



Institutional Contexts for Youth Participation and Cultural Identity in Ethnic-Minority Oral Narratives: An Archival Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Jilin, Northeast China

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Abstract

This archival study maps the institutional heritage environment within which youth participation and cultural-identity processes may be investigated in the ethnic-minority oral traditions of Jilin Province, Northeast China. The analysis used the Spatial Distribution Dataset of Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects and Inheritors in China (2005–2024), comprising 20,924 project records and 22,361 representative-inheritor records. Filtering for Jilin Province identified 442 projects and 215 inheritors. Folk Literature and Quyi were treated as the principal oral-narrative categories, yielding 47 projects and 23 associated inheritors. Descriptive analysis examined category composition, municipal distribution, and administrative recognition year; a conservative title-level review identified explicitly named Korean, Manchu, and Mongolian traditions and recurrent identity resources. Traditional Skills was the largest provincial category, whereas Folk Literature and Quyi together represented 10.63% of Jilin's inventory. Oral-narrative projects were concentrated in Jilin City, Songyuan, Changchun, and Yanbian, and 61.70% were recognized in the 2009–2011 rounds. Fourteen project titles explicitly referenced Korean, Manchu, or Mongolian traditions. Place, ancestry, heroic memory, ritual knowledge, language, moral instruction, and performed narration emerged as recurrent identity resources. The study establishes a reproducible regional sampling frame for youth-centered heritage research; however, the archive contains no individual measures of age, participation, language proficiency, or cultural identity. Accordingly, no individual-level or causal claims are made. Future research should test active performance, intergenerational learning, minority-language use, and community-governed digital participation through survey, interview, participatory, and longitudinal designs.

Keywords: youth participation, cultural identity, intangible cultural heritage, oral narratives, ethnic minorities, Jilin Province, intergenerational transmission

Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is not only maintained by the preservation of a physical object, but by the continuous practice, recognition and transmission of the community. In the 2024 UNESCO Basic Texts, the term intangible cultural heritage refers to living expressions of cultural heritage, practices and value systems that communities continuously renew in relation to their history and environment, including: oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices and rituals; knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship (United

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Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2024). Participation is thus also always part of safeguarding efforts as a tradition is only socially meaningful if it is performed, interpreted, taught, and adapted by people.

Oral narratives have a unique place in living heritage. Collective memory is linked to language, landscape, ancestry, moral expectations, community authority and legends, epics, proverbs, ritual accounts, narrative songs and performed storytelling. Their transmission relies not only on the conservation of words, but also on the conservation of relationships, pronunciation, performance conventions, and material supports that constitute the means of producing meaning. Studies of Indigenous language, dance and music transmission have indicated that transmission practices go hand in hand, and studies of Indigenous musical instruments have indicated that tangible supports can be contiguous to intangible practice (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023; Howard, 2022).

Oral heritage can come as listeners, festival goers, language learners, apprentices, performers, interviewers, translators, digital documenters or decision making partners. The depth, agency and power of these roles differ significantly. In a recent youth-participation framework, therefore, the purpose of participation, positioning of youth, perspectives included, and powers exercised by youth are distinguished (Y. Zhang, Ikiz Kaya, van Wesemael, et al., 2024). The same distinction is required for digital participation, as the options for online access, consultation, co-creation and shared governance are different levels of youth agency (Y. Zhang, Ikiz Kaya, & van Wesemael, 2024).

The province of Jilin is a suitable case for this query. It is recognized for its oral heritage: Korean, Manchu, Mongolian or other traditions that are expressed through legends, proverbs, epics, sung narrative or performed storytelling. Heritage learning can link participation with the sense of cultural identity and social recognition, and situated making practices can lead to cultural self-confidence by maintaining significant relationships with place, community, and heritage knowledge (W. Zhang et al., 2021; Yan & Chiou, 2021). While plausible in the case of Jilin, these should not be a substitute for evidence from young people.

However, when a tradition is visible due to an official inventory it does not necessarily mean that young people know about it, use it, or identify with it. While listing can spur recognition and resources, it can also provide a framing of practices and normalize the fluidity of practices, grant credentials to authorized representatives, and elide intra-community dissent. Official recognition is thus not a straightforward indicator of community vitality and is a complex measure of participation and heritage construction, and the UNESCO safeguarding framework, that is why critical studies of participation warn against this (Eichler, 2021; Lázaro Ortiz & Jiménez de Madariaga, 2022; Melis & Chambers, 2021). In a defensible investigation, it is important to distinguish between the ostensibly visible and the actual experience of young people in relation to the heritage.

In Jilin, there is limited research that has integrated these two levels. National research reveals that the distribution of Chinese ICH resources is uneven, and that various social, historical, economic, and environmental factors interact to influence their distribution and protection (Li et al., 2024; Z. Zhang et al., 2024). The lack is a clear Jilin baseline that marks oral-narrative projects, localizations, the length of recognition, the people involved in the fieldwork and the oral traditions that clearly name themselves.

The aim of the present study is to fill this gap by secondarily analysing the provincial ICH project and the inheritor archive. It is an intentional limitation: the contribution sets out to define the

dissemination and the representational realm of acknowledged oral-narrative heritage in Jilin and relate this to a theory-based research program for the future concerning participation and cultural identity. Since there are no individual youth records available, the article does not attempt to estimate the effect of participation on stronger identity. Rather, it offers the institutional map that is necessary before this relationship is tested responsibly.

Literature Review and Conceptual Background

Living Heritage, Community Participation, and Authority

People-centered heritage management involves communities, groups and practitioners as part of the process of heritage safeguarding, instead of as sources of cultural material from which experts can extract it. The mode can vary from attending and consulting to collaborative learning, cultural production and collaborative decision making. Informal heritage education evidence indicates that civic participation can be linked to authenticity, cultural identity, performed value, and social recognition and that institutional procedures can continue to produce inequalities in access, representation and authority (Eichler, 2021; Yan & Chiou, 2021). The central question is not, therefore, one of participation but of who creates the heritage, who controls the representation of it and who benefits from the recognition of it.

These concerns are particularly important in state-supported inventory systems. China has established several layers of legislation and policies for protecting ICH, and policy implementation is largely conditioned upon the negotiation of responsibilities by institutions, practitioners and communities (Xu et al., 2022). International evidence of projects shows that heritage can make a stronger and more credible contribution to sustainable development when it is included in the design and evaluation of projects, and local knowledge and participation are involved (Giliberto & Labadi, 2022). Studies of practitioner decision-making also reveal that sustainable heritage initiatives are based on public values and perceived benefits, not on the basis of a single motive (Hsu et al., 2022).

Oral Narratives, Identity, and Intergenerational Transmission

In the present research cultural identity is considered a relational and interpretative process and not a trait that is automatically linked to a listed tradition. Participation in heritage might offer a sense of belonging, recognition, cultural confidence and commitment to transmission, but this is dependent on how people relate to practitioners, language and place, as well as how to engage with heritage knowledge (W. Zhang et al., 2021; Yan & Chiou, 2021). There are no archival data to measure these outcomes, they are held as constructs for future field validation.

Oral narratives offer potential resources in such identity work. Place-name legends associate memory with the landscape, family stories associate individuals with their ancestors, heroic epics define idealized behaviours, ritual stories define the ordering of social relations in relation to the moral and spiritual worlds, and proverbs encapsulate social expectations into a memorable form of language. These resources are significant when young people experience them in context and through repetitive exposure through established relationships and practice.

Intergenerational transmission is not only a pathway of knowledge but a social relationship as well. Integrated transmission practices (ITPs) as a focus of research on Indigenous language, music, and dance reflects the significance of the various approaches adopted to transmit and teach the craft. The

research on Indigenous language, music, and dance highlights the value of the integrated approach of transmission practices. In formal and informal education, experiential university programmes, interdisciplinary workshops, course materials and educational heritage activities can be a way to take learners from awareness towards practice by offering repeat choices for interpretation and creation (Dündar & Sümbül, 2024; Meng et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2024; Yan & Li, 2023). Families, community groups, schools, apprentices, and informal performers are all important channels of transmission as well as recognized inheritors.

Digital Participation and Cultural Mediation

Digital platforms have created more places where young people are finding and creating heritage. Geographically mobile youth can be linked to local tradition through online archives, bilingual subtitles, podcasts, short video and interactive maps and digital storytelling. Research on digital Chinese cultural heritage has demonstrated that mediated encounters can create emotional and spatial connections and research on Cantonese opera revealed that technological formats can facilitate transmission if they are tailored to the features of the performance tradition (Chung, 2024; Tong et al., 2023). A dedicated assessment framework further reveals that digital heritage practices for youth must be considered in the light of agency, participation and citizenship, not access alone (Y. Zhang, Ikiz Kaya, & van Wesemael, 2024).

There is a disconnect between digital visibility and meaningful participation. ICH can be made more accessible to younger generations through games and other interactive media, but how this is done in design can mean that some knowledge is retained or simplified (Cui et al., 2021). Studies on digital communication and design of ICH reveal the significance of technological adaptability, understanding the audience, cultural content, and user experience (Li, 2022; Liu & Pan, 2023). Utilizing short video sharing platforms like Douyin can empower creativity and re-distribute power and re-define what it means to be authentic (Wang et al., 2024). More general reviews of digital preservation technologies also demonstrate that technological capture is not preservation of the social conditions of living practice (Skublewska-Paszkowska et al., 2022).

An important question is thus what governs digital participation. Some safeguards are needed, such as community-approved attribution, consent, language integrity, contextual notes, and rights to restrict circulation. When linked to practitioners and local knowledge, digital education can contribute to collaboration and cultural education (Orphanidou et al., 2024). Simultaneously, place-based creative enterprise and urban edutainment research cautions that all that glitters and is innovative does not replace the values, locations and relations that underpin heritage practice (Luo, 2021; Walker et al., 2022).

The Chinese Inventory System and the Jilin Context

The multi-level inventory system of ICH projects, categories, administrative localities, batches of recognition and representative inheritors have been established in China. It has a policy architecture that offers visibility and organizational support, and its spatial studies show good regional clustering and patterns by category (Xu et al., 2022; Z. Zhang et al., 2024). Spatial concentration should be viewed, however, as an institutional and geographic pattern, and not as a direct indicator of current vitality of a community. The regional corridor research also shows that, mapped records, when complemented with local verification and related safeguarding measures, are the most valuable (Li et al., 2024).

This study relies on an archive of 31 administrative regions at the provincial level, and on information on provincial projects and inheritors published in the period 2005-2024 mid-year. While it has files on distribution of heritage category, locality, recognition year, and representative-inheritor, it does not have any direct indicators of youth participation or cultural identity (Liu et al., 2024). The archive marks the institutional location of the recognized oral traditions and practitioners for Jilin and thus provides a reproducible sampling frame for school-, community-, and inheritor-based studies.

Research Questions and Analytical Propositions

The archival analysis addresses three research questions:

RQ1. How are provincial ICH projects distributed across official heritage categories in Jilin Province?

RQ2. What spatial and temporal patterns characterize Jilin projects classified as Folk Literature or Quyi, and how are associated inheritors distributed?

RQ3. Which explicitly named ethnic-minority traditions and identity resources are visible in project titles, and what implications do they have for future youth-centered research?

The literature also suggests three propositions to be put to the test in the field. First, active and intergenerational forms of participation should be more strongly associated than passive exposure to identity exploration, belonging, and intention to transmit. Second, minority-language competence should increase the correlation between an engagement in narrative and cultural identity. Third, digital participation is required to be connected to community context and practitioner authority, but can be undermining meaning if heritage is not given context.

Data and Methods

Research Design

For this investigation, a descriptive, archival secondary data design, which included a theoretically guided, thematic analysis at the title level, was employed. This was chosen because there is no other evidence to be found except for officially registered intangible cultural heritage projects and representative inheritors, as opposed to surveys, interviews, or observations of young people. Therefore, the empirical research involves mapping the heritage context within which youth participation is possible, but not investigating causality between participation and cultural identity formation.

For the category, location, year of recognition, ethnic, and thematic analyses, the unit of analysis was an officially registered heritage project, while for the practitioners' count, it was an officially registered representative inheritor. The study involves quantifying administrative data and cautious qualitative analysis of the titles of projects. Neither individual persons nor households, schools, or youth organizations were observed as units of analysis.

Data Source and Coverage

Empirical Source: Spatial Distribution Dataset of Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects and Inheritors in China, 2005-2024.

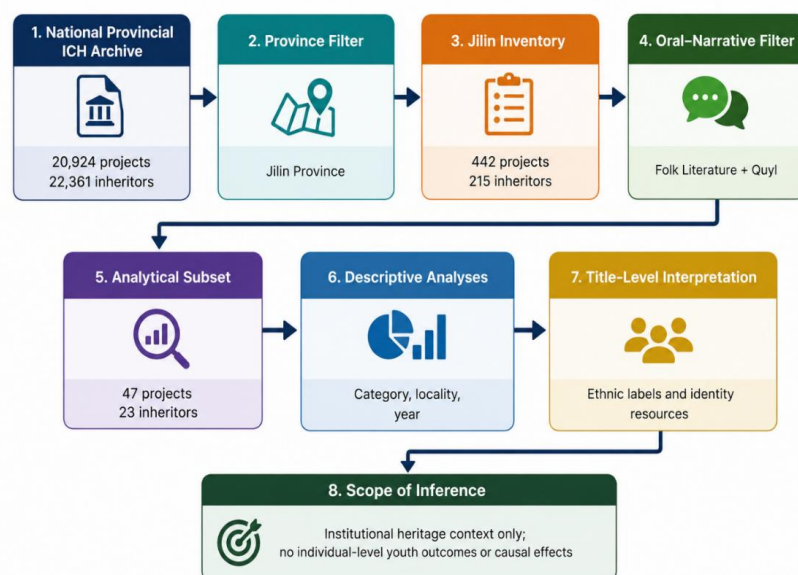
This national-level dataset includes 20,924 project cases and 22,361 representative-inheritor cases in spreadsheet and geospatial formats. Included data variables are project name/inheritor name, heritage category, time of publication/recognition, recognition batch, province, municipality, and geographic information (Liu et al., 2024). This dataset enables reproducible description of institution, space, and time dimensions. It is appropriate for use in describing the institutional context in which youth engagement may take place because it includes identified projects, administrative locations, and practitioner networks. It does not include respondent's age, participation frequency, knowledge of the minority language, cultural identity index, family transmission index, or digital engagement index.

Study Population, Sample Construction, and Inclusion Rules

The source population consisted of all project and inheritor records within the national archive. The first criterion kept records where the English “province” field stated “Jilin Province”, which resulted in a provincial analytical sample of 442 project records and 215 inheritor records. The second criterion determined the oral-narrative sub-sample based on the official categories “Folk Literature” and “Quyi”. “Folk Literature” includes myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, oral history, and epics, while “Quyi” includes storytelling, narrative singing, recitations, drum song traditions, Pansori, Uliger, Haolaibao, and related oral performance forms. The criterion led to 47 oral-narrative projects and 23 inheritors listed under these categories.

Identification of ethnic minorities was conducted using a conservative inclusion criterion based on the title of the record. A project record was marked as being Korean, Manchu, or Mongolian only if the English project title mentioned the group or referred to one of the special forms such as Pansori, Uliger, or Haolaibao. Ethnic minority affiliation did not depend on the project's city or autonomous prefecture of origin.

Figure 1: Analytical Workflow and Scope of Inference



The workflow filters national ICH records to a focused Jilin oral-narrative dataset of 47 projects and 23 inheritors for descriptive and title-level analysis. Findings are limited to institutional heritage patterns and do not support individual-level or causal conclusions. Source: Liu et al. (2024).

Variables and Operational Definitions

Heritage category was extracted from the English category entry in the archive. Municipality served as the recorded administrative location, while publication time was regarded as the administrative recognition year instead of historical age of a tradition. Project title was considered to be useful in identifying any explicitly mentioned ethnicity and theme in the narratives. Inheritor was an indicator of whether there was an official representative inheritor entry with regard to Folk Literature or Quyi. An oral-narrative heritage was operationally defined as a project that was classified as either Folk Literature or Quyi. An explicit ethnic-minority affiliation had to have clear evidence in the project title as explained in section 3.3. The empirical measures include frequency, percentage, locality distribution, recognition year distribution, and thematic categorization based on the title.

Youth participation and cultural identity are constructs used for analysis, not observed variables in the archive. Youth participation was viewed as a scale that extends from listening and attending to language acquisition, performance, documentation, translation, decision-making, and leadership activities. Cultural identity refers to issues of belonging, exploring, affirming, language attachment, historical knowledge, value expression, and commitment to transmission of the culture. As the archive does not have age data, it is impossible

Data Processing and Analytical Procedures

Data processing was done following the same process. First, the data sets of the national projects and inheritors were sorted out to those of Jilin province. Second, the data set of the projects was counted according to the ten heritage categories. Third, the Folk Literature and Quyi data sets were merged to give the oral-narrative set. Fourth, the data sets of the projects and inheritors were categorized depending on the municipalities and autonomous prefectures. Fifth, the data sets of the oral-narrative projects were classified according to the years they were recognized administratively. In each case where percentages were used, the numerator was the number of items for each category, locality, or year whereas the denominator was the number stated directly: 442 projects in the case of full Jilin category profile and 47 projects for the oral-narrative locality and temporal profiles. The percentage calculation is (subgroup count / corresponding total) x 100.

The title-level thematic classification procedure started with direct identification of Korean, Manchu, and Mongolian language items using the predefined coding criterion. The rest of the visible content was categorized theoretically as follows: Coding was restricted to information visible in the official titles and was checked against the same project list used for the quantitative tables. It did not reconstruct complete narratives, evaluate cultural authenticity, or infer community meanings that were not documented in the archive. Theme-frequency estimates were not reported because the archive does not contain complete narrative texts.

No inferential significance tests, regression models, mediation analyses, or causal estimators were applied. These methods would be inappropriate because the research questions are descriptive, the archive contains administrative records rather than a probability sample of young people, and the principal youth-participation and identity constructs are not observed. The analysis therefore reports documented distributions and bounded thematic interpretations only.

Reliability, Validity, and Reproducibility

Quality control was assured through clear inclusion criteria and numerical verification. Ten categories tally to make the total of 442 projects found in the Jilin archive; locality and recognition year totals are each 47 for the oral narrative subset; and inheritor counts by locality total 23. Project and inheritor files were counted separately, and all tables, graphs, and narrative percentages were verified against the same frequency counts and denominators.

Construct validity was constrained by the inherently bureaucratic nature of the source material. A project being listed implies official recognition not vitality, an inheritor implying formal representation not the totality of practitioners, and an English name not necessarily including ethnic identity, local names, or cultural meanings. These constraints were dealt with in the study through conservative coding, clearly defined denominators, and separation between observable findings from archival records and the theoretical assumptions that derive from them. No missing youth variables were interpolated, nor ethnic classifications made unsupportedly.

Ethical Considerations

There is no contact with people through use of administrative data about the cultural heritage from publicly available sources, and there is no collection of personally identifying information or any access to private respondents' data. No complete culturally sensitive story was reproduced. Project names were interpreted cautiously, and the names used did not constitute the exclusive definition of community identity. In case of any survey, interview, observation, audio-visual recording, and other participation projects with youth and heritage holders in the future, ethical approval will be required.

Findings

Overall Profile of Jilin's Provincial ICH Inventory

The national archive contained 20,924 projects and 22,361 inheritors. Filtering for Jilin identified 442 projects and 215 representative inheritors. Jilin therefore accounted for approximately 2.11% of the project records in the national provincial-level archive.

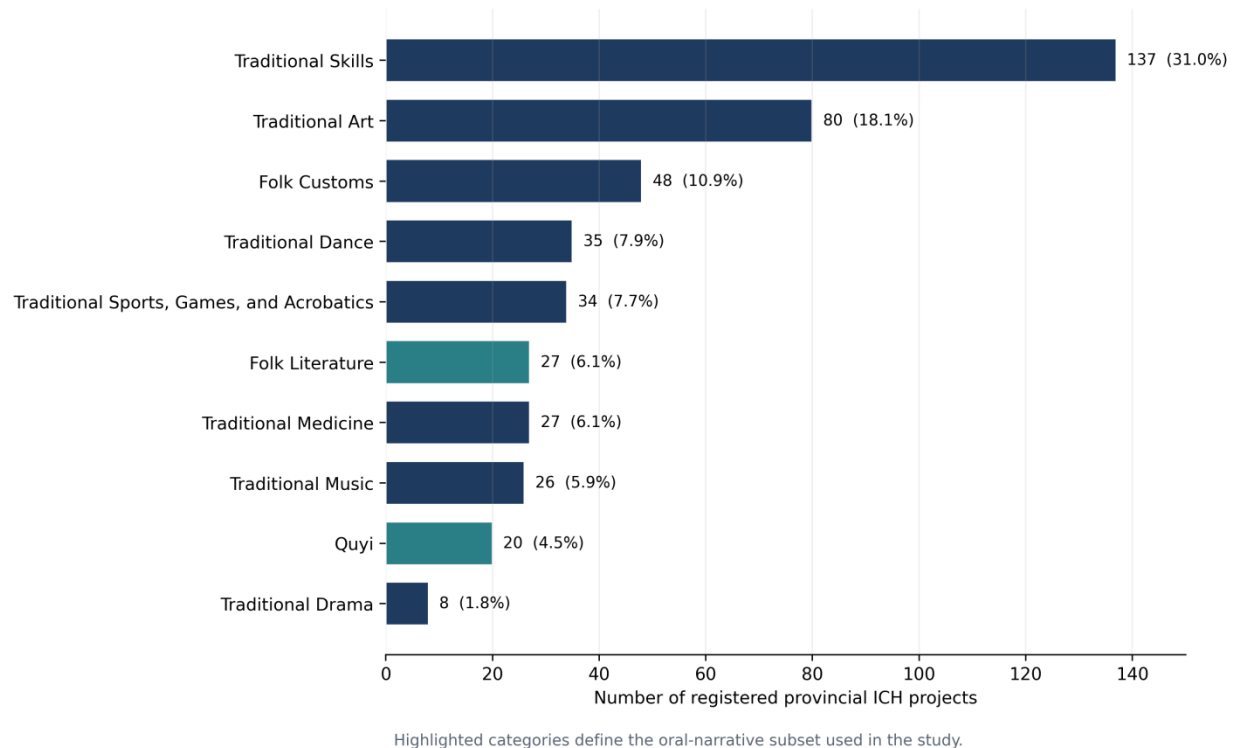
Traditional Skills was the largest category, with 137 projects (31.00%), followed by Traditional Art with 80 (18.10%) and Folk Customs with 48 (10.86%). Folk Literature contained 27 projects (6.11%), and Quyi contained 20 (4.52%). Together, the two oral-narrative categories represented 47 projects, equivalent to 10.63% of Jilin's provincial inventory.

Table 1: Distribution of Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects in Jilin

Heritage category	Projects	Share of Jilin projects (%)
Traditional Skills	137	31.00
Traditional Art	80	18.10
Folk Customs	48	10.86
Traditional Dance	35	7.92
Traditional Sports, Games, and Acrobatics	34	7.69
Folk Literature	27	6.11
Traditional Medicine	27	6.11

Traditional Music	26	5.88
Quyi	20	4.52
Traditional Drama	8	1.81
Total	442	100.00

Figure 2: Distribution of Provincial ICH Projects in Jilin by Category



Geographical Distribution of Oral-Narrative Heritage

The 47 oral-narrative projects were unevenly distributed across nine Jilin localities. Jilin City contained 13 projects (27.66%), Songyuan contained 12 (25.53%), and Changchun contained eight (17.02%). Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture contained five (10.64%), followed by Tonghua with three; Liaoyuan and Baicheng with two each; and Siping and Baishan with one each. The top three localities together accounted for 70.21% of the oral-narrative subset.

The 23 associated inheritors were also concentrated. Jilin City contained seven, Songyuan five, Changchun three, Yanbian three, and Baicheng two. Tonghua, Liaoyuan, and Siping each contained one. Baishan had one oral-narrative project but no inheritor record in the corresponding category subset. The project-to-inheritor pattern should be read as an indicator of institutional representation rather than a complete census of active practitioners.

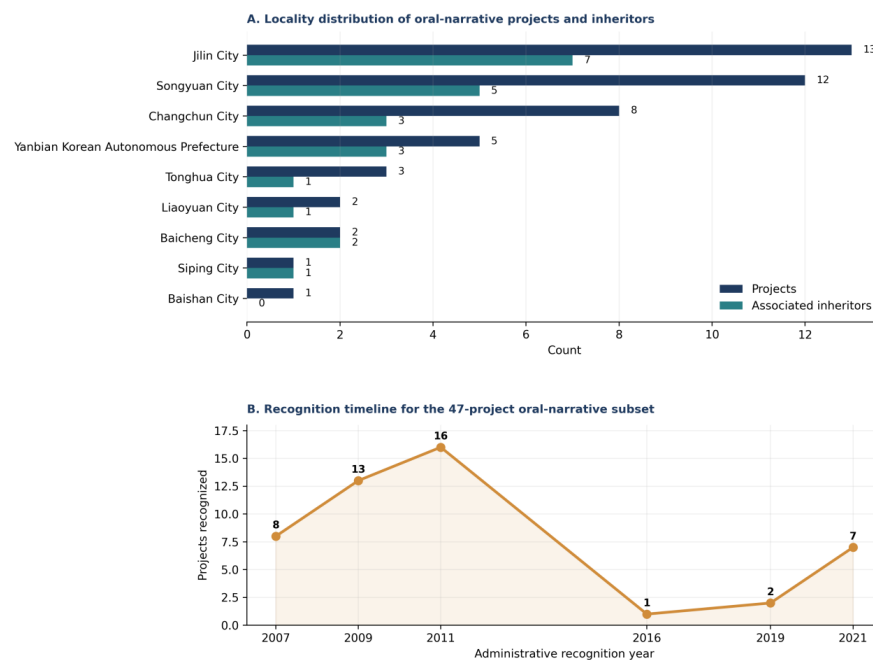
Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Oral-Narrative Projects and Inheritors in Jilin

Jilin locality	Oral-narrative projects	Share of projects (%)	Associated inheritors
Jilin City	13	27.66	7
Songyuan City	12	25.53	5
Changchun City	8	17.02	3
Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture	5	10.64	3
Tonghua City	3	6.38	1
Liaoyuan City	2	4.26	1
Baicheng City	2	4.26	2
Siping City	1	2.13	1
Baishan City	1	2.13	0
Total	47	100.00	23

Temporal Pattern of Administrative Recognition

The 47 oral-narrative projects were recorded in six recognition years: eight in 2007, 13 in 2009, 16 in 2011, one in 2016, two in 2019, and seven in 2021. The 2009 and 2011 rounds together accounted for 29 projects, or 61.70% of the subset. This concentration indicates that the institutional visibility of Jilin's oral-narrative inventory expanded most strongly during those two rounds.

Recognition year must not be confused with cultural age. A tradition listed in 2021 may have been practiced for centuries, while early recognition does not guarantee ongoing participation. The timeline documents administrative incorporation into the provincial safeguarding system rather than origin, continuity, or present vitality.

Figure 3: Spatial and Temporal Profile of Jilin's Oral-Narrative ICH

The locality analysis shows that Jilin City and Songyuan City contain the largest numbers of oral-narrative projects and associated inheritors. Recognition peaked in 2011 with 16 projects, declined sharply after 2011, and partially recovered by 2021.

Ethnic-Minority Traditions and Identity Resources

Of the titles examined, fourteen titles specifically named Korean, Manchu, or Mongolian culture. However, since all records are presented in English language only, this is an underestimate of titles naming ethnic heritage. Three titles described the Manchu oral tradition: The Manchu Narrative, The Shaman Legend of the Shi Family of the Jiutai Manchu, and Legend of Manchu Place Names. Lineage, rituals and interpretation of the local landscape appear to be crucial in these titles.

Three records specifically describe Korean narrative and/or performances: Three Elderly Koreans, Pansori, and Korean Rap Songs and Dance “Beggar Ballad”. The combination of narration, songs, dance, and communal performance demonstrates why administrative categorization is not always sufficient to describe a hybrid form of oral tradition. The presence of these records in and around Yanbian corresponds to the role of the prefecture in the Korean-language cultural performance.

Eight titles specifically mentioned Mongolian oral tradition: Legend of Jilin Mongolian Place Names, Mongolian Proverbs, Mongolian Uliger, The Epic Poem of Mongolian Heroes “Ayonggan: Sandir”, Long Story “Tao Ke Tao Hu”, Mongolian Haolaibao, The Story of Alanhuo, and The Story of Balagencang. The high concentration of these records in Songyuan emphasizes the importance of epics and long poems, proverbs and Across the wider oral-narrative subset, titles pointed to several recurring identity resources. Place and landscape appeared through references to Changbai Mountain, the Liao River, fishing grounds, shipyards, and ethnic place names. Ancestry and family appeared through named lineages and locally remembered figures. Heroic, moral, and spiritual knowledge appeared through epics, shaman legends, proverbs, fairy legends, and words of praise. These themes establish plausible materials for identity exploration, but a title cannot show whether a young person feels pride, understands the language, attends a performance, or intends to transmit the tradition.

Discussion

An Institutional Ecology for Youth-Centered Research

This study documents an extensive but highly variable folk literature and quyi oral-heritage ecology in Jilin. The 47 designated Folk Literature and Quyi Projects and their 23 corresponding inheritors constitute the specific sites and repertoires through which the involvement of youth could be explored. This is a significant finding in itself since claims made about identity formation necessitate proof of existence of such possibilities of contact.

Moreover, the distribution highlights the fact that Jilin’s oral heritage cannot simply be taken to mean a particular locality or ethnic minority. While Jilin City, Songyuan, Changchun, and Yanbian had the highest number of projects, the Korean, Manchu, and Mongolian items represented varying combinations of language, performance, lineage, ritual, and location. Consequently, a comparative analysis design would have to consider stratification according to locality, ethnic community, narrative genre, and urban versus rural setting, rather than assuming homogeneity of a “minority youth” category.

The high number of projects and inheritors corresponds to findings regarding the distribution of ICH resources in general, indicating how they tend to cluster spatially and how the mapped distribution is contingent upon intersecting historical, social, institutional, and geographical factors (Li et al., 2024; Z. Zhang et al., 2024). However, while the

Participation Pathways to Cultural Identity

Title-level themes reflect identity theories that consider identity as interpretative and relational. Legends about places may help to develop attachment to homeland; stories about family can establish a connection between the young person and his/her ancestry; epics about heroes and proverbs can convey behavior standards; and ritual narratives can structure relations with spiritual and moral worlds. However, while such materials provide content for identity reflection, the way in which the engagement is socially structured seems to be crucial for personal meaning of the content.

Therefore, an assessment of participation that can be used in further studies has to differentiate listening, attendance, learning, language use, performance, documentation, translation, decision-making, and leadership. It is good that dimensions such as purpose, positioning, perspective, and power can be used because they make it clear that mere attendance does not mean youth empowerment or shared authority (Y. Zhang, Ikiz Kaya, van Wesemael, et al., 2024).

There are three testable mechanisms here. First, participation may build identity on competence and public validation. Second, intergenerational learning may build identity through relationship with elders and inheritors. Finally, minority language use may enhance metaphoricity, performance conventions, and cultural meaning. All the three mechanisms need to be assessed separately and

Inheritor Networks, Education, and Safeguarding Policy

The inclusion of 23 associated inheritors within 47 projects indicates opportunity and perhaps vulnerability. Associated inheritors could provide culturally based teaching, but the small pool of institutional practitioners could limit access. The safeguarding policy must foster teamwork among groups, apprentices, family practitioners, and community-based organizations rather than relying on a single certified practitioner as sole guardian of tradition.

Educational institutions in Jilin City, Songyuan, Changchun, Yanbian, and other places could build a program around the inventory. Better design will involve repetition, reflection, practicing minority languages, interviews with older speakers, and supervised performances. Research from university heritage education programs, interdisciplinary symposiums, and curriculum-based models suggests experiential and interactive programs as opposed to passive presentations (Dündar & Sümbül, 2024; Xia et al., 2024; Yan & Li, 2023).

Evaluation will include assessment of knowledge, confidence, use of language, sense of belonging, interactions with practitioners, and the will to pass it on. Representatives from the community should be involved in identifying success criteria so that safeguarding is not merely counted through attendance and social media presence. This approach is consistent with research showing that participation is shaped by institutional rules and power relations and that sustainable heritage programmes require locally grounded evaluation (Eichler, 2021; Giliberto & Labadi, 2022).

Digital Opportunities and Risks

Digital media become especially relevant as Jilin's interventions operate in urban, autonomous, border, and rural contexts. Digital archives in two languages, subtitled audio materials, interactive maps, and community-produced podcasts can bring mobile youth closer to local performers. Research on digital Chinese heritage preservation, Cantonese opera transfer, and digitally mediated learning indicates that mediated experiences can facilitate access and cultural interaction when the context is provided and learning remains cooperative (Chung, 2024; Orphanidou et al., 2024; Tong et al., 2023).

Still, digital engagement does not guarantee cultural meaning. Short video platforms might incentivize spectacle, compression, and repetitive visual motifs, while oral storytelling relies on language, duration, and context. Community governance needs to clarify attribution, consent, proper editing, restriction on access, and circulation of sacred or family-specific content. Research on digital communication, youth involvement, and Douyin recommends assessing user experience and changes in cultural authority (Li, 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Y. Zhang, Ikiz Kaya, & van Wesemael, 2024).

The future Jilin research project thus needs to compare at least three digital participation activities: consumption, community-guided documentation, and youth-driven creation. It should evaluate whether digital engagement is a supplement to face-to-face interaction or replaces it and whether minority language use moderates the

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation is that there is no individual-level youth data in the archive. The archive cannot assess the frequency of participation among youth, whether participation was voluntary and meaningful, and whether it was connected with identity. The archive cannot assess mediation through intergenerational learning and moderation through language proficiency and digital participation. The relations proposed above are only theoretical and need to be confirmed by empirical data.

Second, the title-based ethnic coding is limited and imprecise. The project can belong to Koreans, Manchus, Mongolians, Hui people or others while having an English title without specifying its ethnicity. The categories used by administration may split a hybrid practice into the category of folk literature, music, dance, rituals and performances. Third, representatives-inheritors' files do not include all practitioners, and lack in the file does not mean lack in community life.

Fourth, the recognition year is an administrative characteristic and not a historical age and vitality index. Concentration of listed projects in 2009-2011 can be explained by policy cycles, documenting ability, and nomination procedures. Fifth, in the current analysis the frequency description and bounded title interpretation were used without including spatial accessibility, nearness to schools, demographics and participation in the programme.

Longitudinal or programme-evaluation designs would be preferable to cross-sectional causal claims. A feasible design could measure identity and language-related outcomes before and after a sustained community programme, include a comparison group where possible, and document implementation fidelity. Digital projects should also record consent and governance procedures. Such work would move the field from an institutional baseline to a test of how participation operates over time.

Conclusion

This inventory makes an openly documented archive available for studying youth participation and cultural identity in the ethnic minority oral heritage of Jilin Province. The provincial inventory consisted of 442 projects and 215 inheritors, consisting of 47 oral narrative projects and 23 related inheritors. Jilin City, Songyuan, Changchun, and Yanbian were the primary institutions with recognition mostly clustered in the 2009–2011 years. Fourteen titles mentioned Korean, Manchu, or Mongolian tradition while the broader set emphasized place, origins, heroes, rituals, ethics lessons, language, and performance.

The findings make it possible to draw a contextual, not a causal conclusion. Jilin has enough diversity and variety of oral-heritage ecology to carry out youth-centered field research, however, the inventory does not show that participation promotes identification. This question needs direct evidence about young people's participation, language practices, relations, interpretations, and intentionality.

Participation is a key factor of sustainable safeguarding. Not only the listing process, but also the engagement of young people in different activities is crucial for sustainable preservation and continuation of practices. Youth participation should be intergenerational, linguistically motivated, and managed by community members to make oral narratives the living practice of cultural memory and identity.

Data Availability Statement

The study used the publicly available Spatial Distribution Dataset of Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects and Inheritors in China, 2005–2024 (Liu et al., 2024). The official repository record is available at <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodb.2024.08.09.V1>. The analytical subset was defined by filtering for Jilin Province and the categories Folk Literature and Quyi.

Ethics Statement

The analysis used public administrative heritage records and involved no interaction with human participants. No private respondent information or restricted narrative content was processed. Future field research will require institutional ethics approval, informed consent, and community permission for culturally sensitive materials.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

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