

## **The utilization of traditional music culture in contemporary local opera of China—a case study of Sizhou Opera**

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**Keywords:** Traditional music culture; Sizhou Opera; Utilization; China.

**Abstract:** Local opera is an important part of China's traditional cultural. As one of the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage projects in China, Sizhou Opera has strong regional cultural features. The traditional Sizhou Opera was constantly affected by all sorts of "new culture" with the development of industrialization and urbanization, and how to carry on the heritage and development the Sizhou Opera is a question worthy of in-depth discussion. Therefore, it is of great theoretical significance and practical value to carry out research on the inheritance and innovation of traditional music culture in contemporary Sizhou Opera.

### **1. Introduction**

The traditional music culture has made great effects on social progress and national self-confidence, and the cultural confidence has been paid more and more attention since the 21st century. However, the traditional culture is facing great challenges with the development of China's urbanization process. Therefore, the inheritance and development of traditional music culture has become one of the most concerned issues<sup>[1]</sup>.

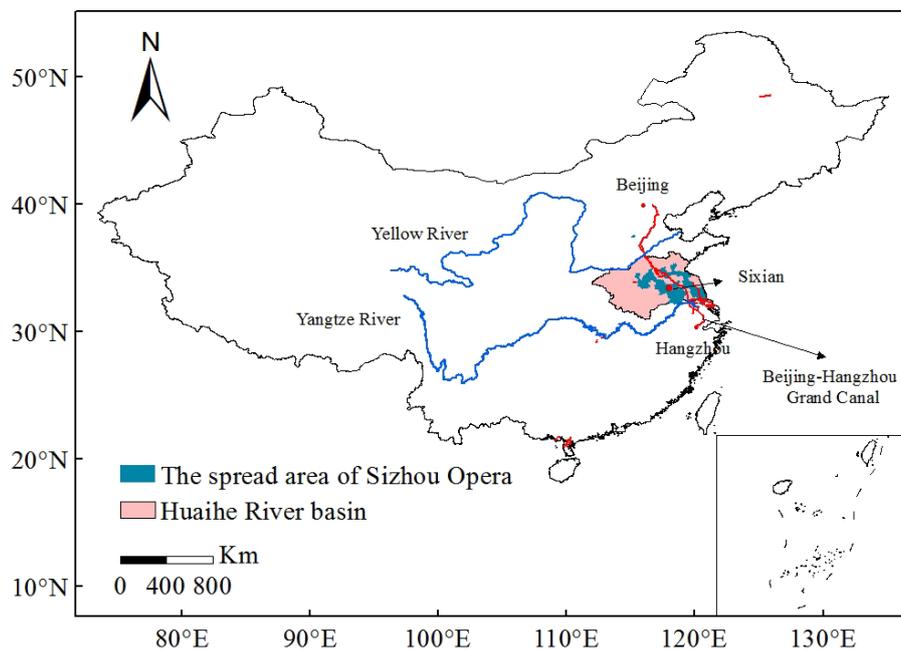
Opera art is an essential part of the excellent traditional culture of China which is an important carrier for the inheritance and performance of traditional culture<sup>[2]</sup>. While the local opera is an important part of China's cultural heritage as well as an indispensable part of people's spiritual and material life. Sizhou Opera, with a history of more than 200 years, is one of the four major operas in Anhui Province and one of the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage projects in China. The performance content is simple and vivid, close to people's livelihood, extremely rural, with strong regional cultural features, known as "the first soul of the pear garden"<sup>[3]</sup>.

The living space of Sizhou Opera has been shrinking with the development of industrialization and urbanization, and the protection of Sizhou Opera has become the primary issue. Although the contemporary Sizhou Opera is constantly developing and innovating, it still faces many problems. For example, there were even some small theater groups in Sizhou who blindly followed the pace of modern music and added some interesting low-level pieces to the content, although they catered to the aesthetics of the small group in a short time<sup>[4]</sup>. Although Sizhou Opera is facing the impact of the increasingly diverse cultural wave, it also faces the good opportunity of

promoting the traditional culture and supporting the development of the opera<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, the combination of protection and innovation of Sizhou Opera in the new era is a question worthy of in-depth discussion.

## 2. STUDY area and Methods

Sixian is located in the northeastern part of Anhui Province where has been considered as the source of Sizhou Opera. It belongs to Suzhou City, Anhui Province, and is called Hongxian County and Zhangzhou with the total area of 1787 square kilometers. The Beijing-hangzhou grand canal flows through Sixian county and the county has a warm temperate zone with a semi-temperate monsoon climate, which is suitable for the growth of various crops, especially for agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry. The annual temperature is 14 °C and the average annual precipitation is 800 to 930 mm (as shown in Fig. 1).



**Fig.1 Location of the Sixian and the spread area of Sizhou Opera in the Huaihe River basin**

At present, there are few researches on the inheritance and innovation of sizhou opera, and there is a lack of complete system. Therefore, this study investigates the survival status of sizhou opera, and explores the application of its evolution of music language, adding style and mode in the inheritance and innovation of contemporary Sizhou Opera. And analyzing the inevitable way of "modern transformation" of Sizhou Opera, and considering the protection and development path of stylization and modernization of contemporary Sizhou Opera in the new period.

## 3. RESULT

### 3.1 The History and development of Sizhou Opera

Sizhou Opera has roots on the banks of Huaihe River in Anhui Province with a history of more than 200 years. The Sizhou Opera and the Liuqin Opera, which is circulated in the Xuzhou area of Jiangsu Province, and the Huaihai Opera in Haizhou and Lunan are different genres of the same kind of drama--" pull cavity soul". The

liuqin opera and the Huaihai opera belong to the northern faction of "drawing the soul chamber", and the Sizhou opera is the southern faction of "pull cavity soul".

The characters of Sizhou Opera are mainly divided into three categories: big born, old living, two heads, small head and ugly. Its performance on the basis of rap a large number of folk "embossed field", "car dance", "land boat dance", "lantern dance", "running donkey" and other dance forms. It has the characteristics of lively, simple and lively, vigorous and vigorous, and it is full of strong local flavor of northern Anhui Province.

The "inheritance" and "innovation" of opera are the eternal topic in the drama industry. In recent years, Sizhou Opera has made various attempts to meet the needs of social development. For example, in 2004, sizhou opera troupe created "Bright Autumn Moon", which appeared on CCTV because of its good script and actors. In 2012, the "Touching the Sedan" was on at the National Grand Theater Concert Hall, which was jointly performed by the Sizhou Drama Theatre of Anhui Province and Symphony Orchestra of Anhui Province. In 2016, the Sizhou Drama Theatre of Anhui Province used the musical form and the Sizhou genre to create a new style of "Green Train", which was grandly staged at the Chang'an Grand Theatre in Beijing<sup>[5]</sup>. The above-mentioned various innovations and attempts have greatly expanded the creative thinking of the traditional Sizhou Opera, and it is an active attempt of the local traditional opera to take the initiative to explore in response to the requirements of the times.

### **3.2 Problems faced by contemporary sizhou opera**

Due to the participation of "intangible cultural heritage" protection, the inheritance and development of Sizhou Opera become one imperious issue for research. Although contemporary Sizhou Opera develops and innovates continuously, it still faces many problems. For example, the traditional Sizhou Opera has lose their vitality and update slowly since the late of 1990s. Recently, some small troupes in Sizhou Opera blindly follow the pace of modern music and integrate their singing into some popular singing methods. Moreover, some vulgar jokes were added in the content, which catered to the aesthetics of a small group in a short time, but abandoned the excellent tradition of Sizhou Opera in the right direction. At the same time, the performance market and performance mode of Sizhou Opera are also restricted, and the audience is limited to middle-aged and elderly groups, with limited market potential and poor economic benefits.

Some studies have pointed out that although "Green Train" has certain innovation, it also has some problems, such as the content and form of the drama in the performance of broken chain, and the theme is far-fetched. The stories of the minority in the south were implanted into the opera genre in the middle and lower reaches of the Huaihe River in the southern corner of the central plains. Moreover, Sizhou opera, like many other local operas, faces the situation of no successor and almost decline. As a local opera popular in northern Anhui province, the crisis and development for the Sizhou Oprea coexists which is an important issue that needs to be solved in future.

### **3.3 The solution to the development of contemporary sizhou opera**

Recently, Sizhou opera faces a good opportunity for the whole country to carry forward traditional culture and support the development of opera. It is necessary to study how contemporary Sizhou Opera is guided by "cultural consciousness" and innovated in the content of plays. There are many ways to develop the Sizhou Opera. Firstly, we should explore the shortcomings of the research, and study the contemporary Sizhou Opera in the development process and absorb the experience of other types of drama. Secondly, we can adapt some songs that were closer to people's lives to meet the values needed for mainstream social development. Thirdly, we can introduce some excellent plays and introduce the development of Sizhou Opera into the road of benign inheritance.

However, the important connotation of intangible cultural heritage is "living state" inheritance. Therefore, we can increase the number of creative and performing staff in Sizhou Opera, and we should enhance propaganda education and bring the Sizhou Opera into classroom teaching, so that more students can get in touch with local operas, enrich classroom teaching, and better promote Sizhou Opera. Moreover, we can attract more people like Sizhou Opera and make Sizhou Opera integrate into people's life. The development in transformation is the inevitable way of "modern transformation" of the contemporary Sizhou Opera. Therefore, more attention should be paid for the combination of "Intangible cultural heritage" protection and Sizhou Opera innovation.

### **4. Conclusions**

In this study, we analyzed the changing features of Sizhou Opera with the aim of exploring the possible solution to the development of contemporary sizhou opera. Some interesting conclusions are obtained as follows:

- 1) Sizhou Opera is the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage projects in China which has a long history of more than 200 years. Its performance content is simple and vivid, and known as the first soul of the pear garden. The contemporary Sizhou Opera it still faces many problems, although it has made various attempts to meet the needs of social development.
- 2) Crisis and opportunity always go together and Sizhou Opera meets a good opportunity for the whole country to carry forward traditional culture and support the development of opera. It is necessary to study how contemporary Sizhou Opera is guided by "cultural consciousness" and innovated in the content of plays. There are many ways to develop the Sizhou Opera and , more attention should be paid for the combination of "Intangible cultural heritage" protection and Sizhou Opera innovation.

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