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Evolution of Public Online Attention to Qinqiang Opera Triggered by the Hit Television Drama *The Lead*: Evidence from Baidu Index

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Abstract

Background and Purpose: Search engine data records netizens' information needs during cultural events, offering a quantitative entry point for evaluating the communication effects of traditional Chinese opera-themed films and TV series. Based on Baidu Index, this paper examines netizens' attention to Qinqiang Opera during the hot broadcast of *The Lead* from five dimensions: attention intensity, terminal structure, regional distribution, audience profile, and demand themes.

Materials and Methods: Using "Qinqiang Opera" as the core keyword, with "Yi Qin'e" and "TV series-The Lead" as comparative keywords, this study collects Baidu Index data from

mainland China between April 10 and June 7, 2026, analyzing communication characteristics reflected in data changes.

Results: Search volume for "Qinqiang Opera" grew significantly after *The Lead* premiered. The "search while watching" mobile mode became the primary channel of public attention. Online attention featured coexistence of traditional popular regions and platform-spreading zones across eastern coastal regions and central cities. The proportion of audiences aged 20-29 and 30-39 rose, with female audiences showing a higher TGI index. Search terms expanded from opera appreciation keywords to knowledge-oriented inquiries, including "the Four Famous Dan Actors of Qinqiang Opera."

Conclusion: The popularity of *The Lead* has significantly raised netizens' online attention to Qinqiang Opera and shifted public search demands toward deeper cultural cognition and understanding of intangible cultural heritage. Baidu Index effectively captures changes in search popularity, mobile communication characteristics, spatial diffusion paths, and thematic shifts in public demands for traditional operas.

Keywords: Baidu Index; *The Lead*; Qinqiang Opera; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Online Attention

1. Introduction

Qinqiang Opera is a vital form of traditional Chinese opera in Northwest China. It was selected into the First Batch of the National Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006^{1,2}. For a long period of time, the dissemination of Qinqiang Opera has mainly relied on geographical communities, theater troupe performances, disciplinary education and local media. Against the backdrop of the mobile Internet, short-video platforms, film and TV series, variety shows and search engines have jointly reshaped public access ways to traditional Chinese operas. Instead of encountering opera via live theatre performances, numerous netizens are initially exposed to Qinqiang Opera through film and TV series clips, theme songs, actor interviews or social media discussions. Subsequently, they acquire relevant cultural knowledge via online searches to figure out “What Qinqiang Opera is”, “How to appreciate Qinqiang Opera”, and “What are the representative vocal excerpts”.

The TV series *The Lead* offers a typical scenario for observing such a transformation process. According to official data released by the National Radio and Television Administration, this key guided TV series premiered on May 10, 2026 during prime time on CCTV-1, with exclusive online streaming rights licensed to Tencent Video nationwide³. As reported by CHINADAILY.COM.CN, the TV series takes the artistic life of Yi Qin'e - a renowned Qinqiang Opera performer, as its main storyline, tracing the rise and fall of this intangible cultural heritage art form^{4,5}. For Qinqiang Opera, *The Lead* is not only a cultural representation of this traditional opera genre, but also a typical communication event where the hit TV series drives the public searches for intangible cultural heritage.

To quantify the communication effect of surging searches for “intangible cultural heritage” driven by the “popularity of the TV series”, search indices from search engines serve as an effective measurement tool. What recorded by the search engines are the users’ voluntarily expressed information needs at the specific time. Compared with questionnaires, interviews and media reports, search indices feature continuity, low cost, near real-time availability and regional breakdown. They are, therefore, increasingly applied in research fields such as tourism, cultural communication and research on social public opinion. As a representative tool for tracking search trends in the Chinese-language internet context⁶. Baidu Index provides multi-dimensional information including keyword search trends, demand graph, media indices, regional distribution and audience profile. It offers an operable data entry point for exploring how mass cultural events translate into online public attention.

Existing researches based on Baidu Index are mostly concentrated on themes concerning diseases, tourism and consumption. For instance, it has been applied to monitor diseases with high global attention (such as hand-foot-and-mouth disease⁷ and lung cancer⁸), and forecast tourism and consumption activities⁹⁻¹⁰. By constructing predictive framework models, Baidu Index demonstrates prominent strengths and great potential in providing real-time behavioral data, forecasting precise risk, optimizing resource allocation and solving problem. In contrast, few researches have explored the temporal evolution of public attention to traditional operas—especially the growth of public interest in intangible cultural heritage driven by hit film and TV series—using Baidu Index.

Taking the growing popularity of the TV series *The Lead* as a clear event node, this paper puts forward the following research questions: First, has the intensity of online search attention toward Qinqiang Opera surged and formed phased peaks following the premiere of *The Lead*? Second, do mobile searches serve as the primary access channel for such public attention? Third, how does search attention differ geographically and demographically? Fourth, do the associated search queries in demand graph shift from entertainment-oriented consumption to themes such as cultural understanding, aesthetic learning and the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Data Sources and Keyword Settings

The research data are sourced from the Baidu Index platform. The core keyword is set as “Qinqiang Opera”, while the comparative keywords include “Yi Qin'e” and “TV series *The Lead*”. Specifically, the keyword “Qinqiang Opera” serves to measure online public attention to this intangible cultural heritage art itself; “TV Series-*The Lead*” is used to depict the popularity of the TV series; and “Yi Qin'e” is used to examine whether the character name serves as an entry point for searches.

The time period is set as April 10, 2026 - June 7, 2026, spanning 30 days prior to the TV series’ premiere through its ongoing hot-broadcast period. The geographical scope is defined as Chinese mainland. The index types consist of the overall search index, PC search index and mobile search index. User attributes cover provinces, cities, age groups and genders. The demand graph is employed to collect associated search terms and rapidly rising search keywords. The data collection modules of the Baidu Index and their corresponding analytical applications are shown in Table 1.

Module	Variable	Extraction Standard	Application
Trend	Search index, PC index, mobile index	Exported on a daily basis or recorded via screenshots	Identify premiere impact and peak changes
Space	Provincial & municipal rankings	Total volume rankings and regional distribution maps	Analyze regional characteristics and nationwide diffusion
Audience	Age and gender profiles	Audience profile based on Baidu Index	Identify potential interested groups
Demands	Demand graph, related terms, rising search terms	Coding based on platform display results	Analyze changes in search intentions

Table 1. Data Collection Modules of the Baidu Index and the Corresponding Analytical Applications

2.2 Event Window and Indicator Calculation

Taking May 10, 2026, the premiere date of *The Lead*, as the event day T0, two observation windows are defined: the baseline period before premiere (T-30 to T-1) and the event-triggered period after premiere (T0 to T+6). Key indicators include the pre-premiere mean M0, the mean M1 within 7 days after premiere, peak value P, peak date D, relative growth rate $G=(M1-M0)/M0\times 100\%$; and proportion of mobile search $S=\text{Mobile Index}/\text{Overall Index}$. Key indicators and the calculation methods are listed in Table 2.

To mitigate accidental fluctuations caused by single-day promotion, public holidays and platform recommendations, both the original daily index and the 7-day average curve of mobile search are analyzed in this research. The regional distribution is interpreted based on the ranking of absolute search volume, with further discussion incorporating population size, internet penetration rate, the distribution range of Qinqiang Opera and the geographical attributes of the TV series’ core creative team.

Indicator	Symbol	Calculation Method	Explanation
Pre-Premiere Mean	M0	Daily Mean Search Index from T-30 to T-1	Baseline Attention Prior to the Event
Post-Premiere Mean	M1	Daily Mean Search Index from T0 to T+6	Attention Triggered by the Premiere
Relative Growth Rate	G	$(M1-M0)/M0 \times 100\%$	Growth Amplitude Driven by the Hot Broadcast
Mobile Search Proportion	S	Mobile Index / Overall Index	Dependency on Mobile Search

Table 2. Main Indicators and Calculation Methods

3. Results

3.1 Event-Driven Surge in Search Volume of “Qinqiang Opera”

According to Baidu Index, the search index for “Qinqiang Opera” remained at a relatively stable baseline level from April 10 to May 9, 2026, with the 30-day pre-premiere mean $M0=506$. Following the official premiere of *The Lead* on May 10, the search index saw a phased upward trend. The 7-day post-premiere mean stood at $M1=2175$, showing a relative growth rate $G=329.8\%$ from the baseline period. The peak search value $P=5706$ occurred on D=May 21, 2026 during the TV series’ hot-broadcast period. The trend of the search index is as shown in Figure 1.

From the curve pattern, the search index of “Qinqiang Opera” did not drop rapidly after a single-day spike on the premiere day. Instead, multiple secondary peaks were triggered by key plots such as “Yi Qin’e Learning chuihuo (fire-blowing)” and “The Death of Master Gou”. It indicates that public attention was not merely confined to premiere-related information. However, as the plot unfolded, the audiences’ interest was continuously re-ignited by Qinqiang Opera performances, character destinies and discussions on intangible cultural heritage.

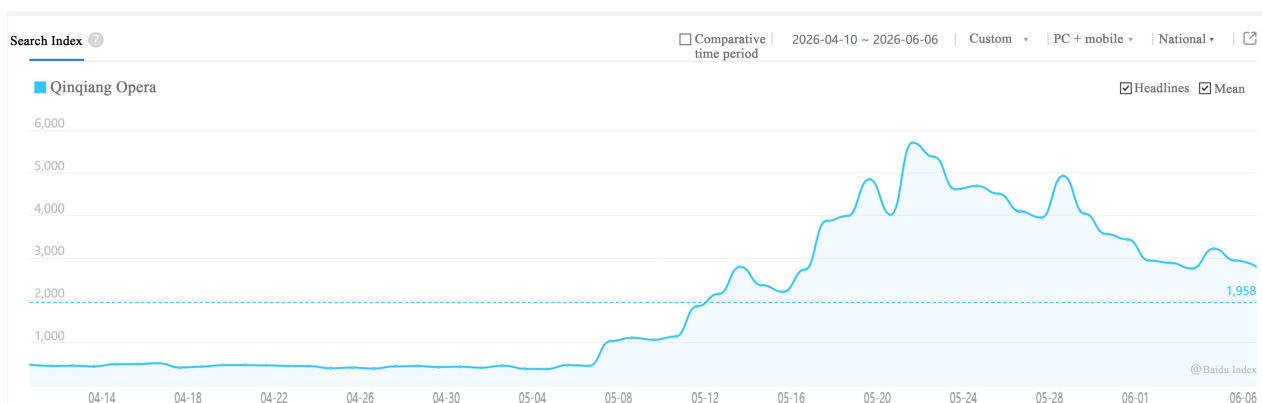


Figure 1. Trend of the Search Index for Qinqiang Opera

3.2 Mobile Terminals as the Primary Access Channel for Public Attention

Terminal decomposition results demonstrate that mobile search index accounted for a relatively high proportion of total search volume. The pre-premiere mobile search proportion $S_0=79.1\%$ is as shown in Figure 2. The proportion climbed to $S_1=88.5\%$ within 7 days after premiere, as shown in Figure 3. If S_1 is higher than S_0 , it reveals that the surging public interest in Qinqiang Opera driven by the hit TV series was predominantly generated within mobile scenarios. Audiences may search relevant information in real time while watching TV, short clips on video platforms, participating in social media discussions or engaging with secondary dissemination via short-video channels. Although the PC search index saw a moderate rise, its growth margin remained limited. This suggested that the public attention to such culture was characterized by fragmented, incidental and real-time information acquisition behaviors.

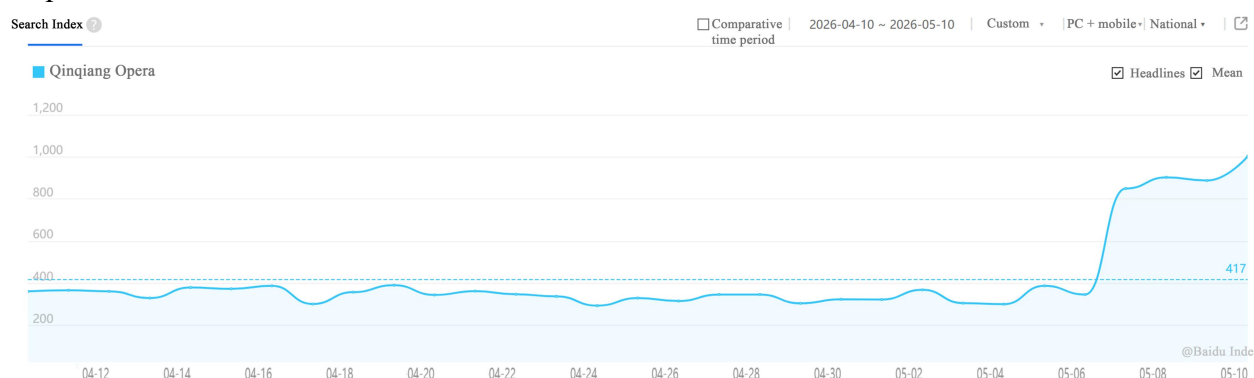


Figure 2. Pre-Premiere Mobile Terminal Search Index

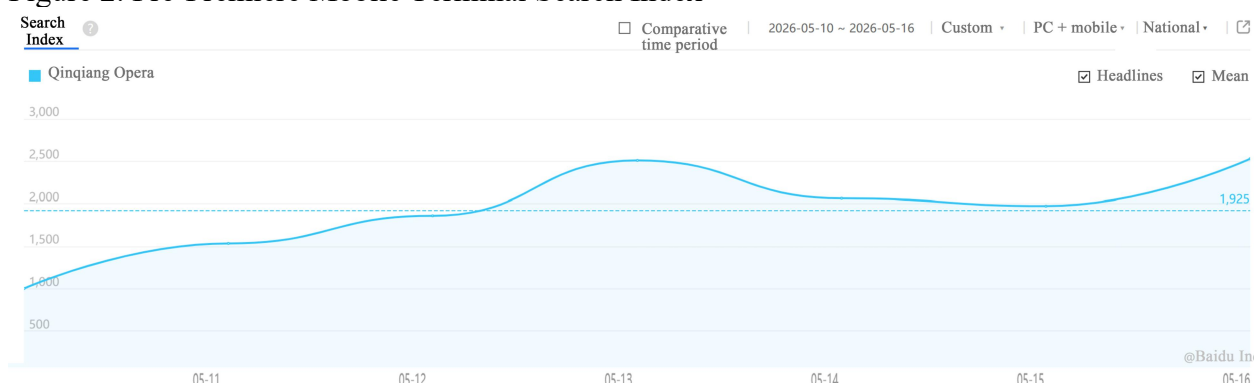


Figure 3. Post-Premiere Mobile Terminal Search Index

3.3 Regional Distribution: Synergy Between Geographical Cultural Basis and Nationwide Dissemination

Regional distribution constitutes a vital dimension for verifying whether public attention to Qinqiang Opera has transcended its local cultural circle. The traditional distribution regions of Qinqiang Opera, including Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Xinjiang, recorded relatively high baseline search volumes. Meanwhile, regions with large populations, frequent internet access and high consumption on video platforms such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Sichuan, ranked high in terms of absolute search volume, as shown in Figure 4. The top ten provinces during the TV series' hot broadcast were Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shaanxi, Beijing, Shandong, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Sichuan, Henan and

Hebei, as shown in Figure 5; the top ten cities were Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Chongqing, Wuhan, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Nanjing, as shown in Figure 6. The data clearly reveals that provinces outside Northwest China achieved markedly higher rankings after the premiere. It demonstrates that, *The Lead's* dissemination through nationwide satellite televisions and online platforms, has expanded Qinqiang Opera from localized cultural scenarios to a broader public cultural field.



Figure 4. Top 10 Provinces Before the Premiere

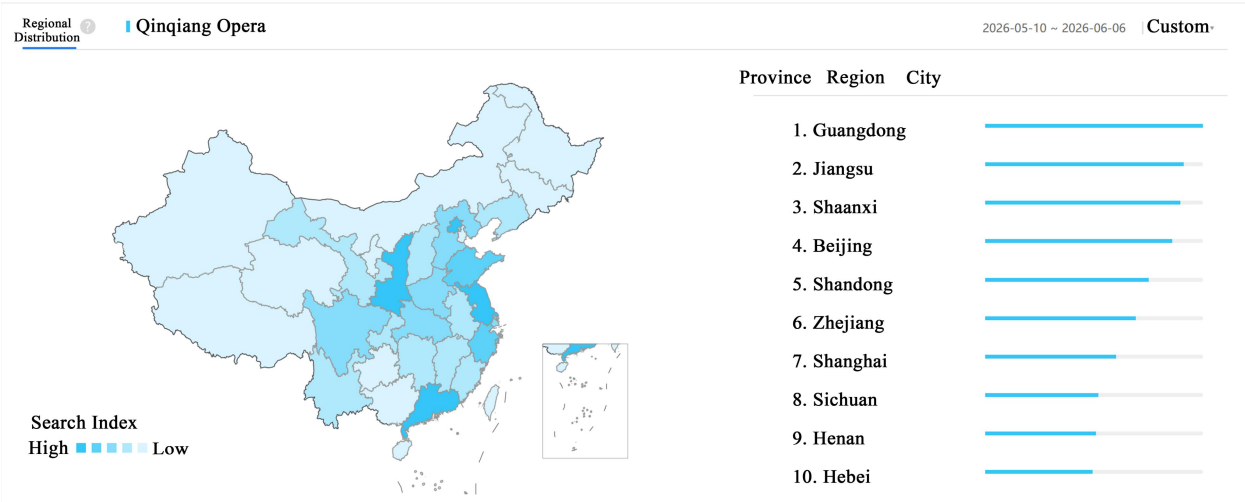


Figure 5. Top 10 Provinces during the Hot-broadcast Period

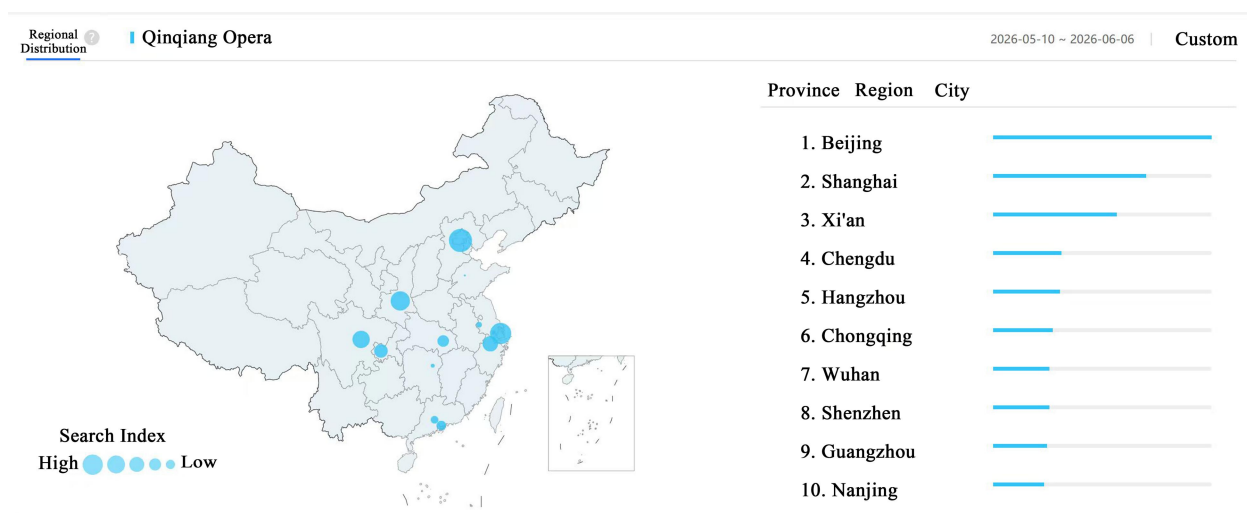


Figure 6. Top 10 Cities During the Hot-broadcast Period

3.4 Audience Profile: Audience Overlap Between Traditional Opera and TV Series

Baidu Index's audience profile can help to examine the structural changes of audiences interested in Qinqiang Opera driven by the hit TV series. In terms of age, audiences before the premiere were mainly aged above 50. After the TV series was released, the proportion of audiences aged 20–29 and 30–39 rose, with a rise in their distribution across the entire network, as shown in Figure 7. This indicates that young and middle-aged TV series audiences began to search for content related to Qinqiang Opera after watching the TV series. One of the most valuable reflections of the TV series' influence lies in the fact that the time-honored Qinqiang Opera has gained recognition among more young people¹¹. Concerning the gender, males accounted for 50.43% and females 49.57% after the premiere, showing a roughly balanced gender distribution (Figure 8). However, the TGI index suggests a higher proportion of female audiences, which can be attributed to female growth narratives, audience attention to cast members, the spreading of theme songs and emotional resonance with the roles.

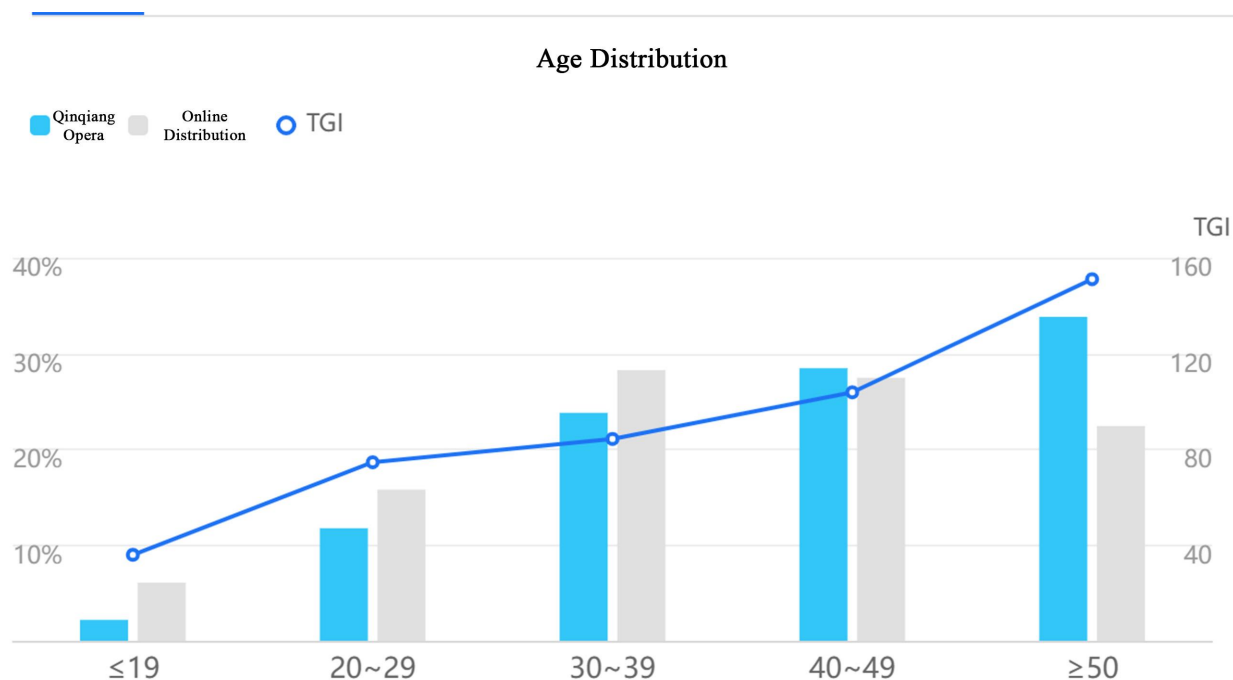


Figure 7. Age Distribution

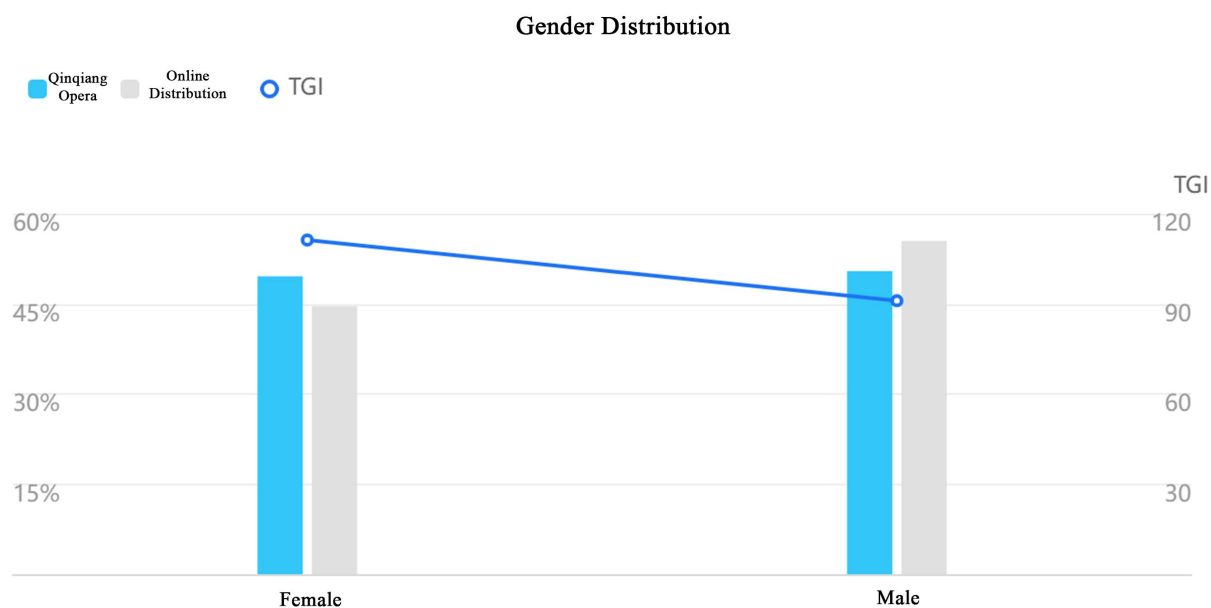


Figure 8. Gender Distribution

3.5 Demand Graph: Transition from Entertainment Entry Point to Cultural Understanding

Demand graph reflects the topics netizens care about when searching for “Qinqiang Opera”. The thematic coding framework of Qinqiang Opera-related search terms is presented in Table 3. Prior to the TV series’ premiere, associated keywords mainly focused on traditional opera appreciation, such as “classic excerpts of Qinqiang Opera”, “complete collections of Qinqiang Opera”, “Qinqiang Operas” and “renowned Qinqiang artists”. After the premiere, search rate

for “the Four Famous Dan Actors of Qinqiang Opera” kept rising. Meanwhile, queries including “Who is the prototype of Yi Qin'e?” and “Which province Qinqiang Opera belongs to as a local opera?” ranked among the top 3 in search popularity. This indicates that the TV series has brought Qinqiang Opera beyond its established fan base and triggered a broader explanatory searches.

Based on the classification of search intentions, the public attention toward Qinqiang Opera during the TV series’ hot broadcast is divided into three tiers: the first tier is episode consumption, covering searches for broadcast platforms, cast members, plots and theme songs; the second tier refers to knowledge acquisition, including inquiries about the definition, history, schools and origin of Qinqiang Opera; the third tier represents aesthetic extension, involving searches for master artists, vocal excerpts, performing techniques and stage performances. The above findings demonstrate that the popularity of the TV series has been converted into public cultural awareness and willingness to engage with this traditional art form.

Category	Representative Keywords	Interpretation	Communication Explanation
Episode Information	[<i>The Lead</i> , Cast Members, Broadcast Time, Theme Songs]	Information demands centering on the TV series itself	Hot access gateway
Knowledge on Qinqiang Opera	[What is Qinqiang Opera, where is the origin of Qinqiang Opera]	Supplementary learning of basic knowledge about the opera	Cultural cognition initiation
Excerpts/ Master Artists	[Qinqiang Opera excerpts/ Master Artists]	Extended Searches for Aesthetic Objects	Interest deepening
Performing Skills / Stage Scenes	[Chuihuo (fire-blowing), singing, reciting, acting and martial arts]	In-depth inquiries into performing techniques presented in the TV series	Conversion from visual spectacle to knowledge search
Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance	[Qinqiang Opera as Intangible Cultural Heritage, Inheritance of Qinqiang Opera]	Concerns over the protection and inheritance of this traditional art	Transformation to public cultural topics
Regional Tourism	[Xi'an Qinqiang Opera, Shaanxi Opera]	Linkages from TV series to local cultural space	Online-to-offline experience transformation

Table 3. Thematic Coding Framework of Search Terms Related to Qinqiang Opera

4. Discussion

4.1 Hit TV Series as Triggers for Public Attention to Intangible Cultural Heritage

The dissemination significance of *The Lead* lies in that it does not consider Qinqiang Opera as a mere regional cultural style or contextual symbol. Instead, it integrates vocational training, stage ethics, industry ups and downs as well as personal destinies of Qinqiang performers into its full-length narrative. What is the main concern of the audiences amid the popularity of *The Lead*? Audiences not only discuss the TV series itself, but also extend their discussions to society, history, life and even intrinsic artistic forms of the art¹². This feature well fits the

unique strengths of TV series as a cultural communication medium. Existing researches have demonstrated that, by abstractly presenting cultural symbols and social values, TV series can effectively convey a nation's cultural spirit and artistic appreciation, and gain wider dissemination via audiences' word-of-mouth interaction¹³. In *The Lead*, Qinqiang Opera is no longer a static intangible cultural heritage on display, but a dynamic narrative clue that affects character destinies and runs through inter-generational inheritance. While empathizing with Yi Qin'e's ups and downs in seeking her artistic career, audiences naturally step into the aesthetic world and professional ethics of Qinqiang Opera. Different from fragmented "popularity" in short videos, the TV series features stronger continuous narration and emotional accumulation. It enables audiences to establish in-depth empathy with characters, and further understand the aesthetic logic and social status of traditional operas. Baidu Index indicates that the search volume of Qinqiang Opera rises greatly after its premiere. Such growth is not merely attributed to the promotion of TV series, but from the joint effects of film and television texts, platform distribution, celebrity influence and intangible cultural heritage narration.

From the perspective of communication chain, public online attention to Qinqiang Opera has five stages, i.e. passive exposure, active search, knowledge supplementation, aesthetic extension and participation transformation. Passive exposure is driven by the premiere, the theme song sung by Faye Wong, and high-recognition performance skills including "chuihuo (fire-blowing)" and "woyu (fish reclining)". Search engines respond to audiences' instant questions; while knowledge-related keywords in demand graph reflect public demands for cultural learning; searches for master performers and Qinqiang excerpts indicate deeper aesthetic appreciation and cultural engagement. In the extension process of this chain, TV series plays a special role in breaking the communication boundaries of intangible cultural heritage. It helps Qinqiang Opera break free from regional restrictions and audience limitations of professional theatres, sparking widespread public debate. Furthermore, it transforms Qinqiang Opera from a niche local opera genre into a cultural gateway that audiences actively search for, voluntarily learn about and are willing to further explore¹⁴.

4.2 The Cultural Implications of Mobile Search and "Concurrent Watching"

The proportion of mobile terminal index rose further during the TV series' hit period, indicating that the emergence of people's interest in Qinqiang Opera is closely related to the mobile media environment. The users search relevant information while watching the full episode on TV, Tencent Video, short video clips, or social media discussions, creating a "search-while-watching" concurrent watching experience. This phenomenon aligns exactly with the "Second Screen" theoretical perspective in communication studies—where audiences use mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, as auxiliary screens while watching content on the main screen (e.g. TV series or films), engaging in media consumption behaviors that may or may not be related to the content on the main screen. Unlike traditional linear communication, where users "watch first, then search", the multitask model of "searching while watching" embeds content consumption and information search in parallel within the same spatiotemporal context, thereby altering the rhythm and pathways through which intangible cultural heritage reaches its audience.

American scholar Napoli, breaks down audience behaviors into a series of processes ranging from awareness, interest, and exposure to engagement, ultimately leading to behavior¹⁵. In the cross-screen communication ecosystem, the cross-screen behavior of the

audiences can be understood as multiple behaviors, such as exposure + engagement generated from different screens, including televisions, computers, and mobile phones. The analysis of its effects is no longer restricted to the traditional, single-dimensional framework of mass communication; instead, it reveals structural characteristics where fragmented watching and deep engagement coexist¹⁶. When audiences watch *The Lead* while searching via their smartphones for “How is the chuihuo (fire-blowing) effect achieved in Qinqiang opera”, “Who is the prototype of Yi Qin’e”, and “What are the differences between Qinqiang Opera and Peking Opera”, this indicates that Qinqiang Opera does not enter the audience’s awareness only after the episode ends, but rather transforms into an active information need the very moment the narrative unfolds. Global audience research has also found this trend: approximately one-fifth of audiences aged 18 to 34 consistently use a second screen while watching television or streaming media content; meanwhile, Nielsen’s analysis of multi-screen user behavior also confirms that, an increasing number of audiences actively switch to mobile devices during watching to search for details or supplementary content, thereby enhancing their core watching experience. In other words, these search behaviors are themselves an intrinsic component of audience engagement in deep measurement—audiences have shifted from passively “watching Qinqiang Opera” to actively “asking about Qinqiang Opera and searching Qinqiang Opera”, and their interest in intangible cultural heritage is continuously stimulated by this behavioral shift.

Data from the hit period of *The Lead* also supports this argument: views of short videos related to the episode exceeded 3 billion, while topics related to “Qin” culture on WeChat Channels generated over 5.3 billion views and received more than 30 million likes¹⁷. In Baidu Index, the search peaks for “Qinqiang Opera” following each episode of *The Lead* clearly correspond to key plot points such as “Yi Qin’e Learning chuihuo (fire-blowing)” and “The Death of Master Gou”. For the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, this scenario offers important insights: cultural institutions, theater troupes, and media outlets should not limit themselves to releasing press releases before the premiere of the TV series. Instead, they should set up searchable, explainable, and shareable knowledge content centered around key plot points—such as “Sources of the opera excerpts”, “Introduction to roles in Qinqiang Opera”, “Explanations of the chuihuo (fire-blowing) technique”, and “A map of Northwest Chinese opera”—to capture real-time search traffic.

4.3 Dual Diffusion: Regional and National

Regional culture is an irreplicable differentiated resource. It can help works stand out amid massive content, representing a new path in the era of declining traffic¹⁸. At present, the information stream is dominated by homogeneous and templated content, so the users’ attention is being fragmented infinitely. “Generic traffic”—which relies on simply piling on sensational elements and formulaic thrills—is no longer sustainable, and the content industry is undergoing a value deflation. Against this backdrop, content with distinct regional characteristics and profound cultural heritage has instead become a scarce “cognitive surplus”—it is not a fast-moving consumer good that relies on dopamine-driven thrills to create fleeting novelty, but rather a long-term value asset grounded in cultural foundations and emotional resonance. Qinqiang Opera itself has distinct regional characteristics of the Northwest China, but the TV series *The Lead* is broadcast on a platform with nationwide reach. Through its long-form narrative, it preserves the “sense of locality” upon which Qinqiang Opera was rooted, striking a balance between viewership and connotation. Following the release of *The Lead*, ticket sales among young audiences at Shaanxi Qinqiang Opera theaters rose by 30%, and sales of related cultural and creative products increased by

150%. *The Lead* has successfully helped this ancient intangible cultural heritage art form break through the dual barriers—regional and generational¹⁹.

The regional data based on Baidu Index also shows high levels of interest in Northwest China and high absolute volumes in the eastern coastal regions/central cities, indicating that the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage occurs in two distinct spatial categories: “cultural foundation zones” and “platform diffusion zones”. The former is supported by local cultural identity, ancestral memories, and a foundation of off-line performances; and the latter is driven by media platforms, population size, and content consumption capacity. In terms of local cultural policy, the former requires strengthening local inheritance and off-line offerings, while the latter is best suited for extending its popularity through touring performances, exhibitions, short-video knowledge channels, and urban cultural events. Shaanxi has issued the *Several Measures for Promoting the Creative Transformation and Innovative Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2025–2027)*. Such Measures explicitly proposes to promote the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage projects such as Qinqiang Opera, and continuously expand their influence through brand events such as excellent Qinqiang Opera repertoire performance and premium intangible cultural heritage exhibition. This policy framework can be deemed as the institutional safeguard for the coordinated efforts of the two types of spaces mentioned above—with the “Foundation Zone” upholding tradition and the “Diffusion Zone” breaking into the mainstream. Only when the two support each other rather than competing against one another can the temporary popularity generated by *The Lead* be transformed into a longer-term dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, thereby taking deep root in the hearts of the audiences.

4.4 Layered Translation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Dissemination Content

From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage dissemination content, *The Lead* should not merely generate associations with the name of the TV Series or create a temporary surge in popularity; rather, it should be transformed into a layered and continuous supply of knowledge. Intangible cultural heritage is not a cultural symbol for one-time consumption; and its core lies in community identity, intergenerational transmission, and the living practices of continuous recreation²⁰. Therefore, the dissemination of content surrounding Qinqiang Opera should cover at least four levels: first, the foundational cognitive level, including historical origins and evolution, geographical distribution and dissemination, vocal tunes and rhythmic patterns, role classification structure, and aesthetic concepts such as “kuyin (sorrowful mode)” and “huanyin (joyful mode)”; second, the level of artists and schools, including representative inheritors, brands of theater troupes, and master-disciple lineage; third, the level of repertoires and classic excerpts, including classic repertoires, representative excerpts, stage stunts, and visual performance conventions; and fourth, the level of contemporary transformation, including new contexts such as film and television adaptations, short video clips, cultural tourism performances, campus outreach, and digital archives. Only by linking together “what it is”, “who performs it”, “what is performed”, and “how it relates to contemporary life” can the promotion of intangible cultural heritage move beyond event-based trending to sustained continuous cognition. It is worth noting that these four levels are not in a linear progressive relationship; rather, they can be advanced in parallel and serve as the entry point for one another—an audience might be drawn directly into the technical level by a short video of “chuihuo (fire-blowing)”, then trace back to the role classification structure. This “deconstruction and reconstruction” aligns precisely with the discontinuous

reading habits of mobile users, while guiding them to gradually piece together a complete knowledge map of Qinqiang Opera.

Specifically, for Qinqiang Opera, the content can be organized entirely around the framework of “master performers + classic plays + famous excerpts + technical skills”. For example, Ma Youxian’s *Xie Yaohuan*, *The Injustice to Dou E* and *The Story of Sue San*; Xiao Yuling’s *Wudianpo*, *The Legend of the White Snake*, and *The Flame Colt*; Yu Qiaoyun’s *The Story of Baochuan Wang*, *The Case of Chen Shimei*, and *Thrice to the Bridal Chair*; as well as Ma Lanyu’s portrayal of Li Huiniang in *A Visit to the West Lake*, showcasing “chuihuo (fire-blowing)” technique—are all representative contents that combine artistic distinctiveness with the potential for widespread dissemination. As for classic excerpts that are particularly suited for public search and platform dissemination, *The Flame Colt: The Flower Presentation*, *Zhou Ren Returns to the House*, *Three Drops of Blood*, and the “chuihuo (fire-blowing)” performance in *A Visit to the West Lake* are all content resources that can translate the abstract concept of “Qinqiang Opera” into concrete and memorable highlights. After this TV series gains widespread popularity, once relevant platforms, theater troupes, and media outlets can simultaneously launch short videos guided introduction, interpretation of excerpts, and character profiles, audiences’ instant search will more easily develop into a sustained interest in traditional opera²¹.

4.5 Shifting of Demand Themes and Evaluation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Dissemination Effect

Evaluation of the traditional dissemination effect usually relies on indicators such as view counts, audience rating, media coverage, or social media buzz; however, these indicators do not necessarily reflect whether the public truly understands the cultural subject matter. Baidu Index’s demand graph provides a gateway that brings us closer to “understanding demand”. The search terms extend to various operas including Four Famous Dan Actors of Qinqiang Opera, excerpts and Laoqiang (an ancient tune style within Qinqiang opera), indicating that the netizens are shifting from entertainment consumption to cultural learning. The advancement of user interests from following plots to acquiring cultural knowledge essentially represents a shift from passive content reception to active cultural interpretation. This “advancement of user interest” is exactly the key indicator for measuring the cultural empowerment effect of TV series. Consequently, the vertical shift in demand themes better reflects the depth of intangible cultural heritage dissemination than mere peak values.

Combining the researches on the digital intangible cultural heritage dissemination at home and abroad, the assessment of dissemination effect should consider at least four types of signals: first, exposure signals, such as search peaks, view counts, and media indices; second, explanatory signals, such as knowledge-based searches asking “what” and “why”; third, aesthetic signals, such as in-depth searches for master performers, classical excerpts, vocal styles, techniques, and schools; fourth, engagement signals, such as comment interactions, singing-along and imitation, derivative works, ticket purchases, and in-person attendance. Each of these four types of signals has its own focus in intangible cultural heritage assessment—explanatory and aesthetic signals together constitute the core dimension for measuring “cultural understanding”, while exposure signals reflect the breadth of reach, and engagement signals measure behavioral conversion; all the four types of signals are indispensable. For the purposes of this paper, Baidu Index primarily captures certain changes during the stages of interest generation and cognition deepening; therefore, it is more suitable to serve as a supplementary tool for measuring the “reach beyond the core fanbase” and “shift

in understanding” of intangible cultural heritage, rather than as the sole criterion for assessing the dissemination effect.

4.6 Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, Baidu Index provides a standardized index rather than actual search volumes, and cannot be directly equated with the number of followers. Second, the identities of searchers cannot be identified; they may include general audiences, media professionals, students, theater enthusiasts, researchers, and marketing accounts, among others. Third, the composition of Baidu users does not fully align with that of general netizens; and differences in age, region, and media usage habits may result in sample deviation. Fourth, during the TV series’ hot-broadcast period, media publicity, celebrity-related topics, platform recommendations, and the secondary dissemination of short videos concurrently influence the search curve, making it difficult to identify the net effect of the TV series’ text alone.

5. Conclusion

Baidu Index provides a quantifiable tool for observing netizens’ online engagement behaviors towards Qinqiang Opera during the hot-broadcast period of the TV series *The Lead*. By establishing an event window centered on the premiere date, we can reveal how intangible cultural heritage arts are introduced into the public search field through TV series and films from five perspectives: search intensity, terminal composition, geographic distribution, demographic profiles, and demand themes. The collected data demonstrates that the TV series *The Lead* has not only increased the visibility of Qinqiang Opera but has also spurred the public to conduct more understanding-based searches about traditional opera. In the future researches, the long-term impact of film and television dissemination on the preservation ecosystem of Qinqiang Opera can be further assessed based on the data from Weibo, Douyin, Bilibili, and Tencent Video buzz, along with offline performance ticketing and cultural tourism.

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