



# A Pluralistic Development Model for Intangible Cultural Heritage Traditional Chinese Opera Art in Aesthetic Education: The Immersive Integration of Traditional Chinese Opera and Musical Drama Named "Entering the Chinese Opera"

—Starting from Shaoxing Opera and the College Student Group

Dihui Li

Tianjin Normal University, Tianjin, China

ldh200349@foxmail.com

**Abstract.** In the context of economic globalization and the rapid development of the Internet, which have greatly promoted international cultural exchanges, the country and society attach great importance to opera art as an intangible cultural heritage. However, the development of musicals in China is superior to Chinese opera. The author analyzed relevant literature through Citespace and Ucinet, based on the theories of drama and opera, Chinese aesthetics and thought and politics, journalism and communication, sociology, psychology, art and education, through the practice research of Shaoxing opera in college students, the author came up with a model of immersive performance combined with new media technology to integrate Chinese opera and musical, to cultivate opera inheritors with aesthetic education as the axis. In this way, it seeks to realize the righteous innovation and digital development of Chinese opera art and give full play to its social and business value, in order to seek a win-win cooperation among individuals, the society and the country.

**Keywords:** intangible cultural heritage, Traditional Chinese opera, Shaoxing Opera, Aesthetic education, Musical theatre.

## 1 Introduction

Under the background of international cultural exchanges, western operas, dance dramas and musicals have been "localized" in China at an extremely fast pace, and have been competing with Chinese traditional operas in the art market with great competitiveness. In recent years, the attention of intangible cultural heritage has gradually increased, and various traditional operas have been competing to show their faces in front of the public. The national style and charm seem to be gradually widely

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loved by everyone. However, from the perspective of the general trend, the development of Chinese opera is still in the doldrums, while the development of musical is in the upswing. The same is a combination of song, dance and drama comprehensive art, why is the development of musicals and opera in a very different situation?

In last year's experimental research on the preferences of Chinese music undergraduates for Chinese opera and Western opera<sup>[1]</sup>, the quantitative analysis results show that music undergraduates prefer and are familiar with opera. The "singing voice" is the "favorite" element in most operas, but it tends to be the "least favorite" element in Chinese operas. Most of the elements that are liked more in opera are related to visual factors, such as acting, personal charisma of the actors, make-up, costumes. Sets, etc. Thus, it can be seen that the importance of keeping Chinese opera singing correct and innovative while paying attention to visual factors, and through guided appreciation rather than random exposure to opera, is important for awakening the cultural confidence in the bones of Chinese people and gradually awakening their love and appreciation of the national art form.

Traditional Chinese opera, as an ancient form of traditional Chinese drama, has hundreds of years of cultural accumulations and has formed many local styles of drama today in its continuous inheritance and development. In its long course, how to carry on the innovation of keeping right to inherit and carry forward the art of opera has always been an important proposition. Chinese opera art has its unique means of expression and unique aesthetic characteristics, is deeply rooted in the traditional culture of the Chinese nation with distinctive national characteristics, and is an important part of the national intangible cultural heritage. The state has set up the National Promotion Committee of the "Aesthetic Education and Stronger Nation Plan". Cai Zhefei, a deputy to the National People's Congress, even proposed to "build a 'Belt and Road' opera corridor". The decline of opera channels and theaters, coupled with the low interest of youth in traditional opera, is more like a warning of the urgency of educating the younger generation in the aesthetics of the art of opera.

Therefore, I am interested in attracting the public's participation through the form of immersive performance, so as to realize the integrated development of opera and musical, and take aesthetic education as the axis, combine the knowledge of different disciplines, Chinese aesthetics and ideological and political thoughts. What's more, operating the Internet and new media to establish online and offline joint matrix. My idea is to take Shaoxing Opera as an entry point, to carry out practical exploration of the project for college students, and then to improve the project on this basis. Later on, we will rely on social resources to develop the project to different regions and different age groups, also promote it to all kinds of operas to realize the organic combination of different traditional operas. The project aims to protect and pass on opera as intangible cultural heritage culture by cultivating opera inheritors and create the contemporary value of opera as intangible cultural heritage culture through exploring a new form of immersive opera musical for cross-cultural communication of opera, and to realize the creative transformation and innovative development of the art of opera. In order to promote the digital protection and commercialization of opera and create the contemporary value of opera as intangible cultural heritage.

## 2 The Proposal of the Idea: Research Hotspot Analysis (Based on Citespace and Ucinet)

An article entitled "Can Shaoxing Opera Become a Musical?", which was established in the 07th issue of Shanghai Drama in 2003, has aroused a lot of people inside and outside of the circle to discuss the reform of Shaoxing opera. On the one hand, some scholars criticized the issue, arguing that the fusion of Shaoxing Opera and Musical Theatre would eventually turn Shaoxing Opera into a Broadway musical, thus losing the essence of Chinese culture. On the other hand, most scholars support the reform of the new Shaoxing Opera. In the words of Zhu Xiaozhen<sup>[2]</sup>, a young opera researcher who is the main supporter of this view, the development of musicals in China is booming, and there is a large market for the audience, which means that there is some kind of fit between musicals and the China's' art market. According to this view, it is not only feasible but also desirable for the reformers of Shaoxing Opera to learn and borrow the good artistic techniques of musicals for their own use. All in all, the question is whether to adhere to the "correctness" of traditional opera or to "innovate" by absorbing foreign cultures. My opinion is that the fusion of Shaoxing Opera and musicals is not a copy of western musicals, but a musical with Chinese characteristics enriched by the artistic essence of Shaoxing Opera, in order to utilize the artistic charm of Shaoxing Opera better. Just imagine, if we blindly insist on the "integrity" of traditional opera and limit Chinese opera art to self-based innovation, then its development prospect is very likely to remain the same as in the past or even gradually weakened. The innovation of opera as intangible cultural heritage combined with musicals can integrate traditional art forms with modern art forms, bringing new artistic sensations and experiences, and at the same time providing a brand-new way for the international dissemination of Chinese culture. Of course, in this process, we can't deny' that it is also essential for the integrity and innovation of Chinese opera itself.

From the above arguments, we can see that protecting and inheriting Chinese opera art as intangible cultural heritage is the consensus of scholars from all walks of life. "Intangible Cultural Heritage" and "Drama" were used as the primary and secondary keywords to search the related literature data in the past 5 years in Web of Science, and the keyword co-occurrence map (as shown in Figure 1) was obtained by CiteSpace, in which "intangible cultural heritage", "influencing factors", "embeddedness" and "economy" have higher degree centrality and are high-frequency hot topics. In addition, there are also hot words such as "cultural inheritance in games", "creative field", "arts and crafts" and "tourism". Further, keyword clustering (as shown in Figure 2) and timeline view (as shown in Figure 3) are obtained to observe and analyze research hotspots and the relationship and evolution process of each cluster hotspot.



Fig. 1. Keyword Co-Occurrence Map (Original)

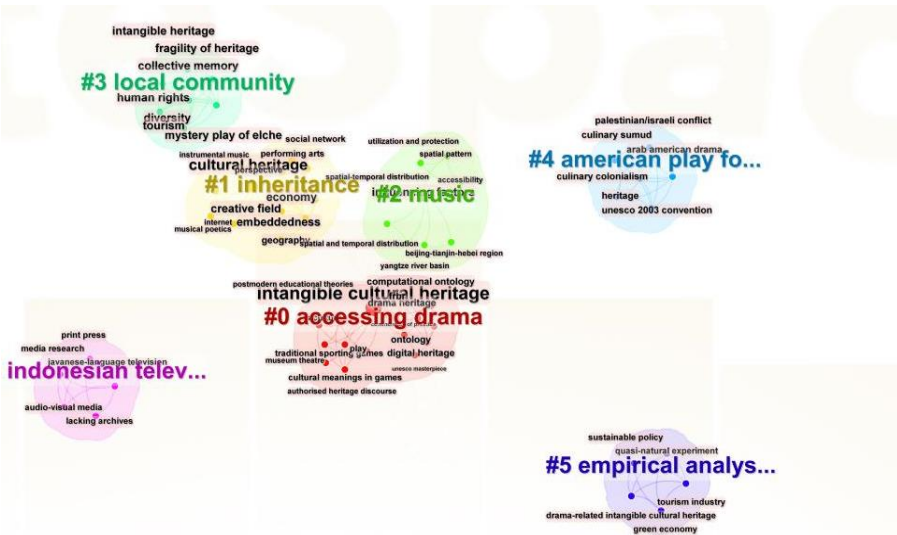


Fig. 2. Keyword Clustering Map (Original)

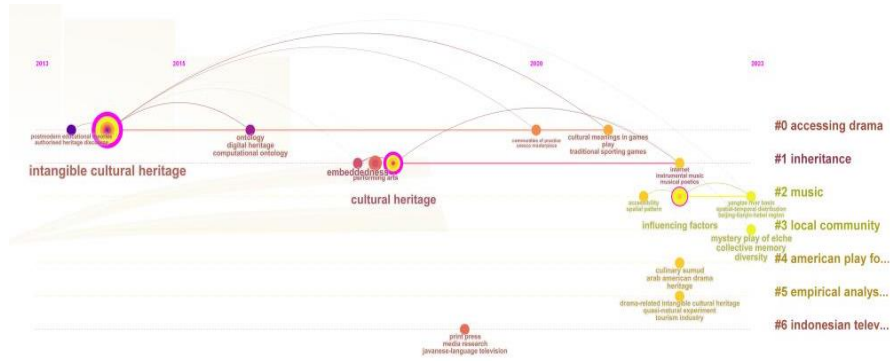


Fig. 3. Timeline View (Original)

It can be seen that scholars in various industries attach importance to drama and cultural inheritance in terms of intangible cultural heritage. In recent years, the attention to factors such as repertoire, music, influencing factors, empirical data, and news media has been significantly increased. It inspires us to focus on intangible cultural heritage, drama, music, repertoire, cultural inheritance, news media and the organic correlation, influencing factors and empirical data among all aspects, and introduce the creative concept of "game" and "arts and crafts", try to combine culture and tourism, pay attention to not only economic benefits but also the digital and commercial development of intangible cultural heritage.

The literature data obtained after preliminary screening on "intangible cultural heritage" and "drama" from CNKI in the past ten years are visualized and analyzed by ucinet to generate keyword co-occurrence network. Through Social Network Analysis, all kinds of keywords were divided into different thematic communities. "Intangible cultural heritage" is the "star" and "prestige" in the network, which is in the core position of research and has developed relatively mature, forming a systematic research structure. The theme communities of "inheritance" and "protection" are large in scale, high in transmission and reciprocity, showing a "strong relationship", with a tendency to form a systematic research structure; The thematic community of "traditional drama" has a general scale, but the internal theme is closely related. It is worth mentioning that "traditional drama" is in the position of "structural hole" in the whole relationship network, and is the "bridge" to communicate many keywords; Thematic communities such as "production/creation", "innovation", "sustainable development", "regional culture", "mass communication" and so on are loosely related to each other, and the structure of the research is not yet obvious. Among them, many research directions in the "production/creation" theme community are in the embryonic stage, which is the high-prevalence area of new technologies and new applications, among which the correlation of different research hotspots is being established, and the overall value of "weak relationship" has not been fully tapped, which may become the engine topic in the future research with broad development prospects.

Based on the above analysis, I was inspired to take the structural hole of "traditional drama" as a bridge, and according to the theory of weak relationship and "embed-

dedness", promote the flow of information through the weak relationship of "artistic creation", "integration of disciplines", "image writing", "tourism literature and creativity", "cultural design", "all-media", "animation design" and "training" in the "production/creation" community. To connect the "living inheritance", "going out", "transformation", "productive protection" and other strong relationships of the "protection" and "inheritance" theme communities, and then integrate the key factors of "mass communication", "innovation", "regional culture" and add the "immersive performance" factor to carry out the embedded project design.

To sum up, the fields of drama, opera, musical and immersive performance each have a certain scale of development, which can meet the basic needs of the public, but there is still room for expansion and improvement in terms of user groups, regions, performance, services or personalization. The project of "Entering Chinese Opera" will integrate the strengths of different fields in the innovative form of immersive opera musical, carry out differentiated innovation on its products and services, combining opera with new media, modern business and new technology, so as to fill the shortcomings of the existing market to "create its own blue ocean in a red sea", and further enhance the market influence and brand competitiveness of "Entering Chinese Opera".

### **3 Rationalization of the Idea: Studies in Theory and Practice**

Before discussing the theory and practice of each field in detail, I would like to mention "a new original format of genre creation-genre transformation (M.Rifater paradigm)" that Olha Chervinska pointed in the article in particular Take art comedy for example, the key point is to remake the classicism of the genre, the remake of impromptu poems and the remake of antique<sup>[3]</sup>. As stated in the text, It is important to understand the phenomenon of genre "fusion" and the genre "split" being expanded into the genre form of playwright by the form of genre "transformation". This provides feasible ideas for the reform of the contemporary theatre field and is one of the important sources of my project concept.

#### **3.1 Theoretical and Practical Research of the Fusion of Chinese Opera and Musicals**

Opera musical is a new form of performance that integrates the elements of traditional Chinese opera and Western musical, dating back to the 1940s. Fang Chen mentioned that "the long-gestation 'Chinese Opera Musicals' finally broke ground". In modern social life, people's aesthetic value and market factors provide opportunities and platforms for the development of opera musicals. The opera circle once again put forward the concept of "opera musical", which made it come to life again in the early 21st century. Since the new century, the drama has further borrowed from the traditional opera in an all-round and multi-angle. The Experimental Opera named "Miss Zhu Li" refined and innovated the use of opera performance, explored the possibility of transplanting western classic works from traditional Chinese operas<sup>[7]</sup>. The "new Shaoxing

Opera", represented by the new version of *Butterfly Lovers* and *Su Qin*, came into being. The original musicals such as "Water Manshan Mountain" and "Butterfly of China" have organically combined Shaoxing opera with Western musicals, providing valuable examples for the integration of opera and musicals<sup>[6]</sup>. The combination of Shaoxing opera and musical is a bold attempt as well as a breakthrough development.

### **3.2 Analysis of Aesthetic and Educational Factors**

#### **3.2.1 Chinese Opera Aesthetics and Thought and Politics.**

Art as a special social ideology, aesthetic value is its most important and basic characteristics. As the core of aesthetic education, art education undertakes the important task of opening people's perception, understanding, imagination and creativity, and making people's inner emotions develop harmoniously<sup>[4]</sup>. From this perspective, art plays an indispensable role in the process of aesthetic education. Chinese opera art, as a living history of the development of Oriental art, can not be ignored in inheriting the spirit of Chinese aesthetics.

#### **3.2.2 "Immersive" Role Playing Game.**

As early as in ancient Greece, the philosopher Plato regarded aesthetic education as a special way or supplementary means of moral education, and proposed to "integrate learning into games". Schiller pointing out that "play impulse" is a kind of free and conscious activity of human beings, which can overcome the limitations imposed by "perceptual impulse" from the aspect of natural necessity and "rational impulse" from the aspect of moral necessity. In terms of the most basic cultural functions, opera is first of all a kind of entertainment for the spectators<sup>[4]</sup>, which satisfies the basic cultural needs of the whole society. In the "outline play", which is an open-ended script creation mode, the production team only writes an indication of the number of scenes in the drama, the characters and sequence of each appearance, and the plot summary, etc. The specific lyrics, reciting and plot performance are handled by the actors with a large number of ready-made procedures, plus a certain degree of improvisation and creativity. This provides a great support for the "immersive" performance mode.

#### **3.2.3 Arts and Crafts and Personalized Service.**

Arts and crafts are an important part of the splendid cultural treasure house of the Chinese nation, with distinct national style and characteristics of The Times. In addition to the most intuitive aesthetic feeling of song and dance, there are more "decorations" in the character dress up. Makeup and costumes of opera pay great attention to decoration. For example, in opera facial makeup, the faces of Jing and Chou are patterned character make-up, the eyebrows and eyes of the Sheng and Dan also have a strong decorative interest<sup>[5]</sup>. The theory of cultural psychology points out that in the process of cultural inheritance, people will understand and reconstruct culture according to different cognitive modes and experiences. With the diversification and digitalization of cultural inheritance methods, people pay more attention to individualized

experience, expression and interaction. Therefore, we have set up the link of DIY cultural and creative products.

### **3.2.4 The Application of Mass Media.**

Network agenda-setting theory (NAS) points out that what affects the public is a cognitive network composed of a series of issues. In other words, news media not only tell us "what to think" or "how to think", but also determine how we connect different pieces of information to construct cognition and judgment of social reality. The diversification of culture, the integration of science and technology with culture and art, the emergence of new art concepts, new art carriers and new art forms have brought new challenges to the living space of Chinese opera itself. The immersive opera musical can not only deepen the art education of Chinese opera, but also promote the digital and commercial development of opera.

## **4 Implementation of the Idea: the Project Program**

In the preliminary preparation, we will collect interested drama and Chinese opera workers, based on the theory and practice of the reform of opera, musical and modern drama in recent years, learn from the creation mode of "outline drama", and combine the interdisciplinary knowledge as the interdisciplinary foundation, integrate Chinese aesthetics and ideological and political thoughts to create the performance outline. In the early stage, the production will be started with the practical experience of "New Shaoxing Opera", and then it will be extended to various kinds of opera, and the organic combination of different traditional operas will be realized. Also, it is going to be combined with local culture, folk customs and folk stories in the process of development.

In terms of the main planning of the project, we will take aesthetic education as the axis to foster opera inheritors:

First, to feel the beauty and appreciate the beauty: The immersive performance combined with opera and musical allows the participants to feel the cross-cultural charm of Chinese opera with the actors in the way of "role game". Combined with multimedia equipment, short film, documentary or animation clips are used as the introduction or epilogue to stimulate participants' interest in immersive opera and deepen their impression. And to set up fun games, prize questions and other links, to mobilize the enthusiasm of the participants in the process.

Second, to create beauty: At the end of the performance, we will set up opera music, dance, repertoire and other experience classes and DIY workshops. Participants can choose different courses according to their own interests for creative experience, and make personalized DIY opera masks, costumes, hangings and other cultural and creative souvenirs.

In addition, we will also record the participants' experience process through photography equipment to produce generative videos and provide them as "growth files"; The production team pays attention to the performance of the participants and communicates with the actors and other workers through the ears. If funds permit in the



later stage, participants will be allowed to wear "eye tracker" to monitor their concerns, and real-time adjustment of each link of the project based on the knowledge of consumer psychology, provide participants of different ages with differentiated services to enhance the experience of participants, and promote the digital protection of opera.

In the perspective of target customers, the project began to take college students as the main audience, through the combination of "online + offline" model, to attract people interested in opera and musicals and develop them into customers. Through detailed and comprehensive services and the feedback and the self-media publicity and evaluation of university students to optimize the project and improve our own reputation. In the later stage, through cultural and creative production, customer communities are established with specific customer groups, so that consumers can experience and recognize the service of the brand.

## 5 Conclusions

The immersive opera musical named "Entering the Chinese Opera", intangible cultural heritage inheritance project, combine drama and opera studies, performing arts, psychology, sociology, journalism and communication, Chinese and foreign music performance as the interdisciplinary foundation, integrate Chinese aesthetics and ideological and political thought, aesthetic education as the axis, to protect and inherit intangible opera culture in the process of participants' experience of feeling, appreciating and creating beauty, and to explore a new mode of intercultural communication of opera. It strives to solve the pain points in the development of Chinese opera art industry, promote the innovation and deepening of opera art theory, drive the development of emerging industries, enhance social benefits, directly provide jobs and increase employment opportunities. The project combine opera with new media, modern commerce and new technology, promoting digital protection of opera, promoting commercial development of opera art, expanding communication channels, increasing awareness and influence, creating more commercial value, and indirectly driving employment. Starting from the school community, the project will gradually expand and develop by relying on large enterprises to ensure the feasibility and sustainability of the project, develop educational brands with characteristics and market competitiveness, realize the win-win of social value and commercial value, and seek win-win cooperation between individuals, society and the country. And through the cooperation with the tourist attractions to promote the combination of cultural tourism, promote the development of regional economy and culture, is conducive to the exchange and understanding of different regions and cultures. In addition, this model can help us promote Chinese opera art overseas, promote cultural exchange and cognition, and carry forward the outstanding traditional Chinese intangible cultural heritage opera culture.

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