

The Assistance of Regional Dialects in the Inheritance of Local Opera—Take Wuju Opera as an Example

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Abstract: Promoting the national culture is an important way to promote the soft power of a country. As a core of traditional culture, the local opera and dialect have a close connection. The paper, taking local Wuju opera in Jinyun, Zhejiang province as an example, discusses the current situations of Wuju opera and dialect, the difficulties of inheriting the traditional culture, and also provides some suggestions for ways to protecting and inheriting Wuju opera and dialect.

The term “regional dialect” often refers to the use of the similar pronunciation by the people in a certain area, shaped in the long history and influenced by the local economic and cultural environment [1]. The term “local opera” is defined as a type of opera that is popular in a certain region with certain local characteristics [2]. With the popularity of mandarin, economic and culture exchanges between regions have become increasingly frequent, accelerating communication and connections between different regions. The development of local opera has been hindered by diverse integration. How to inherit the local operas with the assistance of local dialects deserves profound research. This paper mainly focuses on the way for the inheritance of local opera by protecting regional ethnic characteristics and local dialects. The author takes Wujun opera as an example and explores the inheritance of Wuju opera with the assistance of Junyun dialect.

1. The Close Connection Between Wuju Opera and The Dialect

The local opera and local dialects are the main characteristics of the regional ethnic groups.

As creators of culture, humans have created their own languages in their respective regional and cultural backgrounds. As a unique language in a certain region, regional dialects witness the creation and transformation of its culture. British linguist Palmer once said, “Language is the faithful reflection of the entire history and culture of a nation...Language is not only a reflection of thoughts and emotions, but also has an impact on the emotions of thoughts[3]”. The dialect, the most representative characteristic of the regional language, of course shows the local culture of the region. The local opera, nevertheless, is the specific expression of regional culture. The local opera and regional dialect are neither interdependent nor subordinate, but rather two historically related objects.

Wuju opera arose in the late 17th century, during the middle Ming dynasty in Jinhua, and fully developed, reached peak popularity in the late Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty. In 2008, Wuju opera, the unique Chinese cultural treasure, was added to the national intangible cultural heritage list. Wuju opera is not only popular in the area of Jinhua, formerly known as Wuzhou, where Wuju opera is

originated from, but also widely favored in Lishui, Linhai, Quzhou in Zhejiang province, and northeast parts of Jiangxi province, such as Yushan, Shangrao, Jingdezhen, etc. Jinyun, the former county of the city Wuzhou, now as Jinhua, in Zhejiang province, with the population of 405,000, is the representative fan of Wuju opera. In 2009, Wuju opera in Jinyun has been added to the intangible cultural heritage list in Zhejiang province. According to Chinese government official statistics, there are more than twenty local troupes of Wuju opera in Jinyun, with a total number of more than 1500 performers and more than 15,000 performances every year. Among 253 administrative villages in Jinyun county, there are 3,000 performances every year[4].

There are more than 500 traditional repertoires in Wuju Opera, most of the stories are created based on the historical legends and local true stories. The popularity of the Wuju opera is always judged by the local citizens. Therefore, in order to strengthen the cultural identity of the audience and attract the attention of the local audience, the regional dialect is always adopted in the performance, since dialect would narrow down the distance and establish a close connection between the performers and audience. On the other hand, if there is no local dialect element in the performance of Wuju opera, there would not be any demonstration of local culture; if there is no performance of local Wuju opera, there would be less promotion of local dialects and local culture, so they are closely related and indispensable. The local dialect would provide more assistance for the inheritance of Wuju opera. The local dialect serves as the roots with sufficient nutrients, and Wuju opera would thrive.

However, local dialect also has the influence on the creation of Wuju opera. In the Chinese history, there are seven regional dialect systems according to the localities, namely northern dialect, wuyue dialect (southeast of China), Hunan dialect, Jiangxi dialect, Fujian dialect, Cantonese dialect, and Hakka dialect[5]. The creation of local opera in ancient times was mainly influenced by regional dialects and ethnic characteristics. Wuju operas mainly based on the wuyue dialect and it catered the taste of the local citizens. Performers in local dialect would bring dramatic effect on the performance and leave a profound impression on the audience. What's more, performing in local dialect is of great importance in shaping the figures of the opera, especially the performers' psychological activities.

2. The Current Difficult Situation of Wuju Opera and Regional Dialect

As the development of social economy, facing the multi-diverse entertainment activities and fast-rhythm lifestyle, Wuju opera suffers a lot of unprecedented challenges and crisis. One of the major challenges for Wuju opera is the less and less audience. Nowadays, the audience of Wuju opera is mainly in rural areas, with the majority of elderly people. Most of the young generation are overwhelmed by various appealing forms of modern entertainment, such as movies, pop music concert, dance clubs. Few young people have the interest and enthusiasm of the traditional art forms, as Wuju opera. They complaint about the slow pace and obsolete singing style of this traditional art form [6]. Because of the urbanization of China, a lot of rural people move to urban areas, which is filled with modern atmosphere. Another challenge for Wuju opera is the short supply of professional inheritors of Wuju opera. Firstly, it takes a boy or a girl several years to become a skilled performer and he or she must take tough training about the skills of singing and acrobatics. Opera performing is always considered full of difficulties, arduous, even risks of being injured. There are not many parents who would like to send the child to opera training school. Therefore, Wuju opera is facing the danger of extinction because of the loss of the inheritors.

Performing Wuju opera in Jinyun dialect is the unique characteristic of Wuju opera. The lyrics, melody, and recitation of Wuju Opera are all created based on the tune and pronunciation of Jinyun dialect. Without the Jinyun dialect characteristics, it is impossible to reflect the real essence of Wuju opera. However, this dialect performing style is diminishing. Due to the lack of local professional Wuju opera performers, the opera theaters have to recruit new performers from other provinces, such

as Shandong, Henan, Anhui and Jiangxi. Some of the current Wuju operas are performed in mandarin, which greatly reduces the unique characteristics and charm of Wuju opera. Another reason for the diminishing of dialect in performing Wuju opera is the national popularity of mandarin. As popularizing mandarin has been a national policy in China, mandarin would be adopted in all the schools. Mandarin has become a more common tool for communication between various regions, leading to the continuous loss of dialects in many regions. Many regional dialects are only used in the mouths of the surviving older generation. Therefore, the loss of regional dialects has increased the difficulty of protecting local opera. The regional characteristic cultures have also faded or even perished with the old language ecology.

Based on above current situation, it is extremely urgent to promptly rescue the Wuju Opera and make it inherit in a live form.

3. The Significance of Protecting Regional Dialects and Inheriting Wuju Opera

Local operas and dialects, as the important part the traditional culture, could be considered as the precious treasure of a country. It carries the reflection of the history as well as the cultural connotation. Protecting the traditional opera and dialect equals to inheriting the traditional culture of the country. People growing on the same land share the similar cultural background and preferences, and they have the similar standards of group sharing. Taking Wuju Opera as an example, although Wuju opera is not well-known to many people nationwide, compared with Peking opera, in Zhejiang, Wuju Opera has strong vitality and prospects for inheritance and development and enjoys a great popularity among the local people. Wuju opera would provide people a sense of identity and belonging. People enjoy not only Wuju opera performance, but also the spirit, the folklore, and the passion in mind. The dialect is the vivid expression of Wuju opera, protecting the dialect helps the Wuju opera performers to demonstrate the local culture in a more attractive and appealing way to the audience. The key to protecting local dialect and Wuju opera is to keep its unique characteristics and artistic charm.

On the other hand, opera is not only the reflection of traditional culture and history, inheriting traditional opera would also boost the local economic prosperity. Usually the local opera centers around a city or a county. The Wuju opera troupes are usually invited to give performances of opera at a specific place, such as center hall of the village, or empty field of the village and the performance of always last three or four days. The opera troupes would take all the equipment in a truck to the village. The stage would be installed on the spot. A lot audience from nearby villages would come to watch the opera, and food vans would also get assembled near the performing center for more consumers. Along the way, several industries would be boomed, such as opera costumes, stage installation, transportation, tourism and catering, and Wuju opera becomes an important new force and vitality in the new rural culture of Jinyun [7]. In the long run of the development of economy, local opera would also be taken as the core part of the tourism, which brings the new experience for the tourists.

4. Suggestions for Protecting Regional Dialects and Inheriting Wuju Opera

Protecting dialects and inheriting Wuju opera are beneficial for each other. Protecting dialect would help to keep the native characteristics of Wuju opera and inheriting Wuju opera would help to spread the traditional culture and prolong existence of the dialect. Every party should bear the responsibility of protecting dialects and inheriting Wuju opera.

First, the government support is the basic security measure to ensure the protection and inheritance of the traditional culture. The government should take the responsibility to promote the joint efforts from every walk in the society in the revival of Wuju Opera.

In order to promote the revival of traditional culture, Chinese government should issue some

national favorable policies, such as financial support for developing the traditional culture and some national campaigns for promoting the influence of Wuju opera. The local government should work out some practical ways to enlarge the popularity of Wuju opera, such as filming videos of the wonderful performance of Wuju opera, organizing acting contests of Wuju opera, setting up some public training schools, etc. Some excellent pieces of Wuju opera would be recommended to the national television beurre to join the national programs, in the year 2014, a Wuju opera show, entitled Water over the Golden Mountain joined the children's spring gala in Central Chinese Television. The splendid costume, melodious tune, and professional performance won the recognition of the opera experts. In the year 2021, the official department in charge of popularize the local culture under the Jinyun government, launched a campaign of competition of Wuju opera, attracting hundred of participants and millions of audiences, even the Central television showed this game in live broadcast. This competition won the acceptance and favor from the viewer all over the country and greatly make Wuju opera well known.

The government should not only provide the fund for boosting the local operas, but also make efforts to enhance the people's sense of identity with the local Wu Opera culture in southwest Zhejiang, promote regional positive interaction, coordinate development, and make Wu Opera live forever. Culture is an important part of a country's soft power. Achieving the sustainable development of traditional culture is the major task of the government, though it would be a long way to realize the cultural prosperity.

In order enlarge the publicity of Wuju opera art, the government should create a brand name card for Wuju opera and make the opera into the core of local tourism [8]. What's more, the professional training schools of Wuju opera should be opened up, where the Wuju opera fans could attend the class to learn some about the opera, professional performers could take some training for better performance, and the school also opens some classes for new learners of opera, to systematically teach learners the history and theoretical knowledge of Wuju Opera, as well as skills such as singing, reciting, acting and acrobatic fighting. This would ensure the inheritance of Wuju opera.

Secondly, the local schools should take the responsibility to cultivate children's sense of belonging to their hometown and love for local opera from a young age. Specialty lessons are opened to help students learn regional ethnic characteristics and dialects, and enhance the cultural heritage and connotation of the nation. Local opera can be used as a teaching material. In a classroom full of fun and artistic atmosphere, children would have an intimate feeling towards their local dialect, and can also have a deep understanding of local culture.

Thirdly, the Wuju opera troupes should find ways to survive itself in the modern world. Wuju opera troupes should establish a close relationship with government with the purpose to win the fund to make some innovations, such as upgrading the opera performing facilities, building new theaters, taking some training to improve performing arts, encouraging playwright to compose some new versions of opera repertoires, ect.

The young generation should be the target audience of Wuju opera, therefore, Wuju opera troupes must work out some new ways to attract the attention of the young. On the one hand, every actors or actresses should always keep in mind that practice makes perfect. They must keep practice all the way in order to show the excellent performance. On the other hand, they should also keep up with the development of the digital technology. The power of new media should play a role in protecting and inheriting Wuju opera and local dialect. Wuju opera videos would be preserved on the internet, by network, everyone has the easy access to Wuju opera any time at any place. The new trend of innovational culture also brings some new ideas in the spreading Wuju opera culture. The facial make-ups in opera, the opera costumes, the roles in opera would be printed in the forms of postcards, computer screen pictures, and bookmarks, which are especially favored by the young generation. With the characteristic of "novelty, and uniqueness", Wuju opera would gradually move closer to the

young generation.

5. Conclusion

Regional dialects are closely related to local opera. Protecting regional dialects is the key to ensuring the inheritance of local opera, which is a specific manifestation of regional dialects. By using regional dialects, it can assist in the inheritance and development of local opera. The Chinese government national policy of “Rural Revitalization Strategy” boost the prosperity of traditional culture. Wuju opera combined working together with Jinyun local dialect should take the advantage of the benefits of the policy to make a great improvement and progress in the development and inheritance.

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