

The Talent Problem of the Southern Glove Puppetry

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Abstract. In recent years, with the state's emphasis on intangible cultural heritage, the Southern Glove Puppetry (a form of Chinese folk theater) has also been included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in need of urgent rescue, and the problem of talent is the key to its development. Its mode of operation can be divided into two categories: state-controlled and folk organizations, and the talent problem involves the professional talents in the state-owned arts and cultural institutions controlled by the state, as well as the inheritors, private troupes, and autonomous practitioners included in the folk self-initiated organizations. From here, the article will discuss the current challenges faced by talents and seek solutions, with a view to further promoting the inheritance and development of the Southern Glove Puppetry.

Keywords: The Southern Glove Puppetry; Talent; State Control; Folk Organizations

1. Introduction

Glove Puppetry is a traditional form of Chinese puppetry, mostly performed with small puppets, and the actors tell the story by manipulating the puppets' movements, expressions and language. The performances have various functions, such as cultural inheritance, entertainment, and religious rituals. The Southern Glove Puppetry is a genre of Puppetry that originated in Fujian Province, China, and is mainly popular in Quanzhou and Jinjiang areas. Its history can be traced back to the Jin Dynasty, developed in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and in modern times it has been in a difficult situation due to the influence of national turmoil until the founding of New China. At present, the awareness of the protection of intangible cultural heritage has been strengthened, and the ancient folk art form of Southern Glove Puppetry has gradually attracted widespread attention.

Through field research and in-depth interviews, the study found that Its mode of operation can be divided into two categories: state-controlled and folk organizations, and talent involves the professional talents, the inheritors, private troupes, and autonomous practitioners. However, with the development of the times, it is also faced with talent shortages, talent loss, talent structure is unreasonable and talent incentive evaluation mechanism is not perfect and other talent problems, greatly restricting the development of the Southern Glove Puppetry, which has become a matter of urgency. China has made many useful attempts to build a talent team for the Southern Glove Puppetry, but there are obvious deficiencies. In state-controlled troupes, there are systemic drawbacks such as irrational selection systems and insufficient training of young actors, while practitioners in folk organizations also have talent challenges such as fragmented strength and fragmentation. The article tries to put forward specific solutions in terms of strengthening policy support, talent introduction and institutional reform, helping its inheritance and development, and also hoping to provide a reference for the inheritance of other non-legacy.

2. Talent status and challenges

Unlike tangible cultural heritage, non-legacy has a living nature, so it puts forward higher requirements for the construction of talent team, which requires more specialized, cross-field and practical composite talents. Based on the two major development models of the current Southern Glove Puppetry, the construction of its talent team includes troupe professionals, inheritors and independent operators.

2.1 Professional talents of state-run troupes

State-run troupes are usually cultural and artistic performance teams directly managed or indirectly guided by relevant government cultural departments, which belong to public institutions and are very strict in the selection and training of artists. Jinjiang City Palm Puppet Art Protection and Inheritance Center, established in 1953, is a state-run troupe that focuses on the promotion of the Southern Glove Puppetry.

2.1.1 Challenges of Talent Cultivation

Talent training for state-run theatre troupes is first admitted through independent student enrollment, then professionalized at the Quanzhou Art School, and finally returned to the theatre troupe. In 2004, the Shanghai Theatre Academy for the first time for the whole country to enroll undergraduate puppetry, the troupe also began to cooperate with the Shanghai Theatre, students admitted to the Shanghai Theatre can choose to sign an agreement to return to the troupe to work after completion of their studies. However, there are many challenges in this talent training process.

First of all, the troupe tends to recruit students in the primary or junior high school age group for the convenience of management, while the school year of Quanzhou Art School is as long as three years, five years, or even six years, coupled with the unique artistry of the Southern Glove Puppetry as a non-heritage item, which makes the students' experience of learning the opera boring, complicated, and time-consuming, and many of the students give up halfway through the course.

Secondly, in the initial training method, students graduated from the art school can be directly selected through the orientation to obtain a career title and enter the troupe; and with the reform of the system, students graduated from the art school now have to enter the troupe first to "bring the old with the new" for internships, and then select the best candidates to obtain the opportunity to transfer to the regular, which is essentially transformed into an examination. This transformation has also brought a certain degree of impact to the construction of the troupe's talent team, on the one hand, students in the internship period, low wages, are not allowed to take private work, the treatment is poor, the majority of people because of the difficulty to maintain the basic living expenses and leave; on the other hand, the troupe's transfer system is not perfect, some people have waited for eight years but did not get the opportunity to transfer. Therefore, after surviving the boring career of studying theater, the great uncertainty of the opportunity to be regularized also greatly quenched people's enthusiasm for learning theater, and the brain drain is serious.

In addition, there are also challenges in the cooperation between the troupe and the Shanghai Theater Academy to cultivate talents. Usually, after students take the art exam to enter the Shanghai Theater, the troupe will take the initiative to find these students to sign an agreement, which is mainly as follows: the troupe will be responsible for the student's tuition during the period of the university, but the student will have to come back to the troupe to work after finishing the study. But in essence the agreement does not constitute a contractual relationship, most students and parents to get rid of the shackles of the troupe will choose to pay for their own reading, refused to sign the agreement; and the legal effect of the agreement is also to be considered, some students signed the agreement will be attracted by the big city, after the completion of the study, do not follow the agreement, refused to return to the troupe to work, so the troupe fee to vigorously cultivate the talent, often gone, difficult to retain talent.

2.1.2 Institutional talent dilemma

The troupe is composed of administration, performance, orchestra, production, and specialized data storage, of which the production includes props, costumes and puppet head production. The troupe has high quality requirements for talents, and the construction of the talent team is faced with the problems of shortage of talents, irrational structure, and imperfect incentive mechanism.

A complete puppet show includes a series of processes such as puppet head carving, costume making, and action rehearsals, etc. The complicated content, wide coverage and ultra-high practicality are the key factors causing the shortage of talents, and the single way of training talents, which makes the knowledge level limited, is also an important reason. First of all, the performances

of state-run troupes are usually directly funded by the government, due to the lack of scriptwriters and directors in the troupes, especially the lack of veteran artists, which often leads to irrational distribution of funds, repertoire based on the refurbishment of old scripts and the direct purchase of new scripts, insufficient innovation, and difficulties in the inheritance of skills; second, the relevant professionals are extremely scarce, and most of the managers are halfway educated and lack professional knowledge of non-heritage management. In addition, with the development of science and social progress, the use of digital technology plays an critical role in the preservation and revitalization of non-heritage, but the slow cultivation of high-tech personnel, high cost and other factors that make a large gap, and the troupe's digital professionals can only complete a simple data storage work, and further digitized mining It is difficult to carry out.

Due to its state-owned nature, the state-run troupes of the Southern Glove Puppetry have an irrational talent structure. On the one hand, the troupes pay too much attention to the teaching of arts and cultural skills, the neglect of the market will lead to a tendency of homogenization of talent training. And the troupe is subject to more administrative interventions in management, which is not conducive to the timely adjustment of the troupe's talent configuration to adapt to market demand. On the other hand, with the passage of time, the disproportion between the social security enjoyed by retired persons within the troupe and the creative personnel engaged in artistic production will make it difficult for the troupe to attract and retain outstanding creative personnel. In addition, in the field of interpretation, the maintenance of the stability of the theater company may limit the continuous motivation of the performers to explore new and better combinations.

State-owned troupes, as public institutions, stable work limits the further development of talent, most people will enter the system to obtain the establishment as the ultimate goal, to go in to lie flat, hindering the innovative development of the troupe. Secondly, While the theater company provides lifetime security for its internal performers, the imperfections of its talent selection and incentive mechanism have also brought about larger talent problems. It is understood that the current troupe personnel is divided into four levels, directly from the art school out of the fourth level, each level of wages and salaries are different and across the difficulty of a single condition of advancement to the accumulation of awards. The competition system of the troupe is also unreasonable. Take for example, in the case of the competition of the carving skill of the puppet head, due to the lack of on-site assessment mechanism, some people will participate in the competition with the puppet head purchased from other carvers, thus losing the fairness of the competition.

2.2 Practitioners of Folk Organizations

The folk practitioners of the Southern Glove Puppetry are mainly inheritors, professionals of private troupes, and independent operators. They and the professionals of the state-run theater each play their own roles, complementing each other, and through a two-pronged approach, the Southern Glove Puppetry has been able to continue its legacy in the new era.

2.2.1 Dilemma of Inheritors

Inheritors usually refer to artists or experts with profound attainments and inheritance contributions in a certain intangible cultural heritage program, and are generally divided into four levels, namely, national, provincial, city and county levels, with different levels representing the influence of the inheritors engaged in the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The inheritors of the Southern Glove Puppetry are not only performers of this traditional art form, but are also responsible for teaching skills, training successors, as well as maintaining and carrying forward its artistic characteristics and cultural values. Therefore, the inheritors are also regarded as an important part of the talents of the Southern Glove Puppetry.

ICH usually contains two main forms of existence: single and combined attributes, which in turn determine the identification of the inheritors. The identification of single-attribute ICH bearers takes into account the individual's historical inheritance and social prestige; the identification of comprehensive-attribute ICH bearers is relatively difficult, as it mainly involves dividing important cultural links from the culture as a whole in order to identify the key persons. The Southern Glove

Puppetry is a form of cultural expression that synthesizes various aspects of performing arts, traditional handicrafts and social practices, and belongs to the ICH with comprehensive attributes. The performance of a puppet show contains many cultural links, among which puppet head carving and stage performance are the main cultural links, and the recognition of its inheritors is also mostly from the group of people mastering the skills in these two aspects to select the most culturally authoritative intellectuals. For example, Ms. Cai Meina, who has conducted in-depth research on the characterization and performance of the Southern School of Puppetry, is the Representative Inheritor of Fujian Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, this is only a public default determination of the principle, and there is no actual, written and standardized determination process. If you want to become an heir, you only need to exist as an heir to write your name into the inheritance of the genealogy, and then submitted to the management of the Institute, there is no objection to the direct passage. This simple identification process gives some people the opportunity to speculate and cause confusion in the identification of the inheritor, which in the long run is not conducive to the inheritance and development of the Southern Glove Puppetry.

The inheritance of non-heritage skills is mostly continued by the two ways of passing down the skills from generation to generation and apprenticeship, but now the inheritance between the family and the master and apprentice can no longer meet the needs of the society for the non-heritage inheritors. On the one hand, with the development of society and the popularization of education, people are facing more opportunities and temptations. The carving of the head of the puppet in the Southern Glove Puppetry requires dozens of procedures, and it takes ten years to fully graduate from the master. For the skills passed down from generation to generation, the inheritors generally do not force their families to learn, and mostly focus on interest cultivation, making it difficult to ensure that the skills are passed on to the next generation. On the other hand, "inheritor" belongs to a kind of honorary title, and is not considered a national establishment, although the government will give a certain amount of subsidies to the inheritors, but this subsidy is quite limited, most of the inheritors need to earn their own living. Only by solving objective problems such as capital, place and time can the tradition of apprentices be continued. Moreover, the non-hereditary inheritance is mostly taught by word of mouth, even if the inheritors upload their own work video to the network for people interested in non-hereditary skills for self-study, but due to the lack of books and materials and the lack of high level people from the side of the guidance, learned is also very little. In addition, according to one of the inheritors of the Southern Glove Puppetry, although some schools will invite them to give public lectures, but the target is mostly primary and secondary school students, compared to students in higher education institutions specializing in art technology, the speech can only play a promotional effect, the role of talent training is not great.

2.2.2 The Dilemma of Professional Talents in Private Theater Troupes

With the wave of reform and opening up, private troupes have developed, and their core feature is to realize self-sufficiency while providing spiritual products. Initially, due to the lax approval of private troupes by the relevant government departments, the management mechanism is not sound, which makes the private troupes larger in volume, the quality is difficult to guarantee, and the troupes are scattered and unsystematic. Without government financial support, private troupes have difficulty in cultivating talents, and there are fewer actors who are really qualified to work in the field. At the same time, the lack of good actors, making the industry, "high-paying poachers" phenomenon, actors frequently jump ship in a large number of cases, not conducive to the construction of the troupe's talent team. According to the survey, there are less than ten private troupes in Quanzhou City, and most of them are in the countryside, and the situation is difficult, which also brings impact on the growth of the talent team of the Southern Glove Puppetry.

2.2.3 Dilemma of independent operators

In addition to the inheritors and troupe professionals, the power of private autonomous operators should not be underestimated. They play a prominent role in the inheritance and promotion of intangible cultural heritage by establishing personal workshops, working as volunteers, and

conducting academic research, etc. Unlike professionally trained talents, most of them are amateurs or have skills related to this intangible cultural heritage, and have made great contributions in promoting the modernization and innovation of the Southern Glove Puppetry. For example, with the development of modern technology, there are machine-carved and 3D-printed puppet heads, most of which are now used in theater performances, solving the time-consuming and labor-intensive problem of hand-carved puppet heads. Another example is the Puppet Bookstore located in Quanzhou City, which introduces knowledge about puppets to the public and tourists, and leads them to experience the coloring of the puppet heads and the production of costumes, etc. There they can even experience controlling the puppets themselves, which is a win-win business model that realizes both economic and social benefits.

However, because most of the independent operators are creative talents, they also need to have modern business operation capabilities such as marketing, project management, etc. At the same time, the lack of other forces to support the individual operators, the difficulty of operation, and the inability to meet the need for comprehensive training of talents, so these talents in the field of traditional Glove Puppetry is relatively small. In addition, there are few academic materials in mainland China, and most of the materials come from Taiwan and overseas regions, which greatly limits the research and talent training of the Southern Glove Puppetry.

3. Countermeasures to solve the talent problem

The talent problem is conducive to solving the multiple challenges of inheritance faults, loss of audience, and lack of innovation that are currently being faced. Based on the above mentioned challenges, it is necessary to strengthen macro-control and micro-management to effectively solve the talent problem from various aspects.

3.1 Policy Leadership: Macro-control of the Southern Glove Puppetry

The government formulates policies for the folk organizations of the Southern Glove Puppetry, including economic support and spiritual care, which can not only transform the current difficult situation of private troupes and independent operators, standardize the market environment, and provide a good policy environment for the cultivation of talents; but also the government helps inheritors to cooperate with relevant cultural institutions, which is beneficial to changing the current awkward situation of inheritance. In addition, the local government can formulate relevant laws to regulate the founding of folk troupes and the identification of inheritors.

3.2 Systemic Innovation: Institutional Reform of the Southern Glove Puppetry

In June 2021, the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of State-Owned Cultural and Arts Troupes, which put forward a series of instructions. However, the institutional reform of state-run troupes is not an overnight solution, the need for specific issues to be analyzed specifically. For the South Glove Puppetry talent cultivation and institutional talent shortcomings of the institutional reform, the following points are proposed:

Change the mode of state-run troupe that rely entirely on government funding to operate, and implement institutional reforms that conform to the laws of artistic and economic development. It is necessary to increase confidence in the potential cultural needs of society, and to promote the initiative of theater troupes to develop the performance market and produce works of art that meet market demand. Meanwhile, there is a need to regulate incomes with obvious gradations, optimize the allocation of resources and improve the relevant selection and incentive mechanisms.

(ii) Transform the government's functions and establish a clean culture for theater troupes. The government should strengthen the macro-control that emphasizes both supervision and service, establish a unified hiring and assessment mechanism, adhere to the people-oriented principle, create a harmonious working environment, put an end to all the speculative and fairness-impairing behaviors, and protect the interests of all the actors and actresses.

(iii) Improve the mechanism of talent training, introduction, management, protection and reward. Standardize the process of talent training for the troupe, legislate for its protection, appropriately enhance the treatment of employees to be regularized, and improve the mechanism of regularization, while carrying out regular training and exchange activities for the troupe's employees, and implementing a rotational training system, so as to improve the quality of the talent team.

3.3 Cultivating the future: Revitalization of talents in the Southern Glove Puppetry

The public's cognition and participation is the social foundation for the protection of non-legacy. To promote the non-legacy into the community and non-legacy down to the countryside, which is helpful to unite the community to participate in the cultivation of talents of the Southern Glove Puppetry. At the same time, we should improve the education system of non-heritage, relying on comprehensive and art institutions to set up non-heritage-related theoretical courses with emphasis, universities, troupes and cultural institutions and other sectors of the community to strengthen the practical ability of students, and cultivate non-heritage talents with new ideas. In addition, to promote international and domestic exchanges and cooperation of outstanding talents, the government can formulate relevant policies to encourage and support the art groups and talents of the Southern Glove Puppetry to "go out" and participate in international art festivals and cultural exchange activities; the major opera schools and research institutions can promote the mutual learning and cooperation between different regions through academic exchanges and translations of overseas literature and materials, The major opera schools and research institutions can promote mutual learning and exchange between different regions and genres through academic exchanges and translation of overseas literature; they can also utilize modern information technology and digital media platforms, such as social media and online videos, to disseminate and exchange relevant information with fans of the Southern School of Opera in various places, and to promote the construction of talents in various aspects.

4. Summary

Talent is the key to the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The shortage of talents, loss of talents, irrational talent structure, and imperfect talent evaluation and incentive mechanism faced by the troupe talents, inheritors and independent operators under the two operation modes of state control and civil organizations of the Southern Glove Puppetry require the joint efforts of all sectors of the society in order to promote it to be better inherited and carried forward, and to contribute to the prosperity and development of the cause of intangible cultural heritage.

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