

The Use of Traditional Opera Elements in the Characterization Process of Contemporary Stage Drama

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Abstract: As one of the national treasures of China, the art of opera shapes characters from various aspects such as opera music, character movements, character situations, props, etc., plus its unique programmed aesthetic characteristics, which makes the art of opera make great achievements in character shaping. Based on its own development and change requirements, coupled with the localized transformation requirements of foreign stage dramas, the stage drama has continuously absorbed the successful factors of the opera, especially in the aspect of characterization. The article takes the application of opera elements in the process of characterization of stage plays as the research object, and takes literature analysis, unity of history and logic as the research method, and takes the historical combination of the development of opera art and stage plays, the way of characterization of opera art, and the application practice of opera elements in the process of characterization of contemporary stage plays as the research content, so as to provide reference and reference for the shaping of characterization of opera art and stage plays. It provides reference for the shaping of characters in theatre art and stage drama.

Keywords: Opera Elements; Stage Theatre; Character Portrayal.

1. Introduction

Stage drama is a highly integrated art style of music, dance, art, dramatic literature, table direction and other artistic styles, which expresses a certain theatrical purpose, and includes a variety of stage drama such as drama, musical, opera, and dance drama. Whether it is opera, which uses "music" as the main means to develop theatre, or dance theatre, which uses "dance" as the main means to develop theatre, the ultimate goal is to "tell a good story". The development of a story requires the promotion of the plot, and the characters are one of the important means to promote the development of the plot. Therefore, characterization in stage drama becomes particularly important. Contemporary stage drama draws on the elements of traditional Chinese opera in the process of characterization to make it more in line with the aesthetic habits of Chinese audiences and to promote the development of the plot and deepen the theme.

2. Historical Combination of Opera Development and Stage Drama

Modern stage plays apply the elements of traditional Chinese opera in character building, and there are two fundamental reasons for this: firstly, most of the plays, musicals, operas and other types of stage plays belong to "imported products", and after being introduced into China, they have to be localized, and the process of localization draws on the excellent nourishment of traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, it will absorb the elements of opera, which is one of the typical representatives of Chinese traditional culture; secondly, Chinese traditional opera has a strong tolerance and adaptability in the process of its own development, especially with the reform of modern opera. The application of opera elements to other stage plays is an intrinsic need of its own continuous change and a manifestation of its inclusiveness.

Chinese traditional theatre art can be traced back to the earliest "Nuo", Nuo is an ancient Chinese folk ritual, to the

Shang and Zhou Dynasties, gradually evolved into the expulsion of the epidemic ghosts of the ritual activities, and this ritual activity is played by the witch, and wearing a mask, this character role-playing and make-up performance has become the art of Chinese opera! This kind of performance with character role-playing and make-up became the prototype of Chinese opera art. Since then, Chinese opera has gone through the Han Dynasty's Jiao Ru Opera, Tang Dynasty's Song and Dance Opera, Song Miscellaneous Opera, Jin Yuan Ben, Nan Opera, Yuan Miscellaneous Opera, and Ming and Qing Dynasty's Legends. In modern times, opera artists have improved the art of opera, exploring new plays in ancient costumes, new plays in fashion, etc., while drama was born in this period, and the birth of drama is related to the continuous change and development of the art of Chinese opera. In 1906, Chinese students in Japan initiated the Chunqiu Society, a comprehensive art group in Tokyo, whose members included Li Shutting (1880-1942), Lu Jingguo (1885-1915), Zeng Xiaoguang (1873-1937), Ouyang Yiqian (1889-1962), and others. (1889-1962), etc. The initiator was Li Shutting. At first, the Chunqiu Society took new literature and art as its object of study, including theatre, art, music and other departments, but later, due to financial and human resources, it was forced to focus on theatre, and the reason why the Chunqiu Society chose to "exclusively" focus on theatre was obviously the influence of the Japanese "New School of Drama". The reason why Countryish chose to "revere" theatre was obviously influenced by Japan's "new school of drama". It is a product of the fusion of Western modernist theatre and Japanese theatre. It adds speeches on the basis of traditional Japanese "Kabuki", which forms one of the key elements of theatre - dialogue. The use of "spoken" dialogue by the characters to drive the storyline and the break from the traditional "song and dance" form of drama made the Shinkai theatre the prototype of modern Japanese theatre. Although it was the birthplace of modern Japanese theatre, it was still unable to break away from traditional theatre, mainly because of its inability to break away from the traditional theatre's "formula", such as the role of the

characters and the fact that the female characters were dressed as males, etc. The establishment of the Shun Ryu-sha can be said to be the first step towards the development of modern Japanese theatre. The establishment of the Chunqiu Society can be regarded as the first exploration of Chinese theatre, based on the successful experience of the Japanese New School theatre, but this does not mean that the Japanese New School theatre is the only source of influence for the establishment of the Chunqiu Society. In the early years, China learnt advanced ideas and culture directly from the West, and then, due to a series of social problems such as wars and the decision-making of those in power, it transformed into learning from the West through the "medium" of Japan. The Chunqiu Society was also a product of the direct or indirect influence of Western modernist theatre. Looking at the development of the Chunqiu Society as the first drama group in China, we can say that the birth of drama is closely related to the continuous development and change of the art of theatre. Foreign stage plays must also be localized and transformed if they want to be better developed in China. Musical scripts are one of the artistic categories of Western stage plays, and after they were introduced to China, we localized and transformed them. Many of the classic cantatas in plays such as *The Ballad of the Canal* and *The White-Haired Girl* use elements of opera.

The development and change of opera have influenced stage plays, and stage plays have absorbed the classic elements of opera. To analyse the application of opera elements in the process of characterization in stage plays, it should be necessary to clarify the way of characterization in traditional Chinese opera.

3. The Way of Characterization in Traditional Opera

Classical Chinese opera has its own unique way of characterization, which shapes the characters comprehensively from the characters' language, characters' movements, characters' performances, costumes, props, etc., so as to make the performers closer to the characters, and this kind of characterization has existed since the day of the birth of opera.

In order to make his image closer to Sun Shou Ao, You Meng wore Sun Shou Ao's clothes, imitated Sun Shou Ao's words and deeds, and portrayed Sun Shou Ao in terms of "singing, reciting, acting" and costumes. The character of Sun Shou Ao was portrayed by You Meng from the perspectives of "singing, reciting, acting" and costumes. Because it was a "one-time performance", it could not be regarded as a full-fledged opera, but it already possessed the elements of an opera. In order to highlight the role of Huang Gong, he was dressed up in the specific costume of "red silk hair", and at the same time, he had the lines of "praying" and the words of "praying". In order to highlight the character of Huang Gong, he was dressed up in a specific costume of "red silk and hair", with "prayers" and props of "red gold knife", which shaped the character of Huang Gong from the aspects of character modeling, character lines, character props, etc. Therefore, the Han Dynasty Jiao Dai Opera has also become the cradle of Chinese operas. Song and dance operas of the Tang Dynasty were mature in characterization. "Treading the Shaking Niang" (also known as "Talking about Rong Niang") tells the story of a man surnamed Su in Northern Qi, who was addicted to alcohol and beat his wife every time he got drunk, and the wife cried out to the neighbors after she suffered from severe

beatings. In order to portray the role of the wife, the actor, often a man, "walks and sings" in order to cry about his own suffering, and after each small part of the wife's song, the bystanders chime in: "Tada Kawa, and to come! The wife sings a short passage, and the bystanders chime in, "Tada Kawa, Wolak!" The wife's character is portrayed in the form of songs and dances, with the help of bystanders. In the characterization of the husband of the surname Su, he is dressed up, "in scarlet", i.e., wearing red clothes to show the violent character of the husband, and "in red", i.e., painting the performer's face in red to show the drunken husband, and in terms of the character's movements, the performer staggers drunkenly, with the performer's face in red, and the performer's face in red. In terms of the character's movements, the performer staggers in his drunken steps, which is more in line with the character's image. The storyline of "Baotou" is similar to that of "Donghai Huang gong", but the difference is the ending. "Donghai Huang gong" ends with the sacrifice of the main character, while "Baotou" is the opposite. In terms of characterization, "Baotou" is more detailed than "Donghai Huang gong", and in order to realistically portray the role of the human, the character of the human is portrayed from the word "hair" to the word "plain clothes". In order to create the character of the human, there are specific rules from the character's costume of "being hairy" and "plain clothes" to the character's expression of "face as a cry". In addition, the reform of the opera since modern times has also laid the foundation for the fruitful shaping of characters, such as the reform of the movements of the character of "Hong Niang" in "The Story of the Western Wing" by the opera performers, who changed the original "big strides" to "small broken steps". The performers of the opera reformed the movements of the character of the Red Chamber, changing the original "big stride" to "small broken steps", highlighting the vivacity, agility and loveliness of the character of the Red Chamber, and making it closer to the characters in the play.

The unique programmed aesthetic characteristics of the opera also increase many possibilities for the characterization of the opera, from the role of the "Dan", Dan can be divided into the old Dan, flower Dan, knife and horse Dan, martial arts Dan, color Dan and so on, and the different roles of the different roles stipulate the character's character traits, Yalu Hanya in the Palace of the Brahma Kingdom is the flower Dan, and the flower Dan often expresses the character's lively or lively character. The Flower Dan is often a young and middle-aged woman who expresses a lively or spirited character, with dramatic colors. The flower girl is often a young and middle-aged woman with a lively or spirited character, with dramatic colors, while the main girl expresses a woman's strength and dignity, and is mostly a drama or a tragedy, such as Qin Xingjian in *Qin Xingjian* and Zhao Waning in *Pipa Tale*. In addition, the character traits can also be seen from the performance formula. In the opera performance, there is the "fight" of the opera martial arts, and the "White Lady" in "Stealing the Immortal Herb" is a play in which the Wuhan fights with the White Lady. In "Stealing the Immortal Herb", "White Lady" is a play in which Wuhan fights, and through the White Lady's fights, one can see her upright and kind qualities. In addition to character language, character movement, make-up and other aspects of characterization, opera music is also an important means of characterization. Qianqian, bowl cavity and other types of theatre, used to express the mood of the characters, emotions, music often have a "happy sound", "bitter sound", as the name

suggests, happy sound used to express joy, positive, lively high emotions, while the bitter sound is often used to express the character's sadness. As the name suggests, the joyful tone is used to express joyful, positive and lively high emotion, while the bitter tone is often used to express the character's sadness, grief and mourning low emotion.

To sum up, Chinese opera art uses character movement, character language, opera music, opera wide, costumes, props and other elements in the process of characterization, and the existence of these elements successfully shapes the character image of opera art.

4. The Application Practice of Opera Elements in the Process of Characterization of Stage Plays

The application of opera elements in the process of characterization in stage plays is often reflected in operas, dramas and dance dramas.

Case study of characterization in opera. Opera originated in Europe, with Italy being the most prestigious. The works that use traditional Chinese opera elements in opera are partly because the story is set in China, and partly because of China's own innovative national opera.

On the stage of western opera, there have been works created with China as the background of the story. Although the singing style is still mainly western opera singing, the playwrights imitated the costumes and make-up of traditional Chinese opera in order to express the Chinese style of the characters. For example, Puccini (1858-1924), a famous Italian opera composer, created *Turandot*, an opera with Chinese flavor. *Turandot* tells a story with Chinese background, Puccini used excerpts from the Chinese folk song "Jasmine", and there are a lot of traditional opera elements in the characters' image modelling of the opera. Of course, what *Turandot* shows is how the Westerners see the Orientals, and it is an opera work in which they see the Orientals from a Western point of view. Therefore, *Turandot*'s imitation of the elements of traditional Chinese opera is only manifested in the aspect of costumes and make-up, for example, the actors' costumes with bright colors and wide cuffs; and in the aspect of make-up, there are exaggerated beards, buns and hairpins.

Although opera originated in the West, after entering China, it gradually formed an opera with national characteristics. For example, the opera *Jiang Sister*, which was adapted by the Cultural and Industrial Troupe of the Political Department of the Air Force in the 1960s, is a successful case of absorbing elements of traditional operas, such as Sichuan Opera. The characterization of "Sister Jiang" makes use of the elements of Sichuan Opera, mainly focusing on the use of plate cadences. *Bianqing* style, also known as *banking style*, is a highly used singing style in traditional Chinese opera, which has rich changes in melodic speed, such as fast, slow, and medium, etc. That is to say, on the basis of the original music, it expresses the characters' character according to different banking styles, and then shapes the characters' images. Take the famous excerpt of "Sister Jiang" as an example, from "Silkworms are not finished until they die" to "I wish to fill the world with sweetness" are slow tempo, and from "A Red Heart is Loyal to the Party" onwards, the tempo gradually starts to accelerate. Starting from "A Red Heart Loyal to the Party", it gradually starts to speed up, and the emotion becomes fuller, which portrays the emotion of Jiang Sister's

clear-cut love and hatred and creates the distinctive character image of Jiang Sister. In addition, the singing of the opera "Sister Jiang" is completely different from the western "Opera", absorbing the traditional opera singing techniques, such as the drag of the opera. The portrayal of "Xie'd" in "White-haired Girl" draws on many elements of opera, such as Xi'an's "starting style" when she comes on stage and Xi'an's "opening the door" action in the cantata of "White-haired Girl", which are all borrowed from opera. The movements of Xi'an's "opening the door" in the "White-haired Girl" section are borrowed from the formulaic performance of the opera. When Xie'd cries out "Dad" after Yang Baiao's death, she also draws on the "five tones and four calls" of opera recitation, with the word head biting tightly, the word belly stretching, and the word tail closing slowly, so that the whole pronunciation of the word "Dad" can be described as "gripping" and "gripping". The whole pronunciation of the word "father" can be described as "gripping and popping out", and the performers are very good at theatre.

Case Study on Characterization in Dance and Drama. Modern dance theatre and modern drama entered China together as "imported" Western art forms after the "May Fourth Movement", and over the past hundred years, dance theatre and drama have shown a variety of development modes, among which, some of them focus on the use of traditional Chinese opera elements, some of them are external. Some of these works focus on the use of traditional Chinese opera elements, some of which are external imitations - costumes and make-up, and some are structural imitations - opera music, all of which have practiced the "localization" process of these Western art forms to varying degrees. The process of "localization" of these Western art forms has been practiced to varying degrees.

In January 2015, the Beijing People's Art Theatre premiered the play *Flutter* at the Experimental Theatre, which is best characterized by the introduction of a large number of traditional opera elements. Adapted from one of Pu Singling's collections of short novels about the world, *Liao Zhai Zhiyi* (Liao Zhai's Strange Stories), *Flutter* is a story about a fairy, Flutter, who rescues a down-and-out scholar. The play uses traditional opera elements to portray the characters, such as horseshoe sleeves, clouded shoulders, buns, etc. In addition to this, a small part of the soundtrack of *Fluttering* uses the gongs and drums of opera, which, combined with the characters' operatic styling, creates the traditional opera atmosphere of this play. The play is an experimental drama, but the creative group dared to use traditional opera to tell the story of a ghost, placing the pressure of a down-on-his-luck scholar about his future on a fairy, thus achieving the purpose of releasing the pressure of modern life.

In 2011, the dance drama "Pink Ink Spring and Autumn" performed by Huojin Dance Theatre Troupe of Shanxi Arts Vocational College was staged at Poly Theatre in the capital. The success of *Powder Ink Spring and Autumn* is not only due to the excellent direction and choreography, but also the harmonious combination of traditional opera elements and dance. For example, the traditional opera's beard work is combined with dance to create a beard dance, which shapes the characters through hand movements such as shaking the beard, slamming the beard, pressing the beard, and so on, along with the body's dance movements. In addition, the Water Sleeve Dance of "Pink Ink Spring and Autumn", with its combination of softness and strength, brings the Water

Sleeve Dance to a new beginning. Pink Ink Spring and Autumn not only attracts the audience in terms of the plot, witnessing an opera class going into decline due to the tragedy of the times, but at the same time brings the audience the beauty of the combination of opera and dance. To sum up, the programmed performance of opera art and the programmed character line give the art of opera a unique way of character building, while the contemporary stage drama absorbs the elements of opera in the process of development, which also lays the foundation for the successful performance of the stage drama repertoire.

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