

Intangible Cultural Heritage of Macao

Macao, as a place of cultural integration, is home to a variety of folk customs and traditions. Over the past four hundred years, Chinese and Western cultures have taken root and flourished here, creating a unique cultural landscape in Macao, and forming precious “intangible cultural heritage”. These intangible cultural heritage items have been passed down through generations in Macao and are closely related to daily life, including folk customs, traditional skills, performing arts, etc. Among them, the intangible cultural heritage in the category of performing arts is diversified in form and variety, with items that embody the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture in Macao and those deeply influenced by Portuguese culture, such as Taoist Ritual Music, Patuá Theatre, Portuguese Folk Dance, Baatyam Percussion and Cantonese Opera.

Taoist Ritual Music is used in Taoist rituals and includes various forms of music, such as solo singing, chanting, percussion, wind music, ensemble, etc. It is combined with ritual ceremonies, recitation of scriptures, chanting of mantras, and dance movements to create a solemn and sacred religious atmosphere.

Patuá Theatre is a stage performance in which the Macanese community uses Macanese as the language of performance. Macanese is a Portuguese-based language that acquires the grammar and vocabulary from Malay, Canarese, Cantonese, English, Spanish, etc. The theatre often takes the form of comedy, expressing opinions on social issues and events that attract public interest. With its humorous and satirical style, not only does it bring laughter to the audience, but also provides inspiration for life.

Portuguese Folk Dance is a type of group dance that originated in the rural areas of Portugal, and combines traditional folk dance, folk song, and instrumental music performance. Dancers, often in pairs of men and women, dance together in groups, accompanied by instrumental performance and folk singing, creating a lively rhythm. After being introduced to Macao, Portuguese Folk Dance incorporated local cultural elements and developed into a diverse form of performing art while inheriting Portuguese traditional culture.

Baatyam Percussion is a type of folk music originated in Guangdong. It is classified into eight categories based on the materials and sound principles of the instruments: metal, stone, silk, calabash, bamboo, clay, leather, and wood. In Macao, Baatyam Percussion is mainly performed in birthday celebrations for deities, weddings, festive celebrations, funerals, rituals, etc. The performances can be divided into two types: parade performance and seated performance.

Cantonese Opera is a traditional regional opera performed in Cantonese. The performance styles mainly involve singing, acting, recitation, and martial arts. It incorporates elements of literature, opera, music, and martial arts to present the story through makeup, costumes, stage props, gong and drum music, etc. It is a comprehensive performing art that combines various elements.

Each form of performing art belonging to intangible cultural heritage in Macao has its unique beauty. They not only showcase the harmonious integration of Chinese and Western cultures in Macao, but also reflect and highlight Macao's cultural positioning as a place where Chinese culture is the mainstream and multiple cultures coexist.

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