

# ***Strategies for Sustainable Protection of Traditional Opera Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Rural Revitalization: The Example of the Ningbo Opera in China***

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**Abstract:** The traditional opera intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is closely related to rural revitalization. Traditional opera's intangible cultural heritage needs to be protected in a sustainable manner from the perspective of rural revitalization, and this need comes from both national policy and social and economic growth. With Ningbo Opera chosen as a particular case to be investigated, the research focuses on the sustainable protection of traditional opera ICH from the perspective of rural revitalization. The Ningbo Opera's inheritance situation was also looked into, including the enrollment of students, the number of ICH inheritors, the amount of funding provided by the government to carry out inheritance activities, and the methods of inheritance in four different areas. To analyze and summarize the inherited situation of Ningbo Opera using the method of data analysis, the information on these scenarios was gathered and organized. Using surveys analysis, to look into the villages' situation of sustainably protect Ningbo Opera, the best techniques to look for these factors are suggested. The article is studied in order to investigate the most efficient and sustainable strategies to protect traditional opera ICH and to contribute favorably to the sustainable protection of ICH from the perspective of rural revitalization.

**Keywords:** rural revitalization, traditional opera, intangible cultural heritage (ICH), sustainable protection, Ningbo Opera

## **1. Introduction**

As they support rural revitalization, Chinese government departments have recently turned their attention to the sustainable protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). ICH is the traditional cultural expressions and cultural spaces which are closely related to the life of people of all generations. ICH recorded the process by which humans altered nature, carried human history and civilization, and condensed the essence of traditional culture [1]. Meanwhile, elements of ICH which show distinct national characteristics are important vectors of the humanistic spirit for a nation, as well as the symbol of cultural identity [2]. Traditional opera is recognized as a distinctive kind of folk art and culture. High historical, cultural, aesthetic, and social values are present. In addition to bringing folk wisdom together, it also reflects the traits of folk life, customs, beliefs, and values of different ethnic groups and locations. Chinese traditional culture and art are uniquely expressed through traditional opera. Chinese government agencies have recently focused on the sustainable

protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as part of their support for rural revitalization. Ningbo Opera is one of the representatives of the intangible cultural heritage of traditional Chinese opera. In June 2008 it was inscribed on China's national ICH list by the State Council of the People's Republic of China [3]. However, there are many problems in the current process of sustainable protection of Ningbo Opera, which need to be studied and solved urgently. Based on the perspective of China's national policy of rural revitalization, we take Ningbo Opera as an example to study the ways of sustainable protection of traditional opera ICH. The aim is to explore the role and significance of traditional opera ICH from the perspective of rural revitalization. Take Ningbo Opera as an example to explore the current development status of traditional opera ICH and the ways of its sustainable protection from the perspective of rural revitalization.

## **2. The Relevance of Ningbo Opera to Rural Revitalization**

Ningbo Opera is a Chinese traditional opera sung in the Ningbo dialect in Chinese, and its music belongs to the rap opera tunes of Chinese opera. It was first sung in Ningbo City and nearby areas [4]. Its origins lie in the field songs sung by local peasants in Ningbo [4]. Farmers improvise words to new things they see, hear and think about when they are working in the fields. They sang them in their native dialects, and they were known as field songs. It mainly reflects rural life and expresses farmers' ideals, feelings and wishes. It belongs to oral art creation. Although the tunes are simple and the rhythm is slow, they are suitable for lyricism and are very popular among the masses [5]. This demonstrates that Ningbo Opera's origins are rural and that its inspiration comes from rural life.

It was created in the course of the labor and life of farmers in the countryside. The content of its repertoire is seldom about family and national affairs, political struggles, etc. Most of the plays are based on the production and labor life in the fields. The majority of them are based on the agricultural production and labor life, rural love stories, and anecdotes colored by the region's folklore, which can depict the people's everyday material and spiritual lives as well as their ideal goals. A true representation of the creative and cultural life in the countryside can be found in Ningbo Opera. For example, classical Ningbo Opera plays such as "It's Going to Rain and the Mother's Going to Marry", "The Blood List" and "Pawning the Wife" are all themes that can reflect the life of the local people on the ground. Both the traditional and modern plays of Ningbo Opera can re-veal the profound local culture and history, and are the plays that are closest to rural life and have the most rustic regional flavor.

Ningbo Opera is not only sung in Ningbo dialect in terms of words and pronunciation, but also in terms of tone and voice, which are based on the tone and voice of the Ningbo dialect. It is strongly characterized by the Ningbo dialect. The rhythm of singing is slow, the rhyme is gentle and smooth, and it presents the chaos and sincerity of village life with unique rhyme and rich emotion. It carries the most simple rural culture in the form of traditional opera. For rural residents to provide emotional support and cultural belonging. The deep cultural deposits and local sentiment make Ningbo Opera an indispensable cultural symbol in rural revitalization. Because of its deep cultural ties with the countryside, Ningbo Opera has become a highly representative type of traditional opera in the perspective of rural revitalization. The sustainable protection of Ningbo Opera can be a typical example of the sustainable preservation of other traditional opera ICH in rural revitalization.

## **3. Results of the Material Collection Survey**

The Ningbo Opera's inheritance situation was also looked into, including the enrollment of students, the number of ICH inheritors, the amount of funding provided by the government to carry out inheritance activities, and the methods of inheritance in four different areas. To analyze and

summarize the inherited situation of Ningbo Opera using the method of data analysis, the information on these scenarios was gathered and organized.

In terms of cultivation of talents in Ningbo Opera, in 2003, in order to solve the problem of cultivation of Ningbo Opera actors, Ningbo Foreign Affairs School (School of Literature and Art) and Ningbo Opera Troupe firstly opened the Ningbo Opera In-heritance Class. The course lasted three years, and after graduation, the students entered the troupe, which was the first attempt to train Ningbo Opera talents on an order basis [6]. In 2016, Ningbo Performing Arts Group and Ningbo Foreign Affairs School (Literature and Arts School) once again jointly opened the Ningbo Opera Heritage Class [6]. Adopting the order-type talent cultivation mode, it recruits fresh graduates from junior high schools for the whole city of Ningbo [6]. The course lasts for 4 years, and after graduation, the graduates can directly enter the Ningbo Opera Troupe [6]. The outstanding ones can also enter the career establishment [6]. However, unexpectedly, the registration situation is not optimistic, the original 30 enrolment quota finally recruited less than half of the students [6]. This is worried about the Ningbo Opera Troupe Director Wu Gang, if there is a situation to take over after ten years, the Ningbo Opera will be in danger of break of default in the continuity of talents [6]. The Ningbo Opera ICH Class has enrolled 26 students in two batches, including 10 boys, 11 girls, and 5 in the band, after working hard to enroll students in 2016 and 2017[7]. In these nearly two decades, the Ningbo Opera Inheritance Class has only added new Ningbo Opera Inheritance trainees in 2003, 2016 and 2017. The frequency of enrollment is too low, and there have been thirteen years between the years of 2003 and 2016 without the recruitment of new Ningbo Opera trainees. There are also very few young individuals who are eager to learn Ningbo opera. Only 15 qualified trainees were hired in 2016; in 2017, only 11 qualified trainees were hired. In order for candidates to be willing to apply for the exam, recruitment must also initially try to mobilize their ideologies [8].

According to information posted on the Zhejiang Vocational Academy of Art's official website, the school will begin offering professional academic classes in Ningbo Opera in October 2021. This will be the first college class offered in Ningbo Opera's history [8]. However, because of the still-relatively-short opening period, training the Ningbo Opera inheritors will take some time. The enrollment situation demonstrates that newer generations' acceptance of and involvement in traditional opera has increasingly decreased with socioeconomic development and the acceleration of modernization. The primary driver behind this phenomenon's analysis is the shift in young people's cultural consumption habits and values. They are less likely to engage with classic opera and more likely to engage with contemporary popular culture and developing art forms. The heritage group of the Ningbo Opera has a modest number of young members.

The official website of Ningbo ICH collects information about the age and level of all the current ICH inheritors of Ningbo Opera [3]. It is organized as follows.

Table 1: Ages and levels of ICH inheritors of Ningbo Opera.

Name	Date of Birth	Age	Level of inheritor of ICH
Liuting Yang	November 1947	75	National, provincial, and municipal levels
Jinwen Wang	January 1965	58	Provincial and municipal level
Lizhen Wang	January 1939	84	Municipal level
Xingkang Wo	October 1956	66	Municipal level

Ningbo Opera ICH inheritors now come at three levels: national, provincial, and municipal. There are only 4 people who have been awarded the title of Ningbo Opera ICH Inheritors, namely Lizhen Wang, Liuting Yang, Jinwen Wang, and Xingkang Wo. These four inheritors range in age from 58 to 84. As can be observed, there are not many ICH inheritors of Ningbo Opera at the moment, and they tend to be older. There is a problem with inheritors getting older. The ICH inheritance group of

Ningbo Opera has an average age that is on the high side, making it impossible to create a complete and reliable successor team without youthful inheritors joining. Over time, it may appear that Ningbo Opera is not being adequately protected and that the tradition may even be losing ground slowly.

In terms of funding for the inheritance of Ningbo Opera, the Measures for the Administration of Funds for the Protection of the National ICH issued by China's National Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Culture and Tourism on 30 December 2021 stipulate that the standard for measuring the inheritance activities of representative inheritors is RMB20,000 per person every year. Localities may appropriately increase or decrease the central subsidy according to the results of the assessment of the inheritance activities of the representative inheritors determined by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the financial resources. Among them, for those inheritors with excellent results in the assessment of inheritance activities, the increase in the central subsidy shall not exceed 25 percent of the measured standard [9]. According to the provisions of the representative inheritor of the annual inheritance activities in the measurement of the standard for each person is only 20,000 yuan per year for apprenticeship, art transmission, communications, and other inheritance activities of the expenditures [9]. It can be seen that the Chinese government does not give much financial support to ICH inheritors to do inheritance activities, which may bring certain economic resistance to the representative inheritor's inheritance activities. This may affect the sustainable development of the inheritance of Ningbo Opera.

According to tradition, the Ningbo Opera is typically transmitted orally [4]. Face-to-face instruction and master-disciple transmission are used to accomplish this. The correctness and purity of the skills are greatly ensured by this method of inheritance, but there are some restrictions as well. The oral and mental teaching limitations limit the geographic and human resource potential for the traditional Ningbo Opera, which also affects the scope of dissemination and the sustainability of the opera's inheritance. As a result, the opera is unable to meet the varied needs of modern society for dissemination across regions and demographic groups.

After investigation and analysis, it was found that the inheritance group of Ningbo Opera is fewer and older, and the subsequent inheritance is relatively weak. The funding for inheritance activities is limited, and there is a lack of diversity in inheritance methods, which poses a risk of gradual extinction. Therefore, it is urgent to find effective ways to inherit and protect.

#### **4. Strategies for Sustainable Protection of Traditional Opera Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Rural Revitalization**

##### **4.1. Active Expansion of New Students**

To promote and enroll students in traditional opera ICH is a key component of strengthening the guiding of young people's interest in traditional opera and ICH. In order to better cultivate traditional opera and ICH cultural sentiment and traditional cultural confidence in the hearts of young people, it is important that they comprehend the significance of traditional opera and ICH in traditional culture. ICH inheritor cultivation is an important way to ensure the continuity and vitality of ICH [10]. Take Ningbo Opera as an example, recruiting Ningbo Opera students regularly every year to expand the new force for the Ningbo Opera inheritors. To achieve the echelon cultivation of traditional opera ICH inheritors, to avoid the situation of a succession gap. The government has allocated special funds to provide a certain amount of living allowance for the new students of traditional opera and ICH, so as to solve the worries of the new students of traditional opera and ICH. At the same time, improve the salary of traditional opera and ICH inheritors, so that the traditional opera and ICH industry gradually become high skills have a high rate of return on salary. Let younger student is willing to devote themselves to the cause of sustainable protection of traditional opera and ICH, to rescue the endangered ICH to dedicate their own strength.

#### 4.2. To Develop Rural Characteristic Tourism Industry

The role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in promoting tourism is underestimated [11]. ICH can be combined with the tourism industry through appropriate strategies, and moderate commercialization methods are in line with the development of the experience economy [12]. This demonstrates that a major tactic for boosting the sustainable growth of ICH is the comprehensive integration of ICH with tourism. In order to boost the standard of living and tourism experience in rural regions, combine ICH and tourism in a profound way. Building a Ningbo Opera cultural experience area, a Ningbo Opera tourism block, a Ningbo Opera ICH Museum, a Ningbo Opera performance plaza, a Ningbo Opera study tour pavilion, a Ningbo Opera VR experience pavilion, as well as a Ningbo Opera performance hotel and restaurant are a few examples. The synergy of a storied narrative embedded within a virtual reconstruction context has high consumer appeal and edutainment value [13]. It increases the cultural value of rural tourism and eventually transforms into a landmark project that embodies all that is distinctive about rural tourism by giving visitors a chance to experience the essence of the original local qualities of art and culture. The sustainable development and protection of ICH can both be promoted through fostering economic growth of rural tourism.

#### 4.3. To Develop Rural Characteristic Cultural Industry

The integration of cultural creativity and tourism is a way to showcase different types of regional cultural heritage to the world [14]. With the acceleration of market evolution, people's material life is becoming richer and richer, and their needs are becoming more and more diversified [15]. The demand for products is no longer just functional, but also pays more attention to the feeling of spiritual level, and has higher requirements for the aesthetic value and cultural value of products themselves [15]. Combining with rural cultural businesses is another significant strategy for the sustainable protection of opera. To do this, traditional opera ICH is blended with regional handicrafts, folklore, and other elements, and ancillary products, cultural adaptations, and artistic creations infused with regional characteristics are launched in an effort to increase the market and influence of traditional opera ICH. Rural cultural businesses are able to reach out to the market and innovate, and they may give traditional opera a new energy and flavor.

In this process, they can collaborate with designers to design and produce artistic and cultural products that combine elements of both traditional opera and ICH. For instance, daily items like fans, handbags, notebooks, clothing, and other items that incorporate elements of classic opera from the ICH Ningbo Opera have both utilitarian and cultural value.

It is also possible to collaborate with producers, directors, screenwriters, etc. from the film and television industries to transform the classic opera ICH into movies, TV dramas, variety shows, films promoting culture, etc. These projects not only have value for viewing and entertainment but also for financial investment. Tiktok, Little Red Book, Weibo and other Internet new media are used for promotion and marketing to integrate traditional operas online and off, grow audience sizes and market share, establish a distinctive cultural and creative industry chain and value chain, establish an exclusive cultural brand for ICH and Ningbo Opera, transform traditional opera into a representative cultural symbol with regional characteristics, and provide people with the opportunity to have a more in-depth impression and understanding. It can also boost local consumption, encourage rural economic development through the development of ICH rural cultural and creative industries, and promote traditional Chinese opera. Rural communities gain from each of these advantages. This is a strategy aids in the sustainable protection of traditional Chinese opera ICH.



#### 4.4. To Promote Universal Education

In order to promote universal education in traditional opera and ICH, traditional opera and ICH need to be integrated into the national education system, and a series of measures need to be taken to support the sustainable protection and transmission of traditional opera and ICH in school education. Localities are encouraged to organize the preparation of ICH teaching materials for traditional opera ICH in accordance with the actual situation, so as to ensure that the contents of Ningbo Opera can be taught in a systematic and scientific manner. Taking Ningbo Opera as an example, primary and secondary schools should be encouraged to offer courses in Ningbo Opera to provide students with opportunities to interact and learn about it. In order to ensure the quality of teaching, there is a need to support the participation of ICH inheritors of Ningbo Opera in teaching and to strengthen the training of ICH teachers of Ningbo Opera. Plan to create special inheritance bases for Ningbo Opera ICH in primary and secondary schools to provide students with opportunities for practice and experience. Promote vocational colleges and universities to set up specializations related to Ningbo Opera and other traditional opera, providing students with more in-depth study and training. At the same time, guide social forces to invest and participate in Ningbo Opera education and training, providing students with more practical opportunities and learning resources. Strengthening the discipline system of traditional operatic ICH in colleges and universities and the professional construction of Ningbo Opera, a traditional opera ICH.

Local colleges and universities should fully tap into the folk Ningbo Opera teachers, not only looking for teachers among the older ICH inheritors, but also being able to broaden the teaching force among the young and middle-aged Ningbo Opera performers who are skilled in Ningbo Opera. This will help to alleviate the shortage of teachers in the process of passing on Ningbo Opera to the next generation. To create a team of teachers who can perform, create and teach Ningbo Opera. Cultivate more artistic talents in Ningbo Opera. Encourage more teachers and students to devote themselves to the sustainable protection of the intangible cultural heritage of Ningbo Opera. Provide training and counseling in the art of Ningbo Opera, explaining and performing the knowledge of Ningbo Opera. In order to enable more people to understand and learn about Ningbo Opera as an ICH traditional art. Provide talents for the performance and inheritance of Ningbo Opera.

#### 4.5. To Expand Performance Communication

Intangible cultural heritage is different from static cultural relics displayed in museums [16]. The forms of performance exchange should be diversified and by no means limited to theatre performances. Firstly, the method to encourage performance exchanges is the creation of a platform for interactions in conventional operas. The active organization of traditional opera festivals, exchange exhibitions, academic seminars, fellowship activities, exchange performances, and collaborative creations between traditional opera groups gives ICH opera artists a platform to present their work and share ideas, and it encourages mutually beneficial cooperation. Traditional opera companies can benefit from one another's experience, pool resources, and raise their level of performance and capacity for artistic innovation through collaboration and exchange. Traditional opera performers can benefit from and compete with one another through these events, and audiences can take in performances of many styles and genres of traditional opera. Additionally, it is important to improve internet platforms so that conventional Opera artists can collaborate and exchange ideas, as well as engage with viewers through webcasting, online seminars, and social media.

Secondly, enhancing interactions and exchanges with traditional opera forms from other regions and nations, such as Japanese Noh theater, Italian opera, and the Kabuki theater of Japan, can help traditional opera performances innovate and grow. Traditional opera artists can learn from the performance strategies, aesthetic components, and creative ideas of other traditional opera forms to

enrich their own artistic expressions and stylistic features by organizing traditional opera exchange activities, exchange performances, and co-productions. Encouraging the fusion and communication of many opera genres, giving classical opera performances more modern qualities and creative tension. Through participation in foreign art festivals, cultural exchange programs, and international co-productions, it may also showcase the distinctive charm of Ningbo Opera to audiences around the world. Traditional opera can also be marketed to the international stage with the aid of international platforms and channels in order to increase its aesthetic influence and popularity on a global scale.

In addition, in the conventional Opera category, there have also been a number of competitions for new works, performance competitions, and competitions for the creation of ICH audiovisual works. By holding these competitions, traditional opera ICH composers may, to some extent, be inspired to write works that are oriented toward cultural values, the spirit of the nation, and the spirit of the times, as well as the revitalization of the countryside, rural culture and life, and rural folklore and customs as creative materials to write works that are close to the lives of modern rural people. More people will be able to comprehend the rural regional customs and traditional opera ICH through these activities, which may also support the rural culture's spirit and strategy for revitalization. It is possible to use the performances, creations, and exchanges of Ningbo Opera through more channels to improve the artistic aesthetic level and the ideological and ethical realm of the countryside farmers in a broad way. This can be done by promoting the performances and creative competitions of Ningbo Opera in the countryside on the internet new media, expanding the ways of performing and creating exchanges of Ningbo Opera in the countryside with the help of the internet new media.

#### **4.6. Government Sectoral Linkage and Collaboration**

Through cooperation and synergy, government agencies may create a natural working system. With a similar objective in mind, the sustainable growth of traditional opera is successfully encouraged. To create a uniform working system, various government agencies should improve cooperation and communication. To ensure information sharing, resource sharing, and policy synergy, establish an inter-departmental collaboration mechanism encompassing a number of departments, such as culture, education, ICH, tourism, and agriculture. To create shared action plans and policy measures, coordinate the workload and responsibility allocation among various sectors, and promote cooperation and synergy among all parties, regular meetings will be held. To enable timely transmission and sharing of information, each department should establish an effective communication system, clearly identify their individual roles and duties, and implement the system. They should concentrate on combining theory and practice to develop a thorough grasp of the demands and circumstances of traditional opera ICH and to develop workable policies and solutions. Additionally, it should actively promote social forces' involvement and support, create a platform for collaboration between the government, the scientific community, business, and nonprofit organizations, and create a favorable environment for widespread engagement. In order to guarantee the successful execution of policies, monitoring and assessment of their implementation should be reinforced, and work strategies should be promptly altered and improved. Government departments can create an organic working system to jointly promote the sustainable protection of traditional opera ICH in order to achieve long-term results by strengthening communication and coordination, increasing investment support, strengthening supervision and management, and enhancing publicity and promotion.

#### **5. Conclusions**

After investigation and analysis, it was found that the inheritance group of Ningbo Opera is fewer and older, and the subsequent inheritance is relatively weak. The funding for inheritance activities is

limited, and there is a lack of diversity in inheritance methods, which poses a risk of gradual extinction. Therefore, it is urgent to find effective ways to inherit and protect. Given these circumstances, it is suggested to actively increase the number of new students, develop rural characteristic cultural industry, develop rural characteristic tourism industry, promote universal ICH education, expand performance communication, work with government departments as strategies for sustainable protection to achieve the sustainable development.

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