

Research on the English Dissemination Path of Yongjia Kunqu: A Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: As an outstanding branch of Kunqu Opera, Yongjia Kunqu is rooted in Wenzhou and exhibits distinct local characteristics in its singing and performance styles. It embodies the regional customs and folk culture of Wenzhou, displaying a down-to-earth quality and a charm of everyday life. Based on the current situation of Yongjia Kunqu, this study analyzes the challenges it faces in inheritance and development. It explores the use of English as a medium to connect Kunqu troupes, universities, and online platforms, aiming to protect and inherit this excellent art form and promote its further development.

Keywords: English Dissemination Path; Yongjia Kunqu.

1. Introduction

Kunqu Opera, honored with the titles of "National Intangible Cultural Heritage" and "World Intangible Cultural Heritage," is regarded as a "national treasure" and an indispensable part of Chinese Kunqu. Yongjia Kunqu, as one of the outstanding branches of Kunqu Opera, shines as a cultural emblem in Zhejiang Province and requires further protection and inheritance. Although scholars at home and abroad have published a series of related papers and works concerning Yongjia Kunqu, research on the dissemination of Yongjia Kunqu through the English language is scarce. This paper focuses on the protection of intangible cultural heritage in the Wenzhou region and explores how to connect Kunqu troupes, universities, online platforms, and other multiple dissemination paths to promote Yongjia Kunqu domestically, stimulate the interest and appreciation of contemporary university students and the Chinese population in this national art form, and assist Yongjia Kunqu in going global.

2. Basic Situation and Challenges of Yongjia Kunqu

Formerly known as "Wenzhou Kunqiang," Yongjia Kunqu is prevalent in the southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian regions. As an intangible cultural heritage, it plays a vital role in the traditional culture of Yongjia. Yongjia Kunqu primarily portrays the various aspects of everyday life, catering to ordinary people. Its performance art incorporates local folk customs, endowing it with a simple, natural, and lively character that is more relatable to life compared to other forms of Kunqu. With complex and varied singing styles, fast-paced rhythms, and passionate emotions, Yongjia Kunqu also encompasses slow and melancholic melodies, expressing a range of sentiments. Its distinctive feature lies in its melodies and poetic style, reflecting the essence of ancient Chinese literature and art. It has won numerous awards in various Kunqu competitions, highlighting its artistic value and cultural significance. For instance, the renowned play "Zhang Xiezhong" is acclaimed as "China's first drama" and a "living fossil of Chinese opera." Originating from Wenzhou during the Southern Song Dynasty, it is the earliest and most complete ancient Chinese opera script discovered to date.

Although Yongjia Kunqu is an important component of

Chinese Kunqu, research and understanding of it mostly focus on its performance styles and characteristics, as well as its historical fluctuations. There is a significant lack of research on the current challenges and issues faced by Yongjia Kunqu. In reality, the survival and development of Yongjia Kunqu face tremendous crises and challenges. Young people in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region have limited knowledge or interest in Kunqu, resulting in a sharp decrease in the types and quantity of Yongjia Kunqu productions, shrinking performance markets, and even decline. Insufficient actors, a lack of talent, outdated repertoire, inadequate innovation, diverse cultural impacts of the era, intense competition within the industry and region, insufficient funding for troupes, low employee benefits, difficulties in rehearsing major productions, outdated infrastructure, and other problems make the path for Yongjia Kunqu exceedingly difficult. It is only due to the passion and perseverance of the older generation of Yongjia Kunqu practitioners that this art form has managed to survive and revitalize.

3. Current Research on "Yongjia Kunqu" in China and Abroad

In recent years, the support of national policies, media coverage and promotion, scholarly research and exploration, and the guidance of journals and publications have led to increasingly in-depth research on intangible cultural heritage. The current research on "intangible cultural heritage" and "Yongjia Kunqu" in China has the following characteristics:

3.1. Emphasis on Theoretical Aspects

Research on the protection of intangible cultural heritage overly emphasizes theoretical aspects, while detailed case studies on practical operational aspects of heritage protection are relatively scarce.

3.2. Lack of Depth and Breadth

Research on "Yongjia Kunqu" lacks depth and breadth, with most studies focusing on basic concepts, characteristics, development status, and teaching models. They have significant limitations and lack specialized research on other aspects of the protection and inheritance process.

3.3. Relatively Single Research Perspectives

Approaches to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage tend to involve collaborative efforts among governmental organizations, research institutes, and other institutions to establish academic forums and hold high-profile conferences. There is a lack of research on practical paths accessible to the general public. Moreover, most research is limited to activities such as teaching by instructors, lectures, and campus exhibitions. Research specifically focusing on English language studies and specific paths for the dissemination of a certain type of intangible cultural heritage is particularly rare.

4. Research on the English Dissemination Path of Yongjia Kunqu

How to enhance the popularity and awareness of Yongjia Kunqu among the general public and young people is an important topic that requires attention. This study focuses on Yongjia Kunqu, an intangible cultural heritage in the Wenzhou region, and explores the methods of inheritance, protection, and English promotion through various paths, including Kunqu troupes, universities, online platforms, and international contexts.

4.1. Collaboration with Yongjia Kunqu Troupes

Translate selected excellent scripts of Yongjia Kunqu into English and provide them to Yongjia Kunqu troupes for their performances abroad. The translation of scripts requires high proficiency from translators, emphasizing accurate and authentic translation while reflecting the local customs and characteristics of Wenzhou. The renowned play "Zhang Xiezhuan" from Yongjia Kunqu has already achieved overseas performances and gained popularity among international audiences. The expressive performances, distinctive stage costumes, and captivating movements have made it both unfamiliar and refreshing to foreign spectators.

4.2. Collaborate with Universities

Organize "Yongjia Kunqu" campus activities in universities, such as English short plays based on outstanding Yongjia Kunqu productions. Additionally, hold English competitions, expert lectures, and other English-focused events related to Yongjia Kunqu. For example, organize the "Kunqu Cultural Terminology Translation Competition" or English speech and writing competitions on related themes. Support various cultural activities organized by student clubs and provide policies and funding to encourage the involvement of intangible cultural heritage in youth activities. Many forms of intangible cultural heritage embody various cultural and artistic elements, presented in literature, music, dance, and other forms, which can effectively attract university students.

4.3. Integrate Traditional Culture into English Classes

English courses at universities cover various Western cultures and offer learners the opportunity to explore cultures from around the world, which can influence their worldview, values, and perspectives. Leveraging the English classroom as a platform for cultural heritage, incorporate elements of

Kunqu into English lessons. When encountering content or chapters related to traditional culture, utilize English introduction videos available on various online platforms for supplementary learning. They can also serve as cross-cultural learning materials and extracurricular reading materials, exposing students to the richness of this regional theatrical art form. Some Yongjia Kunqu productions have already achieved English performances abroad, and the recorded performances can be valuable learning materials. By combining "Western English" and "local traditions," traditional culture education can be promoted while introducing Yongjia Kunqu and showcasing Wenzhou and Chinese culture.

4.4. Utilize Online Platforms for Promotion

Upload promotional materials of Yongjia Kunqu to online platforms, such as bilingual PPT presentations introducing Yongjia Kunqu, short English introduction videos, image materials, and English-adapted short scripts (available for campus or small-scale rehearsals). These resources can be freely downloaded and made accessible to the public, including Yongjia Kunqu troupes, university students, Kunqu enthusiasts, English learners, and other Chinese individuals. Take advantage of popular online platforms like short video platforms and mobile games to capture the attention of young people. As these platforms have entertainment appeal, they serve as important means of emotional regulation and stress relief for young individuals. By incorporating elements of Yongjia Kunqu, such as plotlines, characters, stage appearances, and cultural elements, it can provide a fresh and memorable experience for young people. Encourage students to create various excellent cultural English short plays for online dissemination. To attract young people to this traditional art form, it is essential to interpret it using contemporary vocabulary and package it with contemporary aesthetics to generate greater appeal.

4.5. Leverage Social Media and Tourism Resources

Taking advantage of Zhejiang Province's natural advantage of having a large number of overseas Chinese, combine various local and especially Wenzhou's tourism resources to conduct multi-channel promotion. Utilize publishing books, travel souvenirs targeting foreign tourists, and distribute Yongjia Kunqu visual materials/promotional DVDs through various channels to promote Yongjia Kunqu as an outstanding intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, leverage platforms like the "Belt and Road Initiative" to promote Chinese excellent culture globally.

In conclusion, through various approaches, it is important to "activate," "promote," and "expand" Yongjia Kunqu, a national intangible cultural heritage. By following the trends of the times, such as university theater performances, creating short promotional videos, and online dissemination, it can attract the attention and appreciation of young people and Chinese citizens. Furthermore, it can assist Yongjia Kunqu in reaching a global audience and contribute to the protection and inheritance of other intangible cultural heritages by providing a replicable and applicable path. It is a win-win situation for all parties involved.

5. The Significance of English Dissemination of Chinese Culture

Currently, some young people in China have a weak cultural foundation, limited exposure, shallow understanding, and a lukewarm attitude towards traditional culture. There is also a phenomenon of criticizing tradition and idolizing the West to some extent. Some students have a strong interest in learning about China's excellent traditional culture but have doubts and concerns about the methods of inheriting local traditional culture and its future development. There is also a prevalent "mute English" in cross-cultural communication, which refers to the lack of mother tongue cultural knowledge in intercultural exchanges. Due to the focus of current foreign language learning materials on Western culture and society, there is a serious lack of knowledge about mother tongue culture and localized English vocabulary in textbooks. Students clearly exhibit an imbalance between cultural communication "input" and "output" in cross-cultural communication. Consequently, they are unable to translate and explain correctly, and are unable to actively and effectively introduce China's excellent traditional culture to others, including their hometown culture. This "mute English" weakens college students' sense of pride and belonging to their mother tongue culture. China has a vast and profound excellent traditional culture. Chinese music, traditional opera, tea culture, architecture, calligraphy, painting, and handicrafts, among others, all have a long history, profound essence, and immense charm, permeating the Chinese nation for a long time. Leveraging English, a universal communication tool, to tell China's stories can greatly change the current "deficit" in the flow of information, the "discrepancy" between China's real image and Western subjective impressions, as well as the "gap" between soft power and hard power. Human emotions are universal, and outstanding works of art can resonate wherever they go. Often, what Chinese people need to do is to "take action," appreciate our traditional culture, disseminate our culture with sincerity, and create more opportunities to showcase our national art on a broader stage.

6. Conclusion

Yongjia Kunqu is an important part of China's traditional culture, with distinct characteristics and inheritance value in Zhejiang Province, deserving extensive promotion both domestically and overseas. English is a language that is widely learned and mastered by young people in China today and is one of the most practical tools for global communication. Combining English with the inheritance and promotion of the national intangible cultural heritage "Yongjia Kunqu" demonstrates originality and contemporary

relevance. Sharing and appreciating classic art with the younger generation from all over the country, even overseas, holds practical significance in enhancing national "cultural confidence" and strengthening national cohesion. General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned, "China has no shortage of vivid stories; the key is to have the ability to tell them well." As the young generation at the forefront of the times, we should have a sense of cultural confidence in our great nation, transcend the "cultural divide," break through the "cultural barriers," become disseminators of Chinese culture, and "tell China's stories well, spread China's voice well, and explain China's characteristics well" to countries around the world. Yongjia Kunqu will still be in the stage of promotion and innovation for a long time, and it needs more people to understand and discover its charm. Although Yongjia Kunqu has made continuous progress in recent decades, the road to revival and dissemination is still long and requires our continuous efforts. The rise of information technology media such as the internet and short videos presents a new opportunity for the dissemination of many traditional cultures, including Yongjia Kunqu, and also provides new ideas for young people's career breakthroughs. At the same time, our government needs to invest more funds, attach more importance to talent cultivation, and provide more policy support. Researchers also need to participate more in the "cross-cultural" dissemination of our traditional culture, examine ourselves from the perspective of multiculturalism, break free from regionalism and self-appreciation, and take a higher position to view ourselves.

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