

The Preservation and Transmission of Gannan Tea Picking Opera Knowledge After the Cultural Revolution in 1949

Junyong Chang¹ & Weerayut Seekhunlio¹

¹ College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Correspondence: Weerayut Seekhunlio, College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Mahasarakham, 44150, Thailand.

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Abstract

The study focuses on the preservation and transmission of Gannan Tea Picking Opera knowledge after the Cultural Revolution in 1949 using qualitative research methods such as interviews and observations with seven key informants. The following findings were obtained, which can be divided into three distinct periods: The tortuous development phase from 1949 to 1966 marked significant growth and development, with the establishment of specialized schools and the implementation of the “three reforms” contributing to knowledge transmission and preservation. The survival dilemma period from 1966 to 1976 during the Cultural Revolution imposed constraints on artistic expression, but the return of artists from rural areas and their role in recruiting apprentices supported the continuity of Gannan Tea Picking Opera. Finally, the Ganzhou Gannan Tea Picking Opera Troupe and educational institutions contributed to the revival of this traditional art form during the period of rebirth from 1976 to 2023. Retired artists continue to play a vital role in knowledge preservation and dissemination, reflecting the enduring resilience of Gannan Tea Picking Opera.

Keywords: preservation, transmission, knowledge, music education, Gannan Tea Picking Opera

1. Introduction

The Gannan Tea Picking Opera is a regional kind of opera that has evolved through time from its roots in traditional folk songs and dances. The formation of this entity occurred during the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty. The subject under consideration possesses a historical lineage spanning over four centuries. The repository not only safeguards a substantial collection of traditional melodies but also amasses a diverse array of choreographic expressions crafted by artists across historical epochs. The distribution of this phenomenon is extensive, encompassing Ganzhou City, the northern region of Guangdong, as well as the eastern region of Guangdong and the western region of Fujian. The opera in question holds a prominent position among the indigenous operatic traditions of Jiangxi Province (Wang, 2006).

The Queen’s Mother of Xiabang Township in Ganxian County wrote the Gannan Tea Picking Opera. According to township genealogy, on the eve of collecting tea in the new year, there were historical rituals of singing tea songs and dancing with tea lights. To relieve fatigue, tea farmers used to sing folk songs while picking tea in the highlands. It evolved into the “December Tea Picking Song” during the Wanli dynasty of the Ming Dynasty when paired with bamboo instruments and singing. Gannan Tea Picking Operation Preservation:

First and foremost, related policies should be prioritized at the national level in China. The People’s Republic of China’s Cultural Development Planning Outline for the 11th Five-Year Plan period expresses the desire to disseminate an outline for the instruction of Chinese fine traditional culture, traditional classics, and hereditary skills throughout this era. As a result, administrations at all levels across the country are actively responding and taking strong efforts to ensure that this plan is successfully implemented.

During the time committed to the preservation and transmission of China’s “intangible cultural heritage,” Gannan Tea Picking Opera, an essential component of local operas, unquestionably has a significant position in the field of “intangible cultural heritage” conservation. It was named to the initial batch of intangible cultural treasures under the protection of the State Council in June 2006 (Huang, 2022).

Secondly, from the perspective of reform and opening up, there was an introduction of foreign music. With the advent of reform and opening up and the influx of popular music from abroad, the popularity of Gannan Tea

Picking Opera's music witnessed a sharp decline. Simultaneously, the aging of Chinese Tea Picking Opera music experts and the rapid development of modern cities have resulted in a shrinking performance market for Gannan Tea Picking Opera. This, in turn, has led to a shortage of performing talents and a decrease in capital investment (Xu, 2009).

Finally, the dwindling number of Gannan Tea Picking Opera musicians is a major source of worry. Aging folk artists in Gannan Tea Picking Opera music are becoming increasingly visible, resulting in a significant reduction in the pool of professional vocalists. To overcome this issue, we must perform rescue investigations, coordinate extensive sorting, conduct protective research, and develop targeted reform measures. These initiatives are critical to the survival of Gannan Tea Picking Opera music (Xu, 2017).

Furthermore, theoretical information about Gannan Tea Picking Opera music is still rather restricted. This scarcity limits the potential of Gannan Tea Picking Opera music and, by extension, the larger theoretical framework of Chinese national music performance art to survive. Such constraints impede the comprehensive growth and efficient teaching of Gannan Tea Picking Opera music and Chinese national music (Chang, 2017).

Based on the aforementioned information, it can be observed that there have been a limited number of comprehensive research outcomes since the inclusion of Gannan Tea Picking Opera Cultural in the national intangible cultural heritage protection list in 2006. This pertains to both the investigation of Gannan Tea Picking Opera itself and the exploration of its associated artistic elements. The Gannan Tea Picking Opera has been a significant cultural phenomenon since 1949, particularly within the context of Gannan's cultural landscape. The aforementioned cultural practice has been deeply ingrained in the Chinese population for an extensive period of time. The transmission of this knowledge is perpetuated from one generation to the next in an ongoing manner. The objective of this study is to conduct research and promote the preservation of Gannan Tea Picking Opera through the use of anthropological musicology methodologies. The Cultural Revolution in 1949 resulted in the emergence of Gannan Tea Picking Opera as a means to facilitate educational advancement and the acquisition of information. Furthermore, it serves as a means for the perpetuation of cultural practices.

2. Research objectives

To study the preservation and transmission of Gannan Tea Picking Opera knowledge after the Cultural Revolution in 1949.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The General Knowledge of Opera in China

Chinese opera primarily consists of three distinct aesthetic styles, including folk song and dance, rap, and burlesque. This art form has a long-standing history and can be traced back to its origins in song and dance. It has evolved into a full-stage art style over time. From the Han and Tang to the Song and Jin dynasties, a comprehensive form of artistic expression known as opera emerged, including several disciplines like literature, music, dance, fine arts, martial arts, acrobatics, and performing arts. This art form consisted of over 360 distinct genres. The phenomenon under consideration is distinguished by the amalgamation of several artistic forms within a standardized framework, therefore manifesting the distinctive traits of each form while exhibiting a shared essence. Over an extended period of growth and evolution, several forms of Chinese opera have emerged, including but not limited to Peking Opera, Yue Opera, Huangmei Opera, Pingju Opera, Henan Opera, and Gannan Tea Picking Opera (Wang, 2000).

3.2 The General Introduction of Gannan Tea Picking Opera

The Gannan Tea Picking Opera is an artistic manifestation that integrates several elements, such as music, dance, and opera, into a cohesive and multifaceted production. The central component of the Gannan Tea Picking Opera comprises the prevailing melody, encompassing an introduction, an initial song, and a statement tune. The performance is characterized by a complex amalgamation of its constituent elements, whereby the primary components consist of the opening song and the statement tune. However, these components are subject to modifications and alterations that are contingent upon artistic content and narrative development. According to recent research, Gannan Tea Picking Opera music has demonstrated a notable capacity for assimilating other art forms, hence enhancing its overall aesthetic depth and complexity. The rhythmic patterns in music exhibit variations in intensity, alternating between moments of heightened vigor. Simultaneously, the incorporation of singing, dancing, opera, and vocal melodies represents distinctive elements within the realm of Chinese traditional music. The term "tune" encompasses several elements, such as pitch, intensity, timbre, and shape, which are representative of the aesthetic notion of achieving harmony and oneness between humanity and the natural world. The examination of Gannan Tea Picking Opera music has revealed that several musical genres have the potential to

facilitate the dissemination of Chinese folk music and foster cultural interactions. The major objective is to disseminate traditional music in a manner that garners widespread acceptance, thereby enhancing its popularity among the younger demographic (Xu, 2009).

3.3 The General Knowledge About the Preservation of Opera in China

Traditional Chinese opera genres are often split into two groups, according to the National Local Opera Survey (2017): national opera and local opera. National opera is primarily concerned with worldwide communication, national performance, and a large audience, whereas local opera is concerned with a small audience. The number of spectators, the number of professional and amateur troupes of performers, and the proportion of youthful participants in the art form would be the so-called large and small categorization criteria (Yang, 2017).

Peking Opera, Yue Opera, Huangmei Opera, Pingju Opera, and Henan Opera are representative forms of theatrical performance that are widely showcased across many regions in China. There exist additional categories referred to as 'local opera', including a total of 348 distinct genres within the country of China. A total of 48 operas are scattered over a minimum of two provinces, known as 'trans-provincial opera' (kuasheng jūzhong), whereas 300 operas are only found inside a single province, referred to as 'provincial-unique opera' (shengnei duyōu jūzhong). Jiangxi Province is home to a diverse array of traditional local operas, encompassing a total of 33 distinct genres, of which five are recognized as trans-provincial operas. The Gannan Tea Picking Opera is classified as one of the 33 distinct regional operas within the region of Jiangxi Province. The objective of the development of 'new opera' is to enhance the performance and educational methodologies of opera, with a specific emphasis on the preservation and transmission of opera performance arts and instrumental methods (Huang, 2015).

Jiao Juyin's research on opera education and inheritance in China during her time in France was crucial. He concentrated on the development of young opera talents and authored articles on topics such as technical training, cultural education, and educational systems (Jiao, 1986). However, under the Communist Party leadership, the emphasis turned to state propaganda, resulting in a split in studies on opera education and inheritance. Huangmei Opera's performance market is still modest, and further research is needed to increase industrialization. Lanfang Mei of the Peking Opera defends and inherits the opera via word of mouth, media involvement, and new developments. Yue Opera's ancestors focused on improving society through government supervision and creativity. Pingju Opera has a 100-year history and measures for inheritance and protection (Zhang, 2014; Zhang, 2018; Lin, 2022; Ma, 2020; He, 2022).

3.4 Research Theory

In this study, researchers plan to conduct in-depth research on Gannan Tea Picking Opera using Chinese traditional music theory and ethnomusicology theory. In Chinese traditional music theory, studying traditional music forms is crucial. Studying Chinese traditional music structure is a form-focused field. The music culture is its structure, which has evolved over time to match its practices. Analyzing music structure from several perspectives may be used in traditional music (Xiao, 2020; Xu, 2002). Ethnomusicology is the study of music in various communities, focusing on the differences in musical qualities between cultures, regions, and nations. It investigates the links between music, geography, history, and culture, resulting in the compilation of regional musicologies and the development of music-related insights (Chen, 2006; Stone, 2015).

4. Methodology

This study on the preservation and transmission of Gannan Tea Picking Opera knowledge after the Cultural Revolution in 1949 will employ a research approach using qualitative methods. The methodology is structured as follows:

4.1 Literature Review

Undertake a comprehensive examination of pertinent scholarly literature, encompassing historical documents, academic publications, and archive resources pertaining to the Gannan Tea Picking Opera. This will serve as the fundamental basis for doing research and offer a historical backdrop.

4.2 Data Collection

The researcher gathers a diverse range of academic resources, both from historical and contemporary sources. This collection process involves a systematic search for relevant materials that including traditional Chinese music theory and ethnomusicology theory.

4.3 Fieldwork and Interviews

Conduct fieldwork, including interviews with key informants including Binmao Chen, Yujun Zhang, Yuying Huang, Meina Xiao, Yun Hong, Yanling Guo and Wei Lu, as well as surveys, to collect primary data. Engage with

artists, performers, and community members who are knowledgeable about the Gannan Tea Picking Opera. Take notes on their experiences and viewpoints.

4.4 In-Depth Data Analysis

The data collected from both the literature review and fieldwork undergo thorough analysis. This process involves identifying patterns, themes, and commonalities across the collected information. The researcher's objective is to uncover connections between different aspects of music theory and their implications.

4.5 Synthesis and Conclusions

In order to get relevant conclusions, the analysis from the fieldwork and literature study is combined. The goal of the research is to shed light on how various theories interact, what applications they have in real life, and how they affect music knowledge, preservation, and transmission.

5. Results

The result of the preservation and transmission of Gannan Tea Picking Opera knowledge after the cultural revolution in 1949 is divided into three sections: the tortuous development period from 1949 to 1966, the survival dilemma period from 1966 to 1976, and the period of rebirth from 1976 to 2023. From Gannan Tea Picking Opera into the city, out of the city, and then into the city, a detailed combination of the development of Gannan Tea Picking Opera cultural.

5.1 Tortuous Development Period from 1949 to 1966

Gannan Tea Picking Opera entered the city shortly after the People's Republic of China was established and quickly grew, with a particular emphasis on the preservation, transmission, and knowledge of this art form. Artists' standing rose substantially and they acquired public respect. As the number of academic students grew, special schools were developed to teach Gannan Tea Picking Opera, allowing the transmission of its skills and knowledge to the next generation. Several new plays were written during this time period, adding to the preservation of Gannan Tea Picking Opera. As a result, the popularity of Gannan Tea Picking Opera increased substantially.

The three reforms recommended by Liu Yilun in 2009 were important to this evolution. These 'three reforms' sought to alter the system, the people, and the opera. The traditional school system was transformed to provide dynamic institutional support and a solid foundation for the preservation and growth of Gannan Tea Picking Opera. Changing the people required a full change of the old Gannan Tea Picking Opera artists, developing a new generation of socialist successors and Gannan Tea Picking Opera knowledgeable inheritors. Changing the opera was concerned with modifying the ideological substance and cultural connotation of traditional Gannan Tea Picking Opera pieces in order to make them more life-oriented and capable of expressing truth, kindness, and beauty.

The Gannan Tea Picking Opera Troupe was founded as a result of three reforms that not only established specialized performance locations but also protected the income of artists, thus contributing to the preservation of their art. It also improved the quality of their performances. The establishment of Gannan Art School was critical in the development of a significant number of exceptional talents in Gannan Tea Picking Opera, such as Binmao Chen, Yujun Zhang, and Yuying Huang, who went on to become prominent researchers and actively contributed to the transmission of knowledge and skills in this art form.

In summary, Gannan Tea Picking Opera underwent exceptional development from 1949 to 1966, with a focus on preservation via dedicated performance spaces and transmission via specialized art schools. This era saw an improvement in the mental condition of performers as well as an improvement in the quality of performances, which contributed to the preservation and transmission of Gannan Tea Picking Opera knowledge and talent.

5.2 Survival Dilemma Period from 1966 to 1976

From 1966 to 1976, China began implementing its third and fourth five-year programs. What started out as an ideological critique turned into a Communist Party of China-led political campaign. The Central Committee's issuing of the 5-6-1 notice marked the beginning of a decade-long period known as the Cultural Revolution, which imposed enormous difficulties on the Party and the people. This era saw a severe reduction in creative expression, with the Hundred Flowers Campaign giving place to a period of cultural censorship. Only the eight Peking Opera model operas developed by Jiang Qing were allowed to dominate the theatrical stage. This condition has a significant influence on the preservation, transmission, and knowledge growth of Gannan Tea Picking Opera.

Gannan Tea Picking Opera artists were sent to rural locations during the Cultural Revolution. According to Chen Binmao, those who enjoyed Gannan Tea Picking Opera and had a taste of rural life found it fulfilling. Not everyone was transported to the countryside; only the young and unmarried without family responsibilities were sent. In

1968, these assigned entertainers gradually reappeared, with luminaries like Li Baochun and Zeng Qing among the first. Interestingly, instead of returning to the Ganzhou region tea-picking troupes, many returned to local troupes. These seasoned performers, who were skilled and experienced, played an important role in recruiting apprentices from many counties, contributing to the continuity and preservation of Gannan Tea Picking Opera.

Reflecting on the history of the Cultural Revolution, it is clear that the attempt to make Gannan Tea Picking Opera into a model opera violated the norms guiding the natural preservation, transmission, and knowledge development of this art form. Gannan Tea Picking Opera represents the artistic goals of the people of Gannan, and its future growth must preserve its grassroots and traditional beginnings. Gannan Tea Picking Opera can only grow and evolve in a healthy manner if it stays true to its roots.

5.3 Period of Rebirth from 1976 to 2023

Gannan Tea Picking Opera, which had been published after the creation of New China, was sadly destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution, which had spanned millions of lives, came to an end with the eventual demise of the Gang of Four. The Ganzhou Gannan Tea Picking Opera Troupe wowed fans once more when the Gannan Tea Picking Opera made its way back into the city. Furthermore, Ganzhou Art School welcomed a new generation of students eager to study and pass on this art form.

The Ganzhou Drama Studio edited and printed Gannan Tea Picking Opera Music in 1982, which Jinggao Zhang, Dingquan Zhong, Dingming Chen, and Ping Lin collaborated on. This publication is one of the precious materials contributing to the preservation, transmission, and knowledge of Gannan Tea Picking Opera, and it serves as an important reference for this study.

In essence, retiring performers such as Binmao Chen, Yujun Zhang, Yuying Huang, and others continue to devote themselves to the preservation, transmission, and dissemination of knowledge about Gannan Tea Picking Opera to future generations. Their presence is regularly observed in Ganzhou, Ganxian County, Anyuan County, and other locations. They not only raise the performance standards of Gannan Tea Picking Opera via their serious and enthusiastic performances, but they also greatly contribute to raising awareness, protecting, and developing Gannan Tea Picking Opera learning and teaching (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Gannan Tea Picking Opera “Cha Tongge” (Source: Junyong Chang)

Table 1. Chronology of the different period of Gannan Tea Picking Opera

Period	Factors	The development	Effects of the development
1600-1644	Tea Culture and Song	Gannan Tea Picking Song	Tea mountain
1644-1912	Lamp culture and dance	Gannan Tea Picking Lamp	Festival and celebration
1912-1949	Song, dance and opera	Gannan Tea Picking Opera	New Year, birthdays, and strolling through the streets
1949-1966	Music, dance and opera	Three reforms (People Opera System)	Performs throughout the country
1966-1976	Model operas	Peking Opera	Urban and rural areas
1976-2023	Music, dance and opera	Gannan Tea Picking Opera	All celebrations

Table 1 provides a chronological overview of the different periods in the evolution of Gannan Tea Picking Opera,

emphasizing the key factors, the development trajectory, and the consequential effects during each period. It provides a structured look at the evolution and transformation of this traditional art form over time, casting light on the historical context and its influence on Gannan Tea Picking Opera's preservation, transmission, and overall dissemination of knowledge.

6. Discussion

The preservation of Gannan Tea Picking Opera entails a comprehensive strategy that integrates many tactics with the objective of protecting its abundant cultural heritage. The aforementioned techniques encompass the provision of mentoring to facilitate the transmission of the art form, the thorough documentation of performances, the provision of assistance to educational institutions, and the integration of the art form with current platforms. These combined endeavors contribute to the cultivation and safeguarding of this invaluable cultural asset. Nevertheless, the safeguarding of Gannan Tea Picking Opera cannot be entrusted to individuals or groups. It necessitates a collaborative endeavor that encompasses governmental support and proactive engagement from the community.

One of the notable problems encountered in this undertaking is the need to adjust to changing preferences and successfully connect with emerging cohorts while maintaining an unwavering commitment to conventional values and customs. Ensuring an optimal equilibrium between the preservation of tradition, the transmission of skills and knowledge, and the cultivation of a profound comprehension of its cultural value is of utmost importance for the sustained pertinence and vitality of the subject matter.

The preservation efforts indicated are consistent with the findings of much research concentrating on the specific components of Gannan Tea Picking Opera. Wang's research emphasizes the vital need for preserving this one-of-a-kind creative expression, highlighting its intergenerational continuity (Wang, 2015).

In addition, Lei Guo's thorough textbook on Gannan Tea Picking Dance, released in 2013, dives into the dance form's historical history, stylistic components, and distinguishing features. Guo's work contributes significantly to the preservation of both the dance form and the cultural setting and traditions it reflects (Guo, 2013).

The structural qualities of the aria in Gannan Tea Picking Opera were thoroughly examined, with a focus on the "three tunes and one tone" framework and the use of the Hakka dialect as an efficient way of transferring cultural information. Xu's research emphasizes the need to conserve not just the musical qualities but also the cultural complexities that are entwined with them (Xu, 2009). Chen's comprehensive examination of the distinctive musical features inside Gannan Tea Picking Opera emphasizes the need to conserve these melodic qualities that are essential to the art form's uniqueness (Chen, 2012).

Furthermore, Gannan Tea Picking Opera has used digital media to reach a larger audience. However, in a world of technological developments and shifting preferences, preserving the Gannan Tea Picking Opera's tradition remains a critical priority for Jiangxi's growth. Digital technology provides more efficient and exciting paths for growth in a variety of fields. This article investigates the role of digital technology in the progress of western districts, with the goal of creating a tea-picking opera system that is linked with promotional goals. An initiative like this might help young people discover and appreciate tea-picking opera (Fang et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the continued success of the Gannan Tea Picking Opera in preserving and transmitting its wisdom during the Cultural Revolution of 1949 is evident. The crucial roles of mentorship, documentation, and community engagement have been seen in preservation projects. The Gannan Tea Picking Opera has effectively adapted to the changing circumstances while maintaining its traditional heritage. The persistent obstacles to effectively involving younger generations in the preservation of cultural heritage are accompanied by potential possibilities arising from a resurgence of cultural interest and increased governmental backing. Maintaining a delicate equilibrium between tradition and innovation is crucial for ensuring the long-term prosperity of the subject in question. Academic research has generated significant insights. In conclusion, this expedition highlights the lasting significance of cultural legacy and the capacity to adjust in the face of transformation. The Gannan Tea Picking Opera demonstrates an ongoing process of evolution, which serves to safeguard the retention of its extensive knowledge.

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