

How Traditional Culture Responds to the Crisis of Rapid Economic Development: A Case Study of Hunan Flower Drum Opera in China

Juan Xie¹, Jinky Jane C Simeon^b

^aUniversiti Malaysia Sabah, Arts Department, Academy of Arts And Creative Technology, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, ^bUniversiti Malaysia Sabah, Arts Department, Academy of Arts And Creative Technology, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/21997>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i3/21997

Published Online: 13 July 2024

Abstract

Hunan Flower Drum Opera, a traditional opera from Hunan Province, China, is recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage. Known for its humorous and witty musical and dance styles, the opera primarily uses drums and unique instruments, creating a distinctive auditory and visual experience. However, the preservation of this cultural gem is facing significant challenges due to the pressures of modernization and the impact of multicultural influences. This paper thoroughly examines the current state of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, identifying the main issues that hinder its inheritance, such as urbanization, the decline of traditional cultural practices, and competition from global entertainment trends. By analyzing these challenges, this study proposes effective solutions to ensure the continued development and preservation of Hunan Flower Drum Opera in contemporary times, aiming to revitalize this unique cultural treasure and pass it down to future generations.

Keywords: Hunan Flower and Drum Opera, Current Situation, Dilemma Reasons, Inheritance

Introduction

Hunan Flower Drum Opera, a local treasure hailing from Hunan province, has endeared itself to the hearts of the people with its delightful and witty blend of singing and dancing. Rooted in the daily toils of the populace, this traditional art form has traversed a captivating historical journey spanning three distinctive stages of evolution. It metamorphosed from its humble beginnings as two small operas featuring a "dan" character and a clown into the more intricate "three small operas" format. Presently, it flourishes as the modern "Flower and Drum Opera" (Tan, 2007). Geographically diverse, Hunan Flower Drum Opera has branched into distinct regional variants, including Changsha Flower Drum Opera, Yueyang Flower Drum Opera, Changde Flower Drum Opera, Hengyang Flower Drum Opera, Shaoyang Flower Drum Opera,

1* corresponding author: all authors contributed equally

and Zeroing Flower Drum Opera, each with its own unique flavor and popularity within particular regions (Zeng, 2020).

The study of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it represents a vital aspect of China's intangible cultural heritage, reflecting the rich traditions and artistic expressions of Hunan province. Understanding this art form provides valuable insights into the social and cultural fabric of the region. Secondly, as a vibrant cultural artifact, it offers an excellent case study for examining the evolution of traditional Chinese opera and its adaptation to contemporary times. This research can shed light on the broader dynamics of cultural preservation and innovation.

The uniqueness of Hunan Flower Drum Opera lies in its intrinsic qualities. One notable feature is the dramatic essence of its scripts, with a penchant for character comedy and a predominant focus on dramatic characterizations. The art form revels in the art of lampooning and satire, unearthing the foibles and idiosyncrasies of its characters through scripts that mirror everyday life and resonate with authentic portrayals. This is vividly exemplified in classic plays such as 'Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutters' and 'Mending the Pot.' Furthermore, its melodies find their roots in folk mountain songs, evolving from a handful of rudimentary tunes into a diverse spectrum. These musical compositions can be categorized into four distinct styles based on structure and essence: Chuan tune, beaten gong cadence, pai tzu, and minor tune (Zhu, 2018). Instrumentation primarily features the large tube, suona, and drums, with the large tube offering a distinctive tonal quality.

In addition to its musical prowess, the language of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is deeply rooted in the Changsha dialect. However, subtle variations exist across different locales, resulting in nuanced expressions, such as "tangke" for wife and "luo li" for here. This linguistic diversity injects a vivacious and local flavor into the performance, fostering witty and spirited interactions with the audience. The performance itself embodies a vivacious and straightforward style, characterized by a brisk rhythm and a diverse array of steps and stances. Everyday scenes like "rowing a boat" and "chopping wood" seamlessly integrate into the performance, lending it an immersive quality that resonates with the audience. Lastly, the costumes and makeup further distinguish Hunan Flower Drum Opera, adhering to specific characteristics that epitomize the programmatic essence of opera. This not only enhances its artistic appeal but also contributes significantly to its scholarly and cultural value.

In conclusion, the enduring legacy of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is a testament to its remarkable journey, marked by dramatic scripts, folk-inspired music, linguistic diversity, and captivating performances. These elements have collectively imbued it with timeless charm and continue to ensure its relevance in contemporary times. Studying this unique art form is not only important for preserving cultural heritage but also for understanding the dynamics of cultural evolution and the ongoing relevance of traditional arts in modern society.

Problem Statement

The inheritance of Hunan Flower Drum Opera faces a multitude of challenges, primarily centered around the preservation of traditional skills and techniques. These unique performing arts require extensive learning and practice, but the accelerated pace of modern life has cast a shadow over their continuity. Several critical issues emerge, jeopardizing the legacy and development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, demanding the implementation of appropriate solutions. The key challenges in the inheritance of Hunan Flower Drum Opera include:

1. **Loss of Artistic Talent:** The rapid socio-economic development and urbanization have triggered a talent drain from rural to urban areas. Hunan Flower Drum Opera is grappling with a decline in traditional artistic talent as many young individuals opt for more alluring professions. This trend threatens the vitality of this age-old art form.
2. **Shortage of Inheritance Institutions:** Traditional opera societies and troupes encounter numerous difficulties, including staff shortages and inadequate financial resources. The absence of effective inheritance institutions further compounds the predicament, hindering the sustained transmission and evolution of Hunan Flower Drum Opera.
3. **Innovation and Modernization Dilemma:** The hustle and bustle of contemporary life, coupled with changing entertainment preferences, have diminished the younger generation's interest and comprehension of traditional arts. The youth often gravitate towards trendy and modern forms of entertainment, while traditional arts like Hunan Flower Drum Opera struggle to adapt. Balancing the preservation of tradition with the incorporation of modern elements poses a formidable challenge in the inheritance process.

In addressing these challenges, it is imperative to explore strategies that can invigorate the inheritance of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, ensuring its relevance and continuity in a rapidly changing world.

Objectives

To address the challenges facing the inheritance and development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, the research objectives include:

1. To Investigate talent cultivation issues, including systems, methods and resource optimization, to guide the development of exceptional talents in Hunan Flower Drum Opera.
2. To Explore effective inheritance mechanisms for traditional opera art in contemporary society, drawing from experiences of inheritors to provide theoretical and practical guidance.
3. To examine the strategies for innovation while preserving tradition, making Hunan Flower Drum Opera more appealing to modern audiences.

Through the implementation of the above research objectives, we can provide theoretical and practical guidance for the inheritance and development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, and promote the new vitality of Hunan Flower Drum Opera in contemporary society.

Research Methodology

Hunan Flower Drum Opera heritage research can be carried out using a variety of methods, the following are some common research methods:

1. **Field Trips: On-Site Visits:** The research team undertakes field trips to regions where Hunan Flower Drum Opera is actively practiced. These on-site visits serve as the cornerstone for immersing researchers in the cultural context and experiencing the art form in its authentic setting. Researchers engage with local communities, partake in live performances, and witness rehearsals, providing firsthand exposure to the practice and cultural significance of the opera.
2. **Performance Attendance:** Attendance at Hunan Flower Drum Opera performances during field trips is integral. This enables the observation of various facets, including performance styles, stage design, audience reactions, and the interaction between artists and spectators.

These observations contribute significantly to a comprehensive understanding of the opera's artistic and cultural dimensions.

3. Field Investigation: Field investigation entails direct interaction with key stakeholders closely associated with Hunan Flower Drum Opera. Researchers establish personal connections with inheritors, actors, teachers, and audience members. Through face-to-face interactions, investigators build rapport, encourage open dialogues, and cultivate trust among participants.

4. Interviews: In-depth interviews constitute a primary data collection method. These interviews are thoughtfully designed to explore various dimensions, including inheritance experiences, personal perspectives, perceived challenges, and future aspirations related to the opera. Through interviews, researchers glean valuable insights from a diverse range of individuals connected to Hunan Flower Drum Opera.

5. Documentation: Archival materials, including photographs, audio recordings, and video footage, are meticulously collected during field investigations. These documents serve as visual and auditory records that complement qualitative data, offering historical and visual context to the research. Inheritors.

Results and Discussion

1. The Current Situation of Hunan Flower Drum Opera

Hunan Flower Drum Opera is an important part of Hunan culture. Since the reform and opening up, the inheritance and development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera has faced multiple challenges, and in such a context, Hunan Flower Drum Opera is facing a huge existential crisis. It is our duty to objectively articulate the existential crisis facing Hunan Flower and Drum Opera, so that the artistic life and historical and cultural values of Hunan Flower Drum Opera can continue.

Status of theatre companies and bearers

In the new era, the crisis in the heritage of opera is national. Hunan Flower Drum Opera is a local opera and is even more imminent. There is also a fault line of actors on the stage. There are fewer and fewer actors engaged in Flower Drum Opera, and secondly there are fewer and fewer inheritors. The departure of inheritors in particular means that there is a fault line in the transmission of some repertoire. These six genres currently do not have many major inherited troupes or actors.

The Changsha Flower Drum Opera, which has had the greatest impact, is mainly found in Changsha, Zhuzhou and Xiangtan in the eastern part of Xiangtan (Li & Zhen, 2016). Its troupes include the Hunan Provincial Flower and Drum Opera Theatre, the Zhuzhou Drama Heritage Centre Flower and Drum Opera Exhibition and Performance Department, and the Liling Flower and Drum Opera Troupe, and its inheritors include Liu Zhaoqian, a recipient of the Chinese Drama Plum Blossom Award, as well as Ouyang Juwen and Ye Hong. The world-famous "Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutter" is her masterpiece.

Yueyang Flower and Drum Opera is mainly performed in Yueyang, Linxiang and Xiangyin in northern Hunan, and its heritage groups include Yueyang County Flower and Drum Opera Heritage Institute, with Liu Lurong and Yi Wen. The main inheritance groups include Changde, Taoyuan and Li County in northern Hunan Province, and the inheritance groups include the

Changde Dingcheng District Flower Drum Opera Protection Centre, with Yang Jian'e, Huang Shiyuan and Du Meishuang. The Shaoyang Flower Drum Opera is mainly distributed in Shaoyang City, Shaodong and Xinshao in central Hunan Province, and its inheritance groups include Shaoyang Flower Drum Opera protection and inheritance centre (Zhu, 2016). The Zeroing Flower Drum Opera is mainly distributed in Qiyang, Dong'an, Shuangpai, Shaoyang and other places in central and southern Hunan Province, and its inheritance groups are mainly the Zeroing Flower Drum Opera preservation and inheritance centre (Hu, 1992). The Changsha Flower and Drum Opera has unique artistic characteristics compared to the other branches, and is the most widespread and well-developed of the Hunan Flower and Drum Opera.

In this branch of the Changsha genre, the Zhuzhou Theatre Heritage Centre's Xiangdong Road has emerged as a breakthrough. Its new production of 2021, *The Mountain Lantern*, maintains the light-hearted nature of Flower Drum Opera, but uses the unique Xiangdong folk songs and Hakka mountain songs as a form of song and dance, interpreting a true and touching story of poverty alleviation, which has drawn unanimous praise from the artistic community. And the Liling Flower and Drum Opera Troupe, once a very famous troupe of flower and drum opera, is now facing closure.

While in the city the Xiangdong Road is being passed on and carried forward. These phenomena deserve to be studied and explored. The overall point is that both the troupe and the inheritors are declining.

The current state of playwriting and audience

There are not many inheritors or repertoires that are regularly performed. These artists, repertoire and institutions are quietly passing away, and have even seen an accelerated decline in recent years. With the deepening of reform and opening up, there has been competition from multiple cultures, the most popular television has entered millions of households, and various forms of concerts and even sporting events have become hotspots for cultural consumption, competing for audiences of opera, and Flower Drum Opera has encountered the same serious challenges.

There are few new Flower Drum Opera scripts, the content of the opera is stale and there are too few new scripts, leading to a sharp decline in audiences and, consequently, a sharp decline in the number of performances. Actors and audiences are being lost, audiences and troupes are slipping away, and heritage is entering a vicious cycle. It has created a disconnect in audiences.

The following are common scripts from various genres, including the representative works of Changsha Flower Drum Opera such as *The Lulin Guild*, *The Red Lady's Army*, *Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutters* and *Liu Hai Playing the Golden Toad* (Zeng & Zeng, 2014). Representative plays of Yueyang Flower and Drum Opera include *Three Sons of Gui*, *Dong Yong Sells His Body*, *Xiushu Goes to the Sea*, and *Guanpai Yulou*.

The main representative works of Hengyou Flower Drum Opera are *Xi Ying Men*, *Yin Shu Daughter* and *Tu Tu Shi Zheng Yuan*), etc. Xu (2010) The main representative repertoire of Changde Flower and Drum Opera includes *Seeking Husband in Dongchuan*, *Beating Lulu Flower*, *Beating Nephew to the Grave*, *Brother in the Mountain*, *Sister in the Mountain*, *Coincidentally Spotting Yuanyang* Shaoyang Flower and Drum Opera representative repertoire, *Pair of Foot Signs*, *Grinding Tofu*, *Song Saeko*, *Grinding Tofu*; Zeroing Flower and Drum Opera representative repertoire, *Sentinel under the Neon Light*, *Po Lin Lantern*, *Painting the Dragon*, and *Edge in the Closet*, etc.

The current situation of Hunan Flower Drum Opera inheritance methods

The first is the oldest and most traditional form and is still used as one of the main forms of transmission.

The first is the oldest and most traditional, and is still one of the main forms of transmission. The so-called "oral transmission" means that the form is transmitted through the mouth and ears, and the spirit is transmitted through inner comprehension, and learning under the master mainly takes place on a one-to-one basis, with the master teaching mainly through lectures on the content, characterisation, etc., and singing demonstrations. (Yang & Chang, 2018) .

This way of transmission is not widespread and is not conducive to training professional actors on a large scale . School transmission is one of the extremely important ways of transmitting Hunan Flower Drum Opera. Schools are more systematic in teaching Flower Drum Opera and have special courses for each genre's characteristic tunes and repertoire. To date, the Hunan Arts Vocational College has trained a group of Flower Drum Opera performers who work in the troupe and apply the various tunes learned in school, including the representative tunes of various types of Hunan Flower Drum Opera , to the repertoire adaptations or new creations of the repertoire, so that the characteristic tunes of Hunan Flower Drum Opera , after being school, the tunes have been passed on to a wider audience.

However, there are only isolated cases of heritage in schools, and there is a lack of professional teachers entering universities. The third is the heritage of training courses. Hunan Flower Drum Opera heritage in training courses refers to a way of passing on Hunan Flower Drum Opera by attending training courses organised by the government. After a period of basic training, the teacher will streamline the students according to their merits. After the students have been streamlined, the teacher begins to focus on the singing of the students. The training courses in Hunan Flower Drum Opera are mainly project based. Most of this training method is a short-term project, and not many students learn and pursue the profession in the long term. On the one hand, the training courses that exist for learning and Hunan Flower Drum Opera into the classroom are more fragmented and very small in scale, and the breadth, density and depth of their popularity is far from adequate.

Analysis of the reasons dilemma of Hunan Flower Drum Opera Inheritance

Hunan Flower Drum Opera is an important part of Hunan culture. With the development of society, the inheritance and development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is facing multiple challenges. In such a context of the times, Hunan Flower Drum Opera is facing a huge crisis of survival. From the current foundation of the six genres, it is understood that the status of inheritance is not ideal. It is our duty to transform the existential crisis faced by Hunan Flower Drum Opera in the new era, so that the artistic life and historical and cultural values of Hunan Flower Drum Opera can continue. There are two main reasons for these crises.

Aesthetic approach has changed

With the development of the economy, the emergence of colourful forms of entertainment, and the competition of diverse cultures, audiences' taste and appreciation levels are constantly changing, and their aesthetic approach is changing (Yang, 2009). At the same time, the repertoire of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is slowly being updated and there is a lack of new classics. The content of traditional repertoire is old, although the old repertoire is very traditional and the original Flower Drum Opera s such as "Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutter" and

"Mending the Pot" but are prevalent in the countryside, their stories are too commonplace, mostly based on family ethics, male love and female love or life and labour, etc.

With the development of the economy, but it is difficult to meet the aesthetics of the young generation and attract young people to join the team of Hunan Flower Drum Opera heritage. The lack of creative staff makes it very difficult to create an influential work that is loved by the audience, and most performers do not have the ability to create flower-drum operas and lack the inspiration and material to explore the themes of modern life. As the aesthetic level of audiences has increased in the new era, especially young audiences, with forms of entertainment such as popular music and films, the aesthetic tastes and appreciation levels of the general public have changed, and there is a lack of innovation tailored to audience preferences and a dearth of Flower Drum Opera choreographers. The content of these traditional flower-drum operas cannot meet the audience's viewing needs, leading to a loss of audience and a lack of creativity.

Insufficient government support

Insufficient government support and a serious shortage of funds.

The government is the policy maker and promoter in the inheritance of local traditional culture, and the inheritance of local traditional culture requires effective government intervention. The preservation and transmission of Hunan Flower Drum Opera needs to rely on the government's guidance and decision making, and needs to rely on the government to provide generous funding to enable it to survive and pass on better (Yang, 2019)

The need for funding for the promotion of Hunan Flower and Drum Opera, the training of heritage talents, and the operation of the cultural market are all significant. However, the shortage of funds for the protection and transmission of Hunan Flower Drum Opera has resulted in the loss of talents, stagnant development or slow development of the repertoire, and the marginalisation of traditional culture. The coverage of the promotion and transmission of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is not wide enough and there are certain limitations.

The promotion of the awareness of cultural confidence is not strong enough. The mechanism for protecting and training the inheritors of Hunan Flower Drum Opera is not mature and sound enough, which seriously affects the sustainable development of Hunan Flower and Drum Opera. In the old days, Hunan Flower Drum Opera folk artists engaged in Flower and Drum Opera performances in order to survive, and the scope of performances expanded from the countryside to the cities, where they were applied to events such as birthday celebrations, wedding ceremonies and funerals Li & Zhang, (2017) With the change of times and the arrival of a well-off life, these folk heritage subjects gradually moved away from this way of sustaining their livelihoods.

Both folk and troupe, due to the lack of protection and attention to the inheritors of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, the inheritance subjects are facing the dilemma of an ageing age structure and a lack of succession of inheritors. The current situation of the ageing staff of the Hua Gu opera troupes is a serious constraint on their artistic production activities. Fewer and fewer young people are devoting themselves to the study and transmission of flower-drum opera, and there is a discontinuity of actors on stage, with a decrease in the number of troupes and inheritors.

Conclusion

As an important part of China's intangible cultural heritage, opera culture has a rich value for communication. In the face of such a serious situation, in order to do a good job in

the inheritance of Hunan Flower Drum Opera, to promote the development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera for the better, so that the artistic life and historical and cultural values of Hunan Flower Drum Opera can be continued, for the inheritors of Chinese traditional music, i.e. to first have a full knowledge and understanding of their own traditional music culture, and to first have cultural self-awareness, in order to establish confidence in Chinese traditional music, and only then can they consciously and spontaneously inherit and Only then can we consciously and spontaneously pass on and promote our own traditional music culture. To learn and learn from the good practices of Xiangdong Road according to the Raise cultural self-awareness and cultural confidence. Call for greater publicity for Hunan Flower Drum Opera. Studies can be conducted on outstanding cases in the current situation, and Hunan Flower Drum Opera is also groping for new opportunities for development. The preservation and transmission of Hunan Flower and Drum Theatre should become the original intention and mission of the young generation.

References

- Tan, C. M. (2007). Studies on Hunan Flower Drum Opera (Doctoral dissertation, Qufu Normal University).<https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CFD9908&filename=2007097812.nh>
- Zhu Yongbei. (2018). A Brief Discussion on the Heritage Value and Protection Principles of Hunan Flower Drum Opera. *Music World* (12), 53-56.
- Liu, X. Ao, Z. W. Y., & Yong, Z. (2021). Contemporary presentation of cultural forms and social functions of Hunan Flower Drum Opera genre. *Journal of Urbanism* (06), 66-71.
- Zhu Yongbei. (2016). Research on the heritage development of Hunan Flower Drum Opera based on field survey. *Music Exploration* (04), 49-53. doi:10.15929/j.cnki.1004-2172.2016.04.009.
- Li Qiaowei & Tianhui, Z. (2017). Research on the heritage of Hunan Flower Drum Opera in college music education. *Education and Teaching Forum* (27), 219-220.
- Yang, L. S. (2019). Experimental discussion on the inheritance path of Hunan Flower Drum Opera. *House of Drama* (14), 31+33.
- Li Zhen. (2016). The distribution territory and inheritance development status of Flower Drum Opera . *Journal of Wuhu Vocational and Technical College* (01), 71-74.
- Xiangling, Z., & Xiangsi, Z. (2014). Traces of the times in Hunan Flower and Drum Opera: Reflections from the reform of Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutter. *Art Sea* (02), 49-52.
- Chang, Y. (2009). Reflections on the history of Hunan Flower Drum Opera music and its development. *Songhai* (06), 23-25.
- Hu, J. (1992). Traditional techniques of creating cadences in Hunan Flower Drum Opera and its inheritance and development. Huang Zhong. *Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music* (03), 96-101. doi:10.19706/j.cnki.cn42-1062/j.1992.03.051.
- Xu Yanwen. (2010). Research on the current situation, problems and countermeasures of Changsha flower-drum opera class (Master's thesis, Central South University).<https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD2011&filename=2010187864.nh>
- Hu Yiting. (2021). On the classification, style and artistic value of Hunan Flower Drum Opera. *World of Comedy* (2nd half of the month) (08), 10-12.
- Dingling, Z. (2020). An introduction to the artistic genre of Hunan Flower Drum Opera. *The House of Drama* (21), 14-15.