

Derivations and Developments of Traditional Chinese Opera Singing in the Context of Chinese National Opera

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Abstract: As an evolution of Chinese opera art, Chinese national opera has assumed an increasingly significant role within the broader landscape of Chinese theatrical performance. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of the vocal techniques, performance styles, and character development in traditional Chinese opera, exploring the integration of these elements into the singing practices of Chinese national opera. Furthermore, by examining contemporary vocal techniques in Chinese national opera, this study offers insight into the genre's potential trajectory onto the global stage.

Keywords: Chinese Opera; Chinese National Opera; Chinese National Vocal Music.

1. Summary of Chinese Opera Singing, and Chinese National Opera Singing

1.1. Singing Characteristics of Chinese Opera

Opera, which originated in China, is a multifaceted performing art that combines elements of music, literature, visual art, dance, and martial arts. To date, there are over 300 distinct forms of Chinese opera, each with its unique stylistic features and characteristics. The majority of Chinese operas are performed in local dialects, with notable examples including Hunan Flower Drum Opera, Henan Opera, and Cantonese Opera. Each dialect adds a distinctive cultural and regional flavor to the performance [1]. Opera art has a relatively mature system in terms of singing. The singing of opera is closely related to the division of roles. Different roles have different timbre, range, style, and skills in the singing process. For example, Peking Opera has Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou. From the perspective of singing methods, the vocalization methods of Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou are all different. The vocalization of Lao Dan and Hua Dan in Dan roles is essentially different. At the same time, the requirements for singing skills and language expression in the process of opera singing are very strict, which requires the actors to use accurate, vivid, and beautiful language and rhyme to accurately express the character's personality and emotions. During the singing process, we should pay attention to "sinking the qi into the dantian," "pulling the tendons behind the brain" and "round and smooth voice." These respectively mean that the breath should be steady and full, the sound should focus on the resonance of the head cavity, and the voice should be round and sweet.

1.2. Singing Characteristics of Chinese National Opera

The creation of China's first national opera, *The White-Haired Girl*, in 1945 marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of Chinese opera. It bridged the gap between traditional learning and modern innovation, laying the groundwork for the development of Chinese national opera and pioneering a distinct vocal path through practice and

experimentation. This new singing method is systematic and scientific, drawing upon *bel canto* techniques, integrating various vocal methods from Western opera while retaining the core elements of Chinese national characteristics, ultimately creating a new approach to national vocal music.

National vocal music encompasses the folk singing traditions of China's 56 ethnic groups. Over time, it has evolved into more than 100 unique artistic forms, such as the Mongolian Humming and the Uyghur Daolang Muqam, both of which carry strong ethnic identities. While rooted in vocal expression, national vocal music also embodies the deep cultural meanings and emotions of the Chinese people. Through centuries of development, it has formed its own distinctive vocal style, characterized by its connection to opera performance techniques and cultural specificity.

A key feature of national vocal music is its adaptability to different historical periods, with each era shaping its performance styles, vocal techniques, and aesthetic values. This gives national vocal works a clear sense of historical context. Modern national vocal music employs a scientific approach, blending the unique characteristics of diverse ethnic singing styles while aligning with contemporary aesthetic preferences. As society continues to evolve, the public's appreciation and demand for national vocal music will inevitably shift, fostering the creation of new works that reflect the distinctive features of their time. These contemporary singing methods, infused with historical significance and cultural vitality, ensure the enduring relevance of national vocal music.

2. Derivative Development of Opera Singing in Chinese National Opera Singing

2.1. Performance of Singing

The absorption of Chinese opera music materials by opera is more reflected in the singing style. Opera music covers classical opera, song and dance music, folk songs, national instrumental music, *quyi* music and other music categories, with a wide variety and distinct characteristics. However, it has a specific local language and singing style system, which

embodies the collective wisdom of generations of people and reflects the aesthetic taste of the public, becoming an inexhaustible source of Chinese opera music.

Secondly, in terms of singing style, opera singing style has unique expression techniques, such as dragging the singing style, which often expresses the emotions of the characters. When singing, it is often the extension of the ending sound of the word, making the melody sound euphemistic and long, so as to enhance the expressiveness of the music and feel the mood and emotions of the characters. Another example is that the swinging style is also often used in opera, which is used in the singing section or at the end, adding embellishments to the original melody to make the sound flow up and down.

Fig 1. Analysis of the aria "Yi Men Wang" in the opera "The Injustice of Dou E"

One of the ways Chinese folk opera has absorbed the musical expression of opera is the banshi of opera. The banshi of opera has various variations, which can express the emotional ups and downs of characters to the greatest extent.

Usually, there will be a variety of banshi in a tune, which is also often used in the creation of opera. The banshi of in the opera Dou E Yuan fully reflects the characteristics of banshi. Its structure is: Jiaoban -- Manban -- Erliu -- Sanban -- Erliu - Sanban -- Liushui - Duoban - Sanban.

It is not difficult for us to see, Diversification of Opera Forms. The second point is vocal accompaniment in some traditional Chinese operas, which is an indispensable form in folk opera music and is widely used in Sichuan opera and Hunan opera. It can not only set the tone and change the key, but also help the singer express the character's voice and set the atmosphere. It can also be used as the tone of a third person to achieve alienation. This technique has been well used in the creation of Chinese operas. For example, in the opera "Jiang Jie", after Jiang Jie learned that her husband had died, she was very sad. However, in order to hide this grief in front of the old woman with two guns, she used the form of accompaniment to express and describe Jiang Jie's mood. Next is the alternation of narration and dialogue, which refers to an important artistic means of expressing the emotions of the characters. The alternation of recitation and narration in opera has also been well used in opera. For example, in the opera "White-Haired Girl", singing is used to narrate the occurrence of events in the play and introduce the plot in the form of singing. The same expression method is also used when other characters such as Yang Bailao and Huang Shiren appear.

There is also narration. In opera, narration means singing as it should be and singing however you want. This singing principle is also used in the narrative of opera. For example, in the work "Honghu Red Guards", Han Ying recalled with his mother the process of embarking on the revolutionary road in prison. The narration technique was used in the expression of this part.

Table 1. The change of singing method in the development of national opera.

Stage	Characteristics of national opera singing	Masterpieces and singers
1945-1950s	Mainly based on opera singing methods, the breath uses the method of combining Qi and Qi in opera, the singing extensively uses opera moistening techniques, and the kidney rabbit uses the opera "spout" technique.	"Baimaonv" 'The White Haired Girl' Wang Kun and Guo Lanying
1950s-1960s	Add opera elements, actively integrate Bel canto singing, and flexibly use the two singing methods according to different emotions and personalities	"Jiangjie" 'Sister Jiang' Wan Fuxiang
1960-1980s	Learn more about bel canto singing and be flexible in the use of breath and resonance cavity selection	"YuanYe" 'wilderness' WanShanhong
1980-present	The singing method is diversified and innovative, integrating with other singing methods and musical elements, focusing on personalized performance and interpretation of the connotation of the work.	"YiMeng mountain" 'Yimeng Mountain' Wang Lida

2.2. Performance

Jin Tielin, a famous vocal music educator, put forward in "Jin Tielin's vocal Music Teaching Method" that the performance of national vocal music includes sound, emotion[2], character, expression, cultivation and image. Chinese opera absorbs the singing and reading in Chinese opera, and opera performance pays attention to the creation of forms such as color, movement, vocal music and lines, which also restricts the development of Chinese opera performing art. In the plot of "Dou E Yuan," Dou E's performance fully shows the singing and reading and playing skills in Chinese traditional opera. This form of performance is also known as scene art. In the third act of the White-Haired Girl, Xi 'er escapes from Huang's house and finds a river blocking the

way in the dark night in the wilderness. At this time, the actors reflect the scene through the non-physical performance to reflect the objective scenery.

Performance is not only a form of performance of opera body movements. In opera performance, in order to express the performer's superb skills, it is usually used in a methodical manner. In order to achieve a good opera performance, it is necessary to have a scientific way of vocalization to make the singing more pleasant and powerful, and it is also necessary to use standard body movements as an important support to make the entire opera performance more charming, with spirit leading the body and emotion leading the voice. In opera performance, body movements and singing are indispensable and complement each other. If any one of them is not done well, the artistry of the entire performance will be reduced.

Similarly, in the performance method of body movements, solid basic skills must be guaranteed first. Body movements are the posture and form of performance. In order to strengthen the standardization of body movement performance, the waist should be regarded as the center of the whole body, and the power of the waist should be used to drive the whole body to perform movements.

In addition to the waist, the hand posture is also an important part of the body movement. In opera performance, there are a variety of hand movements, such as the common orchid finger, as well as the lifting hand, the wind head hand, etc. These different hand postures will show different charms in different opera performances. The flexible use of hand movements can add to the artistic charm of opera. "Flowers on the soles of feet" refers to the use of steps, including kneeling steps and various long bows, which are important steps and postures. When performing opera, the audience can see the professionalism of the performers just by their steps, which is also a display of their charm. In addition to posture, the change of eyes is also an important expression of emotions, which is the key to making opera performance more colorful. Eyes are the windows to the soul, and eyes can express a lot of content. If there is no expression of eyes in opera, it will be difficult to present the charm. In opera, eyes are divided into "slanting eyes," "angry eyes," "cold eyes," and "crazy eyes." Before presenting the work, the performer must strengthen the practice of eyes and the guessing of characters, so that the character's state can be expressed more accurately and in detail, making the performance more delicate.

3. Reference for Role Shaping

In the process of role creation, opera actors need to follow some basic principles to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the character image. The first step for opera actors to shape their roles is to have a deep understanding of the role. The actors need to fully and deeply understand the cultural, historical and social background behind the role in order to accurately convey the character's inner world and emotional state. The second is harmony and unity. The actors need to coordinate and unify various artistic elements in the performance, such as voice, movement, expression, etc., to express the character's personality characteristics and emotional changes. The third is personalized expression. The actors should find a performance method that matches the character's personality characteristics and emotional background to make the character image more vivid and real, while maintaining the charm of opera art. The fourth is in-depth shaping. The actors should portray the character's inner world and complexity through superb acting skills and meticulous performances to make the character more profound and appealing. The fifth is to be as real as life. The actors need to shape the role as real and natural as possible so that the audience can resonate and resonate emotionally, so as to better understand and appreciate the opera works. By following the above basic principles, opera actors can better shape their roles, convey the emotions and thoughts in opera works, and at the same time show the charm of opera art and the charm of traditional culture. These principles provide guidance and norms for the role shaping of opera actors, and are of great significance for maintaining the uniqueness of opera art and inheriting Chinese traditional culture.

In addition, the drama performers should think about how to create the perfect character image and increase the three-dimensional sense of the character image from the two

perspectives of the artistic expression form of the drama works and the actual life. Drama performers should be truly aware of their responsibilities in drama performance, not only to inherit the excellent Chinese drama performance methods, but also to innovate the drama performance process, increase their own character image shaping ability and drama performance ability, and improve their own literacy.

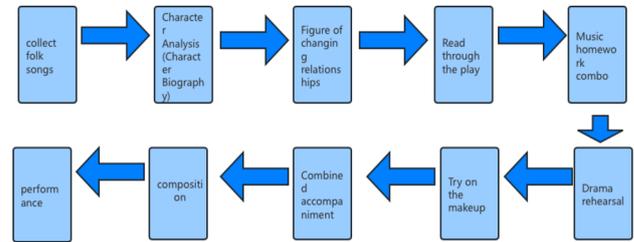


Figure 2. The whole process of shaping the image of Chinese national opera includes

When the small theater opera "Farewell to Cambridge" was created, the cast of Lei Jia, Xue Haoyin, Zhang Haiqing and others went to Xiangshan Shuangqing Villa where Lin Huiyin lived when she was recuperating, Lin Huiyin's tomb and the Temple of Heaven Echo Wall where she and Liang Sicheng fell in love. They read the script, sang the songs in the play, and recited the works of Lin Huiyin and Xu Zhimo. Secondly, in character analysis and character biography writing, after reading the background information and collecting folk songs, the actors have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of time, space, environment and characters.

Then, according to the information and feelings we have, we need to sort out the creative thoughts through words. This link is the actor's analysis of the role, "artistic conception" of the character, that is, "conception," and write down the in-depth understanding of the character's "past and present life," forming the "image seed" of the character in their minds. When conducting character analysis, we should pay attention to how to portray the character's personality and their inner world. The externalization design of the character's personality and thoughts is the externalization of external characteristics and inner personality characteristics. In operas and musicals, the characterization of characters mainly relies on singing and performance, with singing being more important and implemented in the core singing segments of each scene. The most important thing in establishing a character biography is the characterization of the character. Actors can create and portray the character's personality from the following three aspects by observing life and analyzing the character's personality. Next, understanding the establishment and changes of character relationships and the "character relationships" between characters is an important part of the performance. The character's thoughts and personality must be clearly reflected in the contrast of the performance process through the character relationship.

"Acting is about acting out character relationships," and character relationships determine the actors' stage actions. The establishment and changes of character relationships always exist in the play, which is also a very important basis for how actors shape characters in a play. A character may have multiple singing segments in a play, and these singing segments change according to the plot and the establishment and changes of character relationships. Therefore, when shaping a character, it is necessary to adjust the changes in

emotions and dramatic actions during the performance and singing process according to the changes in character relationships and character fate in the plot, so as to shape a flesh-and-blood, vivid character in the play. Then read the script and do script analysis. When reading the script, the actor should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the script's structure, historical background, central idea, characters and character relationships, and creative type. Accurate script analysis can help actors perform accurately and vividly, and rational analysis can help actors dominate emotional stage roles. In folk operas with modern and contemporary themes, actors may need to pay more attention to the clarity of their pronunciation in singing and lines, and the singing and vocal methods will therefore be different from those in Western operas. In folk operas with historical themes, we need to draw on traditional culture such as opera and use its techniques to shape historical figures.

Finally, in the rehearsal, costume fitting, music combination and synthesis performance, we have entered the final stage of opera creation and rehearsal. The actors have basically mastered all the results of accumulation, analysis and polishing. Under the director's dispatch, the whole play will present its basic appearance in different acts. When the actors can sing all the songs assigned to them completely, the drama rehearsal will be very scientific, rigorous and efficient. In the drama rehearsal, the actors' creation and portrayal of the characters will be tested by the director, and the complete shaping of the image of the national opera characters will be presented to other departments of the crew in the form of a whole play rehearsal.

4. Conclusion

Since 1945, Chinese national operas have continuously evolved, expanding from themes rooted in national history while consistently incorporating elements of traditional opera. However, as society progresses, Chinese national operas are undergoing a shift from being primarily nationality-centered to becoming increasingly people-centered, focusing on the

experiences and stories of individuals. The core aim of this paper is to explore how opera elements can be skillfully integrated into the people's themes of national operas, using these elements as a means to effectively narrate Chinese stories.

The academic exploration of the integration between national opera and opera singing represents a significant area of study. This integration not only charts a new course for the development of national opera, but also offers valuable practical insights for the preservation and innovation of traditional Chinese arts.

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