

# Investigation into the Contemporary Changes of Huagu Gongzi and Analysis of the Reasons Therefor

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**Abstract:** Huagu Luozi, a folk dance popular in Yanzhuang Town, Gangcheng District, Jinan City, Shandong Province, is also the only provincial-level intangible cultural heritage in Gangcheng District, thus receiving considerable attention from the local government. After being rated as a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage, Huagu Luozi has evolved from a self-sustaining form to a collaborative effort between the government and the people. There are many changes worth studying in this process. This article will discuss and analyze the reasons for these changes in detail from three aspects: performance purpose, organizational process, and performance format.

**Keywords:** Huagu Gongzi, intangible cultural heritage, contemporary, changes, reasons

## 1. Introduction

Laiwu is located in the central mountainous area of Shandong, on the eastern foothills of Mount Taishan. The central part of the area is gently undulating, while the west is open and expansive, with higher elevations in the east and lower elevations in the west. Yanzhuang Town, which belongs to the Gangcheng District of Jinan City, Shandong Province, has a long history and profound cultural heritage. As early as the Qin Dynasty, there were official roads passing through the village, and post stations were set up inside the village to accommodate travelers. However, due to wars and upheavals, the town experienced several relocations and gradually declined. After population migration, it gradually flourished again. There are many ancient ruins in the town, and there are also many traditional village festivals and commemorative activities. It has its own unique village culture, which is also an important reason why the author chose it as the subject of investigation for Huagu Luozi. Legend has it that during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, Yanzhuang Village was a desolate place where people lived in hunger and cold. However, as a key hub for merchants and artisans, the village boasted well-developed transportation. Villagers thus opened inns along the way for travelers to rest. At that time, some people would play their respective instruments after savoring a meal and drink at a small inn. Beggars would beat flower drums, sellers of rat poison would play dry umbrellas, scissor sharpeners would beat bamboo clamps, and artists would strike gongs. [1] They would sing and dance in sync with the beat, drawing continuous applause from the audience. Inspired by this, they combined their various skills to make a living. They often went to certain vendors to sing congratulatory songs and wish for prosperity, hoping to receive alms. Later, local villagers like Zhang Fengzhi and Miao Chuanmei took a liking to this and adopted it, adapting it into a unique form of storytelling and singing. Since the main performance props were drums and gongs, it was named Huagulozi.

## 2. Contemporary Changes of Huagu Gongzi

### 2.1 Changes in the purpose of performance

Huagu Luozi originated from casual play by street vendors in their leisure time, serving as a form of entertainment for the lowest strata of society during their work breaks and also as a means of begging for a living, which can be described as a

begging art. The costumes and tools required for performance are all sourced from daily life, closely reflecting the aesthetic of the grassroots. In the hands of the first and second generations of performers, it maintained a relatively original performance style, mostly performing around the Lunar New Year to beg for money, and occasionally performing in front of merchants to seek good fortune. During the third and fourth generations, performers would perform during the Lunar New Year when there was less agricultural work, and would also be invited to perform in other villages or factories. At this time, Huagu Luozi was no longer performed for the purpose of begging, but villagers would give away grain, and factories would offer corresponding compensation. By the fifth generation, Huagu Luozi had completely bid farewell to its original begging culture, transforming into a disseminator and extoller of government policies.

### 2.2 Changes in performance routines

The performance of Huagu Luozi features songs, dances, music, and unique performance tools, rooted in the common people and highly distinctive. However, the current Huagu Luozi has undergone significant changes in terms of music, libretto, movements, and costumes.

#### 2.2.1 Changes in music

The music of Huagu Luozi is cheerful, lively, and dynamic, often based on folk tunes from central Shandong. Over the course of its long development, artists and performers have carefully selected and adapted these tunes, gradually forming three commonly used styles that have been preserved to this day. The melodies are mainly medium to slow, steady yet cheerful, and easy to learn and remember. It is precisely these characteristics that have enabled Huagu Luozi to spread widely among the people and establish a strong foundation among the masses during its inheritance process. The three commonly used tunes are "New Year Song," "Painting Fan Surface," and "Sitting in the Embroidery Tower." These three tunes are cheerful, lively, and moving, complementing the dance of Huagu Luozi perfectly. The music has not undergone significant changes; it has simply evolved from the original faster-paced tunes of central Shandong to the three adapted and fixed tunes. The changes in music have been the result of the efforts of generations of artists, which have been beneficial to the spread and development of Huagu Luozi.

#### 2.2.1 Changes in libretto

In the old days, flower drums and gongs were used as begging tools, with lyrics mostly in the "improvising on the spot" style,

describing objects and situations flexibly and humorously, and easy to sing. [2]There are mainly the following types: congratulatory lyrics, originally intended to win alms from vendors, with lyrics mostly congratulating on prosperous business. Nowadays, they are often used as invitations for performances during the establishment of a certain enterprise or major festivals; lyrics adapted from historical stories, stories commonly found in traditional operas, are adapted by artists into lyrics; improvising on the spot, singing and performing during the performance, describing objects and situations. It is relatively casual and humorous; critical lyrics, criticizing a certain person or era, embodying irony in playfulness, expressing the aspirations of the grassroots people.

### 2.2.3 Changes in clothing

The attire worn by performers of the old-fashioned Huagu Luozi (a traditional Chinese performance) was vastly different from today. The purpose of Huagu Luozi performances was to elicit laughter, hence the actors wore tattered clothes with patches piled on top of each other, also to achieve a comical and humorous effect. Only on formal occasions would the actors dress more formally. The clothes worn by Huagu Luozi performers were brightly colored and festive, with a joyful feel, highlighting the actors' image and setting the scene, bringing the audience into the performance more quickly and setting a good foundation for the actors' performance. Nowadays, Huagu Luozi actors all purchase uniform costumes.[3]Although there are distinctions between the leading lady and the clown, wearing uniform costumes loses the previous feel. Such formal clothes also lack the amusing feel, and the performances are not as flexible and natural as before. This has also lowered the quality of the performance.

### 2.3.4 Changes in actions

In the past, the movements of Huagu Luozi were lively and contagious, with a variety of patterns. Nowadays, the movements have slowed down, lost vitality, and the patterns are becoming fewer and fewer. In the past, there were more than ten types of Huagu Luozi formations, but now they end after just a few eight-character phrases. The movements of Huagu Luozi expressed the artists' love for life, using their bodies to express their own and the village's personality. However, the simplification of the movements has led to a loss of vitality, resulting in a decline in the quality of Huagu Luozi performances and a decline into a low point.

## 3. Reasons for the Changes in Huagu Gongzi

### 3.1 Government intervention

The government's intervention initially provided some protection for Huagu Luozi, but it has also disrupted its growth. As the driving force behind the development of Huagu Luozi, the government should face up to its responsibilities and truly play a protective role, rather than interfering or hindering it, in order to facilitate its smooth development.

### 3.2 Rewriting by local cultural elites

Local cultural elites have, to some extent, rewritten the development of Huagu Luozi. These individuals hold the discourse power of local culture in their hands, imposing their own interpretations on the local culture. Local culture is being

rewritten in the hands of these individuals, and it is their strong intervention that has distorted the development of Huagu Luozi. They believe that the old lyrics are just "made up and pieced together" by old artists and have no redeeming value, and they have eliminated the so-called "uncivilized elements".[4] As a result, under the adaptation of these individuals, the lyrics of Huagu Luozi have changed from "prioritizing smoothness" to "being ornate and difficult to understand". These adapted lyrics are very uncomfortable for actors and are easy to forget, which greatly reduces the quality of performances.

### 3.3 The inheritors are neglected

After being rated as a national intangible cultural heritage, Huagu Luozi naturally became a national heritage, representing a broader region and becoming a local showcase, drawing closer to mainstream culture. The lyrics were changed, and were written by local cultural elites. These new lyrics were neither close to life nor easy to understand, making the actors feel uncomfortable. Such lyrics also lost their entertaining function, and their appeal naturally declined. The status of the inheritors was increasingly diluted, and they even became wage earners. The enthusiasm for performance would inevitably decrease, which would inevitably hinder the development of Huagu Luozi.

## 4. Conclusions

After Huagu Luozi was rated as an intangible cultural heritage of Shandong Province, it has evolved from being self-sustaining to being jointly built by the government and the people. Significant changes have taken place in various aspects such as lyrics, costumes, and inheritance. These changes are also related to the intervention of the government, local cultural elites, and the neglect of inheritors. Initially, these external interventions were beneficial for protecting Huagu Luozi, but later they became more of a hindrance and obstruction to its development. The local government should properly fulfill its functions and play the role of a guardian; it is also hoped that local cultural elites can correctly understand and view local culture, refrain from tampering with it, and play the role of a bridge connecting the outside world with local culture; it is even more hoped that inheritors can inherit and carry forward Huagu Luozi, grasp the initiative in their own hands, and play the role of inheritors of Huagu Luozi.

## 5. References

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