

Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage Kunqu Opera: Extraction of Inherited Factors as Intangible Cultural Heritage and Changing Factors for Social Change

無形文化遺産崑曲の継承に関する研究:
無形文化遺産として継承される要素と社会的環境によって変化する要素の抽出

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1. Introduction

(1) Research Background

In order to protect intangible cultural heritage (ICH), in 2003, the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003 ICHC) was adopted at the UNESCO General Assembly. Nevertheless, unlike Japan, France, China, etc, many countries have not established a national or suitable ICH protection system.

Academic discussions about ICH chiefly focus on its legislation, policies, community participation, heritage tourism, etc. However, the discipline of ICH studies is still in its early stages. ICH researches are mainly limited to folklore, anthropology, ethnology, and so on, to focus on analyzing the research object itself. Researches from the perspective of cultural heritage studies and focusing on the inheritance of ICH are hard to find. And the related methodology is still underdeveloped.

As mentioned in 2003 ICHC, ICH can provide bearers with “a sense of identity and continuity” (UNESCO 2003, Article 2). And in 2003 ICHC complementary document *Operational Directives*, ICH is considered to play a “particular role in transmitting values” (UNESCO 2022, VI.1.3). It is reasonable to state that there is something inherited within ICH to ensure the sense of identity and continuity as well as some values. Actually, in Japan’s practices of recognizing the Important Intangible Cultural Properties, except for individual recognition, conditions of designation are set by authorities for collective and group recognition, and bearers concerned should follow them as a way to keep the value. Interestingly, as a response to this practice intentionally or unintentionally, UNESCO also encourages States Parties to “foster scientific studies and research methodologies” to demonstrate ICH’s “value with clear evidence, including appropriate indicators if possible” (UNESCO 2022, VI. para 175). Therefore, it is presumable that the inheritance

of ICH is connected with the inheritance of some values, and these values may be capable of being demonstrated by some indicators. In this research, some noticeable key factors will be extracted from an ICH to explore their inheritance and change. Among them, if there are still some almost unchanged factors even in different times, spaces, and groups of dissimilar professionalism, then these factors can be considered as inherited factors as “indicators” to demonstrate the inheritance and value of ICH.

The 2003 ICHC emphasizes the importance of communities, but dismisses the concept of authenticity. This situation was heavily criticized by Deacon and Smeets (2013) as the instrument could not ensure sufficient community involvement in heritage identification and management, while “communities themselves are often reluctant to abandon the notion of authenticity”. What’s more, critical comments from Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) also pointed out that international heritage policies developed by UNESCO act as a metacultural intervention and tend to confuse intangibility and evanescence with disappearance so that they “attempt to slow the rate of change.” In other words, even though ICH is considered “constantly recreated” (UNESCO 2003, Article 2), it is still possible to keep something authentic within ICH, as the thoughts of communities mentioned by Deacon and Smeets, without trying to “slow the rate of change” deliberately. The point is that even though some parts of ICH are changed - or as expressed in this research that changing factors are existent - there are still some parts inherited within ICH - namely, inherited factors are still existent - and probably functioning as ICH authenticity. In a word, inherited factors and ICH authenticity may be connected with each other. Actually, the 2003 ICHC does not refuse to admit the existence of nature within ICH (UNESCO 2022,

102.a & 171.c), and the nature may be linked to the authenticity of ICH. Since the nature of ICH is important to the inheritance of ICH, and probably could be considered as inherited factors in this research. If inherited factors are proved existent within ICH, then ICH could be proved having nature. Thus, authenticity may be possible for ICH. Hopefully, this research could contribute to current discussions of ICH authenticity.

(2) Research Objective

The objective of this research is to make clear how the factors extracted from ICH are inherited and changed under the influence of time's change (social change), spatial shifts, and bearers' professionalism (social expectations).

Concretely, this research will extract several artistic factors (spoken language, melody, literary form of lyrics, pronunciation of lyrics, dance, stage set, and costumes) of China's Kunqu Opera to conduct comparative studies in three songs for the objectives to explore the inheritance and change of ICH in different times (before and after the establishment of the PRC), spaces (Shanghai and Taiwan) and groups of varied professionalism (professional and amateur groups).

(3) Research Object & Hypotheses

Certainly, there are numerous ICH in China. However, as a performing art that has been long favoured by intellectuals since the 16th century till now, Kunqu Opera is more suitable to be chosen as an object in this research. Firstly, materials about this art are abundant since the 16th century till now. Secondly, the standards of evaluating Kunqu Opera are clearer. Thirdly, precious examples can be found to analyze Kunqu Opera's inheritance in different spaces with dissimilar social conditions (Chinese mainland and Taiwan).

About hypotheses, in this research, inherited factors refer to almost unchanged factors within ICH even time, space, and group's professionalism change. In order to prove their existence, some noticeable artistic factors will be extracted from Kunqu Opera to explore their inheritance and change. If there are some almost unchanged factors in versions of different times (before and after the establishment of the PRC), spaces (Shanghai and Taiwan), and groups of dissimilar professionalism (professional and amateur groups), even though some other factors changed heavily which are expressed as

changing factors, then inherited factors are proved existent in Kunqu Opera. Furthermore, the inheritance of Kunqu Opera can be demonstrated. ICH could have nature. And authenticity may be possible for ICH.

2. Research Perspectives & Methodology

Since Kunqu Opera is a comprehensive stage-performing art, related researches range from literature to music, dance, and so on. Studies of how to protect this art mostly set their sights on the relationships between Kunqu Opera and a variety of stakeholders, on the methods to permeate the recondite art to the public, and its connection to culture industries. Their major desire is to push forward the integration of Kunqu Opera into modern society, while the specific inheritance and changing situation of Kunqu Opera remains unclear. On the other hand, a number of researchers begin to focus on Kunqu Opera's change (e.g. Ke, 2008; Liu, 2017; Zhang, 2018).

In this research, several artistic factors of Kunqu Opera from versions of different times, spaces, and groups of dissimilar professionalism will be analyzed from a perspective of cultural heritage studies to explore the inheritance and nature of this art. In order to conduct factor-based comparative analysis of versions from varied times, spaces, and groups of dissimilar professionalism, literature study, site survey, and interviews were also carried out.

3. Framework of Analysis

In chapter 2, some basic artistic factors of Kunqu Opera - spoken language, melody (formed in the Ming dynasty), literary form of lyrics (formed in the Ming dynasty), pronunciation of lyrics (formed in the Qing dynasty), dance (movements of Zhezi Xi almost fixed in the Qing dynasty), stage set (freehand style formed at least in the Ming dynasty), and costumes (formed in the Ming dynasty) - were introduced. Then the birth and evolution of Kunqu Opera in feudal times (the Ming and Qing dynasties) and the Republic of China (1912-1949) period, namely before the establishment of the PRC (1949-), were stated. Kunqu Opera began to shrink in the middle Qing dynasty and changed from a dramatist-centered system, which formed in the Ming dynasty for dramatists' versatility, scholar-officials' active participation, and comparatively tolerant social environment, to an

artist-centered one in the late Qing dynasty for the tightening of political controlling and frequent wars as well as artists' survival strategies, which gave birth to the technique-stressed Zhezi Xi. The declining of Kunqu Opera still continued in the Republic of China period. However, except for spoken language, which varies heavily in different areas, other factors were inherited well.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that after the establishment of the PRC, the Theater Reform Campaign (1949-1963) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) were launched for some political and social purposes. As a result, the former freehand style and artist-centered Kunqu Opera started to change into realistic and director-centered one to emphasize motifs rather than techniques. Furthermore, especially after 2001, for the impact of the market economy and foreign cultures as well as modern lifestyle, the modernization of Kunqu Opera quickened. Particularly, its dance and stage set changed largely.

Chapter 4 summarized the history of communication between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan and the inheritance of Kunqu Opera in Shanghai and Taiwan. Not later than the Qing dynasty, there were Kunqu Opera activities in Taiwan but troupes disappeared in the 1870s. Thanks to Kunqu Opera amateurs' coming from the mainland together with the Chinese Nationalist Party in the 1940s, this art restarted on this island. Taiwan's audiences had an artistic taste in traditional Kunqu Opera, especially the style of the 1930s, and tended to appreciate and learn this art from mainland's artists after a long martial law, which lasted from 1949 to 1987 and suspended communication between the two sides. By comparison, even though inheriting techniques from famous artists in the Republic of China period, Shanghai's troupe actively introduced some modern changes into their performances to survive new challenges in new times. As a consequence, Kunqu Opera evolved into two directions: Shanghai's modern style and Taiwan's traditional style.

Chapter 5 summed up the inheritance of Kunqu Opera in professional and amateur groups in Shanghai. The professional and amateur groups worked together to conduct the inheritance of Kunqu Opera in Shanghai at least from the Qing dynasty till now. Unlike professional artists who had to handle both dance and singing of this

art, amateur groups' members, whose majority were intellectuals and rarely performed on stage, tended to focus on the singing part and study it. What's more, compared to professional groups' heavily financial pressure, amateur ones were free of this stress. Consequently, amateurs were able to inherit traditional melody, literary form of lyrics, and pronunciation of lyrics more loyally than professional artists.

Chapter 6 compared several artistic factors of three songs - Gun Xiu Qiu (滚绣球), Shan Po Yang (山坡羊), and Tai Shi Yin (太师引) - in versions from different times (before and after the establishment of the PRC), spaces (Shanghai and Taiwan) and groups of dissimilar professionalism (professional and amateur groups in Shanghai). For melody, since all the versions observed traditional rules of melody by more than 50%, and versions after the establishment of PRC changed by less than 10% than the version before, Kunqu Opera's melody was deemed almost unchanged. For literary form of lyrics, since only one character was deleted in Taiwan's version and the change was within acceptable scope, this factor was deemed unchanged. For traditional pronunciation, since all the versions observed traditional pronunciation by more than 80%, this factor was deemed almost unchanged. For dance, since similarities of versions between Shanghai and Taiwan were all less than 40%, this factor was considered as changed largely. For stage set, it was concluded that, unlike Taiwan's traditional style, Shanghai had been developing a modern style. For costumes, its style based on the Ming dynasty almost kept the same no matter the change of space.

4. Conclusion

Since Kunqu Opera's melody, literary form of lyrics and pronunciation of lyrics were almost unchanged although time, space, and group's professionalism changed. They are inherited factors of Kunqu Opera. In other words, inherited factors are proved existent in Kunqu Opera. ICH could have nature. And authenticity may be possible for ICH.

About reasons for the change of changing factors dance and stage set, they are deemed not the core factors, namely the nature, of Kunqu Opera. And related records in detail are limited to consult. What's more, Shanghai's professional artists were impacted by the Theater Reform

Campaign and the Cultural Revolution which stressed motifs rather than techniques for some social and political purposes. Additionally, from feudal times, artists tried to classify characters on stage into several types and develop corresponding performing ways for each of them, which means they attached great importance to role-portraying. As time goes by, artists' understandings of roles tend to change, which leads to a re-portraying of roles with additions of the spirit of times. Furthermore, as a professional group, financial pressure makes it have to change to cater to modern audiences for commercial interests. Thus, large changes happened to the dance and stage set of Kunqu Opera. About implications of the change, it may weaken artists' pursuit of higher techniques and lead to the disappearance of Kunqu Opera's traditional implicit and sedate style. The change of Kunqu Opera means that it is unavoidable for an ICH to interact with its surroundings and adjust to the environment, but it is possible to change in its own way, and that should be worked on particularly.

About the inherited factors melody, literary form of lyrics, and pronunciation of lyrics, they are deemed the core factors, namely the nature, of Kunqu Opera, thus could not be changed largely. Besides clear historical records of these factors, the intentionally or unintentionally consistent inheritance of them among artists from varied times also brought about their almost unchanged situations till now. It may be a result of seeking self-identity for artists. All in all, inherited factors and changing factors work together to constitute the inheritance of Kunqu Opera. Kunqu Opera's inheritance can not realize without either of them.

5. Discussion

There must be some neglected factors that have not been analyzed in this research, such as the vocalization and breathing method. The limitations of the methodology of this research lead to the failure of analyzing these factors: requirements of sufficient records and being easy to find evaluation criteria from some materials.

Even though the insufficiency of records and difficulty to find evaluation criteria for some factors make them hard to be explored, technological and methodological progress in the future may make it possible. What's more, some new inherited and changing factors may take shape

in the days to come, recording them and building evaluation systems are important, if possible, for factor analysis and ICH protection.

About the methodological progress of comparative analysis applied in this research, firstly, if there are not sufficient records of the research object, which mainly refer to directly written records here, then directly unwritten records, indirectly written records, and indirectly unwritten ones may be taken into consideration. Certainly, interdisciplinary studies could benefit the analysis of these records, and multidisciplinary cross-validation could make conclusions more persuasive. And the methodological progress of ICH could also realize in this process.

Secondly, if it is not easy to find evaluation criteria from some materials, especially from some directly written records, then interviews with alive ICH bearers and recording their related practice and thoughts, the more the better, matter a lot. Particularly, to sort out bearers' consensus about the inherited parts of ICH could be helpful to make clear the evaluation criteria. And the development of methodology about systematic interview and analysis in order to understand the inheritance and change of ICH is also expected.

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