

Research on the Integration Strategy of Gaozhou Intangible Cultural Heritage Project Puppetry with Cultural and Tourism Development under the Perspective of the "Hundreds, Thousands, Tens of Thousands" Project

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Abstract: The high-quality development project of "hundreds of counties, thousands of towns, and tens of thousands of villages", abbreviated as the "Hundreds, Thousands, Tens of Thousands" project, is Guangdong's top project for high-quality development. It aims to promote high-quality development, accelerate the advancement of new urbanization, and promote the integration of urban and rural areas. Gaozhou puppetry, integrating with Cantonese opera art, showcases a profound historical heritage. This paper delves into the trend of combining tourism with intangible cultural heritage, analyzes the unique value of Gaozhou puppetry as a tourism resource and its significant role in enhancing the tourism experience, and proposes specific strategies for the integration of puppetry culture with tourism. This paper hopes to aid the development of Gaozhou's "Hundreds, Thousands, Tens of Thousands" project through the development of the Gaozhou intangible cultural heritage project, Gaozhou puppetry.

Keywords: "Hundreds, Thousands, Tens of Thousands" Project; Puppetry Culture; Cultural Tourism; Tourism Development

1. The Historical Evolution and Current Situation of Puppetry Culture

1.1 The Historical Evolution of Puppetry

Puppetry originated during the Han Dynasty and flourished during the Tang Dynasty. In the Han Dynasty, puppetry art already had a rudimentary form, mainly used for funerals and wedding celebrations. By the Song Dynasty, the performance forms of puppetry

had increased, including stick puppets, marionettes, mechanized puppets, as well as water puppets and flesh puppets, with content becoming more diverse [1]. Gaozhou puppetry, as a national intangible cultural heritage, showcases the unique folk culture of Gaozhou and even the western Guangdong region, reflecting the historical characteristics of ancient society, and also embodies the spiritual civilization and values of the people of Gaozhou. Overall, there are many puppetry troupes in the urban area and surrounding towns of Gaozhou, with singing styles and lyrics rich in local characteristics. The folk would spare no expense to invite a puppetry performance to add atmosphere during temple fairs, birthdays, or weddings, and it remains popular to this day.

1.2 The Current Development of Puppetry

1.2.1 Narrowing market for puppetry performances

With the impact of economic globalization and the diversification of cultural and entertainment options, people's ways of entertainment have changed, with television and the internet becoming mainstream. Due to the high cost of puppetry performances and the inability to guarantee income for puppet artists, some troupes find it difficult to sustain their livelihoods, gradually narrowing the market for performances.

1.2.2 Loss of puppet artists

According to puppet artists from the Gaozhou City Puppetry Training Institute, it is difficult to recruit artists nowadays, and there is a lack of dedicated training courses for puppet artists. At the same time, the training of puppet artists requires a long time, and the learning process is relatively complicated. Given that the income of puppet artists is generally low and

insufficient to meet living needs, the number of puppet artists is gradually decreasing [2].

1.2.3 Lack of innovation in repertoire

Interest in puppetry among the younger generation is gradually diminishing, with a lack of innovative talent to support new repertoires. The lack of financial and human resources investment in Gaozhou puppetry leads to a lack of development space for new works. Moreover, traditional Gaozhou puppetry plays often require coordination with puppet manipulation skills and performance forms, which are difficult, have a long learning curve, and limit the innovation and development of the repertoire.

2. Overview of the Cultural Tourism Industry

2.1 The Concept of Cultural Tourism

The cultural tourism industry, with its low consumption, high added value, and strong driving force for economic and social development, has become one of the most dynamic emerging industries today, and is the preferred choice for economic transformation in many countries. It relies on tourist attractions with rich cultural connotations,

allowing tourists to deeply experience local culture, and provides operators with consumption content for sightseeing and leisure.

Scholars believe that the current definition of the cultural tourism industry mainly includes three perspectives: definitions based on inclusion relationships, definitions from the perspective of constituent elements, and definitions based on the combination aspect. The main difference lies in how to define the relationship among the cultural industry, tourism industry, and cultural tourism industry [3]. Most scholars regard culture and tourism as a mutually beneficial relationship, which, in essence, primarily manifests as the intrinsic connectivity between them. Culture endows tourism with profound connotations, while tourism becomes the carrier and pathway for the realization of cultural value [4].

2.2 Development and Current Situation of the Cultural Tourism Industry

The development of China's cultural and tourism industry began in the late 1970s and has mainly gone through four stages. (As shown in Figure 1)



Figure 1. Development of China's Cultural Tourism Industry

Before the reform and opening up, the tourism industry had not yet shown the characteristics of a modern industry. In 1978, along approval and publishing of the "Report on the Development of the Tourism Industry", the tourism industry entered a new industry nurturing period. With the continuous advancement of reform and opening up, sightseeing tourism developed rapidly, and the

cultural tourism industry grew quickly. In 2013, China emphasized the in-depth transmission of culture, integrating tourism more closely with culture. From 2018 to the present, the national policy has pointed out that it is necessary to insist on shaping tourism with culture and highlighting culture with tourism. It aims to improve the integrated development system of culture and tourism,

promote the integration of culture and tourism at a broader scope, deeper level, and higher quality, and advance the integration of industry forms, products, and markets in culture and tourism.

China has transformed from a country short of tourism into a major tourism country, with the general public becoming the main body of tourism consumption. This transformation has played a significant role in generating revenue, promoting consumption and employment creation, and enhancing international competitiveness [5].

2.3 The Trend of Integrating Cultural Tourism with Intangible Cultural Heritage

The cultural tourism industry holds a significant position in the modern economic system, and intangible cultural heritage (ICH), as a key element of "culture + tourism," shows great potential for integration. ICH represents the cultural accumulation of China's excellent traditional culture and is also an important resource for tourism, enriching the cultural connotations of tourism deeply. In recent years, ICH experiences have gained popularity and policy support in tourism, with various regions launching new ICH-themed tourism projects. In 2023, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a notice emphasizing the importance of deeply integrating ICH with tourism. The aim is to systematically protect ICH, promote high-quality development of the tourism industry, and better meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people. In the future, we need to further promote the integration of ICH + tourism on a broader scope, deeper level, and higher standard, allowing ICH to shine in tourism and injecting new vitality into the cultural tourism industry.

3. The Value of Puppetry in Cultural Tourism

3.1 Puppetry Has Unique Performing Arts and Cultural Connotations

Puppetry, a treasure of traditional art, showcases profound cultural heritage. Its exquisite performing skills and unique presentation form add infinite charm to tourist destinations. Puppetry ingeniously integrates ICH with cultural tourism. While enjoying the exquisite performances, tourists can deeply feel the local history, culture, and ethnic

customs, enriching the cultural content of tourism and allowing tourists to appreciate the charm of culture during entertainment. Puppetry becomes an important tourist resource, bringing more humane care and cultural experience to tourist destinations, making travel more meaningful.

3.2 Puppetry Features Strong Interactivity and Participation

Puppetry performances often feature strong interactivity and participation, providing tourists with unique experiences. During the viewing process, audiences can appreciate the exquisite performance skills, participate in the performance, interact with the actors, and even operate the puppets by themselves. This deep participation not only offers tourists the opportunity to enjoy cultural entertainment but also allows them to be more engaged in the tourism activities, enhancing their memories of and affection for the destination.

3.3 Puppetry Has a Unique Effect on Enhancing Economic Benefits

The integration of tourism and culture not only enriches tourists' cultural experiences but also promotes the vigorous development of the local economy. The introduction of puppetry culture not only attracts many tourists to watch but also drives the prosperity of related industries such as accommodation, dining, and shopping. While enjoying puppetry, tourists can also experience the charm of local specialty products, making purchases as souvenirs, thereby injecting new vitality into the local economy. Moreover, the inheritance and development of puppetry culture also drive the development of the industry chain, including puppet making and performance planning, creating more job opportunities locally and achieving a win-win situation for culture and economy.

4. Strategies for Integrating Puppetry Culture with Tourism

4.1 Coordinated Progress in Mechanism Improvement, Talent Cultivation, and Resource Integration

As an important part of intangible cultural heritage, the inheritance and protection of puppetry culture are crucial. To promote the deep integration of puppetry culture and the

tourism industry, coordinated progress in mechanism improvement, talent cultivation, and resource integration becomes key.

Firstly, perfecting the inheritance mechanism is central [6]. By evaluating and recognizing, providing a solid foundation for influential puppetry inheritors, and establishing inheritance bases, encouraging inheritors to conduct public teaching activities to expand the inheritor community, ensures orderly succession work.

Secondly, strengthening talent cultivation is fundamental. Higher education and vocational training should take on the responsibility of nurturing newcomers by setting up puppetry-related majors or courses to train professional performers, scriptwriters, and technical talents. At the same time, by organizing puppetry performances, lectures, and exhibitions, and other popularization activities, it enhances public awareness and interest in puppetry, cultivating more enthusiasts for puppetry culture.

Lastly, integrating resources from all parties is an important means. Governments, enterprises, and social organizations should work together to provide comprehensive support for the inheritance of puppetry culture and talent cultivation. Through resource sharing and complementary advantages, jointly promote the inheritance and development of puppetry culture, injecting new vitality into the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

4.2 Promoting Innovation in Puppetry Performance Forms and Content

4.2.1 Innovation in puppetry performance forms

(1) Enhanced Interactivity: Traditional puppetry performances are performer-centered, with audiences only able to watch. Innovating puppetry could involve adding interactive elements, such as inviting audience members to manipulate the puppets on stage, setting up audience votes to decide the direction of the plot, encouraging active participation in the performance.

(2) Diversified Performance Spaces: Beyond traditional stage performances, exploring performances in schools [7], communities, public squares, and other diversified spaces can attract audiences of different ages.

(3) Flash Performances: Setting up short,

impactful puppetry flash performances at popular spots or rest areas where tourists pass by can quickly grab their attention and enhance their visiting pleasure.

4.2.2 Content innovation:

(1) Integration of Local Features: Combining puppetry with the local culture of the scenic area, telling local historical legends and folk stories, showcasing unique local charm, and increasing tourists' understanding of the area.

(2) Adaptation of Contemporary Stories: Selecting popular films, fairy tales, or socially hot topics for puppetry adaptation, presenting them to the audience in a more modern, understandable way.

4.2.3 Promoting the integration of Gaozhou puppetry with tourism culture

(1) Enriched Cultural Connotations of Tourism: As a representative of local culture, Gaozhou puppetry, when integrated with tourism culture, can enrich the cultural content of tourism, providing tourists with a diverse range of experiences.

(2) New Pathways for Heritage and Development: Through tourism promotion, Gaozhou puppetry can be more widely disseminated and promoted, opening new paths for its heritage and development. At the same time, integration with tourism can also provide puppet artists with more employment opportunities and sources of income.

4.3 Expanding the Tourism Market and Audience Base for Puppetry

4.3.1 Analysis of the tourism market potential of Gaozhou puppetry

(1) Cultural Uniqueness: As a local intangible cultural heritage, Gaozhou puppetry possesses unique artistic charm and profound cultural heritage.

(2) Tourist Attraction: Puppetry performances, integrating traditional skills and folk stories, with their vivid performance style and exquisite puppets, have a strong appeal to tourists [8], becoming a major highlight of the tourism destination.

(3) Market Promotion Potential: By organizing puppetry cultural festivals, themed exhibitions, and other activities, further promote Gaozhou puppetry, enhance its fame and influence in the domestic and international tourism market, and attract more visitors.

4.3.2 Strategies to expand the audience base for Gaozhou puppetry

(1) **Diversified Performance Content:** Combine local historical stories and modern themes to create diverse puppetry performance content.

(2) **Innovative Performance Forms:** Incorporate modern technological means [9], such as AR, VR, etc., to provide tourists with an immersive viewing experience, enhancing their participation and immersion in puppetry.

(3) **Interactive Experience Projects:** Set up puppet making workshops and performance stages, allowing tourists to make and perform puppetry by themselves, enhancing their engagement and experience.

4.3.3 Promoting the deep integration of Gaozhou puppetry culture with the tourism industry

(1) **Cultural Product Development:** Develop a series of cultural products themed around Gaozhou puppetry, such as souvenirs, books, and film and television works, to meet the diverse needs of tourists.

(2) **Tourism Activity Planning:** Plan various tourism activities around Gaozhou puppetry, such as cultural festivals, performance competitions, workshops, etc., to increase tourist participation and experience.

(3) **Industry Chain Extension:** With Gaozhou puppetry at the core, extend the industry chain to develop related tourism products and services, such as puppet making experiences, traditional culture lectures, etc., enriching the tourism content.

5. Conclusion

Puppetry, originating in the Han Dynasty and flourishing in the Tang Dynasty, is a treasure of Chinese culture. However, it currently faces challenges such as the interruption of skill transmission and the loss of traditional repertoires in the modern entertainment tide. Fortunately, the booming development of cultural tourism has injected new vitality into it. This paper delves into the application and impact of puppetry in the tourism field, finding that it can add profound cultural connotations and artistic charm to cultural tourism, aiding the prosperity of the tourism industry and promoting cultural inheritance. To promote the integration of puppetry culture with tourism, corresponding strategies need to be implemented to push its innovative development. Faced with market challenges and opportunities, puppetry needs to keep pace

with the times and innovate continuously to rejuvenate itself.

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