



The Present Situation and Inheritance of Guizhou Liupanshui Xiaohuamiao Drama in Chinese Traditional Minority Culture

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Abstract

The traditional culture of China's ethnic minorities is an integral component of traditional Chinese culture. It encompasses rich and vibrant elements such as language, art, customs, and religion, constituting a radiant gem within the treasury of Chinese national culture. XiaoHua Miao drama in Liupanshui, Guizhou Province stands as a treasure of traditional Chinese minority culture with its unique artistic allure and profound cultural significance. Through historical research, field investigations, and literature studies, the author delves deeply into the current state of Miao drama among the Xiaohua people. The findings reveal that Miao drama confronts numerous challenges including dwindling inheritors, declining audiences, and vanishing traditional skills. Nevertheless, efforts by local governments and non-governmental organizations have enabled certain areas to sustain vitality while innovating their methods of preservation. Emphasizing the training of inheritors is paramount to encouraging greater participation from minority compatriots and the public in preserving XiaoHua Miao drama. Additionally, integrating costumes and languages into XiaoHua Miao drama can enhance public identification and involvement. Lastly, combining XiaoHua Miao drama with contemporary theater in three-dimensional ways using modern technological means for recording and dissemination can promote its presence in schools, communities, and beyond. Only through these measures can this invaluable national cultural heritage radiate new vigor in the modern era while contributing to enriching China's diverse cultural tapestry.

Keywords: Current Situation and Inheritance; The Tiaohua Festival of the Miao Nationality in Nankai; The innovation and development of drama

Introduction

This study draws on concepts and theories derived from diverse cultural preservation practices. The Xiaohua Miao Opera of Liupanshui, Guizhou Province, stands as a treasure among the traditional cultures of China's ethnic minorities, embodying the profound



historical memories and cultural genes of the Xiaohua Miao branch. To commemorate this historical context, the Xiaohua Miao people in Liupanshui have developed a performing art form centered on Lusheng Dance, which integrates elements of warfare and production activities. Among all the performance scenarios of the opera, the Tiaohua Festival (Flower-Jumping Festival)—held at Sankoutang in Nankai Miao and Yi Township, Liupanshui City, Guizhou Province, on the 15th day of the second lunar month annually constitutes the most crucial component of Xiaohua Miao Opera and merits in-depth academic exploration. The Sankoutang Tiaohua Festival in Nankai Township, Liupanshui, is among the first batch of ethnic minority festivals included in Guizhou Province’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection List and ranks as the most influential traditional Miao festival in northwest Guizhou. Festival activities are centered around the mysterious and solemn ritual sequence of Inviting the Flower Tree, Planting the Flower Tree, and Sending off the Flower Tree. Participants are predominantly members of the Xiaohua Miao ethnic group, and the entire opera performance adheres to a set of procedural rituals formed by the unique customs of the branch. With a comprehensive and integrated expressive form, it effectively preserves the ethnic cultural characteristics of the Xiaohua Miao people. As a national-level Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Xiaohua Miao Opera not only exemplifies the perseverance and tenacity of the Miao people but also serves as the most distinctive cultural calling card of northwest Guizhou, characterized by its powerful Short-Stake Steps and exquisite costume craftsmanship. Originating in remote mountainous areas, the festival primarily employs the Miao language, including its performance scripts, and its expressive mode deviates from that of modern opera. This discrepancy has led to a lack of interest among young generations, restricted its development, and created obstacles to intergenerational inheritance. Therefore, the innovative direction of this study is to integrate the opera’s costumes, props, and performance venues with modern opera styles, thereby rendering the protection and inheritance of Xiaohua Miao Opera more accessible and intuitive. On the premise of retaining their original cultural connotations, costumes and props will be combined with modern design elements to better align with public aesthetic preferences. Regarding performance venues, the original empty mountainous spaces will be transformed into standardized stage areas, balancing the preservation of authentic cultural features with the convenience of audience viewing. Furthermore, modern opera performance techniques will be incorporated into the presentation to enhance audience participation and immersive experience. (UNESCO, 2003).

Objectives

1. To the historical origin of XiaoHua Miao nationality and the dance, music, language and performance scene of XiaoHua Miao nationality drama.
2. This study focuses on the current development status of Xiaohua Miao Opera and explores the construction of new forms for its creation, aiming to provide practical support for the inheritance and innovation of this intangible cultural heritage.
3. Through research, this study explores the inheritance and development of Xiaohua Miao Opera.

Literature Review

The exact origin of the “Nankai Sankoutang Miao Tiaohua Festival” (Nankai Sankoutang Miao Flower-Jumping Festival) remains unrecorded. According to the recollections of local elderly Miao village elders, the festival had already taken initial shape around the Guangxu period of the Qing Dynasty (1875–1908). Relevant cultural research has yielded certain achievements in the fields of opera, dance, and ethnic studies.

Drawing on diverse sources-including resources from the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network · China Digital Museum of Intangible Cultural Heritage, reports issued by local government departments, and research findings from academic institutions-this study systematically synthesizes existing research on the cultural connotations, protection status, and inheritance practices of Xiaohua Miao Opera, with the aim of laying a theoretical and practical foundation for subsequent scholarly inquiries. An Overview of Miao Culture, compiled by the Guizhou Miao Studies Association, systematically elaborates on the cultural characteristics of Miao sub-groups from multiple dimensions, such as ethnic history, folklore, and art studies. It argues that the artistic creations of the Xiaohua Miao people are closely intertwined with their historical migrations, production activities, and daily life. Elements such as the “Short-Stake Steps” in their opera performances and embroidered costumes not only reflect the ethnic group’s aesthetic preferences but also serve as concrete manifestations of their ethnic spirit (Guizhou Miao Studies Association, n.d.).The “Miao Ethnic Group” special section on the official website of the People’s Government of Guizhou Province provides detailed accounts of the distribution and folk traditions of Miao sub-groups in northwestern Guizhou, clarifying the unique position of Xiaohua Miao Opera within the broader Miao cultural system (People’s Government of Guizhou Province, n.d.). The entry “Liupanshui Overview · Nankai Tiaohua Festival” on the official website of the People’s Government of Liupanshui focuses on the Tiaohua Festival—the core carrier of Xiaohua Miao Opera. It meticulously documents the festival’s ritual processes (i.e., Inviting the Flower Tree, Planting the Flower Tree, Sending Off the Flower Tree), venue, and cultural implications, noting that



as one of the first batch of intangible cultural heritage items in Guizhou Province, the festival functions as a crucial medium for the dissemination of Miao culture in northwestern Guizhou. These official documents provide primary data for investigating the regional adaptability and ritual functions of Xiaohua Miao Opera. The Liupanshui Cultural Heritage Survey Report, compiled by the Liupanshui Municipal Bureau of Culture in 2020, offers a systematic analysis of the inheritance status of Xiaohua Miao Opera based on field research. On one hand, the opera has fully preserved the unique ritual procedures and artistic styles of the Xiaohua Miao sub-group, with its costume craftsmanship, Lusheng music, and other elements embodying irreplaceable cultural value. On the other hand, constrained by its remote geographical location, Miao-language-dominated expression, and presentation forms disconnected from modern aesthetics, the opera confronts severe challenges, including the loss of young audiences, a in inheritors, and limited development space (Liupanshui Municipal Bureau of Culture, 2020). Issues such as “scene innovation” and “audience expansion” proposed in the report have identified the core pain points and breakthrough directions for future research. The Ethnic Minority Traditional Culture Protection Plan, promulgated by the Guizhou Provincial Department of Culture in 2019, is grounded in the regional characteristic of Guizhou’s multi-ethnic cultural coexistence. It puts forward the core principles of “living protection” and “innovative inheritance,” explicitly designating traditional Miao opera as a key protection object. The plan emphasizes promoting the adaptation of traditional art to modern society while preserving its cultural authenticity, and formulates specific measures regarding financial support, talent training, and the construction of inheritance bases (Guizhou Provincial Department of Culture, 2019). These measures provide a policy basis and implementation guarantee for the protection of Xiaohua Miao Opera in Liupanshui, and also serve as important documentary support for researching local intangible cultural heritage protection mechanisms. (People’s Government of Liupanshui, n.d.).

Conceptual structure

This study investigates the current status and intergenerational inheritance of Xiaohua Miao Opera in Liupanshui, Guizhou, within the framework of China’s ethnic minority traditional cultural preservation. Employing mixed research methods including field surveys, in-depth interviews with inheritors and academic experts, this research conducts a systematic exploration of the opera’s historical evolution and contemporary development. The full text is structured into five chapters in accordance with APA 7th edition guidelines: Cultural Foundation and Theoretical Framework of Xiaohua Miao Opera in Guizhou 1) Geographical Location of Xiaohua Miao Culture, 2) Historical Background of Xiaohua Miao Culture, 3)

Traditional Characteristics of Xiaohua Miao Culture, 4) Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Context of Xiaohua Miao Opera 5) Literature Review

Discussion and Conclusion

After analyzing the research data, the researcher found that:

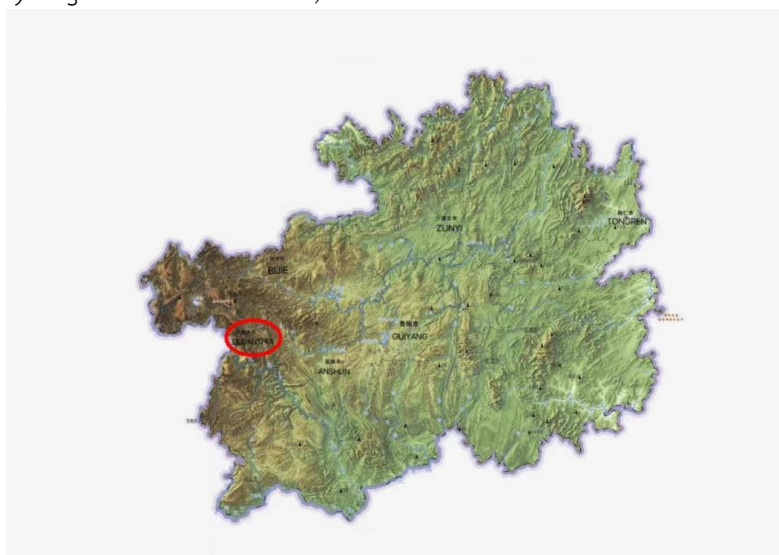


Figure 1 Map of Guizhou Province. The red circle is Liupanshui City

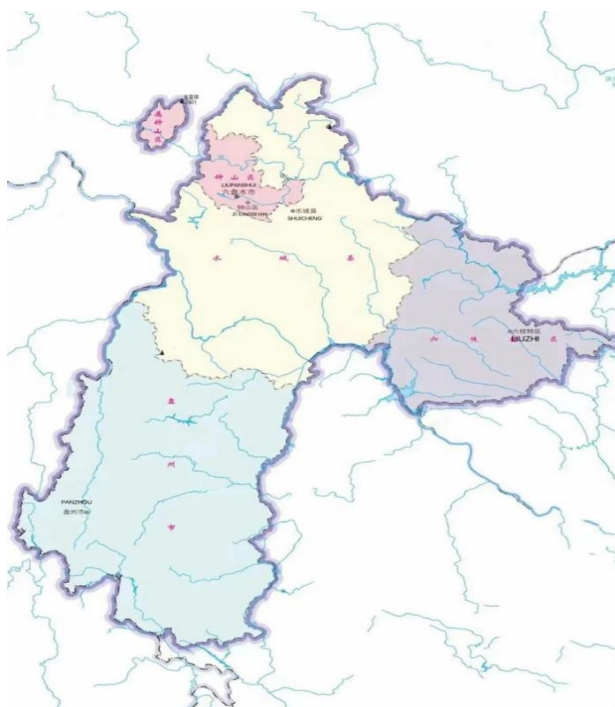


Figure 2 Map of Liupanshui City

Table 1 Table of the Number of Repertoires and Plotlines of the Tiaohua Festival

stills of the scene of Tiaohua Festival	Scene name	Each scene
	Act one: Sacrifice	Zhu Xingrong, the elderly guardian of the flower ball—a core inheritor responsible for safeguarding the ritual traditions of the Tiaohua Festival—led his clansmen in conducting the sacrificial ritual prior to fetching the flower tree.
	Act Two: Inviting the Flower Tree	Village elders and the honor guard proceed to mountain forests to select a flower tree, a ritual termed “Sheng Cuobo” in the Miao language. Before the chosen tree, the elders offer wine and chicken as sacrifices, then fell it and hand it over to the Flower Tree Elder—who organizes the honor guard to receive the tree.
	Act Three: Planting the Flower Tree	As the performance’s core, it depicts the Miao people breaking through enemy sieges during their southward migration, commemorating victories along the route. Led by the Flower Tree Elder, the crowd escorts the flower tree to the flower field,



circumambulates it three times ritualistically, and plants it at the center—an act called “inserting the flower tree” or “Tai Cuo” in Miao. At this moment, skilled Lusheng players wearing hero crowns adorned with “qing ji” feathers step forward on one leg, lean left and right, kneel three times, and repeat the sequence to complete the “Three Prostrations and Nine Kowtows” ceremony. They pay homage to the flower tree (along with the Flower Tree Elder and village elders), a ritual known as “worshipping the flower tree” or “Bi Bo” in Miao.

Act Four: Sending Off the Flower Tree



Before dawn, a mysterious and solemn flower tree retrieval ritual is held. The venerated flower tree is escorted out of the flower field by elders and stored in a clean, secluded location free from human or animal trampling. With the tree sent off, the entire Tiaohua Festival concludes.



Figure 3 Interview with the villagers of Xiaohua Miao



Figure 4 Field investigation on the dance teaching of Xiaohua Miao dance inheritors



Figure 5 Xiong Zhaomei, a non-genetic inheritor of the production of Miao costumes



Figure 6 The new Miao costume



Figure 7 Xiaohua Miao's headwear and costumes



Figure 8 Young Miao people dressed in costumes participate in Scene Tiaohua Festival of the Miao Nationality

By studying the four scenes of the Tiaohua Festival, it can be found that the festival covers an extensive cultural space and preserves the authentic traditional folk cultural and artistic styles of the Xiaohua Miao branch. This enables us to better understand the ideas expressed by the Xiaohua Miao Opera and the significance of its inheritance. Combined with



the plot development of the Tiaohua Festival, it can be integrated with modern theater for creative works to form a new theatrical model; ultimately, by integrating the original lines, dances, music, and costumes of the Xiaohua Miao people, the inheritance and development of this art form can be realized.

Summary

In the master's thesis “The Present situation and inheritance of Guizhou Liupanshui Xiaohua Miao drama in Chinese traditional minority cultur” we conducted an in-depth exploration of the characteristics and artistic features of Guizhou's ethnic minority traditional operas from multiple perspectives, including dance, music, language, and performance scenes. The inherited content of Xiaohua Miao Opera should not be abstract and vague, but concrete, clear, with distinct characteristics and a unique artistic form. The inheritance of Xiaohua Miao Opera is mainly divided into costume symbols, music symbols, scene symbols, and theme symbols. The characteristics of the costume symbols in Xiaohua Miao Opera mainly lie in the reproduction of daily ethnic costumes, the decomposition and transformation of original costume pattern elements, and the integration, replacement, and reorganization of traditional and new elements. The music symbols of Xiaohua Miao Opera are mainly featured by the performance of the Lusheng, a typical Miao musical instrument. The scene symbols of Xiaohua Miao Opera are mainly divided into festival scenes, daily life scenes, music scenes, and dance scenes, all of which show the life details of the Xiaohua Miao people themselves. This is also reflected in the theme selection of Xiaohua Miao Opera, which is based on folk stories and ballads, showing the life content of the Xiaohua Miao people, expressing the people's pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, and embodying the unique theatrical style of the ethnic minority group.

In summary, as a national cultural heritage of Guizhou, the protection and inheritance of Xiaohua Miao Opera require in-depth exploration and research of traditions, as well as innovation on the basis of respecting traditions. By leveraging the development of contemporary theater and integrating with it, Xiaohua Miao Opera can be better protected and inherited, and at the same time, it can appear on the modern cultural stage with a new look, making more contributions to enriching and developing Chinese theater art.

Research Suggestions

The Xiaohua Miao Opera of Liupanshui is a treasure of Miao culture and an important part of China's excellent traditional culture. In recent years, with the increasing awareness of cultural protection, the preservation and inheritance of Xiaohua Miao Opera have received certain attention, but it still faces severe challenges. This paper analyzes the current situation

of Xiaohua Miao Opera from the perspectives of protection, inheritance, and integrated creation with contemporary theater, and puts forward the following three suggestions:

1. Comprehensive Current Situation Survey and In-depth Value Exploration from a Multi-dimensional Perspective

It is proposed to adopt “literature review + field investigation” as the core research methods to systematically conduct research on the current situation and value of Xiaohua Miao Opera. On one hand, by sorting out documents on the Miao migration history and local intangible cultural heritage (ICH) archives, combined with field visits to Miao-inhabited areas in Liupanshui, comprehensively record the preserved repertoires, vocal characteristics, performance techniques, and details of costumes and props of Xiaohua Miao Opera, with a focus on investigating the degree of loss of endangered resources. On the other hand, analyze the symbiotic relationship between the opera and folk activities such as the Tiaohua Festival, explore its in-depth value in ethnic identity and historical memory inheritance, and compare it with the protection experiences of other Miao Opera branches and ethnic minority dramas in China to clarify its uniqueness and development gaps, laying a solid empirical and theoretical foundation for subsequent research.

2. Modernization Improvement to Reinvigorate Xiaohua Miao Opera in Contemporary Theater

To revitalize Xiaohua Miao Opera in contemporary theater, it is suggested to carry out modernization improvements in the following aspects:

2.2 Costume Innovation: Integrate the original complex traditional Miao costumes with modern minimalist designs while retaining Miao cultural elements, making them more in line with contemporary aesthetic needs while highlighting ethnic characteristics.

2.2 Music Innovation: On the basis of preserving core elements such as Miao language singing and folk customs, explore the integration of traditional ethnic music with modern musical elements, and adapt or create new repertoires around contemporary themes to better align with modern theater.

2.3 Language Innovation: Attempt to integrate Miao language with Mandarin and local dialects for innovation, facilitating the promotion and dissemination of Xiaohua Miao Opera.

3. Integration into the Contemporary Theater Market for Sustainable Development

To better integrate Xiaohua Miao Opera into the contemporary theater market, the following suggestions are put forward:

3.1 Diversified Performance Forms: While retaining traditional performance formats, attempt to adapt Xiaohua Miao Opera into theater versions to enhance audience appeal and market competitiveness.



3.2 Industrial Integration: Combine Liupanshui's tourism resources to explore integrated models such as "Opera + Cultural Tourism", "Opera + Cultural and Creative Products", and "Opera + Research Travel". Discuss the balance mechanism between cultural and economic values in market-oriented operations, as well as key issues such as copyright protection and brand building, so as to provide new paths for the sustainable development of the opera.

It is hoped that through the above suggestions, Xiaohua Miao Opera can be reinvigorated and contribute to the inheritance of China's ethnic minority cultures and the development of the theater industry.

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