

Research on the Overseas Publicity of Sichuan Opera in the Internet Era

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Abstract: Sichuan Opera, with its unique cultural elements, is a cultural name card for this district, and has long enjoyed national reputation, together with Sichuan Cuisine and the giant pandas. While Sichuan Cuisine has been well received in foreign restaurants, and the giant pandas, as the national treasure, has walked onto the international stage as a friendly ambassador of the Chinese people, Sichuan Opera has not attracted enough foreign audience, and researches on the overseas publicity of Sichuan Opera are not sufficient and have not drawn much attention. Therefore, this paper seeks to investigate the problems with Sichuan Opera's overseas spread including the content, approach, and validity, and explores the advantages of cultural communication in the internet era, namely, the real-time, rapid, multi-modal, and interactive communication. Based on the findings, the thesis finally proposes strategies of overseas publicity of Sichuan Opera in the internet era, such as contemporary and universal content, different methods for the variety of audience and diversification of communication channels to help Sichuan Opera culture to "go out".

Keywords: Overseas Publicity; Sichuan Opera; Internet Era; Cultural Communication; Strategies.

1. Introduction

Among the many elements of Chinese culture, Sichuan cultural elements are eye-catching, including giant pandas, Sichuan Opera, Sichuan Cuisine, and Shu Brocade and so on, which are well-known both at home and abroad. Among them, Sichuan Opera is an important genre of drama in China, and its overseas dissemination not only helps to maintain its vitality, but also helps to enhance the national self-confidence and pride of the overseas Chinese, and promotes the exchange of Chinese culture and other cultures. As a cultural name card of Sichuan, the successful spread of Sichuan opera abroad is also related to the long-term development of Sichuan cultural industry, which is conducive to the overall improvement of the international image of the region, the development of the international cultural market and certain economic benefits as well. Therefore, exploring the overseas publicity of Sichuan Opera has important cultural, strategic and economic significance.

2. Problems with Overseas Spread of Sichuan Opera

Based on the investigation, the writer has found several problems existing in the spread of Sichuan Opera.

2.1. Content

From the perspective of the content, firstly the overseas dissemination of Sichuan Opera still lays emphasis on skills, neglecting the content, and prefers historical themes to contemporary ones. There is over-reliance on stage stunts such as face changing and fire breathing, ignoring cultural connotations beyond performance skills (Chen. 2013, 70-71)

Secondly, there are not many fine scripts with a sense of the modern times. Although these excellent scripts such as "the Flaming Mountain" and "Jing Hua Yuan" are adapted from ancient literary works and have a sense of history and culture, they seem to be unsatisfactory in presenting the image

of modern China. However, according to the survey, overseas audience are more interested in the cultural life of modern China. Therefore, how to create scripts that not only inherit traditional Chinese cultural values but also have a sense of modern time is worthy of consideration.

2.2. Transmission Channels

From the perspective of transmission channels, 'the main channel for overseas spread of Sichuan Opera is still live performances' (Du, 2015, 30.) For example, the performance team is invited to participate in international art festivals, commercial tours and festival performances organized by local overseas Chinese. In today's internet era with diversified information transmission, its communication channels are limited by time and space, and are slightly monotonous, failing to fully conform to people's cognitive habits of fast, convenient and fragmented information acquisition.

2.3. Communication Validity

From the perspective of communication validity, the influence of Sichuan Opera's overseas dissemination is not great enough. As a heterogeneous cultural dissemination, it will inevitably cause the audience's cultural unfamiliarity and lead to cultural cognition obstacles for non-Chinese audience. According to the survey, the current audience 'mostly are Chinese or professionals engaged in literary and artistic research, and there are few non-Chinese Westerners' (Lin, 2014, 72). With relatively too small audience, the influence and scope of Sichuan Opera's overseas spread need to be improved urgently.

3. Characteristics of Cultural Communication in the Internet Era

Communication in the internet era is real-time, fast, multi-modal, and interactive, breaking the limitations of time and space, allowing people to keep abreast of the latest developments in information. In the era of information

diversification, multimodality is a communication mode that breaks away from a single text or language modality, including the use of multiple senses such as vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste, and enjoys the advantages of traditional media as well. It employs texts, sounds, images, actions, designs and other verbal and non-verbal symbols for narration, emotion, and aesthetic and other multi-dimensional communication. Interactive communication changes the one-way communication mode and is thus a dynamic one between the recipient at present and the one in the past.

The emergence of new media in the internet era ‘has greatly changed people’s lifestyles, cognitive habits, and aesthetic concepts’ (Liu and Zhao, 2015,97). New media relying on the internet have become an important channel to get information, leisure and entertainment. So, Sichuan Opera should seize the golden development opportunities, get rid of the shackles of traditional communication thinking, innovate the content according to the cognitive habits of different target groups, expand the scope of audience, broaden and optimize the communication channels so as to better help Sichuan culture to “go out”.

4. Strategies of Overseas Publicity of Sichuan Opera in the Internet Era

On the basis of the analysis of existing problems and the advantages of cultural communication in the internet era, the writer proposes the following strategies of overseas publicity of Sichuan Opera.

4.1. Selecting Modern and Universal Communication Content

Sichuan Opera repertoire is known as ‘Three Thousand about Tang Dynasty, Eight Hundred about Song Dynasty, countless about Three Kingdoms’, and its plays mostly draw materials from Chinese classical literature, focused on the material and spiritual cultural life in China’s feudal society. But foreign audience’ cultural background and cognition of the history are completely different. Therefore, when they watch such classical and historical Sichuan Operas, they will surely have difficulty understanding the implications of Chinese traditional culture and values if they do not have sufficient relevant background information. Therefore, when playwrights create quality scripts for overseas dissemination, ‘the actual situation of the audience should be fully considered, and the cultural values that are quite contemporary and universal should be extended’ (Wu, 2001, 19.). In other words, it is necessary to implant the propositions that are easy for the foreign audience to understand and accept into Sichuan Opera script writing. In script creation, not only the output of Chinese cultural values themselves but also the ways to spread it must be taken into account. Absorbing and adapting the works of modern and contemporary Chinese writers, highlighting the cultural life of modern China can be regarded as a way of content innovation. In addition, the selective adaptation of foreign classics for Chinese use provides another strategy for the overseas spread of Sichuan Operas. In the overseas dissemination, the content needs to be carefully selected. The contemporary and universal cultural themes are not only easy for foreign audience to accept, but also help to update the old Chinese cultural image in the foreign perspective.

4.2. Adopting Different Communication Methods for Different Audience

Most studies have realized that the sphere of overseas audience of Sichuan Operas is relatively limited to overseas Chinese or literary researchers. Although ordinary people in the foreign countries may be interested, due to many causes such as cultural and language differences, Sichuan Opera has not been included in their category of mainstream cultural products. In response to this phenomenon, China’s overseas Confucius Institutes have played an important role in scientific research and practice. For example, regular opera lectures, performances and other such activities are held to attract more audience. Sichuan opera professionals also need to increase the popularity and influence of it through various forms of publicity to attract ordinary foreign people and make them a stable audience. For people who like online games, game app software embedded with Sichuan Opera plots can be developed to help them understand Sichuan Opera plots through game play, and then enter the theater to watch Sichuan Opera performances.

Besides the overseas Chinese and ordinary foreign people, the audience should also include foreign tourists to China for sightseeing and foreign students’ studying in China. These two groups should become a solid force for the spread of Sichuan Opera overseas. The fact that they travel in China suggests that they have certain interest in Chinese culture. While they appreciate the natural and cultural sceneries, they can also take this opportunity to experience the charm of intangible culture, thus making them an important force for the spread of Sichuan Opera after returning home. Planned training of foreign students in China can be led by Sichuan Opera art groups or government organization in various forms such as organizing Sichuan Opera interest classes, inviting famous masters to hold related lectures, carrying out Sichuan Opera activities on campus or even in classrooms, and offering international courses related to Sichuan Opera. Thus, international students are interested in Sichuan Opera and become the backbone of overseas dissemination of it.

4.3. Diversified Transmission Channels

The use of new media improves the interactivity of communication. On-site stage dissemination is an indispensable traditional way of spreading Sichuan Opera. However, in the internet era, in view of the audience’s multi-modal aesthetic appeal, modern stage technology can be used to display the unique characteristics of Sichuan Opera such as sound, light, color, and shadow. Artistic charm brings an unforgettable audio-visual feast to the audience. The rational use of new media can change the mode of one-way transmission of Sichuan Opera and make interactive transmission possible. For instance, through online forums, Weibo, WeChat public accounts, and Moments, ‘the use of visual, tactile, auditory and other multi-modal can promote the humanistic spirit, unique performance skills and rich singing voice contained in Sichuan Opera’ (Xu, 2001,103). These platforms can also be used to form interactive communication with the audience before and after the performance, allowing the audience to participate as much as possible, thereby increasing influence of Sichuan Opera performances.

Electronic cultural derivatives can broaden the channels for overseas dissemination. In the internet era, people are more inclined to use smart terminal devices such as mobile phones

and tablet computers to enjoy cultural and entertainment life. We can seek cooperation from technology companies to jointly develop app software based on the elements of Sichuan Opera or the plot of it to stimulate different target groups' cognition and interest in it. For example, it is possible to develop apps that simulate the production of Sichuan Opera facial makeup for primary and middle school students who are willing to practice. Through simulation practice, they understand the charm of Sichuan Opera skills. Elements of Sichuan Opera can also be integrated with tourism cultural products to launch a series of creative products. The promotion of Sichuan Opera can produce various cultural derivatives, for example, tourists can scan products rich in Sichuan Opera cultural elements through mobile phones, and read text and audiovisual materials related to Sichuan Opera. The application of this technology to the derivatives of Sichuan Opera culture has a promising market, and it is also easy for foreign tourists to China to accept it. On the one hand, this tourist souvenir is rich in cultural connotation and has preservation value. On the other hand, the product conforms to the cognitive habits of current people and is light and easy to carry. When brought back to the home country as a gift, it invisibly allows Sichuan Opera culture to be widely known.

Sichuan Opera can also rely on scientific research projects of universities or academic institutions, through the sorting and compilation of scripts, and the use of paper or digital media to distribute easy-to-understand Sichuan Opera short stories overseas so as to realize the culture of Sichuan Opera from the level of language and text. 'When overseas audience has a certain understanding of Sichuan Opera stories, it helps them clear the obstacles in cultural background' (Zhong, 2013, 142), thereby improving the effectiveness of Sichuan Opera's overseas dissemination.

5. Conclusion

As the business card of Sichuan culture, Sichuan Opera needs to keep pace with the times in order to truly go global and spread to more overseas audience. It needs to keep innovating in terms of communication content, target audience and communication channels, and choose contemporary and universal content and themes, adopt different communication methods according to levels of audience. New media and electronic derivative products can also be used to remove barriers to cultural background knowledge and improve the effectiveness of Sichuan Opera's overseas dissemination.

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