



Research on Chaoyang Yingge Dance from the Perspective of Critical Heritage

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Abstract

In 2006, Chaoyang Yingge was listed in the first batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list. Under the vision of "heritage", the protection methods of Ying Song and Dance have become more and more diverse, such as "Yingge into the Campus" and "Yingge Movie". The Yingge Dance, which is dubbed "intangible cultural heritage", accompanied by high-level choreography and directing techniques, high-skill camera images, etc., this kind of attention from the elite group has also become the direction of expectation of performance intangible cultural heritage. On the one hand, it is beneficial to promote the inheritance of Yingge Dance; However, on the other hand, building Yingge Dance into stage arts, tourism projects, and museum products will inevitably lead to different degrees of standardization, hollowing, and heterogeneity of Yingge Dance after heritage. Therefore, this paper will take Chaoyang Yingge Dance as a case study, and reflect on the inheritance and development of Chaoyang Yingge Dance from the perspective of heritage by analyzing the heritage performance and characteristics of Yingge Dance in contemporary times. It is imperative that cultural heritage holders and practitioners should examine the phenomenon of heritage from a dialectical standpoint and a critical perspective.

Keywords

Legacy; Chaoyang Yingge Dance; Critical perspective

1. Research Background

The concept of "heritagization" was put forward by Western scholars and falls within the theoretical category of critical cultural heritage studies. From the perspective of critical heritage studies, heritage does not automatically become what we consider "heritage" without preconditions. It is a series of values, meanings, and identities that have been recognized, constructed, participated in, maintained, and passed down by contemporary individuals and communities (Zou Minghua, 2003). The process of "heritagization" is used to criticize cultural heritage itself, analyze the role of power and ideology in the construction of cultural heritage, and examine the creation and formation process of cultural heritage from a reflective and critical perspective. It aims to realize the value application of historical and cultural relics, obtain official recognition, support, and development opportunities, and has great guiding significance for the study of intangible cultural heritage, which is conducive to exploring protection mechanisms, etc. (Yu Fengyi, 2024).

Chaoyang Yingge Dance is popular in the Chaoyang area of Shantou City, Guangdong Province. It is a Han folk square emotion dance that integrates opera, dance, and martial arts. The formation time of Yingge Dance can be traced back to the Ming Dynasty or even earlier. According to the rhythm patterns of the dance, it can be divided into slow, medium, and fast Yingge. Yingge Dance is based on the horse stance, mainly using hammer techniques such

as striking, blocking, sweeping, and stabbing, with steady and vigorous dance steps. In 2006, Chaoyang Yingge Dance was listed in the first batch of the National Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

2. The Heritagization Manifestations of Chaoyang Yingge Dance

2.1 Inclusion in Official Archives

In the current enthusiastic process of applying for intangible cultural heritage, what the protection of intangible cultural heritage lacks is not protection at the level of institutional recognition, but the planning and formulation of protection measures after the identification of heritage. The government's participation endows it with cultural attributes, which are manifested in: first, preservation and display through the collections of museums and cultural centers. Museums are important narrative resources and cultural windows. Although the Shantou Cultural Center is not large in area, it displays the content of Yingge Dance, including performance scenes, character statues, and videos; second, the protection plan is incorporated into government documents to promote communication and exchange through policies and create a sense of inheritance. The captain of the Taguan Yingge Team said that most performances are convened and organized by the government, including international exchange activities. As an important cultural resource of Shantou City, Chaoyang Yingge Dance is recorded in official archives in various forms, creating an opportunity for its reappearance in contemporary society.

2.2 Digital Dissemination

The rapid development of digital technology and the diversification of media forms have opened up new paths for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. Driven by the digital wave, the channels for the inheritance and development of Yingge Dance have been significantly broadened. In 2019, the first movie focusing on Yingge Dance, "The Soul of Yingge", skillfully integrated the cool elements of street dance with the traditional charm of Yingge Dance; the inheritors of Yingge Dance actively used various media platforms to record and share their daily training and performances, allowing people to feel the charm of Yingge Dance up close even when they are far away. In terms of international communication and exchange, digital and intelligent resources have also played an irreplaceable role. During the Spring Festival of the Year of the Dragon in 2023, the Puning Nanshan Yingge Team performed "The Heroic Spirit of Yingge" at multiple landmark locations in London, the UK. The 6-minute performance shocked the audience and received extensive attention and reports from global media. Therefore, in the context of the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the highly developed information technology, Chaoyang Yingge Dance has actively integrated into contemporary life through the innovative model of "digital intelligence + cultural inheritance".

2.3 Integration into the Cultural and Tourism Industry

Cultural tourism is one of the key ways for heritage protection, and the development of tourism is a core driving force for cultural practice (Li Wei, 2024). The "intangible cultural heritage fever" has made heritage tourism, centered around cultural heritage, yield substantial economic benefits, fueling its rapid development. In Shantou, the growing popularity of Yingge Dance at home and abroad has drawn more tourists. The Small Park in Jinping District, a famous local scenic spot, houses the training hall of the Jinping Yingge Team from the Li Family Boxing School, open to tourists for free. This allows them to explore the Yingge Dance culture and watch training. On the streets, Yingge Dance promotion slogans are everywhere, and the "The Soul of Yingge" beverage store blends Yingge elements with Chaoshan's tea culture. Through these efforts, Yingge Dance and Chaoshan folk culture are widely spread. When out-of-town tourists visit, they can better understand the local folk culture. Evidently, Yingge-based cultural tourism has significantly boosted the economic and cultural development of the Chaoshan area.

2.4 Inheritance in Schools

As the country increasingly emphasizes intangible cultural heritage protection, more schools incorporate it. This offers a new protection approach and eases the aging and generational disconnection in the Yingge Dance inheritance. Chaoyang Yingge Dance, a unique Chaoshan cultural treasure, has entered many local schools. In primary and secondary schools, "Campus Yingge Exercise" is key, with a district-wide promotion model in Chaoyang. In universities, it shows up as clubs, often initiated by local Yingge Team members. Some schools publish textbooks. This year, the

Jinping District Bureau of Culture, etc. issued an internal textbook by the Li Family Boxing School for Jinping District. It's for popularization, unrestricted by venue or number of people, and students can master basic moves in half a semester. Yingge Dance daily training is part of school life. Students who like it and don't neglect studies or work can sign up. Their love for it makes a group of young students integrate it into their lives and take pride in being on the Yingge Team, ensuring the continuous inheritance of Chaoyang Yingge Dance.

3. The Heritagization Characteristics of Chaoyang Yingge Dance

3.1 Artistic Presentation

Chaoyang Yingge Dance has endured because it evolves with the cultural needs and concepts of the times, as people infuse it with contemporary - context - fitting connotations. Currently, its main inheritors focus on creatively transforming traditional elements. They first transform its artistic form to suit modern aesthetics. Once lasting 40-50 minutes, Yingge Dance's performance time has been shortened due to official intervention. In the past, actors held a hammer and beat a waist drum with slow, repetitive movements. Now, inheritors reduce repetitions, increase movement difficulty and routine variety. The Yingge hammer has been shortened, and costumes are made more youthful. Second, after becoming intangible cultural heritage, the government offers diverse display platforms. Yingge Dance shows up in festivals, god parades, and entertainment events, becoming part of local life. Professional scholars also adapt it for the stage and art competitions. For instance, the Houxi Yingge Team was invited to a CCTV dance competition, and "The Past Events in Shawan" combines Yingge elements.

3.2 Official Dominance and Civilian Collaboration

Official organizations represented by the government and the most extensive civilian social groups, under the guidance of different goals, jointly participate in the heritagization process of Chaoyang Yingge Dance (Chen Long, 2023). First, the local government is the beneficiary of the heritagization of Yingge Dance. The heritagization of Yingge Dance can not only bring economic benefits to the Shantou area but also build a local cultural brand. In the whole heritagization action, the active guidance and activity planning of the local government have always been the most prominent links. Second, the civilian groups also actively cooperate with the work requirements of the heritagization of Yingge Dance led by the government. The people in the Chaoshan area can recognize the cultural and economic benefits brought to their hometown by Yingge Dance. Therefore, both the inheritors of the Yingge Team and the ordinary people will strongly support and respond to the government's call. For example, during the Spring Festival in 2024, Zheng Zixin, the "first hammer" girl of the Ximen Women's Yingge Team, became popular quickly. Since then, as the first established and "popular" Ximen Women's Yingge Team in Shantou, it has often been invited to participate in various performances and parades. As the team leader, Chen Tanpeng, with his love and responsibility, has been working hard to train more heroic actors. Therefore, the heritagization process of Chaoyang Yingge Dance is the joint result of the collaborative participation of the official and civilian sectors.

4. Thoughts on the Heritagization of Chaoyang Yingge Dance

4.1 The Discourse Mechanism Dominated by the Official Sector

The official sector takes the lead and promulgates a series of policies. On the one hand, it establishes the basic discourse orientation for the protection of cultural heritage (Zhu Fenghui, 2022). With powerful political discourse, it attracts people's attention to cultural heritage and prompts people to put it into specific practice. Just as Chaoyang Yingge Dance can become the object of exploration and protection by the local government of Shantou City, cultural elites, and business groups, it is because people have already formed a consensus on the protection of cultural heritage nationwide. If the guidance of policy discourse is missing, it will be difficult for the protection of cultural heritage to become a matter of people's attention in a short time. On the other hand, although national policies can, to a certain extent, enhance people's attention to traditional culture, they also, to a certain extent, solidify people's ways of discourse and squeeze the space for civilian discourse expression. Policy discourse usually guides the behavior and way of discourse of social members. People accept the shaping of their self-will by official discourse, thus inevitably losing part of their critical thinking. Although Chaoyang Yingge Dance, with the strong support of the government, has participated in various performance activities many times, some policies have also limited the performance time and space of Yingge Dance, making it break away from its original time and space field and become an entertainment program that can be performed at any time.

4.2 The Commercial Development of Yingge Dance

For ordinary social members, the economic value-creating ability of cultural heritage impacts their protection enthusiasm. People actively engage in heritage inheritance activities, driving its commercial transformation. This profit-oriented commercialization significantly affects heritage inheritance. During the process, social members act as heritage owners in interpretation and utilization. Their expression of interests and utilization methods mirror their participation in contemporary heritage inheritance. Take the Houxi, Jinping, and Taguan Yingge Teams as examples, these well-known local teams are set up near ancestral temples, named after deities. In Chaoshan, people have deep folk beliefs, and funds for these teams and training venues mainly come from ordinary believers. The curator Chen Tanpeng attributes his team's good development to respecting the older generation's traditions and loving Yingge Dance. But currently, many teams, driven by the good development of Yingge Dance, are highly utilitarian, casually adapting and exaggerating it. Clearly, over-commercial development of Yingge Dance cultural resources will damage its inherent cultural traits and impede its inheritance and development.

4.3 The Decline of Sacredness

When folk dances are included in the list of intangible cultural heritage, they are favored by official institutions or businesses. However, the awe-inspiring religious ritual connotations of these performing arts are constantly being stripped away. The involvement of intangible cultural heritage has enabled the performance venues to make a three-level leap from rural villages to urban communities and then to the stage, causing the original sacredness and ritual traditions in Yingge Dance to be gradually stripped away, replaced by the currently popular "festival" and "cultural" labels (Hong Yuhan, 2022). The entertainment function of Yingge Dance performances has already surpassed its original sacrificial function. Every lunar January or February, large-scale god parade competitions are held in the Chaoshan area, where the ancestral gods are invited out of the temple and paraded on the street to inspect the living conditions of the people and pray for good weather. The "welcoming the ancestral gods" parade follows a rigorous procedure, which is divided into three parts: inviting the gods, offering sacrifices to the gods, and parading. The parade also includes waving flag standards, thundering gongs and drums teams, and passionate Yingge Dance performances. In this ceremony, each team member walks through every inch of the community. Through pious worship of the gods, they gather into a collective force and jointly pray to drive away evil and avoid harm (Deng Miao, 2023). At the same time, the people participating in the god parade play different roles. The team members transform into messengers of the gods, transcending their ordinary identities in daily life, and this process also provides them with a unique space to release their personal emotions. Against the background of intangible cultural heritage, with the intervention of various external forces, Yingge Dance attached to the god parade ceremony begins to show a secular trend (Li Wen, 2018).

4.4 Discourse Expression Oriented by Heritage Value

The protection of traditional cultural relics through heritagization aims to enhance cultural preservation strategies, differing from folklore, which focuses on understanding national culture (Bamo Qubumo, 2020). Cultural heritage embodies multiple values and faces competing discourses, shaped by power and ideology within the existing development framework. Critical heritage studies examine the power dynamics influencing heritage. The heritagization of Yingge Dance reflects diverse value needs: the government emphasizes national memory and cultural belonging, while commercial entities focus on economic value. Local governments dominate the discourse, guiding Yingge Dance's heritagization, leading to adaptations like shortened performances for stage competitions. This shifts Yingge Dance from specific time and space contexts to any setting, risking superficial inheritance and loss of cultural depth. Overemphasizing external social values in heritagization, while neglecting internal cultural understanding, undermines the essence of traditional culture.

5. Conclusion

Although heritagization has created opportunities for the contemporary inheritance of traditional dances, the discourse contention and interest orientation in the heritagization process have, to a certain extent, weakened the internal value of traditional dances. Some even lose their original cultural connotations due to blindly catering to the heritagization evaluation system. Folk dances are originally an element of traditional culture, but now they seem to have

become cultural signboards used by the main inheritors to create economic and cultural benefits, lacking a sense of vividness and traditional cultural heritage. Therefore, the holders and practitioners of cultural heritage need to examine heritagization from a dialectical stance and a critical perspective. They should not let official discourse dominate but let the discourse return to people's lives, and conform to the development trend of the times on the premise of consolidating the foundation of traditional culture.

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