



CONSTRUCTING THE DAXIAN OPERA GUIDEBOOK IN PUYANG COUNTY HENAN, CHINA FOR PROMOTION

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Abstract

Puyang Daxian Opera, an ancient multi-voice opera originating from the Tang Dynasty, represents a vital part of China's intangible cultural heritage and a cultural treasure of Henan Province. Rooted in centuries of artistic development, its unique features—such as the extensive Qupai system, refined role classifications, and integrated band-singing performance style—demonstrated the deep connections between music, culture, and society. This research combined literature review, field investigations, interviews, and participatory observation to study the historical origins, artistic characteristics, and contemporary challenges of Daxian Opera. A Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook was constructed to document its musical, performative, and cultural elements and was validated through expert review and public engagement, including an online lecture attended by 217 participants. **The findings highlight** the urgent need to protect this heritage from challenges such as declining audiences, aging performers, and insufficient transmission systems. Beyond the local context, the study emphasizes how Puyang Daxian Opera reflects global issues in cultural preservation, illustrating the universal struggle to safeguard traditional art forms in the face of modernization and globalization. By proposing strategies such as integrating

opera heritage into education, cultural tourism, and digital media, this research contributes both to the revitalization of Puyang Daxian Opera and to broader global conversations about protecting and promoting intangible cultural heritage in the 21st century.

Keywords: Constructing; Daxian Opera; Guidebook; Promotion

Introduction

Puyang Daxian Opera is one of the traditional operas in Puyang, Henan Province. It has a long history and profound cultural heritage. The singing music of Daxian Opera belongs to Qupai style, and its performing art has reached a high level, such as the tone quality, timbre, volume and the embellishment and adjustment of the line, and has certain attainments. The performance program of Daxian Opera is unique, with strong local characteristics and local flavor.

Daxian Opera, also known as Xianzi opera, originated from the court opera of the Tang Dynasty. It is an ancient and rare multi-voice opera with a history of more than 1,300 years. Centered in Kaifeng and Puyang of Henan Province, Daxian Opera is popular in the northeast of Henan Province, the south of Hebei Province and the southwest of Shandong Province. In the process of evolution and development, Daxian Opera inherited the tradition of northern opera of Song and Yuan Dynasty, and had a certain relationship with Liyuan Opera of Tang Dynasty court. In the Tang Dynasty, Daxian opera served the royal family. After the collapse of the Tang Dynasty, the opera actors who were originally supported by the court had no economic source, so they went to the folk stage to perform. Court music began to go to the folk and gradually transformed to the opera. By the Song Dynasty, the rudiments of Daxian Opera had been basically formed. At the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, the largest Daxian opera troupe - "Gongxing Troupe" from the court to the people, and later took root in Puyang. The name of Puyang Daxian Opera comes from the fact that its singing starts with "three strings" leading the board, hence the name "Xianzi Opera". It is also called Daxian Opera because of its origin in the court of Tang Dynasty. The origin of Daxian Opera can be traced back to the Liyuan royal Opera

of the Tang Dynasty, which was created by "Liyuan disciples". In the process of development, Daxian Opera gradually absorbed various voice and performance forms and formed its own unique artistic style (Li, 2023).

There are several theories about the origin of the name of Daxian opera: the accompaniment of Daxian opera is played with three strings, so there is a "Xian" character; Another saying is that the singing of Daxian Opera contains the chord tone of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, which was called "Xianzuo opera" or "Xianzi opera" at that time. The word "Da", there are different arguments, one is because Da Xian opera originated in the court, specially, for the court noble performance, so it is called "Da" is the respect for the court opera, the other is because the content of Da Xian opera is more than the performance of historical wars, palace struggles, national contradictions, political change, dynasty change and other large-scale plays, many actors, the scene is grand, so it is called "Da"; Third, in the heyday of Daxian Opera development in the Qing Dynasty, there were many Daxian opera performance groups, which were established early, with old qualifications, a large number of actors and highly skilled groups became Daxian Opera groups, on the contrary, they were called Xiao Xian opera groups, and later people collectively referred to as Daxian Opera (Wang & Li, 2023).

The foot color of Daxian opera has Wusheng, Wudan, Wuhuamian, facial makeup is exquisite, makeup is delicate, and the character is distinct. The band is divided into soft field and hard field, with unique local characteristics and artistic style. The number of traditional plays of Daxian Opera is huge, the subject matter is wide, involving all aspects of social life (Xiao, 2015).

Puyang Daxian Opera faces significant challenges due to modernization. Its audience is primarily elderly as younger generations prefer modern entertainment, shrinking the performance market. The troupe suffers from talent drain, as low pay and status deter young recruits while aging performers retire. Furthermore, unique traditional performance skills risk being lost due to insufficient systematic training and practice for new actors. Nevertheless, as valuable local cultural heritage, concerted efforts are needed to protect and preserve Puyang Daxian Opera for future generations.

Research Objectives

1. To Study the Puyang Daxian Opera.
2. To construct a Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook.
3. To use the "Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook" for Promotion.

Literature Reviews

Puyang Daxian Opera is widely recognized as an ancient and rare form of traditional opera. Regarding its origin, there are several main viewpoints in the academic circle: one holds that it can be traced back to the court art of the Tang Dynasty and later spread to the folk; another emphasizes its direct inheritance from a certain musical system in the Central Plains during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, with the name of the opera genre being related to this origin; yet another viewpoint links its predecessor to earlier forms of drama. Document research confirms that this opera genre was clearly recorded in the Ming Dynasty, endured suppression by the official authorities in the Qing Dynasty but continued to exist among the people, actively participated in social changes in modern times, established a professional troupe in the mid-20th century, and was listed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List at the beginning of this century (Luo, 2016).

Research generally focuses on the unique artistic features of Daxian Opera. Its musical system stands out in the local opera environment, preserving a large number of ancient musical elements and integrating various historical vocal styles, and is regarded as an important "living fossil" of music. The combination of accompanying instruments is unique, and the musical styles of the civil and military sections contrast sharply. The performance routines retain historical traces, the role classification is detailed, and the body movements integrate the styles of both the north and the south. The repertoire was once extremely rich, mainly focusing on specific themes, reflecting a distinct ethical and educational function. These features collectively constitute the core value of Daxian Opera in the study of opera history and traditional culture (Shi, 2011).

Current literature has particularly pointed out the severe survival crisis faced by the Daxian opera. Its transmission scope is extremely limited, relying mainly on a few professional opera troupes. It is currently suffering from multiple challenges such as talent loss, insufficient funds, lack of records of traditional techniques, and shrinking audience base. In response to these challenges, the proposed Promotion measures by the research mainly focus on: strengthening the systematic Promotion and management of intangible cultural heritage, promoting its dissemination in the education system, and exploring innovative promotion methods such as the use of modern media and cultural tourism integration. The academic community particularly emphasizes the need to prioritize the rescue of its precious musical heritage and correct certain biases in the perception of its artistic value, in order to fully activate its academic and cultural value (Wang, 2014).

Research Methodology

This study used mixed method, combine with qualitative and quantitative method. The researcher has divided the research method into 3 steps, as follows:

Step 1: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework Construction:

The research began with a systematic review of historical documents and academic achievements related to Puyang Daxian Opera. By collating original materials such as local chronicles, opera chronicles, intangible cultural heritage archives, previous research works, music score collections, as well as data on the evolution of artistic features.

Step 2: Field research to collect survey data:

Conduct multi-level fieldwork in the Puyang area, investigate the local precious social customs and lifestyles, obtain oral histories and technical experiences through in-depth interviews (with inheritors, old artists, cultural managers), participate in observations to record the performance process, rehearsal scenes, and take audio-visual archives, and collect valuable data for in-depth research.

Step 3: Analyze data and summarize results

After integrating the information from the literature review and the field investigation, the researchers conducted in-depth studies on various materials, revealing the core issues faced by the Puyang Daxian Opera and its unique survival value. Based on this analysis, the researchers extracted key research results and ultimately formulated practical suggestions and plans aimed at promoting its promotion and inheritance.

Key informants were a national intangible cultural inheritor of Puyang Daxian Opera with 5 key informants. The researcher used questionnaire satisfactory survey with the 217 participants in the online lecture.

Results

To Study the Puyang Daxian Opera

This article thoroughly explores the cultural background, historical origin, musical characteristics, as well as the Qupai analysis, character analysis, band analysis and current inheritance status of the "Puyang Daixian Opera". Through various methods such as literature review, field investigation, interviews, and lectures, the researchers collected data and information and systematically summarized all aspects of the Puyang Daxian Opera in China.

The research results show that Daxian Opera, an ancient and rich form of opera, integrates seven unique tones, including more than 300 delicate and varied singing songs. Its music style spans a wide range, showing not only the elegant charm and emotional entanglements of "Gudian Daqu", but also the plain closeness and popularity of "Suqu Xiaoling". From the rousing "Qingyang Qiang" to the leisurely "Luoluo Qiang", from the magnificent "Gougou Qiang" to the soft and delicate "Kunshan Qiang" and the gentle and long "Shipai Qiang", Daxian Opera is like a cultural treasure house, integrating official and folk music and folk customs, and the essence of northern and southern tunes. It is magnificent, like a civilization ark spanning the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. A lavish feast of ancient art for a modern audience.

The research results show that Puyang Daxian Opera, this ancient opera gem deeply rooted in the land of northern Henan Province, with its powerful and passionate singing style, simple and vigorous charm, rich and rigorous Qupai system, and unique artistic expression, has endured through hundreds of years of wind and rain, shining with distinctive brilliance in the starry sky of Chinese opera art. It is not only the crystallization of the emotions and wisdom of the people of Puyang, but also an indispensable treasure in the repository of intangible cultural heritage of the Chinese nation.

To Construct a Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook

After conducting thorough preliminary literature research and preparing for a "study in the study room" approach, the researcher conducted systematic field investigations at the Daxian Opera Troupe in Puyang County from October to December 2023 and from February to May 2024. Through in-depth participatory observations spanning the winter and spring seasons (covering key scenes such as temple fairs during the off-season and cultural and tourism performances during the Spring Festival), combined with multiple in-depth interviews with the inheritor Dai Jianping, the former director of the troupe, the inheritor Yao Jichun, and the current director Zhang Yansheng, the researcher comprehensively documented the existing Qupai music structure and the endangered inheritance ecosystem of Daxian Opera. Based on this, the researcher constructed the "Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook", and sent the guidebook to three experts for evaluation. The guidebook includes the following aspects:

This Guidebook aims to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth systematic study and analysis of Puyang Opera. We will trace its origin and historical evolution, outline its development trajectory; deeply analyze the cultural background it relies on, focus on its artistic essence, elaborate on its unique musical features, diverse Qupai, and strict and standardized structural forms; meticulously interpret the performance characteristics of the roles such as Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou; and deeply analyze the composition of the orchestra, the functions of the main instruments (such as brass instruments, sheng and sanxian), and the playing methods. Through this multi-dimensional and structured

presentation method, we strive to fully showcase the artistic essence of Puyang Opera.

To Use the "Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook" for Promotion

After completing the guidebook, the researcher gave a Lecture on "Inheritance and Promotion of Puyang Daxian Opera" at 4:30 PM on April 23, 2024 through the online Tencent Lecture. In this lecture, the main focus was on elaborating on the historical background and artistic characteristics of Puyang Daxian Opera: The speaker first led the audience through the long course of history, explaining the origin, development and unique position of Puyang Daxian Opera in local culture. Then, he conducted a detailed analysis of its musical style, Qupai types, band introduction, and role classification, allowing the audience to experience its unique artistic charm.

A satisfaction survey was conducted after the Lecture. A total of 217 people participated in the satisfaction survey. A total of 12 items were surveyed, including the attitude towards Puyang Daxian Opera, the overall evaluation of the quality of the guidebook, and the evaluation of the Lecture.

Researchers conducted a questionnaire survey based on their age groups. From this, it can be concluded that there were 54 people in the 20-29 age group, with an average score of 4.18 points (83.6 points); 41 people in the 30-39 age group, with an average score of 4.30 points (86 points); 40 people in the 40-49 age group, with an average score of 4.46 points (89.2 points); 44 people in the 50-59 age group, with an average score of 4.45 points (89 points); and 38 people in the 60 and above age group, with an average score of 4.59 points (91.8 points). The final average score was 4.40 points (88 points). In addition, the researchers also observed some interesting phenomena. In general, as people's age increases, their interest in Puyang Daxian Opera also increases. Especially when it comes to spending time to appreciate the opera, the scores of the older people are higher, and they have a stronger desire to learn the segments of singing the opera. Young people are more interested in the costumes and props, and their score for spending time to appreciate the opera is the lowest.

Discussions

Puyang Daxian Opera, an ancient multi-voice opera with a long history and rich cultural connotation, has become a key object of national cultural preservation since it was honored to be listed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, demonstrating the country's firm determination to preserve and preserve traditional cultural heritage. However, with the rapid development of society and the diversification of entertainment methods, Puyang Daxian Opera is also facing unprecedented market challenges, and its current situation is worrying (Han, 2025). In the face of challenges and difficulties, we firmly believe that as long as all sectors of society make joint efforts to implement and innovate the above promotion strategies and action plans, the precious cultural heritage of Puyang Daxian Opera will surely glow with new vitality and vitality in the new era background, and continue to shine its unique light in the temple of opera art.

The performance form and musical structure: Daxian Opera is indeed unique in its musical structure and performance mode, which subverts the common mode of "singing is the main, music is the auxiliary" in traditional opera, and emphasizes the deep integration and interaction between the band and the singing. In the "Gudian Daqu", the band plays a dominant role, and the actors' singing is no longer isolated, but cleverly embedded in the band's performance, and the two are intertwined to form a highly integrated form of artistic expression. Close collaboration between the band and the actors: Due to the blurred boundaries between the voice and the band, the actors must accurately seize the time to enter the singing, and any small deviation can lead to a disconnection from the band (Li, 2024). This challenge requires the actors' immediate reaction ability and deep understanding of the music. Deep musical understanding and preparation: Both actors and band members need to have a deep understanding and proficiency in the words and tunes of the play to ensure accurate execution even in the complex musical structure and to reduce errors in the performance. Improvisation and resilience: In this mode of performance, the ability to improvise becomes particularly important, once there is a mistake, both parties

need to have the ability to adjust and connect quickly to maintain the flow and integrity of the performance.

The Puyang Daxian Opera Qupai: "Qupai" refers to the standardized name of the tune used in the composition of lyrics and music in traditional music and drama, which is commonly referred to as "Paizi". This is a general term for a specific type of music, which is easy to identify and use. In the early songwriting, there are usually words (words) first, and then the appropriate music is selected to match the content and emotion of the words, that is, "word selection soundtrack". But as time went on, some particularly beautiful tunes came to the fore, and people began to value and intentionally keep these tunes (Si & Wang, 2024). Therefore, the mode of creation gradually changed to create new lyrics based on these retained tunes, according to their original melody lines, rhythm patterns and metrical requirements. During this transition, tunes that were widely recognized and loved were systematically screened and retained as part of the music library. These preserved tunes often continue to carry their original names, which are both traces of musical history and markers of musical style and emotional color. When filling words for Qupai, we must strictly follow the sound characteristics and metrical norms of the tune, which is called "leaning on the sound of lyrics". This means that the lyricist must not only consider the meaning and beauty of the words, but also ensure that the rhythm and tone of the words fit perfectly with the given tune, forming a harmonious unity of sound and meaning. The lyrics of Qupai are mostly in the form of long and short sentences, which are different from the four, five, seven and other neat sentences commonly used in traditional poetry. This structure increases the musicality and expressiveness of the language, and is more suitable for expressing complex and changeable emotions. At the same time, such form requirements reflect strict metrical control, and have higher requirements for the literary skills and musical sense of the lyricist (Xu & Wang, 2024).

The Puyang Daxian Opera role: In a broad sense, the role system of Daxian Opera follows the traditional four categories of Sheng, Dan, Jing and Chou. However, under the impetus of in-depth study and artistic practice, the

professional group of Daxian Opera has carried out a more detailed division and induction of these four categories, and creatively constructed a unique and detailed role classification system of "five Sheng, Five Dan, Five Huamian". This system not only retains the core essence of the traditional profession, but also adds a new dimension on this basis, making the role image more-rich and three-dimensions, and the performance style more diversified (Wei, 2022). The artistic characteristics of the role of Puyang Daxian Opera lie in the perfect combination of the delicate portrayal of the character and the exquisite display of the actors' skills, which not only retains the charm of traditional opera, but also integrates the unique customs of regional culture, so as to shine uniquely in the long river of opera art, and become a cultural bridge connecting the past and the present, inheritance and innovation.

New Knowledges

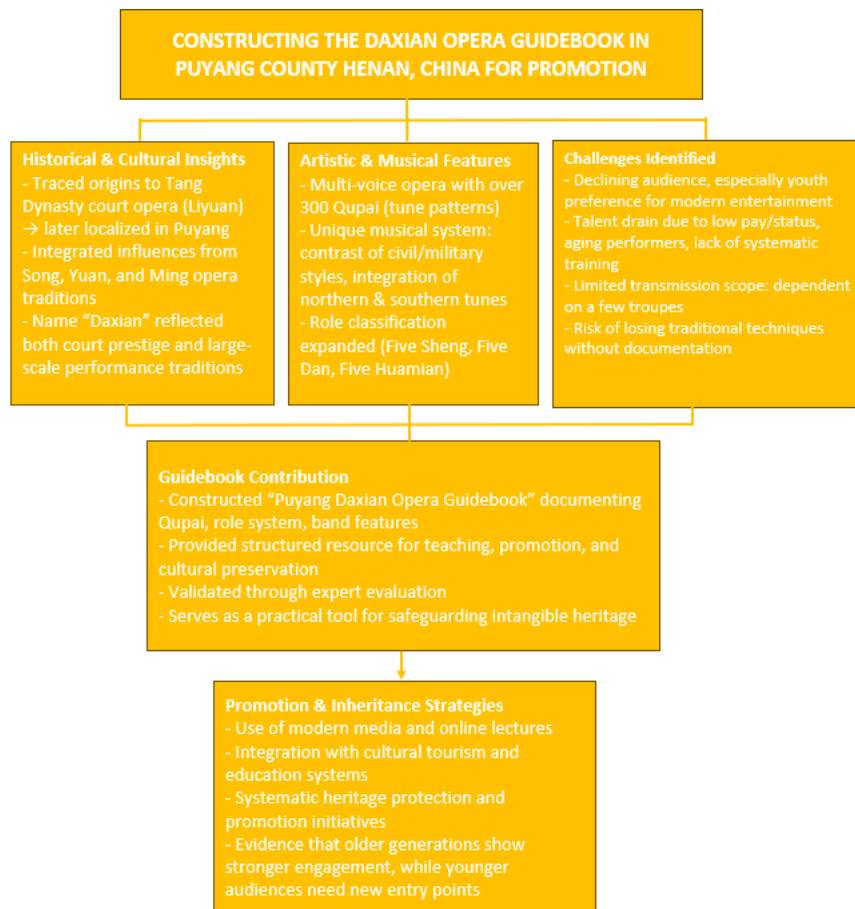


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Constructing the Daxian Opera Guidebook in Puyang County Henan, China for Promotion.

Conclusions

This study confirmed that Puyang Daxian Opera is not only a regional art form but also a significant embodiment of Chinese cultural heritage with global relevance. Its rich musical system, diverse Qupai, and distinct performance traditions reveal the fusion of imperial and folk influences that have survived for over 1,300 years. However, modernization has posed severe challenges, including

shrinking audiences, a lack of young practitioners, and the potential loss of unique performance techniques. Through the creation of the Puyang Daxian Opera Guidebook, this research offered a practical tool for systematic preservation, cultural promotion, and educational use. The successful application of the guidebook and the positive response from public engagement demonstrated that innovative strategies—such as digital lectures, cultural tourism integration, and cross-generational teaching—can breathe new life into traditional opera. Ultimately, Puyang Daxian Opera is not only a treasure of Henan but also a valuable case study in the global dialogue on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, reminding us that preserving tradition in the modern era requires both respect for historical authenticity and the courage to adapt creatively for future generations.

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