

Exploration and dissemination of traditional Chinese Shaoxing Opera IP in mass media

Weiya LIANG

Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing 312000, China

Abstract: In the new era of cultural and creative industries, the prominence of technological development is increasingly evident. The cultural industry must leverage "Internet+" as a pivotal entry point to accelerate the transformation and upgrading of traditional cultural industries. As a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, Shaoxing Opera, also known as Yue Opera, should seize opportunities for cultural inheritance and industrial development. This paper investigates the development status of Yue Opera within the new cultural and creative landscape, focusing on IP-based cultural production. It analyzes the factors hindering Yue Opera's development and elaborates on the current status of developing Yue Opera IPs, taking into account the characteristics of "IP-ization". The study aims to explore multiple pathways for the IP-based development of Yue Opera to create a distinctive Yue Opera cultural industry chain, expand the dissemination of Yue Opera culture, unearth its diverse cultural values, and address the development bottlenecks of Yue Opera culture.

Key words: Yue Opera culture; IP image

1 Introduction

Yue Opera, one of the most prominent forms of traditional Chinese opera, has a history deeply woven into Chinese culture and aesthetics. Among the Yue Opera works, *The Romance of the Western Chamber* stands as a classical performance that has echoed through centuries. In the digital age, traditional art forms - including Yue Opera - encounter both challenges and opportunities. This paper aims to examine how Yue Opera, with a focus on *The Romance of the Western Chamber*, is adapted and disseminated via modern mass media platforms, providing insights into the evolving connection between traditional cultural expressions and contemporary media technologies [1].

2 Yue Opera culture and contemporary development challenges

Yue Opera, as a significant part of traditional Chinese operatic arts, has its roots firmly planted in folk culture. Even though it originated from historical contexts, it is currently experiencing a resurgence. Yue Opera, originating from Shengzhou, Zhejiang, has traced a remarkable journey spanning just over a century. Starting in Shengzhou, expanding to Shanghai, flourishing nationwide, and eventually gaining global influence, its remarkable growth can be largely attributed to the strong support and leadership embodied in the Zhejiang spirit. However, with the evolution of pop culture in Chinese market in recent decades, traditional theater, including Yue Opera, one of China's oldest theatrical forms, faces considerable challenges. Disruption in dissemination, an aging audience, and gaps in generational transmission are among these significant issues.

2.1 Enhancing cultural strength and spreading Yue Opera culture

With the advancement of the economy and society, driven by the strategic development of "Culture Fuelling the Nation" and the spread of high-quality education, China's soft cultural power continues to strengthen. At the same time, young people's patriotism is consistently stoked, with cultural confidence emerging as a key factor. For instance, the thriving "national trend culture" signifies the successful melding of traditional culture and innovative design concepts. This trend, attracting an increasing number of young people to engage in the protection and promotion of traditional culture, has undoubtedly infused new vitality into the rejuvenation of exemplary traditional culture and fostered greater cultural confidence amongst the youth. Gradually, a section of younger audience is turning their attention toward traditional theater, and renowned dramas are coming into their view. However, reputation doesn't necessarily correlate with popularity or acceptance. Yue Opera's current trend of catering to a niche audience is a significant contributing factor. There exists an urgent necessity to bridge the "last mile" gap between Yue Opera and the younger generation [2].

2.2 Present state of Yue Opera culture's dissemination via mass media

Traditional propagation of Yue Opera relied heavily on theater performances, which offered the advantage of high audience loyalty and clear positioning, but suffered from limited transmission capabilities and coverage. However, as mass media has matured and developed, Yue Opera has progressively employed various communication channels. An example of this is the program "The Voice of China: Yue Opera Special Season". This show, co-produced by Zhejiang TV, Shengzhou City (the birthplace of Yue Opera), the Department of Culture and Tourism of Zhejiang Province, and the Learning Power Zhejiang platform, was broadcast on Zhejiang TV, effectively enabled the general public to understand Yue Opera's origins and evolution in both rural and urban Zhejiang. Recognized as the country's second-largest opera type, Yue Opera's unique aesthetic elegance, often referred to as "poetic paintings of southern Jiangsu", highlights diverse singing styles and a vibrant stage. Although this model has significantly furthered Yue Opera's propagation, the rapid development of mass media has outpaced its usage in the context of Yue Opera, leading to a lagging issue. Against this backdrop, it's incumbent upon today's youth to thoroughly understand these underlying reasons and develop corresponding models to help promote Yue Opera through mass media.

2.3 The context of Yue Opera's dissemination among youth

To begin with, young people rarely engage with Yue Opera, partly due to its tonal system based on the subtle Wu dialect. The numerous local accents in Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions can make understanding Yue Opera a challenge, posing a barrier for regional youth. Moreover, geographical factors and tonal disparities further complicate the experience of contemporary youngsters attempting to appreciate the Yue Opera.

Secondly, there exists a general lack of understanding of Yue Opera among young people. The backdrop of the drama often bears a strong connection with ancient Chinese history. Therefore, the dissemination of Yue Opera necessitates the relay of corresponding historical contexts and narratives. However, today's prevailing "fast-food culture" and "utilitarian culture" result in a lackluster comprehension of history among the youth. The limited understanding leads to misconceptions about Yue Opera plots, making its transmission to young people more challenging [3].

3 The contemporary significance of Yue Opera culture

3.1 Routes to revitalize Yue Opera culture in the new era

3.1.1 Actively building new platforms to broaden Yue Opera's reach

In this era of media convergence, the Internet has greatly enhanced the rate and scale of information dissemination. We suggest establishing official websites featuring unique domain names pertinent to traditional Yue Opera to diversify the learning pathways of theater culture. Yue Opera's early adaptability to the Internet, as compared to other opera forms, is mostly attributed to the late Yue Opera expert Gao Yilong. Recognizing the powerful impact of Internet distribution in

promoting Yue Opera, Gao piloted the launch of the Shanghai Yue Opera House's official website in January 2003. This unique domain encompasses areas such as theater introductions, online viewing, show updates, Yue Opera forums, and play overviews.

3.1.2 Innovating Yue Opera forms to boost cultural transmission

New media technologies have paved the way not only for innovative presentations of Yue Opera but also for its enhanced cultural transmission, making the culture more accessible and comprehensible to a broader audience. An important example is the new performance of *Butterfly Lovers* by Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yue Opera Troupe, staged in honor of Yue Opera's centennial. Helmed by Guo Xiaonan, the production innovatively meshes modern adaptations with classic traditions, while preserving classical singing sequences. Employing stage components like "butterfly metaphors through fans", the play seamlessly weaves modern dance lexicon into a traditional opera palette, creating a unique blend of classic and contemporary elements. This fresh rendition was acclaimed during its performance at the 2016 G20 Hangzhou Summit. Moreover, not only has Yue Opera imbibed elements from various genres and art forms in recent years, but also made significant contributions to them. For instance, film adaption of the *Yue Opera Five Daughters Offering Longevity* in 1984 inspired multiple versions in Henan Opera, Xiju, Wuju, and Qinqiang, each with its distinct attributes.

3.1.3 Enhancing Yue Opera's interactivity to strengthen cultural transmission

New media platforms, enabling cross-interactions between spaces, have amplified the degree of interactivity among people. Traditional Yue Opera, utilizing these new media platforms, should optimally use their interactive features to bolster the transmission of Yue Opera culture, promoting the understanding and learning through interactive communication. As an example, the "Famous Yue Opera Actors on Tiktok" broadcasted on August 31, 2022, featuring celebrated Yue Opera artist Xiao Ya, amassed over 20 million viewers. She not only showcased classic Yue Opera segments but also shared her personal stories, offering insights into the evolution of Yue Opera. Furthermore, opera troupes can leverage various social media platforms for disseminating knowledge about Yue Opera. This can be achieved through channels like official Weibo accounts or WeChat public accounts, thereby fostering better communication between the transmitter and the receiver.

3.1.4 Delving deep into Yue Opera culture and practicing brand-oriented communication

In the era of new media, promoting the transmission of traditional Yue Opera culture necessitates a deep exploration of its cultural core. Leveraging the robust communication capabilities and extensive information repository of new media platforms, it's crucial to seek out exceptional content to create outstanding Yue Opera works. By crafting Yue Opera products with brand appeal, we can draw audiences to theaters, furthering the development of China's Yue Opera industry. A prime example of this approach is the "China Yue Opera Art·2020 Shaoxing Opera Event". Organized by Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism and Shaoxing Municipal People's Government, this event harmoniously integrated Yue Opera performances with the natural scenery of Shengzhou, thus exhibiting a century of Yue Opera's illustrious history. Live streaming with the theme "Yue Opera in the Cloud", the event was not just a successful experiment in "Internet + Yue Opera", but also attracted a broader audience, letting them experience the allure of Yue Opera culture, and the brand power of "Yue Opera Hometown of Shengzhou" was also amplified.

3.2 Exploring the skillful combination of Yue Opera Culture and image IP

Cultural creative IP refers to a series of cultural products or brands derived from intellectual property. Yue Opera, rich in historical context and surrounded by various folklore in its classic repertoires, is inherently storied and captivating. However, these narratives and legends have primarily been passed down orally, lacking physical mediums. In this project, we concentrate on "story IP", choosing the classic folklore *Romance of the West Chamber* for promotion and development

via "IP images". The character designs for protagonists like Cui Yingying and Zhang Gong not only resonate with ancient Chinese character imagery but are also charming and lively, making them appealing to younger audience.

3.3 Empowering the internationalization of Yue Opera: the endeavors of contemporary youth

In line with the strategic initiative of "presenting traditional culture to the global stage", the state significantly emphasizes the international dissemination of traditional operas. As a representative of traditional operas, Yue Opera actively participates in international exchanges and performances, delivering the essence of Chinese traditional culture. Folk groups and individuals are vigorously exploring new methods to propagate Yue Opera overseas and broaden commercial performance avenues. For instance, the Shaoxing Performance Company, in promoting the star-studded rendition of the *Butterfly Lovers*, employed a strategy of "famous play+famous actors". This strategy synergized resources and marketing efforts. This blend of cultural exchange and commercial performance has not only exhibited the timeless allure of opera culture on international platforms but also garnered extensive acclaim from foreign audiences. Their promotional tactics underscore the notion that "art transcends boundaries, and beauty, in any form, is universally embraced". Many large Yue Opera troupes maintain their own promotional websites and public accounts, offering both domestic and international audiences more opportunities to discover Yue Opera [4].

4 Conclusion

This accessibility reflects Yue Opera's adherence to a spirit of innovation that is both progressive and pioneering. It also demonstrates a deep-rooted commitment to public interest and folk traditions. By continuously learning from and integrating various outstanding cultural elements, Yue Opera has successfully transcended regional and linguistic barriers, achieving a century of remarkable brilliance. The challenge for contemporary Yue Opera practitioners lies in innovating while preserving heritage. They are tasked with propelling Yue Opera into a broader future, effectively conveying the "Chinese stories" embedded in these operas, and spreading the "good Chinese voices" contained in Yue Opera.

Acknowledgments

This article is a research outcome of the 2023 National College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program project titled "Dissemination and Exploration of Traditional Chinese Yue Opera IP in Mass Media" (Project Number: 202312792031).

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Chen X. 2023. A study on cross-cultural communication of Yue Opera based on cultural self-confidence from the perspective of globalization. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 7 (5).
- [2] Jin Q. 2023. Yue Opera start a new journey under China's cultural policy. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 7 (1).
- [3] Liu YC. 2023. Research on the effectiveness of Yue Opera communication in Zhejiang youth in the new media era. DOI:10.2991/978-2-38476-018-3_9
- [4] Jin J. 2009. *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*. University of Washington Press.

About the author

Liang Weiya, female, born in February 2002, from Ningbo, Zhejiang. She is an undergraduate student in Chinese International Education at Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages. Research Areas: International Chinese Education, Cultural Arts.