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Breaking Down Barriers and Symbiosis: An Analysis of the Dissemination Pathways of Qinqiang Opera in the Digital Age-Focusing on Synergies with Web Series

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Abstract: As one of China's oldest opera genres, Qinqiang carries the profound cultural memory and aesthetic traditions of the north-western region; however, in the contemporary era, it faces challenges such as a generational gap in its audience, limited dissemination channels, and a shrinking cultural ecosystem. This paper argues that the contemporary dissemination challenges faced by Qinqiang are essentially a product of the fragmentation of the dissemination ecosystem following the disintegration of the 'theatrical community', with the core contradiction lying in the tension between the 'presence' requirements of traditional opera and the 'disembodied' nature of digital media. Based on this, this paper proposes using 'web series collaboration' as a breakthrough point to explore pathways for the deep integration of Qinqiang and web series across three dimensions: narrative elements, aesthetic symbols, and production mechanisms. Concurrently, this collaborative strategy must generate synergies with short-video dissemination, digital preservation, and educational transmission to construct a multi-layered dissemination ecosystem. The contemporary dissemination of Qinqiang is not a 'downgraded accommodation' of tradition, but rather a creative practice of reconstructing cultural identity within the context of new media.

Keywords: Qinqiang; Dissemination of Traditional Culture; Web Series Collaboration; Media Convergence; Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

Originating in the Shaanxi-Gansu region, Qinqiang is renowned for its "passionate and stirring" style and "broad, resonant tones". As the progenitor of the Chinese Bangzi opera tradition, it boasts a history spanning several centuries. In 2006, Qinqiang was included in the first batch of the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage [1]. However, like many traditional opera forms, Qinqiang faces a severe crisis of survival in contemporary society: the decline of theatre troupes, an ageing audience, alienation among younger generations, and a shrinking space for dissemination. How to ensure that Qinqiang 'lives' in the present rather than merely 'exists' in archives has become an urgent issue for cultural inheritance [2].

In recent years, with the cross-genre success of opera films such as The Legend of the White Snake: Love and the successful collaboration between traditional and popular culture, the 'opera + web series' model has gradually entered the public consciousness. As the content format most familiar to the digital native generation, web series offer advantages such as flexible storytelling, rapid dissemination and strong interactivity. Can Qinqiang use web series as a vessel to sail into the field of vision of young audiences? This article will begin by examining the underlying logic of Qinqiang's dissemination challenges, systematically explore potential pathways for collaboration with web series, and construct a multi-layered framework for dissemination strategies.

2. Research Methods

In order to protect the correctness and understandability of this research, qualitative research method is used. Literature review and textual analysis are mainly used. The reason for choosing this method is because the subject of this study is the new investigation content. Because putting Qian Qiang and web series together is still a new phenomenon, the qualitative framework is most suitable for exploring the possibility of this cross-media cooperation mechanism, cultural concept and strategy.

Literature review refers to three main academic studies: (1) Chinese academic works about Qian

Qing and other traditional opera forms in history, aesthetics and modern communication [1][2][3][8]; (2) Western and Chinese media theories concerning media ecology, audience behaviour, and cultural transmission [4][5][6]; and (3) case study and Industry Report [7] on the content of the intersection of traditional performing arts and digital media content. These materials were collected from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Wanfang Data and Google Scholar. Use the words "Qinqiang", "traditional opera dissemination", "web series", "media convergence" and "cultural identity" when searching.

The analysis part of this paper examines both the primary material and the secondary material. The primary materials include representative Qinqiang performances (such as Zhou Ren Hui Mei, Sanyuan County) and web TV dramas with traditional opera elements (such as The Red Hibiscus by My Side). The secondary materials include reviews, SNS audience comments, and interviews with people in Qinqiang. The criterion for choosing cases is to give priority to works that can be imagined by many people and works that are skillfully combined with new methods. Because these works will give us detailed tips that are most helpful to analyze the strategy. However, this study has several shortcomings. First of all, because there is no direct questionnaire survey to the audience, and there is no survey of people's feelings actually seen, the method given here is only theoretical and needs to be confirmed. Secondly, the analysis of the article only uses the materials that everyone can see, and does not directly interview artists and creators of web TV dramas in Qinqiang, nor does it go to the field investigation. Finally, the result of this time is that in the current situation of China's specific culture and media, whether it can also be applied to other traditional arts and other regions needs more investigation. In the future, it is necessary to carry out practical research such as questionnaire survey to the audience, discussion group for a few people, and long-term follow-up investigation of information dissemination, so as to confirm and improve the strategy put forward here.

3. The Nature of the Dilemma: The Disintegration of the Theatre Community and the Disruption of the Dissemination Ecosystem

Understanding the contemporary predicament of Qinqiang cannot be simply attributed to the notion that 'young people do not like the old'. Such a judgement is both crude and unconstructive. We must ask: what changes have occurred in the cultural ecosystem upon which Qinqiang depends for its survival?

The dissemination of traditional Qinqiang is founded upon the 'theatrical community' [3]. In rural societies, the stage served as the village's public space, and performances were an integral part of social rituals such as festivals, temple fairs, and weddings and funerals. Audiences and performers shared a common cultural code: the emotions conveyed through the singing, the symbolism of the face paint, and the narrative logic of the stylised movements required no additional 'translation'. More importantly, the relationship between audience and performers was reciprocal-the audience's cheers, boos and even 'tips' (throwing money onto the stage) directly contributed to the unfolding of the performance. This 'presence' was not only central to the aesthetic experience, but also the driving force behind Qinqiang's continuous reinvention as a living art form.

The contemporary media environment has created a threefold rupture within this community. Firstly, a spatial rupture: the process of urbanisation has dismantled the rural theatre stages, whilst the professionalisation and ritualisation of urban theatres have, conversely, created a psychological distance. Second, a temporal rupture: the fast pace of urban life struggles to accommodate a full-length opera lasting three or four hours; the fragmented nature of modern schedules clashes with the complete narrative structure of traditional opera. Third, a semiotic rupture: young audiences lack training in interpreting traditional opera; the rhythmic variations, stylised movements and dialectal recitation in Qinqiang become a foreign language requiring 'translation', and the aesthetic threshold is perceived as a barrier rather than an attraction [1].

Consequently, the core issue in the dissemination of Qinqiang is not that the 'content is poor', but that the 'context has been lost'. Any effective dissemination strategy must be dedicated to reconstructing some form of 'community' within the new media environment-even if this community is virtual, fragmented, and transcends time and space.

4. The Theoretical Basis for Web Series Collaboration: From 'Media Compensation' to 'Cultural Translation'

Web series and traditional opera seem to be completely different media, but they have profound logic that complements each other. Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian correspondent, put forward "the medium is the message", emphasizing that the media itself shapes the view of things [4]. According to this idea, putting the network series and Qinqiang together is not only a transfer of content, but also a dialogue between the two viewpoints.

At the center of this conversation is an idea called media compensation. In media studies, compensation theory explains: "When a new medium appears [5], in order to make up for the shortcomings and limitations of the previous medium, other easy-to-use functions are often provided." During the spread of Qinqiang, web series acted as a compensatory medium in three aspects. First, time is complementary: it is difficult to concentrate on a complete Qinqiang performance for three to four hours, which is a luxury in today's urban life. However, web series is generally divided into 30 minutes to 45 minutes, which can only be seen when you want to watch it in your spare time, so it is in line with people's life rhythm now. Second, the venue is filled: everyone must gather in the previously stipulated theater venue, which is sometimes difficult to go because of the venue and money problems. However, web series can be seen anywhere as long as it uses mobile terminals, so there is almost no place restriction. The third is the supplement of participation: in the previous "theatrical community", the audience either voiced their opposition or expressed their opinions directly, and everyone was very happy to participate in it, but now such exchanges are rare in the official theaters of the city. Through the discussion between live-commenting (danmaku) and social media, web series restored the places that can be attended through user-generated content, and became a virtual "quasi-community" that echoes the interactive spirit of the traditional stage.

In addition, from the perspective of cultural communication, the essence of web series cooperation is a form of "cultural translation". Translation is not copying the original things exactly as they are, but looking for things with the same function in the new market [6]. The vocal styles, rhythmic patterns, face paint and stylised movements of Qinqiang opera must be transformed into organic aesthetic elements within the web series narrative, rather than being awkwardly inserted as 'cultural embellishments' for the sake of novelty. A successful integration should allow the audience to 'sense the presence of Qinqiang' whilst watching the web series, rather than simply being 'told of its existence'.

5. Specific Design of the Integration Approach: The Triple Fusion of Narrative, Symbolism and Production

5.1 Narrative Level: Qinqiang Elements as Plot Drivers

The most superficial form of integration is to use Qinqiang merely as a backdrop or gimmick, such as a character humming a few lines by chance or a theatre stage flashing briefly in a scene. This approach is unlikely to generate any genuine impact. Truly effective integration should see Qinqiang woven into the core narrative structure of the web series.

One viable approach is the 'professional drama' model: using a Qinqiang troupe as the narrative setting, with stories centred on the actors' training, competition, artistic heritage and personal lives. Japan's Vajrapani and China's the Red Hibiscus by My Side (a Peking Opera-themed series) have already provided successful precedents [7]. The value of such series lies in the fact that, whilst following the characters' destinies, the audience naturally acquires industry knowledge, aesthetic judgement and emotional identification. When viewers find themselves gripped by a character's struggle to master "a single line of singing that takes three years to perfect", the "craftsman's spirit" of Qinqiang has already achieved cross-media emotional transmission.

Another approach is 'genre fusion': embedding the aesthetic characteristics of Qinqiang into web series genres such as suspense, fantasy and youth dramas. For instance, the symbolic system of Qinqiang face paint (red for loyalty, purple for filial piety, black for righteousness, pink for the elderly) is itself a narrative code that can be used to visually represent character traits; the postures and weaponry of Qinqiang martial scenes can be transformed into stylised designs for action sequences; and the eerie vocal styles and percussion rhythms of Qinqiang's 'ghost plays' can create a unique auditory atmosphere for suspense dramas. The key lies in ensuring that these elements serve the narrative rather than merely showcasing tradition.

5.2 Symbolic Level: Constructing a Recognisable Qinqiang Aesthetic Identity

The visual language of web series centres on 'close-ups and editing', whilst the aesthetics of Qinqiang are built upon the continuous presentation of 'postures and conventions'. The fusion of the two requires finding a middle ground.

Visually, Qinqiang aesthetics can be systematically incorporated into costumes, make-up and set design. For instance, the patterns and colour schemes of characters' costumes could draw inspiration from the decorative language of Qinqiang stage attire, whilst being modernised, simplified and adapted for everyday contexts; elements such as plaques, screens and lighting in set design could incorporate allusions to Qinqiang plays or elements of face painting. The aim of these approaches is to allow the audience to subconsciously develop a familiarity with Qinqiang aesthetics.

On an auditory level, the 'orchestra' (musical ensemble) of Qinqiang music is highly distinctive. Qinqiang instruments such as the banhu, gongs and drums, and bangzi rhythms could be incorporated into the web series' soundtrack, whilst avoiding a direct replication of traditional opera accompaniment tracks. A more effective approach is to deconstruct and reconfigure Qinqiang's musical motifs-retaining their rhythmic patterns, timbral characteristics or melodic contours, whilst reorganising them according to the compositional logic of film and television scoring. For instance, in a climactic scene marked by an emotional outburst, one might gradually introduce an instrumental variation of the Qinqiang 'jianban' vocal style, rather than suddenly inserting a complete vocal passage. This 'subtle yet allusive' approach is more likely to stimulate the audience's curiosity and desire to explore.

5.3 Production Level: A Mechanism of Mutual Empowerment

Collaboration with web series should not merely be a one-way endeavour for Qinqiang to 'borrow a boat to sail the seas'; rather, it should become a cultural production practice characterised by mutual empowerment.

On the creative side, a 'Qinqiang Advisory' system could be established, inviting senior artists to participate in script discussions, performance coaching and musical design. However, these consultants can't just be "cultural labels". Really have to be involved in every creative decision. For example, they will help you decide what style of movements are suitable for the picture and what kind of songs are suitable for the basis of expressing your mind. At the same time, young writers and directors should suggest going to the Shaanxi Opera Theatre to collect materials through field trips.

In terms of information dissemination, a "common special edition" can be launched in cooperation with the broadcast of online TV dramas. At the end of each episode, you can put in a 3-5 minute "Qinqiang Mini-Lesson" video. In this video, the actor who plays the role will introduce the elements of Qin Qiang that appear in this episode. You can open interactive activities such as 'Learn to Sing Qinqiang with the Characters' on the live commentary platform. Mash-up challenge of "Web Series × Qinqiang" can be published on short video platform. Through these methods, viewers will not only watch passively, but also actively participate. So it will take longer to spread joint activities.

Regarding the cultivation of talents, we will cooperate with the traditional opera school to hold a seminar on "The Adaptation of Opera for Film and Television". In this way, we can cultivate professionals who know Qinqiang, film and TV languages and can do many things. At the same time, provide film and television performance exercises for young Qinqiang actors, so that they can master "the power to show their talents in two places". That is, the whole play can be performed on the stage and detailed performances can be performed in front of the camera. Increasing the existing technology in this way can not only open up new job opportunities for actors, but also create talents for future cross-media cooperation.

6. Collaborative Strategies Beyond Cross-Media Integration: Building a Communication Ecosystem

Although web series collaborations represent the most imaginative dissemination pathway at present, they should not be regarded as the sole solution. The contemporary dissemination of Qinqiang requires the construction of a multi-layered ecosystem, with collaboration serving merely as a core node within it [5].

6.1 Short-Form Video Dissemination

Short-form video dissemination acts as an amplifier of the cross-promotion effect. Content generated during the broadcast of web series--such as Qinqiang excerpts, behind-the-scenes footage and actor interviews--can be edited into

15-60-second short videos for secondary distribution. Hashtag challenges and collaborative filming features on short-video platforms can encourage users to spontaneously produce UGC, forming a conversion funnel: 'watch the web series--scroll through short videos--learn the vocal styles--visit the theatre'.

6.2 Digital Preservation and Innovative Presentation

Digital preservation and innovative presentation form the foundational support. Projects such as high-definition digital recordings of classic Qinqiang plays, holographic performances, and VR immersive theatres not only hold archival value but also provide a repository of materials and technical expertise for web series production [1]. For instance, 'play-within-a-play' segments featured in web series can directly utilise high-quality performance footage preserved digitally.

6.3 Integration into the Education System

Integration into the education system is a long-term strategy. Introducing Qinqiang appreciation modules into primary and secondary school music curricula, and offering 'Qinqiang and Chinese Culture' courses as part of university general education, are key initiatives [8]. These educational practices can synergise with web series: when young people acquire a basic framework of understanding regarding Qinqiang in the classroom, they are more likely to experience aesthetic resonance rather than cultural alienation when watching the associated web series.

6.4 Reshaping the Theatre Experience

The reshaping of the theatre experience serves as a value anchor. The ultimate objective of all media dissemination should be to guide audiences into the theatre to experience the irreplaceable 'presence' [3] of Qinqiang. To this end, the theatres themselves must also undergo innovation: launching 'condensed' productions (60--90 minutes), organising pre-performance introductions and post-performance discussions, reducing ticket prices and introducing student discounts, and creating immersive small-theatre experiences. The audience traffic generated by web series can only be transformed into genuine cultural identity within the theatre.

7. Conclusion: Rebuilding the Cultural Community in the Digital Age

The contemporary dissemination of Qinqiang is, in essence, a practice of rebuilding a 'cultural community' within a fragmented communication ecosystem. The strategic value of web series collaborations lies in their ability to reconstruct a low-threshold, highly interactive and participatory 'quasi-community' for Qinqiang within a media environment familiar to young audiences-where viewers discuss Qinqiang elements in the plot via live-stream comments, imitate vocal styles through short videos, and share their impressions on social media. These behaviours form a new social network centred on Qinqiang within the virtual space [5][6].

However, we must guard against a dangerous tendency: equating 'dissemination' with 'pandering', and 'innovation' with 'de-traditionalisation'. The charm of Qinqiang lies precisely in its unyielding 'stubbornness'-that roar that pierces the heavens, that unfiltered intensity of emotion, and that texture of life rooted in the Loess Plateau. These qualities are not obstacles to dissemination, but rather its assets. The integration with web series is not intended to transform Qinqiang into an 'idol drama disguised as traditional opera', but rather to find its functional place within contemporary narratives whilst respecting the aesthetic core of Qinqiang.

It must be acknowledged that this study remains theoretical in nature: no audience survey or dissemination-effect verification has yet been conducted. The proposed pathways and strategies, while grounded in established media theories and case precedents, require empirical validation through future research. Future studies should focus on the following areas: Firstly, conducting empirical research into audience reception, using methods such as questionnaires and focus groups to understand the genuine feedback of audiences of different age groups regarding cross-media collaboration strategies; Secondly, tracking the long-term effects of such collaborations to assess the conversion rate and sustainability of the 'watch web series-visit the theatre' pathway; Third, exploring the potential applications of AI-generated content (AIGC) in the dissemination of Qinqiang, such as AI-assisted vocal training and virtual actor performances of Qinqiang.

The powerful vocals of Qinqiang once resounded through every ravine and hilltop of the Northwest; they were the voice of the land and the voice of the people. In the digital age, they can still pierce through the barrier of the screen and resonate

anew in the soil of new media. This requires not a melancholic guardianship of tradition, but creative transformation and courageous efforts to break down barriers.

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