

Heritage and Identity of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia: An Area Studies Perspective

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Date: 2025-03-10T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

The regional-country methodology emphasizes research on specific countries or regions from a multidisciplinary perspective, which facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the inheritance of Chinese culture overseas and the construction of cultural identity. This article reviews the historical process of Guangdong Han Opera's introduction to Malaysia along the Maritime Silk Road and outlines the development of local troupes as well as the hidden traces of inheritance amidst temporal changes. The inheritance of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia represents a manifestation of clan power, a marker of Hakka identity, and an identification with Chinese culture. The inheritance of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia bears witness to the cultural exchange and transformation along the Maritime Silk Road; promoting the renewed overseas dissemination of Guangdong Han Opera can facilitate the international dissemination of excellent Chinese culture.

Full Text

Preamble

Inheritance and Identity of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia from a Regional-Country Perspective

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Abstract: The regional-country approach emphasizes multidisciplinary study of specific countries or regions, which facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the transmission of Chinese culture overseas and the construction of cultural identity. This article reviews the journey of Guangdong Han Opera's introduction to Malaysia via the Maritime Silk Road, outlines the development of local opera troupes, and examines the hidden traces of its transmission amid changing times. The inheritance of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia serves

as a manifestation of clan strength, a marker of Hakka identity, and an affirmation of Chinese culture. The transmission of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia bears witness to the cultural exchanges and transformations along the Maritime Silk Road, and promoting its renewed overseas dissemination can facilitate the international spread of outstanding Chinese culture.

Keywords: Maritime Silk Road, Cultural Inheritance, Hakka Culture, Chinese Opera, Cultural Identity

Chinese immigrants from Guangdong and Fujian coastal areas brought the traditional opera Guangdong Han Opera to Malaysia, which gradually developed into a Chinese opera culture with distinctive Malaysian Chinese characteristics. Southeast Asia constitutes a vital component of the Maritime Silk Road, where overseas Chinese communities have preserved traditional Chinese cultural practices, with opera forming an indispensable part of their inherited musical and dramatic heritage. Chinese opera was transmitted to Malaysia via the Maritime Silk Road, establishing an independent history of opera in the region. In Malaysia, Chinese-language opera serves dual functions of ritual worship and public entertainment, embodying the collective memory and cultural transmission of the Chinese community.

However, scholarly attention on the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese opera in Southeast Asia has concentrated on forms such as Cantonese opera, Teochew opera, Gaojia opera, and Gezai opera, as seen in works like Lai Bo-jiang' s *Survey of Chinese-Language Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1993) and *A Brief History of Guangdong Opera* (2001), Chen Hua' s *Survey of Overseas Teochew Opera* (1995-1997), and Xie Binchou' s *Pathways and Characteristics of Guangdong Opera' s Overseas Dissemination* (1996). These studies rarely address Guangdong Han Opera. Today, the transmission of Guangdong Han Opera in Southeast Asia has significantly declined, making it difficult to locate folk troupes and performers of research value. [The author visited major folk Cantonese opera, Teochew opera troupes, and Hakka associations in Malaysia between 2023-2024, observed opera performances at temple venues in Penang and Ipoh, but found no clues about current Guangdong Han Opera performances in Malaysia.]

Southeast Asia' s overseas Chinese society represents the survival and adaptation of Guangdong' s opera ecology, ethnic ecology, and linguistic ecology in foreign lands. Examining Guangdong Han Opera' s inheritance and dissemination in Malaysia from a regional-country perspective can reveal its relationship with Malaysian cultural policies and shifts in diaspora psychology, reflect on its journey as an immigrant art form, and illuminate its experiences and lessons learned, thereby revealing the processes of cultural fusion and multiple identity construction brought by Chinese immigrants. This contributes to deepening regional-country music studies.

This article is a phased research result of the major project "Theoretical and Practical Research on Chinese Art Folklore" (Project Number: 22ZD06) of the Na-

tional Social Fund Art Studies. [In this article, British Malaya before Malaysia's independence in 1957 is uniformly referred to as Malaysia. Malaysia as mentioned herein includes Singapore before its independence in 1965.]

1. Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia

Guangdong Han Opera, also known as Waijiang Opera, reached its peak in Chaozhou where it was regarded as the national opera, Confucian opera, and elegant opera. Performed in stage Mandarin, it was favored and praised by the scholar-official class for its higher artistic level compared to the “rustic local accent” of native Teochew opera [1]. Among common people, Waijiang music was believed to have the power to ward off evil spirits, so in folk ritual activities such as entering ancestral halls, housewarmings, market openings, and land purification, Waijiang opera was often performed before local operas to satisfy Chaozhou people's psychological aspirations [2]. Chaozhou, long the prefectural seat and the political, economic, and cultural center of eastern Guangdong, became a crucial node on the Maritime Silk Road as a major distribution center for goods from Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi due to its location at the Han River estuary. Guangdong Han Opera, rooted in Chaozhou with distinctive folk characteristics, was transmitted to Malaysia along the Maritime Silk Road by the Hakka community. Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia was not a closed self-transmission after arrival; through continuous personnel exchange and cultural interaction, it was constantly recognized and developed.

1.1. Introduction to Southeast Asia Along the Maritime Silk Road: The Initial Transmission Stage

Before 1900, although Chinese immigrants had arrived in Southeast Asian countries including Malaya, they remained at the bottom of society with no specialized folk opera performance organizations in Chinese communities. Around the Xinhai Revolution, due to social turmoil in Republican China, large-scale migration from Fujian and Guangdong to Southeast Asia significantly developed Guangdong Han Opera's transmission in Malaysia. Three factors contributed to this development: first, the noticeably increased number of Chinese immigrants in Malaysia formed a larger group for opera transmission; second, after settling, Hakka Chinese achieved economic development and gradually established religious worship venues, gaining more opportunities for folk entertainment related to their own ethnicity while securing livelihoods; finally, the Maritime Silk Road brought not only immigrants and trade but also continuous cultural exchange. With overseas Chinese economic development, Guangdong Han Opera performances became increasingly active in 1910s-1920s Malaysia, with growing numbers of troupes performing not only at temple festivals and street stages but also year-round in theaters and amusement parks. Hakka merchants in Southeast Asia invited Guangdong Han Opera, their “hometown opera,” to perform under clan association sponsorship.

Cultural exchange along the Maritime Silk Road greatly promoted Guangdong

Han Opera' s spread in Southeast Asia. In 1910 (Xuantong Year 2 of the Qing Dynasty), the Chaozhou Lao Sanduo Waijiang Troupe toured Southeast Asia for three years, reaching Malaysia and receiving warm welcome from overseas Chinese. The troupe featured complete role types, full costumes and props, with over 100 performers, presenting classic repertoires such as *Jiuyan Mountain* and *Xuejiao Swallows the Pearl*, featuring renowned artists including musician Guo Lianshou, young male role Cai Maisan, and clown role Lu Xingzhao [3]. At that time, the Nanyang Hakka Association' s National Music Department had just been established. With support from its director Zhang Yunqing, the department organized a Han Opera class and invited Lao Sanduo' s star performer Lan Yao (from Dapu Huliao) to serve as instructor. The Yuedong Waijiang "Xintiancai Troupe" was invited to perform in Malaya in 1922, and the "Rongtiancai Troupe" performed in Malaysia from 1923 to 1924. Its famous laosheng performer Qiu Junzeng remained in Malaysia, establishing a Han Opera qingban (pure singing group) and "zhongjun ban" (military band), further promoting Guangdong Han Opera' s spread within Malaysia' s Hakka cultural circles.

Under Guangdong Han Opera' s influence via the Silk Road, local Waijiang opera troupes began emerging in the 1910s. The "Yuyu Ruyue Society" was founded in Singapore in 1913 by Chen Zili as an amateur mass organization dedicated to performing Waijiang music and opera. Its mission was "to study Han Opera, preserve national essence, foster relationships, and assist in public welfare and charitable causes." The name "Yuyu" derived from the phrase "Dongshan silk and bamboo, with abundant leisure, thus named Yuyu" [4]. The society' s first performance was in 1922, with mature productions by 1927 [5]. Through generous funding from founding members and honorary presidents, Yuyu Society pioneered the development of local Waijiang opera troupes in the 1930s [6].

1.2. From "Lao Sanduo" to Ruyue Societies: Further Development and Prosperity of Local Troupes

Before the Pacific War, the Lao Sanduo Troupe returned to Southeast Asia for another tour, but this time failed to achieve expected success. They had to pawn their costumes, armor, and instruments to Zhang Yunqing, owner of "Dayu Pawnshop" and a Hakka community leader who was then director of the Nanyang Hakka Association' s National Music Department. Zhang transferred these Guangdong Han Opera performance props and instruments to the Hakka Association' s National Music Department for preservation [7]. The Hakka Association' s National Music Department Han Opera class once raised funds for the 1931 Yangtze River flood victims and for Chinese war refugees during the 1937 Sino-Japanese War. After Lao Sanduo Troupe disbanded, it absorbed talent to cultivate Hakka Han music and opera performers. In the 1930s, it recorded over 30 Han Opera and Han music records, sold throughout Southeast Asia and Guangdong' s eastern region. Although Lao Sanduo' s second Southeast Asia tour didn' t achieve expected profits, it inspired many amateur singing organizations in Malaysian Chinese settlements [8], such as "Liuyi Ruyue Society," "Taorong

Ruyue Society,” “Xinghua Ruyue Society,” and “Chaozhou Eight Counties Guild Hall.” Among them, Taorong Ruyue Society was named with the meaning “to cultivate character and promote harmonious unity,” with the mission “to focus on studying national music and Han Opera, promoting proper entertainment; fostering relationships and mutual assistance; and further seeking welfare for society and freedom and equality for the nation and ethnicity.”

[Figure 1: see original paper]: Taorong Ruyue Society Members Group Photo for Anniversary (1933)¹

¹The historical images of Taorong Ruyue Society’s Han Opera performances shown in this article are collected by the current Singapore Taorong Ruyue Society. See the official website of Taorong Ruyue Society: https://chinatownology.com/Thau_{yong}.html

From the 1930s to early 1940s, with stable social conditions and rising economy in Malaysia, plus further Chinese immigration, Malaysia entered a golden age for opera transmission. Guangdong Han Opera, along with Cantonese opera, Qiong opera, Teochew opera, and Gezai opera, achieved common prosperity. Opera troupes, repertoires, bands, costumes, and stage scenery further developed and improved. Exchange with opera troupes from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan promoted Guangdong Han Opera’s continuous development and progress in Malaysia.

After the 1929 establishment of the Singapore Nanyang Hakka Association, dozens of “Hakka Guild Halls” emerged in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries under its active mobilization [9]. These guild halls served as bonds for Hakka communities, undertaking social and cultural functions including assisting new immigrants, providing business networks, organizing community activities, safeguarding ethnic interests, and preserving and promoting Hakka culture. As an important component of Hakka culture with distinct Hakka characteristics, Guangdong Han Opera enabled Hakka people to express and strengthen their cultural identity through guild hall-organized opera performances and cultural activities, using Guangdong Han Opera as an important means to maintain and display Hakka identity. By organizing Guangdong Han Opera performances at temple fairs and community events, Hakka guild halls provided platforms for performance and dissemination, allowing it to continue and develop within Malaysia’s Hakka communities.

In the late 1930s, the Han Opera performance organization Taorong Ruyue Society’s reputation soared. During this period, Li Guanghua (xiaosheng), a famous amateur performer from Shantou Public Welfare Society, came to Taorong Ruyue Society as a guest performer, introducing the renowned Lai (Xuan) school of xiaosheng singing to Malaysia. At this time, Taorong Ruyue Society, due to its exquisite performances, recorded 44 albums of Waijiang opera, released by the HMV Gramophone Company. They also innovatively changed the traditional Waijiang opera stage layout by moving the four musicians seated at the center of the stage (“four-point gold”) to the side to improve viewing experience. During this period, Taorong Ruyue Society’s Waijiang opera perfor-

manances achieved great success. The society cared deeply about China, donating performance proceeds to Chinese people in need during the civil war. After the 1937 outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, Taorong Ruyue Society contributed performance income as war funds to the Chinese government, participating in various fundraising activities including the Malaysian Chinese Fundraising Arts Carnival and Guangdong Disaster Relief performances, contributing to the anti-Japanese struggle.

After 1945, with the end of the Pacific War and global peace, Chinese-language opera rapidly revived in Malaysia's Chinese communities, ushering in a brief prosperous period. In 1945, under the guidance of Han Opera artist Qiu Junzeng from the Lao Sanduo Troupe, individuals interested in Waijiang opera including Li Tiansheng, Dai Anchang, Fang Junzuo, Zhuo Jimin, and Liang Shaoxian regularly gathered to perform at the Perak Tin Merchants Association building. They cultivated their temperament through these activities and frequently performed publicly, continuing to attract traditional Chinese music enthusiasts and expanding the organization. As the Perak Tin Merchants Association venue became too narrow to meet the growing needs of music enthusiasts, they later moved to the Perak Jiaying Guild Hall, formally establishing the Perak Hakka Association National Music Society. As membership grew, the society hired Mr. Deng Liansan to guide string and wind instrument performance and Guangdong Han Opera singing. Besides performing for clan association activities, they also participated in charitable public welfare performances, with increasing performance opportunities. After the Pacific War, over 100 surviving Taorong Ruyue Society members reestablished the organization at a new location in 1946 and publicly performed two Waijiang opera shows on Carpenter Street. In 1947, Taorong Ruyue Society membership increased to over 200, with members year after year participating in charity performances, studying Waijiang music and opera, and recording albums, continuing to provide venues for Guangdong Han music and opera enthusiasts to learn, practice, and ultimately perform on stage.

In 1949, under the leadership of Mr. Qiu Qiao from the Perak Hakka Association, the Perak Hakka Association National Music Society voluntarily dissolved and, together with other Hakka music colleagues, established the Hakka Association Chinese Music Department. With strong support from advisor Mr. Liang Shuling, they united and cooperated, with increasing membership, continuous creation of new plays, and increased social charity performances, gaining growing reputation. The Chinese Music Department's public Han Opera performances spread throughout Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Tanjung Malim, Teluk Intan, Kuala Kangsar, Segamat, Batu Gajah, Red Mud Mountain, Ipoh, and other locations. Membership grew to over 60, with sound organization, abundant talent, and increasing assets in costumes, props, and stage scenery for Han Opera performances. From 1947 to 1966, Zheng Yisheng served as instructor guiding the "Muar Amateur Jinle Society," a specialized Guangdong Han Opera group, in transmission and performance activities.

Hakka guild halls provided crucial support for Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia by establishing Han music societies. These societies not only organized performances but also cultivated opera talents and conducted opera education and transmission. In immigrant societies with relatively limited resources, guild hall support was essential for opera's survival and development. They provided stable foundational conditions for personnel training and performances, helped cultivate a batch of opera performers and musicians, created performance opportunities at guild hall gatherings and charitable events, and maintained the continuation of this traditional art in Malaysia. As overseas organizations for Hakka people, Hakka guild halls maintained connections with other Hakka associations and clan organizations, forming a vast cultural exchange network. Through this network, Hakka guild halls disseminated Hakka culture in Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia, promoting cross-regional exchange and development of Guangdong Han Opera. This network also provided more opportunities and resources for opera performances, enabling Guangdong Han Opera to continue receiving promotion in Malaysia.

1.3. Changing Times: The Decline of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia

In the 1960s, while Chinese-language opera experienced a revival wave, Guangdong Han Opera encountered setbacks. During this period, although amateur opera movements flourished and commercial opera actively adapted to new social environments, Guangdong Han Opera failed to keep pace with this recovery.

Several factors contributed to this decline. First, Teochew opera troupes and schools rebranded themselves through Teochew opera films, leading to the decline of Waijiang opera. Teochew opera performed on streets for illiterate audiences, and Teochew opera films like *Su Liuniang* (1960) and *Gao Qinfu* (1962) became popular in Malaysia. Second, due to its "obscure and difficult to understand" nature, Waijiang opera teachers gradually decreased, and troupes like Taorong Ruyue Society switched to performing other opera genres. Additionally, Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965 severely weakened Chinese-language opera (including Guangdong Han Opera) in Malaysia, as resources and influence were concentrated in Singapore. At this time, Guangdong Han Opera's performance opportunities in Malaysia sharply decreased, its audience gradually dwindled, and its cultural status became increasingly marginalized.

Entering the 1980s, with Malaysia's rapid economic growth and diversified social and cultural development, Chinese cultural psychology and aesthetic preferences underwent significant changes. During this period, the traditional entertainment function of Chinese-language opera rapidly faded, with performance activities increasingly dependent on specific occasions such as religious festivals. In terms of subject matter, Guangdong Han Opera primarily consists of historical dramas drawn from ancient Chinese historical stories, with content "related to customs, worldly affairs, and national rise and fall," focusing on didacticism [10]. In terms of language and singing, compared to Cantonese opera performed in

Cantonese, Han Opera, sung in Mandarin, was considered “expert’ s work,” requiring good education in Chinese history and language to understand lyrics and scripts written purely in Mandarin, distancing it from ordinary people. In 1983 and 1991, under the invitation and promotion of the Nanyang Hakka Association and Singapore’ s National Theatre, the Guangdong Han Opera Theatre performed in Singapore [11]. Unlike independent Singapore, records of Guangdong Han Opera exchange and transmission in Malaysia since the 1980s are difficult to find.

Against this backdrop, operas like Puxian opera, Min opera, Liyuan opera, Western Fujian Han opera, and Guangdong Han opera nearly disappeared locally, leaving only Cantonese opera, Teochew opera, and Gezai opera to continue transmission in Malaysia due to their broad mass base.

2. Multiple Cultural Identities in the Inheritance of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia

Cultural identity answers the question “Who are we?” Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia serves as a spiritual bond uniting the Chinese community, and its constructed cultural identity in Malaysia’s multiethnic society can be understood at three levels:

2.1. Manifestation of Clan Strength

The circulation and continuation of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia is a direct manifestation of local Chinese clan strength. Historically, immigrants from Guangdong formed tight clan communities based on native place and dialect ties. These clans not only supported each other economically but also sought common spiritual sustenance culturally. Waijiang music was an art form familiar to officials, elites, and scholars, and Waijiang music/opera ultimately came to Southeast Asia with wealthy, educated Hakka and Teochew people, giving Guangdong Han Opera an elite class temperament [12]. Through collectively watching and participating in opera activities, clan members deepened emotional connections and strengthened internal clan identity and belonging. Therefore, Guangdong Han Opera’ s inheritance and development became an external expression of clan strength and solidarity.

Guangdong Han Opera performances in Malaysia served as a form of self-expression for Hakka Chinese (Hakka clan organizations). Competition often surrounded opera activities, sometimes even reaching confrontational levels. This competition was fully manifested between states, neighborhoods, and dialect organizations, particularly among different Chinese neighborhoods within the same state. Guangdong Han Opera performances provided a temporary but effective platform for clans to display their strength and honor, winning respect and recognition from other clans and community members. Psychologically, this expresses collective pride—a shared clan identity and pursuit of clan strength and status. Sociologically, performance activities during specific

periods constructed a tension-filled social field where clans demonstrated their economic, cultural, and social status achievements through collective participation and contribution. Through these performances, clans not only showcased economic strength and cultural heritage but also reinforced internal cohesion and members' sense of belonging. As a symbol of clan strength, Guangdong Han Opera not only demonstrated reverence for ancestral culture and tradition but also self-affirmed and displayed the clan's social status and influence.

Chinese distribution across Malaysian states was uneven, with Chinese settlements varying in economic development and political status. To demonstrate regional development advantages and obtain more positive "other" evaluations, Chinese communities showcased their strength through opera, lion dance, and other performances at important festivals. Therefore, the economic advantages of Chinese communities in Penang, Perak, Johor, and other states also brought local opera prosperity. Successful Chinese merchants and related Hakka clan associations would perform Guangdong Han Opera, this special cultural form, at temple ceremonies to display their own and their clan's strength. Such highly ethnic-symbolic opera performance behavior also easily attracted attention from the entire Chinese society nationwide.

In religious rituals, the number and selection of operas for deity worship could demonstrate a clan's strength and status. Malaysian Chinese displayed clan power and strength through opera performances for deity and ghost worship. Opera performance played an important role in clan rituals, serving not only as religious devotion but also as a symbol of clan status and power. During performances, individual Chinese contributions of opera as offerings actually displayed clan economic strength and cultural heritage before deities and ghosts. This behavior not only satisfied clan members' prayers to deities but also demonstrated clan wealth and unity to other community members. Through opera performance, clan authority was consolidated, and members' self-esteem and sense of belonging were enhanced.

2.2. Marker of Hakka Identity

In Malaysia's multiethnic society, Guangdong Han Opera, as an important component of Hakka culture, has become a crucial marker of Hakka ethnic identity. During migration, Hakka people brought not only their language, customs, and beliefs but also their distinctive local opera—Guangdong Han Opera. This opera form not only preserved the essence of Hakka culture but also became an important marker of Hakka ethnic identity in a foreign land. Through Guangdong Han Opera performances, Hakka people could display their cultural characteristics, distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups, and thereby strengthen internal ethnic identity and pride. Simultaneously, Guangdong Han Opera became an important bridge connecting Malaysian Hakka people with their ancestral homeland culture. For Hakka people who traveled far to Southeast Asia, Guangdong Han Opera represented cultural orthodoxy and hometown voice transmission. Thus, among the Hakka community, from merchants and

elites to common people, news of Guangdong Han Opera performances spread quickly, with many enthusiastic individuals donating money and goods to support hometown opera performances by Waijiang troupes visiting Southeast Asia. It can be said that Guangdong Han Opera allowed Hakka people to feel strong hometown atmosphere and cultural belonging even in foreign lands.

The inheritance and performance of Guangdong Han Opera in Malaysia, particularly ritual operas for deities, mainly concentrated in temples established by Hakka people, fully demonstrating its characteristic as a Hakka identity marker. As an ethnic group with unique cultural traditions and strong ethnic consciousness, Hakka people, after migrating to Malaysia, preserved their cultural characteristics and strengthened Hakka group cohesion and identity by organizing and supporting Guangdong Han Opera performances in temples.

These temples served not only as centers for religious belief but also as cultural and social hubs for Hakka communities. Opera performance activities continued and developed in these venues, becoming important components of Hakka worship and community activities. Through ritual opera performances in temples, Hakka people expressed respect for ancestors and deities while also using these occasions to display and transmit Hakka culture. Opera content often reflected Hakka lifestyles, values, and traditional customs such as loyalty, filial piety, integrity, diligence, and unity, which profoundly reflected Hakka culture.

Hakka Association's Han music societies provided important support for Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia. As cultural organizations for Hakka people, Han music societies played key roles in cultivating performers, organizing performances, and promoting Han Opera. This not only helped Guangdong Han Opera survive and develop in Malaysia but also strengthened Hakka group's cultural identity. Through Han music societies' efforts, Guangdong Han Opera was endowed with richer Hakka cultural connotations, becoming an important way for Hakka people to maintain cultural traditions and express ethnic identity overseas.

Therefore, Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia is not only a continuation of an art form but also an embodiment and marker of Hakka identity. Through ritual opera performances in temples and active support from Hakka guild halls, Han Opera became an important medium for Hakka people to maintain group identity and transmit cultural traditions. This inheritance method reflects Hakka people's perseverance and pride in their own culture and becomes their unique way to highlight Hakka identity in a multicultural society.

2.3. Belonging to Chinese Culture

Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia further strengthens the sense of belonging to Chinese culture. As a brilliant pearl in the treasure house of Chinese culture, Guangdong Han Opera carries rich historical culture and national sentiment. In multicultural Malaysia, Guangdong Han Opera's performance is not only a display and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture but also a

strong call for Chinese cultural belonging. Through watching and participating in Guangdong Han Opera performance activities, Malaysian Chinese can deeply feel the breadth, depth, and unique charm of Chinese culture, thereby strengthening their identification and belonging to Chinese culture. This strengthened sense of belonging not only helps maintain Chinese community's cultural identity and national confidence but also promotes the spread and exchange of Chinese culture in Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia.

In Guangdong Han Opera's dissemination and influence in Malaysia, we have witnessed its key role in promoting Chinese cultural identity. Malaysia, as a multicultural melting pot, integrates Islamic culture, Chinese culture, Indian culture, and Western culture, among others. As an important component of Chinese culture, Guangdong Han Opera is not only an important carrier for Chinese self-expression and ethnic identity but also a cultural marker distinguishing "our group" from "other groups."

Guangdong Han Opera performance activities in Malaysia represent concrete manifestations of profound identification with traditional Chinese culture. This identification covers not only tangible material cultural aspects like opera costumes and props but also deeply penetrates intangible spiritual culture, including lifestyle, customs, religious beliefs, values, psychological characteristics, and aesthetic tastes. Through opera performance customs passed down through generations, Chinese people demonstrate their perseverance and pride in their cultural roots, which is direct expression of cultural consciousness. Fei Xiaotong's advocated cultural consciousness finds vivid interpretation in Malaysian Chinese inheritance of Guangdong Han Opera. It not only promotes internal Chinese cultural identity but also lays foundations for understanding and respecting other ethnic groups' cultural consciousness, thereby helping construct a multicultural and coexisting social and cultural order.

Professor Liu Tieliang's concept of iconic culture provides strong support for understanding Guangdong Han Opera's cultural status in Malaysia. As a form of Chinese-language opera, Guangdong Han Opera not only reflects Chinese cultural contributions in Malaysia's special historical process but also collectively embodies Chinese collective character, common temperament, and inner vitality. Through opera performances, Chinese people can collectively recall, inherit, and strengthen their unique cultural traditions and cultural identity. This cultural practice becomes a bridge connecting past and present, individuals and groups, deepening internal ethnic cultural cohesion.

Through collectively participating in opera activities, Chinese community members strengthen their sense of ethnic belonging and cultural identity. This collective action based on common cultural symbols constructs an image of the Chinese community and also influences other races' perception and imagination of Chinese people and even Chinese culture.

3. Concluding Remarks

Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia bears witness to cultural exchange and transformation along the Maritime Silk Road. It is not only part of Chinese culture but also a product of multicultural blending along the Maritime Silk Road, embodying the complex process of cultural migration and fusion. This traditional opera's spread in Southeast Asia is not only a cultural transplantation brought by Chinese immigrants but also an important way for Chinese society to seek cultural belonging and identity in foreign environments. Through its manifestations at levels of clan, Hakka identity, and Chinese cultural identity, Guangdong Han Opera demonstrates its unique status in Malaysia's Chinese community. However, with accelerated modernization and multicultural impact, Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance and development in Malaysia faces severe challenges.

In multicultural Malaysia, where Islamic culture, Indian culture, Western culture, and other diverse cultural forms intertwine with Chinese culture, this multicultural impact places Chinese-language opera in an identity dilemma during localization, gradually weakening traditional opera's appeal. With the rise of modern art forms such as film, television, and the internet, traditional opera's entertainment function has been significantly weakened. Younger generations prefer fast, convenient entertainment, leading to an aging opera audience and broken transmission chains. Guangdong Han Opera's inheritance in Malaysia lacks systematic and scientific mechanisms. Older generation artists are gradually passing away, while younger generations show insufficient interest in opera, making it difficult for original Hakka associations to locate national music societies, resulting in difficult skill transmission.

To evoke Hakka ethnic memory and support the inheritance and utilization of Chinese cultural heritage, we should construct a contemporary new maritime cultural Silk Road to promote Guangdong Han Opera's overseas inheritance. To achieve this, we can use digital technology to comprehensively record and preserve Guangdong Han Opera, establishing digital resource libraries and transmission platforms. Through online teaching, virtual theaters, and other forms, we can broaden transmission channels and attract more young participants. Simultaneously, we should innovatively adapt and create Guangdong Han Opera works combining modern aesthetic trends and market demands. Through cross-border cooperation and integrating modern elements, we can enhance opera's appeal and competitiveness. Additionally, we can use new media tools like social media and short video platforms for widespread dissemination. We can also actively participate in international cultural exchange activities, strengthening exchange and cooperation with Southeast Asian and neighboring countries' opera arts. Through organizing international opera festivals and performance exchanges, we can display Guangdong Han Opera's unique charm and promote its overseas dissemination and development. Rebuilding Guangdong Han Opera's overseas transmission Silk Road and promoting its inheritance and development in overseas Chinese society can strengthen overseas Chinese identification

and confidence in Chinese culture.

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Author Contribution Statement:

Dong Bo: Proposed research topic, revised final manuscript version.

Jiang He: Implemented research process, acquired and analyzed data, drafted manuscript.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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