

# Exploring the Communication Strategy of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the New Media Context

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**Abstract:** As the pearl of China's intangible cultural heritage, there are still many difficulties in the development of opera. This paper takes Meilin opera of Sanming City, Fujian Province, as an example, analyzes the current situation of the inheritance of Meilin opera in the context of "Internet+", and compares it with the development of similar operas, and finally discusses the new strategies for the protection and development of intangible cultural heritage such as opera from the perspective of communication path and communication mechanism.

## 1. Introduction

Originated from Hui opera, Taining Meilin opera has a long history of more than 300 years, retaining the artistic characteristics of Hui opera and is integrated with local folk arts in Fujian. In 2006, Taining Meilin opera was listed as the first batch of "National Intangible Cultural Heritage", which is a rare physical heritage resource for studying the art of Hui school and exploring the history of Chinese opera.

However, according to Mr. Li Xiuzhen and Ms. Chen Canxia, the non-genetic inheritors of Meilin opera, in today's digitized society, the troupe is still mainly in the rural touring performance, the overall economic situation of the troupe's capital investment is not optimistic, talent training is yellow, and is even facing the danger and challenge of making the troupe unsustainable and the extinction of the genre.

## 2. Literature review

From the available literature, studies on the development and dissemination of Taining Meilin opera have some focuses: introducing protection policies, changing the dialect to Mandarin to make it more worth-seeing, designing cultural products such as gift boxes and nurturing elites, etc. In recent years, scholars have mostly focused on the innovation of traditional programs such as the performance system and art modeling of Meilin opera and have systematically researched techniques such as the steps of Lao Sheng opera, the neck work of three-flower in the roles of Chou and the duck-shaped step, as well as the mostly lost masterpieces such as spitting fire and

changing skirts (Feng Youcai, 2016).

At present, few scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on the media communication of Taining Meilin opera in the digital era. In this paper, we take the digital media communication of Meilin opera as the research object to explore the communication value, current situation and future communication methods of it in the context of "Internet+" full media era.

## 3. Communication dilemma of Meilin opera in the context of media change

The antiquity, rigidity, and ruggedness of the Taining Meilin opera make it both important in historical, cultural, aesthetic artistic and educational value (Xu Xiaoyan, 2015). As one of the first intangible cultural heritage projects, Meilin opera not only plays an important role in the study of Hui art and historical tracing, but also is a specimen of literary fusion where the cultures of the Central Plains and Min-Yue collide and combine and is an important literary resource for the study of Chinese folk aesthetics. In addition, the Meilin Drama Troupe of Taining was awarded the honor of "the first troupe in the world" in the activity of "unique local characteristics drama" by the Ministry of Culture of China. Its communication value is evident. However, 77.63% of the 219 respondents said they had never heard of Fujian Meilin Theatre, and 77.89% of them were Fujian household members.

### 3.1 Status of the dissemination of Taining Meilin opera

At present, the inheritance and dissemination of Meilin opera is mainly divided into two parts: online and offline,

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with offline as the main focus. First, the leading group for the protection of intangible cultural heritage of Taining County and the research group of Meilin opera are set up to hold regular protection seminars, excavating the characteristics of the genre, collecting ancient materials and rehearsing traditional plays. (Ding Xueqin, 2017) Second, a wide range of public performances are carried out in rural areas, communities and schools, and has been performed in other regions and countries like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. Third, young talents are needed. Only one official Weixin account “Taining Meilin opera” of Meilin Opera Art Heritage Protection Center was opened, releasing performance previews, introduction videos and fixing camera videos in a few related institutions media and self-media accounts.

But in today’s “Internet+” era, all elements of communication are changing.

Regarding the dissemination of non-heritage culture represented by Meilin opera in the “Internet+ era”, the author conducted an online questionnaire survey from October 3, 2022 to October 11, 2022, and a total of 219 valid questionnaires were collected. In terms of geography, it covers 17 provinces and cities in China, among which Fujian ranks first with 43.38%. In terms of gender, most respondents were female, accounting for 64.84%. In terms of age, most of them (73.97%) are in the age of 18 to 23. In terms of education and profession, those with bachelor's degree are the most numerous, accounting for 76.26%, followed by master's degree students (15.07%). Among them, those studying or engaged in humanities and social sciences accounted for 45.21%. Among the 219 valid questionnaires, 90.41% of the respondents said that intangible cultural heritage such as opera is currently facing modern communication difficulties.

With the establishment of the new media ecosystem, the absolute authority and leadership of traditional media has been weakened. Everything can be a “medium”. Gradually, professional media (including the traditional and the new), institutional media, self-published media, platform and machine are coexisting in the communication pattern.

The audience has also changed from “audience” to “user”. With the widespread use of the UGC model, individuals can edit, create and publish messages freely after receiving them. The secondary dissemination extends the reach of the message, and then a wider range of users again becomes the producer of the media product, and the message spreads exponentially.



**Figure 1** Change of communication audience

The demand triggers a revolution in imaging. With the development of technology, the content of communication has also shifted from the traditional single text, picture and sound to both audio and visual images (Cui Baoguo, Xu Lijun, Ding Mai 2021). Many theater companies have chosen to perform in a “split version” to meet the public’s preference for “short, frequently and fast”. However, the emergence of too many folding plays has led to controversies about the overall watchability of opera

books.

The questionnaire results show that 48.86% and 22.37% of the respondents generally learn about the non-heritage culture of opera through self-media user graphics and videos and social media. In the case of Taining Meilin opera, for example, the audience can only search and passively receive information on their own, and the opera propaganda is not a large-scale system, too single in form and channel and overly dependent on user autonomy, which is caught in a vicious circle of communication dilemma.

When the elements change, the previous means of communication are no longer applicable. Therefore, placing the Taining Meilin opera in the new media context has become an inevitable trend and a necessary path for the future development of non-heritage culture.

### 3.2 Conservation and dissemination measures of other drama genres of the same type

Along with the development of the Internet and digital media, local opera non-heritage cultural preservation units have gradually begun to modernize the new form of opera art communication.

**Table 1** Protection and dissemination measures of other operas of the same genre of Taining Meilin opera

Sichuan opera	French-style Sichuan opera <i>Jing Hua Yuan</i>	Combining traditional vocal and skills like “face-changing” and “water-sleeving” in Sichuan opera with French-style choreography and nonsensical lines.
	Game-style Sichuan opera <i>Dream Jianghu</i>	The plot and costume combine classic elements of Sichuan opera, giving the game the connotation.
	Promotional video <i>Dream Jianghu</i>	Jin Yong’s Jianghu world is interpreted by traditional forms of Sichuan opera.
Guangxi Wenchang, fishing drum opera, Cai diao, Guangxi opera	Digital Mass Art Gallery (digital album, virtual exhibition hall, etc.)	AI panoramic technology is adopted to experience the charm of opera performance online.
Qinqiang opera clubs: Jingju Theater Company of Beijing, Yi Su She, San Yi She	“Cloud live” payment model	Through the form of live broadcast, the transmission of the traditional stage is extended.
Peking opera <i>Spring Feast</i>	The first VR opera recorded in China	Breaking the boundary between virtue and reality, to build a sense of

		“immersive”.
Gao Jia Opera <i>Sister A Da</i> , Peking Opera <i>Mu Guiying</i> and <i>Zhao's Orphan</i>	Theatrical film	Breaking the “fourth wall” and create modern audio-visual effects.
Hunan Huagu Opera <i>Tinkering</i>	(micro) Anime <i>Tinkering</i>	Speeding up and refining the original meaning, according with the new media's transmission pattern.

#### 4. The two-track parallelism of the dissemination path of Taining Meilin opera

##### 4.1 The means of dissemination of Taining Meilin Opera

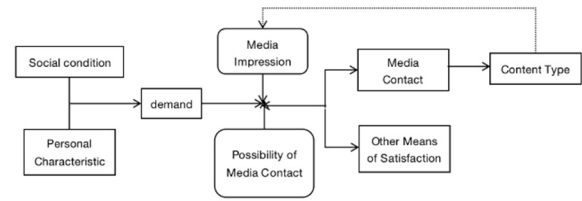
CNNIC's 49th Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China shows that in December 2021, the size of China's internet users reached 1.032 billion, and the Internet penetration rate reached 73.0%. Among internet users, the scale of video users was 975 million, accounting for 94.5%. The scale of short video users was 934 million, reaching 90.5% (2022).

From the above data, new media communication in China is increasingly flourishing, showing four main communication trends: mobile as the mainstream of information dissemination, social media as an important channel for news acquisition, media to achieve intelligent, segmented and accurate communication, and short video has become the latest form of information dissemination. Traditional media still occupy a dominant position, but online digital media and platforms have become the main segment of the media industry. (Cui Baoguo, 2021)

The development of the opera genre depends on cultural policy and environment. Based on this, online communication should be the primary focus to expand the influence and radiation of Taining Meilin opera. The interactive media matrix needs to be established to expand the Internet publicity space and communication channels of Meilin Opera. Besides, two-track parallelism can dig offline entity depth exchange program, to spread both breadth and depth.

##### 4.2 The dissemination effectiveness of Taining Meilin Opera

In *Personal Use of Mass Communication*, Katz et al. proposed a basic model of “Uses and Gratifications” in the process of contact between the public and the media, that is, the causal chain process of “social condition + personal characteristic → media expectations → satisfaction of demand”.



**Figure 2** “Uses and Gratifications” model diagram

Immordino-Yang's research suggests that opera is not only a tool for education, but also an alternative to experiencing and exploring real-life situations in a fictional setting. (van de Water Manon.2021)

Opera enriches audience's experience. Therefore, in terms of communication effectiveness, we should also focus on humanistic emotions in communication, audience's psychological needs, possible access to the communication channels and the enhancement of the contact experience to explore new possibilities of digital communication of opera in the “Internet+ era”.

#### 5. Communication Strategy of Taining Meilin Opera

In *Culture and Commitment*, Margaret Mead categorized human cultural transmission mechanisms into three types: pre- inter- and post-metaphorical cultures (Mead M., 1987). WMU added an information literacy module to the original theatre curriculum to familiarize students with the sources of theatre, (Sachs Dianna E. & Duffy IV Michael J., 2022) which is a typical pre-metaphorical cultural setting.

The questionnaire shows that the access of respondents to information in the current internet era is mainly focused on video (62.56%), audio (62.1%), knowledge communities (54.79%), social (54.34%), and short self-published videos (53.42%). It shows that the current forms of cultural communication are more concentrated in the mutual metaphorical culture of internet communities among peers and the former metaphorical culture from descendants to predecessors.

Therefore, the new strategy of communicating Meilin opera should be based on community communication on all platforms, supplemented by traditional authoritative media news reports and offline participation at the same time.

##### 5.1 Online Communication

###### 5.1.1 IP image construction and application

Firstly, we should let the virtual IP “live” in the form of graphics and videos on the social media platform.

There are two ways to build the virtual image of the IP. One is to extract the characteristic elements and refine the spirit, character-modeling, moves and makeup of Meilin opera players to enrich the character connotation of the IP image. For example, the “Jiang Ricai” portrayed by the inheritor Ms. Li Xiuzhen is strong with great personality value. The performance of the artist Wang Yaokang in “Half of a Ruyi” is humorous and vivid with his neck work

and duck walk. In addition, there is also a unique “three-dot red” makeup of Meilin opera. The IP image can also be made into expression packs containing the classic phrases in the play for social communication, so that more people can accept and spread the essence of Taining Meilin opera in a subtle way.

Secondly, we can create new IP stars by relying on classic IP genes. Based on the opera culture of Meilin opera, a series of virtual IP characters are formed with typical original ones, such as Cui Yunlong, Bian Yixiao, and Zhang Xuyu from “The Deprecated Official”.

### 5.1.2 Community

Unlike traditional media such as professional media organizations, the main body of social media is users, which is a tool and platform for people to share their opinions and experiences based on network technology. That is, to stimulate users’ desire to create, express and share, emphasizing interactivity, allowing users to enjoy the ability to create, to gather themselves into some kind of reading and listening community, and to realize the precise delivery of message preferences.

The establishment of the Taining Meilin opera community on various social media breaks the limit of geography, time and space, aggregating the scattered individual Meilin opera fans into a community with certain influence. They have an identity to share and recreate the opera with related peripheral, graphic and video resources within the community. In this way, more and more information about Meilin opera will be generated, which can form a secondary or even multiple dissemination with greater influence.

### 5.1.3 Being available in various video specifications, multi-platform linkage to produce a sensational effect

As a traditional opera genre, the modernization of Taining Meilin opera can be spread in both visual and auditory communication channels, choosing a combination of horizontal and vertical video screens or a combination of long and short videos, and developing output content strategies according to the characteristics of the platform.

Among the 100 most popular IOS apps, more than 90% are for vertical screen apps. Snapchat reports that the playback completion rate of full-screen vertical video ads on its platform is 9 times higher than that of horizontal ones. On Facebook, the use of vertical video can increase views by 130% and engagement by 4 times (Tencent Media Research Institute, 2019). This means that vertical video is the big trend of mobile terminals.

Compared with horizontal screens, vertical screens can bring a more natural and intimate feeling. Therefore, vertical videos with strong audio-visual impact should be the first thing to consider, which can be an overview and introduction of a theater company, with a simple structure, fast editing, high soundtrack and beautiful images, to play an “eye-catching” effect.

The global video creation platform can focus on favoring drama, documentary and science videos. Each

video should have a complete story structure and a plot with twists and turns to meet the expectations of the audience. The use of strong interactive means such as pop-ups can bring a sense of simultaneous participation. The advantage of the large number of expatriates in Fujian Province has, to a certain extent, satisfied the audience base and dissemination conditions for the overseas dissemination of Meilin opera.

The social media platform is not only a promotion channel for cultural products, but also has strong interactive features and relies on KOLs who have certain influence. Therefore, Meilin opera can seek cooperation with relevant KOLs and release a series of participation and experience videos with “I” as the main body for dissemination.

On (paid) live streaming platforms, Meilin opera’s stage is brought to the screen of mobile devices. The use of internet technology broadens the boundaries of traditional stages, reduces the cost of performance and theater-going, and gives audiences a different kind of theater-going experience.

Opera originated from the art of storytelling. Therefore, auditory communication should also be emphasized. Meilin opera plays, storytelling, historical commentary and song adaptations can be recorded through audio software such as podcasts, allowing users to hear Meilin opera anytime and anywhere.

### 5.1.4 Re-creation with animation, games, film integration

In the 1930s, Benjamin wrote in his book *Toward the Age of Fading Light* (2004) that “film can be analyzed in greater detail and reveal more dimensions of perspective than painting and theater can offer. Compared to stage theater, film is more amenable to analysis because it is easier to isolate the individual components.” (P.97) Therefore, the classic plays of Meilin opera can be expressed through the film language, breaking the “fourth wall”, presenting multi-view, multi-directional and three-dimensional audiovisual effects, increasing the sense of space and communication of modern opera, which allows for wider dissemination.

The results show that 90.41% of the respondents are willing to participate in opera games, among which 50.68% are strongly willing. Taining Meilin opera can rely on its own IP. With animation as the appearance and traditional stories as the core, it can refine the spiritual connotation of each character, and create roles rich in Meilin Opera characteristics. Gamification of the opera story is carried out, so that players can be transformed into opera characters and experience the beauty of Meilin opera in an immersive way.

### 5.1.5 Application of VR/AR technology

VR technology gives the power of viewing to audience, simulating various stimuli for people’s senses, trying to create a “complete space” that “surrounds the individual”, so that opera no longer stops at “imaginary reality”. Users can freely choose the viewing types, to get a “private



custom” stage opera viewing experience.

AR technology allows the AR experience to see both real and virtual images in a head-mounted device. Users can project the virtual opera stage to their own homes and outdoors to experience the “opera in front of them” without having to leave home.

Relying on the technical principle of VR and AR, the mobile device can create a 360-degree free viewing database of Taining Meilin opera, so that the cultural venues and resources database of opera can be visualized and freely presented.

## 5.2 Offline Communication

### 5.2.1 To research and develop peripheral cultural and creative products

The results show that 72.6% of the respondents have the willingness to purchase the cultural and creative peripheral of opera, but 52.51% of them think that the existing design is not impressive enough. The theater company can choose the currently coveted blind box and other practical peripheral products to cross the border co-branding, and carry out multi-dimensional and interactive promotion from production to sale on social self-media platforms, ultimately realizing the role of publicity and funds to feed Meilin opera.

### 5.2.2 Combination with emerging cultural industries

Currently, murder mystery games are very popular, which are of mixed quality, and excellent works rich in cultural connotation are urgently needed. The results show that 78.99% of the respondents are willing to participate in script killing or board games adapted from opera stories, and 38.81% of them said they are very willing. Therefore, the Taining Meilin Theatre Company can make new adaptations of opera stories into script-killing plays or tabletop games and provide traditional Meilin Theatre costumes to wear, allowing for an immersive experience.

### 5.2.3 Combining culture and tourism to enrich the reality experience

Fujian is famous for opera and tourism. The results of this study show that 93.15% of the respondents indicated that they are willing to experience non-heritage culture in person when traveling, among which 56.62% of them are strongly willing to do so. It is possible to reverse the road to the promotion of Meilin opera by promoting cultural tourism and non-heritage experience activities in and around Taining County, Sanming City, and releasing activities such as offline punching and on-site teaching of Meilin opera. In-depth study and hands-on experience of classic works can help regenerate the inheritance of Meilin opera.

## 6. Conclusion

China has a long history and a fruitful intangible cultural

heritage. “A good wind sends ‘intangible heritage’ to the clouds”. We are in the era of rapid development of “Internet+”, we should make good use of new means of communication brought by the times to create a communication chain, which integrates front-end design, content output and integration of the media matrix. We should implement a dual-track communication mode with online and offline linkage to complement each other, so as to promote the Meilin opera of Taining and even all intangible cultural heritage on the road of succession and development.

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