

A Study on the Living Transmission Strategies of Chaozhou Opera as Intangible Musical Heritage in Guangdong under the Perspective of Cultural–Tourism Integration

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Abstract

This study examined the dynamic inheritance of Chaozhou opera (Chaoju) within the context of cultural–tourism integration, focusing on the preservation of its authenticity and sustainable development. The research objectives included investigating strategies for Chaozhou opera’s transmission in tourism, analyzing the balance between cultural authenticity and public engagement, and evaluating the role of multi–stakeholder collaboration in heritage preservation. Using qualitative methods, including interviews with 32 stakeholders from Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang, and data analysis through content analysis and case studies, the study revealed key findings: (1) The vitality of Chaozhou opera relied on adaptive performance forms, diverse presentation platforms, and digital engagement with younger audiences; (2) Challenges such as limited intergenerational transmission and tensions between commercialization and authenticity persist; (3) A balanced multi–stakeholder model combining state support, market participation, and digital strategies can enhance sustainable transmission. These findings contributed to strategies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage while promoting its integration into regional tourism, offering actionable insights for cultural practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: Chaozhou Opera; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural–Tourism Integration; Heritage Transmission; Guangdong

Introduction

In the face of modernization and globalization, the preservation of traditional arts is confronted with significant challenges. Technological advances and the increasing influence of commercial interests threaten the authenticity and sustainability of cultural forms, such as traditional opera. To address these challenges, China has implemented a strategy of integrating cultural heritage with tourism. This approach aims to revitalize intangible cultural heritage (ICH) while fostering economic growth through tourism. Key political frameworks, such as the "Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China" and the "14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," underscore the importance of embedding ICH into contemporary society and ensuring its continued transmission.

Guangdong Province, with its rich cultural heritage and flourishing tourism industry, has made substantial progress in integrating culture and tourism. Chaozhou Opera, a quintessential example of this integration, reflects the region's unique aesthetics, history, and cultural memory. As a traditional performing art, it has long been a symbol of Guangdong's folk traditions, performed in local theaters and temples. However, with the shift towards more participatory and immersive tourism experiences, Chaozhou Opera has evolved, extending beyond traditional stages to cultural festivals, stage performances, and digital platforms, making it more accessible, especially to younger audiences.

Despite this transformation, the combination of culture and tourism remains superficial. Traditional performances are often simplified for mass consumption, undermining the depth and immersion of the art form. The growing popularity of tourism-driven adaptations risks diluting the cultural authenticity of Chaozhou Opera, presenting a significant challenge for its sustainable transmission. Furthermore, while the sector receives increasing state support, the transmission of Chaozhou Opera continues to depend heavily on traditional troupes and individual practitioners, with limited involvement from other key stakeholders such as businesses, universities, and local communities.

A critical gap exists in the literature regarding the integration of traditional performing arts, like Chaozhou Opera, with tourism and the balancing of cultural authenticity with commercial viability. Although previous studies have addressed the broader integration of intangible cultural heritage with tourism, there remains a lack of concrete dynamic analyses examining how traditional performing arts can maintain their cultural essence while adapting to market demands. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring strategies for the sustainable inheritance of Chaozhou

Opera within the context of cultural tourism, critically examining the tension between preserving cultural value and ensuring economic feasibility. This research will contribute valuable insights into the intersection of cultural heritage, tourism, and traditional arts, providing a more nuanced understanding of how Chaozhou Opera can navigate these challenges.

Research Objectives

This study examines the dynamic communication strategies of Chaozhou Opera within the context of Guangdong's cultural-tourism integration. The research objectives are:

1. To analyze how national and local policies shape Chaozhou Opera's communicative ecology, generating institutional frameworks that influence its survival and regional cultural heritage preservation.
2. To explore modern approaches for integrating Chaozhou Opera into tourism, focusing on production innovation, cultural product development, and audience engagement strategies.
3. To investigate the cultural tensions arising from market-oriented tourism adaptation, including commercialization challenges, authenticity debates, intergenerational transmission, and sustainability concerns—all of which reflect an ongoing process of negotiation and dynamic balance.
4. To propose a strategic framework combining institutional support, public participation, and digital innovation to safeguard Chaozhou Opera's legacy while enhancing Guangdong's cultural tourism development.

The study employs qualitative methods including policy analysis, stakeholder interviews, and case studies of tourism-integrated performances. Findings reveal that while economic factors drive symbolic transformation of this art form, strategic interventions in transmission mechanisms and authenticity management can sustain its cultural vitality. The proposed framework offers actionable solutions for intangible cultural heritage preservation in rapidly developing tourism economies.

Literature Review

The preservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) faces significant challenges in the context of modernization and globalization. Scholars have extensively documented these issues, particularly the tension between maintaining authenticity and adapting to contemporary needs. However, much of the existing literature overlooks art-form-specific solutions, particularly for

traditional performing arts like Chaozhou Opera. Cheung (2019) influential work on "living heritage" emphasizes dynamic adaptation over static conservation, yet it provides limited guidance on operationalizing this concept within the realm of traditional arts.

1. Preservation Challenges

A recurring theme in the literature is the over-reliance on traditional theater troupes as the primary vehicle for transmission, which has led to institutional stagnation. Fan, Wang and Hodel (2023) study on Chaozhou Opera highlights significant gaps: the absence of standardized evaluation metrics for preservation effectiveness, and a disconnect between policy frameworks and grassroots implementation. These issues underline the need for sustainable, dynamic preservation models that balance core artistic values with the need for evolution. This gap suggests a shift towards developing institutional support systems beyond traditional troupes, and establishing robust quality control mechanisms for modernized performances.

2. Cultural Tourism Integration

The relationship between cultural heritage and tourism has been extensively explored, with Li et al. (2025) offering comprehensive models for heritage-tourism interaction. However, these studies tend to focus on Western contexts and tangible heritage, leaving a significant void in the integration of Asian performing arts into tourism. Li, Zhang and Wood (2024) case study of Chaozhou Opera sheds light on three specific challenges: the paradox between artistic integrity and tourist-friendly modifications, market segmentation issues, and the instability of income streams due to seasonal demand fluctuations. Notably, there is a lack of empirically tested models for performance adaptation thresholds, sustainable revenue-sharing mechanisms, and long-term impacts of tourism on artistic quality.

3. Generational Transmission Barriers

The transmission of Chaozhou Opera faces multiple barriers, including limitations within the formal education system, declining interest across generations, and urban-rural disparities in access to training. Despite frequent proposals for digital solutions, current research has limitations: a focus on platform-specific studies, insufficient longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of digital transmission, and a lack of systematic analysis regarding optimal digital content formats for different age groups. These gaps highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that incorporate both digital and traditional transmission methods to ensure intergenerational continuity.

4. Synthesis of Research Gaps and Contributions

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a multi-dimensional theoretical framework for the preservation and transmission of Chaozhou Opera:

Adaptive Preservation Model: Expanding on the "living heritage" concept, we introduce a performance adaptation matrix, a troupe-community partnership framework, and a quality evaluation system for modernized performances.

Tourism Integration Framework: Building on Li et al. (2024) work, we propose a performance adaptation scale with tourist engagement metrics, a dual-path revenue model (combining ticketing and cultural product development), and a seasonal performer support system to address the instability of income streams.

Digital Transmission Strategy: Advancing Lim and Zhang (2023) digital approach, we introduce a multi-platform content distribution system, an intergenerational digital mentorship program, and a gamified learning application to engage youth.

This research makes three significant contributions:

Operationalization of Living Heritage: By developing measurable indicators for dynamic preservation, we move beyond theoretical frameworks to actionable strategies.

Cultural Tourism Specificity: We create tourism integration models tailored to the unique needs of performing arts, offering a framework that balances cultural value and market feasibility.

Digital-Physical Transmission Synthesis: We establish complementary digital and in-person transmission channels, facilitating a holistic approach to heritage preservation that integrates modern technology with traditional methods.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating theories from ethnomusicology, cultural studies, and tourism management to better understand the communication dynamics of Chaozhou Opera in the context of cultural tourism integration. By synthesizing these fields, the framework provides a comprehensive lens to examine how traditional cultural forms, like Chaozhou Opera, can maintain their integrity while adapting to the demands and challenges of contemporary tourism and market environments. The goal is to explore how these elements can coexist and thrive, ensuring that cultural heritage remains both relevant and sustainable in the modern age.

1. Living Heritage

Living heritage refers to the continuous transmission of cultural traditions, emphasizing their dynamic adaptation in response to changing social, cultural, and economic factors. Unlike static conservation, living heritage is a dynamic, negotiated field, shaped by various actors, including performers, audiences, cultural institutions, and market forces. This study uses the concept of living heritage to explore how Chaozhou Opera evolves while preserving its essential artistic and cultural values, reflecting its ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity.

2. Cultural Authenticity

Cultural authenticity in the context of Chaozhou Opera involves balancing the preservation of core artistic values with the need for adaptation to attract new audiences. The challenge lies in maintaining the essence of the art form while introducing innovative elements that enhance its appeal in the context of contemporary tourism. This framework emphasizes the importance of this balance in ensuring that Chaozhou Opera retains its cultural meaning and significance as it engages with diverse audiences in modern settings.

3. Public Engagement and Participation

The role of the audience is central in the evolving practice of Chaozhou Opera, especially with the rise of digital platforms and interactive performances. Public participation is seen as crucial for ensuring that the art form remains vibrant and relevant. By engaging audiences as co-creators of meaning, Chaozhou Opera can foster a deeper connection with modern viewers, moving away from passive consumption toward active engagement, facilitated by digital tools, social media, and immersive experiences.

4. Commercial Feasibility

Commercial feasibility refers to the ability of Chaozhou Opera to generate economic value within the tourism industry while preserving its cultural integrity. This involves finding a balance between the commercialization of cultural heritage and the safeguarding of its artistic authenticity. The framework explores how Chaozhou Opera can navigate this tension by developing new revenue models that attract diverse audiences without compromising its traditional values.

Integration of Theoretical Foundations

Ethnomusicology: Ethnomusicology provides the foundation for understanding how Chaozhou Opera serves as a vessel for community identity, cultural memory, and artistic traditions. This discipline places emphasis on performance as both an artistic and social practice, highlighting the role of performers and audiences in shaping cultural heritage. The concept of living

heritage, central to this study, stems from ethnomusicology, offering a framework for understanding how Chaozhou Opera evolves while maintaining its cultural core.

Cultural Studies: Cultural studies allows us to examine how power relations, social norms, and media influence cultural products such as Chaozhou Opera. It frames cultural heritage as the product of both historical legacies and contemporary processes, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. This approach helps us understand the role of Chaozhou Opera in both preserving its cultural significance and adapting to the demands of a globalized tourism market.

Tourism Management: Tourism management theories, particularly those related to experience economy and the cultural value chain, offer analytical tools for integrating Chaozhou Opera into tourism. These theories help identify strategies for positioning cultural heritage within tourism, such as branding, narrative reconstruction, and audience engagement. They provide insight into how Chaozhou Opera can be marketed in ways that balance its cultural richness with the market demands of modern tourism.

Theoretical Model and Application

These theories collectively form a holistic model that informs the study of Chaozhou Opera's transmission within cultural tourism. The framework covers the following dimensions:

Institutional Aspect: This dimension explores the impact of political structures, legislative policies, and cultural institutions on Chaozhou Opera's preservation and integration into tourism. It examines the role of government support and cultural organizations in either promoting or constraining the integration of Chaozhou Opera into the tourism industry.

Sociocultural Dimension: This aspect focuses on the role of public memory, performer identity, and audience perceptions in the transmission of Chaozhou Opera. It highlights the importance of local communities, artists, and spectators in keeping the art form alive and relevant in contemporary society. By understanding these sociocultural factors, we can better assess how Chaozhou Opera maintains its cultural integrity while adapting to new contexts.

Economic and Spatial Aspects: This dimension examines the economic factors, tourism markets, and digital platforms that influence the popularization of Chaozhou Opera. It also explores the changing spatial dynamics of performance venues, shifting from traditional theaters to cultural festivals and digital platforms. The study investigates how digital technologies expand Chaozhou Opera's reach while maintaining its cultural authenticity, addressing both its commercial viability and its artistic integrity.

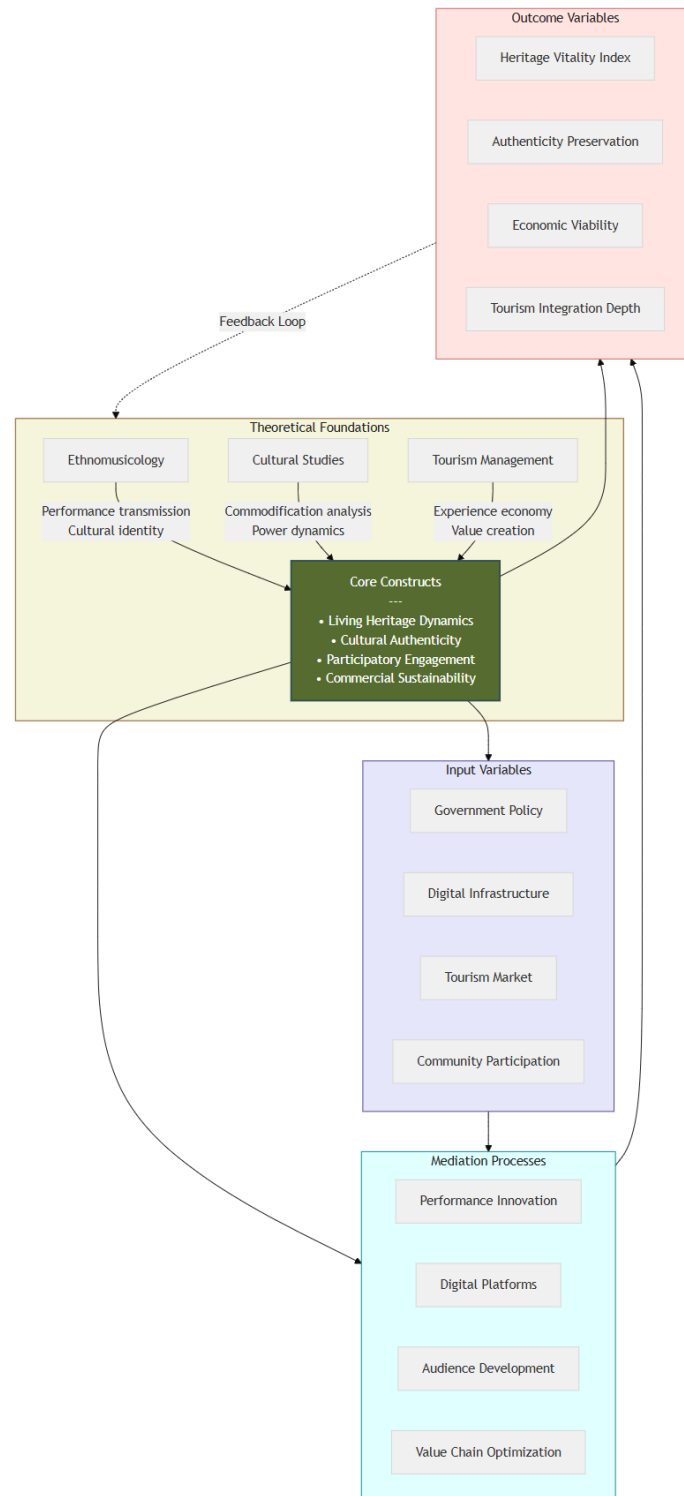


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative, multi-method research design grounded in interpretivist epistemology. The primary aim is to explore the cultural dynamics, institutional structures, and socio-economic contexts that influence the living transmission of Chaozhou Opera (Chaoju) within the context of cultural-tourism integration. By employing a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and case study analysis, the study triangulates multiple data sources to ensure depth and validity. This mixed approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how Chaozhou Opera is preserved, adapted, and transmitted in a modern tourism-driven environment.

Research Components

Population and Sample

The study targets key stakeholders involved in the transmission and development of Chaozhou Opera. These stakeholders include government officials, cultural institutions, tourism developers, opera performers, and local residents.

Sample Selection: A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 32 stakeholders from three representative cities in Guangdong Province—Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang. These cities were chosen based on their varying levels of tourism development, cultural infrastructure, and policy involvement with Chaozhou Opera. The sample size of 32 stakeholders is deemed sufficient for capturing diverse perspectives, given the exploratory nature of this study. The focus was on obtaining a rich, varied range of experiences rather than achieving statistical generalizability. Furthermore, the sample includes a balance of government, cultural, and community representatives to ensure that the research captures the multifaceted aspects of Chaozhou Opera's transmission in tourism.

Research Instruments

Ethnographic Fieldwork: Field observations were conducted at tourist-integrated venues, such as cultural parks, heritage towns, and festivals, where Chaozhou Opera is performed. Additional observations were made at local opera troupes, rehearsal spaces, and educational institutions involved in heritage transmission. These observations provided insights into how Chaozhou Opera is presented to the public and how tourism influences its performance styles.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 key stakeholders, including cultural and tourism officials, opera performers, and local residents. The interview questions focused on transmission challenges, commercialization issues, audience

growth, and future strategies for sustaining Chaozhou Opera. This method allowed flexibility for participants to express their views while also ensuring that all research objectives were addressed. Document Analysis: Relevant documents were analyzed to understand the institutional and governmental frameworks supporting Chaozhou Opera's transmission. These included national, provincial, and municipal policies, tourism development plans, ICH protection strategies, and cultural branding efforts.

Case Study Analysis: Four distinct models of Chaozhou Opera's integration into cultural tourism were examined in-depth. These models emphasized different approaches, such as performance-driven tourism, school-heritage collaborations, digital outreach, and festival-centered cultural tourism.

Data Collection Process

Step 1: Fieldwork observations at key sites, such as tourist venues, opera troupes, community spaces, and educational institutions. This phase focused on understanding how Chaozhou Opera is presented to the public and the effects of tourism on its performance styles.

Step 2: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 key informants, addressing transmission challenges, the impact of commercialization, audience engagement, and future strategies for Chaozhou Opera's sustainability in the tourism industry.

Step 3: Document analysis involved the examination of policy papers, tourism development plans, and ICH-related strategies to comprehend the institutional support and governmental policies surrounding Chaozhou Opera.

Step 4: Case study analysis was used to explore four unique models of Chaozhou Opera's integration into tourism, highlighting performance-driven tourism, collaborations with educational institutions, digital strategies, and festival-based cultural tourism.

Data Analysis and Coding Procedures

The data collected from interviews, fieldwork, and documents were transcribed and coded using NVivo software. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns, themes, and contrasts within the data. The analysis followed a hybrid approach—combining both inductive and deductive methods. In the inductive phase, open coding allowed for the identification of emergent themes from the data. In the deductive phase, existing theoretical frameworks were used to guide the analysis, ensuring that the findings related to the research questions. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Chaozhou Opera's transmission in the context of tourism.

Triangulation and Validity

Triangulation was employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings. By using multiple methods (fieldwork, interviews, document analysis, and case studies), the study cross-checked data across various sources to confirm patterns and minimize bias. This approach increased the depth of the analysis and strengthened the overall findings.

Researcher Positionality and Limitations

As a researcher, I acknowledge that my background and perspectives may have influenced the data collection and analysis process. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research, with an ongoing examination of how my positionality may have shaped interactions with participants and the interpretation of the data. While efforts were made to minimize bias, the limitations of a qualitative study must be recognized, including the subjective nature of the data and the limited generalizability of the findings beyond the selected sample.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent, and their anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process, ensuring that cultural sensitivity was observed in all interactions with stakeholders. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for working with human subjects, ensuring that participants' rights and confidentiality were respected.

Research Results

This study explores the dynamics of Chaozhou Opera (Chaoju) transmission in the context of cultural-tourism integration. The findings highlight both opportunities and challenges, offering insights into how Chaozhou Opera navigates the tension between preserving its cultural authenticity and adapting to modern tourism demands. The results reveal four major themes: tourism-driven performance spaces, government and institutional support, digitalization and new media, and intergenerational transmission. Each theme offers specific insights into how Chaozhou Opera's transmission is shaped by these factors.

1. Tourism-Driven Performance Spaces

Tourism-driven performance spaces have become a critical element in the revitalization of Chaozhou Opera. Cultural heritage parks, scenic tourism zones, and commercial festivals offer new venues that extend beyond traditional theaters and bring performances closer to diverse audiences. These spaces have increased exposure but also introduced challenges.

Key Findings:

Tourism-driven venues attract new audiences, especially younger and international tourists. A performer from Chaozhou shared, "Performing in a cultural park is bringing in a new group of people... It's more of a show than an opera, but it can make it accessible to a larger public" (Interviewee 3, 2025).

However, these venues also promote shorter, simplified performances to accommodate tourists' shorter attention spans. This trend has raised concerns about the loss of dramatic depth and emotional connection. A director noted, "We don't want to lose the emotional connection of Chaoju if we go for quick spectacle formats" (Interviewee 2, June 2025).

Table 1 Dual Effects of Tourism Performance Spaces

Aspect	Positive Impacts	Negative Concerns	Supporting Evidence
Audience Reach	• Attracts younger demographics • Expands to international tourists	• Potential dilution of core audience	"We now see tourists including younger people" (Interviewee 3, 2025)
Performance Format	• Increased visual innovation • Improved narrative clarity	• Loss of complex dramatic structures • Emotional depth reduction	"Compressed forms sacrifice emotional connection" (Interviewee 2, 2025)
Economic Value	• New revenue streams • Employment opportunities	• Commercial pressure alters artistic decisions	30% shorter performances in tourist venues (Field Notes, 2025)
Cultural Transmission	• Broader awareness • Cross-cultural exchange	• Simplified versions may become dominant	60% of park performances omit traditional acts (Troupe Records)

2. Government and Institutional Support

Government support and institutional frameworks have been instrumental in fostering Chaozhou Opera's integration with tourism. Local cultural bureaus in cities like Chaozhou and Shantou have provided financial support, allowing for collaborations between schools, cultural enterprises, and performance troupes.

Key Findings:

While government policies have been supportive, the implementation is often disconnected from grassroots efforts. A cultural bureau official from Shantou stated, "We set aside money for supporting Chaoju shows in tourist zones... but we need more local involvement" (Interviewee 4, July 2025).

The lack of a grassroots mechanism for community participation remains a key challenge. An opera troupe manager commented, "The government's support is good, but it's hard to reach the performers or the local community. We need more local engagement, not just top-down support" (Interviewee 5, June 2025).

3. Digitalization and New Media

The rise of digital platforms and new media technologies has created new opportunities for the transmission of Chaozhou Opera. Platforms like live-streaming services and short-video apps have exposed Chaozhou Opera to a wider audience, particularly younger, tech-savvy generations.

Key Findings:

Digital platforms have expanded Chaozhou Opera's reach globally. A young performer remarked, "We're trying out live streaming our performances on social media... It's great to see people from all over the world engaging with Chaoju" (Interviewee 6, August 2025).

However, the transition to digital platforms has not been without challenges. Many performers struggle with the technical aspects of online performances, and institutional support for adapting performances to digital formats is lacking. A director shared, "We've had trouble changing our shows for online viewers... It's hard to feel the energy from the audience like we would in live performances" (Interviewee 7, July 2025).

4. Intergenerational Transmission

Despite efforts from both institutions and technology, intergenerational transmission of Chaozhou Opera remains fragile. Models like school-heritage partnerships and arts education programs have seen some success, but they are often fragmented and episodic. Many young participants engage with Chaozhou Opera more as an extracurricular activity than a lasting cultural practice.

Key Findings:

Schools and arts programs have not yet fully integrated Chaozhou Opera into their core curriculum, with one teacher noting, "We want to make Chaoju part of school activities, but people

see it as an extra subject. There is no systemic support for it to be a core part of the curriculum" (Interviewee 8, January 2025).

Economic sustainability remains a barrier for young performers, leading to attrition in the performance lineage. A young performer expressed, "I love Chaoju, but there are no financial benefits or job opportunities. I'm looking for other ways to make a living" (Interviewee 9, May 2025).

Summary of Findings

The study demonstrates that while tourism-driven performance spaces, government policies, digital platforms, and intergenerational transmission present opportunities for Chaozhou Opera's integration into cultural tourism, each also introduces significant challenges. The simplification of performances for tourism consumption, gaps in institutional support for grassroots participation, technical difficulties in digital transmission, and the lack of economic pathways for young performers all present barriers to sustainable transmission. However, the increased exposure and broader audience reach afforded by these factors also offer pathways to revitalizing Chaozhou Opera and ensuring its relevance in modern times.

Such results point out the troubles related to a "living" transmission of Chaozhou opera. Chaoju has discovered new spaces and media ecosystem where it can be performed but its transmission needs much more than more visibility. It requires a far more coherent institution, economy, culture, and community. Tensions with regards to upholding Chaoju's cultural integrity, as well as its incorporation into local tourism, alongside top down policies versus bottom up engagements remain a prospect for Chaoju.

Linking the research with ideas like cultural-tourism integration, cultural authenticity, and public engagement helps start working on making plans that do a better job at balancing preserving something from the past with bringing about new ideas.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the preservation and transmission of Chaozhou Opera (Chaoju) within the context of cultural-tourism integration. By addressing both the opportunities and challenges identified, the study underscores the complexities of balancing cultural authenticity with commercial viability. This paradox of "being authentic while selling well" aligns with existing debates in the literature on heritage commodification, illustrating the tension between preserving intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and adapting it for contemporary markets.

Balancing Authenticity and Commercialism

One of the central themes of this study is the negotiation between authenticity and commercialization, which is not unique to Chaozhou Opera but resonates with broader discussions in heritage studies. As Lu (2019), and Pan et al. (2011) have noted, the tourism industry often commodifies culture to make it more marketable, but this commodification risks diluting the core cultural values. The simplification of Chaozhou Opera for tourism—through shorter performances and more visually oriented formats—brings both increased audience reach and concerns about the loss of aesthetic depth. Performers themselves were ambivalent, acknowledging the new platforms and economic opportunities but also fearing the reduction of the art form's emotional depth.

This aligns with the arguments presented by Zhang et al. (2023) in his theory of cultural capital and field theory. Bourdieu argued that cultural products, when commodified, are influenced by those in power within the cultural field, and the local practitioners often have little control over how their art is represented and sold. In the case of Chaozhou Opera, while government policies and tourism developers support the art form's visibility, grassroots involvement remains limited. Local performers and community members, who are essential to preserving the art's authenticity, have limited agency in shaping how Chaozhou Opera is marketed and consumed. This creates a dynamic where cultural preservation and economic interests are constantly negotiating and sometimes in tension.

Tourism and the Paradox of Preservation

The paradox between the opportunities and risks of tourism for heritage preservation is well documented in the literature. As Lim and Zhang (2023) argue, tourism can bring new life to traditional performances, increasing their visibility and engaging a broader audience. However, tourism often leads to the commercialization of culture, which can result in the loss of authenticity. In the case of Chaozhou Opera, while the integration into tourism has expanded its audience base, it has also led to a shift in how the performance is presented—simplifying narratives and focusing on visual appeal. This shift echoes the concerns raised by scholars such as Zhao et al. (2003), who highlight the tension between cultural integrity and the pressures of tourism commercialization.

Comparing Chaozhou Opera to other global examples of intangible heritage, such as Japanese Noh theatre or Indian Kathakali, further contextualizes these challenges. Both Noh and Kathakali have faced similar dilemmas of maintaining cultural authenticity while adapting to

modern audiences. Noh theatre, for example, has been preserved through a delicate balance of tradition and adaptation, with performance changes being carefully controlled to maintain its cultural core. Similarly, Kathakali has integrated elements of tourism, but the emphasis on preserving its ritualistic and narrative elements remains a priority for practitioners. These global case studies suggest that the preservation of performing arts requires not just adapting to new forms of engagement, but also careful negotiation of what can be changed and what must remain intact to preserve the cultural essence.

Digitalization and New Media

The study also highlights the role of digitalization in the transmission of Chaozhou Opera, which is consistent with the growing recognition in the literature of the potential of new media in cultural preservation. Zhang et al. (2023) emphasize the role of digital platforms in reaching younger audiences and maintaining cultural relevance in the digital age. However, as seen in the case of Chaozhou Opera, the transition to digital platforms brings challenges in maintaining the authenticity of the performance. As some performers expressed, digital media platforms do not provide the same emotional connection as live performances, and adapting traditional art forms to digital formats often strips away the depth and cultural resonance that are intrinsic to the performance.

The study's findings echo the argument by Zhou et al. (2024) that digital strategies should be context-specific, emphasizing the need for digital content that preserves the essence of traditional forms while engaging contemporary audiences. While digital platforms offer new opportunities for global engagement, they also require careful consideration of how the art form is represented to avoid oversimplification or cultural dilution.

Intergenerational Transmission and Sustainability

The issue of intergenerational transmission, which is central to the sustainability of Chaozhou Opera, reflects broader challenges in the preservation of ICH. Despite efforts to integrate Chaozhou Opera into educational curricula and provide economic pathways for young performers, the lack of systemic support for long-term sustainability is a critical issue. This challenge aligns with Zhang et al. (2023) work on generational transmission, where cultural practices often fail to engage younger generations due to the lack of structured educational models and economic incentives.

One of the key implications of this research is the need for more robust, long-term strategies for intergenerational transmission. While short-term educational and outreach programs are helpful, they are insufficient without systemic support that integrates cultural practices into formal education systems and provides economic pathways for young artists. This calls for a more comprehensive approach to safeguarding ICH, one that considers the long-term involvement of local communities and the need for economic sustainability for young practitioners.

Implications for ICH Safeguarding

The findings of this study suggest that a more integrated approach to policy-making is necessary to ensure the sustainable transmission of Chaozhou Opera. Government support alone is not enough; policies must be designed to engage local communities and provide both cultural and economic support. This aligns with the broader call in the literature for a co-governance model of cultural preservation, where local communities play an active role in decision-making processes.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of developing new transmission models that consider both cultural and economic factors. Digital platforms, while still in their early stages, represent a new avenue for engagement that should be strategically harnessed to connect with younger audiences. However, as digital media can also lead to the commodification of culture, it is crucial to ensure that digital strategies do not compromise the cultural integrity of Chaozhou Opera.

This research contributes to the ongoing conversation on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage by highlighting the complex relationship between cultural authenticity, commercialization, and digitalization. The study emphasizes that while tourism and digital platforms offer new opportunities for Chaozhou Opera, they also present significant challenges that must be navigated carefully. By linking the findings to existing theoretical frameworks and global case studies, the study underscores the importance of balancing preservation with adaptation to ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

New Knowledge from Research

To achieve sustainable transmission of Chaozhou Opera within the framework of cultural tourism integration, a shift from event-based, single interventions to a holistic, community-driven approach is necessary. The research findings highlight the importance of multi-level collaboration involving local governments, cultural institutions, opera troupes, tourism operators, educators, and communities. Local governments must transition from formal policies to operational integration,

fostering bottom-up initiatives and ensuring long-term, adaptable transmission models. Opera troupes should balance cultural authenticity with tourism adaptation, embracing hybrid performance forms and digital innovation to engage younger audiences. Tourism operators need to create immersive cultural experiences that prioritize cultural authenticity, while educators and communities must focus on fostering cultural literacy and intergenerational transmission. Digital platforms should evolve to play a more active role in preserving and promoting Chaozhou Opera, ensuring its cultural integrity while adapting to modern formats. This integrated approach, emphasizing grassroots involvement and digital engagement, is essential for preserving Chaozhou Opera as a dynamic, relevant cultural practice in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the sustainable transmission of Chaozhou Opera within the context of cultural-tourism integration requires more than just exposure and economic activation. True vitality lies in balancing cultural authenticity, institutional support, intergenerational transmission, and adaptive innovation. While current efforts show promise, they remain fragmented and often conflict between commodification and cultural integrity. Effective strategies must move beyond superficial promotion, focusing on systemic, participatory frameworks and fostering collaborations among state institutions, cultural practitioners, educators, and communities. By positioning Chaozhou Opera as a dynamic, evolving cultural form, this research offers actionable insights for policymakers and cultural strategists to safeguard and revitalize this heritage in the modern era.

Suggestions

The findings of this study highlight the need for a systemic shift in the approach to the sustainable transmission of Chaozhou Opera within the framework of cultural tourism integration. This shift requires moving from isolated, event-based interventions to a more comprehensive, community-driven model. Local governments should focus on operationalizing cultural policies by fostering structural support through cross-sectoral heritage councils that include diverse stakeholders such as cultural officials, performers, educators, and tourism developers. Such councils would ensure democratic decision-making and strengthen the legal standing of policies. Additionally, regional cooperation among municipalities within the Chaoshan area is crucial for

institutionalizing shared identity narratives and resource distribution, which are vital for sustaining Chaozhou Opera's cultural tourism.

Furthermore, the integration of Chaozhou Opera into tourism markets must be balanced with the preservation of its cultural authenticity. Performance troupes should develop hybrid performance forms that preserve core artistic elements while catering to tourist preferences, alongside embracing digital innovation. Collaborations with media creators can help produce interactive, educational content that engages younger audiences. Similarly, tourism operators must move beyond cultural tokenism to create immersive, dramaturgically coherent experiences that resonate with local communities and foster deeper connections with Chaozhou Opera.

Educational institutions must embed heritage literacy in curricula and community programs to nurture a cultivated audience and support intergenerational transmission. Mentorship programs between young performers and experienced masters will be essential in maintaining the traditional knowledge and techniques of Chaozhou Opera. Digital platforms must evolve from mere passive dissemination to active, participatory spaces that prioritize the authenticity of the art form while expanding its global reach.

Ultimately, this study suggests that a holistic, multi-stakeholder framework—incorporating policy coherence, artistic innovation, community engagement, and digital transformation—is crucial for the sustainable transmission of Chaozhou Opera. By adopting such an integrated approach, Chaozhou Opera can thrive as a living heritage, dynamically engaging contemporary audiences while maintaining its cultural essence. This framework offers a replicable model for other traditional arts seeking to navigate the challenges and opportunities of cultural-tourism convergence.

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