

# On the Spreading Paths of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand

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**ABSTRACT.** *Chaozhou Opera, as an ancient Chinese opera, is selected in the first batch of the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China. This article first reviews the historical development of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand and then explores the effective paths for better communication of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand at the policy and practical levels.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Chaozhou Opera; Thailand; Spreading; Paths*

## 1. Introduction

With the full implementation of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Chinese culture has entered a new stage of “going out”, and Chaozhou Opera in Thailand is now facing new opportunities and challenges. In order to meet the requirements of the new era and better inherit and promote Chinese culture along the Silk Road Economic Belt, this study will explore the spreading paths of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand[1].

## 2. The Origin of Chaozhou Opera and Its Historical Development in Thailand

1)The Origin of Chaozhou Opera. Research on the origin of Chaozhou Opera has yielded fruitful results since the play scripts produced in the Ming Dynasty have been collected and well-organized both at home and abroad. In October 1985, Five Chaozhou Operas in the Ming Dynasty was published by Guangdong People's Publishing House. It examined the relationship between Chaozhou Opera and Nanxi (also known as the Southern Opera) from the perspective of the opera history in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, and indicated that Chaozhou Opera was originally of pupai style, a fixed melody used in traditional Chinese music with particular literary rules and meters, and then formed its own style based on the local folk tunes and dances of the Chaozhou region under the influence of Nanxi in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. As early as in the Ming Dynasty, there were many folk tales adapted for Chaozhou plays[Hanxing Chen. 2003.On the Origin of Chaozhou Opera. Shantou: Journal of Shantou University.].

2)The Historical Development of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. Under the

influence of political, economic, and historical factors, Chaozhou Opera has experienced four stages of development in Thailand: nascence, prosperity, depression and revival[2].

The first stage is the nascence of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. Chaozhou Opera was first introduced into Thailand during the 17th and 18th century. According to books written by Victor Purcell, a professor at the University of London, Warren Lubel and other scholars, as well as records in Thailand, Chaozhou Opera was spread to Siam before 1767, known as the late Ayutthaya Period [Qingxia Chen. 2012. Study on Development and Evolution of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. Chongqing: Chongqing University.

The second stage is the prosperity of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. Chaozhou Opera was in its prime in Thailand during the 1920s-1940s. The moderate politics of Thailand had boosted overseas Chinese identity with this country. The third stage is the depression of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. The spread of Chaozhou Opera faced a serious downturn in Thailand with a sharp decline in the number of the opera troupes when Southeast Asian countries were gradually occupied by Japan after the outbreak of the World War II. The fourth stage is the revival of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. On July 1, 1975, Thailand and China established formal diplomatic relations, expressing the strong desire of the two governments and peoples to develop cordial relations and continue the long-time exchanges between the two countries. Chaozhou Opera in Thailand began to usher in a period of gradual revival.

### **3. The Spreading Paths of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand**

#### ***3.1 At the Policy Level***

In the cultural sharing system based on the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, the government serves as the leading force in the spread of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand, and can give sufficient support in terms of policies, laws and systems to advance the overseas development of Chaozhou Opera.

Building up a Cultural Communication Platform. The successful spread and development of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand is inseparable from the tradition of friendly exchanges between China and Thailand. In 2013, General Secretary Xi proposed the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative. On the other hand, Thailand takes an active part in the construction of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), promotes the synergy between its own development strategies, including the Thailand 4.0 and the Eastern Economic Corridor. The two countries' relationship has ushered in a new era, providing a great opportunity for the spread and development of Chaozhou Opera.

Revising the Copyright Law. The Chinese government should further improve and revise copyright laws and regulations to create a fair and scientifically regulated environment for the "going out" of Chinese culture such as Chaozhou Opera.

**Improving the Copyright Agency Mechanism.** The Chinese government should strengthen the training of copyright brokers and improve the industry access mechanism according to market demand, so as to cultivate high-level and professional brokers, and provide sufficient well-qualified talents for the spread of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand.

**Establishing Communication Evaluation System.** The feedback and evaluation are considered to be important factors to test the effects of communication. It is urgent to establish a comprehensive evaluation and feedback system involving audiences, professional readers, translators, copyright brokers, overseas publishing houses, media and other related parties.

### ***3.2 At the Practical Level***

**Innovating the Contents of Chaozhou Opera.** Since the 1990s, under the strong impact of film, television, Internet and other forms of art and entertainment, the spread and development of Chaozhou Opera has been even more difficult in Thailand. Thus, it is in urgent need of content innovation, market subdivision and the cultivation of potential audiences and readers. Only by keeping pace with the times can Chaozhou Opera better meet the real needs of the Thai Chaoshanese and other Chinese people living in Thailand, and lay a solid foundation for their sustainable development in Thailand.

**Chaozhou Opera needs to be localized.** Old play scripts and traditional operas find it difficult to meet the watching needs of Thai residents. However, the number of localized works of Chaozhou Opera is quite limited, which seriously impedes the spread of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand. Therefore, it is necessary to intensify efforts to cultivate the Chaozhou Opera writers in Thailand, and actively promote the production of works that meet the needs of Thai audiences so as to further expand the potential market in Thailand.

**Innovating the Spreading Mode of Chaozhou Opera.** In the era of mobile network when computers, smart phones and e-readers have become the three mainstream communication devices, relevant parties should actively expand the market of digital communication and create a multi-dimensional spreading mode that integrates text, stage performance, and film and television.

**Integrating Resources to Expand Spreading Channels.** In Thailand, organizations including international communication agencies, the Chinese Embassy in Thailand, international publishing groups, folk think tank forums, Tio Chew Association of Thailand and other non-governmental units should also be fully integrated and mobilized, so as to improve the “sense of existence” of Chaozhou Opera through various platforms and channels in an all-round and multi-level way.

## **4. Conclusion**

The time-honored Chaozhou Opera occupies a unique position in the minds of

Thai Chinese. It is the sustenance of the nostalgia and the link of national culture. The spread and development of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand has had a good start. In the long run, to enhance effective publication and spread of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand, it is necessary to establish a sound legal system and ensure the feasibility at the practical level.

The spread and development of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand now faces unprecedented historical opportunities. The BRI is an effective strategy for China to actively build a cooperative, peaceful and harmonious environment of international cooperation when the world pattern is undergoing complex changes, and it creates a great opportunity and external environment for China's deepening reform in an all-round way. In the process of spreading Chaozhou Opera in Thailand, all relevant parties, based on the principle of equal sharing, common prosperity and progress, should utilize various channels of communication such as the network in an effective and comprehensive way, rationally employ market business model, integrate internal and external resources, expand modern digital publishing, and construct a multi-dimensional and diversified communication system of Chaozhou Opera, so as to provide a strong guarantee for the dissemination of Chaozhou Opera in Thailand.

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