ANALYSIS ON THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RHYTHM ON CHARACTER BUILDING IN THUNDERSTORM

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates how psychological rhythms specifically shape the character portrayals of Zhou Puyuan, Fan Yi, and Lu Shiping in "Thunderstorm" through analyzing their linguistic expressions, physical movements, and emotional nuances. The research employs three analytical approaches: 1) literature review, 2) textual analysis, and 3) case study. Findings reveal that linguistic rhythm functions as "sound symbols" that mirror characters identity traits and inner worlds, with language itself serving as the most direct carrier of psychological rhythm. In "Thunderstorm", the characters speech rate, pauses, and tonal variations demonstrate a precise alignment with their identity characteristics, personality traits, and current psychological states.
Keywords: Drama Performance, Psychological Rhythm, Role Shaping, Thunderstorm

INTRODUCTION

The play "Thunderstorm" occupies a central position in the history of modern Chinese drama with its highly charged dramatic conflicts and profound insights into human nature. The thirty-year entanglement of the Zhou and Lu families is condensed into a single day, and this high-density narrative places extremely high demands on the portrayal of characters psychology. In the oppressive theatrical environment, Zhou Puyuans hypocrisy and guilt, Fan Yis desperate resistance, and Lu Shipings restrained resentment are not only conveyed through dialogue but also rely on a non-semantic subtextual force— "psychological rhythm" —to guide the audiences perception.

While academic research on *Thunderstorm* has reached remarkable maturity, existing studies predominantly focus on literary ethics, social critique, or macro aesthetic features. Few studies have systematically quantified the specific technical approaches of psychological rhythm in character development from the micro-performative perspective. This study explores how psychological rhythm serves as a bridge between script text and stage imagery, demonstrating its decisive role in constructing psychological authenticity of characters. The findings aim to provide concrete theoretical references for theatrical performance practices.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

"Thunderstorm", as a representative classic play of Cao Yu, centers on the family feud and ethical entanglements spanning thirty years, condensing the oppression of feudal families, the contradictions of human nature, and the unpredictability of fate within three days. With its highly dramatic conflicts and profound insights into human nature, the play has become a milestone in the history of modern Chinese drama. Current academic research on "Thunderstorm" has formed multiple dimensions, including macro-level discussions on thematic ideas and criticism of feudal ethics, as well as formal-level analyses of linguistic artistry and dramatic structure (Cao Yu, 1933; Tian Benxiang, 2000). However, existing studies mostly focus on the static interpretation of literary texts, with relatively insufficient systematic research on the intrinsic connection between "psychological rhythm" and character portrayal, making it difficult to fully reveal the core causes of how the characters in the work transform from script texts into three-dimensional stage images.

The expression of characters emotions constitutes the soul of dramatic art and is pivotal to crafting iconic roles in *Thunderstorm*. The characters emotions are not portrayed in a flat manner but are richly layered with contradictions—Zhou Puyuans hypocrisy and guilt, Fan Yis defiance and despair, and Lu Shipings endurance and resentment. Without effective means of expression, these complex emotional flows cannot transform into artistic power that resonates with the audience. In this study, "psychological rhythm" is not merely about the pace of actions or speech, but is defined as the external projection of a characters inner psychological dynamics across time and space. It serves as a bridge between the latent text and overt performance, directly determining whether a character can transcend stereotypical labels and become a three-dimensional figure with both human depth and artistic appeal.

To systematically investigate this mechanism, this study constructs a comprehensive analytical framework grounded in the theories of Stanislavski, Freud, and Yu Qiuyu, and critically applies it to analyses at various levels:

First, Stanislavskis "Theory of Inner Experience" forms the technical foundation of this study. In his 1936 work *The Actors Art*, Stanislavski emphasized that "speed-rhythm" is the key technique for evoking emotional memory, asserting that external rhythm must be supported by internal rhythm. This study goes beyond theoretical exposition by applying this theory to analyze how characters like Zhou Puyuan mask the turbulence of their "internal rhythm" through "controlling external rhythm," thereby revealing how "counter-rhythm" in performance shapes the characters dual personalities.

Secondly, Freuds "conflict of personality" theory provides a deep psychological foundation for interpreting abrupt shifts in psychological rhythm. As outlined in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), abnormal fluctuations in a characters psychological rhythm—such as sudden pauses or incoherent outbursts—are manifestations of intense conflicts between the "id" (desires), "ego" (reality), and "superego" (morality). This study employs this perspective to analyze Fan Yis rhythmic breakdown during the stormy night, demonstrating that her chaotic rhythm is not merely a result of emotional outburst but rather the inevitable outcome of subconscious conflicts breaking through rational repression.

Finally, Yu Qiuyus "Multidimensional Synergy Theory" provides a macro-level aesthetic analytical framework for this study. In his 1980 work *A History of Dramatic Theory*, Yu posits that dramatic rhythm emerges through the interplay of linguistic, physical, and emotional elements. Moving beyond conventional dialogue analysis, this study applies the theory to examine how pauses in *Thunderstorm* create an "isomorphism" with rigid physical movements and oppressive environments, collectively constructing the characters psychological space-time.

In conclusion, this study is based on the above theoretical framework and tries to go beyond the traditional literary description. Through the micro-text analysis and performance case study, it deeply excavates the generation mechanism and expression logic of the characters psychological rhythm in Thunderstorm, so as to fill the gap of the existing research in the micro perspective of performance and provide theoretical and practical reference for the stage reconstruction of classic characters.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Micro-Text Analysis

This study employs the standard script of "Thunderstorm" as the core corpus to establish specific coding metrics: 1) punctuation usage (particularly the psychological pauses represented by ellipses and dashes); 2) stage prompts (e.g., "bitterly" and "suddenly" indicating abrupt rhythmic shifts); 3) variations in monologue sentence length. These metrics enable quantitative analysis of the preconceived logical structure of characters psychological rhythms at the textual level.

Structured Performance Analysis Method [Revised] (Original: Case Analysis Method, and the original text mentioned "search engine" was deleted)

To overcome subjective assumptions, this study selected the 2004 public performance version (Gu Weis direction) of Beijing Peoples Art Theatre as the primary observation object. This version is widely recognized as a paradigm of realistic performance. The analysis parameters focus on:

Speech rate variation: the number of words per unit time in key lines.

Duration: The number of seconds the limb remains frozen.

The moment of eruption: the time when the emotion is changed from being suppressed to being vented.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Story Summary

Zhou Puyuan, the authoritarian patriarch, maintained the seemingly respectable Zhou family mansion, while his wife Fan Yi was deeply entangled in a scandalous affair with his stepson Zhou Ping. When Zhou Ping resolved to flee and fell in love with the maid Si Feng, the desperate Fan Yi vowed revenge. On a stormy night, all secrets were finally revealed: Si Fengs mother Si Ping was Zhou Puyuans long-lost lover whom he had abandoned years ago and believed dead; and Si Feng and Zhou Ping were actually half-siblings from the same mother! This electrifying truth shattered everything instantly—innocent Si Feng was electrocuted to

death, Zhou Chong, the Zhou familys youngest son who deeply loved her, died trying to save her, and the heartbroken Zhou Ping took his own life by shooting himself. Two generations and two families crumbled in the storm of fate, leaving behind the ruins of human nature under feudal ethics and the desperate howl of despair.

Language Rhythm: The "Sound Image" of the Texts Identity and Inner Voice

Language is the most direct carrier of psychological rhythm. Analysis shows that the speed of speech, pauses and intonation changes of characters are highly correlated with their psychological states.
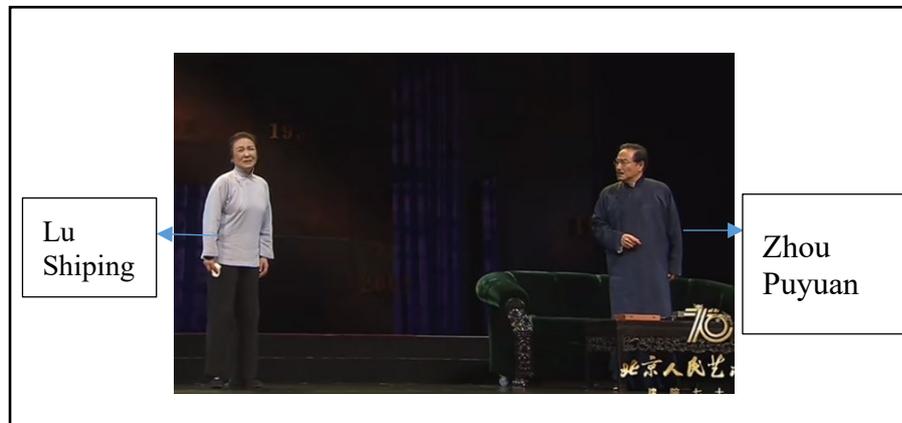
Figure 1 Left is Lu Shiping, right is Zhou Puyuan
Source: Source: www.Baidu.com, January 6, 2026

1) Zhou Puyuan: The "Controlled Pause" Against Hypocrisy
[Revised] (Original manuscript: Zhou Puyuan/Zhou Puyuan)
In the first acts reunion scene with Lu Shiping, Zhou Puyuans speech rhythm follows a clear "control-lose-control-recontrol" pattern. Initially maintaining a steady pace of 3-4 words per second, he projects parental authority. Yet when recognizing Shiping, a five-second non-grammatical pause emerges: "Oh, Shiping! (whispering) Is it you?" This rhythmic disruption is not merely a performance technique but a testament to the collapse of his inner "social mask".

Figure 2 From left to right: Zhou Ping, Si Feng, Fan Yi, Zhou Chong, and Zhou Puyuan.
Source: Source: www.Baidu.com, January 6, 2026

2) Fan Yi: A Note of Despair

Fanyis speech carries a sharp sense of fragmentation, mirroring her thunderstorm-like temperament. In the drinking the medicine scene, her response to Zhou Puyuans coercion shifts abruptly from swift resistance to dead silence. When she finally takes the potion, the phrase Alright, Ive had it is delivered in a razor-sharp moment—like severing all external communication. This abrupt transition marks her psychological shift from outward defiance to inward despair.

Figure 3 On the left is Lu Shiping, and on the right is Zhou Puyuan
Source: Source: www.Baidu.com, January 6, 2026

Lu Shiping: Constraints and Outbreak in Stillness

Lu Shipings dialogue is peppered with "pause markers" —emotional buffers that carry thirty years of repressed anguish. When she reunites with Zhou Puyuan, her heart-wrenching declaration "I... I came to find my daughter" abruptly ends after the first "I," both evading past trauma and concealing her inner turmoil. When Zhou Puyuan denies any shared experience, her speech accelerates abruptly: "You cant imagine how my face will age beyond recognition." The pause dissolves instantly, and the sharp intonation builds the narrative rhythm to a climax, pushing her anger and accusations to their peak.

Action Rhythm: The "Psychological Code" of Body Language

The frequency, amplitude and timing of movements are the silent expression of psychological rhythm.

Figure 4 Fan Yi Taking Medicine in Thunderstorm
Source: Source: www.Baidu.com, January 6, 2026

1) The "Quiet" and "Dynamic" of Fan Yi: Accumulation of Tension

During the forced medication process, Fan Yis body remained in a prolonged state of static tension. This stillness was not empty but an external manifestation of intense inner conflict. When Zhou Ping knelt to beg her, her movements erupted with sudden force—she abruptly rose and pushed away the medicine bowl. This abrupt shift from extreme stillness to extreme movement visually represented the moment Freud described as the id breaking through the superego.

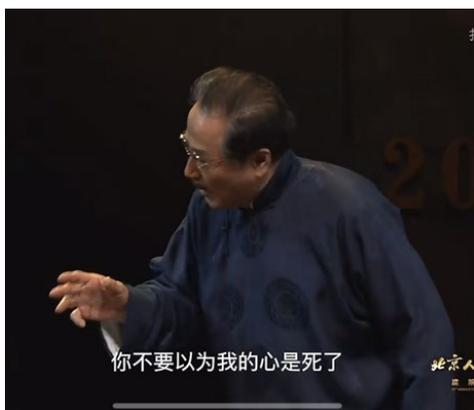**Figure 5** Lu Shiping in Thunderstorm
Source: Source: www.Baidu.com, January 6, 2026

2) The "Delayed" Rhythm of Lu Shiping

Lu Shipings physical movements are characterized by "delayed" and "restrained" actions. In the scene of identifying kin, she clenches her hands tightly while her body trembles slightly. This subtle range of motion creates a contrast tension with the immense turmoil within her. Each delay in her movements is not only a physiological sign of aging but also a psychological obstruction imposed by thirty years of painful memories on her current behavior.

Emotional Rhythm: The Catalyst of Contradictory Personality

The emotion of the characters is not fixed, but fluctuates regularly, which makes the contradiction of the characters more real and credible.

Figure 6 Zhou Puyuan in the Thunderstorm
Source: Source: www.Baidu.com, January 6, 2026

In the painting, Zhou Puyuan senses Lu Shipings deliberate use of past grievances to exert pressure. Consumed by resentment over this history, he immediately orders her to leave immediately. Zhou Puyuan is depicted with one hand raised high and his head bowed, his body language conveying both an authoritative tone and a metaphor for the hidden fury within him.

Zhou Puyuan: The "Disguise" of Emotional Rhythm

Zhou Puyuans outwardly refined demeanor concealed a storm of emotions. He maintained a deliberate reserve toward "Miss Mei" —his antique furniture collection and vintage raincoat exuded a carefully crafted facade of tenderness. Yet when Lu Shiping exposed the truth, his emotions erupted like a flood: "Why are you here? Who sent you?" This sudden shift tore off his hypocritical mask, revealing the cold-blooded nature of a feudal capitalist.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Discussion

Through micro-analysis, this study reveals the specific form of the psychological rhythm of the characters in Thunderstorm, and these findings form a deep mutual verification and dialogue with the theoretical framework constructed in the previous article.

First, Stanislavskis "theory of inner experience" was concretely validated in this study. The research revealed that Zhou Puyuans "5-second non-grammatical pause" during the instant of recognizing kinship was not merely a technical blank, but a direct manifestation of the violent conflict between his "internal rhythm" and the temporary paralysis of his "external rhythm." This finding deepens Stanislavskis assertion that "speed-rhythm is the evoker of emotional memory," demonstrating that in realistic performance, the seemingly static external rhythm often foreshadows the peak intensity of internal experience.

Secondly, Freuds "conflict of personality" theory elucidates the underlying dynamics of Fan Yis (original manuscript: Fan Yi) dramatic emotional shifts. Analysis reveals that her abrupt transition from "stiffness" to "outburst" during the drug-drinking scene represents the moment when the "id" (yearning for freedom and erotic desire) overcomes the repression of the "superego" (feudal ethical norms). This rhythmic rupture (Rhythmic Break) should not be interpreted merely as emotional catharsis, but rather as a pathological manifestation of subconscious conflicts across temporal dimensions, indirectly confirming that psychological rhythm serves as an "electrocardiogram" of a characters deep-seated psychological structure.

Ultimately, Yu Qiuyus "Multidimensional Synergy Theory" finds expression in this studys analysis of Lu Shiping (original manuscript: Lu Shiping/Lu Shuiping). Her "delayed response" manifests not only in speech rate but also through high-tension isomorphisms with her "clenched hands" and "slightly trembling body." This profound synchronization between speech and movement creates a psychologically oppressive temporal-spatial construct, demonstrating how dramatic rhythm—as a "Gestalt" force—can unify all performance dimensions to produce aesthetic impact.

Transcending the singular script of *Thunderstorm*, this study reveals that "psychological rhythm" serves as a universal code bridging script texts and stage imagery. In contemporary theater, whether employing Stanislavskis experiential approach or Brechts alienation technique, actors precise mastery of psychological rhythm is pivotal to creating "flesh-and-blood" characters. This insight suggests that in performance education and practice, we should not merely focus on the logical analysis of dialogue meanings, but also pay attention to non-semantic "subtext" rhythms—such as the cadence of breathing, the cadence of movements, and the tension in silence.

Although this study provides an attempt at micro-level analysis, the following limitations remain:

Subjective limitations: Current analyses of speech rate variations and pauses primarily rely on researchers observations and qualitative descriptions, lacking statistical validation of inter-rater reliability, which may introduce interpretive bias.

Sample singularity: The study only focuses on the specific version of Beijing Peoples Art Theatre in 2004, without covering the rhythmic differences under different directors treatments (such as avant-garde versions and opera adaptations), which limits the generalizability of the conclusions.

Technical limitations: Sound and motion capture remain at the level of visual observation, lacking quantitative support from acoustic software (e.g., Praat) or motion capture technology. Future research can be expanded in the following directions: First, introduce empirical measurement tools, using audio analysis software to accurately measure the fundamental frequency and duration of lines, in order to quantify the acoustic characteristics of "emotional outbursts"; Second, conduct cross-cultural comparative studies to explore the similarities and differences in psychological rhythm processing between Western classics (such as O Neills plays) and Chinas modern drama; Finally, incorporate the perspective of audience perception, using questionnaires or eye-tracking technology to investigate how different psychological rhythm processing specifically affects audience emotional resonance and aesthetic experience.

Conclusion

This study takes "Thunderstorm" as a sample to systematically explore the core role of psychological rhythm in the creation of dramatic characters. The research findings indicate that psychological rhythm is not only the formal shell of performance but also the "invisible skeleton" supporting the vitality of characters.

First, Zhou Puyuans "control pause", Fan Yis "split note explosion" and Lu Shipings "delayed delay" prove that different psychological rhythm patterns correspond precisely to the specific character traits and psychological dilemmas of the characters.

Secondly, the psychological rhythm is the bridge connecting the "implicit text" and the "explicit behavior". Only through the precise design of breathing, pausing and speech rate can the actors transform the flat text in the script into the three-dimensional and contradictory truth of human nature on the stage.

In conclusion, the essence of psychological rhythm is the pulsation of a characters soul. For contemporary theatrical performance, the transition from mere "simulating life" to "rhythmic existence" is the only way to enhance the artistic appeal of performance and establish a sense of presence for the role. Although this study has limitations, it aims to provide a new theoretical reference point for interpreting Chinas classic theatrical performances from a micro-psychological perspective.

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