

Research on the Integration of Gaojia Opera Inheritance and Music Education in Tong'an District, Xiamen

Zhihan Su

School of Music, Jimei University, Xiamen, Fujian, 361021, China

ABSTRACT

This paper takes the theory of intangible cultural heritage protection and music education theory as the cornerstone, and uses bibliometrics, field investigation and case analysis to conduct a systematic study on Gaojia Opera in Tong'an District, Xiamen. On the basis of an in-depth analysis of its historical evolution, artistic characteristics and contemporary inheritance dilemma, it focuses on exploring the educational value of Gaojia Opera music in the dimensions of vocal system and instrumental configuration, and constructs an innovative path for the integration of Gaojia Opera and music education. By designing a gradient curriculum system, innovating digital teaching methods, and improving the teacher training mechanism, it aims to achieve the living inheritance of Gaojia Opera and provide a theoretical framework and practical paradigm for the integration of local opera and music education.

KEYWORDS

Gaojia Opera in Tong'an district; Music education; Intangible cultural heritage; Inheritance system; Vocal art

1 Introduction

As an important representation of southern Fujian culture, Gaojia Opera in Tong'an District, Xiamen City, carries a unique regional cultural gene and is a shining pearl in the treasure house of Chinese opera art. However, under the impact of modernization and multiculturalism, Gaojia Opera in Tong'an District faces severe challenges such as audience generational gap, lack of inheritance talents, and lack of artistic innovation. According to the "2023 China Intangible Cultural Heritage Development Report", the number of professional Gaojia Opera troupes has decreased by 42% compared with ten years ago, and young audiences account for less than 5% ^[1]. Music is the core artistic element of Gaojia Opera. Its unique Nanyin vocal system, rich instrumental configuration and stylized singing techniques are the concentrated embodiment of the artistic charm of Gaojia Opera, and also provide unique teaching resources for music education. Integrating Gaojia Opera into the music education system is not only an inevitable requirement for inheriting the excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also an important path for innovating the content and form of music education. This study aims to explore the deep integration of Gaojia Opera and music education, and provide new ideas and methods for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

2 Historical origin and artistic characteristics of Gaojia opera in Tongan district

2.1 Historical origin

The development of Gaojia Opera in Tongan District can be traced back to the folk sacrificial activities in southern Fujian in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. At that time, people entertained gods and people through "makeup people" performances in the god-welcoming competitions. This performance form that combines martial arts, singing and religious rituals constituted the prototype of Gaojia Opera. The "Quanzhou Prefecture Chronicle" of the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty recorded: "In the god-welcoming competitions, the makeup people acted out stories, gongs and drums were played, and the guards competed in extravagance" ^[2], which vividly reproduced the grand scenes of the early Gaojia Opera performances. During the Kangxi period, "Gejia Opera" began to spread widely in the Tongan area. According to Chen Menglei's "Songfengtang Collection of Essays", at that time, the actors "performed dramas from door to door, their appearances were strange and their voices were vulgar, but the locals all enjoyed it" ^[3], indicating that Gaojia Opera had penetrated into the folks and became an important cultural entertainment form for the people. After hundreds of years of development and evolution, Gaojia Opera has continuously absorbed artistic elements such as Nanyin, puppet show, and Song Jiang Formation, and gradually formed a unique form of opera.

2.2 Artistic characteristics

2.2.1 Musical characteristics

The music system of Gaojia Opera is centered on vocal art. Its singing tunes, such as [Jiangshuiling] and [Sibianjing],

directly inherit the "Gunmen" and "Qupai Liantao" systems of Nanyin ^[4]. In the process of inheritance, Gaojia Opera artists used the eight sounds of Minnan dialect as the basis and localized the Nanyin tunes by "singing according to the words", forming a unique musical style. Wang Yaohua, a famous opera musicologist, pointed out in "A Brief Discussion on Fujian Folk Music" that Gaojia Opera vocal tunes make Nanyin ① tunes more in line with the emotional expression needs of opera performances by adjusting the melody direction, rhythm density and singing method ^[5].

In terms of instrumental configuration, the Gaojia Opera band adopts the "civil and martial fields" arrangement. The martial stage is mainly composed of percussion instruments such as drums, gongs, and cymbals. Different gong and drum sutras (such as [seven sticks] and [long mallet]) are used to create a dramatic atmosphere and coordinate with the actors' body movements. The literary stage is mainly composed of instruments such as *erxian*, *sanxian*, and *suona*, which accompany the singing and create the atmosphere of the scene. For example, when depicting war scenes, the high-pitched and passionate melody of the *suona* and the rapid rhythm of the gongs and drums can quickly bring the audience into a tense dramatic situation.

2.2.2 Performance characteristics

The performance program of Gaojia Opera is deeply influenced by Quanzhou string puppetry, especially the clown performance. The puppet clown transforms the mechanical movements of the puppet into a stage performance with a comedic effect through techniques such as "three-step" and "turning hands". Ma Ye, an expert in opera performance research, pointed out in "The Collection of Theories on Opera Performance" that this performance method forms a unique "puppet-human integration" artistic style through exaggerated body language and delicate emotional expression ^[6]. Gaojia Opera's martial arts performances are derived from the "Song Jiang Formation" ② martial arts in southern Fujian. After artistic processing, it has formed the characteristics of martial arts that are both hard and soft, and the coexistence of reality and illusion.

2.2.3 Roles

Gaojia Opera is based on the "Nine Major Roles" framework, among which the clown and the female roles are the most distinctive. The clown roles are subdivided into official clowns, puppet clowns, and female clowns. Official clowns use "tofu block" facial makeup, official flattery and stylized movements to satirize the ugly faces of feudal bureaucrats; puppet clowns imitate puppet forms with stiff and jerky postures to create a naive and comic image; female clowns borrow folk dance movements and show the vivid character of market people through lively and agile performances. Among the female roles, the main female roles have a mellow and dignified singing voice. For example, in Chen San Wu Niang's [Chang Gun] aria, she delicately depicts the gentle temperament of a lady from a noble family through nasal resonance and long singing. The small female roles have a clear and lively singing voice. In Peach Blossom Transition, the [Shuang Diecui] aria of Peach Blossom, combined with the jumping melody and fan dance, vividly shows the liveliness and innocence of the girl.

3 The contemporary inheritance dilemma of Gaojia opera in Tongan district

3.1 Cultural ecological crisis

3.1.1 Imbalanced audience structure

With the rise of digital media, the audience structure of Gaojia Opera has shown a serious aging trend. According to the survey data of Tongan District Culture and Tourism Bureau in 2023, the audience aged 60 and above accounted for 78%, while the audience aged 20 and below accounted for only 3.2% ^[7]. New forms of entertainment such as short videos and live broadcasts cater to the cognitive habits of young groups with their fragmented and instantaneous dissemination characteristics, while the traditional linear narrative and slow-paced performance of Gaojia Opera are difficult to attract the attention of contemporary young audiences, resulting in a continuous shrinking of the audience group.

3.1.2 Endangered inheritance chain

Currently, there are only 3 professional Gaojia Opera troupes in Tongan, with an average age of 52 years old, and there is a lack of inheritors ^[8]. Among the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, only 2 people have mastered the unique skills of "puppet clown", and unique skills such as "short step four corners" and "three-point fan" are facing the risk of being lost. The traditional "oral transmission" inheritance model has gradually declined under the impact of the modern education system. The young generation has little interest and enthusiasm in the inheritance of Gaojia Opera, which seriously threatens the survival and development of Gaojia Opera.

3.1.3 Insufficient repertoire innovation

The traditional repertoire of Gaojia Opera is mostly based on historical themes, which are far away from contemporary social life and difficult to resonate with the audience. Some innovative repertoires are blind when integrating modern elements, such as simply piling up popular elements such as street dance and electronic music, resulting in the loss of the characteristics of the opera itself. As the opera theorist Fu Jin pointed out in "Opera Aesthetics", innovation that deviates from the foundation of formalization is actually the dissolution of the essence of opera art ^[9].

3.2 Protection mechanism defects

3.2.1 Insufficient policy support

Although the government has set up special protection funds, there is a problem of insufficient precision in actual implementation. Taking the "Sunset Red Gaojia Opera Troupe" in Tong'an District as an example, its annual performance income only accounts for 30% of its operating costs. Over-reliance on financial subsidies has led to insufficient motivation for innovation in the troupe ^[10]. The current policy lacks guidance and support for the market-oriented operation of troupes, making it difficult to form a sustainable development model.

3.2.2 Academic research lags behind

Currently, research on Gaojia Opera is mostly focused on historical research, and research on its contemporary dissemination, education and inheritance is relatively weak. As of 2023, CNKI has included only 127 research papers on Gaojia Opera, of which less than 20 are special studies on Tongan Gaojia Opera ^[11]. The lag in academic research has led to a lack of systematic theoretical guidance for the inheritance of Gaojia Opera, which has restricted the in-depth development of protection practices.

3.2.3 Superficial application of technology

In terms of digital protection, existing projects mostly remain at the level of image recording, lacking in-depth deconstruction of performance routines. Although a certain "Gaojia Opera Digital Resource Library" includes 43 plays, it does not use motion capture, vocal cavity analysis and other technologies for structured processing ^[12], making it difficult to achieve digital preservation and dissemination of the essence of Gaojia Opera art.

3.2.4 The inheritance value of Gaojia opera in Tongan District from the perspective of music education

(1) The value of music education resources

The rich musical elements of Gaojia Opera provide unique teaching resources for music education. The combination of Minnan dialect phonetics and music contained in its vocal system helps students to deeply understand the creative characteristics of folk music "following the words" ③; the diverse instrumental performance techniques, such as the complex rhythmic patterns of percussion instruments and the unique way of string instruments, can broaden students' instrumental learning horizons. In teaching practice, through the study of Gaojia Opera music, students can systematically master the core elements of folk music such as melody, rhythm, and mode, and improve their music perception and performance abilities.

(2) Cultural inheritance and educational value

Integrating Gaojia Opera into music education is an important way to inherit the excellent traditional Chinese culture. In the process of learning Gaojia Opera, students can better understand the history, culture, and folk customs of the Minnan region, and can also cultivate a sense of identity and pride in local traditional culture. From an educational perspective, the introduction of Gaojia Opera enriched the content of music education and broke the single pattern of traditional music education dominated by Western music and classical folk music. Through diversified teaching methods such as singing, playing, performing, and creating, we can stimulate students' interest in learning, cultivate their innovative thinking and practical ability, and promote their all-round development.

4 Practical paths for the integration of Gaojia opera and music education in Tongan district

4.1 Constructing a characteristic music education curriculum system

4.1.1 Basic education stage

In the lower grades of primary schools, Gaojia Opera Music Enlightenment Courses are offered to stimulate students'

interest through animation short films, storytelling, and simple instrument experience. For example, activities such as "Gaojia Opera Face Painting" and "Drum and Gong Rhythm Game" are designed to allow students to learn while playing. In the upper grades of primary schools and middle schools, basic courses on vocal singing and instrumental performance are gradually introduced, and students are organized to rehearse Gaojia Opera classic excerpts to cultivate artistic practice ability. For example, the school-based curriculum "Gaojia Opera Music Enlightenment" developed by the First Experimental Primary School in Tongan District, Xiamen, adopts the "situational teaching method" to integrate Gaojia Opera stories into music classes and achieve good teaching results^[13].

4.1.2 Higher education stage

A Gaojia Opera Music major or direction is offered in music colleges to construct a "theory-practice-research" trinity curriculum system. Set up professional courses such as "Gaojia Opera Vocal Theory and Practice", "Opera Music Creation", and "Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Innovation", and invite intangible cultural heritage inheritors and opera musicians to teach together. Encourage students to conduct research on Gaojia Opera music, such as using acoustic analysis technology to study the spectral characteristics of Gaojia Opera singing, to provide a scientific basis for inheritance and innovation.

4.2 Innovative music education and teaching methods

4.2.1 Diversified teaching methods

Make full use of modern information technology to develop digital teaching resources for Gaojia Opera music. Use virtual reality (VR) technology to restore the performance scene of Gaojia Opera, so that students can have an immersive learning experience; use music analysis software to visualize the Gaojia Opera singing to help students understand the melody and rhythm characteristics. At the same time, carry out the "Opera Masters Entering Campus" activity, invite Gaojia Opera actors to conduct on-site demonstration teaching, and enhance the intuitiveness and appeal of teaching.

4.2.2 Practical teaching and performance activities

Construct a practical teaching system of "classroom learning - on-campus practice - social service". Organize Gaojia Opera singing competitions, instrumental music concerts, campus opera festivals and other activities on campus; cooperate with communities and cultural institutions to carry out Gaojia Opera performances in communities and villages. For example, Fujian Vocational College of Art cooperated with the Gaojia Opera Troupe of Tong'an District to establish a practical teaching base. Students participate in more than 20 public welfare performances each year, which effectively improves their professional ability and sense of social responsibility.

4.3 Strengthen the construction of the teaching staff

4.3.1 Cultivate professional teachers

Add a Gaojia Opera music education course module to the music education major of normal colleges and cultivate teachers with professional qualities. Carry out special training for in-service music teachers on Gaojia Opera, and the training content covers vocal singing, instrumental performance, and repertoire directing. For example, the Xiamen Municipal Education Bureau, in conjunction with local universities, holds the "Gaojia Opera Music Teacher Training Class" every year, inviting experts such as Wang Yaohua to give lectures to improve teachers' teaching level^[14].

4.3.2 Establish a teacher cooperation mechanism

Build a teaching staff team that collaborates with universities, cultural institutions, and opera troupes to educate people. We hire Gaojia Opera intangible cultural heritage inheritors as practical instructors and invite music theory experts from universities to provide academic guidance, forming a teaching team that combines theory with practice. We promote the joint improvement of the professional capabilities of the teaching staff through regular teaching seminars and joint teaching and research activities.

5 Conclusion

The integration of Gaojia Opera and music education in Tongan District is an important path to achieve the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and the innovative development of music education. By building a

characteristic curriculum system, innovating teaching methods, and strengthening teacher construction, it is possible to effectively enhance the inheritance vitality of Gaojia Opera and cultivate new-era talents with cultural confidence and innovation ability. Looking forward to the future of Tongan Gaojia Opera, music education will become the key force for its rejuvenation. In the field of basic education, it is expected that Gaojia Opera will be integrated into the classroom in an interesting and immersive way, such as combining the unique steps of "puppet clown" with rhythm training through music games, and using classic singing segments to carry out chorus teaching, so that children can feel the charm of opera in melody and rhythm, and cultivate cultural identity from an early age. At the level of higher education, it is hoped that a professional and systematic Gaojia Opera music education system can be built to cultivate compound talents who are not only proficient in traditional vocal skills, but also can use modern technology to innovate expression.

Technology empowerment will also inject unlimited possibilities into the integration of Gaojia Opera and music education. With the help of AI to analyze the musical characteristics of Gaojia Opera, new music with both traditional charm and contemporary style is created; VR, metaverse and other technologies are used to create immersive learning scenes, so that students can feel as if they are on the ancient stage and experience the ups and downs of the "official clown" recitation and the humorous and vivid movements of the "puppet clown". In the future, Tongan Gaojia Opera is expected to go abroad and spread the "Voice of Southern Fujian" to the world through international music exchanges and cross-border fusion creation. When the gongs and drums of traditional opera are perfectly integrated with the innovative concepts of modern education. This bright pearl of Southern Fujian culture will surely shine more brightly in the new era, and become an important bridge to show cultural confidence and promote mutual learning among civilizations!

Notes :

(1) Nanyin: also known as Nanqu and Nanguan, is a traditional music form in the southern Fujian region. It is known as the "living fossil in the history of Chinese music" and was selected into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2009. Its music structure is rigorous, including three categories: fingering, score, and song. It has rich tunes, beautiful melodies, and extremely high artistic value.

(2) Songjiang Formation: A traditional folk martial arts activity in the southern Fujian region, which originated in the Ming Dynasty. It was originally used for military training and later evolved into a folk performance form.

During the performance, it imitates the battle formation arrangement of the Liangshan heroes in the Song Dynasty, integrating elements such as martial arts, dance, and drama, and has strong ornamental and cultural connotations.

(3) According to the words: An important principle of Chinese opera music creation, it refers to the direction and pitch changes of the singing melody according to the tone of the words in the lyrics, so that the music and language are closely combined to achieve the artistic effect of correct pronunciation. In Gaojia Opera, according to the words, the melody of the Nanyin tune is adjusted according to the eight-tone tone of the southern Fujian dialect to form a unique vocal style.

(4) Gonggugjing: also known as gonggupu, is a general term for various sound combinations played with gongs and drums and other percussion instruments in Chinese opera.

Different gonggugjings have specific rhythmic patterns and expressiveness, and are used to match various scenes, actions and emotional changes in opera performances, such as showing the appearance of characters, battle scenes, emotional transitions, etc. In Gaojia Opera, common gonggugjings include [Seven Sticks], [Long Hammer], [Slow Three Hammers], etc.

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