

Original Paper

Constructing Cultural Identity through International Collaboration in Ethnic Music Education within Multicultural Contexts

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Received: January 27, 2025

Accepted: February 11, 2025

Online Published: February 28, 2025

doi:10.22158/elsr.v6n1p105

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v6n1p105>

Abstract

In the context of globalization, cultural identity has become a crucial aspect of education, especially in ethnic music education, which functions as a medium for transmitting cultural heritage. Ethnic music education focuses on traditional music forms specific to cultural groups and plays an essential role in shaping and expressing cultural identities. In multicultural settings, where various cultural groups coexist, ethnic music education serves as an important tool for preserving cultural traditions and fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual respect. A significant trend in ethnic music education today is international collaboration, which enables educators and students to explore diverse musical traditions. This exchange not only enriches musical knowledge but also helps individuals understand the construction and representation of cultural identities through music. However, while international collaboration has great potential, its effectiveness in shaping cultural identity remains complex. It can enhance the understanding of one's cultural heritage and foster appreciation for other cultures. At the same time, it may create tensions when traditional practices confront globalized or Westernized ideals.

Keywords

cultural identity, ethnic music education, international collaboration, intercultural dialogue, globalization

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, cultural identity has become a critical concept within education, particularly in ethnic music education, which serves as both a medium and a vehicle for the transmission of cultural heritage (Qiang, 2024). Ethnic music education involves the study of traditional music forms and practices specific to particular cultural groups, and it plays a crucial role in shaping and expressing

cultural identities (Guan et al., 2023). In multicultural contexts, where diverse cultural groups interact and coexist, ethnic music education becomes an essential tool for understanding and preserving cultural traditions while fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual respect (Abril, 2006; Bustos González, 2013). One of the most significant trends in ethnic music education today is the increasing emphasis on international collaboration. Through cross-border partnerships and exchanges, educators and students alike have the opportunity to engage with diverse musical traditions and perspectives, which can influence their understanding of their own cultural identities (Volk, 2004). International collaboration not only facilitates the exchange of musical knowledge and techniques but also promotes the exploration of how cultural identities are constructed and represented through music across different cultures (Li, 2024).

However, while the potential for international collaboration in ethnic music education is widely recognized, its effectiveness in constructing cultural identity remains a complex issue (Guan et al., 2023; Prest, 2020). On one hand, international collaboration can promote a deeper understanding of one's cultural roots and a broader appreciation of others' cultures. On the other hand, it may also lead to tensions as traditional practices and cultural identities are confronted with globalized or Westernized ideals. Therefore, it is important to critically examine the impact of international collaboration on cultural identity within the context of ethnic music education, particularly in multicultural environments where diverse cultural norms and practices intersect.

This article aims to review the existing literature on the role of international collaboration in ethnic music education, focusing on how such collaboration influences the construction of cultural identity. Through this exploration, the article seeks to understand the complexities and contradictions inherent in this process and offer insights into how international cooperation can be optimized to promote both cultural preservation and cross-cultural understanding. By analyzing various studies, this review will highlight the potential and challenges of international collaboration in shaping cultural identities through ethnic music education in multicultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

The construction of cultural identity is a multifaceted process influenced by various educational, social, and political factors (Zhang & Guo, 2023). In ethnic music education, cultural identity is not only reflected in the teaching and learning of traditional music forms but is also shaped through interactions with other cultures. As globalization and multiculturalism continue to impact educational practices worldwide, the role of international collaboration in ethnic music education has garnered increasing attention (Schippers, 2009). This section reviews the existing literature on cultural identity construction in ethnic music education, the challenges and opportunities in such education within multicultural contexts, and the theoretical frameworks supporting international collaboration in educational settings (Bartleet et al., 2020).

2.1 Cultural Identity Construction in Education

Cultural identity is defined as the sense of belonging to a specific cultural group, which is often shaped by shared traditions, values, language, and practices. According to Ozer et al. (2024) cultural identity is not fixed but is instead fluid and constantly evolving, influenced by both internal and external factors. In the context of ethnic music education, this concept is particularly relevant as music acts as a powerful tool for expressing and reinforcing cultural identity. Music not only reflects cultural practices but also serves as a means through which individuals negotiate their place within society (Aróstegui & Louro, 2009).

Studies have shown that ethnic music education plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously allowing individuals to re-define and express their identities in relation to others. For instance, the study by Folkestad (2002) highlighted how the practice of traditional music in ethnic communities reinforces collective identity by maintaining connections to the past. However, as globalization intensifies the movement of people, ideas, and practices, the construction of cultural identity becomes more complex. A growing body of research has explored how individuals and communities navigate the tensions between traditional practices and the influences of modernity (Chauhan, 2022). In ethnic music education, these tensions are particularly evident when traditional music forms are adapted to meet global standards, potentially diluting or reshaping cultural identities in the process.

2.2 Challenges and Opportunities in Ethnic Music Education

Ethnic music education is often characterized by its connection to a particular culture's traditions, which are frequently passed down orally. This form of transmission presents both challenges and opportunities, particularly in multicultural educational settings. One of the main challenges in ethnic music education is the issue of cultural authenticity. As music education programs increasingly incorporate diverse musical traditions, educators must carefully navigate the balance between preserving the authenticity of a particular culture's music and introducing new teaching methodologies that reflect a more globalized approach (Walden, 2020).

In multicultural contexts, ethnic music education is further complicated by issues of cultural appropriation, the tension between preserving traditional forms and adapting them to modern contexts, and the challenge of addressing cultural diversity within the classroom. The introduction of non-traditional or globalized musical influences into local contexts can sometimes create conflicts, as communities may resist change or feel threatened by the influence of external cultures (Song & Yuan, 2021). However, these challenges can also present opportunities for students and educators to engage in meaningful dialogue, developing a more nuanced understanding of their own and others' cultural identities. As a result, ethnic music education offers the potential to foster cultural awareness, empathy, and respect, particularly when approached in a way that recognizes and values diverse cultural perspectives (Walden, 2020; Zheng, 2024).

2.3 The Role of International Collaboration in Ethnic Music Education

International collaboration has become an increasingly significant aspect of ethnic music education, offering both educators and students the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural exchanges. Such collaborations can take many forms, ranging from teacher-student exchanges to joint musical performances or collaborative research projects. These partnerships facilitate the sharing of ideas, techniques, and practices across cultural boundaries, enabling a deeper understanding of music as a universal language that transcends geographical and cultural divides (Behr et al., 2016).

The theoretical framework supporting international collaboration in ethnic music education is grounded in ideas of intercultural communication and education. According to Byram (2008), intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, and it is a skill that can be cultivated through international collaboration in educational settings (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023). Through international exchanges, students and educators not only acquire musical knowledge but also learn to appreciate the cultural contexts in which that music is embedded. As noted by Lim et al. (2022), international collaboration in ethnic music education can thus promote cultural sensitivity and critical thinking, as it encourages participants to reflect on their own cultural identities while engaging with the identities of others.

In terms of practical outcomes, research has demonstrated that international collaboration in music education can lead to the development of a more inclusive and diverse musical curriculum, one that reflects a broader range of cultural perspectives and experiences. Such collaborations can also contribute to the creation of a more inclusive cultural space, where multiple cultural identities are acknowledged and celebrated. However, challenges arise in ensuring that these collaborations are truly reciprocal and equitable. Studies by Musamba Bussy and Vogel (2020) caution that, without careful management, international collaborations may inadvertently reinforce power imbalances, with dominant cultural groups imposing their perspectives on others.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks for Cultural Identity and International Collaboration

Various theoretical frameworks have been applied to understand the relationship between cultural identity and international collaboration in ethnic music education. Postcolonial theory offers valuable insights into how cultural exchanges often occur within a context of unequal power dynamics, where the dominance of Western ideals may overshadow the contributions of non-Western cultures R'boul (2022). Additionally, social constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize the role of social interaction and cultural context in knowledge acquisition, support the idea that cultural identity is formed through both individual and collective experiences in a community (Nithideechaiwarachok & Chano, 2024). Furthermore, scholars such as Kim (2015) have applied intercultural communication theories to explore how individuals adapt and negotiate their cultural identities in cross-cultural encounters. These frameworks suggest that international collaboration in ethnic music education is not simply about learning new musical techniques but also involves a process of identity negotiation, where participants engage with and redefine their own cultural positions relative to those of others. This process can lead to

the hybridization of musical forms and the creation of new, transnational identities that reflect a blending of cultural influences (Golemo, 2020).

3. International Collaboration and Cultural Identity Construction

International collaboration in ethnic music education presents both opportunities and challenges in the construction of cultural identity. As educational institutions around the world increasingly adopt collaborative models that involve exchanges between cultures, students and educators are faced with the task of navigating their cultural identities within these globalized contexts. This section explores the ways in which international collaboration influences the formation and evolution of cultural identity in ethnic music education, highlighting both the positive contributions and potential pitfalls of such collaborative efforts.

3.1 *The Role of International Collaboration in Cultural Identity Construction*

International collaboration, particularly in the context of ethnic music education, serves as a dynamic process through which cultural identity is both reinforced and transformed. As noted by Nattheeraphong and Jenks (2024), intercultural exchanges provide a space where individuals can confront their cultural assumptions and engage with others in ways that expand their understanding of their own identity. Through collaborative musical experiences, students and educators are not only exposed to different musical traditions but also to the cultural contexts that shape these traditions, offering them new perspectives on how their own cultural identity is constructed.

One key way in which international collaboration influences cultural identity construction is through the process of *musical hybridity*. When students and educators from different cultural backgrounds come together, they often share and blend elements of their respective musical traditions. This interaction can result in the creation of hybrid musical forms, which reflect a fusion of cultural influences and contribute to the development of transnational identities. For example, a study by Trehub (2015) on cross-cultural music exchanges in ethnomusicology found that such collaborations frequently lead to the formation of new musical genres, as traditional music is reinterpreted and recontextualized in light of diverse cultural perspectives.

This hybridization process plays a key role in how cultural identity is negotiated and redefined within international collaborations. In these settings, identity becomes fluid rather than fixed, as individuals adapt and transform their sense of self in response to new experiences and intercultural interactions (Kim, 2015). As a result, international collaboration in ethnic music education offers a fertile ground for exploring how cultural identities evolve in a multicultural world.

3.2 *Cultural Identity in the Context of Multiculturalism*

In multicultural contexts, the construction of cultural identity is inherently influenced by the dynamics of intercultural exchange. Multiculturalism, as a social and educational philosophy, emphasizes the recognition and celebration of cultural diversity. Within this framework, international collaboration in ethnic music education can serve as a powerful tool for fostering cultural empathy and mutual respect.

When students from diverse cultural backgrounds come together to learn and perform traditional music from one another, they are provided with an opportunity to understand the meanings and values embedded within those musical forms.

For instance, a study by Bartleet et al. (2020) on the impact of multicultural music education in European schools found that international collaboration helped students appreciate the complexity of cultural identities by exposing them to a range of musical traditions. Students participating in such exchanges reported a heightened sense of cultural awareness and a deeper understanding of how music can serve as a reflection of social, historical, and political contexts. Furthermore, multicultural music education promotes the idea that cultural identity is not confined to a single national or ethnic category, but rather is shaped by the intersections of multiple influences and experiences.

In this sense, international collaboration in ethnic music education allows students to challenge narrow or stereotypical conceptions of cultural identity. By learning from one another, students come to see cultural identity as something that is constructed through dialogue, shared experiences, and mutual respect. As emphasized by Fisher (2020), international collaboration helps to break down the barriers that separate cultural groups, fostering a sense of solidarity and interconnectedness that transcends geographic and ethnic boundaries.

3.3 Challenges to Cultural Identity in International Collaboration

Despite the positive potential for international collaboration to enrich cultural identity construction, there are also significant challenges that can undermine the process. One of the most prominent challenges is the risk of cultural appropriation. When music from one culture is borrowed or performed without proper understanding or respect for its cultural context, it can lead to a distortion of the original tradition and the commodification of cultural elements. This issue is particularly salient in international collaborations where unequal power dynamics often exist between dominant and marginalized cultures (Rose et al., 2024). In such cases, cultural exchange can inadvertently lead to the erasure of cultural identities rather than their celebration.

Another challenge lies in the tension between globalized and localized cultural identities. As international collaborations expose students to a wide range of musical influences, there is a risk that traditional music forms may be altered, diluted, or overshadowed by globalized musical trends. This issue is particularly relevant in ethnic music education, where authenticity and the preservation of cultural heritage are central to the educational process. In a study by Bartleet et al. (2020), it was found that students who participated in global music education programs often struggled with reconciling the globalized influences they encountered with the traditional practices they had been taught. This can lead to a sense of confusion or disorientation about their own cultural identity, as they grapple with the tension between maintaining cultural authenticity and embracing innovation.

Additionally, the power dynamics inherent in international collaboration can present significant challenges. In some cases, the voices of less dominant cultural groups may be marginalized, as Western or more dominant cultural perspectives take precedence. Research by Vangen (2017) highlighted that

without careful management, international collaborations could reinforce existing hierarchies, where the dominant culture imposes its values on the collaborative process, thus shaping the cultural identities of the other participants in ways that may not reflect their own traditions or experiences.

3.4 Strategies for Successful International Collaboration

To maximize the positive impact of international collaboration on cultural identity construction while minimizing the risks, certain strategies can be employed. First, it is essential to approach collaboration with mutual respect and a focus on equitable exchange. Educators and institutions must ensure that all cultural groups have equal opportunities to share their traditions and perspectives, fostering an environment of reciprocity and respect (Zalli, 2024). Furthermore, it is important to approach the process of hybridity with care, acknowledging the value of both preserving traditional music forms and allowing for creative reinterpretations.

Second, cultural sensitivity and awareness must be integral components of international collaboration. Educators should work to develop students' intercultural competence, helping them to recognize the complexities of cultural identity and the importance of understanding the cultural contexts in which music is created and performed (Kang, 2022). By promoting a deep understanding of the meanings behind musical practices, international collaboration can become a transformative experience that enriches students' cultural identities while fostering a sense of global citizenship.

3.5 Conclusion of International Collaboration and Cultural Identity Construction

In conclusion, international collaboration in ethnic music education plays a significant role in the construction of cultural identity. By providing a platform for the exchange of musical traditions and ideas, these collaborations offer opportunities for individuals to redefine and expand their cultural identities. However, the process is fraught with challenges, including the risks of cultural appropriation, the tension between globalized and localized identities, and the dynamics of power in intercultural exchanges. Therefore, successful international collaboration requires a commitment to mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, and an ongoing dialogue that values the contributions of all cultures involved.

4. Cultural Identity in Multicultural Contexts

4.1 Defining and Negotiating Cultural Identity in Multicultural Settings

Cultural identity is a complex and multifaceted construct that evolves within the interaction between individuals and the diverse cultural environments in which they live. In multicultural settings, identity is not a static or singular concept; it is fluid, shaped by the negotiations between personal heritage and broader societal influences. Mustafa (2017) that cultural identity is a process rather than a fixed essence, involving a continuous dialogue between the individual and the social structures that influence them.

In multicultural societies, individuals are often confronted with the challenge of negotiating multiple cultural identities. For example, a person from an immigrant background may feel connected to their ethnic culture, yet also identify with the dominant national or global culture in which they reside. This

process of negotiation is key in multicultural contexts, where different groups coexist and interact, creating a space for individuals to explore their own cultural identities.

Ethnic music education provides an important context for this negotiation, as music serves as a direct reflection of cultural values, history, and heritage. Through learning music from various cultural traditions, students are not only exposed to different musical forms but are also encouraged to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds. By engaging with these musical practices, students are able to situate themselves within a broader cultural narrative, helping them navigate their complex cultural identities. In a multicultural classroom, the music serves as both a bridge and a boundary, allowing students to both express their identities and explore those of others.

4.2 The Role of Ethnic Music Education in Shaping Cultural Identity

Ethnic music education plays a significant role in the construction of cultural identity, especially within multicultural contexts. Music, with its deep ties to cultural heritage, provides an avenue for both personal and collective expression. In multicultural educational settings, ethnic music allows students to engage with cultural traditions that are different from their own, fostering both personal growth and cross-cultural understanding.

For example, learning a particular ethnic music tradition—such as the rhythms of West African drumming or the melodies of Chinese classical music—can provide students with a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance of these musical forms. The process of learning and performing ethnic music can lead to a profound sense of belonging, as it helps students connect with their cultural roots and gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity within their community.

However, ethnic music education does more than just promote the preservation of cultural heritage. It also provides a space for students to experiment with and reinterpret cultural traditions. In multicultural classrooms, students from various backgrounds often collaborate, leading to the fusion of musical styles and genres. This collaboration promotes a sense of shared identity and cultural exchange, where students learn not only to preserve their own cultural traditions but also to embrace and adapt others. By engaging in such cross-cultural collaborations, students can explore the hybridity of cultural identities, which is a central feature of life in multicultural settings.

Ethnic music education, when approached in an inclusive manner, allows students to create new cultural identities that are reflective of the globalized, interconnected world in which they live. In this sense, ethnic music education does not just serve as a means of cultural preservation but also as a medium for the creation of new cultural expressions that reflect the dynamic, multifaceted nature of identity.

4.3 Hybridity, Representation, and the Politics of Cultural Identity

In multicultural contexts, hybridity is an inevitable outcome of the constant interaction between cultures. As individuals and communities interact across cultural boundaries, they often blend aspects of their cultural heritage with those of other cultures. This hybridity reflects the fluid and evolving nature of cultural identity, as it challenges fixed notions of cultural belonging. Khan et al. (2020) emphasizes that

hybridity is not simply a merging of cultures, but a process of negotiation that allows individuals to create new, hybrid identities that are informed by multiple cultural influences.

Ethnic music education plays a key role in facilitating this hybridity, as students often combine elements from different musical traditions in their learning and performance. For example, students may fuse Western classical music with African drumming, or blend Indian ragas with jazz improvisation. These creative collaborations allow students to explore and express their hybridized identities, which reflect the multiple cultural influences they experience. Such practices also encourage students to rethink traditional boundaries between musical genres, promoting a more inclusive approach to cultural expression.

However, the process of hybridity is not without its challenges. The politics of representation can influence how cultural identities are expressed and recognized in multicultural settings. In many educational contexts, certain cultural traditions—particularly those of dominant cultural groups—tend to be privileged over others. This can lead to the marginalization of ethnic music forms that are considered “other” or “non-mainstream.” For instance, in Western educational systems, Western classical music often dominates the curriculum, while the music of indigenous or minority groups may be sidelined or misrepresented.

This imbalance in representation can perpetuate power imbalances and reinforce stereotypes, making it crucial for educators to be aware of the politics of representation in the classroom. As Bailey (2001) suggests, music education must be inclusive, ensuring that a diverse range of musical traditions are represented and respected. It is essential that educators take a critical approach to the curriculum, recognizing the importance of all cultural traditions and working to ensure that each student’s cultural heritage is acknowledged and valued.

In performance contexts, the politics of representation also come into play. When students from marginalized cultural groups perform their traditional music, they may face pressure to conform to the expectations of the dominant culture. This can result in a distorted or inauthentic representation of the music. To address these challenges, educators must emphasize cultural authenticity and foster an environment where students feel empowered to express their identities without fear of misrepresentation or appropriation.

Ultimately, the politics of cultural identity in multicultural settings underscores the importance of inclusive and respectful music education practices. By giving equal value to all cultural expressions, ethnic music education can play a transformative role in empowering students to embrace their cultural identities and express them in meaningful ways.

5. Challenges and Solutions in International Collaboration

International collaboration in ethnic music education offers immense opportunities for cultural exchange, yet it is not without its challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is the language barrier. In multicultural settings, participants often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, which can hinder effective communication. Language differences may create misunderstandings, especially when

conveying complex musical concepts or cultural meanings associated with specific music traditions. As a result, students and educators may struggle to express their ideas, diminishing the overall impact of the collaboration. For example, in cross-cultural workshops, the lack of a common language often leads to confusion, with participants unable to fully articulate the significance of their cultural expressions. To address this issue, it is crucial to implement bilingual or multilingual education programs that bridge the communication gap. Teachers can utilize visual aids and non-verbal methods such as musical demonstrations or body language to facilitate understanding. In some cases, technology can also play a significant role, as online platforms with translation features allow for more seamless interaction. These strategies help overcome the linguistic divide, ensuring that musical concepts and cultural meanings are communicated effectively, even when participants speak different languages.

Another challenge that emerges in international collaborations is cultural sensitivity. Different cultural practices and traditions may clash, particularly when students from varying cultural backgrounds come together to study music. What is considered respectful or traditional in one culture might be viewed as inappropriate or unfamiliar in another. In such environments, there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes or misrepresenting cultural traditions if educators are not culturally competent. For instance, an approach that is considered standard in one country might unintentionally overlook the intricacies of another culture's musical practices, potentially alienating students from those cultures. To mitigate these risks, educators must cultivate intercultural competence, which involves understanding, respecting, and valuing the cultural differences among students. Collaborative teaching practices, where instructors from different cultural backgrounds work together, are essential to ensuring that all traditions are represented authentically. Furthermore, fostering open dialogue where students share their cultural contexts and discuss the importance of their musical practices can deepen mutual understanding and respect. When students feel their cultural traditions are respected and accurately represented, they are more likely to engage fully in the learning process.

Despite these challenges, international collaboration can thrive if educators embrace flexible pedagogical approaches. Differences in educational systems can create additional hurdles; for instance, students from more structured, teacher-centered systems may struggle in environments that emphasize student autonomy and collaborative learning. These varying pedagogical expectations may lead to confusion or disengagement, as students might not be accustomed to taking a leading role in their own learning. To address this, teachers should adopt a blended pedagogical model that combines both teacher-centered and student-centered methods. For example, instructors can provide clear frameworks for students, while simultaneously encouraging them to explore musical ideas independently or in groups. This hybrid approach allows students to benefit from structured learning while also fostering creativity and critical thinking. Moreover, pre-collaboration orientations or workshops can help familiarize students with different educational systems, smoothing the transition between diverse teaching methods. Through such efforts, educators can create a more inclusive and adaptive learning environment that caters to students' varied learning styles and cultural backgrounds.

In summary, while international collaboration in ethnic music education presents significant challenges, such as language barriers, cultural sensitivity issues, and differing pedagogical practices, these obstacles can be addressed with thoughtful strategies. By prioritizing effective communication, fostering intercultural competence, and adopting flexible teaching methods, educators can ensure that collaborations are productive, inclusive, and respectful of diverse musical traditions. This approach not only enhances students' learning experiences but also contributes to the construction of cultural identities through shared musical engagement.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, international collaboration in ethnic music education plays a vital role in constructing cultural identities and fostering cross-cultural understanding within multicultural contexts. As educators and students engage in these collaborative efforts, they not only share and preserve musical traditions but also actively negotiate and redefine their cultural identities through the exchange of diverse musical practices. The integration of multicultural perspectives offers invaluable opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of both their own cultural heritage and that of others, encouraging mutual respect and empathy.

However, despite the rich potential of these collaborations, challenges such as language barriers, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical differences continue to affect the success of these efforts. These challenges can be mitigated by adopting bilingual or multilingual strategies, enhancing intercultural competence, and designing flexible pedagogical models that cater to diverse learning styles. Additionally, fostering ongoing collaborations and creating culturally responsive curricula are essential steps toward ensuring the sustainability and inclusivity of international partnerships in ethnic music education.

Looking ahead, future research should focus on refining hybrid pedagogical models, developing comprehensive intercultural training for educators, and exploring the long-term effects of international collaborations on cultural identity formation. By addressing these areas, the field of ethnic music education can become even more inclusive, dynamic, and relevant in our increasingly globalized world. Ultimately, international collaboration in music education not only serves as a powerful tool for cultural expression but also plays a pivotal role in shaping students' identities and contributing to a more harmonious and interconnected global society.

Projects

1. This paper is a project of the Japan-Korea Research Center for National and Regional Studies of the Ministry of Education, 'Research on the Cooperation and Exchange Mode of the Internationalization Development of Music Education among China, Japan and South Korea' (2024RHZC015).
2. Southeast Asia Research Center of the "Belt and Road" National and Regional Research Center of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 'Study on Public-Private Partnership Model in Education Governance in Southeast Asia' (2024DNYZC019).

3. Sichuan Provincial Key Research Base of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Chinese Culture Foreign Translation and Research Center, 'Study on the Adaptation and Dissemination of Sichuan Intangible Cultural Heritage Traditional Plays in Overseas Markets' (ZY24B04).
4. Sichuan Provincial Key Research Base of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Economic, Social and Cultural Development Research Center 'Research on the Connotation, Composition and Influence of Tibetan Opera Cultural Genes' (2024QZGYZC001).

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