

# Digital Transformation in Chinese Theatre Opportunities and Risks

Shanshan Liu<sup>1</sup> & Nur Qasdina Jeeta Binti Abdullah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Applied & Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Correspondence: Shanshan Liu, Faculty of Applied & Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

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## Abstract

With the advent of the digital age, the business environment of traditional opera has been greatly impacted and affected, especially after the rise of the short video platform, the aesthetic purport of the public has changed from the past. During this process, traditional opera repertoires cannot compete with mass-produced short video works, and are out of touch with the fast-paced life frequency of modern society. Except for some elderly audience groups, it has been difficult for opera art to reach young and middle-aged groups. In order to further expand the audience, inherit opera culture, and enhance the artistic vitality of opera, it has become an irreversible trend to use new media digital technology.

**Keywords:** digital technology, opera inheritance, inheritance dilemma, digital resource base

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## 1. Difficulties of Opera Inheritance in the Digital Age

### 1.1 *The Main Body of Communication: The Survival of Troupes Is Difficult and Opera Talents Are Scarce*

#### 1.1.1 The Number of Troupes Has Dropped Sharply

In the 1980s, there were more than 3,000 Chinese theater troupes, but now there are less than 600 professional theater troupes of major Chinese operas. Taking Pingju as an example, in the 1960s, there were more than 120 professional Pingju troupes in the three provinces of Liaoning, Heilongjiang, and Jilin. After the 1990s, the number of professional Pingju troupes nationwide dropped to less than 30. The number of performances has been greatly reduced, and some large troupes have not performed for a long time (Li Youjun, 2020). The situation of

local operas is even worse, there are few professional troupes in existence, and some operas even have no professional troupes, such as Hui Opera, Yihuang Opera, Ji'an Opera, Fuhe Opera in Wuyuan, Jiangxi, and so on. The troupe is in a state of paralysis due to no performances all year round, or reluctantly performs in inappropriate places such as tourist attractions to make ends meet, and the survival situation is difficult.

#### 1.1.2 State-Run Theater Troupes Struggle to Survive

The state-owned opera troupe was established in the period of planned economy and belongs to the nature of government financial appropriation. After the reform and opening up, state-owned opera troupes still rely on government appropriation for their operating

funds, but the government has adopted a differential appropriation method. In major opera provinces, such as Henan, Shaanxi, Shanxi and other places, because of the wide spread of operas, high popularity, and good audience base, and relatively sufficient financial allocations, the current development situation is relatively good (Ji Mingming, 2019). However, in areas where the opera atmosphere is not strong and the economy is underdeveloped, the government allocates less money, and many city-level and county-level state-run theater troupes have been disbanded. After the troupes adopted the method of differential funding, many troupes with insufficient repertoire production were unable to manage their operations. Some theater troupes are unable to improve the living conditions of opera performers and the production environment of opera creation due to the shortage of funds.

#### 1.1.3 Lack of Professionals

Another worrying aspect of the theater troupe's survival is that a large number of brain drains due to economic constraints make it difficult to guarantee the basic salary of the cast and crew, and some of them have moved to places with better living conditions to develop. For example, changing careers to become an opera teacher, or developing in the film and television industry. The theater troupe can neither retain excellent screenwriters, dancers, actors and other talents, nor can it absorb professional and technical talents such as new media.

#### 1.2 Contents of Dissemination: The Appearance of Kitsch and Low-Level Theatrical Productions

Under the impact of commercial interests and popular culture, the spread and development of opera art is struggling. The consumption characteristics of modern popular culture and the large-scale reproduction of artistic products caused by commercial interests have caused the traditional opera art to suffer a devastating impact. The art of opera is not only an entertainment tool, but also an educational tool. When people watch pleasing opera, they can not only get spiritual enjoyment, but also gain positive energy from opera culture and receive moral education. However, under the impact of commercial interests and popular culture, the purpose of opera art works and programs produced and broadcast through the media is more for economic interests, and the main characteristic of traditional opera as a social

entertainment tool has completely changed. To cater to popular culture is to cater to the tastes of the audience, and to pursue commercial interests requires abandoning some cumbersome and expensive props in the form of opera art expression. The spread of opera art is no longer purely expressing and inheriting the essence of opera art (Feng Chuansheng & Han Daguo, 2020). In order to cater to the market, some opera programs package operas in a glamorous and kitsch style, and use vulgar content to attract audiences. The art of operas has become kitsch and low-level. The development of opera art cannot completely ignore the market, nor can it cater too much to the market. Under the impact of popular culture and commercial interests, how to protect the traditional Chinese opera art culture from the silt in the big dye vat of the market economy and inherit the essence of art is a question worth pondering.

#### 1.3 Mode of Communication: Lack of Communication and Interaction with the Audience Under the New Media Platform

Communication is formed in the mutual communication between the communicator and the audience, and it is very important for the audience to give back their opinions on opera performance to the creators and performers of opera, which is very important for enriching, perfecting and improving the content of opera. For example, after the performance of the "Four Famous Danes" in Peking Opera, special staffs were sent to pay attention to and record the audience's reaction. These Peking Opera masters listened extensively to the opinions and evaluations of their performances from all walks of life. For this reason, they set up a think tank to record and analyze audience feedback. The staffs in the group were called "Mei Dang" and "Cheng Dang" at that time. At present, most opera creators and actors do not make full use of the convenience and universality of new media such as opera apps to create a good atmosphere for communicating with audiences. For example, there are less than five pieces of information in the interactive area of the "CCTV" APP forum interface, and most official opera microblogs on Sina Weibo only frequently update the latest repertoire information, or retweet opera tips. It is a more serious problem that we cannot make full use of new media technologies such as Chinese Opera APP to establish our own communication platform with the audience.

#### 1.4 Communication Effect: Film and Television Images Dilute the Appeal of Opera Art

Watching opera performances in theaters has a different appeal to audiences than watching opera videos on TV, the Internet or APP. The former belongs to personal communication, while the latter is indirect communication through the media, and their communication effects are quite different. For example, operas disseminated on the spot have a strong emotional appeal, but indirect dissemination through platforms such as TV, the Internet, or APPs is difficult to achieve similar effects (An Yongli, 2007). In the final analysis, it is these two different communication media that form two different communication effects, and the film and television images dilute the appeal of opera art communication.

Taking Chinese Opera APP as an example, although the way of dissemination of information is two-way, the screen of mobile phone or tablet computer is small, and the opera programs, opera movies and opera TV dramas on demand on Chinese Opera APP are not as fast-paced and fast-paced as in today's popular culture. Fashionable commercial films and variety shows are popular with the public (especially young audiences). When watching opera performances in the theater, the basic skills of actors include "singing", "reading", "doing" and "fighting", because the sounds made by anger, worry, regret, crying, laughing, resentment, and even coughing must have singing elements. The actors' facial expressions, hands, eyes, body movements, and footsteps are all part of the show, and every subtle movement can elicit bursts of laughter or applause from the audience. However, during the dissemination of Chinese Opera APP, audiences seldom get infected and satisfied with the on-site aesthetics of actors "singing", "reading", "doing" and "playing" performances in opera videos, and even feel that the cadence and elongated singing are long and boring. Just click fast forward on the APP. The audience cannot feel the appeal of opera art on electronic media such as APP.

## 2. Inheritance and Development Strategy of Chinese Opera Based on Digital Technology

In the era of information and digitalization, although the inheritance and development of Chinese opera is facing certain difficulties, it is also ushering in major opportunities. In order to better inherit opera culture, we should establish

a digital opera resource database, implement digital opera document storage, explore big data accurate push services for opera, and build a digital opera talent team. Below, the author will conduct a detailed analysis of these four strategies.

### 2.1 Establish a Database of Digital Opera Resources

Chinese culture is extensive and profound, and opera culture, as a category of excellent traditional Chinese culture, has abundant resources. To this end, the cultural authorities of the government should use computer technology and database technology to create a database of traditional operas, so as to provide storage media for traditional opera culture, and provide detailed and rich resources for the research and inheritance of opera culture. Seeking truth from facts, at this stage, domestic opera culture has problems of one kind or another in both archives construction and management. If these problems cannot be effectively dealt with and resolved, it will inevitably lead to unsustainable inheritance of opera culture. Therefore, relying on the way of creating a professional opera culture database, the standardized and systematic management of opera cultural resources as intangible cultural heritage can be realized. To this end, we should actively build a digital opera resource database. In terms of the content of the opera resource database, it mainly covers the text, video, audio, image and other resources of operas, as well as the dynamic information of operas, etc., which is convenient for retrieval, research and creation of operas, etc. In order to make it easier for the audience to appreciate, research and create operas, functions such as classified navigation and video-on-demand can also be set in the resource library.

### 2.2 Implementation of Digital Opera Literature Storage

From the perspective of the existence form of opera culture itself, its fluidity and vitality make it difficult to store. Judging from the way of inheritance of opera culture, it follows the form of "master-student inheritance" and opera literature inheritance. Among them, the form of opera literature is the type of literature that records the opera culture with handed down value, and this kind of literature is all in paper form. From the perspective of storage and preservation, paper-based opera documents are extremely prone to corrosion and damage (Liu

Hangyu & Li Jing, 2021). It can be said that if precious opera documents are irreversibly damaged and lost, it will be a disaster for the Chinese nation and the entire world. Therefore, the integration and storage of opera cultural resources with the help of digital technology can not only rely on digital media to realize the storage of opera cultural resources, but also use the advantages of digital mass resource storage to provide rich materials for the research and inheritance of opera culture and resources. It is particularly worth mentioning that modern digital technology can realize the digital scanning of paper-based opera documents, and record opera cultural performances in audio, video and other forms, thereby realizing the vivid reproduction of opera culture and effectively avoiding the traditional in the process of intangible cultural heritage protection, the occurrence of “people’s death and art skills” and other situations occurred. Based on the aforementioned considerations, the government’s cultural authority should instruct special personnel to record and photograph excellent traditional opera performances through the application of modern information technology, and digitally scan paper opera documents, so as to maximize the appreciation of traditional operas.

### *2.3 Exploring Big Data Precise Push Service*

Under the influence of the Internet, the concept of “Internet +” has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. From a marketing perspective, major companies are accustomed to using big data technology to realize in-depth mining of user habits, and on this basis to achieve accurate pushes to users. It can be said that this marketing model based on digitalization has greatly surpassed the traditional marketing model in terms of validity and coverage. For enterprises, it can not only reduce their operating costs, but also realize potential marketing. With this in mind, government cultural authorities and opera performance groups should adjust the existing marketing model and actively use modern digital technology to achieve precise opera marketing in order to expand the audience. It is foreseeable that when the dissemination of traditional opera culture takes advantage of digital technology, it will be able to achieve accurate push, and provide a platform and opportunity for the majority of opera lovers to communicate, so that it can effectively promote

opera culture and make opera more popular. Culture has become a hot spot of public attention, allowing opera culture to return to social public life, and avoiding the loss of opera culture lovers.

### *2.4 Build a Digital Drama Talent Team*

In the digital age, the digital inheritance and development of opera urgently needs a corresponding high-quality, structurally optimized, and systematically complete talent team. To this end, we should actively build a digital opera talent team, and cultivate opera performance talents, opera inheritors and compound professionals.

#### *2.4.1 Actively Cultivate Opera Performing Talents*

In the development of opera, opera performers are one of the most critical factors. Opera performers are performing arts talents with solid opera skills and rich stage experience. Currently, the training of opera performers mainly consists of troupes and schools, but there are deficiencies in the cultivation of opera performers. For example, most of the opera performers in troupes are “boys”, who need to start from a baby, and often have a slight lack of education, while the opera performers trained by colleges and universities are relatively weak in opera skills (Shi Haowei, 2021). To this end, in the digital age, we should integrate the two talent training methods of theater troupes and colleges and universities, and strengthen the training methods. For example, opera artists can be invited to strengthen the training of college opera professionals through online teaching.

#### *2.4.2 Actively Cultivate Opera Inheritors*

In the digital age, it is very necessary to actively cultivate opera inheritors. Specifically, we can pay more attention to the inheritors of opera, increase support, give them special funds for training, and use them for living and other subsidies for the inheritors, in order to better optimize the creation of operas and improve the development of operas.

#### *2.4.3 Actively Cultivate Compound Professionals*

Although it is said that opera culture practitioners have performance and research capabilities, the vast majority of opera culture practitioners have obvious shortcomings and deficiencies in computer application ability and digital technology, while those engaged in

computer technology research are involved in the field of opera culture. There are very few, and the resulting problem is that there is an extreme shortage of professionals who have both opera cultural performances, scientific research capabilities, and familiarity with digital technology. In response to this situation, major domestic opera colleges or performance colleges should set up the major of “big data + opera”, scientifically arrange the teaching style, carefully design the teaching content, and arrange high-quality teachers for the students of this major, so that through the cultivation of “big data + opera” compound human resources provides and reserves enough talents for the inheritance and development of opera culture. In addition, due to the epidemic and other reasons, opera troupes have been hit to a certain extent. In the digital age, we can use the power of digitalization to practice the development idea of “simultaneous performance and broadcasting, online and offline integration”, carry out digital upgrading of theaters, promote the application of digital technology in the performing arts industry, and create a well-known brand of online stage performances.

### 3. Summary

In this article, the author analyzes the dilemma of opera inheritance in the digital age, and discusses the development strategy of Chinese opera inheritance based on digital technology from four aspects. In the digital age, the inheritance and development of Chinese opera is indeed facing more possibilities, especially in the dissemination of Chinese opera, digitalization has played a very key role. However, as far as the development of opera itself is concerned, digital inheritance, storage, and push are far from enough. Instead, we should continue to tap the contemporary factors of opera, keep pace with the times, strengthen the hematopoietic ability of opera itself, and enhance opera. own artistic vitality. Only in this way can the performing arts of traditional Chinese opera continue to grow and develop, and a better cultural ecology can be created.

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