

SUSTAINING JIANGNAN FOLK DANCE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC PATHWAYS—A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW (2010–2024)

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ABSTRACT

Jiangnan folk dance renowned for its distinctive cultural heritage and artistic expression is an important part of Chinese traditional arts. The rapid pace of modernization and evolving social aesthetics pose significant challenges to its inheritance and innovation. This study conducts a systematic literature review to identify and analyze the key issues affecting the performance and development of Jiangnan folk dance in the present time. The review highlights challenges such as cultural discontinuity, shifts in aesthetic preferences, and insufficient resource allocation. Furthermore, it explores strategies for fostering the sustainable development of Jiangnan folk dance, via emphasizing policy support, social engagement, innovation, integration, education, and dissemination. By providing a comprehensive analysis, this study aims to contribute to theoretical advancements in the field and offer practical recommendations for the future preservation and evolution of Jiangnan folk dance.

Keywords: Jiangnan folk dance, literature review on Jiangnan dance, artistic innovation on Jiangnan dance, sustainable development of Jiangnan dance.

INTRODUCTION

Jiangnan folkdances serve as vital carriers of Jiangnan culture, embodying the people's distinctive way of life, aesthetics and rich historical memories (Zhou, 2018). However, in recent years, numerous researchers and practitioners have observed that the presence of Jiangnan folk dances within social celebrations and public cultural spaces is diminishing. Ma (2022) observes that this shift is closely linked to accelerated urbanisation and the expansion of global cultural dissemination. Contributing to this factor is the dissolution of traditional communities gradually eroding the social foundations upon which these dances depend.

Drawing on fieldwork observations, Du (2023) makes a strong point that while younger generation show little interest in traditional dance movements, the existing inheritors lack systematic capabilities of passing down the dance in interesting ways and channels. As most folk dances in the Jiangnan region still rely on older-generation artists and single-line apprenticeship transmission, this results in closed audience-performance relationships and lack

of interaction with contemporary aesthetics. This poses as a limitation for Jiannan folkdances to garner interests amongst the younger people and to resonate with modern taste (Du, 2023).

According to Tan (2021) the infiltration of popular culture and international dance vocabularies has gradually marginalised traditional styles. This statement is echoed by Liu (2020) further pointing out that contemporary audiences, particularly younger generations, favour multimedia and hybrid expressions and traditional dance risks being overlooked if it fails to renew its aesthetic appeal. Research by Tang (2016) and Liu (2022) also indicates that urban renewal has eroded traditional festival and folk performance spaces, particularly in Suzhou and Wuxi. The weakening of community festival functions has further constrained the transmission of folk dance. This body of research collectively demonstrates that folk dances of the Jiangnan region are caught in the dual tension between transmission and innovation, a predicament Ma (2022) terms the 'dilemma' of cultural sustainability.

This study aims to map the principal challenges confronting the continuous sustainable development of Jiangnan folk dance, to structure a framework, and propose actionable strategies for modern development. By integrating theoretical reviews with regional case studies, the research endeavours to offer reference pathways for intangible cultural preservation and innovation. The structure of the paper is as follows: section two (2) details the literature review methodology; section three (3) presents the main challenges; section four (4) discusses solutions for cultural preservation and modern transformation; and section five (5) concludes and suggests future research.

METHODOLOGY

Literature search programme

This study employs systematic literature review methodology to explore the challenges faced by Jiangnan folk dance in contemporary times. The study analyses existing research, focusing on two core questions:

RQ1: What are the challenges faced by Jiangnan folk dance in its modern development?

RQ2: What strategies have been adopted to address the challenges?

This review employs China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Google Scholar as primary search platforms for exploratory collection of relevant academic literature. CNKI, is a significant domestic academic repository and complements Google Scholar to assist researchers in identifying core themes such as folk dance, intangible cultural heritage, modern choreography, and cultural preservation and innovation. These themes are intrinsically linked to the modernisation transformation of Jiangnan folk dance within technological innovation and cultural integration.

Search process

The literature search for this study commenced on 20 December 2023 and continued over several months to ensure the comprehensiveness and timeliness of the data. Key databases including China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Google Scholar were selected for retrieval. The study's focus and academic relevance was maintained by establishing selected keywords; 'Chinese folk dance', 'Jiangnan folk dance', 'cultural heritage', 'artistic innovation', and 'development challenges'. Literature screening adhered to three criteria: authority, relevance, and recency. This systematic review primarily focuses on the principal issues confronting Jiangnan folk dance within modernisation. Data selection followed the principles below:

1. Peer-reviewed sources: Only peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and conference papers were included to ensure research reliability, excluding informal or unverified materials.

2. Completed studies: Only completed research and surveys were selected, excluding research proposals or abstracts to guarantee the completeness of data and conclusions.

3. Publications from 2010 onwards: To reflect current academic trends, only research outcomes published in 2010 or later were included, with a particular emphasis on contemporary developments and research trends in Jiangnan folk dance.

This study focuses on reviewing literatures concerning folk dances in the Jiangnan region, while also drawing upon comparative research findings from folk dance studies in other parts of China. Although the core research remains centered on Jiangnan, it appropriately incorporates selected cross-regional literature to reveal similar cultural mechanisms and institutional logics, such as intangible cultural heritage policy frameworks, master-apprentice transmission systems, and the impact of modernisation. These studies serve not as empirical evidence but as theoretical references to deepen academic analysis, while maintaining a clear focus on the Jiangnan region (Jiangsu-Zhejiang-Shanghai). Literature selection emphasises its relevance to contemporary developmental challenges and innovative strategies, comprehensively presenting the distinctive pathways of Jiangnan folk dance in transmission, choreographic creation, and modern transformation.

Reverse tracing was conducted following the initial search to supplement potentially relevant studies. This is to ensure the comprehensiveness and depth of the literature framework. Exclusion criteria were used during the screening process to ensure consistency of subject matter and the themes. Works unrelated to Chinese folkdance or the Jiangnan region were discarded. Similarly, studies lacking specific analyses or case studies on the development of Jiangnan folk dance were excluded due to their limited contribution to the research focus. Through this systematic screening process, the literature framework established for this study reveals logical underpinnings of the transmission, innovation, and dissemination of Jiangnan folk dance within a modernising context.

The screening framework of this study aims to ensure that the analysis focuses on core issues and response strategies for the sustainable development of folk dances in the Jiangnan region, thereby enhancing the scientific rigour and credibility of the research. The initial search yielded 318 relevant publications. Following multiple rounds of screening and comparison, only studies meeting inclusion criteria in geographical scope, methodological design, and thematic relevance were retained for comprehensive analysis and discussion. The final literature corpus provides systematic theoretical and empirical support for understanding the developmental challenges and innovative pathways of Jiangnan folk dance.

In accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, this study meticulously documented the entire literature screening process to guarantee methodological transparency and reproducibility (see Figure 1). Of the 318 articles identified in the initial search, 142 were excluded based on title or abstract mismatch, while a further 146 were discarded following full-text assessment for failing to meet geographical or methodological criteria. Ultimately, 30 studies were included in the systematic analysis. These publications encompassed the principal challenges and viable strategies for the contemporary development of Jiangnan folk dance, offering significant theoretical insights and practical guidance. All inclusion and exclusion criteria were consistently applied to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the screening outcomes.

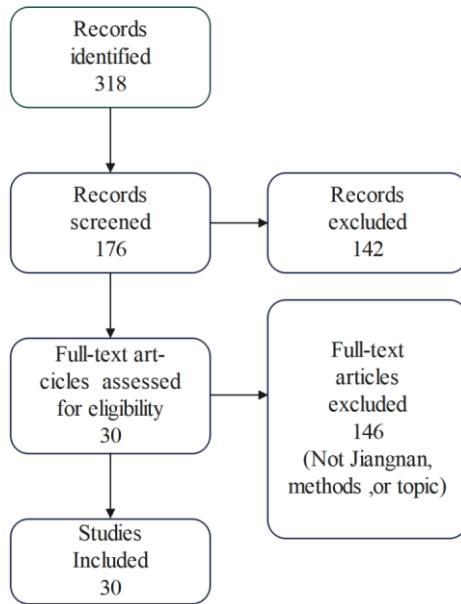


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Selection for Jiangnan Folk Dance

This study employed a systematic review framework, implementing a two-stage screening process (title/abstract → full text) alongside a double-blind peer review mechanism to enhance the reliability and transparency of literature inclusion. To maintain methodological consistency, screened documents underwent brief qualitative coding, identifying four primary themes: cultural transmission, adaptation to modernisation, resources and institutional support, and strategic responses.

The cultural transmission theme focused on ageing transmission groups, insufficient youth participation, and weakened traditional learning environment. Adaptation to modernisation explored dance movement simplification, aesthetic standardisation, and the impact of urbanization and commercialization of folk dances. Resources and support addressed funding shortages, gaps in education and talent cultivation, and inadequate dissemination platforms. Strategic responses looks at four pertinent areas of folkdance sustenance and development; policy support, social engagement, creative integration, and educational promotion.

To ensure coding transparency, anonymised examples are provided: ‘aging inheritors impeding cultural continuity’ is coded as [Cultural Heritage → Aging Inheritors]; ‘declining youth participation in traditional dance’ is coded as [Cultural Heritage → Insufficient Youth Participation]; ‘simplification of dance for stage performance diminishing regional characteristics’ is coded as [Adaptation to Modernity → Simplification and Standardisation of Movements].

The sensitivity testing was conducted by temporarily excluding literature from non-Jiangnan regions to validate the stability of the thematic framework, ensuring findings are grounded in data rather than subjective assumptions. This methodology preserves anonymity, aligns with systematic review standards, and enhances the study's reproducibility and analytical reliability.

Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria

During the literature screening phase, abstracts identified through initial searches underwent rigorous review to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the systematic review. As this study focuses on examining the challenges and response strategies in the modern development of folk dance in the Jiangnan region, the selection criteria were established as follows:

- the literature must focus on developmental challenges and countermeasures for Chinese folk dance, with particular emphasis on research concerning the Jiangnan region;
- only works featuring empirical research, case studies, or practical content were retained to ensure the study's practicality and applicability;
- content must engage in in-depth discussion of key issues in the inheritance, innovation, and development of folk dance, such as transmission gaps, shifts in aesthetic values, and resource scarcity, whilst analysing solutions including policy support, innovative integration, and educational dissemination;
- research should focus on folk dance in the Jiangnan region, though findings from other areas revealing analogous mechanisms (e.g., intangible cultural heritage policy frameworks or pressures of modernisation) may serve as comparative references.

The 330 final literatures selected through this screening criteria maintained high consistency in theme, methodology, and research objectives, establishing a robust foundation for subsequent systematic analysis. This study maintains systematic rigour and focused methodology, incorporating findings from other regions while ensuring all analyses and conclusions remain strictly confined to the Jiangnan regional context. Through meticulous selection criteria, only research literature demonstrating high thematic relevance and substantial practical depth was included, laying a robust foundation for exploring the sustainable development of Jiangnan folk dance.

The research team conducted systematic reading and information extraction from the included literature, covering research objectives, methodologies, and responses to core issues. Key information was collated into Table 1, serving as the basis for subsequent analysis and reporting.

Table 1: Summary of the results of the literature review

Authors and Years		Research Objectives	Methods
1	Dong (2019)	Analyse the strategies of Chinese folk dance in contemporary development.	Literature review, case studies
2	Du (2023)	To analyse the challenges of Chinese folk dance in modern development and to propose strategies to deal with them.	Questionnaire survey, interviews
3	Fan (2022)	To analyse the challenges and difficulties in the development of Chinese folk dance and to propose strategies to deal with them.	Literature review, fieldwork, interviews
4	Hu (2024)	Analyses the challenges of folk dance in Jiangnan in its modern development and proposes strategies to cope with them.	Literature review, observation
5	Liu (2022)	Analyses the challenges of folk dance in Jiangnan in its modern development and proposes strategies to deal with them.	Literature review, observation
6	Liu (2015)	Discusses the inheritance methods, development trends and challenges faced by Chinese folk dances, and provides references for related research.	Literature review, case studies
7	Liu (2020)	To analyse the challenges and changes faced by Jiangnan folk dances in contemporary times, and to propose conservation strategies for inheritance and development.	Literature review, observation, interviews

8	Liu (2023)	Examines the current challenges facing Chinese folk dance and explores how to promote the preservation, inheritance, and development of folk dance through innovative dance forms, government support, and teaching improvements.	Literature review, observation
9	Liu (2023)	Analyses the strategies that Chinese folk dances should adopt when facing the challenges of heritage and development.	Literature review, observation, interviews
10	Liu (2008)	To analyse the challenges and changes faced by Jiangnan folk dance in contemporary times, and to propose conservation strategies for inheritance and development.	Observation, Interview
11	Liu et al. (2024)	Analyses the challenges of Chinese folk dance in contemporary development and strategies to deal with them.	Literature review, observation, interviews
12	Liu (2024)	To analyse the current situation and challenges of Chinese folk dance in modern development, and to propose strategies to deal with them.	Literature Review
13	Lu (2023)	Analyses the coping strategies of Chinese folk dance in modern heritage and development.	Literature review, observation
14	Lu (2021)	Exploring how to promote folk dance through tertiary education.	Literature review, case studies
15	Lv (2022)	To analyse the challenges and coping strategies of Jiangnan folk dance in modern development.	Literature review, observation, interviews
16	Ma (2022)	To analyse the challenges and coping strategies of Jiangnan folk dance in modern development.	Literature review, questionnaire survey
17	Qiao (2020)	Analyse the coping strategies of Jiangnan folk dance in modern heritage.	Literature review, observation, interview
18	Runchun & Yumei (2024)	Analyse the innovation and development of Chinese traditional folk dance in the context of digital integration and proposes strategies to promote sustainable development.	Literature review, case study
19	Sun (2024)	Analyse the challenges of folk dance in terms of inheritance and innovation, integration with other art forms, promotion and popularisation, and environmental construction, and propose strategies to deal with them.	Literature review, observation
20	Tan (2021)	To analyse the challenges and coping strategies of Jiangnan folk dance in modern development. Literature review, observation, interviews	Literature review, observation, interviews

21	Tang (2016)	Analyse the challenges and changes faced by Jiangnan folk dances in modern development and propose conservation strategies for inheritance and development.	Literature review, observation, interviews
22	Tang (2023)	To analyse the challenges and coping strategies in the development of folk dance in Jiangnan.	Literature review, observation, interviews
23	Tang et al. (2024)	Analysing the challenges of folk-dance development in China.	Interviews, questionnaires, literature review
24	Wang a (2024)	Analyse the development status and challenges of folk-dance creation in China, put forward the path to optimize folk dance creation and promote the sustainable development of folk dance.	Literature Review
25	Wang b (2024)	Preserving and transmitting the intangible cultural heritage of Chinese folk dance through digital technology.	Observation, recording
26	Zhang a (2023)	Analysing strategies for the sustainable development of Chinese folk dance.	Literature review, case studies
27	Zhang & Wang (2018)	To analyse the challenges of Chinese folk dance in the process of development and to propose strategies to cope with them.	Literature Review
28	Zhang B (2023)	To analyse the challenges and coping strategies in the development of Jiangnan folk dance.	Literature review, observation
29	Zhu (2022)	Analyses the challenges of folk-dance development in China and strategies to promote sustainable development.	Literature review, interviews
30	Zhou (2018)	To analyse the challenges and coping strategies of Jiangnan folk dance in modern development.	Literature review, fieldwork

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the five domains of safeguarding outlined in the UNESCO (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage—documentation, transmission and education, revitalisation, policy and legislation, and community participation—as its core analytical framework. This system aligns closely with the research focus on Jiangnan folk dance, providing a comprehensive perspective for examining the challenges it faces during modernisation and the corresponding strategies for addressing them.

By categorising relevant literature and research findings across these five dimensions, this study systematically elucidates how Jiangnan folk dance maintains cultural continuity while navigating the pressures of modern transformation. This outcome-oriented analytical framework not only enhances theoretical coherence but also grounds discussions on safeguarding, innovation, and sustainable development within the internationally recognised framework for cultural heritage preservation.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Overview of Selected Literature

This study reviews 30 core publications that systematically reveal the principal challenges and response strategies in the modernisation of folk dance in the Jiangnan region. Twelve literatures focus specifically on transformations in dance communities, transmission mechanisms, and performance forms during modernisation via methods of field observation, interviews, and participatory research. The remaining 18 summaries are common issues in folk dance development nationwide, offering cross-regional perspectives through literature reviews, surveys, and comparative case studies.

Comprehensive analysis indicates that the modernisation of Jiangnan folk dance confronts three core challenges. Firstly, weakened cultural transmission, encompassing actors such as; ageing inheritors cum practitioners, insufficient youth participation, and the attrition of traditional learning environments. Second, the shifting aesthetic orientations, manifested in simplified movements, heightened commercialisation tendencies, and diminished cultural depth. Third, inadequate resource provision, including funding shortages, talent scarcity, and limitations within educational systems and dissemination platforms.

The literature proposes three strategic approaches: policy and social engagement, innovation and integration, and education and dissemination. At the policy level, emphasis is placed on financial support, incentive mechanisms, and social collaboration. Innovation focuses on digitalisation, multimedia applications, and cross-disciplinary creation. Education seeks to revitalise transmission through systematic teaching, community activities, and new media dissemination.

The quality assessment of the literature indicates that most empirical and archival studies possess high academic quality, while some review studies demonstrate moderate reliability. Combined with a systematic screening procedure, this research ensures methodological transparency and robust findings, providing a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for the sustainable development of Jiangnan folk dance.

To discuss the findings, the research questions are revisited:

RQ 1: What are the main challenges facing Jiangnan folk dance in modern development?
According to the search results, the main challenges faced by Jiangnan folk dance in modern development address the following three aspects:

Disconnection of cultural inheritance

Disconnection of Cultural Inheritance in Jiangnan folk dance refers to the gradual disintegration of intergenerational transmission systems, manifested through the ageing of practitioners, insufficient youth participation, and the diminishing of traditional festive occasions and apprenticeship learning environments under the influence of urbanisation and globalisation. In tandem, commercialisation and the shift towards staged performances have eroded the dances' indigenous cultural essence, transforming community-based practices into performative displays. Zhang (2025) highlights that this transformation not only hinders the preservation of skills but also weakens collective cultural identity and continuity, presenting one of the principal challenges in the modern transformation of Jiangnan folk dance.

The inheritance of Jiangnan folk dance is facing the dual challenges of aging inheritors and low enthusiasm for learning among the younger generation. Fan (2018) in "*Shandong folk dance research*", pointed out that the average age of the inheritors has exceeded 50 years old, and some of them are even over 70 years old, which makes it difficult to sustain the inheritance

work in the long term. Similarly, Liu (2008) highlights through “*Perspectives on the history and current situation of Jiangsu folk dance*”, that the precarious state of many traditional dance styles, which face the risk of extinction as the older generation of artists pass away. For instance, the dance form known as “Unwrapping the Table” is on the brink of being lost due to the advanced age of its sole remaining inheritor. This situation underscores the limitations of the individual-dependent mode of inheritance, which is increasingly unable to adapt to the demands and dynamics of modern society.

Tan (2022) in “*Research on the inheritance and innovation of folk dance in southern Jiangsu Province*” states that with nobody to succeed the aging inheritors of the Jiangnan folk dance, the continuation of traditional culture becomes uncertain. Fan (2018) echoes by highlighting the wavering attention and unwillingness of the younger generation to learn the folkdances as contributing factors to sustaining the dance. This is further agreed by Liu (2020) as he shows a deep concern that modern young people's lack of identification with traditional culture and low willingness to learn folk and traditional dance forms have weakened the vitality of the inheritance process.

Recent studies by Liu, 2023; Wang, 2024; and Zhang, 2023, generally acknowledge that inheritors play an irreplaceable role in safeguarding folk dance heritage. However, scholars also note that the economic circumstances of these inheritors are emerging as a primary obstacle. Zhang (2023) and Liu (2023) assert that financial pressures and inadequate social security frequently force practitioners to withdraw from transmission activities, thereby undermining the stability of cultural continuity. Wang (2024) points out that declining interest and participation among younger generations in Jiangnan folk dance worsens this issue, posing a threat to the culture's sustainable development.

As a form of “living culture”, Jiangnan folk dance has long been sustained through oral transmission and festival performances. However, transformations in modern society have presented new challenges to this tradition. Zhu (2022) points out that while oral transmission preserves the dances' vitality, the absence of a systematic documentation and teaching framework significantly constrains their effective transmission. Zhang & Wang (2018) through “*Research on Inheritance and Development for Chinese National Dance Culture*” emphasise that this mode of relying on individual or social forces lack systematic and professional support, therefore deemed as inefficient and unstable.

Fan (2018) noted that many practitioners lack systematic professional training and possess limited understanding of cultural sustainability, rendering them ill-equipped to meet contemporary transmission demands. Liu (2023) similarly emphasised that the absence of comprehensive safeguarding and promotion systems hinders the establishment of enduring mechanisms for transmission. This leads to the overall cultural ecosystem underpinning Jiangnan folk dance is increasingly under pressure from both societal and environmental forces. In “*Perspectives on the history and current situation of Jiangsu folk dance*”, Liu (2008) makes an important point showing the contrasting relationship between the traditional folkdance and the current situation. According to Liu, folkdances were originally rooted in rural festivals and collective rituals, but urbanisation has led to the disintegration of rural social structures, resulting in a decline in folk activities and consequently undermining the continuity of traditional culture.

Ma (2022) and Du (2023) note that the unfortunate decline in folk activities and festivals has progressively reduced the cultural platform for the survival of the development of the dance. Similarly, Dong (2019) contends that globalisation and Western cultural influences are obscuring local traditions, with many Jiangnan folk dances now preserved only in remote regions. She observes that this cultural fusion accelerates the assimilation of local cultures, leading to the gradual disappearance of geographically distinctive dance forms.

Another contributing factor that places Jiangnan folk dance in a difficult position is stage adaptation. As Liu (2024) observes, choreographers are often under pressure to create striking visual images which tend to pare down the original movement vocabulary. This could be viewed as subtle, everyday gestures rooted in regional life are now reshaped into heavily stylised movements and poses designed mainly for visual clarity. In the process, much of the dances' ethnic texture gets diluted, leaving audiences with only a surface impression of what was once a living practice.

A similar shift occurs in the musical component. Traditional melodies and rhythmic patterns are frequently replaced with contemporary soundtracks that support the choreographic mood but do not fully convey the emotional landscape of the original dance form. While these modern arrangements may heighten dramatic impact, they also soften the distinctive tonalities and cultural "flavour" that anchor Jiangnan dances to their historical and social contexts.

Liu (2015) argues that whilst the dissemination of Jiangnan folk dance has expanded significantly with deepening marketisation and commercialisation, on the other hand, its spiritual and cultural substance has progressively diminished. To cater to audience and commercial demands, performances exhibit an overemphasis on ornamentation and superficiality, prioritising form over substance. This view is supported by Wang (2024) further contending that excessive pursuit of entertainment value and theatrical spectacle undermines folk dance's artistic integrity and its capacity to bear cultural significance.

Modern Aesthetic Shift

The "modern aesthetic shift" denotes the structural evolution undergone by Jiangnan folk dance in responding to contemporary audiences' aesthetic and visual expectations. This manifests primarily through the simplification of dance movements, the redesign of costumes, and the reinterpretation of music to align with the dissemination of popular culture. With the advancement of commercialisation and mediatisation, the symbolic significance and regional authenticity of the dances have gradually diminished. This transformation extends beyond formal innovation, reflecting a redefinition of Jiangnan traditions in terms of cultural identity and aesthetic value (Lei, 2024).

The traditional and ceremonial nature of Jiangnan folk dance is increasingly challenged by shifting modern aesthetic preferences. Zhang & Wang (2018) in *"Research on Inheritance and Development for Chinese National Dance Culture"* argue that in the adaptation process for contemporary stages, this art form is often perceived as outdated and lacking diversity, therefore, failing to resonate with the varied aesthetic expectations of modern audiences. This perception, they assert, poses a significant threat to its continued inheritance and development. Echoing this concern, Sun (2024) in *"Exploration of the Development Direction of Chinese Folk Dance Culture in the Context of the New Era"* observes that the rapid evolution of audience aesthetic demand has led to the gradual neglect of Jiangnan folk dance forms and narratives, deemed obsolete and singular in their expression.

The adaptation and simplification of dances have weakened their core cultural connotations in the process of staging and commercialisation, thus making it difficult to form a deep emotional resonance with the audience. Du (2023) in *"Challenging Stigmatization Through Cultural Dance: Exploring the Role of Fengyang Flower Drums In Shaping Collective Identity, Revitalizing Tradition, And Overcoming Social Prejudice"*, argues that this monolithic form is unable to meet the modern audience's expectations for novelty and artistic expression. This has gradually marginalised Jiangnan folk dances in the cultural market. Similarly, Liu (2024) postulates that although staging has improved the communication effect, the movements, music and emotional expression of the dances have been 'generalised', and the national characteristics and emotional depth have faded. Liu (2023) strongly believes that western

culture has led to the Jiangnan folk dances being seen as too traditional, further aggravating the shrinking market and the marginalisation of cultural transmission.

While digital media has broadened the dissemination channels for folk dances in the Jiangnan region, an excessive pursuit of theatrical effects has conversely diminished their cultural depth. Lu (2023) and Liu (2023) note that within a commercialised context, numerous folk and traditional dances have been excessively packaged to cater to the tourism market, gradually being reduced to mere entertainment commodities. This tendency not only dilutes the historical substance of the dances but also diminishes their inherent national spirit and cultural significance.

The transition of Jiangnan folk dance from rural settings to urban environments presents a significant risk of diluting its distinct regional and traditional characteristics, as highlighted by Tang (2016) in "*The change of Jiangsu folk dance from countryside to town*". Tang (2020) observes that folk dances from the Jiangnan region are frequently perceived as lacking vitality and contemporary relevance on modern stages, thus, rendering them unappealing to urban audiences. The above perspective is also agreed by Tan (2021) who posits that younger generations favour international dance styles incorporating popular or fashionable elements, rendering traditional folk dances as monotonous and outdated. To accommodate this aesthetic shift, Ma (2022) points out that some choreographers excessively pursue visual spectacle and grand-scale production, yet this approach frequently comes at the expense of Jiangnan's traditional cultural essence and regional distinctiveness.

Liu (2024) observes that movements from traditional Jiangnan folk dances have been reconfigured for the modern stage to align with a “universal” aesthetic ideal. While such adaptations enhance the stage presentation's adaptability, they diminish the dances' regional character and artistic depth. These formalised innovations, though visually appealing, often weaken the dances' expressive power and cultural substance. Some choreographers merely replicate the external forms of traditional dances while neglecting their spiritual essence, resulting in works that lack cultural authenticity and heritage value (Liu, 2024). The scarcity of materials and complexity of craftsmanship further makes it difficult to fully restore traditional costumes and props of Jiangnan folk dance in contemporary times. While modern production methods enhance performance efficiency, they also distort cultural symbols, further diminishing the dance's cultural transmission and aesthetic significance.

Traditional folk dances of the Jiangnan region are renowned for their simplicity and improvisational nature. However, within contemporary stage arts, this natural and unadorned mode of expression struggles to align with modern audiences' aesthetic demands for visual innovation and dramatic spectacle (Liu, 2008). Liu (2008) notes in "*Perspectives on the history and current situation of Jiangsu folk dance*", this has led to the re-choreographing of many Jiangnan folk dances to include popular elements. Whilst these adaptations may be more visually appealing, Liu (2022) claims that such treatments frequently undermine the cultural integrity and symbolic significance of the dance. Concurrently, shifting social aesthetic preferences and the pervasive influence of global popular culture have increasingly led traditional dance forms to be perceived as outdated (Tan, 2021). This situation shows the enduring tension between cultural heritage preservation and modern artistic innovation.

Insufficient resource support

One of the most persistent challenges facing the inheritance and growth of Jiangnan folk dances is the simple lack of resources. In practice, this shows up everywhere: funding is tight, trained practitioners are few, the education pathway is inconsistent, and there are not enough platforms for regular performance. Even the digital promotion work—which younger audiences rely on—is still far behind. When all of these weaknesses accumulate, the tradition struggles to sustain itself. It becomes harder to nurture artistic depth, the transmission from one generation to the

next is easily interrupted, and the wider public gradually loses touch with the form. As Huang & Noknoi (2025) point out, this resource gap has become a major obstacle to the meaningful modernisation and long-term survival of Jiangnan folk dance.

Although the government has intensified efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage in recent years, the transmission and development of Jiangnan folk dance remain significantly constrained by insufficient follow-up resource allocation. Liu (2022) affirms that local authorities typically invest heavily during the heritage nomination phase, yet protective measures often stagnate post-success, creating a scenario where 'nomination concludes, thus protection concludes.' This phased investment model proves inadequate for sustaining the continuity and systematic nature of heritage preservation. As noted by Tan (2021) in "*Research on the inheritance and innovation of folk dance in southern Jiangsu Province*", funding shortages lie at the heart of the challenges facing the preservation of folk dances in Jiangnan. As a result, performance opportunities for many traditional dance forms have gradually shrunk leading to a decline in financial resources. This further marks the difficulty in sustaining long term funding to maintain these dances. This scarcity of resources renders the chain of transmission ever more fragile, further exacerbating the disconnect between intangible cultural heritage dances and contemporary society.

Liu (2023) further notes that inadequate financial support in rural and underdeveloped regions undermines the continuity of folk-dance performances and transmission activities, hindering the advancement of sustained conservation efforts. Moreover, this funding shortfall directly impacts the economy of practitioners, hampering their motivation for long-term commitment. Ma (2022) and Wang (2024) contend that inadequate livelihood support and limited social recognition for folk artists not only devalues their efforts but also demotivates them. This decline not only weakens younger generations' enthusiasm for Jiangnan folk dance but also intensifies the crisis of transmission. Furthermore, the scarcity of exhibition and dissemination platforms constrains the dance's overall development. As Ma (2022) observes, the limited coverage of cultural centres and art galleries deprives Jiangnan folk dance of stable venues for performance and transmission.

The sustained development of folk dance in the Jiangnan region is constrained by inadequate institutional and creative support. Tan (2021) notes that shortages of funding and professional talent limit the innovative potential of creative teams. Liu (2022) argues that the absence of experienced choreographers creates an imbalance between artistic form and content expression, thereby hindering overall progress. Similarly, Tang et al. (2024) highlight that the lack of a professional talent cultivation system and training mechanisms weakens the creative vitality and artistic quality of Jiangnan folk dance works.

The sustainable transmission of Jiangnan folk dance relies heavily on educational support, yet inadequate investment by higher education institutions has become a significant problem (Lu, 2021). Weak curriculum design, insufficient funding, and a lack of humanistic care alienate students from traditional dance, hindering genuine comprehension of its cultural essence. According to Sun (2024), the limited number and incomplete structure of dance education institutions significantly undermine the educational transmission and continuity of Jiangnan folk dance.

Zhang (2023) in "*Comparative study on the artistic characteristics of Jiangsu flower drumming*", argues that the limited investment in Jiangnan folk dance in schools and the lack of students' understanding of the cultural connotations have resulted in a weak foundation for the heritage. Liu (2023) pointed out that the youth's low interest in Jiangnan folk dance further weakened the inheritance. Studies continue to show there is a clear decline of the attractiveness of traditional culture under the influence of globalisation and young people's reduced interest in Jiangnan folk dance (Liu, 2020; Zhang, 2023).

Building on the challenges related to audience engagement and cultural authenticity, Liu (2020) and Zhang (2023) emphasise the limited role of educational institutions in fostering cultural identity through folk dance. This lack of integration within the school system is compounded by insufficient support from regional governments, as Lu (2023) pointed out in "*Inheritance and development trend of Chinese folk-dance culture*". Lu suggests that a lack of understanding regarding the intrinsic value of Jiangnan folk dance translates into inadequate financial resources and protective policies. This deficiency not only hinders the development of a robust educational framework for the art form but also restricts its wider dissemination and overall development within society.

Media and digital communication play important roles in creating visibility for dance. Unfortunately, in the matter of Jiangnan folk dances, this factor does not help. Liu (2022) points out that public engagement with this dance form remains low, particularly among younger demographics, who generally lack emotional resonance and cultural identification. Tang et al. (2024) claims that existing promotional methods are overly formulaic, failing to effectively convey the dance's profound cultural significance and historical value. Similarly, Tan (2021) affirms that the younger generation exhibits weak identification with traditional dance forms, while the absence of diverse and innovative dissemination platforms has increasingly marginalised Jiangnan folk dance within contemporary cultural discourse. Likewise, Liu (2023) critiques certain cultural institutions for their lack of empathy in promoting and staging folk dance performances.

RQ2: What strategies did the researcher use to address these challenges?

According to the search results, the researcher's strategies to address these challenges include the following three areas:

Policy Support and social participation

Policy support and social participation refers to the collaborative efforts of government and multiple societal stakeholders in providing sustainable support for the preservation and innovation of Jiangnan folk dances. Such support encompasses policy arrangements including financial subsidies, tax incentives, intellectual property protection, and incentive mechanisms for practitioners, while simultaneously mobilising active participation from enterprises, non-governmental organisations, and communities. This multi-tiered collaboration helps ensure continuity in preservation efforts, promotes cultural activities, and heightens public engagement, thereby establishing a sustainable cultural conservation system (Yuan, Yusof, Ghafar & Cheah, 2025).

Government support is widely regarded as a crucial foundation for revitalising Jiangnan folk dance. Liu (2024) asserts the importance of establishing dedicated funding for inheritor training, creative reinterpretation of works, and digital archiving, alongside refining relevant intellectual property legislation. Fan (2022) emphasises constructing a systematic policy framework to clarify responsible entities and optimise resource allocation. Lu (2023) suggests employing policy measures such as tax relief and cultural subsidies to ensure the stable operation of folk dance groups and foster the long-term development of folk dance education and cultural activities in the Jiangnan region.

Qiao (2020) contends that enhancing professional recognition and welfare provisions for folk artists through targeted policies to alleviate their livelihood pressures is essential for ensuring the continuity of cultural transmission. Liu (2023) similarly advocates establishing systematic evaluation and incentive mechanisms for inheritors, complemented by stable funding, social security provisions, and oversight systems. Wang (2024) argues that governments should actively encourage broad public participation while strengthening institutional support for cultural centres and folk associations to alleviate shortages of

professional talent. Collectively, these studies underscore that a comprehensive policy framework constitutes the core safeguard for preserving and revitalising Jiangnan folk dance heritage.

In “*Contemporary transformation of Suzhou folk dance*”, Hu (2024) argues that folk dance competitions and cultural activities should be organised through government-led efforts to unite the arts and culture sector and social forces to create a folk culture brand in conjunction with traditional festivals. Lv (2022) proposes setting up inheritance bases and organising cultural festivals and exhibitions to expand social influence in “*Research on dance art creation under the perspective of Jiangnan culture*”. Zhou (2018) argues that for funding folklore activities, it is important to provide stipends and organise lectures/talks to improve the living environment and to motivate inheritors and young people to participate. Taken together, these policy measures provide comprehensive support for the preservation and inheritance of folk dances in Jiangnan.

The extensive participation of social forces constitutes a vital component in advancing the inheritance and development of Jiangnan folk dance. Liu (2023) indicates that enterprises may enhance their social influence by sponsoring Jiangnan folk dance events and funding research projects. Ma (2022) suggests that governments should collaborate with non-governmental organisations to hold cultural festivals, competitions, and exhibitions, thereby stimulating public engagement and participation. Lu (2023) further suggests that community events and online communication platforms can effectively spark residents' interest in Jiangnan folk dance, facilitating its deeper integration into contemporary life.

Despite the challenges, Liu (2024) in “*Analysis of the inheritance and development of Chinese folk dance*” posits that social organizations and enterprises hold significant potential in bolstering the dissemination and promotion of Jiangnan folk dance. Liu suggests that sponsoring activities, funding projects, and organizing volunteer participation can effectively contribute to its wider reach.

Furthermore, community activities, festivals, and competitions not only encourage broader social engagement but also cultivate a positive environment conducive to preservation and inheritance. Echoing this sentiment, Lv (2022) in “*Research on dance art creation under the perspective of Jiangnan culture*” advocates for collaborative efforts among social enterprises, civic organizations, and cultural institutions to further advance the dissemination and promotion of Jiangnan folk dance. Zhou (2018) in “*Research on the characteristics and inheritance of Jiangnan folk dance*” further emphasizes the value of organizing folk art competitions and folk culture touring activities as effective means of integrating Jiangnan folk dance into contemporary cultural life, thereby enhancing its popularity and attracting a wider audience to appreciate its unique charm.

Innovation and Integration

Innovation and integration refer to the process of modernising Jiangnan folk dance through digital technology, multimedia innovation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, while preserving its ethnic characteristics and cultural essence. This strategy expands artistic expression and audience reach, achieving sustainable cultural transmission by blending traditional elements with contemporary aesthetics and global cultural exchange (Runchun & Yumei, 2024).

The application of digital and multimedia technologies presents fresh opportunities for the preservation and innovation of Jiangnan folk dance. Liu (2024) notes that emerging technologies such as VR, AR, and holographic projection can significantly enhance the immersive quality and expressiveness of dance, thereby attracting younger audiences. Runchun & Yumei (2024) point out that integrating 3D animation and holographic imagery into

traditional performances renders folk dance more attuned to contemporary aesthetic demands. They further emphasise that techniques such as 3D animation, holographic imaging, and multimedia editing can virtualise dance elements, thereby elevating artistic expression and dissemination appeal.

Additionally digital technology's advancement offers fresh approaches to both creation and preservation. Wang (2024) recommends employing digital media to document and recreate traditional movements, integrating contemporary social themes to produce works resonating with the era. Wang (2023) argues that techniques like high-definition photography, multi-directional motion capture, and holographic imaging not only effectively preserve dance heritage but also propel the industrialisation and market development of intangible cultural heritage.

As explained earlier, digital technology has become an important creative and preservational tool for Jiangnan folk dances, and many scholars have approached this topic from different angles. Liu (2023), for instance, points out that multimedia recording is not just a technical aid but a practical way to capture the nuances of performance, teaching processes, and the cultural stories behind the dances. In his view, even a simple documentary can become a long-term archive for researchers. Ma (2022) looks at the performance side and notes how 3D and holographic projections can deepen the emotional atmosphere on stage, giving audiences a much more immersive experience than traditional staging alone.

In her study on the contemporary transformation of Suzhou folk dance, Hu (2024) stresses the need to "textualize" endangered movement practices—essentially turning fragile, orally-transmitted traditions into clear, multimedia-based records that can be systematically protected. Qiao (2020) extends this idea further by showing how digital tools such as holographic projection and 3D animation open the door to cross-border collaborations with animation, theatre, and music.

Taken together, these scholars reveal how digitalization does more than modernise the form; it creates new pathways for safeguarding, reimagining, and sharing Jiangnan folk dances with a wider public.

Within globalisation, modern innovation and cross-cultural collaboration represent crucial pathways for enhancing the international influence of Jiangnan folk dance. Liu (2024) states that partnerships with international artists not only infuse Jiangnan folk dance with an international perspective but also foster cross-cultural understanding and integration. Sun (2024) adds that collaborations with international artistic ensembles can propel Jiangnan folk dance onto the global stage, elevating both its artistic and cultural identity.

A key strategy for achieving long-term sustainable development lies in modernising dance performance forms while preserving ethnic characteristics. Zhang & Wang (2018) recommend creating contemporary expressions that balance modernity, entertainment value, and audience accessibility. Lu (2023) on the other hand, suggests integrating core socialist values into dance works, therefore, incorporating contemporary social themes to make artistic expression resonate with everyday life.

Liu (2023) notes that incorporating contemporary themes enhances audience engagement, broadening the reach and influence of Jiangnan folk dance. Sun (2024) further advocates interdisciplinary collaboration, blending traditional cultural elements with modern music and stage design to create innovative and forward-looking works. Together, these views highlight the vital balance between modern adaptation and the preservation of cultural essence.

Education and dissemination

Education and dissemination refer to the promotion of Jiangnan folk dance through systematic teaching frameworks, tiered educational programmes, community cultural activities, and modern information technology alongside new media platforms. Its core objectives are to enhance public awareness and participation, strengthen younger generations' understanding and interest in the dance, and ensure the sustained transmission of dance knowledge, skills, and cultural significance (Liu & Kalimyllin, 2024).

Teaching serves as a vital conduit for transmitting Jiangnan folk dance. Liu et al. (2024) propose establishing a multidimensional teaching system to refine instructional dance content and methodologies. Sun (2024) recommends constructing a multi-tiered educational network encompassing primary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, and communities to comprehensively advance the transmission and popularisation of Jiangnan folk dance. Lu (2023) emphasises leveraging online courses and interactive platforms to overcome geographical constraints and attract broader participation in learning.

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in Jiangnan folk dance pedagogy. Qiao (2020) advocates offering specialised courses, lectures, and field research to deepen students' understanding of the dance's cultural context and artistic characteristics. Ma (2022) proposes inviting folk artists to teach, combining practical experience with multimedia instruction to enable students to appreciate the dance's authentic appeal through hands-on engagement. Community education also serves as a vital pillar for preservation. Liu (2023) indicates that community competitions, cultural festivals, lectures, and exhibitions can enhance public recognition of dance culture while enriching local cultural life. Zhou (2018) further notes that local governments should provide essential infrastructure, such as folk culture squares, to create specialised environments for Jiangnan folk dance education and activities.

The application of modern information technology has provided new avenues for disseminating Jiangnan folk dance. Liu (2023) notes that through short videos, live streaming, and high-quality dance recordings, the audience can be significantly expanded and cultural dissemination enhanced. Ma (2022) continues to point out that online dissemination not only attracts younger audiences but also provides opportunities for creative practice in Jiangnan folk dance. Lu (2023) emphasises that social media platforms such as Jieyin and Weibo serve as vital promotional tools, enabling greater public engagement with dance culture through regular livestreams, video sharing, and online commentary. Simultaneously, she advocates establishing a dance culture database to document dance works through text, images, audio, and video for long-term preservation.

Recent research indicates new media plays a pivotal role in promoting and developing Jiangnan folk dance. Sun (2024) notes that showcasing exemplary works through live streaming and short videos significantly broadens audiences. Zhu (2022) emphasises that new media not only supports digital preservation but also disseminates dance culture widely, offering immersive experiences and creating novel pathways for transmission.

Tang (2023) observes that the global ubiquity of online streaming, short videos, and mobile applications should be leveraged to advance the dissemination and innovation of Jiangnan folk dance. Zhang (2023) adds that the online production and distribution of digital audio-visual content not only attracts broader audiences but also strengthens social recognition and cultural value. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that new media technologies have played a transformative role in the preservation, promotion, and innovation of Jiangnan folk dance.

DISCUSSION

The modern development of Jiangnan folk dance faces multifaceted challenges, particularly in cultural transmission. The ageing of practitioners and waning interest among younger generations have created a significant knowledge gap. Traditional oral teaching methods prove inefficient, lacking systematic preservation measures and professional support, which further constrains the art form's sustainability. Urbanisation and the dissolution of rural communities have disrupted the original cultural ecosystem, worsening transmission difficulties. Addressing these issues requires strategies that both safeguard cultural knowledge and actively engage younger generations.

Shifting contemporary aesthetics also challenges the traditional forms of Jiangnan folk dance. Outdated dance styles are often perceived as obsolete and limited in variety, struggling to engage modern audiences. Adaptations for stage performances frequently simplify movements, reducing the dance to mere performance art and diluting its cultural and ethnic identity. Commercialisation tendencies prioritise visual spectacle over deeper cultural significance, leading to the wearing down of traditional substance. Effective strategies must therefore balance audience expectations with preserving the dance's cultural essence.

Limited resources also constitute a significant obstacle to sustainable development and innovation. Insufficient educational programmes and university curricula constrain the cultivation of new talent and the transmission of knowledge. Weak community outreach further weaken public engagement, while unstable government support creates shortages in resources and performance platforms. Overcoming these challenges requires strategic funding allocation and targeted initiatives to support cultural preservation and creative development.

Scholars have proposed strategies for Jiangnan folk dance, emphasising the importance of policy support and social engagement. Key measures include establishing dedicated funding and enacting legislation to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, ensuring the continuity of conservation and innovation efforts. Effective resource allocation is crucial for enhancing the efficiency of fund utilisation. Involving enterprises, community organisations, and NGOs can raise public awareness and amplify the cultural influence of Jiangnan folk dance, thereby fostering an ecological environment conducive to its preservation, promotion, and revitalisation.

Innovation and integration prove vital for the revitalisation of Jiangnan folk dance. Digital technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and holographic projection create conditions for enriching dance expression and delivering immersive experiences. These technologies not only modernise the art form but also broaden its international reach through cross-cultural collaborations and contemporary creations. Integrating real-life themes into dance and combining it with other art forms like music and theatre enables works to retain traditional cultural elements while appealing to modern audiences. This multidimensional strategy balances cultural heritage preservation with artistic development, adapting to societal and aesthetic shifts.

Education and dissemination are core means to ensure the sustainable development of Jiangnan folk dance. Establishing a multi-tiered educational framework encompassing primary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, and community programmes cultivates inheritors possessing both cultural literacy and practical skills. This system nurtures the public's appreciation for dance from an early age while providing advanced training for professional learners. Furthermore, leveraging new media platforms such as short videos, live streaming, and online courses broadens audience reach and engages younger generations. The integration of education with digital dissemination effectively supports the preservation and widespread promotion of Jiangnan folk dance.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this review outlines the numerous challenges confronting the modern development of Jiangnan folk dance, including gaps in cultural transmission, shifting audience aesthetics, and insufficient resources. Concurrently, research indicates that targeted strategies—such as comprehensive policy frameworks, technological innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and systematic educational measures—can effectively address these predicaments. Integrating modern technology and creative approaches with traditional cultural values is recognised as a vital pathway to ensuring the sustainable development of Jiangnan folk dance. By bridging tradition and modernity, these strategies not only safeguard cultural heritage but also enable dance forms to evolve in response to contemporary societal demands. This review provides theoretical reference and practical guidance for subsequent research, aiding the transmission, innovation, and dissemination of Jiangnan folk dance while enhancing its enduring vitality and international influence.

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