

**Present Situation And Revival Of Traditional Chinese Opera In
Rural Areas' Modernization Process --- A Case Study On Henan
Province**

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Tang Huixia, hereby declare that the content of this thesis is original and true, and has not been submitted at any other university or educational institute for the degree or diploma. All information derived from other published/unpublished sources has been cited and acknowledged appropriately.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the decline and revival of traditional Chinese opera in the modernization process of rural China, to discover the factors for its changes and to discuss its inheritance issue. In order to achieve the research objectives, a case study on Henan opera was conducted in Henan province where two counties and villages were selected to do the survey and interviews.

Based on the analysis on the collected data, the decline of traditional Chinese opera was confirmed. Contrasted with the situation before 1990, the number of the troupes and performers has shrunk dramatically in rural areas. The audience declined, and the age group was more concentrated in the elderly. The potential successor of traditional opera industry is worrying and ordinary people do not think learning or engaging in this enterprise is a good choice. In general, traditional opera is much less important and influential in people's lives in rural areas. The declining significance mainly comes from the change of external social environment. Compared with China's traditional agricultural society in the past, more than 70% of the working population aged 20-55 in the modern countryside have chosen to leave their hometown to make a living in larger cities. The invasion of modern culture and entertainment industry has almost completely changed the content and ways of cultural entertainment of farmers.

From the perspective of traditional Chinese opera itself, the past opera innovations have proved that its strong ancient cultural genes and its classic core make it difficult to adapt to the modern society by making proper changes. In this sense, its decline in modern China is inevitable.

However, it is found from the investigation of this study that in some rural areas of Henan province, due to the combined effect of many factors, such as local traditional

folk fair, influential individuals, non-governmental organizations, combination with cultural tourism, government's attention and reasonable guidance, traditional opera shows a trend of revival in rural areas.

Xuchang County is one of the two main case study sites. In the past ten years, remarkable cultural phenomena have taken place in Xingyuanpu village, such as the villagers' spontaneously shooting of opera films, the villagers' establishment of folk opera art troupe, and the self-written, self-directed and self-performed operas. Opera culture here showed a strong revival after a short downward slide of the situation. The coexistence of multiple forms of opera transmission formed by the combination of modern and traditional opera is one of the remarkable phenomena in the opera practice in this village.

Compared with Xuchang County, the investigation in Xun County showed us a more traditional view of opera. Here, opera performance follows the stage tradition that has been abided for hundreds of years. Opera traditions did not fade their power or charm. On the contrary, they are being interpreted by the local people in a new sense. The main reason opera performances flourished in Xun County over the years is that the local area has two regional advantages. One is the 'Xun County Ancient Temple Fair'. Another advantage is that the county has preserved diverse forms of folk art, such as stilt, bamboo horse, back pavilion, land boat, and other folk acrobatic performances. There is a firm and unbreakable symbiotic relationship between traditional Chinese opera and these folk arts.

Based on the investigation and analysis of the present situation of traditional Chinese opera, this study further discussed how to inherit the opera in modern countryside. The inheritance of traditional Chinese opera in rural areas should follow its own characteristics, pay attention to the protection and inheritance of its core cultural and artistic values, and avoid excessive consumption and inappropriate modernization reform. Practitioners should explore local superior resources, actively develop

traditional opera tourism and broaden the channel of opera transmission. In addition, the government culture and education departments should introduce effective policies and measures to support the enterprise of traditional opera, opera troupes and practitioners by means of providing financial support, accelerating the infrastructure construction of rural community theaters, conducting classified management according to different current situations of opera types and promoting traditional opera in the context of the basic education to cultivate successors for the opera.

From the theoretical perspective, this research comprehensively uses the multi-disciplinary theories and perspectives of sociology, history, theatre and media. It is an example of interdisciplinary comprehensive research. From a practical angle, this study can help people to have a more comprehensive understanding of traditional opera culture and the artistic value of opera, so as to facilitate the promotion of it in China. In addition, from the perspective of cultural heritage inheritance, the practices and Suggestions drawn from this study may provide some reference value for relevant decision makers.

This study may have some innovations in three points. Firstly, as mentioned above, this study comprehensively applies theories from multiple disciplines to study a complex issue. Compared with the thinking of single dimension, the comprehensive application of the multi-disciplinary theory has made some innovations in the research scope. Secondly, the model of nested case study from whole to part established in the process of data collection makes some innovation. In addition, the concept of the core cultural value of traditional Chinese opera proposed in this study is original. This concept may present important reference significance for the inheritance and development of traditional opera culture in today's society as well as the future.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese opera, modernization process, decline, revival, inheritance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP.....	I
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	II
ABSTRACT.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VI
LIST OF FIGURES.....	XIII
LIST OF TABLES.....	XV
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 RESEARCH OBJECT AND MAIN CONCEPTS.....	1
<i>1.2.1 Research object.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1.2.2 Main concepts.....</i>	<i>2</i>
1.3 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATIONS.....	5
<i>1.3.1 Research background.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.3.2 Research motivations.....</i>	<i>9</i>
1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	10
<i>1.4.1 Research objectives.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.4.2 Research questions.....</i>	<i>11</i>
1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS.....	11
1.6 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH.....	13
<i>1.6.1 Research contribution.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.6.2 Innovation of this research.....</i>	<i>14</i>
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION.....	15

1.8 SUMMARY.....	16
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CHAPTER 2 CHINESE ANCIENT CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL OPERA.....17

2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	17
2.2 FOLK CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL OPERA.....	17
2.2.1 <i>Festival folkways and traditional opera</i>	18
2.2.2 <i>Folk life and traditional opera</i>	22
2.3 ANCIENT CHINESE PHILOSOPHY AND TRADITIONAL OPERA.....	24
2.3.1 <i>Mixing grief and joy to harmony, the pursuit of a happy ending</i>	24
2.3.2 <i>Grade ethics and traditional opera</i>	26
2.3.3 <i>Realm of life and “stylization” of traditional opera</i>	27
2.4 RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE OPERA.....	29
2.4.1 <i>Draw materials from religion</i>	29
2.4.2 <i>Rely on God, worship God and reward God</i>	29
2.4.3 <i>Dissemination of religious doctrines</i>	30
2.5 SUMMARY.....	31

CHAPTER 3 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN

MODERNITY PROCESS32

3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	32
3.2 MODERNITY THEORY AND THOUGHT.....	33
3.2.1 <i>Baudelaire’s aesthetic modernity theory</i>	34
3.2.2 <i>Marshall Berman’s interpretation of modernity</i>	35
3.2.3 <i>Karl Marx’s modernity thoughts</i>	36
3.2.4 <i>Max Weber’s modernity thoughts</i>	40
3.2.5 <i>Overview of the modernity theory</i>	41

3.3 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN RURAL MODERNIZATION PROCESS OF CHINA.....	42
3.3.1 <i>National policy on rural areas</i>	43
3.3.2 <i>Overview of studies on China's rural modernization process</i>	48
3.4 SUMMARY.....	51

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....52

4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	52
4.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ADOPTED IN THIS RESEARCH.....	52
4.3 RESEARCH METHOD.....	53
4.4 FIELDWORK SITES AND THE REASON FOR SELECTION.....	57
4.4.1 <i>Xun County</i>	58
4.4.2 <i>Xuchang County</i>	59
4.5 DATA COLLECTION METHOD.....	61
4.5.1 <i>Questionnaire survey</i>	62
4.5.2 <i>Interview</i>	63
4.5.3 <i>Participant observation</i>	70
4.5.4 <i>Secondary data collection</i>	70
4.6 ANALYSIS METHOD.....	71
4.7 CHALLENGES IN DATA COLLECTION.....	73
4.8 SUMMARY.....	74

**CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND DISSICUSSION: THE DECLINE OF
TRADITIONAL CHINESE OPERA IN HENAN RURAL
AREA.....75**

5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	75
5.2 LOSING ITS STATUS AS CULTURAL CENTER: THE OVERALL DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL OPERA IN RURAL HENAN.....	75

5.3 SYMPTOMS OF THE DECLINE.....	76
5.3.1 <i>Sharp reduction in the number of performances.....</i>	77
5.3.2 <i>Increasingly narrow space for acting occasions.....</i>	78
5.3.3 <i>Negative changes in the number and age structure of the audiences.....</i>	79
5.3.4 <i>Younger generation's low awareness of traditional opera.....</i>	82
5.3.5 <i>Decline in the number of traditional Chinese opera troupes.....</i>	83
5.3.6 <i>Disappearance of many opera types.....</i>	83
5.3.7 <i>Mass loss of traditional repertoire.....</i>	84
5.4 REASONS FOR DECLINE.....	85
5.4.1 <i>Contradiction between classical core of traditional Chinese opera and the modern society.....</i>	86
5.4.2 <i>Powerful invasion of heterogeneous culture and modern media culture in the Internet era.....</i>	92
5.4.3 <i>The fault age and loss of the audience of traditional Chinese opera.....</i>	93
5.4.4 <i>The disruption of traditional Chinese opera education and the inadequacy of traditional Chinese opera promotion.....</i>	94
5.5 SUMMARY.....	96

CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: PARTIAL REVIVAL OF RURAL OPERA--- AN INVESTIGATION OF XINGYUANPU VILLAGE, XUCHANG COUNTY.....98

6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	98
6.2 VISUAL MEDIA THEORY AND TRADITIONAL OPERA TRANSMISSION MEDIA.....	99
6.3 OPERA PRACTICE OF MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN XINGYUANPU VILLAGE.....	103
6.3.1 <i>Deep-seated opera cultural tradition of Xingyuanpu Village.....</i>	104
6.3.2 <i>Xingyuanpu villagers going to the “theatre field”: a traditional stage</i>	

<i>communication pattern of opera</i>	107
6.3.3 <i>Opera film of Xingyuanpu Village</i>	110
6.3.4 <i>TV opera of Xingyuanpu Village</i>	112
6.3.5 <i>Xing Yuan Chun Traditional Chinese Opera Art Troupe</i>	115
6.4 ANALYSIS ON THE TRANSMISSION PATTERNS OF TRADITIONAL OPERA IN XINGYUANPU.....	117
6.4.1 <i>Impact of different communication patterns on peasant audiences</i>	117
6.4.2 <i>Distortion and elimination of the characteristics and attraction of the opera by electronic communication patterns</i>	119
6.5 INSIGHTS FROM THE REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL OPERA IN XINGYUANPU VILLAGE.....	125
6.5.1 <i>Emphasis on the discovery and utilization of local opera resources</i>	125
6.5.2 <i>The powerful role of individuals and folk organizations</i>	127
6.5.3 <i>A communal life for rural communities built through traditional opera</i>	129
6.6 SUMMARY.....	130
CHAPTER 7 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: PARTIAL REVIVAL OF RURAL OPERA--- AN INVESTIGATION OF XUN COUNTY.....	131
7.1 INTRODUCTION.....	131
7.2 SUBJECT AND VARIATION: TRADITIONAL CHINESE OPERA IN MUTIPLE FORMS.....	131
7.2.1 <i>Geographical location and the temple fair culture in Xun County</i>	131
7.2.2 <i>Opera performance at the Xun Ancient Temple Fair and other rural temple fairs</i>	139
7.2.3 <i>Commercial performance</i>	152
7.2.4 <i>Opera factors in the folk custom</i>	155
7.3 ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE REVIVAL OF LOCAL OPERA IN XUN COUNTY.....	161

7.3.1	<i>The tradition of temple fairs and folk culture as the foundation for the development of local opera.....</i>	<i>161</i>
7.3.2	<i>Important role of folk societies and troupes in developing traditional performance.....</i>	<i>171</i>
7.3.4	<i>Cultural and tourism industry built by local government.....</i>	<i>177</i>
7.4	SUMMARY.....	180
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION.....		181
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	181
8.2	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	182
8.2.1	<i>Reasons for traditional Chinese opera declining in modern society.....</i>	<i>183</i>
8.2.2	<i>The revival of traditional Opera in Xuchang County.....</i>	<i>189</i>
8.2.3	<i>The revival of traditional Opera in Xun County.....</i>	<i>190</i>
8.2.4	<i>Comparison of traditional Chinese opera practice in two cases.....</i>	<i>192</i>
8.3	SUGGESTIONS ON THE INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF OPERA IN RURAL HENAN.....	195
8.3.1	<i>Maintaining traditional essence and excavating local folk art resources...195</i>	
8.3.2	<i>Combining opera culture with tourism to build local brands.....</i>	<i>196</i>
8.3.3	<i>Applying scientific and technological means to innovate carrier forms....</i>	<i>198</i>
8.3.4	<i>Accelerating the improvement of infrastructure and the construction of Community Theater.....</i>	<i>200</i>
8.3.5	<i>Classification and management of opera types to protect endangered arts... ..</i>	<i>206</i>
8.4	CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH	209
8.5	LIMITATIONS.....	210
8.6	FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS.....	211
8.7	EPILOGUE.....	212
REFERENCES.....		213

APPENDIX.....220

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Structure of the thesis.....	16
Figure 4.1 Location of Henan Province in China.....	54
Figure 4.2 Locations of the two study sites in Henan Province.....	55
Figure 4.3 Flow chart of the data analysis.....	72
Figure 5.1 Old people watching an opera performance.....	81
Figure 6.1 Locations of Xuchang County and Lingjing Town in Henan Province.....	104
Figure 6.2 the performers of XingYuanChun Opera art troupe took a curtain call on stage.....	117
Figure 7.1 Location of Xun County in China.....	132
Figure 7.2 Stone tablet of Huayan Temple in Xun County.....	133
Figure 7.3 Stone tablet of Wenmiao Temple in Xun County.....	134
Figure 7.4 the stone buddha of Dapi Mountain.....	136
Figure 7.5 the Thousand Buddha Cave of Fuqiu Mountain.....	136
Figure 7.6 Poster for the ancient temple fair of Xun County in 2019.....	142
Figure 7.7 An opera show in Wangcun Village in Xun County.....	144
Figure 7.8 Wooden clapper used in Dapingdiao Opera.....	150
Figure 7.9 Stilt performance at Xun Ancient Temple Fair.....	156
Figure 7.10 Bamboo horse performance at Xun Ancient Temple Fair.....	157
Figure 7.11 Beige performance at Xun Ancient Temple Fair.....	160
Figure 7.12 A young actor who took part in a Beige performance.....	160
Figure 7.13 Clay coo-coos made by the inheritor Wang Xuefeng.....	165
Figure 7.14 Wicker basket.....	167
Figure 7.15 A farmer is making wickerwork in his cellar.....	168
Figure 7.16 Stone carving lion.....	170
Figure 7.17 Street scene during the ancient temple fair of Xun County.....	179
Figure 8.1 Data of traditional opera live-broadcast on TikTok in 2021.....	199

Figure 8.2 A makeshift opera stage in a village in Hua County.....	201
Figure 8.3 Backstage of a makeshift opera stage.....	202
Figure 8.4 Loud Shadows in Netherlands.....	203
Figure 8.5 the Natural Cliff Theatre in Cefalu, Italy.....	203
Figure 8.6 the Skorba Theatre in Putuj, Slovenia.....	204
Figure 8.7 the 365 Theatre in Beijing, China.....	204

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 The main documents about agriculture and rural area issued by Central government in 1950s.....	43
Table 4.1 Traditional Opera practitioners interviewee list in Xun County (Interview 1).....	66
Table 4.2 Peasant audience interviewee list in Xun County Interview 2)	67
Table 4.3 Traditional Opera practitioners interviewee list in Xuchang County (Interview 3).....	67
Table 4.4 Peasant audience interviewee list in Xuchang County (Interview 4).....	68
Table 4.5 Traditional Opera practitioners interviewee list in Xun County (Interview 5).....	68
Table 4.6 Government staff interviewee list in the three study sites (Interview 6).....	69
Table 4.7 Henan Opera scholar interviewee list (Interview 7).....	69
Table 4.8 Online interviewee list (Interview 8).....	69
Table 6.1 Investigation on the household watching Liyuanchun in Xingyuanpu.....	114
Table7.1 Information of some local opera troupes.....	148
Table7.2 Part of the commercial performances of the Yellow River Opera Company..	154
Table 8.1 Production, life, entertainment changes in rural areas.....	188

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Taking traditional Chinese opera as object, rural areas as the geographic reach, and the recent 40 years as the time period, this study aims to discover the presently existing situation and evolution process of traditional Chinese opera in China. This chapter is mainly a general introduction to the overall research. Firstly, the research object and main concepts are introduced, which is followed by a description of the relevant research background and the main study motivations. In the fourth part, the main objectives and corresponding research questions of this study are explained. Then, the research methods and process are briefly introduced. The justification of the value and innovation of this research is summarized in section 1.6. At last, chapter 1 ends with the presentation of the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Research Object and Main Concepts

1.2.1 Research object

Traditional Chinese opera (戏曲)¹ is the object of this study. It is a general term of traditional Chinese opera, which contains more than 360 types of Chinese opera in different ethnic areas, with tens of thousands of dramatic plays. Tracing back from its birth to today, it can be found that rural areas provided the main environment and audience for the production and development of traditional Chinese opera, and gradually formed different forms distinguished from urban opera in the long historical process (Zheng, 1990, p.25). This study mainly selected Yuju Opera, one of the five

¹ “戏曲” is the Chinese character for traditional Chinese opera, pronounced *Xiqu*.

great local opera types of China, in addition of Quju, Yuediao, Dapingdiao and other local operas, focus on the rural areas of Henan Province, a major agricultural and rural province in China to conduct a case-oriented study on the issues of evolution and inheritance of traditional Chinese opera.

1.2.2 Main concepts

1.2.2.1 Traditional Chinese opera

Wang Guowei, a famous Chinese scholar and drama theorist, is recognized as the founder of the study of Chinese opera theory. He gave a very precise definition of traditional Chinese opera in his book *The Source of Traditional Chinese Opera: performing a story by singing and dancing* (Wang, 1983, p.4). He further explained in another book “*Song and Yuan Opera Examination*” that traditional Chinese opera “must be combined with speech, action and singing to perform a story, and then the meaning of drama begins” (Wang, 2007, p.3).

Traditional Chinese opera originated from primitive singing and dancing, which is a kind of comprehensive stage art style with a very long history. Through the cultivation of the Han, Tang, Song and Jin dynasties, it has formed a relatively complete art of drama, which is comprehensively expressed in the forms of literature, music, dance, fine arts, martial arts, acrobatics and performing arts. With its impressionistic writing, imaginative expression and stylized performance, it is different from other nations’ drama art in the world. About in the 16th to 19th century AD, this ancient dramatic art began to diverge. It is integrated with the folk culture of different regions and nationalities in China, gradually forming a diversified family of dramatic arts with distinct characteristics. In the garden of traditional Chinese opera, there are five main types of local opera which are Peking Opera, Yuju Opera, Shaoxing Opera, Huangmei

Opera and Pingju Opera².

1.2.2.2 Yuju Opera

Henan is called Yu for short in China, so Henan Opera is also called Yuju opera. It was originally named Henan Bangzi, also has the names of "high tunes", "Henan tunes" and "roar against mountain". From these names, the general characteristics of Yuju Opera can be directly reflected: loud singing, rough style, cadence, strong sense of rhythm. Bangzi, a traditional Chinese folk percussion instrument, is one of its main accompaniment instruments. The term "Yuju Opera" was first seen in Wang Peiyi's "Yuju Opera News" in the 1920s and "An Examination of Yuju Opera" written by Zou Shaohu in 1934 AD. Ma Zichen, Yuju Opera theorist of the 20th century, stated in the book *"An Analysis of the Origins and Flows of Yuju Opera"*: "until the early years of the founding of PRC, due to the influence of the fashion of the theatre circle at that time, the term of "Yuju Opera" became more and more popular"(Ma, 2009, p.22). He further explained: "but it has been limited to writing, the old name of Bangzi Opera is still attached to other provinces and some remote areas of the province" (Ma, 2009, p.23). Yuju Opera is one of the five main influential types, mainly in Henan Province and other areas of northern China.

1.2.2.3 Rural opera and urban opera

In order to clarify the specific features of the main object of this study, the researcher divided traditional Chinese opera into rural opera and urban opera on a regional basis. In addition, the important difference between the two also lies in the artistic form, aesthetic characteristics and communication forms caused by the different popular regions and audiences. Rural opera is part of the main object of this study. To a large

² Peking Opera is known as the quintessence of Chinese culture and is popular in Beijing, Shanghai and other area. Shaoxing opera is mainly popular in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shanghai and other southeast regions of China, Huangmei Opera is mainly popular in Anhui province, and Pingju opera is mainly popular in North China, mainly in Hebei province.

extent, the opera type and its form are still keeping the tradition of ancient Chinese opera in the mainstream sense as well as the way of communication. Originally born in rural areas, Chinese opera spread to urban areas in the late 19th century. In order to adapt to the geographical characteristics of cities and the aesthetic taste of urban audiences, Chinese opera was highly refined in its artistic form. And its transmission mode was transferred from rural outdoor platforms and temples to enclosed urban theaters. With China's move toward modernization and urbanization in rural areas over the past two decades, especially in the internet, some new changes have taken place in rural opera. This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

1.2.2.4 TV opera and internet opera

Dr. Jiao Fumin put forward the concept of post-stage in his PhD thesis. According to his statement, the post-stage period is the period of alienation and disappearance of the substantial stage in the traditional sense, which refers that the performance can be fulfilled by drawing support from or apply modern audio-visual communication technologies such as movie, TV , Internet, etc (Jiao, 2006). During this period, the realization of the transmission of opera could be broken away from the stage with traditional sense; the performance of actors and the viewer's watching no longer has to take place face to face. In other words, mass media appeared in the process of communication between traditional opera and audience. The communication of traditional opera in the post-stage period is a kind of indirect communication and mass communication. From this perspective of media, based on the investigation and research on the transmission channels of traditional Chinese opera in rural areas in recent years, compared with the stage opera in traditional sense, the researcher tries to summarize the concepts of TV opera and internet opera.

TV opera is a new breed of art produced by combining modern television. It refers to the use of television technology means that break through the space-time limitation in essence, and appropriate use of real scenes and television audio-visual language to

express the opera art, refine the opera cultural features in the form of TV program.

In this thesis, internet opera mainly refers to all the information about traditional opera that can be seen on the network, some of which exist in professional opera websites, some exist in the web pages of other websites. Network drama has audio, video, pictures, text and other forms. For the convenience of discussion, this study focuses on network traditional opera audio and video. Network opera video is very inclusive. It can not only record drama TV, drama film and stage drama performance, but also enable mp3, flash opera production on the Internet and so on. Internet opera sources are accessible in many online channels. Above all, it is the resource of professional drama website (include drama forum) or culture website. Secondly, it is the drama resource of video and search engine website. At present, a large number of opera resources are directly available on China's video websites, such as Tencent, Tudou, IQIYI, Youku and search engines such as Baidu, 360 and other websites. Thirdly, opera resources are also available on other kinds of websites. Many art programs on portal websites and culture programs on government websites also may provide opera resources. In addition, they are available on the websites of some institutions, especially cultural and tourism institutions including some schools and libraries.

The different modes of communication will inevitably lead to a series of changes in the opera itself and the audience's aesthetics. What are the effects of these changes on the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera? Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis will provide a more detailed discussion on these issues.

1.3 Research Background and Motivation

1.3.1 Research background

Traditional Chinese opera was completely formed in the Yuan dynasty in the 13th century AD. After a long period of development and evolution, traditional opera has formed unique artistic characteristics. It constantly absorbed the cultural resources of the ancient Chinese society and integrated various art forms including music, dance, recitation and acrobatics and so on. In the process of spreading in various regions of China, opera was combined with local folk culture and art. Thus, in the later period of feudal society, it evolved from a primary type to hundreds of local opera types, including widely known Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera. Yuju Opera is one of the five types with strong influence, mainly spread in Henan Province and other areas of northern China.

Traditional Chinese opera took shape and developed in a long-running process. In the 20th century, the famous Chinese drama theorist Zhou Yibai elaborated on the origin and development of traditional opera in book *“Outline of Traditional Chinese Opera Development History”*. He claimed that traditional opera developed in the forms of official music and folk music from the beginning, and could be traced back to as early as Western Han Dynasty that traditional Chinese Opera blossomed into an independent art (Zhou, 1979, p.19-20). Further, “Sui Dynasty was an essential period for independence” (Zhou, 1979, p.21), because singing, acting, listening and watching were finalized from this time. In the Yuan Dynasty, traditional opera was mostly spread in the folk. By Ming Dynasty, however, it had become a widely appreciated form of art across the country. Fu Jin, a professor of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, argued that “the traditional opera had played a significant role in cultural and entertainment life of Chinese people, especially the general public since Song and Yuan Dynasties”(Fu, 2014, p.14). American Christian missionary Arthur Henderson Smith, who lived in rural China for more than 40 years and preached in Northwestern Shandong for 30 years, wrote many books about China. The first page of his work *“Village Life in China: A Study in Sociology”* said: “In an era that relied on word-of-mouth, people who were scattered in different corners of the earth spent their time alone” (Smith, 1998, p.1). At that time when traditional opera gradually became

the most popular form of art in ancient China, he reached a very objective conclusion that “traditional opera can be called a unique public entertainment form in China and it is to the Chinese what sports is to the British or the matador to the Spanish”(Smith, 1998, p.53).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, traditional opera has declined quickly amid China’s transformation from an agricultural to an industrialized and service-based one owing to opening up and rapid economic growth as well as massive invasion of foreign modern and popular culture. In the 1980s and the beginning of this century, the fate of traditional operas were discussed twice in the theatrical circle. *Chinese Theatre* issued a speech “*The Fate of Contemporary Drama*”³ given by dramatist Wei Minglun at the end of 2002, who described the situation of traditional operas in contemporary China that the actual situation of contemporary Chinese opera cannot be regarded as a kind of decline in general. Accurately speaking, it is characterized by a sparse audience, the reason for which “is not that there is no outstanding opera, but no matter how excellent it is, there are few audiences” (cited in Jiang & Xiao, 2005, p.12). Mr. Wei further attributed this situation to “the huge change in the contemporary lifestyle and means of entertainment” (Wei, 2002). Since TV and computers ushered in the era of indoor entertainment, people can enjoy everything by watching TV at home and surfing the Internet in Internet cafes comfortably and freely, without having to go to the theater to watch the stage performance. After the publication of Wei Minglun’s article, it immediately sparked a large-scale discussion in the theatrical circle. Over the next year, *Chinese Theatre* published a total of 36 pieces of articles discussing the fate of contemporary drama, totaling over 200,000 words.⁴ Later on, the magazine organized a special seminar in Foshan City, Guangdong Province of China, where artists and theorist in the theatrical circles gathered for thorough discussion and

³ Wei Minglun, *The Fate of Contemporary Drama*. *Chinese Theatre*, 2002 (12). The two concepts of drama and traditional opera are both coincide and different. Traditional opera is a unique traditional Chinese drama art. Dramas include modern drama and other pioneering art forms in addition to traditional opera. In this study, drama specifically refers to traditional Chinese opera.

⁴ The data is from the *Print Journalist*, *The Seminar on the Fate of Contemporary Drama convening in Foshan*, *Chinese Theatre*, 2004(1).

exchanges on the fate of traditional operas.

Given declining traditional culture as the whole, traditional opera suffers a keen sense of crisis under the impact of various cultures and means of entertainment. The main research object of this paper, Henan Yuju Opera, is also facing a pessimistic or unpromising environment. Dr. Chen Guohua of the Shanghai Theatre Academy of China found in his investigation that the number of opera troupes in Henan has dropped sharply since the beginning of the 21st century. “Every theatre troupe wrestled with a sea of troubles such as incomplete business, weak cast and undiversified repertoire” (Chen, 2006, p.93). Opera troupes are facing difficulties to survive and develop in the fierce competition among various art categories in the shrinking Henan Opera’s market. Actors can no longer maintain their livelihoods if depending on performance income alone.

However, the author found an eye-catching phenomenon in the field investigation that two distinct kinds of opera phenomenon have appeared in rural areas of Henan. On the one hand, the number of opera performances has shrunk dramatically, and its influence on ordinary people is far less powerful than it was 30 years ago. The rapid decline of types of drama and opera troupes, and serious staff turnover reflects the difficult situation facing traditional opera in today’s modern society. Against this worrying backdrop, however, the author is pleased to see that in a few typical towns and villages in rural Henan, traditional opera is becoming more inclusive in modern society, showing tenacious vitality and a strong recovery. In Xun County of Henan Province, the opera performance in the temple fair in Lunar January has thrived with the concerted efforts of local farmers, self-governing association, enterprises and local governments, attracting more and more tourists and audiences. Xuchang is endowed with rich opera resources and performance traditions in Henan Province. In recent years, local farmers have spontaneously established non-governmental opera organizations, held activities centering on opera culture and produced opera-related works, resulting in great social influence and drawing the attention of many

well-known media and scholars.

A core issue actually arises at the discussion of the Chinese theatrical circles in Foshan, which can be summarized as “the transformation of Chinese opera from traditional to modern”.⁵ The dramatists put forward two questions to be resolved urgently around this core: first, the impact of modern media on the opera; second, whether the road to revival of the opera is in the folk and in the countryside. In addition, some scholars discussed the inevitability of the decline and even the demise of traditional opera art in modern society considering that the opera has the attribute of ancient culture. As early as in the 1980s, some scholars believed that traditional opera, as an ancient drama of singing and dancing, was difficult to meet the needs of new audiences in modern era, which is a kind of “sunset art” opposite to “youth art”; some argued that traditional opera must be replaced by movies and television. These scholars concluded that traditional opera was too ancient to be easily appreciated by the audience in the new era, and it was inevitable to decline and wither away.

In conclusion, what changes are taking place in traditional opera in the vast modern countryside of China? It’s the decline of opera, and on the other hand, its revival in some rural areas. Is there some connection between these seemingly contradictory phenomena? And how should it be explained? What is the impact of modern culture, especially television, movies, the Internet and other mass media on traditional opera? What kind of influence will the “combination” of opera and media bring to the audience? What is the relationship between the coexistence of multiple drama media and the inheritance of opera culture? These questions are the starting point and focus of this research.

1.3.2 Research motivations

⁵ In July 2005, Nanjing University and Shanghai Theater Academy jointly held an international seminar on the art of drama, themed by “Chinese Drama: From Tradition to Modern”. The part of the results was summarized in a book titled Chinese Drama: From Tradition to Modern, edited by Dong Jian and Rong Guangrun, Beijing Zhonghua Book Company, 2006.

The motivation of this study is mainly from the following three points.

Firstly, under the influence of a major trend in literature and art to the city, most of Chinese opera theory research and the innovation in the 20th century usually targeted urban opera as main object, roughly took traditional Chinese opera as western drama as a kind of typical modern theatre art. This trend has deviated from the traditional opera art's existing environment, far away from its original cultural soil. Taking the current situation of rural opera in contemporary China as the focus, this study attempts to put traditional opera back into the original environment for observation, and then describes the evolution track it has experienced in the rapid social changes during the past three decades.

Secondly, China's rural society has undergone great changes in the process of modernization started in the 1980s. As a drama with distinct genes of ancient agricultural civilization, what kind of evolution is it going through in this social change and what kind of development direction it will take in the future? There is a lack of in-depth research in the academic field on these issues.

Finally, the researcher was born and grew up in Henan, and has certain geographical advantages in the research of this topic. The researcher has often followed my elders to go to the countryside stage to watch the operas since I could remember. The author was very impressed by the Yuju Opera for many years. In addition, the author has worked as a music teacher for 17 years and the academic achievements have laid a certain foundation for this study. Therefore, based on the above three points, the author hopes to contribute to the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera, especially Yuju Opera, through this study.

1.4 Research Objectives and Research Questions

1.4.1 Research objectives

It aims to investigate the present situation of traditional Chinese opera, to explore the reasons for the decline and the partial revival of it, this study selects Henan Opera to conduct case study in Henan Province. More specifically, the research objectives include:

1. To explore the reasons and the inevitability for the decline from the perspective of modernity theory.
2. To investigate the factors of the partial revival in rural Henan under the general trend of decline.
3. To discuss the inheritance and the development of the future of traditional opera based on the research on the above two objectives.

1.4.2 Research questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, five research questions are proposed:

1. Is the decline of the opera in modern China inevitable?
2. What are the factors affecting the decline of traditional Chinese opera?
3. What are the manifestations of the revival of local opera in rural areas of Henan province?
4. What are the factors affecting the revival of traditional Chinese opera?
5. What influence does the revival have on the inheritance and the development of traditional opera?

1.5 Research Methodology and Process

As a qualitative study, this research adopts a case-oriented approach. From the theoretical perspective, this research comprehensively adopts the multi-disciplinary theories and perspectives mainly from sociology, history, theatre and media.

China has a vast territory and a great variety of traditional operas. Yuju Opera is the one of five major types of traditional Chinese operas, which is very popular both in Henan Province and other areas of China. Henan is its birthplace and the most important transmission area. Therefore, this study selected two rural areas in Henan Province as field-working sites for case studies. They are Xun County, and Xuchang County. The criteria for choosing fieldwork sites of this study are as follows:

1. The sites need belong to the main popular region of Yu Opera, the main object of this study.
2. The sites should be relatively dispersed in geographical location.
3. They are generally same in the degree of economic development and social modernization of the sites.
4. There are some impressive phenomena with traditional opera in the local area.

In these two study sites, the ancient temple fair in Xun County is listed in the national intangible cultural heritage⁶, and the spring fairs in Xuchang County have a history of up to 600 years. Xuchang County has been given the title of “hometown of traditional opera” by the provincial government⁷.

Questionnaire survey, unstructured interview and participant observation, the approaches of data collection are employed in this study. In order to explore the status of traditional Chinese opera performance in rural areas and the degree of the rural residents’ acceptance to the opera, the researcher conducted a questionnaire survey.

⁶ The information is from China Intangible Cultural Heritage official website.
https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/15140/

⁷ The information is from People's Government of Xuchang County official website.
<http://www.jianan.gov.cn/jagk/walkIntoXC.html>

470 questionnaires handed out to local villagers by hand or by mail during the field work. Finally, there were 207 and 243 valid samples recovered.

Unstructured interview was employed as a main method for the collection of primary data. The interviewees include ordinary villagers, opera performers, group operators, opera researchers, creators and government officials of cultural departments. In addition to the interviews, participant observation was used in the fieldwork to help obtain better understanding on the research objects and phenomena and to verify the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews.

In this study, the secondary data mainly involves some relatively fixed basic information. This information is accessed mainly through the official websites of local government departments at all levels, and some information is indirectly obtained from the published results of other researchers.

In order to reach the final conclusion, a comprehensive method combined single and compared analysis is adopted in the study.

1.6 Justification for the Research

1.6.1 Research contribution

As illuminated in above sections 1.3, this study is a very complex work. Declining or reviving? What changes are taking place on traditional opera in rural China? Is there some connection between these seemingly contradictory phenomena? How will the changes bring influence on the inheritance of traditional opera? These questions are the starting point and main concerns of this research. It is necessary to use multidisciplinary theory to construct the research framework, and to use a variety of investigation methods and analysis methods to find the answers.

From the theoretical perspective, this research comprehensively uses the multi-disciplinary theories and perspectives of sociology, history, theatre and media. It is an example of interdisciplinary comprehensive research. The method, idea and process of this research can not only be applied to the same type of traditional art and culture research, but also provide reference for the research in the field of social culture and intangible cultural heritage.

From a practical angle, this study can help people to have a more comprehensive understanding of traditional opera culture and the artistic value of opera, so as to facilitate the promotion of it in China. In addition, from the perspective of cultural heritage inheritance, the practices and Suggestions drawn from this study may provide some reference value for relevant decision makers.

1.6.2 Innovation of this research

This study may have some innovations in three points.

Firstly, as mentioned above, this study comprehensively applies theories from multiple disciplines to study a complex issue. Compared with the thinking of single dimension, the comprehensive application of the multi-disciplinary theory has made some innovations in the research scope.

Secondly, the model of nested case study from whole to part established in the process of data collection makes some innovation.

In addition, the concept of the core cultural value of traditional Chinese opera proposed in this study is original. This concept may present important reference significance for the inheritance and development of traditional opera culture in today's society as well as the future.

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of eight chapters (Figure 1.1). Chapter one is a brief introduction of the whole study. Chapter two and three are the section of literature review which present research background, relevant theories and research status in this field. Chapter two describes the history and the main features of traditional Chinese opera and Yuju Opera, as well as their current situation in China. Chapter three discusses the process of the modernization of rural China, and the social and cultural changes brought by modernization. Chapter four presents research methodology and process of this study. Research method, theory scope, the process of data collection and data analysis are explained in this section. Research analysis and findings are explored in three chapters, which are Chapter five, Chapter six, and Chapter seven. Chapter five examines the changes of traditional opera in rural Henan, and the reasons for the decline. The core cultural value of traditional opera and the significance of it to contemporary Chinese society are discussed in this chapter. The sixth chapter and the seventh chapter respectively reveal the specific findings of the two case studies and make an in-depth analysis of the influencing factors of the revival in these two regions. Based on the findings, chapter eight tries to discuss the inheritance and development of traditional opera. As the last part of the dissertation, chapter eight concludes this study with a summary of findings, recommendations, research contributions, research limitations and research directions for the future.

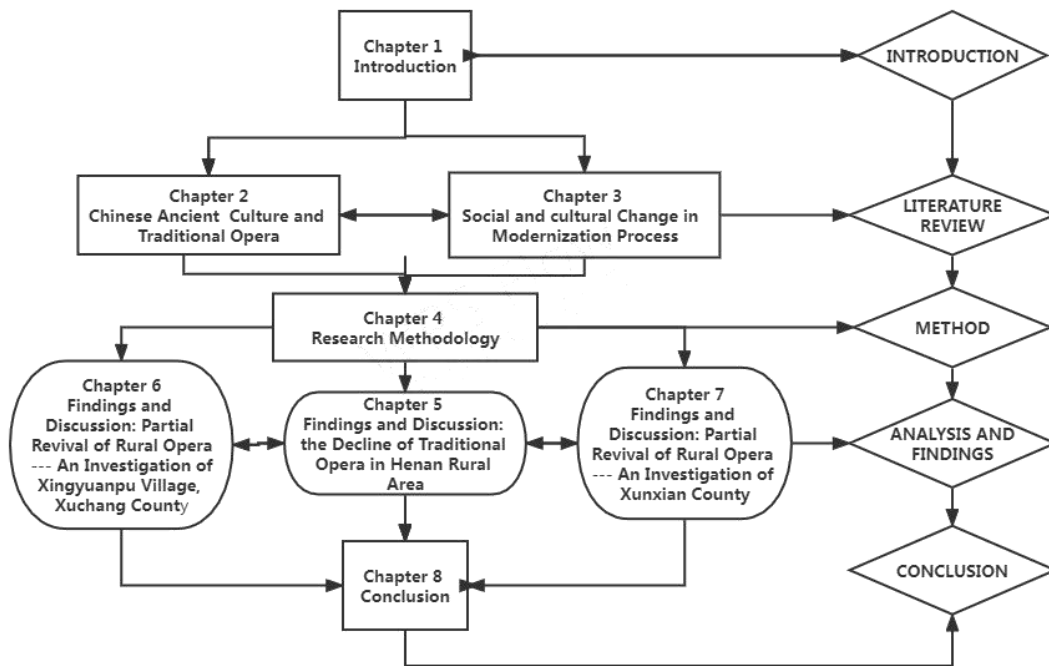


Figure 1.1 Structure of the thesis

Source: Made by the author

1.8 Summary

This chapter makes a brief introduction to this study. Considering the distinctive national and local characteristics of traditional Chinese opera, research objects and main concepts are firstly introduced. Then, research background and research motivations are presented to explain the cause and necessity of this research. Research objectives and research questions are proposed to guide the direction of this study. Then, research methodology and process is stated briefly, which is followed by the research justification to evaluate the values and innovations of this research. At last, the structure of this dissertation and the main contents of each chapter are introduced briefly. In the following second chapter, the general history, artistic characteristics and development status of traditional Chinese opera and Yuju Opera will be discussed from the perspective of Chinese ancient culture.

CHAPTER 2 CHINESE ANCIENT CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL OPERA

2.1 Introduction

Chinese traditional opera is the main object of this study. In order to find out the main factors for its rapid disappearance in the modernization process of China, it must be returned to the cultural context in which it was born and flourished. Therefore, this chapter aims to discuss the mainstream culture that developed by Chinese traditional society and its reflection of these ethical values in traditional opera, and examine traditional opera's content and form, cultural connotation, and propagation medium, as well as its aesthetic characteristics.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part explores the relationship between the folk culture of ancient China and traditional opera. The second part discusses the influences of the classical philosophy of China based on Confucianism of traditional opera. The third part briefly analyzes the relationship between the religious culture of ancient China and traditional opera.

2.2 Folk Culture and Traditional Opera

The secularized folk culture is the foundation of the whole culture of a country, a nation, and a region. As the huge foundation of a cultural pyramid, it provides inexhaustible nutrients and sources for the upper and core cultures of a specific nation. Folk culture is a kind of widespread and generation to generation production, living customs and habits, as well as common behavior pattern that co-created by the people who lived in a region for generations. It has a very extensive and far-reaching influence on various cultural and artistic varieties of a country, a nation, and a region.

Traditional Chinese opera was born in folk. The secular life of the folk masses is its main object of expression. “The relationship between opera and the upper class has always been quite estranged, while the relationship with the lower class is very close” (Zheng, 1990, p. 42). In ancient Chinese society, most of the creators and actors of traditional opera are scholars, folk artists, and the lower class who are not recognized by the upper class. The main audience of opera was also illiteracy, farmers, and ordinary citizens without well school education. It was only in the late Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty, influenced by the personal preferences of a few rulers, that opera finally had a chance to enter the royal court. Therefore, the Chinese traditional opera rooted in the folk culture, and folk culture is the soil for its survival. In the other side, the folk culture also gives the opera a distinct national folk color and secular appearance.

2.2.1 Festival folkways and traditional opera

Traditional Chinese opera’s performances were mostly held during seasonal festivals, especially in the rural areas. The ancient Chinese agricultural society maintained a static state of being unable to communicate with each other for a long time, without the opportunities and channels provided by festival activities, traditional opera could not survival and spread. So, festivals are considered as an important communication platform for the development of traditional opera.

Today, festivals still play an important role in Chinese people’s life. Attaching great importance to festivals is a custom handed down from generation to generation in traditional Chinese society. “*Winter Solstice -Dream Record in Dongjing*”⁸ recorded: “On November winter solstice, the most important festival in Capital, everyone, even very poor people, buys clothes, wine, and food, and sacrifices their ancestors. The government allows people gambling at this time. People celebrate with each other,

⁸ This is a book written by Meng Yuanlao, a litterateur in the Song Dynasty of China. It mainly recorded the local life and customs of the capital city Bianliang.

just like the spring festival” (cited in Tang, 1985, p.98). Thus, it can be seen that even very thrifty people would unsparingly spend the money they saved at ordinary times on winter solstice. Some people even borrowed money for the festival. The consumption view of festivals reflects the importance that ordinary people in ancient China attached to festivals. The Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Zhongyuan Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Double Ninth Festival, Laba Festival, social day as well as temple fairs, the birthday of God and so on, are all public festivals that the ancients attach special importance to.

Why did the ancient Chinese pay so much attention to festivals? First of all, the festival is closely related to the belief of ancients. Ancient Chinese worshiped Gods and believed in ghosts. The Ghost Festival, the first day of the tenth lunar month and many other days associated with the gods were directly related to this. In ancient China, there was a culture of dragon worship, embodied in the Dragon Boat Festival and the Dragon Head Festival on the 2nd day of the 2nd month of the lunar calendar. The Double Seventh Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival are related to the ancient Chinese’s respecting for the sky and the universe, worshiping stars, and the moon. Qingming Festival and Double Ninth Festival are related to ancestor worship and exorcism. Social day and the Spring Festival originated from ancient people’s reverence for the land they lived on. These primitive beliefs, like a mysterious and powerful cultural force, permeated the hearts of everyone in ancient Chinese society, and influenced people’s thoughts and behaviors.

The second reason is that seasonal festivals regulated the agricultural production activities of the ancients. China was founded on agriculture in ancient times. The primitive pattern of human farming has been maintained for thousands of years. The most important factor impact on agriculture is farming season. Ancient Chinese created the twenty-four Solar Terms based on their long experience of agricultural activity. Complying farming season, crops will grow in favorable weather, harvest

will be favorable. “*Lv Shi Chunqiu*”⁹ noted: “If the agriculture orders that were supposed to be enforced in summer were issued in the first month of spring, the wind and rain will come from time to time, crops will wither early, the kingdom is in danger.” “If, in the second month of spring, the agriculture orders that were supposed to be enforced in autumn were issued, the country will be flooded, the cold air will come suddenly, and the enemy will invade; the agriculture orders that were supposed to be enforced in winter were issued, Yang-qi will be insufficient, crops will not ripen, and there will be frequent looting among the people; the agriculture orders that were supposed to be enforced in summer were issued, the country will suffer drought, the heat will come too early, and crops will be infested” (cited in Tang, 1985, p. 127). It can be seen that the festivals were used in dividing agricultural time. All of agricultural farming activities should comply with the solar terms.

The third reason why ancient Chinese people attached importance to festivals is that festivals played an important role in entertaining and adjusting their lives. Festivals provided people with a break from the hard physical labors, gave them opportunities to concentrate on recreational activities, enjoying relaxation and leisure, and finally regained strength for the next stage of labor. This just likes what people called “charging” today. Confucius once observed the situation of farmers’ festival carnival at that time, and pointed out the festival’s “charging” function with the words “a hundred days of toil, a day of pleasure” and “relaxation and concentration, the way of civil and military” (Confucius, 1960).

Ancient Chinese festival had many functions. It not only provided an important market for commodity trading, but also served as the main place for cultural entertainment activities such as acting, storytelling and juggling. When the festival came, people stopped working and visited relatives and friends with their children. Watching opera was an important part of festival celebration, as well as a good way

⁹ This is a great work on miscellaneous studies in the Warring States Period of ancient China. It is said that the author was Lv Buwei, prime minister of the State of Qin. It was written around 239 BC.

for people's entertainment. On the other hand, the festivals celebrated by all the people also gathered a large number of audiences for the opera performance. Professor Zheng Chuanyin noted: "festivals are an important medium of connecting the opera consumption and production and disseminating opera culture" (Zheng, 1990, p. 112).

As Confucius said, "After one hundred days of toil, people deserve one day of pleasure". The "one day of pleasure" (Confucius, 1960) is one of the main contents of the festival culture. It is also one of the important reasons why festivals attracted generations of ancient Chinese. Limited by the level of education and consumption ability, most people in ancient China could not or were not used to entertaining themselves alone, but preferred gathering to watch the scene of bustle. Gongs and drums, singing and dancing, colorful opera performances just met the needs of ordinary people's holiday entertainment. In addition, in the numerous Gods' birthday and festivals related to the God worship, the performance activities also played a God worship function. Liu Zenglu, a writer of Qing dynasty, in his work "*Dream Garden Gong Collection Works*" said: "Playing opera to reward God in spring and autumn is the kind wishes of ancient people to their ancestors through music" (cited in Zheng, 1990, p. 135). This reflects that in the folk sacrificial activities, opera was also sacrificed to the Gods together with other material tributes, which means opera became a special spiritual and cultural tribute.

Festival not only provides an important platform and a large number of audiences for the survival and dissemination of traditional opera, but also affects the content and form of it.

In terms of content, Chinese traditional operas are mostly based on folklore, mythology, and historical romance. The content of the story is mostly simple and clear, the plot direction is apparent and interpretable, the language is plain and easy to understand, and the characteristics of living and secularization are prominent.

Compared with western dramas, the structure of traditional Chinese opera plays is simple, and most of their plot development is organized according to the time sequence which is convenient for memory. The characters in the drama are highly labeled and simply characterized by good and evil, focusing on simplicity, rather than pursuing the multifaceted and complex characters. These characteristics of contents perfectly adapt to the main audience-- agricultural laborers, ensuring the number and stability of the audience. On this point, Li Yu, a literary critic and dramatist in Qing dynasty, made a very precise argument in his book *“Records in Leisure and Accident”*: “one person, one thing, and one line go to the end” (Li, 2007, p.21). He further argued that opera should “suit both refined and popular tastes”, so that “the women and children who do not read books can enjoy it, so it should be shallow rather than profound” (Li, 2007, p.22).

From the expression form of traditional opera, singing and dancing, the mixed use of a variety of art forms meet the secular psychology of happy in festival. The colorful opera costumes and props, as well as the various opera masks with clear distinctions between good and evil, also fit in with the aesthetic level and taste of ordinary peasant audiences.

In short, there is a kind of symbiotic relationship between Chinese festival folklore and traditional opera. The opera relies on the festival to survive, and the festival uses opera to play its cultural function of entertaining people and offering sacrifices to Gods. They depend on each other and form a symbiont with close relationship.

2.2.2 Folk life and traditional opera

In addition to many important festivals, traditional opera performances also appeared in the ancient Chinese people’s important nodes of life. Every marriage, birth, senior’s birthday, relocation and other festive activities were often accompanied by lively opera performances. Usually, the host hires troupe to perform opera to express the

joyful mood. They also use the grand scene to entertain friends and guests. Sometimes, neighbors and relatives will pay for the performance with some gifts to the host. This phenomenon is still prevalent in rural areas in northern China today.

In many regions of ancient China, a normal death of old people was also regarded as a matter of joy and congratulation, and was called “red-and-white happy event” together with marriage. Funeral performance is also a widespread folk custom. It is recorded in volume 261 “important customs” of the book *“Imperial Edict of the Supreme Emperor of Qing Dynasty”*: “the people of some provinces, who were relatively wealthy, would spend a lot of money in luxury during funerals. Opera would be performed in the funeral place for days while holding the funeral and on the way to cemetery.” (Tang, 1985, p. 215)

In addition to the above important life nodes, it is also a folk custom to gather money for opera during the slack season (according to the author’s childhood memory, this phenomenon still exists in modern times). Because rural areas are the birthplace of traditional opera, and farmers are the main audience, the opera performance season also adapts to the time and rhythm of agricultural production. Sowing in spring, planting in summer, harvesting in autumn and storing in winter were the basic rhythms of agricultural production in ancient China. Only by adapting to the rhythm, avoiding the busy season and choosing the leisure time, can the opera performance attract the farmers and maintain its own survival. Therefore, cold winter, the end of a year and early spring season, the beginning of a year, is the busiest time of opera performance. This custom continues today in rural China. In Qing dynasty, a government notice in Jiangsu province recorded that “every spring, in order to enjoy opera, the villagers gather money, and set up stages in empty fields. The performance attracts men and women from far and near come to watch, and the whole region is in hilarity”¹⁰ (cited in Tang, 1985, p.197). Thus, it can be seen that gathering performance was a very grand occasion in slack season at that time.

¹⁰ It is from Volume 9 of “the note of Tang Zi” written by Tang Bin in the Qing Dynasty.

To sum up, the traditional Chinese opera born in the folk also served the production mode and life style of its creators. The traditional Chinese opera had been immersed in the folk secular culture for a long time, and finally formed its plain and natural artistic characteristics.

2.3 Ancient Chinese Philosophy and Traditional Opera

Artistic creation is a process of human thinking. A work of art is a product of thought. Traditional Chinese opera has distinctive characteristics which are different from western drama in ideological content, expression form and aesthetic pursuit. This is closely related to the theory of ancient Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism.

2.3.1 Mixing grief and joy to harmony, the pursuit of a happy ending

Most traditional Chinese operas have a relatively happy ending; even the tragic works are hardly exceptional. Western tragedies often end with the tragic death of the hero or heroine, a symbol of beauty or justice, which deeply shocks the hearts of the audience and achieves the aesthetic effect of “sadness”. The tragic works of traditional Chinese opera are both sad and joyful. Stories usually have happy ending. For example, “*The Injustice to Dou E*”, the representative work of Guan Hanqing (a famous dramatist in Yuan dynasty) was listed as one of the top ten classical tragedies in China. In the play, the good heroine Ms. Dou was framed for murder by the treacherous philistines, the philistines colluded with the greedy government officials, and weak Ms. Dou was sentenced to death. But the story doesn’t end there. The author let Ms. Dou’s ghost meet her government official father in his dream. The father was separated from her and they lost touch with each other in her childhood. The unjust case is overturned eventually. Ms. Dou’s unjust treat was compensated. It’s a compensatory happy ending. In traditional opera works, such examples are numerous, such as the famous

works *“The Palace of Eternal Youth”*, *“Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai”*, *“The Orphan of Zhao”*, *“The Peony Pavilion”* and so on. Pure tragedy, such as western tragedy, is rare.

Therefore, Li Yu said in *“Records in Leisure and Accident - Lyrics and Rhythms Part”*: “The end of a book, called a big end, is difficult in its natural transition with the interest of reunion” (Li, 2007, p.15). In *“Commentaries on the Dream of Red Mansions”*, the famous thinker Wang Guowei summarized the structural pattern of Chinese classical operas and novels as: “those who begin with sorrow end with joy; those who begin with separation end with harmony; those who begin with hard end with easy” (Wang Guowei, 1983). It can be seen that the pursuit of perfection is the aesthetic pursuit of opera creation and appreciation. The underlying reasons should be found in ancient Chinese philosophy.

Ancient Chinese had a cosmological view of the unity of heaven and human. They thought that the universe is not externalized out the existence of human, but is a harmonious and compatible unity with human. Mencius, one of the founders of Confucianism, believed that man’s nature was inherited from heaven, that nature and man were connected, and that heaven and humanity were one (Mencius, 2010). Cheng Yi, a scholar of neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty, further developed this theory as: “Tao and nature are the same”. “The essence of nature is density, the tendency of nature is the mandate of heaven, the external form of nature is mind, and the motion of nature is disposition. All of them are one” (cited in Zheng, 1990, p.179). The cosmology of “the unity of man and nature” is of decisive significance to the way of thinking of ancient Chinese. This is more vivid in contrast of the west and ancient China in the way of thinking. The west clearly distinguishes object and subject, nature and human society, whose understanding of the external world depends on rational thinking. By contrast, the Chinese traditional mode of thinking is used to treat people’s inner and outer environment, nature and society as a whole and pursue harmony and unity. Under the influence of this thinking mode, the scientific research,

literary creation, and aesthetic appreciation in ancient China all showed the holistic thinking characteristics of pursuing harmony and completeness.

2.3.2 Grade ethics and traditional opera

It is well known that the majority of rulers in China's long ancient feudal society used Confucianism to govern the country and win the hearts and minds of people. Confucian ethics require people to abide by the "three cardinal principles", that is, "ruler guides subject, father guides son, husband guides wife". In family, children should obey the principle of filial piety. In national politics, subjects should be absolutely loyal to the monarch. Individual moral cultivation should obey and serve the collective and national will of "governing the country and the world" (Confucius, 1960).

Confucianism is based on "righteousness". Confucius considered "righteousness" to be a necessary quality of a gentleman (a man of noble character, usually male). "*The Analects of Confucius*" said, "A person of virtue regards righteousness as a fundamental principle to guide his acts, practices righteousness according to etiquette, demonstrates it by way of discretion, and fulfills it in honesty. This is what a person of virtue does" (Confucius, 1960). At the same time, it takes "benevolence" as the core of moral ethics. When superior man's personal life conflicts with the way of benevolence and righteousness, he should "sacrifice his life for righteousness", that is, give individual life to uphold the principle of benevolence and righteousness. In this spiritual atmosphere of moralization, traditional Chinese opera shows a strong typification and moralization in its contents and figures of characters. There are strict and clear distinctions between good and evil characters in traditional Chinese opera, which clearly manifest in dressing, facial makeup, singing tone and other aspects. Even the audience watching the opera for the first time can easily distinguish the good from evil. Therefore, there is a unique division of roles and professions in traditional Chinese opera, which is called "Sheng (the lead), Dan (the female lead), Jing (the

painted face), Mo (the old lead) and Chou (the clown)". It is actually a highly refined summary of the common characteristics of all types of characters. In the direction of the story, good things happen to good people, and bad people usually end badly. It shows a clear moral orientation.

2.3.3 Realm of life and "stylization" of traditional opera

In "*the Analects of Confucius*", Confucius had a very famous discourse on the realm of life:

"At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right" (Confucius, 1960).

This passage can be considered as the most classical expression of Confucian philosophy on the realm of life. Have freedom on one's mind, follow one's desire, but never overstep all kinds of laws and regulations of the society. This is the highest state of life pursued by Confucians. The opera immersed in Chinese classical culture is exactly the artistic representation of this philosophy.

Another important feature of traditional Chinese opera which is different from western drama is virtual and "stylized" performance. "Freely artistic creation within strict norms is an important feature of classical opera" (Zheng, 1990, p.175). The "stylization" of opera means that specific rules and standard formats must be strictly followed in all aspects of opera creation and performance. The rules and formats of programs are not abstract and general, but very specific and precise. About play writing, Li Yu said: "Composition is the foundation of the lyrics, just like the pattern of a woman's embroidery. Paint a leaf first and then embroider it. Not a single stitch is allowed to be added or omitted; no matter the embroiderer is clumsy or skillful" (Li,

2007, p.20). This passage emphasizes the “stylization” of the opera writing process. There are also a set of rules that must be followed in an actor’s second creation process. Such as costume stylization, facial makeup stylization, closing door and pushing window, going upstairs and downstairs, sailing a boat and riding a horse, battling and other stage performance details, all of them follow specific formats. It can be said that every move of the actors on the stage has a formula. Stanislavsky, a former Soviet drama master, commented that Chinese opera performance is “free action with rules” (cited in Zheng, 1990, p.175). Some scholars summarized the stylized characteristics of Chinese opera in more vivid words: “Dancing in shackles”. This is highly consistent with the spiritual core of Confucian philosophy, which is “following one’s heart without transgressing what is right” (Confucius, 1960).

Of course, the formation of stylization also relates to the ancient Chinese society’s conservative idea, the thinking pattern that valuing the predecessors’ experience, and the way of opera’s succession by oral teaching. The ancient Chinese feudal society has a very long history. Although it underwent very frequent changes of dynasties, actually, what changed were only the rulers sitting on the throne; the political structure, production and life style, cultural and spiritual connotations of the society remained almost exactly the same. The stable state of almost ground to a halt provides a hotbed for the creation of the traditional opera’s stylization. No matter which actor is under the costume, the action of the same character or even the same kind of character on the stage is highly consistent. Actors and audiences have also reached a tacit understanding in performance and aesthetic acceptance. Therefore, the aesthetic of Chinese opera will also have a major characteristic that the audience will be never tired of a same play.

On the one hand, the stylization of the whole process endows Chinese traditional opera with distinctive characteristics different from other national drama, as well as keeps the internal stability of its artistic features. On the other hand, it also makes the opera wear a heavy old mask from inside to outside, and has a great distance from the

modern aesthetic taste of today's people, especially the young generation. Today's people consider that the opera clearly belongs to "the gone era", which increases the difficulty for its inheritance and transmission in today's society.

2.4 Religious Culture and Traditional Chinese Opera

During its long gestation and development time, Chinese opera was inevitably influenced by the complicated religious culture of ancient Chinese society. Many opera artists had a long-term faith in Buddhism or Taoism. In process of artistic creation, it naturally draws nourishment and borrows materials from religious culture, while expresses religious spirit.

2.4.1 Draw materials from religion

One of the major types of traditional Chinese opera is Taoist opera. The characters come from Taoist mythology, such as Eight Immortals, Thunder God, Mother of Lightning, Door God, The Queen of the Flower, Local God of the Land, Dragon King in the sea, and Jade Emperor in heaven and so on. Known as one of the four masters of Yuan opera, Ma Zhiyuan got his nickname "Shenxian Ma" for his many writings on Taoist opera.

2.4.2 Rely on God, worship God and reward God

When discussing the festival culture, the author has mentioned that the traditional opera performance often relies on the celebration of God's birthday to maintain its existence and expand its influence. In turn, the opera is also used by religion, with a religious function of worshipping and rewarding God. In the views of the ancient Chinese, Gods of all religions and sects loved theatergoing. The Qing dynasty scholar Hong Ziquan pointed out in "*The Theory of Opera Performance to Worship God*"

that “Performing opera to worship God is the general rule of the world. Acting helps people remember the God and shows people’s respect to God” (cited in Tang, 1985, p.261). The earliest opera stages in China also provide evidence for this view. “In the ancient Pingyang area in the south of Shanxi Province, there are eight stages preserved from Yuan dynasty, they are located in Niuwang temple in Linfen Wei village, Dongyue temple in Wangqu village, Houtu temple in Dongyang village, Qiaoze temple in Yicheng Wuchi village, Four Holy Palaces in Caogong village, Sanguan temple in Yuncheng Sanluli road, Sanlang temple in Yongji Dong village, and Virgin temple in Shilou temple village (Chai, 1988). Most of the above temples belong to Taoism, and some others embrace Buddhism. It is enough to explain the close relationship between ancient opera performance and religious temple.

2.4.3 Dissemination of religious doctrines

As a secular culture, Chinese opera has the largest audience and is a perfect way to promote religious teachings to the public. It is reflected in the following three aspects. First of all, “classical opera gives a positive answer to the existence of fairyland and to the possibility of laity becoming immortal” (Zheng, 1990, p.229). Not only that, the opera also gives a positive answer about the existence of ghosts after death. For example, the Yuan opera works “*Lost into the Peach Garden*”, “*The Injustice to Dou E*”, “*A Chinese Ghost Story*”, “*A Beauty in the Painting*” and so on. Ghosts also play a crucial role in great master Tang Xianzu’s representative opera “*The Peony Pavilion*”. Secondly, the theme of many opera works are the Buddhist theory of “cause and effect”, which advocates the repaying of good and evil and the circulation of cause and effect. In this way people are educated, and people’s thoughts are guided. The characters in these works have distinctive personalities and “happy endings”, satisfying the potential expectations of the audience. The wicked will reap the bad, but the good will have a happy ending. The idea guides the audience from the thought to be good, and accumulates blessings. In addition, the influence of religion on drama is also reflected in some ritualized details of stage performance. Even in nowadays,

before the opening of the opera, a band will play a number of instrumental music unrelated to the opera play, to attract the audience. This is called “Da Nao Tai”. It is the same as the Taoist ritual ceremony. They use the same music, such as “*The General’s Order*” and “*Nezha’s Spirit*”. They also use the same musical instruments, including gongs, drums, cymbals, clarinet, flute, and wooden knocker.

2.5 Summary

To sum up, the traditional operas that were bred and grew in the social and cultural soil of ancient China were influenced by folk customs, Confucian philosophy in the upper-level culture and religious culture in varying degrees. It has formed distinctive artistic characteristics and cultural connotations, which make it not only different from the contemporary dramatic arts of other nations, but also far away from the spiritual characteristics and aesthetic tastes of the modern Chinese people. Therefore, according to the modern aesthetic theory, the decline of ancient opera art in modern China is inevitable. However, in today’s China, especially in the vast rural society, traditional opera, although have declined but not die, even still survive tenaciously. The complex factors behind it deserve to be explored by researchers.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN MODERNITY PROCESS

3.1 Introduction

Modernity is one of the most universal grand concepts since the 18th century. With the modernization process of the most countries in the world, modernity has penetrated every corner of the world and every aspect of individual life. In the process of modernity, the insides and outsides of social culture have undergone and are undergoing profound changes. As one kind of traditional cultures and arts, conceived in the 5th century BC and born in the 12th century AD, the traditional Chinese opera is experiencing a rapid decline in the process of modernization, especially in the rural areas of China. About 40 years ago, one of the main forms of Chinese peasants' entertainment and aesthetic activity was to watch opera performances in front of a simple open-air stage. Today, this phenomenon is getting fewer and fewer, and in some areas it even doesn't happen anymore. The most profound reason must be interpreted in the context of modernity theory.

From the theoretical perspective, this chapter mainly discusses what modernity means? What did modernity give up? What are the changes in social life and culture in the process of modernization?¹¹ How did China enter the process of modernization? To answer these questions, this chapter contains two parts. The first part generally summarizes the relevant modernity theories of major western thinkers, including Karl

¹¹ Here, Modernization means the dynamic process of development and change from traditional society to modern society. This is consistent with the meaning of modernization explained by Berman. He pointed out that the so-called modernization was a variety of social processes in which the maelstrom was constantly generated and constantly changing (Zhang, 2006). Modernity emphasizes the characteristics and status that modern society differs from traditional society.

Marx, Max Weber, Marshall Berman and so on. The second part is an overview of the social and cultural changes of Chinese rural society in the process of modernization.

3.2 Modernity Theory and Thought

According to the philosopher Habermas, the word ‘modern’ was used as early as the 5th century AD to distinguish modern Christian society from Roman society (Habermas, 2004, p. 178). It can be seen that its original meaning is relative to the past era. There has also been a long discussion of the word “modernity”. Different scholars give different definitions based on their disciplinary vision. The definition of modernity and modernity in this paper follows the concept in the cognition of most people, that is to say, modernity is a specific period in the history of human society, compared with the traditional social period. Modernity refers to the existence state of people different from the past created by the historical development and transformation of the mode of production in modern society, which is the characteristic and state of modern society different from the traditional society.

Modernity is the abstract generalization of the historical concept of modern and the social and historical process of modernization. As a sociological concept, modernity is always inseparable from the process of modernization. Industrialization, urbanization, bureaucracy, secularization, civil society, nationalism, nation-state, and other historical processes are all indicators of modernization. In a word, modernity involves the complex interaction between four historical processes: political, economic, social, and cultural evolution. The establishment and legalization of secular political rights, the establishment of modern nation-states, the formation and industrialization of market economy, the disintegration of traditional social order, the division of labor of society, and the decline of religion with its contrast - the rise of secular culture are the concrete manifestations of modernity.

3.2.1 Baudelaire's aesthetic modernity theory

In the history of modernity research, the French poet Charles Baudelaire defined the concept of “modernity” earlier, which he has talked about many times in different expressions, the most classic of which is: “Modernity is transitional, transient, and accidental, is half of art, the other half is eternal and not change” (cited in Huang, 2014, p.37). The modernity defined by Baudelaire refers to the component of beauty or art, which is the specific, special, relative and changing part contained in all art and beauty of all times. The corresponding another part is universal, absolute, and eternal in all art and beauty of all times. We find that Baudelaire's modernity is not a definition of time or era, but refers to the specific and unique aesthetic characteristics of art in a specific era. However, according to Baudelaire, the non-modernity and eternal elements extracted from art and beauty can transcend time and be universally appreciated by people of different ages.

We can find that the concept of modernity put forward by Baudelaire has special meaning. He refers to the immediacy and temporality of aesthetics. This is different from the concept of modernity that most people understand later. However, Baudelaire's aesthetic modernity theory is helpful to the author's thinking and interpretation of the theme of this study. Baudelaire's anatomy of art and beauty inspired my thinking of the duality of the aesthetics of traditional Chinese opera.

After a long period of development-on the one hand-with the change of times and spreading regions, traditional Chinese opera has evolved a variety of artistic characteristics and types of drama. On the other hand, no matter how it evolves, traditional Chinese opera has always contained constant aesthetic characteristics, which is especially reflected in its art form. This constant feature is obviously different from other kinds of drama. The duality of traditional Chinese opera can be used as an example of Baudelaire's aesthetic modernity theory. Conversely, the latter can explain the complex appearance of the former in the development process from

the perspective of aesthetic theory.

Regarding Baudelaire's importance to modernity theory, Marshall Berman commented objectively: "If we had to nominate who was the first modernist, he must be Baudelaire" (Berman, 2003, p.169). As the first modernist, Baudelaire not only found aesthetic modernity from art and beauty, but also predicted the negative impact of social modernization on human spirit. He distinguished aesthetic modernity from social modernity and discerned the opposition between them. It can be said that it was Baudelaire who initiated Marx, Weber, Habermas, Matei Calnescu and other sociologists and philosophers to critically examine and study modernity in the universal sense of social, historical, and political category.

3.2.2 Marshall Berman's interpretation of modernity

Marshall Berman, an American scholar, in his representative work, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*, expressed his understanding of modernity in accessible narrative. He viewed modernity as an experience that everyone has in modern society, an experience full of contradictions and paradoxes. While modernity gives people great power to change the world, it also changes people themselves. Modernity represents not only an objective historical change, but also the specific experience of countless men and women who "must be absolutely modern" (Berman, 2003, p.15). Marshall Berman notes that to be modern is of finding ourselves in situations that promise adventure, strength, joy, growth and change for ourselves and the world, but at the same time have the risk of destroy everything we have, know and even were (Berman, 2003, p.15-16).

According to Berman, modern society is like a maelstrom in which people are involuntarily disintegrated and reborn, troubled, and suffering, and searching for themselves in endless contradiction. When modernity endows people with sufficient energy and freedom to change the world, and when social life is gradually modernized,

the paradox of modernity will eventually drag people into the spiritual desert of alienation. As a result, today we find ourselves in a modern age that has lost connection with its own root of modernity, and it “means the destruction of an important form of public space. It promotes the fragmentation of our world into a group of private material and spiritual interests. We all live in isolated windowless cages, far more isolation than we need” (Berman, 2003, p. 41-42).

However, Berman’s thinking on modernity did not stop at criticism. He further pointed out that today’s modernism is based on tradition and cannot be separated from tradition. “Modernists can never part with the past. They must always be haunted by it, unearth its ghosts, and recreate it as they rebuild their world and themselves.” Only by maintaining “the ties that bind modernity to the past - ties that are close and antagonistic - can it help modern people, present and future, to be free” (Berman, 2003, p. 462).

From Berman’s perspective, the seemingly incompatible contradiction between the decline and revival of traditional Chinese opera in this study can be reasonably understood. Classical culture and art, including traditional Chinese opera, could come back to people’s view after being neglected by modern society for a long time. In other words, these classical culture and art belonging to yesterday are not really dead, they have been latent demand by the people who created them. From these ancient cultures and arts, people can identify who I am? Where am I from? Where will I go? and so on the spiritual confusions, so as to get rid of the lost brought by modern society to people.

On the subversive transformation of modernity to traditional society, Karl Marx had a more classical formulation of this argument: “All that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 34).

3.2.3 Karl Marx’s modernity thoughts

The most influential views of modernity theory were developed by Karl Marx (Inglehart, 2004). Although many researchers have argued over many of Karl Marx's ideas on the development of human society, they fully agreed with one of Marx's core ideas, which is that social and economic development would inevitably cause great changes in society, politics, and culture. With his piercing scrutiny, Marx exposed the root of all the changes in modern society:

“Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and vulnerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they ossify. All that is solid melts into air. All that is holy becomes profaned” (Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 34).

With the continuous improvement of production tools, more and more large industrial production has been formed. The rural population, which had relied on traditional agriculture and manual labor, was increasingly absorbed into the machine industry, and consequently, more and more large cities appeared. “It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life” (Marx & Engels, 1999, p.33).

Here, Marx referred to two great changes. The first is the replacement of agricultural civilization by industrial civilization. In the long human history before the bourgeoisie came to power, the basic mode of social production was “work from the sun rising and rest after the sun setting”¹². People bartered and were self-sufficient. The law of nature was the only principle for people to arrange production and life. In the modern society of industrial society, such a mode of existence is difficult to sustain.

¹² This is a well-known Chinese folk saying, translated by the author.

Technology is changing, information is changing, and capital markets hold all the secrets of productive relationship.

The second dimension is the social and cultural change that industrial civilization wants to adapt to. In the agricultural civilization era, the social culture for thousands of years chanted green mountains and clear water, natural scenery, daily necessities, natural life. In such a life, people have formed the values of economy, satisfaction, diligence, and thrift, leisure and inaction. There is neither the need nor the drive to change. However, the social culture which adapted to the industrial civilization is always unsatisfied and changeable. It tended to an endless exploration of the unknown experience. Culture and art are also highly commercialized and market-oriented, constantly innovating to open up and occupying new markets.

In the whole process of world modernization, the concept of globalization is mentioned more and more frequently. Today, globalization has become an indisputable fact. In fact, in "*The Manifesto of the Communist Party*", Marx had made a classic summary of globalization: the demand for expanding product sales drove the bourgeoisie to travel around the world. The bourgeoisie, by opening up the world market, makes the production and consumption of all nations universal (Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 274).

The globalization of production and consumption has eliminated the self-sufficiency of nations. "The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all the means of production, by the most convenient transportation, has drawn all the peoples, even the most savage ones, into civilization"(Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 276). Thus, it can be seen that it is the development and expansion of the modern capitalist mode of production that has created the "modern" living state of human.

According to Marx's theoretical logic, globalization further intensifies the influence of modernity on all nations in the world, and in this process, evolves richer meanings

to modernity.

“The old needs met by local products were replaced by the new needs met by the products of far-off countries. The local and national self-sufficiency and isolation of the past has been replaced by the interaction and interdependence of the various nationalities. So does the production of matter, and the production of spirit. The spiritual products of all nationalities constitute public property. The one-sidedness and limitation of a nation become increasingly impossible, so the literature of many nationalities and places forms a kind of cosmopolitan literature” (Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 276-277).

Cosmopolitan literature here refers to the globalization of culture. It means that the cultural transformation from the former national and local culture to the global modernity refers to a new cultural phenomenon generated by the mutual influence and interaction of various national cultures.

Marx’s description on globalization likes a great prophecy. Arif Drick commented: “What Marx and Engels wrote in the middle of the 19th century may have seemed strange in their time, but it is an extremely apt description of our time” (cited in Huang, 2017, p.64). Indeed, in the middle of the 19th century, for example, China was still under the rule of the last feudal dynasty, Qing dynasty. The feudal society still struggled, the agricultural civilization dominated the whole country, and people’s ideology remained frozen and closed as the past thousands of years. The globalization of matter and spirit was a myth to China at that time, which few people believed. However, today, the globalization of modern culture is in full swing, and the cultural influence on traditional nations is declining, which has become one of the big concerns of scholars in various countries and regions, including China.

The most important originality of Marx’s modern society thoughts lies in his understanding and use of the concept of “modernity” in the sense of the development

and transformation of the mode of production. In Marx's view, modern society is distinguished from the previous "tribal ownership", "commune ownership and state ownership", "feudal or hierarchical ownership" societies by the following three main signs: the first is the transformation of the mode of production. Manual production was replaced by machine industrial production. Before the development of human history to modern society, no matter what stage of ownership society was in, the mode of production was dominated by manual labor. Secondly, with the emergence of large industrial production, human has developed from a regionally limited existence into a worldwide, historical existence. People's communication relations have undergone fundamental qualitative changes. Regional limitations are disappearing, "the former local and national self-sufficiency and isolation characterized State has been replaced by the intercourse and interdependence of all nationalities" (Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 276). Thirdly, the relationship between human and nature has undergone profound changes. The transformation of the mode of production in modern society and the drastic liberation of productive forces liberate people from the dependence on nature and land.

In short, according to Marx's theoretical logic, all the phenomena of modern society cannot be understood and explained without the modern mode of production. The fundamental direction of examining the contemporary social phenomena and social problems is the historical reflection on the modern mode of production. Therefore, to discuss the fate of traditional Chinese opera in modern society, it must be investigated in the context of China's modernization process.

3.2.4 Max Weber's modernity thoughts

Weber was well known as a staunch rationalist. He argued that one of the core factors of modernity was the rationality of the people who were opposed to the witchcraft or gods that pre-modern society held in common. Reason saved people from the rule of the overwhelming god and "disenchanted the world" (Weber, 1987, p. 142). Human

society re-established rules by virtue of rational thinking and intellectualization, and People's daily life was totally dependent on rational science.

As Habermas, the contemporary German philosopher commented: "Rationality is one of the threads that we can use to construct all of Weber's theory theories" (Habermas, 2004, p.151). In Weber's modern theory, tradition is the antithesis of rationality. Tradition is the essential characteristic of pre-modern society, while rationality is the fundamental factor of modernity. Along this point, Weber in his book "*Religion in China: Confucianism and Taoism*" pointed out that the fundamental reason why China had not embarked on the capitalist road like the West was that Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism and Taoism, lacked a spirit of transcendence and innovation to the present society (cited in Huang, 2017, p.44).

Anthony Giddens, a contemporary British sociologist, interpreted modernity as a form of social organization. He argued that "in terms of its extension, they (modernity) establish social connections across the world; in terms of its connotation, they (modernity) are changing the most familiar and the most personal field of our daily life" (Giddens, 2000, p. 5).

According to Weber and Giddens, China, which has entered the modern society, is bound to break with tradition as much as possible in terms of politics, economy, and culture.

3.2.5 Overview of the modernity theory

Comparing the thoughts of these western thinkers from the 19th century to the 20th century about modern society, it can be found that there are some similarities. Although Karl Marx and Max Weber sharply criticized the disadvantages of capitalism produced by modernity, they also affirmed its historical contribution to the development of human society in varying degrees. It has pulled human history out of

the long, dark reign of the medieval gods and freed the productive forces of society to the fullest. It broke the solidification and stagnation of traditional society, destroyed the stillness of farming culture, and pushed mankind onto the road of modernization. But, on the other hand, as modern capitalism became more and more powerful, everything solid was destroyed, along with simple beliefs, value systems and traditional culture. Finally, modern people were alienated and dehumanized in some sense.

Although these scholars observed modern society and explained modernity from different angles, they reached important consensus on the binary opposition between modern spirit and tradition. From this point of view, the traditional opera, which gave birth to and formed in the traditional society, is bound to fall from its former pedestal in the process of the development of China's modern society. It can be said that the modern thoughts of Western scholars provide a convincing theoretical fulcrum to explain the overall decline of traditional Chinese opera.

3.3 Social and Cultural Changes in Rural Modernization Process of China

Historically, the main stage of traditional Chinese opera was the rural area. Especially in the past few hundred years, the maturity and prosperity of local operas are closely related to the nourishment of rural culture. Therefore, to discuss the situation and future of traditional opera in modern society, we must pay attention to rural area. Of course, culture and art cannot exist in isolation from the social environment. To investigate the development and change of traditional opera in rural areas, it is necessary to make clear what modernization process China's rural areas have experienced and are experiencing.

Most researchers believe that China's modernization began in 1840 AD and roughly experienced three stages: 1840-1948 AD, 1949-1978 AD, and 1979 to the present.

The first stage is not directly related to the subject of this study. Therefore, the modernization process of the last two stages is mainly reviewed.

3.3.1 National policy on rural areas

In the view of scholar Fei Xiaotong, traditional Chinese agricultural society was basically autonomous and less constrained by state policies at the political and legal level. Therefore, he proposed concepts of “rule by rites” and “no litigation” to summarize one of the characteristics of traditional agricultural society in China (Fei, 2007, p. 63). Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, a series of macro policies and laws have been promulgated by central government to meet the phased requirements of modernization and to address rural, agricultural and peasant issues. The “rule by rites” and the autonomy system of traditional rural society based on blood relations and acquaintance relationship has been replaced by modern policies and laws.

Along the time clue, the government’s macro rural policies could be divided into three stages since the establishment of PRC:

1. Before the reform and opening up (1949-1978)

As table 3.1, the main contents of rural policy at this stage were land reform and people’s commune movement, which aimed to nationalize land, carry out collective agriculture and rural social life with commune as the basic unit, and complete the socialist transformation of agriculture and rural areas.

Table 3.1 The main documents about agriculture and rural area issued by Central government in 1950s¹³

Number	Name	Issue time
1	The Land Reform Law of Chinese People	June 30, 1950
2	Resolution on the Development of Agricultural Production Cooperatives	1953
3	Suggestions on the proper incorporation of small agricultural cooperatives into larger societies	March 1958
4	Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Establishment of People's Communes in Rural Areas	August 1958

After 30 years of practice, the rural areas of the country have basically become people's communes. However, in the process of carrying out the people's commune movement, a series of problems, such as exaggerated style and Great Leap Forward, appeared because of the eagerness for success, making agricultural production stagnated for a long time. After the start of the "Cultural Revolution", almost all fields of society, including agriculture, experienced a decade of stagnation or even regression, which aggravated the poverty of farmers and put rural modernization into a difficult situation.

2. The first five years of reform and opening up (1979-1984)

Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held in 1978, China has gradually implemented the basic policy of reform and opening up. From 1979 to 1984, it enacted several decrees, including the "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Issues Concerning Accelerating Agricultural Development", "the Notice on the Establishment of Township Governments by Separating Government and Commune Governments", and "the Notice on Rural Work in 1984", and put forward that "We must revise and correct erroneous policies that are not conducive to developing farmers' enthusiasm of

¹³These documents are all from *Selected Documents of the CPC Central Committee*, published by the CPC Central Party College Press in 1992.

production and agricultural productivity”¹⁴. Then, the Government formulated and implemented a series of policies to adjust agricultural development, promote rural economic reform and increase farmers’ production and income.

The rural policy in the new period of reform and opening up with the household contract responsibility system as the main body has been widely and effectively carried out in rural areas, and the basic operation mode of agricultural development has been established.

3. Period of rural market economy reform and development (1985-2000)

Relying on the positive effect of the rural policy of household contract responsibility system, agricultural productivity has been greatly liberated and farmers’ incomes have increased significantly. But at the same time, rural areas’ development faced the “ceiling” effect, which is in need of new ideas and policies to break through. Between 1985 and 1992, the Communist Party of China formulated and implemented a series of rural policies of marketization.

In 1985, the “No. 1 documents”¹⁵ of the central committee of the Communist Party of China introduced 10 policies to further activate rural economy, and in 1987, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee issued the Notice of Deepening Rural Reform¹⁶, making it clear that the agricultural planning system already cannot adapt to the current rural economy and the development of the society, and thus should be gradually banned, while rural commodity economy should be developed. Besides, it is necessary to establish and perfect the marketing mechanism of agricultural products corresponding to rural areas, and formally begin to explore the commercialization and

¹⁴ These documents are all from *the Selected Important Documents since the Third Plenary Session of the CPC Central Committee*, published by People's Publishing House in 1985.

¹⁵ The source of this document is *Selected Important Documents on Agriculture and Rural Work in the New Period*, published by the Central Documentation Press in 1992.

¹⁶ The source of this document is *Selected Important Documents on Agriculture and Rural Work in the New Period*, published by the Central Documentation Press in 1992.

marketization of rural economy.

At the Eighth Plenary Session of the 13th CPC Central Committee in 1991, “the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Further Strengthening Agriculture and Rural Work”¹⁷ was adopted. This document affirms the achievements of rural economic reform in the past ten years, summarizes the experience and lessons of the formulation and implementation of rural policies, designs the goals and tasks of rural work thereafter, and for the first time proposes to build “a new countryside with Chinese socialist characteristics” as the goal of rural reform.

AD 1992 is considered an important turning point since China’s reform and opening up. Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour Speech and the convening of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China confirmed that the development of the socialist market economy system has become the main goal of economic system reform. During this period, China’s rural township enterprises developed vigorously and the agricultural economy showed a prosperous scene.

In January 1996, the CPC Central Committee and The State Council issued “the Major Tasks, Policies and Measures on Rural Work During the Ninth Five-Year Plan Period and This Year”(Wang, 2016), and in January 2001, the CPC Central Committee and The State Council issued “the Opinions on Doing a Good Job in Agricultural and Rural area in 2001”(Wang, 2016).

In the aspect of rural industrial structure adjustment, relying on the development of township enterprises was the key to solve the problem of rural surplus labor force, the construction of small towns was proposed for the first time as well. In February 1993, The State Council issued “the Decision on Accelerating the Development of Township Enterprises in the Central and Western Regions”, which emphasized that the

¹⁷ The source of this document is *Selected Important Documents on Agriculture and Rural Work in the New Period*, published by the Central Documentation Press in 1992.

development of township enterprises is of greater significance to the development and the rural economic reform in the central and western regions. In 2000 AD, Opinions on Promoting the Healthy Development of Small Towns pointed out that only the development of small towns could gradually alleviate various rural problems since the reform and opening up, and the development of small towns was regarded as an important topic and task for a long time (Wang, 2016).

4. New era of comprehensive rural reform in the 21st century (2000-2021)

Entering the new century, China's reform and opening up has been carried out for 20 years. While the achievements have been made, the problems are also quite prominent, among which the most serious problem is the serious imbalance of urban-rural dual economic development. Therefore, the rural policy of the Communist Party of China in this stage took sharing of reform achievements between urban and rural areas and overall planning of urban and rural development as the basic direction, and started a new round of comprehensive rural reform centering on the key reform links and central tasks, such as rural tax and fee reform and the construction of a new socialist countryside.

In 2000, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and The State Council issued "the Notice on Pilot Work of Rural Tax and Fee Reform"(Wang, 2016), marking the official launch of the tax and fee reform, which opened up a new direction for the subsequent rural policy. In August 2002, "the Rural Land Contract Law" was passed, marking the legalization transition of rural land contract issues. In 2004, China carried out a pilot reform to exempt agricultural tax in Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces. On January 1, 2006, the agricultural tax was completely abolished in China, ending the agricultural tax system that had lasted more than 2,000 years.

In 2006, The State Council issued "the Several Opinions on Solving the Problem of Migrant Workers in cities" (Wang, 2016), aiming at solving the increasingly

prominent problem of migrant workers in cities. It also put forward the guiding ideology and basic principles for properly solving the problems of migrant workers, and proposed specific guidelines for solving the problems of low wages and arrears of migrant workers, and the protection of migrant workers' labor rights and interests, as well as the employment services and skills training of migrant workers.

During this period, the household registration system, which had bound farmers for half a century, was liberalized year by year, and discrimination against rural migrant workers were gradually eliminated.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the central government has attached great importance to the issue of agriculture, rural areas and farmers. The report to the 18th National Congress of the CPC states that “solving the problems of agriculture, rural areas and farmers is the top priority in the work of the whole Party”, and makes it clear that “the integration of urban and rural development is the fundamental way to solve the problems of agriculture, rural areas and farmers”¹⁸. The four “No. 1 documents”¹⁹ successively issued by the Central Government from 2013 to 2016 were all closely related to the development of modern agriculture, and put the management of ecological, cultural, and environmental issues brought about by rural modernization on an important agenda.

Overall, since the founding of the rural modernization reform mobilized the enthusiasm of farmers, farmers became the subject of production and operation, which truly solved the problem of food and clothing of all Chinese people, achieved the great goal of eliminate poverty in rural areas, greatly increased the living standards of farmers, agriculture, and rural areas to accelerate the transformation to modernization. However, at the same time, rural problems such as left-behind

¹⁸ The full text of the document is available on the official website of the Party School of the CPC Central Committee. <https://www.ccps.gov.cn/ggfw/wjxz/xywj/>

¹⁹ The full text of the document is available on the official website of the Party School of the CPC Central Committee. <https://www.ccps.gov.cn/ggfw/wjxz/xywj/>

children, empty nesters, “hollow villages” and “cultural deserts” have become increasingly prominent.

3.3.2 Overview of studies on China’s rural modernization process

Since the modern transformation of traditional Chinese society, especially since China carried out the national policy of reform and opening-up, the contradiction of urban and rural development imbalance appears more and more prominent, issues relating to agriculture, rural areas and farmers become worse. These problems called the attention of many scholars to China’s modernization and rural social transformation, the characteristics of traditional rural culture, the changes of the rural culture and so on. To this end, many related theories and propositions have been developed.

In his book *“Sociology of Development and China’s Modernization”*, Tong Xing examined the concept of development from the perspectives of economy, politics, and culture, summarized the historical experience and lessons of China’s modernization process and explored the conditions, roads, and models of China’s modernization (Tong, 2005).

Lu Xueyi’s “Research on the Road to China’s Rural Modernization” conducted in-depth and detailed research and exploration on the history, reality, and future of China’s rural modernization from the aspects of the transformation of traditional agricultural society, the evolution of planned economy and dual social structure, the turnaround, process, and goals of China’s rural modernization (Lu, 1995).

Studies on the characteristics of rural culture mainly represented by Fei Xiaotong’s *“Rural China”* and Wang Huning’s *“Contemporary Chinese Rural Family Culture: An Exploration of the Modernization of Chinese Society”*. Fei put forward the famous theory of “difference pattern”, which revealed the principle of rural culture that the traditional Chinese culture was individual-centered and developed to the outside of

ethical relations, interpersonal relations, and social communication mode (Fei, 2007, p. 28). Wang Huning defined traditional rural culture as village family culture, and further summarized the main characteristics of the transition of village family culture to modern society: “the form of group structure changed from consanguinity to community; the way of living changed from settlement to mobility; the organizational structure changed from hierarchy to equality; the means of regulation changed from etiquette to law; the economic form changed from agriculture to industry; the resource channel changed from self-sufficiency to transaction; the way of life changed from closure to openness; the historical trend changed from stability to innovation” (Wang, 1991, p. 152).

As for the changes of rural culture, scholar Li Youmei summarized the changes of rural culture in the process of modernization as “three stages” in the book *“Transformation of Rural Culture in the Process of Rapid Urbanization”*. The first is the rapid rise of a large number of township enterprises in the 1980s with the implementation of the reform and opening policy. More than 100 million peasants left the land, transforming their careers from farmers to workers without leaving their hometowns, and modern industrial civilization was rapidly occupying the countryside. The second stage started from the late 1980s and early 1990s, a large number of farmers went to work in city, forming a new social class - migrant workers. During this period, more than 100 million farmers not only left the land, but also realized the transformation of their professional identity, and left their hometown, leaving the rural civilization in the way of life, and directly subjected to the baptism of “urban civilization”. The third is the nationwide urbanization construction that began in the mid-1990s and reached its climax in the early 21st century. Large-scale land expropriation and demolition made tens of millions of farmers have not left their hometown, but the physical sense of the countryside has ceased to exist. Industrialization and urbanization not only changed their professional identity, but also made them become “urban population” in the household registration system (Li, 2007, p. 20-24).

In his research “Predicament and Reflection of Rural Cultural Construction in the Process of Urbanization”, Ding Yongxiang pointed out that in the process of urbanization, the cultural ecology of China’s rural areas has undergone great changes, and the spiritual life of farmers has faced difficulties. To solve this problem, Chinese people should seek resources from traditional folk culture and pay attention to the role of nationality, communication, and inheritance of traditional folk culture (Ding, 2008, p. 212).

3.4 Summary

This chapter reviewed the theories from two relevant fields, which are western modernity and rural modernization process of China. Section 2.2 analyzed the modernity theories of western thinkers including Baudelaire, Berman, Marx, and Weber, and connected them with the theme of this study from the aesthetic, social and historical perspectives, so as to find the theoretical support to explain the fate of traditional Chinese opera in modern society. Section 2.3 consists of two parts, which are the review of the Chinese government’s rural policy and the overview of representative studies on the process of China’s rural modernization. Based on the first three chapters, the next chapter will explain the research methods and process of this study in detail.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 looks at the research methodologies employed in this study. This part is a brief introduction on the structure of this chapter. Section 4.2 describes the theoretical perspectives of this study. Section 4.3 does an explanation on the design of the research methods. Section 4.4 explains the reasons for choosing fieldwork sites. Methods and procedures for data collection, including primary and secondary data, are described in detail in section 4.5. Section 4.6 tries to make a brief introduction on the data analysis process. The next part presents the obstacles and challenges encountered in the process of data collection and analysis. At last, this chapter concludes with a short summary.

4.2 Theoretical Perspectives Adopted in This Research

In order to achieve the objectives, from the theoretical perspective, this research comprehensively adopts the multi-disciplinary theories from the perspectives of sociology, history, theatre and media.

The occurrence and evolution of any culture is in a certain social environment and closely related to the political, economic, religious and other conditions of a particular society. A typical example is traditional Chinese opera. The basic objective of this study is to investigate the existing status and the evolution of traditional Chinese opera in rural areas in the past 40 years. In order to realize this goal, it is necessary to put traditional opera into the modernization process of China's rural society. Therefore, it is essential to study and describe the changes of Chinese society,

especially the rural society. In this process, important social change research and modernity theory research methods and results in sociology will be adopted.

As a kind of drama art, traditional Chinese opera has a clear dramatic attribute and distinct characteristics of traditional Chinese culture. When discussing its evolution in rural areas and its inheritance, we must clarify several questions at first: what has changed? which part has not changed? what is its core cultural value? what are characteristics of opera we need to inherit and protect? To answer these questions, in-depth desk research was conducted on the opera ontology. The analysis of the formation, development, literary content and aesthetic features of traditional Chinese opera requires the research methods and perspectives of theatre and history.

Media theory and thoughts play an important role in the investigation and study of the three case sites. In the field work of Xuchang County, it is found that various media forms coexist for the transmission of local opera. Open stage performance is a traditional form of its transmission for hundreds years, which still remains in local villages. Meanwhile, up to 47.3 % of the respondents enjoy watching local operas on TV. ²⁰ Some TV opera programs such as “Liyuan Chun” and “Opera Stage” are very popular there. However, the younger generation of Internet natives is more inclined to enjoy and share opera culture through online video platforms such as Tencent, Youku and social networking APP such as TikTok and WeChat.²¹ Diversified modes of communication, especially the marriage with modern mass media means, are one of the important factors for the revival of traditional opera in rural areas like Xuchang County.

4.3 Research Method

²⁰ The data is from the questionnaire survey conducted by the author, more details can be seen in figure 4.4.

²¹ The data is from the questionnaire survey conducted by the author, more details can be seen in figure 4.4.

This research is a nested case study with dual structure. Case study was considered as an effective method in social research. Babbie calls it an idiographic examination of a single individual, group, or society. He further states that its chief purpose is description, although attempts at explanation are also acceptable (Babbie, 1998, p.282). Among the hundreds types of traditional Chinese operas, Henan opera²² is selected as the most popular case, and in the vast rural areas of Henan province two cases sites (Xun County and Xuchang County) are selected to conduct the investigation. Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 shows the location of Henan Province in China and the specific location of the two study sites in Henan Province, respectively.



Figure 4.1 Location of Henan Province in China

Source: made by the author based on Map of China

²² Henan Opera refers to the general name of local opera varieties formed and mainly popular in Henan Province, including Yuju opera, Quju opera, Yuediao Opera, DaPingdiao Opera and other more than 20 kinds of small types.

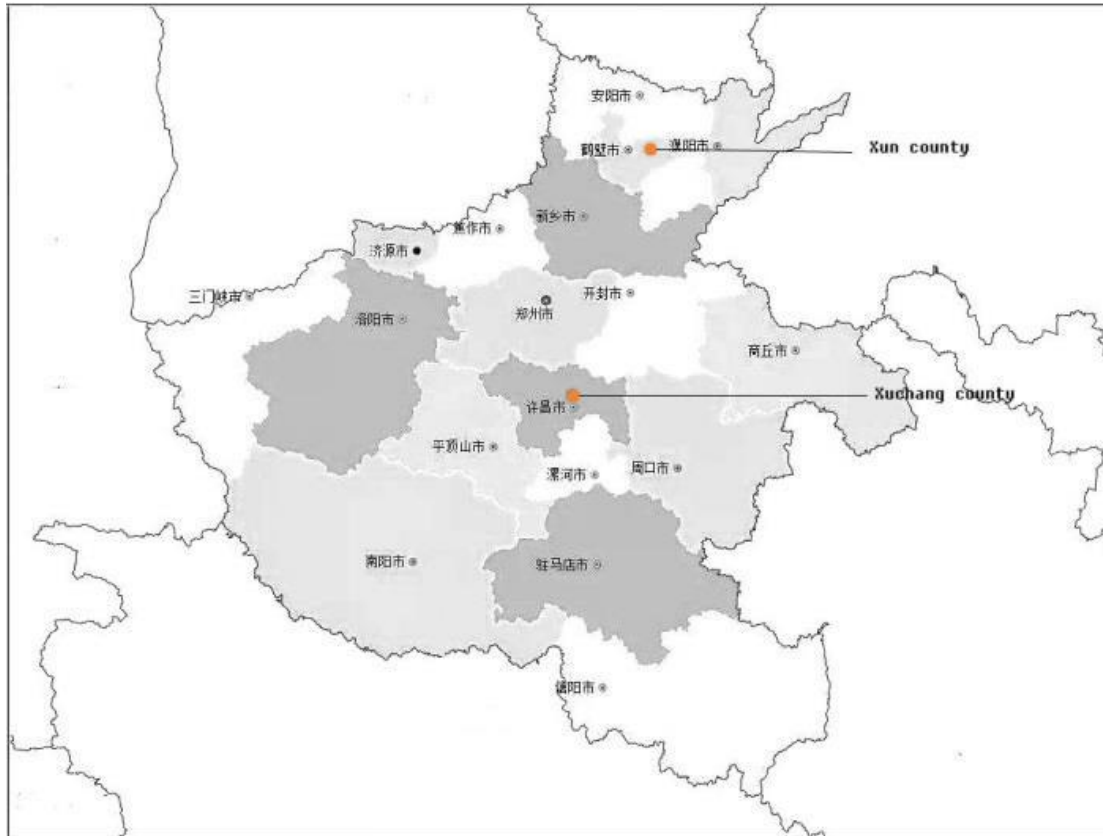


Figure 4.2 Location of the two study sites in Henan Province

Source: made by the author based on Map of Henan Province

Traditional opera is a general term for more than 360 kinds of drama arts developed in ancient Chinese society. These kinds of drama have the same root, which is the Zaju art developed in the Yuan Dynasty. It was been considered that had been conceived in the ritual acts of people in the primitive age. After thousands of years of development, it especially absorbed the singing and dancing art of the Tang Dynasty and the rap and acrobatic art of the Song Dynasty, and was finally born in the Yuan Dynasty in the 13th century. About in the 16th to 19th centuries, this ancient dramatic art began to diverge. It was integrated with the folk culture of different regions and nationalities in China, gradually forming a diversified family of dramatic arts with distinct characteristics. Originating from the same source, these 360 kinds of dramas share the most important feature of traditional opera: using singing and dancing to tell stories. So it is collectively called traditional Chinese opera.

Considering these factors, this study takes traditional Chinese opera as a whole, and selects Henan Opera, one of its five types as a representative to discuss the current situation issues and inheritance of traditional opera in rural China. There are several reasons for choosing Henan Opera. First of all, Henan opera is one of the five major operas in China. Dramatic reformer Ma zichen even argued that Henan Opera was the largest type of regional opera in China in the 20th century (Ma, 1995). Among the program list of the world's most influential CCTV Spring Festival Gala, one is a series of Chinese opera pieces featuring all five major types (sometimes Kunqu opera included), which is an almost fixed program. Henan Opera performance must be among them. This example can prove the position of Henan Opera among traditional opera types. He Baolin, a researcher of Henan Provincial Research Institute of Culture and Arts states that in its most prosperous period, Henan opera spread to more than 20 Provinces (regions and cities) including Taiwan. There were professional troupes and fixed audience groups of Henan opera around China. Even today when traditional opera is not flourishing, there are still 167 professional Henan Opera troupes and more than 1,300 amateur Henan Opera troupes in 13 Provinces and cities. In this sense, no other local opera in the country can match it (He, 2017) . Secondly, located in the Central Plains of China, Henan Province is the second most populous Province in China. It is a major transportation hub in China. Thirdly, since ancient times, Henan region has been dominated by agricultural economy, and rural areas account for a large proportion in terms of population proportion, industrial structure and cultural characteristics. At the same time, due to such geographical advantages, the migration of Henan people in different parts of China has been very prominent since ancient times, and the culture of Henan Opera has been spread widely by the migrations. Fifthly, over its 600 years of development, Henan opera has been relatively stable from its form to its aesthetic features, and it has retained what it was initially. In the last, the researcher grew up in Henan Province, and I have been very familiar with Henan Opera, with deep feelings and a strong desire to study and perform it. Based on the above six reasons, this study chooses Henan Opera as the representative of traditional opera to explore.

After determining the external framework, this study proposes the following five research questions based on the main objective of exploring the survival status and inheritance of traditional Chinese opera in rural areas, so as to make the outline of the story clearly visible:

1. Is the decline of the opera in modern China inevitable?
2. What are the factors affecting the decline of traditional Chinese opera?
3. What are the manifestations of the revival of local opera in rural areas of Henan province?
4. What are the factors affecting the revival of traditional Chinese opera?
5. What influence does the revival have on the inheritance and the development of traditional opera?

The first two questions build a foundation for the study. The answers to them provide an analytical basis for the third and fourth questions. The results of the analysis guide the thinking and discussion of the last question.

4.4 Fieldwork Sites and the Reason for Selection

The criteria for choosing fieldwork sites of this study are as follows:

1. The sites are part of the main popular region of Henan opera, and the main object of this study.
2. The sites should be relatively dispersed in geographical location.
3. They are generally same in the degree of economic development and social modernization of the sites.
4. There are some impressive phenomena with traditional opera in the local area.

According above criteria, three sites were selected in Henan Province. They are Xun County and Xuchang County. Xun County, located in the north of Henan Province and affiliated to Hebi prefecture, covers an area of 966 square kilometers with 438 administrative villages and a total population of 713,000. It is a famous national historical and cultural town, the hometown of Chinese folk culture and art, and an advanced County in grain production²³. Xuchang County (renamed Xuchang Jianan, a district of Xuchang prefecture on February 5, 2017), located in the center of Henan Province, covers an area of 1,002 square kilometers and has a population of 800,000 and 457 administrative villages. It is an important export base of hair products processing, automobile transmission shaft production base, beancurd and bamboo production base. Xuchang County was awarded the title of “Hometown of Traditional Opera in Henan Province” by a culture department of Henan Province in 2018²⁴. The more particular reasons for choosing them will be explained one by one.

4.4.1 Xun County

The most important reason for the selecting of Xun County is due to its Ancient Temple Fair in the First Month of Lunar year. The great event has a well-known reputation as “the No.1 Ancient Temple Fair in North China”. It was originated in the 4th century and has been more than 1600 years of history. From the first day of the first lunar month to the second day of the second lunar month, the fair lasts for one month.²⁵ It is long-lasting and large-scale, maintaining the characteristics of the Ming and Qing dynasties and attracting millions of visitors from 20 Provinces and cities around China as well as from oversea. According to statistics from the local cultural tourism department, during the 2017 event, tens of thousands of tourists visit here every day from the surrounding areas, and there are more than 300,000 people per day

²³ The data is from Xun County government’s website: <http://www.Xun.gov.cn/zoujinXun/>

²⁴ The data is from Xuchang County government’s website: <http://www.jianan.gov.cn/jagk/walkIntoXC.html>

²⁵ The data is from the website of Xinhua News.
http://www.ha.xinhuanet.com/newsphoto/20170206/3642309_c.html

at the peak.²⁶ In 2014, the ancient temple fair in Xun County was included in the fourth batch of national intangible cultural heritage protection list. Canadian scholar Mr. Andrew once commented that “the temple fair in Xun County is China's carnival”(Han, 2018).

The ancient temple fair is a kind of combination of ancient traditional folk customs, folk religious and cultural activities. Every year on the 9th to 16th AD days of the lunar calendar, dozens of folk festive activity teams are organized from villages and towns to show on stilts, perform lion dances, dragon dances, land boat rides and acrobatics etc. It is also a concentration of business, conference and exhibition, tourism activities platform, which has a distinct regional and extensive participation, almost every administrative villages in the County involved. Traditional opera performance and cultural activities with strong opera elements take a very important part in the overall fair. It can be said that the traditional opera culture was strongly promoted and spread through the platform of this ancient temple fair in Xun County. More details on this are discussed in Chapter 7.

As a typical case, the ancient temple fair culture in Xun County provides a perfect sample for this study to investigate the existing status of traditional opera in rural areas and explore the main factors of the revival of traditional opera. It also contributes great value for the final discussion on the inheritance and protection of traditional opera culture.

4.4.2 Xuchang County

The outstanding cultural phenomena of traditional Chinese opera in Xuchang County are the main reason for attracting the author. The Duzhai Shuhui in Xuchang County is a grand gathering of traditional opera in the central plains culture with a long

²⁶ The data is from the website of Xinhua News.
http://www.ha.xinhuanet.com/newsphoto/20170206/3642309_c.html

history. It can be traced back to the alternation period of the Western Han Dynasty and the Eastern Han Dynasty, with a long history of about two thousand years. It is held every year on the 13th day of the first lunar month. Performers from all over the country come to Xuchang to take part in the cultural festival. It makes this ancient form of traditional folk culture to be well preserved. At the same time, the festival also provides an opportunity of communication and cultural fusion, and makes the local opera to be very inclusive. Therefore, traditional opera in Xuchang region has not only strong heritage, rich form, flourishing elements, but also healthy ecological conditions and the solid mass base. In 2018, it was designated as one of the first batch of “Hometown of Henan Opera” by Henan Provincial Department of Culture and Provincial Federation of Literature. In recent years, The “Xingyuan Chun” troupe set up by farmers of Xingyuanpu Village, Xuchang County has been very active. It has independently shot and produced opera films, created and performed original drama works, and attracted the attention and reports of several large media. Nearby Cao Wang Village is a well-known local base for producing opera costumes, makeup, hair, and props. These signals have shown that the industrialization of traditional Chinese opera in this area has obvious characteristics and the overall developing trend is very well.

In fact, the author got the same impression in the field interview during the Chinese Spring Festival holiday in 2019. The local cultural authority in charge of the cultural undertakings of traditional Chinese opera has very complete and detailed documents about traditional opera. There are a large number of private opera groups with orderly management, and traditional opera performances are very frequent. The researcher interviewed more than 30 local opera performers, troupe leaders, government officials and ordinary audiences. With the help of local artists and government, the author also obtained a mass of first-hand data including nearly 30 hours of videos, audio material and hundreds of pictures, as well as related statistics and census forms from the local cultural department and research institute. Through field investigation, the author has gained a thorough understanding of explicate and implicit phenomena and problems

with opera culture in Xuchang County, as well as its history and current problems. These intuitive feelings provide the basic information and motivation for this study.

The examination in Xuchang County provides a living case for this study to discuss the modern evolution and diversified modes of communication of traditional opera. It also helps to inspire the generation of suggestions on the inheritance and development strategies of traditional Chinese opera culture.

4.5 Data Collection Method

As a social field study caused by phenomena, data collection is of great importance in the methodological system. It determines whether researchers can have a complete grasp of the phenomenon, and whether the surface of the story can be fully mapped out. This step is the premise of analyzing the phenomena layer by layer and discovering the internal essence of things. Sufficient data and information is one of the key factors to ensure the accuracy of research results. In order to obtain enough data information, this study spent a lot of time to collect data including primary and secondary data.

Babbie noted that survey research is the most frequently used mode in social science. He evaluated survey research is “probably the best method” to the social researchers interested in collecting original data from a large population (Babbie, 1998, p.256). Thompson (1996) was more specific about the range of respondents. He argued that survey research usually only viewed a limited sample of people, frequently as low as 300 to a high of 800 or 1000 respondents in a major field study (cited in Babbie, 1998, p.257). There is a conceptual difference between the two scholars. Babbie's “survey research” is essentially a larger category of concepts. It includes questionnaires, interviews and telephone surveys. Instead, the latter focused more on a smaller category which is questionnaire survey. The author agrees with the former in this

paper. The methods and procedures used in the primary data collection of this study will be described as follows.

4.5.1 Questionnaire survey

Questionnaire survey is an effective method for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population (Babbie, 1998, p.256). In order to explore the status of traditional Chinese opera performance in rural areas and the degree of the rural residents' acceptance to the opera, the researcher designed a questionnaire survey. This questionnaire contains 17 questions, among which the first six questions focus on the acceptance level of the respondents on traditional opera, the seventh to the eleventh questions focus on the investigation of traditional opera performances in local village, and the next four questions focus on the transmission mode of traditional opera. In the end, two self-directed questions are designed, the main purpose of which is to understand the peasants' comprehensive impression on traditional opera and their cognition of the aesthetics.

In November 2018, 210 questionnaires were distributed by hand to families in Xingyuanpu Village of Xuchang County. In January 2019, 260 questionnaires were handed out to local villagers in Chengguan Town of Xun County by mail to a local township staff Mr. Jia. Finally, there were 207 and 243 valid samples recovered, respectively.

It should be noted that, considering the level of English proficiency of most rural residents in China (especially the elderly Chinese farmers, who are less educated and have very weak English reading and writing skills), the original version of questionnaire (Appendix 4.1) was made in Chinese, and this English version (Appendix 4.2) was translated by the author from the original version.

In order to investigate the attitude and understanding of young generation towards

traditional opera, another questionnaire survey with 12 questions was designed for college students. In it, six questions surveyed college students' fondness for opera and the frequency of watching opera performances, and the other six questions tested college students' knowledge of Henan traditional opera (Appendix 5.1). In September 2019, the researcher selected 1200 college students to carry out this online questionnaire survey, and obtained 1057 valid questionnaires. The students were from three colleges and universities in Henan Province, including Henan Vocational and Technical College, Zhengzhou University, and Zhengzhou Institute of Information Technology.

4.5.2 Interview

Babbie noted that compared with questionnaire survey, interview methods are “definitely more effective” for complicate studies (Babbie, 1998, p.271). During the field work of qualitative study, interactive interview is an important tool frequently adopted for data collection. Corbin and Morse noted that the purpose of unstructured interview is to encourage interviewees to share details about the particular phenomena with their unique memories and emotions (Corbin & Morse, 2010, p.17). Diccico-Bloom and Crabtree noted that unstructured interview is a good tool to foster views about individual experience and cognition on given issues (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In general, the questions in unstructured interviews are open and non-standardized, which are well suited to stimulating and facilitating interaction between interviewers and interviewees. Relatively, the questions in structured interview are usually closed and standardized, which is more suitable for the quantitative study but not for exploring complex phenomena (Bryman, 2017, p.212).

In this study, unstructured interview is mainly used. This study aims to investigate the current situation of traditional Chinese opera and explore the factors for the revival of the opera in rural areas. Experience and perspective from multiple dimensions, including actors, audiences, managers and government department, are essential to the

objective description of the whole story. When interviewees from different dimensions view the same thing from different perspectives, their expressions and experiences are bound to be different. It is very important to give them some free room of expression. Therefore, unstructured interview is more suitable for this study.

Who should be identified as the interviewees? Rudestam and Newton suggested that a phenomenological study usually identifies people who experienced the specific phenomenon (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p.109). According this principle, the performers and the audiences are the key persons who should be identified as interviewees. The occurrence of any cultural phenomena and cultural evolution is not isolated, it inevitably and closely tied to the local social environment at that time, therefore, to correctly understand and explain the current situation of the traditional opera culture in rural areas, must make the managers and chroniclers of local society involved. So the company organization of operators and relevant government staffs are also very necessary for telling the story.

How to select and get touch with these candidates? According to researcher's own conditions and specific circumstances, a core-periphery strategy is adopted. The governments at all levels in China have a cultural administration department. Its basic function is to formulate the overall strategy, plan and design for the development of science, culture and education, to formulate and promulgate major policies and regulations on science, culture and education, to guide, supervise and coordinate scientific research departments and teaching institutes in the effective implementation of the State plan for the development of science, culture and education, to carry out the reform of science, technology, culture and education step by step in an orderly manner under leadership, to develop scientific, technological, cultural and educational personnel and to examine, appoint and supervise leading personnel of their respective departments. According to the Several Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council regarding the Deepening of Reforms of the Cultural System ([2005] No. 14) and the Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on

Further Strengthening Rural Cultural Construction ([2005] No. 27), local governments should increase investment in rural cultural infrastructure construction, to develop the public cultural undertakings, continue to conduct cultural counterpart support activities, to improve the cultural assistance mechanism, to solve the lack of rural culture products and services, to enrich spiritual and cultural life, to improve rural community cultural facilities, multi-investment, rational distribution, integration of cultural resources, to improve the efficiency of use, and to strengthen the protection of cultural heritages and support fine traditional Chinese cultures.²⁷ Along this line of the relationship between government and practitioners, the researcher firstly got touch with the relevant official staffs working in the cultural department of local government. Through their introduction, the researcher further identified and contacted opera troupes and individuals, fans and farmers with special significance.

Rural China is a typical society of acquaintances. Sometimes, with the help of one respondent, other more important respondents are quickly identified. On the whole, during the investigation of the two case sites, a total of 47 people were interviewed, including traditional opera actors, representative farmers (including opera fans and ordinary audiences), leaders of opera companies and private institutes, and officials of government. A large number of recorded and written materials were obtained, which strongly promoted the advancement of this research. The details are as follows:

Up to now, there were four rounds of interviews conducted in this study. The first round of field study was conducted in Xun County and Xuchang County in November 16-24, 2018. A total of 21 people were interviewed in Xun County and 19 people in Xuchang County. The second round of field work was conducted in the Chinese Spring Festival period in 2019, exactly from February 10-13, 2019. A total of 7 people were accepted the interviews in Xun County. With the help of a tutor in my undergraduate age, the author was able to conduct the third round of interviews with

²⁷ The full texts are available at the central government's official website, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2011-10/25/content_1978202.htm

Mr. Geng, a famous Henan opera performing artist and composer, and Mr. He, a researcher of Henan Academy of Arts in December 2019 (Table 4.7). The researcher had planned to go back to Xun County and Xuchang County during the 2020 Spring Festival holiday. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak happened during this period, and the Chinese government took strict measures for the defense, including banning all gatherings and non-essential personnel movements. The research plan had to be shelved. However, the author was curious about the survival of opera performers and the troupe in the difficult period with the suspension of opera performances, so the author conducted three online phone interviews with three opera practitioners through the social platform WeChat (Table 4.8).

Next to this paragraph, the author uses 8 tables to present the basic information of the 8 interviews in these four rounds. It should be noted that in order to conduct the interview smoothly, the respondents were informed of the relevant basic information, such as research topic, data usage, interview content and rights and obligations of the participants. The privacy rights of the respondents were carefully protected in this study. The names of all respondents were replaced by the initials of their family names, and all the collected materials have been carefully kept.

Table 4.1 Traditional Opera practitioners interviewee list in Xun County (Interview 1)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
1	Du	54	Male	Donghu village ,Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	Leader of Haiyan Yu opera troupe
2	Sun	59	Male	Donghu village ,Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	Actor of Haiyan Yu opera troupe
3	Wang	46	Male	Donghu village ,Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	Actor of Haiyan Yu opera troupe
4	Zhang	22	Female	Donghu village ,Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	Actor of Haiyan Yu opera troupe
5	He	43	Female	Donghu village ,Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	Actor of Haiyan Yu opera troupe
6	Zhang	54	Male	Donghu village ,Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	Actor of Haiyan Yu opera troupe

Table 4.2 Peasant audience interviewee list in Xun County (Interview 2)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
1	Xie	57	Male	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
2	Sun	69	Male	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
3	Zhang	47	Female	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	
4	Huang	26	Female	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	
5	Zhang	52	Female	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 17th, 2018	
2	Sun	69	Male	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
1	Xie	57	Male	Chengguan Town, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
6	Wang	71	Male	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
7	Zhou	68	Male	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
8	Wang	50	Female	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
9	Liu	53	Male	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
10	Wang	29	Female	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
11	Wang	13	Female	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
12	Zhang	64	Male	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
13	Wang	6	Male	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
14	Zhang	40	Female	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
15	Wang	33	Male	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	
16	Zhang	10	Female	Wangzhuang Village, Xun County	Nov. 18th, 2018	

Table 4.3 Traditional Opera practitioners interviewee list in Xuchang County (Interview 3)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
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1	Xu	55	Male	Xuchang city	Nov. 20th, 2018	a TV opera program director
2	Lu	66	Male	Xuchang city	Nov. 20th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
3	Zhang	41	Male	Xuchang city	Nov. 20th, 2018	Opera actor
4	Liu	19	Female	Xuchang city	Nov. 20th, 2018	Opera actor
5	Zhao	68	Male	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader
6	Wang	46	Male	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	a local Folk Art Society's leader

Table 4.4 Peasant audience interviewee list in Xuchang County (Interview 4)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
1	Zhao	64	Male	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
2	Wang	72	Female	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
3	Zhang	55	Male	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
4	Cao	63	Male	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
5	Cao	63	Male	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
6	Wang	55	Female	Xingyuanpu village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
7	Guo	46	Female	Caowang village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
8	Huang	47	Female	Caowang village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
9	Cao	40	Female	Caowang village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
10	Cao	70	Male	Caowang village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
11	Cao	21	Male	Caowang village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	
12	Wang	23	Male	Caowang village ,Xuchang County	Nov. 21th, 2018	

Table 4.5 Traditional Opera practitioners interviewee list in Xun County (Interview 5)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
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1	Zhang	40	Male	Huanghe Yuju Opera Troupe	Feb. 11th, 2019	local opera troupe owner
2	zhang	40	Female	Huanghe Yuju Opera Troupe	Feb. 11th, 2019	local opera troupe Director
3	Niu	59	Male	Huanghe Yuju Opera Troupe	Feb. 11th, 2019	Opera actor
4	Liu	19	Female	Huanghe Yuju Opera Troupe	Feb. 11th, 2019	Opera actor
5	zhang	43	Male	Huanghe Yuju Opera Troupe	Feb. 11th, 2019	Opera actor
6	Wang	44	Female	Huanghe Yuju Opera Troupe	Feb. 11th, 2019	Opera actor

Table 4.6 Government staff interviewee list in the three study sites (Interview 6)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
1	Shen	55	Male	Xun County	Nov. 16th, 2018	
2	Zhang	40	Male	Xuchang County	Nov. 20th, 2018	
3	Jia	29	Male	Xun County	Feb. 10th, 2019	

Table 4.7 Henan Opera scholar interviewee list (Interview 7)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
1	Geng	80	Male	Zhengzhou	Dec. 22th, 2019	
2	He	45	Male	Zhengzhou	Nov. 24th, 2019	

Table 4.8 Online interviewee list (Interview 8)

Interviewee Number	Interviewee First Name	Age	Gender	Interview Venue	Interview Date	Remark
1	Zhang	40	Male	Online, WeChat phone	April 24th, 2020	local opera troupe owner
2	Liu	19	Female	Online, WeChat phone	April 24th, 2020	Opera actor
3	Zhang	40	Female	Online, WeChat phone	June 12th, 2020	local opera troupe owner

4.5.3 Participant observation

Breyman stated that participant observation is a basic way for a qualitative study. This method requires researchers to immerse themselves in the selected sites to observe and experience the reality (Breyman, 2017, p.260). The author's hometown is in Xuchang County, the fourth day of the first lunar month is the traditional fair in the village, three consecutive days and three nights of opera performance is a custom. Every Spring Festival, The author return there to feel the charm of traditional opera, experience the rural carnival, and observe the changes of the countryside and farmers. From November 16 to 18, 2018, the author conducted survey in Xingyuanpu Village, Xuchang County, visited cultural squares and cultural stations in the village, and watched the daily rehearsal of the troupe Xingyuanchun, which was set up spontaneously by local villagers. During the Chinese Spring Festival holidays from 2017 to 2019, the author observed and understood another site, the ancient temple fair in Xun County, for obtaining intuitive impressions and taking a large number of pictures. The information collected from these immersive observations plays two important roles in the research. One is to help researcher better understand the research objects and phenomena through field visits and observation. The other important purpose is to verify the observed relevant information with the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews to make the data more comprehensive and accurate.

4.5.4 Secondary data collection

In this study, the secondary data mainly involves some relatively fixed basic information, such as the number and distribution of opera types, geographical location, area, population of case points, and policy documents issued by relevant government departments. This information is accessed mainly via the official websites of local government departments at all levels, and some indirectly obtained from the published results of other researchers. Babbie evaluated that secondary analysis is cheaper and

faster than doing original survey (Babbie, 1998, p.275). The author does realize the convenience and benefits of secondary data. In addition to useful information, professional skills and methods can be drawn from the research results of others to build and optimize my own research.

4.6 Analysis Method

The next three chapters cover the research analysis in detail. The analysis methods and procedures are briefly described here.

Through the field work, the researcher found that there were both similarities and differences between the case sites. The ecological environment of traditional opera in the two counties is basically the same, and so is the current situation of the opera. However, the specific forms of opera revival are different, and the specific factors leading to the revival also are obvious uniqueness. In this case, the author has carried on the longitudinal individual analysis respectively, and the horizontal correlative, comparative analysis on the two cases.

As shown in Figure 4.3, in analytical steps, the researcher firstly manages and categorizes all data and information to three categories, according to two main research goals, the present situation of traditional opera, revival phenomenon and the influence factors. It is worth mentioning that some information corresponds to more than one category, for example, the behavior of a peasant who is a big fan of traditional opera is not only a part of the specific phenomenon of local opera's revival, but also can be analyzed from its behavior motivation to a certain factor influencing the phenomenon. After this classification analysis, the preliminary results corresponding to the two objectives can be obtained, and then to analyze the overlap and correlation between the preliminary results, in addition to the second hand data, finally the author could complete descriptions of the present situation of traditional

opera in rural areas, find out the main factors of the revival phenomena. On this basis, the discussion and suggestions on the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera are made in chapter 8.

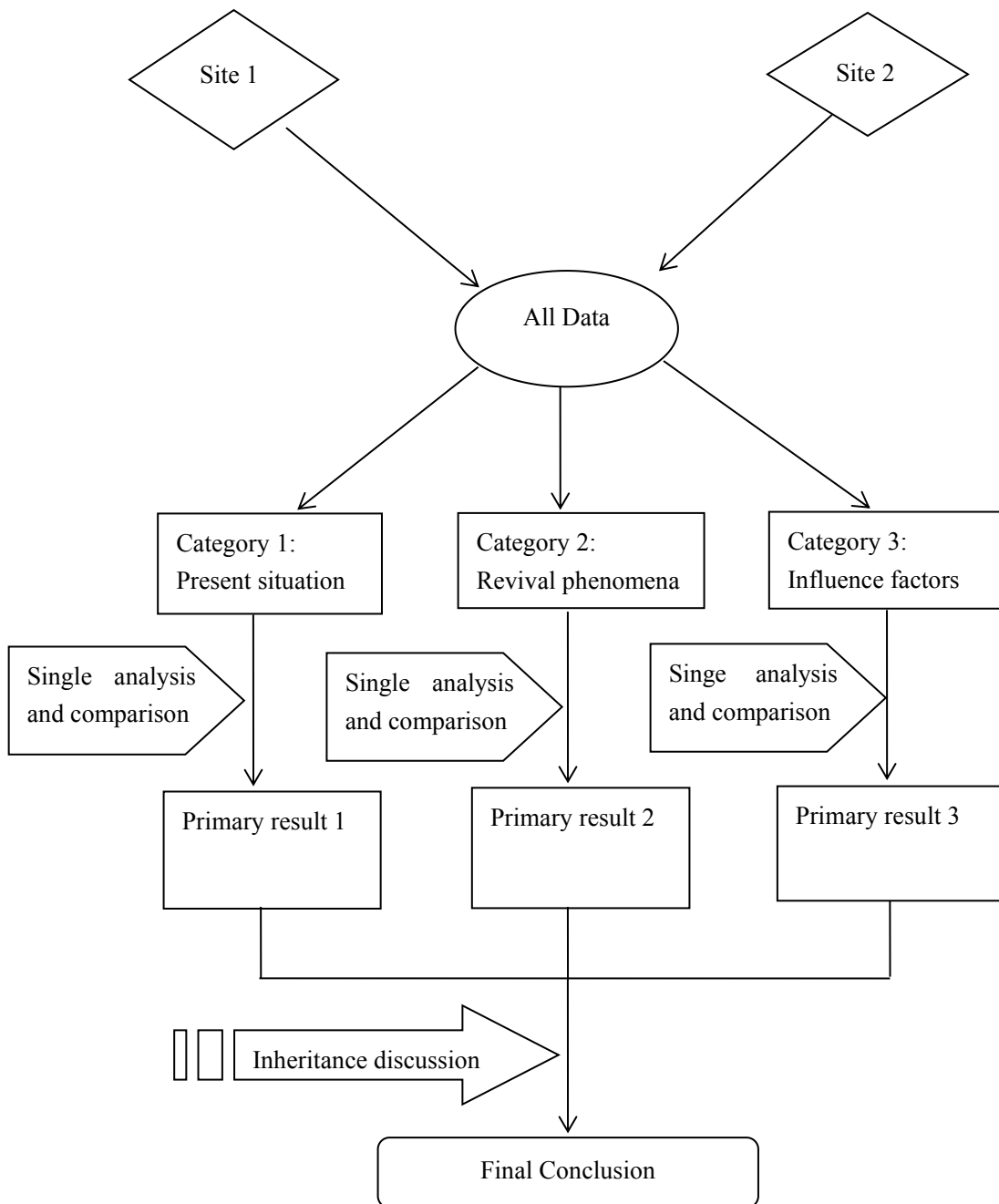


Figure 4.3 Flow chart of the data analysis

Source: made by the author

4.7 Challenges in Data Collection

Change of traditional culture is a complex issue, so the fieldwork lasted for a long time. The researcher encountered challenges throughout the data collection. Some obstacles have been solved through efforts, while others are temporarily insurmountable. Some of the challenges have been integrated into the study properly, while others point the way for future research.

Many materials, especially those about traditional Chinese culture and the ontology of traditional opera, were written in classical Chinese, which leads to the existence of two challenges. The first challenge is that the author must have a correct understanding of classical Chinese, and the second is that the author must accurately express its meaning in English. In order to overcome the obstacles, the author read a lot of classical Chinese materials to improve the understanding of classical Chinese. In addition, the relevant professional colleagues gave me a lot of help to resolve some specific issues which could not be solved by the author alone.

The second challenge is related to the peak season of the theatrical performances in rural areas. To keep pace with traditional peasant's working schedule, the opera performances in rural China usually take place between the Spring Festival and the third month of the lunar calendar. However, the free time of the author during this period was very limited, so the two rounds of main field investigation have to be finished within a week. The author cannot stay at the case sites for longer time to collect more information. The author's self-assessment may lead to insufficient research on the transmission mode and the inheritance of traditional opera. The question is open to further study.

The third difficulty arose from external circumstances. During the Spring Festival holiday in 2020, the author planned to visit Xun County and Xingyuanpu village Xuchang County again for further investigation and interviews. Unfortunately, since

the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the government has taken strict measures for the defense, including banning all gatherings and non-essential personnel movements. The research plan had to be shelved. However, the author was very worried about the survival of opera performers and the troupe in the difficult period with the suspension of opera performances, so three online phone interviews were conducted with three opera practitioners through the social platform WeChat. The shelved plans have been made up to some extent.

4.8 Summary

This chapter describes methods employed in this research. From the theoretical perspective, this research comprehensively adopts the multi-disciplinary theories and perspectives mainly from sociology, history, theatre and media. On the whole, this research is a nested case study with dual structure. The designation of the case study and the reasons for the case selection are explained in detail. Questionnaire survey, unstructured interview and participant observation, the approaches of data collection are presented. The analysis methods and procedures are briefly described. The next three chapters present the research analysis and findings.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISSICUSSION: THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE OPERA IN HENAN RURAL AREA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the overall decline of traditional opera in rural areas of Henan Province. 5.2 briefly describes the change of the status of the opera in the process of the modernization of China. 5.3 mainly examines the symptoms of the decline from the perspectives of performances, troupes, repertory, actors and audiences. 5.4 analyzes the main reasons for the decline of opera and other influencing factors from the aspects of opera itself and external social environment.

5.2 Losing Its Status as Cultural Center: the Overall Decline of Traditional Opera in Rural Henan

Gilbert Rossman, professor of sociology at Princeton University in the United States, pointed out in the book *“Modernization of China”* that "Modernization always becomes a goal"(Rossman, 1988, p78). In his opinion, modernization is the most dramatic, profound and obviously inevitable social change in human history. Existing social models are destroyed without exception (Rossman, 1988, p78).

China’s modernization process has accelerated since the reform and opening up. With the development of modernization, Chinese society has undergone tremendous changes. Large-scale industrialization and urbanization have rapidly changed the previous appearance of Chinese society that was dominated by agriculture and rural areas. Industrial development and urbanization have a strong spillover effect on rural

society. The rural culture based on traditional farming has been greatly impacted. Corresponding modern changes have taken place in the values of farmers who have left their hometowns and no longer rely solely on agriculture for their livelihoods. These have caused historical changes in Chinese rural society, especially the culture in rural society.

Arthur Smith, an American missionary who lived in the Chinese countryside for 20 years in the 19th century AD, said in the special chapter of "Rural theatre" in his book "*Rural Life in China*" that "Chinese opera can be said to be China's unique form of public entertainment drama, like sports to the English or bullfighters to the Spanish" (Smith, 1998, p57).

It can be said that traditional opera had been the most important part of the cultural and entertainment life of Chinese people, especially the ordinary people, since the Song and Yuan Dynasties. However, the survival and development of traditional culture and folk art are facing unprecedented difficulties. In particular, the content of new culture and entertainment such as modern song, dance, film and television is extremely rich, which has changed the situation of the "cultural Center" that has long been "dominant" in the cultural market in rural China. In such a large agricultural province with abundant rural areas as Henan, traditional opera has been experiencing an overall decline since the beginning of the 21st century AD, compared with the glory of the old era.

5.3 Symptoms of the Decline

According to the data of "Investigation on the Status quo of national traditional Chinese opera and opera troupe"²⁸, issued by the national key scientific research

²⁸ The report is available on the official website of the National Arts Foundation.
https://www.cnaf.cn/special_col/list_num/36.html

project of art discipline of China in 2020, with the tremendous changes in social lifestyles, traditional opera art has not only gradually withdrawn from the urban stage, but the performance market in rural areas is also shrinking. Even in the major province of rural population, traditional opera is undergoing rapid "marginalization"²⁹ in rural Henan.

This decline is reflected in 7 aspects, including sharp reduction in the number of performances, the increasingly narrow space for acting, the decline in the number of audiences and their aging, the low awareness of opera among young people and children, the drastic decrease in the number of opera troupes, the demise of some small opera types and the loss of a large number of traditional plays.

5.3.1 Sharp reduction in the number of performances

Since the beginning of the new century, the number of opera performances had greatly reduced compared with the 1980s and 1990s in rural areas in Henan.

In the past, the gongs and drums of opera in the booming period could almost be heard in the villages during the slack season. As long as there was an opera performance in a village, villagers from several nearby villages walked or rode bicycles there to spend their leisure time, day and night.

Nowadays, in most rural areas of Henan, there are less noisy scenes of live opera performances. According to the statistical data obtained from Henan Opera Research Institute, it can be found that from 2000 to 2019, the number of various opera performances in the rural areas of Henan has dropped drastically. For example, in Xinzheng County, which is governed by the provincial capital Zhengzhou City, there were about 1,380 opera performances in 2000, but by 2019, the number had dropped

²⁹ The term refers to the very low proportion of opera in people's cultural entertainment life, in sharp contrast to its central position in traditional society.

to about 430, a 68 percent decrease. In Xin 'an County of Luoyang in the west, the annual number of opera performances was about 1,800 in 2000, but by 2019, the figure had dropped to about 860, down 52 percent. In Huangchuan County, located in the southern region of Xinyang, the total number of opera performances was about 1,650 in 2000, but by 2019, the number had dropped to about 1,020, a decrease of 38 percent.³⁰

5.3.2 Increasingly narrow space for acting occasions

In the countryside of China, before entering modern times, the reasons and occasions for opera performances were very diverse. Sacrifice to the gods, folk festivals, celebration of good harvests, prayers for rain, emperor's birthday in Buddhism, celebration of ordinary people's getting married and giving birth to children, sending off the passing-by of the elderly people, prayers for the longevity of the elderly, celebration of excellent results in imperial examination, for all these reasons people would employ theatrical troupes to perform in the village to entertain the people in and around the village. The performances were mostly continued for more than three days, with one performance each in the morning, afternoon and evening. Sometimes opera performances were to repay a vow and fulfill promises made to gods or others. The vows might have been made by an individual in time of sickness, the theatricals to be the expression of gratitude for recovery. In the case of an entire village, it was often the returning of thanks to some divinity for a good harvest, or for a timely rain. Sometimes the reasons for the theatricals might sound absurd. "A quarrel between individuals is frequently composed by the adjudication of "peace-talkers" that one of the parties shall give a theatrical exhibition by way of a fine, in the benefits of which the whole community may thus partake"(Smith, 1998, P60). Sometimes there was no better reason for holding a theatre than that a sum of public money had been accumulated, which there was no other way to spend.

³⁰ Data source: internal information of Henan opera research institute.

The situation has changed a lot in the 1980s and 1990s, as the government strictly restricted farmers' traditional beliefs and religious activities, the aforementioned religious sacrificial activities have basically withdrawn from rural social life. The performances appear mostly on traditional "spring fairs"³¹. In this period of time, opera performances not only have entertainment functions, they also undertake the special function of gathering popularity for the commodity trade market. In addition, there are usually many consecutive days of opera performances on occasions such as villagers' getting married and childbirth, the funeral of the elderly, celebrating birthday of the elderly, and other major festivals.

However, with the development of the modernization of rural society, the occasions for opera performances have become less and less. In some places, the traditional "spring fairs" activities have been discarded. "Now the rural areas are sparsely populated (there are too few people living in the village), and some villages even no longer retain the fairs, and of course they do not invite the troupe to perform operas anymore."³² With the outward flow of rural people, the traditional clan blood relationship in the countryside has become increasingly looser, and the original meaning and value of civil activities with special significance to the family are becoming less important. Accordingly, the opportunities for this type of opera performance have decreased. In addition, the occasions that were always celebrated with opera performances in the past have now been partially replaced by other forms of activities such as song and dance performances and movies, and there are fewer occasions and opportunities for opera performances.

5.3.3 Negative changes in the number and age structure of the audiences

³¹ A gathering with trade, entertainment, and food activities in rural areas of northern China usually takes place from the Spring Festival to the wheat harvest season in June. It usually lasts one to three days, and the dates and duration vary from village to village.

³² Words are from the owner of the Yellow River Yuju Opera troupe, interviewee 43.

Traditional Chinese opera is a kind of stage theater art with “liveness” as one of its inherent characteristics. This characteristics of “liveness” , with the connotation of the presence of the audience, the number of audiences, and the interaction between the audience and the actors (applauds and Cheers) will not only directly affect the effect of a performance , but also constitute an important feature, the expressiveness, that distinguishes opera from other types of drama.

However, great social changes have taken place in rural Henan areas since the new century; such changes include the relatively low income of the rural people due to the low price of agricultural products; rural *Hukou*³³ (registered permanent residence) as the low social status, the serious lag in rural infrastructure construction, and the unbalanced development between China's eastern and western regions, coastal and inland regions, cities and rural areas. Consequently, to live in rural areas and to be engaged in agricultural production are not accepted by most young people. Some of them try to obtain urban employment through higher education and leave the countryside completely, and a larger group of them, go to cities, as part of the "floating population", to work and earn a living. There in the cities, they are called the "migrant workers", and they live in cities for most of the time, only returning to the countryside during the Spring Festival holiday to reunite with their families. Such social changes caused by the market economy have contributed to the emergence of "empty shell village", "empty nest elderly" and "left-behind children" in China, which have attracted much attention in recent years.

The social changes also extend to the opera market in rural Henan. The impact on the changes in opera audience has severely restricted the survival and development of opera, which is also an important symptom of the decline of opera. The negative changes in audience lie in the two aspects: the decrease in the number and the aging of the audiences. On one hand, according to relative surveys, compared with the 1980s and 1990s, the total number of audiences at the opera performances in rural

³³ This is the pronunciation of the Chinese character "户口".

areas of Henan has decreased by more than 50% in recent years. For many performances the number of audiences is even less than 100. On the other hand, the audience's age structure is extremely uneven. In the past, men and women, young and old, would gather under the stage, just like Mr. Smith observed:

“From a social point of view, the most interesting aspect of Chinese village theatricals is the impression which is produced upon the people as a whole. This impression may be feebly likened to that which is made upon children in Western lands, by the immediate imminence of Christmas, or in the United States by the advent of a Fourth of July ” (Smith, 1998, p58).

Today, only the elderly over 50 and children under 10 remain in front of the stage. The lively scenes recorded in “*Rural Life of China*” rarely appear in the rural areas of Henan nowadays.



Figure5.1 Old people watching an opera performance

Source: provided by interviewee 43

The loss of young rural audiences has resulted in the lack of the main body of rural opera culture. The loss of this group makes the construction of rural opera culture lack in a vigorous foundation and a strong driving force. As a result, it is difficult for the opera troupes to recruit new members and thus have few successors.

5.3.4 Younger generation's low awareness of traditional opera

In September 2019, the author conducted a questionnaire survey (Appendix 5.1) with 1,200 college students on their awareness of opera. The students were from three colleges and universities in Henan Province, including Henan Vocational and Technical College, Zhengzhou University, and Zhengzhou Institute of Information Technology. As stated earlier, in the long history before 1949, opera has been playing the function of "educating the people" with opera being the main form of cultural entertainment when all people knew something about the opera and went to watch it. In the second half of the 20th century, urban and rural residents' watching the opera was regarded as one of the main cultural entertainments. However, the situation has changed dramatically. According to the survey, the "millennial" young people born in the 21st century have a greatly reduced overall awareness of traditional opera; even for the representative local operas in Henan Province such as Yuju opera, Quju opera, Yuediao opera, little is known among the young people.

According to the survey data, 78% of the interviewees just know about Yuju opera, and have not heard of Quju opera, Yuediao, Daoqing, Dapingdiao and other Henan opera types. A whopping 67 percent of the respondents attend live opera performances less than five times a year, and 23 percent have never attended one. As many as 84% of the interviewees were unfamiliar with the representative repertoire, the major roles, the stylized movement, and the symbolic meaning of the costume makeup of Henan opera. 39% of the respondents said they did not like opera, and 75% of them believed that the main reason they did not like opera was their lack of understanding and learning. Chinese-English version of the questionnaire can be found in appendix 5.1.

The level of young people's awareness of traditional Chinese opera is an important indicator to evaluate the current prosperity of opera. At the same time, it will directly affect the future inheritance and development of opera. Only with enough young people who understand opera, pay attention to opera, love opera, are willing to engage in opera-related occupations and continue to commit to the promotion of opera culture, can the future of opera be guaranteed.

5.3.5 Decline in the number of traditional Chinese opera troupes

Opera troupe is the carrier of the development of opera culture and the main body of the opera performance market. Since the 1950s, there have been several notable changes in the number of Chinese opera troupes. According to data released by the Department of Culture Affairs of Henan Province and Henan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences (2020), before the 1980s, when opera culture was flourishing, there were more than 2,000 state-run opera troupes in Henan province. By 2012, the number had dropped to 171, a decline of more than 90 percent. By 2019, Henan has six provincial-level troupes, 22 prefecture-level ones and 130 county-level ones. The change of the number of private troupe quantity is relatively complex, the generation of private troupe began in the 80s, the Chinese government has allowed private capital into the cultural market, in the number of private company in 2005 in Henan province before the explosion, the registered ones by the competent department of culture reached more than 1700, in fact, there are many smaller ones without registration. However, due to the shrinking market after 2005, the number of groups has been significantly reduced³⁴. On the whole, the number of opera troupes in Henan Province is decreasing.

5.3.6 Disappearance of many opera types

³⁴ Data source: Official website of Henan Provincial Culture Department <https://hct.henan.gov.cn/>

According to incomplete statistics, by 2019, the number of Chinese opera types has been reduced from more than 360 in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China to 280, and the number of opera types in Henan Province had also decreased from 45 to 31 in those years. For the reason that the traditional operas have long adopted the primitive inheritance method of passing from master to apprentice through oral instruction, once the old inheritor passes away, it may cause the disappearance of a play. At present, including Erxian, Taikangdaoqing, Henan Shadow opera, Luantan, the four opera types have completely withdrawn from the historical stage. Some types of traditional opera have also entered a state of substantial extinction because no one has inherited them, such as Wanbang and LiuQin Opera. At present, there are 18 endangered types of operas that have inheritors but not enough to organize an entire performance of the opera³⁵.

5.3.7 Mass loss of traditional repertoire

There were more than 1,000 traditional repertoire in Henan recorded in historical materials. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, there were 657 traditional repertoires of Henan opera according to government statistics. The 1960s and 1970s were the "dark times" of traditional arts. Like literature and music, the art of opera has also become a megaphone serving politics and ideology. A large number of traditional repertoires have been destroyed. "In the face of socialist revolution and class struggle, traditional operas were completely attacked. During the "Cultural Revolution", there are an only handful of traditional operas that have not received public criticism"(Jiang, Xiao, 2005, p.24).

A large part of classic repertoire that had long been performed on stage and had been widely circulated didn't have the opportunity to be performed and couldn't be used for teaching for a long time during that special period and this had caused the

³⁵ Data source: internal information of Henan opera research institute.

permanent loss of a large number of precious written materials and a large number of more precious old opera artists. This deplorable situation was corrected in the late 1970s, and the legacy of traditional opera was rescued and discovered on a large scale.

However, restricted by the limitation of the way of inheritance, a large number of traditional repertoires have been lost forever with the older generation passing and there being few people to organize, pass on, and perform. Among those that have been lost, there are more than 20 opera plays of Yuju Opera, such as *Chunqiupei*, *Ditangban*, *Nvzhenhua* etc., about 16 opera plays of Yuediao Opera, such as *Wenwangchizi*, *Zhuicigu* etc., about 8 opera plays of Quju Opera, such as *Shuoturenzi*, *Mahulv* etc., about 27 opera plays of Dao qing opera, such as *Sunbinzuodong*, *Hanxiangzi* etc., and about 9 opera plays of Dapingdiao Opera. There are still many lost plays of other minority opera types that cannot be fully counted.³⁶

The lost plays embody the wisdom and labor of countless opera artists. They are an important part of Chinese culture and an important manifestation of Henan's regional cultural characteristics. Some plays have a history of over one thousand years and are still of great value and significance to modern China. It has to be said that the loss of these traditional plays is very regrettable.

5.4 Reasons for the Decline

This section explores the reasons for the overall decline of opera in modern society from the aspects of opera itself and external social environment, and also answers the first two research questions: Is the decline of the opera in modern China inevitable? What are the factors affecting the decline of traditional Chinese opera?

³⁶ Data source: internal information of Henan opera research institute.

The development trend of any culture will be affected by the social environment on which it depends, and in turn, it can also reflect the changes in the social environment. Opera is a component of the Chinese social and cultural system. Its rise and fall not only depends on the opera itself, but is also deeply influenced by the modern social and cultural environment. The decline of opera culture is also the result of the interaction between its core and external ecology. First of all, the inherent contradiction between the classical core and modern society of traditional operas constitutes the internal cause that determines its decline. Secondly, the powerful invasion of modern media culture in the Internet age, the disconnection and loss of opera audiences caused by special historical reasons, and the severe weakness of opera promotion and education constitute the "external factors" that accelerate the decline of opera.

5.4.1 Contradiction between classical core of traditional Chinese opera and the modern society

The art of opera sprouted in the pre-Qin period of China and was conceived in the mature period of Chinese feudal culture from the Han and Tang Dynasties to the Song and Yuan Dynasties. It matured in the Yuan Dynasty in the 13th century AD and formed its complete form of theatrical art. Afterwards, there have been more than 300 types of operas that have undergone the same ancestry differentiation, blending and evolution of Zaju in Yuan Dynasty, Legends in Ming and Qing, Kunqu Opera, Peking Opera in the late Qing Dynasty, and other local operas. These types of opera are from the same family and originated from the same roots. In addition to their distinctive regional and national characteristics, they all share the same cultural and spiritual characteristics of opera which the author would call the "classical core" of opera.

It is this "classical core" that makes Chinese traditional operas distinctive and recognizable in the forest of opera worldwide. Nevertheless, it is also this kind of "classical core" that has caused opera to encounter cold shoulders in modern Chinese

society and are gradually marginalized from its status as the center of national culture. In a sense, the "classical core" makes opera become opera, and the "classical core" also creates a huge gap and contradiction between opera and modern society, and its decline is inevitable.

In terms of content analysis, opera reflects the social life in ancient China, which is very different from modern Chinese society. An overview of the traditional opera repertoire is mostly about the themes of emperors, generals, historical stories, folklore, and emotional entanglements between gifted scholars and beautiful ladies. Examples are *Generals of Yang family* repeatedly performed in Peking Opera and Yuju Opera, representative Peking Opera *Farewell My Concubine* and *Drunken Concubine*, etc., representative Yuju Opera plays, *the wind pavilion* and *Dou E Yuan*, etc.

These stories do not have much overlap with modern people's daily life and life experience, and it is difficult to resonate with modern audiences. In addition, in the feudal society of China, opera has taken on the dual functions of social and cultural entertainment and civilizing the people from its inception. Confucianism, the mainstream thought in feudal China, emphasized "literature is to convey moral values" (cited in Zheng, 1990, p.248) and valued the ethical principles of the individual and the country, society, and family. Opera is a comprehensive art cultivated during the mature period of Chinese feudal society, and it is inevitable that Confucianism will be infiltrated into it.

Confucianism attaches great importance to historical experience, as the saying goes, "The memory of the past serves as a guide for the future" (cited in Zheng, 1990, p.185). This cultural spirit made the content of the opera script relate closely to the history. Confucianism stresses the value of propriety and righteousness, and requires the superior man to "cultivate himself, regulate the family, govern the country, and

benefit the world"³⁷. The thought of moral supremacy of Confucian culture has exerted a profound impact on the story logic, character images, contradictions and conflicts, the perspective of observing social life, and the ending of the story. As scholar Zheng Chuanyin said: "The ideological content and artistic expression of classical operas and even opera criticism have many connections with Confucianism."(Zheng, 1990, p.187)

However, with the development of the times to the present, China's social modernization has reached a high level, and the social environment, people's lives and social connections and communication methods have all undergone tremendous changes. Compared with the ancients in the era of agricultural civilization, modern people are much different in terms of appearance, ideological cognition, and behavioral norms. Modern Chinese people, especially young people under the age of 50, have a different understanding of the ethics advocated by Confucianism, such as loyalty to the emperor and patriotism, the "three principles and five virtues"³⁸, and the way of benevolence and justice. They have a different understanding of the moral concepts preached in traditional operas. Some moral ideas preached in traditional Chinese opera are hard to understand and be accepted by modern people.

Under such circumstances, it is easy for the young people with extreme and impulsive thinking to deny the art of opera because of their contempt for a certain play. Therefore, the ancient stories that opera is good at telling are very different from the modern social environment and life, which is one of the important factors that constitute the contradiction between opera and modern society.

Another important factor that constitutes this contradiction is reflected in the artistic

³⁷ This is a classic Chinese Confucian saying, from *the Book of Rites*.

³⁸ The three principles and five virtues is a Chinese idiom, which is the moral standard between people advocated by the Confucian ethics in feudal China. The three principles refer to the principle that king is the commander for minister, father is the commander for son, and husband is the commander for wife. They talk about the ethical logic between king and minister, father and son, and husband and wife. The five virtues refer to benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, and faith. They speak of the moral standards that people should abide by in society.

expression of opera. Stylization is one of the main artistic features of opera. From creation, stage performance (including all singing and action) to band accompaniment, opera must strictly follow a series of complex and fixed norms, called "programs." Take Peking Opera as an example. Its singing is mainly composed of Erhuangqiang and Xipiqiang. Erhuang has Guiban, Huilong, Adagio, Shake, and Sanban rhythms. Xipiqiang has Daoban, Manban, Yuanban, and Kuaisanyan, Flowing water and other rhythmic forms. There is a fixed paradigm for the connection between any two rhythm forms, for example, in the Erhuang tune, Daoban is often connected to Huilong. There are basic formats for the number of characters, syntax, rhyme, etc. in the lyrics. To score operas, traditional tunes must be used in accordance with traditional rules, and new songs must not be created at will. The performance of the actors must strictly follow the procedures. Regardless of the actor's own conditions and skills, as long as the actors play the same role, they will perform in accordance with the same procedures and rules of action from the "self-introduction" to the next action. For example, all generals will follow the program of "Kick the Hegemony" to show how to put on the battlefield.

Stylization endows opera with a very unique artistic quality, which makes it distinctly different from the theater art of other nations in the world, especially Western countries, so some people say that traditional Chinese opera is an art with a distinct nationality (Liao, 2005). But at the same time, it must be realized that it is the strong stylized features of opera that make it difficult to modernize and improve to adapt to the aesthetic habits of modern people.

Virtuality is another main feature of the art form of opera. Unlike the West's overall pursuit of beauty in environmental design and actors' performances, Chinese opera, like painting, calligraphy and other traditional Chinese arts, pays attention to "freehand brushwork". The stage layout and environment creation often only use one or two pieces. Symbolic props to mention, for example, the living room and hall of the emperor and ministers and nobles are represented only by a table and two chairs

covered with bright silk, while the boats in the river are depicted with a wooden oar in the hands of the actors, and the actors hold one. The short rod decorated with colorful tassels is a horse whip to symbolize horse riding.

Actors' performances are also full of virtuality, and many behaviors are performed without physical objects. The transformation of time and space in opera is also virtual. In the same stage space, two completely different dramatic time-space transitions can be realized by just a few quick walks of the actors. The virtual artistic performance of opera not only has a normative requirement for the performance of the actors, but also puts forward certain professional requirements for the audience's appreciation. Therefore, there is a Chinese saying "Laymen are overwhelmed by the fun while professionals try to find out the trick.", which refers to the special requirements that the virtuality and stylistic artistic characteristics of opera put forward for audience appreciation.

However, modern Chinese people, especially young people, grew up in the era of mass media culture and are accustomed to watching authentic story through movies or TV. The virtual performance of opera is just the opposite of the public's cultural aesthetic habits. In the following part, the shrink of modern media culture on the living space of the traditional opera will be discussed in detail.

Unlike dramas, movies, and TV dramas, the story development rhythm of Chinese opera is slow and discontinuous. When every important person appears on the stage, he/she must first temporarily "jump out" of the role, and explain to the audience his/her identity, origin, story, purpose and intention in the tone of the narrator, and then "jump back" to the role identity to perform "his/her life". Often when the scenes of the most intense conflicts and conflicts or fierce battles are presented, the artistic treatment of opera will also be reflected in the slowing of rhythm and non-continuous development, such as the long-term high-difficulty and highly admirable body dance of actors. Actions are used to express complex and intense inner emotions. For

example, in battle scenes, there are martial arts and dance performances such as several rounds of somersaults, flower guns, and sword dances. These greatly enhance the level of performance and appreciation of the opera, but they do not contribute to the advancement of the plot. On the contrary, it prolongs the process of the development of drama conflict in time, that is, objectively extends the time for the audience to appreciate a drama. In addition, opera, especially Kunqu Opera, Peking Opera, Yuju Opera, Qinqiang Opera and other traditional operas with a long history (except for younger types of opera such as Huangmei Opera and Shaoxing Opera) often use large verses (similar to the arias in Western operas), the twists and turns in the singing and the long prolonged vocalization often make modern people who are used to listening to popular music feel anxious. These characteristics formed a heavy aesthetic barrier between the artistic expression of opera and the modern audience. This is also one of the important reasons why there are the contradictions with the fast pace of modern society, the cultural psychology of being impatient and shallow taste of ordinary people.

In addition, for Henan local opera, its rich local flavor is also a "double-edged sword". Henan's local opera is a combination of northern Bangzi accent and Henan dialect, local folk music, rap art and other artistic elements, and has matured after long-term development. No matter whether it is Yuju Opera, Quju Opera, Yuediao or other types of Henan opera, when the music starts and the actors begin to speak or sing, the local flavor of the Central Plains that marks the local characteristics of Henan will be vividly displayed. For many people in Henan, especially the middle-aged and the elderly people with stable social status and mature in thinking, this could be a kind of cultural memory and cultural identity. However, for young rural people in Henan, the social identity of Henan and rural area gave others negative images of them.³⁹ This prevented them from gaining a high sense of social value and it is very difficult for them to form a sense of regional cultural identity.

³⁹ For various reasons, there used to be a period of time when the Chinese society had regional discrimination against people from Henan.

In summary, the inherent "classical core" of opera art in terms of subject matter and form of expression is far away and insurmountable from the diversified, changeable, and fast-paced modern society, which is the decisive internal cause leading opera to a overall decline in modern society.

5.4.2 Powerful invasion of heterogeneous culture and modern media culture in the Internet era

The ups and downs of traditional Chinese opera involve various and complicated factors concerning society, politics, economy, culture, audience's artistic taste and aesthetic habits, etc. In certain social periods, the market share of stage art performance is also limited. In the 1990s, with the influx of international capital in the cultural and art performing market, foreign performance companies and pop culture companies from Hong Kong and Taiwan quickly squeezed into the cultural market of mainland China. Stage art forms such as song and dance performances, concerts, musicals, and circus performances originated from Western countries quickly seized most of the cultural market. In particular, popular music from Hong Kong and Taiwan is welcomed and sought after by most young people. The unchanged traditional opera appeared unprepared and were caught off guard by this severe impact.

In addition, the modernization of Chinese society has brought about constant changes in the forms of communication. "In the era of written words, the dissemination carriers were mainly literature and stage. In the era of electronic technology, movies and television became popular. In the era of Internet, global satellite communications and the Internet arose" (Liao, 2005). It was also in the 1990s that television began to spread widely in rural households in Henan. People can watch TV at a very low price without leaving their homes.⁴⁰ TV programs include movies, a variety of shows, song

⁴⁰ In many parts of Henan's rural areas, people spend no more than 20 dollars to buy a non-compliant simple satellite TV signal receiving device, and after installation, they can watch TV programs for free for a long time

and dance performances and other kinds of cultural programs, among which there are also a small number of TV drama programs. In the 21st century, with Chinese society entering the Internet era, Media and cultural products with more diversified and more convenient access methods have further squeezed out the little living space left for traditional opera, and the external social environment faced by opera has become more complicated. Wei Minglun, famous playwright lamented: "Xiqu"⁴¹ cannot compete with fashion entertainment. Fashion entertainments are mainly indoors or in small rooms. The opera stage is squeezed out by fashion entertainments in small rooms and grand squares" (Wei, 2003).

5.4.3 The faultage and loss of the audience of traditional Chinese opera

The lessening and losing of audiences caused by the social and historical changes in the second half of the 20th century is one of the important reasons for the decline of traditional Chinese opera. Before the 1950s, Chinese society developed relatively slowly, with little difference between urban and rural areas, and the differentiation of social classes was not obvious. During this period of time, opera had concerned relatively stable audience groups inclusive of the farmer audience group and the urban audiences, and the differences in psychology and aesthetic taste between the two groups were relatively insignificant.

However, the "Cultural Revolution" that swept across China's social, political, economic, cultural and artistic fields in the 1960s and 1970s not only changed the natural development of opera, but also undermined the stability of opera audiences to a large extent. There was a gap in the inter-generational cultivation of opera audience. The Chinese who were born and grew up in that period only knew eight "revolutionary model plays", and it was difficult for them to understand the broad and profound opera culture as a whole. Knowing little about Chinese opera, people will easily misunderstand and stay away from the art of opera.

⁴¹ "Xiqu" is the name of traditional Chinese opera in Chinese pronunciation.

Since China implemented reform and opening up in the late 1970s, many farmers left the countryside and entered the cities. The process of modernization and urbanization was advancing rapidly, and the number of urban residents continued to expand. With the rapid development of education, the group of intellectuals expanded rapidly. With the tremendous changes in social class, the differences in cultural basis, social psychology, and aesthetic tastes among different groups have become more and more obvious.

The "classical core" of opera art determines its stability in carrying content and form of expression. The immutability of opera is in sharp contrast with the drastic changes in social groups and classes. The development of the two is not synchronized. This has caused the loss of a large number of opera audiences. Social groups such as urban migrant workers, corporate white-collar workers, self-employed individuals, and rural intellectuals with superior living conditions have experienced "convergence" in terms of living conditions, political status, and information acquisition, forming a large "middle class" which is called the "mass group" of those who appreciate art. The growth process of this huge mass group is accompanied by the popularity of heterogeneous entertainment culture and mass media, and naturally they may prefer the modern popular cultures to the traditional one. As far as opera is concerned, it obviously lacks related research and adaptation to the new groups formed in this modernization process. For them, traditional Chinese opera is not sufficiently attractive.

5.4.4 The disruption of traditional Chinese opera education and the inadequacy of traditional Chinese opera promotion

Both Fu Jin and Hao Zhaoqing, two opera theorists, clearly pointed out that the periodical blank in the professional education of opera caused by special historical reason has caused the shortage of opera actors. This is one of the important reasons

that caused opera to fall into a crisis of survival (cited in Jiang & Xiao, 2005, p.56). Fu Jin said in his book "History of Chinese Theatre": "Almost all theatrical actors completely stopped practicing during the 'Cultural Revolution', and now they are permitted to perform traditional repertoires suddenly, but the actors' skills are not restored. The skills cannot be achieved in just three or five years" (Fu, 2014, p.289).

During the Cultural Revolution⁴², traditional repertoire shouldn't be used to train students in all opera performing schools across the country, and the original systematic teaching and training models was discarded, making it difficult for the schools to cultivate qualified opera talents. As a matter of fact, opera actors usually need to receive systematic and professional training and cultivation from childhood. "Because the training of young actors has been interrupted for a long time, the drain of performance talent is obvious" (Fu, 2014, p.289). The training process of stage performance actors is a slow one, while the audiences are impatient to wait.

The stage performance of Chinese opera cannot be restored to its original level in a short period of time and it takes a long time for ordinary audiences to develop an interest in appreciating opera, and to have an emotional connection with opera and repertoire. Therefore, the disruption of the professional education of opera is one of the external factors that influence the decline of opera.

Opera actors need to be trained and opera audiences need to be continuously cultivated. Based on the author's personal experience and long-term observation and research, in China's basic education system, especially in rural primary and secondary education, opera culture is rarely included in the school curriculum before 2016. At the same time, social opera performances outside schools have decreased, and opera culture has gradually withdrawn from the center. In addition, students of both urban and rural primary and secondary schools are generally burdened with heavy

⁴² It is generally believed that the ten years of the Cultural Revolution is the interruption and stagnation or even a regression of China's modernization process.

schoolwork, and their leisure time is filled with popular entertainment culture and video games.

Therefore, there is much work to be done to promote and make traditional Chinese opera popular among the Millennials and the generation born in the 00s who have grown into the backbone of social consumption. The results of the questionnaire survey on Henan college students mentioned above confirmed this finding. Fortunately, the Chinese government departments in the new era have realized the important value of opera culture and the urgency of popularizing opera. In 2017, the Chinese Ministry of Education and other three relevant central government departments put forward the advocacy of “we will vigorously promote elegant art and traditional opera into campuses”, and then it will be open to the whole country⁴³. The popularization and promotion of the students' general knowledge of opera began to be carried out in all provinces and regions.

5.5 Summary

Carl Polanyi, the British scholar has stressed that a social change, including a social disaster, is "first and foremost a cultural rather than an economic phenomenon, and cannot be measured by income data and demographics...The cause of degradation is not economic exploitation, as is often assumed, but the disintegration of the cultural environment of the victims"(Polanyi, 2020, p.78). Modernization has brought profound changes to China's social structure. The rural areas have gradually realized the overall transformation from tradition to modernity, and the rural society has been carried into the track of urbanization, industrialization and marketization. An important problem that accompanies this is the confusion of cultural belonging of

⁴³ On August 3, 2017, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Culture jointly issued “the Opinions on the Implementation of Traditional Chinese Opera in Schools”. The full text can be seen on the official website of the Ministry of Education.

farmers brought by cultural change and the marginalization of traditional culture.

In summary, the overall decline of opera is the inevitable result of social and historical development. To research on the various signs that reflect its decline is an important way to consider how to inherit and protect the culture of opera. The contradiction between the "classical core" of opera and modern society is the internal cause of its decline. The competition with other cultures, the loss of opera audiences, the lack of professional education of opera and the lack of power in the popularization and promotion of opera constitute external factors that influence and accelerate its decline. To clarify the reasons is an important prerequisite for correctly viewing the decline of Chinese opera and actively thinking about its future development.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: PARTIAL REVIVAL OF RURAL OPERA--- AN INVESTIGATION OF XINGYUANPU VILLAGE, XUCHANG COUNTY

6.1 Introduction

Viewed as a whole, all over China, the traditional Chinese opera has lost its position as the cultural center of Chinese society in the era of agricultural civilization⁴⁴; it has experienced and is still experiencing a rapid overall decline. In some rural areas of Henan Province, however, the opera culture has shown its vitality in different forms in recent years and occupied an important position in the rural cultural market and rural social life. Recent years have witnessed striking phenomena at Xingyuanpu Village in the south of Xuchang County, i.e. farmers shooting opera films and setting up an amateur opera art troupe, etc. It can be found from an analysis of the phenomena that the prosperity of Xingyuanpu Opera reveals a transformation of the opera in terms of form and feature under the circumstances of different communication patterns, which involves both modern media's shallow interpretation of the opera's external elements and distortion and counteraction of its internal features. A track of the approximately circular opera performance practice⁴⁵ of Xingyuanpu villagers indicates that the opera has great significance for the farmers and the rural society in setting up a spiritual home and a public cultural space. Thus the Xingyuanpu Village has typical significance for the study of opera cultures in the rural China.

⁴⁴ Agricultural civilization refers to a cultural collection of national system, custom system and culture education formed by farmers in long-term agricultural production to meet the needs of agricultural production and life. The agricultural civilization of traditional Chinese society integrates Confucian culture and various religious cultures, forming its own unique cultural content and characteristics. Its main body includes the idea of national management, the idea of interpersonal communication, language, drama, folk songs, customs and various sacrificial activities.

⁴⁵ This is a figurative summary of Xingyuanpu villagers' opera practice from the stage - film and television - stage.

This chapter contains three main parts. 6.2 introduces the evolution of traditional opera's transmission media and discusses it in combination with visual media theory. This section serves as a theoretical basis to the next one. 6.3 narrates the coexistence of multimedia opera practice in this case, including their "theatre field", opera film, TV opera and their experience of opera troupe. 6.4 and 6.5 reveals the reflections and inspirations extracted from the case by the researcher.

6.2 Visual Media Theory and Traditional Opera Transmission Media

Cultures and literature have experienced several stages of change throughout the history of human society. The first stage is the most intuitive figurative art, followed by the language and written cultures. Human beings have created a large number of literary works, while the film, television and visual culture that derived from high-tech popular in modern time seem to have gone back, to some extent, to the point of the origin. The written culture in the intermediate stage lasted for the longest period of time, yielded fruitful achievements, and accumulated by far the most valuable cultural heritage of mankind. The outstanding characteristic of the culture was the rap language and written records, which brought people a room to imagine and associate. Therefore it is of great charm and gives people an aesthetic pleasure. The film, television and visual culture, however, are counteracting, to a certain degree, the unique charm that the language and written cultures exude, as well as the aesthetic pleasure they give people.

The "global village" predicted by McLuhan in the 1960s has been materializing. The world now is in an era surrounded by modern media culture. Since film, television, Internet, virtual images, and many other media sprang up, human beings are building a visual cultural system that has images in common; and our cultures are derailing their rational process, which centers on language, and turning gradually to the concentration on images, i.e. "from language to image" (Michelle, 2006, p.2). Martin

Heidegger also made a similar prediction by saying that “we have entered the age of the world picture” (Heidegger, 2004, p.54).

By saying the visual culture we mean that visual factors, particularly image factors, dominate our cultures. The Hungarian film theorist Balazs first proposed the concept of “visual culture.” He observed the great changes brought about by film technology as a medium. According to his judgment, with the emergence of films, a new kind of culture would replace the print culture. He thought that the invention of printing gradually weakened the role of vision, and that abstract symbols replaced facial expressions and body movements to convey meanings. The visible thought became the comprehensible, while the visual culture turned into a “conceptual culture” (Balazs, 1986, p.78).

The appearance of films is a great revolution in the history of human civilization. They are turning the attention of human beings to the visuality, and taking humans back to the visual culture again. The “visible human returned to our culture, especially people’s facial expressions, gestural movements and body language.” (Zhou , 2008)

McLuhan demonstrated the arrival of an electronic propagation culture from the perspective of the transformation of media and mode of transmission, saying that this culture integrates the visual culture with the auditory culture, having a greater effect on the audience than any other previous media, especially the emergence of television(Zhou, 2008). Daniel Bell, known as the father of post-industry, pointed out that the mainstream language today was visual sound and pictures, especially the latter constituting aesthetics and giving the audience guidance (Bell, 2007, P106).

Zhou Xian, a scholar and translator, once said, “Chinese traditional culture has a long history and rich visual resources, so the absorption and transformation of these traditional resources by contemporary Chinese visual culture will inevitably make up

the characteristics of contemporary Chinese visual culture” (Zhou , 2008) . Therefore, what must be recognized in the process of inheriting and developing traditional cultures is that modern science and technology, industrial production and “consumption first” social tendency, have a significant influence on the development of the modern visual culture, and on the inheritance and development of traditional cultures.

In the light of development tendency of human culture, i.e. from visual culture, letter symbols to visual culture again, opera served as an “intermediate of history”(Lu , 1981), because all human theatre arts are in essence to present literary content in the form of stage performance. It is a synthesis of literature and stage performance, and a coalition of written and visual cultures. It can be said that the opera actually has its natural “gene” of visual culture. We can see clearly from this perspective the internal mechanism that has promoted the transformation of the traditional opera culture in the process of modernization.

For traditional Chinese operas, media refer to the communication channels and means from the stage production to the audience. From the middle and late periods of Chinese feudal society to the 21st century, traditional Chinese operas have been proceeding a traditional stage mode of transmission, including the humble open earth stage in the countryside, stages built specially for traditional Chinese opera in the temple, the small and medium-sized delicate opera pavilions in the palace or noble houses, the large-scale opera theaters in the city and small stages in the tearooms and taverns. Being simple or luxurious, open or closed, the stage was the only and direct medium under the circumstances of the communication pattern. The key to the pattern of traditional opera communication through the medium of stage is being on the scene. The opera representation and the audience’s appreciation take place concurrently, being involved in a specific, irreversible occurrence.

Up to now, the way of spreading the traditional Chinese opera culture has experienced

a lot of changes. The application of electronic visual media expedited a combination of traditional Chinese operas with the films and TV, which gave birth to traditional Chinese opera videos, opera variety shows, opera TV plays, etc, a variety of opera culture types and China's unique opera films communicated by the TV media. As an emerging art form and communication medium, films were first combined with the opera art as soon as they appeared in China at the beginning of the 20th century. The first Chinese opera film was the Peking Opera *DingJun Shan* that starred by Tan Xinpei. Mei Lanfang, the famous Peking Opera master, also produced a series of Peking Opera films. Opera films have developed into one of artistic types of Chinese films. On the other hand, "operas provide a narrative way of thinking that conforms to the national customs and the public appreciation habit," and "the opera art also serves as an art reference for Chinese films" in terms of the audio-visual language and performance (Gao, 2005).

With the popularization of TV in Chinese families, operas began to appear in the TV programs connecting TV and operas. Beijing TV station, the first television station in China, began its test broadcast on May 1, 1958. Soon after was the successive live broadcast of opera artists' performances, such as Mei Lanfang's *Mu Guiying*, Shang Xiaoyun's *Shuang Yang Princess*, Xun Huisheng's *The Matchmaker*, Zhou Xinfang's *Four Scholars*, etc. In 1965, Yuju Opera *Chaoyanggou* (Scene II) performed by Henan opera master Chang Xiangyu as protagonist, and an excerpt of Peking Opera *Red Lantern* were broadcast at the Spring Festival Gala, becoming the first cultural programs broadcast with video technology in China. In the television network of China there are not only special opera channels (including the opera channel of CCTV, Shanghai Television opera channel, Guangdong TV drama channel, Henan TV drama channel, etc, as well as many regional, county level television opera channels) that produce and broadcast many opera teleplays, opera films and stage opera videos, but also many opera shows on provincial satellite TV stations, including *Li Yuan Chun* on Henan TV, *Dating in Front of Theatre* on Anhui TV, *The Qin Opera* on Shaanxi TV, and *Approaching the Big Stage* on Shanxi TV. In particular, Henan, a well-known

opera province, had and has a large number of TV opera programs at multi-level TV stations, which has become an eye-catching opera cultural phenomenon⁴⁶.

Subsequently, with the advent of the Internet era, operas combined with the Internet visual media, mainly giving birth to online operas, opera flash and other new forms of opera. The stage (on the scene), TV, films and Internet have so far created a multi-level opera communication network, and created a rich opera visual cultural environment, and varied existences and forms of opera culture.

6.3 Opera Practice of Multiple Communication Media in Xingyuanpu Village

Xingyuanpu Village is located in Lingjing Town, Jian'an District (previously named Xuchang County), Xuchang, Henan Province (Figure 6.1). It is a Hui-Han nationality mixed village with about 1,300 residents. In the past ten years, Xingyuanpu Village, which was called "Home of Opera"⁴⁷ in the history, has witnessed some remarkable cultural phenomena, such as shooting opera films; establishing folk opera art troupe; and producing, directing and acting opera plays on their own. The opera culture has gained momentum of revitalization after a short period of decline.

⁴⁶ According to the author's investigation, there are at least 12 opera columns of local TV station in Henan province, including "The Great Opera Stage" of Henan Xuchang education TV station, "Heluo Opera Garden" of Luoyang TV, "New Liyuan" Nanyang TV station, "Mulan Opera Garden" of Shangqiu TV station, "Tianzhong Great stage" of Zhumadian TV station, "Lake Wave Great Stage" of Anyang TV station, "The Construction Group Great Stage" of Hebi TV station, "Local accent Great stage" of Pingdingshan TV station, "The Weekend Grand Theater" of Zhengzhou TV station, "People Paradise" of Xuchang county TV station, "Opera Contest" of Ruzhou TV station and so on.

⁴⁷ Chinese people call the place where opera performance activities are particularly frequent and has many opera performance troupes as "Xi wo".



Figure 6.1 Locations of Xuchang County and Lingjing Town in Henan Province

Source: made by the author based on Henan (n.d.) and Xuchang (n.d.)

In terms of the communication patten of the opera, there are many ways of opera spreading in Xingyuanpu Village, such as the opera stage performance, opera film, opera TV, etc. These forms of media interact and coexist, jointly promoting the formation of a cultural community at Xingyuanpu Village. The small village reflects an entire communication pattern of the opera culture in the rural China. In the aspect of the relationship between villagers and the opera culture, the farmers are not only the audience but also creators and participants of the local opera culture.

6.3.1 Deep-seated opera cultural tradition of Xingyuanpu Village

“Villages, where the traditional ways of Chinese life is well preserved, are the natural carriers of traditional Chinese cultures and have the most extensive and profound cultural foundation of Chinese society”(Cao, 2000). The opera tradition of Xingyuanpu Village and at Xuchang region is firstly manifested in the opera performance at temple fairs. “Chenghuang Temple Fair” is held every year on the eighth day of the fifth lunar month at Xingyuanpu Village. At the temple fair, opera performance was and is put on every year without exception. As the local saying goes, “Chenghuang opera goes down forever.” During the temple fair, an opera troupe is

employed to perform for five consecutive days, and many villagers go to watch the opera spontaneously. Xingyuanpu is certainly not the particular case of putting on opera performance at the temple fair. Temple fairs and gatherings are held in more than a dozen of villages around Xingyuanpu. According to a local old villager surnamed Wang, from the Spring Festival till the time to harvest wheat, there are fairs almost every week and opera performances are performed at the fairs⁴⁸. It is a local custom to go to the fair and visit relatives; and the days of fairs have become important festivals of local people. Going to the fair is not only a custom but also a chance to engage in social interactions. As observed by Arthur Henderson Smith who gave a vivid description of the opera at rural fairs of China:

“As soon as it is certain that a particular village is to have a theatre, the whole surrounding country is thrown into a quiver of excitement. Visits by young married women to their mothers' homes, always occasions to both mothers and daughters of special importance, are for a long time beforehand arranged with sole reference to the coming great event.....To theatrical holidays in China every other mundane interest must give way”(Smith, 1998, p.53).

Secondly, it is a folk custom to celebrate happy events. Xingyuanpu Village and Xuchang region maintain such custom. The villagers celebrate on many joyous occasions, such as marriage, birth of baby, the senior's birthday, completion of a new house, and even birth of a calf and so on. Ways of celebration has changed with the times. “Operas were popular in the past, then movies, and now stage performance of opera again, with films occasionally”⁴⁹, all of these constitute Xingyuanpu's rich and complex folk culture.

Thirdly, there is supporting industry of opera at neighboring villages. Quandian

⁴⁸ The data is from interviewee 13 in Xuchang on November 21, 2018.

⁴⁹ The words are from interviewee 5 in Xuchang city on November 21, 2018.

Village lies on the west of Xingyuanpu Village. It's only a few minutes' drive away. Like Xingyuanpu, Quandian is also a village with an intense atmosphere of the opera culture. The temple fair on the 15th day of the first lunar month every year always attracts villagers dozens of kilometers away. More importantly, Quandian is well-known all over China for its opera supplies industry. According to the *Cultural Records of Henan Province*, the opera industry here has a long history.

During the reign of the emperor Qianlong in the Qing dynasty, a Quandian native Bai Jun and others acquired technique of processing human hair from other places, after that hair processing industry has gradually thrived here. As market demanded, they began to develop opera supplies, making makeup beard and hair, horsewhip, horsetail whisk and other props. In the late Qing dynasty, Bai Qingchun and other villagers went all over China to study the advanced technology, and then came back to the village to produce makeup beard and hair products, with upgraded quality. Stage costume shops in Suzhou, Shanghai, Hangzhou, etc ordered their products. Then the products were sold across the country. Many peasant workshops sprang up successively and reached a considerable scale during the period of the Republic of China... You could find all kinds of costumes, knives, guns and props needed (Han, Li, 2006, p.25).

In an interview with Quandian villagers, a villager said proudly, "to set up a new opera troupe, we can get all costumes and props including hats, clothes, shoes and any other things prepared all ourselves"⁵⁰. It can be seen from the words how flourishing the supporting industries are. The opera art troupe established by Xingyuanpu villagers has its costumes and props mostly purchased from the village.

Fourthly, besides opera, Xingyuanpu villagers live a rich literary and artistic life. In Lingjing Town, each village puts on a folk art performance every year in the Lantern

⁵⁰ The words is from interviewee 15 in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

Festival; these performances mainly include lion dance, land boat, racedonkey dance, taking the bridal sedan chair, etc. The characters or props in the folk art performance mostly come from opera stories; and the costumes, props, horsewhip and paddles are also used in these performances. *“The Records of Xuchang County”* wrote that the local strong artistic atmosphere has a long history. “From the Qing Dynasty, villagers set up various folk art clubs, contributing money to make props and giving their own performances. They have rehearsals before the Spring Festival, put on performances during the festival and at the spring fairs” (Xuchang County Annals Compilation Committee, 1995). Xingyuanpu Village boasts a lion dancing team, a land boating team, a gong and drum team, and an art troupe, etc. There are cultural activities every year during the Spring Festival, including lion dancing, rowing land boat, gong and drum performance; and the art troupe of Xingyuanpu Village often participates in the county's folk art competitions on behalf of Lingjing Town. Although these performing forms do not belong to the traditional Chinese opera, yet they bear remarkable characteristics of opera in terms of art elements and performance style. The performances of these “folk art clubs” help establish and preserve the theatregoing tradition of Xingyuanpu villagers.

6.3.2 Xingyuanpu villagers going to the “theatre field”: a traditional stage communication pattern of opera

Like most villages in Xuchang region and Henan Province, villagers used to gather in a “theater field” to see opera performances. A traditional stage is still the main communication pattern of the traditional opera in local rural areas. There are a variety of occasions for the opera performance, such as “praying for family recovery from illness, praying for rain, regular worship in temples, celebrating for the glory, celebrating the senior’s birthday, wedding celebration, celebrating a friend’s starting business, etc”(Zheng ,1990, p.79). In spite of the variety of occasions, they can be roughly divided into two categories, one is “fairs”, and the other is the folk festive occasions. This point has been described above and will not be repeated here.

In the rural areas of Xuchang, you can rarely see a theatrical troupe performing at a villager's home; instead, it usually gives a performance in a square or an open space, which is called "the theater field" in the local dialect. Villagers from far and near are free to watch the performances. In the traditional thinking of local people, the more the audience is, the greater reputation the host family enjoys. "Theater field" is different from the regular indoor theater in the city, where there is a set of rules that must be complied with. In rural areas, however, opera performances are given in an "open space", and a stage can be set up anywhere suitable; and surrounding villagers are free to enter a performance place. In fact, traditional opera performance organizations mainly appeared in the form of folk theatrical troupe since the Song and Yuan Dynasties, when Chinese operas were fully developed. The opera artists who travel around the country were called "Luqi", "Xingyuan" or "Sanyue", etc; while the opera troupe was called "Jianghu Troupe" or "Grass Stage". According to the records of *Tales of Wulin* by Zhou Mi in the Song Dynasty, "Luqi's (street performers) giving performances on the streets or in open space, rather than in theatres, is called 'Dayehe'" (cited in Zou, 2017, p.56). The *Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival* painted by Zhang Zeduan in the Song Dynasty depicted the prosperity in the downtown of Kaifeng City, which vividly reproduced the scenes of theatre going in the busy and prosperous streets.

To go to the "theater field" is an important part of life for Xingyuanpu villagers, especially in the past, when watching operas was their greatest enjoyment due to lack of other forms of cultural life. According to a villager, he once walked all the way to Zhangpan Town, more than 50 km away from his village, in the 1970s and 1980s, to watch the opera performance; whereas theatergoing to the Wunvdian Village, which was dozens of miles away on the east of his village, was a common occurrence. "I lived in a hostel there and went to the theatre field for fourteen days in succession;

there was nothing else to enjoy except the opera”⁵¹.

“Theatre field” is the most popular place for Xingyuanpu villagers to watch the opera. It was originally in front of the Chenghuang Temple, and then relocated to an open space, the site where the Chenghuang Temple was before it was pulled down during the Cultural Revolution. Every year before the opera performance begins during the Xingyuanpu Temple Fair, there is a ritual activity in the “theatre field”. The site will be cleared first; and then a respectable person at the village will be invited to preside over the sacrifice ceremony. Before the first play, villagers will set off firecrackers to pray for being safe and smooth going, and for good weather for the crops. The performance activities at Xingyuanpu Village still bear a sense of ceremony of the opera to some extent.

Xingyuanpu Temple Fair is held when people are doing trade activities. When asked whether they can hear clearly the singing of the performance, the old man surnamed Wang said immediately, “(although) it is noisy at the fair, once entering the theater field and concentrating on the performance, I cannot hear other sounds anymore; when watching a bitter situation opera or tragedy, I cannot help crying as well”⁵². It can be seen from the words that on-the-spot stage performance can get viewers together, offer them a chance to exchange emotions, and synchronize performers with the audience. The chance to have such real feeling and interactions is one of the basic features of the theatre art. Theater is an important part of opera and an important medium for its communication. McLuhan believed that the media were the extension of the human body, which once changing, would have more psychological effects on people. As far as the operas are concerned, a change in theater and media will not only bring about transformation of spatial concept, but also lead to the changes in performer-audience relations, and then result in the change of audience's aesthetic psychology for the opera.

⁵¹ The words are from interviewee 9 in Xuchang on November 21, 2018.

⁵² The words are from interviewee 8 in Xuchang on November 21, 2018.

6.3.3 Opera film of Xingyuanpu Village

Opera film, a new form of transmission mode, has two different ways in Xingyuanpu Village. One is the opera film with special significance made by villagers, the other is watching opera film.

In 2005, Respondents 5 became a local celebrity for organizing villagers to make an opera film about war. In 2008, in order to present gift for the Beijing Olympic Games, he made another opera film. "The Olympic Games is a big event for China, and farmers should also be able to express their expectation and good wishes for the Olympics."⁵³ He and two other farmers from neighboring village formed "super cheerleaders for the Olympic Games", and carried out voluntary propaganda in surrounding villages by performing operas and singing. The film "Super Cheerleader", adapted from their story, began shooting in Xingyuanpu village. The Respondent 5 was actor and director, villagers of Xingyuanpu became figurants of the film and the shooting lasted more than two weeks. The villagers fell into unprecedented happiness. It could be said that the whole village involved in the work because about 100 villagers directly participated in the shooting of the film although most of the villagers were onlookers.

With the help of two technical supporters, Respondent 5 finished the film. One is Mr. Quan, an owner of a photography shop who came from neighboring village, who completed the post-production of the film with his home computer and film editing techniques as the critical technical support. The other is Respondent 7, who used to be the village secretary of the party of Xingyuanpu Village and the projectionist of rural digital cinema project in Lingjing Town. He is also quite proficient in photography technology and provided a lot of guidance in film shooting. When the film was

⁵³ The words are from interviewee 5 in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

released in the village, almost all villagers came to watch and also attracted thousands of villagers from other villages.

Farmers' attempt to make opera film has an extraordinary significance in the construction of rural cultural space. China's rural areas have always been regarded as the relatively closed and underdeveloped place, but under the influence of various medium and the constant permeation of electronic technology, the rural cultural space is undergoing dramatic changes. From opera, artistic performance to film, Xingyuanpu farmers can break through the space restrictions and technical barriers, freely transform in different visual cultural space, and realize the integration between history and reality and between tradition and modern.

Purchasing and playing a film in public is a way for rural villagers in Xingyuanpu and Xuchang region in occasions of praying to god, which include the wishes for a happy marriage, an birth of a boy, making a lot of money, good health of the elderly parents, or safe trip wherever to go. In fact, this form is a variant of the folk festival theatrical custom, but it partially replaced the opera performance because of the popularity of the film. The played films included opera films and other popular films in the market at that time. There is a long history of opera in Henan. Since the appearance of opera films, many opera films has been made, including "*Chaoyanggou*", "*Lowest officer*" and "*Carrying bridal Sedan*", which are popular all over the country.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, gathering at night to watch a movie on an open square was popular in Xingyuanpu village, and the number of audience has multiplied several times. Several villagers had the experience of watching film at night in other villages. And opera film was sure to play every time. Today, although this form has become relatively rare, opera film is still very popular among local villagers. Most villagers have bought opera film videos, DVDs and watching at home, a considerable number of families have installed the networking, so villagers are more convenient to acquire opera film resources.

6.3.4 TV opera of Xingyuanpu Village

With the popularity of Li Yuan Chun, a Chinese opera TV program produced by HNTV⁵⁴ since the mid-1990s, there have been great changes of the way that Xingyuanpu villagers watched opera. As mentioned above, Chinese opera was played by TV station 40 years ago in China. In 2001, CCTV 11 was launched specially for Chinese opera and provided TV audiences with various traditional opera programs. However, if Henan audiences wanted to watch other TV channels outside Henan, they should pay to cable TV service every month. Most farmers in Henan who are poor cannot afford it. Therefore, many farmers can only watch the programs offered by local TV channels including HNTV. This situation did not improve until the first ten years of 21 century and TV RF covered most of rural villages. In recent years, more and more people began to use internet TV resources. However, for Henan farmers represented by Xingyuanpu villagers, they preferred local traditional opera culture so the attraction of other opera programs is far less than that of Li Yuan Chun.

In 1994, HNTV created a new variety show called “Liyuan chun”, which featured with classical Yu Opera performance and aimed to promote this traditional theatre through modern media. At its beginning stage, “Li Yuan Chun” was a type of gala especially performing three representative traditional theatres of Henan province, which are Yuju Opera, Quju Opera and Yuediao Opera. In March 1999, “Li Yuan Chun” was redesigned from content to form. The new “Li Yuan Chun” became a performance contest among ordinary fans of the opera.

“Li Yuan Chun” adopts recorded broadcast form, which produces one program per week and broadcasts at the golden time of Sunday night. The selected contestants perform a piece of a classic play in turn accompanied by a professional band. After a performance, contestant would get some comments from several artists and experts,

⁵⁴ This is the abbreviation of Henan Provincial Television Station.

as well as be voted by the spectators. The winner could be given a big award, such as mobile phone, electrical appliance, even a car.

Henan province is widely considered as the cradle of Chinese civilization as well as traditional theatre. Besides, Henan is the no.3 in total population in China which has more than 100 million people⁵⁵. Rooted in such a socio-cultural environment, the redesigned “Li Yuan Chun” made an incredible myth in Chinese TV industry. The achievements of “Li Yuan Chun” mainly included keeping the highest audience rating at the same period for years, created a highest audience rating record up to 35.7%, attract more than 100,000 contestants in 2012, caused a Xiqu TV show boom around China, such as “Voice of Qin” of Shanxi TV and “Tongleyuan” of Beijing TV and then sparked a longtime discussion on “Li Yuan Chun” phenomenon at Chinese theatre study.(Jin, 2012) From 2005, “Li Yuan Chun” successfully expanded again. The involved theatre types increased from 3 up to a dozen, contestants came to Zhengzhou ⁵⁶from all over the country. After the development over 20 years, today “Li Yuan Chun” has become the most influential Xiqu TV show of China.

Today, the internet and smart phones are widely used. In order to attract more young audience, online live and internet forum were opened for Li Yuan Chun which can be synchronously played online and by TV. In addition, it enhanced the communication and interaction between audience and this program. According to data sourcing from official website of Li Yuan Chun, over 50,000 people had registered to participate in the challenge competition and there were over one million people watched Li Yuan Chun by the end of June 2019.⁵⁷

Currently, traditional opera programs are played by Henan provincial, municipal and prefectural TV stations. Therefore, villagers of Xingyuanpu village could watch many traditional opera programs such as Li Yuan Chun, Hao Xi Tian Tian Kan and Xiang

⁵⁵ Data source: Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of Henan Province, 2019

⁵⁶ Zhengzhou is the capital city of Henan province.

⁵⁷ Data source: Henan TV column of “*Li Yuan Chun*” official website <http://www.hnlyclm.com>

Yin Ju Chang produced by other HNTV channel, Xiqu Da Wu Tai produced by Xuchang Education TV station (municipal), Xi Mi Le Yuan produced by XCTV (municipal) and Bai Xing Wu Tai produced by Xuchang County TV station (prefectural). In the questionnaire survey made for this paper, one of the questions is related to the opera TV programs which are watched by farmers. 92 questionnaires were sent to households of Xingyuanpu village in total and 87 valid ones were retrieved (Table 6.1). From the data collected, 31 households (36%) watched almost all Li Yuan Chun, 41 households (47%) often watched it, 9 households (10%) sometimes watched it and only 6 households (7%) never saw this program. However, the corresponding data of other opera programs of the same type were far lower than those of Li Yuan Chun. This shows that Li Yuan Chun is the favorite program of respondents. Such traditional opera TV programs play a great role in promoting opera culture and cultivating loyal audiences. Villagers of Xingyuanpu village not only like such programs but also apply for participating in such programs which eliminates TV programs' sense of mystery and villagers' strangeness of them as well as the distance between TV programs and villagers. Respondent 9 in Xingyuanpu village said to the author, "Some villagers of neighboring village had participated in such programs but I thought that I could sing better than them."⁵⁸ Some theatre fans from Xingyuanpu village are addicted to art of Chinese traditional opera because of Li Yuan Chun and the Chinese Opera Art Troupe Xing Yuan Chun established by Xingyuanpu village that was inspired by such opera programs like Li Yuan Chun.

Table 6.1 Investigation on the household watching Liyuanchun in Xingyuanpu

Watching frequency	Number of households	Proportion
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⁵⁸ The words are from No.9 interviewee in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

Almost every issue	31	36%
Often	41	47%
Sometimes	9	10%
Never	6	7%

6.3.5 Xing Yuan Chun Traditional Chinese Opera Art Troupe

Xing Yuan Chun Chinese Opera Art Troupe of Xingyuanpu village was founded in 2005. Respondent 5 who have produced films proposed to establish an art troupe on the basis of influences of film shooting to organize theatre fans to rehearse operas. He explained to the author in the interview, “We all like to perform in opera and have common interests and we also can engage in chitchat”⁵⁹. This proposal won the support of theatre-obsessed villagers so Xing Yuan Chun was established quickly.

At the initial period of founding, Xing Yuan Chun mainly imitated operas from DVD disks. Later, as more and more villagers join in to learn opera performance, Xing Yuan Chun attracted more talents who create new programs based on real facts occurred in their families or other families to integrate the daily living with traditional opera. For example, Respondent 12 joined in the troupe because she felt unhappy that her son was very unfilial after the death of her husband. After joint Xing Yuan Chun, she not only found the joy of life but also blended unfilial facts of her son with related program “Thunder Strikes Unfilial Son”. Hereafter, her unfilial son was condemned by all villagers.

Members of Xing Yuan Chun rehearsed programs by using of spare time and made a performance tour around Xingyuanpu villages and neighboring villages, which attracted more and more farmers to watch opera and learn opera performance. At the

⁵⁹ The words are from No.5 interviewee in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

same time, their opera performance developed a public space for farmers for a party. Hundreds of villagers sit around Xing Yuan Chun to watch their rehearsal and performance. Especially on summer nights, watching the performance of “Xing Yuan Chun” became the best choice of villagers for fun. Respondent 5 said, “villagers used to play Mahjong but were not interested in playing it after the establishment of Xing Yuan Chun”⁶⁰.

In recent years, Xing Yuan Chun performed operas not only within Xingyuanpu village but also in other villages around it. Their performance was made in more counties such as neighboring county in addition to Xuchang County, which extends to a larger geographic area. The author heard of that Xing Yuan Chun made a performance tour in Changge County by relatives from the hometown in October 2020. Through the communication with the troupe leader, the author knew that they made a performance tour in many villages in Xuchang County and the theme was the hot spot of society – Fighting against COVID-19 Epidemic. It could be said that the practice of the farmers in Xing Yuan Chun not only actively promotes the local opera culture but also provides good experience for the construction of new rural culture in Henan province (Figure 6.2).

⁶⁰ The words are from interviewee 5 in Xuchang on November 21, 2018.



Figure 6.2 The performers of Xing Yuan Chun Opera art troupe took a curtain call on stage

Source: Provided by interviewee 5

6.4 Analysis on the Transmission Patterns of Traditional Opera in Xingyuanpu

The communication patterns of opera culture in Xingyuanpu village are diverse, and these patterns interact with and influence each other. In chronological order, the major communication patterns of opera in Xingyuanpu have undergone a rough transition from stage to film and to television and back to stage, and none of them are absolute. It is because non-traditional media such as film, television and network have not completely replaced traditional stage, which has always existed, but its share has been changing. In addition, now it seems that non-traditional media are not a single existence, they are currently co-existing and symbiotic. For the peasants of Xingyuanpu village, as well as for the opera culture itself, different communication patterns have different meanings and impacts.

6.4.1 Impact of different communication patterns on peasant audiences

The combination of traditional opera culture with modern media such as film, television and network has created new communication patterns. For villagers in Henan like those of Xingyuanpu, the new communication patterns have brought both positive and negative impacts.

In terms of positive impact, first of all, the media such as film, television and network have made it more convenient for peasants to access the opera culture resources. "In the past, we could only watch the opera when opera performances are held, but now we can watch opera on TV whenever we want"⁶¹. Secondly, a wide variety of opera culture products such as complete repertoire videos, opera live-action TV dramas, clips of difficult skills of professional opera actors, opera tournaments for opera fans, expert reviews, teaching by famous artists and short videos of non-mainstream and untraditional opera elements popular on the Internet today meet the diverse needs of peasant audiences with different cultural qualities and different aesthetic habits. Moreover, modern communication methods have objectively attracted and cultivated more peasant audiences, especially young audiences. In the survey and interviews, I have noticed many times that the younger generation of rural residents are "housebound" people, who prefer to stay at home or even in their own rooms most of the time, except for the necessary social interactions. Their cultural and entertainment needs are almost entirely satisfied by cell phones, computers, televisions and other electronic devices. Respondent No. 16 is a 16-year-old girl, granddaughter of Respondent No. 8 in Xuchang, she told the author that, "I like to watch TV at home, I can watch any plays I want, and the opera performances in the village are always watched by the elderly and women, so I feel ashamed to go there."⁶² Some young people start to understand and love opera through TV, network and other channels. For example, Respondent 17 in Xuchang, 23 years old, said,

"I didn't like opera before because all the plays here are Henan opera, which are

⁶¹ The words are from the author's summary based on a number of random street interviews in Xingyuanpu Village and the nearby Caowang Village

⁶² The words are from No.16 interviewee in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

too rustic, and then I happened to switch to the opera channel of CCTV, a Peking opera program was being broadcast, which I thought was much more elegant than Henan opera, and the costumes looked beautiful, after that I was addicted to Peking opera"⁶³.

Sophisticated and older audiences are still more likely to watch live stage performances of opera. First, these people have had more interactions with traditional opera culture in their lives and for a longer period of time. In the first half of their lives, they experienced and participated in the "revolutionary model opera" period when opera was widely propagated as a political tool during the Cultural Revolution and the brief glory period of traditional opera in the 1980s (for example, the author's affection for opera primarily stems from the fact that I used to go to the performance site with the elders when I was young). They have a deep and natural affection for opera, and many of them are not only satisfied with watching opera, but also set up folk troupes like "Xing Yuan Chun" to engage in opera performances. For these people, watching opera (or performing on stage) is a way to relive their cultural memories and to satisfy a higher level of spiritual needs. The words of No. 5 interviewee in Xuchang reflect their feelings very well: "Watching opera on TV is not interesting, not vivid, how can it be as enjoyable as watching it live!"⁶⁴ The difference involves the distortion and elimination of the characteristics and attraction of traditional opera culture by means of electronic media.

6.4.2 Distortion and elimination of the characteristics and attraction of the opera by electronic communication patterns

Undoubtedly, opera TV program "Li Yuan Chun" and the investigation of Xingyuanpu village have shown a strong visual media power by modern electronic and digital communication patterns such as film, TV and network, which have been the initial

⁶³ The words are from No.17 interviewee in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

⁶⁴ The words are from No.5 interviewee in Xuchang on November 21, 2018

attempts to extend the range of opera culture, and we can see from these attempts the possibility of inheriting opera culture by modern means. However, after uncovering the surface of opera TV phenomenon, like “Li Yuan Chun”, and comparing the essential difference between modern film and television communication and traditional stage communication, it is discovered that the combination of opera with film and television does not present the original meaning of opera, as theatrical characteristics, virtuality, dramatic nature and other important characteristics of opera as they are all deformed and deconstructed. Therefore, opera researchers must analyze its essence with an objective view and the pros and cons rationally. It is necessary to recognize the advantages of modern media over the traditional stage, but more importantly, it is also worthwhile to be alert to the negative effects it may have on the cultural heritage of opera.

6.4.2.1 The promotion of modern media on traditional Chinese opera

Undoubtedly, as many scholars have accounted, modern medias like “Li Yuan Chun” has made remarkable promotion on traditional Chinese opera. The combination between modern media and the ancient art broke through the limitation of traditional theatre on its transmission.

Firstly, modern media broke the spatial limitation and the temporal limitation of onstage performance. The original performance of traditional Chinese opera was bounded by the old conditions of space and time. Usually, in urban area, theatre is normal space for performance. In rural area, a special stage which has no stable seats always could be used to play traditional theatre. Audiences have to schedule their time to go to the assigned venue for watching. The limitation extremely affected the number of audience and the performance quality, as well as the effect of watching.

Modern media efficiently broke the spatial limitation and the temporal limitation of onstage performance, such as Li Yuan Chun. HNTV built the no.8 studio hall mainly

for“Li Yuan Chun” which has 17,000 m² covered area with the biggest stage of China, cost over 800 million RMB ⁶⁵. All of the digital TV user can watch the performance in front of the device in their house anytime in China.

Secondly, modern media efficiently solved the slow rhythm, an weakness of traditional Chinese opera. Rhythm is one of the main obstacles in front of the development of traditional Chinese opera in contemporary time. As a typical ancient art form, traditional Chinese opera used to take quite long time to complete the story narrative. In the past, people spent half day to enjoy a play. The slow rhythm cannot be adapted to the contemporary audience’s habit and their fast pace of life.

Through modern media, this weakness could be remedied in certain degree. According to Zhang Jianping, the director of “Li Yuan Chun”, this program “broke the original rhythm of Xiqu, the long and slow story telling was changed to a short and quick episode, the original transition part and narrative part were deleted, the rhythm of the whole performance was shortened obviously” (Zhang, 2012).

Thirdly, the advantages of visual expression of modern media help to enhance the visual presentation of opera. In original performance, the shaping of the artistic image and the expression of the charm in traditional Chinese opera mainly are implemented though the instantaneous performance elements, including actor’s sing, dance, monologue, action, and the exquisite movement of their hands, eyes and bodies. The distance from the stage to the audience, adding the instantaneous characteristic, could decrease the charm of the theatre.

Modern media can make a perfect presentation of the performance by the advanced photographic and editing techniques, which select excellent sights to shift or connect as a smooth performance. Through the screen, audience can get a better visual and

⁶⁵ Data source: Henan TV column of “*Li Yuan Chun*” official website <http://www.hnlyclm.com>

auditory experience.

6.4.2.2 The distortion of modern media on traditional Chinese opera

Modern media could effectively improve many weaknesses of traditional communication forms of opera. However, at the same time, modern media communication could also cause a certain distortion to the aesthetic features of traditional opera.

1. The destruction of the integrity of traditional Chinese opera. The first is the destruction of the integrity of the opera story by television and internet transmissions. Unlike traditional stage performances where an intact play is performed on the stage, the story played on television and the Internet is often broken up into fragments. However, as with other theatre arts and plays around the world, the essential attribute of opera is to tell a story in its entirety. Fragmented television opera programmes and short online opera videos have actually abandoned the essential attribute of opera but unilaterally captured its performance attributes of song, dance, martial arts, acrobatics and other stage skills. In addition, the commercial nature of modern media has made opera constantly interrupted by advertisements even in the presentation of fragmented opera. Many villagers in Xingyuanpu Village said that *Li Yuan Chun* was an annoying programme, mainly because sponsors were attracted by its influence, and advertisements accounted for about one third of the total length of the programme. The unexpected break has destroyed the integrity and fluency of the live stage performance.

The integrity of the visual presentation of opera is also undermined. From the stage to television and online platforms, the visual presentation has changed from a three-dimensional form to a two-dimensional one. In contrast to the vertical feeling brought forth by the stage, modern media bring the audience plain images without depth. The circulation of images and sound impact the audience's visual and auditory

senses like a wall, constituting a contradictory world where the real and the virtual is mixed up. The comprehensive temporal art of the opera and the multi-sensory participation of the audience are biasedly visualized, and the vertical feeling of the stage changes to a flow of frames. Mike Featherstone noted that "audience follows the rapidly changing television images closely that it is difficult to connect the referents of those images into a meaningful statement, and simply revels in the tension and sensory stimulation created by images flashed on the screen"(Featherstone, 2000, p.79). The rapid flow of images, therefore, hardly allows the audience to immerse in the emotional and rhythmic realm of opera. Daniel Bell's claims are even more sobering:

"All this inevitably results in a distortion of common sense perception across the whole range of human experience ... (Television) raises our tensions to feverish levels without leaving us a moment of resolution, reconciliation or transformation, which is the purifying effect of cathartic ritual ... after a whirlwind of sensual excitement, all that remains is the tedium of daily life" (Bell, 2007, p.196).

2. The irreproducibility of opera as a stage art is dissipated. One of the charms of stagecraft is the irreproducibility of its performances. Benjamin once said that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 2006, p.68). As a stagecraft, opera certainly has this feature, which constitutes the unique charm of the art of opera. A same play may be created differently by different creative groups, so as the same role. Due to subjective and objective factors, the performance of the same role by the same actor may be different in different time and space. From this perspective, it is possible to explain the many cases in the history of opera in which opera fans have chased after the famous character, such as the Peking Opera artists Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xinfang, the Yuju Opera artist Chang Xiangyu and the Huangmei Opera artist Yan Fengying. There is also a tendency in veteran opera fans that is the repeated appreciation of the same play, even if he/she is familiar

with every line.

However, this irreproducibility is dissolved from the moment opera is combined with modern media such as film and television. Opera has changed from maintaining "its presence in time and space" to "its presence not in time and space". The technology of reproduction allows the same performance to be reproduced at any time and in any space, and the value of uniqueness attached to it is destroyed.

3. The distorted relationship between the audience and the actor. One of the reasons why theatre arts place special emphasis on theatricality is that theatre provides a wonderful aesthetic process created by the emotional experience of both the actor and the audience on and off the stage. Theatre theorists have found that the most fascinating, mysterious and distinctive characteristic of theatre is that a common reaction, an inevitable mutual effect and a shared emotional experience emerge during the performance process, and that this emotional experience and the actors' performance interaction "give the theatre a special collective psychological environment that only occurs during theatrical performances" (Liao & Xiao, 2005, p.76). Opera is a typical representative of this characteristic of theatre. The virtual, realistic and programmatic artistic feature of opera and its strong regional characteristic particularly demands the active participation of the audience in the process of realizing its cultural and artistic value. Every movement of the actors on the stage will be closely linked to the imagination and understanding of the audience off the stage, and in turn, the audience's expressions of emotion, such as applause and tears, which are common in traditional opera performances, will be reflected back into the stage performance, forming a close partnership between the actors and the audience, as if the audience is also the direct creator of the opera performance.

However, when the audience is moved to a private space separated by the screens of film, television or internet terminal, this relationship is distorted to one of passive reception, with the audience being alienated from the work of art. That is why the

villagers of Xingyuanpu Village feel that watching opera on television is cold. This partly explains why, in today's society with highly developed modern media means, the main form of transmission of opera in Xingyuanpu Village has returned to the stage scene. In the beginning, film and television opera did attract a large audience, but after a long time, villagers who love opera culture find it difficult to get the same feeling and enthusiasm they used to get from watching opera, so they returned to the stage on their own. It partly explains why the main form of transmission of opera in Xingyuanpu Village has reverted to the live stage, given the highly developed modern media.

6.5 Insights from the Revival of Traditional Opera in Xingyuanpu Village

Xingyuanpu Village is one of the millions of ancient villages in Henan with a long history and profound cultural traditions. Tradition and modernity have collided and combined in the flood of modernization in China, changing the custom and culture and bringing the ancient opera culture back to life. The diverse forms of opera transmission in Xingyuanpu Village and the innovative opera practices of the villagers have given the author much food for thought. The village is a microcosm of the countryside in China, and an objective observation can bring useful thoughts on the transmission and development of opera culture in rural society.

6.5.1 Emphasis on the discovery and utilization of local opera resources

In a survey of the opera repertoire favored by the villagers of Xingyuanpu Village and a survey of Xing Yuan Chun opera practice, the author found an interesting phenomenon, which is the integration of local cultural resources in the opera. Compared to other regions in China, the villagers of Xingyuanpu Village are supposed to be more obsessed with the stories of the Three Kingdoms. Xuchang is an important place for the occurrence of the story of the Three Kingdoms. It is the seat of

the Wei Dynasty founded by Cao Cao (hence it is renamed Wei Capital). According to the *Xuchang Opera Journal*, there are 79 kinds of "Three Kingdoms Play" that have been passed down in Xuchang. The stories of the Three Kingdoms that have been brought to the stage are prevalent in Xuchang. One of the most popular stories in Xingyuanpu Village is that of Xu Shu, a character from the Three Kingdoms. According to *Xuchang Opera Journal*, it is a story about traditional Chinese virtues, which still has practical significance for the construction of healthy rural culture in modern China.

"Xu Shu paid a visit and recommend Zhuge Kongming to Liu Bei. Liu Bei invited Xu Shu to visit Zhuge Kongming together with him. Xu Shu said you should not summon him to your door but condescend to him by yourself. Liu Bei followed his suggestion. Xu Shu advanced south with Liu Bei, but was attacked by Cao Cao and Xu Shu's mother was captured. To save his mother, Xu Shu had to leave. As he was leaving, he pointed to his heart and said to Liu Bei, 'I had wanted to build hegemony with you, but now that my mother has been detained, I have to abandon my original intent and thus ask for leave.' So he went to Cao Cao without developing a single strategy for the rest of his life" (Han, Li, 2006, p.94).

There are many plays in Henan Yuju opera that praise Xu Shu's loyalty and filial piety, such as the traditional plays of *Xu's Mother Reviles Cao Cao*, *Three Visits to The Cottage*, *Xu Shu Crosses the River*, *Chang Ban Hill* and *Xu's Mother Reprimands Her Son*.

Thunder Strikes the Unfilial Son, one of the preserved plays of the Xing Yuan Chun Opera Art Troupe, is the response of the villagers of Xingyuanpu Village to the filial piety of Xu Shu. The play tells the story of a young couple who are struck by lightning because they were not filial to their mother. It reflects the simple mentality of the peasants who value filial piety. Buddhism, which propagates the idea of

retribution for good and evil and urges people to be good has profound influence on people in rural China. *I Love My Father* is also a regular repertoire of Xing Yuan Chun that propagates filial piety. These new plays adapted or created by Xing Yuan Chun, actually have the same roots as the story of Xu Shu in the traditional repertoire, and also show a way for Xing Yuan Chun to explore and utilize local cultural resources.

6.5.2 The powerful role of individuals and folk organizations

Throughout the process of investigation on Xingyuanpu Village, the author was strongly impressed by the powerful role played by individuals and folk organizations in cultural transmission.

Respondent No. 5 is a central figure in the cultural activities of opera in Xingyuanpu Village. He is the initiator of the filming of the opera film, in which he acts as the director and the actor, and actually takes on the role of producer and supervisor as well as the complicated work of service support. He is also the organizer and main actor of the Xing Yuan Chun Opera Troupe. As a core person of the troupe, he plays an irreplaceable role in the production, rehearsal and performance of the opera.

This is closely related to the life experience of Respondent No. 5. Born in the 1950s, the nearly 70-year-old man has experienced the ups and downs of traditional Chinese opera in the second half of the 20th century. During the Cultural Revolution, he was the backbone of the local Mao Zedong Literary and Artistic Propaganda Team and was a actor of "revolutionary model plays". In addition, the influence of political movements and ideology was not profound in rural areas of Henan compared to urban areas. According to the recollection of Respondent No. 5, traditional opera performances were common but presented in a semi-underground state in the rural areas of Henan where Xingyuanpu Village is located. Respondent No. 5 was also the heir to a family of traditional Chinese medicine and a village doctor, whose cultural

and artistic qualities were much higher than those of other Chinese peasants of his generation.

Therefore, the high educated group living in the countryside, represented by Respondent No. 5, has actually been immersed in traditional opera culture for a long time and watching and performing opera is an essential part of life for them. Meanwhile, regular appreciation and practice of opera has equipped them with a certain level of opera performance ability, which makes a foundation for them to play a leading role in the cultural activities of opera, and with their age and status in the clan, their appeal and influence are very strong.

Under the leadership of Respondent No. 5, Xing Yuan Chun has developed a number of regular opera repertoires over a decade. Among them, there are traditional plays as well as new works created by the group members based on their real life. These productions have gained wide popularity among the villagers, some young people are attracted by their opera performances, and some even participate in. The number of people in the troupe has grown from a single digit to 56 now, many of whom are under the age of 50. Xing Yuan Chun opera troupe has now become a cultural window for the village and a visiting card for foreign exchange.

The role played by peasant-run folk troupes such as Xing Yuan Chun in promoting and spreading opera culture is obvious. Unlike professional troupes, their members come from the peasantry and, to some extent, their performances are more in tune with the cultural base and aesthetic interests of peasant audience. The theme of the plays is mostly connected with rural life, which can portray the sorrows and joys that occur in rural society and meet the cultural needs of rural residents, thus playing a powerful role in infecting and uniting people. On the basis of the author's observation, it is a common phenomenon for peasants to set up amateur opera troupes in Xuchang. According to the villagers of Xingyuanpu Village, there are about thirty amateur opera troupes in Xuchang County. Unfortunately, an accurate survey of peasant-run troupes

requires a great deal of time and effort to implement fieldwork and follow-up surveys, and this work is yet to be carried out in the future.

6.5.3 A communal life for rural communities built through traditional opera

When the opera activities of the peasants in Xingyuanpu Village are observed in the overall context of village life, it is easy to identify the important role that opera plays in constructing the public cultural space of Xingyuanpu Village, connecting the history with the present, and bridging the emotions of the super-kinship between villagers. It can be said that the structural and functional significance of opera for an ancient village like Xingyuanpu has long gone beyond the ordinary understanding of the object of aesthetic activity.

Before the mid-1990s, opera was largely indigenous to Xingyuanpu Village, and the theatre was a place where villagers and their friends and relatives met, chatted and commented on the performances on stage. In 2005, the villagers organized Xing Yuan Chun art troupe, which brought Han and Hui ethnic groups together. Thus, opera in Xingyuanpu Village is an art transcends family and clan. It is probably the largest and most widespread form of communal life in modern rural life. From a sociological point of view, opera has created a communal space for human bonding, in which the cultural genes and values shared by the villagers resonate with their common life experiences, thus forming a unique cultural connection among them and a communal cultural identity belonging to the village community.

This communal cultural identity is undoubtedly very valuable, especially in the context of globalization, cultural homogenization and the general decline of traditional culture. It can give the community a cultural subjectivity and give its members the spirit and enthusiasm to actively participate in the development of their own culture. It is only with the active participation of the subjects that traditional

culture can be passed on. In such a process, new cultural factors and traditions are created, thus forming a unique and recognizable culture that is specific to the region.

6.6 Summary

Xingyuanpu Village is a microcosm of Chinese traditional villages. Like most villages in China, it is experiencing a collision between tradition and modernity. Modern media culture and technology have become ubiquitous in this village, covering people's productive work, daily life and social interactions. Some scholars say that China is now in an era where feudal culture, capitalist culture, socialist culture and post-modern culture are intertwined. In the social context of the co-existing and competing of various cultures, the people of Xingyuanpu Village have returned to their traditions and built a public cultural space for spiritual sustenance and emotional exchange with opera. At a time when professional opera artists and theoreticians are lamenting the decline of opera and worrying about its future, the villagers of Xingyuanpu Village are understanding and passing on the local opera culture in their own way, which provides a vivid example of the revival of this ancient art in rural areas, and some positive insights into the complex question of "how to inherit and develop traditional opera culture in modern society".

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: PARTIAL REVIVAL OF RURAL OPERA--- AN INVESTIGATION OF XUN COUNTY

7.1 Introduction

Contrasted with its counterpart in Xuchang prefecture, the development of traditional Chinese opera in Xun and Hua counties appears a different kind of prosperity. If the survey in Xuchang County gave the author a strong sense of certain individuals' outstanding performance in the opera practice, the results observed in Xun County display a impressive vitality of folk traditions. In addition, many stable local groups play an irreplaceable role in the revival of the opera.

Under the prosperity lies the issue of how traditional opera can hold on and adjust to the changes of modernization. It is worth noting the conflict between the traditional and the modern culture.

7.2 Subject and Variation: Traditional Chinese Opera in Multiple Forms

7.2.1 Geographical location and the temple fair culture in Xun County

Xun County is located in the northern part of Henan province, adjacent to Hebei and Shandong provinces. It is at the boundaries of these three provinces, the transition zone from the North China Plain to the Tai-hang Mountains (Figure 7.1). Historically, Xun County located along the old course of the Yellow River, served as a major military town in Central China. It was also an important hydro-junction, a place of cultural exchanges, and a vital communication line that ran in all directions.



Figure 7.1 Location of Xun County in China

Source: made by the author based on China (n.d.) and Henan (n.d.)

These geographical factors contributed to the long-standing and stable cultural accumulation in Central China; on the other hand, they made it convenient for Xun County to receive resources, population, and culture from surrounding areas. *The Ming empire Xun County Equitan good governance monument* written by Meng Si⁶⁶ in the Ming Dynasty said:

“Xun County is a grand strategic place in the northern region of China...Due to the havoc and turmoil caused by wars, Xun County witnessed a vast tract of uncultivated land and overgrowth of grass; then the government comforted survivors and ordered people to migrate here to expand the population” (cited in Xing, 2018).

Multiple tablet inscriptions that demonstrate the migration have been discovered in the territory of Xun County (Figure 7.2, 7.3). For instance, Mr. Guo’s tombstone in Guozhuang Village of Baisi Town bears: “the Guos, who were natives of Hongtong

⁶⁶ Meng Si was born in the Ming Dynasty, and the year of his birth and death cannot be verified, nor the year of his writing.

County, Shanxi Province, migrated to Botou Village, West of Xun, during the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty when the Emperor relocated the people by households to expand his territory...” It is known from the reference in the inscription that the tomb-owner was originally from Hongtong, Shanxi, and that the whole family migrated to Xun County in compliance with the government order in the early years of the Ming Dynasty. There are more than ten similar inscriptions in Xun County; all of them refer to Hongtong County, Shanxi Province. Therefore, it is clear that a large proportion of Xun’s population is descendants of immigrants. The large number of immigrant population also brought a fusion of diverse cultures.



Figure 7.2 Stone tablet of Huayan Temple in Xun County

Source: taken by the author (Feb., 2018)



Figure 7.3 Stone tablet of Wenmiao Temple in Xun County

Source: taken by the author (Feb., 2018)

Xun County is well known in and around Henan province for its annual ancient temple fair held in the first month of the lunar calendar. One of the physical conditions for the formation and continuation of the ancient temple fair is numerous temples and Taoist abbeys interspersed among the Dapi and Fuqiu mountains in the territory of Xun County. According to records in the book *Shang Shu · Yu Gong*⁶⁷:

“Ruoshui River is diverted into Heli River, and the water downstream flows into the desert through dredging. The Heishui River is dredged and flows to Sanwei Mountain and into the South China Sea...The river is dredged from Jishi, flows to Longmen, southward to Huayin, then eastward to Dizhu Mountain, Mengjin, Luorui, past Dapi... and flowing into the sea” (cited in Xing, 2018).

The “Dapi” mentioned herein denotes the Dapi Mountain in the territory of Xun County. According to the legend of Great Yu Controlling Flood, Dayu climbed on the

⁶⁷ “*Shang Shu · Yu Gong*” is one of the earliest geographical books in China.

mountain during his endeavors of taming the flood. This legend for the mountains and rivers of Jun County wrapped in ancient cultural glory. Both the Fuqiu and Dapi mountains in the territory of Xun County belong to the Taihang Mountain. The Fuqiu Mountain, which is in the South of Xun County, was called the “South Mountain” by locals; whereas the Dapi Mountain located in the East is named the “East Mountain.” Because of both natural and humanitarian advantages, the Dapi and Fuqiu Mountains had witnessed the settlement of the Buddhist and Taoist cultures since the Wei and Jin Dynasties. Temples and Taoist abbeys scattering all over the mountains are reflections of almost all dynasties in the middle and later periods of China’s feudal society, e.g. Tianning Temple in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Thousand Buddha Caves of the Tang Dynasty, Taipingxingguo Temple of the Song Dynasty, Guanyin Rock of the Yuan Dynasty, Bixia Palace of the Ming Dynasty, and Lvzu Temple of the Qing Dynasty. In addition to their appeal to religious stylites, the mountains also found favor in the eyes of Wang Yangming (1472-1529 AD), the great thinker in the Ming Dynasty, who ran the Yangming Academy in the mountain and had written the famous *Poem on Climbing the Dapi Mountain*. The landscapes reflected the atmosphere of humanism of the two mountains. The most historically valuable cultural heritage is the stone buddha of the Northern Wei Dynasty located in the east Dapi Mountain. The stone Buddha with more than 1,700 years of history is about 450 years earlier than the famous Leshan Buddha in Sichuan province, and five meters higher than Lushena Buddha in Luoyang Longmen Grottoes. The stone Buddha demonstrates Buddhism’s wide popularity in Central China (Figure 7.4). Furthermore, the Thousand Buddha Cave containing nearly 1000 sculptures located in the Fuqiu Mountain is engraved in the Tang Dynasty and considered the treasures of stone carving art of China (Figure 7.5).

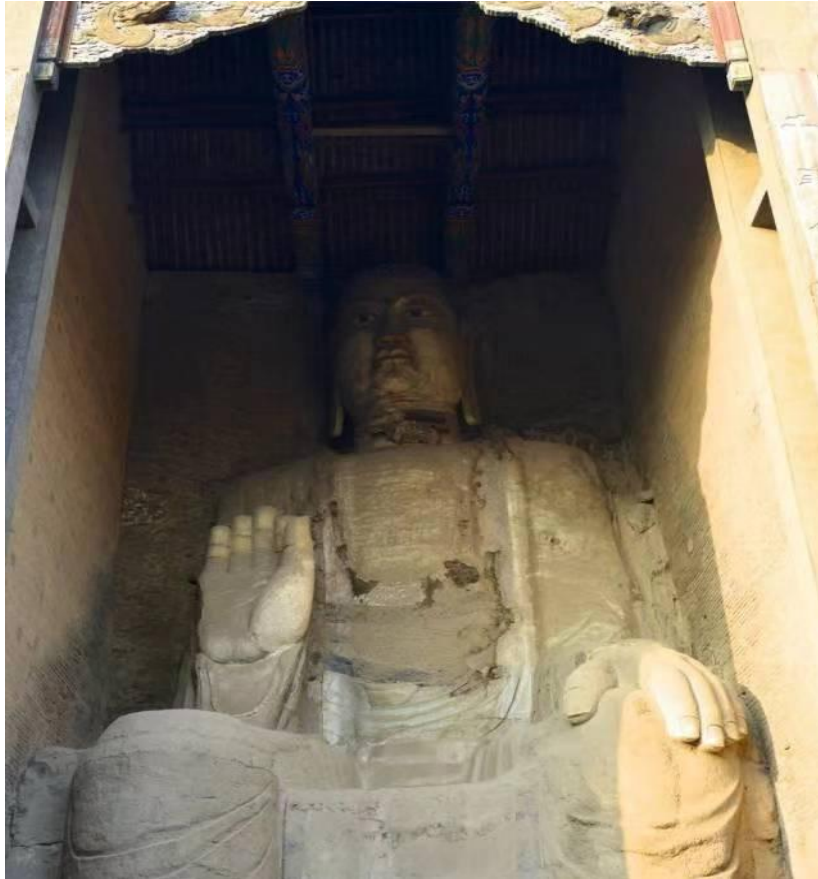


Figure 7.4 the stone buddha of Dapi Mountain.

Source: taken by the author (Feb., 2018)



Figure 7.5 the Thousand Buddha Cave of Fuqiu Mountain.

Source: taken by the author (Feb., 2018)

Temple is the origin of all temple fair activities. Numerous temples in Xun County have created environmental conditions for the formation and development of temple fairs. Temples and Taoist abbeys are major places of temple fairs and public spaces for the locals' religious and mental activities. In this public space, people of the same culture or faith congregated around temples to hold regular gatherings, which gradually integrated with commercial trade, culture, arts, entertainment, and many other spiritual and material activities, and has evolved into the temple fair over time.

If the mountains have contributed to the heavy religious atmosphere in the formation and development of the Xun Ancient Temple Fair, the river provides it with convenient transportation and a source of myth in the process of cultural integration. The Qi River, a tributary of the ancient Yellow River, mentioned repeatedly in the *Book of Songs* as a major geographical factor for the formation and development of Xun County. The river is considered as the cradle of agricultural civilization in Central Plains, and also one of the major sources of the Grand Canal dug gradually from the later period of the Han Dynasty to the reign of the Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty. Thus, it was a pivot for transportation for the economic and cultural development of the ancient Xun County. As Xun County is placed at the important position of the Grand Canal, the developed grain transport facilitated local economic prosperity and population flow, which further promoted cultural exchanges and integration from different regions.

Besides prosperity and development, the river also brought about flood disaster to Xun County. According to records, there were dozens of recorded floods in the history of Xun County. This section of the ancient Yellow River flooded frequently, which posed grave threats to the life and property of the locals. Therefore, people who had performed extraordinarily in taming the river and legendary heroes were invariably honored as divinities, for example, King Yu who passed by his house three times without entering in nine years when he tamed the river, and legendary Erlang God

who killed the flood dragon for maintaining the river. According to the record in the *Annals of Xun County*, the earliest temples in the Dapi and Fuqiu mountains are the King of Yu Temple and the Erlang God Temple, which prove that the two figures who created wonders to regulate the river and watercourse were worshipped by the ancients of Xun County. For a rather long period of history, locals worshipped the Water Gods each year, praying for the Gods' protection against flood. The phenomenon indicates a psychological foundation of the ancients of Xun County, who worshipped the Water Gods for their fear of flood. Therefore, worship of the Water Gods was a major theme and content of earlier temple fairs in Xun County, and also an essential foundation for various artistic performance activities at the temple fair of Xun County.

Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the First Lunar Month is an ancient custom of the Han nationality, as well as a religious and cultural activity for local people. It originated from the Northern Wei and Houzhao Dynasties, and had a history of more than 1,600 years to this day. The temple fair had fully developed since the later period of the Ming Dynasty and has been carried forward up to now. It is held during the month of Chinese New Year in the temples that scatter in the Fuqiu and Dapi mountains. The temple fair centers on offering sacrifices to the gods, making wishes, and entertainment, plus trade and assembly activities. With time moving on, the Xun Ancient Temple Fair had gradually evolved to the current grand scale. Today, Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the First Lunar Month known as "The First Ancient Temple Fair in North China", and is held for a longer period from January 1st to February 2nd of the lunar calendar, with over 200,000 visitors daily, or even reaching a peak of more than 700,000 daily visitors. It attracts tourists from more than 20 provinces and cities around the county, as well as from home and abroad.

Starting from the first day during the first month of the lunar calendar, the event reached its highlight on the sixteenth day. On this day, a team performing the "Shehuo" performance and some artistic troupes put on shows such as stilt walking, lion and

dragon dances, running land boat dance, acrobatics and opera performances in the two mountains. On such occasions, merchants flocked into the fair and attracted a steady stream of people.

Nowadays, Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the First Lunar Month has developed into a large folk religious sacrifice activity, as well as an exhibition and performance of the folk art and culture in the Central Plains of China. It is a living fossil of traditional Chinese folk culture and arts. In 2004, it was listed among the Pilot Projects for the National Intangible Cultural Heritage of China; In 2005, Clay coo-coo, a type of folklore sculpture typical in Xun County, was included in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List of China, and was rated as the Folk Classics of Henan; In 2007, Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the First Lunar Month and Xun Folk Shehuo were included in the Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Henan; In 2008, Xun Folk Shehuo Performance was included in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List of China. In 2014, Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the First Lunar Month was included in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List of China.⁶⁸

7.2.2 Opera performance at the Xun Ancient Temple Fair and other rural temple fairs

7.2.2.1 Opera performance at the Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the First Lunar Month

In rural China, temple fairs and ceremonial events are the main occasions of most opera performances. The relation between opera and folk performances is shown in many existing documents. Saishe Activities⁶⁹ are catalysts for the birth and prosperity of traditional Chinese opera. The temple opera performance is the most popular type of activity in the greater rural area of China. The folk religion and folk performance respectively serve as the carrier and the parent of the opera, while the opera is the

⁶⁸ The data comes from the Henan Intangible Cultural Heritage Website and the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Website. <http://www.henanfeiyi.com/>, <https://www.ihchina.cn/>

⁶⁹ Saishe refers to the competition performance activities between the folk Shehuo teams.

most dynamic, the most boisterous, and the wildest way to release and express feelings. The “Carnival” at the Xun Ancient Temple Fair is no exception. The Fair features the gong and drum music of the opera. The major way for the public to participate in the entertainment is to watch it. The author conducted field research on Xun Ancient Temple Fair in Lunar January during the Chinese New Year in 2018 and 2019 and discovered that the opera performance activity has characteristics distinct from the usual opera performance.

Firstly, the opera performance last for a long time. The 2018 Xun Ancient Temple Fair& the 10th China (Hebi) Folk Culture Festival activity in Xun County was held from February 16 (the Chinese New Year) to March 18 (the Longtaitou Festival). With “visiting the ancient temple fair and the ancient city, appreciating the folk customs in Central Plains, and enjoying the tourism feast” as its theme, the event offered 19 activities including the Shehuo Cruise, local opera exhibition and performance , performance of intangible culture in Central Plains, and traditional folk culture exhibition of Xun County. Among others, the opera exhibition and performance lasted for 17 days, from February 25 to March 13 (from January 10 to 26 of the lunar calendar).

Secondly, a variety of operas were involved in the exhibition and performance, including local operas in Henan such as Yu Opera, Qu Opera, Yuediao Opera, Dapingdiao Opera, Erjiaxian Opera, and representative operas in other regions, such as Peking Opera, Qinqiang Opera, and Huangmei Opera. According to statistics, there were a total of 22 types of operas participated in the exhibition.

Thirdly, the performances were put on with high frequency. The 17-day opera performance was scheduled at 9 a.m., and 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. respectively each day, i.e. a total of 51 opera performances during the temple fair.

Fourthly, the forms of the opera performance were diversified. There were

performances of a full text of plays, collections of varied opera fragments, the performance of a single opera, and the assembly of varied operas. The performances could satisfy the audiences' various requests.

Fifthly, the opera performance attracted a large moving audience. According to the author's observations, owing to the strong attraction of the Xun Ancient Temple Fair, there were far more audiences who stop by the stage than those watching the ordinary rural opera performance. The audiences contained both residents and foreign tourists. Local audiences were mostly seniors who usually carried a stool or a chair and prefer to spend more time to watch the performance. Tourists, however, were varied in age, and most of them were attracted by the sound and the color of the opera. Most of them just stood and watched for a while before leaving, thus had a feature of strong fluidity.

The author visited Xun County again during the period of the Chinese New Year in 2019 to conduct field research. Compared with the previous years, the ancient temple fair in 2019 had two new characteristics. First, it last longer, i.e. from the Chinese New Year to the Longtaitou Festival. Second, the event offered both online live-streaming and offline performance (Figure 7.6). With the technical support of the 5G network of Hebi Unicom, the Dahe Daily·Henan Live Broadcast team presented a full HD live streaming of the temple fair. On February 20, netizens who watched "Shehuo" performance through the live broadcast exceeded 20 million. Both the number of viewers and the spatial scale had been expanded. With a long duration, a large scale, and rich activities, coupled with the assistance of the Internet broadcast technology, the influence of the Xun Ancient Temple Fair had reached its peak, giving a true picture of Chinese Carnival. The opera performance during the ancient temple fair in 2019 was largely the same as that in 2018; the only difference lay in the venue of the opera performance, which extended from the county area in 2018 to the foot of the Dapi Mountain in 2019. The opera performances were put on simultaneously at the Eyunlou Stage, the Square of the Town God's Temple, and the foot of the Dapi Mountain.



Figure 7.6 Poster for the ancient temple fair of Xun County in 2019

Source: downloaded from the website of the government of Xun County

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the high-profile Xun Ancient Temple Fair in Lunar January, despite the full preparation, was canceled on January 24, 2020. All urban and rural opera performances were prohibited by the government. By the Spring Festival of 2021, the local government once again called off all offline activities (including the Shehuo Cruise scheduled on of the ninth and the sixteenth day during the first month of the lunar calendar) at the Xun Temple Fair — the 13th China (Hebi) Folk Culture Festival in the territory of Xun County to avoid gathering and reduce the risk of the pandemic. Online events were held instead, including the online New Year’s shopping festival, Shehuo Cruise, intangible heritage exhibition on the Internet, and online gourmet festival, on the theme of “visiting the millennium temple fair and doing shopping for the Spring Festival.”

7.2.2.2 Opera performance at other rural temple fairs

If the ancient temple fair is the carnival that swept across the Xun County, the village and town temple fairs are more of fun gatherings and trade fairs on a smaller scale.

Besides the annual ancient temple fair, villages and towns under Xun County have their own temple fair schedules from the beginning of Spring until the Mid-autumn Festival. As American missionary Arthur. H. Smith has observed, the temple fair is one of the important festivals for rural people who need to visit their relatives and friends, worship the gods and ancestors, enjoy entertainment and appreciate the local culture. It also gives people an excellent chance of engaging in commercial trade, playing and shopping.

The village and town temple fairs from spring through autumn, with the ancient temple fair in on the first month of the lunar calendar at the core, have exceeded their former role in history and now became an important part of the lives of people all over Xun County. Celebration for temple fairs has been a way for people to confirm their identities as natives of Xun County, and to respond to such propositions of philosophy as “who am I” and “where am I from”, as well as an important event in the daily life of ordinary families. Even in modern times, with the rapid development of urbanization, temple fairs still have a powerful appeal to the people of Xun County. More than once in the interview, the author heard that local people expressed themselves in this way:

As long as I’m not far away from my home (the native place in Xun County), i.e. within two hundred kilometers, I will drive or take a high-speed train home for the temple fair. (Respondent 5 in Xun County, September 2019)

There are two major events for me to return home, one is the Spring Festival and the other is to celebrate the temple fair of my village. (Respondent 1 in Xun County, September 2019)

It feels well for family members, who work outside to have reunion dinners at home, pay respects to the ancestors, and socialize with relatives before going back to work. (Respondent 3 in Xun County, September 2019)



Figure 7.7 An opera show in Wangcun Village in Xun County

Source: provided by Respondent No. 5 in Xun County

Same with Xuchang prefecture, the rural temple fairs in Xun County are universally accompanied by the opera performance (Figure 7.7). However, the opera performance of rural temple fairs in Xun County has distinct features.

1. The role of the the fair initiator

Different from other regions in Henan, there is a special post in each village and town under Xun County, i.e., the fair initiator. Other than being appointed by the government, a fair initiator is elected or recommended by villagers. Fair initiators are not subordinate to the rural grassroots administrative branch of government. Thus, they don't participate in the management of villages or communities. The fair initiator, as an organizer and a manager of folk fair clubs and temple fairs, takes charge of all related affairs, e.g. financing, task allocation, inviting the theatrical troupe, logistical support, etc. According to respondent 3 in the Beijie Community of Xun County:

“Before the temple fair, the fair initiator holds a mobilization meeting and an

investment preparation meeting first and then arranges for several subchiefs of fair to collect the fundings from each household. The fair initiator is mainly in charge of making arrangements, which are implemented respectively by subchiefs who serve the masses, including being responsible for public security, programs, and logistics during the temple fair” (respondent 3, 2019).

It can be confirmed from the existing stone inscriptions in Xun County that the fair initiator system has been passed down since ancient times. In *the Tablet Inscription about Successful Completion of the Four-Year Holy Gathering* during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, which is preserved in the Buddhist Temple in the Dapi Mountain, there are explanations of Fu Youde, a fair initiator, who said, “*my fellows and I invited people to attend the Holy Gathering of Guan Yin Bodhisattva, and took turns to serve as the fair initiator; I have been acting as the fair initiator for four years, and have reaped substantial rewards.*” It can be seen from the words that the post of fair initiator was held in turn, with the term of four years. Nevertheless, some fair initiators worked for as long as 12 years. For instance, the *Tablet Inscription about 12-Year Sacrificial Offering to Bixiyuanjun — The Goddess of Mount Tai* bears: “*I climbed up the mountain in Xun County each year and have been offering incense to the goddess for 12 years; my wish has been satisfied and a great success has been achieved; the stone is hereby marked for eternity.*”

It can be discovered from the inscription that the fair initiator was not assigned to officials of Xun County since the ancient times, but by the leader of big clans or rich squires, or in turn by the master of each household. One of the major duties of the fair initiator and societies is to arrange for and lead the people in the Buddhist and Taoist activities. Most fair initiators have high prestige and great charisma among villagers, which reflects the simple, honest and humble character of the Xun people.

According to the introduction of local villagers, there are more than 100 societies, large or small, all over Xun County. Most fair initiators are individuals of high

charisma elected by villagers, out of cadres of the village committee. The fair initiators can serve one to three years, and are re-elected after their term ended. Actually, many fair initiators serve for another term of office. There are very few societies that adopt a heredity system of fair initiators. For example, the fair initiator of the Xiguan Community is a teenager who is too young to deal with the affairs of the society independently, thus, his duty is fulfilled by other sub-chiefs. The existence of an underage fair initiator represents more of the family inheritance system of the fair initiator.

The major reason why societies and fair initiators have been passed down to this day in Xun County is the local villagers' attitude towards dues and the practice of the fair initiator in managing the dues. Respondent 3 is a fair initiator of Beijie Community, a large society in the local area. He said:

“The common people are willing to contribute the money. One will be unhappy if his/her contribution is not accepted. They know in their hearts that the fair is ours and that as a member of Beijie, each owner of shops and stores shall donate, and that's common practice. Besides, a list of donators will be posted and people feel a sense of honor when they see their name on it. In the past two decades, more and more donations were collected, i.e. from one or two thousand yuan in the beginning to sixty or seventy thousand. There are detailed records on the money collected each year, donations by each household and unit, the amount spent on each item, surplus or deficit. The records are posted at the village committee. The masses are welcome to check at any time. The balance of money is used as dues for the next year; whereas the deficit is usually apportioned by the fair initiators. It's our own business and we do not swindle money out of the masses; all the money is used properly; so the fair is getting better and better.”(respondent 3, 2019).

Respondent 2, a fair initiator of Donghoujie said:

“the locals hold a strong belief in the Gods; they are active in contributing money to the temple fair because they believe that, if not, they will not be protected by the Gods in the year to come, and the family will have bad luck”(respondent 2, 2019).

2. Local private troupes are the main force in opera performances

The opera performer in Xun County is largely local opera troupes. Particularly, private opera troupes are active participators in the rural opera market. As Henan is in Central Plains area of China, it is accessible in all directions. In addition, it is part of the tradition for Henan people to be avid opera fans, thus resulting in Henan as a destination for nearby opera troupes to perform across the province. It is found from the survey in Xuchang that opera troupes from Shandong, Hebei, Shanxi and Shaanxi put on performances there. However, the rural opera market in Xun County is occupied firmly by local opera troupes. Respondent 5, owner of a local private opera troupe, explained the phenomenon:

Firstly, there are already enough local opera troupes. As traditional opera-loving counties, Xun, Hua, and Qixian⁷⁰ are full of opera actors and theatrical troupes which are mostly privately operated. For the sake of survival, the opera troupes go to the countryside to perform throughout the year. The local business is the most popular, for the troupes can save on traffic and accommodation than in other places, and make more profits. Secondly, local people like Dapingdiao Opera. People who can sing Dapingdiao Opera are basically from the local opera troupes. Admittedly, the number of Dapingdiao Opera actors is decreasing throughout these years.

From the words of the troupe master, it can be found that there are a large number of

⁷⁰ Both Hua and Qixian are adjacent to Xun County, and the three counties share common dialects and folk culture, as well as folk opera traditions.

opera troupes in Xun County and the nearby Hua and Qixian and that private troupes are especially active in the opera performance (Table 7.1). Table 7.1 shows some of the local troupes surveyed by the author. As can be seen, most of the local troupes are privately run, and their performances mainly focus on Yu opera and Dapingdiao, covering the northern part of Henan and the neighboring provinces of Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu and Shandong. People's preference for the Dapingdiao Opera, a type of local opera, reflects a long-established folk tradition in this region.

Table 7.1 Information of some local opera troupes

Name	State or private	Opera type	Business scope
Xun Opera Company	state	Yu	North Henan, Handan (Hebei), Yuncheng (Shanxi)
Yellow River Opera Company	private	Yu, Dapingdiao	Xun, Hua, Puyang, Changzhi (Shanxi)
The Queen Yu Opera Company	private	Yu, Zhuizi	Henan, Shanxi, Hebei
Dongfeng Opera Company	private	Yu, Dapingdiao	Xun, Anyang, Hebi
Xun Dapingdiao Opera Company	state	Dapingdiao	North Henan, Hebei, Shaanxi, Shanxi
Endless Love Opera Company	private	Yu, Dapingdiao, Pu	Henan, Gansu, Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong
Changqing Yu Opera Company	private	Yu	Xun, Hua, Qixian, Anyang
Chenxinhuang Dapingdiao	private	Dapingdiao	Xun, Hua, Yanjin

3. Preference to the Dapingdiao Opera

Yu Opera is the representative opera of Henan Province. It can be seen as a type of

drama that is widely popular in the counties and cities under Henan Province. The other two major local operas, namely, Qu Opera and Yuediao Opera, are mainly popular to the people in the south of Xuchang. Compared with Yu, Qu, and Yuediao operas — three major operas of Henan Province, Xun people show preference to a different local opera — Dapingdiao Opera. To this day, the local Dapingdiao Opera is a must in the temple fairs of Xun County.

Dapingdiao Opera, which took shape in the Ming Dynasty, is called “Dabang Opera” in the north of Henan. According to records of *Tablet Inscription about Renovation of Mingfu Temple in Hua County* in the 11th year of Emperor Hongzhi’s reign in the Ming Dynasty, “besides renovation of the pagoda, a performance of Dabang and Daxian operas was put on respectively.” The *Records of Xun* bears: “Xilu Dabang Opera has come into being since the 50th year of Qianlong Period in the Qing Dynasty (i.e. 1786 AD)”(cited in Liu, 2018). According to *Records on the Opera of Yanjin County*: “In the Ming Dynasty, performances of Dapingdiao Opera went for three days since the twenty-fifth day on the first month of the lunar calendar in celebration of the God of Fire Temple Fair in Wu’antun Village of Yanjin county”(cited in Liu, 2018).

It is thus clear that the popularity and development of Dapingdiao Opera had been linked with the religious and temple fair activities for at least hundreds years.

Dapingdiao Opera was originally called Pingdiao Opera, which is a type of Bangzi Opera. Its tune is lower than that of Yuju Opera; thus it is called Pingdiao Opera. Dapingdiao Opera is popular among the people in North Henan, West Shandong, and South Hebei. It can be divided into three major schools based on local dialects, namely, Hedongping Opera based in Heze, Shandong; Dongluping Opera around Puyang, Henan; and Xiluping Opera with Xun at its core.

The music of Dapingdiao Opera belongs to the beat and tune style, which is based on

the tempo of the wooden clapper. That is, the change of tune is subject to the variation of tempo and velocity of the wooden clapper. The clapper, which is largely made of jujube wood, is about 50cm long, and 8cm in diameter, with a bowl-like shape dent. When the clapper is beaten with a wooden stick, it will make a low and deep sound like “Do” in the numbered musical notation (Figure 7.8). As the proverb of Xun County goes, “four tablets and two horns are symbols of Dapingdiao Opera.” The proverb points out the feature of the musical instruments for the Dapingdiao Opera. “Four tablets” refer to large cymbals used for the performance of Dapingdiao Opera; whereas the “two horns” mean cusped horns.



Figure 7.8 wooden clapper used in Dapingdiao Opera

Source: downloaded from Wechat official account “Culture Henan”

Dapingdiao Opera was born in the Ming Dynasty and reached its golden age in the Qing Dynasty. There are numerous troupes of Dapingdiao Opera along the Yellow River; thus it is said that “the troupes of Dapingdiao Opera amount to 19, including 15 along the Yellow River, and four in Caozhou (Heze today)” (Respondent No. 5, 2019). Dapingdiao Opera was spread in a wider range from the late Qing dynasty to the early years of the People’s Republic of China, involving more than 60 prefectures and counties under

Henan, Hebei, Shandong, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces. Since the 1990s, Dapingdiao Opera has fallen into decline, which is manifested in a smaller range of performance, i.e. North Henan, West Shandong, and South Hebei regions. In 2006, Dapingdiao Opera was included in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List of China. By far, there have been eight national and provincial intangible cultural heritage inheritance and conservation centers for Dapingdiao Opera (including five centers respectively in Yanjin, Hua, Neihuang, Xun and Puyang counties; and three in Mudan District, Dongming County, and Chengwu County under Heze City, Shandong Province)⁷¹.

All the operas are rooted in and have developed based on the local culture. Dapingdiao Opera is no exception. Located in the transition zone from Taihang Mountain to the North China Plain, Xun County features scenery typical of central and north China. Natives of Xun are distinctly characterized by unsophistication, straightforwardness, and generousness of northern Chinese. Owing to its geographic position, Xun County went through more battles in history, which is reflected in the plays of Dapingdiao Opera. The plays of Dapingdiao Opera mostly derive from the historical romance of heroes and legendary novels, e.g. *Romance of Sui and Tang Dynasties*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *Generals of the Yangs*, and *A Complete Biography of Yue Fei*. Dapingdiao Opera is focused on traditional historical repertoire. According to incomplete statistics, the number of the repertoire of Dapingdiao Opera passed down by oral account exceeds 600, over 180 of which are performed frequently, with noted works of *Jinyang Pass*, *Rise in Rebellion in Yanghe*, *Beheading the King of Zhao*, *Madame Qin Xianglian*, and *The Story of Golden Whip*, etc.

It is observed from the repertoire that Dapingdiao Opera differ considerably from Shaoxing and Huangmei operas in South China, the latter two focusing on love dramas. The distinction is not only appeared in the essential factors of opera such as the tune, music, and performance, but also the scenery, culture, and population temperament between North and South China. Different from Kunqu and Peking

⁷¹ The data is from the official website of China Intangible Cultural Heritage. <https://www.ihchina.cn/>

operas popular in the select society or developed regions, the performance style of Dapingdiao Opera integrates customs with the local culture in the northern Chinese countryside, matching its nature of a type of local drama widely received in rural areas. The common lyrics and unrestrained performance conform to the Northern Chinese's straightforward character and aesthetic preferences. Opera performance is largely put on at the temple fairs and the funerals or on joyous occasions in Central Plains. Due to the rowdy performance occasions such as temple fairs, actors must enunciate clearly in a large voice to the lively rhythm, which is a major artistic style of Dapingdiao Opera.

The Xun natives' preference for Dapingdiao Opera is also manifested in their spontaneous efforts to carry forward and conserve the ancient art. According to the author's survey, more than half of the private troupes in Xun take Dapingdiao Opera as the major type of their opera performance. Some troupes are family businesses, e.g. the family troupe operated by respondent 6. Some are private troupes operated by retired actors from national troupes, e.g. the troupe established by respondent 4. There are also troupes set up by villagers who are fond of Dapingdiao Opera. They purchase costumes and other equipment at their own cost, and hire an expert to offer training; such is the case for East Xun Dapingdiao Opera Troupe formed at Chenxinzhuang Village, Liugu Town, Xun County. It can be seen from the phenomenon that on the one hand, Dapingdiao Opera is vastly supported by locals and has been inherited as a cultural gene, on the other hand, modern residents of Xun County are passing down the art form and conserving it by their commitments in the opera practice.

7.2.3 Commercial performance

With the rapid development of China's economy and urbanization, the occasions for opera performances have also changed. Traditionally rural opera performances are concentrated at the temple fairs, and on festivals, joyous and funeral occasions. The prosperity of rural markets and commerce has introduced additional opportunities to

rural opera performance, i.e. commercial celebrations which are commonly held to mark the opening of a new shop, annual enterprise meetings, the commencement of sales of houses, and factory and mine ceremonies. A survey into 6 private opera troupes in Xun County shows that the commercial opera performance is displaying some new tendencies.

Firstly, commercial performances are more expensive on average, last longer, and the total payment of the order is often very high. The rural temple fairs, weddings and funerals in North Henan, including Xun County, are charged at approximately 3,000-5,000 RMB per performance according to the quotation in the traditional opera performance market. Usually, three performances can be scheduled in a day and last for about one to three days. The above-mentioned opera performances on business celebration occasions are currently quoted at 5,000-12,000 RMB per performance, such as shop openings, and annual enterprise gatherings. There are also many employers such as factories and coal mines, which are larger in scale, and offer the opera troupe a large performance contract with the duration up to half a month. (Respondent No. 5, 2019)

Secondly, more and more demand for commercial performances radiates from county towns to rural areas. It has been found from the interviews that commercial performances have begun to appear in the rural areas of Henan since 2005. The performances initially emerged from the county areas, after a decade of development, the number of opera performances is increasing in towns and villages, making it commonplace in those areas. Table 7.2 is a list of some commercial performances that the Yellow River Opera Company in Xun County gave in recent ten years.

Table7.2 Part of the commercial performances of the Yellow River Opera Company

Time	Employer	Occasion	contract amount (Yuan)
May 1st - 3rd, 2010	Xun Jianye Super Mall	Opening Ceremony	25,000 for 6 shows
Jan. 1 st 2011	Hebi Branch of China Unicom	Annual Celebration	5000 for 1 show
May 1st - 5rd, 2011	Xun Jianye Super Mall	the first anniversary	30,000 for 6 shows
Oct. 1st - 2nd, 2012	Xun Junyue Hotel	Opening Ceremony	10,000 for 2 shows
Dec. 21st - 26th, 2012	Yuncheng Coal Mine	Condolences and treat	30,000 for 6 shows
May 1st - 3rd, 2013	Yonghui Amusement water-park	Opening Ceremony	24,000 for 3 shows
Dec. 31st, 2013	Xun ZD Food Group	Annual Celebration	8,000 for 1shows
May 1st - 3rd, 2014	Puyang Shangyi Shopping Square	Opening Ceremony	30,000 for 6 shows
July 19th-24th , 2014	Changzhi Sky City	Opening Ceremony	60,000 for 12 shows
Oct. 15th - 16th, 2014	Changzhi Daan Coal Mine	Condolences and treat	30,000 for 6 shows
Sep. 18th, 2015	Xun Yulong Shopping Center	Opening Ceremony	10000 for 1 shows
May 1st - 3rd, 2016	Xun Jianye Super Mall	Anniversary Ceremony	42,000 for 6 shows
Dec. 12th, 2016	Xun Huabaogang grilled chicken shop	Opening Ceremony	8,000 for 1 shows
July 21st, 2017	Xun Yuchujiang Restaurant	Opening Ceremony	8,000 for 1 shows
Oct. 1st - 3rd, 2017	Xun Wanda Wanda plaza	Autumn festival	30,000 for 3 shows
Nov.11th, 2017	Xun Jianye Super Mall	Shopping day	12,000 for 1 shows
Mar. 5th, 2018	Xuaxian Gao's flat powder food	Opening Ceremony	8,000 for 1 shows
May 1st - 2nd, 2018	Xun Zuideyi restaurant	Opening Ceremony	15,000 for 2 shows
Aug. 7th, 2018	Xun Left Bank Cake House	Opening Ceremony	8,000 for 1 shows
Oct. 2nd, 2018	Xuaxian Sis and bro potato powder noodles 10 branches	celebration	8,000 for 1 shows
Apr. 16th - 24th, 2019	Changzhi Daan Coal Mine	Condolences and treat	80,000 for 9 shows
Jun.17th, 2019	Xun Uncle Sun's mutton soup	Opening Ceremony	10,000 for 1 shows
Aug. 19th, 2019	Xun Wang's braised food store	Opening Ceremony	10,000 for 1 shows

Thirdly, employers make requests for the program other than the opera performance. As mentioned by most respondents in the interviews, one of the differences between commercial shows and opera performances is that, apart from the opera performance, a common practice for employers is making requests for popular songs and dances. In some cases, such requests are made during negotiation then included in the written contract. In most cases, however, the employer asked them randomly, which was not agreed in the performance contract by both parties. Nevertheless, since opera performances are usually paid afterward, most troupes, which are not yet remunerated, have to do their best to meet the additional requests. Facing the situation, many respondents show unwillingness; some opera actors even feel offended.

7.2.4 Opera factors in the folk custom

Xun Ancient Temple Fair has witnessed the integration of folk customs and arts in North China. On the ninth and the sixteenth day of the first month in the lunar calendar, there is a large-scale annual parade and exhibition of folk arts and customs, which are collectively known as “Shehuo.” February 20, 2019, i.e. the sixteenth day of the first lunar month, is the day when the folk Shehuo teams of villages (communities) in Xun County give touring performances from the ancient town of Xun to the Fuqiu Mountain, with 32 troupes joining the tour. The traditional forms of this folk performance mainly include pan drum show, lion dance, stilts walking, yangko, running land boat, bamboo horse dance, dragon lantern, Beige, Tailaosi, Dingdeng, big-head monk dance, and floating river lanterns; besides, the event also displays a non-performance art form named “Clay coo-coo.” Though the arts such as stilts walking, running land boat, bamboo horse dance, and Beige differ from operas in form, a closer observation reveals that many of the artistic elements are the same with or similar to the opera.

1. Stilt walking

Stilt walking is a form of performance in which an actor walks on long wooden stilts strapped to the feet. The stilts, which are diversified in form, can be divided into civilian and military stilts, both calling for a high degree of skill. As stilt walkers are much higher than the common people, the show can be watched far and near. In addition, the stilt performance can be given in a large space, without being limited to the stage; thus it is popular with peasants as one of “Shehuo” performances. By far, there have been nearly 20 stilt performance teams spreading over Xun County and surrounding towns. As shown in the picture below, the character roles, costumes, and props for the stilt walkers are almost all from traditional operas, e.g.(Figure 7.9), Sun Wukong in *The Handsome Monkey King*, and Xu Xian in *Lady White Snake*. It is worth noting that in recent years local stilt performance societies are aware of passing down the art form to younger generations, and have introduced many roles for children to participate.



Figure 7.9 Stilt performance at Xun Ancient Temple Fair

Source: provided by Respondent No. 12

2. Bamboo horse

The bamboo horse is a long-standing kid’s play. There were records about the bamboo horse as early as the Pre-Qin Times. After the Tang Dynasty, folk arts related to the bamboo horse, such as drama, dance, and lantern, appeared one after another and had gained popularity in various regions of China (Xing, 2018). The bamboo horse maker

makes the shape of a horse out of bamboo and straw paper. The actors, who tie the bamboo horse around the waist with the rope and wear ancient costume that covers part of the horse, walk or run on foot in place of the horse's hooves. Through the innovations by generations of artists, the running bamboo horse dance in Xun County has evolved into 18 formations of performance to this day. A bamboo horse performance team usually consists of scores of members, who play figures in the traditional operas or folk tales such as the *Wagang Army*, *General Xue Rengui's Expedition to the West*, and *Generals of The Yangs*. The actors are generally dressed up and made up as military officers in the opera, displaying the state of war (Figure 7.10). The bamboo horse performance by the Donghoujie Society in Xun County has always been the most popular with the audiences. The quick change in a variety of formations, accompanied by sonorous and forceful gong and drum music, adds to the pleasure of people enjoying the performance.



Figure 7.10 Bamboo horse performance at Xun Ancient Temple Fair

Source: provided by Respondent No. 11

3. Beige (carrying a stand on the back)

“Beige” is a unique traditional folk custom that integrates historical stories, myths and

legends with arts including drawing, opera, silk figure, paper sculpture, and acrobatics. It has a wide influence in the field of Chinese folk customs and folk arts; it is also one of the most popular art forms of “Shehuo” at the Spring Festival temple fairs in Xun County.

According to research, “Beige” originated from the Southern Song Dynasty, developed in the Ming Dynasty, and flourished in the Qing Dynasty. To this day, it has spread over the country as one of the performances on religious activities or festive celebration occasions (Xing, 2018). Throughout its development, “Beige” has gradually included multiple folk arts and skills and grown into an eclectic art that involves literature, drawing, music, sculpture, performance, mathematics, and dynamics. In the hearts of people of all ages, “Beige” is the most popular folk performance that is the closest to their lives, and also an intangible cultural heritage.

“Beige” is also called the “story on the back,” as each show depicts a traditional opera story. “Beige” has strong cultural connotations and outstanding characteristics of opera. It draws its materials from operas and folk legends; therefore, actors’ makeup and costume resemble opera characters.

“Beige” is an art on the back of adults. It is made up of the upper, middle, and lower parts (Figure 7.11). The upper actor is called “Shangzhuang” (Geying), who is played by a boy or girl aged from three to eight (Figure 7.12); the lower actor, namely, “Xiazhuang,” is played by a young adult who is dressed in military costume and skilled in various acting techniques, acting as the support in the performance; the middle part — “Zhongjie” — consists of an iron frame tied on the back of the adult and a stand to support the upper child. The upper, middle, and lower parts add up to four meters high. Shangzhuang, Xiazhuang, and Zhongjie are all related to the plot of operas. Shangzhuang and Xiazhuang, which are heroes or heroines in the opera, are linked together by a small and exquisite shank; Zhongjie is the iconic prop. For instance, when performing the *Lady White Snake*, when Shangzhuang plays the role

of the white snake or the blue snake, Xiazhuang will act as Xu Xian, while Zhongjie will appear in the form of an opening umbrella. The formation implies the plot of the white snake borrowing an umbrella from Xu Xian on the broken bridge. When marching down the street, the performance team carries the banners, umbrellas, and fans; while playing the gongs, cusped horns and eight cymbals to remind onlookers of clearing the way. The scene is as solemn and spectacular as if an emperor was heading out of the imperial palace. When it comes to the field performance, Xiazhuang dances a set of Yangko steps, adapting to the music; when the formations cross, Shangzhuang will move accordingly with Xiazhuang; amazingly, Shangzhuang and Xiazhuang on parade perform the dances that are perfectly in tune with the beats of gongs and drums.



Figure 7.11 Beige performance at Xun Ancient Temple Fair

Source: provided by Respondent No. 17



Figure 7.12 A young actor who took part in a Beige performance

Source: provided by Respondent No. 17

In conclusion, the wide display of opera's elements to the "Shehuo" performance in Xun County shows that opera has a deep-rooted influence on the local culture and that the folk arts are interpenetrative and interconnected in form.

7.3 Analysis of Factors Affecting the Revival of Local Opera in Xun County

7.3.1 The tradition of temple fairs and folk culture as the foundation for the development of local opera.

7.3.1.1 Temple fair art activities form the direct basis

It can be seen from the phenomenon description in 7.2 that the long-established tradition of temple fairs and the folk culture in Xun prefecture are the base for opera to survive and flourish; whereas the full participation of people in the folk activities has laid a favorable mass base and created a social environment for carrying forward the opera art in modern times.

Sacrificial activities that had begun since ancient times can be considered as the rudiment of the Xun Ancient Temple Fair. The rituals from prehistoric times further combined with the widespread of incense offering and worship activities after the Wei and Jin dynasties, gradually creating a space for people's faith. The figure of Buddha in the Dapi Mountain of the Wei and Jin dynasties, the Thousand Buddha Caves of the Tang Dynasty, and a large number of Taoist abbeys built in the Ming Dynasty are all physical manifestations of the space. All the religions in the world originated from humans' fear of nature, their worship of the power that conquers nature, and their desire to survive. Georg Simmel believed that any social phenomenon has two inseparable elements, i.e. form and content; and that the form is a process of

synchronizing, by which individuals gather together, forming a group with long-lasting relations (cited in Xing, 2018). With this viewpoint, the temple fair activities all over Xun County and China, have their contents — the same or different faiths, and forms — sacrificial ceremonies at the temple fairs and a variety of “Shehuo” performances, including the opera. People can show their reverence and gratitude to the gods and have spiritual communication with them in the temple; what’s more, as believers of the gods, people will feel safe and be full of hope and strength for the future. These highly similar spiritual sources have contributed to different religions and cultures in the context of different geographic environments and social conditions. In Xun County, the demonstration of such is the ancient temple fair during the Chinese lunar New Year. The activities of worshipping the gods among different religions are conducted in fixed schedules and at varied places, thus being a spectacular event participated by all people.

According to Benedetto Croce, an Italian historian, historicity “ can be defined as an act of understanding and apprehension about the actual living needs”(Croce. 2005, p.67).Croce’s definition of “historicity” reveals the people’s motive of retelling and reproducing history. Xun Ancient Temple Fair in the first month of the lunar calendar implies the abundance of historical memory community spirit. It can be said that the temple fairs in Xun County are a form in which people retell and celebrate their history. The following points are the specific analysis of this conclusion.

1. The worship of King Yu. As mentioned before, there are multiple temples of King Yu existing all over Xun County, worshipping one of the ancestors and saint kings in the recordable history of China. Xun County is located in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, where legend has it that King Yu once controlled the flooding of the Yellow River and passed down the selfless spirit of “passing by his home three times without entering the house.” Natives of Xun County portray King Yu as an old fisherman dressed in an imperial robe and held a “demon fish.” It is also included in the characters that appeared in the “Shehuo” performance, demonstrating

people's admiration for King Yu in praise of his dedication to the people.

2. The worship of the river god. The ancient Xun County was surrounded by a Grand Canal. Living by the water, natives of Xun County naturally hoped for safe watercourses. Therefore, it was general practice for ancient Xun people to worship the river god, which is further showcased in the flower boat performance in the "Shehuo" activity. Societies that give flower boat performances are largely from villages or communities along the Wei River. The most famous one is the Flower Boat Holy Society of Shunhe Community. One of their programs *Mr. Zhang Carries Mrs. Zhang on the Back* is a performance about the flood, depicting the developed water transport in Xun County, and people's gratitude for the river god that guarded the watercourse in history.

3. Battle scenes. As mentioned above, there are many battle scenes and depictions of heroic figures from history and legends in the "Shehuo" performance, namely the bamboo horse and the "Beige". In history, countless wars occurred in the Central Plains. As a military stronghold, Xun County was always the center of incessant warfare. Numerous battles took place in Xun, the most famous of which was the Wagang Uprising at Wagangzhai. The history of perpetual warfare naturally created an atmosphere of promoting military or martial spirit among the folks in Xun County. Folk martial arts societies thrive in Xun County, with as many as dozens of societies that center on Wushu performances, and have passed down the Wushu routines to this day. In addition to various types of Wushu performances, a form of the folk art performance on the theme of wars has developed in Xun County. Among others, a typical one is the bamboo horse performance that demonstrates the grand battle scenes. The most well-known bamboo horse performance in Xun County is from Donghoujie Shehuo Society. In the performance, two actors in the front of the team, who wear black hats with a command flag in hand lead the team forward; other actors dress in the costumes of soldiers or generals and hold a horsewhip in hand. They portray the intense battle scenes by running and pretending to ride on horses. According to the

interview, some actors thought that they were playing female generals of the Yangs, while others assume they were the soldiers of Wagang Army.

In conclusion, the rich historical memory is vastly reflected in the formation of the Xun Ancient Temple Fair, and the folk art performance and artistic modelings. Jan Assmann pointed out: “a country or an ethnic group shares common culture, language, mentality, manner, and religion. These factors make up cultural psychology and structure that bring about the common art form and a style of the nation or the ethnic group” (Assmann, 2015, p.84).

Historical memory is group-based; it is communicated and conveyed through social space. Temple fair activities create a space for communication, and folk art is the language; people acquire and pass on historical memory from generation to generation through their participation year after year. The collective historical memory is awakened when people participate in or enjoy the art performances. The deep psychological motivation in the participation and enjoyment is the identification and value of ethnic culture. It is the collective memory of the history and the community spirit of Xun people that has developed the folk art (opera included), and determined both the practice pattern and the orientation of artistic style of the subjects of the folk art.

7.3.1.2 Good atmosphere of antiquity provided by folk handicraft arts

If the ancient temple fair on the first year of the lunar calendar reflects the holy side of Xun culture, the diverse folk handicrafts such as Clay coo-coo, carpentry, wickerwork, and stone carving demonstrate its secular and practical sides. These handicraft art traditions, which are closely related to people's life, have created a favorable atmosphere and environment for the development of opera. The following is a brief introduction to Clay coo-coo, wickerwork, and stone carving.

1. Clay coo-coo

Clay coo-coo is a kind of small clay toy specialized in Xun County. It is mainly produced at Yangtun Village, Liyang Town, Xun County. The village has over two thousand population, more than 70 percent of whom can make Clay coo-coos, marking the toy a typical local artwork. The Clay coo-coos have a hole both in the rear and at the base. When blown, the Clay coo-coo will make a sound like “coo-coo.” That is why it has gained the name of “Clay coo-coo” or “Cuckoo.” Xun Clay coo-coos have more than one hundred shapes under three basic categories: figures, animals, and birds. The figures are mainly characters from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and Wagang Army, and animals and birds are mainly creatures such as tigers, lions, elephants, swallows, turtledoves, and peacocks. Featuring primitive, simple, and elegant shapes, plus bright colors, the Xun Clay coo-coos display a primitive sense of beauty (Figure 7.13).

It is named as a living fossil of history by experts on folklore for its long historical standing and remarkable cultural features. On May 20, 2006, the Xun Clay coo-coo was included in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List by the State Council. In November 2019, the List of Protection Units of Representative Projects of National Intangible Cultural Heritage was released; the People’s Cultural Center of Xun obtained the qualification as the protection unit of Xun Clay coo-coo.



Figure 7.13 Clay coo-coos made by the inheritor Wang Xuefeng

Source: taken by the author (Feb., 2018)

3. Wickerwork

Wickerwork, just as its name implied, is a handcraft that involves wickers. It is one of the well-known traditional handcrafts of Xun County. It comes from the town of soft willow on the bank of the Yellow River, where the wickerwork has been passed down for 600 years to this day. As sun-curing and soaking are major working procedures for making Xun wickerwork, the processes are environment friendly and pollution-free, creating solid and durable products in use.

Over the years, Xun wickerwork has developed a complete set of processes, which is repetitive yet ordered, primitive yet exquisite, each procedure demonstrating art and skill. The products can be used as both artwork and utensils. This is a clear difference between the wickerwork and other handicrafts such as Clay coo-coo and stone carving. As a result, the wicker products from Xun County are popular locally, even in and outside Henan Province, and have won public praise and widely acclaimed in the market.

The creation, inheritance, and development of Xun wickerwork recorded the social condition of all historical periods and indicated the extremely complicated social background. The wickerwork is a witness to the rise and fall of the commodity economy. Regardless of plastics, metal, and other supplies being the mainstream materials for daily utensils nowadays, Xun wickerwork still holds a place in the people's lives, showing great vitality and tremendous spirit as a national culture.



Figure 7.14 Wicker basket

Source: downloaded from the official website of Xun County People's Government



Figure 7.15 A farmer is making wickerwork in his cellar

Source: downloaded from the official website of Xun County People's Government

3. Stone carving

The stone carving of Xun (Figure 7.16), also named bluestone carving, has had over two thousand years of history to this day. This handcraft art can be traced its history back to the Han Dynasty and prevailed in the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Therefore, Xun County is regarded as the source of stone carving and inscription arts in Central Plains. The Dapi, Fuqiu, and Shanhua mountains in Xun are rich in piebald stones, which provide a natural resource for creating and developing stone carving art.

A large number of stone carvings are preserved in Xun, including existing stone relief of the East Han Dynasty, Big Buddha Figure of the Houzhao Dynasty, the Thousand Buddha Caves of the Tang Dynasty, the Curled up Dragon Rock of the Song Dynasty, the Enrong Gateway of the Ming Dynasty, and dozens of works from the Qing Dynasty (Xing, 2018). Given the unique history of the evolution of Xun stone carving

technique, the original styles and features in all historical periods are fully preserved. After a long period of inheritance and evolution, the skill has developed a complete technological process, which is rigorous, ordered, and coherent. Stone carvings from Tunzi Town of Xun County can be seen in the well-known historical architectural complexes such as the Palace Museum in Beijing, the Dragon Pavilion in Kaifeng, The Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing, the Great Hall of the People, the Monument to the People's Heroes, and the History Museum of China. According to the report of the *Hebi Daily*, "Xun Stone Carvings" applied by Zhengchang Villagers in 2011 was included in the third batch Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage List, and the stone village that has the historical vibe is also listed in the Traditional Chinese Villages Catalog.

According to the official website of the government, by the end of 2019, Xun County contains more than 400 stone carving and inscription manufacturers, involving a total of over 20 members of national, provincial, and municipal folk art associations, 5,000 carving technicians, and over 27,000 stone carving practitioners. There have been more than ten types of stone carving products, including stone arches, breast boards of antique buildings, murals, human statues, animal carvings, with an annual value of 130 million Yuan⁷².

⁷² The data is from the official website of Xun County People's Government.
<http://www.Xun.gov.cn/zjx/index.html>



Figure 7.16 Stone carving lion

Source: downloaded from the official website of Xun County People's Government

According to the introduction on the official website of the People's Government of Xun, Xun County preserves over 30 traditional cultural heritages. Besides the traditional folk arts mentioned above, other heritages include antique pottery crafts, dough figurine art, Taoist music, and brass instrument. The cultural heritages have boosted the development of the social custom of worshipping and cherishing the antiques. Specifically, people have a high sense of cultural identity and are aware of carrying forward the traditional culture. The awareness of cultural identity is strongly felt by the author in field investigations. The author believes that this kind of cultural identity and consciousness is very rare and valuable in modern society. In the context of the same social-historical environment, the opera and a variety of folk traditional arts in Xun County, which can be traced to the same origin, have witnessed the integration of different artistic elements. Thus, the sense of cultural identity and the diversified traditional arts have created an environment for the inheritance and development of the traditional opera in Xun County.

7.3.2 Important role of folk societies and troupes in developing traditional performance

The performance activities at the Xun Ancient Temple Fair mainly consist of “Shehuo” and opera performances, while the main participants are folk societies and private opera troupes. It is the primary form of folk performance in Xun County.

1. Folk societies

Folk societies dominate the artistic performances at Xun Ancient Temple Fair. The original meaning of the Chinese character “society” refers to the Gnome and offering sacrifice to the Gnome, which further refers to the date or place of offering sacrifice to the Gnome. A group with twenty-five members is regarded as a “society” in the Zhou Dynasty; therefore, the meaning of “society” has extended to a grassroots administrative unit and a collective organization that carries out a joint activity, as well as some institutes and enterprises in modern times.

It can be said to some extent that Xun folk societies and Xun Ancient Temple Fair are connected. Temple fairs stemmed and thrived from temples. As temples were built in the Dapi and Fuqiu mountains, a growing number of people came to offer sacrifice to the Gods and Buddhas, which facilitated the large-scale development of the temple fair and the folk “Shehuo” activity, as well as the emergence of folk societies (cited in Xing, 2018). Before the establishment of societies, due to the influence of the small-scale peasant economy model, individuals without lateral ties in the rural society lacked the senses of community and belonging. Societies have provided the public with a chance of joining in collective activities and having a sense of social belonging and safety, thus offering the public a chance of practicing their faiths and following customs during temple fairs. Therefore, societies have been passed down as a folk tradition in the local area. From the perspective of anthroposociology, a

community has the following features: firstly, a common interest of people; secondly, a common ecological environment and geographic location; thirdly, a common social system or structure (Ma, 2020). According to this criterion, the folk societies in Xun County to some extent serve as communities.

According to a survey about folk societies conducted by Xun Mass Art Museum in 2013⁷³, there are 156 folk societies registered in the Xun Cultural Bureau, which scatter in the towns and villages under the jurisdiction of Xun County. The survey covered the basic information of 156 folk societies, including name, location, time of establishment, main performance events, number of participants, age level of members, capital source of society, the situation of inheritance, and future development planning. From the time of recording, the earliest one in Xun County is the Wushu Society in Yangqitun Village. According to the locals, the society was founded in the later period of the Sui Dynasty (the early years of the 7th century) in memory of the uprising of the Wagang Army. According to statistics, there are 25 societies founded in the Ming and Qing dynasties, about 16 from the Republic of China, 114 established or restored after 1949 (including 14 established or restored in the 1980s, 40 in the 1990s, and 60 after 2000). It has been discovered in the survey and interviews that most societies with several hundred and thousand years of history do not have exact dates of establishment, which can but be speculated based on the memories of the elder generation, existing stone inscriptions, and written historical materials. Perhaps societies in Xun County appeared much earlier than the recorded time. Based on the existing evidence, what can be confirmed is that folk societies started to exist no later than the middle and later periods of the Ming Dynasty, mushroomed in the Qing Dynasty, and declined for a time due to war and political reasons. Folk societies were not restored until the 1980s, and then sprung up all over Xun County and continued to grow thanks to social awareness and support from the local government.

⁷³ The following information comes from the survey report. However, the report is internal to the government agency and cannot be provided in this thesis.

The survey shows that folk societies are mainly engaged in traditional performances such as martial arts, lion dance, stilt walking, yangko, Beige, flower boat, and bamboo horse; whereas few societies perform modern art forms, for instance, square dancing, body-building exercises, and band performances. The ones which do perform newer art forms are mostly established after 2000. The main reason for this phenomenon is that these new events, especially square dancing, are popular with people in the modern society of China. Compared to traditional events which require performers with higher skills and a deep background in folk culture, modern performances such as square dancing are easy to learn and spread, without requiring much capital investment. Thus they are becoming popular in the newer societies.

The number of members of the societies ranges from a few dozen to more than thousand, depending on the population of the neighborhood, community, or village where the society is located. Moreover, the 156 societies are mostly collectives based on villages and communities, except for two business organizations (No. 119 and No. 155), and one family-based organization (No. 138).

As mentioned before, each society has gradually formed its unique performance events over the long period of development, i.e. the masterpieces as said by the locals, e.g. “Beige” of Beijie Community, pan drum show of Beiguan Community, lion dance of Dongguan Community, bamboo horse of Donghoujie, yangko dance led by umbrella holder of Shantang Town, and Wushu of Erlangmiao Village. These societies, which have evolved their unique styles of performance, have won acclaim in Xun County and surrounding areas as well-known brands and cultural products of supreme quality.

Financial support is a must for the establishment and operation of societies. An analysis of the capital sources of societies shows that funds can be raised by voluntary contributions from members, corporate sponsorship, government (village committee)

subsidy, individual sponsorship, output fund of collective land, and contributions from the fair initiator. Societies vary greatly in terms of the annual amount of funds. On the whole, societies in the county seat of Xun raise much more funds than those in the countryside, and traditional large societies outclass smaller ones. The amount of funds is on the decrease from the county seat to the surrounding areas. The Society of Arts of Beijie Community in the county seat of Xun County raise the largest amount of funds, i.e. nearly 200,000 yuan each year; whereas Shanxi Waist Drum Team at Weixian Town (No. 93) collects about 200 yuan of association dues each year; the yangko team at Yuanzhuang Village of Wangzhuang Town, which has no funding at all, have actors buying props at their own cost.

In terms of age, members of traditional societies have a wide age span, from kids to elders. Participants over 40 dominate societies, by and large, especially the elders above 60. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, young people cannot afford the time to freely join in the rehearsal and performance of society due to the fast-paced life and workload. On the other hand, traditional folk activities cannot attract young people as there are more options of entertainment nowadays; this poses a great challenge to the inheritance and development of folk societies.

2. Private opera troupes

Same with other county-level prefectures in Henan province, the subjects of opera performance in Xun County consist of state-owned and private opera troupes. The distinction between two types of troupes lies in the degree of participation of the government's administrative power. The state-owned troupes are subject to direct management of cultural authority concerning personnel appointment, assets allocation and management, fund guarantee, and business content. In contrast, private troupes, which are similar to the common private enterprises, are operated and managed by the staff of troupes. The self-reliant private troupes, which are responsible for their own profits and losses, only need to register with the government's cultural department and

business administration. At present, Xun County boasts two state-owned troupes (namely, Xun Yuju Opera Troupe and Xun Dapingdiao Opera Troupe) and over 20 private troupes. Low price, poor performance conditions (mostly outdoor stage), and peasants' poor aesthetic taste in opera result in private opera troupes being the main participant which offers opera performance in the rural markets in Xun County and surrounding county-level prefectures (Hua County, Qi County, etc.).

Xun County is one of the counties which keep the earliest document on activities of folk Henan opera troupes, which began as early as during Zhizheng's reign of the Yuan Dynasty. Zou Shaohe, a theorist, said in his book *General Theory on Yuju Opera*:

“there is an opera troupe in Xun County that has the longest history; both the old books and sacrifice offering bowls of the troupe bear the reign title of the Emperor Zhizheng of the Yuan Dynasty; it is clear that the Yuju Opera had appeared before the Zhizheng reign of the Yuan Dynasty” (cited in Zou, 2017, p.57).

Since the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, folk Yuju Opera troupes had sprouted all over Xun, such as Dagaodiao Opera of the Zhengs, Gongyi Troupe, Kids' Troupe, Gaodiao Troupe of Baidaokou, Qianfeng Troupe Society, and Gaoping Amateur Yuju Opera Troupe. The folk troupes were mostly established and handed down from the older generations of the family or masters. The tradition has been maintained to this day.

Since the Spring Festival in 2019, the author has followed and surveyed the Yellow River Henan Opera Troupe, one of local private troupes. Respondent 5 is the founder and leader of the troupe, and his wife acts as both the female lead heroine and deputy's head. The couple was schoolmates at the opera school and worked together in a troupe run by their master. In September 2005, they collected over 50,000 yuan -

their savings and loan - to set up their own troupe. Up to now, the Yellow River Henan Opera Troupe has grown from a troupe with less than 10 actors into one with 32, with rehearsal room and performance equipment worth more than 700,000 yuan. Without being confined to Xun County, their performances have extended to Gansu, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Hebei, Shandong, and other provinces. According to the couple, the troupe gives performances in the rural areas away from their hometown most of the time from the beginning of the third day of the first month to the early days of the tenth month of the lunar calendar. During the period, they cannot return to Xun until the intervals between performances. With one gig after another in the peak season, sometimes the troupe has to stay outside for three months in a row without a single break. Therefore, the two children of the couple are basically raised under the care of their uncle and aunt.

About 80 percent of the performances of the Yellow River Henan Opera Troupe were put on at village temple fairs. As head of the troupe, respondent 5 would go to other villages in advance for performance tasks.

“I normally do plan that last at least a month of uninterrupted performance; we have to do like this as actors are paid by the work; without performances, actors would have no income and might complain” (interviewee 1, 2020).

“Under normal conditions, when a temple fair is held in somewhere, performances will be given for three days, three performances a day; villagers on hearing of the news will come from surrounding villages dozens of miles away. More than 80 percent of the middle-aged and elderly people in this area are opera fans. Once an actor appears on stage, the audience knows well what he or she will sing or whether his or her acts and costume are proper” (interviewee 1, 2020)

“We definitely going to keep it up, as the opera troupe has supported dozens of families; we cannot do without it.” (Interviewee 1, 2020)

The couple's passion and pride for the opera career could be felt constantly during the interview.

To sum up, with numerous folk artists, the folk societies and private troupes are the main participants in the traditional art market of Xun County and play an important role. The author believes that the proper inheritance and development of the folk arts, including operas mainly lies in their passion and long-term perseverance for the traditional culture and art.

7.3.4 Cultural and tourism industry built by local government

For a long time, Chinese traditional opera lacked market cultivation, ecological conservation, and cultural literacy. This situation has caused numerous operas and troupes to rapidly lose their market during the structural reform, being marginalized in their respective ecological environment, and even losing their awareness of their character in the overall cultural pattern. Competent cultural departments at all levels have adopted regular policies since 2015 to provide complete support to and expand the influence of the opera, especially during the 18th CPC National Congress when the government passed several supporting policies. The policies, which targeted the fading status of operas, have greatly promoted the position of operas in social and cultural construction. On January 25, 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued *Opinions on the Implementation of the Project to Inherit and Develop the Fine Traditional Chinese Culture*, which addresses the inheritance and development of fine traditional Chinese culture via official document for the first time. The document stresses in particular:

“As China's economy and society are undergoing profound changes... it is urgent to deepen the understanding of the importance of the fine traditional Chinese culture, enhance people's cultural awareness and confidence; it is pressed for exploring the

value connotation of the fine traditional Chinese culture to further stimulate the vitality and vigor of the culture; China is in urgent need of strengthening policy support for the building of an inheritance and development system of the fine traditional Chinese culture.”⁷⁴

On April 28, 2017, Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Finance jointly issued the *Implementation Plan on Promoting the Opera in Rural Areas* ([2017] No. 11 Document), it points out:

“with a view to safeguarding the basic cultural rights of rural residents,” “promoting transmission, popularization, and development of the opera art in the countryside, and accelerating focus of cultural resources to the grassroots, and heightening the mass peasants’ sense of gain from the public cultural services.”⁷⁵

The Plan stresses the principle of serving the overall situation under guidance, social participation under the leadership of the government, categorized supply according to circumstances, and efficiency improvement based on integrated resources. Moreover, the development of the opera in the countryside shall be incorporated in the building of the public service system of culture and in the scope of public cultural service to be purchased by the government to integrate resources in a targeted way and improve the quality and level of rural opera.

Under such political background, in recent years the governments of Hebi and Xun County vigorously promoted the development of local cultural and tourism industry, and engaged in facilitating the prosperity and development of opera. Inspired by the China Luoyang Peony Cultural Festival, Hebi Municipal Bureau of Tourism has upgraded Xun Ancient Temple Fair and other local folk cultures since 2009,

⁷⁴ The full text is available at the official website of Central People's Government of PRC. <http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengcewenjianku/index.htm>

⁷⁵ The full text is available at the official website of Central People's Government of PRC. <http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengcewenjianku/index.htm>

proposing the concept of “Hebi Folk Culture Festival” and iconic local tourism products. Over ten years of exploration, Xun County created its own folk culture tourism brand, attracting tourists at home and abroad. To take the 11th Hebi Folk Culture Festival in 2019 as an example (Figure 7.17), Xun County received as many as 700,000 tourists on the 16th day of the first lunar month alone, and the number of online viewers of the live broadcast exceeded 20 million.



Figure 7.17 Street scene during the ancient temple fair of Xun County

Source: downloaded from the official website of Hebi People's Government

A large number of local government officials joined in the “Shehuo” parade and the walking tours in the mountains on the eighth, ninth, fifteenth, and sixteenth days during the first month of lunar calendar. Government departments planned the routes of societies’ show tours to prevent any potential conflicts. Fair initiators agree upon the schedule of the performance involving hundreds of societies under the supervision of cultural and tourism management authorities; police officers and fire departments were on standby throughout the tour. Therefore, the large-scale temple fair was conducted in good order. Tourists could either watch the performances of all societies around Wenzhi Pavilion, or follow their favorite society all the way. As the streets where the ancient temple fair activities did on the way to the mountain are all major

business zones, the narrowness and crowded bystanders were major issues. Thus, the local government assigned a large number of police and even armed police forces to maintain order each year. Furthermore, the duration of society shows was restricted. Though it somewhat hindered the enthusiasm of participating societies, people can enjoy the performance safe and sound.

To further enrich the rural culture and ensure the survival of certain opera troupes, governments at all levels in Henan Province have adopted policies and measures to purchase performances from opera troupes and send them to the countryside since 2016. The table released by the Henan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism lists supported programs of private troupes in 2020. The Yellow River Henan Opera Troupe surveyed by the author was among the list of supported troupes. Though the government's annual financial investment in the supported programs of troupes is far from sufficient, the supporting measures undoubtedly play a positive role to some extent in the survival of private troupes and the inheritance of traditional opera art (Appendix 7.1).

7.4 Summary

With the unique geographical location and historical evolution, Xun County boasts time-honored, large-scale folk activities at the ancient temple fair during Chinese New Year. Based on the tradition of temple fairs, rich folk culture, and art resources, traditional opera in Xun County displays a picture of prosperity different from that in other places. Folk organizations, private opera troupes, folk artists, fair initiators, and the local government actively participate in the inheritance and development of local folk art (including traditional opera), and provide valuable Xun experience for the development of traditional opera in other rural areas of China.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

In the course of China's modernization, the overall decline of traditional opera has become an indisputable fact. Whether in urban or rural areas, opera audiences have been lost in large numbers, opera troupes are struggling to survive, and endangered or dead opera types are ubiquitous. Opera has fallen from its former throne of literature and art, and laments about its future fate could be heard everywhere. Many Chinese scholars and artists have studied this grand social and cultural phenomenon from different angles. A general survey of published research results shows that most of them are only superficial descriptions of the decline of traditional Chinese opera or focus on the improvement of themes and content, singing, performance, and other ontology in traditional Chinese opera, and there are also studies focusing on traditional Chinese opera with historical perspectives. These studies are broad in the spatial dimensions, or deep in the temporal dimensions, or profound in the ontological objects. However, any social phenomenon has a very close relationship with the changes in the social environment. Thus, it is necessary to look at the changes of traditional opera by situating it to the social change in China. Why the opera in modern Chinese society suffered the fate of decline, but in some rural areas the opera's living situation is obviously not so bad? One can even assume that there is a revival trend, and how to explain this phenomenon? The existing theoretical studies have not yet answered these two questions critically including the future fate of opera. Therefore, this study is committed to examining the traditional Chinese opera in the modernization process of rural areas in China and trying to find the answers to the above two key questions. To achieve this goal, five research questions are proposed:

1. Is the decline of the opera in modern China inevitable?

2. What are the factors affecting the decline of traditional Chinese opera?
3. What are the manifestations of the revival of local opera in rural areas of Henan province?
4. What are the factors affecting the revival of traditional Chinese opera?
5. What influence does the revival have on the inheritance and the development of traditional opera?

To answer these questions, this study uses a combination of literature research and case studies. Based on reviewing relevant literatures, two cases of Xuchang County and Xun County were selected, and four rounds of field investigations were conducted to collect sufficient first-hand data. Based on the analysis and discussion of the overall decline of traditional opera and the findings in the case study, research question 5 is extended into suggestions on the inheritance of Henan traditional opera in rural areas. This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of this study from the following aspects. Firstly, the research findings are summarized, including the reasons for the decline of traditional opera in modern society, the experience of traditional opera practice in Xuchang County, the experience of traditional opera practice in Xun County, and the comparison of the opera practices in both places. The second part puts forward some suggestions on the inheritance of Henan opera in rural areas, and then discusses the contribution and deficiency of this study. Finally, the general directions of future research are proposed.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the main findings of this research through field investigation and literature review and answers the first four questions of this research. In response to the first two research questions, 8.2.1 expounds the internal characteristics of traditional opera and external environment. Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn: determined by the classical core of opera and influenced by many factors of

external social environment, the decline of traditional opera in modern society is inevitable. 8.2.2 and 8.2.3 summarize the revival manifestations of the two case sites and analyze their influencing factors. 8.2.4 ends the section with a comparison of the two cases.

8.2.1 Reasons for traditional Chinese opera declining in modern society

Strictly speaking, China's modernization process had already begun in 1840 with the Opium War between Britain and China. Based on the particularity of the research field, this study limits the modernization process within a time interval of 40 years between 1978 and 2019. This stage is the rapid modernization brought by reform and opening up, and the social structure of China's rural areas has undergone profound changes. The widespread implementation of the land distribution system and household contract responsibility system made rural areas gradually realize the overall transformation from tradition to modernity. After 2000, rural society was embedded in the track of urbanization, industrialization, and marketization, accompanied by an important problem of cultural change and cultural construction lag (Zhou, 2010). During modernization, traditional opera has gradually been marginalized, with both opera and its practitioners facing a survival crisis. Based on previous studies, this study comprehensively applied the theories of sociology, philosophy, aesthetics, drama, history, and other disciplines to analyze the internal and external factors leading to the decline of traditional opera from the two levels of opera itself and audience. This study thus drew the following conclusions: As an art produced in ancient agrarian society, the traditional Chinese opera has a distinct and stable classical core, and its decline in modern society is part of historical necessity.

8.2.1.1 Internal cause: the inherent classical core of traditional Chinese opera as a decisive factor in the decline

In the fifth chapter, I refer to the spiritual characteristics of traditional opera art as the

"classical core" of opera. This "classical core" makes it have distinct uniqueness and identifiability in the forest of human drama. It is precisely this "classical core" that makes traditional Chinese opera encounter a cold reception in modern Chinese society and gradually marginalized from the position of the national cultural center. In a sense, the "classical core" defines the nature of the opera, and the "classical kernel" also makes the opera severely estranged and contradicted modern society, which is the decisive internal factor leading to its decline. One can assume that the decline of the traditional opera with a classical core in modern society is inevitable. The "classical core" is basically manifested in two aspects: the content and the artistic expression form.

From the content analysis, traditional opera accompanied ancient China through the middle and later period of the long feudal society, which reflects the ancient Chinese social life. It is good at telling the ancient content that has a great difference from modern society and life backgrounds. It can be found in an overview of the traditional opera plays handed down to the present that most of them are about emperors and ministers, historical stories and romance, folklore, and emotional entanglements between talented men and beauties. These stories do not overlap much with modern people's daily life and experiences, so they rarely resonate with contemporary audiences.

The classical core of traditional opera is also reflected in its form of artistic expression. Stylization is one of the main artistic characteristics of traditional Chinese opera. From composition, stage performance (including all singing and movement) to band accompaniment, the opera strictly follows a series of complex fixed norms called "stylization". The stylization gives the opera a unique artistic quality, which makes it clearly different from the dramatic arts of other nations, especially Western countries. But at the same time, it must be noted that the strong stylization of the opera precisely makes it challenging to modernize and improve it to adapt to modern aesthetic habits.

Virtuality is another major artistic feature of traditional Chinese opera. Contrasting to Western drama in theatric environment creation and actor performance as "real" as the overall pursuit, traditional opera, Chinese painting, Chinese calligraphy, and other Chinese traditional art pay attention to "freehand brushwork". The opera often uses only one or two pieces of symbolic props to hint at pivotal points of the specific theatric environment. For example, one table and two chairs covered with bright silk can represent the stately hall of the emperor and ministers. A boat in the river is depicted by a wooden paddle in the actor's hand, and a short stick decorated with colorful tassels is used as a riding crop to symbolize riding. Actors' performances are also full of virtuality, as many behaviors are performed without any objects. The expression of time and space in the opera is also virtual. In the same stage space, only a few circles of rapid walking by actors can realize the transformation of two completely different drama periods and spaces. However, modern Chinese people, especially young generations, have grown up in the age of mass media culture and are used to watching realistic stories through movies or television. The virtual performance of traditional opera is contrary to their popular cultural aesthetic habits.

The virtual artistic expression and stylized characteristics of opera not only have normative requirements for actors but also require audiences to appreciate them from a professional's view. Therefore, the Chinese saying "laymen are overwhelmed by the fun while professionals try to find out the trick" refers to the specific requirements for the audience's appreciation of traditional opera.

The slow pace of opera also challenges the patience of modern audiences. Unlike drama, film, and TV series, opera has a slow and discontinuous story. When each important character appears on the stage, the character must "jump out" of their role temporarily and explain their identity, story anthems, purpose, and intention to the audience in the tone of the narrator, and then "jump back" to the role to perform. Often in the performance of the most intense conflict or war scenes, the slowing of rhythm and non-continuous development also reflected the artistic treatment of opera.

For example, the actors perform massive dance movements that are complicated and captivating to show complex and intense emotions. In each battlefield fighting scene, martial arts and dance performances such as somersault, spear playing, and sword dancing are arranged in multiple rounds. These body movements show a certain alienation from the storytelling. They greatly enhance the level of performance and appreciation of the opera, but they do not contribute to the advancement of the plot. However, it prolongs the process of the development of drama conflict in terms of duration. In other words, it extends the time needed for the audience to appreciate a drama. In addition, traditional opera, especially Kunqu opera, Peking Opera, Yuju opera, Qinqiang opera, and other types with a long history often use lengthy verses (similar to the arias in Western operas), twists and turns in the singing, and long prolonged vocalization. Such practices often cause anxiety to modern people who are used to listening to popular music. These characteristics have formed a heavy aesthetic barrier between the artistic performance of opera and the modern audience, and it is also one of the critical factors that lead to the contradiction between opera and the fast pace of modern society, modern ordinary people's taste, their cultural psychology, and aesthetic styles.

In addition, the rich local flavor is also a "double-edged sword" for Henan operas. The local opera in Henan combines northern Banzi opera with Henan dialect, local folk music, rap art, and other artistic elements and is developed after a long period. Regardless of Yuju opera, Quju opera, Yuediao opera, and other various operas, the local flavor of central Plains, which marks Henan's local characteristics, will be vividly displayed when the music starts and the actors begin to speak or sing. For many Henan people, namely middle-aged and older people with stable social status and more insusceptible ideology, this is cultural memory and identity. However, for young rural people in Henan, the social identity of Henan and rural areas makes them unable to obtain a high level of social value, which easily leads to their difficulty in forming regional cultural identity.

To sum up, the inherent "classical core" of opera art in terms of theme, content, and form of expression has a far distance and insurmountable estrangement from the diversified, changeable, and fast-paced modern society, which is the decisive internal cause leading traditional opera to an overall decline in contemporary society.

8.2.1.2 External cause: modernization of rural society affecting the decline of traditional Chinese opera

The modernization of Chinese rural society in China has brought about drastic changes in production, labor, lifestyle, social interactions, entertainment, cultural content, etc. These changes together constitute the external factors affecting the decline of traditional Chinese opera.

In the 1980s, the vast rural areas of China, including Henan Province, experienced significant changes in production relations and land distribution systems. The commune system was replaced by the household responsibility system. The norm of commune members working together and distributing resources as a collective has changed. The new production mode with families as a unit led to changes in how farmers lived and socialized so that the two could adapt to each other.

Opera is a kind of cultural entertainment in the large-scale field. The peasants in the collective era did not watch the opera performance alone. Watching opera is a common activity of hundreds of peasants from the same commune. What happens in such a scene is considered not only a cultural entertainment activity but also a social activity or a kind of individual cultural identity in the collective. However, as communes no longer exist, the function and value of the opera to serve the collective production and collective life vanished. In other words, the original social function and collective cultural identity function of opera are no longer needed by farmers under the mode of family production and family life.

In the 1990s, television began to spread in Henan rural households. People can watch TV series, movies, variety shows, and song and dance performances for a low price without leaving their homes. In the 21st Century, the process of rural urbanization in China has sped up, and the agglomeration development of non-agricultural industries based on manufacturing and service industries has once again changed the production and lifestyle of rural society. Most young and middle-aged farmers leave their land and become "migrant workers" in cities for a better life. The elderly and children left at home cannot continue farming the land contracted by the family. Coupled with the need for industrialization and the large-scale development of new agriculture, the scattered small-scale production mode of family farming has gradually changed into various forms of large-scale agricultural cultivation. Therefore, it is rare for family members to live together in today's rural China. Instead, family members live separately in urban and rural areas. With the advent of the Internet era and the popularity of smartphone, more diversified and convenient media and cultural products have further crowded out the remaining space of traditional opera. As a part of the lifestyle of the "old time" lifestyle, traditional opera was disconnected from modern farmers (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 Production, life, entertainment changes in rural areas

Time	Production mode	Life mode	Main leisure activities
1958- 1984	collective(the people's commune)	collective	Watching opera
1985-1990	Household responsibility system	Family	Watching opera
1991-2000	Household responsibility system	Family	Watching TV
2001-2012	Household responsibility system and Large-scale operation	Family members live apart in cities and villages	Watching TV and surfing the Internet on computers
Since 2013	Large-scale management	Family members live apart	Surfing the

of modern agriculture

in cities and villages

Internet on
smartphones

From the perspective of the history of opera itself, in the 1960s and 1970s, the inheritance of opera, like other traditional cultures and arts, also experienced unnatural faultage and losses, which aggravated the survival crisis of opera in the process of modernization in China.

To sum up, the decline of traditional Chinese opera is the result of the joint action of its ontological core features and external ecology⁷⁶. First of all, the contradiction between the classical core inherent in traditional Chinese opera and modern society constitutes the internal cause that determines its decline. Modernization has brought about profound changes in China's social structure, and rural areas have gradually realized the overall transformation from tradition to modernity. They have been dragged into the track of urbanization, industrialization, and marketization, accompanied by cultural change and the marginalization of traditional opera. The invasion of modern media culture in the Internet age, the fault age and loss of opera audiences caused by special historical reason⁷⁷, and the lack of opera promotion and education constitute the external causes that accelerate the decline of opera. In a word, the overall decline of traditional opera culture in rural areas of China has been inevitable given the social and historical development.

8.2.2 The revival of traditional Opera in Xuchang County

Xuchang County, located in the Xuchang District of Henan Province, is one of the two main case study sites. Xingyuanpu Village in the local Lingjing town is a village

⁷⁶Refers to the external social environment in which opera exists based on the concept of ecology in biology.

⁷⁷Refers to the Cultural Revolution.

where the Hui and Han nationalities live together with about 1,300 residents. In the past ten years, remarkable cultural phenomena have taken place in this village, such as the villagers' spontaneously shooting of opera films, the villagers' establishment of folk opera art troupe, and the self-written, self-directed and self-performed operas. Opera culture here showed a strong revival after a short downward slide of the situation.

The coexistence of multiple forms of opera transmission formed by the combination of modern and traditional opera is one of the remarkable phenomena in the opera practice in this village. In Xingyuanpu Village, there are many forms of opera transmission, such as stage performances, opera films, and opera television shows. These forms of media influence each other, coexist and jointly promote the formation of the cultural community of Xingyuanpu Village. There is a double link between the farmers and opera in Xuchang County, which is different from other places. They not only accept and appreciate the opera as audiences but also become the creators themselves to participate in the opera practice, such as shooting the opera film, setting up the opera art troupe, creating and editing, and rehearsing the opera repertoire. Watching, singing, and performing opera is part of the life of the local farmers. To some extent, opera is a career for them.

How to modernize opera has been a leading topic discussed and explored by Chinese theater researchers in the past 40 years. The opera practice in Xuchang County highlights the form of modern media opera transmission, which provides a valuable idea for this issue. Compared with the traditional stage performance, opera films and opera television shows break through the space and time limitations through the two modern media so that opera can be transmitted more conveniently. At the same time, they also adjust the contradiction between the "classical core" of opera and modern society to a certain extent.

8.2.3 The revival of traditional Opera in Xun County

Compared with Xuchang County, the investigation in Xun County showed us a more traditional view of opera. Here, opera performance follows the stage tradition that has been abided for hundreds of years. Opera traditions did not fade their power or charm. On the contrary, they are being interpreted by the local people in a new sense.

The main reason opera performances flourished in Xun County over the years is that the local area has two regional advantages. One is the 'Xun County Ancient Temple Fair'. The traditional activities of the 'Xun County Ancient Temple Fair' have provided all the conditions for the prosperity of opera with their strong appeal and attraction. Rich, ancient natural landscape, the duration of the month-long, average daily flow of tens of thousands of tourists provides the best stage, plenty of sessions, and plenty of audiences for traditional opera. The booming market ensures the survival and development of a large number of private opera troupes, In turn, the troupes performed spectacular operas at the ancient temple fairs. A virtuous circle has been formed between the traditional culture and commodity market, the ancient temple fairs, and the participants.

Another advantage is that the county has preserved diverse forms of folk art, such as stilt, bamboo horse, back pavilion, land boat, and other folk acrobatic performances. These folk arts echo opera in various elements such as stories, opera characters, performance forms, costumes and makeup, tunes, and instruments. The folk acrobatic performance activities can be regarded as a derivative of opera culture, that is, "peripheral products". There is a firm and unbreakable symbiotic relationship between traditional Chinese opera and these folk arts. The distinctive "derivative" and "echo" strengthen and promote the cultural gene of opera and make up for the lack of entertainment that simple opera performance does not have. Besides, Xun County also retains a variety of traditions of folk handicrafts, such as wood carving, stone carving, and wicker weaving. Although these handicrafts are not directly related to opera like the above folk performing arts, they also participate in creating a distinct traditional

cultural atmosphere because of their long history and profound folk traditions. In this sense, they also contributed to the local prosperity of opera.

8.2.4 Comparison of traditional Chinese opera practice in two cases

The study and the comparison of the two cases reveal that the opera practices of these two places share something in common but also have their own characteristics.

8.2.4.1 The influence of temple fair customs on local people's life

The importance of temple fair customs (including the “Spring Fair” in common villages and the “Xun Ancient Temple Fair” in Xun County) is what Xuchang and Xun counties share in common. In Xingyuanpu Village, Xuchang County, there is a “Chenglong Temple Fair”, which is most valued by local people, on the eighth day of the fifth lunar month every year. In addition, from the Spring Festival to the busy season of wheat harvest and farming, there are many temple fairs in the surrounding villages and towns, almost within ten miles of each other every day. After thousands of years of history, the ancient Temple Fair in Xun County is still one of the most influential traditional temple fairs in Northern China. Similar to the Mid-Autumn Festival and Spring Festival, the temple fair is still an important festival that is different from daily life. During the fair, family members are expected to return home for a reunion regardless of whether they are in their hometown, relatives and friends visit each other, and opera and food become important contents for people to enjoy and entertain their guests. There will be opera performances in temple fairs. Acting is a bridge for people to communicate with ancient ancestors and spirits. Watching the opera is essential for people to adjust to their spiritual life. Temple fairs have a profound impact on people's lives, as well as on the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera.

8.2.4.2 Symbiosis between other folk arts and traditional Chinese Opera

In Xingyuanpu Village Xuchang County, folk cultural activities such as lion dancing, land boat rowing, and gong and drum performances are held every Spring Festival and Lantern Festival. More diverse "Huashe"⁷⁸ performances, including stilts, bamboo horses, and back pavilions have become one of the main attractions of Xun County's ancient Temple Fair to attract tourists from home and abroad. Although these folk performances do not belong to traditional Chinese opera, they more or less borrow the context of traditional Chinese opera to organize their performance content, and there is an apparent shadow of traditional Chinese opera in the artistic elements and performance style, such as costumes, makeup, and props.

8.2.4.3 The preference of local farmers for local operas

In addition to the most popular Yu opera, Xuchang is the birthplace of Quju Opera and where the Quju Opera gains popularity. The most famous Quju troupes and Quju performing artists are in the area. Both urban and rural audiences enjoy Quju no less than Yu opera. Xun County and Hua County are where Xilu Dapingdiao opera was born and became well-known. They are home to the country's leading Dapingdiao troupes and artists and have also cultivated the most important Dapingdiao audience and performance market. Compared with Yu Opera, which is one of the "five major operas", these two local operas can be called "own" operas for local people and contain the most important of cultural identity.

8.2.4.4 The important role of folk organizations

In the practice of opera in both cases, non-governmental folk organizations have played a critical role in the inheritance and development of opera. In the course of the investigation in Xuchang County, interviewee No. 1's name was mentioned several

⁷⁸ "Huashe" (花社) is another folk term for "Shehuo" (社火), which is a general term for all kinds of performances in temple ceremonies.

times. He is the proponent of making an opera film in Xingyuanpu village, as well as the director and one of the leading artists of the film. In 2015, he and several other farmers founded the Xingyuanchun Opera Art Troupe and led the troupe to select material from village life to create plays and rehearse several contemporary operas popular with villagers. Under the efforts of him and the members of the art troupe influenced by him, today, "Xingyuanchun Opera Art Troupe" has developed from an amateur opera organization founded spontaneously by farmers into a well-known opera troupe in the Xuchang area.

There have always been countless private opera troupes in Xun County, neighboring Hua County, and Qixian County. Most of these private opera troupes originated from family or teachers, and the troupes are highly professional in management and performance. They have long been active in rural areas in the north and west of Henan and many rural areas in Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, and other provinces. On the one hand, they meet the needs of farmers for opera culture, and on the other hand, they contribute a lot to the inheritance and development of traditional opera. In addition to these professional private troupes, due to the tradition of the "Ancient Temple Fair of Xun County", there are also numerous local folk clubs. Although these clubs are not directly engaged in traditional opera practice, they also help the inheritance and promotion of traditional opera culture through the annual temple fair.

8.2.4.5 Innovative experiment and adherence to tradition

As summarized in 8.2.2 and 8.2.3, Xuchang County and Xun County respectively walked out two distinctive paths of traditional opera revival: innovative experiments and sticking to tradition.

The activities conducted by farmers, such as the opera films in Xingyuanpu Village, the opera TV programs broadcasted in the Xuchang area, and traditional opera art troupes, are all pioneer experiments different from traditional opera ecology. Through

these innovative experiments, traditional opera has realized a certain degree of modernization in Xuchang County. It has accumulated valuable experience for the inheritance and development of traditional opera in rural areas.

Based on the advantaged traditional resources and folk customs of Xun County, the conventional form of opera can be inherited and promoted in a relatively complete way. In addition, with the rapid development of culture and tourism in Henan Province in recent years, traditional culture and performing arts products, including opera, have been endowed with new vitality and become one of the essential tourism resources to attract foreign tourists.

8.3 Suggestions on Inheritance and Development of Opera in Rural Henan

Based on the study of the reasons for the overall decline of traditional Chinese opera and the investigation and summary of two revival cases, the author puts forward the following four suggestions for traditional Chinese opera practitioners and local government administrative departments regarding the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera in Henan rural areas.

8.3.1 Retaining traditional essence and excavating local folk art resources

Although traditional opera with the inherent "classical core" has been struggling to adapt to the changes of modern society, the author believes that the inheritance and development of traditional opera must first firmly retain the traditional essence. During China's modernization, Chinese opera has also experienced many reformations. The "drama + singing", real scene stage, Peking opera version of *Turandot*, and other experimental products borrowed from Western drama culture failed, and the audience could not accept the twisted traditional Chinese opera. In other words, repertory themes that reflect ancient social life and the stylized,

virtualized expression techniques have been integrated into the soul of the opera and accepted by generations of audiences. Any efforts to remove the original character of the opera will not serve the purpose of inheritance and development.

China has a vast territory and a large number of nationalities, and there are a variety of folk art resources related to traditional Chinese opera. Take Henan as an example, there are more than 20 kinds of operas, and there are also rich resources of other oral arts related to opera, such as Henan Zhuizi and Dagushu. Local folk resources with distinctive characteristics should be explored to provide sources for the inheritance and development of opera in rural areas.

8.3.2 Combining opera culture with tourism to build local brands

In 2017, the OECD pointed out that "cultural tourism" has become one of the largest and fastest-growing tourism markets worldwide. Conceptually, cultural tourism can be defined as "people leaving their usual place of residence for cultural attractions with the intention of gathering new information and experiences to meet their cultural needs"(Liang, Xie, Yu, 2015, p.39). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) puts forward that the main motives of travel are for study tours, performing arts, culture, participating in festivals, visiting sites or monuments, and so on (Liang, Xie, Yu, 2015, p.37). Such activities can be regarded as cultural tourism. Performance and festival events are the main types of cultural tourism products.

In April 2018, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China was officially established, which merged the functions of the former Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Administration into one department of the State Council. Local governments at all levels have also quickly established government management agencies that integrate cultural tourism, sports, and media. At present, the development of cultural tourism in China has entered a new era. With a solid market basis, diverse forms of expression, and rich spiritual experience, tourism has gradually integrated cultural

experience into the daily life of the Chinese people.

For rural areas, in the integration of culture and tourism, using local opera culture to lead the development of tourism and revive traditional culture via tourism is the perfect solution to realize the inheritance and innovation of traditional opera. Opera can be connected to the bigger market through tourism. Opera practitioners should constantly enrich the supply types and modes of opera cultural products and services. To further enhance the attraction and influence of opera culture to young tourists, opera practitioners should use rich art forms to create infectious tourism-performing artworks based on highly restored local cultural symbols and things. Their opera products and services will be more related to cultural heritage, cultural resources, and cultural elements.

In the case of Henan Province, the development of opera culture tourism has many advantages and is facing the best development opportunity in history. The first is the rapid development of cultural tourism in the Yellow River ancient capital, which is becoming one of the new development trends in China's tourism market. Secondly, under the condition of a long-term sustainable population and abundant resources, tourism in Henan Province will occupy the core position of cultural tourism. Thirdly, transportation is very convenient. Zhengzhou, the capital city of Henan Province, is one of the major transportation hubs in China, where the 米-shaped high-speed railway network⁷⁹ meets. The high-speed railways and expressways are connected in all directions in the province. Tourists from all over the country can easily reach every village by high-speed train and bus. Fourthly, the abundant cultural resources related to opera are applicable to tourism.

The Ancient Temple Fair in Xun County is a successful case of integrating traditional culture and art, including opera, with tourism. In recent years, there have also been

⁷⁹ "米" is a Chinese character whose meaning corresponds to the English words "meter" and "rice". Here this Chinese character is only used to show the shape of the high-speed railway network.

cultural activities in Henan Province, such as the Majie Story-telling Festival in Baofeng County and the 10,000 people grand gathering of Henan Opera in Zhumadian city. These annual activities occur regularly, attracting entertainers and opera practitioners from all over the country, not to mention countless tourists. These events have become attractive tourism brands in these regions. Such tourism products are bound to produce good benefits in developing the local tourism economy in the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

8.3.3 Applying scientific and technological means to innovate carrier forms

Technological innovation and the Internet are subverting the pattern of the traditional performing arts industry, providing support for the digital development of the performing arts industry. On the one hand, the original performance institutions have accelerated their entry into online media. For example, the National Theatre of the UK started to create high-definition drama and film in 2009, and the digital combination of stage and screen has become a trend. On the other hand, the development of Internet technology has led to the emergence of a series of new forms and contents, such as the production of performance content and innovation of self-media performance forms, which have had an impact on the original traditional mode. The emergence of COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of performing arts from offline to online, and various performance entities have opened online “stages”. From the demand side of performing arts activities, with the development of society and material enrichment, people’s demand for spiritual products is gradually escalating, and traditional performing arts activities can no longer meet people’s needs, neither in content nor form. From the supply side of performing arts activities, the progress of technology, especially the development of the Internet, electronic technology, and intelligent equipment, makes performing arts activities more varied in terms of content, performance, and appreciation. The 2021 TikTok Opera Live Broadcast Data Report released by TikTok, a comprehensive online social networking platform, indicated that there are 348 kinds of existing operas in China, and 231 of them have

opened live broadcasts on TikTok, with a coverage rate of 66.4%. Among them, Peking Opera, Qinqiang Opera, Shaoxing Opera, Huangmei Opera, and Yuju Opera are the most popular. Henan, Anhui, Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces lead the country in terms of the number of opera audiences and anchors. In 2021, there were more than 800,000 live broadcasts of opera with 2.5 billion cumulative viewers and an average of 3,200 viewers per show (Figure 8.1).

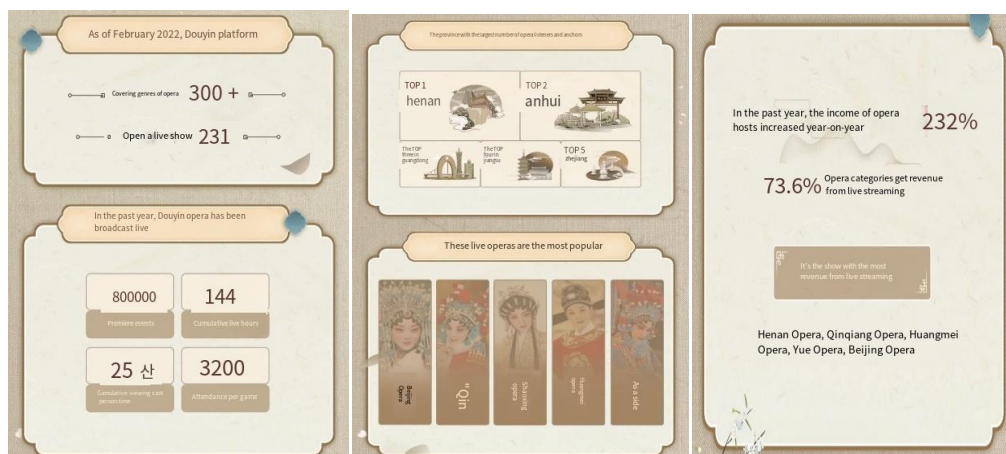


Figure 8.1: data of traditional opera live-broadcast on TikTok in 2021.

Source: Downloaded from internet.

<https://world.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202204/15/WS62592266a3101c3ee7ad0aa8.html>

The inheritance and development of opera should follow the trend of digital, intelligent, and integrated development and realize industrial upgrading with the Internet and high technology as the driving force. In August 2019, six Chinese government departments, including the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Cyberspace Administration of the CPC Central Committee, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the State Administration of Radio and Television, jointly issued the *Guidance on Promoting the Deep Integration of Culture, Science, and Technology*, offering guidance on promoting the deep integration of culture and science and technology. Compared with large and medium-sized cities with relatively complete infrastructure and widespread application of science and technology, rural areas

should speed up the construction of infrastructures such as network coverage and support for performing arts production, production, and consumption venues. The innovative performance forms such as "Cloud Theater", "Cloud Theater Festival" and "cloud concert" held under the COVID-19 pandemic should be upgraded and solidified to form a new outlet for online performance. In the context of 5G popularization, the use of VR, AR, and other digital virtual technologies will break the barriers of the original opera performance forms and audiences, promote the upgrade of immersive performance, improve performance support services, and provide a complete set of solutions with high-quality performance equipment. In terms of space, opera performances should be supported by new technologies and apply venues like shopping malls, subways, bookstores, and outdoor public spaces to perform beyond professional theaters. This requires the industry management departments, trade associations, professional opera troupes, and other organizations to actively connect with the high-tech industry, take the initiative to propose demands, and promote the application of new technology in the opera performance industry.

8.3.4 Accelerating the improvement of infrastructure and the construction of Community Theater

The physical stage is still the main space for opera performances. Compared with cities, most rural areas in China lag in building modern theaters and stages. According to the author's research in Henan Province, most opera performances in rural areas use simple, moveable outdoor stages like the one shown below (Figure 8.2 and 8.3). The main body of the stages consists of steel supports and canvas tarpaulins, and the whole space is divided into two parts- front stage and backstage- by the background curtain. Stage lighting conditions are simple and are generally solved by pulling out a temporary wire from the public power lines of the villages. As opera is often performed in the evenings, temporary electrical equipment risks threatening the life safety of actors and audiences and fails to ensure a smooth show. Moreover, the troupes are supposed to prepare the stage facilities before each performance. In other

words, they have to bring the equipment to their destination.

Such open-air performance spaces are also unfriendly to the audience. The open space under the stage is the area provided for audiences. Some people brought folding stools and chairs from home and sat there. Some people sat on bicycles, electric cars, tricycles, and other transportation tools. Some people had to stand for two or three hours during the performance. All of those greatly reduced the audience's experience. Such an open-air theater naturally does not have public facilities such as toilets and dressing rooms, nor can it provide convenient services such as drinking water, thus failing to meet the basic physical needs of the audience. It is also easy to cause problems such as poor hygiene and a dirty environment (Figure 8.2, 8.3).



Figure 8.2 A makeshift opera stage in a village in Hua County

Source: Provided by the respondent No.5 of Xun County.



Figure 8.3 Backstage of a makeshift opera stage.

Source: Provided by the respondent No.5 of Xun County.

Community theater is a mature system in Britain and the US. Compared with urban grand theaters, it is unique in its foundation and connections with the community. On the other hand, it is also an inseparable element of its community. Community theater is essentially a non-profit, not as commercial as a resident theater company. Instead, it seeks to produce high-quality, high-caliber plays for the benefit of the local population. The content varies from classical or experimental plays to those based on local themes. In some countries and regions of the world, various village and community theaters have gone beyond the original function of "theater" to become famous local landmarks and recreation places. They not only undertake theatrical performances but also engage in folk art, stage performances, special exhibitions, and other fields. Examples include Loud Shadows in Netherlands (Figure 8.4), the Natural Cliff Theatre in Cefalu, Italy (Figure 8.5), and the Skorba Theatre in Putuj, Slovenia's oldest town (Figure 8.6). The design and construction of these theaters are ingeniously combined with local natural landscapes, cultural features, and classic scenes in a highly creative style.



Figure 8.4 Loud Shadows in Netherlands

Source: Downloaded from internet. <https://neothinks.com/village/3801/>



Figure 8.5 the Natural Cliff Theatre in Cefalu, Italy

Source: Downloaded from internet. <https://neothinks.com/village/3801/>



Figure 8.6 the Skorba Theatre in Putuj, Slovenia

Source: Downloaded from internet. <https://neothinks.com/village/3801/>

Many modern small and medium-sized indoor or outdoor community theaters have been established in Beijing, Shanghai, and the rural areas of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, especially in areas where urban and rural areas are integrated. The 365 Theatre in Huilongguan and Tiantongyuan Communities in Beijing is a good example. The theatre, with a total area of 1,026 square meters, can accommodate 501 audiences complete with lighting, sound system, and other supporting facilities, which carries the dream of "365 days of drama around you every day". From the stage design and the seating areas for the audience, to dressing and rehearsal rooms backstage, the theater embodies its pioneering concept of space and its attitude toward integrating performance. One year after its launch, the mini theater has been putting on shows from five dimensions of drama creation, rehearsal, performance, education, and exhibition to residents and foreign tourists. The theater has become a platform for local theater practitioners and audiences to interact, communicate and grow together.

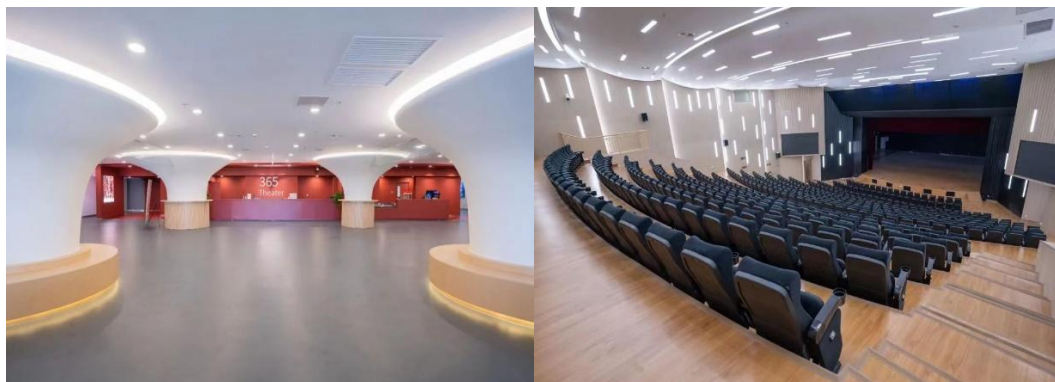


Figure 8.7 the 365 Theatre in Beijing, China

Source: Downloaded from internet. <https://www.ttyssq.com/thread-3755487-1-2.html>

In the above case, plenty of evidence to speed up the construction of rural opera theatre and community theatre is not only improved physical environment, is advantageous to the drama of the inheritance and education, and helps to form under

the condition of the contemporary new type of rural socio-cultural identity and participate in public affairs, enhance residents' identity and self-worth, and enhance their sense of happiness.

Compared with the grand theater, the small theater has a small scale, small investment, and flexible operation, which is more suitable for the "lightweight" small performance with low cost and cheap ticket price. It is a platform carrier that connects art and benefits the people together. Small rural theaters have multiple functions, such as offering performances accessible to everyone, delivering information, and cultural exchange. Rural small theaters are also the stage for training rural literary and artistic talents. Small theaters, small creations, small investments, and small performances can give grassroots artists and artists who are rooted in rural areas more opportunities to practice. Some skits, origami plays, folk art, rap, and stage play created by rural performers who have not been able to appear on the big stage, for the time being, can be verified and modified through "lightweight" performances to improve their artistic ability. Small rural theaters are also the main venue to satisfy the cultural and artistic needs of the masses. In today's rural areas, a large number of young and middle-aged workers leave the countryside, and most of those who stay in the countryside are middle-aged and older people. This part of the masses is relatively passive in the demand for culture and art and lacks the momentum and habit of actively appreciating culture and art through various media means. They are the biggest beneficiaries of the construction of small theaters in rural areas.

The founders of the Sha Tin Theatre and the New Domain Theatre in Hong Kong, Choi Sik-cheong and Poon Hui-sum, are committed to making "[the] theatre a force that can be owned by all, actively engaging in the community and making theatre an organic part of social life"(Liang, 2017). Mok Chiu-ruk, known as the master of people's theatre, said: "Not only to provide leisure entertainment for the general public...What I want to do is to promote this kind of 'entertainment' to make it a 'garden' for communication, dialogue, concern, and mutual support between

communities "(Liang, 2017).

Therefore, to inherit the Henan opera, rural theaters and community theaters should be built in the vast rural areas as soon as possible, so that small theaters can play a pivotal role in enriching farmers' cultural life and inheriting national culture. Counties (cities, districts) and towns should incorporate the construction of small theaters into the practical project of people's well-being and build several small theaters with higher standards and seats of 300 to 500 people. The height, width, and depth of the stage can meet the general needs of repertory performances. It is necessary to rebuild or expand existing small theaters or cultural compounds that do not meet the requirements of the stage, lighting, sound, and other infrastructure. Local professional troupes or cultural centers shall organize professional training for the management and service personnel of the small theater to improve the professional level of stage design, lighting, sound personnel, and the overall quality of the small theater. The operation of the theater will be carried out in a way that supports marketization and public welfare. Under the premise of government leading, private capital injection is encouraged, and excellent economic talents are encouraged to pay attention to rural public welfare undertakings by giving back to their hometown. Small theaters can also undertake the exchange performances of various opera troupes, the performances of folk groups at low cost, and other commercial performances, which can effectively cultivate the consumption habits of the majority of audiences to buy tickets to watch performances, and play a subtle influence on the positive and sustainable development of the future art industrialization.

8.3.5 Classification and management of opera types to protect endangered arts

The Annals of Chinese Operas, compiled in 1983 and published in 1999, collected 374 types of operas from all parts of the country and ethnic groups (cited in Zhou, 2015). However, as mentioned in Chapter 5, in 2007, the national research and investigation on types of operas organized by the National Folk Art Development

Center of the Ministry of Culture of China showed that 286 types of operas existed in China, and 88 types of operas had died out in just over 20 years(Zhou, 2015). In the past 20 years, operas in Henan Province that are still active have shrunk from 45 to less than 20 . Among them, 16 are listed as endangered, accounting for 4/5 of the total. Among the lost or endangered types of operas, many have lasted for hundreds of years and have high cultural value, such as Qingfeng Liuzi Opera, Pingyu Sixian Dao, and Taikang Daoqing Opera (Ma, 2018). The disappearance of these types of operas is undoubtedly a severe loss of national culture and local cultural heritage.

Through investigation, comparison and combing, the author found that the original widely distributed and influential types of big operas were full of vitality, their stage performances at home and abroad were very prosperous, and their influence in society was constantly expanding. These types of operas often have numerous professional or amateur troupes not only in their original places but also in the whole country, which is easy to get a large amount of national-related stage art project funding. Examples include Peking Opera, Pingju Opera, Shaoxing Opera, Henan Opera, Huangmei Opera, Kunqu Opera, and Qinqiang Opera. Beyond the first stage, most operas are in a worrying situation of inheritance and development, with outdated theater equipment, weak repertory-creation, scarce talent, and a sluggish performance market, which rarely get public attention. It can be said that these types of operas risk being lost to varying degrees.

Obviously, the existence value of endangered operas needs full attention. Because endangered operas have been circulated in a relatively closed area for a long time and have little communication with the outside world, they have preserved many ancient features of operas in the context of the continuous change of Chinese operas. The discovery shows supporting significance to the study of the development and changes of Chinese operas. Its musical voice, stage performance, and theater composition can provide abundant research materials for studying drama music, stage, and theater. In addition, in terms of anthropology, folklore, religion, and other disciplines, the local

records since the Ming and Qing dynasties show that opera is closely related to folk customs, among which the drama forms such as religious ritual drama and local sacrifice drama are of great value to the study of traditional folk customs. Scholar Kang Baocheng mentioned in the *Origin and Flow of the Art of Nuo Opera* that a trend in the development history of Chinese drama is the transformation from religious ceremony to dramatic ceremony. "The key to the research is to discover and investigate the performance form between religious ceremony and dramatic form" (Kang, 1999, p.264). It is significant to the study of Chinese drama history and religion that most of the endangered opera forms are between "religious ceremony" and "drama form".

For the traditional operas that have values in inheritance but risk extinction, the author suggests that the government set up a specialized management program for "endangered operas". In addition to offer funding, the government should pay more attention to its cultural heritage and expand the influence of the operas, make it better to meet the needs of the local populace culture, and truly ensure the types and the existence and continuation. At the same time, the endangered operas should try to explore the possibility of combining with current trends, maintain their individuality to avoid disappearance. In this regard, the Nanyang region's practice of Wan Bang, a local opera, is an enlightening example. All the local Wanbang Troupes receive 60% of their funding from the government and 40% from the troupes themselves (Ma, 2018). The government manages the troupe at the macro level to ensure they are on the right track and gives it greater autonomy at the micro level. What to perform and how to perform is up to the troupe itself. According to the requirements of the government and the market demand, combining the characteristics of the types of operas and their own conditions, the company determines the plays to be performed and carries out performance activities, paying attention to both the social and economic benefits of drama products, encouraging people with excellent works, and opening up more doors to increase income. The government cannot restrict local troupes, causing them to lose their vitality nor can it push endangered operas that are

at the brink of extinction to the market and let the market decide their fate. Endangered operas must overcome the traditional concept of relying on the government. Instead, they need to establish a modern market consciousness, consciously conduct cultural management, practice their internal skills, enhance market competitiveness, and survive and develop in the market economy. They should also focus on the construction of plays, strive to create new works that reflect modern life, and at the same time protect excellent traditional ones so that they can be passed on.

For those operas that have been lost and died out, from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage protection, relevant government departments and social forces should try to set up special funds for the establishment of opera culture museums or experience centers, to rescue, protect and utilize these artistic audio and video, pictures, documents, costumes, props, and stages. That way, operas can be heard, seen, experienced, and studied as opera cultural heritage.

8.4 Contributions of this research

From the point of view of theoretical research, this study further discusses the basis of the "declining view of drama" generally proposed by predecessors and draws clear conclusions: Based on the ancient life content of opera and its inherent classical artistic characteristics, as well as the rapid development of China's modernization process brought about by the drastic social changes, such internal and external factors, the decline of opera in modern Chinese society is inevitable. This study not only verifies the marginalization of opera in people's cultural and entertainment life through a large number of investigations but also finds out the causes of its marginalization from the two aspects of opera itself and the social environment, that is, answers two key questions: What is the most important feature of opera? What changes have happened to the environment of opera in modern society? In the face of

such a grand proposition as the inheritance, protection, and development of traditional Chinese opera, we must understand these two problems clearly to take effective measures and methods.

In the literature research, this study incorporates the western theory of modernity and the traditional Chinese philosophy into the vision. On the one hand, it discusses the significant influence of modernity on social and cultural changes, and on the other hand, it examines the internal regulation of the traditional Chinese philosophy on the formation and evolution of opera. Both perspectives have influenced the fate of opera in modern Chinese society. Therefore, the conclusion of this study on the overall decline of Chinese opera has positive theoretical reference value for the future development of Chinese opera, especially for the study of Chinese opera.

Opera is a broad concept, and its living conditions in different regions, urban and rural areas in China vary. This research observed the fate of opera from a historical approach and analyzed the cases of Xuchang and Xun counties via fieldwork. The study found that the ancient drama art in the birth of the original soil - rural areas still has a tenacious vitality and creativity. In the above two areas, Henan opera has shown a trend of revival in different forms. Undoubtedly, the findings of this part of the investigation are of great significance to the opera career in Henan. On the one hand, it inspires the construction of opera culture in rural areas, and on the other hand, it proposes ideas for the inheritance and development of opera art in rural areas. On a larger scale, this study also has certain reference values for inheriting and developing traditional Chinese opera in other regions of China.

8.5 Limitations

Due to the author's scientific research ability and experience, this study has deficiencies and limitations. Before this, the author mainly engaged in vocal music

teaching and drama theory research, thus lacking systematic and scientific field research methods and experience. When designing the questionnaire and interview outline, the author often felt that she did not fully explore the problem. In the field observation and interviews with people, there is a deviation in the grasp of their own roles, and sometimes they unconsciously bring the researcher into the field of investigation, which affects the accuracy of the survey to a certain extent.

Since the end of 2019, opera performance activities in rural areas of Henan province, which are closely related to this study, have been severely restricted due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which directly affected the collection of first-hand data in terms of quantity and timeliness.

In addition, the author has lived in a Chinese language environment for a long time, so she is not good at conducting scientific research and writing papers in English. The lack of language ability limits the expression and presentation of the research results to a certain extent.

However, the author tried her best to overcome these deficiencies and limitations, ensure the scientific nature of the research conclusions, and achieve the predetermined research objectives and research contributions.

8.6 Future Research Directions

Henan has a vast territory. As the old saying goes, "ten miles of different wind, a hundred miles of different customs", the appearance of local operas is closely related to the local dialect. In the future, this study should expand the research scope in the regional dimension, and include the rural areas in the south and west of Henan in the case study, to draw a more complete map of rural opera in Henan. At the same time, the author plans to conduct a comparative study between urban and rural areas in

Henan to explore the similarities and differences of opera in different cultural and ecological environments.

There are numerous studies regarding the historical changes in Henan opera. However, there has not been enough investigation and research on other representative opera types in Henan, such as Quju, the mainstream opera in the author's hometown, and Yue tune, which is popular in Xuchang, Nanyang, Zhoukou, and other places. In the future, the author will explore further in this direction and try to fill in some gaps in the study of Henan traditional opera.

As the author mentioned in 8.5 Limitations, the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the opera industry in recent years is immense, which has severe challenges but also contains unexpected new opportunities. On this subject, the author has carried out part of the field survey, accumulated some data and information, and established friendly contacts with some opera groups and practitioners. As the Chinese government and society adapt to the epidemic, the survival and development of opera in the new situation are still changing, which needs to be followed up and studied.

8.7 Epilogue

Marx said: all solid things melt into air. As a cultural heritage of the old times, traditional Chinese opera has suffered a severe impact from modernity in the process of modernization and declined as a whole, just like the traditional art of other nations. However, because of its profound national character and powerful tradition, opera has not disappeared and will not die out. Especially at present, China has been carefully examining and adjusting the pace of modernization. In the rural areas where the degree of modernization is still low and the traditional power is strong, traditional opera is being embraced again by the wandering children who were lost. Because it carries a distinct national cultural gene in its blood, it can clearly answer the confused

modern Chinese people "Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going?"

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APPENDIX

4.1 Questionnaire survey on traditional Chinese Opera watching situation in Henan rural area (original version)

河南农村居民观看戏曲情况抽样调查问卷

本问卷为河南农村地区观看戏曲情况抽样调查问卷，仅用于学术研究。本问卷共包含 18 个问题，其中客观选择题 16 个，主观简答题 2 个，预计用时 5-10 分钟可完成。

被调查人基本信息：年龄_____性别_____受教育程度_____作答日期_____

1. 你喜欢戏曲吗?
A 非常喜欢 B 喜欢 C 无所谓 D 不喜欢
2. 你几岁开始了解戏曲?
A 12 (含 12) 岁之前 B 13-18 (含 18) 岁 C 19 岁之后 D 不了解戏曲
3. 你喜欢哪些剧种? (可多选)
A 河南豫剧、曲剧、越调 B 京剧 C 越剧 D 其他剧种 (请注明: _____)
4. 你喜欢哪种类型的戏曲作品?
A 传统剧目 B 现代剧目 C 都喜欢 D 都不喜欢
5. 你能够演唱或表演戏曲片段吗?
A 很擅长 B 能够 C 会一点儿 D 不能
6. 你会和家人、朋友交流看戏感受吗?
A 经常会 B 偶尔会 C 很少会 D 从不会
7. 你的村庄去年有几次现场戏曲演出?
A 10 次以上 B 6-9 次 C 3-5 次 D 3 (不含 3) 次以下
8. 你认为来观看村里戏曲演出的村民多吗?
A 很多, 几百人 B 较多, 一百人左右 C 一般, 几十人 D 很少, 不到五十人
9. 你的村里戏曲演出观众群体的年龄是怎样的?

A 60 岁以上老年人为主 B 40-60 岁为主 C 40 岁以下人群为主 D 各年龄层人群皆有，比较平均

10. 你认为村里的戏曲演出缘由有哪些？（可多选）

A 村里的传统集、会 B 春节等重大节庆 C 红、白喜事 D 其他（请简要注明：_____）

11. 你的村里有没有固定的戏曲演出场地？（可多选）

A 有，固定的开放式露天戏台（高台） B 有，剧院 C 有，临时戏台 D 都没有

12. 你喜欢收看电视戏曲节目吗？

A 非常喜欢 B 喜欢 C 无所谓 D 不喜欢

13. 你喜欢收看哪个电视戏曲节目？（可多选）

A 梨园春 B cctv 空中戏院 C 戏曲大舞台 D 其他（请注明：_____）

14. 你的家庭经常通过电视收看戏曲节目“梨园春”吗？

A 几乎每期都看 B 经常看 C 有时看 D 从来不看

15. 你经常收看中央电视台的 CCTV11 戏曲频道吗？为什么？

A 经常看，因为节目很丰富 B 有时看，遇到自己喜欢的演员或者内容时会看 C 基本不看，因为不喜欢节目内容 D 从来不看，因为接收不到此频道电视信号

16. 你和你的家人会通过网络浏览或观看与戏曲相关的内容吗？

A 经常上网观看 B 遇到自己喜欢的演员或者内容时会看 C 基本不会 因为不习惯网络途径 D 从来不看，因为不上网

17. 传统戏台、现代剧院、电视戏曲节目和网络平台这四种形式中你最喜欢哪种方式来观看戏曲？原因是什么？请简要回答。

答：_____

18. 你喜欢/不喜欢戏曲的原因是什么？请简要回答。

答：_____

4.2 Questionnaire survey on traditional Chinese Opera watching situation in Henan rural area (English version)

Questionnaire survey on traditional Chinese Opera watching situation in Henan rural area

This questionnaire aims to investigate the situation of traditional Chinese opera watching in Henan rural area, it is only used for academic research. The questionnaire includes 18 questions in total, 1-16 are optional questions, 17-18 are short answer questions, it will take about 5-10 minutes to finish them.

Survey respondent's basic information: Age _____ Sex _____ Education level _____
Date _____

1. Do you like traditional opera?
A. very like B. like C. do not matter D. don't like
2. At what age you began to know traditional opera?
A. before 12 B. between 13-18 C. after 19 D. don't know until now
3. What kind of traditional opera do you like?(Multiple Choice)
A. Henan Yu Opera, Qu Opera, Yuediao Opera B. Beijing Opera C. Yue Opera D. others(Please indicate _____)
4. What kind of Traditional Opera plays do you like?
A. traditional plays B. modern plays C. both A and B D. neither A or B
5. Can you sing or play some fragments of Traditional Opera?
A. very good at B. I can C. a little D. I can not
6. Do you share your feelings of watching traditional opera with your families and friends?
A. often B. sometimes C. seldom D. never
7. How many times were there traditional Chinese opera performance in your village last year?
A. more than 10 times B. 6-9 times C. 3-5times D. less than 3 times
8. How many villagers did come to watch traditional opera in your mind?

- A. hundreds B one hundreds more or less C. dozens D. less than fifty
9. How about the age of the majority of traditional opera audiences in your village?
A. older than 60 years old B. between 40 -60 years old C. younger than 40 years old D. all ages involved
10. What do you think are the reasons for the opera performances in the village?
(Multiple Choice)
A. traditional fair, festival of this village B. important festivals, such as the Spring Festival. C. weddings or Funerals D. others (Please indicate_____)
11. Is there fixed performing place in your village?
A. yes, fixed outdoor stage B. yes, theater C. yes, temporary stage. D. no
12. Do you like watch traditional opera TV program?
A. very like B. like C. do not matter D. don't like
13. Which traditional Opera TV program do you like? (Multiple Choice)
A. Liyuanchun B. CCTV11 Opera theater in the Sky C. Ground Stage of traditional opera D. others (Please indicate_____)
14. How often do you and your families watch Liyuanchun on TV?
A. almost every issue B. often C. sometimes D. never
15. Do you often watch traditional opera Channel of CCTV11? Why?
A. often, because it has great variety program B. sometime, Just watch my favorite actors or program. C. seldom, because I don't like D. never, because there is no signal in my house
16. Do you and your families watch traditional opera on internet?
A. often B. sometime, just watch my favorite actors or program. C. seldom, because I am unaccustomed to using internet D. never, because I never use Internet
17. There are four ways to watch traditional opera, traditional stage, modern theater, TV program and internet platform, which one do you like best? Why? Please answer briefly in the blank area.
18. Why do you like/not like traditional opera? Please answer briefly in the blank area.

5.1 Sample questionnaire of college students' knowledge of opera in Henan Province

河南大学生对于戏曲知识了解情况抽样调查问卷

Sample Questionnaire of College Students' Knowledge of opera in Henan Province

本问卷为河南大学生对于戏曲知识了解情况抽样调查问卷,仅用于学术研究。本问卷共包含 12 个问题,其中客观选择题 9 个,连线题 1 个,主观简答题 2 个,预计用时 5-10 分钟可完成。

This questionnaire is a sample survey of Henan college students' understanding of opera knowledge and is only used for academic research. This questionnaire contains 12 questions, including 9 objective multiple choice questions, 1 connecting question and 2 subjective short answer questions. It is expected to take 5-10 minutes to complete.

Basic information of interviewees:

Age _____ Sex _____ college _____ date _____

年龄 _____ 性别 _____ 所在学校 _____ 作答日期 _____

1. 你喜欢戏曲吗? Do you like traditional Chinese opera?

A 非常喜欢 B 喜欢 C 无所谓 D 不喜欢

A very like B like C It doesn't matter D don't like

2. 你几岁开始了解戏曲? In what age you begin to know opera?

A 12 (含 12) 岁之前 B 13-18 (含 18) 岁 C 19 岁之后 D 不了解戏曲

A before 12 B 13-18 C 19 D never know

3. 请选出你知道的河南地方戏剧种 How many local Opera do you know?

A 豫剧 B 曲剧 C 越调 D 越剧 E 大平调 F 道情

A *Henan opera* B *Qu opera* C *Yue opera* E *Taipingdiao Opera* F *Daoqing Opera*

4. 你过去一年中看过几场戏曲演出? (含现场与电视、网络平台等) How many opera show have you watched in last year?

A 10 次以上 B 6-9 次 C 3-5 次 D 3 (不含 3) 次以下 E 0 次

A More than 10 B 6-9 C 3-5 D less than 3 E 0

5. 你的学校去年有几次现场戏曲演出? How many opera show did your college organized in last year?

A 10 次以上 B 6-9 次 C 3-5 次 D 3 (不含 3) 次以下 E 0 次

A More than 10 times B 6-9 times C 3-5 times D Less than 3 times E 0

6. 以下哪些是豫剧剧目代表作? Which one is the representative works of *Henan opera*?

A 《红灯记》 B 《朝阳沟》 C 《抬花轿》 D 《花木兰》 E 《女驸马》 F 《牡丹亭》

A "The red lantern" B "Chaoyang ditch" C "carrying bridal sedan" D "Hua mu Lan" F "female son-in-law of the king" D "The peony pavilion"

7. 请将以下剧目与主要人物进行连线。Connect the Character with Opera play

《清风亭》	黄桂英	The wind pavilion	Huang
Guiying			

《香囊记》	唐 成	The perfume pouch story	Tang
Cheng			

《七品芝麻官》	银 环	The lowest officials	Yin
Huan			

《大祭桩》	周凤莲	The big sacrifice pile	Zhou
Fenglian			

《朝阳沟》	张君瑞	The Chaoyang ditch	Zhang
Ruijun			

《红娘》	张继保	The Match maker	Zhang
Jibao			

8. 你认为传统剧目《铡美案》中包拯的角色属于哪个行当? What kind of Character of Bao Zheng belong to in *the opera of law case of Mei*

A 净 B 老旦 C 青衣 D 老生

A Jing B Laodan C Qingyi D Laosheng

9. 你认为下列戏曲脸谱中哪一种代表着人物奸诈的性格特征? Which of the following facial makeup in opera did you think represent the character's treacherous character

A 蓝色脸 B 黑色脸 C 白色脸 D 紫色脸

A blue face B black face C white face D Purple face

10. 你认为戏曲舞台上生角演员的“甩发”有什么样的表现意义?

What do you think is the expression meaning of the "swing hair" of the actor on the stage of opera? Multiple Choices?

A 激愤 B 疯癫 C 绝望 D 恐惧

A Angry B Crazy C Depair D Fear

11. 你的大学课程中有以戏曲为主题的课程吗? 是必修课还是选修课?

Are there any opera-themed courses in your college curriculum? Is it a compulsory course or an elective course?

Answer 答: _____

12. 你喜欢/不喜欢戏曲的原因是什么? 请简要回答。

What's the reason why you like/dislike opera? Please answer briefly.

Answer:

答: _____

7.1 Support Project List 2020 for private opera troupes released by the Henan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism

Source: provided by Respondent No.5

2020 年度民营文艺表演团体演出扶持资金扶持项目

地市	剧团名称	剧目名称	购买场次	购买金额(万元)	购买金额(万元)
郑州市	河南豫西豫剧演出有限公司	《清风亭上》	20	6	27
	河南明道豫剧大剧院有限公司	《包青天》	10	3	
	中牟豫剧文化演艺有限公司	豫艺	20	6	
	荥阳市小毛猴剧团演出有限公司	《农家媳妇》	20	6	
开封市	河南豫东豫剧演出有限公司	《穆桂英挂帅》	20	6	27
	河南开心一方文化演艺有限公司	《包公转轿》	20	6	
	通许县书承曲艺团	《宋天祥轶事》	20	6	
	通许县现代曲艺演唱团	豫艺	15	4.5	
洛阳市	伊川县豫剧演出有限公司	《梨园往事》	20	6	31.5
	洛阳市观演演出有限公司	《芳草》	20	6	
	嵩县嵩州豫剧艺术团	《三娘教子》	15	4.5	
	新安县紫荆花戏剧表演服务有限公司	《杨春扫雪》	15	4.5	
平顶山市	洛阳市春晚豫剧团	《时来运转》	20	6	22.5
	洛阳市百花豫剧团有限公司	《杨秀英告状》	15	4.5	
	平顶山市豫华豫剧团有限公司	《伏牛山盟》	20	6	
	淇河区德歌演绎团	《四郎探母》	15	4.5	

安阳市	内黄县魏氏大子调剧团	《双喜临门》	20	6	33
	汤阴县广艺豫剧团	《三娘教子》	20	6	
	安阳市豫剧艺术研究院有限公司	《大明律》	20	6	
	安阳市豫剧艺术研究院有限公司	《三打白骨精》	20	6	
鹤壁市	安阳市北关区豫剧艺术团	《血溅乌纱》	10	3	27
	鹤壁市山区豫剧艺术团	《梨花开了》	20	6	
	鹤壁市山区豫剧艺术团	《五凤岭》	10	3	
	鹤壁市山区豫剧艺术团	《管公孝》	20	6	
新乡市	鹤壁市山区豫剧艺术团	《老黄牛说媒》	20	6	21
	淇县淇水豫剧艺术团	《许穆夫人》	20	6	
	鹤壁市淇河豫剧团	《鹤发丹心》	20	6	
	卫辉市金凤凰豫剧团	《斩墨子》	10	3	
焦作市	辉县市星光豫剧团	《三娘教子》	20	6	33
	封丘县关小凤祥祥满天天兴豫剧团	《余大君点将》	20	6	
	延津县农民和谐艺术团	《寒娘冤》	20	6	
	沁阳市宋寨豫剧团	《弄官寻母》	15	4.5	
濮阳市	河南省豫剧豫剧团	《蝴蝶庄的姑爷》	20	6	21
	濮阳市百花曲剧团	《清官颂》	15	4.5	
	焦作市豫剧豫剧团有限公司	《穆桂英》	20	6	
	博爱县月秀豫剧团	《打碗记》	20	6	
许昌市	武陟县小青年豫剧团	《红灯记》	20	6	27
	台前县豫剧艺术中心	《彩仙桥》	15	4.5	
	台前县尚寨山东梆子剧团	《贺后骂殿》	15	4.5	
	南乐县豫剧豫剧团	《大明律》	10	3	

周口市	周口市川汇区豫剧艺术团	《大闹天宫》	15	4.5	30
	太康县豫剧豫剧团	《王金莲灯》	20	6	
	郸城县豫剧豫剧团	《包公转轿》	15	4.5	
	西华县豫剧豫剧团	《刀劈杨九》	10	3	
驻马店市	周口市红云豫剧团演艺有限公司	《罗锦楼》	20	6	34.5
	周口豫剧演出有限公司	《三娘教子》	20	6	
	驻马店市开发区豫剧演出有限公司	《三合御状》	20	6	
	驻马店市开发区豫剧演出有限公司	《狮子戏球》	15	4.5	
漯河市	正阳县豫剧豫剧团	《春晓花开》	20	6	21
	上蔡县豫剧豫剧团有限公司	《飞车、杂技、魔术》	20	6	
	遂平县合理演艺有限公司	《包青天》	20	6	
	遂平县合理演艺有限公司	《包青天》	20	6	
信阳市	信阳市豫剧豫剧团	《丁郎认父》	15	4.5	4.5
	信阳市豫剧豫剧团	《全家福》	15	4.5	
	信阳市豫剧豫剧团	《一个婆婆仁媳妇》	20	6	
	信阳市豫剧豫剧团	《一个婆婆仁媳妇》	20	6	

濮阳市	濮阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	22.5
	濮阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	10	3	
	濮阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	20	6	
	濮阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
三门峡市	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	27
	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	20	6	
	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	20	6	
南阳市	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	21
	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
	三门峡市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
信阳市	南阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	27
	南阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
	南阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	
	南阳市豫剧豫剧团	《包青天》	15	4.5	