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**Safeguarding Chinese Traditional Local
Opera as Intangible Cultural Heritage:**

**A Study of Maoqiang Opera in
Shandong, China**

Chen Li

**A Thesis presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Music
Durham University
England**

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Abstract

There are more than 300 types of traditional local opera currently in existence in China, carrying the traditions, aesthetics, values and dialects of their localities and acting as a vibrant part of the local identity. However, they are generally not commercially viable and are dependent on government support for their survival. Maoqiang Opera, which is based in the rural area of southeast Shandong Province, is a prominent example. The opera has been in existence for over two hundred years but for the past seventy years has been primarily guided by government policies, which aim to keep the opera tradition alive while also encouraging appropriate modernisation. In 2006, Maoqiang Opera was designated as State-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by China's Ministry of Culture. In this context, the Maoqiang community claims that they obtained more official recognition of the significance of the culture and more subsidies for the inheritance of the artform.

Drawing upon fieldwork carried out in 2020, this thesis illuminates how government policies have influenced the inheritance, preservation, dissemination and development of Maoqiang Opera in contemporary Shandong society, particularly since its elevation to ICH status. The structure of the thesis is based on the policy framework for safeguarding Chinese traditional culture as ICH laid out by central government. This consists of four principal elements: *'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage'*, *'Carrying out Theatrical System Reform'*, *'Sending Opera to the Countryside'*, and *'Making Traditional Operas Represent Modern Life'*. This thesis argues that almost every aspect of Maoqiang Opera is profoundly affected by government policies and actions. It is government intervention that allows the opera to maintain vitality and contribute social value in today's China.

Romanisation

The Romanisation of Chinese terms and names in this dissertation uses the *pinyin* system, which is based on Mandarin pronunciation. Chinese names are given using the standard Chinese order, with family name first and given name second.

Declaration

The content of this dissertation is based on research carried out in the Music Department of the Art and Humanities Faculty, Durham University, UK. No part of this dissertation has previously been submitted for accreditation towards a degree in Durham or any other University.

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This thesis is the result of collective efforts, and I express my sincere gratitude to all of my informants and interviewees, including the many officials, scholars, scriptwriters, and performers with whom I have communicated and carried out interviews during this project. I am particularly thankful to the Maoqiang Opera performers Wang Yunting, Sun Hongjü, Niu Xigao, Wang Xühua, Zheng Shixing, and Xüe Lintao, from different troupes, who taught me the professional skills of Maoqiang Opera and shared their personal experiences. I am also indebted to the composer Huai Changjian, the scriptwriter Zhang Yüzhen, and the players in the various opera bands, Xü Qingli, Ge Pingjin, Zhao Congsheng, and Wang Zewen, for sharing, without reservation, their professional knowledge of Maoqiang music and Maoqiang culture. Special thanks go to Zhang Shoufeng, an official of the Wulian County Cultural and Tourism Bureau, and Li Xiangxue, the leader of the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe. They approved my application to join the Wulian Troupe and allowed me to travel and perform with the troupe in different local villages. I would also like to thank Mr. Frank Kouwenhoven, Prof. Jiang Ying, Dr. Su Dawei, Dr. Zhu Mengwen, Ms. Wang Ruyi, Mr. Dong Yanping, and the various members of the Durham Music Department for their suggestions and encouragement. Finally, I am extremely grateful to my parents. It is because of their unwavering and unconditional love and support that I am able to pursue my academic career without other worries. This thesis is my small gift, dedicated to the great traditional culture of China. I will never cease in my efforts to safeguard and disseminate the rich cultural and historical artefact that is Chinese opera.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Maoqiang Opera in Shandong Province

According to the National Local Opera Survey released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China on 26 December 2017, there were 348 local traditional Chinese operas on 31 August 2015.¹ Maoqiang Opera, in Shandong Province, is one such. It has a defining musical characteristic - an octave pitch raise on the last syllable of each line. Performances of this opera, which involve the use of local dialect, are still prevalent in the southeast peninsula area of Shandong (see Figure 1-1). The dissemination of Maoqiang culture is rooted mainly in rural areas of Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Qingdao, Wulian and Zhucheng (see Figure 1-2).



Figure 1-1. The red circle in the map shows the territory of the southeast Shandong peninsula.

¹ Data comes from the 'National Local Opera Survey' results, released by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism on 26 December 2017. https://www.mct.gov.cn/whzx/whyw/201712/t20171226_830165.htm

I have translated all the interviews and Chinese resources into English, and I take responsibility for any errors.

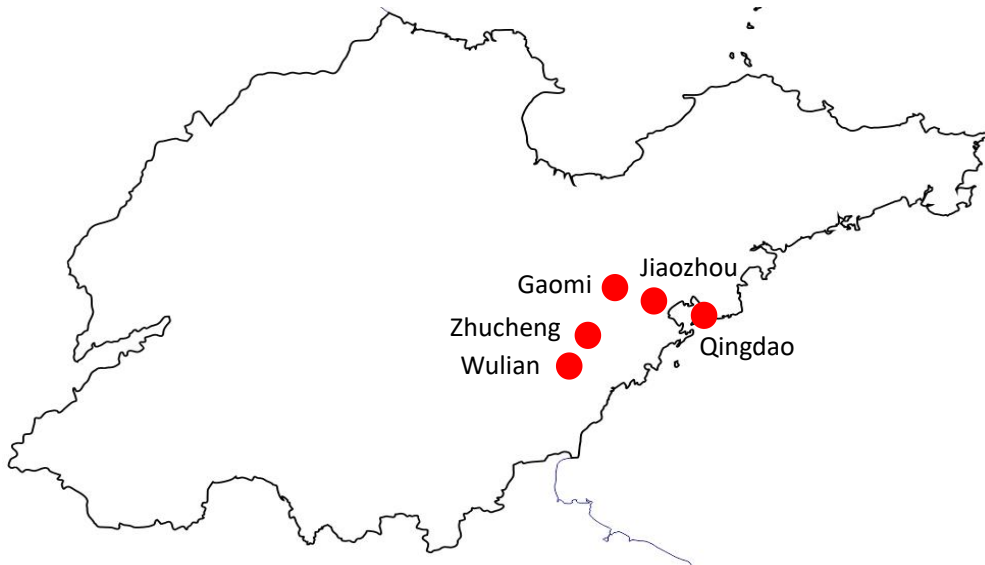


Figure 1-2. The five red spots indicate the location of cities and counties that currently have Maoqiang opera performances.

Historical evidence suggests that traditional operas in Shandong underwent significant developments towards their current states during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1636-1912) Dynasties (Li and Ji, 1983; Gao, 2000; Liao and Liu, 2012). There are 28 types of traditional local opera still extant in Shandong Province (2017 National Local Opera Survey). The traditional opera forms in the neighbouring provinces of Hebei, Henan and Jiangsu are well-known across China, and communication between Shandong and those neighbouring provinces is thought to have contributed to the early prosperity of Shandong's traditional operas (ibid). Specifically, the Shandong Peninsula is one of China's three significant peninsulas located in the lower reaches of the Yellow River (*huanghe*). Meanwhile, 800 kilometres of the Beijing to Hangzhou Grand Canal (*jinghang dayunhe*) flow through Shandong Province. Most of its area is flat terrain offering convenient land and water transportation. Thus, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, opera troupes from the neighbouring provinces visited Shandong's cities and performed by the docks of the grand canal. Meanwhile, the performers of these troupes learned from local culture, particularly local dialect and folk tunes (*minjian xiaoqu*). This kind of communication promoted the localisation of different types of opera genres and the fusion of local and non-local operas, also contributing towards the emergence of new types of opera (Sun, 2012).

By the end of 2019, Shandong Province had accrued 173 forms of State-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (*guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*) and 751 forms of Provincial-Level ICH (*shengji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*).² Regarding Maoqiang Opera, with the efforts of officials and performers from different cities and counties, especially the local governments of Gaomi City and Jiaozhou City, this artform was

² Data comes from the results of the Shandong Provincial Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development 2019, released by the Shandong Provincial Bureau of Statistics on 29 February 2020. http://tjj.shandong.gov.cn/art/2020/2/29/art_6196_8865096.html

nominated by China's Ministry of Culture in the first batch of State-Level ICH in 2006 - Category ID: IV-67.³ Figure 1-3 shows the certificate of Maoqiang Opera as State-Level ICH.



Figure 1-3. This certificate was awarded by the State Council (PRC) and certified by the Ministry of Culture (PRC) in June 2006. It is on display in the museum of Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe.

The Maoqiang community generally acknowledges that this artform has more than two centuries of history and that modern Maoqiang Opera derives from Leather Drum Opera (*zhouguzi xi*) in the southeast area of Shandong Province. The term 'maoqiang' has been widely used since the 1950s, with the term 'mao' of Maoqiang Opera meaning to 'flourish' (*fanrong*) and 'bloom' (*xingwang*), communicating an intention to promote a bright future for participants and audiences. However, based on my fieldwork in 2020, the development of Maoqiang Opera and the running cost of professional Maoqiang Opera troupes relied almost entirely on the financial and policy support of different levels of government.

Applying for the ICH title is an important way for the Maoqiang community and inheritors to obtain official recognition of the significance of their culture, as well as to gain more subsidies for the inheritance of the artform. The title 'ICH' even draws the general public's attention and academic commentators. The critical roles of the government in safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as ICH lie in distributing subsidies and providing performance opportunities for Maoqiang troupes and performers. To be designated as ICH, Maoqiang Opera must have unique musical characteristics distinguishing it from other Chinese operas and be deemed representative of a particular group in a specific geographical area, reflecting local aesthetic sensibilities, linguistic features and folkways.

³ Document No.18 of 2006, issued by the State Council (PRC), 20 May 2006, http://www.gov.cn/zwjk/2006-06/02/content_297946.htm The No.IV category refers to traditional Chinese Opera. In 2006, 92 traditional Chinese operas were selected as the first batch of State-Level ICH.

Currently, the government-funded Maoqiang Opera troupes are obligated to fulfil government-assigned performance tasks. A particular priority task is giving regular Maoqiang performances in local villages, aiming to bring vitality to Maoqiang troupes and performers while enhancing the local opera market and local culture more generally. The implementation of this task is the embodiment of a nationwide cultural activity titled '*Sending Opera to the Countryside*' ('*songxi xiexiang*')⁴. In Shandong Province, this cultural activity is also called '*One Village, One Year, One Performance*' ('*yicun yinian yichangxi*'). Maoqiang performers usually simply term this task 'performing in the countryside' ('*xiexiang yanchu*'). This task provides the Maoqiang troupes with more performance opportunities, and the villagers can enjoy free Maoqiang performances. Moreover, to maintain the vitality of this traditional artform in modern society, the Maoqiang troupes create modern operas (*xiandai xi*), regarding this as an effective way to promote Maoqiang Opera to keep pace with the times, and meanwhile to get extra bonuses from the government. These modern works are usually called 'products of the times' ('*shidai chanwu*').

This dissertation aims to clarify the current situation of Maoqiang Opera as a nominated ICH and investigate how the intervention of governmental policy influences the Maoqiang community to maintain the vitality of its traditional performance art in contemporary Shandong society. Throughout this thesis, the phrase 'Maoqiang community' refers to all those who are involved in carrying out governmental policy, including the Maoqiang troupes as collective entities, individual performers, composers, scriptwriters, and scholars - though the phrase excludes the audience members. This is because, based on my field research, most of the audience members have fewer than three opportunities each year to watch live Maoqiang Opera performances. Watching Maoqiang performances is an optional entertainment for them. Rather than being active participants in safeguarding the artform, most of them are passive recipients of the policies and performances. Meanwhile, the phrase 'governmental policy' encompasses four interrelated initiatives: 'safeguarding intangible cultural heritage', 'carrying out Theatrical System Reform', 'sending opera to the countryside', and 'making traditional opera represent modern life'.

This dissertation thus demonstrates that government intervention affects almost all aspects of the community's activities relating to safeguarding Maoqiang Opera culture, impacting how performers acquire their skills, how they fulfil performance tasks, and how new works are created. Here, I argue that, without government support, this traditional artform would scarcely be able to survive in modern Chinese society. To have a more comprehensive understanding of the research context of Maoqiang Opera culture and to clarify how my research questions are informed, the next step in this dissertation is to review the literature on cultural policy, music as ICH, traditional Chinese opera, and Maoqiang Opera as local opera in Shandong Province.

⁴ Many central-governmental policies have affected the deployment of the *Sending Opera to the Countryside*, including rural revitalisation policies, sending culture to the countryside, Theatrical System Reform, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, and protecting traditional Chinese culture.

1.2 Literature Review

This review proceeds through five main research fields to clarify the context of governmental intervention in safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Shandong Province, China. The five research fields encompass: studies of cultural policy; key themes of music as ICH; research on Chinese music as ICH; studies on traditional Chinese opera; and research about local opera forms in Shandong, chiefly Maoqiang Opera. It should be noted that, throughout the main body of this dissertation, there is little reference to English-language studies, simply because there are so few that address the specific practices that I focus on. Rather the English-language studies are more important for developing research questions and methodologies. In contrast, Chinese-language studies provide extensive details about the aspects of opera being explored in each chapter. Thus, most English-language studies about cultural policy and music as ICH are discussed here in Chapter 1, and additional details from the Chinese-language studies are presented in subsequent chapters when addressing policies for safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as ICH, measures towards Theatrical System Reform (*jütuan tizhi gaige*), Maoqiang Opera's historical development, Maoqiang opera's musical characteristics, and the processes involved in creating modern Chinese operas.

1.2.1 Studies of Cultural Policy

A large number of studies explore cultural policy within social, political and economic contexts. This section is divided into four sub-themes, respectively reviewing theoretical research about cultural policy in general, studies concerning cultural policy in China's neighbouring countries such as Japan, South Korea and Singapore, studies explicitly addressing cultural policy in China, and specific national policies for safeguarding traditional Chinese culture as ICH. These studies and policies are reviewed to shed light on the various factors affecting the governments' formulation and implementation of cultural policy.

Theoretical Research on Cultural Policy

Many earlier works emphasise how cultural policy is situated within the scope of public policy, and is directly influenced by government decisions and actions (for example, Schuster, 2003; Mulcahy, 2006; Stevenson, 2010a and 2010b; Bell and Oakley, 2015). Specifically, as a branch of public policy, the primary concern of cultural policy is the administration of culture (Bell and Oakley, 2015: 45). Dye (2005: 1) emphasises that, ultimately, policy is based on choice: will the government intervene or not? Similarly, Mulcahy (2006: 265-320) points out that "cultural policy is what government choose to do or not to do in relation to culture", with policies invariably becoming complex and intertwined, encompassing diverse economic, foreign, welfare and social concerns. Meanwhile, Stevenson (2010a: 159) writes that all levels of government become drawn into cultural policy, including national

government, local government, and supra-state bodies such as the European Union. Accordingly, in the case of Maoqiang Opera also, numerous bodies play a part in safeguarding culture and, in this study, I address the following questions: what are these various bodies? What are the mechanisms through which they collaboratively operate, and through which policies are enacted? And, thereafter, how do policies influence the development of tradition?

Research on cultural policy often also addresses the democratisation of culture, which is an essential principle in formulating plans, pursuing equal access to significant cultural treasures amongst ordinary people (for example, Bakke, 1994; Matarasso and Landry, 1999; Mulcahy, 2006). For example, the distribution of Norway's population is sparse, and most of the public resources, including cultural facilities, are concentrated in Oslo, Norway's capital city and the largest city. By applying "top-down" and "centre to periphery" policy, the Norwegian government has sought to increase public subsidies and government-supported "cultural programs" to address this problem, taking various artistic activities, including symphony, opera and ballet, to remote locations far from the city centre (Bakke, 1994: 115-125). In China, similar cultural policies have been implemented in a top-down way to give the residents of less developed areas more opportunities to enjoy government-funded cultural activities - most significantly the policy of *Sending Culture to the Countryside* (*song wenhua xiaxiang*), examined in detail in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Meanwhile, cultural policy research also tends to examine interconnected areas such as cultural industry, cultural identity, and cultural tourism. Several researchers have explored the connection between culture and economy, arguing that culture can also be regarded as marketable goods (Cunningham, 2002 and 2004; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Galloway and Dunlop, 2007). While culture can engender direct or indirect economic benefits, at the same time, of course, it makes a city attractive, promoting creativity and enhancing self-worth (Florida, 2002). Similarly, Mulcahy (2006: 327-328) emphasises that "public life and civil society" - and the "civic identity" associated with local culture - influence "how people define their communities and see themselves in the world and in history". Accordingly, in the study of Maoqiang Opera (and other present-day opera forms), it is necessary to consider not only the economic dimension underlying policy - the opera's commercial value - but also the ways in which opera informs local identity in modern society.

In cultural policy and practice, one can often observe a tension between elitist and populist values (for example, Cummings and Katz, 1987; Robinson, 1993; Bennett, 2001). These can be seen as the "two key tensions for national cultural policy"; policy makers are situated "between the goals of excellence versus access, and between government roles as facilitator versus architect" (Craik, McAllister, and Davis 2003: 29). The advocates of elitism tend to be in the minority, spearheaded by aficionados, highly skilled "creative artists", and "major cultural organisations". They emphasise

that the culture supported by cultural policies should be meaningful, with funds focused on supporting arts with “aesthetic quality” and “richness” in their contents (ibid). In contrast, the advocates of populism usually advocate broadly inclusive definitions of culture, stressing that resources should be directed across a wide spectrum of practitioners in the interest of advancing accessibility and cultural diversity (Bennett, 2001). Supporters of populism tend to see high value in blurring the boundaries between professional and amateur cultural activities (Wyszomirski, 1982: 3-14). Although the Chinese government stresses the importance of cultural diversity, the criteria for allocating funds for the protection of local cultures vary. In particular, and in line with elitist values, state-owned professional opera troupes receive more attention and enjoy preferential policies. Accordingly, in this study, I clarify the policies regarding the criteria that are applied when allocating resources to the various Maoqiang Opera troupes, and the potential for tension and conflict between government-sponsored professional troupes and privately-owned amateur troupes.

Cultural Policy in China’s Neighboring Countries

Japan was the first country in East Asia to introduce a cultural preservation programme, its policies and practices subsequently influencing equivalent programmes in other East Asian countries, such as China and South Korea. Specifically, in June 1968, the Japanese government established its Agency for Cultural Affairs (*bunkachō*, ACA) to “promote and spread culture and preserve cultural properties” (ACA, 1968 in Otmazgin, 2012: 47). From the outset, Japan’s cultural policy has continuously highlighted the importance of soft power, “supporting and encouraging the export of Japanese contemporary culture and lifestyle”, more recently encompassing the export of Japanese animation, manga, and pop music (Otmazgin, 2012: 37-40). Additionally, the enactment of cultural policy in Japan has long involved collaboration with business, where Japanese companies provide financial resources to support cultural affairs. Support seldom happens through third parties such as “artists and arts organisations independent of the companies” (Kawashima, 2012: 300-302).

Meanwhile, the literature on South Korean cultural policy highlights several issues. As early as 1976, Yersu Kim suggested that “the most significant rationale for cultural policy” was “the construction of cultural identity” (Kim, 1976: 10-12). Several decades later, Yim (2002: 37) recognised that cultural identity remained a central concern: “as a whole, since the establishment of the first republic of 1948, the foremost challenge of Korean cultural policy has been to resolve the issue of cultural identity”. Kwon and Kim (2014: 423-426) note that a key strategy at the heart of South Korea’s cultural policy has long been the fomentation of “a knowledge-based economy”, where the production of services and products is based principally on knowledge-intensive activities. At the same time, the state has long played a very strong role in shaping cultural matters. In his exploration of the “arts-state relationship” in Korea, Lee discusses how the Arts Council Korea acts as “an

autonomous and consensus-based organisation” to redefine the “arts-state relationship” by “subsidising projects and activities that promote arts and culture” (2012: 323-335). However, he recognizes that Korea’s arts policy is not only “deeply embedded in the country’s historical and political contexts” but “has long been characterised by the ‘strong state’” (2012: 324). This view is supported by Hong (2019: 1-4), who identifies cultural policy as being “state-driven” and “state-centred or statist”. As my study will go on to show, in China, the cultural policy mechanism has a similarly “state-centred” character, though without the input of an Arts Council-like autonomous body. Rather, in the Chinese case, it is exclusively various government sectors (centring on the Cultural and Tourism Bureau) that shape and implement cultural policies - organising, subsidising and scheduling all government-funded cultural activities.

Singapore has also formulated and applied a series of distinctly interventionist cultural policies during its short modern history. Lily Kong (2012) identifies three stages. Firstly, in the late 1960s and 1970s, cultural policy sought to harness the arts to disseminate certain political views. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, Singapore stepped into the cultural economy policy period, and the government started to lay the foundations for cultural tourism, striving to construct a distinctive cultural identity accommodating the three main ethnic groups (Chinese, Malays, and Indians). Finally, in the 2000s, to foster “(cultural) creativity” for the economy, one of the most important developments is “the adoption of a ‘creative industries’ policy” (Kong, 2012: 283). In an earlier publication, Kong (1995) provides compelling evidence, showing that the Singaporean government’s conflation of cultural policy with propagandizing has, in fact, been a long-term phenomenon. For example, in the widely disseminated “Sing Singapore” TV programme, the carefully selected musicians’ contributions are employed as carriers to “perpetuate certain ideologies” of the “ruling elite”, even “to inculcate a civil religion that directs favour and fervour towards the nation” (Kong, 1995: 447-459). Kong’s research suggests some obvious parallels between Singaporean and Chinese cultural policy. In the latter case also, it is required that the supported cultural forms - such as Maoqiang opera, for example - advance state-sanctioned progressive socialist ideologies.

Cultural Policy in China: An Introduction

China’s cultural policies are explicitly geared towards both perpetuating traditional Chinese culture and promoting socialist values. The state-run mechanism for implementing policy has been markedly expanded in scope and influence since Xi Jinping became president in 2012. According to the 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development, issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in August 2022, the main aims of China’s cultural policies are as follows: the solid construction of core socialist values; ensuring that cultural industry serves the public; integrating culture and tourism; developing ever more effective systems for preserving, transmitting and utilising cultural heritage; innovatively harnessing

technology to ensure the effective dissemination of culture via mass media; and promoting more balanced and coordinated development between urban and rural areas.⁵

Ever since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the central government has consistently played a strong, dominant role in formulating and enacting policies. It has always paid keen attention to the "ideological nature of content", seeking to censor out "heterodox content" from all forms of published and broadcast media (Montgomery, 2009: 39-40). Until 1977 (the end of the Cultural Revolution), the "highest leader" played the most critical role in determining boundaries of acceptability, and a large volume of historical research has focused on this extended period. For example, Hung (2011) has examined the political culture under Mao Zedong, the PRC's founding father. Meanwhile, a great deal of research (for example, Perris, 1985; Rao, 2017; Ammirati, 2018) has focused more specifically on cultural policy during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), especially on the impact of Model Operas such as *The Red Lantern* (*hongdeng ji*).⁶

After the Cultural Revolution, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Chinese government recognised that the growth of the cultural market presented "a significant pluralising force" and could generate much needed economic benefits, thereafter changing policy to integrate concepts relating to supply, demand and competition. China also witnessed the emergence of creative industries "based on individual creativity, skill and talent" (Keane, 2000: 246-257). In the 2000s, Cultural policy shifted towards fostering "creative cities" and "characteristic towns", seeking to promote regional distinctiveness, civic pride, and, of course, cultural tourism (Keane, 2009: 431-434). In 2015, a policy blueprint was released showing the government's ambition "to make China an innovative nation" and paying particular attention to building "distinctive cultural brands" (Keane and Chen, 2019: 743-747). Here, it is proposed that people should draw on "local cultural resources" to foster "distinctive regional characteristics", while at the same time promoting "national characteristics" (Yi, 2016: 143-152).

Policies for Safeguarding ICH in China

In 2001, Kunqu Opera was selected in UNESCO's first batch of 19 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.⁷ This can be seen as a landmark event, prompting the central Chinese government to pay attention to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH). On 26 March 2005, the General Office of the State Council enacted the first national cultural policy about safeguarding ICH, *Suggestions on Strengthening the Procedures of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in*

⁵ Clause 3 of the Second Article, *The 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development*, 16 August 2022. The original text is released on the State Council's official website http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-08/16/content_5705612.htm

⁶ For more details about the revolution and model operas, see Sections 1.2.4 and 6.1.1

⁷ List of the 90 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity proclaimed by UNESCO in 2001, 2003 and 2005, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00264-EN.pdf>

China' (the 2005 Suggestions)⁸. The main contents of the 2005 Suggestions include: interim measures for the application and evaluation of representative works of State-Level ICH; guidelines, objectives and principles for safeguarding ICH; and establishing the Inter-Ministerial Joint Conference System (*buji lianxi Huiyi zhidu*) for Safeguarding China's ICH.⁹ The committee of the Joint Conference System is responsible for formulating the draft of guidelines and policies for selecting and safeguarding China's ICH and submitting drafts to the state council for approval. On 22 December, the state council approved another national policy, '*Notification on Strengthening Cultural Heritage Protection*', stipulating that cultural heritage in China (including ICH) can be divided into four levels: state-level (*guojiaji*), provincial-level (*shengji*), city-level (*shiji*) and county-level (*xianji*).¹⁰ Currently, 1372 items have been nominated as State-Level ICH: 518 items in 2006, 510 items in 2008, 191 items in 2011, and 153 items in 2014. As mentioned, Maoqiang Opera was designated amongst the First Batch of State-Level ICH in 2006.

Designation as State-Level ICH does not mean that safeguarding this culture is highly prioritised because it is on the brink of disappearance. On the contrary, it is mainly the most well-known and well-developed traditional cultural forms that are appointed as State-Level ICH.¹¹ The criteria for assessing potential State-Level ICH are strict and complicated. The applicants must meet all the requirements of the 22 Articles listed in the 2005 Suggestions. Among them, one of the most fundamental requirements is clarified in Article VII: "When applying for [ICH designation], applicants need to draw up a practicable Ten-Year Safeguard Plan (2006-2016), and corresponding specific measures of safeguard must be carried out." The content of the Ten-Year Safeguard Plan must address the following five critical concerns (my own translation from the original text of Article VII in the 2005 Suggestions):

(1) Archiving (*jiandang*): Establishing complete archives for the declared projects through collecting, documenting, classifying, cataloguing and so forth;

(2) Preservation (*baocun*): Utilising text description, audio recording, video recording, digital multimedia technology and so forth to make sure the documentation of the protected objects is authentic, comprehensive, and systematic. Meanwhile, the related data should be collected as much as possible, and related institutions should properly preserve the collected data to make rational use;

⁸ Document No.18 of 2005, issued by General Office of the State Council (CPC), 26 March 2005, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2008-03/28/content_5937.htm

⁹ Eight ministries and commissions were responsible for the operation of the system (2005-2018), including the Ministry of Culture; Development and Reform Commission; Ministry of Education; State Ethnic Affairs Commission; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Construction; Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Religious Affairs and Cultural Relics.

¹⁰ Document No.42 of 2005, issued by the State Council (PRC), 22 December 2005, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2008-03/28/content_5926.htm

¹¹ For instance, Peking Opera was also selected as the First Batch of State-Level ICH in 2006, Category ID: IV-28.

(3) Inheritance (*chuancheng*): Through social education and school education, making sure the ICH can be transmitted to the next generation and can continue to be inherited and promoted as a living cultural tradition in related communities, especially among the younger generation;

(4) Dissemination (*chuanbo*): Taking advantage of festival activities, exhibitions, teaching observation, training activities, professional seminars and other forms, and publicising through mass media and the Internet to deepen the general public's understanding of ICH and to promote information sharing;

(5) Safeguarding (*baohu*): Taking achievable and practicable measures to ensure the intellectual property (*zhili chengguo*) of ICH can be preserved, inherited and developed. The inheritors of ICH are entitled to safeguard their cultural expressions and spaces handed down from generation to generation. More importantly, misunderstanding, distortion and abuse of ICH should be prevented.

Zhou Chao (2015), a professor at the Law school of Chongqing University, shows how policies from the mid-2010s have been enshrined in law - specifically, the Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage (LICH) enacted on 25 February 2011 at the 11th National People's Congress. In this paper, Zhou explains how the law cemented the government's approach as "safeguarding" rather than merely "protecting". Although the Chinese word "*baohu* (保护)" can be translated in both ways, as Zhou explains, safeguarding denotes a more active approach, where culture is not merely preserved but is also revitalised and promoted to ensure its continued relevance and "reasonable utilisation (*heli liyong*)" within contemporary society (see also Barbara, 2006 in Zhou, 2015: 7).

Evidently, China is drawing upon the interpretations of "safeguarding" put forward by UNESCO at the General Conference of 2003, when the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was established.¹² According to Clause 3 of Article 2 of the Convention, "safeguarding means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the ICH including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage." Following UNESCO's lead, the Chinese Law of Intangible Cultural Heritage (LICH) pinpoints the same nine aspects - similarly linking safeguarding to inheritance, preservation, dissemination and development (see also Howard, 2012).

¹² Contents published on the official website of UNESCO,
<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/convention-safeguarding-intangible-cultural-heritage>

As explored in this section, cultural policies reflect the ruling group's prevailing attitudes towards culture. In the case of China, the formulation and implementation of cultural policies are government-centred, involving a typical top-down administrative system that profoundly influences all aspects of the country's cultural construction and development. Since the 2000s, ICH-related policies have become increasingly significant for maintaining the viability of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary society. In November 2020, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued a 15-year plan: by 2035, China plans to become a country with strong culture (*wenhua qianguo*) and markedly improved cultural soft power. In this context, safeguarding ICH has been further emphasised by the Chinese government as one of the ways to achieve the goal.¹³ Following earlier studies and the government's policies (outlined in the five critical concerns for evaluating State-Level ICH in the 2005 Suggestions), I hereafter opt to use the word "safeguarding" in conjunction with ICH because it is broader in scope than "preserving" and other terms.

1.2.2 Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Themes

There is a growing body of research exploring music as intangible cultural heritage (ICH), with many studies examining how the processes of designation and safeguarding impact culture more broadly. Various key themes have emerged, which are highly pertinent to this current study. Ronstrom (2014: 54), for example, observes that, under the pressure of globalisation, many countries fear losing their distinctive traditional musical culture, and therefore treat the processes of ICH as an endeavor to define, preserve and promote national identity. Accordingly, "[t]raditional music or folk music is increasingly being recast as heritage music", with the concomitant reassessment altering understandings of "what kind of past the music comes from, to whom it belongs, and what it stands for" (ibid). In such contexts, ethnomusicological research becomes of paramount relevance, with ethnomusicologists taking on key roles in "the documentation, transmission and preservation of oral traditions" (ibid), their audio-visual recordings and meticulous ethnographic documentation becoming necessary resources to sustain musical genres (Grant, 2016). Meanwhile, Norton and Matsumoto (2018: 5) claim that the engaged research of this issue from the perspective of ethnomusicology has been instrumental in encouraging the evident "move... away from terms like preservation" towards the implementation of "framing terms like ecology, sustainability and resilience". Moreover, Lauren Istvandy (2021) explores how cultural heritage often diminishes in its relevance and prevalence within the original host community, even as it is being documented and preserved in authorized music archives and promoted on stage. Likewise for Maoqiang Opera (and other forms of traditional musical culture in China), it is evident that designation as ICH is founded on concerns about sustainability. Officials, practitioners, and audience

¹³ The full text of the '2035 State Planning' is released on the official website of the State Council of China, 3 November 2020, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-11/03/content_5556991.htm

members fully recognise the powerful impact of globalisation and other major forces on people's tastes and market forces. Furthermore, in China also, meticulous documentation lies at the heart of the ICH-related processes, not for the sake of fixing traditional practices but rather for ensuring their sustainability and resilience.

Another major theme explored in the studies is commodification (for example, in Chan and Ma, 2004; Zan and Sara, 2012; and Taylor, 2017). Here, it is noted how the social value of appointed cultural heritage is often reduced or altered, with performance instead being treated as a highly marketable commodity, specifically as an economic resource for promoting tourism. For example, as Norton and Matsumoto note (2018: 6), efforts to combine tourist commerce with heritage preservation tend to generate "new patterns of sociality and new forms of identity". Titon (2009: 119) also writes that the "heritage management is doomed to the paradox of constructing staged authenticities". In the case of Maoqiang Opera, also, ICH-designation has evidently prompted officials and performers to undertake a detailed assessment of what constitutes distinctive "authentic" expression. However, here, the staged expression is still steadfastly directed towards the region's inhabitants, rather than tourists - in marked contrast with certain other, much more famous genres of appointed ICH, such as Sichuan Opera, Huangmei Opera, and Xiang Opera. For Maoqiang Opera, and many other small regional ICH traditions scattered across China, the potential for commercialisation within the tourist industry remains largely unexplored.

1.2.3 English-language Research on Chinese Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage

This section now turns to review the English-language research about Chinese safeguarding policies and practices, excluding those studies that specifically address opera forms (which are reviewed in the subsequent section). Two books stand out as especially thorough in their exploration of this topic. The first book, edited by Keith Howard, titled *Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2012), examines the policies, ideologies, and practices involved in the preservation of East Asian traditions, including five chapters that focus on the handling of ICH within China, by Helen Rees, Catherine Ingram, Olivia Kraef, Yingfen Wang, and Lauren Gorfinkel. Another book, edited by Norton and Matsumoto and titled *Music as Heritage* (2018), investigates the management of musical heritage in East Asia, but applies more historical and ethnographic perspectives; here, there are two Chinese music studies, by Min-Yen Ong and Hwee-San Tan.

These, and other, studies highlight that it was not until the early 2000s that the Chinese government became seriously committed to safeguarding cultural heritage, finally recognising the pressures of Westernisation and modernisation on diverse forms of traditional culture. The addition of Kunqu Opera to UNESCO's list of masterpieces in 2001 seems to have been particularly influential, alerting the

government to broader global safeguarding trends and their potential benefits. As Su Junjie¹⁴ points out, the Chinese authorities responded by targeting traditions “seen to possess excellent Chinese historical, literary, artistic and scientific values”, and applying a notably “state-centred” and “government-led” approach (Su, 2019a: 3). Su Junjie (2019a) presents an especially clear account of the Chinese top-down ICH administrative system’s structure. He details the various roles played by the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage - the highest-level administrative agency responsible for managing national ICH issues, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. He also elucidates how the department addresses four levels of agency, encompassing national, provincial, municipal, and county heritage, with the administrative agency at each level having its own ICH Protection Centre and committee of experts.¹⁵

Tan (2018: 234) similarly highlights the top-down nature of ICH governance in China, expressing a more negatively critical stance and suggesting that such an approach generates “more questions than answers to the problem of cultural loss”, pitting “local practitioner against institutional labelling and control”. Tan’s (2018) study examines recent efforts to safeguard the Nanyin vocal-instrumental genre in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, showing how the ICH policies of the Chinese government have functioned at both county and city levels. Here, she highlights another crucial motivating factor within the Chinese government’s endeavours; specifically, the promotion of ICH is increasingly intertwined with economic policy, becoming “not merely a tool for building national cohesion and identity but an actual economic and foreign policy” (2018: 233). Cultural heritage policies in China have been brought into alignment with the government’s project for “a vibrant cultural industry”, including cultural tourism, fuelling economic development while enhancing China’s international standing (ibid). Like Nanyin, Maoqiang Opera is cultivated and performed in both counties and cities, promoted by the authorities as representative culture. Following Tan’s lead, I aim to reveal how county- and city-level ICH policies and activities operate alongside one another in efforts to boost the artform’s cultural significance and profitability.¹⁶

¹⁴ Su Junjie is an Associate Professor at the Cultural Development Institute of Yunnan University, China.

¹⁵ As Su points out, at the county level, the ICH Protection Centre is sometimes identified rather differently, specifically as a cultural centre (*wenhua zhongxin*) or cultural station (*wenhua zhan*).

¹⁶ Wang (2012) also examines efforts to safeguard Nanyin as ICH, although she focuses exclusively on policies and practices in Taiwan Province, where preservation-focused state agencies and private groups have been actively promoting Nanyin since the 1980s. Wang paints a decidedly negative picture of Taiwan’s Nanyin culture, highlighting how performance of the genre has increasingly become “a commodity with which to make money, achieve fame and tour abroad” (2012:175). Meanwhile, she notes that, although the overall number of groups has increased, many are actually “one-man companies”, which “rely on the assistance of musicians from outside” (2012:176). Competition for funds and prestige has exacerbated tensions between groups and individual musicians, and only a minority of groups have avoided applying for state funding, “attempt[ing] to keep the traditional practices of amateur clubs alive”(ibid). It seems likely that similar trends are sweeping across the mainland of China also, where performance groups are increasingly committed to competing with one another to secure funds and opportunities from the authorities, and a dwindling minority actively seek to persist outside the government’s intervention.

Maags and Heike (2016), however, suggest that China's excessive pursuit of economic growth and its elite-driven approach to enacting ICH policies has been changing: despite a continued "lack of local communities' involvement", "a growing number of new actors are entering the policy-making scene", establishing an increasingly dense web of networks between government policy makers, officials, scholars, and professionals at both central and local levels (2016: 72). Although policy is still implemented in a typical top-down manner, the perspectives of lower-level and local-level government officials, troupe leaders and inheritors are perhaps being taken more into consideration during the formulation and implementation of cultural policies. As Norton and Matsumoto (2018) persuasively argue, it is indeed crucial for policy makers to consider the everyday realities faced by musicians and audience members, as well as the practitioners' own views about safeguarding policies. The case of Maoqiang Opera, explored in this thesis, offers ample scope to study the effects of the government's top-down policies on local communities, to assess the local communities' reception of those policies, and to evaluate the ways in which local communities contribute towards safeguarding culture as ICH.

In keeping with Maoqiang Opera's status, my research mainly focuses on the roles played by the lower-level administrative agencies in managing cultural activities. However, other researchers have investigated the workings of the high administrative agencies - for example Min-Yen Ong (2018), who explores Kunqu Opera as ICH in China. Here, Ong highlights two key effects of the Chinese government's top-down strategies. One is that the cultural ownership of Kunqu has been transferred to the state. The other is that the appointed professional Kunqu troupes have greatly benefitted in terms of resources, publicity, and opportunities, while the other unappointed troupes have become increasingly marginalised - despite the 2003 UNESCO Convention's declaration that, in order to safeguard heritage, it is vital to ensure the "widest possible" participation of both professional and amateur communities.

In her study about Kunqu, Ong (2018: 140-142) argues that it is hard to achieve a delicate balance between the government and the community when, in China, "safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is a political task". She contends that, for the government, the preservation and promotion of ICH is closely linked with "commercial and political objectives" while for the community, especially grass-root organisations and amateurs, the main focus is "safeguarding and maintaining the traditional aesthetics that define Kunqu" (ibid). During her fieldwork (conducted between 2009 and 2014), Ong found that amateur troupes frequently encountered financial difficulties because their singing practices were usually unstaged and were not acknowledged by the authorities. However, this lack of political intervention gave them "greater freedom to practice their own chosen repertoire and performance practice as they wished" (Ong, 2018: 139). This had given rise to notable differences in the singing techniques and musical aesthetics fostered by the amateur and government-appointed troupes. The professionals adjusted their practices in line

with the state's agendas, while the amateurs typically sought to maintain the "original flavour of the original soup (*yuan zhi yuan wei*)" and "resisted and resented any innovative developments" (Ong, 2018: 137). Ong's research has enlightened me to pay attention to all types of Maoqiang Opera troupe, investigating their varying relationships with the authorities and the implications of those relationships for performance practice.

The frequently interrelated themes of ICH commodification and tourism are also highlighted by Su Junjie (2019b) in his study of Dongjing music in Yunnan Province, as performed within the context of Naxi culture - the Naxi people being one of China's 56 officially recognised ethnic groups. Following on from an investigation into the history, instrumentation, and melodies of Dongjing, Su focuses especially on the activities of Dongjing associations and their interactions with local government, revealing a prevailing trend towards tourism-related commodification in the key city of Lijiang. He finds that local government (in that area and elsewhere also) is eager to take advantage of local ICH, coopting musicians to perform their arts as cultural products and services for economic gain. Su further explains that local government can even accrue tax benefits when their commercial programmes feature appointed ICH. Meanwhile, Rees (2012) demonstrates that Dongjing music also persists as "highly localised ritual music" within small towns and villages in this same geographical area, existing alongside other Naxi artforms such as folksong and folk dance, as well as the seven-string zither, *guqin* (Rees, 2012: 36).

Ingram (2012) identifies similar trends of ICH commodification amongst another minority ethnic group - the Dong people based in Guizhou Province, in the South-Western plateau area of China. Here, the genre known as "Kam Big Song" (*dongzu dage*) again exists in several distinct versions, one adapted for staged performance and the other persisting in a more traditional format in Kam villages. The former has now become a high profile artform, performed by professionals in the concert venues of major Chinese cities outside Guizhou and internationally, featuring in festivals, documentaries, and song competitions, and being taught in local schools in Liping County (where young singers can even secure singing scholarships). McLaren (2010 and 2011) has also researched the Kam Big Song tradition in detail, though he focuses much more on the impact of the changing social and geographical environment upon the artform. As he points out, the songs once served as "mediums for encoding ecological understanding" in this mountainous area (McLaren, 2011: 432), but the lifestyles of the local people have radically changed, especially amongst the younger generation who aspire towards modern urban lives. Accordingly, the songs have been artistically processed into shorter forms, making them more attractive to both domestic and international audiences. Drawing inspiration from the work of Su, Rees, Ingram and McLaren, in the current study, I have sought to examine the full range of Maoqiang performance scenarios operational in the present day - exploring the differences between the interpretations of amateurs and professionals, and analysing the ways in which

practices have been repackaged for performance on television, in festivals, and on the urban stage.

As Gorfinkel (2012) compellingly argues, within the Chinese state's top-down system, the upper levels of administration carefully marshal regional and local ICH (such as the traditions examined by the above-mentioned researchers) to construct, express, and celebrate China's diverse yet united multi-ethnic identity. In particular, Gorfinkel presents a succinct analysis of the ways in which the folk song and dance traditions of the various ethnic groups are presented on the tightly state-controlled national broadcasting network via China Central Television (CCTV). Here, the performances, though seemingly entertainment- and education-focused, echo a wider socio-political agenda. Because these programmes are subsidised by the "state propaganda department", there is little concern for authenticity. Rather, the goal is effective "political symbolism", where "ideology rather than commerce is of prime importance" (Gorfinkel, 2012: 103-107). Gorfinkel's observations are clearly pertinent to my own study and, accordingly, I direct substantial research towards investigating how Maoqiang Opera has been packaged for presentation on television, appearing alongside various other regional musical forms.

To conclude this section of review, it is evident that most of the English-language studies investigating Chinese ICH safeguarding policies and practices highlight the implications of the government's top-down administrative system on local practices, illustrating their points through case studies of specific genres fostered in specific geographical locations. Many of these studies have focused on the traditional music cultures of minorities in the southern region of China, including the Dongjing music of the Naxi minority in Yunnan Province (Su 2019a and 2019b; Rees, 2012), and Kam Big Song of the Dong Minority in Guizhou Province (Ingram, 2012; McLaren, 2011). Meanwhile, there appears to be an absence of easily accessible English-language research focusing on the safeguarding of traditional Han Chinese ICH in China's northern plain and coastal areas. This current study aims to address this paucity head on, enriching the English-language literature about Chinese cultural safeguarding through a detailed study of a local Han Chinese opera in the area. Up to this point, the Maoqiang Opera tradition in Shandong Province has remained entirely unexplored in English-language scholarship.

1.2.4 Studies of Traditional Chinese Opera

The existing literature on traditional Chinese opera is extensive and focuses on diverse aspects, including history, performance practice, musical components, and social context and function. Guo Yingde, a famous writer in China and professor of classical Chinese literature at Beijing Normal University, points out that the research fields addressing Chinese drama and Chinese opera overlap to a great extent, encompassing early forms such as the variety plays (*zajü*) developed during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and the various opera forms which rose to national significance

during the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1912) and the Republic of China period (1912-1949), such as Peking Opera, Yue Opera and Cantonese Opera (Guo, 2010). Meanwhile, as Pang (2005: 363) advises, it is essential to keep in mind that Chinese opera encompasses much more than just “instrumental music, song and dance”, also incorporating “acting recitation, martial arts, acrobatics, mime, poetry [and] prose”. In short, it is “all-encompassing theatrical entertainment”.

Amongst the English-language literature, abundant studies examine the emergence and growth of Chinese traditional opera on the worldwide stage (for example, Pang, 2005; Guo, 2010; Thorpe, 2010; Law, 2012; Chen, 2017; and Rolston, 2018). Thorpe (2010) details the staging of a postmodern Chinese opera, *Monkey: Journey to the West*, at the UK’s premier opera venue, the Royal Opera House, and assesses the reasons for this production’s success in 2008. Much previous research has explored Chinese opera in North America. Pang (2005: 362) states that although Chinese opera is losing its audiences at home, it is “slowly gaining interest and building momentum in America”. Rao’s (2017) historical study demonstrates that Chinese opera’s rise to prominence in America can, in some cases, be traced back surprisingly far; here, she provides transcriptions and extensive musical analysis of two recordings of Cantonese operatic aria dating from the 1920s. Guo’s (2010) study reviews the literature on classical Chinese Drama in North America, focusing on key English-language studies from 1998 to 2008.¹⁷

Other studies assess the historical development of specific forms of Chinese opera within China itself. For example, Goldstein (1999) applies a cultural theory lens to explore how Peking Opera transformed into a symbol of Chinese national culture, becoming the most popular form of urban staged entertainment during the late Qing (1840-1912) and Republic of China period (1912-1949). Lin Da (2018), a project researcher at the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum, also examines the development of Peking Opera during this period, focusing especially on the contributions of Mei Lanfang, “who was commonly regarded as the foremost Chinese actor of Peking Opera” (Lin, 2018: 128). She identifies three waves of English language literature about Mei’s impact, dating from the 1920s to the present.

Extensive study focuses on the Model Operas that were created and widely propagated during the Cultural Revolution, replacing most other equivalent forms (1966-1976) (for example, Perris, 1983; Zuo, 1991; Mittler, 2003; Lau, 2008; Slavicek, 2010; and Rao, 2017). Because there is strict censorship in mainland China regarding the study of this period, scholars addressing Model Operas have usually published their research findings through the Internet or publishing houses in Hong Kong, Taiwan or western countries (see Pang, Clark and Tsai, 2016). These studies interpret Chinese revolutionary music and culture from socio-political and historical

¹⁷ Guo (2010) states that his study is a continuation of Sun, Chen and Li’s (2000) Chinese-language research on Chinese classical opera performances overseas, which provides an overview of the most significant literature dating from before 1998.

perspectives, exposing how ideology and cultural policy determined every aspect of the artform, profoundly influencing people's tastes and outlooks.

More specifically, Lao (2008) states that the hegemonic cultural policy during the Cultural Revolution period was a "disaster" for the diversity of Chinese music, and Shao and Mu (2007) highlight one of the most famous slogans from the period, "smash the old world; establish a new one", which amply encapsulates the devastation wreaked upon traditional Chinese culture (Shao and Mu, 2007: 86). As Zuo (1991) details, it was ultimately down to just a few political leaders in the Communist Party to decide which repertoire should be permitted, following their own interests. Perris (1983) further demonstrates that, during the Maoist period (before 1977), music and other art forms were subordinate to politics. No music could be regarded as "innocuous", all music had to "state an official message", and artistic individuality had to be aligned to the central government's political agenda (1983: 2). Ordinary Chinese people in both urban and rural areas watched operas like *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (zhiqū weihushan)* "at least twice every year" (Slavicek, 2010: 91). Regardless of whether they enjoyed the musical works or not, they had no choice but to listen to them; the primary function of the operas was "ideological and political education" (Rao, 2017: 165).

Based on my interviews with Maoqiang performers, Maoqiang Opera has been profoundly influenced by Peking Opera in diverse ways (including percussion music, body movements, costumes and facial makeup). According to research on Maoqiang Opera (for example, by Wang and Ding, 2009; Shan, 2017; and Zhou, 2019), one of the main reasons for this is that the ancestor of Maoqiang Opera was usually performed as a warm-up playlet before Peking Opera performance. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, the vast majority of Maoqiang troupes disbanded or transformed into Peking Opera troupes, engendering further deep connections between the opera forms. To assist my assessment of Peking Opera's influence on Maoqiang Opera, I have therefore consulted various studies detailing Peking Opera's musical contents. Alongside the limited scholarship in the English language (for example, Fu, 1996; and Guo, 2011), the Chinese-language research of this field is more comprehensive, including numerous case studies in the monthly journal *Peking Opera of China*¹⁸ (for example, Qu, 1995; Zhang, 2004; Sun, 2019; Yang, 2021). For this thesis, the most important reference has been the book *The Percussion Music of Peking Opera (jingjū luogu)* (1982), which documents 22 mnemonic notations and 143 percussion patterns for Peking Opera and details their playing methods and usage scenarios (see Section 4.2). This book was first published in 1960, incorporating contributions from three leading professors from the National Academy of Chinese Opera, Wu Chunli, He Wei, and Zhang Yuci. The performers of the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe recommended this book to me,

¹⁸ The journal *Peking Opera of China (zhongguo jingjū)* concerns all aspects of Peking Opera. It was founded in 1992 and is directly managed by China's Ministry of Culture. By March 2022, this journal had publicised 8198 articles about Peking Opera.

identifying it as an essential aid to my study of Maoqiang Opera's percussion music.

Meanwhile, my study draws information and ideas from diverse publications detailing the ongoing policies and processes of Theatrical System Reform (*jütuan tizhi gaige*) in China. These governmental policies from the 1950s to the 2010s have been highly influential in shaping the management models of opera troupes and the opera market, particularly for the government-funded troupes. Research on the background, processes and effects of Theatrical System Reform is abundant (such as Gao, 1985; Jian, 1986; Chang, 1996; Fu, 2010 and 2012; Guan, 2013; Kang, 2017; and Hu, 2018), and these works will be introduced later, in Section 2.2. Research on creating modern operas is also significant (for example, Zou, 2012; Wang, 2013; Guo, 2015 and Yang and Ling, 2017), as 'modern opera' in this sense can be construed as encompassing new developments and innovation in Maoqiang Opera. Indeed, modern Maoqiang works are central concerns of my study. Specific policies relating to their creation, and the principal points arising from studies of the creation of new works of traditional Chinese opera, are discussed in Chapter 6, particularly the viewpoints of two leading scholars in this field, Zhang Geng (1911-2003) and Guo Hancheng (1917-2021).

1.2.5 Research on Maoqiang Opera as Local Opera in Shandong

There are officially 28 forms of traditional local opera in contemporary Shandong Province, with Maoqiang Opera being one of them. In recent decades, investigation into these various opera forms has gradually become more comprehensive, detailed and refined, with government-funded experts increasingly being involved in the process; see, for example, Li Zhaobi and Ji Genyin's *The History of Shandong Local Operas* (1983); Gao Dingzhu's *Music of Shandong Opera: An Introduction* (2000); and Sun Shougang's *Series of Shandong Local Operas* (2012). These books detail the repertoires, histories, musical features, and other characteristic stylistic elements of the various Shandong operas, invariably classifying Maoqiang Opera within the Leather Drum Opera System (*zhouguzi tixi*) of Shandong operas (see Section 2.2).

There are also abundant journal articles focusing on specific opera genres. For example, Wang Yinglin (2018) details the history, famous performers and singing techniques of Shandong Bangzi Opera; Guan Chengfeng and Qi Wenxuan (2020) examine the defining characteristics of Liuqiang Opera; and Zhao Wenying (2020) focuses on recently created Lü Opera works. Meanwhile, recent years have also witnessed an increase in interdisciplinary research about Shandong opera forms within a much broader social, political, and economic context. For example, Zhong Xingming and Wang Yan (2021) focus on the preservation, inheritance and utilisation of local ICH, with local operas in Shandong serving as case studies; Gao Jianqun and Wang Lu (2021) assess recent endeavours to transmit Shandong opera forms outside China as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative; and Liu Wenlin (2022) uses Lü Opera

performance in Dongying City as a case study, illustrating the role of local culture in promoting local tourism industry.

Two recent books are essential aids towards understanding Maoqiang Opera's position within the wider context of Shandong operas. Firstly, Zhou Aihua's book (2019), titled *A Study of Shandong Small-Local Operas*, summarises the general history of Shandong operas, explains the value of local operas in carrying local culture and local identity, and categorises them into four systems according to their different song styles, speech styles, musical characteristics, and dialects. She further confirms that Maoqiang Opera can be classified within the Leather Drum Opera System. Secondly, Zhao Zheng's book (2019), titled *A Study of Shandong Local Opera Music*, also identifies four main categories of Shandong opera, and pinpoints the musical characteristics of the representative opera genres in each category. In his research, he uses Maoqiang Opera, Liuqiang Opera and Wuyin Opera as examples to explain the musical characteristics shared across the opera forms in the leather drum opera category.

Earlier accounts of Maoqiang Opera's historical development can be found in Li and Ji's book (1983) and *Traditional Opera in China: The Shandong Volume* (1994) by the editorial committee of traditional opera in China. In line with this research and other more recent studies (such as Shan, 2017; Zhou, 2019 and Zhao, 2019), the Maoqiang community generally uphold the view that modern Maoqiang Opera derives from localised Leather Drum Opera (*zhouguzi xi*) in the southeast cities and counties of Shandong Province, including Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Wulian, Zhucheng and Qingdao (see Section 2.3.2). Meanwhile, previous studies have also explored the performances of Maoqiang Opera before the 1950s, focusing on two earlier forms, specifically, *ben* leather drum (*ben zhoughu*) and *mao* leather drum (*mao zhoughu*); see, for example, Jiang, 1955: 18 and Liu and Wang, 1988 (Vol.10): 137-138. As certain researchers have convincingly shown (Zhang, 1980: 91; Shan, 2017: 15-21; Zhou, 2019: 130), even amongst performers dedicated to the same kind of opera, one can typically find a plethora of styles with their own characteristic "flavours" (*weidao*), where only the artists themselves and knowledgeable enthusiasts can identify the fine distinctions. The Maoqiang community agree with this interpretation, noting subtle differences in dialect and style across different regions, and drawing distinctions between local versions, such as Gaomi Maoqiang, Jiaozhou Maoqiang, and Wulian Maoqiang (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3).

Meanwhile, my research also draws from studies addressing other Shandong Province opera forms, especially Liuqin Opera, Bangzi Opera and Lü Opera (Li and Ji, 1983; Gao, 2000; Zhou, 2019), because these are known to have influenced Maoqiang Opera in various ways. For example, much of Maoqiang Opera's classic repertoire is shared with Liuqin Opera, and Maoqiang's distinctive *mao* melodic pattern is thought to have evolved from Liuqin's *lahun* tune (*lahunqiang*) pattern (detailed in Section 4.3.2). At the same time, numerous points of distinction remain.

For example, while Maoqiang Opera employs the *jinghu* (two-stringed bowed fiddle) as a primary melodic instrument (in common with Peking Opera), Liuqin Opera features the *liuqin* (plucked lute) instead (Song, 2014).

Moreover, because the spoken parts of Maoqiang Opera feature local dialect, this study also draws from linguistic research into Shandong dialects. Since 1957, linguists have collected extensive data from 97 counties to compile the *Shandong Dialect Dictionary* (1997), edited by Dong Shaoke. Another key study in this area is *Research on Shandong Dialects* (2001), edited by Qian Zengyi. The latter is currently the most comprehensive and authoritative research of Shandong dialects and is based on Qian's early research in 1985, documenting more than 610,000 words, illustrating the tones, dialect words, grammar and historical development of the Shandong dialect, particularly in the Qing Dynasty. Qian's study also helpfully includes 24 maps, illustrating the distribution of dialects across Shandong. According to both Dong (1997) and Qian (2001), there are 130 different Shandong subdialects in total, and each of the counties and cities that currently foster Maoqiang performance has its own distinctive subdialect (see Section 2.2.3).

There are currently only two extended books focusing on Maoqiang Opera. Neither is easy to fully understand without prior extensive knowledge about Chinese music theory. One of the studies, entitled *Basic Knowledge about Shandong Maoqiang Opera* (2009), mainly focuses on the Jiaozhou style of Maoqiang Opera. From 2004 to 2009, many Maoqiang Opera performers and artists from different troupes in different cities contributed to the data collection for this book, with two senior performers from the Jiaozhou Maoqiang (Wang Benhong and Ding Senjü) leading the process and acting as chief editors. Most of the book is filled up with music scores in number notation, documenting 15 sung melodies from classic Maoqiang works, and 49 commonly used prelude melodies, interlude, coda, and labelled melodies. Certain sections from this book were submitted to the committee of the joint conference system in 2006, in a bid for State-Level ICH. This book is also used to provide basic preliminary teaching material to young performers (by different opera troupes), and is sometimes used by amateurs and enthusiasts who wish to learn as a hobby.

The other extended study of Maoqiang Opera focuses instead on Gaomi style Maoqiang Opera: *A Study of Gaomi Maoqiang Opera* (2017), by Shan Xiaojie. Shan is a native Gaomi person and an associate professor at Kaili Conservatory of Music (Kaili College), Guizhou Province, and the research for her book was funded by the Guizhou government. She conducted five field investigations with the Gaomi Troupe in 2006, 2007 (twice), 2014 and 2016, with her most extended trip lasting about a month (in February 2007) and her shortest lasting just six days (in August 2007). The book addresses many aspects of the artform, including its history, famous performers, contexts of performance, the development of the Gaomi troupe, the classic works in the repertoire, the different actors' roles, percussion patterns, characteristic features in spoken and sung passages, the changing opera market, government policies for

safeguarding Maoqiang Opera in Gaomi City, stylistic innovation, and achievements in creating new works. Meanwhile, from the perspective of music analysis, Shan also examines Maoqiang Opera's musical forms, rhythmic patterns, melodic patterns (in the sung passages), tonality, and vocal register. Although Shan's research covers a wide range of topics, many research areas are addressed only in one or two paragraphs, often with only scanty details provided as evidence. For example, Shan explores the Maoqiang opera market by collecting 400 questionnaires from audience members (in 2006); although she observes that 98 of the 100 older respondents who had finished primary school listened to Maoqiang Opera frequently in their daily lives, she does not provide any information about their ages, and does not detail how she selected the recipients and distributed and collected her questionnaires. In addition, her study remains very much focused on the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe. In contrast, my study seek to investigate the various different types of Maoqiang troupe and their contrasting activities under the supervision of national and regional government.

Overall, this literature review has identified the main studies that I have drawn from in my work, specifically to address four primary research fields: cultural preservation policy, music as ICH, traditional Chinese opera, and local operas in Shandong Province. These reviewed studies have played important roles in my project, providing extensive pertinent information and ideas, while informing my research questions, methodologies, and presentation. Hereafter, my focus turns to Maoqiang Opera and to the government's impactful measures to safeguard and promote it. The final two sections of this chapter will clarify my research questions, explain my methodology, and introduce the thesis outline.

1.3 Research Questions and Methodology

This study focuses on revealing Maoqiang Opera's current predicament in detail - elucidating the contents of the operas themselves (as focal examples of regional ICH), explaining the day-to-day activities of the troupes that keep the artform alive, detailing the government's safeguarding cultural policies, and clarifying precisely how those policies are enacted in Maoqiang culture at large. Inspired by the literature reviewed above (and also by the studies addressed in more depth subsequently), and deeply informed by my fieldwork experiences in Shandong Province, my work has been guided by the following set of research questions, each accommodating four subsidiary areas of study:

1) Why is Maoqiang Opera regarded as representative of traditional local culture in Southeast Shandong Province, worthy of nomination as State-Level ICH?

- What is the history of Maoqiang Opera? How did it develop into its current state? And what are the areas of contention within the research?
- What are the defining characteristics of Maoqiang Opera that have been handed down from previous generations into the present (considering percussion patterns, melodic patterns, singing techniques, narrative themes, and so on)?
- In what ways has Maoqiang Opera been influenced by Peking Opera and by other local operas in Shandong Province? Meanwhile, what are the elements that render Miaoqiang Opera distinctive from other forms?
- How is local identity embedded in Maoqiang Opera (for example through the handling of dialect), and how does the artform contribute towards the lives of people living in the area?

2) How do governmental policies influence the Maoqiang opera troupes' activities, and who are the Maoqiang opera performers in the present-day?

- How do governmental policies inform the opera troupes' management models?
- What are the different types of Maoqiang opera troupe, and how do their management models differ? What are the routine activities of the different types of Maoqiang troupe, and what are the underlying objectives to their practices?
- Who are the Maoqiang performers in the different troupes, and what are their personal motivations for joining troupes, developing skills, and performing? How are performers selected, trained, and evaluated?
- What are the performers' attitudes towards other troupes and their management models? To what extent is there tension or conflict between government-sponsored professional troupes and amateur troupes?

3) Who watches Maoqiang Opera, and how have governmental policies influenced the Maoqiang Opera market in rural and urban areas?

- What was the Maoqiang market like, historically? Who cultivated and supported the artform in previous times?
- In current times, who constitutes the core audience for Maoqiang Opera? What are their opinions towards recent transformations in performance and reception?
- How do the performers adapt their art to suit widely varying contexts (ranging from small remote rural villages to large stages in huge cities)?
- What policies have been formulated to sustain the Maoqiang market in its homeland rural areas, and how are they enacted?

4) How have governmental policies influenced the Maoqiang Opera repertoire and performance practice?

- What types of new Maoqiang Opera are produced, why are they created, and what are they like (in terms of musical characteristics, story themes, performance styles, and so on)?
- Who is involved in the creation of new works, and what are the factors that influence their creative decisions?
- How are new pieces received by audiences? What are the various difficulties encountered when creating modern works?
- How does the Maoqiang community address the dilemma of maintaining authenticity while allowing change? What are the viewpoints of officials and performers concerning new repertoire and its role in future development?

This study mainly draws upon an ethnographic methodology to explore these research questions. My fieldwork in the southeast peninsula of Shandong Province between January and October 2020 involved the following: interviewing Maoqiang Opera participants; filming different types of Maoqiang troupes' daily rehearsals and live performances; transcribing the collected recordings and music scores of Maoqiang works¹⁹; and learning about this opera in detail from Maoqiang performers - encompassing the form's history, musical characteristics, vocal techniques, body gestures, opera makeup, and much more besides. Specifically, to help me identify the artform's defining musical characteristics, I mainly learned from two performers in the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe, a drummer in the percussion ensemble (Xu Qingli) and a player of the *jinghu* (two-stringed vertical

¹⁹ I obtained my bachelor's degree from the Music Conservatory of Capital Normal University, Beijing, China and have learned vocal music, piano, and music theories since junior high school.

fiddle) (Ge Pingjin). Some of the vocalists in this troupe also taught me how to sing various excerpts. To investigate the Maoqiang troupes' different management models and performance styles, I visited six different Maoqiang troupes and groups. To develop a detailed understanding of the troupe's government-backed cultural activities, I participated in the Wulian Troupe's performances in the countryside (detailed further below), and observed their involvement in a local public square dance competition and in the summer festival of the Wulian County (see Appendix. 2 Schedule of 2020 Fieldwork).

Meanwhile, I interviewed professional and amateur performers, composers, scriptwriters, enthusiasts, government officials, and audience members (mostly villagers in the countryside). During the interviews, I used Mandarin Chinese, and when I communicated with the older villagers in the countryside, I used the Shandong dialect with which they are most comfortable and which I am proficient at using, having been born and raised in the area myself. To update my information, I have consistently kept in touch with most of the Maoqiang performers I have met (see Appendix. 1 List of Interviewees).

Moreover, I joined a government-funded Maoqiang troupe as an apprentice - specifically, the Wulian County Qinglian Maoqiang Opera Troupe (*wulian xian qinglian maoqiang jütuan*). Participant-observation has been easily the most constructive method for gaining information about Maoqiang culture. Observation and interviews have proved essential for accessing people's memories and opinions, but I have found that interviewees have tended to be rather cautious, aiming to provide 'correct' and 'model' answers. This has especially been the case when interviewing performers from government-funded troupes. Consequently, I have sought to interact with performers in less formal contexts than the interview, finding ample opportunities to discuss all sorts of matters while joining the troupe on its daily activities. From 11 January to 5 July 2020, I was able to participate in the troupe's daily routines, joining them in group discussions, one-to-one conversations, and rehearsals and performances. I also made sure that I was helpful to them, for example assisting in arranging stage props and cleaning the rehearsal rooms.²⁰ Most importantly, I could travel together with this troupe to a great many local villages, to film live Maoqiang performances and interview audience members in the countryside (see Appendix 3. List of the 54 Villages in Wulian County). I had originally considered conducting questionnaires to elicit audience members' memories and opinions, but I soon abandoned that approach on discovering that some were uncomfortable with the official-seeming format of the written text and taking advantage of being there face-to-face with them in their home villages.

Although, generally, I was able to gather extensive information about Maoqiang culture during my fieldwork period, it should be noted that, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the Maoqiang troupes cancelled their public activities in February and

²⁰ I obtained an internship certificate from the Wulian Troupe's administrative office.

March 2020. However, the members of the different troupes remained actively involved in creating new COVID-themed works during this period, to eulogise medical workers, volunteers, and ordinary Chinese people, portraying their solidarity and determination to fight the pandemic together. Thus, I was able to adapt to circumstances and turn my attention to documenting the processes involved in producing new repertoire - opera songs, playlets and full-length operas.

Although I am locally born and bred, I knew little about the many facets of live Maoqiang performance prior to my fieldwork. Alongside my involvement in back-stage and front-stage activities, I also gained insights through on-stage participation, playing cameo roles in the classic opera performances of various different troupes - specifically, taking on various “running soldier” (*paobing*) roles involving no spoken or sung lines. Figure 1-4 shows some of my various contributions as a minor performer.



Figure 1-4. ① The Wulian Troupe’s performance of the classic opera *Splashing Water in Front of a Horse* (*maqian poshui*), Zangjia Chahe Village, Hubu Township, 15 May 2020;²¹ ② The New Era Troupe’s performance of the classic opera *Young lady Mengjiang* (*mengjiang nü*), Yanhe Village, Jietou Township, 11 July 2020;²² ③ The Wulian Troupe’s performance of the classic opera *The Younger Sister’s Wedding* (*zimei yijia*), Huangxiangzi Village, Hubu Township, 13 May 2020;²³ ④ Two local villagers and me at the entrance to the Gaoze Troupe’s headquarters after recording a promotional video, Gaoze Village, Gaoze Subdistrict, 3 September 2020.

²¹ I am one of the running soldiers, standing behind the young male performer on the right.

²² I am one of the running soldiers, wearing the green and yellow top.

²³ Four running soldiers are standing in the second row, and I am the second running soldier from the left.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Following on from this introductory chapter, my exploration of Maoqiang Opera proceeds through five chapters, exploring the above-listed research questions. Based on relevant literature and ethnographic fieldwork data, Chapter 2 presents the cultural background of Maoqiang Opera. This chapter firstly reviews the policies regarding Maoqiang Opera's initial application for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2006 and secondly details how policies of Theatrical System Reform have influenced the constitutions, structures, and workings of government-funded opera troupes. Maoqiang Opera's history is explored in detail, showing how the genre is rooted in various local folk genres that were once prevalent in Shandong Province. Discussion then turns to examine how local identity is still embedded within performance practice today, especially via the implementation of Shandong dialect. Meanwhile, this chapter also introduces the types of stories told in the operas, detailing a selection of classic works that are well-known amongst audience members and still performed frequently today. Finally, this chapter reviews the Maoqiang Opera market from the 1950s to 1980s, showing why the community considers this period as a golden period of prosperity.

The subsequent four chapters then focus on four topics that are closely interrelated as critical concerns for state-level ICH designation: the inheritance, preservation, dissemination, and development of Maoqiang Opera culture. Most importantly, these chapters show how various government policies have profoundly impacted all aspects of the culture.

Chapter 3 examines how policies of Theatrical System Reform have affected the troupes' constitutions and activities, focusing on Maoqiang performers, current management models, different types of Maoqiang troupe (state-owned, state-private-owned, privately-owned and local civic), sources of income, and the types of performance that the troupes give. The chapter is based on four main case studies, detailing the workings of the four different types of troupe and their contributions towards safeguarding Maoqiang Opera in contemporary society. Here, it is demonstrated that the government-funded troupes play a dominant role in ensuring that Maoqiang Opera is transmitted to the next generation as a living cultural tradition.

Chapter 4 elucidates the artform's artistic contents - detailing the various characteristics that define Maoqiang Opera, distinguishing it from other local operas and making it worthy of designation and preservation as ICH. The scope of this topic is broad, encompassing body movements, costumes, facial makeup, and so forth. However, this study especially concentrates on exploring Maoqiang Opera's distinctive musical characteristics (percussion patterns and melodic features), and also considers the relationships between Maoqiang Opera and other operatic forms (Peking Opera, Liuqin Opera and Bangzi Opera).

Chapter 5 examines how the policy of *'Sending Opera to the Countryside'* currently impacts performance practice. This chapter argues that, although Maoqiang Opera is also disseminated through mass media, the live performances form the backbone of the current preservation efforts, ensuring the vitality of the Maoqiang troupes and revitalising the Maoqiang market in numerous villages and towns. This chapter highlights the primary performance task of the government-funded Maoqiang troupes, which is regularly giving live performances in the countryside. The Wulian Troupe's first show season of 2020 is examined in detail to investigate the performing activity in the countryside. The current state of the Maoqiang Opera market in both rural and urban areas is also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 6 examines the policy of *'Making Traditional Opera Represent Modern Life'*, focusing on the ongoing process of creating modern Maoqiang works with the guidance and support of the government. This chapter uses four representative modern works created during different historical periods as case studies for exploring the following matters: how works serve as 'products of the times' (*shidai chanwu*); why all Maoqiang troupes are enthusiastic about creating modern works; what challenges are commonly encountered in this creative process; and, most importantly, what the actual effects of this process are on cultivating interest amongst audience members and further developing the artform. This final chapter again highlights government intervention as the main driving force for Maoqiang Opera's continued development in modern society.

Chapter 2. The Cultural Background of Maoqiang Opera

This chapter explores the cultural background of Maoqiang Opera, drawing from original ethnographic fieldwork data and relevant literature. Policies for the reform of China's theatrical system have influenced the classification and management model of current government-funded Maoqiang Opera troupes. Accordingly, the first section teases out the histories of specific policies from the 1950s to the 2010s and presents a review of the historical development of government-funded troupes.²⁴ Subsequently, it is also crucial to establish a comprehensive understanding of the background of Maoqiang Opera itself. The second section thus focuses on clarifying the essential features of Maoqiang Opera, exploring why this form of traditional (*chuantong*) and local (*difang*) opera acts as a potent expression of local identity. The third section then introduces the types of stories told in classic Maoqiang Opera, which still today constitutes the most commonly performed and widely appreciated repertoire amongst audience members. Finally, this chapter explores why the Maoqiang community considers the period from the 1950s to the 1980s to have been a golden period in Maoqiang Opera history.

2.1 Theatrical System Reform in China

From March 1949 to 1951, the local battlefield art troupes²⁵ (*zhandi wengong tuan*) in the time of war were gradually turned into song and dance troupes, art troupes or opera troupes, which were managed by private persons, but under the supervision of local party committees. This could be seen as the beginning of Theatrical System Reform - a complicated, profound and ongoing process in China, influencing the development of all types of traditional opera troupes. The most significant time points in this reform are the years 1951, 1985, 1994, 2003 and 2015, when vital policies about reforming opera troupes were enacted (Fu, 2010 and 2012; Guan, 2013; Kang, 2017; Hu, 2018). Focusing on these time points, this section explores the influences of this reform on the development of government-funded traditional opera troupes, especially Maoqiang Opera troupes.

The first national-level policy, '*Instructions about Chinese Opera Reform*' was enacted on 5 May 1951, signed by prime minister Zhou Enlai²⁶ (1898-1976), specifying the necessity of reforming traditional opera troupes. The opera troupe registration system (*jütuan dengji zhidu*) was formulated in this document and implemented in 1951. The central government would bear the income losses and pay the cost of

²⁴ Details about the current management models of different Maoqiang Opera troupes and the specific responsibilities of government-funded troupes are explored in Chapter 3.

²⁵ The People's Liberation Army managed this kind of troupe during the war, mainly composing and performing red songs, military songs and martial music.

²⁶ Zhou Enlai was the first prime minister of the People's Republic of China and was a member of the Chinese Communist Party's first generation of central collective leadership. The original full text of this document can be found in Shandong Political Newspaper, 1951, Vol.05; Shanxi Political Newspaper, 1951, Vol.06; Jiangxi Political Newspaper, 1951, Vol.02, <https://xuewen.cnki.net/CJFD-SXBA195106026.html>

costumes, stage properties and general expenses of registered troupes. Meanwhile, registered troupes should pay taxes if they made a profit from commercial performances. This kind of troupe was the earliest form of the state-owned troupe (*guoban tuanti*) - the type of troupe fully funded by the government (Chang, 1996: 11; Fu, 2005a: 94). The current Maoqiang troupes in Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Qingdao and Wulian were registered as troupes between 1955 and 1965.

To become a registered troupe, private troupes should choose a particular type of opera to perform, and the officially certified name of their troupes should contain a specific opera's name, such as Peking Opera Troupe, Kunqu Opera Troupe, Huangmei Opera Troupe, and Maoqiang Opera Troupe. Meanwhile, a settled performance site was also required, as many private troupes travelled widely across cities and provinces causing management difficulties and ambiguities for local government. The settled performance site could be a hall, theatre, auditorium, or even an outdoor stage. This influenced the specific area or provinces where a particular type of local opera currently existed (Fu, 2010: 7-8 and 2005a: 93; Chang, 1996: 8-9). Still today, outdoor stages are widely prevalent across the countryside of China, being used for performances, competitions (for example, of square-dancing) and the opening ceremonies for street markets. Maoqiang Opera troupes have long given village performances on this kind of stage.²⁷

Meanwhile, the registered opera troupe should be a professional troupe. In order to integrate the best resources, the phenomenon of troupe merging (*jütuan hebing*) was expected, and the registered troupes attracted the most skilled performers to join. After ten years of reform, the number of registered opera troupes had increased to 2842 by 1962 (Guan, 2013: 94-96). However, privately-owned opera troupes still played a dominant role in the traditional opera market during the early 1960s, because the number of registered professional troupes was far less than private amateur troupes (Guo, 2012; Guan, 2013). Regarding Maoqiang troupes, elderly villagers in Wulian County also recollected that they could enjoy performances by their own villages' amateur troupes in the 1950s and early 1960s, but there were few opportunities to enjoy performances by professional troupes.²⁸

However, the increased number of registered troupes soon became a heavy financial burden on the central government. Even worse, because the government funds covered the revenue deficit, performers of registered troupes had little awareness of competition and innovation, which was not conducive to the further development of the whole opera market (Zhu, 1982; Fu, 2005b). As early as 1957, the Ministry of Culture introduced a new policy to improve eligibility criteria to control the increasing number of newly registered troupes. In 1963, the Ministry of Culture first proposed to change the management model of registered troupes to self-financing (*zifu yingkui*). This kind of troupe was called a 'collectively-owned troupe' (*gongyou*

²⁷ For more details, see Section 5.1.2 about performance sites in the countryside.

²⁸ Personal communication with elderly villagers, Wulian County, between May and July 2020.

zhi jütuan) because the ownership of the troupe belonged to all the troupe members. The government would not be responsible for covering the deficit of collectively-owned troupes, and the troupe members should bear their own profit and loss (Yan, 1981; Xu, 2010).

There was little scope for the 1963 proposal to take effect on a national scale because of radical changes in policy associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), wherein propaganda teams (*xuanchuan dui*) directly managed by local party committees took the place of the vast majority of traditional opera troupes. Only a few opera troupes were restructured after 1971, but their performances were still Model Opera (*yangban xi*) and most of them adopted the self-financing management mode without government funds (Fu, 2010: 8). Elderly members of the current Maoqiang troupes recall that their troupes were re-labelled as ‘cultural and art propaganda teams’ (*wenyi xuanchuan dui*). For example, Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe was called ‘Gaomi Cultural and Art Propaganda Team’. All the classic Maoqiang performances in Gaomi Troupe during the revolutionary period were banned, and the model operas dominated the whole opera market in Gaomi City. The Maoqiang Opera Museum of the current Gaomi Troupe exhibits a mass of scripts, leaflets, and photos of Model Opera performances from the revolutionary period (see Figure 2-1).²⁹



Figure 2-1. Photos of Gaomi Troupe’s performances during the revolutionary period, in Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Museum, August 11, 2020.

After the revolution, in the early 1980s, Theatrical System Reform entered into a new stage. Research shows that the current system, where state-owned opera troupes

²⁹ For more details, see Section 6.1.1 in Chapter 6 about modern operas.

rely entirely on government financial support, was formed during this period (Fu, 2010: 3; Guo, 2012: 200). The central government gave strong support to revive the traditional opera performance market, which was destroyed during the revolution. After 1978, the opera market witnessed an increasing number of professional opera troupes fully funded by the government. Troupe members were paid regular wages and could also gain additional income from commercial performances (where audience members would pay for entry). The number of state-owned troupes in China is recorded as having peaked at 3533 in 1980 (Fu, 1998b: 26). In this way, then, the traditional opera market is thought to have experienced a brief period of prosperity under the government's full backing (Yan, 1981; Gao, 1985).

However, it is thought that troupe members' competitiveness and positivity were diminished as a consequence of stable and equally-distributed income. Meanwhile, the expenses of managing professional opera troupes were huge, as there were too many service staff members in the troupes, including bookkeepers, chefs, drivers, cleaners and even health workers. Their salaries were also covered by the government, and differed little from the wages of the opera performers themselves. Cultural ministry advisers and scholars increasingly called for more profound troupe reform to solve these problems. They proposed reducing the number of state-owned troupes and switching to the management model of the self-financing troupe (Yang, 1983: 41; Zhong, 1983: 59; Zhang and Wang, 1983: 6-7). As early as 1983, the local governments of many provinces had already begun to reduce the number of state-owned opera troupes. For example, in 1983, Shandong Province had 157 state-owned troupes with more than 10800 practitioners. Later, by 1985, there were only 72 troupes with less than 7000 practitioners (Gu, 1986: 20).

On April 23, 1985, the Ministry of Culture released another important document, *'Instructions on the Reform of Performing Arts Troupes'*. The clauses in this document officially specified that state-owned troupes should reduce their dependence on government support and face market competition directly (Jian, 1986: 34). The policy encouraged the self-financing management model, with the government only providing a small basic salary to troupe members and limited costs towards costumes, staging and so on. Distribution based on labour was emphasised, the capability assessment system (*renyuan kaohe zhidu*) was implemented to knockout unskilled performers and redundant staff, and commercial performances became the primary source of income for opera troupes (Fang, 1986: 18).

However, with changes in entertainment culture, particularly the popularisation of television and films, the traditional opera performance market gradually entered a depression after the 1980s. Most of the troupes failed to adapt to the market competition. They could not make enough income from commercial performances and the government-allocated basic salaries were insufficient to cover their basic operating expenses. To generate more performance opportunities, state-owned troupes lowered the fees for their commercial performances. However, some troupes

encountered the problem of income being lower than the outgoing expenses. Thus, they had to stop all their performances and go out of business (Fu, 1998b: 26; Chang, 1996: 8). This phenomenon was commonplace. According to data provided in the *Guangming Daily* on May 10, 1995, there were 2681 state-owned troupes in 1994, 373 of which did not give a single performance throughout the whole year. The state-owned opera troupes had gone through a challenging period. Although several new policies were enacted by the Ministry of Culture between 1985 and 1994 to increase the vitality of traditional opera culture, state-owned troupes still could not resolve their financial difficulties and began to disband one after another (Peng and Liu, 2016). For example, the Wulian County government disbanded the old Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe in December 1986, mainly because of financial difficulties.

In 1994, to maintain the sustainable development of traditional opera, the Ministry of Culture enacted two proposals on 28 February and 24 March. The decision to allocate performance subsidy (*yanchu butie*) to state-owned troupes was finally confirmed in the March proposal: '*Instructions on Accelerating and Deepening the Reform of State-owned Performing Arts Troupes*'. After that, provision to state-owned troupes was standardised to include basic salary and performance subsidy, with additional income being gained through commercial performance. Moreover, the government funds were not limited to subsidies. For example, the government also encouraged opera troupes to compose modern operas, and there have been various types of government-organised script-writing competition since the 1990s. If the new works won a prize, the opera troupe would be rewarded with a bonus. This ongoing policy is called '*Substitute Subsidies with Rewards*' (*yijiang daibo*).³⁰ The development of state-owned troupes has thus entered a relatively stable period (Fu, 1998a and 2012; Guo, 2012). In 1998, there were still more than 2600 state-owned opera troupes in China, even though the opera performance market was still shrinking (Fu, 2005a: 92).

In the 21st century, Theatrical System Reform has entered a new phase, focusing on the important roles played by cultural enterprise and performing companies in stimulating the vitality of the traditional opera market. On 8 November 2002, Jiang Zemin's Report at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China specified: "we must give our support to major cultural projects, art schools and troupes, ensuring that they are up to national standards and embody national characteristics".³¹ The report also emphasised the importance of cultural industry, proclaiming that "developing the cultural industry is an important means for enriching socialist culture in the market economy and meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of the people."

³⁰ Performance subsidies and rewards are still important sources of income for the current government-funded opera troupes. For more details, see Chapter 5 about performing in the countryside and Chapter 6 about creating modern operas.

³¹ From Clause 5 of the Sixth (VI) Article in Jiang Zemin's report, '*Cultural Development and Restructuring*'. The Chinese-English Version of the full text was released on the official website of China Daily, http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/19thpcnationalcongress/2017-10/16/content_32684821_10.htm

On 31 December 2003, the second national-level policy since 1951 for reforming the management model of opera troupes was enacted, entitled '*Notifications for Implementing a Pilot Project, Supporting Cultural-Industrial Development and the Transformation of Commercial Cultural Institutions into Cultural Enterprise during Cultural System Reform*'.³² Between 2007 and 2014, the Ministry of Culture and the Publicity Department of the Communist Party enacted another six policies toward stepping up cooperation between the government and cultural enterprise in managing performing art troupes. Remarkably, the 2009 policy stipulated that the local governments of each province, autonomous region or municipality should fulfil the task of reforming at least one or two state-owned troupes before 2012, especially the reform of county-level state-owned troupes.³³ With the implementation of these policies, the number of state-private-owned troupes (*gongsi heyong tuanti*) increased significantly on a national scale (Yang, 2015; Liu, 2015). In simple terms, the government funds all the expenses of state-owned troupes, while the critical features of the state-private-owned troupe are that the cultural enterprise or performing company bears the cost of basic salary for the troupe members rather than the government. However, the government still covers the expenses of performance subsidies and other kinds of bonus (Kang, 2017: 46-47). Both state-owned troupes and state-private-owned troupes are classified as government-funded troupes. This study will explore the management models of different types of opera troupe in more detail in Chapter 3.

The current management models of traditional opera troupes were formed in 2015 when the third national-level policy concerning Theatrical System Reform was enacted, entitled '*Instructions for Prioritising the Social Effects of State-owned Cultural Enterprise, Balancing Social Effects and Economic Benefits*'.³⁴ After 2015, cultural policies have further emphasised that the development of cultural industries should always prioritise social effects. This means that the government no longer prioritises the self-financing management model, pushing opera troupes to participate in market competition in order to gain economic benefit. Meanwhile, cultural policies have consistently paid more attention to safeguarding and transmitting traditional Chinese operas as intangible cultural heritage (Kang, 2017; Che, 2018; Hu, 2018). Notably, since 2015, all the live performances of state-private-owned traditional opera troupes in the countryside have also been fully funded by the government.³⁵

³² Document No. 105 of 2003, issued by the General Office of the State Council. The full text can be found on the official website of the Chinese government. This document had lost efficacy on 27 November 2015, according to Document No.68 of 2015 of the State Council. Full-text can be found on the official website of the Central People's Government of China, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-09/21/content_5110267.htm

³³ Source texts from the '*Several Instructions on Deepening the Theatrical System Reform about State-Owned Performing Art Troupes*', released on 29 July 2009, http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2009-07/29/content_1378601.htm

³⁴ Document No. 50 of 2015, issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, 14 September 2015, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-09/14/content_2931437.htm

³⁵ See Chapter 5 about performing traditional opera in the countryside for more details.

Theatrical System Reform is ongoing, with new policies about managing traditional opera troupes still being issued. On 22 January 2019, new documents were jointly issued by China's Publicity Department of the Communist Party, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Culture and Tourism: '*Proposed Regulations for Assessing the Social Effects of State-owned and Non-state-owned Performing Art Troupes*'.³⁶ This has further stimulated a strong work ethic within opera troupes simply because official recognition, subsidy and reward is dependent on achieving good results in the governmental assessment system. In 2020, the concept of one troupe one system (*yi tuan yi zhi*) was more frequently proposed by political advisers who are field experts in traditional opera, as the actual situations of the different opera troupes are thought to vary.³⁷ This approach may well be tested in the near future.

2.2 Shandong Dialect in Local Traditional Opera

Maoqiang Opera is a small local traditional opera (*chuantong difang xiao jüzhong*) from Shandong Province, performed using the Shandong dialect. Clarifying the origins and definition of Maoqiang Opera is crucial before exploring the art form's current situation and future development. During my field trip in the southeast area of Shandong Province, I collected verbal descriptions of Maoqiang Opera from Maoqiang artists, scriptwriters, officials, composers, and audience members. Literature and documentary evidence will also be used in this section to prove and enhance the reliability of people's verbal descriptions. This section explores the three main concerns of investigating Maoqiang Opera: why Maoqiang Opera is classified as a local and small opera; how Maoqiang Opera becomes what it is now; and how the Shandong dialect is articulated within Maoqiang Opera.

2.2.1 Situating Maoqiang: Opera in the Southeast Shandong Peninsula Area

According to the National Local Opera Survey (2017), traditional Chinese opera genres (*zhongguo xiqü jüzhong*) are generally divided into two categories: national opera (*guojü*) and local opera (*difang xi*).³⁸ Meanwhile, although there is no clear and unified definition in the literature regarding what constitutes a small opera (*xiao jüzhong*) and what constitutes a big opera (*da jüzhong*), these terms are commonly employed. It should be noted that the 'small' and 'big' traditions are different from the anthropological idea of 'little' and 'great' traditions, where the former have a

³⁶ Document No. 13 of 2019, jointly issued by different government agencies, http://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/zcfg/gfxwj/202012/t20201204_906338.html

³⁷ Political advisers' suggestions and proposals at the video conference for '*Promoting the inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Opera*'. Conference excerpts can be founded on the official website of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), 28 September 2020, <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2020/09/28/ARTI1601258514179116.shtml>

³⁸ The National Local Opera Survey was released by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism on 26 December, 2017. https://www.mct.gov.cn/whzx/whyw/201712/t20171226_830165.htm

more localised spread and the latter are trans-provincial in their reach. Basically, the criteria for the classification of ‘small’ and ‘big’ will include the number of core audience members, the number of both professional and amateur troupes, and the proportion of young participants within the artform (*Criteria for the Classification of Chinese Opera Genres*³⁹, 2015). The English version of the abstract of Zhou Aihua’s research (2019: 1), *A Study of Shandong Small-Local Operas*, also uses “small” to describe the characteristics of many local operas in Shandong. This section specifically explains why Maoqiang Opera is ‘local’ and ‘small’.⁴⁰

(a) A ‘Local’ Opera

There are two types of national opera, one being Kunqu Opera and the other being Peking Opera. They are currently performed throughout China. Apart from these two national operas, all the other types of traditional Chinese operas are known as ‘local opera’. There are 348 types of traditional local opera in China. Among them, 48 types of local opera are now distributed in at least two provinces, namely ‘trans-provincial opera’ (*‘kuasheng jūzhong’*). The other 300 types only exist in one province, namely ‘provincial-unique opera’ (*‘shengnei duyōu jūzhong’*). Shandong Province has 28 types of traditional local opera. Among them, four types are trans-provincial operas. Maoqiang Opera is one of the 24 provincial-unique operas, only existing in Shandong Province.

The audience and opera market of the two national operas can be found throughout China. Kunqu Opera is identified as one of the oldest operas in China. It originated in the 14th century in southern China and gradually spread to the whole country. Kunqu Opera is also called ‘the ancestor of all kinds of Chinese opera’ (*bai xi zhi zu*) (Fu, 2014: 42). Peking Opera is generally acknowledged as the most famous type of traditional opera in China and is also known as ‘Chinese Opera’ (*‘guocui’*). In its early history, Peking Opera was influenced by many other Chinese operas, such as Kunqu Opera and Qinqiang Opera⁴¹ during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). The Peking Opera artists not only absorbed elements from other operas, but also dedicated themselves to establishing a distinctive Peking Opera style (Li and Barba, 2010). Peking Opera’s percussion music and body movement have substantially impacted the development of many varieties of local operas, including Maoqiang Opera (Wang and Ding, 2009).

In contrast, the distribution of local operas, including provincial-unique operas and trans-provincial operas is restricted to specific regions or a few provinces. Some opera forms are unique to a particular province and do not have a market outside their homeplace. For example, Maoqiang Opera is this kind of opera: its troupes, performers and audiences currently only exist in Shandong Province. Such opera

³⁹ The *Criteria for the Classification of Chinese Opera Genres (zhongguo xiqu juzhong rending biao zhun)* was issued by the Research Institution of Chinese Opera, Chinese National Academy of Arts, in 2015. See also the 2017 National Local Opera Survey.

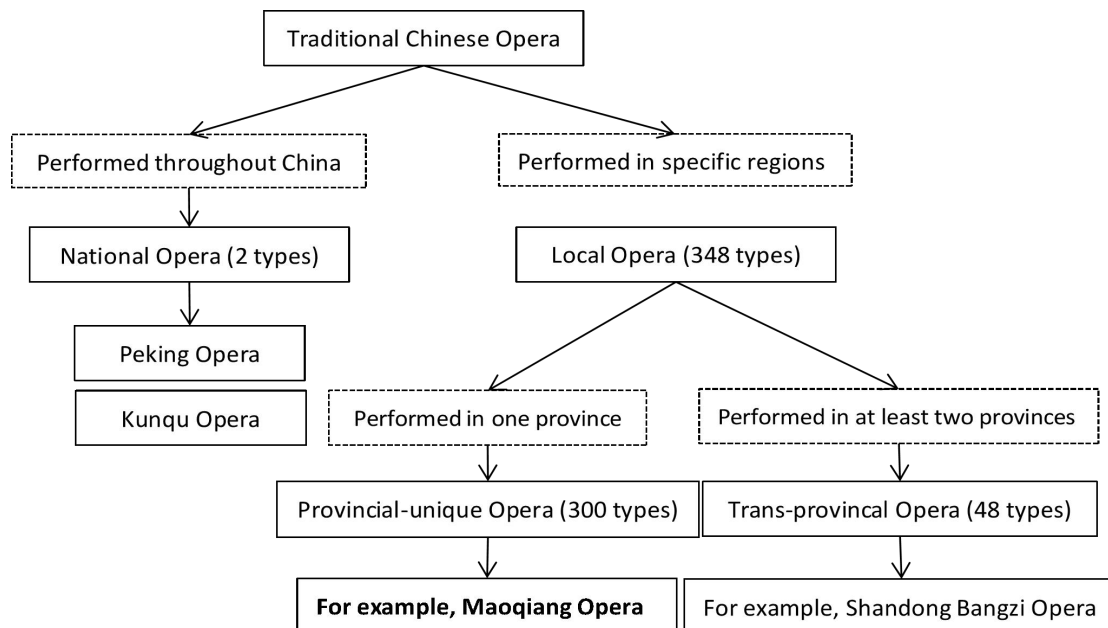
⁴⁰ For further discussion of this keyword ‘traditional’, see the next section: The History of Maoqiang Opera.

⁴¹ Qinqiang Opera exists in the northwest provinces of China, including Shānxi Province and Gansu Province.

forms' restriction to a single region is owing to various interrelated factors. One of the most frequently cited reasons is that the aesthetic of provincial-unique operas mainly caters to local people, and the dialogues of these operas are spoken in local dialect, which is difficult for outsiders to understand (Song, 2014).

Meanwhile, some opera forms are trans-provincial. For example, the trans-provincial form Bangzi Opera historically originated in Hebei Province but is currently also popular in Hebei's neighbouring provinces, including Shandong and Shānxi. The Chinese word *bangzi* means the watchman's clapper, and Bangzi Opera's performance is always accompanied by wooden clappers (Ma and Mao, 1982). The Bangzi Opera in Shandong Province was first introduced from Hebei Province and collided with Shandong's local dialect and culture. Eventually, it developed into a Shandong style of Bangzi Opera. Nowadays, Bangzi Opera has at least twelve styles, and each style is usually named after the region where the style was formed, such as Hebei Bangzi Opera and Shānxi Bangzi Opera. Thus, as a trans-provincial opera, Bangzi Opera in Shandong Province is named as Shandong Bangzi Opera (Qi and Zhang, 2015; Kong, 2021). Table 2-1 shows the standard way of classifying traditional Chinese operas in accordance with regional distribution.⁴²

Table 2-1. Categories of traditional Chinese opera



Although Maoqiang Opera is currently a provincial-unique opera, before the 1980s, Maoqiang Opera troupes also performed the opera form outside Shandong, intending to generate a larger Maoqiang market in the northeast provinces of China. Shan's research about Maoqiang Opera in Gaomi City (2017: 14-16) mentions that during the 1920s, when the Maoqiang Opera was called '*mao* leather durm'

⁴² The diagrams in this section represent a summary of the information in the text above. This study is the first to use charts of this type to clarify the relevant data of Maoqiang Opera .

(‘*maozhougu*’) performance, the Shunhe (harmony) Troupe of Qingdao City travelled around the main cities in the northeast provinces of China. The troupe achieved great success and was warmly welcomed by the locals. It should be noted that there was a wave of immigration during the early 20th Century, during which a large number of Shandong residents emigrated to northeast China in search of arable land (Yu, 2009; Hu, 2013). The ancestral home of many of these locals (*dangdiren*) was actually Shandong Province, which means that many of the audience members were not local residents from the northeast provinces. Rather, the audience of Maoqiang performances were still primarily made up of Shandong people (Shan, 2017: 14).

However, these audience members in the northeast provinces have declined year by year. An older performer of the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe, Xue Lintao, who was born in 1963, told me about the experience of his master’s friend who performed during the 1960s:⁴³

“Most performers of that generation of already passed away including my master...When they traveled to the northeast, the performers of the old troupe were usually under the age of 40, and some of them were only in their 20s. At that time, the members of the old troupe would go to a certain county because they heard that there were a lot of Shandong people living there. They believed their performance would achieve success as each of their performances in Gaomi City had received a lot of applause. Their troupe was very popular in Gaomi City. The performers felt very proud of their performances and resolved to give the Shandong people an opportunity to hear voices from their hometown... They built a big temporary shed in that county and people had to buy a ticket to watch their performances. But I think they lost the sight of the truth that many immigrants from Shandong Province had already lived there for more than fifty years and were no longer familiar with Shandong culture. The younger generation in that county had never even heard of Maoqiang Opera... In the first week, a lot of people went to the performance site maybe because they were curious about these strangers who were from their hometown. After about one week, the audience was getting smaller and smaller.”

Nowadays, the Maoqiang community is still keen to perform Maoqiang Opera outside Shandong Province. Almost every year, there are opportunities for state-owned Maoqiang troupes to perform in Beijing or other provincial-capital cities. However, the Maoqiang community admits that it is difficult to cultivate new followers of Maoqiang Opera outside Shandong and the core audience of Maoqiang Opera is still restricted to southeast Shandong. As a result, Maoqiang Opera is a local opera or, more precisely, a provincial-unique opera of Southeast Shandong Province.

⁴³ Interview, in Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe, 11 August 2020.

(b) A 'Small' Opera

Without a doubt, the two national operas, Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, belong within the big opera category. However, certain local operas can also be categorised as a kind of big opera. According to some scholars who study local operas in Shandong Province (Gao, 2000; Sun, 2012), the most famous trans-provincial opera form in Shandong, Lü Opera, is a kind of big opera. Lü Opera is performed in at least seven provinces of China, even including the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. However, most of the 23 professional Lü Opera troupes are in Shandong Province.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, there are many state-owned troupes dedicated to Lü Opera, especially provincial-level government-funded troupes⁴⁵ (*shengji guoying jütuan*). One of these is the Lü Opera Theatre of Shandong Province (*shandong sheng lüjü yuan*), located in Jinan, Shandong's capital city. Moreover, there are many classic Lü operas, which have been well preserved and are still widely performed. Furthermore, recruiting and training young Lü Opera performers has gone smoothly in recent years. Only in 2018, the Lü Opera Theatre of Shandong recruited 15 performers who were all under the age of 30, and in 2020, there were 24 performers under the age of 30.⁴⁶

In comparison with Lü Opera, Maoqiang Opera is a kind of small opera. It only has three city-level government-funded troupes⁴⁷ (*shiji guoying jütuan*). These troupes are located in Gaomi City, Jiaozhou City, and Qingdao City. Although it is said that Maoqiang performance is also popular in Rizhao City, there is no city-level troupe of Maoqiang Opera based there (though there is a single city-level Lü Opera troupe). The only professional Maoqiang Opera troupe in Rizhao city is a county-level government-funded troupe⁴⁸ (*xianji guoying jütuan*), which is the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe. Moreover, only two troupes in Gaomi and Jiaozhou are officially designated as qualified institutes for safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as intangible cultural heritage. This means these two troupes can get more financial support from the central government and gain more opportunities to perform at government-sponsored events, and thus are more competitive to attract more young performers to join.

Additionally, designation as either a big or small opera depends on the opera form's current predicament. The development of traditional Chinese opera is continues uninterruptedly, being influenced by government policies, the activities of practitioners, the aesthetic tastes of audience members, and so on. These influences

⁴⁴ Data released on the official website of Chinese Opera Culture Network (*xiqu wenhua wang*), 4 August 2013, <https://m.xiquwenhua.com/lvju/xinwen/79316.html>

⁴⁵ Provincial government (specifically, the provincial-level Culture and Tourism Bureau) directly manages this kind of state-owned troupe. This kind of troupe can receive relatively abundant financial support from the government.

⁴⁶ Data released on the official WeChat account of Lü Opera Theatre of Shandong Province, 24 December 2020.

⁴⁷ Municipal government (specifically, the municipal-level Culture and Tourism Bureau) directly manages this kind of state-owned troupe. The total number of staff members in city-level troupes is usually less than eighty.

⁴⁸ The county government directly participates in the management of this kind of troupe. More information about the classification of opera troupes is provided in Chapter 3.

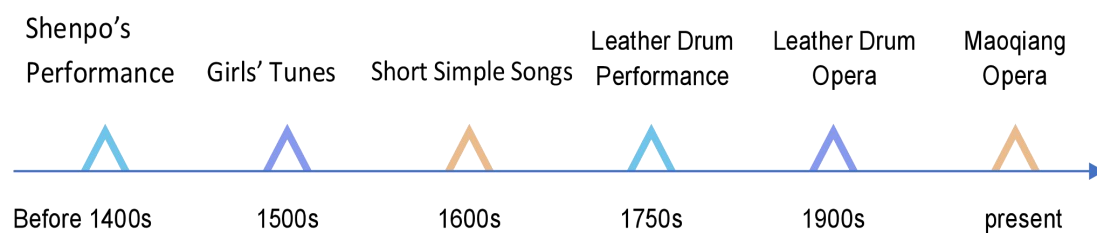
are uncertain and constantly changing, which means a big opera may become smaller, and a small opera may also have potential to develop into a big opera. Therefore, to be more precise, Maoqiang Opera is currently a small local opera situated in southeast Shandong Province but perhaps its status could change in the future.

2.2.2 The History of Maoqiang Opera

Before Maoqiang Opera became what it is now, it developed over a long period of time. It is generally acknowledged by the Maoqiang community that Maoqiang Opera is a traditional opera with more than two centuries of history. The existing history about Maoqiang Opera is mostly based on the old artists' recollections and oral narrations. Because Maoqiang Opera and its ancestors have mainly been cultivated and enjoyed within rural areas, both its audiences and performers have been intimately tied to agricultural life. Having limited links to literati culture, Maoqiang performers and enthusiasts have usually lacked interest in documenting the history and current practice of their artform, rather devoting attention to polishing professional skills. When investigating the origins, definition and development history of Maoqiang Opera, researchers commonly face a lack of historical literature, and especially a lack of documents before the 1950s (Sun, 2012; Shan, 2017; Zhou, 2019).⁴⁹

Elderly artists are unable to tell long histories because their memories do not extend beyond the period of their master, or at most, the period of their master's master. A subjective description is unavoidable in oral history, making the current descriptions of Maoqiang Opera's origin unclear and varied. Meanwhile, uncertainties are unavoidable in this kind of oral account of history. There will be no specific points in time regarding the beginnings or ends of different stages of Maoqiang Opera history. Based on the timeline, this section explores Maoqiang's history by briefly examining its early development before the 1600s; secondly, exploring its precursor, the leather drum (*zhouguzi*) performance; and, thirdly, explaining its mother genre, Leather Drum Opera (*zhoughuzi xi*). However, in reality, genre development is more complex than this, and one form leads through gradual transformation into another form. The main timeline of Maoqiang Opera's historical development is shown below, in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2. The five main stages of Maoqiang Opera's historical development



⁴⁹ Another account of Maoqiang Opera's historical development can be found in *Traditional Opera in China: Shandong*, 1994, assembled and published by the Editorial Committee of Traditional Opera in China.

(a) Early developments: three pre-Qing stages (before 1636)

I have met many artists of Maoqiang Opera and asked them about Maoqiang's origins. To summarise briefly: during the late Ming Dynasty (the late 1630s), many farmers in Shandong were displaced by the chaos caused by war and years of natural disasters. They lost their sources of income and had to leave their homes to seek a living elsewhere. To earn small change or food, the displaced farmers would sometimes give performances of short simple songs (*xiaoqū*) to benefactors. Over time, these performances geared towards gaining living expenses gradually became increasingly complex and diverse, evolving into many kinds of operas, one of them being Maoqiang Opera. Reflecting its ancestry, Maoqiang Opera is still comprised of repertoires of short simple songs.

My informants also mentioned that the melodies of these short simple songs might well come from so-called 'girls' tunes' (*'guniang diao'*). This information seems fairly reliable as I have found a wealth of information about girls' tunes in the literature. *Guniang diao* is a Chinese word comprised of three Chinese characters: *guniang* means girl or young lady, and *diao* in this context describes a specific model of tunes that can be distinguished from other models. The direct translation could therefore be 'tunes performed by young unmarried women'. Thus, I will use the term 'girls' tunes' to replace the Chinese word in my thesis.

Sun Shougang (2012: 3-4) writes in his monograph *Local Operas in Shandong* that the origins of many kinds of local operas in Shandong Province probably lie in girls' tunes. The same theory is thereafter articulated in the research of Shan Xiaojie (2017: 9-11) and Zhao Zheng (2019: 78-83). Earlier, Kong Peipei (2006: 29) asserts that girls' tunes were popular in the middle of the Ming Dynasty, because the transcriptions handed down from the Wanli period (1573-1620) of the Ming Dynasty already mentioned performances of girls' tunes.⁵⁰ This documentary evidence also suggests that girls' tunes actually developed from exorcism rituals, which used to be very popular in rural areas of Shandong Province. If someone became sick, their families would ask a shaman for help to cure the illness. At that time, exorcism rituals in Shandong Province were dominated by female shamans who were usually referred to by local people as *'shenpo'*. The ritual performances of the *shenpo* gradually evolved into girls' tunes and spread among the ordinary villagers. Zhao (2019: 81) goes on to explain why girls' tunes eventually became popular:

“This kind of [exorcism] ritual could be accomplished without the presence of the female shaman [*shenpo*], being carried out by asking an ordinary woman instead. This suggests that the ritual may not have been too difficult to perform, which makes for [tunes performed during] the ritual being easily learned and sung.”

⁵⁰ The transcription from Wanli period, Ming Dynasty in Ma's (2003) research is named *Bo 钵 Zhong 中 Lian 莲*, literally meaning 'lotus flower in a earthen bowl'.

In this way, some academics place the very beginnings of Maoqiang Opera's history before the Ming Dynasty (before the 1640s), identifying three main stages to the early development of the form.⁵¹ Specifically, the earliest ancestor of Maoqiang Opera performance is thought to be probably the female shaman's (*shenpo*) performance of exorcism ritual, with subsequent stages being the girls' tunes (*guniang diao*) and then the repertoire known as short simple songs (*xiaoqū*).

(b) Leather Drum Performance

The generally-acknowledged history of Maoqiang Opera begins after the mid-Qing Dynasty, that is to say, after the 1750s, when the short simple songs gradually became localised in different areas of Shandong. With decades of development, the performances of these songs eventually developed into a new kind of performance named 'leather drum' (*'zhouguzi'*), which was a kind of performance primarily geared towards earning a living. The current artists' oral history and scholars' research typically asserts that the tunes of leather drum performance derive from the aforementioned short simple songs. However, when it comes to understanding why this early genre was known as *'zhouguzi'*, there are at least five different interpretations. The most cogent and convincing interpretation considers *zhouguzi* to mean, literally, elbow drum.

A current member of Wulian County Maoqiang Opera troupe, Zhao Congsheng, who was born in 1952, shared his understanding of leather drum performance with me.⁵² Zhao used to be a public official and worked in the Wulian County Cultural Centre. He joined the opera troupe after retiring from the centre. His job includes sorting out historical documents within the county annals and producing transcripts of folk culture in Wulian County. He is the person in the Wulian Troupe who knows the most about the history of Maoqiang Opera. He explains:

“During the mid-Qing Dynasty, there were still a lot of people wandering around different villages in the rural area of Shandong Province. They were usually the poorest farmers who had lost their workable land. Some of them travelled to the southeast villages and gave performances to the local villagers, in search of a living. They usually brought a leather drum and attached the drum to their waist. I have heard that the drum skins were usually made of dog skin because, compared to cowhide, dog skin was easier to get.”

In this phase, leather drum performance included very little instrumentation, only featured one or two performers, and did not last long. Zhao explains further:

⁵¹ The early development of Maoqiang Opera is also thought to have been influenced by local folk songs in Shandong Province and Yangko performance. Yangko is a kind of folkdance performance that originated in the Nansong Dynasty (1127-1279). It still prevails in rural areas of Shandong Province and provinces of northern China.

⁵² Personal communication, in Wulian Maoqiang Troupe, 2 April 2020.

“The wandering farmers went and knocked on the doors of the benefactors, singing while beating the leather drum. Sometimes, they used the elbow of their arm to beat the drum instead of using their hand. This is because they needed to use their hand to reach out for the benefactors’ alms. [I had another conversation with Zhao afterwards, and he said this may also have been because the performers were holding something else in their hands, or they needed to use it for gesturing in dance.] The contents of their performances were small stories that happened in people’s daily lives, or they could even sing about their own miserable life experiences or articulate some auspicious wishes to their benefactors.”

Zhao Congsheng’s understanding of leather drum performance is the one that is most commonly adhered to within the Maoqiang community and also by most researchers of local Shandong opera, although some details remain uncertain. For example, there is no confirmed information about the size of the leather drum and precisely how it was held during their performance. Li Zhaobi and Ji Genyin (1983: 116) also mention leather drum performance in their monograph *A Compilation of Historical Materials for Local Opera in Shandong Province*. They write that “the performers usually wrapped a small leather drum (*xiao pigu*) under their elbow, singing and beating the drum at the same time”. However, it is uncertain whether the small leather drum was a palm-sized drum, or if the drum was wrapped to the waist as suggested by Zhao Congsheng’s explanation, in which case it was probably of a slightly larger size.

This phase of leather drum performance has been regarded as a transitional period, during which performances were attributed with a complete storyline and additional instrumental accompaniment. Shan (2017: 11-12) explains that, compared with the performance of short simple songs, one of the most significant developments of leather drum performance was the usage of percussion instruments such as drum, wooden clapper and gong. To compel more benefactors to give small change, leather drum performances became more and more complicated and professionalised, requiring more people to join the performance.

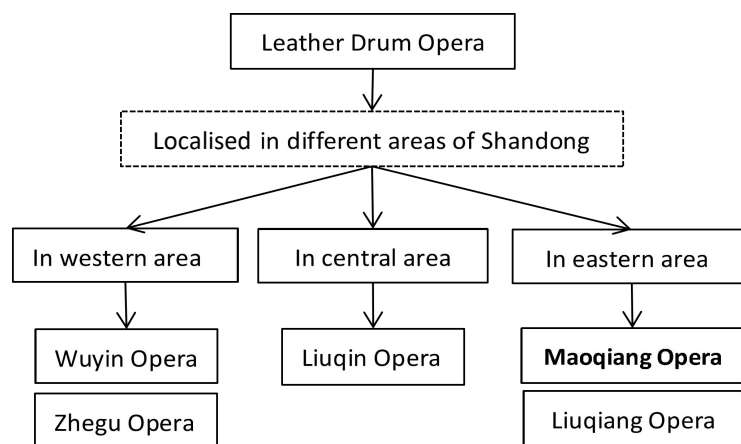
It is generally stated that leather drum performance went through at least three stages before becoming a form of opera (Gao, 2000: 117; Zhou, 2019: 92; Zhao, 2019: 86). Initially, the performance itself was called ‘*jiao menzi*’ (literally ‘knocking at the door’), and there were only one or two people who performed from door to door. The stories in the performances were relatively simple and short. The second stage was called ‘*ba ditan*’ or ‘*liao ditan*’ (literally ‘finding an open space’). In this period, two or three people usually gave performances beside the entrance of a village or in an open space in the village. The third stage was called ‘*pan dengzi*’ (literally ‘finding a bench to sit’). Here, more than three people were involved in the performance, giving performances at fixed performance sites yielding a large flow of people, such as street markets. During the late Qing Dynasty (around the 1900s), leather drum

performances given by at least two performers and featuring a full storyline gradually developed into Leather Drum Opera (*zhouguzi xi*), which could be seen as the ‘mother’ of Maoqiang Opera (*ibid*).

(c) Leather Drum Opera

The Maoqiang community generally asserts that modern Maoqiang Opera derives from localised Leather Drum Opera, formerly performed in the southeast cities and counties of Shandong Province, including Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Wulian, Zhucheng and Qingdao. Leather Drum Opera was one of the most popular opera forms in the early 1900s, and was performed in various localised forms in different regions of rural Shandong. Local styles of Leather Drum Opera were influenced by local dialect, local music, local aesthetic sensibilities, and local folk tunes. Nowadays, the original Leather Drum Opera forms have disappeared. However, there are currently at least five localised opera forms that trace their lineages back to those earlier forms, namely Maoqiang (茂腔) Opera, Liuqiang (柳腔) Opera, Liuqin (柳琴) Opera, Wuyin (五音) Opera and Zhegu (鸪鸪) Opera (Shan, 2017; Zhao, 2019; Zhou, 2019; Li, 2019). Table 2-3 shows that, when classifying local operas in Shandong Province, these five operas are conceived as belonging to the Leather Drum Opera System (*zhouguzi tixi*).⁵³

Table 2-3. The Leather Drum System



The relationship between these five operas is as kinsfolk. They all have similar characteristics: the melodies of these five operas generally sound soft (*pinghuan*), and they have many shared items in their repertoires. For example, Maoqiang Opera and Liuqiang Opera⁵⁴ are known as ‘*jiaodong zimei hua*’ (literally ‘twin sisters opera in eastern Shandong’). They currently share the same classic repertory of more than

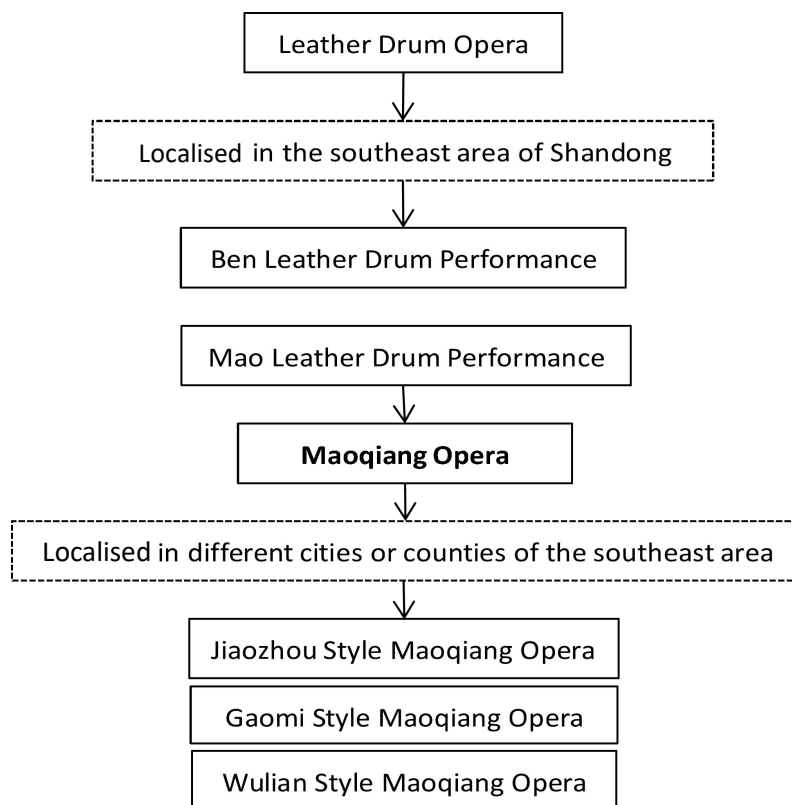
⁵³ Most literature about Shandong Province opera mentions these five significant opera forms. However, Zhou’s (2019:94) research mentions that the Leather Drum Opera System encompasses six types of opera. She also includes Denqiang Opera, which only exists in Boxing County, Binzhou City, in the northern area of Shandong Province.

⁵⁴ Liuqiang Opera is also a listed intangible cultural heritage in Shandong. However, there is only one state-owned opera troupe of Liuqiang Opera in Jimo City, which is a county-level city (*xianji shi*) of Qingdao City. Its development now faces huge difficulties, and it is the kind of small local traditional opera that is about to disappear.

12 operas, and opera performers who learned to perform one of the two operas can perform the other one (Zhou, 2019: 90-93). When it comes to differences, particularly in the realm of musical characteristics, Maoqiang Opera’s melodic passages usually culminate in a long sustained upper-octave dominant note - the characteristic of *mao* tune (*maodiao*).⁵⁵ In contrast, the melodies of Liuqiang Opera usually culminate by ascending to a final upper-major-sixth dominant note. Meanwhile, Maoqiang Opera was influenced by Peking Opera and uses the *jinghu*, which is a two-stringed bowed instrument with a high register, as its main musical instrument. In contrast, Liuqiang Opera uses the *sixian huqin*, which is a four-stringed bowed instrument (Li and Ji, 1983: 116; Gao, 2000: 117).

The development from Leather Drum Opera to modern Maoqiang Opera underwent two main stages: *ben* leather drum (*ben zhougu*) performance and *mao* leather drum (*mao zhougu*) performance (see Table 2-4). In Shan’s study (2017: 11) about Maoqiang Opera in Gaomi City, she mentions that the *ben* 本 element means local (*bendi*). Meanwhile, *mao* 冒 refers to an essential musical characteristic of *mao* leather drum performance - *mao* tune, which is also one of the most distinctive musical characteristics of the modern Maoqiang Opera (Shan, 2017; Zhou, 2019).

Table 2-4. The Modern Development of Maoqiang Opera



Ben leather drum performance was initially only accompanied by percussion instruments, including a small drum (*xiaogu*), wooden clappers (*bangzi*) and a small gong (*xiaoluo*) (Shan, 2017: 11). However, the couple Hai Maozi (stage name) and

⁵⁵ For more details, see Section 4.3.2 about the *mao* tune (*maodiao*) of Maoqiang Opera .

their three daughters, who were all specialists in Liuqin Opera⁵⁶ came to Southeast Shandong from the northern area of Jiangsu Province in around the 1860s and introduced elements of that opera form into *ben* leather drum performance. The *liuqin* was then used as the main accompanying instrument for many decades. This remained the case until the early 1900s, when the early form of Maoqiang Opera was performed as a warm-up playlet for Peking Opera, and the *jinghu* became the main accompanying instrument.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the Hai Maozi Family also integrated the melodies of Liuqin Opera into *ben* leather drum performance. Their performances soon grew in popularity and were adopted by other *ben* leather drum performers in the region of the southeast Shandong, thereby contributing to the form's evolution into *mao* leather drum performance (Jiang, 1955: 18; Liu and Wang, 1988 (Vol.10): 137-138; also in Shan, 2017; Zhou, 2019 and Zhao, 2019).

More stringed instruments and wind instruments were introduced during the following stage of *mao* leather drum development. The latest research about the origins of Maoqiang Opera was published in a monthly journal of the Communist Party Committee of Rizhao City, *Work and Research*, Vol. 368, August 2021, pages 49-51 (see Figure 2-2).⁵⁸ This research further confirms that Liuqin Opera also influenced Maoqiang Opera in around the 1860s and the *mao* tune of Maoqiang Opera originally came from the *lahun* tune (*lahunqiang*) of Liuqin Opera.⁵⁹ More importantly, it also points out that *mao* leather drum performance was initially shaped and popularised around the area of Lao Longwo Village in Lanshan District (about 95 kilometres from Wulian County), Rizhao City.



Figure 2-2. An influential recent study about Maoqiang Opera: *Uncovering the Mist of Maoqiang Opera's Origins: An Investigation into the Founder of Maoqiang Opera - 'Lao Manzhou'* (2021).

⁵⁶ The liuqin, which resembles a small pipa, was the main string instrument used for accompanying *mao* leather drum performance. Currently, Liuqin Opera is a trans-provincial local opera performed in both Jiangsu Province and Shandong Province, and it still uses the liuqin as its main string instrument.

⁵⁷ For more details, see Section 4.1 about the Maoqiang Opera band.

⁵⁸ This research about Maoqiang Opera was written by officials from local government institutions, especially by the Jufeng Township Government of Lanshan District.

⁵⁹ See Section 4.3.2

This research suggests that Lao Manzhou (stage name), who was one of the Hai Maozi couple's daughters, and her three sons and four daughters were all skilled *mao* leather drum performers, making key contributions to the popularity of *mao* tune and *mao* leather drum performance. By examining the *Family Tree of Ding in Rizhao* (*Rizhao ding shi jia cheng*, 1860 edition; see Figure 2-3), this research confirms that the family name of Lao Manzhou's husband was Ding. Their second daughter, whose name was Ding Baohong (1882-1953), became the famous and skilful Maoqiang Opera performer known as Wang Ermei⁶⁰, who is thought by researchers (for example, Jiang, 1955: 16-18⁶¹; Shan, 2017: 12-14) to have made a great contribution to the popularity of Maoqiang Opera in the first half of the 1900s and is commonly mentioned as a key figure in the origins of Maoqiang Opera.

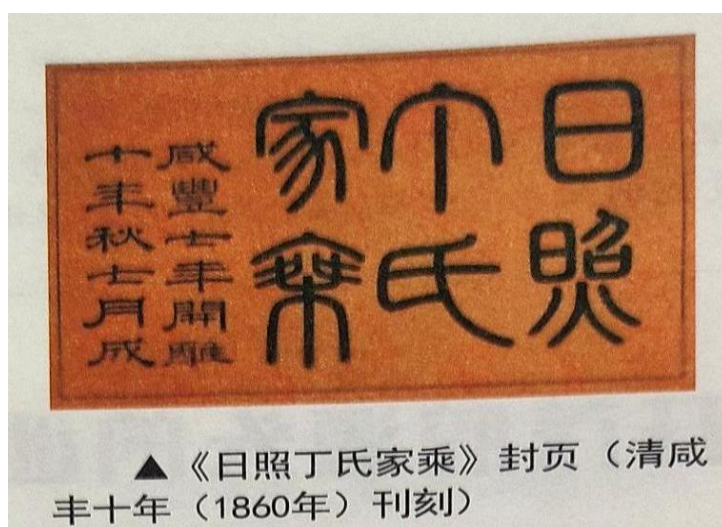


Figure 2-3. The cover page of the *Family Tree of Ding in Rizhao*, first published in the tenth year of the Xianfeng emperor of Qing Dynasty (1860), taken from the aforementioned *Uncovering the Mist of Maoqiang Opera's Origins* (2021), page 50.

To conclude, Maoqiang Opera has undergone a complicated history of development, which is generally thought by Maoqiang performers and scholars to have comprised five main stages (see Table 2-1). Based on all the above-noted information, the second stage of Leather Drum Opera (*zhouguzi xi*) - *mao* leather drum (*mao zhougu*) performance, which evolved from *ben* leather drum (*ben zhougu*) performance - can be regarded as the main precursor of current Maoqiang Opera. Including the stages of female shaman's (*shenpo*) performance, girls' tunes (*guniang diao*) and short simple songs (*xiaoqu*), the development of Maoqiang Opera probably spans more than five centuries. However, most people assert that its history as an opera form begins after the 1750s, with leather drum (*zhouguzi*) performance and then Leather Drum Opera.

⁶⁰ Her family name was actually Ding and her husband's family name was Wang. The name Ermei indicates that she was the second daughter in her family.

⁶¹ Jiang Xingyü's study (1955) in *An Introduction to Local Opera in Eastern China (huadong xiqu Jieshao)* is the earliest literature exploring the origins of Maoqiang Opera.

2.2.3 Shandong Dialect in Maoqiang Opera Performance

The formation of local opera is influenced by many factors, including local culture, customs, folk tunes, people's aesthetics, and local dialect. Moreover, a noteworthy feature of local opera is *yizi xingqiang*, literally meaning that tunes are applied systematically in accordance with lyrics. Lyrics are sung in different local dialects, contributing to the formation of different flavours (*weidao*) in local opera (Zhang, 1980: 91; Zhou, 2019: 130). When the exact same opera is performed by groups from different localities, only the artists and enthusiasts are able to identify finer distinctions. Differences in flavour are a crucial means for recognising and classifying different styles of the same opera form. Because of regional differences in Shandong dialect, performances of Maoqiang Opera are said to embrace different flavours and hence different styles (*liupai*), the main ones being Gaomi Maoqiang, Jiaozhou Maoqiang, Wulian Maoqiang and Zhucheng Maoqiang (Zhang, 1980; Shan, 2017; Zhou, 2019).

This section provides an introduction to Shandong dialect. Meanwhile, by reviewing recordings of Maoqiang performances given by Wulian Troupe in 2020, this section highlights four distinctive features of Shandong dialect, providing examples of their articulation within contemporary live Maoqiang Opera performance. The four features are: distinctive modal particles, repeating the subject, rhotic accenting, and certain slang expressions (CD Tracks 2-1 and 2-2).⁶² Although there are many other characteristic linguistic features that likewise serve to locate Maoqiang Opera in the southeast Shandong, these four are amongst the more easily identified and explained.

As mentioned in the preface of *Shandong Dialect Dictionary* (Dong and Zhang, 1997), "Shandong dialect is part of the source of Mandarin Chinese". Typically, the pronunciations of northern dialects have numerous similarities with standard Mandarin. Dialects in the northern area of China including Shandong are not difficult to understand for those from outside of the area. However, the tones (*shengdiao*) and intonation (*yudiao*) of northern dialects have their own features and the existence of region-specific dialect words further differentiates one northern dialect from others. For example, for the word 'chat', '*liaotian*' (聊天) is used in Mandarin, '*laguaer*' (拉呱儿) is used in Shandong dialect, and '*laokeer*' (唠嗑儿) is used in Dongbei⁶³ dialect. According to *Research on Shandong Dialect* (Qian, 2001), there are 130 distinguishable Shandong subdialects in total. These are named according to

⁶² All four features are explained through extracts from classic Maoqiang works. The first three features are explained through extracts from *The Story of a Wall*, performed in Wangjiada Village, 12 May 2020 (CD Track 2-1), and the fourth feature is explained through extracts from *The Younger Sister's Wedding*, performed in Huangxiangzi Village, 13 May 2020 (CD Track 2-2). Both of these classic Maoqiang works are introduced in detail in Section 2.4.

Except the specified CD tracks, all of the recordings are recorded and edited by the author. CD Tracks 2-1 and 2-2 have been uploaded to <https://space.bilibili.com/14270606>

⁶³ The far-northeast provinces of China include Heilongjiang Province, Jilin Province and Liaoning Province.

their locality. In the *pinyin* Romanisation system of Mandarin, syllables are comprised of an initial (*shengmu*), a final (*yunmu*), and a tone (*shengdiao*). The criteria for classifying different subdialects include classifying the features of initial, final, tone and also dialect words in different regions. Qian suggests that Shandong dialect has two big categories, one being East Region (*dongqū*), and the other being West Region (*xiqu*). There are ten criteria for deciding subdialects in the East Region and seven for the West Region.

However, the identification of dialects is more complex than simply applying these criteria of evaluation. Figure 2-4 is one of the 24 maps in Qian's research which shows the distribution of all 130 styles of Shandong dialect in Shandong Province. Each of the two main categories has two sub-categories. The East Region dialects are classified into East Lai District (*dong lai pian*; '●') including 15 subdialects, and East Wei District (*dong wei pian*; '⊙') including 25 subdialects. The West Region dialects are classified into West Qi District (*xi qi pian*; '○') including 42 subdialects, and West Lu District (*xi lu pian*; '⊖') including 28 subdialects.

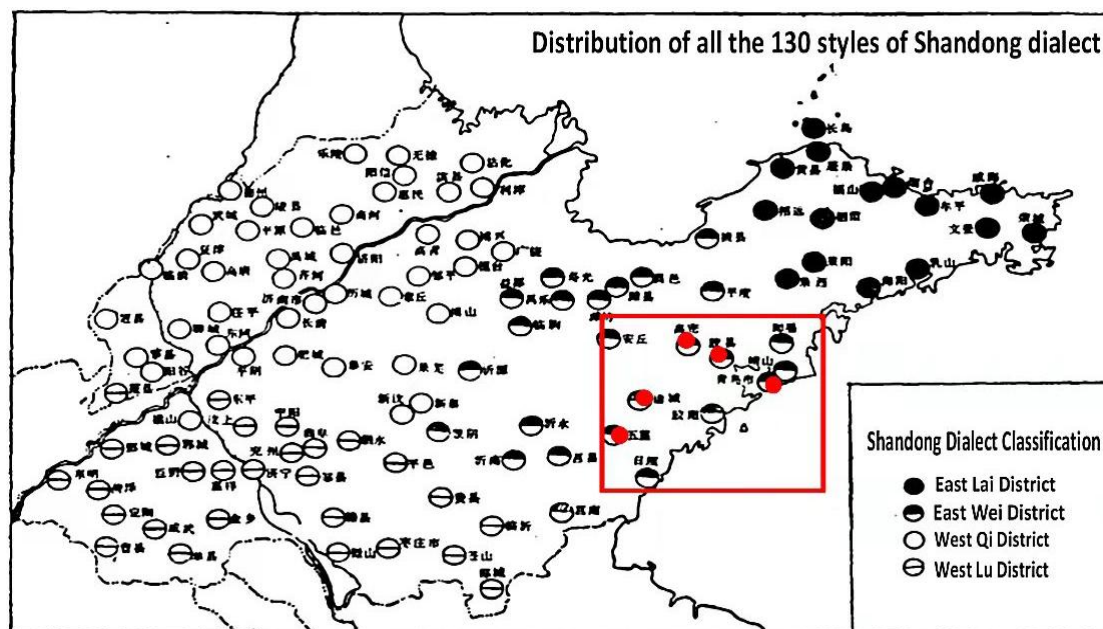


Figure 2-4. Taken from *Research of Shandong Dialect* (2001), first published in 1985, page 259.

The map shows that dialects in the southeast area where Maoqiang Opera exists belong to the sub-category of the West Wei District. The subdialects of Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Qiandao Wulian and Zhucheng (see the five red spots) in this area are all listed on the map. The five red spots on the map are also the location of counties or cities that currently have Maoqiang Opera performances. This clearly demonstrates that different subdialects are used in the performance of Maoqiang Opera and have therefore influenced the formation of different Maoqiang Opera styles. Meanwhile, local dialects and local operas have influenced the development of each other. Local dialects have been safeguarded as a vital part of local culture, and local operas are said to help safeguard and transmit local dialect words.

However, with the promotion of Mandarin Chinese, the younger generation receives Mandarin education from preschool, becoming more and more unfamiliar with their local dialect. Many dialect words are no longer used in people's daily lives but are still used in the performance of local opera. For example, 'yesterday evening' in Mandarin is '*zuotian wanshang*' (昨天晚上), while in Shandong dialect it is '*yeer houshang*' (夜儿后上). This dialect word is used in the performance of Chuiqiang Opera, which is a kind of local opera in the northwest Shandong (Shan, 2017: 130-131). There is also a similar expression for 'yesterday evening' in southeast Shandong, but instead of using the rhotic accent *ye-er*, people in the southeast usually use '*yelai houshang*' (夜来后上) (An, 2013: 245; Zhang, 2014).

To illustrate the four aforementioned representative linguistic features of Shandong dialect, four examples have been extracted from live Maoqiang performance. Firstly, Shandong dialect employs distinctive modal particles. For example, '*an-yang-lai*' (literally 'Oh!' or 'Ah!') is a special modal particle widely used in Wulian County and some surrounding areas, but is seldom heard in the other inland cities. Local Wulian people also frequently omit the last character when speaking this modal particle: '*an-yang*'. Performers from Wulian Troupe tell me that the '*yang*' element probably derives from the modal particle '*an-niang-lai*'. In this case, the *niang* means mother, so this expression could perhaps best be translated as 'Oh Mother!' In Wulian Troupe's Maoqiang performances, this modal particle is frequently applied and is one of many dialect words that instantly conveys Wulian County's local identity, indicating to listeners that the performers of the opera troupe are themselves probably Wulian County people.

Secondly, Shandong dialect involves frequent repetition of the subject as a form of emphasis. For instance, '*ni na guo lai ba ni*', literally means 'you should give it to me'. The repetition of the subject '*ni*' (you) at the end of the phrase is a distinctive feature of Shandong dialect. In many cases, the subject can be omitted without negatively affecting the meaning or grammar. Thirdly, rhotic accenting features prominently and in distinctive ways. For example, '*zhe ge tian-er*' literally means 'the weather is...'. In this case, the character '*tian*' normally means 'sky', but when a rhotic accent is added to '*tian-er*' in Shandong dialect, the meaning becomes 'weather'. Although rhotic accenting is frequently encountered in a great many northern Chinese dialects, including Beijing dialect, the precise details of the Shandong dialect rhotic accent are distinct from other forms, especially when applied at the end of a phrase or in conjunction with dialect words. In Maoqiang Opera, rhotic accenting is applied very frequently to emphasise a character's emotion and make the dialogues more conversational.

The fourth example concerns local slang expressions. The phrase '*tu kou tuo mo za ge woer*' literally means 'spitting saliva can punch a hole [in the ground]', denoting that one must keep one's promise. In Maoqiang performance, this kind of slang expression features extensively within song lyrics and conversations between

characters. Meanwhile, one can frequently hear this kind of slang being used in conversations between elderly villagers in the countryside. However, it is less commonly employed in the younger generation's daily life. In addition, the distinctive Shandong-style rhotic accent is also applied in this example, further augmenting the flavour of local identity.

Overall, the application of local dialect in Maoqiang Opera's spoken parts enables the artform to act as a potent expression of local identity, establishing local uniqueness and distinctiveness. Local opera and local dialect are mutually supportive. Dialect endows the opera with its characteristic local qualities, while the opera itself plays a role in sustaining knowledge and use of local dialect. In modern society, due to the promotion of standard Mandarin in schools and the media, the younger generation encounters and employs dialect less and less in their lives, with numerous distinctive words and slang expressions dropping out of everyday usage. However, these expressions are preserved and disseminated for the longer term through artforms like Maoqiang Opera.

2.3 The Stories of Classic Maoqiang Operas

Nowadays, most of the Maoqiang Opera troupes' performances are of classic works, encompassing classic comedy and tragedy handed down from the previous generations. In all cases, the performance of classic works is rendered wearing traditional opera costumes. The Maoqiang Museum of Gaomi Troupe preserves the script of more than fifty classic Maoqiang Operas, and more than twenty of them are still frequently performed on the stage. Although new modern operas have been composed every year, they are only performed for specific anniversaries or cultural activities. The classic works never go out of style and seem more popular among the audience. Take the year of 2020's performances for example: the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe gave 52 Maoqiang Opera performances during their first performance season in the local villages from May to July, all of which were of classics. Likewise, the Gaomi City Maoqiang Opera Troupe gave 65 performances from June to September in Gaomi City's Red Sorghum Art Festival and Maoqiang Opera Weeks, and not a single modern work was performed.

Most of the classic opera stories are derived from folk legends, which have been circulated by word of mouth and have been passed down in China for hundreds or even thousands of years. It is not just Maoqiang Opera that performs these stories. Other types of traditional opera also have their own versions of these traditional stories. The stories with happy endings usually describe the interpersonal relationships of ordinary people in everyday life scenarios, and many of these topics are still worthy of discussion in current society. In contrast, tragic stories are usually about characters in different social classes. People in a weak position have no right to speak out their bitterness. Tragedy also happens in the circumstances of ordinary people being at the bottom of society and oppressed by the ruling class. These

ordinary people have no choice but to choose extreme ways to resist the ruling class, to demonstrate their inner beliefs and dignity.

A prominent feature of classic Maoqiang Opera stories is that female characters usually play a leading role. In the feudal society of old China, women usually had low status and should be humble. Many classic Maoqiang stories describe the miserable life experiences of female characters, or their lives after marriage. Female audience members have appreciated these stories both in the past and present. The themes of these stories are not only to show the injustices women encountered in feudal society, but also to describe their pursuit of love and freedom (Shan, 2017: 25-27).

This section will pinpoint the typical characteristics encountered within traditional Maoqiang Opera stories, specifically by introducing two classic comedies and two classic tragedies. Meanwhile, this section also includes a detailed case study of a classic work, *The Story of a Wall (qiangtou ji)*, which was performed 30 times during Wulian Troupe's first performance season in 2020.⁶⁴ All the operas discussed in this section were performed multiple times during my fieldwork period by different Maoqiang troupes and are still very well-known and popular among the core audience of Maoqiang Opera.

2.3.1 Classic Comedy

The first story is *The Younger Sister's Wedding (zimei yijia)*. This opera was performed six times by Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe (see Figure 2-5) in their first performance season in the countryside from May to July 2020. The Chinese word *zimei* denotes two sisters - older and younger. In this story, 'yi' means 'exchange' and 'jia' refers to 'marrying' and 'becoming someone's wife' - here emphasizing that the sisters have the upper hand in deciding whether to get married.



Figure 2-5. A performance of *The Younger Sister's Wedding (zimei yijia)* by the Wulian Troupe in Fanjiadong Village, Xumeng Township, 3 June 2020.

⁶⁴ See Section 5.1 Performing in the Countryside: Traveling with the Wulian Troupe in 54 Villages for more details.

There are two male characters in this story, one being a father whose wife passed away many years previously and who had to work hard to bring up his two daughters. The elder sister is an arrogant, peacockish person who despises the poor and only wants to marry the rich. The younger sister is a warm-hearted and obedient person who is also dutiful towards her father. The other male character is a young man who was born in a poor family but finally succeeded in obtaining an official post in the empire after years of efforts and gained wealth. Both the young man's family and the two sisters' family were once poor but still helped each other. The young man has a marriage contract with the elder sister, which was made by his parents and the sister's parents many years ago.⁶⁵ Before the wedding ceremony, the young man pretends to be poor, wishing to sound out whether the elder sister only covets his position and money or not. As expected, the elder sister decidedly refuses to attend the wedding ceremony and laughs at the young man, saying, "you are such a poor panhandler". She also yells: "I would rather die than marry him".

The wedding ceremony is suspended. In ancient China, it was extremely immoral to break the marriage contract and go back on one's word. The father is quite worried and anxious, and he comes up with an idea. During the traditional wedding ceremony, the bride's face should be covered with a red cloth, which means the other people cannot distinguish whether the bride is the elder sister or not. Thus, he asks his younger daughter to replace her elder sister to complete the wedding ceremony. Since nobody knows the details of the contract, nobody knows the contract has been broken.

Fortunately, the younger sister has been fond of the young man since she was a child. Even though she knows he is poor, she is willing to stay together with him. The young man has also had a good impression on the younger sister since childhood. However, he cannot take the initiative to break the marriage contract. He had planned that if the elder sister did not mind his poverty, he would follow the contract and marry her, giving up his desire to be with the younger sister. The younger sister puts on the bridal dress and comes to the wedding ceremony. The young man tells the younger sister he has already gained wealth and is just pretending to be poor. At the end of the story, they complete the wedding in a lively atmosphere surrounded by crowds and with cheerful background music. The whole performance lasts two hours. A particularly noteworthy feature is the opera band's live version of the background music at the wedding, which is similar to what is performed at wedding ceremonies in real life.

The second story is *A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law (xiao gu xian)*. This opera was performed six times in the countryside by the Wulian County Troupe in June 2020 alone. This story focuses on the relationships between mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law. After a woman got married in ancient China, she had to integrate with her husband's family and wait upon her mother-in-law.

⁶⁵ In ancient China, it is a common phenomenon that parents can decide their children's marriage partner.

Although in current China, young people can set up their own families after marriage, many married females still live with their husband's family, especially in rural areas.

Diaoshi is a 50-year-old widowed mother. She sets all her affections only on her own daughter and son, and has tried every means to destroy the self-confidence of her daughter-in-law Ronghua and show off her status in the family. She is arrogant and high-handed. She always beats and scolds Ronghua, saying that her cooking does not taste good and her housework is not done well. Although Ronghua is mild and considerate of her husband and the family, she would never dare to stand against the unwarranted requirements of her mother-in-law. Her husband is bland and gentle, but obedient in front of his mother. Fortunately, Ronghua has a good relationship with her sister-in-law Guini who is Diaoshi's daughter. They are about the same age and often share thoughts with each other. Guini is an optimistic and intelligent young lady. She finds it intolerable that her mother often deliberately embarrasses her sister-in-law. Guini always tries to defend Ronghua against the unreasonable behavior of her mother (see Figure 2-6).



Figure 2-6. A Wulian Troupe performance of *A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law* (*xiao gu xian*) in Yuejia Zhuang Village, Wanghu Township. This photo shows the episode in which Guini (dressed in red) tries to stop her mother Diaoshi (dressed in blue) from beating and scolding her sister-in-law Ronghua (dressed in pink), 13 June 2020.

However, when Guini is not at home, there is nothing preventing Diaoshi's harsh behaviour. As the tensions between Diaoshi and Ronghua escalate, Ronghua feels helpless and finally decides to commit suicide, but is successfully saved by her husband and Guini. Focusing on the difficult relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, this story aims to promote familial harmony. At the end of the narrative, Diaoshi confesses that she only beats and scolds Ronghua because, when she was young, her mother-in-law had similarly severely reprimanded her. She never dared to fight back and maintained bitter grievances from those early life experiences, venting all her resentment upon Ronghua. She finally realises her

mistakes and apologises to Ronghua, admitting that Ronghua is considerate and respectful. This type of story, culminating in the joyous reparation of broken relationships, tends to be warmly welcomed by audience members and is frequently performed, particularly during China's Spring Festival. The troupes perform these operas with happy endings across many different villages in the region to add a joyful atmosphere to the festival and bring good luck to the villagers.

2.3.2 Classic Tragedy

Despite their sad endings, classic tragedies are also very popular among the audience members. The two operas detailed in this section are both unabridged full-length operas, which usually have eight to ten episodes, and need more than three hours to perform, and more than 20 performers to participate. The two tragedies are both named after their female protagonists. The first tragic story is *Young Lady Mochou* (*mochou nü*). Mochou is the name of the female leading role in the story, meaning do not be sorrowful. The Chinese character *nü* 女 means female and can be used after the name of a girl or a young lady. I watched the New Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe's live performance (see Figure 2-7) of this story three times, and every time I could find some audience members crying.



Figure 2-7. The New Era Troupe's performance of *Young Lady Mochou* (*mochou nü*) in Dongcheng Xian Village, Jietou Township. This photo shows the opera's opening scene, when there were more than a hundred villagers present, 7 July 2020.

Mochou is a servant working at the general's mansion. She was once a noble maiden but her family experienced misfortune and Mochou was sold to the mansion through human trafficking. She is well educated and clever and has a pair of beautiful eyes. Mochou attracts the general's son, who is the young master of the mansion. They are about the same age and soon fall in love. The young master gives her the name Mochou, hoping that it could bless the young lady he loves. The young master finally decides to tell the head of the family, his grandmother, that he determines to marry Mochou. However, marriage across such a pronounced class difference was

impossible in ancient China. Mochou is only a humble servant and could never be the young master's wife. The young master cannot disobey his grandmother's command and marries a noble maiden who is vicious and extremely jealous of Mochou.

Even worse, the young master is not allowed to meet Mochou anymore after he has married the noble maiden. The young master misses Mochou and has lost all desire for food and drink. He becomes severely ill and is unable to recover even after seeing many doctors. One day, a celebrated doctor comes to the general's mansion and makes a prescription. The grandmother opens it and is shocked by the contents of the prescription. It states that "only the eyes of Mochou can cure the young master's disease". The noble maiden, who is now the young hostess of the mansion, persuades the grandmother that "this is definitely the only way to save the young master. Although this method is cruel, it is still a good deal - sacrificing a servant to save the young master".

Eventually, the grandmother accepts this prescription and asks Mochou to come. Mochou says that "as long as this method can cure the young master, I will give my eyes to the doctor and let him to make the medicine." Mochou's kindness touches the doctor. He confesses the truth that he did not write this prescription, and that it was the young hostess who forced him to do so (see Figure 2-8). He exhorts Mochou not to give her eyes. However, Mochou knows that the young hostess wants to kill her, and she also knows she has no choice because of the disparity in status.



Figure 2-8. The episode of *Young Lady Mochou* in which the young hostess (dressed in red) is forcing the doctor (dressed in blue) to prescribe taking Mochou's eyes, while her servant is handing a brush pen to the doctor, performed by the New Era Troupe, 14 July 2020.

Mochou sacrifices her eyes and struggles with her fate afterwards. Finally, she gives up and jumps into a pond full of lotus flowers, where she dies. Mochou's last thoughts are described through a six-minute monologue which is full of sorrow and anger. As for the young master, he is close to frantic after hearing that Mochou lost her eyes and jumped into the pond. He curses everyone around him, including his grandmother and his wife. The young master jumps into the lotus pond in front of all

his family. The whole performance ends with the sounds of the other performers' shouts and wails.

The second tragic story is *Young Lady Mengjiang* (*mengjiang nü*). Mengjiang is the name of the leading female role. This story is one of the four great Chinese folklore stories, with a history of thousands of years. It is featured in Peking Opera and the repertory of other local operas in Shandong, including Lü Opera, and in the repertory of other provinces also. I documented four live performances of this opera, two performances by the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe (see Figure 2-9) and two by the New Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe (see Figure 2-10). The performances of the different troupes also feature slight differences in plot and the conversations between different characters.



Figure 2-9. The Wulian Troupe's performance of *Young Lady Mengjiang* (*mengjiang nü*) during the Summer Festival celebration, on the stage of the county stadium. This photo shows the penultimate episode in which Mengjiang (the young lady dressed in white and in front of the stage) is presenting two conditions to Emperor Qin (the man standing behind the desk in the middle of the stage) in the emperor's palace, 6 August 2020.



Figure 2-10. The New Era Troupe's performance of *Young Lady Mengjiang* on the People's Square of Rizhao City. This photo shows the troupe performing the final scene of the story. It was already about 10:30pm and a few audience members left before the end of the performance, 17 September 2020.

This story is set in the Qin Dynasty. The First Qin Emperor coerces many male labourers to build the Great Wall and Mengjiang's husband Wan Xiliang is one of them. Xiliang is captured by the imperial soldiers in the middle of his wedding ceremony. After that, Mengjiang misses her husband every day, and one evening she dreams of Xiliang telling her that it is freezing and he has no cotton-padded clothes. The following day, Mengjiang decides to travel to visit her husband immediately. After experiencing numerous difficulties, she finally arrives at Xiliang's place. However, she is told that Xiliang has already passed away because of an accident at work. His body was buried at the foot of the Great Wall and the exact location cannot be found. Mengjiang cries for many days and her lamentations touch the gods. One corner of the Great Wall collapses and she finally finds her husband's body.

The emperor in this story is a greedy and shameless person. When he hears that a corner of the Great Wall has collapsed because of a woman, he is furious and sends soldiers to arrest Mengjiang. The emperor finds that Mengjiang is beautiful and young. He then plans to make Mengjiang into one of his concubines. Mengjiang agrees but only on two conditions: firstly, Wan Xiliang should be given a ceremonial burial and, secondly, the Emperor and all officials should wear mourning dresses to honour Wan Xiliang. This request is a great challenge to the emperor's authority. However, the emperor readily agrees to both conditions. At the end of the story, Mengjiang kills herself by crashing into her husband's tombstone and the performance ends with the sounds of shouting and wailing. This is the standard ending in the Maoqiang Opera version. In other folkloric versions, for example, the narrative ends with Mengjiang saying that she would like to go for a river cruise, jumping into the river, and dying. After her death, her soul comes across the dragon king under the river, and the dragon king helps Mengjiang to wreak revenge by creating huge surging currents in the river water (Yang, 2010).

2.3.3 A Detailed Case Study: The Story of a Wall

All four stories mentioned above are centred on female characters, with male characters having supporting roles. These stories are still very popular with audience members, especially the female audience, regardless of whether the endings are tragic or happy. However, it should be noted that the classic Maoqiang stories are not limited to highlighting female characters. For example, *The Story of a Wall (qiangtou ji)* depicts the interweaving stories of various characters, both female and male. In the Wulian Troupe's first performance season in 2020, this opera was the most frequently performed classic Maoqiang work, being performed 30 times from 12 May to 5 July. This section examines the current live Maoqiang Opera performance version of *The Story of a Wall*, using Wulian Troupe's performance as a case study.

The Story of a Wall tells a famous traditional folktale that is widely spread across northern China and is shared by many types of local Chinese opera in different northern provinces, such as Lü Opera in Shanong Province, Laba Opera in Liaoning

Province, Yü Opera in Henan Province and Qingqiang Opera in Shanxi Province.⁶⁶ This story has also been adapted into opera films, the earliest made in 1982.⁶⁷ In the case of Maoqiang Opera, to publicise the artform among children and young people, the Gaomi City government invested 800,000 yuan (about £80,000) in producing a cartoon version of this classic work.⁶⁸ The cartoon version was produced by the Animation Department of Qingdao University of Science and Technology and was aired on the Gaomi Channel at the end of 2011.⁶⁹

The Maoqiang version of this work introduced in this section was rehearsed by the Wulian Troupe in 2017 and has been performed every year since then. Until 2020, there were still many villages that had not seen the Wulian Troupe's performance of this work.⁷⁰ This work has five episodes, taking about one hour and forty minutes to perform. This is one of the Wulian Troupe's favourite works because it has many spoken parts and features engaging dialogue between characters to promote plot development, which means the performance of this work is labour-saving not only for vocal performers, but also for players in the band. Moreover, audience members who are unfamiliar with Maoqiang Opera can also follow plot developments easily, particularly young audience members who may get distracted during the sung passages.

Like most Maoqiang operas, this work serves a didactic purpose, telling people that they have a duty to care for elderly parents. There are six characters in this story, one being an old man aged around 80 and another being an elderly silversmith aged around 60. The old man has two sons named Daguai and Erguai and two daughters-in-law, but none of them wants to take care of him. They even kick him out of the house during a cold winter, and the most famous sung passage of this work, titled *The Lives of Old People are Tough (lao lai nan)*, is performed by the old man (see Figure 2-11) to show his desperation and helplessness in this condition.

⁶⁶ For example, the audience can watch the Qingqiang Opera version of *The Story of a Wall*, performed by Xi'an City Qingqiang Opera Theatre on: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV18a4y1L7S2/>

⁶⁷ This opera film is a Shandong Bangzi Opera version produced by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio. The full version has been uploaded by an anonymous user on:

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av838043794/> Bangzi Opera is another local opera form in Shandong Province.

⁶⁸ In this thesis, I take one British pound to be equivalent to nine Chinese yuan.

⁶⁹ The full version has been uploaded by an anonymous user on:

https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNDAyMTIxNzA2NA==

⁷⁰ In Wulian County, the villagers in some wealthy villages or villages bordering with Weifang City also invite Maoqiang Opera troupes or Lü Opera troupes from Weifang City to perform in their villages. They have already seen live performances of *The Story of a Wall* performed by the other opera troupes.



Figure 2-11. The old man dressed in shabby clothes, performed by Zhang Li, Wulian Troupe's performance in Qianjia Zhuang Village, 29 May 2020.⁷¹

The Maoqiang Opera version of this sung passage is comprised of 16 sung phrases, taking about five minutes to perform.⁷² The lyrics of this sung passage are as follows:

The lives of old people are tough,
Old people are unwelcome because of their inability to [make money],
I have been a carpenter all my life and live frugally,
I suffered a lot to bring up my sons.

I sold my belongings in order to send Daguai to learn to do business,
I borrowed a high-interest loan in order to send Erguai to study in a private school,
Who knows, Daguai pretends never to have had a father after he made much money.
Erguai's [attitude towards me] has dramatically changed after he married a capitalist's daughter.

Thinking back, I treated my sons as pearl and diamond,
Now, my sons treat me like a dog,
My two sons neglect their filial duties,
My two daughters-in-law are vicious.

I am so hungry and cold,
The two couples shift the blame to each other,
I am waiting from morning till noon,
I am starving! I feel dizzy and dazed! I feel my heart is fried in oil.

⁷¹ The Maoqiang performers' information in this section is introduced in Section 3.3.1.

⁷² The music characteristic of this sung passage is explained in Section 4.3.3, Transcription 4-29.

One day, the elder son Daguai intends to send the old man to Erguai's home but Erguai shuts the door and pretends no one is at home. Daguai then lifts his father onto the wall of Erguai's house and asks his father to jump into Erguai's house, but the old man cannot climb down. He shouts for help but his two sons pretend not to hear. Fortunately, the old man has a cunning and kind-hearted friend, the silversmith, who helps the hopeless old man get down from the wall. The silversmith plays a neat trick on the two couples, convincing them that the old man has a large stash of money hidden somewhere. He comes to visit the two couples' homes and asks them where their old father is and cheats the two couples that the old man entrusted him to handle a lot of silverware many years ago. He visits his old friend because it is time for the old man to pay him the charges for handling the silverware (see Figure 2-12).



Figure 2-12. The silversmith (on the right) performed by Zheng Shixing is attempting to convince Daguai (in the middle), a comedic character performed by Chen Jingang. Daguai's wife is performed by the leader of Wulian Troupe, Li Xiangxue. Wulian Troupe's performance in Qianjia Zhuang Village, 29 May 2020.

The silversmith's trick works. In the following years, the two couples start to compete with each other by preparing fine clothes and serving sumptuous meals. They flatter the old man by all means in an attempt to discover the silverware's whereabouts (see Figure 2-13). However, the old man left only one word before he died. He says: "every time I look at that wall, I think of my friend, the silversmith."



Figure 2-13. Erguai and his wife, performed by Shang Jinyang and Zhang Sha, are flattering the old man who dresses in a fine red costume, *ibid.*

The two couples act at once to find the silversmith even without hosting a funeral for the old man. The silversmith tells them that they must first host the funeral ceremony. After everything is settled, the silversmith intends to leave but is prevented by the two couples (see Figure 2-14). They force the silversmith to confess the treasure's location, otherwise, he will not be able to leave. The silversmith thinks for a while and answers: "probably, your father buried the treasure under the corner of that wall!"



Figure 2-14. The two couples try to prevent the silversmith from leaving, *ibid.*

In the end, the whole wall collapses on top of the two couples while they are excavating. They shout for help but the silversmith laughs and states: "now the wall has collapsed and your father no longer needs to climb over it anymore!" The whole performance ends with the sounds of the silversmith's laughing and the two couples' shouting.

In sum, the five stories detailed in this section are all told through the medium of full-length Maoqiang Opera. The Maoqiang classic works also include some short stories comprised of only one or two episodes and usually taking less than fifty minutes to perform. The stories of Maoqiang classic opera address a wide range of topics including: children's obligation to care for their elderly parents; young people's freedom to choose their spouses; the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; and young people's marriage at the behest of their parents. These topics are still worth discussing in current Chinese society. Although the Maoqiang Opera market is shrinking in contemporary Shandong, the classic Maoqiang works are still well-known and popular among the villagers in the countryside.

2.4 The Maoqiang Opera Market in Rural Areas: A Historical Review

Although Maoqiang Opera has undergone more than two hundred years of history to acquire its current form, this section focuses specifically on the period from the 1950s to the 1980s (excluding the period of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976). The current Maoqiang community generally acknowledges that this period was the most prosperous period for the development of the Maoqiang Opera market, which has been shrinking since the mid-1980s.

Following the foundation of new China in 1949, the national economy recovered rapidly within three years from 1949 to 1952. The central government promulgated the Land Reform Law (*tudi gaige fa*) in 1950 and launched a land reform programme, abolishing the feudal system of old China, with farmers becoming landowners (Pan, 1957). After that, the first five-year plan, from 1953 to 1957, focused on national economic development and industrialisation. The development of capitalist industry and commerce was encouraged and the rural economy further improved (Li, 2015; Feng and Zhao, 2019). People in the countryside could spend more of their earnings participating in recreational activities. As mentioned earlier, because the Maoqiang Opera performers did not see much value in documenting their activities, very little historical literature remains to shed light on the Maoqiang Opera market before the 1980s. Currently, the best-preserved written materials relating to Maoqiang Opera are in the museum of Gaomi City Maoqiang Opera Troupe. However, most collections in this museum are old Maoqiang Opera scripts (see Figure 2-15), old photos of performers, old musical instruments, and old costumes, which have limited relevance to any investigation of the Maoqiang Opera market.

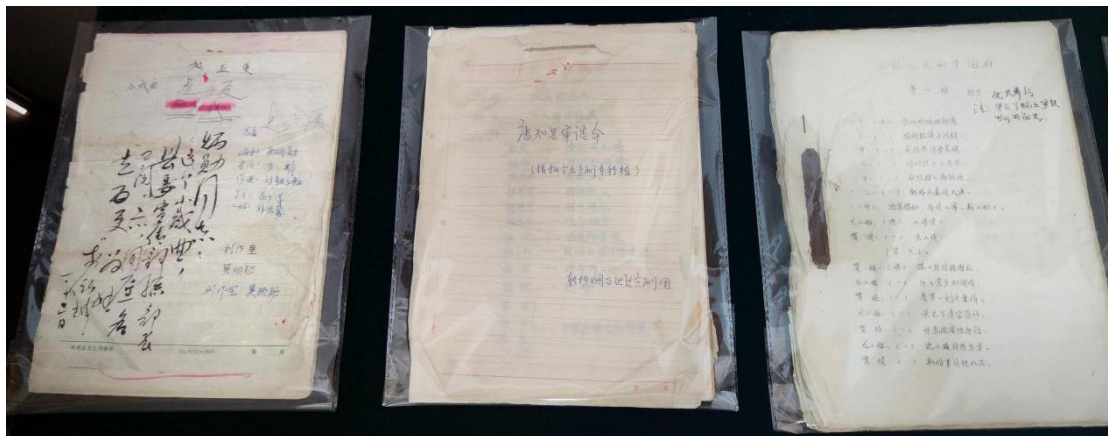


Figure 2-15. Most of the items in Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Museum are old Maoqiang Opera scripts. 11 August 2020.

Although the topic of the Maoqiang Opera market between the 1950s and 1990s has been mentioned before in scholars' research, including Li and Ji (1983), Liu and Wang (1985), Shan (2017) and Zhou (2019), these studies usually focus on general information and present only very little detailed information about troupes, performers and audience members. For example, Shan's research (2017: 139-146) only briefly mentions the market of Maoqiang Opera, addressing the historical development of the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe. She writes:

“In the 1950s, there was an open cultural environment. The local government started to fund first-class amateur opera troupes. Among them the Shengli [Victory] Maoqiang Opera troupe was turned into a state-owned opera troupe and was renamed the Gaomi City Maoqiang Opera Troupe...Governmental support increased the income of the Maoqiang Opera artists and improved the social status of the Maoqiang Opera community. The artists thereafter had strong enthusiasm to polish their professional skills...The wonderful performances of Maoqiang Opera artists made a deep impression on audience members and more and more local people became enthusiasts of Maoqiang Opera...As a state-owned troupe, the Gaomi Troupe gave more than 400 performances one year during this period, and they gave 460 performances in 1955 alone.”

One of the most important references for this thesis is an official document *The 2018 Annual Work Summary of Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe* (2018 Summary), provided by Qin Xuhe, who is one of the leaders of the current Wulian Troupe and an official of Wulian County Cultural Centre. The full text of this summary is about 7000 words long, introducing the early history and current development of Wulian Troupe and charting the development of two private amateur troupes in Wulian County.⁷³ It was mainly written by old curators of the county's cultural centre based on historical materials, including county annals and transcripts of Wulian's history, and also based

⁷³ Both amateur troupes had already disbanded by the mid-1980s.

on recollections of elderly Maoqiang Opera artists. This is the only official written material I collected that noted details about the Maoqiang Opera market during this focal period of the 1950s to 1980s.

In this next section, I now turn to examine the Maoqiang Opera market from the 1950s to 1980s, basing my study on recollections from elderly Maoqiang performers and elderly audience members in the countryside, and historical documents collected during my fieldwork. This is commonly understood to have been a golden period for the tradition, in which opera troupes were able to make a profit from commercial performances and receive subsidies from the government. Maoqiang performance became a viable job, offering a good income, and audiences came to consider Maoqiang Opera performance one of the most appealing recreational activities.

2.4.1 Old Maoqiang Opera Troupes

The development of Maoqiang Opera troupes in different counties and cities of the southeast Shandong Province between the 1950s and 1980s had much in common. For example, the old Maoqiang troupes in Gaomi, Qingdao and Wulian underwent a similar development during this period. They were all initially privately-owned troupes (*minyong tuanti*) before developing into state-owned troupes (*guoban tuanti*). This section explains how Maoqiang troupes developed in a period of relative prosperity, using the old Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe as a case study.

According to the 2018 Summary, between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, there was a rapid growth in the number of both professional registered Maoqiang troupes and self-organised amateur Maoqiang troupes, and only in the area of Wulian County, there were hundreds of Maoqiang troupes. The old Wulian Troupe was founded in 1954, originally as an amateur opera troupe named Tongle Troupe (*'tongle'* literally means 'share happiness together'). After two years of development, on 23 August 1956, the Wulian County government took over the Tongle Troupe and renamed it the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe. The members of the current Wulian Troupe often introduce their performances by saying that the old troupe used to be one of the most famous professional-style troupes during the 1960s, and its performances were very popular. The old troupe not only performed in local villages but also visited hundreds of villages outside Wulian County, their footprints covering at least five to six counties and cities in southeast Shandong. Maoqiang Opera performers from the neighbouring cities, including Gaomi and Qingdao, are said to have come to the old Wulian Troupe to learn professional skills.

Although the old troupe was disbanded in the Cultural Revolution, the elderly performers regrouped the troupe in early 1977 and recruited young apprentices aged between 11 and 20. The older performers of the current Wulian Troupe, Niu Xigao, Wang Xuhua and Xu Qingli, were originally young apprentices in the old Wulian Troupe. In the early 1980s, the Maoqiang market experienced a short

recovery period with strong government support and enthusiastic audiences. However, as explained in the preceding section about Theatrical System Reform, the governmental policy in 1985 changed to emphasise the self-financing management model and the government reduced subsidies for state-owned opera troupes. The government encouraged traditional opera troupes to participate in market competition, competing with other artforms, but it was challenging to manage an opera troupe without the government’s financial support. Meanwhile, significant changes had taken place in Chinese people’s lifestyles. Watching opera performances was no longer a primary recreational activity. The old Wulian Troupe was disbanded in 1986 because the government stopped distributing subsidies and the troupe could not earn enough profits from commercial performances.

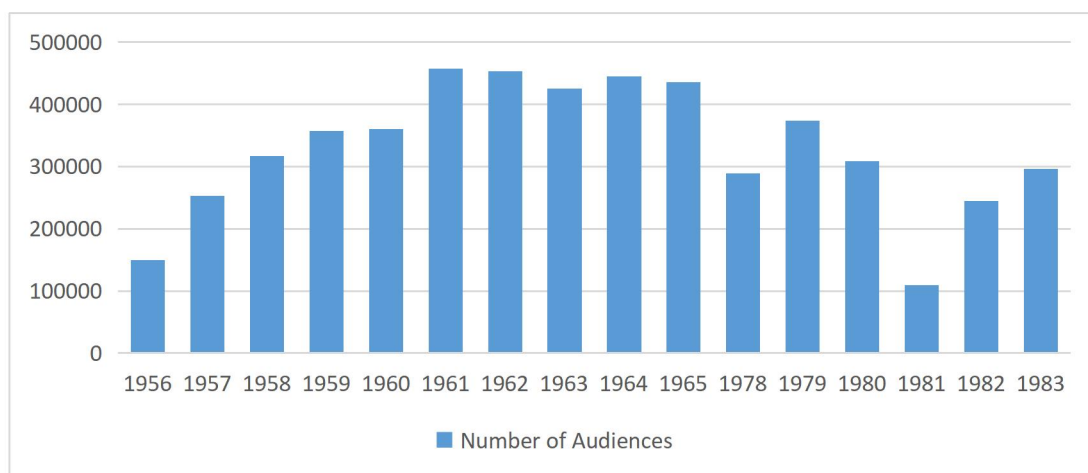
Providing essential data about the Maoqiang Opera market in Wulian County before the 1990s, the 2018 Summary records details about the old Wulian Troupe’s performances, incomes from commercial performances, and the number of audience members between 1956 and 1983 (see Table 2-5).

Table 2-5. Historical records of the old Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe’s performances

Year	Number of performances	Income (RMB)	Total number of audience members
1956	288	14200	150000
1957	451	26249	252684
1958	328	19480	317350
1959	369	26763	357000
1960	399	37011	360400
1961	329	58467	457899
1962	362	67373	453200
1963	329	42137	425300
1964	339	38772	445179
1965	424	31369	435454
June 1966	212	18686	325380
Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)			
1978	204	25754	288756
1979	331	49777	374274
1980	256	36048	308564
1981	101	13553	109004
1982	311	31934	245000
1983	461	45861	296174

The number of people attending performances evidently steadily increased from 150000 to 360400 between 1956 and 1960. After peaking at 457899 in 1961, the figure remained relatively stable in the following years before 1966. During the revolutionary period, Model Operas, especially the Peking Opera works, strongly influenced Maoqiang performances. In this ten-year period, Maoqiang performances were banned. The elderly Maoqiang performers emphasise that the performances of Model Operas changed people’s tastes and transformed many of them into enthusiasts of Peking Opera.⁷⁴ The total number of audience members between 1978 and 1983 was rather less than it was before 1965 (see Table 2-6), but this period is still regarded as falling within the prosperous period of Maoqiang Opera’s market.

Table 2-6. The number of people who came to watch the old troupe’s performances between 1956 and 1983



It is inconceivable that these figures could be accurate to a single digit. However, according to the art director Niu Xigao and the other older members of the current Wulian Troupe, the documentary data about the old troupe’s revenue and number of performances is reliable as an approximate figure. Niu Xigao says that it was possible to keep records of ticket sales because the sales processes had to be systematised and carefully managed, owing to Maoqiang Opera’s popularity.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, data about income, numbers of performances, and numbers of audience members in 1984 and 1985 cannot be located. Even the former curator of the cultural centre, Zhan Yuzhen, could not identify who had been the note-keepers of the original data. Nevertheless, the elderly performers recall that before the old troupe disbanded in 1986, they were still quite busy during those two years and travelled around many villages.

During this period, income was primarily generated through three different means. Firstly, the work summary shows that the old troupe gave performances in an outdoor mobile theatre called a *‘bu weizi’* (literally ‘tent cloth made into a circle’) - a

⁷⁴ For example, the elderly performer Xue Lintao from the current Gaomi Troupe and Niu Xigao from the current Wuliang Troupe.

⁷⁵ Interview, in Wulian Troupe, 8 July 2020.

large circular tent which encloses the perimeter but does not provide overhead shelter. People wishing to enter the mobile theatre and watch a Maoqiang performance had to buy a ticket. The floor space of this kind of mobile theatre became bigger and bigger. The summary also noted that, in 1963, the troupe's *bu weizi* could accommodate about 4000 audience members.⁷⁶ This kind of performance, conducted in different villages throughout the region, was an important source of the troupe's income.

Secondly, the wealthier people in the village often invited the opera troupe to give performances when someone in their family had a birthday or got married, or on a traditional festival day. The village committees also invited the opera troupe to perform in their villages to pray or celebrate good harvest crops or enrich the villagers' recreational activities. Meanwhile, the troupe was also invited to perform at street markets in the countryside to attract shoppers. The sponsors would pay the troupe, enabling villagers to enjoy the performances for free.

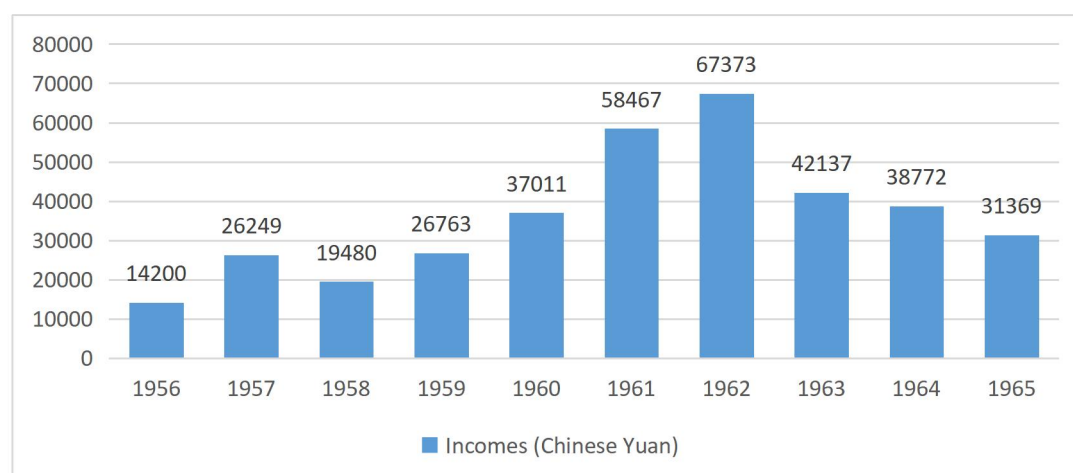
Thirdly, as a state-owned troupe, the old troupe was funded by the local government. In return, they had to perform at official events and government-organised activities. For example, the document records three especially important performances of the old troupe: on early November 1959, it gave a performance at the opening ceremony of the Annual On-site Meeting of the Provincial Party Committee of Shandong Province; from 20 December 1961 to 11 January 1962, the troupe was invited by the Shandong Bureau of Culture to perform at provincial-level cultural exchange activity⁷⁷ (*wenhua jiaoliu huodong*) in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong; on 3 July 1982, the troupe performed a full-length traditional Maoqiang Opera called '*Survival or Death*' (*'shengsi pai'*) at the opening ceremony of a conference addressing issues concerning the mountain areas in Shandong Province.

The old troupe's income increased steadily from 1956 to 1961, peaking at 67373 Chinese yuan in 1962 (see Table 2-7). However, the following years witnessed a gradual decrease in the income from commercial performances. Compared with 1962, the troupe's income in 1965 had reduced by more than a half to only 31369 Chinese yuan.

⁷⁶ The original number provided in the 2018 Summary data is 4000. I enquired about the reliability of this number with Zhang Yuzhen who was one of the compilers. She could not confirm whether the *bu weizi* could indeed accommodate 4000 people or not (text conversation by phone, 26 September 2020).

⁷⁷ The Bureau of Culture (now the Bureau of Culture and Tourism) invites representative inheritors, groups, or troupes of local traditional culture such as folk songs, operas, handcrafts and paintings to gather in one specific city. These participants give performances, exhibit their art works, or give lectures to the public during the period of this activity. They also have opportunities to communicate with each other and popularise their art forms. This kind of activity, organised by different levels of government, has been held almost every year up to the present.

Table 2-7. Annual income of the old troupe's commercial performances from 1956 to 1965



The decrease of income after 1962 is not thought to indicate a shrink in the Maoqiang market. Rather, the elderly members of the current troupe think that the old troupe was receiving less work probably owing to a proliferation of amateur Maoqiang Opera troupes. In the 1960s, with Maoqiang Opera's popularity booming, enterprising villagers with sufficient performance skills started organising their own amateur troupes. Many of these troupes could give high standard performances and worked in competition with the professional troupes. According to the 2018 Summary, there were more than 300 amateur troupes in Wulian County alone around 1965. Even villages in Wulian had their own opera troupes and groups. Wealthier villagers could therefore just invite the opera troupe of their own village, rather than have to look further afield. In this way, people appear to have had more choices and opportunities to enjoy Maoqiang performances.

In 1977 the Cultural Revolution finally came to an end. After China's reform and opening-up policy was enacted in 1978, China underwent major developments in politics, economics and culture. Maoqiang Opera was quickly revived and performed in villages again after 1978. However, the performers evidently had very little time to practice and ensure good quality performances. For example, Wang Xuhua, who was born in 1958 and joined the old Wulian Troupe in 1978, told me about her experiences of learning Maoqiang Opera. She stated that some young apprentices, including herself, began to perform on the stage after only two or three months of training.⁷⁸ Additionally, it should be noted that the old troupes only gave 101 performances in 1981 and the income from commercial performances in that year was at its lowest. However, this was because the old troupe reduced the number of performances in order to focus on rehearsals.⁷⁹ It was in 1981 that the old troupe began to create and rehearse the modern works of Maoqiang Opera. In 1982, it began performing the newly created opera in the countryside and at official events.

⁷⁸ Personal communication, in Miaojia Gou Village, 5 June 2020.

⁷⁹ Text conversation by phone with Zhang Yuzhen, 26 September 2020.

To summarise, Maoqiang Opera troupes are said to have enjoyed a period of relative prosperity between the 1950s and 1980s (excluding the period from 1966 to 1976). The Maoqiang Opera performances attracted large numbers of audience members and both state-owned professional troupes and privately-owned amateur troupes could make profits from their various types of performance. After the mid-1980s, the overall situation of the traditional opera market declined owing to numerous factors, including changes in cultural policy and people's lifestyle. The old Wulian Troupe finally disbanded in 1986 and the current troupe was not set up until November 2011.

2.4.2 Maoqiang Opera Performers' Recollections

Maoqiang Opera performers were local celebrities during that prosperous period and there were a lot of celebrated Maoqiang performers (*maoqiang mingjue*), such as Zen Jinfeng (1931-2017) and Zhu Shulan (1937-2015) and Gao Runzi, who was born in 1918 (see Figure 2-16). Their performances were highly popular and their names are still remembered by older audience members in villages to this day. It is said that villagers used the most famous performers' names to name the opera troupes instead of using the troupes' real names, whenever they were referring to a troupe coming to visit their village. For example, villagers would say, Gao Runzi's troupe comes to our village rather than the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe comes to our village.



Figure 2-16. Gao Runzi was a famous performer of the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera troupe in the 1950s. This photo hangs on the wall of the museum of Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

Some of the older performers, aged over 50, have memories concerning the latter part of the period from the 1950s to 1980s, and this section is based on their recollections. The middle-aged performer of the New Era Maoqiang Troupe, Liu Guanglan said that Maoqiang Opera performers were similar to pop stars during the 1960s.⁸⁰ She has heard from older people that the villagers would invite the most famous performers to sleep over in their homes. Villagers regarded this as something worth showing off, and the performers would receive the best treatment from the villagers. The members of the Gaomi Troupe also mentioned a similar phenomenon during the 1980s. Performers of their troupe would sometimes come to Maoqiang enthusiasts' homes, which was a kind of offstage opportunity to interact with the audience members. Figure 2-17 shows a famous performer of Gaomi Troupe, Fan Yunjie (born in 1940), teaching Maoqiang Opera in a villager's home during the 1980s.



Figure 2-17. A photo showing Fan Yunjie (right of centre) and an accompanying erhu player at a villager's home, provided by the Gaomi Troupe, 23 August 2020.

A former performer of the old Wulian Troupe and senior art consultant of the current troupe, Wang Yunting, who was born in 1941 and joined the old troupe in 1957, has told me about an important performance of the old troupe in 1959.⁸¹ He was only about 19 years old at that time (see Figure 2-18). He recalls:

“Maoqiang Opera’s development was much in advance of the other local operas in Shandong during the 1960s. Maoqiang artists were creative people and we learned the strengths of other local operas including Lü Opera, Wuyin Opera, and Liuqin Opera.⁸² Some of the traditional operas

⁸⁰ Personal communication, in New Era Troupe, 2 August 2020.

⁸¹ Interview, in Wang Yunting’s home, 3 September 2020.

⁸² Maoqiang Opera’s traditional performance did not include musical instruments. The current style of Maoqiang Opera band was mainly influenced by Peking Opera; see Section 4.1 about the Maoqiang Opera band.

of Maoqiang actually came from the other local operas [For example, the story of *The Younger Sister's Wedding* is learned from Lü Opera]...We had more than 30 classics on the list of our repertory at that time. Maoqiang Opera was one of the most famous local operas among the audience members in Shandong...I remember the party committee of Shandong Province held an important meeting⁸³ in Wulian County. The important leaders of Shandong Province would come to Wulian to attend this meeting. The staff of the meeting visited our troupe ahead of the schedule to check whether we were capable enough to give a performance at the opening ceremony. If the performance of our troupe did not meet their standards, they would allocate this performance task to the Lü Opera Troupe of Shandong Province. Finally, we got the opportunity to perform. I was only playing a supporting role at that moment and only appeared briefly with the leading performers, but I was still proud that I was a member of the old troupe...Maoqiang Opera became renowned in the local opera community and our troupe soon became one of the most famous Maoqiang Opera troupes. The opera performers from Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Zhucheng and Qingdao city all came to our troupe to learn professional skills...I think the 1960s was the first prosperous period of Maoqiang Opera, and the 1980s was the second prosperous period.”



Figure 2-18. Photos hanging on the wall of Wang Yunting’s home, 3 November 2020. The photo on the left was taken on 29 November 1959. The photo on the right is also Wang Yunting, taken in the late 1990s or early 2000s.

⁸³ One of the three important performances of the old Wulian Troupe in November 1959, mentioned earlier.

Because there was a big market for opera performance, being a Maoqiang performer became a sought-after profession and could receive above-average income. This made the selection and training of young performers more stringent than it is now.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the professional skills of old Maoqiang performers were said to be more abundant.⁸⁵ Even the performers' costumes of that period are said to have been more exquisite.⁸⁶ Wang Xuhua recalls her experiences in the old troupe around the 1980s:⁸⁷

"In 1978, the leaders of the old troupe found me and invited me to join their troupe because they heard from local villagers that I had a very good voice. I performed Model Operas for two years during the Cultural Revolution and I was not quite familiar with the performance of Maoqiang Opera at that moment...But, at that time the county government funded the reconstituted old troupe and paid a regular salary for performers. I was attracted by the payment, 40 to 50 Chinese yuan for each month.⁸⁸ Finally, I decided to join the troupe after a revering a master [*baishi*] ceremony⁸⁹ and gave up the opportunity to attend the college entrance exam [*gaokao*] in 1978...Many young people were eager to join the troupe but only the most talented youngsters were chosen by the leaders of the old troupes. I remember there were more than thirty members at that moment and most of our performers were aged under 30. The troupe also had chefs to cook for us. The county government provided us with a pickup truck, so that we could travel around to different villages with our costumes and instruments.⁹⁰ That was very important for us because without the truck, we would have had to use horses to pull the cart, just like the old troupe did in the 1950s [and 1960s]."

Although Wang Xuhua told me in another conversation that she did not like Maoqiang Opera and her favourite traditional opera forms were Lü Opera and Huangmei Opera. However, she looked proud of her experiences in the old troupe during our conversation. She added:

⁸⁴ Current training processes are discussed later in Section 3.6.

⁸⁵ This is particularly the case for the role of *wusheng* (the character playing a martial role in Chinese opera). This role has disappeared from Maoqiang Opera because the *wusheng's* body movements, such as back flipping, are too difficult to master for the current young Maoqiang performers.

⁸⁶ The costumes of the current Maoqiang Opera troupes are usually acquired from online shops as unified line products. However, historically, the costumes were made by specialist tailors, and a complete costume including headwear, outerwear, inner cloth, and stage properties, could take months to produce.

⁸⁷ Personal communication, in Miaojia Gou Village, 5 June 2020.

⁸⁸ The average revenue of a factory worker during the 1980s was 30 Chinese yuan.

⁸⁹ After the *baishi* ceremony, the young apprentice formally joined the troupe and started to learn professional skills with a specific Maoqiang Opera performer.

⁹⁰ From today's perspective, ways of life at that time were rather difficult. Li Futang, another former performer of the old troupe and now the assistant leader of the New Era Maoqiang Opera troupe, tells me that one performance season of the old troupe in the 1980s could last for one month. It was unrealistic to have daily trips. Performers at that time had to bring all their personal belongings, costumes and instruments that would be used during the performance season.

“Our troupe was one of the most popular troupes. We travelled to many villages in Shandong Province and were warmly welcomed by the audience...We gave four or five performances a day. I felt exhausted sometimes but when I heard the applause of the audience, I told myself I had to hold on. The audience never left until we finished the performance... The county government also built a small theatre in the county centre.⁹¹ Maoqiang Opera troupes and other art teams or groups were allowed to give performances in this theatre. The ticket for watching a Maoqiang Opera performance in the theatre was usually two Chinese yuan. This was not cheap for most of the audience members in our county but the tickets for our performances were soon sold out.”

2.4.3 Elderly Audience Members’ Recollections

Members of the Maoqiang community typically assert that the future prospects for the Maoqiang Opera market are concerning, especially because the current Maoqiang Opera audience is elderly, consistently comprising people over around 60 years old. Based on evidence collected during my field trip with the Wulian County Troupe in 54 villages, the core audience of Maoqiang Opera is thought to be female villagers over 58 years old, at least in Wulian County.⁹² However, the situation was different during the 1950s to 1980s, when Maoqiang Opera performances are said to have attracted audience members of all ages, particularly females under the age of 40. Nowadays, those women have become elderly, accounting for the majority of Maoqiang Opera audience members in the current opera market. Figure 2-19 shows a typical image of a current audience, mainly made up of elderly women.



Figure 2-19. An audience watching the performance of the Wulian County Troupe in Fanjiadong Village, Xumeng Township, 3 June 2020.

⁹¹ This theatre was demolished in 2005. Now, this place is a public square with many stone benches and summerhouses.

⁹² Reception is explored in Section 5.1.3 about the core audience of Maoqiang Opera .

I met many of these elderly audience members in different villages of Wulian County. They told me that, before the Cultural Revolution, almost every village had its own art team (*wenyi dui*), and performing Maoqiang Opera was one of the main activities.⁹³ The performances of the old Maoqiang Opera troupe, amateur troupes and also art teams made a deep impression on audience members of that period. I conducted short interviews with 168 elderly female villagers over 58 years old. 144 of them were able to name classic works of Maoqiang Opera that they watched before the 1990s, and 78 of them remembered the names of famous performers such as Zen Jinfeng and Zhu Shulan.⁹⁴

A selection of the elderly villagers' recollections of that period are as follows. In Donglouzi Village, Xumeng Township, I met Lin Guangxiang⁹⁵, who was 72 years old. She was not born in the village but moved there after she got married. As a result, she was not quite familiar with the old county troupe, but knew the most famous performer of the troupe, Zhu Shulan. Most of her memories were of the Xumeng Commune Maoqiang Opera Troupe, which was one of the most famous amateur troupes in Wulian County.⁹⁶ She recalls:

“Sometimes, they gave four performances per day from morning to nightfall. Because I lived far away from the *dachang* [the performance site, usually beside the agricultural products market in rural areas]...I did not want to miss any of the performances, so I always brought food to the performance site for lunch. There were so many people on the site. It was difficult to find a place with a good view, if I got there late. No one left before the end of the performances...The [Xumeng] troupe has disbanded and most of the performers have passed away. I remember they were already not young at that time. The troupe also had young performers but they were not playing lead roles.”

In another village of Xumeng Township, Fanjiadong Village, I met four grandmas who were between 70 and 80 years old, sitting together and chatting.⁹⁷ They had come to

⁹³ The art teams were usually organised by the village committee. Villagers who had skills in singing, dancing or instruments could sign up voluntarily. Their activities included Yangko dancing (*yangge wu*), lion dancing (*wushi*) and playing gongs and drums. Many Maoqiang Opera troupes of that period were actually this kind of art team. The art teams still exist in most of the villages in Wulian County, but their main activity has become square dancing.

⁹⁴ This will also be introduced in Section 5.1.3.

⁹⁵ Interview, in Donglouzi Village, 2 June 2020.

⁹⁶ This troupe is one of the two amateur troupes documented in the 2018 Summary. It was founded in November 1977 by 13 amateur Maoqiang Opera artists and was disbanded in 1985. Although this troupe only existed for eight years, they gave more than two hundred performances each year in the Xumeng Township and 70 to 80 performances outside the township. The repertoire of this troupe consisted of more than twenty classics, which was more than that of the current county troupe. I visited five villages in this township with the current Wulian Troupe, and the performers frequently said: “It is stressful performing in Xumeng Township, because there are lot of *dongxi de ren* (literally people who know a lot about Maoqiang Opera)”.

⁹⁷ Personal communication, in Fanjiadong Village, 3 June 2020.

watch the opera, arriving an hour early before the scheduled start. They asked me whether this would be the Wulian County Troupe, though it became apparent that they were actually referring to the old Wulian Troupe.⁹⁸ One grandma said: “The performers of [the old] Wulian troupe were beautiful and young, and some of them were children under 15 years old.” They mentioned several names of performers, some of which I was hearing for the first time. For example, Zhou Maozhen (born in the 1930s) was also a famous performer in the old troupe. From their conversation, it was clear that they were quite familiar with the repertory and performers of Maoqiang Opera and could name the characters in the Maoqiang stories, but none of them could sing the melodies of Maoqiang works. This was a phenomenon that I regularly encountered in my fieldwork. Villagers frequently said that they were familiar with Maoqiang Opera melodies and knew Maoqiang Opera when they heard it. Similarly, in Heijianling Village, Wanghu Township, I met a 67-year-old grandpa who said that he watched the old county troupe’s performance for the first time when he was only 6 or 7 and had been very impressed by their performances since then.⁹⁹ However, when I asked him about the repertory of Maoqiang, he said “I remember the characters and stories of Maoqiang Opera, but I forget the titles of the stories.”

Although Maoqiang Opera performances were popular in the 1960s, the four grandmas also told me that they had had to wait for one year to enjoy Maoqiang performances of the old troupe, because the transportation was very inconvenient and they could not travel too far away from their home. They added that, when hearing of an opera troupe coming to visit a village, people from all the surrounding villages would gather together for the performance. This phenomenon is frequently alluded to by villagers and, in the 1980s, the situation was still quite similar. In Xishaozhai Village, Shichang Township, a 68-year-old grandma whose family name is Liu told me about her experiences of watching Maoqiang Opera performances in the 1980s. She recalled:¹⁰⁰

“I love Maoqiang Opera and I have listened to this opera since I was a child. When I was young, I had few opportunities to watch Maoqiang Opera. Troupes only came to our village during the Spring Festival period. I remember your troupe [the old county troupe] was very famous among villagers. In my mind, this was the first time your troupe came to our village.¹⁰¹ We are very pleased to enjoy Maoqiang Opera performance again. In the past, we had to walk a long way to the *dachang* [the

⁹⁸ Villagers usually consider the old and current Wulian troupe to be one and the same opera troupe, because they are both named Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe. However, the Maoqiang artists tend to consider the current troupe a restructured new troupe.

⁹⁹ Personal communication, in Hei Jianling Village, 26 June 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, in Xishaozhai Village, 29 June 2020.

¹⁰¹ Actually, the troupe members told me that this was the second time the current Wulian Troupe travelled to this village since 2015.

performance site]. It was too far away from our village and I remember many people on their way before dawn...There were too many people on the site and it was difficult to get close to the stage.”

Based on the elderly villagers’ recollections, audience members in the 1950s to 1980s were enthusiastic about Maoqiang Opera. There were also quite a few young enthusiasts at that period, who are still the core audience of Maoqiang Opera currently. However, during our conversations, they would often sigh with emotion when considering how few opportunities they had had to watch the performances of professional troupes, owing to a lack of information regarding when and where the performances would take place and poor transportation for the large numbers of villagers. They had had to enjoy the Maoqiang performances of the art teams in their villages instead.

To summarise, it is often said that the proportion of young people in the audience is indicative of the prospects of a traditional opera. However, in the last three decades, very few young people have become Maoqiang Opera enthusiasts. The number of Maoqiang Opera troupes is also in decline and even the most professional troupes, including Gaomi Troupe and Jiaozhou Troupe, are unable to profit enough from commercial performances. The market for Maoqiang performance is still shrinking, and the development of Maoqiang Opera seems unlikely to witness another prosperous period. This is the viewpoint of most Maoqiang Opera artists. Although nationwide cultural policies about safeguarding intangible cultural heritage were enacted, without a promising commercial market and totally relying on government support, the future prospects for Maoqiang Opera are full of uncertainties.

The Maoqiang Opera market is still rooted in the rural areas of contemporary Shandong society. To further revitalise traditional opera market in the rural areas, a nationwide policy for ‘*Sending Opera to the Countryside*’ (*songxi xiexiang*) was enacted in 2015, with government-funded troupes bearing primary responsibility for fulfilling this task. Although private amateur troupes are also involved in the process of safeguarding Maoqiang Opera and Maoqiang market, the government-funded troupes are generally considered by the Maoqiang community to be the main contributor. The next chapter of this study will, thus, specifically explore the current management models of different types of Maoqiang Opera troupe and examine their various activities in detail.

Chapter 3. The Inheritance of Maoqiang Opera Culture:

Maoqiang Troupes and Performers

Opera troupes play an essential role in safeguarding and transmitting traditional Chinese operas, giving performances to meet the audience members' desires, and creating new works to ensure that traditional opera keep paces with the times. Their enthusiasm, creativeness and performance are, of course, influenced by economic factors such as funding, and by the effectiveness of their management models. Since the founding of new China in 1949, cultural policies addressing the opera troupe's management models and subsidies have been enacted every few years, aiming to safeguard traditional Chinese operas and ensure a thriving opera market. As explained in Section 2.1, the central Chinese government initiated the Theatrical System Reform of opera troupes as early as the late 1940s. This ongoing project in China underlies the current classification and management models of the various types of opera troupe.

The first section in this chapter details the various types of opera troupe that are currently operational in China. Drawing from my fieldwork findings and presenting four main case studies, the following four sections illustrate the management models, sources of income, and ranges of performance of the different types of Maoqiang troupe presently in existence, and provides brief portraits of selected representative Maoqiang artists. The relationships between the different types of Maoqiang troupe are discussed in the sixth section. Finally, because the Maoqiang Opera troupes also bear responsibility for transmitting the artform to the next generation of inheritors, the last section reveals the teaching and learning processes that pervade the Maoqiang troupes' daily activities, using the Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe as a case study.

3.1 The Current Classification of Opera Troupes

As classified in the 2017 National Local Opera Survey, released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on 26 December 2017, there are 348 types of local opera and 10278 listed local opera troupes. Among these troupes, 1524 are called 'state-owned troupe (*guoban tuanti*) and the other 8754 troupes are called 'non-state-owned troupes' (*fei guoban tuanti*), including 'state-private-owned troupe' (*guoban minying tuanti*), 'privately-owned troupes' (*minying tuanti*), and 'local civic group' (*minjian banshe*). This section explains the workings of the current four types of opera troupe: state-owned troupe, state-private-owned troupe, privately-owned troupe and local civic group.

State-owned opera troupes are a kind of for-profit cultural institution (*jingyingxing wenhua shiye danwei*). This refers specifically to public institutions (*shiye danwei*) dealing with cultural affairs about press and publication, radio, film and television,

and culture and art. The category includes state-owned publishing houses, bookstores (for example, the Xinhua Bookstore), art troupes, film studios, movie theatres and news websites.¹⁰² The term ‘public institution’ was firstly mentioned in the ‘*Report on the State Accounts of 1955 and the State Budget of 1956*’.¹⁰³ Currently, public institutions in China are still social service organisations (*shehui fuwu zuzhi*) addressing certain domains of activity: scientific and technological; educational; cultural and health.¹⁰⁴ Public institutions are under the management of the government, and pursuing social welfare and social effects are their essential features. There are three main management models for public institutions: full-funding (*quane bokuan*), balance allocation (*chae bokuan*) and self-supporting (*zishou zizhi*). As full-funded cultural institutions (*quane bokuan wenhua shiye danwei*), state-owned troupes are managed by the local Cultural and Tourism Bureau (*wenhua he luyou ju*). The government’s financial allocations cover the state-owned troupes’ daily operating budget and staff members’ basic salaries. Funds are allocated by local governments based on local economic development policy rather than a unified allocation from the central government. To join state-owned troupes, candidates must pass an entrance exam co-organised by the government and the troupe, and there is an age limit for enrolling.

When it comes to the state-private-owned troupes, each member’s basic salary is usually paid by a local performing art company or media company instead of the local government. When a troupe becomes state-private-owned, it becomes a subordinate body of the local company, which is responsible for the troupe’s day-to-day operation. For companies that work with local government, their activities should run under the supervision of the local Cultural and Tourism Bureau. The management model of state-private-owned troupes is similar to that of the self-supporting cultural institutions (*zishou zizhi wenhua shiye danwei*), which are also a type of for-profit cultural institution. However, the management model of a self-supporting cultural institution can be very complex and may vary from city to city, following local policies and different approaches to government engagement.

¹⁰² Document No. 16 of 2019 - *Notification of Preferential Tax Policies for Cultural Enterprises turned from Profit-making Cultural Institutions in the Cultural System Reform*, issued by the Ministry of Finance, and the State Administration of Taxation, 16 February 2019, <http://www.chinatax.gov.cn/n810341/n810755/c4090312/content.html>

This document is a supplement to Document No. 124 of 2018 - *Deepening the Cultural System Reform: Regulations of transforming Profit-making Cultural Institutions into Cultural Enterprises*, issued by the State Council, 28 December 2018, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2018-12/25/content_5352010.htm

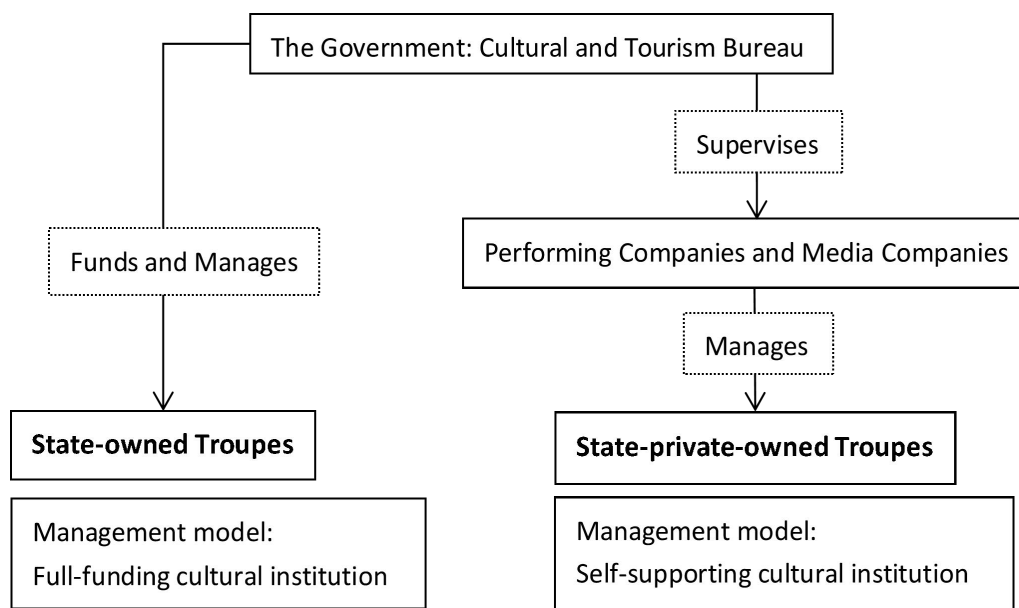
The 2019 document confirms that the reform will be enacted until 31 December 2023. Although there are still three state-owned Maoqiang opera troupes, it appears that the trajectory is towards establishing more state-private-owned opera troupes.

¹⁰³ One of the reports on the Third Session of the First National People’s Congress on 15 June 1956, by Li Xiannian (1909-1992), who was the former vice-premier and finance minister of new China. The original full text of the report can be found at: http://www.gov.cn/test/2008-03/06/content_911631.htm

¹⁰⁴ Source text from the *Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Reform of Public Institutions by Classification*, issued by the State Council and the CPC Central Committee, 23 March 2011, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-04/16/content_2114526.htm

In short, the main characteristics of self-supporting cultural institutions are as follows: earned profits do not need to be turned over to local government; no subsidies are accrued from the government when encountering financial losses; and they can enjoy tax benefits and preferential policies.¹⁰⁵ Since 2019, the central government has called for commercialising for-profit cultural institutions, and many institutions are in a transitional period, operating both as a commercial company and a cultural institution. Summarising the forementioned information, Table 3-1 shows the relationship between the government, companies, and the two types of opera troupe.

Table 3-1. The relationship between the government, company and troupes



The category of privately-owned opera troupe is quite broad, encompassing professional troupes and amateur troupes. However, all share the essential characteristics of being privately funded and self-organised (National Local Opera Survey 2017). A bankroller who pays for the basic salary of troupe members is essential for the survival and development of a privately-owned troupe. Without receiving subsidies from the government, it is very rare for a local opera troupe to make enough income from commercial performances. In Zhou Aihua’s research (2019: 238-246) of traditional opera forms in Shandong Province, the privately-owned opera category also includes amateur troupes organised by local opera enthusiasts, which only gather when performance opportunities arise. They may, on occasion, perform for a financial reward if an individual or organisation is

¹⁰⁵ Document No. 16 of 2019, issued by the Ministry of Finance, and the State Administration of Taxation, further confirmed that, from 2019 to 2023, for-profit cultural institutions turned into enterprises or state-private-owned organisations can enjoy five years of tax exemption, <http://www.chinatax.gov.cn/n810341/n810755/c4090312/content.html>, 16 February 2019.

For preferential policies, state-private-owned Maoqiang Opera troupes are eligible to receive government subsidies for performing in the countryside. For more details, see Section 3.3 and Chapter 5.

willing to pay.¹⁰⁶

Lastly, local civic groups are self-organised, not-for-profit organisations. These may exist in urban areas, but they are mostly amateur troupes or small hobby groups rooted in rural areas and closely connected with the audiences in the countryside. The members are villagers who are enthusiasts of traditional opera and join for the purposes of self- and community-fulfilment. They are farmers, factory workers, shopkeepers and all kinds of freelancers who are country-bred people. Meanwhile, the leader plays a critical role, coordinating performances and calling together all the group members. Most importantly, a local civic group also needs a bankroller to pay for the essential expenses of giving performances, for example, purchasing costumes and props. Otherwise, the members have to share those kinds of expenses. Here, the performers are all amateurs and part-timers who gather to rehearse and perform on a voluntary basis with no basic salary. The management of local civic groups is loose, and members can decide whether to join or leave at any time, with almost no restrictions (National Local Opera Survey 2017; Sui, 2017; Zhang, 2016; Sun, 2012).

The National Local Opera Survey shows that in 2015, 241 types of local opera had at least two state-owned troupes, and 120 of them only had one state-owned troupe. The other 107 types of local opera had no state-owned troupe, and 70 of them only had local civic groups. In this context, the predicament of Maoqiang Opera seems slightly better than many other opera forms because there were four professional state-owned Maoqiang Opera troupes in 2015, and still today, three of those are state-owned troupes - the troupes in Gaomi, Jiaozhou, and Qingdao City. The troupe in Wulian County became a state-private-owned troupe in October 2015. Meanwhile, there is an active privately-owned Maoqiang troupe and a local civic Maoqiang group in Wulian County. The following four sections will specifically illustrate different types of Maoqiang Opera troupe and group.

3.2 State-Owned Opera Troupes

There are currently three state-owned Maoqiang Opera troupes in the cities of Gaomi, Jiaozhou and Qingdao, directly managed by each city's Cultural and Tourism Bureau. The official title of the Maoqiang Opera troupe in Gaomi City is registered as 'Gaomi City Art Theatre' (*gaomishi yishu jüyuan*, Gaomi Troupe, founded in 1952); in Jiaozhou City, 'Jiaozhou Maoqiang and Yangko Art Inheritance and Safeguarding Centre'¹⁰⁷ (*jiaozhoushi maoqiang yangge yishu chuancheng baohu zhongxin*, Jiaozhou Troupe, founded in 1950); and, in Qingdao City, 'Qingdao West Coast New Area Maoqiang Art Inheritance centre' (*qingdaoshi xihaiyan xinqu maoqiang yishu chuancheng zhongxin*, Qingdao Troupe, founded in 1956).

¹⁰⁶ In this context, the Gaoze Maoqiang Opera Troupe (see Section 3.5 local civic groups) is also a privately-owned troupe.

¹⁰⁷ A rural folk dance performance currently mainly existing in the area of Jiaozhou City.

The troupes in Gaomi and Jiaozhou were initially privately-owned Maoqiang Opera troupes but they became government-funded registered troupes in 1955, following the implementation of the opera troupe registration system.¹⁰⁸ The troupe in Qingdao City was initially called 'Jiaonan County Song and Dance Troupe' (*jiaoxian gewu jütuan*), and was transformed into a Maoqiang Opera troupe in around 1958. However, it turned into a song and dance troupe again during the 1990s and 2000s for the sake of securing more performance opportunities.¹⁰⁹ In 2012, it finally became the current Qingdao Maoqiang Opera Troupe. As a state-owned troupe, the Qingdao Troupe is obliged to undertake the government-allocated task of performing Maoqiang Opera in the countryside (see Figure 3-1).



Figure 3-1. The Qingdao Troupe's performance of the classic Maoqiang work, *The Story of a Wall* (*qiangtou ji*), Aduo Township, Qingdao City, 30 April 2022; this photo was released on the official account of Qingdao Troupe.¹¹⁰

The range of performances of state-owned Maoqiang troupes differs a little from case to case. Because the government fully funds these troupes, they have to fulfil government-allocated performance tasks, focusing on undertaking government-organised people-benefiting cultural activities (*wenhua huimin huodong*), especially providing people-benefiting performances (*huimin yanchu*) to publicise local culture and enrich residents' daily lives. For example, state-owned Maoqiang troupes are responsible for giving performances on Cultural and Tourism Festival (*wenhua he lüyou jie*) and Cultural and Natural Heritage Day (*wenhua he*

¹⁰⁸ Further historical information about Maoqiang Opera troupes is provided in Section 2.4.

¹⁰⁹ Personal communications with the members of the current Wulian Maoqiang Troupe between March and July 2020. The Qingdao Troupe still gave Maoqiang performances during that period, and some of their performers came from the old Wulian Troupe after the latter was disbanded in 1986.

¹¹⁰ The original text can be found at <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2mqKGLK-EQ3ATdjiTnP3Q>

ziran yichan ri), which have been celebrated annually since 2016.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, they have been required to perform in the countryside since 2015, at a cultural activity in Shandong Province called ‘*One Village, One Year, One Performance*’ (*yicun yinian yichangxi*).¹¹²

State-owned troupes also perform at cultural activities organised by local governments according to the cities’ own characteristics. For example, since 2016, the Gaomi Troupe has undertaken a cultural activity titled ‘*Red Sorghum Cultural Festival: Maoqiang Opera Week*’¹¹³ (*honggaoliang wenhua yishujie: maoqiang zhou*), every year during both summer and winter (see Figure 3-2). The Maoqiang Opera Week is one of the activities of this cultural festival. The troupe gives Maoqiang performances in different public squares throughout the city centre, where citizens can enjoy Maoqiang Opera performances for free. Actually, the styles of these cultural activities in different cities are much the same, but with different titles.



Figure 3-2. The Gaomi Troupe performing in front of the Gaomi Grand Theatre during the 2020’s Red Sorghum Cultural Festival: Maoqiang Opera Week from 4 November to 10th; this photo was provided by the administration office of the Gaomi Troupe.

State-owned troupes also attach great importance to creating modern works of Maoqiang Opera and participating in script writing competitions. If a new work wins a prize, the troupe gains additional funding from the government, according to the policy called ‘*Substituting Subsidies with Rewards*’ (*yijiang daibu*). Furthermore,

¹¹¹ These activities are prevalent nationwide, organised by different levels of government from county-level to national-level.

¹¹² For more details, see Chapter 5 about performing Maoqiang Opera in the countryside.

¹¹³ Gaomi is the hometown of Mo Yan, who was the first Chinese writer to become Nobel laureate for literature. People outside Shandong know of Maoqiang Opera from Mo Yan’s book *Memories of Mo Yan*. *Red Sorghum* is one of the best-known full-length novels by Mo Yan.

state-owned troupes employ a far greater proportion of young performers, compared to other types of troupe. They are young professionals who have learned Maoqiang Opera from the age of 11 to 16 with older performers or in Maoqiang training classes (*maoqiang peixun ban*). New candidates (instrumentalists in the opera band) who wish to join a state-owned troupe should sign up for recruitment on the official website of the local government and pass a professional competence test to guarantee fairness. In addition, the retirement system of state-owned troupes follows the state-specified standard of public institutions, with male performers required to retire at 60 or 55 and female performers at 55 or 50. This means none of the regular members in state-owned troupes is over 60 years old.

Meanwhile, based on the local cultural policies in different cities, different state-owned troupes also manifest unique qualities, particularly in their management models. The largest troupe is the Jiaozhou Troupe, with 106 troupe members in 2020. However, the members of the Jiaozhou Troupe are divided into two groups, specialising in the performance of Maoqiang Opera and Yangko Dance, respectively, because both of these two art forms are representative performing arts in Jiaozhou City (though they are thought to have influenced one another to a major degree). The young performers in the Jiaozhou Troupe are able to perform both Maoqiang Opera and Yangko Dance.¹¹⁴ The Jiaozhou government intends to take advantage of the two types of artforms to create a more unique local culture in Jiaozhou City. In 2015, with the support of the Jiaozhou government, the troupe combined the two artforms within a new Maoqiang work, *The Story of Yangko Dance's Hometown (yanggexiang de gushi)*. This work was selected for the Creation of the National Fine Works of Art Funding Project in 2018. The conversations in this work are spoken in Jiaozhou dialect, and the melodies of the sung passages feature a strong Maoqiang Opera flavour. The performers' costumes and body movements are in the classic Yangko Dance style (see Figure 3-3).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Personal communication with Liu Guanglan, who retired from the Jiaozhou Troupe and is currently working in the New Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe (privately-owned troupe) in Wulian County, in New Era Troupe, 13 July 2020.

¹¹⁵ Source text from the news flash released on the official account of the Jiaozhou Government- I Love the Golden Jiaozhou, 5 June 2018, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/DJHMUCAA05149U82.html>, and the official website of Qingdao News, 26 October 2017 https://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2017-10/26/content_20037159.htm



Figure 3-3. The Story of Yangko Dance’s Hometown (yanggexiang de gushi), in Mei Lanfang Grand Theatre, Beijing, 10 July 2017.

Most importantly, the two state-owned Maoqiang troupes in Gaomi City and Jiaozhou City played an essential role in applying for State-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) designation in 2006. As noted in literature review (Section 1.2.1), because the criteria for assessing State-Level ICH are strict, it is difficult for many local art forms to be selected without having a professional and productive team. Maoqiang Opera was able to stand out among many other small local opera forms in China because it already had state-owned troupes active in 2006.¹¹⁶ With the support of local government, the two troupes cooperated and prepared the documentation for assessment. Currently, Gaomi Troupe and Jiaozhou Troupe are generally recognised by the Maoqiang community for their performance quality and management model and are officially certified as state-level institutions safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as ICH.

According to the members of Gaomi Troupe, their troupe experienced a boom period from 2006 to 2020, especially in terms of an increased number of young performers, increased performance opportunities, increased wages for troupe members, improved social status of opera performers, and higher motivation to create new works. Based on the troupe’s actual predicament, especially its personnel and financial situations, specific measures for safeguarding Maoqiang Opera in Gaomi City have been formulated and implemented through the joint efforts of the local

¹¹⁶ Based on the 2017 National Local Opera Survey, the predicament of Maoqiang opera is still healthier than many other small local operas, especially in terms of the number of state-owned troupes.

government and the troupe itself. The details of the measures correspond to the Ten-Year Safeguard Plan, especially the five concerns noted in Section 1.2.1. The troupe members have, to a large extent, reached their goals and achieved satisfactory results as follows:¹¹⁷

- (1) Archiving:** Collecting and collating old scripts, photos, musical instruments, costumes and so forth; collecting data about the development history of Gaomi Troupe; transcribing scripts and music notations of classic operas; videoing elderly Maoqiang artists;
- (2) Preservation:** Building the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Museum to preserve related documentation, audio-visual recordings, and all types of collected data;
- (3) Inheritance:** Selecting and training talented youngsters aged between 11 and 14 via free-to-attend government-funded Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Training Classes between 2008 to 2013; establishing an ICH Training School of Maoqiang Opera; dividing the troupe into the young people's troupe and the old people's troupe to give more performance opportunities to young performers;
- (4) Dissemination:** Holding the Red Sorghum Cultural Festival and giving performances during the Maoqiang Opera Week in the city centre; regularly giving performances in the countryside; regularly giving lectures in local schools; providing opportunities for the public to visit the troupe and the museum on open days; publishing DVDs of Maoqiang Opera performance;
- (5) Safeguarding:** Placing emphasis on rehearsing and polishing the performance of classic works; creating new works to seek further development of the art form; ensuring that the Gaomi government fully funds the basic salary and monthly retirement pay of the troupe members; and paying officially certified Maoqiang inheritors additional allowances.

Having designated Maoqiang Opera as ICH, government policies now dictate almost all aspects of preservation- and revitalisation- related activity. Meanwhile, the state-owned Maoqiang troupes have played a fundamental role in carrying out the governmental policy and putting the specific measures into effect. Based on interviews held with members of the Gaomi Troupe and documents collected during my field trip to Gaomi City in August 2020, The remainder of this section uses the Gaomi Troupe as a case study, elucidating the management model of a typical state-owned troupe and providing insights into troupe members' creative lives.

¹¹⁷ Interviews with troupe members, in Gaomi Troupe, July to August 2020. See Section 3.2.1, The Case Study of Gaomi Troupe, for more details.

3.2.1 Case Study: The Gaomi City Maoqiang Opera Troupe

The Maoqiang community generally acknowledges that the Gaomi Troupe is currently the most influential Maoqiang Opera troupe and has never been disbanded in its development history since it was founded in 1952, even during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Although the troupe members also occasionally give song and dance performances, rehearsing classic Maoqiang Operas and creating modern Maoqiang works are the main tasks of the Gaomi Troupe. From 2006 to 2015, with the support of the Gaomi government, Gaomi Troupe published 24 DVDs of classic Maoqiang Opera performances, which are popular among Maoqiang performers and enthusiasts. The publication of these DVDs further enhanced the influence of the Gaomi style Maoqiang Opera. Notably, the performers of many privately-owned troupes and local civic groups frequently use DVDs as models for learning the melodies, lyrics and actors' lines of classic Maoqiang works.

Gaomi City is a relatively wealthy county-level city (*xian ji shi*) under the administration of Weifang City.¹¹⁸ By the end of 2020, Gaomi City had a total registered population of 877,393.¹¹⁹ Maoqiang Opera culture is officially regarded as one of the four artforms of The Image of Gaomi City¹²⁰ (*gaomi yinxiang*). The local government attaches great importance to safeguarding this kind of traditional culture by increasing subsidies, promoting the appointment and training of new performers, and setting up cultural museums. With generous backing from local government, the Gaomi Troupe has witnessed steady development since 2006. This troupe is located in the city centre, in an independent three-story building called 'Gaomi Grand Theatre' (*gaomi da jüyuan*). The theatre has a concert hall, a Maoqiang Opera museum, several rehearsal rooms, and administration offices. The Gaomi Troupe first settled in this theatre in June 1995, and all their performances are free for citizens to watch. There is a medium-sized public square in front of the theatre, which is usually used as a car park. However, on occasion, a stage is set up there, for the purpose of spreading awareness and appreciation beyond the building's confines (see Figure 3-2, earlier).

Regarding the current management model of the Gaomi Troupe, it is fully funded by the local Gaomi government and directly managed by the Gaomi Cultural and Tourism Bureau. *The Introduction of Gaomi Art Theatre*¹²¹ (*gaomi yishu jüyuan*

¹¹⁸ In simple terms, the economic development of a county generally refers to a rural economy. In contrast, a county-level city has equipped public infrastructure constructions, and its economic development includes both urban and rural economies.

¹¹⁹ Data released by Weifang City Bureau of Statics, 10 June 2021, <http://wfrb.wfnews.com.cn/content/20210610/Article03003TB.htm>

¹²⁰ The other three artforms are Gaomi style ash painting, clay sculpture and paper cuttings.

¹²¹ Researchers visiting the Gaomi Troupe are provided with *An Introduction to the Gaomi Art Theatre*, a 6000-word introduction to the troupe's historical development and its most notable accomplishments, written by administrative officers from the troupe. The Gaomi Troupe members told me that, in recent years, undergraduates and postgraduates have continuously come to visit the troupe every few weeks. Many of the students are undertaking research projects for their courses, typically only visiting on one occasion. Accommodating these visitors is another crucial component in the troupe's remit.

jieshao) provided by the administration office of the Gaomi Troupe shows that the financial provision of the local Gaomi government accounts for more than 80% of the Gaomi Troupe's source of income. The government invests more than two million Chinese yuan (more than £220,000) every year for the troupe's daily operating cost, covering the basic salary, bonus and performance subsidy for performers and administrative staff. Rehearsing new works, publishing DVDs, and developing the facilities is dependent on additional subsidies. The administrative officer of the Gaomi Troupe, Shi Wei, told me that in 2013 alone, the local government invested about three million yuan (about £330,000) towards improving the infrastructure of Gaomi Grand Theatre, including lighting and loudspeaker equipment, and air conditioning and fire-fighting apparatus.¹²²

The management model for the Gaomi Troupe divides members' salaries into base pay (*jiben gongzi*) and merit pay (*jixiao gongzi*) to avoid equalitarianism and encourage productivity amongst troupe members. Their total wages are about 4,000 to 6,000 Chinese yuan (about £440 - £660) per month, similar to the local civil servant's salary. The amount of base pay is influenced by members' job titles, from 2,500 to 3,500 Chinese yuan (about £270 - £380) per month. Performers with senior professional titles, for example, a National First-class Performer (*guojia yiji yanyuan*), can receive a higher level of base pay. The amount of merit pay is influenced by the rate of attendance, members' participation in performances, and prizes for creating new works.

In addition, a fingerprint attendance machine is used by the Gaomi Troupe on working days, offering members the opportunity to gain a perfect attendance bonus. During my field trips in Wulian County and Jietou Township, I found that fingerprint attendance machines were also used in state-private-owned troupes and privately-owned troupes. Although the Gaomi Troupe's regulations are relatively strict, if troupe members request long leave with reasonable causes such as maternity leave or sick leave, their basic salary tends not to be reduced. According to my interviewees, the performers' salary can fully cover their cost-of-living needs. As a result, they can concentrate on polishing performance skills and fulfilling their performance tasks.¹²³

(a) The Young People's Troupe and the Old People's Troupe

Concerning the distinguishing characteristics of the Gaomi Troupe, a key feature lies in the troupe's management model for young performers. The Gaomi Troupe currently has 54 members, with 43 performers and 11 administration officers. To give young performers more opportunities and cultivate young inheritors, in 2016, the leaders of the Gaomi Troupe divided the troupe into two troupes: the young people's

¹²² Personal communications, in Gaomi Troupe, between 9 and 16 August 2020.

¹²³ As I will show in the following sections, performers in the other types of opera troupes usually have their own side businesses.

troupe (*qingnian tuan*), with 35 members under 45 years old, and the old people's troupe (*laonian tuan*), with 19 members. Currently, the rehearsal rooms for the young people's troupe are on the second floor, while the older performers stay on the first floor. They all have their allocated schedules and performance tasks. The young people's troupe has a busier schedule because it is responsible for the Gaomi Troupe's important performance task, giving performances in the countryside (see Figure 3-4).



Figure 3-4. The young people's troupe performing classic Maoqiang Opera in Kanjia Township, Gaomi City, 31 March 2021; photo provided by the Gaomi Troupe administration office.

The two troupes only rehearse together for newly created modern operas. Creating modern Maoqiang work is one of the main tasks and duties of state-owned troupes, requiring the participation of many performers, particularly instrumentalists and percussionists. These modern works are usually government-funded projects focusing on specific topics. For example, during my field trip to Gaomi Troupe, all the performers at that period were rehearsing a full-length modern Maoqiang work, created by the Gaomi Troupe to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 2021. This new work is titled 'Stay True to the Mission Forever' (*chuxin yongheng*), telling a story about the party's determination to combat corruption and promote legal construction. This work was premiered on 25 January 2021 in the Gaomi Grand theatre concert hall (see Figure 3-5). More than 800 attendees watched the live performance, including party members, administration officers and ordinary citizens.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Simple reportage with a photo released on the official website of Weifang City Commission for Discipline Inspection, which is a government agency investigating cases of official corruption, 27 January 2021, http://www.wfjw.gov.cn/gzdt/xcyj/202101/t20210127_5814981.html



Figure 3-5. The Gaomi Troupe performing *Stay True to the Mission Forever* (*chuxin yongheng*), 25 January 2021; photo provided by the Gaomi Troupe administration office.

Most of the young performers acquired their professional skills at the Gaomi Maoqiang Juvenile Training Class (*gaomi maoqiang shaoerban*) from 2008 to 2013. So far, this is the only Maoqiang training class in Gaomi City, but it has done much to alleviate the problem of the local Maoqiang scene's ageing demographic. The leader of the troupe, Huai Changjian, who is also a Maoqiang Opera composer, told me that after Maoqiang Opera was listed as intangible cultural heritage, cultivating Maoqiang Opera inheritors became a major concern in the Gaomi government's agenda.¹²⁵ With the support of the Gaomi government and Weifang Art College, the Juvenile Training Class was founded on 14 November 2008, and *An Introduction to the Gaomi Art Theatre* records that Fan Fusheng, who was the mayor of Gaomi City at that time (2007-2011), attended the opening ceremony, marking the importance of the moment. Young people aged between 10 and 14 and talented in singing Maoqiang Opera or playing traditional Chinese instruments are eligible to register for the entrance exam of this training class. About a hundred applicants enrolled for the first exam, and 40 were selected as probation trainees, with all ensuing expenditures covered by the Gaomi government. Trainees can learn Maoqiang Opera's singing techniques and body movements of performing for free, drawing on the expertise of supervisors from Weifang Art College, performers from the Gaomi Troupe, and older Maoqiang performers based in Gaomi City. The first three months are a probation period. After five years of training from 2008 to 2013, 12 young performers, including opera performers and instrumentalists, eventually passed the graduation test and joined the Gaomi Troupe in 2014.

¹²⁵ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

The graduates from the training class were under 20 years old when they became Maoqiang Opera performers in 2014, and they are still amongst the youngest of all the professional Maoqiang performers in Shandong Province. One of these graduates, Bie Shujun (see Figure 3-6), born in 1996, recalls why she joined the training class and her experiences of learning Maoqiang Opera as follows:¹²⁶



Figure 3-6. The image of Bie Shujun in the interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

“I was 12 years old when I joined the training class, but I knew nothing about Maoqiang Opera at that time. Although my mum was a traditional opera enthusiast, I had no interest in the videos she watched. The first time I learned Maoqiang Opera was because there was a karaoke competition at Gaomi Maoqiang Opera in 2008. My mum made the decision for me to participate in the competition, because she thought I was gifted at singing. I prepared for only two weeks to learn an opera song with recordings. After a while, my mum told me that the Maoqiang Opera training class was recruiting students. She helped me fill in the application form, and I successfully passed all the tests. My parents arranged it at that time, but I was not rejected to learn at the training class...I did not aim to become a Maoqiang Opera performer before graduating from the training class. In an ordinary middle school, learning academic courses is the most important thing for students, but in the art college, we spend most of our time learning the arts. I was being cultivated as an opera performer, so my major courses were for vocal music [*changqiang*], Chinese Opera body movement [*xiqu shenduan*] and spoken parts of Chinese opera [*xiqu nianbai*]. I felt these courses were quite interesting. Looking back now, the learning period in the training class was pleasant...During those five years, we only performed selections of Maoqiang Opera or acted as running soldiers¹²⁷ [*paobing*]. I was a very obedient student, and most of my classmates were just like me, because we were so young and had little idea about the characters in an opera. Our supervisors taught us step by step, and we just dutifully followed their instructions.”

Another young performer, Chen Futao (see Figure 3-7), who was born in 1997, talked about similar experiences concerning learning Maoqiang Opera. He similarly joined

¹²⁶ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020. She is the leading role in the Maoqiang Opera film - *Red Sorghum*.

¹²⁷ The silent roles in full-length works, standing behind or around the main characters.

the Gaomi Troupe because his parents were traditional opera enthusiasts. His parents sent him to the entrance exam of the training class when he was only 11. He recalls that, in the first three years, they only practiced the most basic performance skills, including voice training (*diao sangzi*) and body movement training. Every morning, the trainees had to practice these basic skills together during morning practice (*zaogong*). They also learned music theory, including how to read music notations. It was not until the fourth year of the training programme that they started to read the scripts of Maoqiang Opera and began to act as running soldiers on the stage. Chen Futao recounted his experiences of working in the Gaomi Troupe as follows:¹²⁸



Figure 3-7. The image of Chen Futao in the interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

“There are 35 members in the young people troupe, and we are a team. We would never conflict with each other over performance opportunities, and the atmosphere in our troupe is harmonious. So we can just concentrate on improving our performance skills...There is a fair chance for us to succeed because we have so many performance opportunities. Every year we give hundreds of Maoqiang Opera performances in various circumstances, and I cannot remember precisely how many

performances I have already participated in. I have made a lot of progress since joining the Gaomi Troupe. Particularly, I can tell that my comprehension and interpretation of each character’s personality traits is more advanced, and sometimes I feel that I am fully integrated in the character. I am now a Maoqiang Opera enthusiast, although sometimes I lack the enthusiasm to practice...I think the [Gaomi] troupe attaches great importance to our development, and the leaders show commitment towards us. When we rehearse new modern works, the troupe will invite directors and famous performers from more specialised professional troupes to guide our performances. We also have many opportunities to attend training classes for further studies.”

Bei Shujun further mentions that after she graduated from the training session and joined the troupe, she felt a rapid transformation of identity from student to professional.¹²⁹ Having undertaken countless performances to help her polish her skills, she was able to take on leading roles in full-length Maoqiang Operas:

¹²⁸ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020. He is also the leading actor in the Maoqiang Opera film - *Red Sorghum*.

¹²⁹ Personal communication, in Gaomi Troupe, 14 August 2020.

“Last year, we travelled to Jiaozhou City to participate in a cultural activity, and we met some young performers from the Jiaozhou Troupe. I found that some of them could not even apply their face paint without the help of their masters. They said that they were pretty envious of our troupe because they had fewer opportunities to play leading roles in full-length operas, their masters always choosing those characters. They also relied on their masters to confer with locals about performance sites, power supply requirements, and so on when performing in the countryside. In contrast, we are more independent and can fulfil all the performance tasks ourselves. I think we are fortunate to be protected and encouraged by the older performers in our troupe. We also have our own mobile stage vehicle. All we need to do in the troupe is just to think about polishing our performance skills.”

The Maoqiang community regards the Gaomi Troupe’s management model for cultivating young performers as a pattern for success, though, at the time of writing, it remains the only troupe that divides its members into two cohorts. According to the young Maoqiang performers, it works well to boost the young performers’ personal development. Regarding the old people’s troupe, there are 19 performers aged from 45 to 60. They all have professional job titles, and six are registered members of national or provincial Chinese opera associations. The development of the young people’s troupe depends on support from the older performers to a great extent.



Figure 3-8. The image of Huai Changjian in the interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

The leader of the Gaomi Troupe, Huai Changjian (see Figure 3-8), who was born in 1964, has worked in the troupe since 1976, when he was only 12 years old.¹³⁰ He currently plays many roles in the Gaomi Troupe, including administrative leader, violinist, composer and conductor, and he has played a major role in establishing the troupe’s current management model. His parents were Chinese opera enthusiasts, and he developed a particular fondness for Peking and Lü Opera. By his own admission, his Maoqiang Opera composition is strongly influenced by these two operas. Huai Changjian is the composer of the Maoqiang Opera film *Red Sorghum* (2018)¹³¹, and the composer of the published DVD version (Gaomi version) of the traditional Maoqiang Operas *The Younger Sister’s Wedding* and *Young Lady Mochou*.

¹³⁰ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

¹³¹ The Maoqiang Opera vision of *Red Sorghum* was rehearsed in 2014, and the Maoqiang Opera film version of *Red Sorghum* was produced and released in 2018 by the Gaomi Troupe.

Meanwhile, he is also the conductor for the full-length modern Maoqiang Opera about fighting the COVID-19 pandemic *Emergency Expedition (jinji chuzheng)*. He recalls that in 1976, the old Gaomi Troupe recruited 15 young performers aged from 11 to 14. Only two of them still work in the Gaomi Troupe, himself and Xue Lintao (detailed below). He initially specialised in stringed instrument playing but then branched out into other areas, including composition, working alongside various scriptwriters.



Figure 3-9. The image of Xue Lintao in the interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

Xue Lintao (see Figure 3-9) is another older performer in the Gaomi Troupe, who first joined in 1976 when he was 12 years old.¹³² He is now officially recognised as a National Second-Class Performer (*guojia erji yanyuan*) and a prominent Maoqiang Opera director. He directed the forementioned performance of the new opera *Stay True to the Mission Forever* (see Figure 3-5, where Xue Lintao is the male performer in the middle of the stage). Xue is also an enthusiast of Peking Opera. His father was a Maoqiang Opera performer, from whom he began his training. In our discussion, he stressed that a key concern for the older people's troupe was the production of new

Maoqiang works, highlighting that they had produced ten new prize-winning works in recent years. Although they do not perform in the countryside, they still have many opportunities to perform in local nursing homes and other venues. Xue Lintao expounded the same views as co-leader Huai Changjian: the old generation of opera performers should encourage young performers to become more independent; Maoqiang Opera has no future without innovation (creating modern operas); and drawing influences from Peking Opera and other kinds of traditional opera is advantageous.¹³³

(b) The Maoqiang Opera Museum

The oldest Maoqiang Opera museum is located on the second floor of the Gaomi Grand theatre, managed by the Gaomi Troupe since 1995.¹³⁴ Exhibits, including old scripts, music scores, photos, costumes, props, traditional instruments, newspaper

¹³² Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

¹³³ More details about the performers' opinions about the innovation and development of Maoqiang Opera are provided in Chapter 6.

¹³⁴ There are currently two Maoqiang Opera museums in existence. Another one is a new museum opened to the public on 8 June 2019, located in Qingdao City titled Shandong Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition and Experience Centre. In recent years, such centres have been established in provinces of China following the guidance of the central government for safeguarding local intangible cultural heritages. The exhibition hall of Maoqiang Opera culture is one of the halls in the centre. During my trip in October 2020 to Changsha City, Hunan Province, I found the newly-constructed Xiang Opera Museum is also located in this kind of centre.

clip articles, promotional brochures, and honour certificates, are preserved and displayed in the museum. Meanwhile, the museum also exhibits the troupe's recent achievements, such as the latest DVDs of the troupe's performances at the Traditional Opera Gala in 2016 and 2017's Spring Festival in Gaomi City (see Figure 3-10). The exhibits in this museum provide precious data for investigating the Gaomi Troupe's development history and Maoqiang Opera culture after the 1950s.



Figure 3-10. Various publications about Maoqiang Opera culture, including books and DVDs, 14 August 2020.

The old scripts are the most important collections in the museum (see Figure 3-11).¹³⁵ The forementioned *Introduction to the Gaomi Art Theatre* states that, from 1954 to 2005, the Gaomi Troupe rehearsed and performed 150 traditional Maoqiang works and 98 modern Maoqiang works. All the scripts of these works are well preserved in the museum, serving as important materials for studying Maoqiang repertory. The scripts were first written out by hand from the 1980s to 1990s and then in print from the 2000s by older artists recalling the texts that they had memorised many years previously. The scripts of some modern works were not originally created by the Gaomi Troupe's own scriptwriters, but rather were adapted from other sources, for example, the script of *Red Sorghum*.

¹³⁵ See also Figure 2-16 in Section 2.5.



Figure 3-11. Old Maoqiang Opera scripts, held in the Gaomi Theatre Opera Museum, 14 August 2020.

Meanwhile, this museum serves as the educational base for traditional opera culture in Gaomi City, playing a vital role in safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as ICH. Local elementary schools organise visits to the museum and the theatre every year, following the government's drive to carry forward Gaomi's fine traditions. However, the museum is only open to the public during limited periods, such as Maoqiang Opera Weeks or theatre open days, and visitors need to book a place in advance before entering. To make the most of the building's spaces, some museum exhibition rooms are also used as practice rooms, conference rooms or costume storage rooms during ordinary times (see Figures 3-12, 3-13 and 3-14).

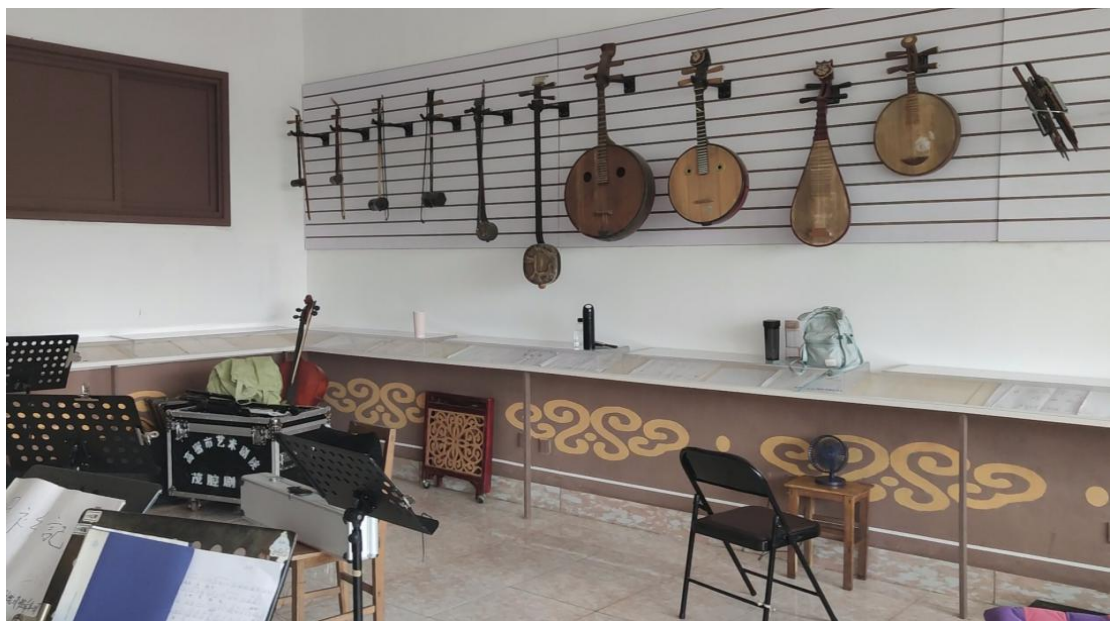


Figure 3-12. An exhibition room with traditional Chinese instruments hanging on the wall - also used as a practice room for the young people's troupe, 14 August 2020.



Figure 3-13. An exhibition room showing old Maoqiang Opera scripts and costumes –also used as a meeting room or small conference room for administration officers, 11 August 2020.



Figure 3-14. An exhibition room for costumes and props. The costumes on the hangers are used currently in the performances, but the headwear to the right of this photo is just for exhibit, 11 August 2020.

To summarise, although state-owned Maoqiang troupes can have their own certain distinctive qualities (such as the Gaomi Troupe’s division into younger and older groups), they share a number of essential attributes. Most importantly, they are fully funded by the government and are responsible for fulfilling government-assigned tasks. The performers tend to be professionals who have learned and performed Maoqiang Opera for many years. The government pays all the operating expenses of the troupe, including members’ basic salary and different kinds of benefits, particularly the subsidies for performing in the countryside and bonuses for creating modern works.

3.3 State-Private-Owned Opera Troupes

Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe (*wulian xian maoqiang jütuan*, Wulian Troupe) is currently the only professional Maoqiang Opera troupe in Rizhao City and is also the only state-private-owned Maoqiang Opera troupe, with 22 members in 2020. The old Wulian Troupe was founded as early as August 1956 but had experienced many dissolutions, reconstitutions and changes in management.¹³⁶ In November 2011, the current Wulian Troupe was reorganised by the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau (WCTB) and fully funded by the local Wulian government as a state-owned troupe. However, in October 2015, following the guidance of the Theatrical System Reform in China, the management right of the Wulian Troupe was handed over by the WCTB to the Rizhao City Yiqun (Friendship) Cultural Media Company (Yiqun Company).¹³⁷ This section examines the management model, sources of income, and responsibilities of the Wulian Troupe and highlights its performers' characteristics.

3.3.1 Case Study: The Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe

The Wulian Troupe currently exists as a subordinate body of Yiqun, a company which also manages the only cinema in the county centre. Yiqun works under the management of the WCTB and is no longer a purely commercial media company. Officials from the bureau are involved in the decision-making processes for the company's essential activities. Currently, Yiqun undertakes two primary government-funded tasks: one is showing free movies to villagers in the countryside; another is giving complimentary performances to villagers in the countryside. The cinema is responsible for the first task, and the Wulian Troupe is responsible for the second, giving song and dance performances and Maoqiang Opera performances in the local villages.¹³⁸

The Wulian Troupe's rehearsal rooms and Yiqun's administrative offices are located in the Wulian County Cultural Centre (WCCC, see Figure 3-15). This is an enormous government-owned building, adjoining the Wulian County Museum and only about fifteen minutes' walk from the county's central shopping street.¹³⁹ This building has six departments: the Wulian County Cultural Market Management Office; the Wulian County Mass Cultural Activity Centre; the Wulian County Cultural centre; the Wulian County Activity Centre for Women and Children; the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe; and Rizhao City Yiqun Cultural Media Company. Six plaques carved with the names of these departments are hanging on the wall beside the main entrance of the centre.

¹³⁶ See Section 2.4 about the historical review of the Maoqiang Opera market.

¹³⁷ For commercial companies in China, opportunities to cooperate with the government or undertake government-funded tasks can be obtained through open tendering.

¹³⁸ More details are presented in Chapter 5.

¹³⁹ The members of the Wulian Troupe are claimed to be satisfied and proud of working in this kind of surroundings, which is an important reason they choose to stay in the troupe.



Figure 3-15. The Wulian County Cultural Centre and the troupe's mobile stage vehicle for travelling to villages, 16 January 2020.

Serving as a major source of income for the Wulian Troupe, the cinema is the profitable subordinate body of the Yiqun Company. The media company is, in fact, the main contributor to the troupe members' basic salary. Performers over 60 typically receive 500 Chinese yuan (about £55) per month, and young apprentices 1200 yuan (about £130) per month. Other members or performers receive 1800 yuan to 2000 yuan (about £200 to £220) per month based on their positions in the troupe or job titles. Meanwhile, the troupe depends on subsidies to finance its performances in the countryside. Each performance is granted a subsidy from the central government of between 1000 yuan and 1500 yuan (between about £110 and £165), which is distributed proportionally to troupe members. The troupe usually gives two performances in one village over the course of a single day - a song and dance performance in the afternoon and a Maoqiang Opera performance in the evening (see Figure 3-16). According to the troupe members, the subsidy is their primary motivation to travel to different villages all year round, giving more than 400 performances each year.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 5 for further information about the troupes' performance tasks (since 2015), drawing from my field trip with the Wulian Troupe in 54 villages.



Figure 3-16. The Wulian Troupe performing Maoqiang Opera in Nanhuitou Village, Kouguan Township. Performances are typically held in this kind of site - an open area next to the Village Party Branch, 21 May 2020.

For additional subsidies, the troupe now contributes to most government-organised cultural activities in Wulian County. In particular, the famous Summer Festival in Mountain City (*shancheng zhixia*) has been held annually since 1997, from the end of July to August. Government agencies, art organisations, local schools and all kinds of civic groups are eligible to participate in this cultural activity.¹⁴¹ They give performances every evening at the Wulian County Stadium during the festival period. In addition to performing Maoqiang Opera, the troupe members typically contribute to other performance teams in singing, dancing, instrument playing, and so on. The summer festival is funded by the County Bureau of Finance and backed by extensive commercial sponsorship (see Figures 3-17 and 3-18).

¹⁴¹ At this type of event, every performance is judged by a panel of officials from the Wulian County Cultural Centre (WCCC) and Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau, according to criteria issued by the WCCC, including creativeness, numbers of participants, costumes and props and so forth. The most accomplished are given awards.



Figure 3-17. The 2020 Summer Festival (30 July - 12 August) at the Wulian County Stadium, 5 August 2020.



Figure 3-18. Various performances at the 2020 Summer Festival, Wulian County Stadium, 30 July to 12 August 2020. The Wulian Troupe's Maoqiang Opera performances are shown on the top right and left bottom.

Meanwhile, the Wulian Troupe gives commercial performances during the Spring Festival period. Normally, in February, village councils or wealthy villagers pay for troupes to perform in their village to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The payment for such performances is determined by the troupe and can be up to 5000 Chinese yuan (about £550) per performance. So, February is the month in which members typically earn their highest monthly income. However, in February 2020, the Yiqun Company and Wulian Troupe experienced the most difficult period since their foundation because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the cinema was closed, and all commercial performances were canceled.

The government provides the Wulian troupe and Yiqun Company with ample space in the Wulian Cultural Centre but does not manage the troupe directly or pay the basic salaries of troupe members. This relieves pressure from government officials and from local financial expenditures. Meanwhile, the troupe is still eligible to undertake government-funded performance tasks and contribute at government-organised cultural events, while Yiqun benefits greatly from tax benefits. According to Document No. 84 of 2014 and Document No. 16 of 2019, issued by China's Ministry of Finance, and State Administration of Taxation, the Yiqun Company enjoys at least five years' tax exemption.¹⁴² I asked the company's manager, Wang Haiyan, and other members about the tax benefits they had obtained, but their answers were rather ambiguous.

Although the members are busy with performances all year round, the company can only provide a low basic salary for them. Accordingly, the Wulian Troupe is now quite unstable regarding the turnover rate of personnel, and the troupe's criteria for recruitment can no longer be strict. It is therefore troubled by a lack of experienced performers. The *jinghu* player, Ge Pingjin, who has been in the Wulian Troupe for more than three years, told me: "There are new members joining and old members leaving almost every three months. This is not a professional troupe, but 'a troupe of people coming and going' [*liudong jütuan*]." ¹⁴³

(a) Performers from Various Backgrounds

The distinctiveness of the Wulian Troupe lies in its performers. Although they are all local residents of Wulian County, their backgrounds vary widely and so do their motivations for joining the troupe. Between March and July 2020, the Wulian Troupe had 22 members in total - a reduced number owing largely to the pandemic. The current leader of Wulian Troupe, Li Xiangxue mentioned that the troupe had

¹⁴² See footnote No. 105 in Section 3.1.

¹⁴³ Personal communication, in Wulian Troupe, 21 April 2020.

This has been mentioned by other members as well. One older performer even told me that it would be best for me not to stay in Wulian for too long, but instead spend more time learning professional skills from the Gaomi or Jiaozhou Troupe.

comprised about 40 members in 2017.¹⁴⁴

Based on my fieldwork enquiries, it is apparent that the Wulian Troupe's members vary greatly in three main ways. The first of these concerns their route to becoming a Maoqiang Opera performer. Some of them are young performers fresh out of opera training class in Wulian County, or from Maoqiang Opera clubs in local schools, or graduated from a conservatory of music. Others are elderly performers who learned Maoqiang Opera from older predecessors. Still, others entered the group as friends or relatives of existing members, as opera enthusiasts or retirees with skills in instrument playing or singing.¹⁴⁵ Secondly, the performers in the Wulian Troupe vary widely in age, ranging from 17 to 70 years old (in 2020).¹⁴⁶ Thirdly, the members vary greatly in their employment profiles. It is common for the middle-aged performers, especially, to manage a sideline while working as opera performers, particularly when endeavouring to raise a child.¹⁴⁷ Some of them additionally work as repairmen, food store owners, managers of online stores, TV network anchors, and so forth. Meanwhile, all the older performers also have diverse personal histories in other fields of activity besides opera. After the old Wulian Troupe was disbanded in 1986, there was a long stint of inactivity before the new troupe was constituted. Thus, even the older members who had first learnt the art as youngsters were obliged to pursue other employment before joining.¹⁴⁸

The youngest member of the Wulian Troupe is He Miao, who was born in 2002 and was only 17 years old when she joined as an apprentice at the end of 2019.¹⁴⁹ She first learned Maoqiang performance in the Maoqiang Opera Club of Wulian Science and Technology School¹⁵⁰. She was the only student to be selected as a formal apprentice of the Wulian Troupe. The foundation of this club was supported by the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau (WCTB) in 2018, following the government's initiative of *Chinese Opera Entering Campus*¹⁵¹ (*xiqu jin xiaoyuan*). She said, "I

¹⁴⁴ Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the troupe suspended its activities for about two months. In January 2020, there were 23 members. When rehearsals resumed at the end of March, three young members resigned and joined another privately-owned opera troupe in Wulian County (the New Era Troupe). And then, in April, the Wulian Troupe recruited two young performers and became a stable 22-member troupe until July (the end of the troupe's first performance season in the countryside).

¹⁴⁵ In the Gaomi Troupe, most performers graduated from the Maoqiang Training Class (2008-2013) or learned professional skills with older Maoqiang artists from a very young age.

¹⁴⁶ Performers in the Gaomi Troupe (state-owned troupe) should retire at the age of 50, 55 or 60.

¹⁴⁷ In my fieldwork, I did not hear of any performers in the Gaomi Troupe having to manage sidelines for their living.

¹⁴⁸ The aforementioned two older performers in Gaomi Troupe, Huai Changjian and Xue Lintao, have more than forty years of opera performance experience.

¹⁴⁹ Interview, in Wulian Troupe, 9 May 2020; Personal communications, between March and July 2020.

¹⁵⁰ A kind of technical secondary school. Students graduating from middle school can either choose to take the entrance exam for high school or this kind of school.

¹⁵¹ Document No. 2 of 2018, *Notification of Launching Refined Art Entering Campus Activity in 2018*, issued by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Cultural and Tourism and Ministry of Finance of China, 13 April 2018. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A17/moe_794/moe_628/201804/t20180419_333675.html

registered for Music Club first because I love singing. However, in our school, each student could register for two clubs. Maoqiang Opera Club was my second choice. I was just curious about that club...There were only about forty students in the club...because to join it, we had to pass a test [mainly for vocal performance and body movement], and there were nine judges at that time [performers in the Wulian Troupe, officials from the WCTB and the Wulian County Cultural Centre].” She further mentioned that their supervisors were performers from the Wulian Troupe who came to their school twice a week to teach some basic passages from Maoqiang Opera. Furthermore, as she explains: “we had a lot of opportunities to perform Maoqiang Opera at our school’s cultural festivals (see Figure 3-19), and we could even act as running soldiers during the Summer Festival in Wulian Stadium...I found the Maoqiang Opera arts to be very attractive, and I intend to join the troupe after graduating from secondary school.”¹⁵²



Figure 3-19. The students of a school club rehearsing Maoqiang Opera for their school’s art festival in 2019. He Miao plays the role of a grandmother, wearing a grey wig and standing in the middle. Photograph provided by He Miao.

The current Wulian Troupe was founded in November 2011, when there were less than thirty members in total, half of them being youngsters aged 14 to 18 who learned Maoqiang performance in a three-month Maoqiang accelerated course (*maoqiang suchengban*) funded and organised by the Wulian local government in August 2011.¹⁵³ The WCTB arranged for a group of older Maoqiang artists to teach these youngsters, who had previously passed an entrance test. Currently, only one of those youngsters is still working in the Wulian Troupe: Yu Jie¹⁵⁴, who was born in 1995 and now has a two-year-old son, is satisfied with her current lifestyle, and

¹⁵² I contacted her again in October 2020. She had already resigned from the troupe, instead intending to pursue training for preschool education.

¹⁵³ Information from *The Annual Summary of the Wulian County Troupe* (2018).

¹⁵⁴ Personal communication, in Wulian Troupe, 15 April 2020.

rarely thinks about changing her career. She says that she joined the troupe because she loves stage performance and also because she did not do well in academic subjects in middle school, failing the entrance exam for high school. She can now play leading roles in many classic Maoqiang works. For example, during my fieldwork period, the role of Diaoshi (mother-in-law) in the classic comedy *A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law* was usually played by her (see Figure 3-20).



Figure 3-20. Yu Jie performing in two different classic Maoqiang operas, in Wulian County, between 12 May and 5 July 2020.

The two leading young performers graduated from the music conservatory and learned Maoqiang Opera with older performers in the Wulian Troupe after joining in 2014. Shang Jinyang (male), who was born in 1991, and Zhang Sha (female), who was born in 1990, both majored in vocal music performance at university, receiving bel canto and folkstyle singing education.¹⁵⁵ They are a couple in real life and often play the part of husband and wife in Maoqiang performances (see Figure 3-21).¹⁵⁶ Shang joined the troupe because he loves vocal performance and “the feelings of performing on the stage”. Zhang’s reasons for joining are also straightforward: “Even though the pay is low, I heard that this troupe has a two-day weekend.” During our interview, she stated that in addition to worrying about the low income, she was concerned that “I will miss the two-day weekend when the troupe starts doing its performances in the countryside again.”

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Shang Jinyang, in Wulian Troupe, 15 April 2020; Interview with Zhang Sha, in Wulian Troupe, 8 May 2020.

¹⁵⁶ They did not know each other before joining the troupe, but now they already have a three-year-old son. While they are busy with performances, the child is taken care of by his grandparents.



Figure 3-21. Shang Jinyang and Zhang Sha playing the part of a couple in the classic work *The Story of a Wall (qiangtou ji)*, Qianjia Zhuangzi Village, Songbai Township, 29 May 2020.

Zhang Li, who was born in 1985, also joined the troupe in 2014. Before that, he was a worker in a local handbag factory. He was accepted because he is good-looking and skilled at dancing, though not an accomplished vocal performer. He is an aficionado of dance, makeup and performance and specialises in female roles, providing one of the most appreciated elements within the troupe’s performances. He is now able to play various types of leading role in both modern and classic Maoqiang operas. In addition, he has developed local fame in Wulian County, with about 30,000 people following his online platform. His son is already 11 years old, and his wife is very supportive of his work. He says that although the income is not enough, he could not think of a job that would suit him better (see Figure 3-22).



Figure 3-22. Zhang Li performing in different classic Maoqiang operas, and dressing in traditional women’s costumes in song and dance performances, in Wulian County, between 12 May and 5 July 2020.

The current leader of the Wulian Troupe is Li Xiangxue who was born in 1982 (see Figure 3-23).¹⁵⁷ She graduated from a music conservatory, majoring in folk singing. She is now one of the two officially certified Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritors of Maoqiang Opera in Rizhao City (*rizhaoshi maoqiang yishu feiyi chuanchenren*). She was a singer in a song and dance troupe before 2011, when she received an invitation from the Wulian Troupe and started to learn Maoqiang Opera. She recalls the first time she learned a Maoqiang Opera song with her master, the older Maoqiang performer, Wang Yunting¹⁵⁸: “it took me one month of practice to master only four musical phrases because the ‘flavour’ [*weidao*] of Maoqiang Opera is so difficult to reproduce.” The privately-owned Maoqiang troupe (New Era Troupe) has invited her to join their troupe several times, promising to pay higher wages, but she has rejected the invitations. She says: “I have a responsibility to keep the troupe going forward.” She is not only the lead performer in the troupe, but also the main coordinator for arranging performance sites, organising cultural activities in Wulian County, and seeking commercial performance opportunities. Without her efforts, it would be difficult for the troupe to function effectively.



Figure 3-23. Li Xiangxue performing in different classic Maoqiang operas, in Wulian County, between 12 May and 5 July 2020.

Zheng Shixing is a sketch comedy actor who was born in 1968.¹⁵⁹ Before joining the Wulian Troupe in 2012, he worked in various performing art troupes, specialising in comedy and playing roles in modern Lü Opera films between 1991 and 2011. He joined the Wulian Troupe after being introduced by his friend and fellow member

¹⁵⁷ Interview, in Wulian Troupe, 22 April 2020. She owns an online shop selling children’s clothes.

¹⁵⁸ Wang Yunting was born in 1941 and was a Maoqiang Opera performer of the old Wulian Troupe in the 1960s; more details are presented in section 2.4.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, in Guojia Xinzhuang Village, 21 June 2020.

Zhang Yuzhen¹⁶⁰. He says he has no interest in Maoqing Opera and explains: “I do not have a very good voice for singing Maoqing Opera, and the melodies of Maoqing are also not to my taste...I am just a sketch performer and am interested in drama performances without sung passages...I have been working in this troupe for many years because it is very difficult to change career at my age.” When performing in the countryside, he is usually responsible for creating and delivering sketch comedy episodes. He always plays the more comedic roles in Maoqing Opera - those which do not require much singing, such as, for example, the silversmith in *The Story of a Wall* (see Figure 3-24).



Figure 3-24. Zheng Shixing playing the bamboo clappers (left), and playing the roles of silversmith (middle) and mother-in-law (right) in a sketch comedy devised by himself, in Wulian County, between 12 May and 5 July 2020.

The older performers in the Wulian Troupe are all around or over the age of 60. Three of them were members of the old Wulian Troupe in the 1980s and acquired their skills and knowledge through the traditional system for transmitting Maoqing Opera, following specific Maoqing Opera masters.¹⁶¹ However, they all engaged in other careers after the old troupe was disbanded in 1986, such as working in a shoe factory or taking up the grain trade. They accepted invitations from the Yiqun Company and the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau and returned to join the current Wulian Troupe at the end of 2018, including Niu Xigao, who is currently the troupe’s art director and the principal supervisor of young performers. They tell me

¹⁶⁰ She is a scriptwriter for Maoqing Opera and Lü Opera and the former leader of the Wulian County Cultural Centre.

¹⁶¹ More details about the older performers and the transmission system are provided in section 3.7 about teaching methods.

that they continuously practised Maoqiang Opera for many years and still occasionally give performances in privately-owned troupes in their spare time.¹⁶²

The two oldest members of Wulian Troupe are Zhao Congsheng, who is 68 years old, and Li Xincai, who is 70 years old (in 2020).¹⁶³ They were originally members of the Songming Art Troupe.¹⁶⁴ Because the Wulian Troupe lacked musicians for its opera band, they were invited to assist in 2019. Zhao is an *erhu* player and singer in the troupe (see Figure 3-25). He was a public official before retiring from the Wulian Cultural Centre and is familiar with the history and professional knowledge of Maoqiang Opera. He is a big enthusiast of Maoqiang Opera and first learned the basics of playing *erhu* from his middle-school teacher. In the following decades, he has been learning and practising *erhu* and vocal performance by himself. His performance skills are praised by the other troupe members, who typically say that, although he is not a salaried performer, his performances are of professional quality.



Figure 3-25. Zhao Congsheng performing Chinese folk song during the Wulian Troupe's trips in the countryside, Heijianling Village, Wanghu Township, 26 June 2020.

Li Xincai is the only person in the Wulian Troupe who knows how to play the *suona* shawm, which is a necessary instrument in the Maoqiang Opera band. He started performing at the age of 20 and was a professional singer and *suona* player in a military art troupe during the 1980s. He often gives a solo *suona* performance when the troupe is performing in the countryside. Meanwhile, he tells me that he is also

¹⁶² Wulian County had two privately-owned Maoqiang Opera troupes during the 1990s and the early 2000s, but they were subsequently disbanded.

¹⁶³ Personal communications with Zhao Congsheng, in Wulian Troupe and villages of Wulian County, April to July 2020. Information about Zhao Congsheng is also mentioned in section 2.2.2. He was responsible for sorting out the historical documents for Wulian County. Interview with Li Xincai, in Beiyong Village, 20 June 2020

¹⁶⁴ More details are presented in Section 3.5.2.

good at songwriting. He regularly performs his own musical works and talks to the others about the scores of his vocal compositions, which have been published in various local newspapers and magazines (see Figure 3-26). Although he works in the Wulian Troupe, he says: “my favourite opera is Peking Opera...I do not like Maoqiang Opera at all, because the melodies of Maoqiang Opera sound too sorrowful [*beishang*].” However, he adds, “the stage is pretty important in my life. I am quite satisfied with my current lifestyle, traveling with the troupe and giving performances to audiences.”



Figure 3-26. Li Xincai playing suona shawm (left) in Qianjia Zhuangzi Village, Songbai Township, 29 May 2020; a photo of Li playing clappers (right); and samples of his publications in local newspapers and magazines (lower right), provided by Li Xincai.

Generally, the day-to-day management of the Wulian Troupe closely resembles that of the Gaomi Troupe. The Wulian Troupe also uses a fingerprint machine to check participation and awards bonuses for perfect attendance, and performance subsidies are similarly distributed according to each member’s contribution. The types of performance mentioned above undertaken by the Wulian Troupe are almost the same as those undertaken by the Gaomi Troupe, with performance in the countryside likewise being the most important task. However, the Wulian Troupe has more opportunities to give commercial performances. In contrast, even during the Spring Festival period, the Gaomi Troupe’s performances are for public welfare. Furthermore, the Wulian Troupe pays more attention to performing in villages for subsidies, while the Gaomi troupe spends plenty of time creating and rehearsing new

works. Although the Wulian Troupe has also been through periods of activity in creating, rehearsing, and performing modern works, after 2017, no full-length operas have been created, and the troupe has only rehearsed and performed a single half-hour playlet about fighting against the COVID-19 in 2020.

In summary, as a state-private-owned troupe, the Wulian Troupe is another type of government-funded troupe that relies on government funds for its survival, obliged to undertake certain performance tasks in order to gain subsidies. However, in this case, a company (Yiqun) serves important managerial and economic roles, supplementing the financial burdens of the local government, while benefitting from tax reductions. Compared with the state-owned troupe's managerial model (such as that of the Gaomi Troupe), although this management model is functional, many troupe members still expressed a mood of discontent during interviews, because they did not get paid much. Some of them remained because they could see no better option, but others moved on to privately-owned professional troupes in search of better pay. However, it is difficult for outsiders to weigh the actual gains and losses of leaving the Wulian Troupe, joining another troupe, or even leaving the Maoqiang community.

3.4 Privately-owned Opera Troupes

Currently, there is only one privately-owned professional Maoqiang Opera troupe - the New Era Maoqiang Opera Performing Art Troupe (*xinshidai maoqiang yishutuan*, New Era Troupe). This troupe is made up entirely of full-time members, delivering high-standard performances. It was founded in November 2018, and at the time of my fieldwork, between March and September 2020, it comprised 37 members in total. This section examines the defining characteristics of this troupe, including its management model, the geographical range of its performances, and the regional backgrounds of its constituent members.

3.4.1 Case Study: The New Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe

Dong Yanping, who is the troupe's bankroller, set up the New Era Troupe. He is the chairman of the Stone Industry Association of Wulian County and owns a very profitable stone machining company located in his hometown, Jietou Township¹⁶⁵ in Wulian County. He is also a local celebrity as he boosted local employment by hiring more than 400 villagers to work in his company. In 2018, he invested two million Chinese yuan (about £220,000) in purchasing costumes, props, and two mobile stage vehicles. He also owns the whole fifteenth floor of the Stone Business Centre in Jietou Township (see Figure 3-27). This is the troupe's headquarters, including two rehearsal rooms, a dining hall, employee dormitories, and offices for troupe leaders

¹⁶⁵ Jietou Township is famous for its natural marble resources and is one of the county's tax revenue contributors. The villages in this township are amongst the wealthiest in Wulian County.

and administrative staffs. However, this Stone Business Centre is far from the residential areas and county centre, with a one-way drive taking about half an hour.



Figure 3-27. The building in which the New Era Maoqiang Troupe is based, 8 July 2020.

Dong Yanping explained to me that a primary motivation for founding the troupe was that he was getting old (having been born in 1961). His son was now able to act as the company's proprietor, and so he had time to manage the troupe's affairs carry forward his aspirations for local culture. He once said to me: "it is important for young people to remember that Maoqiang Opera is a traditional opera of their hometown."¹⁶⁶ He is proud of his troupe's achievements, especially now that it performs prominently at two of the most important cultural activities in Rizhao City: the Culture and Tourism Festival and Cultural and Natural Heritage Day. During my fieldwork period, he came to visit the troupe every day and, sometimes, I observed him managing the mobile stage lighting during performances in villages.

Although the New Era Troupe gave more than two-hundred performances each year in 2019 and 2020, it was still unable to make sufficient profit to survive without Dong Yanping's financial backing. Dong Yanping explained to me: "each Maoqiang Opera performance costs more than 6,000 yuan (about £660) to put on, and the lowest income for one performance is just 3,000 yuan (about £330). We also give free performances which provide no income at all. In 2019 alone, my troupe suffered a deficit of more than 600,000 yuan (about £66,000)."¹⁶⁷ He added that the members' salaries were also expensive, amounting to between 4000 yuan and 5000 yuan (between about £440 and £550) per member per month. Every year, 200,000 yuan (about £22,000) in wages had to be provided to the troupe's current leader, Sun Hongjü, the former leader of the Gaomi Troupe from 1998 to 2014. Dong Yanping invited her to join his troupe because, as a National First-class Performer (*guojia yiji yanyuan*), Sun Hongjü is currently one of the most famous Maoqiang Opera celebrities. Her characteristic performance style is preserved in the numerous

¹⁶⁶ Personal communication, in New Era Troupe, 8 July 2020.

¹⁶⁷ Personal communication, in Yanhe Village, 11 July 2020

Maoqiang DVDs of the Gaomi Troupe, and she has influenced the practices of many amateur performers and Maoqiang enthusiasts. Her image is printed on the troupe's brochures and mobile stage vehicles, to advertise their productions (see Figure 3-28).



Figure 3-28. The New Era Troupe has three mobile stage vehicles of three different sizes in order to adapt to different performance sites. The largest one is the most frequently used. 8 July 2020.

The management model of the New Era Troupe is quite simple. Dong Yanping is the troupe's owner, manager and bankroller, and Sun Hongjü is the leader who directly manages the troupe's day-to-day operations. Three schedules for the members' daily training and a list of ten rules hang on the wall of the troupe's main rehearsal room, formulated by Dong Yanping and the troupe's other senior figures. However, in practice, matters of management are determined almost entirely by Dong Yanping and Sun Hongjü, with little or no consultation with other troupe members. The other members rarely openly express themselves when faced with a change to the troupe's modus operandi, rather discussing privately amongst themselves about matters they find unreasonable. In addition, the troupe also has a fingerprint attendance machine and administers a perfect attendance bonus of 900 yuan (about £100), following the practices employed in government-funded troupes like Gaomi and Wulian. It is stipulated that members should arrive at the rehearsal rooms at 9:00am to clock in and practice their professional skills when there is no stage performance in the evening, but if there is a performance in the evening, they can arrive at 1:30pm.

The performances of the New Era Troupe are not restricted to Wulian County. Rather, the troupe has more opportunities to perform in the city centre of Rizhao and participate in city-level cultural activities. These performances are usually paid for by village committees, local government, or commercial agencies. However, the priority for this troupe is evidently giving performances in the countryside - commercial performances similar to those of the Wulian Troupe during the Spring Festival period.

I travelled with the New Era Troupe to 4 villages between 7 and 15 July 2020. Each performance was partially subsidised by the village committee - a sum of 3000 yuan and 5000 yuan (between about £330 and £550). However, to avoid conflict with the Wulian Troupe, they mainly travelled within Jietou Township in Wulian County.¹⁶⁸ Unlike the Wulian Troupe (and their principle of *One Village, One Year, One Performance*), the New Era Troupe usually stays in one village for 2 or 3 days and gives the villagers at least two opera performances. Typically, on the first day, there is a full-length classic Maoqiang Opera performance (see Figure 3-29), and on another day, a Maoqiang playlet is presented featuring diverse forms of song and dance (see Figure 3-30). The troupe routinely visits almost every village in Jietou Township. The villagers in this township are therefore able to enjoy at least two Maoqiang Opera performances each year.¹⁶⁹



Figure 3-29. The New Era Troupe performing on their largest mobile stage, Jinchuanyu Village, Jietou Township, 14 July 2020.

¹⁶⁸ The troupe is welcomed by villagers in Jietou Township and is supported by the township government not only because of the professional-style performances, but also because Dong Yanping is a famous local entrepreneur, as was mentioned earlier.

¹⁶⁹ Sometimes, the troupe performs in villages located just a block from each other. Villagers, therefore, are able to enjoy more than four Maoqiang Opera performances in this case.



Figure 3-30. A dance performance by the New Era Troupe, Yanhe Village, Jietou Township, 10 July 2020.

Moreover, with its high quality of performance, the troupe regularly receives invitations from the Cultural and Tourism Bureau of Rizhao City to give full-length Maoqiang Opera performances - for example, at the Rizhao Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Project (*rizhaoshi feiyi zhanshi xiangmu*) for celebrating the Rizhao City Culture and Tourism Festival in 2020. The Wulian Troupe was only granted a ten-minute performance slot at the opening ceremony of the latter event on 29 August, after which the New Era Troupe performed extensively in stadiums and people's squares across the region. Most of these performances were subsidised by the Finance Bureau of Rizhao City, attracting large numbers of city dwellers (see Figure 3-31¹⁷⁰).

¹⁷⁰ See also Figure 2-11 in Section 2.4.2.



Figure 3-31. One of the New Era Troupe’s Maoqiang Opera performances in the city centre of Rizhao, celebrating the 2020 Rizhao Culture and Tourism Festival, 6 September 2020.

In addition, the New Era Troupe is very active in creating modern Maoqiang Opera works, sometimes rehearsing and performing four new works within in a two-year period.¹⁷¹ In 2019, Dong Yanping invested about 200,000 yuan (about £22,000) towards the creation of a full-length Maoqiang Opera *The Story of Huashi Village* (*Huashicun de gushi*). This work was premiered at the Rizhao Culture and Tourism Festival in August 2019, depicting how the primary secretary (*diyì shuji*) of Huashi village leads the poor villagers out of poverty, in line with the national policy of *Targeted Poverty Alleviation* (*jingzhun fupin*).¹⁷² In 2020, a new full-length opera about fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic, *Emergency Expedition* (*Jinji chuzheng*), was created by the troupe in February and broadcast on a local TV in May.¹⁷³

(a) The Distinctiveness of the New Era Troupe: Performers from Different Regions

The hometowns of the New Era Troupe’s performers include Jiaozhou, Wulian, Gaomi and Qingdao, all known for the prevalence of Maoqiang Opera performance. They joined through friends’ recommendations or responding to recruitment advertisements posted on social network platforms. At the time of my fieldwork, there were 13 performers from Wulian County. Most of them were former members

¹⁷¹ The full-length modern Maoqiang works are addressed further in Chapter 6.

¹⁷² On 25 February 2021, President Xi Jinping announced at the National Poverty Alleviation Commendation Conference that China has already achieved a victory in fighting against poverty, leading about one hundred million Chinese of 832 poverty-stricken counties to overcome poverty within an eight-year period, news released on the official website of the Chinese government, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-02/25/content_5588879.htm

¹⁷³ More details are given in Chapter 6

of the Wulian Troupe, aged 20 to 40. Since 2018, they had joined the New Era Troupe one after another, seeking more performance opportunities, better working conditions, and, most importantly, higher salaries. Three young performers joined the New Era Troupe together at the end of March 2020.¹⁷⁴ When I first met them in the preceding January, they were still in the Wulian Troupe as outstanding members. Meanwhile, the two art directors of the New Era Troupe also came from Wulian and were active in the original old Wulian Troupe in the 1980s. The assistant leader and one of the scriptwriters came from a local civic group, the Songming Performing Art Troupe.¹⁷⁵

The troupe also accommodated many performers from Jiaozhou City, who had followed Sun Hongjü.¹⁷⁶ After Sun Hongjü formally retired from the Gaomi Troupe in 2015, aged 50, she returned to her hometown of Jiaozhou City, and founded her own Maoqiang Opera troupe in 2016 with commercial sponsorship. Sun was already very famous in the Maoqiang Opera community, and many wealthy Maoqiang Opera enthusiasts were pleased to sponsor her troupe. She called back others who had retired from the Jiaozhou Troupe, performers from local amateur troupes, skilled individuals whom she was familiar with, and others she knew to have learned Maoqiang Opera before. She and Dong Yanping were already friends, having known each other for more than fifteen years, and in 2018, Dong approached her with the proposal to found a new Maoqiang Opera troupe in Wulian County. She responded by dismantling her original privately-owned troupe in Jiaozhou City and then relocating with 14 other members to launch Dong Yanping's New Era Troupe. In addition, at the time of my fieldwork, the troupe included a few performers from Gaomi City, who had retired from the Gaomi Troupe or were skilled amateur performers of Maoqiang Opera. It should be noted that most of the members in the New Era Troupe were aged around or over 50, with only eight being under the age of 40.

The New Era Troupe members work to a very tight schedule. Most of their performances take three hours or more to finish, lasting between 7:00pm and 10:15pm, because they never perform scaled-down versions of Maoqiang Opera.¹⁷⁷ In contrast, the performances of the Gaomi and Wulian troupes are usually finished within two hours. After the performances, the members still need to take at least half an hour to tidy away all the equipment into the large mobile stage vehicle (see Figure 3-32). Members living in the county centre usually get home late, between 11:30 and 12:00pm.

¹⁷⁴ One of them had already left the New Era Troupe in September 2020 and quit the career of performing Maoqiang Opera.

¹⁷⁵ More details about this troupe are given in Section 3.5.2.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, in New Era Troupe, 15 July 2020.

¹⁷⁷ This is the guiding ideology of Sun Hongjü, as she believes that the scaled-down version is not authentic.



Figure 3-32. The New Era Troupe's equipment includes the mobile vehicle itself, a mobile sound control desk (on the left of the stage), a large tent, music stands, and chairs for the opera band. Dong Chengxian Village, Jietou Township, 9 July 2020.

The troupe provides free accommodation and free meals for all members. Members from outside Wulian, including Sun Hongjü, live in the troupe's dormitory, where two to five people live in one room. Members from Wulian County are also provided with accommodation, and they can choose to lodge with the troupe or not. Normally, they travel every day between the troupe and their home in the county centre. When performing at cultural activities in Rizhao City, members from the county centre will choose to stay in the dormitory; otherwise, they would get home around 1:00am. When there are no performances, members from outside Wulian rarely go outside the Stone Business centre, which is surrounded by different stone companies and far away from commercial blocks. Typically, they only leave the troupe's headquarters to take four or five days off each month.

The members tend to socialise within factions, depending on where they come from, age, and other factors. The members who live in the troupe's dormitory usually start practicing in the morning, no matter whether there is a performance in the evening or not. These members are usually older performers who are often praised by troupe leaders for their hard work. Meanwhile, it is unrealistic for members who live in the county centre to arrive early every day, and they are very unsatisfied when troupe leaders encourage them to come earlier. Furthermore, a group of young performers within the troupe always stay together for dinner. They have widespread discontent regarding their payment and working conditions. Their salaries in June 2020, for example, were all around 2800 yuan (about £300) in total, far less than the promised 4000 to 5000 yuan. One of them, who has worked in the troupe for a whole year, says that there was only one month in 2019 when the salary reached 4000 yuan.

Meanwhile, the perfect attendance bonus is difficult for them to achieve because the bonus requires attendance of at least 25 to 27 working days per month. Those who live in the county centre also complain about the high travelling expenses. One of these younger performers explains to me that she intends to leave the troupe if she can pass an exam for entering teacher training.¹⁷⁸ Another even says: “I joined this troupe only for the high salary... I now regret having come to the New Era Troupe.”

In contrast, when I chat with older performers, they usually tell me they are pleased with the lifestyle and what they desired is performance opportunities on a bigger stage. These performers are usually Maoqiang enthusiasts. Many of them, especially the retired performers of Jiaozhou and Gaomi troupes, have retirement pensions and therefore have little worries about living expenses. One of the troupe’s art directors, Li Weiping, who was born in 1963 and has performed Maoqiang Opera for more than 30 years, says that “Maoqiang performers at my age have already retired. The troupe provides me with a stage for Maoqiang Opera performance...I am grateful to the troupe and cherish every opportunity to perform on the stage.”¹⁷⁹

Typically, there is only one professional Maoqiang Opera troupe in each county or city, but Wulian County has two troupes. It seems natural that this would create some tension, especially in securing young performers and competing for government-funded performance opportunities, and further enquiry into the relationships between different Maoqiang troupes will be provided later. Interestingly, despite being a privately-owned troupe, the New Era troupe still secures opportunities to perform at government-organised cultural activities, and to accrue government subsidies and bonuses. Although the older performers seem to be satisfied with the troupe’s management, the young performers, especially those who left Wulian Troupe for higher wages, confess that the experience of working in the New Era Troupe in 2019 and 2020 failed to meet their expectations.

3.5 Local Civic Groups

Unlike the performers of the forementioned three types of Maoqiang troupe who are professionals performing for wages, the members of local civic groups (*minjian banshe*) are amateurs who perform Maoqiang Opera in their spare time. The latter tend to be older people aged over 60. This section focuses on the features of different types of amateur and self-organised troupes in rural and urban settings, where Maoqiang opera features as a prominent element.

During my field trip to Wulian County, I often saw a certain 70-year-old grandpa managing his fruit trees or vegetables in the daytime. In the evenings, I sometimes

¹⁷⁸ This young performer is still working in the New Era Troupe at the time of writing.

¹⁷⁹ Personal communication, Yanhe Village, 13 July 2020.

met him playing *erhu* or drums in the Wulian Troupe's opera band. The Wulian Troupe welcomes villagers who are skilled in traditional instruments and familiar with the rhythms and melodies of Maoqiang Opera to join their opera band, which is a way to interact with Maoqiang enthusiasts.¹⁸⁰ I asked these older villagers whether they knew a Maoqiang troupe organised by the local villagers. However, because the amateurs usually met irregularly and did not have a fixed rehearsal room, it was not easy to trace their rehearsals and performances. The professional Maoqiang performers also know little about the amateur troupes in villages. The Maoqiang performers of the Wulian Troupe generally considered that, in 2020, the total number of local Maoqiang civic groups in contemporary Shandong Province was probably less than 30.

Meanwhile, Maoqiang Opera is also performed by residents in urban areas. In China, each community has a community party branch (*sheqū dangzhibu*) which is the lowest level of agency in Chinese communist party and the local authority in the urban area.¹⁸¹ Each community also has a neighborhood committee (*jūwei hui*), equivalent to the village party branch (*cun dangzhibu*) and village committee (*cunwei hui*) in the rural area. The communities provide free common rooms for residents to do various recreational activities. These rooms are where urban residents gather and form hobby groups depending on their interests, addressing dance, calligraphy, table tennis, or anything else.

This section firstly uses the Gaoze Maoqiang Opera Troupe (*gaoze maoqiang jütuan*, Gaoze Troupe), in Gaoze Township, Wulian County, as a case study to illustrate the characteristics of an amateur Maoqiang troupe in the countryside. Secondly, it uses the Songming Performing Art Troupe (*songming yishutuan*, Songming Troupe) in Furong Community (*furong sheqū*) and the traditional music band in Jiefang Road Community (*jiefanglu sheqū*), Wulian County, as case studies to reveal Maoqiang Opera performances among urban residents.

3.5.1 Case Study: The Gaoze Township Maoqiang Opera Troupe

The Gaoze Troupe is a large and active local amateur troupe with more than 60 members. It was founded in 2012 by its current leader and bankroller, Fan Fengjuan, who was born in 1959.¹⁸² Before retiring in 2010, she was an administrator in a local middle school and had no experience of performing Maoqiang Opera. After retirement in 2011, Fan Fengjuan had more free time and organised her square

¹⁸⁰ More details are presented in Chapter 5.

¹⁸¹ On 8 May 2019, the general office of the CPC Central Committee issued a guideline about strengthening and improving party building at the basic level in urban areas, which once more highlighted the importance of constructing community party branches, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-05/08/content_5389836.htm

¹⁸² Interview, in Gaoze Troupe, 3 September 2020; Personal communications, May to August 2020.

dance team with 16 dancers in Gaoze Village. Fan Fengjuan says that a famous local amateur Maoqiang troupe was first founded in Gaoze in 1962. During the cultural revolution, this troupe became a Peking Opera troupe before disbanding a few years later owing to a lack of performers. It was not until 2012, that a troupe was registered once more with the Wulian County Civil Affairs Bureau (*wulianxian minzhengjü*), specifically as a legal mass organisation (*qunzhong zuzhi*).¹⁸³

The current Gaoze Troupe is usually referred to by the locals as ‘Gaoze Art Troupe’ (*gaoze yishutuan*), and it also has two officially certified titles Gaoze Maoqiang Opera Troupe and Gaoze New-Field Entertainment Activity Centre (*gaoze xintiandi yüle huodong zhongxin*). The troupe is divided across two activities, square dance and Maoqiang Opera, though many members perform in both. The troupe’s permanent rehearsal room is located beside the main road of Gaoze Village in a two-story house (see Figure 3-33), provided free by the village party branch and the Gaoze village committee.



Figure 3-33. Two plaques showing the two officially certified titles of the Gaoze Troupe, hanging by the entrance to its practice space, 3 September 2020.

By 2020, Fan Fengjuan had spent more than 200,000 yuan (about £22,000) on purchasing costumes, props and audio equipment and renting a bus to take performers to the performance site. She could not afford the expenses of purchasing and running a mobile stage vehicle, instead having to rely on employing outdoor stages in villages. Each year, she drew extensively from her own and her husband’s pensions¹⁸⁴, while also receiving support from her son and daughter-in-law. She further explained about the development of her troupe:¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ In China, all performing art troupes or groups must register with the local Civil Affairs Bureau before holding public events and giving public welfare performances. Otherwise, their activities will be considered illegal.

¹⁸⁴ 200,000 yuan is about one-third of their pensions from 2012 to 2020.

¹⁸⁵ Interview, in Gaoze Troupe, 3 September 2020.

“In 2010, we only had 16 female square dance performers. Some of them were also interested in Maoqiang Opera. However, we did not have enough opera performers. So, we only rehearsed opera songs and Maoqiang playlets, and gave performances in our village. At first, there was no accompaniment from melodic musical instruments, and we only gave vocal performance accompanied by gongs and drums. But more and more villagers heard that we also gave Maoqiang Opera performance, and older villagers who could play *erhu*, *suona*...and *sanxian* joined our team and we started to rehearse together. Anyone of any age can join us, as long as they have a certain specialty in art performances. Now, we can rehearse full-length operas...This is the tenth year that I have managed the troupe, and I think the development of our troupe has been smooth. With the support of the township and county government, I do not worry too much about it. The township party branch provides me with an office in the township government’s building, because I have made contributions to the inheritance and dissemination of the local culture of our hometown.”

In 2020, the members of this troupe were all local villagers aged 35 to over 80, mostly over 60 years old, with the oldest member being an 82 year old *suona* player. The leading opera performer was 63 year-old Li Guiying¹⁸⁶, who had performed in the troupe for three years. She mentioned that she had been interested in opera performances since she was young. Her husband also joined the troupe and was responsible for managing the computer and sound equipment. In recent years, she had more spare time because her grandchild could go to school. She learned Maoqiang Opera by watching DVDs of the Gaomi Troupe and performers from the Wulian Troupe. She recalled that there was a test when she joined the Gaoze Troupe because the troupe was already thriving in 2017, with many villagers eager to join. However, the test was quite simple: singing a song of any kind. She added: “I just like the troupe’s atmosphere. I can meet friends here, and there is nothing to do at home.... When I go to the street market [in Gaoze Village], some of the peddlers who sell vegetables recognise me as the main performer of the troupe. They greet me warmly and even give me free vegetables.”

Although the Gaoze Troupe is certified as a Maoqiang Opera troupe, most of its activities centre on square dance performance (see Figure 3-34), and its square dance team is one of the most competitive in Wulian County. On 12 August 2020, they performed in the finals of the Tenth Square Dance Competition of Wulian County and won second class prize with a 4000 yuan bonus (about £440). Dance

¹⁸⁶ Personal communication, in Gaoze Troupe, 24 May 2020.

competitions of this kind are held nationally, with square dance now one of China's most widespread and popular mass cultural activities. In 2020, square dance competitions in Wulian County attracted about a hundred local square dance teams.¹⁸⁷



Figure 3-34. The Gaoze square dance team performing in the qualifying competition of the Tenth Square Dancing Competition of Wulian County, 21 July 2020.

The Gaoze Troupe gives about 60 Maoqiang Opera performances each year, some of which contribute towards the government's performance task of *One village, One year, One performance* in Wulian County. Since 2016, the Wulian Troupe has given 10 to 20 of their performance obligations to the Gaoze Troupe, to relieve its own heavy schedule whilst encouraging the Gaoze Troupe's development. This policy also gained support from the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau, which is responsible for allocating part of the Wulian Troupe's subsidies to the Gaoze Troupe, amounting to between 800 to 900 yuan (about £88 to £100) per performance. Meanwhile, since 2017, the Gaoze Township government has allocated another performance task to the troupe: giving 20 performances each year in the local villages of Gaoze with a subsidy of 900 yuan (about £100) per performance.¹⁸⁸ Performers who participate in these performances are able to get 30 to 50 yuan reward (about £3.30 to £5.50). Beyond these subsidised performances, all the other Maoqiang Opera performances given by the Gaoze Troupe were done out of charity, for example for older villagers in local nursing houses in rural areas.

Moreover, the Gaoze Troupe has been active in creating new Maoqiang Opera works,

¹⁸⁷ Data from my fieldwork in Wulian County, centring on the Summer Festival and the Square Dance Competition between 17 July and 13 August 2020. The square dance performances attracted many middle-aged female participants. More details are given in Chapter 6 about challenges.

¹⁸⁸ This subsidy is directly allocated by the Wulian County Bureau of Finance and not by the central government.

rehearsing more than five new operas (three of them full-length) since its foundation. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, its performance in the countryside was cancelled in February and March 2020. It was not until May that the troupe's performers gathered for the rehearsal of a modern work themed fighting against the pandemic, titled *The Family and Country (jiaguo qing)* and telling the story of a medical worker who goes to Wuhan City to be a volunteer. On 24 May 2020, after only three rehearsals, 23 performers recorded a performance of the work (see Figure 3-35), thereafter submitting it for a competition held in Rizhao City, specifically for newly created works on the topic of fighting the pandemic. The libretto was written by Fan Fengjuan's husband, Wang Xilai, who was a public official in the party branch of Gaoze Township prior to his retirement. One of his professional duties had been collecting and sorting local legends and stories from local villages, and he now drew from that reservoir in his capacity as the Gaoze Troupe's main scriptwriter. Meanwhile, other members of the troupe also contributed their thoughts when creating new works.



Figure 3-35. Performers of the Gaoze Troupe preparing for the recording of *The Family and Country (jiaguo qing)* in their rehearsal room, Gaoze Troupe, 24 May 2020.¹⁸⁹

As Zhou convincingly argues (2019), it is appropriate to classify the more well-developed local civic groups that have many active members, enjoy ample opportunities for giving commercial performances, and have incomes, as privately-owned troupes.¹⁹⁰ In the 2017 National Local Opera Survey, the Gaoze Troupe is classified as such, not only because it is a large troupe with more than 60 performers and has a bankroller, but also because it has income, receiving performance subsidies from the government since 2016. However, Fan Fengjuan

¹⁸⁹ The video equipment was rented, and the video player was hired from a local media company. Fan Fengjuan also invited three members from Wulian Troupe to come to help.

¹⁹⁰ In Zhou Aihua's research (2019), see also in Section 3.1.

insists: “our troupe should be classified as a peasant troupe [*“zhuanghu jütuan”*], because we do not have commercial performances and professional performers. In comparison with the performers in the New Era Troupe, who are all professionals, all the members in our troupe are local villagers and amateurs.”¹⁹¹ In this case, it is advisable to say that the boundary between different types of troupes is blurred. All opera troupes have their own distinctiveness, and they are always in a process of development, responding to changing circumstances.

3.5.2 Local Hobby Troupes and Groups

Local civic groups are self-organised, not-for-profit hobby groups. Despite my avid searches in the county centre of Wulian and the city centres of Gaomi and Rizhao, I failed to find any such focusing especially on Maoqiang Opera. However, members of the Wulian Troupe directed me towards the Songming Performing Arts Troupe - a civic group based in Wulian County which included excerpts from Maoqiang Opera in its wide-ranging repertoire. The Songming Troupe was founded in 2012 by Zhao Mingbin, who was the former minister of the Wulian County Publicity Department. After he retired in 2012 at the age of 60, he called for his retired friends who were interested in performance to join his troupe.¹⁹²

The Songming Troupe mainly specialises in instrumental performance on Chinese traditional instruments, with two members also playing violin. However, some of its members are also skilled at vocal performance, so they include repertoire from Maoqiang, Peking, Lü, and Huangmei Opera. In 2020, the troupe had 26 members in total, who were mostly retired men aged over 60.¹⁹³ Unlike other civic groups, the Songming Troupe has a regular time for gathering, though members can decide whether to come or not without any restrictions. The party branch of the Furong Community in the county centre of Wulian provided the troupe with a free rehearsal room in 2018. Since then, every day from 8:30am to 11:30am, members who have spare time can turn up to participate (see Figure 3-36).

¹⁹¹ Interview, in Gaoze Troupe, 3 September 2020.

¹⁹² Personal communication with Zhao Mingbin, in Songming Troupe, 1 August 2020.

¹⁹³ This is probably because many are retired officials of Zhao Mingbin’s friends.



Figure 3-36. The rehearsal room of the Songming Troupe in the spare space of one of the reading rooms in Furong Community's Senior Citizens Activity Centre, 1 August 2020.

Locals also know the Songming Troupe as the 'retired cadre art troupe' (*tuixiu ganbu yishutuan*), because most members worked in government agencies before retirement, including six former leaders of township culture centres in Wulian County, and ex-music teachers from local schools. The current leader of the Songming Troupe is Wang Guixiu, who was born in 1958 and joined the troupe after she retired from a local middle school in 2013.¹⁹⁴ She plays the role of vocal performer and is responsible for coordinating performance sites. Although they are amateurs, their performances are said by locals and performers in the Wulian and New Era Troupe to be of a standard associated with professionals.¹⁹⁵

Wang Guixiu says that there are eight vocal performers in Songming Troupe, including herself, who practice Maoqiang Opera songs and excerpts in their spare time.¹⁹⁶ Currently, the troupe only performs Maoqiang Opera for self-entertainment rather than audiences. This is because, since 2019, the troupe has been set a different performance task by the Wulian Civil Affairs Bureau: giving a hundred instrumental ensemble performances per year in nursing houses across the county and township centres, and also, to a lesser extent, in the countryside. Although the bureau only subsidises the troupe's travelling expenses, members are very positive about undertaking this task.

Although the Songming troupe gave no Maoqiang Opera performances in 2020, Wang Guixiu explains that it was active in creating modern Maoqiang works before 2019. Many members can write Maoqiang Opera script, because they were

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Wang Guixiu, in Songming Troupe, 3 August 2020.

¹⁹⁵ As mentioned, two members (a vocal performer and a scriptwriter) of Songming Troupe joined the New Era Troupe, and another two (an *erhu* player and a *suona* player) joined the Wulian Troupe.

¹⁹⁶ Interview, in Songming Troupe, 3 August 2020.

experienced handlers of local culture before they retired from local government agencies or cultural institutions. Most recently, in 2018, a new Maoqiang work was created and performed in a local nursing home, based on a script by Yu Qiang¹⁹⁷, the current scriptwriter of the New Era troupe, on the theme of supporting old people. This work received official recognition from Rizhao City as one of that year's most excellent literary and artistic works. In short, then, Songming is a remarkably large, active, and highly-skilled local civic troupe - somewhat unusual amongst urban non-professional residents, where one more commonly encounters much smaller, less active, and less accomplished groups.

The traditional music band of the Jiefang Road Community (*jiefanglu sheqū*) is a more typical local civic group. In 2020, it had 23 registered members - mostly retired residents from all walks of life - and they too had regular scheduled meetings, between 8:30am and 11:30am in the party branch of the community building. However, fewer than 8 members would turn up to each session (see Figure 3-37), and they had no assigned performance tasks and almost no performance opportunities. Their repertoire extended beyond traditional music (including opera) to include red songs and revolutionary songs, which they would particularly focus on when playing in public squares on summer evenings.



Figure 3-37. The traditional music band of the Jiefang Road Community (*jiefanglu sheqū*), featuring numerous erhu players, as many local bands do, 4 September 2020.

Although non-professionals perform Maoqing Opera for entertainment in both rural and urban areas, it is notable that these participants are mostly older people. Like other troupe types, the most active civic troupes and groups also tend to fulfil performance tasks assigned by the government, though it is a matter of choice in

¹⁹⁷ Yu Qiang is 71 years old and plays the role of running soldier in Maoqiang Opera performances in the New Era Troupe. His hometown is Wulian County, but he worked in Weifang City as the editor of Weifang News Magazines. Gaomi City is under the management of Weifang City.

their case. In some cases, like the Gaoze Troupe, the presence of a bankroller and receipt of government subsidies, mean that performing Maoqiang Opera is not merely a recreational activity for the troupe. However, for others, such as the Songming Troupe and the less active traditional music bands in urban settings, the members have full freedom to decide what to perform.

3.6 Relationships Between Different Maoqiang Opera Troupes and Groups

Nowadays, the various professional troupes in the different cities operate independently from each other, and there are few opportunities for them to work together. However, the young performers do occasionally meet during provincial-level cultural activities and the older performers from different troupes, in contrast, tend to know each other well. Specifically, as one of the most famous Maoqiang troupes in Shandong Province during the 1960s, the old Wulian Troupe attracted many young performers from outside Wulian. After that troupe disbanded in 1986, most of its performers engaged in other careers. However, some continued in the world of opera, becoming well-known central senior figures in the Maoqiang opera scene, joining troupes in Gaomi, Jiaozhou and other places. So, older performers tend to know each other quite well through their shared links back to the old Wulian Troupe.

Among the three types of professional Maoqiang troupes, the state-owned troupes evidently receive the most government funds and, accordingly, their members tend to be more satisfied with their job duties and wages. As mentioned earlier, there is only one professional Maoqiang troupe per city, in Gaomi, Jiaozhou and Qingdao. These troupes fulfil their performance tasks and mainly give performances in their home cities. The local governments fully fund them, and there is no apparent competitive relationship between them.

However, in Wulian County (including Rizhao City), there are two Maoqiang troupes, a state-private-owned troupe (Wulian Troupe) and a privately-owned troupe (New Era Troupe). The relationship between these two troupes is more fraught, especially because they compete for performance opportunities, resources, and reputation. The Wulian Troupe used to play a vital role at government-funded cultural activities in and around Rizhao City, such as the Rizhao Cultural and Tourism Festival and the Rizhao Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Project. However, since the foundation of the New Era Troupe at the end of 2018, this latter troupe has taken away those opportunities. Hence, the more skilful young performers from the Wulian Troupe have, one by one, left to join the New Era Troupe, forcing the former to keep recruiting new less skilled members to fill the vacant positions. In addition, the

National Second-Class Scriptwriter, Zhang Yuzhen, who initially created new Maoqiang works for the Wulian Troupe has switched allegiances, now cooperating with the New Era Troupe.

The New Era troupe's bankroller, Dong Yanping, once mentioned to me that, in the interests of securing a bright future for Maoqiang Opera in the region, he had consulted with a higher-level official from the Wulian County Cultural and Tourism Bureau about the possibility of merging his troupe and the Wulian Troupe. Through this measure, his troupe would be able to take a more prominent role in performing in the countryside. However, his proposal was rejected for reasons outlined by Zhang Shoufeng, one of the public officials from the Bureau who is currently the primary coordinator between the Wulian government, Yiqun Company and Wulian Troupe. She explained to me that the government is resolved to support the future development of all Maoqiang troupes in Wulian County, and that it would be difficult to manage a sizeable state-private-owned troupe with more than 60 troupe members, especially when two private enterprises are involved.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, she alluded to various other logistical problems: the members' basic salaries in the two troupes are different; the bankroller of the New Era Troupe may well be unable to cover all salaries for the long term without additional financial support; and the Yiqun Company cannot be removed from the operations because it is responsible for another crucial government-funded task - showing free movies to villagers in the countryside, which the New Era Troupe could not take over.

The relationship between the New Era Troupe and the Gaomi Troupe is unusually close. They cooperate in creating and rehearsing modern Maoqiang works, mainly because of the leaders' relationships. The leader of the New Era troupe, Sun Hongjü, was formerly the leader of the Gaomi Troupe, and the Gaomi Troupe's current leader, Huai Changjian and the New Era Troupe's bankroller, Dong Yanping, have been acquaintances for many years. Normally, a state-owned troupe like the Gaomi Troupe would not form a partnership with a privately-owned troupe. However, members of the Gaomi Troupe have contributed to the New Era Troupe's performances on multiple occasions. For example, Huai Changjian played the role of conductor at the premiere of *Emergency Expedition* at the Rizhao Grand Theatre in 2020, and two *pipa* players and a *ruan* player from the Gaomi Troupe joined the New Era Troupe opera band as volunteers when the latter group was lacking performers.¹⁹⁹ The drive from Gaomi City to Rizhao City takes more than three hours, and members from the Gaomi Troupe generously undertook that journey numerous times for the sake of rehearsals and performance.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Zhang Shoufeng, in Wulian County Cultural Centre, 4 September 2020.

¹⁹⁹ More details are provided in Section 6.1.3.

In Wulian County, apart from the New Era Troupe, the other three active troupes - the Wulian Troupe, Gaoze Troupe and Songming Troupe - all cooperate quite regularly, with performers standing in for one another when needs arise. As noted earlier, the *suona* and *erhu* players from the Wulian Troupe were originally members of the Songming Troupe, and they still visit the Songming Troupe when the Wulian Troupe are less busy. Meanwhile, the Wulian Troupe's young drummer, Wang Xihui²⁰⁰, was originally an amateur player in the Gaoze Troupe. He joined the Wulian Troupe in April 2020 to fill a vacancy when the previous drummer left to join the New Era Troupe. Nowadays, there seem to be no conflicts between the Wulian and Gaoze troupes, with members of the former sometimes helping to augment the performances of the latter. For example, in May 2020, three Wulian Troupe members participated in rehearsals and the recording of the Gaoze Troupe's modern work about fighting the pandemic (see Figure 3-38).



Figure 3-38. A young male performer from the Wulian Troupe, Zhang Li, plays the leading role in the Gaoze Troupe's production of *The Family and Country* (*jiaguo qing*), in the Gaoze Troupe's rehearsal room, 24 May 2020.

The Wulian Troupe's performances during the Summer Festival period, for example, of *Young Lady Mengjiang*, involved about 40 performers in total. Members from the Gaoze Troupe were invited to join the performances (mainly playing the role of running soldiers, see Figure 3-39) and members from the Songming Troupe were invited to join the opera band. Unsurprisingly, these amateurs tend to be very enthusiastic about getting opportunities to perform alongside professionals on a big public stage.

²⁰⁰ Wang Xihui was born in 1990, see Figure 3-42 in Section 3.7.1



Figure 3-39. Performers from the Gaoze Troupe (in red costumes) alongside Zhang Li, from the Wulian Troupe. Amateur performers are fond of taking group photos like this and posting them to their social network. 3 August 2020

In summary, the various professional Maoqiang troupes based in different regions mainly operate independently from one another. However, for those professional troupes based in the same region, competition naturally arises. Although the amateur troupes evidently play significant roles in safeguarding Maoqiang culture in contemporary Shandong society, it is these professional troupes that lead the collective endeavour. Particularly, the government-funded Maoqiang troupes (state-owned troupe and state-private-owned troupe) take centre stage when it comes to performing in the countryside, creating modern operas, and participating in government-backed cultural activities. Most importantly, to cultivate young Maoqiang inheritors, the government-funded troupes also devote much time and effort to transmitting Maoqiang Opera to the next generation. The last section of this chapter uses one more case study to examine these learning and teaching processes in more detail.

3.7 Teaching and Learning Maoqiang Opera

The Maoqiang Opera market has long been confined to the southeast Shandong peninsula as a local opera. For local governments, it does not seem necessary to fund a permanent Maoqiang training school, because there is no constant demand for new professional Maoqiang talents in the current opera market, even though the government-funded activities in both rural and urban areas have provided more performance opportunities in the past several years. The Maoqiang community

widely accepts that, although isolated Maoqiang training classes have contributed substantially to cultivating young performers, the teaching and inheriting processes are mainly integrated into the Maoqiang performers' daily activities. Specifically, older performers, who are generally aged between 55 and 60, usually play the role of masters and supervisors (*shifu*) and are obligated to teach skills to new members. Meanwhile, the young performers are apprentices and students (*tudi*), able to learn from the older performers and gain experience through live performance.

Currently, there is no centralised educational institution for teaching Maoqiang performances, and rather the Maoqiang troupes themselves serve as the forums for transmitting skills. According to Wang Yunting, who performed in the old Wulian Troupe in the 1960s, there was no specific Maoqiang training school even in the 1950s and 1960s, when Maoqiang performance was more prevalent.²⁰¹ Since the late 1980s, Maoqiang performances have faced a shrinking market. Most opera troupes were dissolved, and the demand for Maoqiang performers dropped dramatically until Maoqiang Opera was listed as State-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006. Because there were almost no new young Maoqiang performers for an extended period, even the state-owned troupes faced varying degrees of difficulty in recruiting young talent, particularly during the early 2000s. To tackle this predicament, Maoqiang Opera training classes were funded by local governments to cultivate young Maoqiang performers.

One example of a successful Maoqiang training class is the five-year Gaomi Maoqiang Juvenile Training Class, which took place in Gaomi City from 2008 to 2013 and has not been repeated since. All 12 graduates from the class are currently members of the Gaomi young people's troupe, still aged under 30 in 2020.²⁰² The leader of the Gaomi Troupe, Huai Changjian, told me that the local government had no plan for funding another series of Maoqiang training classes in the short term because the young people's troupe was sufficiently large and competent at present: "The young performers in our troupe are hardworking and outstanding. They can undertake the task of performing in the countryside independently, without the assistance of older performers. I have great confidence in their future development."²⁰³

However, in Wulian County, the only series of training sessions ever held, conducted over three months in 2011, was evidently much less successful: only one ex-trainee, Yu Jie²⁰⁴, still works in the Wulian Troupe at the time of writing. Other attempts have been made to provide youngsters with opportunities to learn traditional opera, for example, four-week government-sponsored training classes in 2017 and 2018 in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province. However, these classes do not focus

²⁰¹ Interview, in Wang Yunting's home, 3 September 2020.

²⁰² See Section 3.2.1 about the state-owned Maoqiang Opera troupe - Gaomi Troupe.

²⁰³ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

²⁰⁴ Yu Jie is the performer of the mother-in-law of *the Virtuous Daughter-in-law*; see details in section 3.3.1.

specifically on Maoqiang Opera. Rather, the supervisors are invited from the Shandong Lü Opera Troupe and the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts²⁰⁵ (*zhongguo xiqu xueyuan*) in Beijing. Furthermore, unfortunately, it seems that the trainees would only be able to learn a small amount during such a brief period. Accordingly, for those young people pursuing a profession in Maoqiang Opera, most of the training takes place within the troupe itself, with processes of teaching and learning integrated in the troupe's daily schedules. The next section focuses once more on the Wulian Troupe as a case study, providing a detailed exploration of these essential processes.

3.7.1 Case Study: The Wulian Troupe's Daily Routine

The Wulian Troupe's performers are required to polish their professional skills during the intervals between their countryside performance seasons.²⁰⁶ In 2020, between 1 April and 11 May, as the COVID-19 pandemic was almost controlled in Shandong Province, the troupe members returned to the Wulian Cultural Centre to rehearse and prepare for the coming performance season, following a set daily routine from Monday to Friday.

Every weekday at around 8:00am, the performers usually practiced basic skills for about one hour, using various different rehearsal rooms: singing, speaking, body movements and musical instrument performance. This morning practice (*chu zaogong*) usually took place under the supervision of Niu Xigao, Xu Qingli and Wang Xuhua, the troupe's supervisors who all used to work in the old Wulian Troupe during the 1980s. Niu Xigao is the troupe's art director and principal supervisor, skilled in playing military roles and elderly male roles. Meanwhile, Xu is the troupe's lead drummer, and Wang performs the main older female roles. Figure 3-40 shows the young performers doing a physical training routine in the main rehearsal room of the Wulian Troupe under the supervision of Niu Xigao.



Figure 3-40. Niu Xigao (standing on the left) regulating the trainees' movements through clapping and shouting, 7 April 2020.

²⁰⁵ The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts awards bachelor's and master's degrees to students (including overseas students) who major in Peking Opera performance.

²⁰⁶ Wulian Troupe's performance seasons in the countryside will be provided in Chapter 5.

The opera band’s percussionists also participate in the morning routine, supervised by the drummer Xu Qinli, who has been supervising the two young performers Chen Xiaoning (born in 1997) and Wang Xihui (born in 1990) for over five years. The percussionists usually practice the basic rhythmic patterns in the locker room, substituting the big gong with a homemade wooden gong and covering the other instruments with a cloth to ensure that the sounds do not disturb the other troupe members (see Figure 3-41).



Figure 3-41. Xu Qingli supervising Chen (on the left) and Wang (on the right) to perform Maoqiang rhythmic patterns. The instrument in the photo on the right is the wooden gong used in the Wulian Troupe, 23 April 2020.

Regarding the troupe’s string instruments, the *jinghu* player Ge Pingjin (born in 1980) and *jingerhu* player Zhao Congsheng usually practice together in the small rehearsal room (see Figure 3-42). They are enthusiasts of traditional Chinese opera and often practice the sung passages of the other Chinese operas for self-entertainment after they finish their training tasks. Ge Pingjin is also a skilful *jinghu* maker, and the two *jinghu* used in his teaching and live performances were both made by himself.



Figure 3-42. Ge Pingjin (left) and Zhao Congsheng (right) practicing the sung parts of the modern opera work *Driving an Honest Man Mad (dalaoshi fabiao)*, 8 April 2020.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Ge Pingjin learned *jinghu* performance with Wang Zonghua for more than six years. He once worked in the food and beverage industry and joined the troupe in 2017.

In addition, the troupe gives performers plenty of discretionary time to practice by themselves according to their situations. Young performers usually take this opportunity to practice the sung and spoken parts that they are less familiar with. If a part needs two or more performers to perform it, they will practice in small groups. Meanwhile, young performers sometimes receive one-on-one supervision to polish their performance skills, particularly in regard to vocal technique and body movements. The supervisors are willing to and passionate about providing tutorials and are responsive to the young performers' questions. What is more, the supervisors appeared to be eager to respond to the young performers' questions and needs (see Figure 3-43).



Figure 3-43. Niu Xigao giving a tutorial about Maoqiang body movements (left, 29 April 2020) and Li Xiangxue and Zhang Jiayan practicing a sung passage from *The Younger Sister's Wedding (zimei yijia)* (right, 15 April 2020).²⁰⁸

Moreover, the opera band's performers are obliged to accompany vocal performers when they practice their sung passages. In most cases, the vocal performers and *jinghu* player have already rehearsed the important parts many times in small groups

Wang Zonghua is the honorary leader of Wulian Troupe and the composer of the modern Maoqiang works *Driving an Honest Man Mad* (2017) and *Fight the Virus* (2020).

Zhao Congsheng is a former official working in the Wulian Cultural Centre who knows a great deal about Maoqiang culture. More information about him is provided in Section 3.3.1.

²⁰⁸ Zhang Jiayan is an officially certified city-level (Rizhao City) Maoqiang Opera inheritor who learned Maoqiang performance from Zhu Shulan, a performer in the old Wulian Troupe during the 1950s and 1960s.

before all the performers gather to rehearse together (see Figure 3-44). To better coordinate with each other, they confirm specific details in advance, including tempo changes, the positioning of breath takes, and the precise duration of held notes. However, the *jinghu* player Ge Pingjin tells me that, although he expects the vocal performers to rehearse with him in advance, few of them take the initiative to polish and upgrade their performance. He hopes that the members will become more proactive, though it is not his responsibility to push them.²⁰⁹



Figure 3-44. Zhang Jiayan practising a sung passage from *The Younger Sister's Wedding* with the two string instrument players in the small rehearsal room, 14 April 2020.

Although the Wulian Troupe's regulations stipulate that all the young performers must practice in the morning and manage their time wisely, their levels of engagement vary, with some even focusing their attentions on mobile phone games instead during working hours.²¹⁰ Although the more committed senior members frown upon such lax attitudes, they acknowledge that it is difficult to mobilise enthusiastic engagement when the wages are low. In addition, Niu Xigao explained that he and the other supervisors refrained from strictness because they were worried about the outflow of young members.²¹¹

The Wulian Troupe's members devote most of their daily rehearsals to practicing classic Maoqiang works together. All performers are obliged to attend this routine (see Figures 3-45 and 3-46). Even if there is no role for them to play, they are

²⁰⁹ Personal communication, in Wulian Troupe, 14 April 2020.

²¹⁰ In my field research, I found that this phenomenon exists in all types of professional Maoqiang troupes, including the Gaomi and New Era Troupe.

²¹¹ Personal communication, in Wulian Troupe, 28 April 2020.

required to watch and learn from other people's performances. This is particularly important for new members, as the process of watching is an important means of familiarising themselves with the essential features of Maoqiang performance. Since 2011, the troupe has focused on rehearsing one or two classic works every year. By 2020, 11 classic works had been rehearsed, for use in their countryside performances. Each work was usually rehearsed more than twenty or thirty times before it was performed in front of an audience.



Figure 3-45. All the performers rehearsing *The Story of the Silver Hairpin* (*yinchai ji*) under the supervision of Niu Xigao, in the main rehearsal room of the Wulian Troupe, 30 April 2020.



Figure 3-46. All the performers rehearsing *The Younger Sister's Wedding* in the main rehearsal room of the Wulian Troupe, 9 May 2020.

Although the troupe encountered many difficulties in the first half of 2020, especially the outflow of young members and the cancellation of performances during the Spring Festival, it still rehearsed two classic works and one modern anti-pandemic themed work. One of the classic works was the Wulian Troupe's version of *Young Lady Mengjiang* (*mengjiang nü*), which was premiered during the summer festival celebration in Wulian County on 6 August 2020.²¹² The other classic work was *The Story of the Silver Hairpin* (*yinchai ji*), which the Wulian Troupe had not performed before. The principal supervisor, Niu Xigao, played a particularly important role in rehearsing both the classic and modern works, quickly jumping between different

²¹² See Figure 2-9 in Section 2.3.2.

characters, setting examples for the other performers, and pointing out problems that needed to be addressed. Niu took over this job in 2018. Before that, the first principal supervisor between 2011 and 2014 had been Wang Yunting, who had had to step down due to old age. After that, the principal supervisor was Pan Zhaosheng, who made a significant contribution by recalling and collating the Wulian version of Maoqiang Opera scripts. He passed away from cancer in 2017.

Another important part of the Wulian Troupe's daily routine is revising Maoqiang opera scripts together. In this process, the older performers are the main contributors, while the young performers simply note down what they state (see Figure 3-47). For example, in 2020, a lot of time was devoted to modifying the characters' conversations in *The Story of the Silver Hairpin* - a very lengthy work (about two and a half hours). In fact, the modifications and rehearsals were not completed in time for the troupe's first performance season in 2020, so the work was postponed for the second performance season beginning in November. Li Xiangxue explained to me that, although parts of the Wulian Troupe's scripts were transcribed from the Maoqiang DVDs published by the Gaomi Troupe, the main body of the melodies and texts were collated based on the older performers' memories of the old Wulian Troupe's version.



Figure 3-47. Performers of the Wulian Troupe revising and simplifying the script of *The Story of the Silver Hairpin* under Niu Xigao and Wang Xuhua's guidance. This script was initially transcribed from the full-length version of Gaomi Troupe. The conversations in the final Wulian Troupe version include many Wulian dialect words, which are different from the Gaomi version, 14 April 2020.

In addition, the older performers often recommend the young performers to watch performances by famous traditional Chinese opera performers, especially to imitate the precise body movements employed for particular roles. Because the body

movements of Maoqiang Opera are copied from Peking Opera, the type of opera that the members watch most often is Peking Opera (see Figure 3-48).



Figure 3-48. Performers from the Wulian Troupe watching a short 2012 version of the classic Peking Opera *The Great White Beach* (*da baishuitan*), 8 April 2020.

In conclusion, based on four main case studies, this chapter has revealed the management models, sources of income, ranges of performance, and constitutions of the four different types of Maoqiang opera troupe currently in operation: state-owned troupe, state-private-owned troupe, privately-owned troupe, and various kinds of local civic group. In contemporary society, in terms of relative contributions to safeguarding and passing on the traditions of Maoqiang Opera, government-funded troupes are the most important contributors, mainly because they have specific responsibility for giving regular Maoqiang performances and training young Maoqiang inheritors. The New Era Troupe, a privately-owned Maoqiang troupe, is still highly active at the time of writing. However, its daily activities and future development are largely dictated by its sponsors, which makes the sustainability of the troupe uncertain.

Chapter 4. The Preservation of Maoqiang Opera Culture: Music Characteristics as Intangible Cultural Heritage

When it comes to the performance characteristics of Maoqiang Opera, this artform is influenced by Peking Opera in many aspects, especially in its percussion music (*luogu Jing*), phonic notation (*daiyinzi pu*), stylised body movements (*shenduan*), types of roles (*hangdang*), facial makeup (*lianpu*), opera costume (*xizhuang* or *xifu*) and casting (*xuanjue*). Maoqiang Opera became strongly influenced by Peking Opera during two historical periods in particular. Firstly, in the early 1900s, the predecessor of Maoqiang Opera, Leather Drum Opera (*zhouguzi xi*), was often performed as a type of warm-up playlet (*nuanchang xiaoxi*) for Peking Opera. As a result, the Leather Drum Opera performers had plenty of opportunities to learn from Peking Opera performances. They continued to refine the stories and enrich the performances of Leather Drum Opera, which promoted the further development of the artform and attracted many enthusiasts. After the founding of new China (1949), Leather Drum Opera was finally renamed as 'Maoqiang Opera' with several registered troupes funded by the government.

Secondly, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), almost all the Maoqiang Opera troupes were disbanded or changed into Peking Opera troupes. Meanwhile, Maoqiang performers became Model Opera performers. Based on interviews with older members of the Gaomi Troupe and Wulian Troupe, performers who were born in the 1960s and joined the troupe at the age of 11 to 17 initially learned how to perform Peking Opera for more than two years and did not start to learn Maoqiang Opera until the end of 1976. Currently, most of these performers have a common point - they are still Peking Opera enthusiasts and prefer Peking Opera to Maoqiang Opera.²¹³ Although the Jiaozhou Troupe was not disbanded and was still referred to as a Maoqiang Opera troupe during that period, it also could not perform classic Maoqiang works and had to perform modern operas, which were adapted from modern Peking Opera works and Model Opera works.

However, as officially certified intangible cultural heritage, Maoqiang Opera still has unique melodic characteristics in the poetic-style lyrics (*changci*) of the sung passage (*changduan*), the sung tune (*changqiang*), the vocal music and singing techniques, making Maoqiang Opera distinguishable from all the other traditional Chinese operas, including all the other local operas in Shandong Province.²¹⁴ Based on the two

²¹³ For example, the current leader of Gaomi Troupe, Huai Changjian, born in 1964; the current director of Wulian Troupe, Niu Xigao, born in 1963.

²¹⁴ Because Shandong dialect is used in the spoken parts and characters' conversations of all types of local operas in Shandong Province, the musical characteristics of Maoqiang Opera are the most important distinctive features of the art form.

specialised studies about Maoqiang Opera²¹⁵ and data collected during my fieldwork, this chapter firstly introduces the Maoqiang Opera band itself, secondly, examines the Peking Opera-influenced percussion music of Maoqiang Opera, and, thirdly, explores the melodic characteristics that surely contribute the most towards the artform's uniqueness.

4.1 The Maoqiang Opera Band

The Maoqiang Opera band consists of a percussion instrument band and a string and woodwind instrument band, including at least seven players with at least three in the percussion band. Many of the players are versatile and are called “*yizhuan duoneng*”, which essentially means “the players are usually particularly good at one instrument, but they also know how to play some of the other instruments” (Shan, 2017: 44). Regarding the percussion music of Maoqiang Opera, it has borrowed heavily from Peking Opera in terms of percussion instruments and playing techniques. As in Peking Opera, the percussion band has five essential instruments: drum (*sigu*), clappers (*xiangban*), large gong (*dalu*), small gong (*xiaolu*), and small cymbals (*xiaobo*) (see Figure 4-1 and the following interpretations of each instrument).



Figure 4-1. The drum and clapper player of Wulian Troupe. Xu Qingli (57 years old, who was a member of the old Wulian Troupe in the 1980s) and his two apprentices in their routine training, Wulian Cultural Centre, 22 April 2020.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ One of these studies, entitled *Basic Knowledge of Shandong Maoqiang Opera* (2009), focuses on the Jiaozhou style Maoqiang Opera. The other study mainly investigates Gaomi style Maoqiang Opera: *A Study of Gaomi Maoqiang Opera* (2017). More details are explained in the literature review, see Section 1.2.4.

²¹⁶ Typically, there are four performers in the percussion music band of Maoqiang Opera and Peking Opera, with one performer playing both the drum and clappers. In Wulian Troupe, the young performer Chen Xiaoning (25 years old) is responsible for both the large gong and cymbals which are attached to a specially-made stand. It is normal that one performer has a variety of responsibilities in the current Maoqiang Opera troupe.

Drum (*sigu*): The small drum in Chinese opera is called '*sigu*' (literally meaning the drum major of the percussion band). Alternatively, because only one side of the drum is covered with skin, the drum is sometimes also referred to as '*danpi gu*' (single-side drum). It is played with two thin bamboo sticks, called '*gu jianzi*' (thin drumsticks). The drum player is called '*gulao*' (the drummer), and he serves as the conductor of the whole band.

Clappers (*xiangban*): These are usually made of bamboo and are mainly used to help control the rhythm during sung passages, and for creating a strong steady rhythmic texture in conjunction with the drum. The drummer usually holds the clappers in his left hand and meanwhile plays the drum with his right hand, as shown in Figure 4-1.

Large Gong (*dalu*): This is most commonly used in conjunction with certain stylised body movements for particular roles, especially the male role (*shengjue*) and the military role (*wusheng*), and is usually used in fight scenes.

Small Gong (*xiaoluo*): This is also called '*shouluo*' (hand-gong), and is also used for the stylised body movements of different types of roles, especially the female role (*danjue*), young male role (*xiaosheng*) and clown role (*choujue*).

Small Cymbals (*xiaobo*): In Maoqiang performances, a pair of small cymbals are almost always used to enhance the percussion band texture.

The percussion instruments are used for many purposes during performance. They can be employed to indicate curtain-up (*kaimu*), to match performers' stylised body movements, such as entering the stage (*dengtai*) and exiting the stage (*tuichang*), to accompany the string and wind instruments, to help reveal the emotions of characters and enhance the atmosphere of different scenarios, and especially can be applied to accompany the performance of acrobatic fighting (*wuchang*).

The string instruments are also essential components of the Maoqiang Opera band. They typically include one or two *jinghu* (Peking Opera fiddle), and several *erhu* and *jingerhu* (bigger two-stringed fiddle), which play in unison. With these string instruments and the aforementioned percussion instruments, the opera band is able to guarantee a minimum standard live Maoqiang performance (see Figure 4-2). Meanwhile, the instruments in the Maoqiang Opera band also include *pipa* (four stringed pear-shaped lute), *yueqin* (moon-shaped Chinese mandolin), *yangqin* (Chinese dulcimer), and woodwind instruments - *suona* (Chinese shawm) and *zhudi* (bamboo flute).



Figure 4-2. The performers in the Wulian Troupe opera band practicing together in the main rehearsal room. Their seating order is usually fixed, from left to right: *erhu*, *jingerhu*, *jingerhu*, small gong, small cymbals and large gong, drums and clappers, and *jinghu* respectively, Wulian Cultural Centre, 22 April 2020.

In many cases, although the drummer is the main conductor, the sung passages of Maoqiang Opera may directly begin with a short prelude without percussion accompaniment. In such cases, the *jinghu* player(s) serves as the conductor of the string and woodwind instruments. During a live performance, the *jinghu* player, who is called 'zhuxian' ('principal string player'), usually sits opposite the other players and cooperates with the drummer to conduct the opera band played in unison, by making eye contact and nodding their head (see Figure 4-3).



Figure 4-3. The position of the opera band is always to the left side of the mobile stage. The *jinghu* player Ge Pingjin (in the hat) always sits in front of the other instrument players because this position is convenient for him to communicate with the players, the drummer and the vocal performers, Hubu Village, Wulian County, 14 May 2020.

However, when there are more than ten players in the band, the drummer is usually the only conductor responsible for the band's rhythmic synchronisation (see Figures 4-4 and 4-5). Moreover, in many cases, it is the vocal performers' duty to give the opera band a signal to indicate the tempo of the following sung passages. This signal

is called '*jiaban*' ('shouting'), and it involves raising the intonation of the last two or three syllables of the spoken part and keeping the last syllable for at least two bars before the sung passage starts.



Figure 4-4. The drummer Wang Zewen usually conducts the band by using the thin drumstick as a baton or by using his bare hands. The *jinghu* player (in the hat) and the other players sit together. In the main rehearsal room of the New Era Troupe, 9 July 2020.

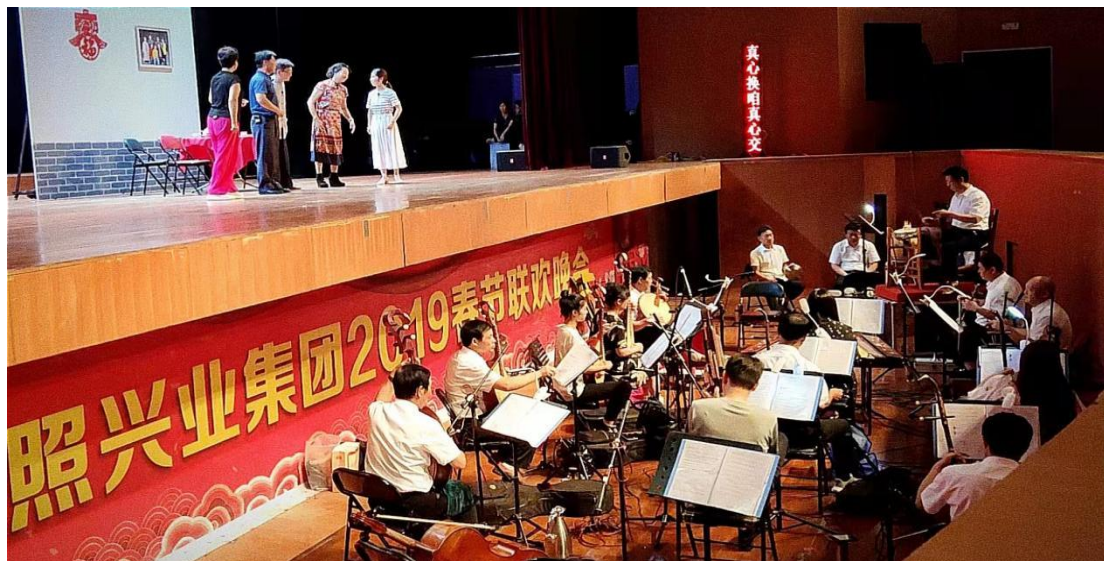


Figure 4-5. The opera band of the New Era Troupe rehearsing in Rizhao Grand Theatre. The drummer is on a high platform, which enables him to pay attention to the performers on the stage and meanwhile to conduct the band, 2 August 2020.

4.2 Percussion Patterns

Percussion band music is an essential integral element within traditional Chinese opera. The percussion instruments' contributions are referred to simply as percussion patterns (*luogu dian*). The musical score for the percussion instruments is called 'percussion notation book' (*'luogu jing'*). Both Maoqiang Opera and Peking Opera employ the same notation system called 'phonic notation' (*daiyinzi pu*). This section introduces the basics of Maoqiang percussion music, providing five examples of named percussion patterns to explain the similarities and differences between different Maoqiang Opera styles and the influences of Peking Opera percussion practice on Maoqiang Opera. In addition, this section also discusses the warm-up performance for percussion instruments called '*datai*'.

In this section, information about the percussion patterns and the phonic notation is mainly drawn from three studies: the book *The Percussion Music of Peking Opera* (1982)²¹⁷ records 22 mnemonic syllables and documents 143 percussion patterns; the book about Jiaozhou style Maoqiang (2009) records 23 mnemonic syllables, 67 percussion patterns, and three special symbols²¹⁸; and Shan's research about Gaomi style Maoqiang (2017) records 22 mnemonic syllables and 39 percussion patterns²¹⁹. Moreover, the two percussion notation books I collected during fieldwork in 2020 (2020 Notation) also record different percussion patterns, with 31 forms in Wulian Troupe and 29 forms in New Era Troupe. Currently, there are no more than 30 frequently used percussion patterns in Maoqiang Opera performance, which are called 'the model version of named percussion patterns' (*'jiben luogu dian'*). In comparison, the 67 patterns used in Jiaozhou Troupe include both the model versions and variations.²²⁰

To document the percussion patterns as accurately as possible, the mnemonic notation uses simple Chinese characters to imitate the sounds of drums and gongs, which are easy to read out and memorise. Each specific Chinese character represents not only the desired sound but also the required playing technique for a specific percussion instrument or a combination of percussion instruments. For example, the sound for beating the large gong sounds similar to the pronunciation of the Chinese character 匡 (*kuang*). Generally, the interpretations of the mnemonic syllables and percussion patterns in the three books and in the notation book of different troupes

²¹⁷ The book *The Percussion Music of Peking Opera (jingju luogu)* is edited by Wu Chunli, He Wei, and Zhang Yuci who are professors of the National Academy of Chinese Opera, first published in 1960 and republished in 1982. This book is recommended by performers in Wulian Troupe for further information about the percussion music of Maoqiang Opera.

²¹⁸ The three special symbols are: △-Beat the suspended cymbal; ▽- Beat two suspended cymbals together; ※- Beat the double large gong (*da shailuo*).

²¹⁹ Shan's research about the percussion patterns references Liu Jidian's research - *Introduction to Peking Opera Music (jingju yinyue gailun)* (1981).

²²⁰ Similarly, there are 82 original percussion patterns used in Peking Opera (as detailed in *The Percussion Music of Peking Opera*, 1982). The other 61 patterns are variations and combinations.

are basically the same. Although a few mnemonic syllables are written in different Chinese characters, the differences are negligible, because these characters usually represent the same percussion instruments and the same corresponding playing techniques. For example, the different characters 隆 (*long*) and 龙 (*long*) in the different books all refer to beating the bass drum, and the characters 台 (*tai*), 来 (*lai*) and 呆 (*dai*) all refer to beating the small gong.

Regarding present-day Maoqiang percussion patterns, most model versions of the named percussion patterns (*luogu dian*) are adapted from Peking Opera. However, the specific patterns recorded in Maoqiang percussion notation books are different from the Peking Opera percussion patterns. Moreover, in order to distinguish different Maoqiang Opera styles, the named patterns in the notation book of different troupes also have some differences. Furthermore, because Maoqiang artists have placed great emphasis on the innovation and future development of Maoqiang Opera, they have drawn inspiration from various other local operas such as Bangzi Opera²²¹, Huangmei Opera, Lü Opera and so forth. Lastly, to distinguish Maoqiang Opera from other traditional Chinese operas, during the 1950s and 1960s, Maoqiang artists also composed a few unique percussion patterns. Thus, the five examples of named patterns in this section illustrate the above-mentioned five characteristics.

Before examining them, it is necessary to explain the main mnemonic syllables and their corresponding percussion instruments and playing techniques used in Peking Opera and Maoqiang Opera (see Table 4-1). The choices of mnemonic syllables are different in different troupes; in the following notations, I use the Jiaozhou system throughout, to aid comparison and avoid confusion.

²²¹ A trans-provincial traditional local opera commonly exists in Shandong Province, Henan Province and Hebei Province.

Table 4-1. The mnemonic syllables used in percussion notation books

Percussion Instruments	Mnemonic Syllables in Chinese	Pronunciation	Playing Techniques
Drum (<i>sigu</i>)	大/答/打	dà	Hold one thin drumstick with right hand and beat the drum softly
	八	bā	Beat the drum once loudly with two thin drumsticks together
	嘟/都	dū	Beat the drum with two thin drumsticks alternately and continuously
	龙冬/隆冬	lóng-dōng	Use one thin drumstick and beat the drum twice at moderate volume
	拉 ²²²	lā	Beat the drum once with two thin drumsticks together at moderate volume and only used after the 'dū'
Clappers (<i>xiangban</i>)	扎/扎...	zhā	Beat the clappers once or continuously
	衣	yī	Beat the clappers
Large Gong (<i>dalu</i>)	匡	kuāng	Beat the large gong
	仓	cāng	Beat the large gong, small gong and cymbals together loudly
	顷/倾	qīng	Beat the large gong softly
	空/孔	kōng	Beat the large gong, small gong and cymbals together softly and mute the overtones immediately
Small Gong (<i>xiaoluo</i>)	台	tái	Beat the small gong
	来	lái	
	呆 ²²³	dāi	
	匝	za	Beat the small gong and mute the overtones immediately by hand
	令/另	ling	Beat the small gong softly
Small Cymbals (<i>xiaobo</i>)	才 ²²⁴	cái	Beat the cymbals and small gong together
	切 ²²⁵	qie	
	七	qi	Beat the cymbals and mute the overtones immediately
	扑	pu	Put the edge of the cymbals on the lap or abdomen to mute the overtones when beat the cymbals
Rest	乙	yǐ	Rest on downbeat
	个	gè	Rest on upbeat

²²² Only used in the notation book of Maoqiang Opera.

²²³ The mnemonic syllable 'dāi' is only used in the notation book of Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe.

²²⁴ Only used in the notation book of Maoqiang Opera.

²²⁵ Only used in the notation book of Peking Opera.

This section adopts the following abbreviations for the various percussion instruments: drum - 'D'; clappers - 'C'; large gong - 'Lg'; small gong - 'Sg'; small cymbals - 'Sc'; rest - 'R'.²²⁶

(1) Duotou Percussion Patterns²²⁷

Only a few named patterns recorded in the Maoqiang Opera percussion notation books are almost indistinguishable from equivalents found in the Peking Opera notation books. Among them, the *duotou* patterns are typical examples, frequently used at the beginning of sung passages in duple metre (2/4), to accompany the prelude and set the tempo. *Duotou* is also sometimes called 'big *duotou*' ('*da duotou*'). In addition, the common metre (4/4) *duotou* may be called 'small *duotou*' ('*xiao duotou*') and is applied to various scenes, especially to accompanying the performer's stage gait (*taibu*) when walking on and off the stage.

Duotou patterns are recorded in the Peking Opera notation book (1982: 86), Jiaozhou Maoqiang notation book (2009: 75) and the two notation books used in Wulian Troupe and New Era Troupe. Transcription 4-1 shows the mnemonic syllables of the specific percussion pattern for the initial form of *duotou*. This is the pattern given in all four sources.

Transcription 4-1:



 龙 冬 | 大 大 大 台 | 仓 来 才 | 乙 才 仓 | 大 扑 台 | 仓 ||

lóng-dōng | dàdà dàtái | cāng láicái | yǐcái cāng | dàpu tái | cāng ||

D - D | D D D Sg | Lg Sg Sc | R Sc Lg | D Sc Sg | Lg ||

Although the notation books of the different troupes record a similar initial form of *duotou*, there are also many *duotou* variations used in various scenes.²²⁸ For example, the New Era Troupe has a unique form of *duotou* variation, which consists of the first half of *duotou* and some new patterns with the tempo slowing down gradually (see Transcription 4-2). It is usually used when the main characters first appear on stage and strike a characteristic pose (*liangxiang*).

²²⁶ This study is the first to use these abbreviations to aid communication of the various instruments' patterns for non-Chinese speakers, although the specific techniques used are not represented by these letters.

²²⁷ In the notation books of the different Maoqiang troupes, *duotou* is either written as '夺头' or '垛头', but there is no difference in meaning between these two formulations.

²²⁸ Four forms in Peking Opera notation book (1982); three forms in Jiaozhou Maoqiang notation book (2009); one form in New Era Troupe notation book (2020).

Transcription 4-2:

Slowing down

龙 冬 | 大大 大台 | 仓 来才 | 乙才 仓大大 | 大大 大大衣 | 仓 ||

[duotou]

lóng-dōng | dàdà dàtái | cāng láicái | yǐcái cāng dàdà | dàdà dàdà yī | cāng||

D - D | DD D Sg | Lg Sg Sc | R Sc Lg DD | DD DDC | Lg ||

In addition, the second half of the *doutou* pattern can be positioned after a different kind of pattern known as ‘*changchui*’, in common metre (4/4), which can accompany the performer’s body movement of walking back and forth slowly, and introduces the prelude of the sung passage. The combination of *changchui* and *duotou* is named *man changchui* (slow *changchui*), and is typically played at a moderate tempo (see Transcription 4-3).²²⁹

Transcription 4-3:

乙台 ||: 仓 七 台 七: || 仓 七 台 七 台 | 仓 来才 乙才 仓 | 大扑 台 仓 ||

[changchui] [duotou]

yǐtái ||: cāng qī tái qī :|| cāng qī táiqī tái | cāng láicái yǐcái cāng | dàpū tái cāng||

R Sg ||: Lg Sc Sg Sc :|| Lg Sc Sg Sc Sg | Lg Sg Sc R Sc Lg | D Sc Sg Lg ||

(2) Matui Percussion Patterns²³⁰

Regarding the relationship between Peking Opera and Maoqiang Opera, although the names and corresponding usage scenarios of the rhythmic patterns are basically the same, the actual patterns themselves are subtly different from each other, though the similarities are also readily apparent. For example, all the following four forms of *matui* patterns are in triple metre (3/4) and are used in scenes of acrobatic fighting, mountain climbing, cutting firewood and other kinds of physical work involving repeated action. In all notation books, these *matui* patterns feature one bar of repeated beats and end with a ‘仓’ *cāng* stroke on the large gong, small gong and cymbals together. In most cases, the final ‘*cāng*’ stroke is positioned on the downbeat, but in Wulian Maoqiang it is on the offbeat (see Transcription 4-4).

²²⁹ The *changchui* pattern followed by the *fengdiantou* pattern is titled *kuai changchui* (rapid *chuangchui*), and is typically played at an allegretto tempo.

²³⁰ Matui-马腿 is also named matuier-马腿儿.

Transcription 4-4:

Peking Opera (1982:64):

嘟 | 龙冬 乙八 乙嘟 ||: 仓个 令切 乙台: || 仓个 令切 乙台 | 仓 ||
 dū | lóng-dōng yǐbā yǐdū ||: cānggè língqiè yǐtái: || cānggè língqiè yǐtái | cāng ||
 D | D-D R D R D ||: Lg R Sg Sc R Sg: || Lg R Sg Sc R Sg | Lg ||

Jiaozhou Maoqiang Opera (2009:74):

冬八 乙台 ||: 仓 台才 乙台: || 仓 台才 乙台 | 仓 ||
 dōngbā yǐtái ||: cāng táicái yǐtái: || cāng táicái yǐtái | cāng ||
D D R Sg ||: Lg Sg Sc R Sg: || Lg Sg Sc R Sg | Lg ||

Gaomi Maoqiang Opera (2017:54):

龙冬 乙八 乙台 ||: 仓 令七 乙台: || 仓 令七 乙台 | 仓 ||
 lóng-dōng yǐbā yǐtái ||: cāng língqī yǐtái: || cāng língqī yǐtái | cāng ||
D-D R D R Sg ||: Lg Sg Sc R Sg: || Lg Sg Sc R Sg | Lg ||

Wulian Maoqiang Opera (2020 Notation):

嘟大 | 乙八 乙台 仓 ||: 台才 乙台 仓: || 台才 乙台 仓 ||
 dūdà | yǐbā yǐtái cāng ||: táicái yǐtái cāng: || táicái yǐtái cāng ||
D D | R D R Sg Lg ||: Sg Sc R Sg Lg: || Sg Sc R Sg Lg ||

(3) Souchang Percussion Patterns²³¹

There are also cases of model versions that have the same name but differ quite substantially from one another; this tends to be more common for longer patterns with no internal repetition. An example is *souchang* (meaning ‘searching pattern’), which is usually used in scenes where someone is searching for something or somebody, in the process of chasing (for example, after criminals), or checking the outside environment (by looking out of the window). Transcription 4-5 lists five versions of *souchang* patterns recorded in different notation books. Among them, only the Jiaozhou version is in a simple metre (1/4) and has to be positioned after the other form of percussion patterns. Although the five versions have few similarities, they all have the eighth rest ‘乙’ *yǐ* before the ending.

²³¹ *Souchang*-搜场

Transcription 4-5:

Peking Opera (1982:84):

八.嚙 頃切 | 倉切 令切 | 倉 令倉 | 令倉 乙切 | 倉 ||
bā.dū qīngqiē | cāngqiē lìngqiē | cāng lìngcāng | lìngcāng yǐqiē | cāng ||
D. D Lg Sc | Lg Sc Sg Sc | Lg Sg Lg | Sg Lg R Sc | Lg ||

Jiaozhou Maoqiang Opera (2009:74):

… … 空才 | 倉才 | 台才 | 倉才 | 令倉 | 令倉 | 乙才 | 倉 ||
… … kōngcái | cāngcái | táicái | cāngqi | lìngcāng | lìngcāng | yǐcái | cāng ||
… … Lg Sc | Lg Sc | Sg Sc | Lg Sc | Sg Lg | Sg Lg | R Sc | Lg ||

Gaomi Maoqiang Opera (2017:53):

八嚙 | 頃七 倉七 | 令七 倉 | 令倉 令倉 | 乙七 倉 ||
bādū | qīngqi cāng qi | lìngqi cāng | lìngcāng lìngcāng | yǐqi cāng ||
D D | Lg Sc Lg Sc | Sg Sc Lg | Sg Lg Sg Lg | R Sc Lg ||

Wulian Maoqiang Opera (2020 Notation):

台 | 空才 倉才 | 空才 倉才 | 龍倉 龍倉 | 乙龍 倉 ||
tái | kōngcái cāngcái | kōngcái cāngcái | lóngcāng lóngcāng | yǐlóng cāng ||
Sg | Lg Sc Lg Sc | Lg Sc Lg Sc | D Lg D Lg | R D Lg ||

The Version of New Era Troupe (2020 Notation):

八嚙 頃才 | 倉七 令才 | 倉 令倉 | 令倉 乙七 | 倉 ||
bādū qīngqi | cāngqi lìngcái | cāng lìngcāng | lìngcāng yǐqi | cāng ||
D D Lg Sc | Lg Sc Sg Sc | Lg Sg Lg | Sg Lg R Sc | Lg ||

(4) Bangzisui Percussion Patterns²³²

Although the term '*bangzisui*' refers directly to Bangzi Opera, the actual *bangzisui* pattern used in Maoqiang Opera differs from the equivalent *bangzisui* pattern played in the former genre. It is a kind of recomposed new pattern in simple metre (1/4) and is usually used for accompanying the female role's body movements, particularly walking onto the stage. It is typically followed by a short prelude to transit to the sung passage. In 2017, during the Maoqiang Culture and Arts Festival, several Maoqiang artists highlighted the importance of borrowing percussion patterns from other opera forms, with the *bangzisui* pattern being mentioned in several presentations.²³³ Although *bangzi* refers to wooden clappers, this instrument does not feature at all in any of the different versions. The Jiaozhou Maoqiang notation book (2009:84-85) records only one initial form of *bangzisui* (see Transcription 4-6).

Transcription 4-6:

大 | 大大大 ||: 仓才 仓才 :|| 仓 | 才才 | 令才| 乙才| 令仓||
dà | dà dàdà ||:cāngcái cāngcái:|| cāng| cáicái| língcái| yǐcái| língcāng||
D | D DD ||: Lg Sc Lg Sc :|| Lg | Sc Sc | Sg Sc | R Sc | Sg Lg ||

Another version of *bangzisui* is recorded in the notation book of Wulian Troupe, which is very different from the Jiaozhou version and is only used in Maoqiang troupes in Wulian County (see Figure 4-6 and Transcription 4-7). The drum player Xu Qingli explained that this version of *bangzisui* has been used since the 1980s in Wulian County, but he cannot tell who actually created it.²³⁴ I also interviewed Wang Yunting, who is the former vocal performer of the old Wulian Troupe in the 1960s and he was also unable to recall who composed the Maoqiang *bangzisui* pattern.

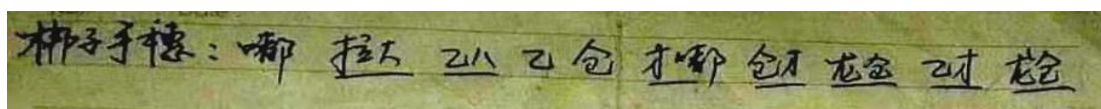


Figure 4-6. The *bangzisui* pattern as recorded in the old handwritten percussion notation book of the Wulian Troupe, provided by Zheng Dewei.²³⁵

²³² Bangzisui-椰子穗

²³³ The 2017 Maoqiang Culture and Art Festival was held in the capital city of Shandong Province, Jinan. Almost all the active Maoqiang Opera Troupes (10 troupes in total) attended this festival, each one performing a full-length Maoqiang Opera. There were also seminars during the festival, and many researchers from music conservatories, universities and academic institutions in Shandong Province gave presentations, including the president of Shandong Province Theatre Association, Chai Xinji, who is also a famous composer of both Lü Opera and Maoqiang Opera. Their speech drafts are published in the autograph album of this festival, propounding much advice about the inheritance and future development of Maoqiang Opera.

²³⁴ Personal communication, in Wulian Troupe, 1 April to 11 May 2020.

²³⁵ Zheng is the former young vocal performer in Wulian Troupe, and is currently a member of the New Era Troupe. He obtained this old score from Pan Zhaosheng, who was his master in Wulian Troupe and the former vocal performer of the old Wulian Troupe (1980s), but passed away in 2018. I also collected a new version of the Wulian Troupe notation book, which was provided by the drummer, Xu Qingli and the *jinghu* player, Ge Pingjin.

Transcription 4-7:

嘟 | 拉大 | 乙八 | 乙 | 仓 | 才嘟 | 仓才 | 龙仓 | 乙才 | 龙仓 ||
 dū | lādà | yǐbā | yǐ | cāng | cáidū | cāngcái | lóngcāng | yǐcái | lóngcāng ||
 D | DD | RD | R | Lg | ScD | LgSc | D Lg | R Sc | D Lg ||

(5) Danbaobian Percussion Patterns²³⁶

As noted, most of the named percussion patterns of Maoqiang Opera are adapted from Peking Opera, and a few are from other local operas. Although Maoqiang artists had attempted to create new named patterns before the 1980s, only a very small number of them have been popularised within the Maoqiang community. Currently, there is only one truly unique named pattern within Maoqiang Opera, which is called ‘*danbaobian*’ (‘single *baobian*’), in simple metre (1/4). The main feature of *danbaobian* lies in the three rests - ‘乙’ *yǐ* (rest on downbeat), followed by ‘大’ *dà* (beating the drum softly with one thin drumstick) and ‘台’ *tái* (beating the small gong softly), and then followed by ‘仓’ *cāng* (beating the large gong, small gong and cymbals together loudly, in order to make a comparison with the previous offbeat). *Danbaobian* is usually used to accompany the body movements of a clown or other capricious character (especially walking onto the stage and striking a pose). For instance, it can be used to characterise Diaoshi²³⁷, who is hard to get along with and often changes her mind unexpectedly. Transcription 4-8 shows the two model versions of *danbaobian* used in Jiaozhou and Wulian, which are similar to each other.

Transcription 4-8:

Jiaozhou Maoqiang Opera (2009:84):

乙大 | 乙大 | 乙台 | 仓 | 才才 | 空仓 | 令仓 ||
 yǐdà | yǐdà | yǐtái | cāng | cáicái | kōngcāng | língcāng ||
RD | RD | RSg | Lg | ScSc | Lg Lg | Sg Lg ||

²³⁶ In Jiaozhou Troupe, it is titled *danbaobian* 单包边, but it is also titled with different Chinese characters 单包鞭 and 单抱鞭, and also titled with *danbianbian* 单边鞭 in the other Maoqiang troupes.

²³⁷ Diaoshi is the mother-in-law in the classic comedy, *A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law*, presented in Section 2.4.1.

Wulian Maoqiang Opera (2020):

乙大 | 乙大 | 乙台 | 仓.全 | 台才 | 空仓 | 龙仓 ||
yǐdà | yǐdà | yǐtái | cāng.ge | táicái | kōngcāng | lóngcāng||
R D | R D | R Sg | Lg. R | Sg Sc | Lg Lg | D Lg ||

In addition, the Jiaozhou notation book (2009:84-85) also records several *danbaobian* variations, though these are not widely employed and are not used in the other troupes. Particularly, there are two versions of newly named percussion patterns, *shuangbaobian* (double *baobian*) and a combination of *danbaobian* and *shuangbaobian* (see Transcription 4-9).

Transcription 4-9:

Danbaobian Variation (intro):

大 | 仓才 | 仓 | 空仓 ||
dà | cāngcái | cāng | kōngcāng||
D | Lg Sc | Lg | Lg Lg ||

Shuangbaobian Percussion Pattern:

① 乙大 | 乙台 | 空来 | 仓 | 令仓 | 乙才 | 令仓 ||
yǐdà | yǐtái | kōnglai | cāng | língcāng | yǐcái | língcāng||
R D | R Sg | Lg Sg | Lg | Sg Lg | R Sc | Sg Lg ||

② 大 | 仓才 | 来才 | 空仓 | 令仓 ||
dà | cāngcái | láicái | kōngcāng | língcāng||
D | Lg Sc | Sg Sc | Lg Lg | Sg Lg ||

Danbaobian + *Shuangbaobian*:

乙大 乙大 乙台 ||: 仓才 仓才: || 空才 | 仓才 | 仓个 | 令才 | 乙才 | 令仓 ||
yǐdà yǐdà yǐtái ||: cāngcái cāngcái: || kōngcái | cāngcái | cāngge | língcái | yǐcái | língcāng||
R D R D R Sg ||: Lg Sc Lg Sc: || Lg Sc | Lg Sc | Lg R | Sg Sc | R Sc | Sg Lg ||

It should be noted that the named patterns recorded in the notation books of the different Maoqiang troupes are standardised. During my fieldwork, I observed no obvious instances of variation in the Maoqiang opera bands' performances. One important reason is that the main role of the opera band is to accompany the vocal performers, and the performance of Maoqiang Opera is a trilateral cooperation of vocal performers, melodic instrument performers and percussion instrument performers. As mentioned, a Maoqiang work has usually been rehearsed dozens of times before its premiere. It is not usual for vocal and instrumental performers to emphasise personalisation in the live performances with no consultation with the other performers in advance.

In general, the performances of professional Maoqiang performers are also standardised. Specifically, in order to make the performers more familiar with different named patterns and then better cooperate with each other, all the performers in New Era Troupe are required to recite the frequently used 29 model versions of the named pattern, aiding close coordination.²³⁸ In contrast, Wulian Troupe does not follow this procedure but only encourages the performers of vocal, woodwind instruments and string instruments to memorize the beats. Because some performers in Wulian Troupe are not quite familiar with the long and complicated percussion patterns, simplified versions are used instead in live performances, though these variations not recorded in their notation book.²³⁹

During live performances, on rare occasions, performers may be called upon to respond to unexpected situations, spontaneously adjusting their usual practices in creative ways. For example, on 28 June 2020, Wulian Troupe performed *The Story of a Wall* in Xueshi Village in Jiuxian Mountain Natural Scenic Spot. Because the performance site was in a mountainous area, when the silversmith was walking onto the stage, he added an extra line: "the mountain path is rugged. I cannot walk fast." The percussion band immediately responded by playing a slower-than-usual rhythm to accompany his body movements.

Warm-Up Percussion Performance: *datai*

In traditional Chinese Opera performance, the term '*datai* score' ('*datai pu*') refers to a pre-determined sequence of patterns played by the percussion ensemble before the formal opera performance begins, as commonly recorded on paper through the medium of mnemonic notation. The *datai* performance uses percussion instruments to make very loud sounds, heightening the lively atmosphere on the performance site to attract the audience and to remind them the opera performance is about to begin. Normally, Maoqiang Opera troupes only give *datai* performances on outdoor sites in the countryside. The *datai* performance involves at least four to seven

²³⁸ Gaomi Troupe also follows this procedure. Different Maoqiang troupes have different criteria for assessing their members' performances, and in most cases, organising examinations.

²³⁹ This seems to be one of the factors that the performance of the New Era Troupe is considered by the Maoqiang community to be better than that of Wulian Troupe.

performers. The drummer is the conductor, who uses the small double-side drum to conduct the band, but not the single-side drum. The performance lasts typically for about 10 to 15 minutes, but the performers can reduce the duration to as short as about three to five minutes, or cancel the performance directly, when they encounter special circumstances such as bad weather.

Many of the patterns in the *datai* score are repeated a number of times, and the performers can also repeat the entire piece from the beginning. The drummer controls the tempo of the performance and indicates when patterns should be repeated by playing signal drum beats, in most cases, beating the drum rapidly with two drumsticks alternately and continuously (‘都’*dū*) for one bar, and then beating the drum loudly with two drumsticks at once (‘八’*bā*), as designated by the mnemonic syllables.

Each Maoqiang Opera troupe gives a rather different *datai* performance to reveal its distinctive character. Figure 4-7 shows the five performers of Wulian Troupe giving a *datai* performance. The performers can revise and recompose the *datai* score according to the number of troupe members and their level of expertise and experience. For example, the *datai* score of the Wulian Troupe consists of a sequence of 12 model patterns, which has been used since the troupe was reconstituted in 2011 (see Figure 4-8). This is a revised version of the old Wulian Troupe’s *datai* score. The drum player Xu Qingli has made a major contribution by recalling and revising the original version used in the 1980s.



Figure 4-7. Many of the performers in Wulian Troupe can master two or three instruments, and switch between playing different roles in the opera band. The loud sounds of *datai* performance also attract a few villagers to the site. Donglouzi Village, Wulian County, 2 June 2020.

4.3 Melodic Characteristics

In this section, the melodic characteristics of Maoqiang Opera are explained by using specific examples transcribed from Maoqiang Opera performance. Most of these transcriptions are drawn from original Maoqiang Opera music scores (the vast majority of them being handwritten scripts).²⁴¹ Collecting and collating opera scripts has been an essential element within the Maoqiang Opera preservation process. When applying for the title of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), such documents are essential for demonstrating the artform's contents and pedigree. Using the Wulian Troupe as an example, 17 scripts of classic Maoqiang works are preserved in the archive of the Wulian County Cultural Centre, written and collated by the members of the Wulian Troupe between 2011 and 2015 for the assessment of Provincial-Level ICH (Wulian style Maoqiang Opera). Each script includes a story outline, music scores with lyrics (the sung passages), actors' lines (the spoken parts), percussion patterns and cue words of actors' body movements. Currently, the music score of Maoqiang Opera still uses number notation (see Figure 4-9).

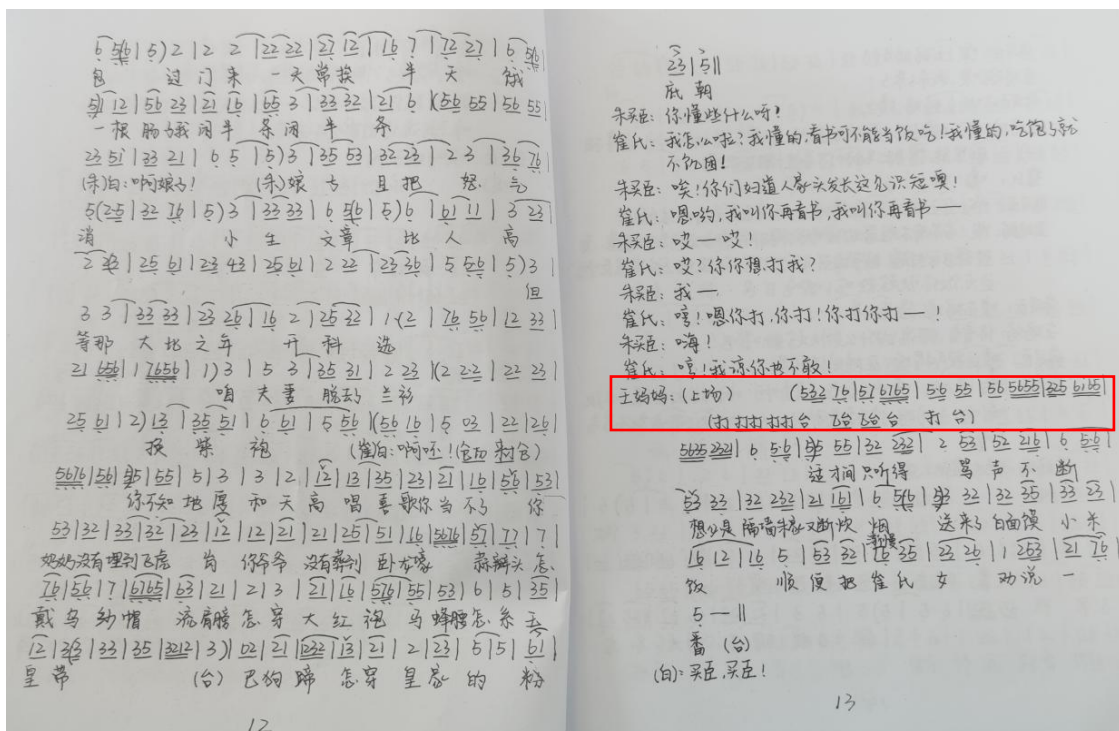


Figure 4-9. The handwritten script of a classic Maoqiang Opera - *Splashing Water in Front of a Horse* (*maqian poshui*, pages 12 to 13), preserved in Wulian Cultural Centre.²⁴²

²⁴¹ During the 1950s and 1960s, the inheritance of Maoqiang Opera relied on oral teaching, and the earliest Maoqiang scripts were written by Maoqiang artists around the late 1980s and most of them are currently preserved in the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Museum.

²⁴² The red box contains examples of a *siping* female tune variation and a starting to sing percussion pattern, which will be explained in Transcription 4-12 in this section. The opening of the photographs of Maoqiang Opera script and transcriptions is authorised by the Wulian Culture Centre, Wulian Troupe, New Era Troupe and Gaomi Troupe for academic research.

Regarding the basics of melodic structure, Maoqiang Opera adopts the typical Chinese pentatonic scale, do (*gong*), re (*shang*), mi (*jue*), sol (*zhi*) and la (*yu*), with a movable-do system. It mainly employs *zhi* tonality (*zhidiao*), known as ‘positive tonality’ (*zhengdiao*), where the tonic is sol (*zhi*) and also employs *gong* tonality (*gongdiao*), known as ‘negative tonality’ (*fandiao*), where the tonic is do (*gong*). The positive tonality of Maoqiang Opera is in either E, F or G major in the system of western tonal music theory, with the most frequently used key being E major. Meanwhile, the corresponding negative tonality (closely related keys) employs either B, C or D major, with B major as the most commonly used.

In Maoqiang Opera, the vast majority of sung passages use the positive tonality. Only a few move to the negative tonality in order to make a comparison with the former keys, when the sung passage shows dramatic changes in the character’s mood or plot conflicts (Wang and Ding, 2009: 3-4; Zhou, 2017: 28-33). For instance, one sung passage in the classic tragedy *Young Lady Mengjiang* (*mengjiang nü*) describes the plot of Mengjiang’s fiancée being arrested by soldiers in the middle of the wedding ceremony and being transported to build the Great Wall. This passage sung by Mengjiang is in negative tonality, B major, to express her sorrowful, indignant, and helpless feelings. Transcription 4-10 shows the *yinzi* (prelude tunes) of this passage, transcribed from the New Era Troupe’s script of this classic work.

Transcription 4-10:



When it comes to the model tunes (*jiben diao*) of Maoqiang Opera, sung passages in the positive and negative tonalities are further classified as either female tunes (*nüqiang*) and male tunes (*nanqiang*). As a whole, it is simply the case that tunes sung by males are classified as male tunes and likewise for female tunes. The model tunes are, therefore, classified into four types: positive tonality female tunes; positive tonality male tunes; negative tonality female tunes; and negative tonality male tunes. The specific melodies of female tunes and male tunes for each tonality are slightly different from each other, and the simplest method to distinguish them is to distinguish the prelude tunes (*yinzi*) that precede each sung passage.

Meanwhile, the classification of model tunes is also influenced by the rhythm and tempo (*banshi*) of the sung passage.²⁴³ Through drawing from Peking Opera and Bangzi Opera, Maoqiang Opera now has more than 20 types of *banshi*, and one of

²⁴³ The usage of different *banshi* is according to different roles and plots of the story.

the most commonly used is initial rhythm (*yuanban*, 2/4, at a moderate pace, $\text{♩} = 88$). As a result, for example, the melodies of two representative prelude tunes are called ‘positive tonality - initial rhythm - female tune’ (*zhengdiao yuanban nüqiang*) and ‘positive tonality - initial rhythm - male tune’ (*zhengdiao yuanban nanqiang*), respectively. Transcription 4-11 show the score of the two tunes, transcribed from my fieldwork notes, as played by the Wulian Troupe’s *jinghu* player Ge Pingjin and drummer Xu Qingli during tutorials from January to July 2020.²⁴⁴

Transcription 4-11:

Positive tonality - Initial rhythm - Female tune:



Positive tonality - Initial rhythm - Male tune:



Male tunes are now also used for the sung passages of female roles, especially for older female roles. Ge Pingjin²⁴⁵ explains that because Maoqiang Opera has more female than male characters, this change has been implemented to avoid boredom. As mentioned earlier, sung passages are often preceded by a short prelude without percussion accompaniment (as shown in Transcription 4-11). In this case, the *jinghu* player usually plays the leading role in conducting the string and woodwind instruments and sets the tempo by speaking out the words of command *-zha* (扎, downbeat) and *duo* (哆, upbeat). *Zha* and *duo* are onomatopoeic syllables for strokes played on the clappers (*zha*) and drum (*duo*).

Currently, the Maoqiang Opera performers usually use the term ‘*siping*’ to designate all the model tunes in positive tonality employing the initial rhythm (2/4), and thus, the above-noted two prelude tunes are also called ‘*siping* female tune’ and ‘*siping* male tune’. The two representative tunes are presented here in their model forms. However, there are many existing variations for *siping* tunes and the performers select them in advance of the performance, usually beginning with a series of percussion patterns. Such patterns are called ‘starting to sing percussion patterns’

²⁴⁴ Fieldwork notes, 2 April 2020.

²⁴⁵ Personal communication, in Wulian Cultural Centre, April 2020.

('kaichang luogu dian'), and many of them have no specific name. Transcription 4-12 shows an example of a starting to sing percussion pattern, followed by a *siping* tune (specifically, *siping* female tune variation), transcribed from the score in the red box in Figure 4-9.

Transcription 4-12:

♩ = 88

打 | 打打 打打 | 台 乙台 | 乙台 台 | 打 台 ||
 dà | dà dà dà dà | tái yǐ tái | yǐ tái tái | dà tái ||
 D | D D D D | Sg R Sg | R Sg Sg | D Sg ||

For the other commonly used Maoqiang Opera *banshi*, one more example is sharp rhythm (*jianban*, 2/4, at fast tempo, ♩ = 108). Sung passages set to sharp rhythm are usually used to narrate and explain the background and general context of a plot and are always accompanied by a starting to sing percussion pattern. In this case, the drummer sets the tempo with two bars of drumbeats. Transcription 4-13 shows two prelude tunes executed with sharp rhythm and the two starting to sing percussion patterns, also transcribed from my fieldwork notes observing Wulian Troupe tutorials.²⁴⁶

Transcription 4-13:

Positive tonality - Sharp rhythm - Female tune:

♩ = 108

嘟... ... | 八大 台 | 仓 才 | 仓 来才 | 七来 乙来 | 才 ||
 dū... ... | bādà tái | cāng cái | cāng láicái | qīlái yǐlái | cái ||
 D... ... | D D Sg | Lg Sc | Lg Sg Sc | Sc Sg R Sg | Sc ||

²⁴⁶ Fieldwork notes, 2 April 2020.

Positive tonality - Sharp rhythm - Male tune:

♩ = 108

嘟... ..|八大台|仓才 |仓 来才 |七来 乙来 |仓 ||
 dū... ..|bādà tái |cāng cái |cāng láicái |qílái yǐlái |cāng ||
 D... ..|D D Sg| Lg Sc | Lg Sg Sc |Sc Sg R Sg | Lg ||

Based on literature review and knowledge gleaned from discussion with Maoqiang Opera troupe members, this section mainly focuses on three melodic characteristics that are said by the community to play strong roles in making the opera form distinctive. All three are thought to have been handed down from at least a hundred years ago. Firstly, a key defining feature of Maoqiang Opera melody is its use of model tune with seven-word lyrics (*qizi changci*) together with variations upon this structure. Secondly, the singing technique *damao* is another core style-defining feature, wherein the final dominant note at the end of a phrase is repeated and sung an octave higher for an additional one, two or more bars. This practice is also called ‘mao tune’ (*maodiao*), and it is the reason why the opera form is called ‘Maoqiang’. The third characteristic feature is the conspicuous use of a descending scale - sol mi re do la sol - in preludes, interludes, codas and almost all sung passages.

4.3.1 model sung tune and Seven-Word Verse

In Maoqiang Opera performance, the melodies of sung passages are known as *changqiang* (sung tunes). Currently, more than a hundred sung tunes have been documented by different Maoqiang troupes, including both classic tunes and newly composed tunes.²⁴⁷ Among them, the most commonly used classic sung tunes are known as *changqiang jiben diao* (model sung tunes). One of them is shown in Transcription 4-14. This section examines different variations of this model sung tune and the features of the lyrics of Maoqiang sung passages, explaining why the sung passages of Maoqiang Opera sound familiar. This section also examines the differences between Maoqiang model tunes and named tunes (*qupai*).

²⁴⁷ The 2009 Jiaozhou Troupe’s publication is mainly for documenting the sung melodies of Maoqiang Opera.

Transcription 4-14:²⁴⁸



This model sung tune is in 2/4 and consists of three phrases. It is frequently used to begin the sung passages of both female and male roles, in a wide variety of scenarios. The prevalence and importance of this tune within Maoqiang culture quickly becomes apparent when one examines opera scripts, such as the 11 Maoqiang works (classic and modern) that I collected during my fieldwork. It is also confirmed by discussion with the members of Wulian Troupe, New Era Troupe and Gaomi Troupe, and with Maoqiang enthusiasts who can sing remembered passages or even reproduce them on *erhu*.²⁴⁹ Although only a few of the 390 villagers I interviewed were willing or able to hum particular passages to me, many told me that when they hear familiar tunes (*shuxi de diaoer*), such as this one, it enables them to identify Maoqiang Opera immediately.²⁵⁰

The model sung tunes currently employed are thought to come from local folk tunes, folk songs, and *yangko* performance, and to have existed since as early as the 1800s. The Maoqiang community generally acknowledged that the vocal performers of *ben zhougu* (*ben* leather drum performance) contributed greatly to the transmission of this material. Meanwhile, the lyrics of *ben* leather drum performance usually comprised seven Chinese characters per phrase, with each sung passage being composed of between four and six phrases (Zhou, 1992: 627-639).²⁵¹ These features of *ben zhougu* have been handed down for generations. Currently, short sung passages comprising only four phrases are still quite common in Maoqiang Opera, and one of the most basic lyric arrangements is called 'seven-word verse' ('*qizi jü*'), further divided into 4+3 verse (*si-san jü*), 3+4 verse (*san-si jü*) and 2+2+3 verse (*er-er-san jü*).

²⁴⁸ All the following transcriptions are in E major to make them easier to compare with each other.

²⁴⁹ For example, the Maoqiang enthusiast, Xu Fushun, see in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.5, Figure 5-34.

²⁵⁰ Based on field research in the countryside of Wulian County, 12 May to 5 July, 2020.

²⁵¹ Zhou Weichi is the chief editor of the 1992 version of *The music of Chinese Opera: Volume One of Shandong (xiqü yinyüe jichen: shandong jüan)*. Zhou's research also noted that the sung melodies during the period of *ben leather drum* only accompanied by three percussion instruments - small drum, clappers and small gong.

In present-day Maoqiang Opera, it is also common for phrases to be composed of more than seven characters, with the added characters being modal particles, auxiliary words and words with no practical consequence, having no influence on the rhythmic pattern, tempo and melody. This type of added character is called an 'embedded character' (*'jiaqian zi'*), and it is always in the position of an upbeat and frequently used in 5+3 verse (*wu-san jü*) and 4+4 verse (*si-si jü*). In this case, the line with more than seven characters is still classified as a seven-word verse (Shan, 2017: 62-63). Different seven-word verses can be accommodated within the above-noted model tune with only a little variation.

Additionally, although there is usually a couplet poetic structure (*duilian jiegou*) for every two lines in the Maoqiang sung passages, the lyrics are not poetic in nature simply because the main function of the Maoqiang sung passages is to convey information and narrate the story. This is also why the melodies of Maoqiang Opera feature a lot of repetition. Meanwhile, as mentioned several times before, Maoqiang performance is rooted in the countryside amongst people who have usually had very little formal school education, and it is always important to make the lyrics easy to understand.

Transcriptions 4-15 and 4-16 show typical examples of seven-word verses excerpted from classic Maoqiang works, with the characters in red circles being embedded characters. Firstly, Transcription 4-15 shows the first two sung phrases (in 4+3 and 4+4 arrangements) of a famous Maoqiang sung passage excerpted from *Miss Yang is Going on a Spring Outing (yangbajie youchun)* and performed by an old female role, Yang's mother. This transcription is from the Wulian Troupe's script (CD Track 4-1 is Wang Xuhua's singing of this sung passage, live performance of Wulian Troupe in Nanling Village, 18 May 2020²⁵²). She is asking the Song dynasty emperor for impossible-to-obtain betrothal gifts (such as dragon's scales), because she is dead against this marriage. This excerpt has 41 sung phrases in total and is often performed by enthusiasts as a vocal solo work with karaoke accompaniment.

²⁵² CD Track 4-1 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678085>

All the CD Tracks in this Chapter have been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/am33583525>

Transcription 4-15:

Asking for Betrothal Gifts

♩ = 96 Classic Maoqiang Opera

① 万 岁 要 选, 杨
wan sui yao xuan, yang

八 姐; ② 几 件 彩 礼, 要 上 府
ba jie; ji jian cai li, yao shang fu

门
men

The lyrics literally mean:

- ① Yang Bajie was chosen by the emperor;
- ② [I need to go to the emperor's] palace and ask him for some betrothal gifts.

Secondly, Transcription 4-16 is excerpted from the first sung passage of *The Story of a Wall* (*qiangtou ji*), performed by a middle-aged female role, the elder daughter-in-law called Lishi. This transcription is from the Wulian Troupe's script (CD Track 4-2 is Li Xiangxue's singing of this sung passage, live performance of Wulian Troupe in Loujiapo Village, 19 June 2020²⁵³). This sung passage has 11 sung phrases in total, with each of the first six phrases being followed by a short interlude. This transcription shows the last three lines (in 5+3, 4+3 and 4+3 arrangements), and the melody also accords closely with the model sung tune, as shown in Transcription 4-14.

²⁵³ CD Track 4-2 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678086>

Transcription 4-16:

The Story of a Wall (excerpts)

Classic Maoqiang Opera

♩ = 96

① 不 是 俺 李 氏, 偏
bu shi an li shi, pian

心 眼; ② 谁 家 不 是, 这 样
xin yan; shui jia bu shi, zhe yang

的; ③ 拿 起 扫 帚,
di; na qi sao zhou

把 地 扫
ba di sao

The lyrics literally mean:

- ① Me Lishi is not [the kind of person] with prejudice;
- ② All the other families are doing the same thing;
- ③ [It is better to] pick up the broom and sweep the floor.

Meanwhile, another very commonly employed lyric form is ten-word verse (*shizi jü*, normally in 3+3+4 and 3+4+3 arrangements), ranking second in frequency to the seven-word verse. Although each phrase of the sung passage may have a different number of characters, the melody still has a strong flavour of Maoqiang model melodies. For example, the melody shown in Transcription 4-17 is adapted from the Maoqiang model tune shown in Transcription 4-14. This excerpt shows the first two phrases (in 3+3+4 and 3+4 arrangement, respectively) of a sung passage performed

by an old female role (aged around 60), Zheng Yuesu, excerpted from *A Piece of Clothing* (*luoshan ji*), transcribed from the Wulian Troupe's script (CD Track 4-3 is Sun Hongjü's singing of this sung passage, DVD recording of the Gaomi Troupe, published in 2004²⁵⁴).

Transcription 4-17:

A Piece of Clothing (excerpts)

Classic Maoqiang Opera

♩ = 88

① 郑月素, 跪察院, 泪珠滚
zheng yue su, gui cha yuan, lei zhu gun

滚; ② 尊一声, 青天的大人
gun; zun yi sheng, qing tian de da ren

The lyrics literally mean:

- ① *Zheng Yuesu* kneels on the ground of the law court, and her tears are starting to stream;
- ② My lord who is impartial and incorruptible (*qing tian da ren*), [could you please take notice of the reasons?]

In order to preserve Maoqiang Opera's distinctive characteristics, the composers of modern Maoqiang Opera works employ the old model tunes within their new works, with only limited adaptation in order to preserve the original identity. Transcriptions 4-18 and 4-19 show the sung passages of a young female role, Lilin, excerpted from *Emergency Expedition* (*jinji chuzheng*), composed in 2020 on the theme of fighting against COVID-19.²⁵⁵ Sun Hongjü, the current leader of the New Era Troupe, is the composer of this work. Although she is not familiar with musical notation and has never learned about music theory, she knows the musical structures well. To compose, she simply reads the lyrics and immediately sings them to the melodies

²⁵⁴ CD Track 4-3 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678087>

The full version of this classic work can be watched on;
https://www.bilibili.com/video/av75351933/?vd_source=4165d7e4468a44049fd99c4525a49c70

²⁵⁵ More details are presented in Section 6.1.3.

that flash into her brain, recording them on her mobile phone.²⁵⁶ The violoncello player of the troupe Ding Yujun then notates the melodies for the other troupe members to use.

The following two melodies composed by Sun Hongjü also sound quite similar to the model tune shown in Transcription 4-14 and to each other. They can be understood as seven-word variations on the same model melody. Transcription 4-18 shows the very first two phrases of the first sung passage in the opera, signalling very clearly to the audience that they are watching a Maoqiang performance.²⁵⁷ This is transcribed from the New Era Troupe’s music score, Page 2 (CD Track 4-4 is Cui Xiaoyue’s singing of this sung passage, live performance of the New Era Troupe, in Rizhao Grand Theatre, 2 August 2020²⁵⁸).

Transcription 4-18:

Emergency Expedition (excerpts 1)

Scriptwriter: Zhang Yuzhen

Composer: Sun Hongjü

$\text{♩} = 96$

① 原 *yuan* 定 *ding* 初 *chu* 六 *liu* 把 *ba,* 喜 *xi*

事 *shi* 办 *ban;* ② 谁 *shui* 料 *liao* 疫 *yi* 情 *qing,*

临 *lin* 眼 *yan* 前 *qian*

The lyrics literally mean:

- ① The original date of the wedding ceremony would be *chu liu* (the sixth day of the lunar month, and the position of the syllable - ‘*liu*’ is equal to an embedded character);
- ② No one predicted this unexpected pandemic.

²⁵⁶ During the interview on 15 July 2020, Sun showed this skill to me by composing a Maoqiang flavour melody for the lyrics of a randomly selected pop song.

²⁵⁷ Sun’s explanation of why she used this melody for the first sung passage.

²⁵⁸ CD Track 4-4 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678135>

To portray the calm personality of the female character Lilin, even after the different characters in the story have experienced many conflicts, there is almost no change in her style of singing, with the following sung passages clearly demonstrating the melody of the model sung tune and a closely related seven-word verse structure. Transcription 4-19 shows the first two sung phrases of Lilin’s final sung passage, transcribed from the New Era Troupe’s music score, Page 20 (CD Track 4-5 is also Cui Xiaoyue’s singing, live performance in Rizhao Grand Theatre, 2 August 2020²⁵⁹).

Transcription 4-19:

Emergency Expedition (excerpts 2)

Scriptwriter: Zhang Yuzhen
Composer: Sun Hongjü

♩ = 96

① 嫂 子 并 非， 没
sao zi bing fei, mei

阻 拦； ② 奈 何 小 军，
zu lan; nai he xiao jun,

去 意 坚
qu yi jian

The lyrics literally mean:

- ① My sister-in-law has told [Xiaojun not to go to the Wuhan City];
- ② However, Xiaojun has already made his decision.

Transcription 4-20 shows the first two sung lines of an excerpt from another modern work, *Driving An Honest Man Mad (dalaoshi fabiao)*, which is a playlet created by the Wulian Troupe in 2017.²⁶⁰ This is transcribed from the Wulian Troupe’s music score, Page 3 (CD Track 4-6 is Wang Qimei’s singing, audio-visual recording of the Wulian Troupe, recorded in 2017²⁶¹). This excerpt is performed by a female role aged over 50,

²⁵⁹ CD Track 4-5 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678072>

²⁶⁰ For more details, see Section 6.1.2.

²⁶¹ CD Track 4-6 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678073>

The full version of the recording of this modern work can not be found on the internet. The recording is preserved in the Wulian Troupe and Wulian Cultural Centre.

and the first two lines feature a 3+3+3 verse and a 3+4+3 verse. The composer Wang Zonghua was mainly a Lü Opera composer.²⁶² However, because he is a Wulian person living in Wulian County, the Wulian Troupe have offered him the title of ‘Honorary Troupe Leader’ (*‘rongyu tuanzhang’*) in 2012, and have often asked him to help compose for new Maoqiang Opera scripts. His compositions of Maoqiang works are known by the troupe members as ‘Maoqiang Opera with Lü Opera flavor’ (*‘lüju wei-er de maoqiang’*), as there are numerous grace notes and accidentals in his works, while classic Maoqiang Opera is simpler (*jiandan*) and clearer (*ganjing*).²⁶³ Although this excerpt features the melodic characteristics of Lü Opera, the basic Maoqiang Opera tune, as shown in Transcription 4-14, can still be easily distinguished.

Transcription 4-20:

Driving an Honest Man Mad (excerpts)

Scriptwriter: Zhang Yuzhen

Composer: Wang Zonghua

$\text{♩} = 88$

借 下 了 刘 大 叔 三
jie xia le, liu da shu, san

千 元; 他 的 儿 明 天
qian yuan; ta de er, ming tian

结 婚, 咱 犯 难
jie hun, zan fan nan

The lyrics literally mean:

- ① [I] borrowed uncle Liu three thousand yuan;
- ② It will be embarrassing for us to attend his son’s wedding tomorrow.

²⁶² Wang Zonghua is also a *jinghu* player and a local famous violin teacher, who has his own music training school for training young students in Wulian County.

²⁶³ This remark is mentioned many times by the *jinghu* player, Ge Pingjin and *jingerhu* player, Zhao Congsheng of the Wulian Troupe.

The Qupai Tunes of Maoqiang Opera

It is important to highlight that although composers can accommodate different numbers of syllables within a model tune, the model tunes of Maoqiang Opera are not the so-called 'named tunes' (*'qūpai'*), which are usually named to apply to specific scenarios and are often subjected to variation (Wang and Ding, 2009 and Thrasher, 2016). Rather, the Maoqiang model tunes can be applied to any scenario and are rendered in a great many subtly differing variations. However, Maoqiang Opera does employ a large number of named tunes borrowed from Peking Opera and realised as localised versions. These named tunes are usually performed by the band and used as background music to heighten the atmosphere of different scenarios including saying farewell to guests, at wedding ceremonies or funerals, and even while somebody is thinking something, changing clothes, or a female character is sewing. Although it is uncommon, some Maoqiang named tunes for string and woodwind instruments are also used for sung passages.

Maoqiang Opera also has its own unique named tunes, though less than ten are documented in Wang and Ding's book (2009) and Shan's book (2017). Meanwhile, different troupes render named tunes slightly differently, as they do for named percussion patterns (detailed earlier in this chapter). For example, *nanluo* tune is a unique Maoqiang named tune for string instruments (*sixian qūpai*). It was originally a simple tune but has been adapted into long versions for various joyous scenarios including wedding ceremonies, reunions of family members and festive celebrations (Shan, 2017: 184). CD Track 4-7 records a *nanluo* tune variation used for the closing chorus of the classic comedy *A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law*, performed by four performers of the Wulian Troupe in Qian Niniu Village, 10 June 2020²⁶⁴. Transcription 4-21 provides a single example of a characteristic Maoqiang named tune, showing the two-line *nanluo* tune as performed by the Gaomi Troupe.

Transcription 4-21:

Nanluo Tune in Gaomi Troupe:²⁶⁵

Nanluo Tune

Version of Gaomi Troupe



²⁶⁴ CD Track 4-7 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678074>

²⁶⁵ Hummed for me by Xue Lintao, personal communication in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020. This tune is also documented in Shan's research (2017: 184).

This simple two-line version is in E major and is close to the simplest model of the *nanluo* tune. Other variations also sound quite similar to the model. For instance, in the Jiaozhou and Wulian Troupes, the tune is in B major and is used for various sung passages (see Transcription 4-22).

Transcription 4-22:

Nanluo Tune in Jiaozhou Troupe:²⁶⁶

Nanluo Tune

Version of Jiaozhou Troupe



The phrases enclosed in brackets are performed in unison by the string and woodwind instruments with percussion accompaniment. The vocal performers sing the other passages with string accompaniment. This version can also be performed without vocal parts, in this case, with *suona* shawm playing throughout. Long versions are currently widely used by numerous different troupes. The Gomi Troupe's long version is similar to that of the Jiaozhou Troupe but in E major. The New Era Troupe plays the same version as the Jiaozhou Troupe. Meanwhile, the Wulian Troupe's *nanluo* tune demonstrates more differences, as shown below.

²⁶⁶ Transcribed from the original score in Wang and Ding's book (2009:93-94).

Nanluo Tune

Version of Wulian Troupe



During the long process of development, the different Maoqiang troupes have influenced one another to differing degrees, with certain model tunes and labelled melodies becoming core features of the style but certain points of stylistic variation being evident. One suspects that this process has always been operational, for example during the 1960s, when many famous Maoqiang troupes gave performances in different southeast areas of Shandong, promoting the interchange of different Maoqiang styles. And, during the 1990s, when many Maoqiang Opera troupes were disbanded, particularly in areas of Wulian and Zhucheng County, performers from those troupes joined the Gaomi and Jiaozhou Troupes, promoting further stylistic interchange. Nowadays, for young Maoqiang troupes, for instance, the current Wulian Troupe learned a lot from the Gaomi and Jiaozhou Troupes. In the Wulian Troupe, although the majority of sung tunes and lyrics for the classic scripts are notated based on the older Wulian performers' memories, some of them are transcribed from DVD recordings by the Gaomi Troupe, when the older performers cannot recall certain important details of the scripts. Therefore, it is unwise to define which troupe's performance is more authentic and can be seen as most representative of Maoqiang Opera Culture, and designation as state-level ICH does not necessarily indicate authenticity either.

²⁶⁷ Transcribed from the original score in Wulian Troupe.

4.3.2 Mao Tune

The commonly used model melody named ‘*mao* tune’ (‘*maodiao*’) is another distinguishing feature of Maoqiang Opera. It was probably formed around the 1860s during the period of *mao* Leather Drum Opera (*mao zhougu* - the mature period of Leather Drum Opera). *Mao* refers to the *mao* note, which is the fifth degree (dominant, *zhiyin* - *sol*) of the scale as executed in the upper-octave register. The term ‘*mao* tune’ refers to a phrase in which the melody culminates by singing a final long sustained *mao* note. Performing this technique is referred to as ‘sung *mao*’ (‘*damao*’) (Wang and Ding 2009: 2-4; Shan, 2017: 28-29).

As mentioned earlier in Section 2.3.2 (Maoqiang’s history), Hai Maozi’s family members are often thought to have introduced *mao* tune to the repertoire. Although *mao* tune is thought to have derived from Liuqin Opera, the equivalent feature in Liuqin Opera differs in that the sung passage culminates in the upper-octave keynote (*gongyin* - *do*), known as ‘*lahun* tune’ (‘*lahunqiang*’). Transcription 4-23 (CD Track 4-8) shows a sung passage of *lahun* tune from *Zhuangyuan Dageng* (literally meaning, the person who tells time to the others is a number one scholar), as performed by the Linyi City Liuqin Opera Troupe in a 1982 recording, featuring the singer Zhang Jinlan (1928-present).²⁶⁸ The notes in the red boxes in the following transcriptions indicate the sung passages of *lahun* tune or *mao* tune.

Transcription 4-23:

Lahun Tune

Excerpt of Classic Liuqin Opera
Zhang Jinlan's singing (1982)

$\text{♩} = 108$

一 飞 签, 二 火 票, 逐 俺 逐 俺
yi fei qian, er huo piao, zhu an zhu an

With an arrest warrant and an exclusion order, [I was] asked to back to my town.

回 乡
hui xiang ei

Meanwhile, in contrast with the *jinghu* (bowed string instrument) in Maoqiang Opera band, it is the *liuqin* (plucked string instrument) that plays the most prominent accompanying role in Liuqin Opera. The overall style of Liuqin Opera is livelier than Maoqiang Opera, with a faster tempo and shorter phrases. In many cases, the sung passage requires performers to employ heightened speech (*nianchang*). Here, the linguistic tones within the text are accentuated, conveying the characters’ emotions.

²⁶⁸ CD Track 4-8 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678075>
The recording can be downloaded from the internet <https://www.qingting.fm/channels/264407/>

In the context of Maoqiang Opera, the aforementioned heightened speech style is rarely employed when performing *mao* tune, and performers often improvise by adding grace notes and meandering patterning, extending the phrase that leads up to the final upper-octave dominant note. For example, Transcription 4-24 (CD Track 4-9) shows a typical example of *mao* tune taken from a performance of *The Younger Sister's Wedding* by the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe (2004, DVD), as executed by the singer Shang Yongmei (born in 1965).²⁶⁹

Transcription 4-24:

Mao Tune

Excerpt of Classic Maoqiang Opera
Shang Yongmei's singing (2004)

把 咱 拉 扯 大
ba zan la che dà - a

[Our father] brought us [single-handed].

Based on my interviews with the older members of various Maoqiang troupes (such as Wang Yunting who was born in 1941), it seems that the *mao* tune execution in classic Maoqiang works has remained almost unchanged since the 1950s. They state that their masters and their masters' masters sang *mao* tune in much the same way, starting with two sixteenth notes (*mi sol*), descending by step (*re do la sol*), and then leaping up to the final tone. Although *mao* tune is still a significant and characteristic feature of Maoqiang Opera, just like the model tune (detailed earlier in Transcription 4-14), Maoqiang performers widely acknowledge that it is executed less frequently than it was, since the 1980s. Niu Xigao explains that one of the main reasons is that the audience's aesthetic preferences have changed: "In the past [the 1950s and 1960s], performers usually sang *mao* tune with a lot of grace notes at the end of every two or three phrases, but the audience gradually got tired of the monotonous *damao* technique and felt that the frequent use of *mao* tune sounded a little 'uncomfortable' [*suan*' - tasting sour]."²⁷⁰

Present-day performers may choose to sing the final upper-octave dominant note or not, according to their own tastes and singing techniques. The leader of the Wulian Troupe, Li Xiangxue, claims that she does not have a strong voice and further explains that, during the performance seasons in the countryside, she is sometimes unable to sing too many grace notes and the higher final note because of throat fatigue, but

²⁶⁹ CD Track 4-9 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678120>

The recording can be downloaded from https://www.ixigua.com/6830593326350074381?wid_try=1

²⁷⁰ Niu Xigao is a former member of the old Wulian Troupe, and now the art director of the current Wulian Troupe. Interview, in Wulian Troupe, 8 July 2020.

she mentions that more skilful Maoqiang performers usually do not omit the higher note and can sing more grace notes.²⁷¹ Whether or not performers execute the complete *mao* tune during a live performance, the string instruments always perform a link tune (*lianqiang*) immediately afterwards to highlight the octave interval. The link tune is a short interlude mainly performed by string instruments, beginning with the last note (either keynote or dominant) of the preceding phrase or an octave higher from that final note (see the link tunes in Transcription 4-25, 26 and 27).

Transcription 4-25 shows an example of *mao* tune without the final upper-octave note leading into a *lianqiang* (link tune). This example is taken from a live performance of *The Story of a Wall* by the Wulian Troupe, in Loujiapo Village, Yuli Township, 19 June 2020, featuring the singer Li Xiangxue (CD Track 4-10²⁷²).

Transcription 4-25:

Mao Tune and Link Tune 1

Classic Maoqiang Opera
Li Xiangxue's singing (2020)

$\text{♩} = 96$

来 到 俺 家 里
lai dao an jia li - (link tune)
[My father] will come to visit my house

我
wo

拾 掇 拾 掇.....
shi duo shi duo.....
I [need to] clean up [the room]

In modern compositions, there are only minor differences in *mao* tune patterning, occurring on the level of grace notes, where composers and performers can deduce differences in their personal tastes. Rather than include the final upper-octave note of a *mao* tune in the Maoqiang score, composers usually omit it and simply proceed directly with the link tune, giving performers the freedom to choose whether to add the *mao* note or not. So, Li Xiangxue's singing of the classic work in Transcription 4-25 is deemed normal according to current conventions.

²⁷¹ Personal communication, in Wulian Troupe, 15 January 2020.

²⁷² CD Track 4-10 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678121>

Transcription 4-26 shows another example of *mao* tune, as commonly articulated in current Maoqiang practice. This is transcribed from a live performance of Emergency Expedition in Rizhao Grand Theatre (audio-visual recordings), 2 August 2020, featuring Liu Zhi who is currently the assistant leader of the New Era Troupe and the only inheritor of the Sun School Maoqiang Opera. In this excerpt, Liu Zhi chooses to sustain the final note for two bars even while the link tune proceeds (CD Track 4-11²⁷³).

Transcription 4-26:

Mao Tune and Link Tune 2

Scriptwriter: Zhang Yuzhen
Composer: Sun Hongjü
Liu Zhi's Singing (2020)

♩ = 108

众 志 成 城,
zhong zhi cheng cheng,
Unity is strength, solidify the cornerstone (the masses)

固 后 方
gu hou fang

a tempo Vocal: $\frac{2}{4}$
ang (link tune)

Transcription 4-27 shows a more unusual example of *mao* tune, as appearing in a modern Maoqiang work. This is taken from the Wulian Troupe's premiere of *Fight the Virus (zhan yi)* at the opening ceremony of the annual Wulian County Summer Festival (audio-visual recordings), with the vocal part performed by Li Xiangxue, 30 July 2020.²⁷⁴ In this excerpt, the *mao* tune still ends with the dominant note (sol) but it begins with 're si' instead of the more usual 'mi sol', and performers cannot omit

²⁷³ CD Track 4-11 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678076>

²⁷⁴ More details about this modern work, see Section 6.2.3, Chapter 6.

the final upper-octave note (CD Track 4-12²⁷⁵). In addition, in this example, the composer Wang Zonghua writes one more sung phrase (bar 11-16) before the *mao* tune and the *mao* tune is followed by a coloratura interlude (*hua guomen*) instead of the usual link interlude. This type of interlude is normally used when the following sung passage has an obvious change of style, especially a change of rhythm and tempo (*banshi*) occurring in line with plot development. Typically, the following part will be performed by another character.

Transcription 4-27:

Mao Tune and Interludes

Scriptwriter: Peng Liyuan
Composer: Wang Zonghua
Li Xiangxue's Singing (2020)

$\text{♩} = 88$
at slow tempo

自 责 内 疚,
zi ze nei jiu,
[!] feel self-accusation, compunction and suffering.

(link tune) 受 煎
shou jian

熬
ao - - - ao - - -

a tempo
ao (coloratura interlude)

(yangqin solo)

²⁷⁵ CD Track 4-12 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678077>

Coloratura interludes commonly feature extended series of meandering sixteenth notes, and they constitute another characteristic feature of Maoqiang music. The *jinghu* player Ge Pingjin from the Wulian Troupe gave me the following example of a coloratura interlude (Transcription 4-28) during a tutorial about Maoqiang music, explaining that this pattern is executed with only limited variation in a variety of classic works.²⁷⁶ This interlude can be transposed to either E or B major; in Transcription 4-28, it is given in E major for ease of comparison.

Transcription 4-28:

Coloratura Interlude

Version in Wulian Troupe



²⁷⁶ Fieldwork notes, 30 April 2020.

4.3.3 The Descending Scale

In both classic and modern Maoqiang works, the descending scale - *sol mi re do la sol* (ending with the dominant note) - is used in almost all sung passages. This feature has already been clearly shown in many of the previous transcriptions, especially those showing the singer's vocal lines. Crucially, it is apparent in both the model tune (variations) and the *mao* tune. No matter how the melodies, tempos, rhythms, and plots are varied in different Maoqiang works, the descending scale phrase has always been an unchanging core style-defining feature of Maoqiang music. The repeated use of the *sol-mi-re-do-la-sol* scale strengthens Maoqiang music's distinctive flavour. In this section, two excerpts are used to further illustrate how the descending scale is executed in sung passages, preludes, interludes and codas of both classic and modern Maoqiang works. Both typical and atypical descending scales are highlighted in red brackets below.

Transcription 4-29 shows an excerpt from the classic work *The Story of a Wall*, as performed by the Wulian Troupe in Qianjia Zhuang Village, 29 May 2020. Here, the role of Zhang Haoshan (an old man who has two unfilial sons) is given by Zhang Li. This is a famous sung passage titled *The Lives of Old People are Tough (lao lai nan)*, taking about four minutes to perform. It is comprised of 40 musical phrases in total, including 16 sung phrases and nine interludes. Although the descending scale does not appear in the sung lines, it does in some of the interludes, including both the prelude and coda, which end with it (CD Track 4-13²⁷⁷).

This transcription shows the prelude, the first four sung lines and five interludes. The typical descending scale can be seen in the prelude and interludes 3 and 5. It can also be noted that the exact same material is used for interludes 3 and 5; another characteristic feature of Maoqiang music is that the same familiar tunes are used again and again for preludes, interludes and codas, especially in the classic works.

The lyrics of the four sung lines literally mean:

- ① The lives of old people are tough;
- ② Old people are unwelcome because of their inability to [make money];
- ③ [I] have been a carpenter all my life and live frugally;
- ④ [I] suffered a lot to bring up my sons.

²⁷⁷ CD Track 4-13 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678078>

Transcription 4-29:

The Lives of Old People are Tough

Classic Maoqiang Opera
Zhang Li's singing (2020)

$\text{♩} = 88$

(Prelude)

5

① 老 来 难
lao lai nan

10

哟 (Interlude 1) 老 来 难, (Interlude 2)
na lao lai nan,

15

20

② 老 来 无 能 讨 人
lao lai wu neng tao ren

25

嫌, (Interlude 3)
xian,

30

③ 一 辈 子 当 木 匠 省
yi bei zi dang mu jiang sheng

35

吃 简 用, (Interlude 4)
chi jian yong,

40

④ 为 拉 巴 儿 子 受 尽
wei la ba er zi shou jin

45

熬 煎 (Interlude 5)
ao jian

50

Transcription 4-30 (below) shows further use of this same descending scale. It illustrates the closing chorus of the modern Maoqiang Opera *Fight the Virus (zhan yi)*, as performed by the Wulian Troupe in Wulian County Stadium, sung by five female performers, 30 July 2020. This final sung passage is composed of four lines with no interlude. In order to enhance the Maoqiang flavour at this critical final point of the production, the composer Wang Zonghua uses the *mao* tune in the fourth phrase. Furthermore, the prelude, coda, and singers' second and fourth phrases all end with the characteristic *sol-mi-re-do-la-sol* scale (CD Track 4-14²⁷⁸).

The lyrics of the four lines literally mean:

- ① Warm words can dispel 'the dark clouds' ('anxiety and a sense of distrust');
- ② The simple words 'taking care' can make people's hearts warm;
- ③ The heroes sacrifice themselves for righteousness;
- ④ [The heroes] fight against the virus bravely to [ensure that everyone can] embrace 'the warm spring' ('a bright future').

²⁷⁸ CD Track 4-14 has been uploaded to <https://www.bilibili.com/audio/au3678079>

Transcription 4-30:

Fight the Virus (closing chorus)

Singing Tune Designer: Wang Zonghua
 Script Writer: Peng Liyuan
 Wulian Troupe's performance (2020)

$\text{♩} = 96$

(Prelude) ① 一声劝
yi sheng quan

5
 慰散乌云, ② 一句保重
wei san wu yun, yi ju bao zhong

10
 暖人心, ③ 英雄舍身为大
nuan ren xin, ying xiong she shen wei da

15
 义, ④ 勇斗病魔迎暖春
yi, yong dou bing mo ying nuan chun en —

20
 — en — — en — — Mao Tune — — (Coda)

25

To summarise, referencing three studies (*The Percussion Music of Peking Opera*, 1982; *Jiaozhou style Maoqiang*, 2009; *Gaomi style Maoqiang*, 2017) and two manuscripts of Wulian style Maoqiang percussion patterns and using examples transcribed from live Maoqiang performances and scores of both classic and modern Maoqiang works, this chapter has shown that, as local Intangible Cultural Heritage, Maoqiang Opera features a wealth of traditional musical characteristics inherited from the older generations. The model sung tune (*changqiang jiben diao*) and seven-word verse (*qizi ju*) of the Maoqiang sung passage, *mao* tune (*maodiao*) and descending scale (*xiaxing yinjie*) of Maoqiang music, as illustrated in this section, are surely the form's

most easily recognised distinctive features, inherited from the older generations and still in use nowadays in both classic and modern Maoqiang works. Meanwhile, this chapter has also explained the appearance of positive and negative tonalities and female and male melodic styles, which are further significant components within Maoqiang music. Although this artform is influenced by Peking Opera, especially in its percussion music, its uniqueness derives especially from distinctive melodic characteristics, including particular sung tunes (*changqiang*), poetic style lyrics (*changci*) in the sung passages (*changduan*), and singing techniques such as sung mao (*damao*). They all play key roles in enabling Maoqiang Opera to be distinguished from other Chinese operas, including other local operas in Shandong Province.

Chapter 5. The Dissemination of Maoqiang Opera

Culture: Maoqiang Performances and Audiences

The dissemination of Maoqiang Opera culture is rooted in rural areas. As Maoqiang Opera is not a well-known local opera outside its home region, performances are concentrated in villages in the countryside as well as in its surrounding areas. To fulfil the task of giving regular Maoqiang performances in villages, since 2015, Maoqiang troupes have been supported and subsidised by different levels of government, enabling audience members to enjoy free Maoqiang performances. This task is the embodiment of a nationwide cultural activity called ‘*Sending Opera to the Countryside*’ (‘*xiqu jin xiangcun*’). In Shandong Province, it is also called ‘*One Village One Year, One Performance*’ (‘*yicun yinian yichangxi*’).

Maoqiang troupes are responsible for disseminating the artform to a wider audience and have opportunities to perform in urban areas during government-organised county-level and city-level cultural activities, such as at the annual Cultural and Tourism Festival (*wenhua he luyou jie*). However, even the government-funded troupes have few opportunities to perform outside Shandong. The most recent formal Maoqiang performance in Beijing was by the Jiaozhou Troupe in 2018, when the troupe’s modern work *A Story about the Hometown of Yangko Dance* (*yanggexiang de gushi*) won an award.²⁷⁹ Moreover, the role of mass media has been highlighted by the Maoqiang community in recent years, for example, performing Maoqiang Opera on livestreaming platforms and television programmes.

The data in this chapter was collected during my field trip to Wulian County and Rizhao City in 2020. There are three sections: Section 5.1 uses the Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe as a case study to illustrate the current situation of a professional Maoqiang troupe’s performances in rural areas and investigates the current core audience of Maoqiang in the countryside; Section 5.2 discusses the current Maoqiang performances and audiences in the county centre of Wulian and the city centre of Rizhao; Section 5.3 uses the 2020 Spring Festival Gala of Wulian County as a case study to illustrate how Maoqiang Opera is disseminated through mass media.

5.1 Performing in the Countryside: Traveling with the Wulian Troupe in 54 Villages

Wulian County was founded in 1947. Before 1991, both Gaomi County (now called Gaomi City) and Wulian County were managed by Weifang City. In 1992, Rizhao City was newly founded in Shandong Province, and since then Wulian County has been

²⁷⁹ More details are presented in section 3.2 about state-owned Maoqiang Opera troupes (see Figure 3-3).

managed by Rizhao City.²⁸⁰ Currently, Wulian County has 12 townships including 527 administrative villages (*xingzheng cun*) and 718 natural villages (*ziran cun*). The administrative village has an independent village party branch (*cun dangzhibu*) and usually has a larger resident population (over three hundred). In contrast, the natural village usually has a small population (under one hundred) with no party branch. By the end of 2019, Wulian County had a total registered population of 511,608, including 330,009 rural residents.²⁸¹

The Wulian County government actively responds to instructions about conducting cultural activities to bring culture to the countryside (*wenhua xiexiang*), initiated by the central government. The contents of the cultural activities mainly include giving performances in villages, film screenings in villages, and constructing village libraries.²⁸² In line with the instructions, since October 2015, the Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe has undertaken the government-assigned task of giving performances in villages, and the range of the troupe's performances includes song and dance performances for young and middle-aged villagers, and Maoqiang Opera performance for elderly villagers.

The Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe usually has three or four show seasons per year in the countryside. For each show season, the troupe members need to work continuously for about one or two months with almost no vacation. However, most of the troupe members look forward to the show season because they can achieve an attendance bonus with no need to clock in on the fingerprint machine and can receive an extra allowance of 20 to 60 yuan (about £2.2-6.6) per day depending on their job duties.

This section focuses on the troupe's first show season from 12 May to 5 July (a period of 54 days with 51 working days and a three-day holiday from 23 to 25 June for the Dragon Boat Festival), because the show season of the Wulian Troupe in February 2020 was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, the troupe visited 54 villages in Wulian County, including 51 administrative villages in eight townships and three natural villages in Jiuxian (Nine Celestials) Mountain Natural Scenic Spot.²⁸³ The troupe gave 95 complete live performances in total, including 43 song and dance performances and 52 Maoqiang Opera performances²⁸⁴, and attracted a total number of about 9,400 attendees to the performance site.

²⁸⁰ In Rizhao City, Lü Opera is more famous than Maoqiang Opera. The management mode of Rizhao Art Theatre is similar to the Gaomi Art Theatre, which is titled 'art theatre' but is actually a traditional opera troupe. The Rizhao Art Theatre is also called Rizhao Lü Opera Troupe.

²⁸¹ '2019 Wulian County National Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin', data released by the Wulian County Statistical Bureau, 2 April 2020. Full text can be found at:

http://www.wulian.gov.cn/uploads/file/20200611/20200611151844_78560.pdf

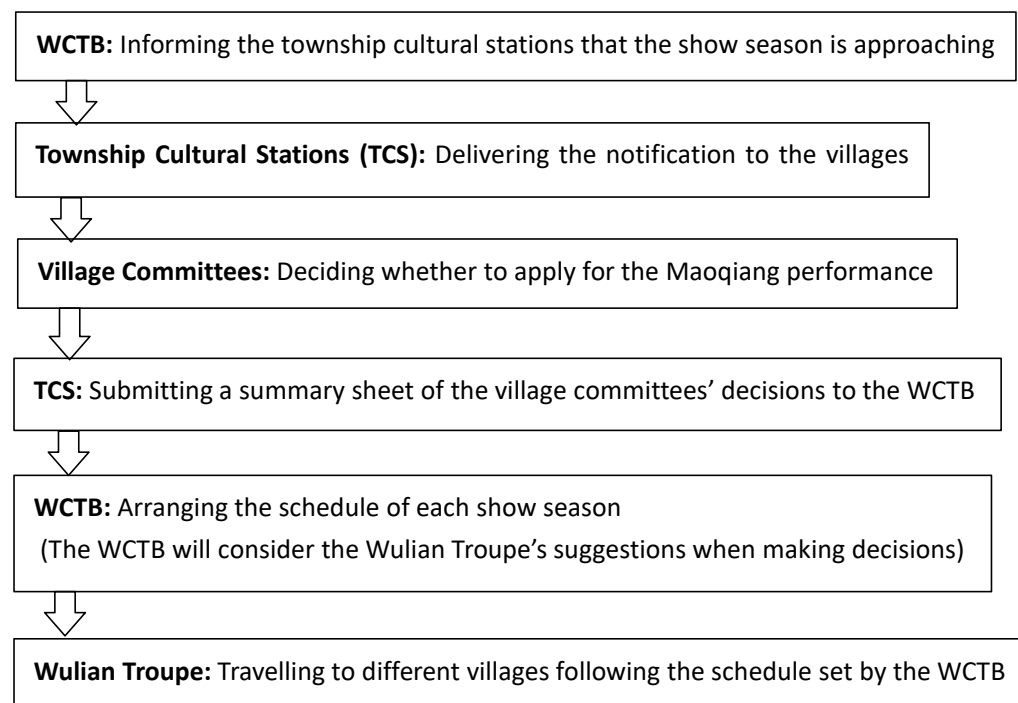
²⁸² According to the Guidance of National Standards for Basic Public Cultural Services (2015-2020), issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, released on 14 January 2015, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/14/content_2804250.htm

²⁸³ See Section 5.1.4 about the villages in the Jiuxian Scenic Spot.

²⁸⁴ Two song and dance performances and three Maoqiang performances are not counted in the total number, because they were cancelled or stopped in the middle due to bad weather or a tight schedule.

The schedule of villages to visit in each show season was arranged in advance. If the performance was cancelled in case of exceptional circumstances such as bad weather, the village concerned must wait for the arrival of the troupe in the next show season or following year.²⁸⁵ In 2020, there were four main sectors involved in the decision-making process, including the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau (WCTB), the township cultural stations²⁸⁶ (*xiangzhen wenhua zhan*), village committees and the Wulian Troupe itself. The WCTB would prioritise the villages which have not yet been visited before. By September 2020, the Wulian Troupe had already performed in more than 200 villages, and villages that had not been visited usually had a population of less than 300 or could not provide a suitable site for the mobile stage vehicle to drive in.²⁸⁷ Table 5-1 shows the official procedures of arranging performances in the countryside and the role of the four main sectors in this process.

Table 5-1. Procedure of arranging performances in the countryside



²⁸⁵ In my field trip, there was also an exceptional case, in which the troupe visited one village two times in the first show season, see Section 5.1.5 in the chapter.

²⁸⁶ The township cultural station is under the direct management of the county-level Cultural and Tourism Bureau and is the lowest level of the public cultural institution of the local government. The construction of a cultural station at the township level is an essential part of promoting cultural development in rural areas and has firstly been put forward in Document No. 27 of 2005, '*Suggestions on further strengthening the construction of rural culture*', issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council

http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_161057.htm

²⁸⁷ The Wulian Troupe has no clear record of which village has been visited how many times since 2015. The leaders and the members roughly noted the record according to their memory.

This section firstly focuses on the Wulian Troupe’s routine activities during the whole period of the 2020 first show season in the countryside. Secondly, it clarifies how the troupe adapts to the rural environment by illustrating the different performance sites in villages. Thirdly, it explores the characteristics of the current core audience of Maoqiang Opera. Fourthly, it details the Maoqiang performances themselves and considers the audiences encountered in different types of village. Lastly, it further examines the various exceptional circumstances that the Wulian Troupe encountered in this show season.

5.1.1 The Routine Activities of the Wulian Troupe in the Countryside

Following the schedule of the first 2020 show season, the Wulian Troupe initially visited the villages that were relatively far away from the county centre (a one-way trip to the remotest villages takes about an hour) and then travelled to villages that were closer to the county centre (a one-way trip takes within 20 minutes). Every time before the troupe arrived at a village, the leader Li Xiangxue would confirm with the contact person, who is usually the village party secretary or one of the village heads, about the troupe’s arrival time, performance time and performance site in advance.²⁸⁸ Members of the Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe usually gathered at the Wulian County Cultural centre at 1:00pm or 2:00pm every day and set out for the countryside together.²⁸⁹ The song and dance performance normally began at 4:00pm, and the Maoqiang Opera performance normally began at 7:00pm.

(a) The song and dance performance

The repertoire of the song and dance performance is updated every year or two. In 2020, it consisted of 13 works performed in a fixed order. The sequence would change slightly when a performer was temporarily absent or there was a bad weather. There were two group dance performances, two solo performances of traditional Chinese instruments, seven vocal solo performances, one *shulaibao* performance (rhythmic storytelling with bamboo clapper accompaniment), and one sketch comedy. The lyrics of the *shulaibao* performance and the story of the sketch comedy were original works created by members of Wulian Troupe in 2019.²⁹⁰ A complete live performance of the 13 works only lasted about one hour. Table 5-2 lists some details of the song and dance performance.

²⁸⁸ The Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau would send the contact way for the coordinators of each village to Wulian Troupe in advance.

²⁸⁹ The troupe has a middle-sized bus to drive members to villages.

²⁹⁰ The main contributor is the oldest performer of Wulian Troupe, Li Xincan, and the comedy actor of the troupe, Zheng Shixing, see Section 3.2.1.

Table 5-2. Wulian Troupe’s song and dance performance:

Sequence Number	Genre	Main Feature of Each Work
1	Group Dance	Three or four female members dressed up in traditional Chinese costumes
2	Vocal Solo	Chinese pop song
3	<i>Shulaibao</i> Performance	Themes: praising the economic development of Wulian County in recent years; introducing the famous scenic spots of Wulian County
4	Vocal Solo	Maoqiang Opera excerpts
5	Vocal Solo	Folk style singing
6	Vocal Solo	Cross-dressing performance
7	Group Dance	Three female members and one male member dressed up in modern apparel.
8	Sketch Comedy	Theme: the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law
9	Instrumental Solo	<i>Yangqin</i> solo
10	Vocal Solo	Maoqiang Opera song
11	Instrumental Solo	<i>Suona</i> solo
12	Vocal Solo	Chinese pop song
13	Vocal Solo	Folk style singing

In contrast with full opera performance where performers were required to laboriously dress up in specific outfits, the song and dance performance was much more casual, with most of the performers (particularly the soloists) just wearing their everyday clothes of shirt, jeans and sneakers.²⁹¹ A young performer once said, “I know that every performance should be taken seriously, but the troupe has no hard and fast rule about the stage makeup and there is no extra pay for extra work in stage makeup. So, I usually do not dress up for the solo performance.”

²⁹¹ In contrast, all the performers of the New Era Troupe should dress up when they give song and dance performances in the countryside.

In contrast, there were also enthusiasts of stage performance who gave performances in the countryside not purely for money. This is the case, for example, for the cross-dressing performance (vocal solo) of Zhang Li - one of the most popular performances of the Wulian Troupe. His performance lasts about four or five minutes on the stage, but it usually takes him at least 40 minutes to dress up for each performance. In this show season, he changed into a total of five different traditional Chinese costumes, each accompanied with a different hairstyle and accessories (see Figure 5-1). However, his performance was the only vocal solo which was not a live vocal performance, instead involving lip-syncing to a recording of a female singer.²⁹²



Figure 5-1. The different costumes and hairstyles of Zhang Li's cross-dressing performance, Wulian County, 12 May to 5 July 2020.

The sketch comedy was another popular performance that would always receive warm applause from the audience. There are five characters in this story. To enhance comedic effect, the two leading roles - mother-in-law and daughter-in-law - were played by two male performers (see Figure 5-2). The mother-in-law is eager to have grandchildren but the daughter-in-law is fond of travelling and shopping and has no plans to have a child after being married for years. One day they are informed that their old houses in the village will be demolished, and the government will relocate them into a new big house.²⁹³ After that, they start to squabble about the ownership of the house property. They come to the village committee and ask the mediator for help. Eventually, the dispute is settled when the mother-in-law learns that her daughter-in-law is pregnant. As an original work, the conversations between characters are modified according to the current events. For example, in 2020, the mother-in-law quarrels with her son and daughter-in-law: “Why are you still thinking about traveling to different areas! Aren't you afraid of the coronavirus?”

²⁹² The recording of the original singer's performance of this song is downloaded from the internet.

²⁹³ The context of this plot is expected in the countryside and is about the ongoing national policies of improving the rural living environment, following the policies about rural revitalisation.



Figure 5-2. Zhang Li is the daughter-in-law and Chen Xiaoning, the drummer of the opera band, plays the role of the son, Beiyang Village, Yuli Township, 20 June 2020.

(b) The Maoqiang Opera performance

The Maoqiang Opera performance typically began at 7:00pm. To catch the villagers' attention and announce that the formal performance of Maoqiang Opera was about to begin, the opera band usually gave a warm-up percussion performance (*datai*) in advance to make some loud sounds. Since the rhythmic pattern of *datai* can be played in infinite loops, performers can control the duration of the performance from 10 minutes to 15 minutes. When encountering bad weather, the duration can be as short as three to five minutes to finish the routine as soon as possible.²⁹⁴ After the *datai* rite, the compere of the troupe would give opening remarks before each Maoqiang performance.²⁹⁵ The full text of the Wulian Troupe's opening remarks is as follows:

Good evening dear leaders, folks, and friends! We are here in response to the policy to conduct cultural activities themed 'Our Chinese Dream' ('*women de zhongguo meng*') and 'Sending Culture to Myriad Families' ('*wenhua jin wanjia*'), issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Our goals are to be close to the masses (*tiejin qunzhong*), close to the grassroots (*tiejin jiceng*), and promote advanced culture among ordinary people. For this, we have prepared elaborately for a special performance of Maoqiang Opera. On behalf of the Publicity Department of Wulian County Committee of CPC, the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau and the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe, I convey my most gracious greetings to everyone. Please enjoy the full-length traditional Maoqiang Opera - *the title of the opera*. Now, the show begins!

²⁹⁴ The details have been presented in Section 4.2.

²⁹⁵ The former compere of the Wulian Troupe resigned in March 2020 and joined the New Era Troupe, and the leader assigned this task to me temporarily in this show season. The Wulian Troupe recruited two young female members at the end of July 2020, and the job vacancies had already been filled.

In the first show season of 2020, the Wulian Troupe gave 52 complete Maoqiang Opera performances. Generally, four to six Maoqiang works are prepared and rehearsed for each show season. The repertoire of Maoqiang Opera performance in each show season is determined in advance by the leaders and the art director of the Wulian Troupe. The repertoire of the first 2020 show season included five classic comedies (see Table 5-3).

Table 5-3. Performance information: the five classic comedies

Title	Themes of the story	Performance Frequency	Duration	Number of Participants
<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Children should care for their elderly parents	30	One hour and a half	four male performers; two female performers
<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	Freedom to choose one's spouse	7	Fifty minutes	One male performer; two female performers
<i>A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law</i>	The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law	6	One hour and a half	One male performer; three female performers
<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Freedom to choose one's spouse; Young people's marriage at the behest of their parents	6	Two hours	Two male performers; two female performers; six running soldiers
<i>Splashing Water in Front of a Horse</i>	Freedom to choose one's spouse	1	Two hours	Two male performers; three female performers; eight running soldiers

Because some villages had been visited several times between 2015 and 2020, the leader of the Wulian Troupe, Li Xiangxue, roughly noted these villages to ensure that the villagers could enjoy different opera performances every year. In 2020, *The Story of a Wall* (*qiangtou ji*) was the most frequently performed and the troupe's preferred work, mainly because it has few sung passages.²⁹⁶ In contrast, *The Younger Sister's*

²⁹⁶ More details are presented in Section 2.4.3.

Wedding has several long sung passages and relatively few spoken parts. The players in the band must continue to perform for about two hours, which is laborious, especially for the elderly players. One of them once quipped: “could we just delete a little bit from this work’s plot? I do not even have time to drink a sip of water in this two-hour period.”²⁹⁷

Meanwhile, if two or more of the five classic comedies had not been performed in a particular village, the Wulian Troupe preferred to perform the shorter works. In 2020, each Maoqiang Opera performance of the Wulian Troupe was granted a subsidy from 1000 to 1200 yuan (about £110 and £140). The fifty-minute performance of *Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival (jie nian)* performed by only three vocal performers was also eligible to receive a subsidy of 1000 yuan. In contrast, a two-hour performance including ten or more than ten performers only could receive a subsidy of 200 yuan more. In this case, the short comedy *Jie Nian* was another preferred work in this show season (see Figure 5-3).



Figure 5-3. Only three characters feature in the classic work *Borrowing Goods for the Spring Festival (jie nian)*. Zhang Li (on the left) and Li Xiangxue (on the right) play the roles of newlyweds while Yu Jie (in the middle) plays the role of a matchmaker, Guo Jiaxin Village, Yuli Township, 21 June 2020.

Although the classical work *A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law* was also performed six times in this show season, it was not the work that the performers preferred to perform. If both of the two preferred works had already been performed, *A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law* was the troupe’s third choice. This work contains several lengthy

²⁹⁷ The two-hour version of Wulian Troupe’s performance of *The Younger Sister’s Wedding* has already been expurgated. In contrast, the full-length version of New Era Troupe’s performance lasts for two hours and a half.

sung passages, long conversations, and long monologues, which are difficult for performers to memorise. Most importantly, the performers were not fully prepared for this work before this show season because the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their regular schedule. During the performance, one or two prompters who were familiar with the script had to stand beside the left side of the mobile stage to prompt the performers with their lines.

In addition, after each song and dance performance had finished at about 5:30pm, the village committees would provide a free evening meal for members of the Wulian Troupe (in a village canteen or at a local restaurant). The dinner time was also the time for members to sit together and chat with each other. Among the 54 villages, only three village committees did not provide a meal for the troupe. In this case, the members would bring their own food and apply for a meal subsidy. In 2020, the vast majority of village committees in the first show season provided the evening meal to avoid giving the impression of being a stingy village, and most of the village committees provided a type of standard meal (see Figure 5-4).



Figure 5-4. Typically, there were two tables with the same dishes for members. Female members and the younger male members (10 people) usually sat at the same table, and the elderly male members (12 people) would sit together, Shang Dijagou Village, Shichang Township, 5 July 2020.

It should be noted that the evening meals influenced the troupe's Maoqiang Opera performance. In cases when the troupe had felt that they received a cold welcome, members would try to finish the performance as soon as possible by giving an eight-minute warm-up percussion performance followed by a fifty-minute Maoqiang performance, increasing the rate of the spoken parts and sung passages, or even skipping a few sections of the opera.²⁹⁸ One troupe member even complained after

²⁹⁸ The following are common causes of dissatisfaction: not receiving an evening meal and not being told of this omission in advance; enduring a long wait until the village secretary or the other leaders of the village show up; being asked to pay for the meal after finishing eating without being informed in advance that the meal is not free.

the performance in a particular village: "So disgusting! This is the last time we'll ever visit this village."

The routine activities of the Wulian Troupe in the countryside were accomplished by about 8:30pm or 9:00pm daily. Before and after the performances, the male members of the Wulian Troupe would finish the task of loading and unloading the mobile stage, and the troupe would pay additional wages for these male members²⁹⁹. All the members were able to arrive home before 10:00pm and could have free time until 1:00pm or 2:00pm the next day³⁰⁰. Typically, the Wulian Troupe followed the above noted daily routine during the whole period of the first show season in 2020.

5.1.2 Performance Sites: Adapting to the Rural Environment

In recent years, the construction of rural highways in Wulian County has made it more convenient for the troupe to give performances in small and undeveloped villages³⁰¹. As noted, a critical reason that Wulian Troupe cannot visit some villages is that there is no suitable performance site in that village, or the roads cannot let the mobile stage vehicle pass through. The troupe uses a middle-sized mobile stage vehicle³⁰² in villages for the purpose of cost saving and to adapt to the rural environment. The troupe has overcome various kinds of obstacle to perform in as many villages as possible. This section focuses on the different sites of the Wulian Troupe's performances in the countryside, including the yards of the village committees, public squares near the village, village stages, locations near the highway, and any other open spaces in or beside the village.

Ideally, the performance site is on flat ground, enabling the stage vehicle to park nearby (- the mobile stage is 7.7 meters long and 3.8 meters wide), and meanwhile, it should be able to accommodate a sufficiently large audience and be located near to a power supply. The troupe's first task on arrival at the performance site was to check the electrical connection because the troupe would not be able to use the LED screen of the stage vehicle with a low voltage or ageing circuit. For example, the public square in Mohezi Village was used because the yard of the village committee was too small for the stage vehicle. However, the public square had no power supply. The leaders of the troupe and the village secretary consulted with the villagers living near the square, and one of them agreed to provide electricity for the stage vehicle. For power saving, the LED screen was not used during the performances (see Figure 5-5).

²⁹⁹ In contrast, the large mobile stage of the New Era Troupe had to be loaded and unloaded by all the members without additional subsidies.

³⁰⁰ Many of the members utilise this half-day holiday for their side businesses, not just for relaxing. For example, the *yangqin* player of the troupe went to the local street market almost every morning to sell homemade rice cakes.

³⁰¹ This is because, since 2015, the economic and cultural policies of the central government have put much more emphasis on accelerating rural economic revitalisation and rural cultural construction.

³⁰² The Wulian Troupe has two mobile stage vehicles. The troupe purchased the middle-sized vehicle via self-raised funds, and the large vehicle was allocated by the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Finance in 2015.



Figure 5-5. Wulian Troupe’s group dance performance (in traditional costumes) on the small public square of Mohezi village, Kouguan Township, 19 May 2020.

In this show season, 30 of the Maoqiang performances given by the Wulian Troupe were held in the yard (*dayuaner*) of the village committee and village party branch.³⁰³ Many office buildings of the village committees have been rebuilt in recent years with the support of the local government or through self-raised funds. The yards in wealthy and large villages were well equipped, spacious and without a boundary wall (see Figure 5-6). This kind of village usually has a larger residential population, which means there were more attendees (more than two hundred people) on the site of the troupe’s performances. This was also the kind of village that the Wulian Troupe was more willing to visit every year, and the older male members were fond of discussing the annual changes in this kind of village, walking around, and chatting with the local villagers at break time.



Figure 5-6. The yard of the village committee in Miaojiagou Village, Xumeng Township. This space was rebuilt in 2018, becoming a public recreational area in the village, attracting more villagers to the site. This kind of site, with tall lighting equipment and fitness equipment, is typical in wealthy villages in Wulian County, 5 June 2020.

³⁰³ This kind of site is referred to by villagers as ‘the big yard of village party branch’ (*‘dangzhibu dayuaner’*) because the village committee and the party branch in the village are at the same place.

However, many villages still had small yards (see Figure 5-7). Such villages usually have a population of fewer than 300 villagers, who are mostly older people aged over 60. In this show season, the troupe travelled to several small villages that it had not been to before and was warmly welcomed by the villagers. It was common in small villages that most of the elderly villagers arrived at the site more than half an hour before the performance, and they were more talkative when asked about the Maoqiang performances. Although the number of attendees on the site affects the performers' enthusiasm for giving their performance, my observations suggest that the quality of the troupe's performances in 2020 was more obviously influenced by whether the villagers were enthusiastic and the members of village committees were amicable.³⁰⁴



Figure 5-7. A typical small yard in a small village. This village only had about 200 residents in 2020. There were only 32 attendees in total - the smallest audience in the first show season, Nanling Village, Kouguan Township, 18 May 2020.

The troupe members usually used the village committee and party branch's office rooms and conference rooms as dressing rooms or waiting rooms. The troupe typically stayed in one village for seven hours, from 2:00pm to 9:00pm, and a waiting room was essential for troupe members, especially elderly members. Meanwhile, the makeup procedures of Maoqiang performances were complicated, especially for the female performers who needed a dressing room to prepare their hair, makeup, and dress for the performance (see Figure 5-8). If the village committee could not provide such a room (usually in a relatively undeveloped village), the performers had to apply makeup and dress in the stage vehicle or make a simple changing room with a curtain.

³⁰⁴ More details are presented in Section 5.1.4.

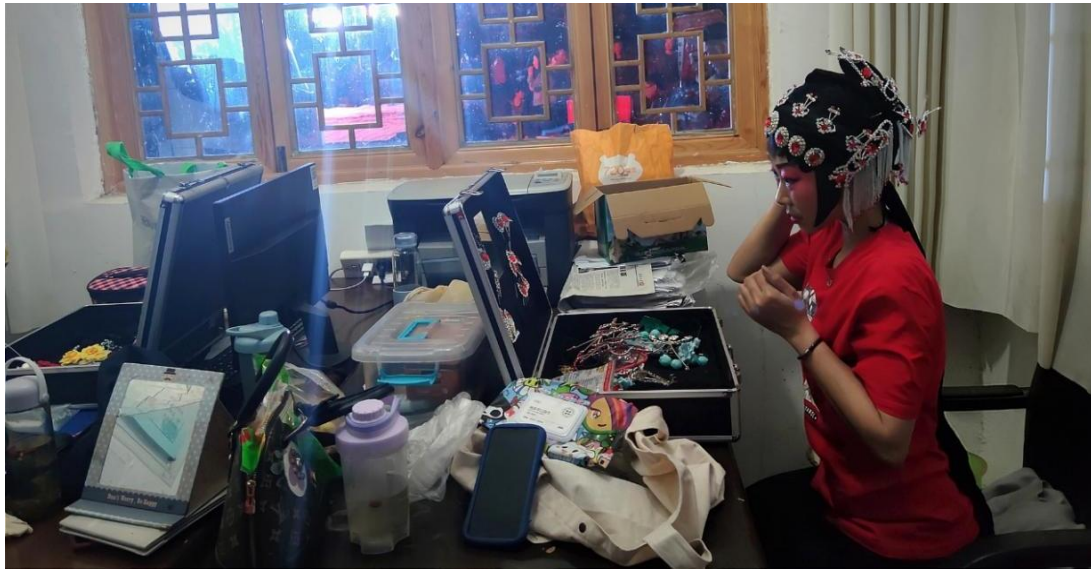


Figure 5-8. The leader of the Wulian Troupe Li Xiangxue applying hair accessories in the office room of the village committee, Huangxiangzi Village, Hubu Township, 13 May 2020.

Meanwhile, each village committee usually has a broadcast room equipped with simple devices, including microphones, a small mixing station and wireless radio, which can broadcast or rebroadcast notifications through loudspeakers installed in different areas of the village (see Figure 5-9). The sound of these loudspeakers can cover the whole village. The village committee would notify villagers about the performance times and the stage location through these loudspeakers and call for villagers to come and watch the performances.



Figure 5-9. The loudspeakers in villages are typically installed on the top of telephone poles, Xi Shaozhai Village, Shichang Township, 29 June 2020.

The troupe performed on five public squares in the 2020 first show season. The public squares in villages are also ideal sites for giving performances. With the

development of the rural economy, the construction of rural infrastructure is getting better and better, encompassing the construction of public squares. The public square (typically including one or two basketball courts) provides villagers with an area for daily entertainment. Even if there is no performance in the evening, there will be a lot of villagers gathering in the public square taking exercise. In contrast, villagers do not go to the yard of the village committee for recreational activities, as it is the office location of the committee.

Moreover, some wealthy villages even have a large independent public square (see Figure 5-10), which can attract villagers from several surrounding villages and thus can attract more audience members, including young and middle-aged people. These villages foster an atmosphere of vitality, which is reflected in the activities of village square dance teams. The Wulian Troupe welcomes the dance teams to give performances before and after their performance because this can attract more villagers to the performance site, especially the dancers' relatives and friends.



Figure 5-10. The independent public square of Dongnan Po Village³⁰⁵, Chaohe Township, constructed in 2018. Over 150 people attended the song and dance performance in the afternoon - many more than the usual 100 or so commonly encountered. Over 350 attended the evening opera performance, 24 May 2020.

The village stage is also an ideal site for the Wulian Troupe to perform in the countryside. The village stage is officially called the 'new era grand village stage' (*xinshidai xiangcun dawutai*). The construction of this kind of stage is also associated with cultural policies about *Sending Culture to the Countryside* and is intended to provide villagers with additional public space to conduct cultural activities. For example, the preliminary contests of the annual local square dance competition in Wulian County are typically held on this kind of stage. In Shandong Province, the construction of village stages and public squares in the countryside provides a better living environment for the rural residents.

³⁰⁵ Dongnan Po is a thriving village near Rizhao, with 835 people working for a local real estate company under the supervision of the Chaohe Township government. It is honoured as a so-called County-Level Civilised Village (*xianji wenming cun*) in Wulian County.

Performers were quite keen to perform on larger stages. Although almost every village in Wulian County had built a village stage in 2020, not all of them were suitable for giving performances because many of the stages were still under construction and had no stable power supply or the stage was too small. In Wulian County, some smaller stages are in the middle of smaller villages near the village committee. Some larger stages are located outside the villages to accommodate bigger attendees (see Figures 5-11 and 5-12). The leader of the Wulian Troupe, Li Xiangxue, once explained: “if all village stages were well equipped with power supply and sound equipment, we could travel to more villages without the mobile stage vehicle, which could not only save money, but also save time for loading and unloading the mobile stage.”³⁰⁶



Figure 5-11. An audience of less than 100 in Kouguan Village (with a population of over 2000), the main community of Kouguan Township. This village stage (still under construction) is backed by the text “New Era Grand Village Stage”. It is about a fifteen-minute walk from the village committee, located beside the local farmers’ market³⁰⁷, 22 May 2020.



Figure 5-12. When the Maoqiang performance began at around 7:20pm, there were already more than 200 attendees on the site. This performance attracted about four to five hundred people in total - the largest audience in the 2020 First Show Season, Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Personal communication, in Kouguan Village, 22 May 2020.

³⁰⁷ The area is also used as a parking area for market visitors.

The Wulian Troupe also visited many small and undeveloped villages. Following the principle of adaptability, the Wulian Troupe set up the mobile stage in a variety of open spaces in the rural environment, as long as there was a stable power supply.³⁰⁸ Sometimes, the troupe performed beside barbeque restaurants outside the villages (see Figure 5-13) and even in the middle of the highway (see Figure 5-14). Sometimes, the troupe also performed on soil slopes on the border of the villages (see Figure 5-15), so villagers from neighbouring villages could notice the troupe's performances and tell this information to the others. The village committee would also inform the other committees of neighbouring villages that the Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe would come to give performances. This is why some villages were small, but there were still more than a hundred attendees.



Figure 5-13. The troupe performed in Songjia Zhuangzi Village (with a population of over 1400) besides a highway and outside the residential area of Xumeng Township³⁰⁹ several times. There were more than 300 attendees and many of them arrived very early, at around 6:00pm. One of the barbeque restaurants³¹⁰ provided the electricity for the stage vehicle, 4 June 2020.

³⁰⁸ The troupe also performed in the yard of the village kindergarten and an abandoned school. When the members could not drive the stage vehicle to the performance site, they would move the sound equipment from the vehicle to the site.

³⁰⁹ The township had the famous Xumeng Amateur Maoqiang Opera Troupe during the 1960s.

³¹⁰ Barbeque restaurants and convenience stores surrounded this open space.



Figure 5-14. The first performance of the Wulian Troupe in Hubu Village (with over 1000 residents), Hubu Township. The village committee only had a very small yard, no public square, and no open space with a power supply. The troupe finally decided to perform on the main road near to the entrance of the village, with the permission of the committee. The traffic was temporarily closed for about four hours, 14 May 2020.



Figure 5-15. The troupe visits the Qian Niniu Village, Wanghu Township, every year. This village had less than 200 residents in 2020, relocated here because of reservoir construction. More than half of the audience members on the site were from the neighbouring villages, 10 June 2020.

5.1.3 The Current Core Audience of Maoqiang Opera

The Maoqiang community are especially concerned about the future of their art's popularity because the current core audience of Maoqiang Opera is comprised of older people. Indeed, based on my observations in the different villages of Wulian County and by doing interviews with 390 audience members on the sites of Maoqiang performance, I documented that the majority of audience members I met on the site were female villagers aged over 58. Since I could not interview the villagers if they were not on-site, this field survey does not collect data regarding villagers who did not attend and only addresses the on-site villagers at Maoqiang performances (see Figure 5-16).



Figure 5-16. An audience of more than 130 in Wang Jiada Village (with over 400 residents), Hubu Township. The photo was taken about half an hour after the performance had started, when the troupe's performance typically has the largest number of spectators, 12 May 2020.

Investigating the on-site villagers is a more effective way to determine which kinds of villagers constitute the core audience of Maoqiang Opera performance. When there were about 150 on-site villagers in a particular village, in one case, that village may have more than a thousand residents, while in another case, the 150 might constitute the majority of the village population. Generally, most people come to see the performance because they are interested in it or curious about the arrival of the opera troupe. Although the male villagers typically only make up less than one-fifth of the total audience at each performance, one is very likely to find Maoqiang enthusiasts among them.

In this study, the core audience of Maoqiang Opera refers to people who had seen live Maoqiang Opera performances before and could give examples of Maoqiang works and remember the names of Maoqiang performers. The 390 audience members in the different villages were asked to supply their exact age and answer four main questions:

Question 1 Do you know Maoqiang Opera is a famous local traditional opera in Wulian County?

Question 2 Have you ever seen live Maoqiang Opera performances before?

Question 3 Do you know some famous Maoqiang Opera stories, or can you give some examples of Maoqiang Opera works you know?

Question 4 Do you know some famous Maoqiang Opera performers?

Due to the lack of young attendees in villages, the age distribution of the 390 audience members who responded to my questionnaire is unbalanced. Among them, 232 people were aged over 58 (59.4%), only 88 were aged between 45 and 57 (22.5%), and 70 were aged under 44 (17.9%). A gender gap among the 232 older attendees is also noticeable. Of these, 168 (72.4%) were female and 64 (27.5%) male. As mentioned, the age distribution of on-site attendees indicates which group of people is most likely to provide the core of the Maoqiang audience. In this study, age 58 was found to demarcate this group, rather than 60 and 55. I only met 14 on-site audience members aged between 55 and 57 in the different villages. Although the eight female attendees of this age responded positively to the four questions, the total number of on-site attendees in this age group was too small for the purposes of the survey. In contrast, 41 attendees were 58 or 59 years old. Most of the 38 female attendees in this group responded positively to the four questions. These can be regarded as the core audience of Maoqiang Opera. Observation in different villages suggests that the number of audience members under 44 (not counting children under 12) was extremely small. To find the 70 younger interviewees who participated in this survey and ensure a balanced gender distribution (35 female attendees), I had to actively seek them out on site. The age distribution reported here thus underestimates the predominance of older people in the audiences for village performances. Table 5-4 shows the summary of data statistics of the 390 audience members' answers to the four questions.

Table 5-4. Statistics summary of 390 on-site audience members in different villages of Wulian County in 2020³¹¹

Age Groups	Gender	Number of attendees	Attendees who knew Maoqiang Opera before	Attendees who have seen live Maoqiang Opera performance before	Attendees who could give examples of Maoqiang Opera works	Audiences who remembered a name or names of Maoqiang Opera performers
Aged over 58	Female	168 (43%)	163 (46.1%)	152 (60.3%)	144 (64.2%)	78 (59%)
	Male	64 (16.4%)	62 (17.5%)	51 (20.2%)	50 (22.3%)	34 (25.7%)
Aged 45 to 57	Female	57 (14.6%)	51 (14.4%)	23 (9.1%)	16 (7.1%)	8 (6%)
	Male	31 (7.9%)	25 (7%)	12 (4.7%)	11 (4.9%)	11 (8.3%)
Aged under 44	Female	35 (8.9%)	28 (7.9%)	9 (3.5%)	0	0
	Male	35 (8.9%)	24 (6.7%)	5 (1.9%)	3 (1.3%)	1 (0.7%)
Total		390	353	252	224	132

³¹¹ The five denominators (in red font) of the percentages in brackets after the raw numbers are the total number of attendees and the four corresponding total numbers of attendees who responded positively to the four questions.

The first question concerns the popularity of Maoqiang Opera among the local villagers. Among the 390 people, 353 knew that Maoqiang Opera is a traditional local opera in Wulian County. In 2020, Maoqiang Opera seemed to be slightly more well-known among the elderly people aged over 58. Attendees who had never heard of Maoqiang Opera before were usually not local villagers of Wulian County, particularly the female villagers who were not born in Wulian County, but married to local villagers. Meanwhile, some of these audience members were travellers who happened to pass by the performance sites (usually beside the highway and on the open spaces outside the village) and were attracted by the percussion instruments' loud sounds and opera performers' fancy costumes.

In this survey, 16 young audience members were aged between 14 and 24 and were mainly university students, high school and middle school students (see Figure 5-17). It was rare to meet these young people on site, but all of them answered that they knew Maoqiang Opera.³¹² These young people usually came together with their parents and grandparents. Some of them explained that they knew a little about the opera because their family members were Maoqiang enthusiasts, and others mentioned that they had acquired knowledge about Maoqiang Opera from their music teachers in local schools. Although they mentioned that their music teachers once played the audio-visual recordings of Maoqiang Opera, they could not remember more details about the opera, such as rhythms, melodies or stories.



Figure 5-17. The young attendees in Jingjia Zhuangzi Village, Hubu Township. In May 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had more free time after their online courses, 12 May 2020.

The remaining three questions were intended to identify the core audience of Maoqiang Opera (the Maoqiang Opera enthusiasts). Of the 232 audience members aged over 58, 203 had seen a live performance of Maoqiang Opera before. Most of them watched the Maoqiang Opera performances during the 1960s and 1980s, while a few mentioned the performances of the current Wulian Troupe or the Gaoze

³¹² In 2020, the Wulian Troupe also gave performances on weekends and most national holidays; thus, it was more likely to find a young audience during the vacation.

Amateur Troupe. Initially, the second question was “did you ever see the live performances of the old Wulian Maoqiang Opera Troupe?” However, many of the elderly attendees could not remember exactly which opera troupe had performed in their village, especially, the opera performances during the 1960s when there were thought to be more than a hundred amateur Maoqiang Opera troupes in Wulian County only.³¹³

Moreover, 194 of them could remember at least one or two famous Maoqiang Opera works. The most frequently mentioned operas were *The Younger Sister’s Wedding* and *A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law*. Although some elderly audiences could not remember the titles of the works, they could roughly narrate the stories and the features of the main characters. These individuals are also included amongst the 194 audience members who could give examples of Maoqiang Opera works.

Furthermore, 112 of the audience members still remembered the names of famous Maoqiang Opera performers, including the performers of the old Wulian Troupe Zhu Shulan (1931-2016), Wang Peixian (1934-2015) and Wang Yunting (1941- present), who were the masters of performers of the current Wulian Troupe and New Era Troupe.³¹⁴ In the past, many of the elderly audience members had to wake up very early and bring their food, travelling long distances just to watch Maoqiang Opera performances.³¹⁵ Some of the elderly audience members knew the names of famous performers, even though they had not seen their performances. In addition, Sun Hongjü, the current leader of the New Era Troupe, was also mentioned several times. In some villages that the Wulian Troupe visited annually, the audience members were also familiar with the current leader, Li Xiangxue.

Although there are also Maoqiang enthusiasts amongst the elderly male villagers, the total within this sample group was far less than their female counterparts. It is common to see elderly female villagers arrive at the performance site together very early, chatting and waiting for the performance to begin. One is more likely to receive positive feedback and pick up valuable information - recollections of personal experiences of watching Maoqiang Opera - from conversations with these people (see Figure 5-18). Finding a place with a good view is the primary reason they come very early. Some of them even arrive as early as 6:00pm, when the performers usually just start to prepare. Meanwhile, to see the facial expressions of opera performers clearly, these female villagers are often keen to sit close to the mobile stage (see Figure 5-19).

³¹³ See Section 2.5.1 Old Maoqiang Opera Troupes.

³¹⁴ See Section 2.5.2 Maoqiang Opera Performers’ Recollections.

³¹⁵ See Section 2.5.3 Elderly Audiences’ Recollections.



Figure 5-18. A group of elderly female villagers, having arrived early at around 6:40pm, when the band's performers (to the right of the mobile stage) are giving the warm-up percussion performance. Wanghu Village, Wanghu Township, 12 June 2020.³¹⁶



Figure 5-19. Almost all the audience members sitting directly opposite the mobile stage are elderly female villagers, while most male attendees sit on both sides of the yard beside the wall. Yuejia Zhuang Village, Wanghu Township, 13 June 2020.³¹⁷

In contrast, even though some elderly male attendees came very early, they would find a seat further away from the mobile stage (see Figure 5-20). Although some of them stated they were not interested in Maoqiang Opera, they still stayed at the performance site until the end of the performance, standing or squatting a distance

³¹⁶ This performance site is an open space in front of the office building of several village committees, surrounded by several villages with about 1800 residents. The Maoqiang performance attracted about 150 villagers.

³¹⁷ This village only had about 500 residents, but there were still about 120 attendees in the yard of the village committee.

away from the stage (see Figure 5-21). Even if there was spare space nearer the mobile stage, they tended not to approach. For this group, being on site was mainly an opportunity to hang out and chat with friends.



Figure 5-20. In this case, a few villagers arrived about one hour before the performance, when the members had just finished their dinner. Two elderly female villagers were sitting near the mobile stage and chatting with the band performers, while two male villagers were sitting further away from the stage, Yanhe Village, Wanghu Township, 8 June 2020.



Figure 5-21. Male villagers on the site of a Maoqiang performance, Hei Jianling Village, Wanghu Township, 26 June 2020.

According to the survey, although most of the older on-site villagers knew Maoqiang Opera to be a local opera form in Wulian County, it was still difficult to find Maoqiang enthusiasts amongst the younger villagers. In this survey, only one male villager aged under 44 (specifically, aged 42 years old) mentioned Song Hongjü's Troupe (the New Era Troupe) and said he watched Song Hongjü's performance several times on the local TV channel with his family. Meanwhile, he added that the Wulian Troupe's performances were the only live performances he had ever watched. It should be

highlighted that all 14 on-site villagers aged under 44 who answered that they had watched live Maoqiang performances before came from the villages that the Wulian Troupe had visited at least once. This demonstrates how cultural policies geared toward bringing culture into the countryside do indeed generate greater awareness.

In addition, there is extensive use of smartphones in rural areas. Even older people aged over 60 and 70 have them. During my field trip, it was common to meet elderly villagers asking young performers to take photos with their grandchildren and, in most cases, the performers were happy to interact with the children. Meanwhile, during the performances, attendees of all ages were interested in taking photos and videos, especially the older people who would save the videos and watch them repeatedly. I met a female villager aged 65 in Xuanwang Village.³¹⁸ She showed me several videos of *A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law* performed by the Wulian Troupe in 2019 in her village. She told me that she could not calculate how many times she had watched those videos, and when she heard that the troupe would come again, she quickly finished her farm work and arrived at the performance site right after dinner. In this village, I also saw many other villagers sitting close to the mobile stage and taking videos during the opera performance (see Figure 5-22).



Figure 5-22. Elderly audience members sitting directly opposite the mobile stage, holding their smartphones and taking videos, Xuanwang Village in Jiuxian Mountain Natural Scenic Spot, 7 June 2020.

While the majority of audience members walk to the performance site, some of the more infirm individuals are unable to walk long distances to watch Maoqiang performances. When they live a little far from the village committee, or the site is outside the village, or they hear the troupe will perform in the neighbouring village, driving a three-wheeled electric vehicle is usually their best choice, which is also the

³¹⁸ This is one of the smallest villages in Wulian County, currently with only 81 residents who are mostly elderly, of whom 52 in total attended the opera performance.

most common way for rural residents to travel around in the countryside (see Figure 5-23). There are many three-wheeled vehicles on the site, which is a sign that some audience members are probably from neighbouring villages. Although three-wheeled vehicles could be found in almost all the 54 villages during my field trip, they were particularly prevalent when the troupe was performing on the border between several different villages (see Figure 5-24).



Figure 5-23. A female audience member sitting on a three-wheeled electric vehicle, taking videos of the Wulian troupe’s performance, Beiying Village, Yuli Township, 20 June 2020.



Figure 5-24. Many of the audience members here had come by three-wheeled vehicle, Qian Niniu Village, Wanghu Township, 10 June 2020.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ See also Figure 5-15 in Section 5.1.2.

5.1.4 The Performances and Audiences in Villages of Different Types

In most cases, the villages visited by the Wulian Troupe in the 2020 first show season had been visited by the troupe at least one or two times since 2015. Meanwhile, the troupe also visited the other kinds of villages in 2020: villages that the troupe should visit annually; villages that the troupe visited for the first time; and villages in local scenic areas. However, based on the evidence collected in all 54 villages, the troupe's performances and the audience's characteristics in most villages seem to have no clear-cut distinction. This section explains the features of the above-noted three kinds of village, focusing on how this classification has come about.

The troupe performs annually in the kinds of village which have more Maoqiang Opera enthusiasts³²⁰, or are main villages³²¹ with large residential populations surrounded by several small villages. For these main villages, as long as the village committees applied for Maoqiang performance, the Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau (WCTB) will arrange the Wulian Troupe's visit. The villagers of the nearby small villages can come to the main village if they want to enjoy Maoqiang performances. Although the troupe only gives one Maoqiang performance in one village, the performance can attract villagers from several surrounding villages, which may include villages that the troupe has already visited.³²²

Similarly, almost every year, the troupe also gives one or two performances in the so-called 'village community' (*nongcun sheqū*), which is usually formed by the amalgamation of several big villages with at least more than a thousand residents (see Figure 5-25 and Figure 5-26). The applications of the small villages near the big villages, main villages and village communities are usually rejected by the WCTB, or no application is submitted in these villages. This is why there are still many small villages in Wulian County that have not been visited by the troupe. Because there are so many villages in Wulian county, it is unrealistic for the troupe to visit all of them. Thus, the target of "One Village, One Year, One Performance" is evidently unachievable in the case of Shandong Province.

³²⁰ These villages are in the kind of townships (Yuli Township and Xumeng Township) that had famous amateur Maoqiang Opera troupes during the 1960s, See Section 2.5.

³²¹ Many townships share their name with their main village, for example, Kouguan Village in Kouguan Township (see Figure 5-11), and Hubu Village in Hubu Township (see Figure 5-14).

³²² Wulian County had 1245 villages in 2020. According to the Wulian Troupe's 2018 Annual Summary Report, the troupe gave more than 620 performances in 2018. However, the 2020 First Show Season only visited 54 villages, giving 93 performances in total. The number 620 probably included performances in those surrounding villages that the troupe had previously not visited.



Figure 5-25. This public square is in Fangcheng Community, which has authority over four villages, with a total residential population of about 1800. In the afternoon, only about 130 on-site villagers were watching the troupe’s song and dance performance, and the public square was occupied by villagers who needed to dry grains, Wanghu Township, 14 June 2020.



Figure 5-26. In the evening, the Maoqiang Opera performance in Fangcheng Community attracted about 280 audience members, *ibid.*

Additionally, it is worth acknowledging one rather exceptional case. Here, the Wulian Troupe travelled several times to a small village with about 300 residents. The highway to this village was still under construction and the mobile vehicle had to be driven on narrow dirt roads. Moreover, the yard of the village committee was too small, so the troupe had to move all the sound equipment to the small village stage. The troupe members referred to this village as ‘the preferred village of the leaders’ (*‘guanxi cun’*) because its main leader is an acquaintance of one of the officials in WCTB. Almost every year, the troupe gives at least one Maoqiang performance in this village. In 2020, performing in this village was an additional task for the troupe in

the afternoon, as the troupe then travelled to another village to give another Maoqiang performance in the evening.

The troupe visited ten villages for the first time in this show season, of which six are in Hubu Township.³²³ The troupe typically visited five to seven villages in each township and gave two performances in each village, but in Hubu township, the troupe visited nine villages from 12 to 16 May, and only gave one Maoqiang Opera performance in each village. The troupe attempted to travel to two villages each day, which was a tight schedule for all the members, particularly for some male members who needed to load and unload the mobile stage two times. Because the opera performances on the first four days in Hubu Township involved intense physical exertion, the leaders finally decided to cancel the opera performance in the evening on 16 May to take a timeout.

In 2020, Hubu Township was a relatively poverty-stricken area in Wulian County, with many villages still under construction. Under the context of China's poverty alleviation plan³²⁴, the county government and higher-level governments paid much closer attention to the development of Hubu township at all levels including the infrastructure construction, economic development, and cultural development. Since *Sending Opera to the Countryside (songxi xiaxiang)* is one of the essential tasks of *Sending Culture to the Countryside (song wenhua xiaxiang)*, the record of task fulfillment in this township is more likely to be checked by the authorities. Therefore, in order to accomplish the performance task and travel to different villages in Hubu Township as much as possible and not affect the performance schedule in other villages, the WCTB arranged for the Wulian Troupe to visit nine villages in five days.

The chief objective of the government-assigned task of performing in the countryside is to benefit rural residents as much as possible, ensuring that even the more remote villages are not neglected. During this show season, the troupe travelled to three villages in scenic mountain areas - villages that they had visited before in 2019. All were natural villages, located in remote areas, with very small populations (usually less than a hundred people), and without a village party branch. In order to improve the living conditions in mountain areas, the local government has built many flat roads, allowing the mobile stage vehicle to drive in these villages.

All three villages are located in Jiuxian Mountain at high altitudes. By 2020, each village only had about 70 to 100 residents who were almost entirely older people over 60. The first village (see Figure 5-27) is far away from the tourist area and close to the mountain's top. The second village (see Figure 5-28) is close to the tourist area (famous for mountain rafting), located only about fifteen minutes' walk away. The last village (see Figure 5-29) is in the dining area of the scenic spot, which has many family-run restaurants. However, the daily management of these restaurants relies

³²³ For example, see Figures 5-14, 5-16, 5-17 and 5-30 of the villages in Hubu Township. The other four villages that the troupe had never visited until 2020 are all small or medium-sized, see Figures 5-31 and 5-32.

³²⁴ The year 2020 was a crucial year for overcoming poverty. See footnote No. 172 in Section 3.4.1.

on elderly family members because most middle-aged and young family members are responsible for delivering daily necessities and usually live in the township or county centre.



Figure 5-27. About 110 audience members in a small open space in Qian Weichang Village. Some are from the six neighbouring villages, with about 700 residents in all. A local villager provided electricity for the mobile stage but the power could not supply the LED screen, Jiuxian Mountain Natural Scenic Spot, 6 June 2020.



Figure 5-28. Although Xuanwang Village only had 86 residents³²⁵, the Maoqiang Opera performance attracted 62 attendees in total, Jiuxian Mountain Natural Scenic Spot, 7 June 2020.

³²⁵ About twenty years ago, this village had more than 500 residents. See also Figure 5-22.



Figure 5-29. 60 people came to this performance site (a small open space between two restaurants) in Xueshi Village (with less than 100 residents), Jiuxian Mountain Natural Scenic Spot, 28 June 2020.

The Wulian Troupe's opera performance did not appear to differ substantially in accordance with the villages' size, wealth, or character (as administrative or natural villages). The Wulian Troupe was always welcomed by audience members and, in every village, there were villagers who would arrive more than half an hour before the performance, take photos during the performance, and ask about the troupe's future schedules. As detailed earlier, in all cases, most audience members were elderly females. Unsurprisingly, the troupe members preferred to visit and perform in big wealthy villages because the infrastructures enabled easy set up and ensured larger attendees. However, the members would never slack off even when the troupe performed in small villages without lounges, dressing rooms or a water dispenser. Most of them were proud of their identity as "performers of the [Wulian] County Troupe". They felt responsible for their performances in front of the audience.³²⁶ The overall quality of the troupe's performance only declined when the weather was terrible or in rare cases when the troupe members felt the village committee disliked them.³²⁷

5.1.5 Exceptional Circumstances

In the 2020 first show season, the troupe members tried their best to ensure that there was at least one Maoqiang performance in each village, even if they encountered terrible weather. If the rain came down heavily, the troupe had no choice but to cancel their performance, and the village committee would then

³²⁶ Personal communications with the majority of performers of Wulian Troupe.

³²⁷ See Section 5.1.1 about the even meals in different villages.

reapply for a show in the next season. The Wulian Troupe was evidently very careful about deciding to cancel because, as long as the opera performance continues, there will always be an audience on site. During my field trip to Wulian County, most of the audience members would stay until the end of the performance, even in bad weather, when some would leave briefly just to collect an umbrella. From May to July 2020, the Wulian Troupe performed several times in bad weather. If the rain started to become overly heavy, they would temporarily cease their performance until they could continue once more.

For example, the troupe encountered bad weather when performing in Wujia Zhuangzi village (see Figure 5-30). This village is a relocated small village with only about 300 residents. The troupe had to perform on a soil slope without a stable electric supply because the village was still under construction. The leaders of the village committee hoped that the troupe could perform *The Younger Sister's Wedding* and the troupe members agreed to their requests. However, it began to rain in the middle of the performance. A few of the villagers left, but the troupe decided to continue performing. One *erhu* player of the troupe characterised this performance as follows: “what used to be in slow tempo [*manban*] became fast tempo [*kuaiban*]”. Although the troupe accomplished its performance task, the two-hour performance was reduced to a little over 90 minutes, because the performers skipped a whole chapter of the story including two long sung passages.



Figure 5-30. The audience members in Wujia Zhuangzi Village, Hubu Township, watching the Maoqiang Opera performance in the light rain with umbrellas, 14 May 2020.

On 9 and 27 June 2020, Xiaoheya Village was visited twice by the troupe. This village had never been visited by the Wulian Troupe before, even though the village committee had applied for the Maoqiang performance many times. This medium-sized village with 400 to 500 residents was also under construction at the time. Unfortunately, the first opera performance was cancelled because of heavy rain.

Although the performers were dressed up and waited until 8:40pm, the rain still showed no sign of letting up. So, the troupe only gave a song and dance performance in the afternoon on 9 June (see Figure 5-31). In typical cases, the audiences in such a village would have to wait for the troupe to come in the next show season, probably in the next year.



Figure 5-31. Performance in an open space near the village committee. Because most villagers were busy with farm work during the daytime, there were only 42 on-site people, and many of them had to look after their children or grandchildren, Xiaoheya Village, Wanghu Township, 9 June 2020.

However, the troupe members were warmly welcomed by the village committee members, who catered well to their needs and provided a fancy evening meal in the village canteen. Meanwhile, a group of elderly villagers wandered outside the performers' dressing room in the village committee. They came and asked several times when the Maoqiang performance would begin and did not leave until the troupe members loaded all the sound equipment and the mobile stage. Before the troupe left, its leader Li Xiangxue consulted with the committee members about whether they could return to this village or not, because they had to continue performing in other villages for the next three weeks. The troupe finally found an opportunity to revisit this village in the afternoon on 27 June (see Figure 5-32). The troupe travelled to two villages and gave two Maoqiang Opera performances on that day - a tight schedule, as in Hubu Township.



Figure 5-32. Performance in the village committee’s small yard. The sun was too dazzling, so the troupe members had to find a place backing onto the sunshine.³²⁸ Most of the 86 audience members came about half an hour before the performance, sitting in the shadow either in the yard or just outside, *ibid*, 27 June 2020.

During this show season, local villagers would occasionally express keenness to participate in the troupe’s performances. If they could play musical instruments (in most cases, *erhu* or gongs), the troupe would welcome them to join the opera band. Such villagers are usually Maoqiang enthusiasts who are quite familiar with the rhythms, melodies and plots of the famous Maoqiang works, and are able to keep pace with the band’s performance without rehearsing in advance. For example, one villager in Nanhuitou Village³²⁹, Xu Fushun (see Figure 5-33), who was already 84 years old in 2020, was an *erhu* player in a local township Maoqiang troupe during the 1960s. His eldest son was the headmaster of a local training school for traditional Chinese instruments, and his daughter-in-law, Li Weiping, was the Maoqiang Opera director of the New Era Troupe and former performer of the old Wulian Troupe in the 1980s.³³⁰ The troupe visits Xu Fushun’s village annually because this village has quite a few Maoqiang enthusiasts. Some villagers even remember the names of the current troupe members and can recall what they performed in previous years. Although only about 80 audience members were on site, the troupe performed *The Younger Sister’s Wedding*. Xu Fushun, who knows the long sung passages of this work well, was invited to join the band.

³²⁸ The performers’ costumes were still wet with perspiration after the performance as the weather was already sweltering at the end of June.

³²⁹ see Figure 3-16 in Section 3.3.1, showing this village’s party branch.

³³⁰ Personal communication with Xu Fushun, in Nanhuitou Village, 21 May 2020.



Figure 5-33. The Wulian Troupe's band. The leftmost performer is Xu Fushun, Nanhuitou Village, Koguan Township, 21 May 2020.

Additionally, students would sometimes attend wishing to document the troupe's activities. Along with the Wulian County Culture Centre, which plays the role of the Local Traditional Culture Education Base (*chuantong wenhua jiaoyü jidi*), the Wulian Troupe is also responsible for cooperating with visiting journalists, researchers and students. When visitors - particularly college students - come to document their activities, most members are willing to help them. For example, during a trip to Xishaozhai Village on 29 June 2020, five first year students from Qingdao University participated in the troupe's song and dance performance (see Figure 5-34). They needed the credits for a compulsory course, which required them to do fieldwork as a team and give presentations to demonstrate their research outcomes. The topic of their presentation was traditional culture in their hometown.



Figure 5-34. Five students giving a short opening speech to introduce themselves and praise the performers for continuing and developing the Maoqiang Opera tradition. Later, they performed a pop song, Xi Shaozhai Village, Shichang Township, 29 June 2020.

All five students were locals from Wulian County. Two were villagers from Loujiapo Village, Yuli Township who had seen the troupe's performance in their village on 19 June, when they returned from Qingdao City for a short vacation. They said that they knew Maoqiang Opera to be a traditional local opera in Wulian County because their family members were Maoqiang enthusiasts, and their music teachers in middle and high school also introduced it to them. On that day, they just happened to come across the troupe's performance and decided to give a presentation about Maoqiang Opera at a later date. They introduced themselves to the leader Li Xiangxue and saved her contact details after they watched the troupe's live performances. On 29 June, the two students and three of their classmates arrived at the troupe's performance site to document the troupe's routine for a day, taking many photographs and interviewing several performers about their personal experiences.

To conclude, this section has provided a detailed account of the Wulian Troupe's most significant performance task in 2020, namely 'performing in the countryside' (*'xiaxiang'*). Following the schedule formulated by the Wulian County Cultural and Tourism Bureau, they visited a wide variety of communities, typically delivering a song and dance performance and a full-length Maoqiang Opera performance. To reach as many communities as possible, they had to overcome various difficulties, adapting their practices to suit specific onsite predicaments and challenging rural environments. Performing Maoqiang Opera in rural villages remains the key concern for maintaining the Maoqiang market and satisfying the core audience, mainly comprising elderly female villagers aged over 58. Furthermore, this section has also highlighted that, although the Wulian Troupe encounters widely varying circumstances in different villages, its performances do not appear to differ substantially in accordance with the village's size and wealth.

5.2 Maoqiang Opera Performances and Audiences in Urban areas

Compared with people living in rural areas, residents in urban areas can choose to participate in more kinds of cultural activities. Watching Maoqiang Opera performance is only one of many options, and residents also have more choices in more developed regions. Since 2015, professional Maoqiang troupes have been granted to perform annually in the city centre of Rizhao at major cultural activities³³¹ organised and financed by the local government. However, in 2020, there were still not enough opportunities for the troupes to perform in urban environments regularly, and most of my interviewees were not very optimistic about the development prospects of the Maoqiang market in urban areas. In this section, the scope of urban areas refers to the county centre of Wulian and the city centre of Rizhao.

The deputy director of Wulian County Cultural and Tourism Bureau, Zhang Shoufeng, who is also the main organiser and coordinator of Wulian County's annual Wulian Summer Festival, explained why there are no regular Maoqiang Opera show seasons in urban areas.³³² According to Zhang's explanation, it is unrealistic for local governments to subsidise show seasons in urban areas, which would impose additional financial burdens on the government. Meanwhile, one opera troupe would not be able to finish all the performance tasks. Rather, it would require several Maoqiang troupes making joint efforts to perform in both rural and urban areas. Meanwhile, it is unrealistic for the government to subsidise all the local troupes. Because each city usually has their own performing art troupes (for example, the Rizhao Art Theatre is responsible for inheriting and disseminating Lü Opera), in order to avoid competition, the Wulian Troupe cannot give regular public performances in other areas (for example, in the city centre of Rizhao) to publicise Maoqiang Opera culture without an invitation, except on special occasions (for example, Rizhao City's major cultural activities).

In the county centre of Wulian, since the Wulian Troupe was reconstituted in 2011, Maoqiang Opera has been performed every year on Maoqiang Opera weeks³³³ (*maoqiang zhou*) and in special shows during the Wulian Summer Festival. The Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau releases the performance information in advance through the most widely used social software in China, Wechat (*weixin*), including the repertoire, times and sites. All the residents living in the county centre can go to the sites of the Maoqiang Opera performance because the county centre is not a large area and public transportation is convenient. The Wulian Troupe typically

³³¹ For example, Culture and Tourism Festival; Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Project.

³³² Interview, in Wulian County Cultural Centre, 4 September 2020. The summer festival has been held annually in Wulian County since 1993, lasting more than two weeks, from the end of July to August. My fieldwork covers the whole season of the 2020 Wulian County Summer Festival, at which the Wulian Troupe makes prominent contributions.

³³³ The Maoqiang Opera weeks in Wulian County are typically in the first week of May and October, during national holidays.

gives five to ten Maoqiang performances annually at the county stadium and Furong Square³³⁴ in the county centre. The New Era Troupe also performed at the Furong Square and had given more than ten performances by 2020. Residents in the county centre of Wulian have more opportunities to enjoy Maoqiang Opera performances than villagers in the countryside.

The Wulian Troupe gave two Maoqiang Opera performances during the period of the 2020 Summer Festival at the county's stadium. However, both were confronted with bad weather. On 3 August, the first performance, *The Younger Sister's Wedding*, was cancelled halfway through. On 6 August, *Young Lady Mengjiang* was completed in light rain, with about 200 attendees in the stadium. In contrast, there were usually more than a thousand people in the stadium watching the song and dance performances during the festival period.³³⁵ It is reasonable to suggest that most of these attendees, who were mainly elderly people, were core enthusiasts of Maoqiang Opera. Specifically, the official performance time was at 7:00pm. However, many arrived at the stadium at around 6:30pm and waited for nearly an hour in the light rain until the performance finally began at about 7:30pm (see Figure 5-35). The performance ended at 10:20pm, and there were still about 140 audience members on the site.



Figure 5-35. Attendees in the stadium, waiting for the performance to start. Because of the rain, performers in the band moved onto the high steps of the backstage³³⁶, 6 August 2020.

The Wulian Troupe's *erhu* player Zhao Congsheng also pointed out that these elderly audience members in the county centre were core opera enthusiasts. Some of them were local urban residents who had seen the performances of the old Wulian Troupe during the 1960s and 1980s because the old troupe not only performed in villages,

³³⁴ The Furong Square of Furong Community is one of the largest residential areas in the centre of Wulian County and is also the location of the Songming Art Troupe, see section 3.5.2.

³³⁵ See Figures 3-17 and 3-18 in Section 3.3.1 about the 2020 Wulian Summer Festival.

³³⁶ This change made it difficult for the band to respond to the signs of vocal performers during the performance.

but also frequently performed at street markets around the county centre. Others were originally villagers from the countryside who had moved to the county centre to live with their children. They too had experiences of watching the old Wulian Troupe as part of their previous rural lives.³³⁷ Among these audience members, I had a conversation with a 72 years old male, Bai Qūqing, who came to find me and asked whether I was a member of the troupe (I was holding a camera at that moment). He wished to give some suggestions regarding the troupe's performance. He firstly praised the performers, saying: "the body gestures of the performers are very professional and they must have had a lot of practice." He then added that "the sound of the opera band is loud, but the voice of the performers is small, and sometimes it is difficult to hear clearly the dialogues between the performers."³³⁸

In the city centre of Rizhao, only the New Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe was permitted to perform full-length Maoqiang Operas in 2020. In the government-organised cultural activities in September, the troupe gave five performances of classic works on different public squares. The troupe performed the classic comedy *The Younger Sister's Wedding* three times, and two classic tragedies *Young Lady Mochou* and *Young Lady Mengjiang*. Each of these performances attracted hundreds of audience members, primarily residents living nearby. The troupe also performed a modern anti-pandemic themed work - *Emergency Expedition* at the Rizhao Grand Theatre on 2 August, with 161 people present.³³⁹

In 2020, the New Era Troupe's performances on public squares usually began at 7:00pm. The typical performance site is the People's Square of Rizhao City (*rizhaoshi renmin guangchang*) (see Figure 5-36), neighbouring four large residential areas. The official account of the Rizhao Cultural and Tourism Bureau on the Wechat App would release a schedule of all activities during the city's cultural events. Citizens who subscribed to the official account could receive notifications and check this schedule. The New Era Troupe would also advertise their performances on its own Wechat account in advance. However, the effect of these notifications seemed quite limited. Most people on the site seemed to have no prior knowledge of the Maoqiang performance because they arrived at the performance site more than half an hour late. The number of attendees usually began to increase from about 8:00pm to 9:00pm, when the residents finished their supper and came to the square for a walk or other recreational activities such as square dance. Although the residents came in late, few of them left early before the end time of the performances, at around 10:00pm.

³³⁷ Personal communication, in Wulian County Stadium, 6 August 2020. See Zhao Congsheng's image and relevant information in Figure 3-25, Section 3.3.1.

³³⁸ Personal communication, in Wulian County Stadium, 6 August 2020. Bai and his wife are all Maoqiang Opera enthusiasts. They have also watched different versions of *Young Lady Mengjiang* performed by the Jiaozhou Troupe and New Era Troupe, and they prefer the performance of the New Era Troupe.

³³⁹ The Rizhao Grand Theatre is the city's prominent performing art theatre and can accommodate about one thousand people.



Figure 5-36. The New Era Troupe’s performance in the city centre of Rizhao 340 on the People’s Square at around 8:40pm, 17 September 2020.

According to the plans of the troupe’s bankroller, Dong Yanping, on 2 August 2020, the performance of *Emergency Expedition* in Rizhao Grand Theatre (see Figure 5-37) should have been commercial. The unified ticket price of the performance was 45 yuan (about £5). The performance information was released as early as 13 July 2020 and citizens could book the ticket on the theatre’s official website. The performance was successful without a hitch, winning warm applause from the audience. One middle-aged woman said: “I did not expect that the performers from a private-owned troupe could sing so well. If they visit our city again, I would like to pay for the ticket.” However, probably, not a single ticket was sold. The tickets were complimentary, and the ticket gate allowed free entry. The attendees were mostly those who knew the members of New Era Troupe directly or indirectly.³⁴¹ For example, a group of officials working in the Rizhao City Cultural Centre received tickets from the troupe as a gift. Another group of audience members were members of the Rizhao Art Theatre (Rizhao Lü Opera Troupe). They also received free tickets because the New Era Troupe have collaborative relationships with the theatre’s performers.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ See also Figures 2-11 and 3-31 about the performances of the New Era Troupe in the city centre.

³⁴¹ The troupe also provided ten complimentary tickets for me, so the 161 audience members included my parents and friends.

³⁴² A partnership between the New Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe and the Rizhao Lü Opera Troupe was under planning.



Figure 5-37. The banner above the stage states “The Premiere of *Emergency Expedition* - a full-length Modern Maoqiang Opera Themed Fighting Against the Coronavirus Pandemic”, in Rizhao Grand Theatre, 2 August 2020.

During my field trip in the city centre of Rizhao, I conducted 53 short face-to-face interviews with audience members on the scenes of the New Era Troupe’s Maoqiang Opera performances (13 of them were attendees at the Rizhao Grand Theatre). There were three ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ questions about the traditional opera, and the 53 audiences were divided into three age groups. In the city centre, the people I encountered on the performance sites were local residents covering all ages with a relatively balanced gender distribution.³⁴³ However, it was also difficult to find school students (teenagers) on the performance sites, and the attendees aged between 30 and 60 seemed to be the largest age group. The details of the questions, age groups and data statistics are listed in Table 5-5.

³⁴³ In contrast, as mentioned in Section 5.1.3, the majority of audience members in the countryside were elderly villagers aged over 58, and the number of female villagers was much larger than its male counterparts.

Table 5-5. Statistics of answers from audience members of different age groups about three 'Yes or No' questions

Answers Age Groups	Question 1: Have you ever seen Maoqiang Opera performance before?		Question 2: Do you know any local operas in Rizhao City or in Shandong Province?		Question 3: Are you willing to pay for a local opera (Maoqiang) performance?		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	It Depends
Under 29 (6 interviewees)	0	6	6	0	0	6	0
Between 30 and 60 (30 interviewees)	0	30	21	9	4	12	14
Over 61 (17 interviewees)	1	16	14	3	0	15	2
Total (53 interviewees)	1	52	41	12	4	33	16

Regarding Question 1, because there were not many Maoqiang Opera performances in the city centre, I found only one 73 year-old woman, Hu Xiuying, who said she had watched Maoqiang Opera performances when she was a teenager.³⁴⁴ She used to live in a local village but had now moved to her daughter's home in the city centre to look after her grandchildren. She recalled that someone got married in her village and invited a Maoqiang Opera troupe to create a jubilant atmosphere and the troupe performed for three consecutive days. However, she was completely unfamiliar with the melodies and the classic works of Maoqiang Opera, as she did not even realise that she was watching a Maoqiang Opera performance, instead mistaking it for a Lü Opera, despite the two opera forms sounding very different.

According to the results of Question 2, Lü Opera is clearly more well-known than Maoqiang Opera among the respondents. Forty-one respondents, including the six young interviewees aged under 29, all answered that Lü opera is a local opera in Shandong Province.³⁴⁵ Although the Rizhao Lü Opera Troupe also performs annually in public squares and the open spaces in residential areas in the city centre, none of them had watched the live performance of Lü Opera in recent years. This may be because the respondents had little enthusiasm to pay attention to the performance information, or the publicity of performance information was ineffective. Only one middle-aged interviewee mentioned that he had watched the live performance of a Peking Opera troupe in July 2020 on the Rizhao People's Square.

Regarding Question 3, only four middle-aged people in Rizhao Grand Theatre expressed willingness to pay for local opera performances. Watching live performances was one of their favourite recreational activities, but they seemed to be developing little interest in local opera after watching the performance of the New Era Troupe. Meanwhile, along with the 16 people who did not respond 'Yes' or 'No' immediately, the typical reasons for them to pay for the tickets to opera performances included: they could take their children to the live performance to help them pick up some knowledge about traditional Chinese culture; and they were willing to pay for high-quality performances given by famous troupes. The remaining 33 respondents all answered 'No' without too much thinking. For those aged under 60, most of them were simply not interested in local opera. The 17 older people over 61 (12 of them over 67) mentioned that although they loved traditional opera (such as Peking Opera, Huangmei Opera and Lü Opera), they would rather watch videos than pay for live performances. Their opinions were almost the same as the elderly villagers in the countryside. This may be because many were originally rural residents who had migrated to the city centre for personal reasons.

³⁴⁴ Personal communication, on People's Square of Rizhao City, 17 September 2020. According to this elderly woman, she first watched Maoqiang Opera performances during the first half of the 1960s. As mentioned in Section 2.5, this was the golden period of the Maoqiang Opera market, when there were over a hundred active Maoqiang Opera troupes.

³⁴⁵ Lü Opera is a famous local opera in Shandong Province and is also known by many opera enthusiasts in other provinces of China (see Section 2.3.1). The Shandong Lü Opera Theatre is one of the national-level traditional opera troupes called 'The Eight Red Flag Troupes' (*bada hongqi jüyuan*) in China.

To conclude, this section has further clarified that the current Maoqiang opera market is still confined to rural environments. Although Maoqiang performances can be found in urban environments, the practice of disseminating Maoqiang Opera culture among urban residents through live performances seems to have limited results. In 2020, Maoqiang troupes still had insufficient opportunities to perform in urban areas, and it was still difficult to find Maoqiang enthusiasts in the city centre of Rizhao.

5.3 Disseminating Maoqiang Opera through Mass Media

The Maoqiang community and local governments (Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Qingdao and Wulian) have emphasised the need to harness various up-to-date means for popularising Maoqiang Opera amongst a broader audience. One of these is to broadcast Maoqiang performances on livestreaming platforms. As mentioned, Maoqiang troupes have many opportunities to perform in urban areas in government-backed cultural activities, such as the annual Cultural and Tourism Festival and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Project (the Maoqiang Opera Weeks), and the Summer Festival. Anyone who follows the official account of the local cultural tourism bureaus and Maoqiang troupes on Wechat social media can watch the live broadcasting of these performances.³⁴⁶ Meanwhile, some Maoqiang performers also broadcast their performances on livestreaming platforms. For instance, Zhang Li from the Wulian Troupe, who is also an online anchor and is famous for his cross-dressing performances, broadcasted the troupe's performances almost every day during the troupe's first performance season in 2020, also receiving tips from users.

Regarding other dissemination methods, television programmes, including documentaries, films and cartoons about Maoqiang Opera, are also produced to further popularise the culture among a general audience, especially a young audience. Specifically, there are two documentaries about Maoqiang Opera, one of which was produced by the Wulian Cultural centre in 2011 and aired in 2012 on the Wulian County Channel. This documentary includes three episodes, each lasting about 35 minutes.³⁴⁷ The contents are mainly about Maoqiang's history and musical characteristics, offering the viewpoints of three elder Maoqiang performers about

³⁴⁶ See the playback of the opening ceremony of the 2020 Wulian County Summer Festival (30 July 2020) on the official account of Wulian Convergence Media:

https://wx.vzan.com/live/tvchat-2080944488?jumpitd=1&fr=&sharetstamp=1643415180727&shaid=GYnl-Baqe ghHi8l13fZ5RQ**#/ (The modern Maoqiang opera - *Fight the Virus* was premiered on this ceremony, starting at 0:22:00).

³⁴⁷ The resources of the full version of this documentary cannot be found on the Internet, but the art director of Wulian Troupe copied the video of the three episodes to me. The first episode is uploaded by an anonymous user to : https://play.tudou.com/v_show/id_XODlyMDU2NTMy

This video also includes recording a modern Maoqiang work created by the Songming Art Troupe (see section 2.5.2).

the current situation (in the early 2010s) and the future development of Maoqiang culture.

Another documentary was produced by China Central Television (CCTV) Channel No. 10 Science and Education in 2017 and was aired on 7 July 2020.³⁴⁸ This 38-minute documentary introduces six types of traditional Chinese local opera from different provinces, with the section about Maoqiang Opera only lasting about 7 minutes. Although this documentary only gives a very general introduction to Maoqiang performance, it constitutes a rare and valuable vehicle for spreading awareness of this local artform on a national level, and the ratings of the CCTV channels are much higher than the local TV channels at city-level and county-level. Meanwhile, CCTV Channel No. 11, specialising in traditional Chinese operas, also aired the opera film version of *Red Sorghum* on 19 May 2018, produced by the Gaomi Troupe in 2017.³⁴⁹ As mentioned in Section 2.4.3, the Gaomi government also subsidised the Animation Department of a local university in southeast Shandong to produce a cartoon version of the classic Maoqiang work *The Story of a Wall*, to publicise Maoqiang Opera among children, which was aired on the Gaomi Channel in 2011.

However, there is no regular Maoqiang-related television programme in Shandong Province and never has been, and the full-length Maoqiang operas are usually only aired on special occasions. For instance, to celebrate progress in fighting the pandemic, the Wulian Channel established a temporary programme broadcasting *Emergency Expedition (jinji chuzheng)* every day from 1 to 7 May 2020 (national holidays in China). For the regular televised Maoqiang performances over the past five years, Maoqiang Opera has been performed every year in the local Spring Festival Gala (*chunjie lianhuan wanhui*) to celebrate Chinese New Year. Although the performance is short (typically around five minutes) and the audience ratings of city-level and county-level TV channels are not great, it is still a significant opportunity to introduce Maoqiang Opera to a wider audience.

Holding the Spring Festival Gala is a nationwide cultural activity. A festival gala will involve various types of performance such as singing, dancing, poetry recitation, acrobatics, martial art displays, sketch comedy, magic shows and so forth. Every year, the government at different levels will organise their own festival gala to celebrate the coming new year and review the big events of the past year. Meanwhile, the whole process of the gala will be broadcasted on central or local television channels. For Chinese people, it is a tradition to watch the live broadcasting of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala (*yangshi chunwan*) on New Year's Eve between 8:00pm and 12:30am with their families. This CCTV Gala has been conducted since 1983 and is still the

³⁴⁸ The audience can watch the full version of the documentary on the official website of CCTV: <http://tv.cctv.com/2020/07/07/VIDEiqi00btddGifbwB6oFBm200707.shtml> The part of Maoqiang Opera starts at 19'39".

³⁴⁹ The audience can watch the full version of the Maoqiang film on the official website of CCTV: <https://tv.cctv.com/2018/05/19/VIDELnWIAqbnZXQnuNvjQ7s180519.shtml>

top-rated spring festival gala in China.³⁵⁰ Every year, although the gala's contents and style constantly change, performing traditional Chinese opera is always an essential element within the CCTV Gala. This performance is usually in the form of a specially arranged short performance of no more than ten minutes to show representative excerpts from several types of Chinese opera, usually the national operas and big local operas such as Peking Opera, Kunqu Opera, Yue Opera and Huangmei Opera.

For the Spring Festival Galas conducted in different provinces and cities, the overall style is similar to the CCTV Gala, with singing, dancing, acrobatic performances, and traditional opera performances also essential elements. However, compared with the CCTV Gala, the length of the local gala is much shorter, and the contents are more about local events and local culture. Moreover, the local gala is usually recorded in advance and broadcast two or three days before New Year's Eve on local TV channels. In recent years, both the CCTV Gala and most of the local gala were broadcasted on leading livestreaming platforms simultaneously with the TV channels to deal with the decreasing number of television viewers.

In Gaomi, Jiaozhou and Wulian, where Maoqiang Opera is popular, the specially arranged Maoqiang performance is an essential element within the local festival gala for exhibiting local culture. In this section, the Maoqiang performance in the 2020 Spring Festival Gala of Wulian County is used as a case study to illustrate how Maoqiang Opera is adapted to such contexts where the audience is bigger than usual.

5.3.1 Case Study: Televised Maoqiang Performance in the 2020 Wulian County

Spring Festival Gala

On 14 January 2020, the performers of the Wulian Troupe attended the live recording of the 2020 Spring Festival Gala to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The gala is a type of variety show, with 13 performances lasting about two hours (including commercial breaks). There were more than three hundred viewers on-site in the studio hall of the Wulian County Broadcast and Television centre (Wulian TV Centre). The gala was broadcast as a temporary TV program on the Wulian General Channel on 22 January, two days before New Year's Eve of 2020. People could also watch the live broadcasting and playback of this program and send real-time comments on the livestreaming platform of the Wulian County Convergence Media Centre (*wulianxian rongmeiti zhongxin*). 4280 users were watching the live broadcasting on 22 January, and more than 20,000 users watched the playback by the end of 2020.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ The rate of the average audience share (*shou shi fen e*) of the 2020 CCTV Gala was 68.356%..

³⁵¹ The playback of the 2020 Spring Festival Gala can be viewed online: https://wx.vzan.com/live/tvchat-1011086624?shaid=GYnl-BaqeghHi8l13fZ5RQ**&vprid=0&sharetstamp=1643313116345&ver=4c14efc088ff4855ba9f55d98cee1879#/ (The Maoqiang performance starts at 0:33:20)

The specially arranged six-minute Maoqiang Performance of the Wulian Troupe is one of the 13 performances performed on behalf of the Wulian County Cultural and Tourism Bureau. Since 2011, this yearly routine has been one of the troupe's most important performance tasks. To prepare, about two months before the formal performance, the troupe begin by selecting appropriate Maoqiang excerpts, choreographing the performers' body movements, recording the soundtrack, and customising new costumes. Every year during this period, the troupe usually stop travelling in the countryside and start rehearsing especially for this occasion two or three weeks in advance.

For the performance in 2020, twelve performers played six types of role (*hangdang*), including young male (*xiaosheng*), elderly male (*laosheng*), clown (*chou*), leading female (*qingyi*), elderly female (*laodan*) and young female warrior (*daomadan*). Each role requires two performers (see Figure 5-38). Niu Xigao explains that he arranged six pairs of identical roles for the performance to produce a striking effect on the stage.³⁵² In addition, twelve dancers from the previous performance item in the gala also participated as dancing partners to the other twelve to heighten the festival atmosphere of the performance (see Figure 5-39).



Figure 5-38. A group photo of the twelve performers, taken in the dressing room of the Wulian TV Centre before the formal performance. The costumes of the two young female warriors (with four flags at the back) were custom-made. Such costumes were never worn in village performances, 14 January 2020.

³⁵² Personal communication, in Wulian County Broadcast and Television Centre, 14 January 2020.



Figure 5-39. A stage photo of the Wulian Troupe's Maoqiang performance in the 2020 Wulian County Spring Festival Gala, held in the studio hall of the local television centre, 14 January 2020.

During the performance, the performers only needed to synchronise their actions with the soundtrack, which had been recorded in advance. The troupe's opera band recorded the accompaniment in the troupe's own recording studio (see Figure 5-40). This meant that the band's musicians did not need to attend the live recording of the performance. Niu further explains that pre-recording was employed to ensure that the performance went smoothly with as few unexpected situations as possible. This was deemed necessary because the performance would be broadcast, and there were also quite a lot of viewers in the studio hall during the live performance.³⁵³



Figure 5-40. The Wulian Troupe's recording studio on the second floor of the Wulian Cultural Centre, owned by Yiqun Media Company. It is also used for commercial purposes with charges of 300 yuan (about £33) per hour, 2 April 2020.

³⁵³ Personal communication, 14 January 2020

Although the formal performance began at about 9:00pm, the female Maoqiang performers arrived at the dressing room as early as 3:30pm because it usually takes more than two hours to be thoroughly and exquisitely dressed up and to conduct final rehearsals for this type of formal occasion (see Figure 5-41). In contrast, during their trips to the countryside, female performers usually take about forty minutes to apply their makeup and put on their accessories and costumes. Meanwhile, the older performers will help and supervise the dressing processes of the young performers for such noteworthy performances because some of the young apprentices are not sufficiently skilled at applying their own makeup (see Figures 5-42 and 5-43). Painting opera face (*hua lianpu*) is an essential skill for any qualified Chinese opera performer, and all the professional Maoqiang performers I met during field research were able to paint different looks to match different characters.³⁵⁴



Figure 5-41. A snapshot of Li Xiangxue and the other young female performers from the Wulian Troupe in the dressing room, preparing for the festival gala, 14 January 2020.

³⁵⁴ During my field research, I learned several lessons with different performers about how to paint an opera face, and I can paint the looks of the type of cameo roles and the other types of female roles.



Figure 5-42. The older performer Wang Xuhua applying the opera face for an elderly female role on her young apprentice He Miao, 14 January 2020.



Figure 5-43. The older performer Chen Jingang painting the opera face of a clown on young troupe member Zheng Dewei, a vocal performer of pop songs and the troupe's sound technician, 14 January 2020.

The troupe usually performs rearranged and simplified excerpts from classic Maoqiang works or newly composed Maoqiang opera songs. In 2020, the Wulian Troupe's contribution to the gala was entitled '*Chinese Opera in a Flourishing Age*' (*shengshi liyuan*) and contained five small pieces, each lasting a little over one minute. The first piece was a new opera song performed by two clowns, and the

second was an excerpt adapted from a classic Huangmei Opera performed by two young male roles and two leading female roles. The following three pieces were excerpts from famous classic Maoqiang works, including, for instance, *Asking for Betrothal Gifts*³⁵⁵ (*yao caili*). The following discussion mainly examines the first two pieces, as the others were performances of classic excerpts without distinct rearrangement.

The first piece, entitled ‘*Chunyou Dengshang Wulian Shan*’, literally means ‘traveling to Wulian Mountain on a spring outing’ (Spring Outing). The lyrics of this song were written and revised by the troupe members together, adopting the usual couplet poetic structure (*duilian ti*), with three pairs of couplets and six sung phrases (seven-word verse) in total. Moreover, the performances of the local festival gala usually feature a strong local character, and the contents are required to keep pace with the times. Thus, it is also necessary for the Maoqiang performance to pay attention to current local affairs. In 2020, the troupe members decided to write a text praising and publicising the county’s most famous and profitable tourist site Wulian Mountain (see below).

The lyrics:

- ① Sitting on a small sedan chair³⁵⁶ and holding a [fabric] fan,
- ② [We] climbed Wulian Mountain on a spring outing;
- ③ The beautiful scenery of Wulian Mountain looks like a wonderland,
- ④ The rhododendrons are in blossom and brilliant red,³⁵⁷
- ⑤ [We] welcome visitors from everywhere and anywhere,
- ⑥ [The visitors] will indulge in pleasure.

The melody of this song was arranged by Wang Shande who was the troupe’s *erhu* and gong player, though he left the troupe in May 2020. He accommodated the lyrics within one of the characteristic Maoqiang labelled tunes (*qupai* tunes) for stringed instruments - specifically, *nanluo* tune, making just a few changes to specific notes.³⁵⁸ Almost all the sung phrases and interludes of this piece are directly taken from *nanluo* tune, repeated over and over again. Specifically, the melody of the verses ①, ③ and ⑤ (the ascending verse of each couplet) are exactly the same, drawn directly from the vocal part of *nanluo* tune. Transcription 5-1 shows this opera song, transcribed from the recording of the troupe’s live performance on 14 January 2020.

³⁵⁵ See Transcription 4-15 in Section 4.3.1.

³⁵⁶ Sedan chair was one of the most commonly used vehicles in ancient China.

³⁵⁷ Wulian Mountain is famous for its rhododendron garden. The Wulian Rhododendron Festival is held annually by the local government to attract more tourists.

³⁵⁸ See the second notation in Transcription 4-22 (Section 4.3.1), showing Wulian Troupe’s rendition of *nanluo* tune.

Transcription 5-1:

Spring Outing

Lyrics: Members of Wulian Troupe
 Composer: Wang Shande
 Performed by Zheng Dewei and Chen Jingang (2020)

$\text{♩} = 108$

5
 ① 二 人 小 轿 呼 扇
 er ren xiao jiao hu shan

10
 扇,
 shan,

15
 ② 春 游 登 上 了 五 莲 山;
 chun you deng shang le wu lian shan;

20

25
 ③ 五 莲
 wu lian

30
 山 上 仙 镜 美,
 shan shang xian jing mei,

35

40
 ④ 杜 鹃
 du juan

45
 花 开 红 艳 艳;
 hua kai hong yan yan;

50

⑤ 喜 迎 八 方 游 客 来,
xi ying ba fang you ke lai,

55

60

⑥ 流 连 忘 返 乐 心 田
liu lian wang fang le xin tian

The second piece is adapted from one of the most famous excerpts from the Huangmei Opera work *Tian Xian Pei* (*Marriage of the Fairy Princess*): *Mangong Duichang* (literally, after work antiphonal singing, *Antiphonal Singing*). Transcriptions 5-2 and 5-3 take the first two sung phrases of *Antiphonal Singing* to show the differences between the Maoqiang Opera version (transcribed from the recording of Wulian Troupe’s live performance on 14 January 2020) and the Huangmei Opera version (transcribed from the recorded performance of Anhui Province Huangmei Opera Theatre, televised version broadcast on CCTV Channel No.11 Traditional Chinese Opera, 10 June 2019).³⁵⁹

The lyrics of the first two sung lines (seven-word verse):

- ① There are a couple of birds on the tree,
- ② The mountains are green, the waters are clear, and [we are with] smiles on our faces.

³⁵⁹ The region of Anhui Province is currently where the Huangmei Opera performance is famous. This opera can be watched on the official website of CCTV (the excerpt of *Antiphonal Singing* starts at 1:38:45”, the Episode 06) <https://tv.cctv.com/2019/06/10/VIDEgkHN7UyaPuyLRiWBuzmf190610.shtml>

Transcription 5-2:

Antiphonal Singing

Maoqiang Opera Version
Performed by Wulian Troupe (2020)

$\text{♩} = 106$

① 树 上 的 鸟 儿
shu shang di niao er

成 双 对,
cheng shuang dui,

② 绿 水 青 山 带
lu shui qing shan dai

笑 颜
xiao yan

Transcription 5-3:

Antiphonal Singing

Huangmei Opera Version
Televised performance by Anhui Theatre (2019)

$\text{♩} = 60$

① 树 上 的 鸟 儿 成 双 对,
shu shang di niao er cheng shuang dui,

② 绿 水 青 山 带 笑 颜
lu shui qing shan dai xiao yan

Regarding the relationships between these two versions, the troupe members accommodated the lyrics of *Antiphonal Singing* within the Maoqiang basic sung tune and made some changes at the end of each sung phrase. The original lyrics in Huangmei Opera performance also adopt the couplet poetic structure, employing six pairs of couplet in total, with 12 sung phrases. This short performance of Maoqiang Opera only extracted the lyrics of the first six phrases. Although the lyrics of this piece are borrowed from Huangmei Opera, the melody can immediately be recognised by Maoqiang enthusiasts because the characteristic Maoqiang interludes, prelude and coda remain unchanged, instantly conveying the identity of Maoqiang music. Meanwhile, each sung phrase of the Maoqiang version is followed by a short interlude, with a different melody used for each. In contrast, the sung phrases of the Huangmei Opera version are consecutive without interludes, and the melody of the first two sung phrases is repeated five times.

In conclusion, this chapter has highlighted that performing Maoqiang Opera in the rural areas of southeast Shandong Province continues to be of critical importance for government-funded Maoqiang troupes, implementing the national cultural policy of sending opera to the countryside, maintaining the Maoqiang market, and satisfying the Maoqiang core audience (mainly the local older female villagers). Meanwhile, there are evidently still few opportunities for Maoqiang troupes to perform for urban residents. At the same time, the Maoqiang community has attempted to disseminate Maoqiang Opera culture to a broader audience through utilising mass media. These measures have created more opportunities for the general audience to learn about the artform. However, with years of effort, cultivating new Maoqiang enthusiasts, particularly young followers, in the local urban areas and even rural areas still seems very difficult.

Chapter 6. The Development of Maoqiang Opera Culture: Creating Modern Maoqiang Works, Revitalising the Maoqiang Opera Market, and Maintaining Government Support

The Maoqiang Opera community attaches great importance to the future development of this artform. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, during my fieldwork period in 2020, I observed numerous Maoqiang troupes conduct a wide variety of activities to safeguard their traditional artform in modern society with the guidance and support of the government. These activities mainly embraced holding training classes, fulfilling various government-assigned performance tasks, and disseminating Maoqiang Opera through mass media. To make Maoqiang Opera keep pace with the times and increase its popularity among a wider audience, the Maoqiang community also commits time and effort to creating modern works. This final chapter focuses in more detail on the ongoing endeavor to create new repertoire, using four representative works created during different historical periods as case studies, mainly illustrating the stories of modern Maoqiang operas and the effects of this creative process. This chapter also explores the challenges the Maoqiang community has encountered in revitalising the Maoqiang market, again emphasising the government support as the *sine qua non* for the future development of Maoqiang opera culture.

6.1 “Products of the Times”: The Stories of Modern Maoqiang Opera

Since the 1950s, cultural policies about safeguarding traditional Chinese opera have highlighted the importance of creating new works. The new works of traditional Chinese operas are called ‘modern operas’ (*xiandai xi*). The modern operas created in each historical period of new China are intended to reflect the prevailing social situations of the times, with the subjects concerning specific social phenomena and events and the main standpoints being in keeping with the dominant political ideology, expressing easily comprehensible narratives. Like other modern works of traditional Chinese opera, the modern works of Maoqiang Opera also reflect the prevailing social predicament of the historical periods in which they were created. The operas are intended to reflect real life, situations and characters, portraying the life of ordinary local villagers. These works are called “products of the times” (*shidai chanwu*) by the performers.

National-level cultural policy is the main driver behind the creation of modern operas. As early as 5 March 1958, the Ministry of Culture issued the first national-level policy about stimulating the development of traditional Chinese opera, ‘*Notifications on*

Vigorously Promoting Artistic Creations, requiring traditional opera troupes to create a series of new works to reflect real life (*fanying xianshi*) and eulogise heroes (*ouge yingxiong*).³⁶⁰ At that time, many professional opera troupes became registered opera troupes³⁶¹, which were the main participants in the creation of modern operas. In the same year, on 13 June, 28 representatives from different provinces and municipalities gathered in Beijing for a national conference titled ‘Operas Representing Modern Life’.³⁶² For a whole month, the representatives discussed the main principle underpinning the development of traditional Chinese opera called ‘taking modern operas as the key link’ (*xiandai jumu weigang*). They also set a goal that the proportion of modern opera performances would account for 20 to 50 per cent of the performances of most registered opera troupes, and the troupes should try to achieve this goal within three years. The former deputy head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee Zhou Yang (1908-1989) insisted during the conference that “only by carrying out the correct policy of getting rid of the stale and bringing forth the fresh can we truly inherit and carry forward the splendid tradition of Chinese opera.” Henceforth, creating modern operas of traditional Chinese opera has become an important task for government-funded opera troupes.

Over the last several decades, cultural policies about safeguarding traditional Chinese opera have consistently emphasised the importance of creating modern works, and modern operas have continually been created, rehearsed, and performed. Notably, on 11 July 2015, the General Office of the State Council enacted a policy titled ‘Policies to Support the Inheritance and Development of Traditional Opera’, which is the highest-level official policy specifically focused on the affairs of safeguarding traditional Chinese opera.³⁶³ Of this document’s 21 articles, the 6th article concerns supporting modern opera creation by increasing financial support. Following the policy, the Central Finance Institution and the National Arts Fund increased the fund investments and rewards to create modern opera scripts.

In recent years, extensive financial support has mobilised enthusiasm and initiative within the whole traditional opera community for creating modern works. Opera troupes have been particularly enthusiastic about government-funded theatrical creation competitions because this is a way to attain bonuses, honour and publicity. If the troupes can carry off prizes in competitions, they can more easily gain attention and support from the government and apply for additional government subsidies, which can be used to award bonuses to performers, purchase costumes and props, make video recordings, and subsidise daily expenses. Meanwhile, the government

³⁶⁰ The original text of the policy was published in Hunan Political Newspaper, Vol.06, 1958. The electronic version of the document can be found at <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-FLZB195806015.htm>

³⁶¹ For the early form of state-owned opera troupes, see Section 2.1 about the Theatrical System Reform in China.

³⁶² The conference summary was published in People's Daily, 7 August 1958. The electronic version of the summary can be found at <https://new.zlck.com/rmr/b/news/105ECL4A.html>

³⁶³ Document No.52 of 2015, issued by General Office of the State Council, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-07/17/content_10010.htm

follows the principle that the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese opera requires joint effort amongst all kinds of opera troupes and the masses. Privately-owned troupes, thus, can also compete for subsidies and performance opportunities with government-funded troupes. Even without the government's requirement, privately-owned troupes still have strong enthusiasm for creating new works because it is a vital way to gain official recognition and government-provided performance opportunities.

This section focuses on four representative and influential modern Maoqiang works of different subject matters - two full-length operas and two playlets. Firstly, a full-length opera themed promoting Family Planning Policy and a playlet themed fulfilling tax obligations created by the Gaomi Troupe (state-owned troupe) are used to illustrate the subject matters of modern opera in history. Secondly, a playlet created by the Wulian Troupe (state-private-owned troupe) is used to illustrate a story addressing a topical issue - *Targeted Poverty Alleviation*. Thirdly, a full-length opera about fighting the COVID-19 pandemic created by the privately-owned New Era Troupe is introduced, alongside some other anti-pandemic-themed new works created by different government-funded troupes.³⁶⁴ Meanwhile, this section also discusses the significance and difficulties in creating modern Maoqiang works.

6.1.1 Subject Matter in the late 20th Century

As a government-funded troupe, the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Troupe started creating and performing modern works as early as 1958. By 1964, performances of traditional Maoqiang works in Gaomi County were wholly banned, and all the public performances of the troupe became modern operas. It is worth mentioning that about one-third of the old scripts in Gaomi Maoqiang Museum are scripts of modern Maoqiang works. The historical documentation of the current Gaomi Troupe shows that 48 modern Maoqiang operas were rehearsed and performed in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶⁵ In this period, the scripts of many modern operas of the old Gaomi Troupe were the so-called 'adapted operas' (*yizhi xi*), adapting stories from modern Peking Opera works and Model Operas, for example, *The White-Haired Girl* (*baimao nü*) (see Figure 6-1). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the old Gaomi Troupe was renamed as the Gaomi Peking Opera Troupe (see Figure 6-2) and started rehearsing and performing Model Operas.

³⁶⁴ All the specifically illustrated modern works in this section have been performed many times in front of the public.

³⁶⁵ The administrative staff of Gaomi Troupe provided the documents during my field trip to Gaomi City in August 2020.



Figure 6-1. Stage photos of *The White-Haired Girl* (*baimao nü*). Song Aihua (on the left), born in 1938, plays the leading role. Gao Shuying (female performer), born in 1941, plays the role of Red Army soldier (on the right). These photos are preserved in the Gaomi Maoqiang Opera Museum, 11 August 2020.

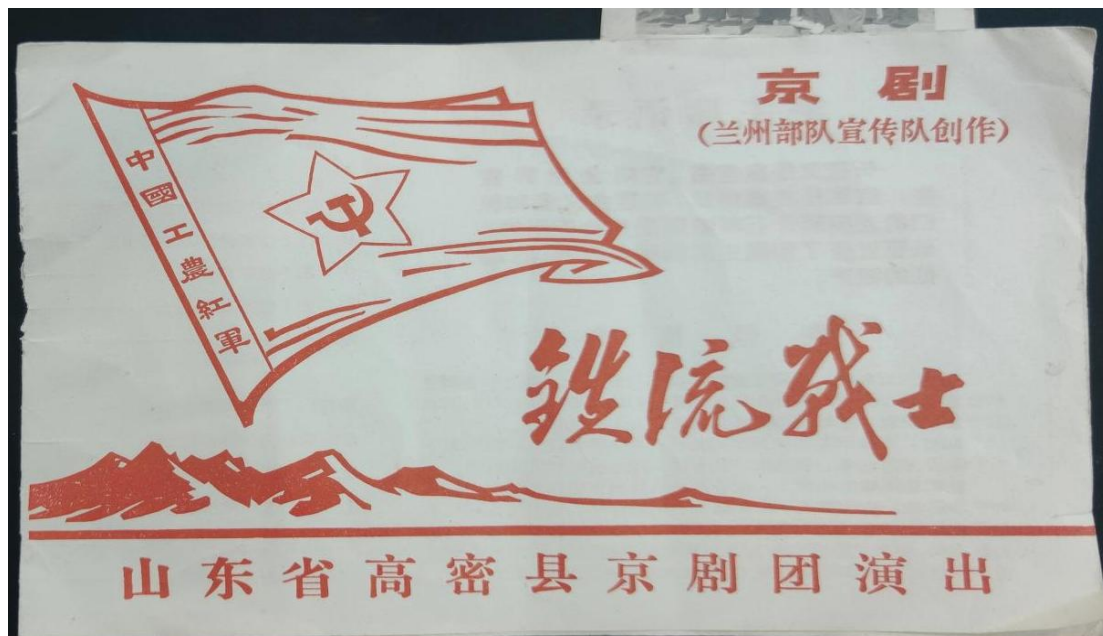


Figure 6-2. Pamphlet of a Peking Opera performance by the old Gaomi Troupe during the Cultural Revolution. The Lanzhou Army Propaganda Team initially created the story to eulogise the red army of workers and peasants. The bottom of the pamphlet includes the text “The Performance of Shandong Province Gaomi County Peking Opera Troupe”, *ibid.*

The new works' modern elements, including new stories, new stage settings, modern costumes, and western instruments, brought novelty to the audiences. It is generally recognised that Model Operas addressing revolutionary themes replaced all other stage performances. However, the current leader of the Gaomi Troupe, Huai Changjian, explained that only the performance of classic Maoqiang operas was restricted entirely during that period, though the old Gaomi Troupe still gave performances of modern Maoqiang operas.³⁶⁶ The troupe adapted the stories of Model Operas for Maoqiang opera performances and created a few original modern Maoqiang works to publicise Mao Zedong's thoughts and Chinese revolutionary culture.

After the Cultural Revolution, to cope with the extremely high rates of population growth leading up to the 1980s, the central Chinese government wrote the *Family Planning Policy* (*jihua shengyü zhengce*) into the country's constitution in 1982. This policy has strongly influenced all ordinary Chinese people, especially rural residents because it ran counter to prevailing traditional concepts and practices in rural areas, as conveyed through adages such as "preferring boys to girls" (*zhongnan qingnü*), "the more sons the more blessings" (*duozi duofu*), and "having a son to carry on one's family name" (*chuanzong jiedai*). For many rural families, if the couple's first child was a daughter, the family usually chose to keep having children until a baby boy was born.

In response to the state policy, the Gaomi Troupe created the most famous original full-length modern Maoqiang work in 1989, *The Desire for a Baby Boy*³⁶⁷ (*paner ji*). The subject matter of this story focuses on one of the basic state policies - Family Planning, known by the masses as the *One Child Policy* (*yihai zhengce*). The scriptwriters of the Gaomi Troupe took several months doing fieldwork in local villages to collect materials. The process of composing and rehearsing the opera took about a year. The rehearsal diary of this work from 25 November 1989 to March 1990 is still well preserved in the Gaomi Maoqiang Museum (see Figure 6-3), documenting details about the objectives and process of the performers' rehearsals, the problems and difficulties they encountered, and the guiding opinions of the directors and the former troupe leaders.

³⁶⁶ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

³⁶⁷ The performance of this opera lasts for about 140 minutes.

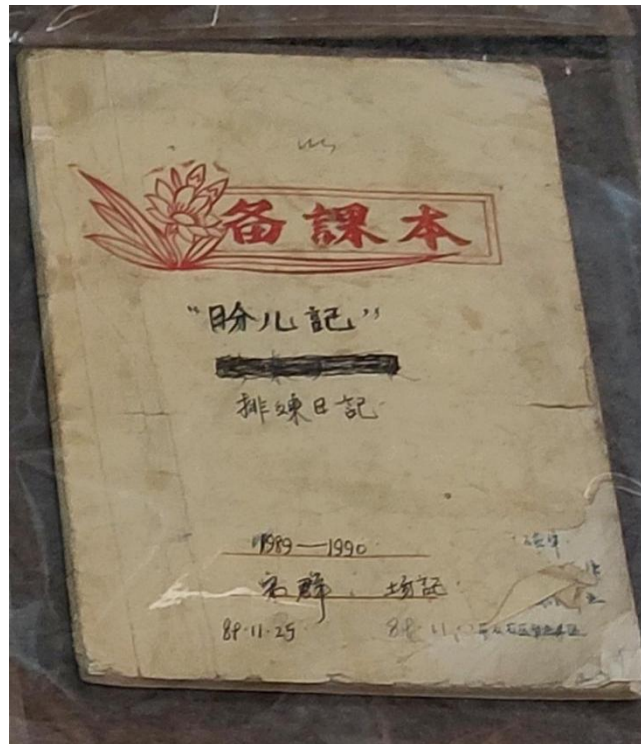


Figure 6-3. Rehearsal dairy (1989-1990) of *The Desire for a Baby Boy* (*paner ji*), *ibid.*

This story concerns the relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and contains 17 characters (13 female characters and four male characters) who are local villagers living in the rural area of Shandong Province. There are three main characters: a female village cadre (Xingqin) who is responsible for publicising the *One Child Policy*; a middle-aged female villager (Suyun) who has three daughters; and Suyun's mother-in-law who wishes for a grandson. Although there are many additional characters, the Maoqiang community considers the storyline clear and well-constructed. To portray the different characters, the composers use a lot of short monologues and sung passages to depict the characters' different thoughts.

The Desire for a Baby Boy is a tragic story with no comic characters or pleasurable episodes. This is relatively uncommon in the stories of modern Maoqiang opera, which usually have a comic ending. To summarise the plot, Suyun is living with her husband and her mother-in-law after getting married, and her family is a low-income family. They have just paid the penalty of breaking the *One Child Policy*, because they already have three children. However, none of the children is a boy. Suyun's mother-in-law trusted the prediction of a fortuneteller who asserted that if Suyun could give birth to her fourth child, the fourth baby would be a boy. Although Suyun remains in poor health and does not want to risk her life to have one more child, she is finally compromised because her mother-in-law and husband threaten her with divorce. At the end of the story, Suyun suffers a heart attack and dies after giving birth to the fourth child - a baby girl. Her husband and mother-in-law are bitterly remorseful for their wrong decisions, but everything is too late, and they can only cry while hugging the daughter.

This story's main character is Xingqin, a female communist and one of the leaders in the village. She is a devoted adherent of the state policy and a defender of women's rights and interests. When Suyun was alive, she asked Xingqin for help after she got pregnant with her fourth child. Although Suyun did not want this child, she could not decide to have an abortion. Xingqin expended all her efforts to persuade Suyun's husband and mother-in-law to comply with the *One Child Policy*. She also led the other six married women to publicise new ideas to the villagers, namely that a daughter is as good as a son. However, all her efforts were wasted, with Suyun's husband claiming that no matter the fine, he must have a son to carry on his family name. Xingqin received much abuse from the traditionally minded villagers. However, as the birth of the child approaches, Xingqin has stopped trying to persuade anyone and is busy caring for Suyun in the hospital. After Suyun passes away, she even takes on the responsibility of looking after the newborn baby, to help relieve the economic burden facing the unfortunate family.

On 8 March 1990, the Bureau of Art Affairs in the Ministry of Culture invited the Gaomi Troupe to Beijing City to perform this new work to celebrate International Women's Day. He Jingzhi (1924 - present), the former vice minister of the Ministry of Culture³⁶⁸, and other leading comrades of the Party were present and watched the live performance. Central People's Radio and China Central Television reported the event on 9 March, and more than ten news media outlets reported about the performance. The Gaomi Maoqiang Museum still exhibits many photos of this performance, occupying half a wall in the exhibition room (typically, there are only one or two photos per opera performance), including stage photos, group photos of performers, and photos of leading comrades who were present (see Figures 6-4 and 6-5).³⁶⁹



Figure 6-4. The stage photo of the daughter-in-law, Suyun, and her mother-in-law in *The Desire for a Baby Boy (paner ji)*, *ibid*.

³⁶⁸ He Jingzhi is also one of the two scriptwriters of the most famous Model Opera, *The White-Haired Girl*. His hometown is Zaozhuang City, Shandong Province.

³⁶⁹ Gaomi Troupe treats these photos as a badge of honour.



Figure 6-5. The photos of leading comrades are more numerous than photos addressing other elements in this modern opera. The group photo on the right corner is the image of the opera band, *ibid*.

The former leader of the Gaomi Troupe, Sun Hongjü, performed the role of Xingqin. She is very proud to have been selected and cast in the role when she was 27 years old. She says that Xingqin is one of her favourite Maoqiang opera characters throughout her 40-year acting career. She still likes to sing some classic passages during her leisure time. Sun Hongjü further insists that “when it comes to modern operas of Maoqiang, *The Desire for a Baby Boy* is always the representative one that should be mentioned. As an original modern work of the Gaomi Troupe, the performance of this opera in Beijing is a milestone in the development history of Maoqiang culture. It was the first time a Maoqiang troupe had given a performance in the capital city of China... Even though it did little to enhance the popularity of Maoqiang and the form still remained within Shandong Province, the performance alerted audiences on the national level to the existence of Maoqiang Opera.”³⁷⁰

Because of their successful performance in the capital, the Gaomi Troupe’s fame was significantly elevated within Shandong Province. The troupe acquired many opportunities to perform in local villages and the county centre. The historical documentation records that between April and July 1990, the troupe toured different villages and communities of Gaomi County and gave more than a hundred commercial performances with an income of 80,000 yuan (about £8,800), attracting more than 200,000 local audience members. This achievement was remarkable

³⁷⁰ Interview with Sun Hongjü, in New Era Troupe, 15 July 2020. After performing this work in Beijing, she became increasingly famous in the Maoqiang community and was honoured with National First-Class Performer in 2002.

during that period when the traditional opera market was rapidly shrinking. Benefitting from this opera, all the members of the Gaomi Troupe were rewarded with a bonus. Some performers who had already left the troupe because of low income even resubmitted application forms, attempting to rejoin. Even up to the present, it constitutes the most successful modern Maoqiang opera in the development history of Maoqiang culture.

Since the 1990s, Maoqiang opera troupes have collaborated with government agencies to create modern works addressing specific subject matters. The agencies usually provide financial support for the troupe in advance. If the story touches on specialist knowledge, the agency will dispatch an official to join the troupe as a consultant to help write the script. In 1995, the Gaomi Troupe worked with the local Tax Bureau and created a modern Maoqiang playlet - *The Story of Managing a Watermelon Orchard (guayuan qing)* to publicise paying taxes according to law (*yifa nashui*).³⁷¹

This playlet only has four characters, and the performance lasts only about 30 minutes. The main character, Chunyan, is a female tax collector (acted by Sun Hongjü) who is responsible for collecting taxes in the rural area. Chunyan's mother passed away when she was young, and her father will remarry a widow, Tianshen, who owns an orchard garden with a good watermelon harvest. According to the law, Tianshen is obligated to pay income tax. However, if she does so, the proceeds from selling watermelons may not suffice for her and Chunyan's father to decorate their wedding room. Because Chunyan works in the local tax bureau, Tianshen intends to ask Chunyan to help exempt her from the tax. As a qualified tax collector, Chunyan knows that she could never bend the law for the benefit of her relatives or friends. She patiently explains the importance of paying taxes to the overall national development and stresses that everyone has a responsibility to contribute to society. At the end of the story, Tianshen realises her mistake and pays the tax. The Gaomi Opera Museum still preserves one group photo of all the performers of this work, and a clipping from a local newspaper at the time, which includes performance information (the broadcast time on the local TV) and the outline of the story (see Figure 6-6).

³⁷¹ This subject matter is still not out of date. The Wulian Troupe also created an original full-length opera about paying taxes consciously in 2016.



Figure 6-6. In the group photo of *The Story of Managing a Watermelon Orchard (guayuan qing)*, Sun Hongjü is wearing a hat in the middle of the second row. Her costume is modelled on the actual dress of a female tax collector in the 1990s. The clipping from a local newspaper includes a photo of the four characters, *ibid*.

6.1.2 Keeping Pace with National Policies: Targeted Poverty Alleviation

One of the most significant and influential national policies in 21st Century China so far has been *Targeted Poverty Alleviation (jingzhun fupin)*, first put forward in November 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC). On 18 October 2017, Xi Jinping delivered a report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC and officially proposed the objective of carrying out *Targeted Poverty Alleviation*: “we must ensure that by the year 2020, all rural residents living below the current poverty line have been lifted out of poverty, and poverty is eliminated in all poor counties and regions. Poverty alleviation should reach those who truly need it and deliver genuine outcome.”³⁷²

Since 2017, poverty alleviation has been a hot subject matter in modern Maoqiang opera. There are five new modern works about *Targeted Poverty Alleviation*: four full-length operas and one playlet. The New Era Troupe created two operas about this topic.³⁷³ The opera, created in 2019, depicts how a local village’s first secretary (*diyì shuji*) leads the poor villagers out of poverty. The main character of the opera,

³⁷² In Article 4, Title VIII. Growing Better at Ensuring and Improving People’s Wellbeing and Strengthening and Developing New Approaches to Social Governance, in Xi Jinping’s 2017 Report, Page 43. The English Version of the Report can be downloaded at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm The original text can be found at, http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm

On 25 February 2021, President Xi Jinping announced at the National Poverty Alleviation Commendation Conference that China has already achieved a victory in fighting against poverty, see footnote. 174 in Section 3.4.1.

³⁷³ The local villagers already watched the two new works of the New Era Troupe in the countryside.

created in 2020, is still a first secretary, but this work was created to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the CPC (1921-2021). The other two original full-length operas of the Gaomi Troupe and Jiaozhou Troupe were also created in 2020 for the same purpose.

This section focuses on the playlet created by the Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe in 2017, titled *Driving an Honest Man Mad (da laoshi fabiao)*. There are four characters: Li Dazeng, a mild and honest man; Li Dazeng's wife, who is concerned with face-saving; a village secretary; and a newly appointed female township leader (see Figure 6-7). In 2018 and 2019, this playlet was performed by the Wulian Troupe several times in different local villages and was performed in the small theatre of the Wulian County Broadcasting Station.



Figure 6-7. The four characters in *Driving an Honest Man Mad (da laoshi fabiao)*. The female township leader is in the middle, and the village secretary is on her left.³⁷⁴ This photo, showing the troupe's performance in the small theatre of the Wulian County Broadcasting Station in 2017, was provided by the administrative staff of the Wulian Troupe.

The family of Li Dazeng is listed as a poverty-stricken household in the village, receiving government subsidies to maintain the minimum living standard. However, to fulfil the government-assigned task of reducing the number of poverty-stricken households, the village secretary does not report their existence to the township government. Consequently, Dazeng's family can no longer receive the basic living allowance from the government and becomes trapped in a much more difficult situation. When the secretary hears that the township leader will come to the village to double-check the poverty alleviation outcomes, he gives some money to Dazeng

³⁷⁴ The two female performers Wang Qimei and Chen Yanin left the Wulian Troupe in 2020.

and repeatedly asks him not to expose the truth. Meanwhile, he puts a bag of sheep manure in the yard of Dazeng's bungalow and asks him to tell the township leader that the sheep had been sold to make money.

Although Dazeng is unwilling to tell a lie and argues with the secretary, his wife accepts the money because their family has a debt to be paid off as soon as possible. However, the quarrel is heard by the township leader who has already arrived at the village, because she has found some inconsistencies in the report of the village. She pretends to be a thirsty passerby and asks Dazeng's wife for a glass of water. She chats with Dazeng and his wife about the difficulties they have encountered and inquires of them about their living conditions. The village secretary does not expect the township leader to be female³⁷⁵ and asks her to get out of the house immediately. At the end of the story, Dazeng confesses to the township leader about the evil plan of the village secretary and asks his wife to return the money. The village secretary is removed from office, and the township leader also promises Dazeng and his wife that the government will never give up a single poverty-stricken family.

The playwright of this playlet is Zhang Yuzhen, who judged her own work as follows during our discussion: "although this story is short, we can see big things through small ones. The difficulties that the poverty-stricken family encounters in this story may well be encountered by poor families across other regions in the country...False information about the progress of poverty alleviation works against the interests of the people. This work also expresses a conviction that party members and cadres must never be allowed to damage the image of the government. The grass-roots village secretaries and leading cadres should be strict with themselves, following the principle of delivering genuine outcomes, and strengthening the ideological awareness of serving the people."³⁷⁶ As the former head of the Wulian County Cultural Centre, a communist, and a famous local traditional opera and sketch comedy playwright, Zhang Yuzhen is still active in various government-backed activities. She has written new scripts for the modern Lü Opera and Maoqiang Opera and published opera scripts, reviews, and research reports in journals, magazines, and newspapers. Her standpoint is always consistent with the officially recognised mainstream ideologies, representing values of the local civil servants.

In December 2017, this work was selected for inclusion in the 2017 Traditional Opera Script Incubation Project of the Ministry of Culture.³⁷⁷ This modern Maoqiang playlet was the only local opera work from Shandong Province to have been selected in this nationwide competition, constituting a significant event in the history of traditional

³⁷⁵ The number of male officials in China is much more than that of female officials.

³⁷⁶ Zhang Yuzhen is also the playwright of *Emergency Expedition*. Personal communication, in Rizhao Grand Theatre, 2 August 2020.

³⁷⁷ Document No. 260 of 2017, issued by the General Office of the Ministry of Culture. The results of being selected and subsidised modern works is released in the 'Notification of Expert Review Results of the 2017 Traditional Opera Script Incubation Project', http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-08/28/content_5317130.htm

opera in the region. The project subsidised 60 modern works of traditional Chinese opera in total, with 16 full-length operas being subsidised for 200,000 to 250,000 yuan (about £22,000 - £28,000) and all the playlets being subsidised for 50,000 yuan (about £5,500). In addition, on 31 March 2018, the Shandong Province Scriptwriter Association held a special conference entitled The Wulian County Literature and Art: Traditional Opera Creation Seminar, to discuss how to refine works. The refined version of the script was published in a Journal, *The Scriptwriter*, in 2019.³⁷⁸ In 2020, the New Era Troupe created two new full-length operas about poverty alleviation and gave performances in local villages. To avoid comparison, although this work is thought to have been a great success and to represent a milestone in the development of modern Maoqiang opera, the Wulian Troupe no longer rehearses it and has not performed it in the countryside since 2020.

6.1.3 Keeping Pace with the Times: Fighting Against the COVID-19 Pandemic

Literary and performance works are understood to be effective means for disseminating ideology and boosting morale during times of hardship. From February to July 2020, various Maoqiang troupes created two full-length operas³⁷⁹, three playlets and more than ten Maoqiang opera songs. Although all types of Maoqiang opera troupe made contributions, this section mainly focuses on the most representative work - a full-length opera produced by the privately-owned New Era Troupe, entitled *Emergency Expedition*³⁸⁰ (*Jinji chuzheng*). The pandemic-themed works of government-funded troupes are also briefly addressed in this section.

(a) The full-length Modern Opera - *Emergency Expedition*

The New Era Troupe responded quickly, creating their new work about fighting the pandemic in early 2020. As a privately-owned troupe, the bankroller Dong Yanping decided to create the work. The troupe resumed rehearsing as early as the middle of February 2020, because its members lived together in a dormitory and thus were not subject to the severe restrictions of the home quarantine policy. Meanwhile, because the troupe could not perform in villages, it had enough time to focus on creating and rehearsing new repertoire. From 1 May to 7, 2020, the Wulian County TV channel broadcasted the video recording of *the Emergency Expedition*. During my field trip to local villages, I also encountered several villagers who told me they had watched this opera on TV and they were usually fans of Sun Hongjü's performances. In contrast, the members of the government-funded troupes were restricted by anti-epidemic measures and suspended all group activities for about six weeks.

The story of *Emergency Expedition* contains nine characters, the main protagonist

³⁷⁸ *The Scriptwriter*, Vol.06, 2019 <https://mall.cnki.net/magazine/article/JUZJ201906006.htm>

³⁷⁹ One work was created by a local civic group, the Gaoze Troupe, in May 2020. The related information is in Sections 3.5 and 3.6.

³⁸⁰ The live performance of this opera lasts about 130 minutes.

being an elderly female villager planning for her second son's wedding reception. Her son's name is Jun, so people usually call her Jun's mother.³⁸¹ Because of the COVID outbreak, the wedding should be cancelled to avoid the assembling of a crowd. However, Jun's mother is a headstrong person and, just like many other older villagers in the countryside, does not comprehend the importance of the quarantine policy during the outbreak. She believes the pandemic will not spread to her small village in Shandong Province. She refuses to wear a mask, reduce the frequency of her wandering around, or keep social distance (see Figure 6-8).

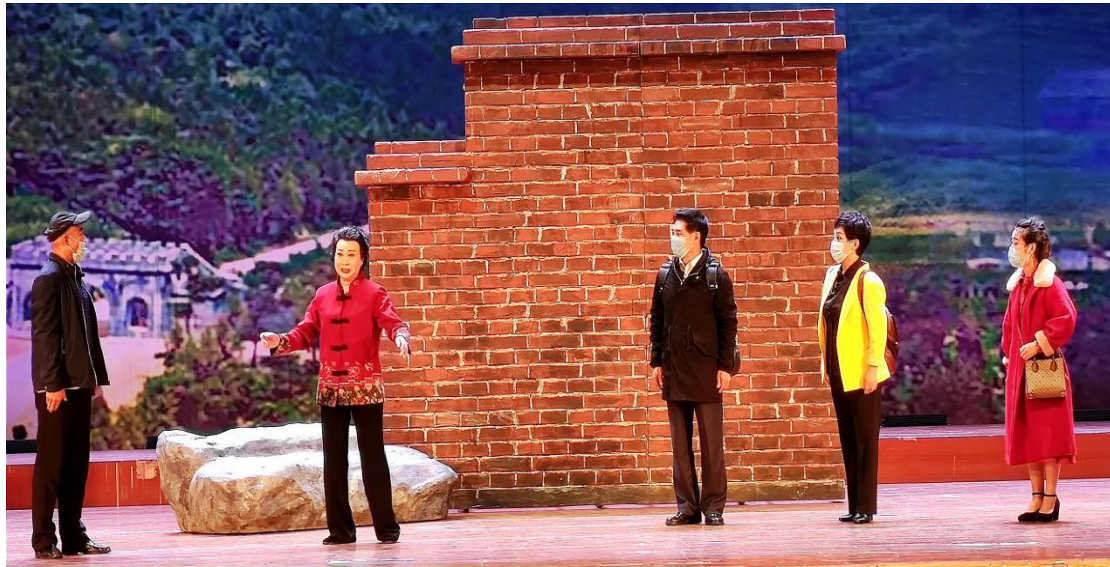


Figure 6-8. Stage photo of the live performance of *Emergency Expedition (jinji chuzheng)* in the Rizhao Grand Theatre. When Jun's mother (the second performer from the left) leaves her home, she is astonished because everyone she comes across in her village is wearing masks, 2 August 2020.

Following the volunteers' persuasion, Jun's mother finally realises the dangerousness of the coronavirus. She decides to postpone the wedding reception, staying at home to reduce the risk of infection. She even asks Jun, a surgeon, to return home as early as possible because hospitals are high-risk areas for infection. However, her family members conceal from her that Jun has already left Shandong Province for Hubei Province to support the medical workers in Wuhan City - the worst-hit city in China during the outbreak. Jun's mother is extremely worried about her son's safety and scolds the other family members for failing to prevent him from going to Wuhan. In the opera finale, Jun's fiancée, a nurse, convinces her future mother-in-law that being a volunteer in Wuhan City is very honourable and that it is the primary responsibility of every medical worker to cure sickness and save the patient. Meanwhile, Jun calls his mother, saying that he is safe and that the anti-epidemic measures and facilities in Wuhan are fully effective. Finally, Jun's mother comprehends her son's decision and decides to be a volunteer herself, persuading

³⁸¹ This is a custom in China to call married women with children - Someone's Mom. Sun Hongjü played the role of Jun's mother

other elders in the village to wear masks and keep social distance (see Figure 6-9).



Figure 6-9. Stage photo of *Emergency Expedition*. Although Jun never appears on stage, his image can be seen in the family photo on the wall. The woman on the far left is Jun's sister-in-law, the young lady on the far right is his fiancée, the middle-aged man is his elder brother, and the old couple sitting beside the table are his parents, *ibid*.

The scriptwriter of *Emergency Expedition* is Zhang Yuzhen.³⁸² During our conversation, she explained that she was so impressed to hear that the bankroller Dong Yanping donated one million yuan (about £110,000) to Wuhan City, Hubei Province. She, thus, donated the script, which she completed within four weeks between February and March 2020, to the New Era Troupe without any contribution fees. With the successful premiere of *Emergency Expedition* in Rizhao Grand Theatre, the New Era Troupe gained honour and was invited to perform it again at city-level and provincial-level cultural events. The troupe benefitted from receiving additional opportunities to perform in the city centre. Zhan Yuzhen further explained that “as the main character in this story, Jun’s mother has undergone two major changes - firstly, from not understanding the importance of anti-epidemic measures to abiding by the measures, and secondly, from complaining about Jun’s decisions to becoming a volunteer herself, publicising safety measures.” The image of Jun’s mother serves to represent, in microcosm, the many ordinary Chinese people who initially did not realise that preventing the virus required collective effort. This opera was still performed in 2021 in different districts and townships of Rizhao City, alongside the two modern operas on *Targeted Poverty Alleviation*. During my field trip, it was the only modern work performed in villages (see Figure 6-10) - all the others being classic operas.

³⁸² Personal communication, in Rizhao Grand Theatre, 2 August 2020. She was the former leader of Wulian County Cultural Centre and the scriptwriter of the Wulian County Troupe.



Figure 6-10. A performance of *Emergency Expedition* in Xi Chengxian Village, Jietou Township. Because the soundtracks of this work have been recorded in advance, the performers only need to synchronise their actions with the soundtrack, 8 July 2020.

(b) Government-funded troupes creating anti-pandemic works

Privately-owned troupes are more responsive than government-funded troupes in creating new works about hot social topics. This is because, for these troupes, the bankroller possesses the decision-making power. If the bankroller approves the decision to create modern operas, the other members quickly engage in the processes. In contrast, for government-funded troupes, creating new works involves more procedure. The leaders, representatives of performers, and administrative staff need to draw up and submit a proposal to introduce the new project to the local Cultural and Tourism Bureau. Estimating the expenditure and applying for funding in advance is also necessary. After all the preparations are made, the leaders can assign tasks to specific departments, and meanwhile, meetings will be held periodically to monitor the progress.

Although the government-funded troupes did not create full-length Maoqiang operas, they composed and recorded more than ten Maoqiang opera songs between February and April 2020. Maoqiang opera songs are newly composed vocal works of between four- and ten-minute duration, featuring the typical melodies and rhythms of Maoqiang Opera. They are easier to create and disseminate amongst audiences than larger-scale works. The Gaomi Troupe released two video recordings of Maoqiang opera songs in March. One of the songs won second prize at a competition in Shandong Province geared towards creating anti-pandemic-themed artistic works. This song, entitled '*I am Proud I am Chinese*' (*wo jiaao woshi zhongguoren*), describes how the entire Chinese populace made a joint effort to fight against the virus. Meanwhile, the Qingdao Troupe released eight vocal works between 19 March

and 27 April. Among these works, the first and the fourth work are Maoqiang opera songs, and the other works are in the style of Chinese revolutionary songs or pop-style lyric songs.

In 2020, the state-owned troupes were busily committed to various other tasks, giving them limited time to create new works. For example, the Gaomi Troupe was busy rehearsing two new full-length operas, one promoting the socialist legal system and the other fighting against corruption to construct a clean government. The Qingdao Troupe was also busy rehearsing an original full-length modern opera at that time, explicitly celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China. Moreover, they also need to fulfil the performance tasks assigned by the government, including their performances in the countryside. Thus, creating opera songs was much more feasible than producing new Maoqiang operas. Huai Changjian, who is the administrative director, Maoqiang opera composer, and violinist of the Gaomi Troupe, explained:³⁸³

“We must ensure the quality of our new productions, because everyone knows that Gaomi City is the hometown of Maoqiang Opera and we attach great importance to the reputation of our performances. Typically, it takes at least half a year to prepare for the premiere of a new work. It is unrealistic for our theatre to create a new Maoqiang opera within one or two months...We would not perform just to get the job done...I am not sure about the situation of other opera troupes, but our troupe did not receive any notifications from the Cultural and Tourism Bureau that a new opera themed anti-pandemic should be created...We are rehearsing six classic Maoqiang operas and one modern opera to prepare for this year’s second Maoqiang Opera Week [from 4 to 10 November 2020].”

Meanwhile, during that period, the state-owned opera troupes had to abide by the government’s anti-epidemic measures, making it unrealistic for them to gather enough performers for a full-length opera. Furthermore, the restrictions in some cities were stricter than in others. For instance, it was not until April 2020 that the Gaomi Troupe’s daily activities returned to normal. However, indoor performances were still not permitted even in August, and the Gaomi Art Theatre was only reopened to the public on 30 September. In contrast, the Rizhao Grand Theatre was reopened at the end of July. Contrasting against the human resource needs for full-length opera, producing a video of Maoqiang opera song only needs one or two performers.

The state-private-owned Wulian Troupe created two Maoqiang playlets. During our discussions, the leaders and members of the troupe recalled that they had no idea to create a new opera before May 2020. They thought that the pandemic would soon

³⁸³ Interview, in Gaomi Grand Theatre, 11 August 2020.

be controlled and that they would be able to restart their performances in the countryside. Thus, they missed the chance to create a new opera and compete with the New Era Troupe's impressive *Emergency Expedition*. The first of the Wulian Troupe's playlets, *Back Home (hui jia)*, relates the interaction between a village secretary and a villager who returns from a high-risk area and refuses to abide by the quarantine policy. The second playlet, *Fight the Virus (zhan yi)*, relates the interaction between a nurse and her patient who has tested positive for COVID-19. The troupe finally chose to focus their rehearsal on the second playlet because it was adapted from a true story in Wulian County, features only two characters, and lasts only 27 minutes. The scriptwriter is a famous local writer (Peng Liyuan) specially invited from Rizhao City. The playlet was successfully performed at the opening ceremony of the Wulian County Summer Festival. This live performance was both the premiere and the sole performance of the work (see Figure 6-11).



Figure 6-11. Stage photo of the live performance of *Fight the Virus (zhan yi)*. To improve the performance quality, the troupe invited three skilled players of traditional Chinese instruments to join the opera band, Wulian County Stadium, 30 July 2020.

6.1.4 Significance and Difficulties: Creating New Maoqiang Operas

Although this section mainly focuses on the modern works of Maoqiang Opera created after the 1970s, it should be recognised that, over a century, new works of traditional Chinese opera have continually been created, rehearsed, and performed. New works of traditional opera were initially called 'fashionable dress opera' (*shizhuang xinxi*) because the performers' costumes for this type of work were similar to people's everyday wear at that time, contrasting with the traditional costumes featuring especially elaborate headwear and accessories. The first fashionable dress Peking Opera, *Sorrow of the Times (niehai bolan)*, was performed in 1914. The leading performer of this work was Mei Langfang (1894-1961), the founder of the Mei School (*Meipai*) of Peking Opera. The story itself was based on events in 1906, connected with the establishment of the so-called '*ji liang suo*', a

charity organisation to help and support prostitutes. After that, many other regional opera forms followed suit, creating new works addressing current and recent events, such as publicising democracy and republicanism (Zou, 2012; Yang and Ling, 2017). After the founding of New China (1949), new works focusing on people's modern lives, for which the performers would wear modern costumes, began to be called 'modern opera' (*xiandai xi*) in official documents.

Based on the existing literature, many commentators discuss and stress the significance and necessity of creating modern works. For example, both of the leading scholars and critics within this research field, Zhang Geng (1911-2003) and Guo Hancheng (1917-2021)³⁸⁴, emphasised that creating new modern operas is essential to ensure that the opera form is sufficiently rejuvenated for modern society. As early as 1958, Zhang had already published a monographic study, *The Role of Traditional Opera in Expressing Modern Life*, arguing that "traditional Chinese opera should highlight 'folkloric culture' [*minsuxing wenhua*], 'pay attention to the general public's lives, and suit both refined and popular tastes' [*huanxi yumin, yasu gongshang*]." ³⁸⁵ At the age of 98, Guo (2015) pointed out that "modern opera is the 'touchstone' [*shijinshi*] of the modernisation of traditional operas" and stressed that the creation of modern operas is vital for the future development of traditional Chinese opera.³⁸⁶ Other famous scholars, for example, Wang Changan (2013), also stress that "in order to attract public attention, traditional operas should pay attention to the public; in order to gain recognition from modern society, traditional operas should pay attention to modern society."³⁸⁷ According to findings made during my field research, the members of the different Maoqiang troupes also strongly advocate the practice of creating modern works, stressing that doing so is essential to ensure the form's future prosperity. None of my interviewees expressed a negative view of this practice, and they were usually very proud of the achievements of their troupes in creating modern operas, often alluding to prizes and honorary titles they had secured.

Meanwhile, many other commentators pinpoint difficulties encountered in the creative process and propose possible solutions, and discuss the adverse effects of excessive political influence on modern works. In some cases, the creation of new works is regarded as 'guided writing' or 'named composition' (*mingti zuowen*), where the subject matter and narrative content are determined to a large extent by external parties. The traditional opera troupes only do what they must to fulfil political tasks.

³⁸⁴ Zhang Geng was the former head of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts (the highest educational institution for learning traditional Chinese operas). Guo Hancheng was a famous scriptwriter and the former director of the Research Institute of Chinese Opera. They are the two co-editors of *The General History of Chinese Opera* (*zhongguo xiqu tongshi*, 1981), the foundational research of traditional Chinese operas.

³⁸⁵ Zhang Geng (1958), *lun xiqu biaoqian xiandai shenghuo*, in the introduction, Beijing: China Drama Publishing House.

³⁸⁶ Guo Hancheng (2015), 'The Gene of Chinese Opera Aesthetics Cannot be Changed', *China Culture Daily*, 18 September 2015.

³⁸⁷ Wang Changan (2013), 'Some Ideas about the Development of Modern Operas', *China Arts Daily*, 18 February 2013. Wang is the director of the Anhui Province Research Institute of Chinese Opera.

Meanwhile, some modern works have been criticised for focusing too much on the enlightenment of ideology and the cultivation of ethical thought, emphasising the didactic function (*jiaoyü zuoyong*) while neglecting the entertainment function (*yüle zuoyong*). Moreover, some troupes are thought to attach undue importance to gaining honour and awards. Some modern works are created and rehearsed for the sake of gaining awards and prestige but are never even performed in front of an audience (Su, 2011; Li, 2017; Fu, 2020). Furthermore, beginning in the 1990s, some scholars and critics (Gao, 1991; Ke, 1992) have voiced concerns that newly created works have focused too much on contemporary settings and society, neglecting the traditional characteristics (music, dialect and custom) that were also crucial components in the artform (Sun, 2021).

Additionally, the creation of modern works also faces a lack of professional scriptwriters, particularly younger writers. It is unrealistic for the older writers to completely put themselves in the shoes of the young audience members. A new important study conducted by Lu Han (2020: 109-115) focuses explicitly on the scriptwriters, titled *'Investigating the Current Situation of Chinese Opera Writers, from the Perspective of Data Analysis'*.³⁸⁸ Lu collected electronic questionnaires from 754 Chinese opera and theatre scriptwriters addressing various artistic forms from 32 provinces and cities in mainland China. He found that only 150 respondents were traditional opera writers; about 44% were aged over 55, 32% were aged between 46 and 55, and only 13% were aged between 25 and 35. My fieldwork suggests that the Maoqiang Opera scene also faces a dearth of young scriptwriters. Zhang Yuzhen was already 70 when she wrote the *Emergency Expedition* in 2020. The Wulian Troupe's scriptwriter, Qin Xuhe, who formerly led the Wulian Culture Centre, is also over 60. Although new Maoqiang works are created yearly, little success has been achieved in attracting young audience members and stimulating the opera market.

Furthermore, being 'products of the times' (*'shidai chanwu'*), most modern works can only be performed within a particular period of history. The art director of the Wulian Troupe, Niu Xigao, once told me that most modern Maoqiang works have a brief lifespan of no more than two years. Once the concerns of the society and the government have changed, these works are no longer suitable to be performed anymore.³⁸⁹ Specifically, the topics of the modern Maoqiang works introduced in this section are closely related to hot issues of different periods. However, none of these works is still being performed currently. A typical example is the Gaomi Troupe's work, *The Desire for a Baby Boy*, which was created and performed during the 1990s to publicise the *One Child Policy*. The population growth rate in China has rapidly dropped since the 2000s, and in October 2015, the central government announced that a couple could have two children and, after May 2021, could have three children. Obviously, this work's theme is history, and the situation will be the

³⁸⁸ Lu Han (2020), *Hundred Schools in Arts*, Vol. 5 (176).

³⁸⁹ Only a few modern works are still performed on special occasions, such as reviews of representative works, reviews of excellent award-winning works, and officially organised cultural activities.

same for the works addressing the fight against COVID-19 (2020) and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (2021).

Although the members of different troupes have made concerted efforts to highlight both the didactic and entertainment functions of modern Maoqiang works, the results seem less satisfactory than expected. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Maoqiang core audience is mainly composed of female villagers over 58, who usually prefer stories addressing the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, living out one's life in retirement, and romance folklore. These audience members are less interested in themes of the times, such as paying one's taxes according to the law, targeting poverty alleviation, struggling against corruption, and participating in voluntary service. Based on my observations, most villagers gather at the performance site of Maoqiang Opera mainly to be entertained, with many keen to watch the scene of bustle (*kan renao*). Many come to enjoy the lively festive atmosphere, and feel a little disappointed if the bustling scenes fall short of expectations. Maoqiang troupe members typically recognise that the primary purpose of creating and performing new works is to satisfy enthusiasts and attract new followers, acknowledging that one should not place undue emphasis on fulfilling tasks, winning awards, and gaining honours. However, this desired balance is not always achieved in practice because creating new themed works is an important way to achieve additional bonus payments and allowances, which are important income sources for subsidising the troupes, particularly the government-funded Maoqiang troupes.

Furthermore, it is common that the composers of Maoqiang learn from the melodies of other traditional operas and even local folk songs. They may also compose new melodies based on their own aesthetic sensibilities. Although this kind of practice increases the expressiveness and richness of Maoqiang music, it is criticised by some older and conservative performers (for example, my interviewee Zhao Congsheng in the Wulian Troupe) who care most about preserving the authentic flavour of Maoqiang music. However, as discussed and demonstrated in Chapter 4, although the music of modern Maoqiang works may feature characteristics drawn from other sources, the distinctive features of Maoqiang are still well kept, particularly the variations of the basic sung tune, *mao* tune and the descending scale. This means that, in general, the traditional style-defining musical characteristics of Maoqiang have been well preserved in modern operas and most modern Maoqiang works have highlighted the traditional characteristics of Maoqiang Opera. Wang Yunting (born 1942), who performed in the old Wulian Troupe, explains that “the development history of Maoqiang is a process of absorbing anything and everything [*jianrong bingbao*], though not uncritically. This process keeps opening up new ways to guarantee the unflinching vitality of Maoqiang Opera.”³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ Interview, in Wang Yunting's home, 3 September 2020.

To conclude, although there are limits regarding the extent to which a traditional opera form can be innovated while remaining traditional, my interviews with Maoqiang performers and composers reveal that creating modern opera and learning from other traditional Chinese opera forms are highly valued. They prefer to prioritise innovation when talking about their plans for the future development of Maoqiang Opera. By drawing influences from other sources - melodious tunes, rhythms and tempo, costumes, stories, and so forth - one can enrich Maoqiang culture.

6.2 The Shrinking Opera Market: Challenges in Cultivating Young Performers and Attracting Young Audiences

As long as there are performers and audience, the Maoqiang performances can be passed down from generation to generation. This section, therefore, focuses on the two major concerns faced by Maoqiang troupes in safeguarding Maoqiang Opera, namely cultivating young performers and attracting young audiences. As explained earlier, Maoqiang troupes and training classes have made great contributions in cultivating young inheritors (for example, the five-year Maoqiang training class of the Gaomi Troupe from 2008 to 2012).³⁹¹ However, there is still a long way to go for the young performers to improve their skills and inherit this artform. In comparison with the younger generation, the older Maoqiang performers, who joined the old Maoqiang troupes between 1976 and 1978, are selected and trained under a different cultivation system.³⁹² Although they now work in different troupes, they know each other very well, and some of them even learned Maoqiang Opera from the same master. They state that the current criteria for selecting and training young performers are not as strict as they used to be.

Specifically, in the past, the leaders and older performers of Maoqiang troupes usually asked around in different villages about whose families had talented children. They then came to visit and invite those children to join their troupes. Children aged 11 and 14 could also participate in the qualification trials organised by different troupes. Because the Maoqiang community was a high-to-medium income group (particularly in the first half of the 1980s), the competition between young applicants was fierce. Niu Xigao, who joined the old Wulian Troupe in 1976 at the age of 14, explains the criteria for selecting young performers in the past:³⁹³

“When selecting inheritors, we had unwritten criteria - ‘evaluating the three generations’ [*kan san dai*], meaning that we would also consider the

³⁹¹ For more details see Sections 3.2.1, 3.3.1 and 3.7.1.

³⁹² For example, my interviewees include Huai Changjian (leader and composer) and Xue Lintao (director and performer) in Gaomi Troupe, Niu Xigao (art director and performer), Xu Qingli (drummer) and Wang Xuhua (female performer) in Wulian Troupe, Li Futang (director and performer) and Wang Weiping (female performer) in New Era Troupe.

³⁹³ Interview, in Wulian Troupe, 8 July 2020.

‘qualities’ [*tiaojian*] of the young applicants’ parents and grandparents, including their appearance, intelligence, voices, physical fitness and so forth...This was also the system used by the famous troupes in the ‘50s and ‘60s, applied to make sure that the chosen child would be sufficiently qualified to be a Maoqiang performer.”

Niu Xigao further recalls his experiences of working as an apprentice in the old Wulian Troupe.³⁹⁴

“We did not have holidays and we ‘practiced in the coldest weather in the winter and the hottest weather in the summer’ [*donglian sanjiu; xialian sanfu*]. Every day we had to get up early at 5:30am to finish the routine of ‘practicing in the morning’ [*chu zaogong*]...The living conditions at that time were arduous. We did not have rehearsal rooms and could only practice in outdoor areas. When it snowed at night, the first task for us the next morning was to sweep away the snow and then get practicing as usual”

Meanwhile, Niu Xigao and Xue Lingtao mention that they suffered beatings by their masters if they truanted or if their body movements were not up to their masters’ requirements. In contrast, nowadays, the relationship between most older and younger performers is that of colleagues, rather than master and apprentice. Although the young performers still learn skills from the older performers, they do not learn the specific style of a specific older performer. Niu Xigao adds that:³⁹⁵

“In the past, the apprentices ‘pleaded with’ [*qiu*] their masters to teach them. In order to keep our masters satisfied, we even had to prepare water for them to wash their faces, because when our masters were satisfied, they were more likely to teach a specific technique a few more times. Young performers cannot understand the situations we faced in the past, and now it is us who plead with them to learn skills.”

According to interviews with older Maoqiang performers (for example, Xu Qingli and Wang Xuhua), before the 1990s, the relationships amongst young apprentices were typically characterised by competitiveness. They had to take extra initiatives to improve their performance skills and would monitor their progress in relation to others to ensure that they did not fall behind. Some even practiced furtively in the evenings when the others were resting. However, in modern society, there is little competition between the different troupes in different cities, and the fluctuation of the opera market does not influence the troupes’ incomes or practices. This is because, typically, there is only one government funded Maoqiang troupe in each

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

city or county. Professional Maoqiang troupes usually rely on government-provided performance opportunities, and the government provides subsidies as long as the troupes fulfil their responsibilities. Without too much outside pressure, as mentioned earlier, young performers in both the Gaomi Troupe and Wulian Troupe are liable to fiddle with their mobile phones or play card games together instead of advancing their performance skills.

Although older interviewees worry that the young performers may lack sufficient motivation to improve their performance skills, most of them admit that it is unrealistic to ask the young performers to endure hardship and endeavour as the older generations did. Among them, Xue Lintao says that “the young performers are so lucky because they were born in an age of plenty. They can now travel to the countryside by air-conditioned coach, but in the past [the 1980s and 1990s], we only had tractors and *jiefang* cars [a type of big open-topped truck]. It was freezing in the winter, but we did not slack off on any of the performances.”³⁹⁶ Moreover, some elder performers in the Wulian Troupe particularly mention that they feel disappointed about the perfunctory performances in villages. As noted in this thesis, during the live performances, there is at least one prompter, who is familiar with the script, standing beside the mobile stage and prompting some of the young performers with their lines.³⁹⁷ They explain that this would never have happened during the 1960s and 1980s. Some of them even judge this phenomenon to be “ridiculous” (“*hen ke xiao*”) and “absurd” (“*bu xiang hua*”).

Compared with cultivating young performers, the task of cultivating a new core audience seems even more daunting. Even with years of performing in urban areas and disseminating through mass media, the Maoqiang core audience is still largely confined to the older attendees of live performances in the countryside. Meanwhile, commercialising Maoqiang Opera is almost impossible. Even the village audiences have become used to watching free Maoqiang performances. Hence, the New Era Troupe’s unsuccessful attempt to sell tickets for the *Emergency Expedition* premiere in Rizhao Grand Theatre. This inability to sell tickets also reflects the fact that such modern works have limited appeal for wider audiences, especially young ones. All the activities mentioned earlier, and the various measures for safeguarding Maoqiang Opera culture, are carried out to satisfy the current audience and attract a new audience. However, the decreasing number of Maoqiang enthusiasts is still worrisome. In 2020, most audience members in the countryside were already aged over 60.³⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the urbanisation process in the rural area of southeast Shandong is accelerating, and the residents in wealthy villages have more choices of leisure activity. The villagers’ enthusiasm for watching Maoqiang performances appears to

³⁹⁶ Interview, in Gaomi Troupe, 11 August 2020.

³⁹⁷ See Section 5.1.1. about the performance of the *A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law*.

³⁹⁸ For more details see Section 5.1.3

be lower in the more developed villages. For example, in Wulian County, some wealthy villages have amalgamated into big rural communities. The infrastructure is already very close to the city communities, with a central square, gym equipment and basketball courts. As two performers of the Wulian Troupe explained: “the performers are able to sense the atmosphere among the audience, and the villagers in big villages have already ‘become inured to the unusual’ [*jian guai bu guai*]”, which means the some villagers have already lost their curiosity about the Maoqiang troupe because they give Maoqiang performances in these villages almost every year.³⁹⁹ Some performers in the Wulian Troupe expressed dissatisfaction at the tendency for troupes to prefer visiting wealthier villages with prominent audience members living in them.⁴⁰⁰ In their view, troupes should visit more small villages, where the total number of residents is few and there is a high proportion of older people. These villages are thought by them to have more Maoqiang enthusiasts. In the first show season of 2020, the Wulian Troupe made special efforts to perform in a greater abundance of relatively undeveloped villages, which the troupe had never visited before. As noted, the audience members in this type of village usually come to the performance site very early and do not leave early, even when it is raining.⁴⁰¹

More importantly, many urban residents come to the performance site of Maoqiang Opera because they are curious about the opera troupes and an artform they have never heard of before. Although it is beneficial for the general public to have more choices about their recreational activities, their enthusiasm may easily be replaced by new preoccupations. When a site is holding two or more recreational activities, the Maoqiang performance seems less competitive than the other events in captivating audience members. During my field research period, I compared the live Maoqiang performances in rural and urban settings. In urban contexts, it was sometimes the case that a great many attendees would be on the performance site. However, a large proportion would be drawn towards other activities instead such as square dance. For example, after documenting more than a hundred live performances, I found that the New Era Troupe’s performance in Rizhao City Library Square attracted the largest audience (about a thousand), including young and middle-aged people.⁴⁰² Interestingly, a square dance team performed simultaneously, and the attendees split into two separate audiences, not seeming to interfere with one another (see Figure 6-12).

³⁹⁹ Personal communication, in Hou Suotou Village, 27 May 2020.

⁴⁰⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 4, in some cases, this is also because the road to the villages is rough or too narrow to let the mobile stage vehicle pass.

⁴⁰¹ For example, see Figures 5-30, 5-31 and 5-32 about the small or undeveloped villages in Section 5.1.5

⁴⁰² This performance is sponsored by the Cultural and Tourism Bureau of Rizhao City and the Rizhao Newspaper Office.



Figure 6-12. The crowd on the left is watching a performance by the New Era Troupe. Meanwhile, the crowd on the right is dancing, Rizhao City Library Square, 6 September 2020.

Overall, in the past decade, the Maoqiang community has achieved satisfactory results in cultivating young inheritors with government support, although some of them may lack motivation to polish their performance skills and inherit the artform. In 2020, although the Wulian Troupe and New Era Troupe, to some extent, faced difficulties owing to a lack of young performers, both troupes have successfully recruited young apprentices. For example, the Wulian Troupe recruited three young female members aged around 20 in 2020 and three older female performers in 2021. After ten years of development, by the end of January 2022, the Wulian Troupe still had 26 members.

Based on observations and interviews during my field research period, it is clear that the decreasing core audience and lack of young enthusiasts are the biggest challenges for the future development of Maoqiang Opera. Although Maoqiang troupes are actively involved in various types of live performance in rural and urban areas, attracting many attendees to the performance site, these people tend to be casual observers, curious to observe the unfamiliar bustling scenes for a short while. Here, the opera market faces intense competition, not so much from other forms of traditional opera but rather from the plethora of modern forms of entertainment.

6.3 Strong Government Support: Future Opportunities for the Maoqiang Community

Although the heavy reliance on government-provided subsidies and performance opportunities results in some problems, government support is one of the most essential impetuses for Maoqiang troupes to make progress in modern society. When it comes to the future development of Maoqiang Opera, most of my interviewees,

especially older performers such as Wang Yunting, Huai Changjian and Niu Xigao accept that in the foreseeable future, as long as there is a strong government support and they have opportunities to participate in government-backed activities, the revenue for managing their Maoqiang troupes and disseminating the genre is guaranteed.

Local government has never overlooked the benefits of popularising Maoqiang performances among the general public and younger generation. Maoqiang troupes thus receive additional funds for scheduling various events for amateur performers and enthusiasts to participate in, thereby disseminating Maoqiang Opera as local intangible cultural heritage among residents. These events include planning open day tours, organising Maoqiang training classes, and giving performances and lectures to students in local schools. The leading promoter of the events is the local Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Training School, usually the other post of the government-funded Maoqiang troupes. For example, with the support of the local government, in April 2019, the Wulian Troupe successfully established its Intangible Cultural Heritage Training School in Rizhao City. The official sign of the ICH Training School hangs in the corridor of Wulian Troupe alongside various publicity boards, introducing Maoqiang Opera and the troupe to the general public (see Figure 6-13).



Figure 6-13. On the far left, this plaque displays the logo of the official Intangible Cultural Heritage designation and the Rizhao City Intangible Cultural Heritage Training School.⁴⁰³ The first publicity board (centre left) shows the troupe’s four honour certificates, awarded in different competitions for creating modern operas. The other two boards (on the right) indicate that Wulian style Maoqiang Opera is intangible cultural heritage of Shandong Province, and display the troupe members’ images, Wulian Cultural Centre, 15 January 2020.

The events held by the ICH Training Schools play an essential role in disseminating Maoqiang Opera among residents. For instance, in 2020, the Wulian Troupe held two sessions of Maoqiang training classes. The first session, held on 11 July, was open to the general public, amateurs and enthusiasts. Anyone interested in Maoqiang performances was eligible to register. The class took the form of four lectures given

⁴⁰³ The signs used for ICH Training Schools differ from province to province and city to city, but they are always based on the official Intangible Cultural Heritage designation logo.

by the troupe members and Wang Yunting (born in 1942) over four weekends. The second session was held on 27 and 28 October, open to local primary school students. Here, the troupe members performed a classic Maoqiang playlet to the students and then organised a short test, to select talented young students to take part in subsequent training classes. Figure 6-14 shows snapshots of these two sessions, released on the official social networking accounts of the Wulian Troupe and Wulian County Cultural Centre.



Figure 6-14. The Wulian Troupe’s performance in Wulian Experimental Primary School and images of the subsequent test. The photo below shows the attendees of the first lecture about Maoqiang Opera.⁴⁰⁴

For most professional Maoqiang troupes, progress largely depends on the policy and financial support of the government. According to interviews, Maoqiang performers are pleased to give performances not only in the countryside but also on Maoqiang Opera weeks, Maoqiang troupe open days, and formal occasions to celebrate different festivals and days of commemoration. Although some young performers complain about their salaries and heavy schedules, they nevertheless acknowledge that these additional activities are important components in the endeavour to revitalise the opera market. All the Maoqiang performers I met in 2020 spoke highly of government policies and government-funded activities. None expressed any optimism at the prospect of decreased or relinquished government provision.

⁴⁰⁴ The original photos and other images of the lecture, performance and test can be found at:

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/taKqcVGvIYSs46ibIP4zzg>, 11 July 2020;

<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/K8G4QmeMe9aY9hWrP4r2HA>, 28 October 2020.

In addition, the Gaomi Troupe also held similar training classes in Gaomi Experimental Primary School in September 2021 and presented the teaching results on 6 February 2022 on the official social networking account of Weifang Cultural and Tourism Bureau at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1FiliAMCUg5QCN8dySdesQ>

During my visits to villages in Wulian County, I noted that older villagers would often recall their first experience of watching Maoqiang Opera by saying: “when I was a child...”. During these visits, I also encountered many young children on the sites of the Wulian Troupe’s performances. These children were sometimes the most active attendees, arriving at the performance site very early, staying very close to the stage vehicle, and vigorously applauding, cheering, taking photos of the performers, and even visiting the performers’ dressing rooms. Figures 6-15, 6-16 and 6-17 show various images of young children on performance sites.



Figure 6-15. Children watching a comedy sketch performed by the Wulian Troupe. Children usually come with their grandmothers to the performance site of both the song and dance performances in the afternoon and the Maoqiang performance in the evening, Dong Huaya Village, Chaohe Township, 26 May 2020.



Figure 6-16. These youngsters arrived at the performance site even earlier than the older female villagers, Zangjia Chahe Village, Hubu Township, 15 May 2020.



Figure 6-17. Children prefer to sit or stand very close to the mobile stage during the performances, while the adult villagers usually stay further out, Yuetuan Village, Shichang Township, 4 July 2020.

Of course, it is difficult to assess how these performances will impact the children’s longer-term reception of opera. Some children appear to be captivated by what is happening on the stage and, in discussion, state that they enjoy the performance, occasionally even pinpointing details that draw their attention, such as the costumes. Others, however, soon lose their focus on the opera, turning their attentions to other concerns such as wandering around or playing with skateboards. Only time will tell whether or not, after 50 years, some of these children will become enthusiasts, reminiscing “When I was a child...”

To conclude, performances of Maoqiang Opera were booming during the period of my fieldwork in 2020. Both the government funded Maoqiang troupes and the privately-owned troupe were extremely busy undertaking a wide range of performances. It seems likely that this situation will continue into the near future, for as long as the government deems this artform (and others like it) to serve beneficial social and political functions. At the time of writing this passage (in 2022), I am still receiving new photos and updates from various Maoqiang troupes, all indicating a continuation of their vigorous schedules, centring on their trips to villages scattered across the region. The Wulian Troupe, in particular, have reported investing in new costumes and equipment, recruiting four new performers, and switching to using their large mobile vehicle for more trips (making use of recent funds granted by local government for the purpose). And, meanwhile, the date displayed on their LED display has changed from “2021” to “2022” (see Figures 6-18 and 6-19).



Figure 6-18. The Wulian Troupe performing the classic Maoqiang work *A Piece of Clothing* (*luoshan ji*), photo provided by the Wulian Troupe, March 2021.



Figure 6-19. The Wulian Troupe performing the classic Maoqiang work *Hulin's Wedding Ceremony* (*hulin qiangqin*) on the large mobile stage, photo provided by the Wulian Troupe, July 2022.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This thesis has illuminated how government policies have influenced the inheritance, preservation, dissemination and development of a traditional local opera form with more than two hundred years history - Maoqiang Opera. As has been shown, Maoqiang Opera remains popular in the rural area of the southeast Shandong Peninsula, especially among older female audience members. This thesis has focused on four core motivations, which lie at the heart of central governmental policy: *'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)'*, *'Carrying out Theatrical System Reform'*, *'Sending Opera to the Countryside'*, and *'Making Traditional Operas Represent Modern Life'*. The principal concerns of government bodies therefore embrace funding opera troupes, subsidising performers, providing performance opportunities, covering the expenditure of giving performances, rewarding the creation of modern works, and disseminating traditional opera culture through official media. For the Maoqiang Opera community itself, primary duties include holding Maoqiang training classes and teaching performance skills as part of the opera troupe's daily training to cultivate young inheritors; fulfilling government-assigned performance tasks to satisfy the core audience in the countryside and expand influence among a wider audience; collecting scripts, transcribing scores, and recording performances of classic works to preserve the traditional characteristics of Maoqiang Opera; and composing modern works to make Maoqiang keep pace with the times.

As the literature review has revealed (for example, Montgomery, 2009; Gorfinkel, 2012; Maags and Heike, 2016; Tan, 2018; Su, 2019a and 2019b), China's administrative system is top-down, that is, it is government-centred and led. My fieldwork, conducted in 2020, has confirmed the critical roles performed by different levels of government in ensuring that Maoqiang Opera culture remains active and vibrant. Cultural policies that safeguard traditional operas are also implemented in a typical top-down manner, and these have profoundly influenced Maoqiang Opera. Without policy and financial support, the opera would likely lose its significance in contemporary Shandong society. Although certain Maoqiang Opera troupes have exercised some personal agency in planning their activities and rehearsing according to their own desires, the role of the Maoqiang Opera community in safeguarding their art is generally more that of an active and determined enforcer of government policy.

Several researchers (for example, McLaren, 2011; Ingram, 2012; Ong, 2018; and Tan, 2018) have examined the influence of centrally-directed policies in safeguarding ICH in China, arguing that local amateurs and grass-root organisations resent and react against government control, institutional labelling, innovation, and commodification. However, my observations and interviews indicated that the members of privately-owned troupes, amateurs, and grass-root performers were sincerely proud

of participating in government-backed performances and gaining official recognition, even without subsidies. None of my interviewees expressed a negative view of government intervention. Quite the contrary, they voiced their appreciation of the opportunities the government presented and stressed that state support was helping to keep their culture alive.

Like many other traditional opera forms, Maoqiang has still nevertheless continued to face difficulties, such as the outflow of talent, lack of performance opportunities, lack of young audience members, lack of young and skillful performers, and even a lack of playwrights and composers. To address these predicaments, the various Maoqiang troupes have been drawing upon governmental supervision and support and implementing active measures. This study has demonstrated that the most urgent problems of cultivating young inheritors, maintaining the opera market in the countryside, and creating new Maoqiang works, have been substantially alleviated. In particular, although Maoqiang Opera troupes experienced a profound lack of young performers and even dissolution during the 1990s and early 2000s, the various state-owned troupes have made considerable achievements in cultivating young performers. For example, Gaomi Troupe held a five-year Maoqiang training class in 2008 to cultivate young inheritors aged between 11 and 14 and founded its young people's troupe (*qingnian tuan*). The other two state-owned Maoqiang troupes in Jiaozhou City and Qingdao City also took measures to recruit sufficient numbers of performers aged under 40. My interviewees generally stated that, owing to the strength of governmental backing, the overall situation for Maoqiang Opera's inheritance, preservation, dissemination and development would not be too worrisome in the short foreseeable future.

In 2020, the various Maoqiang Opera troupes were still in a period of sound growth that had extended over the last decade. Although their original plans were interrupted by the unforeseen pandemic, they all remained actively involved in the creation of new anti-pandemic themed works, composing opera songs, playlets and even full-length works in February and March. Because of the responsive and effective anti-pandemic measures of the Chinese government, the troupes' daily activities soon returned to normal from April, and the government-funded troupes resumed their performances in the countryside in May. Studies about Maoqiang Opera have also increased in recent years, including Shan Xiaojie's (2017) detailed research about Gaomi style Maoqiang Opera. Zhou Aihua (2019) and Zhao Zheng's (2019) studies about local operas in Shandong Province also contain one or two sections about Maoqiang Opera.

Maoqiang Opera performers typically hold the view that the process of preserving Maoqiang Opera began to improve steadily following its appointment as a State-level ICH in 2006. From that point, the form's uniqueness and significance as an expression of local cultural identity, aesthetics, dialects, and folkways were officially recognised, and Maoqiang-related activities enjoyed preferential policies and more funding. As

outlined in Chapter 2, government policies towards Theatrical System Reform (*jütuan tizhi gaige*) have been implemented over a long period, with five time points standing out as particularly significant, when important policies were enacted - specifically, in the years 1951, 1985, 1994, 2003 and 2015. It is clear that recent policies have stimulated the establishment of the current management models of government-funded Maoqiang troupes.

Maoqiang Opera developed over a long period of time and was not called “Maoqiang Opera” until the 1950s. Due to a lack of historical documentation, details about the origins and history of Maoqiang Opera are mainly based on old artists’ recollections and oral narrations, collected and recorded by different researchers after the 1950s. The general development history in Chapter 2 is not only based on interviews with old artists aged around or over 70, especially Zhao Congsheng (*erhu* player), and Zhang Yuzhen (scriptwriter) and Wang Yunting (Maoqiang performer), but also draws from other academic research. For example, one of the earlier descriptions about Leather Drum Opera can be found in Jiang Xingyu’s study (1955) - *Introduction to Local Opera in Eastern China*, and the latest study about the origin of Maoqiang Opera in a monthly journal of the Communist Party Committee of Rizhao City, *Work and Research* (August, 2021). The performing community and scholars generally acknowledge that Maoqiang Opera originated from short simple songs (*xiaoqū*), performed by displaced farmers to make money during the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Gradually, this artform transformed into leather drum performance (*zhouguzi biaoyan*) after the Mid-Qing Dynasty (after 1750s), performed by at least two people and featuring a full storyline, and then becoming Leather Drum Opera (*zhouguzi xi*) in the late Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), often performed as a type of warm-up playlet (*nuanchang xiaoxi*) for Peking Opera. They also generally acknowledge a convincing theory that Maoqiang Opera derives from localised Leather Drum Opera in the southeast cities and counties of the Shandong Peninsula including Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Wulian, Zhucheng and Qingdao.

Meanwhile, as a type of local opera, the spoken parts of Maoqiang works are performed in Shandong dialect. Drawing from other academic studies of local opera and local dialect, for example, Sun Shougang’s research (2012), *Series of Shandong Local Operas* and Qian Zengyi’s research (2001), *Research of Shandong Dialect*, Chapter 2 also examined how Shandong dialect is evidenced in Maoqiang performances. The community and scholars commonly acknowledge that the incorporation of Shandong dialect contributes a lot to the uniqueness and local identity of Maoqiang Opera. To further confirm this viewpoint, this study has reviewed recordings (2020) of live Maoqiang performances given by the Wulian Troupe, identifying four representative linguistic features of Shandong Dialect as particularly recognisable: distinctive modal particles, repeating the subject, rhotic accenting, and certain slang expressions.

Based on my fieldwork in 2020, most of the Maoqiang troupes' live performances were of classic Maoqiang works, and most of the Maoqiang performers acknowledged that classic works seemed more popular among the audience, especially among elderly female villagers. One of the main reasons mentioned by both performers and audience members is that they prefer the stories of the classic works, addressing themes such as 'children caring for their elderly parents', 'people freely choosing their spouse', 'difficult relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law', and so forth. Most of the villagers I spoke to in the countryside also pinpointed familiarity as another key reason for their preferences; from multiple encounters stretching over many years, they have developed detailed nuanced relationships with the classic works' stories, such that the stories link them to their pasts. This study specifically introduced five famous and often-performed classic Maoqiang works to pinpoint the typical characteristics of their stories. Further, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Maoqiang Opera's history, this study has also investigated the Maoqiang Opera market from the 1950s to 1980s (excluding the period from 1966 to 1976), showing why this period is considered by the Maoqiang community to be a period of great prosperity. Drawing from interviews with older performers and privately-owned documents provided by the Wulian Troupe, this study is the first to present a detailed account of the old Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe's activities between 1956 and 1983, including details about the number of performances, income, and audience sizes. Evidently, the market has greatly shrunk since those days when there were over a hundred local Maoqiang groups in the Wulian region and people were willing to buy tickets. In the present day, people will only attend free performances.

The main body of this thesis - Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 - have presented the first ever in-depth exploration of the processes involved in safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as Intangible Cultural Heritage in contemporary southeast Shandong society, respectively focusing on the following interrelated facets: the activities of Maoqiang troupes and performers to ensure inheritance; the artform's distinctive musical characteristics, targeted for preservation; performances in rural and urban areas and via the media, for the purposes of dissemination; and the creation of new works, ensuring development.

Drawing from my fieldwork findings and the official documents (particularly the National Local Opera Survey, 2017), Chapter 3 has revealed the management models, sources of incomes, and ranges of performances for the four types of Maoqiang Opera troupe presently in existence - namely, state-owned troupe, state-private-owned troupe, privately-owned troupe, and various kinds of local civic group. This chapter has argued that the government-funded Maoqiang troupes, which usually have decades of history, are the main enforcers of government policies, bearing the most responsibility for carrying out government-backed cultural activities, cultivating inheritors, creating new works, collecting and archiving historical documents and old scripts, and undertaking other similarly safeguarding-focused

tasks. In contrast, the management models and daily activities of the other types of troupe, particularly the privately-owned troupes, are usually dictated to a large extent by the bankroller. Although privately-owned troupes have the potential to develop into highly active operations, this study has suggested that their long-term sustainability is inherently uncertain; for example, the New Era Troupe, founded in 2018, would run into trouble should the current bankroller run out of money or lose interest. Hence this thesis has argued that the government-funded troupes are inherently better placed to implement developments over the longer term.

Another key contribution of Chapter 3 is to demonstrate a direct correlation between wage earnings and performance quality, enthusiasm, and creativeness. Interviewees in the state-owned troupes invariably expressed satisfaction with their earnings, which were fully funded by the government and sufficient for them to be able to concentrate on their job duties. In contrast, some performers from the other types of troupe, for example the Wulian Troupe where the basic salary is paid by a local media company, have to supplement part-time jobs to support their families. Younger performers tend to be particularly discontented with meagre salaries, resulting in a high rate of staff turnover in those particular troupes. Moreover, this chapter has demonstrated that cultivating Maoqiang inheritors is now one of the most significant responsibilities within the government-funded troupes, with teaching and learning processes pervading the troupes' daily activities, as illustrated by the Wulian Troupe's routines. Every day, the troupe members practice basic skills, revise scripts together, rehearse in small groups or independently, reconvene to practice all together, and study the performances of famous exponents. Throughout these processes, the younger performers are guided by the troupe's three supervisors (Niu Xigao, Xu Qingli and Wang Xuhua).

As local Intangible Cultural Heritage, Maoqiang Opera is imbued with a wealth of traditional musical characteristics inherited from the older generations, some of which render it particularly distinctive from all the other local opera forms. While Maoqiang Opera is strongly influenced by Peking Opera, especially in its percussion music, its uniqueness appears to derive especially from certain melodic characteristics, including particular sung tunes (*changqiang*), poetic style lyrics (*changci*) in the sung parts (*changduan*), and singing techniques. Thus, Chapter 4 began by examining the form's Peking Opera-influenced percussion music, explaining its mnemonic notation system and constituent patterns, drawing from *The Percussion Music of Peking Opera* (1982), Wang and Ding's study about Jiaozhou style Maoqiang (2009), Shan's study about the Gaomi style Maoqiang (2017), and two manuscripts of Maoqiang percussion patterns that I collected from the Wulian and New Era Troupes. This study is the first to apply systematic musical analysis to reveal points of similarity and difference between Peking Opera and Maoqiang Opera percussion patterns, and to highlight differences of interpretation between individual Maoqiang troupes. Although Maoqiang percussion music does indeed borrow heavily from Peking Opera in terms of techniques, instruments, notations and

pattern names, only a few of the labeled Maoqiang patterns are near-indistinguishable from Peking Opera patterns. Meanwhile, there is notable variance between the different troupe's renditions of patterns, even when they share the same name, indicating that there is space within the tradition for troupes and individuals to forge their own independent interpretations of inherited materials.

Although seven-word verse (*qizi jü*), named tunes (*qūpai*), interludes such as link tunes (*lianqiang*) and coloratura interludes (*hua guomen*), and the concept of rhythm and tempo (*banshi*) are used in Maoqiang Opera, these are also evident in many other forms of Chinese opera. Using examples transcribed from live Maoqiang performances and scores of both classic and modern Maoqiang works, Chapter 4 has detailed some of the more distinctive characteristics of Maoqiang performance, including distinctions between positive and negative tonalities and female and male melodic styles, and three particularly recognisable melodic features: model tune (*jiben diao*), mao tune (*maodiao*) and descending scale (*xiaxing yinjie*). This study suggests that it is these three features that are the most distinctive and prevalent style-defining elements in both classic and modern Maoqiang repertoire - essential must-have features that play an enormous role in distinguishing the form from other Chinese opera forms, including others in Shandong.

Government policies have attached great importance to the dissemination of Maoqiang Opera, dissemination being identified as a key process for safeguarding the form as ICH. Situated at the heart of this study, Chapter 5 argues that giving live performances does indeed serve a crucial role in disseminating Maoqiang culture and revitalising the Maoqiang market. My research findings show that the troupes give hundreds of live Maoqiang performances every year, which are free to attend, with the vast majority still taking place in local villages in rural Shandong - the culture's heartland. This chapter suggests that, although years of prolonged effort have helped sustain interest amongst the core audience, the prospects for expanding the Maoqiang Opera market in urban areas is still worrisome.

Since 2015, the government-backed activity of '*Sending Opera to the Countryside*' (*'songxi xiaxiang'*), focusing on giving regular performance in the local villages, has not only provided Maoqiang performers with more performance opportunities and subsidies, but also served the core audience of Maoqiang Opera with free performances, and thereby maintained the Maoqiang Opera market in Shandong's rural areas. Although the Maoqiang community and local governments (Gaomi, Jiaozhou, Qingdao and Wulian) have attached great importance to transmitting Maoqiang Opera to a wider audience, their primary concern for revitalising the opera market is '*servicing the core audience*' (*fuwu hexin guanzhong*). Thus, '*performing in the countryside*' (*'xiaxiang'*) has consistently been highlighted by the government-funded troupes as their primary performance task. To explore this initiative in depth, my fieldwork account follows the whole journey of the Wulian Troupe's first show season of 2020, visiting 54 local villages in total, illustrating

arrangement procedures, detailing the logistical practicalities of performing in the countryside, documenting the audiences' size and constitutions, and pinpointing exceptional circumstances encountered during the endeavours.

Chapter 5 has clarified that, at least in the Wulian County, the current core audience of Maoqiang Opera is mainly comprised of elderly female villagers over 58 years old. This finding is based on interviewing 390 audience members on the sites of Wulian Troupe's Maoqiang performances in the 54 villages. Of these, 168 were women aged over 58, of whom 163 had, not surprisingly, seen live Maoqiang Opera performances routinely before. Although the local Cultural and Tourism Bureau plays a dominant role in arranging the sequence of visits in each show season, the troupes can evidently negotiate details, with most troupe members seeming to prefer performing in larger administrative villages, which usually have more audience members on site and a spacious public square to park their mobile stage vehicle. Despite the exigencies of the performance seasons, featuring extensive travelling, a one-hour song and dance performance, and a full-length Maoqiang performance every day for about two months, it seemed that troupe members tended to look forward to them. My observations suggest that this is probably not because of their devotion to Maoqiang Opera, but rather because they receive extra allowances during show season. In addition, they appear to be positively affected by the enthusiasm and friendliness of villagers and village committees, with the size of audience being of less significance

Conversely, Chapter 5 found that there are currently insufficient opportunities for Maoqiang troupes to perform in urban environments on a regular basis. For example, I found it very difficult to find a Maoqiang enthusiast amongst the citizens of Rizhao City; only one of my 53 interviewees at a very well-attended performance there - an old woman aged 73 - had ever watched Maoqiang performance before. The others were there solely to enjoy the lively atmosphere. Further, this chapter also explored attempts to disseminate Maoqiang Opera through mass media, suggesting that such efforts probably have very little potential to attract new Maoqiang enthusiasts despite tapping into current trends in modern society. Taking the televised Maoqiang performance in the 2020 Wulian County Spring Festival Gala as a case study, this exploration has illustrated the preparation procedures and specific contents of this type of performance, showing how the practices not only aim to highlight Maoqiang Opera's status as local Intangible Culture Heritage but also advertise local tourism; hence, the lyrics of the first Maoqiang opera song in the 2020 Gala highlighted the touristic appeals to be enjoyed in the region.

Over the past few decades, cultural policies geared towards safeguarding traditional Chinese opera have continually emphasised the importance of creating new works, and this is the topic that is addressed in Chapter 6. The stories of modern works usually draw from people's real lives and reflect the prevailing social predicaments of the periods in which they were created. They are intended as 'products of the times'

(*'shidai chanwu'*), ideally suited for inculcating ideology amongst the masses. At the same time, the creation of modern works is intended to rejuvenate the arts such that they suit the tastes and experiences of modern society and remain relevant - preserving traditional elements (such as the musical details pinpointed in Chapter 4) but also injecting modern elements. Hence, certain highly influential commentators have been forthright in their advocacy of creating new works, including the scholar critics Zhang Geng (1911-2003) and Guo Hancheng (1917-2021). In recent years, abundant financial support has mobilised enthusiasm and initiative for creating modern works across the whole traditional opera community. Accordingly, in discussion, members of the Maoqiang community frequently highlight that Maoqiang Opera should keep pace with the times, often stressing that creating modern operas may help attract new audience members and maintain the vitality of this traditional opera. Hence, Chapter 6 has explored the ongoing process of creating new Maoqiang works with government support, using four influential modern Maoqiang works as examples, respectively themed '*Promoting the One Child Policy*' (*'jihua shengyü'*), '*Paying Taxes According to Law*' (*'yifa nashui'*), '*Targeting Poverty Alleviation*' (*'jingzhun fupin'*) and '*Fighting Against The Covid-19 Pandemic*' (*'kangji yiqing'*).

Despite the commonly-made claims, however, this study suggests that the continuous creation of new works every year has a very limited effect on stimulating the opera market and attracting a wider audience. This is because the new works focus on instilling ideology at the expense of ensuring entertainment value. Thus, audience members hoping for a lively festive atmosphere and an engrossing story tend to feel disappointed. Meanwhile, the works themselves lack long-term relevance, ceasing to be of interest once social predicaments have changed. Hence, for example, *The Desire for a Baby Boy* (*paner ji*), which was performed in the 1990s to publicise the *One Child Policy* (*jihua shengyü*), has now become a historical artefact, the central government having announced that couples are permitted to have three children after May 2021. Meanwhile, the opera market in both rural and urban communities continues to shrink. The opera community is evidently yet to find effective ways to boost enthusiasm and interest for the form amongst younger, and even middle-aged people, since I encountered very few younger enthusiasts during my fieldtrip. Most members of the Maoqiang community were content to follow the government's directives, lured by the promise of bonus, honour and official recognition.

In further study of Maoqiang Opera, it would be fruitful to explore the relationships between Maoqiang Opera and the other opera forms in Shandong Province, as well as its relationships with opera forms outside of Shandong. This study has already introduced how Maoqiang percussion music was influenced by Peking Opera, and has pinpointed the differences between the *mao* tune of Maoqiang and *lahun* tune of Liuqiang (another local opera in Southeast Shandong). To clarify and enrich the historical account of this performance art, it is now necessary to investigate in

greater detail the various ways in which Maoqiang's musical characteristics, performance styles, stories, body movements, costumes, and facial makeup have been influenced by other traditional Chinese operas since the 1950s. In conversation, Maoqiang performers have often emphasised the importance of development (*fazhan*) and innovation (*chuangxin*), and it is clear that they have long drawn influence from more famous opera forms in order to achieve these goals. For example, the script of the classic Maoqiang Work *A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law* (*xiaogu xian*) was originally adapted from a Lü Opera (the most famous local opera in Shandong Province) as early as the 1950s, with both versions still being performed in Shandong today. In this case, it would be beneficial to conduct a comparative analysis of the Maoqiang and Lü versions - recording live performances, transcribing sections, examining dialect, and interviewing performers to develop a detailed understanding. Moreover, certain Maoqiang Operas and individual episodes have been adapted from opera forms outside of Shandong. For example, this study has mentioned that the Maoqiang version (2020) of *Antiphonal Singing* (*mangong duichang*) is adapted from one of the famous excerpts of Huangmei Opera of Anhui Province. *The Story of a Wall* (*qiangtou ji*) and *Young Lady Mengjiang* (*mengjiang nü*) are classic works in many regional opera forms. Thus, it would be valuable to explore how the uniqueness and local identity of different traditional opera forms are embodied in the different versions of the same work, and how the adapted works are indigenised and localised in different areas. Further, it would also be fruitful to conduct a detailed comparative study of the different Maoqiang troupes' renditions, since it is apparent that they each foster their own styles. Some of these suggested projects would ideally involve collaboration amongst a team of specialists, simply because of their scale and the need to draw upon detailed expertise spanning multiple traditions and disciplines.

This study has mainly focused on the government's intervention in Maoqiang Opera culture - examining the policies geared towards safeguarding Maoqiang Opera and exploring how they have affected performance practice. However, of course, there are also individual Maoqiang performers who have committed extensive efforts and skill towards sustaining the artform, yielding great influence on how it is performed. There are already abundant studies about the artistry and contributions of Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), who exerted a great influence on the development of Peking Opera and modern opera forms, creating Mei School Peking Opera (*meipai jingjü*). However, there are no such studies about the more minor stars of regional opera forms like Maoqiang, even though they have been influential in developing styles and repertoires. It would be fruitful, therefore, to create focused studies of key figures in the Maoqiang world, such as the current leader of New Era Maoqiang Troupe, Sun Hongjü, who has been highly active over many years, even developing her own distinctive style - Sun School Maoqiang Opera (*sunpai maoqiang*). For the audience, it is also the case that a famous opera star may be more appealing than the opera itself. Thus, the New Era Troupe is often referred to as 'Sun Hongjü's Troupe' (*'sun Hongjü de tuan'*) by audience members and other performers alike.

Maoqiang Opera currently seems to be in a relatively well-developed state compared to many others amongst China's 348 local opera forms, as suggested by the National Local Opera Survey (2017). This survey indicates that there were four professional state-owned Maoqiang troupes in 2015 (which has decreased to three in 2020). In comparison, 120 of the local opera forms only had one state-owned troupe in 2015, and 70 others only had amateur local civic groups. Meanwhile, Maoqiang Opera is one of the 170 Chinese opera forms appointed as State-Level Intangible Cultural Heritage. Although the four main aspects of government policy noted in this thesis pertain to all state-level cultural management - especially the policies of '*Sending Opera to the Countryside*' and '*Safeguarding Traditional Chinese Opera as ICH*' - the actual impacts of these policies on different local opera culture will surely vary from case to case and region to region. And, in addition, it is necessary to consider the impacts that such policies have on opera forms that are not appointed at all: do they become increasingly marginalized? How do they sustain themselves? The author strongly supports undertaking a detailed comparative exploration of how government policy affects live performance, inheritance, preservation, dissemination and development in an extensive study covering a wide range of opera forms, including those that have not been selected as ICH and which do not even have professional opera troupes.

Some local opera forms have become widely famous beyond their locality, such as Huangmei Opera (*huangmei xi*) in Anhui Province, Chuan Opera (*chuanjü*) in Sichuan Province, and Xiang Opera (*xiangjü*) in Hunan Province. My 2020 field trips to Chengdu City in Sichuan and Changsha City in Hunan found that both Chuan and Xiang Opera were being prominently performed in the heart of the top local tourist spots. Both could be enjoyed in many tea houses (*chaguan*) and the local theatres, and Xiang Opera was also being staged in a special outdoor live-show venue located in one of the city's most bustling commercial blocks, Pozi Street. In particular, the Changsha City Xiang Opera Troupe gives free Xiang Opera performances on a regular basis. In contrast, this study has discussed how the New Era Troupe completely failed to sell tickets for their performance of the Maoqiang Opera *Emergency Expedition* (*jinji chuzheng*) in 2020, and recognised that Maoqiang Opera performances are not made readily available via purpose-designed sites at any tourist sites in the area. Accordingly, it would be beneficial to conduct a comparative study in the context of cultural tourism and cultural industry studies. How can troupes, local businesses, tourist agencies, and local government most effectively collaborate to boost engagement with local opera forms? How can lesser-known forms such as Maoqiang Opera begin to emulate the successes of the more famous operas? Why is it that some forms thrive while others dwindle or even disappear?

Although Maoqiang Opera has remained popular amongst older female villagers as a matter of tradition, this thesis has demonstrated that safeguarding this opera form in China's modern society has relied heavily on government support. It is the government's policies and subsidization that have spurred the archiving of relevant

documents, transcription of representative musical characteristics, rigorous management of opera troupes, cultivation of young inheritors, active engagement with the opera market, and regular creation of new works. In this dynamic, the government's role is to promote performance opportunities for the Maoqiang community and pay for their activities. Meanwhile, it is the Maoqiang performers' responsibility to fulfill the government-assigned performance tasks, ensuring that citizens living across a wide expanse can enjoy free Maoqiang performances as the primary beneficiaries. This study suggests that the joint efforts of the government and the Maoqiang community have proved effective in safeguarding Maoqiang Opera as an active living traditional performance art. Maoqiang Opera is thus able to avoid becoming the type of traditional performance art that people can only learn about second-hand, through consulting old video recordings and written recollections. Or at least, it can be confirmed that the process whereby relevant artistic forms gradually cease to be significant in people's lives and eventually stop being performed has been temporarily stalled.

Appendix 1. List of Interviewees

Name	Description	Interview Place	Date
Bie Shujun 别 淑君	Maoqiang performer of Gaomi Troupe, major in young female role	Gaomi Art Theatre	11.8.2020
		Text conversation conducted by phone	12.9.2021
Chen Futao 陈 福涛	Maoqiang performer of Gaomi Troupe, major in young male role	Gaomi Art Theatre	11.8.2020
Chen Jingang 陈 金刚	Maoqiang performer of Wulian Troupe, major in clown role	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	3.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	7.4.2020
		Guanshangou Village	30.6.2020
Chen Xiaoning 陈 小宁	Gong and cymbal player, of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	22.4.2020
		Songjia Zhuangzi Village	4.6.2020
Cui Xiaoyue 崔 小月	Maoqiang performer of New Era Troupe, major in young female role	Wulian Broadcast and Television Centre	14.1.2020
		Wulian Cultural Centre	16.1.2020
		New Era Maoqiang Troupe	9.7.2020
Ding Yujun 丁 玉军	Violoncellist of New Era Troupe	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	11.7.2020
Dong Yanping 董 衍平	Founder and Bankroller of New Era Troupe	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	8.7.2020
		Yanhe Village	11.7.2020
Fan Fengjuan 范 丰娟	Founder of the amateur Maoqiang troupe - Gaoze Troupe	Gaoze Maoqiang Troupe	24.5.2020
		Wulian County Stadium	3.8.2020
		Gaoze Maoqiang Troupe	3.9.2020

Ge Pingjin 葛平今	Jinghu player of Wulian Troupe, craftsman of making Jinghu	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	3.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	21.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	28.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	7.7.2020
He Miao 何苗	Young Maoqiang apprentice of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Broadcast and Television Centre	14.1.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	16.1.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	9.4.2020
		Qianjia Zhuangzi Village	29.5.2020
Han Yueying 韩月英	Maoqiang enthusiast (84 years old)	Hubu Village	14.5.2020
Huai Changjian 槐长剑	Head of Gaomi Troupe, Maoqiang opera composer, conductor, violinist	Gaomi Art Theatre	11.8.2020
Li Futang 历复堂	Maoqiang performer of New Era Troupe, major in elderly male role, former member of the old Wulian Troupe (1980s)	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	13.7.2020
Li Naixiu 李乃秀	Maoqiang performer of New Era Troupe, major in middle-aged female role, former member of the amateur Maoqiang troupe (1980s) - Xumeng Township Troupe	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	14.7.2020
		Text conversation conducted by phone	11.2.2021
Li Weiping 李维萍	Maoqiang performer of New Era Troupe, major in middle-aged female role, , former member of the old Wulian Troupe (1980s)	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	13.7.2020

Li Xiangxue 李 祥雪	Leader and Maoqiang performer of Wulian Troupe, major in young female role, officially certified Maoqiang inheritor of Rizhao City	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	15.1.2020
		Text conversation conducted by phone	26.2.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	22.4.2020
		Xiaoheya Village	27.6.2020
Li Xincan 李 欣才	Suona and bamboo flute player of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	29.4.2020
		Beiyong Village	20.6.2020
Liu Yingyu 刘英玉	Official of Wulian Cultural Centre	Chang Lingzi Village	24.7.2020
Liu Zhi 刘 芝	Maoqiang performer of New Era Troupe, major in young female role, inheritor of Sun School Maoqiang Opera	Yanhe Village	13.7.2020
Niu Xigao 牛 西高	Art director and Maoqiang performer of Wulian Troupe, major in elderly male role, former member of the old Wulian Troupe (1980s)	Wulian Broadcast and Television Centre	14.1.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	2.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	28.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	8.7.2020
		Text conversation conducted by phone	12.6.2021
Shang Jinyang 商 金洋	Maoqiang performer of Wulian Troupe, major in young male role	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	15.4.2020
Shi Xiangsong 石 祥松	Sound technician of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	8.4.2020
Sun Hongjü 孙 红菊	Head of New Era Troupe, national first-class Maoqiang performer, major in both young female role and elderly female role, founder of Sun School Maoqiang Opera, former head of Gaomi Troupe	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	14.7.2020
		New Era Maoqiang Troupe	15.7.2020
		Rizhao Grand Theatre	2.8.2020
		Rizhao People's Square	16.9.2020

Wang Haiyan 王海艳	Manager of Yiqun Media Company	Text conversation conducted by phone	11.12.2019
		Wulian Cultural Centre	7.7.2020
Wang Guixiu 王桂秀	Head of Songming Art Troupe, vocal performer	Songming Art Troupe	1.8.2020
		Songming Art Troupe	3.8.2020
Wang Shanfang 王善芳	Official of Wulian Cultural Centre	Wanghu Community	19.7.2020
Wang Xihui 王希会	Drummer and cymbal player of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	30.4.2020
Wang Xuhua 王绪华	Maoqiang performer of Wulian Troupe, major in elderly female role, former member of the old Wulian Troupe (1980s)	Hou Suotou Village	27.5.2020
		Miaojia Gou Village	5.6.2020
Wang Yihe 王义和	Jinghu player of Songming Art Troupe	Wulian County Stadium	6.8.2020
Wang Yunting 王云亭	Maoqiang performer, officially certified Wulian Maoqiang inheritor, former member of the old Wulian Troupe (1960s), retired	Interviewee's home	3.9.2020
Wang Zewen 王泽文	Drummer and clappers player of New Era Troupe, former member of Maoqiang troupe in Jiaozhou City	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	8.7.2020
Wei Xinjian 魏新建	Bamboo flute player, member of New Era Troupe	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	8.7.2020
Xu Qingli 徐庆利	Drummer and clappers player, leader of Wulian Troupe, former member of the old Wulian Troupe (1980s)	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	14.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	15.4.2020
		Xi Yaotou Village	18.6.2020
Xu Fushun 徐福顺	Maoqiang enthusiast, amateur erhu player	Nanhuitou Village	21.5.2020
Xu Ting 许婷	Young Maoqiang apprentice of New Era Troupe	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	9.7.2020
Xue Lintao 薛林涛	Director of Gaomi Troupe, Maoqiang performer, major in elderly male role	Gaomi Art Theatre	11.8.2020

Yu Jie 于洁	Maoqiang performer, major in elderly women clown	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	15.4.2020
Yu Qiang 于强	Scriptwriter, Maoqiang performer of New Era Troupe, major in elderly male role	New Era Maoqiang Troupe	9.7.2020
Zhang Jiayan 张加燕	Maoqiang Performer, major in both young male role and female role, officially certified Maoqiang inheritor of Rizhao City, leader of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	9.5.2020
		Hou Suotou Village	27.5.2020
		Xumeng Village	1.6.2020
Zhang Li 张利	Maoqiang performer, major in both young male role and elderly male role	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	28.4.2020
		Xumeng Village	1.6.2020
Zhang Qinghua 张青华	Erhu player of Wulian Troupe	Fangcheng Community	14.6.2020
Zhang Sha 张莎	Maoqiang performer of Wulian Troupe, major in young female role	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	8.5.2020
Zhang Shoufeng 张守凤	Official of Wulian Cultural and Tourism Bureau	Wulian Cultural Centre	4.9.2020
Zhang Yan 张燕	Yangqin player of Wulian Troupe	Qianjia Zhuangzi Village	29.5.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	7.7.2020
Zhang Yuzhen 张玉贞	Scriptwriter of <i>Emergency Expedition</i>	Rizhao Grand Theatre	2.8.2020
		Telephone conversation	17.9.2020
		Text conversation conducted by phone	19.9.2020
		Text conversation conducted by phone	26.9.2020
Zhao Congsheng 赵从升	Jingerhu player of Wulian Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	14.4.2020
		Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	15.4.2020
		Xueshi Village	28.6.2020

Zhao Mingbin 赵明滨	Erhu player, member of Songming Art Troupe	Songming Art Troupe	3.8.2020
Zheng Dewei 郑德伟	Sound technician, member of New Era Troupe	Wulian Maoqiang Troupe	17.1.2020
		Telephone conversation	4.4.2020
		New Era Maoqiang Troupe	12.7.2020
Zheng Shixing 郑世省	Maoqiang performer, major in middle-aged and elderly male roles	Guojia Xinzhuang Village	21.6.2020

Appendix 2. Schedule of 2020 Fieldwork

Month	Description of Main Activities
January	From 12 to 18: Visiting Wulian Troupe
	On the 14th: Travelling with the Wulian Troupe to record their televised Maoqiang performance
February and March ⁴⁰⁵	Collecting and sorting the data about newly composed Maoqiang opera songs, playlet and full-length works themed anti-pandemic
	Online communications with Maoqiang performers
	On 23 March: Visiting the New Era Troupe
April	Recording the daily activities and rehearsals of Wulian Troupe
	Taking tutorials about Maoqiang history, music and performances (vocal and body movements) in the Wulian Troupe
	On the 18th and 19th: Visiting the Songming Art Troupe
May	Recording the daily activities and rehearsals of the Wulian Troupe
	Taking tutorials about Maoqiang history, music and body movements
	Since the 12th: Travelling with the Wulian Troupe in different local villages
	On the 21th: Visiting the music group in the Jiefang Road community
	On the 24th: Visiting the Gaoze amateur Maoqiang troupe
June	Travelling with the Wulian Troupe in different local villages
July	From 1 to 5: Travelling with the Wulian Troupe in different local villages
	From 7 to 16: Visiting the New Era Troupe to record the performers' daily activities, rehearsals and performances
	From 17 to 24: Travelling with the Wulian Cultural Centre to local townships for the dance team auditions of the annual square dance competition
	From 27 to 31: Visiting the Wulian Troupe to record their activities for the annual summer festival
August	On the 1st and 3rd: Visiting the Songming Art Troupe
	On the 2nd: Travelling with the New Era Troupe to Rizhao Grand Theatre
	From 3 to 6: Recording the performances on the 2020 Summer Festival and the Wulian Troupe's Maoqiang performances
	From 8 to 13: Visiting the Gaomi Troupe and the Red Sorghum Film Base
	On the 27th: Visiting the Gaoze amateur Maoqiang troupe
September	On the 2nd and 3rd: Visiting the Gaoze amateur Maoqiang troupe
	On the 4th: Visiting the music group in the Jiefang Road community
	From 6 to 18: Traveling with the New Era Troupe to Rizhao City to record their rehearsals and Maoqiang performances in the city centre

⁴⁰⁵ All the performances of all Maoqiang troupes in February and March were canceled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Appendix 3. List of the 54 Villages in Wulian County

Name of the Townships ⁴⁰⁶	Name of the Villages	Description	Performance Site	Title of the Maoqiang Operas ⁴⁰⁷	Number of Attendees ⁴⁰⁸	Date of Visit ⁴⁰⁹
Hubu Xiang 户部乡	Jingjia Zhangzi Village 井家庄子村	Administrative village with more than 400 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 120	12.5.2020 (2:40-4:00 pm)
	Wangjia Da Village 王家大村	Administrative village with more than 400 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 130	12.5.2020 (7:30-8:50 pm)
	Songjia Village 宋家村	Administrative village formed by the merger of three villages with more than a thousand residents	Public square in front of the village party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 103	13.5.2020 (3:10-4:30 pm)
	Huangxiangzi Village 黄巷子村	Administrative village with more than 500 residents, simplified Maoqiang performance because of unreasonable time planning	Open space in front of the village party branch	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Around 250	13.5.2020 (8:00-9:25 pm)
	Hubu Village 户部村	The main administrative village of the Hubu Township with more than a thousand residents	Main road nearby the entrance of the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 150	14.5.2020 (3:00-4:15 pm)
	Wujia Zhuangzi Village 吴家庄子	Administrative village with about 300 residents, simplified Maoqiang performance because of bad weather	Open space in the centre of the village	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Around 70	14.5.2020 (7:10-8:40 pm)

⁴⁰⁶ The local townships in Wulian County are classified as '*xiang*' (relatively undeveloped township) and '*zhen*' (relatively developed township) basically according to the degree of their economic development.

⁴⁰⁷ The opera performances highlighted in yellow were uncompleted Maoqiang performances.

⁴⁰⁸ Normally, there were few attendees on site at the beginning of each performance, but the number of attendees gradually increased from 7:40 pm to 8:10 pm. The number of attendees of each Maoqiang performance was counted during this time bucket.

⁴⁰⁹ This includes the start time and finish time of each Maoqiang performance.

	Gaoge Zhuang Village 高阁庄村	Administrative village with about 500 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 80	15.5.2020 (3:00 - 4:15 pm)
	Zangjia Chahe Village 臧家槎河村	Administrative village with about three thousand residents	Public square of the village party branch	<i>Splashing Water in Front of a Horse</i>	More than 300	15.5.2020 (7:10-9:10 pm)
	Liangjia Zhuangzi Village 梁家庄子村	Administrative village with more than a thousand residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 70	16.5.2020 (2:50-4:15 pm)
Kouguan Zhen 扣官镇	Lianfeng Zhuang Village 莲峰庄村	Administrative village with more than a thousand residents	Open space next to the highway	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 80	17.5.2020 (3:00-4:30 pm)
	Nanling Village 南岭村	Administrative village with about 200 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	32	18.5.2020 (7:15-8:50 pm)
	Mohezi Village 磨合子村	Administrative village with 742 residents	Public square in the centre of the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 100	19.5.2020 (7:00-8:20 pm)
	Xiajia Zhuang Village 夏家庄村	Administrative village with 725 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Around 120	20.5.2020 (7:30-9:00 pm)
	Nanhuitou Village 南回头村	Administrative village with about 500 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Around 80	21.5.2020 (7:15-9:10 pm)
	Kouguan Village 扣官村	The main administrative village of the Kouguan Township with more than two thousand residents	Village stage	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	More than 400	22.5.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)
	Yinjia Ping Village 尹家坪村	Administrative village with about 300 residents	Village stage	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 90	23.5.2020 (7:15-8:45 pm)
	Dongnan Po Village 东南坡村	Administrative village with 835 residents	Independent public square of the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	More than 350	24.5.2020 (7:10-8:40 pm)

Chaohe Zhen 潮河镇	Dujiahe Village 杜家河村	Administrative village with more than a thousand residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 150	25.5.2020 (7:15-8:45 pm)
	Donghuaya Village 东花崖村	Administrative village with more than a thousand residents	Main road of the village	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Around 100	26.5.2020 (7:15-9:10 pm)
	Housuotou Village 后梭头村	Administrative village with about 600 residents	Main road nearby the entrance of the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 120	27.5.2020 (7:20-8:45 pm)
	Caiyuan Village 菜园村	Administrative village with about 800 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 130	28.5.2020 (7:00-8:30 pm)
Songbai Zhen 松柏镇	Qianjia Zhuangzi Village 钱家庄子村	Administrative village with about 700 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 140	29.5.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)
	Xibaimiao Village 西白庙村	Administrative village with a little more than 200 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	35	30.5.2020 (7:00-8:15 pm)
	Qian Changchengling Village 前长城岭村	Administrative village with about two thousand residents	Open space in front of the village party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	More than 300	31.5.2020 (7:15-8:55 pm)
Xumeng Zhen 许孟镇	Xumeng Village 许孟村	The main administrative village of the Xumeng Township with more than two thousand residents, performance was suspended and canceled because of bad weather	Open space in front of the village party branch next to the highway road	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	13	1.6.2020 (6:50-7:10 pm)
	Donglouzi Village 东娄子村	Administrative village with about 1200 residents	Open space in front of the village party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	More than 200	2.6.2020 (7:50-9:15 pm)
	Fanjiadong Village 范家东村	Administrative village with more than 900 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>	Around 160	3.6.2020 (7:35-9:00 pm)

	Songjia Zhuangzi Village 宋家庄子村	Administrative village with 1439 residents	Open space outside the village next to the highway road	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	More than 300	4.6.2020 (7:15-8:45 pm)
	Miaojiagou Village 苗家沟村	Administrative village with more than a thousand residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 110	5.6.2020 (7:20-8:45 pm)
Jiuxian (九仙) Mountain Natural Scenic Spot	Qian Weichang Village 前苇场村	Natural village with less than 200 residents	Open space in the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 110	6.6.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)
	Xuanwang Village 宣王村	Natural village with 86 residents	Open space in the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	62	7.6.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)
	Xueshi Village 靴石村	Natural village with less than 100 residents	Open space in the village	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	60	28.6.2020 (7:00-8:30 pm)
Wanghu Zhen 汪湖镇	Yanhe Village 燕河村	Administrative village with about 1100 residents	Open space in front of the village party branch	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 140	8.6.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)
	Xiaoheya Village 小河崖村	Administrative village with about 500 residents	Village stage	The Maoqiang performance was canceled because of the bad weather	---	9.6.2020
			Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	86	27.6.2020 (3:20-4:50 pm)
	Qian Niniu Village 前泥牛村	Administrative village with less than 200 residents	Open space on the border of different villages	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 110	10.6.2020 (7:20-9:00 pm)
Shijia Gaohua Village 石家高化村	Administrative village with more than 1500 residents, very simplified performance because of bad weather	Open space nearby the village kindergarten	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 70	11.6.2020 (7:20-8:10 pm)	

	Wanghu Village 汪湖村	The main administrative village of the Wanghu Township with about 1800 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	Around 150	12.6.2020 (7:30-8:20 pm)
	Yuejia Zhuang Village 岳家庄村	Administrative village with about 500 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 120	13.6.2020 (7:10-8:50 pm)
	Fangcheng Community 坊城社区	Village community formed by the amalgamation of four administrative villages with about 1800 residents	Public square in front of the community party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 280	14.6.2020 (7:10-8:40 pm)
	Heijianling Village 黑涧岭村	Administrative village with about 300 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	85	26.6.2020 (7:20-8:10 pm)
	Xiaobaquan Village 小雹泉村	Administrative village with about 700 residents	Public square nearby the village party branch	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 120	27.6.2020 (7:20-9:00 pm)
Yuli Zhen 于里镇	Yujiaguanzhuang Village 于家官庄村	Administrative village with about 630 residents	Public square nearby the village party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 170	15.6.2020 (7:20-8:40 pm)
	Shuangshanhou Village 双山后村	Administrative village with about 870 residents, accelerated performance because of bad weather	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	Around 120	16.6.2020 (7:20-8:00 pm)
	Xiyaotou Village 西尧头村	Administrative village with a little more than 200 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	More than 200 ⁴¹⁰	18.6.2020 (7:20-8:10 pm)
	Loujiapo Village 娄家坡村	Administrative village with about 710 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 120	19.6.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)

⁴¹⁰ There were many attendees from the neighbouring villages.

	Beiyong Village 北营村	Administrative village with about 800 residents	Public square in front of the community party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	Around 180	20.6.2020 (7:20-8:10 pm)
	Guojia Xinzhuang Village 郭家新庄村	Administrative village with about 900 residents	Open space in front of the community party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	Around 140	21.6.2020 (7:20-8:10 pm)
	Henan Village 河南村	Administrative village with more than a thousand residents, performance was suspended and canceled because of bad weather	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 100	22.6.2020 (7:10-7:30 pm)
Shichang Xiang 石场乡	Xishaozhai Village 西邵宅村	Administrative village with about 700 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 120	29.6.2020 (7:20-8:30 pm)
	Guangshangou Village 官山沟村	Administrative village with about 640 residents	Main road in front of the village party branch	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 160	30.6.2020 (7:15-9:00 pm)
	Niejia Yaqian Village 聂家崖前村	Administrative village with about 400 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases for the Spring Festival</i>	Around 120	1.7.2020 (7:20-8:10 pm)
	Liwangtuan Village 李旺疃村	Administrative village with about 500 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-in-Law</i>	Around 140	2.7.2020 (7:15-9:00 pm)
	Yuetuan Village 岳疃村	Administrative village with about 800 residents	Open space in an abandoned village school	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 170	4.7.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)
	Shang Dijiagou Village 上邸家沟村	Administrative village with about 1400 residents	Yard of the village committee and party branch	<i>The Story of a Wall</i>	Around 140	5.7.2020 (7:20-8:50 pm)

Appendix 4. Glossary

Maoqiang Opera Performance and Other Performance-related Terms

Pinyin	Chinese	Explanation
Ba Ditan/Liao Ditan	扒地摊/撂地摊	Literally 'finding an open space', watching Maoqiang Opera
Bangzi	梆子	Wooden clappers
Bangzisui	梆子穗	Named percussion pattern
Banshi	板式	Rhythm and tempo
Bu Weizi	布围子	Tent cloth made into a circle, a kind of mobile stage for opera performances
Ben Zhougu	本肘鼓	Ben leather drum
Changchui	长锤	Named percussion pattern
Changci	唱词	A poetic form for lyrics, usually with seven syllables per line
Changduan	唱段	Sung part/sung passage
Changqiang	唱腔	Vocal music/Sung tune
Changqiang Jiben Diao	唱腔基本调	Basic sung tunes, used as models for variation
Chou/Choujue	丑/丑角	Clown role
Chu Zaogong	出早功	Practicing in the morning
Chuanju	川剧	Chuan Opera, a local opera in Sichuan Province
Chuantong Difang Xiao Jüzhong	传统地方小剧种	Small local traditional operas
Chuantong Xiqu	传统戏曲	Traditional opera
Daiyinzi Pu	代音字谱	Phonic notation
Da Duotou	大夺头	Big <i>duotou</i> , a named percussion pattern
Dachang	大场	The performance site of Maoqiang Opera, usually beside the agricultural products market in rural areas
Daluo	大锣	Large gong
Damao	打冒	Sung mao, a singing technique of Maoqiang Opera
Danbaobian	单包边	Named percussion pattern
Danjue	旦角	Female role in Chinese opera
Danpi Gu	单皮鼓	Single-side drum
Daomadan	刀马旦	Young female warrior in Chinese opera
Datai	打台	Warm-up performance for percussion instruments
Datai Pu	打台谱	Datai score for warm-up percussion performance

Dengtai	登台	Entering the stage
Diao Sangzi	吊嗓子	Voice training
Difang Xiqu	地方戏曲	Local opera
Doutou	夺头	Named percussion pattern
Duilian Jiegou	对联结构	Couplet poetic structure
Fandiao/Gongdiao	反调/宫调	Negative tonality
Ganjing	干净	Literally 'clean', denoting an ideal vocal quality and unornate patterning in classic Maoqiang Opera
Gong	宫	'Do' in Chinese pentatonic scale
Gu Jianzi	鼓槌子	Drumsticks
Gulao	鼓佬	Drummer
Guniang Diao	姑娘调	Girls' tunes
Hangdang	行当	Types of roles in Chinese traditional opera
Hua Guomen	花过门	Coloratura interlude
Hua Lianpu	画脸谱	Painting opera face, putting on makeup
Jiandan	简单	Literally 'simple', denoting unornate patterning in classic Maoqiang Opera
Jianban	尖板	Sharp rhythm, 2/4, at fast tempo, ♩ = 108
Jiaoban	叫板	Shouting, a vocal technique in Chinese traditional opera performances
Jiao menzi	叫门子	Literally 'knocking at the door', watching Maoqiang Opera
Jiaodong Zimei Hua	胶东姊妹花	Twin sisters opera in eastern Shandong Province
Jiaqian Zi	加嵌字	Embedded characters
Jiben Diao	基本调	Model tunes
Jiben Luogu Dian	基本锣鼓点	Model version of named percussion patterns
Jingerhu	京二胡	Bigger two-stringed Peking Opera fiddle
Jinghu	京胡	Peking Opera fiddle
Jüe	角	'Mi' in Chinese pentatonic scale
Kaichang Luogu Dian	开唱锣鼓点	Literally 'starting to sing percussion patterns', signalling the immediate entry of the vocal part
Kaimu	开幕	Curtain-up
Dongzu Dage	侗族大歌	Kam Big Song, the grand choirs of Dong minority
Kan San Dai	看三代	Evaluating the three generations, a criterion for selecting young Maoqiang Opera talents

Kuaiban	快板	Fast tempo
Lahunqiang	拉魂腔	Lahun tune of Liuqin Opera
Laodan	老旦	Elderly female role in Chinese opera
Laosheng	老生	Elderly male role in Chinese opera
Lianpu	脸谱	Facial makeup
Lianqiang	连腔	Link tune
Liupai	流派	Different styles of Chinese traditional opera
Liuqiang Xi	柳腔戏	Liuqiang Opera, a local opera in Shandong Province
Liuqin	柳琴	A plucked string instrument
Liuqin Xi	柳琴戏	Liuqin Opera, a local opera in Shandong Province
Luogu Dian	锣鼓点	Percussion patterns; named percussion patterns
Luogu Jing	锣鼓经	Percussion notation book; the percussion music of traditional Chinese opera
Lüjü	吕剧	Lü Opera, a local opera in Shandong Province
Lüjü Weier De Maoqiang	吕剧味儿的茂腔	Maoqiang Opera with Lü Opera characteristics, performers' description of new Maoqiang works composed by Wang Zongyou
Man Changchui	慢长锤	Named percussion pattern
Manban	慢板	Slow tempo
Mao Zhougu	冒肘鼓	Mao leather drum
Maodiao	冒调	Mao tune, a characteristic tune of Maoqiang Opera
Maoqiang Xi	茂腔戏	Maoqiang Opera, a local opera in Shandong Province
Matui	马腿	Named percussion pattern
Minjian Xiaoqǔ	民间小曲	Local folk tunes
Nanluo	南锣	Nanluo tune, a characteristic Maoqiang named tune
Nanqiang	男腔	Male tunes, characteristic tunes of Maoqiang Opera sung by male performers
Nianchang	念唱	Heightened speech
Nuanchang Xiaoxi	暖场小戏	Warm-up playlet
Nüqiang	女腔	Female tunes, characteristic tunes of Maoqiang Opera sung by female performers

Pan Dengzi	盘凳子	Literally 'finding a bench to sit', meaning watching Maoqiang Opera
Paobing	跑兵	Running soldier, cameo roles in Chinese opera
Pinghuan	平缓	Soft, describing the tempo of melodies
Pipa	琵琶	Four stringed pear-shaped lute
Qingyi	青衣	Leading female role in Chinese opera
Qizi Changci	七字唱词	Basic tune with seven-word lyrics
Qizi Jü	七字句	Seven-word verse
Qupai	曲牌	Named tunes
Shang	商	'Re' in Chinese pentatonic scale
Shenduan	身段	Body movements
Shengjüe	生角	Male role in Chinese opera
Shizi Jü	十字句	Ten-word verse
Shouluo	手锣	Hand-gong
Shuangbaobian	双包边	Named percussion pattern
Shulaibao	数来宝	Rhythmic storytelling with bamboo clapper accompaniment
Sigu	司鼓	Lead drum in the percussion band, giving signals to other band members
Siping	四平	Maoqiang basic tunes in positive tonality employing the initial rhythm
Sixian Huqin	四弦胡琴	A four-stringed bowed instrument
Sixian Qupai	丝弦曲牌	Named tunes for string instruments
Souchang	搜场	A named percussion pattern
Sunpai Maoqiang	孙派茂腔	The Sun School of Maoqiang Opera
Suona	唢呐	Shawm
Taibu	台步	Stage gait
Tuichang	退场	Exiting the stage
Wuchang	武场	Acrobatic fighting
Wusheng	武生	Military role in Chinese opera
Wuyin Xi	五音戏	Wuyin Opera, a local opera in Shandong Province
Xiangban	响板	Clappers
Xiangjü	湘剧	Xiang Opera, a local opera in Hunan Province
Xiao Duotou	小夺头	Small <i>duotou</i> , a named percussion pattern
Xiao Pigu	小皮鼓	Small leather drum
Xiaobo	小钹	Small cymbals
Xiaogu	小鼓	Small drum
Xiaoluo	小锣	Small gong
Xiaoqu	小曲	Short simple songs

Xiaosheng	小生	Young male role in Chinese opera
Xiqū Nianbai	戏曲念白	Spoken parts in Chinese opera
Xiqū Shenduan	戏曲身段	Chinese opera body movements
Xizhuang/Xifu	戏装/戏服	Opera costume
Xuanjüe	选角	Casting
Yangqin	扬琴	Chinese dulcimer
Yizhuan Duoneng	一专多能	Literally 'one specialism and many skills', denoting a performer is unusually skilled at one thing but adept at other roles also
Yizi Xingqiang	依字行腔	Tunes are applied systematically in accordance with lyrics
Yinzi	引子	Prelude tunes
Yizhi Xi	移植戏	Adapted operas
Yu	羽	'Sol' in Chinese pentatonic scale
Yuanban	原板	Initial rhythm, 2/4, at a moderate pace, $\text{♩} = 88$
Yueqin	月琴	Moon-shaped Chinese mandolin
Zaogong	早功	Morning practice
Zhegu Xi	鹧鸪戏	Zhegu Opera, a local opera in Shandong Province
Zhengdiao Yuanban Nanqiang	正调原板男腔	Positive tonality - initial rhythm - male tune
Zhengdiao Yuanban Nüqiang	正调原板女腔	Positive tonality - initial rhythm - female tune
Zhengdiao/Zhidiao	正调/徵调	Positive tonality
Zhi	徵	'Fa' in Chinese pentatonic scale
Zhouguzi	肘鼓子	Leather drum/Elbow drum
Zhouguzi Tixi	肘鼓子体系	Leather drum system
Zhouguzi Xi	肘鼓子戏	Leather Drum Opera
Zhudi	竹笛	Bamboo flute
Zhuxian	主弦	Principal Peking Opera fiddle player

Names of Works, Persons, Policies, Activities, Organizations, and Other Terms

Pinyin	Chinese	Explanation
Bai Xi Zhi Zu	百戏之祖	The ancestor of all kinds of Chinese operas - Kunqu Opera
Baocun	保存	Preservation, a key term in policies about safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH)
Baohu	保护	Safeguarding, a key term in policies about safeguarding ICH
Bu Xiang Hua	不像话	Absurd, an often used word amongst Maoqiang performers for unqualified performances
Buji Lianxi Huiyi Zhidu	部际联席会议制度	Inter-ministerial joint conference system
Chaguan	茶馆	Tea houses
Chae Bokuan	差额拨款	Balance allocation
Chuanbo	传播	Dissemination, a key term in policies about safeguarding ICH
Chuancheng	传承	Inheritance, a key term in policies about safeguarding ICH
Chuangxin	创新	Innovation, a key term in policies about safeguarding ICH
Chuanzong Jiedai	传宗接代	Having a son to carry on one's family name, a traditional ideology in China
'Chunyou Dengshang Wulianshan'	春游登上五莲山	<i>'Traveling to Wulian Mountain on a Spring Outing'</i> , a Maoqiang opera song
Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui	春节联欢晚会	Spring festival gala
'Chuxin Yongheng'	初心永恒	<i>'Stay True to the Mission Forever'</i> , a modern Maoqiang work
Cun Dangzhibu	村党支部	Village party branch
Cunwei Hui	村委会	Village committee
'Da Baishuitan'	大白水滩	<i>The Great White Beach</i> , a classic Peking Opera
Da Jüzhong	大剧种	Big opera
'Da Laoshi Fabiao'	大老实发飙	<i>Driving An Honest Man Mad</i> , a modern Maoqiang playlet
Daguai	大怪	The older son in the classic Maoqiang Opera, <i>The Story of a Wall</i>

Dangdiren	当地人	Locals
Dayuaner	大院儿	Yard of the village committee and village party branch
Diaoshi	刁氏	The mother-in-law in the classic Maoqiang opera, <i>A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law</i>
Ding Baohong	丁宝红	Maoqiang opera performer
Diyi Shuji	第一书记	Primary secretary
Dong Lai Pian	东莱片	East Lai District, one of the four sub-categories of Shandong dialect
Donglian Sanjiu; Xialian Sanfu	冬练三九；夏练三伏	Practicing in the coldest weather in the winter and the hottest weather in the summer
Dong Wei Pian	东潍片	East Wei District, one of four sub-categories of Shandong dialect
Dongqu	东区	East Region, one of the two big categories of Shandong dialect
Dongxi de ren	懂戏的人	Literally people who know a lot about (Maoqiang) opera
Duozhi Duofu	多子多福	Literally ‘the more sons the more blessings’, a traditional ideology in China
Erguai	二怪	The younger son in the classic Maoqiang Opera <i>The Story of a Wall</i>
Fan Yunjie	范云洁	A celebrated female Maoqiang performer in Gaomi City
Fanrong	繁荣	Flourishing, an often mentioned ideal for Maoqiang Opera’s future
Fanying Xianshi	反应现实	Reflecting real life, an often mentioned ideal for modern Maoqiang work
Fazhan	发展	Development, a key term in policies about safeguarding ICH
Fei Guoban Tuanti	非国办团体	Non-state-owned troupes
Furong Sheqū	芙蓉社区	Furong Community, a residential area in Wulian County
Gao Runzi	高润滋	A celebrated male Maoqiang performer in Gaomi City
Gaomi	高密	Gaomi City, a county-level city
Gaomi Da Jüyuan	高密大剧院	Gaomi Grand Theatre
Gaomi Maoqiang Shaoerban	高密茂腔少儿班	Gaomi Maoqiang Juvenile Training Class

Gaomi Yinxiang	高密印象	The image of Gaomi City, a description of Gaomi's characteristic cultures
Gaomi Yishu Jüyuan Jieshao	高密艺术剧院介绍	An introduction to Gaomi City Art Theatre
Gaomishi Yishu Jüyuan	高密市艺术剧院	Gaomi City Art Theatre
Gaoze Maoqiang Jütuan	高泽茂腔剧团	Gaoze Maoqiang Opera Troupe
Gaoze Xintiandi Yüle Huodong Zhongxin	高泽新天地娱乐活动中心	Gaoze New-Field Entertainment Activity Centre
Gaoze Yishutuan	高泽艺术团	Gaoze Art Troupe
Gongsi Heying Tuanti	公私合营团体	State-private-owned troupe
Gongyou Zhi Jütuan	公有制剧团	Collectively owned troupe
'Guayuan Qing'	瓜园情	<i>The Story of Managing a Watermelon Orchard</i> , a modern Maoqiang playlet
Guanxi Cun	关系村	The preferred village of the leaders
Guo Hancheng	郭汉城	A leading scholar and critic of Chinese opera
Guoban Tuanti	国办团体	State-owned troupe
Guojia Erji Yanyuan	国家二级演员	National second-class performer
Guojia Yiji Yanyuan	国家一级演员	National first-class performer
Guojiaji	国家级	State-level
Guojiaji Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan	国家级非物质文化遗产	State-level intangible cultural heritage
Guojü	国剧	National opera, Peking Opera
Hai Maozi	海帽子	Hai Maozi couple, specialists in Liuqin Opera
He Jingzhi	贺敬之	The former vice minister of the Ministry of Culture
Hebei	河北	Hebei Province
Heli Liyong	合理利用	Reasonable utilisation
Hen Kexiao	很可笑	Ridiculous, an often used word amongst Maoqiang performers for unqualified performances
'Honggaoliang Wenhua Yishujie: Maoqiang Zhou'	红高粱文化艺术节: 茂腔周	'Red Sorghum Cultural Festival: Maoqiang Opera Week', government-funded Maoqiang Opera performances in Gaomi City
'Huadong Xiqü Jieshao'	华东戏曲介绍	<i>An Introduction to Local Opera in Eastern China</i> , Jiang Xingyu's

		famous study (1955)
Huanghe	黄河	The Yellow River
‘Huanxi Yumin, Yasu Gongshang’	还戏于民，雅俗共赏	‘Pay attention to the general public’s lives, suiting both refined and popular tastes’, a slogan
‘Huashicun De Gushi’	花石村的故事	<i>The Story of Huashi Village</i> , a modern Maoqiang work
‘Hui Jia’	回家	<i>Back Home</i> , a modern Maoqiang playlet
Huimin Yanchu	惠民演出	People-benefiting performances
‘Jia Guo Qing’	家国情	<i>The Family and Country</i> , a modern Maoqiang playlet
Jiandang	建档	Archiving, a key term in policies about safeguarding ICH
Jiang Xingyu	蒋星煜	A leading scholar of Chinese local operas
‘Jianrong Bingbao’	兼容并包	‘The process of absorbing anything and everything’, a slogan
Jiaoxian Gewu Jütuan	胶县歌舞剧团	Jiaonan County Song and Dance Troupe
Jiaoyu Zuoyong	教育作用	Didactic function
Jiaozhoushi Maoqiang Yangge Yishu Chuancheng Baohu Zhongxin	胶州市茂腔秧歌艺术传承保护中心	Jiaozhou Maoqiang and Yangko Art Inheritance and Safeguarding Centre
Jiaozhou	胶州	Jiaozhou City, a county-level city in Shandong
Jiben Gongzi	基本工资	Base pay
‘Jie Nian’	借年	<i>Borrowing Special Purchases For The Spring Festival</i> , a classic Maoqiang playlet
Jiefanglu Sheqū	解放路社区	Jiefang road community, a residential area in Wulian County
‘Jihua Shengyü’	计划生育	Family planning policy/ One child policy
‘Jinji Chuzheng’	紧急出征	<i>Emergency Expedition</i> , a modern Maoqiang work
Jinghang Dayunhe	京杭大运河	Beijing to Hangzhou Grand Canal
Jingyingxing Wenhua Shiye Danwei	经营性文化事业单位	For-profit cultural institution
‘Jingzhun Fupin’	精准扶贫	‘Targeted poverty alleviation’, a policy
Jixiao Gongzi	绩效工资	Merit pay

Jütuan Dengji Zhidu	剧团登记制度	Opera troupe registration system
Jütuan Hebing	剧团合并	Troupe merging
Jütuan Tizhi Gaige	剧团体制改革	Theatrical system reform
Jüwei Hui	居委会	Neighborhood committee
Kan Renao	看热闹	Literally ‘watching the bustling scene’, a description of the primary attraction of Maoqiang Opera for audience members on site
‘Kangji Yiqing’	抗击疫情	‘Fighting against the covid-19 pandemic’, a theme for creating new Maoqiang operas, playlets and songs
Kuasheng Jüzhong	跨省剧种	Trans-provincial opera, Chinese local operas currently existing in more than two provinces
Lanshan	岚山	Lanshan District, the hometown of the famous Maoqiang performer Wang Ermei in Rizhao City
‘Lao Lai Nan’	老来难	<i>The Lives Of Old People Are Tough</i> , sung passage of a classic Maoqiang Opera <i>The Story of a Wall</i>
Lao Longwo	老龙窝	Lao Longwo Village in Rizhao City
Lao Manzhou	老满洲	One of the Hai Maozi couple’s daughters, a Maoqiang Opera performer
Laonian Tuan	老年团	The old people’s troupe, the older Maoqiang performers in the Gaomi Troupe
Lilin	李琳	A female character in <i>Emergency Expedition</i>
Liudong Jütuan	流动剧团	Literally ‘a troupe of people coming and going’, performers’ description of the situation of Wulian Troupe
‘Luo Shan Ji’	罗衫记	<i>A Piece Of Clothing</i> , a classic Maoqiang work
‘Maqian Poshui’	马前泼水	<i>Splashing Water in Front of a Horse</i> , a classic Maoqiang work
‘Mangong Duichang’	满工对唱	<i>Antiphonal Singing</i> , after-work antiphonal singing, excerpts from the Huangmei Opera work <i>Marriage of the Fairy Princess</i>
Maoqiang Mingjüe	茂腔名角	Celebrated Maoqiang performers

Maoqiang Peixun Ban	茂腔培训班	Maoqiang training classes
Maoqiang Suchengban	茂腔速成班	Maoqiang accelerated course
Maoqiang Zhou	茂腔周	Maoqiang Opera weeks
Mei Langfang	梅兰芳	The founder of the Mei School of Peking Opera
Meipai	梅派	The Mei School of Peking Opera
'Mengjiang Nü'	孟姜女	<i>The Young Lady Mengjiang</i> , a classic Maoqiang tragedy
Mingti Zuowen	命题作文	Guided writing /named composition
Minjian Banshe	民间班社	Local civic group
Minsuxing Wenhua	民俗性文化	Folkloric culture
Minying Tuanti	民营团体	Privately owned troupes
'Mochou Nü'	莫愁女	<i>The Young Lady Mochou</i> , a classic Maoqiang tragedy
Ni Na Guo Lai Ba Ni	你拿过来吧你	'You should give it to me', a single line of spoken text from the classic Maoqiang Opera <i>The Story of a Wall</i>
'Niehai Bolan'	孽海波澜	<i>Sorrow of the Times</i> , the first fashionable dress Peking Opera
Nongcun Sheqū	农村社区	Village community, a residential area in the countryside
Nuanchang Xiaoxi	暖场小戏	Warm-up playlet
Ouge Yingxiong	讴歌英雄	Eulogy for heroes
'Paner Ji'	盼儿记	<i>The Desire for a Baby Boy</i> , a modern Maoqiang work
'Qiangtou Ji'	墙头记	<i>The Story of a Wall</i> , a classic Maoqiang comedy
Qingtian Daren	青天大人	A lord who is impartial and incorruptible
Qingdaoshi Shunhe Jütuan	青岛市顺和剧团	Shunhe (harmony) Troupe Of Qingdao City
Qingdaoshi Xihaiian Xinqu Maoqiang Yishu Chuancheng Zhongxin	青岛市西海岸新区茂腔艺术传承中心	Qingdao West Coast New Area Maoqiang Art Inheritance Centre
Qingnian Tuan	青年团	The young people's troupe
Qiu	求	Pleading with, older performers' description of young performers' negative attitude towards learning Maoqiang performance skills
Quane Bokuan	全额拨款	Full-funding, a management model

Quane Bokuan Wenhua Shiye Danwei	全额拨款文化事业单位	Full-funding cultural institution
Quanguo Difang Xiqü Jüzhong Pucha	全国地方戏曲剧种普查	National local opera survey
Qunzhong Zuzhi	群众组织	Mass organisation
Rizhao Dingshi Jia Cheng	日照丁氏家乘	The family tree of Ding in Rizhao
Rizhaoshi Feiyi Zhanshi Xiangmu	日照市非遗展示项目	Rizhao intangible cultural heritage exhibition project
Rizhaoshi Maoqiang Yishu Feiyi Chuanchenren	日照市茂腔艺术非遗传承人	Intangible cultural heritage inheritors of Maoqiang Opera in Rizhao City
Rizhaoshi Renmin Guangchang	日照市人民广场	The People's Square of Rizhao City
Rongyu Tuanzhang	荣誉团长	Honorary troupe leader
Shancheng Zhixia	山城之夏	Summer festival in mountain city, a government-funded cultural activity in Wulian County
Shandong Sheng Lüjü Yuan	山东省吕剧院	Lü Opera Theatre Of Shandong Province
Shanxi	山西	Shanxi Province
Shehui Fuwu Zuzhi	社会服务组织	Social service organisations
'Shengshi Liyuan'	盛世梨园	'Chinese Operas in a Flourishing Age', a key theme in Maoqiang Opera performance
'Shengsi Pai'	生死牌	<i>Survival or Death</i> , a classic Maoqiang work
Shengdiao	声调	Tones
Shengji	省级	Provincial-level
Shengji Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan	省级非物质文化遗产	Provincial-level intangible cultural heritage
Shengji Guoying Jütuan	省级国营剧团	Provincial-level government-funded troupes
Shengmu	声母	Initial, syllable in the pinyin romanisation system of Mandarin
Shengnei Duyou Jüzhong	省内独有剧种	Provincial-unique opera, Chinese local opera currently only existing in one province
Shenpo	神婆	Female shaman
Sheqü	社区	Community, a kind of residential area
Sheqü Dangzhibu	社区党支部	Community party branch

Shidai Chanwu	时代产物	Products of the times, performer's description of modern Maoqiang works
Shiji	市级	City-level
Shiji Guoying Jütuan	市级国营剧团	City-level government-funded troupes
Shijinshi	试金石	Touchstone, Guo Hancheng's description of modern opera's significance
Shiye Danwei	事业单位	Public institutions
Shizhuang Xinxi	时装新戏	Fashionable dress opera
Shuxi De Diaorer	熟悉的调儿	Familiar tunes, audience members' description of Maoqiang Opera's melodies
Songming Yishutuan	松鸣艺术团	Songming Performing Art Troupe
'Songxi Xiaxiang'	送戏下乡	'Giving opera performances in the countryside'/'Sending opera to the countryside', a policy
'Song Wenhua Xiaxiang'	送文化下乡	'Sending culture to the countryside', a policy
Suan	酸	Tasting sour/uncomfortable, audience members' description of <i>mao</i> tune's melody
Suyun	素云	A female character in the modern Maoqiang work <i>The Desire for a Baby Boy</i>
'Tianxian Pei'	天仙配	<i>Marriage of the Fairy Princess</i> , a classic Huangmei Opera work
Tiaojian	条件	Qualities, criteria for selecting young Maoqiang inheritors
'Tiejin Jiceng'	贴近基层	'Close to the grassroots', a slogan
'Tiejin Qunzhong'	贴近群众	'Close to the masses', a slogan
Tukou Tuomo Zagewoer	吐口唾沫砸个窝儿	Spitting saliva can punch a hole in the ground, a local slang expression used in the classic Maoqiang work <i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i>
'Tudi Gaige Fa'	土地改革法	Land Reform Law
Tuixiu Ganbu Yishutuan	退休干部艺术团	Retired cadre art troupe, a description of the Songming Art Troupe
Wan Xiliang	万喜良	A character in <i>The Young Lady Mengjiang</i> , Mengjiang's husband
Wang Changan	王长安	A scholar of Chinese opera

Wang Ermei	王二妹	A Maoqiang Opera performer
Wang Xilai	王喜来	A Maoqiang scriptwriter
Weixin	微信	WeChat, the most widely used social software in China
Wenhua He Lüyou Jie	文化和旅游节	Cultural and Tourism Festival, a government-back festival
Wenhua He Lüyou Jü	文化和旅游局	Cultural and Tourism Bureau, the city-level and county-level government agency concerned with cultural and tourism affairs
Wenhua He Ziran Yichan Ri	文化和自然遗产日	Cultural and Natural Heritage Day
Wenhua Huimin Huodong	文化惠民活动	People-benefiting cultural activities
Wenhua Jiaoliu Huodong	文化交流活动	Cultural exchange activities
‘Wenhua Jin Wanjia’	文化进万家	‘Sending culture to myriad families’, a slogan and a government-funded cultural activity
‘Wenhua Qiangguo’	文化强国	‘A country with strong culture’, a slogan
Wenhua Ruan Shili	文化软实力	Cultural soft power
‘Wenhua Xiaxiang’	文化下乡	‘Bring culture to the countryside’, a policy
Wenhua Zhan	文化站	Cultural station, the township-level government agency concerned with cultural affairs in China
Wenhua Zhongxin	文化中心	Cultural centre, the government institution concerned with cultural affairs
Wenyi Dui	文艺队	Art team
Wenyi Xuanchuan Dui	文艺宣传队	Cultural and art propaganda teams
‘Wo Jiaoao Woshi Zhongguoren’	我骄傲我是中国人	<i>I Am Proud I Am Chinese</i> , a Maoqiang opera song
‘Women De Zhongguo Meng’	我们的中国梦	‘Our Chinese dream’, a slogan
Wulian Xian Maoqiang Jütuan	五莲县茂腔剧团	Wulian County Maoqiang Opera Troupe
Wulianxian Minzhengjü	五莲县民政局	Wulian County Civil Affairs Bureau
Wulianxian Rongmeiti Zhongxin	五莲县融媒体中心	Wulian County Convergence Media Centre

Xi Lu Pian	西鲁片	West Lu District, one of the four sub-categories of Shandong dialect
Xi Qi Pian	西齐片	West Qi District, one of the four sub-categories of Shandong dialect
Xian Ji Shi	县级市	County-level city
'Xiandai Jūmu Weigang'	现代剧目为纲	'Taking modern operas as the key link', a slogan
Xiandai Xi	现代戏	Modern operas
Xiangzhen Wenhua Zhan	乡镇文化站	Township cultural stations
Xianji	县级	County-level
Xianji Guoying Jütuan	县级国营剧团	County-level government-funded troupe
Xianji Wenming Cun	县级文明村	County-Level Civilised Village
'Xiao Gu Xian'	小姑贤	<i>A Virtuous Daughter-In-Law</i> , a classic Maoqiang comedy
Xiao Jūzhong	小剧种	Small opera
Xiexiang/Xiexiang Yanchu	下乡/下乡演出	Performing in the countryside, referring to government-funded performances
Xingqin	兴芹	A female character in <i>The Desire for a Baby Boy</i>
Xingwang	兴旺	Blooming, a description of Maoqiang Opera's future
Xingzheng Cun	行政村	Administrative villages
Xinhua Shudian	新华书店	Xinhua bookstore, a state-owned publishing house
Xinshidai Maoqiang Jütuan	新时代茂腔剧团	New-Era Maoqiang Opera Troupe
Xinshidai Maoqiang Yishutuan	新时代茂腔艺术团	New Era Maoqiang Opera Performing Art Troupe
Xinshidai Xiangcun Dawutai	新时代乡村大舞台	New era grand village stage, a kind of fixed performance venue in rural areas in China
Xiqū	西区	West Region, one of the two big categories of Shandong dialect
'Xiqū Jin Xiangcun'	戏曲进乡村	'Sending opera to the countryside', a policy
'Xiqū Jin Xiaoyuan'	戏曲进校园	'Chinese opera entering the campus', a policy
Xuanchuan Dui	宣传队	Propaganda teams
Yanchu Butie	演出补贴	Performance subsidy

'Yang Ba Jie You Chun'	杨八姐游春	<i>Miss Yang is Going on a Spring Outing</i> , a classic Maoqiang sung passage
'Yanggexiang De Gushi'	秧歌乡的故事	<i>A Story about the Hometown of Yangko Dance</i> , a modern Maoqiang work
Yangshi Chunwan	央视春晚	The China Central Television spring festival gala
'Yao Caili'	要彩礼	<i>Asking For Betrothal Gifts</i> , a classic Maoqiang sung passage
'Yi Tuan Yi Zhi'	一团一制	'One troupe one system', a policy
'Yicun Yinian Yichangxi'	一村一年一场戏	'One village, one year, one performance', a policy
'Yifa Nashui'	依法纳税	'Paying taxes according to the law', a slogan
'Yihai Zhengce'	一孩政策	One child policy/family-planning policy
'Yijiang Daibo'	以奖代拨	'Substitute subsidies with rewards', a policy
'Yijiang Daibu'	以奖代补	'Substituting subsidies with rewards', a policy
'Yinchai Ji'	银钗记	<i>The Story of a Silver Hairpin</i> , a classic Maoqiang work
Yuan Zhi Yuan Wei	原汁原味	Literally 'original soup, original flavour', describing authentic style
Yudiao	语调	Intonation, syllable in the pinyin romanisation system of mandarin
Yüle Zuoyong	娱乐作用	Entertainment function
Yunmu	韵母	Final, syllable in the <i>pinyin</i> romanisation system of Mandarin
Zen Jinfeng	曾金凤	A celebrated female Maoqiang performer in Wulian County
'Zhan Yi'	战疫	<i>Fight the Virus</i> , a modern Maoqiang playlet
Zhandi Wengong Tuan	战地文工团	Battlefield art troupes
Zhang Geng	张庚	A leading scholar and critic of Chinese opera
Zhili Chengguo	智力成果	Intellectual property
'Zhiqu Weihushan'	智取威虎山	<i>Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy</i> , a model opera
Zhongguo Xiqu Jüzhong	中国戏曲剧种	Chinese opera genres

Zhongguo Xiqu Xueyuan	中国戏曲学院	National Academy Of Chinese Theatre Arts
Zhongnan Qingnü	重男轻女	Preferring boys to girls, a traditional ideology in China
Zhu Shulan	祝术兰	A celebrated female Maoqiang performer in Wulian County
Zhuxian	主弦	Principal string player, the <i>jinghu</i> player in Maoqiang Opera band
Zhuanghu Jütuan	庄户剧团	Peasant troupe
'Zhuangyuan Dageng'	状元打更	<i>The Person who Tells Time to the Others is a Number One Scholar</i> , a classic Maoqiang work
Zhucheng	诸城	Zhucheng City, a county-level city
Zifu Yingkui	自负盈亏	Self-financing, a management model
'Zimei Yijia'	姊妹易嫁	<i>The Younger Sister's Wedding</i> , a classic Maoqiang comedy
Ziran Cun	自然村	Natural villages
Zishou Zizhi	自收自支	Self-supporting, a management model
Zishou Zizhi Wenhua Shiye Danwei	自收自支文化事业单位	Self-supporting cultural institutions

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