

Research on the Inheritance, Innovation, and Popularization Pathways of the Ulan Muqi Spirit in the New Era

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Abstract

The Ulan Muqi is a unique grassroots "red" cultural and artistic carrier specific to Inner Mongolia, as well as a vital cultural platform for cultural development in Northern Xinjiang and for fostering a strong sense of the Chinese national community. Over nearly seventy years of development, the Ulan Muqi has achieved historic milestones in spiritual heritage preservation, the dynamic protection of intangible cultural heritage, and grassroots public cultural services; however, against the backdrop of deepening digital transformation, accelerated integration of culture and tourism, and evolving audience aesthetics, it also faces multiple structural challenges, including constraints on talent recruitment and institutional mechanisms, intergenerational gaps among audiences, conflicts in funding and operational management, and lagging digital dissemination. This study takes the Ulan Muqi of Qingshuihe County as its core field research sample and, drawing upon Marxist theories of people-centered literature and art, theories on fostering a strong sense of the Chinese national community, and theories on grassroots public cultural services, constructs a three-dimensional integrated analytical framework based on "inheritance – innovation – popularization." From four dimensions—upholding the spiritual core, innovating artistic forms, providing targeted popularization services, and ensuring collaborative support by multiple stakeholders—the study proposes systematic optimization pathways, aiming to provide theoretical references and replicable practical models for the high-quality development of the Ulan Muqi initiative and for enhancing the quality and efficiency of grassroots public cultural services in ethnic regions in the new era.

Keywords: Ulan Muqi Spirit; Cultural Heritage; Grassroots Public Cultural Services; Fostering a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

1. Introduction

The Ulan Muqi, whose Mongolian name means "red sprout," is a grassroots mobile cultural ensemble established after the founding of the People's Republic of China to adapt to the actual conditions of Inner Mongolia's pastoral regions—characterized by vast territories, sparse population, and scarce public cultural resources. In 1957, the first Ulan Muqi troupe in China was founded in Sunite Right Banner, Xilingol League. The initial troupe relied on "two curtains, three kerosene lamps, and five musical instruments" as its basic equipment, pioneering a mobile performance model that "uses the sky as a curtain and the ground as a stage," and from its inception, it has established itself as a core entity rooted at the grassroots level, dedicated to serving farmers and herdsmen (Zhang, 2018). Over nearly seven decades of development, the Ulan Muqi has evolved from a grassland-based cultural work team into a benchmark for the grassroots cultural front across China. Currently, the region boasts 75 standardized Ulan Muqi troupes with over 3,590 registered members, performing more than 8,000 public shows annually and accumulating over 400,000 performances in total. It serves not only as a living repository for intangible cultural heritage such as Mongolian long songs, horse-head qin, and traditional dances, but also as a iconic cultural symbol that carries red memories and fosters interaction, exchange, and integration among all ethnic groups (Zhou, 2019).

In 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping wrote a reply letter to members of the Ulan Muqi, endowing them with the new-era connotation of the "Red Literary and Artistic Light Cavalry" and elevating the cause of the Ulan Muqi to the level of the national cultural strategy. Subsequently, the Regulations on the Ulan Muqi of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and the Medium-and Long-Term Development Plan for the Ulan Muqi Cause (2021–2030) were successively issued, establishing a long-term institutional mechanism at the legal level to ensure the team's organizational structure, financial support, and protection of its rights and interests, thereby propelling the Ulan Muqi into a new phase of rule-of-law-based and systematic development. Currently, digital technologies are comprehensively reshaping the cultural dissemination ecosystem, the deep integration of culture and tourism has become the mainstream trend in industrial development, and public aesthetic preferences and cultural consumption habits have undergone profound transformations; under these circumstances, the Ulan Muqi bears the dual mission of upholding its original revolutionary aspirations while embracing the changes of the contemporary era. Based on the requirements for cultural development in northern Inner Mongolia and aimed at overcoming current developmental challenges, exploring a development path that synergistically advances heritage preservation, innovation, and popularization has become a crucial task for cultural construction in ethnic regions in the new era.

2. Review of Domestic and International Literature

2.1. Relevant International Research

The international academic community has conducted early research on grassroots mobile cultural activities and the preservation of ethnic folk cultures, yielding three categories of core findings: First, research on mobile cultural service models; scholars have used mobile theater

troupes in Assam, India, and rural cultural performance teams in Russia as case studies to systematically analyze the organizational structures and safeguard mechanisms for lightweight, mobile grassroots cultural services. Their approach to achieving comprehensive cultural coverage across remote areas aligns closely with the developmental logic of the Ulan Muqi (Patgiri, 2019). Second, research on the living transmission of folk arts; scholars from Europe, Central Asia, and Mongolia have focused on the issue of the modern survival of traditional arts among nomadic communities, analyzing the role of folk arts in maintaining ethnic identity, while also exploring the principle of preserving cultural authenticity during artistic adaptations—providing a reference framework for the Ulan Muqi's practice of carrying forward intangible cultural heritage (Meintjes, 2021). Third, research on cultural dissemination in the digital age; the international academic community generally holds that the digital transformation of traditional arts does not merely involve the simple replication of offline content, but requires the reconstruction of content forms in accordance with the dissemination patterns of social media platforms; such research directly addresses common challenges such as homogenization of online content and insufficient professional operational management, thereby providing theoretical inspiration for the digital transformation of the Ulan Muqi (Mohapatra & Panda, 2025).

Overall, international research has provided diverse perspectives on the operation of grassroots cultural and artistic organizations; however, due to significant differences between the institutional context and cultural ecology in foreign countries and those in China's ethnic regions, their conclusions cannot be directly applied to the actual development realities of the Ulan Muqi.

2.2. Relevant Domestic Research

The academic community in China has established a multi-dimensional research framework centered around the Ulan Muqi, which primarily comprises six major directions: First, the tracing of its historical context, involving systematic verification of the birth background and functional evolution of the Ulan Muqi, thereby reconstructing its developmental trajectory from a grassland work team to a national cultural brand (Hao & Liu, 2018). Second, the interpretation of its spiritual values, integrating with the strategy of strengthening the sense of community for the Chinese nation to elucidate the core connotations and contemporary value of the Ulan Muqi spirit, and to analyze its unique role in fostering national identity (Qi, 2021). Third, research on intangible cultural heritage transmission, exploring how the Ulan Muqi has transformed traditional Mongolian arts into stage-based performances and identified pathways for their living transmission (Amur, 2020). Fourth, analysis of artistic creation, using Ulan Muqi ensembles at league and municipal levels as case studies to summarize the ethnic characteristics and creative patterns of their works (Nie, 2021). Fifth, exploration of development strategies, proposing transformational approaches addressing issues such as talent cultivation, the application of new media, and the integration of culture and tourism (Ge et al., 2025). Sixth, interpretation of policies and institutional frameworks, analyzing the supportive role played by the "Regulations of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on the Ulan Muqi" in the development of these ensembles (Yin, 2020).

Existing research has elucidated the developmental trajectory and core values of the Ulan Muqi, establishing a foundational research framework; however, three limitations persist: first, the research methodologies predominantly focus on literature review and theoretical deduction, while

lacking sufficient in-depth fieldwork with frontline practitioners and diverse audiences, resulting in relatively weak empirical support; second, the existing research frameworks exhibit a fragmented nature, often addressing spiritual heritage or artistic innovation in isolation, without conducting a systematic analysis that treats heritage preservation, innovation, and popularization as an organic whole; third, the proposed policy recommendations tend to be macro-level in scope, failing to provide an in-depth analysis of structural challenges such as organizational conflicts, intergenerational audience gaps, and path dependence toward digital transformation, and lacking actionable implementation plans. Building upon these observations, this study employs grassroots Ulan Muqi units at the banner and county levels as field samples to construct an integrated analytical framework for empirical research, thereby addressing the aforementioned shortcomings in existing scholarship.

3. Theoretical Foundations and Analytical Framework

3.1. Core Theoretical Foundations

(1) The Marxist Theory of People's Literature and Art

Marxism holds that literature and art constitute an essential component of social ideology; the fundamental stance of socialist literature and art is that they originate from the people, serve the people, and belong to the people. The "People's Literature" theory emphasizes that literary and artistic creation must be rooted in the life practices of the people, reflect the voices of the masses, and fulfill its social function of uniting hearts and fostering moral education. For over sixty years, the Ulan Muqi has consistently upheld its mission of "serving the people"; its creative works and performances are guided by the needs of farmers and herdsmen, representing a vivid embodiment of People's Literature in ethnic minority regions. Building upon this theoretical foundation, this study analyzes the internal logic through which the Ulan Muqi steadfastly adheres to the people's standpoint and optimizes cultural supply.

(2) The Theory of Strengthening the Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

Strengthening the sense of community for the Chinese nation is the central theme of ethnic work in the new era, with its core objective being to guide people of all ethnic groups to embrace the "Four Shared Values" concept and enhance their "Five Identities." Cultural identity represents the most fundamental form of identification; the exchange and mutual learning among the outstanding cultures of all ethnic groups constitute the core pathway for fostering cultural identity. As a dual carrier of both ethnic culture and revolutionary culture, the Ulan Muqi ensemble's works embody the cultural heritage of the grasslands and the philosophy of ethnic unity, thereby promoting the integration of diverse ethnic cultures through its service to grassroots communities. Drawing upon this value orientation, this study explores the mechanism through which the Ulan Muqi ensemble plays a role in enhancing cultural identity and consolidating ethnic consensus.

(3) Theory of Grassroots Public Cultural Services

The theory of grassroots public cultural services adheres to a people-centered approach, emphasizing the safeguarding of the basic cultural rights and interests of diverse groups, the

achievement of equitable, inclusive, and convenient service provision, and the encouragement of social forces to participate in public cultural development. The Ulan Muqi is a core component of the grassroots public cultural service system in Inner Mongolia; its development encompasses multiple dimensions, including policy support, financial investment, and talent cultivation. This study employs the Ulan Muqi as an analytical tool to explore the pathways for achieving high-quality development of the Ulan Muqi from a supply optimization perspective.

3.2. The "Inheritance–Innovation–Popularization" Three-Dimensional Analysis Framework

This study constructs a three-dimensional integrated analytical framework of "inheritance–innovation–popularization," in which these three elements mutually reinforce and are organically unified, thereby forming a complete logical chain for the development of the Ulan Muqi initiative.

Inheritance serves as the foundation and core tenet, embodying the commitment to safeguarding the spirit of the Ulan Muqi and the authentic essence of the ethnic culture; it encompasses not only the continuation of the "red spirit" —characterized by hard work and service to the people—but also the living transmission of traditional intangible cultural heritage skills and classic theatrical works; this constitutes the defining characteristic that distinguishes the Ulan Muqi from other artistic organizations. Innovation acts as the driving force and pathway, guiding the adaptation of artistic content, expressive forms, and dissemination models to contemporary times—requiring both original creative endeavors aligned with the themes of the era and the evolution of dissemination formats in accordance with the principles of digital communication; this represents the core pillar enabling the Ulan Muqi to adapt to the demands of the modern era. Popularization serves as the ultimate goal and focal point, focusing on achieving comprehensive coverage of cultural services and fostering audiences; through targeted services tailored to diverse groups—including farmers, herdsmen, adolescents, and urban residents—the Ulan Muqi aims to facilitate the widespread dissemination of spiritual and cultural values, representing the final manifestation of its public cultural service function.

These three elements do not exist in isolation: heritage establishes a cultural baseline for innovation, thereby preventing alienation and distortion; innovation infuses heritage with contemporary vitality, thus avoiding rigidity and decline; and popularization provides application scenarios and a base of audiences for both heritage and innovation, enabling the maximization of cultural value. Only through the synergistic advancement of these three elements can the Ulan Muqi initiative achieve high-quality and sustainable development.

4. The Practical Challenges Facing the Development of the Ulan Muqi in the New Era: An Empirical Analysis Based on Field Research

This study takes the Ulan Muqi of Qingshuihe County as its core research sample; utilizing qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews and participatory observation, and in conjunction with an analysis of the overall development status of Ulan Muqi across the entire region, this study identifies that grassroots Ulan Muqi organizations are currently facing four interwoven structural dilemmas.

4.1. Dual Constraints from Both Talent and Institutional Factors: a Talent Gap Under Staffing Quota Barriers

As the classified reform of cultural and artistic institutions across China continues to advance, grassroots Ulan Muqi units in Inner Mongolia have generally adopted a dual employment model comprising permanent staff under public institution staffing quotas and temporary contract-based performers. This dual employment mechanism, combined with policies governing the total number of staffing positions, has increasingly exacerbated challenges to the sustainable development of talent within these organizations. On one hand, the allocation of permanent staffing quotas for grassroots cultural and tourism institutions has been consistently tightened; most existing positions are assigned to veteran performers with over twenty years of experience, resulting in an aging workforce structure where young key personnel under the age of 45 account for less than 30% of the total staff. These stringent staffing entry barriers make it difficult for fresh graduates from art-related universities or young practitioners with expertise in stage production or new media operations to be formally appointed as permanent staff; furthermore, contract-based employees can only receive basic labor wages and lack long-term safeguards such as professional title promotions, performance-based bonuses, and comprehensive pension and medical benefits. Consequently, their career advancement pathways are narrow, leading many young contract-based performers to leave their positions after merely 2–3 years of service, resulting in persistently high turnover rates and a growing problem of talent shortages and a generational gap in the workforce.

On the other hand, fiscal budgets for personnel expenses at the banner and county levels are limited; the approved total number of staff members is subject to a rigid upper limit. Constrained by this overall staffing cap, the vast majority of grassroots Ulan Muqi ensembles face the practical challenge of incomplete or fragmented allocation of artistic roles. Specialized positions such as maqun (horse-head bowed violin), Cha'erdao, Mongolian long songs, traditional Mongolian performing arts, and choreography for ethnic folk dances have long been plagued by staffing shortages. Consequently, some classic intangible cultural heritage performances and large-scale thematic ensemble dances cannot be rehearsed in a regular and complete manner due to the lack of full-time instrumentalists and choreographers; instead, tasks such as stage accompaniment, supporting roles, and prop coordination must be handled by existing performers who simultaneously assume multiple roles. This chronic overloading of concurrent duties has compressed the time and energy available for performers to refine their skills and engage in original creation; this not only directly undermines the professional standard of daily rural performances but also fundamentally erodes the traditional talent cultivation advantage of the Ulan Muqi—characterized by "specialized expertise with versatile capabilities and deep mastery of craft"—which has been upheld for over seventy years. Furthermore, existing regular training resources are predominantly concentrated within the Ulan Muqi ensembles directly under the league-level government; there are very few quotas allocated for banner-and county-level teams to undertake external advanced training or specialized skill development programs. As a result, veteran performers experience slow updates to their traditional skills, while young performers lack systematic channels for professional advancement, thereby amplifying the negative impacts arising from this imbalance in talent structure.

4.2. Intergenerational Disruption of the Audience: Supply-Demand Mismatch and the Absence of a Cultivation Mechanism

As the classified reform of cultural and artistic institutions across China continues to advance, grassroots Ulan Muqi units in Inner Mongolia have generally adopted a dual employment model where permanent staff under public institution staffing quotas coexist with temporary contract-based performers; this dual employment mechanism, combined with policies governing the total number of staffing positions, has increasingly exacerbated challenges to the sustainable development of talent within these organizations. On one hand, the allocation of permanent staffing quotas for grassroots cultural and tourism institutions has been consistently tightened over the long term, with most existing positions being assigned to veteran performers with over twenty years of experience; as a result, the age structure of the workforce is predominantly advanced, with those under 45 accounting for less than 30% of the key personnel on permanent staff. Strict entry barriers for staffing positions make it difficult for fresh graduates from art-related universities or young practitioners with expertise in stage production or new media operations to be formally appointed to these positions; furthermore, contract-based employees can only receive basic labor wages and lack long-term safeguards such as professional title promotions, performance-based bonuses, and comprehensive pension and medical benefits; consequently, their career advancement pathways are narrow. As a result, many young contract-based performers leave their positions after merely 2–3 years of service, leading to persistently high turnover rates within these teams and a growing problem of talent shortages and a generational gap in the workforce.

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4.3. Tension Between Funding and Operational Management: the Institutional Conflict Between the Public Welfare Nature and Market Expansion

The statutory core function of grassroots Ulan Muqi is to perform inclusive public welfare performances for farmers and herdsmen; however, all units rely heavily on fixed annual subsidies from local government finances for their operating funds, with a singular source of funding and limited growth potential. The current financial subsidy amounts can only cover the minimum essential operational expenses—such as the basic salaries of full-time staff, fuel costs for performances in rural areas, simple props and consumables, and basic costume maintenance—but provide almost no dedicated funding support for expansionary activities, such as the creation of high-quality original plays, upgrades to professional stage design and lighting equipment, cross-municipal cultural exchange tours, or the digital documentation of intangible cultural heritage. Large-scale original plays themed around "Red History" or "Ethnic Unity" involve lengthy processes spanning from field research and script refinement to composition, rehearsal, and the production of costumes and props, requiring substantial financial investment; after most Ulan Muqi teams complete the premiere of such plays, they are often left shelved due to a lack of specialized funds for touring and promotion, making it difficult for these performances to reach more towns and villages; furthermore, the comprehensive costs—including round-trip transportation, accommodation, and venue rental—for cross-provincial or cross-regional cultural exchange performances are prohibitively high, and the purely public welfare free-performance model cannot generate any cost recovery; consequently, most Ulan Muqi teams lack the financial capacity to cover these expenses, severely limiting their ability to promote external cultural exchanges.

Under the strict requirement to uphold the fundamental baseline of public cultural public welfare services, market-oriented revenue-generating approaches—such as the development of cultural and creative products, collaborations with cultural tourism live performances, and customized themed commercial exhibitions—face multiple practical obstacles: there is a lack of supporting policy guidance at the county level; no dedicated special funding is allocated for cultural and creative development or market operations; and the internal team lacks full-time staff with professional backgrounds in marketing or cultural tourism planning; consequently, these market-oriented explorations can only rely on sporadic attempts by individual members, resulting in an overall state of spontaneous, fragmented, and low-return activities. The institutional contradiction between the statutory positioning of public welfare services and the logic of market-driven revenue growth has long remained unresolved, becoming a core bottleneck that restricts the expansion of development space for the grassroots Ulan Muqi and enhances the quality of their literary and artistic creations.

4.4. Lagging Digital Transformation: Dual Shortcomings in Content Production and Professional Operations

In recent years, under the guidance of policies promoting the digital transformation of culture and tourism in Inner Mongolia, most banner-level and county-level Ulan Muqi groups have successively registered official accounts on new media platforms such as TikTok, Kuaishou, and Video Channels. However, their overall digital development has remained at a superficial stage of platform entry and trial engagement, still falling short of establishing a mature and systematic online dissemination framework. At the content production level, most online releases consist of

simple edited clips from field performances conducted in rural areas, without adopting customized content strategies tailored to the fragmented viewing habits, high-interaction requirements, and lightweight science communication characteristics of short-video platforms. The video visuals, editing pacing, and commentary often lack thoughtful design, resulting in severe homogenization, scarce cultural interpretations or storytelling-based science education content, making it difficult to capture the attention of young online audiences. Consequently, key dissemination metrics such as views, shares, and likes have remained consistently low over the long term. At the operational management level, all tasks—including filming, editing, copywriting, and comment moderation—for these new media accounts are undertaken by frontline performing artists and office administrative staff on a part-time basis, with no dedicated positions for new media producers, short-video post-production specialists, or online operations personnel. Performers face heavy daily commitments involving field performances and rehearsals, making it challenging for them to allocate stable time for continuous account updates. As a result, the frequency of content releases fluctuates significantly, and the overall account operation lacks long-term systematic planning.

At the conceptual level of development, the vast majority of grassroots Ulan Muqi managers still adhere to a traditional offline-centric mindset, viewing online new media channels merely as auxiliary promotional tools for their live performances; they have yet to establish an integrated development approach based on "attracting audiences online, delivering services offline, and fostering mutual reinforcement between both platforms." As a result, online content remains entirely disconnected from offline activities such as public welfare performances, intangible cultural heritage experiences, and campus outreach programs, failing to create a synergistic effect. This path dependency arising from the traditional offline operational model has directly led to sluggish progress in the digital transformation of these teams, preventing them from leveraging internet channels to break geographical barriers and reach vast numbers of young online audiences—thus missing the critical opportunity to expand the influence of the Ulan Muqi's red culture and grassland intangible cultural heritage during the digital era.

5. Practical Approaches to the Inheritance, Innovation, and Popularization of the Ulan Muqi Spirit in the New Era

5.1. Upholding Integrity and Forging the Soul: Strengthening the Foundation for the Transmission of the Ulan Muqi Spirit

(1) Upholding our Red Heritage and Promoting a Contemporary Interpretation of its Spiritual Essence

Upholding the people-centered stance is the core essence of the Ulan Muqi spirit. To carry forward the Ulan Muqi spirit in the new era, it is first essential to firmly grasp the fundamental purpose of "serving the people," continue the fine tradition of engaging deeply with grassroots communities and rooting oneself among the masses, and consistently carry out practical initiatives such as door-to-door performances benefiting the public and targeted services for special groups, thereby ensuring that the banner of the "Red Literary and Artistic Light Cavalry" always flies high on the front lines of the grassroots level.

Building upon this foundation, it is essential to promote the transformation of the spiritual essence into contemporary discourses—by deeply integrating the spirit of the Ulan Muqi with the Core Socialist Values, the spirit of the Mongolian horse, and the concept of ethnic unity—and by aligning these elements with themes such as grassroots governance in the new era, rural revitalization, and cultural development in northern Mongolia, thereby uncovering the contemporary value of this spiritual heritage. Through methods such as pre-service training for team members, thematic creative workshops, and the identification and promotion of exemplary role models, all practitioners can gain a profound understanding of the spiritual core, integrate the transmission of this spirit throughout the entire process of daily creation and performance, and thereby prevent the spiritual essence from becoming hollow or reduced to mere symbols.

(2) Improve the Living Heritage Transmission Mechanism to Safeguard the Authenticity of Ethnic Culture

The Ulan Muqi ensemble serves as a core platform for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage; therefore, it is essential to establish a systematic framework for the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage. This involves implementing the "Veteran Artisans Residing at the Ensemble to Mentor Apprentices" system, establishing special allowances for intangible cultural heritage practitioners, inviting seasoned veteran artists and inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to reside at the ensemble to conduct art instruction, and creating master-apprentice transmission archives to ensure the continuity of traditional skills across generations; furthermore, it entails launching a digital archiving project for classic repertoire—where classic performances such as traditional folk songs, dances, and opera are recorded in high definition, transcribed into written texts, and archived digitally—to establish a digital resource database for the Ulan Muqi ensemble's intangible cultural heritage, thereby achieving the permanent preservation and sharing of these cultural resources.

In the process of cultural inheritance, it is essential to uphold the fundamental principle of cultural authenticity, rigorously protect the core techniques and cultural essence of traditional arts, avoid over-deconstructing or alienating tradition in order to cater to market demands, and ensure that the cultural roots of the nation remain intact and unaltered.

5.2. Empowering and Enhancing Efficiency: Promoting the innovative development of the Ulan Muqi artistic and cultural initiatives

(1) Premium Creative Production: Balancing Tradition With Innovation Through Deep Integration of Traditional Heritage and Contemporary Expression

Literary and artistic creation constitutes the core productive force of the Ulan Muqi. It is essential to implement a collaborative creation model combining "traditional artists with modern directors": where traditional artists oversee the cultural essence and technical standards, while professional directors are responsible for the stage presentation and contemporary expression, thereby achieving a creative transformation of traditional art. On one hand, original works should be produced based on the themes of our era—focusing on real-world subjects such as rural revitalization, ethnic unity, and the development of northern border regions—to create original pieces that combine intellectual depth with artistic beauty, ensuring they resonate with the daily lives and emotional needs of

contemporary audiences; on the other hand, classic traditional repertoire should undergo modern adaptations by integrating modern stage lighting, sound effects, and narrative techniques, while optimizing their rhythm and presentation format—thereby preserving the traditional charm while aligning with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. For instance, the 2026 CCTV Spring Festival Gala performance titled "The Galloping Hai Liu Horse" serves as a successful example of such a modern adaptation of traditional folk songs.

At the same time, we should leverage the traditional strength of the Ulan Muqi ensemble—its "specialized yet versatile" approach—by conducting comprehensive skill training for its members and cultivating interdisciplinary talents equipped with performance, creative, and operational capabilities to better meet the diverse service needs at the grassroots level.

(2) Digital Communication Upgrade: From Content Repurposing to Systematic Operations

To overcome the challenges of digital transformation, it is essential to undergo simultaneous upgrades across three dimensions: content, operations, and philosophy. At the content level, a customized content ecosystem tailored for short-video platforms should be established; the traditional approach of directly copying offline segments should be replaced by developing diverse content formats such as "classic excerpts + cultural interpretation," "team members 'daily lives + technical knowledge dissemination,'" and "red-themed stories + scenario-based performances." These formats should convey cultural depth through lightweight and engaging approaches, aligning with the content consumption habits of young audiences. At the operational level, a professional new media operations team should be formed—by recruiting specialized talent, collaborating with universities' media programs, or purchasing third-party services—to address existing operational gaps; a regular content update schedule and account management plan should be developed to enhance communication effectiveness. At the philosophical level, a "dual-channel integration" development mindset should be adopted, deeply linking online dissemination with offline services; online live streaming and short videos can be used to drive traffic toward offline performances and cultural tourism activities, while materials generated from offline events can be leveraged to enrich online content production, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of mutual empowerment.

5.3. Targeted Audience Coverage: Establishing a Comprehensive Cultural Outreach Service System

By breaking away from a "one-size-fits-all" service model and establishing a targeted outreach system tailored to the specific needs of different groups, we can achieve precise coverage of cultural services.

(1) Targeting Farmers and Herdsmen: Precision-Based Public Welfare Services

For rural and pastoral communities, we will continue to uphold the core model of offline public-benefit performances while optimizing the precision of our services. By flexibly scheduling performances in accordance with the rhythms of production and daily life in these areas—specifically by avoiding peak farming or herding seasons—we will implement a "Cultural Service Catalog" system that compiles diverse service offerings—including performances, educational programs, and folk activities—allowing community members to request services based on their specific needs, thereby enhancing the alignment between services and demands. Additionally, for

special groups such as elderly individuals with limited mobility or persons with disabilities, we will continue to provide door-to-door performances and home-based services, bringing cultural services directly to the people and safeguarding the basic cultural rights of grassroots communities.

(2) Targeting Adolescent Audiences: the Deep Integration of Aesthetic Education With Ideological and Political Education

To address the challenge of intergenerational cultural gap, the key lies in cultivating a young audience base. Efforts should be made to institutionalize the integration of Ulan Muqi culture into school curricula—by collaborating with education authorities to incorporate Ulan Muqi art into the aesthetic education programs and ideological-political education frameworks of primary and secondary schools—and to regularly organize activities such as artists visiting campuses, intangible cultural heritage experience sessions, and red-themed storytelling events; furthermore, campus practice bases should be established to enable students to visit Ulan Muqi ensembles for observation and rehearsals, and to experience their artistic skills, thereby fostering cultural emotional bonds through immersive interactions. Through a normalized and systematic approach to integrated aesthetic and ideological-political education, we can help young people understand grassland culture and the "red spirit," cultivate a new generation of audiences, and achieve the intergenerational transmission of culture.

(3) Targeting Cultural and Tourism Audiences: Immersive Experience-Based Communication

Leveraging the trend of cultural-tourism integration, we aim to create immersive cultural experiences tailored for urban residents and tourists. By integrating local cultural-tourism resources with iconic cultural landmarks, we will develop cultural-tourism products such as immersive live performances and folk custom experience camps, enabling audiences to transition from passive spectators to active participants and thereby enhancing their overall cultural experience; we will also develop cultural and creative products and digital merchandise featuring the characteristics of the Ulan Muqi folk ensemble to extend the cultural industry chain; furthermore, we will organize cross-regional cultural tours, utilizing cultural IP assets such as the Great Wall and the Yellow River to create themed performances, thereby expanding the reach of grassland culture and revolutionary culture, and strengthening the regional cultural influence.

5.4. Collaborative Governance: Enhancing a Long-Term Guarantee Mechanism with Multiple Stakeholders

The development of the Ulan Muqi program involves multiple departments and stakeholders; therefore, it is essential to establish a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance framework to overcome institutional bottlenecks.

(1) Establish a Cross-Departmental Collaborative Governance System

Promote the establishment of a regular collaborative mechanism among departments such as culture and tourism, publicity, ethnic affairs, education, and township-level authorities; establish a Collaborative Working Group for the Development of the Ulan Muqi; unify the planning of work tasks, clarify the division of powers and responsibilities, and break down departmental barriers;

integrate resource assets from grassroots cultural stations, New Era Civilization Practice Centers, schools, scenic spots, and other venues to build a diversified service platform for the Ulan Muqi, thereby achieving shared resource utilization and joint venue management; incorporate the inheritance of the Ulan Muqi spirit and the effectiveness of cultural services into the performance evaluation system for grassroots culture and tourism units; and establish a diversified evaluation mechanism centered on public satisfaction, communication coverage, and audience cultivation outcomes, thereby leveraging the guiding role of these evaluations.

(2) Strengthening the Talent and Funding Support Mechanisms

Regarding talent support, efforts will be made to optimize staffing management by appropriately increasing the number of permanent positions for the grassroots Ulan Muqi units, with these positions prioritized for recruiting professionals in scarce specialties; the remuneration, benefits, and career development system for contract-based team members will be improved, a performance-linked salary growth mechanism will be established, the channels for professional title evaluation will be streamlined, and the talent pool will be stabilized; furthermore, a collaborative talent cultivation mechanism between universities and local authorities will be established—by cooperating with art colleges and relevant academic departments to conduct targeted training programs, internships, and practical training, thereby broadening the channels for talent acquisition.

Regarding funding guarantees, efforts will be intensified to enhance fiscal special support by establishing dedicated funds for high-quality creative projects, digital infrastructure development, and intangible cultural heritage preservation, thereby ensuring the implementation of expansionary initiatives; while upholding the fundamental public welfare nature of these endeavors, market-oriented support policies will be introduced to facilitate the compliant conduct of cultural and tourism collaborations, commercial performances, and other activities by the Ulan Muqi, thereby broadening their funding channels; additionally, social capital and public welfare funds will be encouraged to participate in the Ulan Muqi's public welfare cultural projects, thereby establishing a diversified funding mechanism characterized by government leadership and social participation.

6. Conclusion

The Ulan Muqi originated on the grasslands at the grassroots level and has grown among the masses; it serves not only as a distinctive national cultural treasure that carries forward the excellent traditional folk customs, nomadic culture, and regional civilization of the Mongolian people, but also as a landmark vehicle for red culture that embodies the "people-centered" artistic orientation and engraves the "red gene"; furthermore, it acts as an irreplaceable cultural bond that promotes interaction, exchange, and integration among all ethnic groups and strengthens the sense of community for the Chinese nation. As we enter a new stage of development marked by the rapid advancement of digital civilization and the deep integration of the cultural and tourism industries—where media transformation is reshaping the landscape of cultural dissemination, rural revitalization is expanding the scope of grassroots cultural services, and the spiritual and cultural needs of the public are becoming increasingly diverse and stratified—this era presents unprecedented broad opportunities for the Ulan Muqi to broaden its service boundaries, innovate

its artistic expressions, and expand its cultural influence. However, simultaneously, the multiple practical contradictions revealed by previous field research—such as structural gaps in the talent pool, intergenerational imbalance among the audience, insufficient funding for operations, and lagging development of digital communication systems—continue to constrain the quality improvement and upgrading of grassroots Ulan Muqi performances, posing a prominent challenge to their long-term sustainable development.

Inheritance, innovation, and popularization are interwoven and dialectically unified, collectively forming the intrinsic core logic behind the high-quality development of the Ulan Muqi initiative in the new era: upholding cultural and spiritual inheritance serves as the fundamental cornerstone for ensuring steady and sustainable progress of this undertaking; promoting innovation in literary and artistic content as well as in dissemination models acts as the core driving force for overcoming developmental challenges; and achieving comprehensive, audience-specific cultural popularization while safeguarding the equal cultural rights of all ethnic groups represents the ultimate objective of all endeavors. Only by maintaining a coordinated approach that integrates these three elements and advances them in unison can the cultural, social, and contemporary value of the Ulan Muqi be fully unleashed.

This study draws upon first-hand interview data, performance records, and operational empirical materials obtained from field research conducted by the Ulan Muqi in Qingshuihe County, constructing a three-dimensional integrated analytical framework of "inheritance – innovation – popularization." It systematically examines the four existing structural challenges faced by grassroots literary and artistic teams and proposes four corresponding practical implementation pathways: upholding core values to strengthen the foundation of inheritance; empowering creators to enhance creative effectiveness and activate innovation momentum; implementing targeted outreach strategies to refine the popularization system; and fostering collaborative governance to establish long-term safeguard mechanisms. From multiple dimensions—including spiritual continuity, literary and artistic creation, audience engagement, and institutional safeguards—the study provides actionable and replicable optimization solutions, aiming to offer practical references for grassroots Ulan Muqi organizations at the banner and county levels in Inner Mongolia in overcoming their current developmental bottlenecks, while also providing theoretical support for improving the quality and efficiency of grassroots public cultural service systems in ethnic regions.

Objectively speaking, this survey has focused solely on the Qingshuihe County Ulan Muqi as its core sample, resulting in certain limitations regarding both the geographical coverage and the types of groups surveyed. Ulan Muqi ensembles across different leagues, cities, pastoral areas, and agricultural regions exhibit distinct differences in terms of resource endowments, operational conditions, and audience demographics; consequently, the analytical conclusions and optimization pathways derived from this study still carry certain regional limitations. In future ongoing research, we will further expand the scope of the survey by selecting multiple Ulan Muqi ensembles of varying scales and development models—categorized by pastoral, agricultural, and suburban areas—to conduct comparative studies, thereby refining the identification of differentiated development challenges and continuously refining and improving development implementation pathways tailored to specific scenarios. This approach aims to revitalize the Ulan Muqi—a "red

literary and artistic light cavalry" deeply rooted in northern Inner Mongolia—by continuously exploring the profound cultural essence of northern Inner Mongolia, telling compelling stories of ethnic unity, and continuing to play a pivotal role in the new era in uniting hearts, nourishing public sentiment, and forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, thereby contributing a lasting and profound cultural force to the cultural prosperity and development of northern Inner Mongolia and the joint progress of all ethnic groups.

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