status

The most critical success factor is the strategic use of Cultural Identity. By leveraging its status as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), the troupe has built a "brand" that attracts governmental funding and institutional recognition. This status serves as "Symbolic Capital" that differentiates Taiyuan Luogu from generic folk music. A cultural stakeholder (General Informant) explained the power of this branding:

"The 'National ICH' title is a mark of quality. It opens doors to national grants and corporate sponsorships that would be inaccessible to a regular folk group. It makes the public view Taiyuan Luogu as a national treasure that must be supported."

The synergy of leadership and teamwork: The human element

The findings highlight that success is rooted in the unique synergy between a Visionary Leader and a Disciplined Team. The transmitter acts as more than a teacher; he is

a charismatic leader who fosters unity and a sense of mission. One senior troupe member (Casual Informant) described this synergy:

"Our leader has a vision that goes beyond just playing drums. He pushes us to be excellent, and in return, we offer our absolute loyalty. In Taiyuan Luogu, if one person is off-beat, the whole performance fails. Our success comes from this 'unity of heart and rhythm' that the leader inspires in us."

Cross-border and multicultural exchange: The driving force

Finally, the research identifies Cross-border and Multicultural Exchange as the driving force for innovation. The troupe actively collaborates with the tourism industry, modern media, and international festivals, which "injects innovative energy" into their traditional performances. A representative transmitter (Key Informant) discussed this adaptive strategy:

"We cannot stay in the village forever. We collaborated with modern stage designers and even television producers. Some purists might complain, but this is how we reach the younger generation. By mixing our traditional beats with modern visual aesthetics, we make the ancient drum music feel 'alive' and 'current' again."

An audience member (General Informant) echoed this sentiment after a performance:

"I never thought drum music could be this exciting. It felt like a modern concert but with deep historical roots. The way they integrated visual elements and interacted with the crowd was very different from what I expected from 'folk' art."

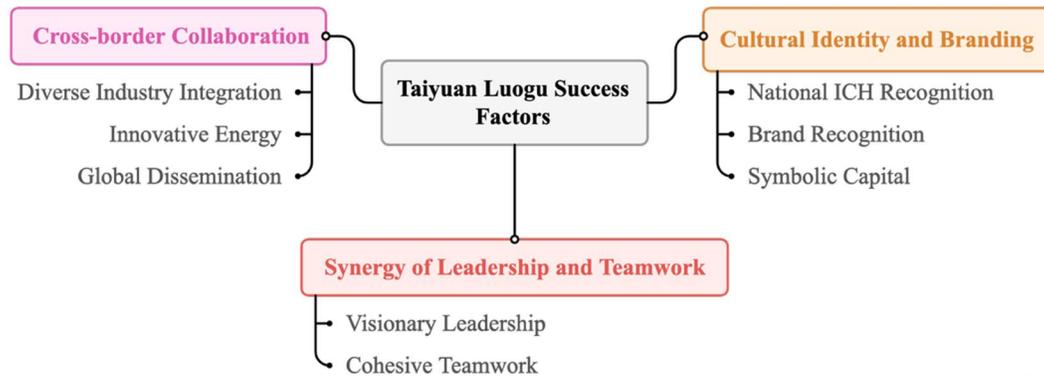


Figure 2. Key success factors of Taiyuan Luogu.

As shown in Figure 2, the success of the troupe is a "joint effect." The identity provides the content, the leadership provides the structure, and the teamwork provides the execution.

Synthesis of results

The results demonstrate that Taiyuan Luogu's survival in

the 21st century is not accidental; it is the result of a deliberate "Active Professionalization" strategy. The evolution from an informal transmission model to a structured art troupe has provided the necessary institutional support to overcome the crisis of succession. To synthesize these findings and bridge the transition toward the theoretical implications discussed in the following section, the core shifts are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of transition and success indicators.

Dimension	Traditional state	Modern professionalized state
Transmission	Informal/Family-based	Systematic/Art Troupe Model
Positioning	Rural Ritual	High-Value Performing Art
Management	Decentralized (Individual-led)	Hierarchical (Institutionalized)
Innovation	Static/Preservationist	Dynamic/Multicultural Exchange

Ultimately, the data suggests that the key success factors, cultural identity, leadership, and cross-border collaboration, work in tandem to transform a local tradition into a globally competitive art form. The informants' testimonies indicate that Taiyuan Luogu's success stems from striking a balance between the weight of tradition and the flexibility of modern management. This integrated approach ensures that the "best drum in the world" continues to resonate with contemporary audiences while maintaining its deep cultural soul, providing a structural foundation for the broader discussion on cultural administration and educational sociology.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that the survival of Taiyuan Luogu depends on a transition from informal folk

practice to a professionalized organizational model. This aligns with the theoretical principles of "Active Professionalization," where intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is not merely preserved as a static artifact but is managed as a living, evolving enterprise. This result is consistent with the work of Nogales-Muriel (2024) and Singh (2024), who argue that eco-social transitions require cultural arts to adopt critical, structured approaches to remain relevant. By redefining the drum art as a high-value performance rather than a rural ritual, the Tai Zhong Luogu Performing Art Troupe has successfully mitigated the "crisis of succession" identified in the introduction.

Furthermore, implementing a Structured Training System addresses the pedagogical gaps noted by Fox (2021) and Li et al. (2024) in the transmission of literacy in traditional music. While traditional methods relied on spontaneous oral transmission, the standardized curriculum observed in this study ensures ensemble

precision and technical longevity. This professional positioning creates a "Symbolic Capital" that, as Zhang and Moonsuwan (2025) suggest, strengthens cultural identity and attracts institutional support. However, this study also highlights a potential tension: while Beibei (2024) emphasizes the importance of folk elements, the integration of modern stage aesthetics and multicultural exchange, though successful in attracting younger audiences, may be viewed by purists as a dilution of authenticity. This suggests that the "success" of ICH is a delicate balance between historical integrity and market adaptation.

This research concludes that the Tai Zhong Luogu Performing Art Troupe serves as a replicable model for sustaining endangered folk arts. The transition from a decentralized, family-based tradition to a hierarchical, professionalized structure provides the administrative and financial framework necessary to withstand the pressures of urbanization. The key success factors are National ICH branding, visionary leadership, and cross-border collaboration, which function as a unified life-support system. As Lamaro et al. (2025) and Pereira et al. (2023) posited, the management of knowledge and the transformation of administrative roles are essential for cultural survival in the 21st century. Ultimately, the "best drum in the world" remains resonant not only for its rhythmic complexity but also for its organizational resilience.

Future studies should employ quantitative longitudinal analysis to track the long-term career trajectories of younger apprentices within these professionalized troupes. Additionally, comparative research between Taiyuan Luogu and other regional percussion forms, such as Jiangzhou, could identify whether the "Art Troupe Model" is universally applicable or contingent upon specific regional economic factors in Shanxi Province.

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