



The Influence of Mass Media on Cantonese Culture

Junhao Chen

College of Journalism and Communication, Jinan University, Guangdong 510632, China
Chester0210@outlook.com

Abstract. Mass media plays a role in the dissemination and preservation of culture. With the in-depth development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Cantonese culture has promoted the prosperous development of the economy, education, culture, and other undertakings in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. At the same time, Cantonese culture is also key to enhancing the identification of Chinese culture among Chinese people at home and abroad. This paper adopts the literature analysis method to sort out and analyze the existing literature, and analyzes the influence of mass media on the dissemination of Cantonese culture from the traditional period, namely the broadcasting and radio-television stage, to the period of emerging media. Moreover, on the basis of existing studies, combined with cultural identity theory, it analyzes its audience structure, dissemination scope, and dissemination channels, and explains the dilemmas in the inheritance of Cantonese culture as well as suggestions and prospects for mass media to assist the development of Cantonese culture. The study holds that mass media has played an important role in the dissemination of Cantonese culture, and is the key to inheriting Cantonese culture, enhancing the identification of Chinese culture among Chinese people at home and abroad, and assisting the in-depth development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Keywords: Mass Media; Cantonese Culture; Cultural Identity

1 Introduction

Cantonese, commonly known as Baihua, is also called Guangdong dialect and Guangfu dialect. It is one of the seven major Chinese dialect groups and also an important component of Lingnan Guangfu culture. Cantonese culture has positive significance for promoting the cultural and economic development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, promoting the integration of economy, trade, culture, and tourism, and enhancing identification with the Bay Area. In recent years, with the development of network information technology, mass media has exerted multifaceted influences on Cantonese culture. Some scholars have found that Cantonese, as a treasure of Guangfu culture, is being understood and learned by more people through different forms of mass media. At the same time, in the process of dissemination, some content with distinctive Cantonese characteristics, due to a series of issues such as semantic abstraction and strong cultural barriers, is prone to misunderstanding and obstruction

in communication, thus leading to the phenomenon of cultural loss. Existing studies mainly focus on analyzing the dissemination of Cantonese culture during a specific period of mass media development, while there remains a gap in research on how the overall development of mass media has influenced the dissemination of Cantonese culture. In response to the above phenomena, this paper focuses on two core issues: “the changes in mass media involved in the dissemination of Cantonese culture” and “the identity negotiation behind language use.” By analyzing the changes in the dissemination channels, discourse forms, and audience structure of Cantonese culture from the stage of traditional mass media, namely Cantonese broadcasting and radio-television, to the stage of new media, namely short videos and social media, and by combining cultural identity theory, this paper explores how Cantonese users, especially the younger generation, make language choices and express identity in daily communication and media use under the background of the popularization of Mandarin and population mobility. This paper uses the literature analysis method to search for and read relevant materials and literature. The advantage of this method lies in its ability to conduct a macro-level study of the influence of the overall development trajectory of mass media on Cantonese culture, which is conducive to carrying out the research, so as to better inherit and preserve Cantonese culture, and on this basis put forward relevant suggestions and prospects.

2 The Core Connotations of Cantonese Culture and the Theoretical Support of Mass Media

2.1 The Core and Connotations of Cantonese Culture

Cantonese, also known as Baihua, Guangfu dialect, or Guangdong dialect, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and is an important component of the Chinese language. Cantonese has the characteristics of a long history and profound cultural depth. It integrates the dialects of the Lingnan region with the characteristic languages of the Baiyue ethnic groups, and gradually formed modern Chinese [1]. At the same time, as an important component of Guangfu culture, Cantonese retains in its language many characters that are extremely rare in modern Chinese, such as 嚟 (lai4), 冇 (mou5), 喺 (hai2), and 㗎 (zo2). The uniqueness of Cantonese in linguistic terms reflects the long historical inheritance and broad and profound cultural characteristics behind it, and has positive significance for the study of ancient Chinese.

Language is not only an important component of culture, but also has the functions of cultural expression, identity, and inheritance. Cantonese has long held an important position in the language use of overseas Chinese and is a pillar connecting the emotional ties between compatriots at home and abroad. It is of great significance for enhancing the sense of identification with Chinese culture among Chinese people worldwide. In the development process of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, university students in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area generally hold

an attitude of identification with Chinese culture, and Cantonese has played an important role in this, promoting the prosperous development of education and the economy in the Greater Bay Area [2].

2.2 The Theoretical Support of Mass Media

Media is the intermediary that enables both sides to establish a relationship. In communication studies, media refers to the material tools that use material carriers to store and disseminate information. Communication scholar Schramm defined media as tools for expanding information and the scope of communication. The category of “mass media” discussed in this paper refers to traditional mass media, namely the stage of Cantonese broadcasting and radio-television, and then to new media, namely the stage of short videos and new media. This section takes cultural identity theory as its core theoretical support. Cultural identity theory highlights individuals’ sense of belonging to and consensus on cultural cognition within the corresponding group [3]. As the core symbol and carrier of Lingnan culture, Cantonese culture, with mass media as its “intermediary,” undergoes a process that is fundamentally one of repackaging in terms of its dissemination, presentation, and guidance. Cultural identity theory provides an analytical foundation for the interactive relationship between media and Cantonese.

3 The Shaping of the Dissemination of Cantonese Culture by Traditional Mass Media

3.1 Cantonese Radio Broadcasting

Radio has the characteristics of rapid dissemination, wide coverage, and auditory priority. The earliest Cantonese radio station in Guangzhou can be traced back to the “Guangzhou Broadcasting Station” during the Republican period, which no longer exists today. The station broadcast programs to the public in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English in rotation [3]. By the early 1980s, with the flourishing of Cantonese jianggu culture and the popularization of broadcasting stations and radio stations, radio storytelling became a trend of the time, and Cantonese culture was disseminated on a large scale. As part of mass media, radio created a new model of oral communication and expanded the scope of the dissemination of Cantonese culture. At the same time, the entry of Cantonese jianggu into radio stations also enabled the storytelling culture, which had originally circulated among the people, to develop in a more professional direction. While better serving listeners, it also promoted the inheritance of Cantonese culture, as well as the vigorous development and wider dissemination of Cantonese culture [4].

3.2 Cantonese Television Programs

Television programs in the Guangfu region, represented by Guangzhou, have used Cantonese for broadcasting for more than 50 years, and their ratings have consistently ranked high locally. In the early stage of reform and opening up, programs lacked good production quality. In the Hong Kong region, however, television program production was at the forefront, and the programs produced catered to public tastes. In addition,

Guangdong could receive the signals of Hong Kong television programs, and under the atmosphere of sharing the same Cantonese-language environment, citizens were more inclined to watch Hong Kong television programs. In order to attract audiences, in the late 1980s, the government specially approved two famous channels to use Cantonese for broadcasting, namely Pearl River Channel and Guangzhou Channel. According to survey data cited by scholars, the proportion of the public who supported the use of Cantonese in television programs was as high as 99% [5]. This shows that Cantonese occupies an extremely high position in the hearts of citizens in the Guangfu region and has already become a unique cultural symbol.

At the television drama level, the highly representative Guangdong works *Seventy-Two Tenants* and *Native Husband, Foreign Wife* have become important excellent works for the dissemination of Guangfu culture. *Seventy-Two Tenants* tells the story of the tenants in a compound of seventy-two households during the Republican period fighting wits with the landlord and landlady. Its content involves Guangfu folk customs, Cantonese culture, social landscape, and historical narrative. It presents to the audience Guangzhou's unique cultural charm. *Native Husband, Foreign Wife*, on the other hand, takes as its main line the family anecdotes that occur between the "Guangzhou man" and the "non-local daughter-in-law" in a Xiguan mansion, showing the sparks generated by the collision between Guangfu culture and external cultures, and reflecting the development and changes in Guangzhou's local customs, social life, and culture since reform and opening up [6]. The witty and humorous language is intertwined with plots rich in Guangfu culture. Cantonese culture has been displayed from daily life to the screen, and while the inheritance of Cantonese culture has gradually become more concrete, the audience range has also become broader.

4 New Forms of the Dissemination of Cantonese Culture in the Context of Emerging Media

With the rapid development of Internet technology and the new media environment, the dissemination of Cantonese culture has also gradually entered a new media form. According to scholars' analysis, by the end of 2024, the number of global Internet users exceeded 5 billion, and the number of short-video users in China reached as high as 900 million. Watching short videos has already become an indispensable part of people's daily lives in China. The characteristics of new media, namely fast dissemination speed, wide range, and strong interactivity, are deeply favored by the public [7]. The new media era has also brought new opportunities for the effective dissemination of Cantonese culture. On the basis of using the Cantonese-style stand-up comedy form of *dongdukxiu*, Yue Zhi Yi Er has innovated Cantonese dialect talk shows. The content of its programs caters to current hot trends and conforms to the aesthetic needs of young people. It uses witty and humorous plots and dialogues to interpret the daily life and social customs of the Guangfu region, thereby triggering extensive discussion and reflection among audiences. As of October 2025, the total number of followers of Yue Zhi Yi Er across all online platforms had exceeded 40 million, the main account had released more than 1,800 videos, and the cumulative total number of views across all

platforms had exceeded 35 billion. Its audience group as a whole tends to be younger. According to Xigua Data monitoring, the audience group of Yue Zhi Yi Er is mainly concentrated among those born in the 1990s, with those aged 18 – 24 accounting for 29.96%, those aged 25 – 29 accounting for 31.16%, and those aged 30 – 34 accounting for 16.01% [8]. To a certain extent, it has alleviated the problem that young people know little or not deeply enough about Guangfu culture. Although the content created by Yue Zhi Yi Er is rooted in Cantonese culture, its audience is not limited to Cantonese-speaking regions. This shows that while Yue Zhi Yi Er uses a brand-new mass medium as a carrier to inherit Cantonese culture well, its content, which stays close to current affairs, features distinctive dramatic performances, and uses witty and humorous language, has also attracted a large number of viewers from non-Cantonese-speaking regions, becoming a major short-video IP of Cantonese culture and effectively enabling more people to understand Cantonese culture.

5 The Dilemmas in the Inheritance of Cantonese Culture and Suggestions for Its Development

5.1 The Practical Dilemmas in the Inheritance of Cantonese Culture

First of all, at a time when Cantonese short-video self-media is flourishing in great variety, creative dilemmas and problems have also emerged. The content created by most accounts tends to be the same: the content created by most bloggers leans toward jokes and daily life, often lacking creativity and cultural connotation, which causes visual fatigue among audiences; the audience circle is overly limited: the video content created by creators is confined to local Cantonese-speaking groups, and the threshold for the Cantonese culture they share is high, making it difficult for non-local viewers to understand. Secondly, in the 1990s, Article 6 of the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China stipulated: "Schools shall promote the nationally common Putonghua." With the introduction of the central government's policy of promoting Putonghua, referred to as "Promoting Putonghua," schools in Guangdong Province all use Putonghua as the common language in teaching in order to promote communication and exchange across the country. In many families, on the premise that both parents have acquired Cantonese, Putonghua is used as the primary language in daily family communication in order to reduce the pressure on children to learn Putonghua [9]. This has caused the younger generation to grow up in a Putonghua-speaking environment from an early age, and the number of young people who can speak Cantonese has become smaller and smaller, resulting in the phenomenon of "local outsiders" among children in many families. That is, on the premise that both parents can speak Cantonese, children take Putonghua as their mother tongue. With the development of transportation in China, the younger generation's understanding of Cantonese culture has decreased, and the environment and number of people using Cantonese have been greatly reduced, which has directly led to the weakening of the inheritance of Cantonese culture and the decline of Cantonese culture. In addition, as one of the main languages of communication among Chinese people worldwide, Cantonese plays an important

role in enhancing identification with Chinese culture. According to scholars' research, Cantonese media is the second most frequently contacted language medium among Malaysian Chinese in various language media, and has been widely recognized by overseas Chinese. Even though their frequency of contact with Guangdong Cantonese radio and television programs is relatively low, ethnic Chinese still have high expectations for the use of Guangdong Cantonese radio and television programs as media. Overseas Chinese pointed out in interviews that Guangdong's radio and television programs have problems such as insufficient entertainment value, overly rigid hosts, and relatively little attention to local Chinese culture, making it difficult to satisfy overseas audiences' expectations for the use of Cantonese media [10].

5.2 Suggestions and Countermeasures for Mass Media to Assist the Inheritance of Cantonese Culture

McLuhan pointed out that "any new medium is a process of evolution, a process of biological fission. It opens the door for human beings to new fields of perception and new forms of activity." Today, with the rapid development of Internet technology and the new media environment, new media has already become the main battlefield for the dissemination of Cantonese culture, and all kinds of short videos spreading Cantonese culture are emerging one after another. In terms of Cantonese talk shows, Yue Zhi Yi Er has successfully gained popularity through life-oriented plots and witty and humorous dialogues. For Cantonese cuisine exploration accounts, there are "Mingming Xianbuzhu" and "Shi Alan Bushi Alan," while for cooking-related accounts, there are "A Xin de Zhiyu Riji" and "Houpi Cheng." Under today's broader environment of integrated media, hosts from traditional media have also opened their own self-media accounts. "Peng Tingting" and "Lu Xiao'ai," by sharing their work and daily life as hosts, have been loved by many viewers. In the author's view, creators of Cantonese self-media should deeply cultivate local characteristic culture, thoroughly explore local folk customs and regional features, and reduce the phenomenon of homogenization [11]. At the same time, Cantonese self-media videos should identify target audiences, lower the threshold for dissemination, and broaden the scope of dissemination. Moreover, as local creators, they should enhance their cultural identity with Cantonese culture. It is suggested that the content they create should strengthen the output of cultural values, trigger resonance among Cantonese cultural groups, and better inherit Cantonese culture. For overseas user groups, it is suggested to deeply explore the local culture of Chinese communities and convey the customs of overseas Chinese. In addition, algorithmic big data technology should be used to accurately target overseas user groups and create overseas communities for the dissemination of Cantonese culture, which is of positive significance for cultural connection and the enhancement of cultural identity. In addition, the Guangzhou Municipal Government mentioned in its 2026 work report that it would "protect Cantonese, this living carrier of Guangfu culture, so that Lingnan culture may become an important bond of cultural identity." After the gradual completion of the promotion of Putonghua, how to protect and inherit Cantonese culture well has become a new proposition. The author's research found that many primary and secondary schools in Guangzhou have implemented a series of activities of "bringing Cantonese into campuses," providing new ideas for the younger generation to learn

Cantonese culture. This paper holds that parents are children's first teachers, and the joint cooperation of family and school is the key to children's learning of Cantonese culture. Daily communication within the family should also strongly advocate Cantonese as the language of communication, so as to enhance cultural confidence in and cultural identity with Cantonese culture.

6 Conclusion

This paper studies the influence of mass media on Cantonese culture and sorts out the dissemination process of Cantonese culture from the traditional media period, namely the stage of Cantonese broadcasting and radio-television, to the new media period of short videos and social media. The research result of this paper is that, as an important carrier of the dissemination of Cantonese culture, mass media laid a good foundation for the dissemination of Cantonese culture during the traditional media period, while the development of new media has broadened new channels for the dissemination of Cantonese culture. From this, the research conclusion is further drawn that mass media has played a positive role in the dissemination of Cantonese culture. This study provides much valuable reference significance for future research on the direction of the influence of mass media on Cantonese culture, mainly affecting the future development direction of mass media for the dissemination of Cantonese culture, as well as the necessity of developing overseas user communities to better disseminate Cantonese culture. Future research should focus more on deeply exploring the characteristic cultural directions of local communities and overseas Chinese. Through the power of mass media, the public's cultural identity with Cantonese can be continuously strengthened, so that Cantonese culture may remain ever-renewing and be passed on from generation to generation.

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