

# Comparative Musical Images of Female Characters in the Chinese Musical Jinsha and the Film Musical La La Land

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**Abstract.** This paper compares the musical images of the heroine Kim of the original Chinese musical "Sands" with Miya, the heroine of the movie musical "City of Love, the aim is to explore the shaping logic of female roles in the translation process of different cultures. Combining the creation background of the two works, the cultural pedigree of the characters, solo tracks "at that time" and "Audition", duet tracks "one day" and "City of Stars", as well as the corresponding stage or audio-visual design, this paper believes that the role-building of musical drama will be deeply influenced by the overall cultural narration. Kim's image was built on the Chinese ethical logic of responsibility, civilization continuation and sacrificial protection, while Mia embodied the modern American logic of personal ambition, self-definition and artistic adventure. These differences are not only reflected in narrative motivation, but also in music form, tonality arrangement, singing techniques, stage presentation, as well as two women's symbolic effects related to love, mission and self-identity. Through comparison, we can find that the performance of theater musicals and film musicals not only presents female images with sound, but also translates more macro cultural values into audible, visible, specific forms that can be interpreted at the level of drama.

**Keywords:** Musical; Cultural translation; Female role shaping; Sands; City of Love; Comparative study.

## 1. Introduction

This study aims at comparing the female musical images of Kim, the heroine of the original Chinese musical "Sands", with Miya, the heroine of the movie musical "City of Love. This study does not regard role shaping as an isolated performance problem but regards the two protagonists as the products of different cultural systems. By analyzing the creation background, cultural pedigree, lyrics, singing techniques, DUET structure and stage or audio-visual design, this paper attempts to explore the contemporary musical works, how the Eastern and Western cultural values are translated into specific female roles.

This comparison has at least two meanings. First of all, "Sands" and "City of Love" belong to different artistic traditions respectively, but both rely heavily on the role-building mode driven by songs. Secondly, both works put female roles at the core of macro discussion about love, fate, ideal and cultural memory. Therefore, comparing the image of Kim and Mia, it can be used to explore how musicals shape women as both emotional subjects and carriers of collective ideas. The core point of this paper is that the essential differences between the two roles are related to the different cultural translation logic behind them. These differences will not only affect the character traits of the characters but also affect the artistic strategies of their image presentation.

## 2. Creative Backgrounds Of Jinsha And La La Land

Jinsha was inspired by the archaeological discovery of the Jinsha site in Chengdu in 2001. Excavated artifacts indicated that the site belonged mainly to the late Shang and early Western Zhou periods, roughly 3200 to 2800 years ago, with a small number of relics from the Spring and Autumn period. The site is widely believed to have been a political and cultural center of the Chengdu region in the late Shang and Western Zhou eras, suggesting that an advanced urban civilization had already emerged there more than three millennia ago.

The discovery of the Jinsha site attracted the attention of archaeologists, historians, and musicians. Led by the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture, the Bureau of Radio and Television, and the Chengdu Daily Newspaper Group, the project aimed to turn the ancient Shu civilization represented by the Jinsha site into a cultural and tourism IP. Around RMB 20 million was invested. Well-known Chinese composer San Bao, screenwriter Guan Shan, and prominent performers including Sha Baoliang, Yao Beina, Zheng Qiyuan, and Tan Weiwei participated in the production of the original Chinese musical Jinsha.

The creative team extracted symbolic materials from the ancient Shu civilization, including the Sun Bird motif and bronze masks, and transformed dormant historical memory into stage narrative. The story tells of Jin, an incarnation of the Sun Bird, and Sha, a prince who is separated from her after a sacred gold foil artifact breaks. Three thousand years later, Sha is reincarnated as an archaeologist who discovers fragments of the foil at the ruins, and the ebony spirit Chou opens a retrospective journey through time. Sha and Chou then travel through three historical moments—Yin-Shang ritual space, a Warring States battlefield, and a Song-dynasty flower banquet. On the battlefield, the fish spirit Xiaoyu sacrifices herself to restore the foil and awakens Sha's memory. In the city of Hibiscus, the Lady of Flowers witnesses the reunification of the gold foil. Yet the journey exhausts Jin's divine power, and just as she is about to touch modern civilization, she dissolves into the wind. Sha finally vows before the ruins to revive her beloved. The musical thus turns a love story spanning from the Shang-Zhou era to the present into a tragic totem of ancient Shu civilization. [1]

La La Land, by contrast, was produced by Summit Entertainment, Gilbert Films, Impostor Pictures, Marc Platt Productions, Black Label Media, and TIK Films. Written and directed by Damien Chazelle and starring Ryan Gosling, Emma Stone, and John Legend, the film was released in the United States on December 16, 2016, and in China's mainland on February 14, 2017. "City of Love" tells a romantic story that happened in Los Angeles. The relationship between the two protagonists has gone through three stages: Encounter and love, tear conflict between ideal and reality, and reunion five years later.

The creation concept of this film is closely related to the aesthetic experience of shazelle himself. He has publicly expressed the influence of MGM classic musicals such as *Song in the Rain* (1952) and *An American in Paris* (1951) on himself, it also tries to revive the creation tradition of integrated musicals under the contemporary background. His use of long shots, choreography and scene scheduling is a deliberate tribute to the *Song in the Rain*. The opening track "Another Sunny Day" used 100 dancers to rehearse for three days, which directly echoed the large-scale visual scheduling design of the section of "Broadway Melody". In both works, song and dance propel the narrative rather than interrupt it. For this reason, *La La Land* has often been regarded as a successful modern revitalization of the Hollywood musical form. [6, 10]

### **3. Cultural Genealogy Of The Two Heroines**

#### **3.1. Jin: Cultural Genealogy and Ethical Mission**

Regional culture is closely connected to geographical environment. Historically, China has remained a unified multiethnic country characterized by large-scale coexistence and localized concentration. As one of the world's four ancient civilizations, it has preserved an unusually continuous cultural record for more than three thousand years. The character of Jin carries key elements of a Chinese cultural logic that links family, polity, and civilization. Her core ethical background is shaped by Confucian culture.

The roots of this tradition may be traced back to the Zhou system of ritual and music, and in the musical, they reappear in Jin's mission consciousness as protector of civilization. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, Confucianism was founded by Confucius around the ideal of *ren* and norms of self-restraint and ritual propriety. Later thinkers such as Mencius and Xunzi developed different views of human nature. In the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu combined Confucianism with orthodox political ideas. In the Song and Ming dynasties, Neo-Confucianism

systematized moral metaphysics. In this set of cultural traditions, the expectations of the Society for Women often include dignified, gentle, reasonable and ethical responsibilities.

During the creation of "Jinsha", the production team integrated ancient Shu civilization with more universal Chinese cultural concepts such as yin and yang, five elements and unity of man and nature. Chinese traditional music with five tones as the core is often regarded as the sound symbol of social harmony. Therefore, the role of Kim is not just a pure heroine of love. As the embodiment of the gold ornament of "Sun God bird" unearthed by archaeology, she is a Guardian image, and her love, sacrifice, protection and the continuation of civilization are inseparable. Her character has not only a soft side, but also inner firmness, with external beauty and moral courage. Through the circular narration of "Jin Wu Day by day" and Jin's self-sacrifice, personal emotion and civilization inheritance are integrated together and transformed into a kind of spiritual connection. [9]

### **3.2. Mia: Migrant Modernity, Jazz, and Individual Aspiration**

Mia's cultural pedigree is related to the contradictory but creative logic of American immigrant society. The United States was shaped by a wave of immigrants. From the settlement of Puritans in the 17th century to the influx of immigrants from Ireland, Germany and other parts of Europe, in addition, Africans who were forcibly trafficked in the triangle trade caused conflicts between colonists and Aborigines, different religions and different cultural groups. Therefore, American culture needs certain inclusiveness to maintain social stability, but this inclusiveness is never a simple cultural integration. Immigrant culture is formed in the process of selective reservation and creative transformation. Mia not only insists on herself but also adapts to the characteristics of the environment, which exactly reflects this set of operation mechanisms.

Modern American social thoughts were deeply influenced by the European Enlightenment. Locke's theory of natural rights provides support for the concepts of life, freedom and property, while Rousseau's theory of social contract highlights the tension between freedom and social constraints. The combination of these ideas and the reality of modern social life have shaped Americans' pursuit of self-identification and self-definition. Mia failed the audition many times, but she didn't have the idea of deciding what acting is and what is artistic success.

This set of cultural logic is also related to modern feminism. The women's movement after World War II broadened the employment channels of women and laid the foundation for the demand for equality. The follow-up feminism and punk movement not only challenged the code of conduct of the upper class, it also questioned the myth of "super female" shaped by capitalism. From this point of view, Mia's independence, rebellion and insistence on self-dominance have historical basis, not just simple personal traits. When she was working in a studio coffee shop, she was made difficult by the guests. Later, she jumped out of the performance standard that people expected during the final audition. These plots put artistic labor, the structural contradiction between gender expectation and self-realization requirements is presented in the form of drama.

Jazz is the core music symbol of the city of love. Its cultural pedigree can be traced back to triangle trade, the history of African being forcibly trafficked to America, and the integration of African rhythm practice, European tonality system and church music. From Bruce, Lingge to New Orleans jazz, this set of tradition encodes improvisation, segmentation and dialogue into musical forms of free expression. Contemporary Cultural Studies often interpret the echo structure in African American music as Democratic voice dialogue. This cultural tradition is also reflected in Mia's final audition, breaking the routine and improvising into a contemporary manifestation of cultural interaction and artistic subjectivity. Mia's persistence includes both down-to-earth efforts and uncertainty about the future. She has both courage and self-doubt. However, she has always been pursuing her own identity. When Love conflicts with career, she will retain her independent personality and the right to choose freely. [4, 5]

## 4. Solo Numbers: “Dang Shi” And “Audition”

Compared with Jin's "at that time" and Mia's "audition", we can find that there are obvious differences in lyrics creation, music form and singing interpretation between the two.

### 4.1. Lyric Analysis

The lyrics of "at that time" use poetic language to build a female image with both Confucian dignified temperament and the sense of Sunbird sacred. The opening question "at that time, who remembers that time....." It not only expresses nostalgia for memory but also reflects a calm reflective thinking mode. Kim did not indulge in sadness but was examining whether the memory itself was still trustworthy. This kind of restrained introspection is consistent with the traditional Chinese aesthetic ideal of "being sad but not hurt.

The natural image in the song is the external projection of Jin's inner world. The expressions like "The wind have passed, the clouds have dispersed, and the dream has awakened" follow the creation principle of expressing emotions through the scenery of Chinese poetry. The gradual process from perceiving changes to realizing the impermanence of the world makes the lyrics create the heroine image with the ability of philosophical reflection. Jin did not directly blame the failed promise but narrated the pain in a peaceful tone. The lyrics "no matter if it is too early or too late, it is just because of that moment" echo the concise feature of the words in the book of songs with endless meanings. Expressions related to physical feelings, such as "having unspeakable thoughts in your heart", make emotions specific and sensible, and will not become straightforward catharsis.

Different from the former, Mia's "audition" uses contemporary language close to life to shape the role. "My aunt used to live in Paris" binds Mia's image with family memory and romantic spiritual inheritance at the beginning, which shows that her artistic ideal is not an impulse, but a source of cultural inheritance. The repeated word "story" highlights her identity as a listener and inheritor and also shows that narration itself is the source of motivation for her to become an actor. The chorus "respect those with dreams" expands the expression from personal ambition to the collective identity of dreamers. "Although they look silly" adds self-cognition and contradiction: Mia knows that such dreams may not be rational enough in others' eyes, but she still chooses to respect them. "A little craziness is the key" further clarified her rebellious understanding of art. Therefore, the whole song contains multiple characteristics of Romanticism and Realism, persistence and doubt, inheritance and resistance at the same time.

### 4.2. Vocal Technique

In the work "at that time", the singer used the relatively recognized singing style in the framework of lyric ballad. The frequent switch between chest sound and head sound not only reflects the singer's technical control ability but also concretizes the role's pulling state between memory and reality. This song also integrates the relevant elements of Chinese opera. The prelude and interlude use the free rhythm similar to the loose board, referring to the method of lengthening time in traditional opera, the results have distinct national characteristics. The flexible handling of rhythm strengthens the feeling of monologue in the character's heart, and the way of using opera for reference also adds the supporting force of narration to the content. The detailed treatment of air sound and vibrato can convey the psychological fragility of the character, especially the performance in the part of "who is listening to the hearty words" is particularly obvious. The contrast of strength and strength sets up a complete curve of emotional ups and downs, from the self-examination of the main song to the powerful release of the emotion of the chorus. [8]

During the audition, the singing design made layered sound processing with the change of mia's psychological state. From a technical point of view, this song combines the singing style similar to speaking with the change of strength. The main song part imitates the rhythm of telling stories, weakens the explosive consonants, and uses subtle pauses to restore the reality of memories. From the perspective of music, this kind of treatment is manifested as late start of vocalization and

asymmetric breath exchange of musical sentences, which is different from the way of chanting white in traditional operas and more suitable for the expression needs of musical plays. In terms of resonance, in the bass area, the singers mainly use the mixing of chest sounds to avoid the exaggerated sense of stage. In the treble area, the singers add the real singing with controllable volume, while retaining the high-pitched overtones. What is worth noting is that Emma Stone's singing skills are not flawless, and those tiny singing flaws are more able to stand up to Mia's identity as a non-professional singer and actor. From this point of view, this performance reflects the transformation of contemporary singing from expressive to experiential. Technology serves to shape roles, not to show off skills.

## 5. Duets, Staging, And Characterization

Table 1 and table 2 summarize the main differences between solo and duet paragraphs to be discussed below.

### 5.1. Duet Analysis: “Zong You Yi Tian” and “City of Stars”

As a bystander who spans three thousand years, Sha builds the character image of Jin through the interaction of lyrics and music in "One Day". Most of his melody lines dominate the narrative trend, while Jin's response is more emotional feedback, and the content of active promotion is less. "I want her to tell me by herself", Sha sang with a firm tone and expectation, but the version of Jin's response was full of uncertainty. In the duet section, the steady melody of Sha often wraps the melody line of Jin, which coincides with the relationship between the leader and the leader. From the perspective of music, this also corresponds to that Jin has not fully awakened and that she is in a state of being protected and waiting for growth.

In contrast, *City of Stars* uses a simplified reproducing complex three-stage structure. Sebastian's part is *g-dorian* style, which is matched with swinging rhythm and jazz harmony, depicting a frustrated but self-mockery traditional image. Mia's appearance has the switching between natural minor and harmonic minor, the tone is clear and the rhythm is split, it can be seen that she has a more outgoing desire for artistic freedom. In the part of duet, the switching of multi-tonality is a very clever musical metaphor, which not only reflects their emotional intimacy, but also hides the unsolved tone tension, these tensions also indicate deeper differences in values between the two roles. Sebastian's song "I feel it from the first hug with you" focuses on emotional attachment, Mia's sentence "you have never been so shining" turned starlight into a sensible image of talent and ideal. Therefore, this duet is not only a love song but also implies the declaration of the gradual formation of Mia's artistic subjectivity.

### 5.2. Stage and Audiovisual Design

The core of the dance design of *Jinsha* is image expression. The vertical structure connecting the sacrificial platform and the underground passage creates a ritual space connecting heaven, earth, man and God. The visual projection of the bronze pattern and the sound effect texture similar to the chime form the synaesthesia effect, which makes the audience feel as if they have entered the archaeological stratum. The stable chorus rhythm further deepened the collective memory and common sense of awe. However, the design of "City of Love" is more inclined to spatial narration and seasonal narration. [7]

"Another sunny day" turns the expressway into the scene of city narration, which breaks the inherent romantic imagination of the public towards the modern city with body movements, environmental noise and split rhythm. The four-season structure of the film corresponds to the warming and cooling of the protagonist's emotion, and the repeated musical motivation binds the musical symbol and emotional development together. Therefore, these audio-visual languages not only play a decorative role, but also directly participate in the characterization, and also carry the film's thinking on ideals, struggles and regrets.

## **6. Female Characters In Cultural Translation**

Jin and mia are both carriers of cultural translation, and their reactions in mission, love, self-realization and attitude towards setbacks are obviously different.

### **6.1. Mission and Inheritance**

Jin's mission comes from the continuing ethics of confucianism. As the guardian of civilization, her responsibility is inherited as cultural responsibility not out of personal choice. In "at that time", her emotional expression always revolves around protection and sacrifice. Awakening means further recognition of her own responsibility, not self-liberation.

Mia's "mission" is completely personal. Her pursuit of performance is not to continue the collective cultural order. In audition, the sentence "respect those who have dreams" conveys self-defined rebellious logic, and personal value does not need to be judged by outside recognition.

### **6.2. Love**

Kim's love has a strong sense of fate. The fetter between her and sha is not the free choice in the modern sense, but the emotional entanglement rooted in the myth and circulating. Like the logic of many chinese tragic narratives, personal emotions ultimately give ethical responsibility to a higher level.

Mia's love is closer to modern independent choice. Her relationship with sebastian happened by chance, not by destiny. The seeds of conflict have been planted in their duet. She finally chose to give priority to the development of her career, which was out of rational self-decision rather than being coerced by the outside world.

### **6.3. Responses to Setbacks**

When facing setbacks, kim's coping style is patience and inward transformation. Pain will not be directly vented, but will be transformed into a deeper sense of mission, which is consistent with confucianism's idea that emotion obeys moral order.

Mia's coping style is more inclined to direct confrontation. After many failures, she still insisted on her own way of performing, and the final audition was more like an impromptu and conventional performance. This also reflects the local culture's praise for self-breakthrough and self-remodeling.

### **6.4. Cultural Symbols Produced by Different Social Contexts**

On a deeper level, the root of the difference between kim and mia is that the two cultures have different definitions of individual and collective relations. Jin represents the logic of collective priority. In this logic, forbearance, destiny and sacrifice are all ethical virtues. Mia represents the logic of personal priority. Rebellion, autonomy and pursuit of dreams are all positive values encouraged. Therefore, the shaping of the two characters is not only the translation of culture, but also the translation of different modern women's views: jin is the guardian of civilization, and mia is the independent individual of self-definition [2].

## **7. Conclusion, Limitations, And Implications**

This comparative study shows that kim and mia's musical images are formed in different cultural translation processes. As cultural symbols, their role setting is restricted by a wider range of social forms and artistic conventions. Cultural background is the internal driving force of characters' behavior. For example, when mia encounters the conflict of values in love, she still insists on the purity of her dream, which is related to the modern american self-discourse; And kim's self-sacrifice, corresponding to the ethical logic of collective continuation higher than individual desire in chinese culture. These cultural differences also influence the form selection of the works: jinsha uses more

non-linear narrative and ritualized images, while the city of love uses clearer linear structure, it lowers the threshold of audience's understanding.

At the same time, the cultural context of china and the United States still endows women with heavy emotional labor responsibility. In the two works, women's emotional expression is the core source of audience's pleasure in watching movies: kim's tragic aria can arouse audience's empathy and pity, mia's successful audition can satisfy the audience's imagination of progressive self-realization. This also shows that gender issues in the shaping of musical figures need to be viewed from a critical perspective and cannot be directly equivalent to women's empowerment. [3]

There are several limitations in this study: first, only two representative works are selected for comparison, and it is impossible to draw a more universal conclusion; Second, the interpretation of some music forms is based on the existing cultural framework, which may simplify the polysemy of music symbols; Thirdly, the discussion is basically based on the eastern and western binary framework, there is no musical creation practice involving africa, latin america and other regions; Finally, the gender analysis part is not included in queer theory or non-binary gender perspective.

These limitations also point out the direction for subsequent research. Female characters in musicals should not be limited to narrow emotional narration but should assume more structural roles in the plot. More importantly, all drama roles, regardless of gender, should have the function of cultural translation. In the current era of globalization, creators should avoid the rigid division of essentialism such as "women are responsible for preserving tradition, while men are responsible for creating future. Musical drama creation should not only interpret the spiritual logic in traditional voice, but also reconstruct human experience in an open, diversified and critical way of self-reflection. From this perspective, musicals can become civilized auditory archives, which not only retain cultural context, but also record the diversity of human expression.

**Table 1.** Comparative analysis of the solo numbers “Dang Shi” and “Audition”

| Comparative Dimension | Jinsha — Jin, “Dang Shi”                                                                                | La La Land — Mia, “Audition”                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Formal Structure      | Two-part form (A–B)                                                                                     | Recapitulating compound ternary form (A–A'–B–A) with sectional-song implications                                  |
| Mode and Harmony      | B minor–C minor–F minor; traces of pentatonic thinking; chromatic alteration heightens dramatic tension | F major/D minor–E major–A major; jazz harmony (II–V–I, V–VI, diminished seventh chords)                           |
| Rhythmic Features     | Even quarter-note pulse evokes historical gravitas; free prolongation and dense rests propel emotion    | Swing eighth notes and triplets; irregular rhythm produces breath-like flow and suits jazz improvisatory thinking |

**Table 2.** Comparative analysis of the duet numbers “Zong You Yi Tian” and “City of Stars”

| Comparative Dimension      | Jinsha — Jin and Sha, “Zong You Yi Tian”                                                       | La La Land — Seb/Mia, “City of Stars”                                                                            |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Musical Structure          | C major; recapitulating simple ternary form (A–B–A')                                           | G Dorian to D minor; natural and harmonic minor usage; reduced recapitulating compound ternary form (A–A'–B–A'') |
| Relationship Between Parts | Sha's stable line envelops Jin's higher melody; intertwining voices symbolize guide and guided | Seb's descending line and Mia's ascending line move in contrary motion, foreshadowing future divergence          |
| Motivic Function           | The prophetic motive of “one day” runs through the work; Sha's line holds narrative authority  | “City of Stars” acts as an implicit manifesto; Mia's melodic line eventually exceeds Seb's narrative frame       |

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