

THE MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MUSICAL PERFORMANCE OF QIN NIANGMEI: A CLASSIC GUIZHOU OPERA IN THE 1960S

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Abstract

Using a classic Chinese Guizhou Opera *Qin Niangmei* as a case, this paper aims to learn from and absorb the excellent parts of traditional Guizhou Opera arts to facilitate the adaptation and creation of traditional art performances blended with contemporary arts aesthetic concepts. This paper adapted observation method and interview method to conduct a detailed induction and analysis of the musical structure, melody, mode, performance of its classic chapters. The opera not only integrated the traditional Dong opera and its unique beautiful melody, but also it described the Chinese feudal ideology of men and women made match by parents' order and match-maker's word which was opposed to the modern free love. The result found that; The study delves into the intensity elements of opera music, emphasizing their role in conveying romantic charm and facilitating the circulation of artistic conception. Traditional Chinese music values subtle changes in sound structure. Examining a specific opera scene, the analysis highlights the emotional power of tone changes, especially in challenging feudal society. The victory of Niangmei in the opera symbolizes a yearning for a life free from oppression. The study underscores the oriental artistic charm found in subtle expressions and voice modulation.

Additionally, the research recognizes opera as a dynamic social activity, where aesthetic values evolve through long-term interaction between performers and audiences, reflecting real-life contexts. Acknowledging the passage of time, the study emphasizes the need for classic works to adapt to contemporary aesthetics while preserving their excellence, particularly in the context of Guizhou Opera's inheritance and dissemination.

Keywords: Traditional Opera, Qin Niangmei, Guizhou Opera, Performing Style, Music Structure

Introduction

As one of the most popular recreation among the audience in China, traditional operas enrich the spiritual life of the Chinese people, and lead them to the true, the good and the beautiful continuously. However, under the impact of market economy and global diversified cultures, Chinese operas including local Guizhou Operas fall into decay with each passing day, and are gradually replaced by diversified recreations such as movies, pop musics and games, etc. The development of opera faces various adverse conditions, which are manifested as audience loss, the creation fails to keep pace with the times, and easily produces aesthetic barrier with the audience and others. For

example, the singing, costumes and props of the opera were often divorced from the living habits of the modern society, such as language, dress and infrastructure. The heterogeneous cultural feelings cannot be easily understood and accepted by the young audience in the contemporary society. In terms of the Chinese opera art, the success or failure of stage performance is closely related to the aesthetic interest and aesthetic judgment of composers to a great extent (Zhou Aihua, 2019). At the same time, we can find that the development and inheritance of the Chinese opera art are also limited by the aesthetic interest and level of the audience. The opera was about China in the 1960s which was the “marriage system struggle” and the “struggle between landlords and farmers” in the story of *Qin Niangmei* and whether today's audience can understand and feel the culture performed in the plot was worth studying and thinking. Therefore, it can be concluded that the creation of the aesthetic theme of the art of Guizhou Opera was to reflect the content of the “destiny struggle theme” of contemporary, local, current social conditions and current ethnic groups.

As a local opera with Chinese national features, Guizhou Opera presents a performance style with strong national minority color, mainly spreading in the Dong people living area located at the junction of Guizhou, Hunan and Guangxi provinces, and later widely throughout Guizhou, with a history of nearly 300 years (Guiyang Branch of Chinese Musicians Association, 1962). In 2008, Guizhou Opera was included in the Chinese National Non-material Cultural Heritage List. The establishment of Guizhou Opera's artistic performance style is greatly affected by the performance artistic style and performance technological means of Kunqu Opera of China, which applies the creative methods of Chinese opera art's “virtuality, decorativeness and expansiveness” to represent the artistic style of operas, expressing the artistic effect of “great work, grand style and tremendous vigor”. Most scene devices of traditional Guizhou operas are set according to the plot's needs, which are mainly one table and two chairs, to replace real plot scenes with imaginary virtual scenes; modern operas and new historical plays draw soft and hard flats according to the plot's needs to realize backdrop projection. Around the 1960s, *Qin Niangmei*, *Madam Shexiang*, *Peony Pavilion* and other Guizhou operas were familiar to national people after a performance tour in Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. (2013) Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi and other leaders watched the performance of *Qin Niangmei* when it was performed in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, and they wrote an inscription of praise. Famous artists such as Mei Lanfang, Zhou Xinfang, Ouyang Yuqian, Ma Shaobo and Gai Jiaotian praised *Qin Niangmei*'s excellent progressiveness of revolutionary thought and excellent artistry in articles (Guizhou Institute of Culture and Art, 2008).

The performance form of operas will form a performance formula with fixed paradigm and aesthetical characteristics in a specific period, region, cultural category and context. Moreover, previous performance formulas will adapt and generate new performance forms due to the change of aesthetic forms to meet the aesthetic requirements for watching and performance in the present era. In the article *Some Aspects of Verbal Art in Bolivian Quechua*, John H. McDowell (McDowell, 1974) analyzed “special formulae” in the folklore performances of Bolivian Quechua, and believed that the above formulas might be a kind of means to calibrate the performances. “Special formulas” originated from English phrases like “did you hear the one about...” which is used only for verbal performances. The performance formula of Chinese operas is a special format of performance technology which is consisted of “singing, speaking, acting and acrobatics”. “Singing, speaking, acting and acrobatics” is an artistic vocabulary in shaping the stage image which is also named “four skills”. “Four skills” has a matching training method and standard named “five methods” -- hand, eyes,

body, method, step. However, the "special formulae" mentioned by John H. McDowell can only be classified as the "singing and reading" part of the Chinese opera performance formula in terms of shaping the stage image, which is limited to the scope of oral performance, excluding physical performance. Richard Bauman (*BaumanRichard*, translated by Yan Lihui, 2008) considered that if a performer would like to have the ability to sing epics, the singer himself must master a certain amount of formulas in full line or half line that represent characters, actions and places. The formulas here means the "special formulas" in the scope of verbal performance as John H. McDowell said. To explain the "newborn of performance", Richard Bauman proposed "the ability of generating new procedural¹ expressions based on a fixed mode of formulas". If we bring it to Chinese context and opera modes, we can find that it means forming a new performance mode based on "four skills and five methods" (a formulaic and standardized mode of performance, singing and dancing). John H. McDowell's "special formulas", together with "the ability of generating new procedural expressions based on a fixed mode of formulas" proposed by Richard Bauman, shares the same meaning with the "four skills and five means" (procedural and normative performing actions or singing techniques) that require opera actors to have in Chinese operas, that is, the ready-madeness of formulas (According to the definition of Chinese opera, it is also known as ready-madeness of formulas (it also can be called the ready-madeness of the scope of verbal performance according to the definition of Chinese opera) (*BaumanRichard*, translated by Yan Lihui, 2008). The flexibility of performance forms further allows the performances of performers to adapt to the situation, the audience's reaction and aesthetic requirements, the emotions of performers themselves, as well as the limitation of the performance duration.

The Guizhou Opera Qin Niangmei mainly narrated that over one hundred years ago, a beautiful Dong girl (Qin Niangmei) in Guzhou Sanbao² fell in love with a young farmer (Zhulang) of her neighboring stockaded village, but there was an unreasonable rule that "the adopted daughter followed her mother's brother" (i.e. her mother's brother arranged marriage) in the Dong Nationality at that time. In order to fight for freedom of marriage, they escaped to a place named Qibaiguan Cave. However, due to coveting Qin Niangmei's good look, the local official (Yinyi) vainly attempted to forcibly occupy her, and should kill Zhulang. With the help of the local villagers, Qin Niangmei used tricks to bury Yinyi in his own tomb, removing the evil and paying off the old scores. After the adaption of the Dong Opera Zhulang Niangmei by (Wu Dingguo, 1992 (02)), it was adapted to Guizhou Opera Qin Niangmei in 1960, which has performed in Guiyang, Beijing and other cities and got praise from audiences. Mei Lanfang, a Peking Opera artist, said that "Qin Niangmei I saw is a folk story with a long history..... It was really a good opera from the perspective of ideology and artistry" with appreciation after watching the performance. In the same year, Guizhou Opera Qin Niangmei was made into a stage art film by Haiyan Film Studio. This paper selected a classic Guizhou Opera Qin Niangmei (live version of 1961) in the 1960s as a case, and the opera was divided into eleven scenes, with a total performance duration of 102 minutes. The detailed induction and analysis of structure,

¹ Procedural: it's a vocabulary translated by the translator of the original book, which is the same as the "the performance formulas of Chinese opera" mentioned above, both of which refer to the style and method. But the content is just belong to the scope of oral performance. It is still written in accordance with the translator's original vocabulary here.

² Sanbao: it's the name of the place where Niangmei used to live before escaped from the marriage.

melody, singing and performance in its classic chapters are conducive to learning from and absorbing the excellent parts of traditional Guizhou Opera arts, so as to adapt and create operas that conform to contemporary arts aesthetic concepts.

2020; Zhu Hong, the president of Guizhou Qian Theater, accepted an interview in his office on March 12th, 2021 (The three of interviewees included in the article are all with their consent).

Chart 1. Interview Table of Guizhou Opera Artists, as follows.

Interviewer	Position of Job	Time and Place of Interview	Main Contents of the Interview	Results of the Interview
Wang Anguo	Professor of Capital Normal University and Hunan Normal University	At teacher Wang's home of Zunyi city on May 29 th , 2021	About the inheritance and development of Guizhou Opera in modern society	As a senior professor in China, Professor Wang expressed his satisfaction that the interviewer (the author) could deeply study the local opera in Guizhou, and believed that the new and young generation should take the responsibility to promote the local opera, so that local opera culture can be inherited.
Zhu Hong	President of Guizhou Opera Theater in Guizhou province	At Guizhou Theater in Guizhou province on March 12 th , 2021	About how the performance forms of new and old Guizhou Opera have changed and how they evolved	Mr. Zhu gave his own opinion on his own experience in performing Guizhou Opera. He mainly believed that the performance form of Guizhou Opera has been evolving, because modern Guizhou Opera has added more personal emotions

				into the characters, which is more in line with the aesthetic needs of people in modern society.
Yu Daling	Former actor of Zuiyi Opera Troupe (She has retired.)	At teacher Yu's home in Zunyi city on February 13 th , 2021	The acting form and character style Yu presented in <i>Qin Niangmei</i> , by acting as the role-Qin Niangmei	Yu thinks that Guizhou Opera is the most popular local opera in Guizhou province. Its language must be the local dialect of Guizhou to reflect the unique style of Guizhou Opera. And she also proposed that the current performance form must be innovative, in order to meet the aesthetic needs of audiences in modern society.

Chart 2: Observation Form of the Art Performance for Guizhou Opera, as follows.

Object of Observation	Time of Observation	Place and Method of Observation	Contents of Observation	Results of Observation
<i>Qin Niangmei</i>	From August 3 rd , 2020 to present	Online network watching, a total of 8 times	Performance forms and styles of Guizhou Opera in the 1960s	The performance form is too old-fashioned, the stage facilities are old.
<i>The Peony Pavilion</i>	April 5 th , 2021	Offline watching (1 time) at Grand Theater of Zunyi city, Guizhou province	A deep understanding about the predecessor of Guizhou Opera-Kun Opera	Guizhou Opera evolved from traditional opera, and Kun Opera is one of the important

				sources. Understanding the performance forms of Kun Opera is helpful to explore the development of Guizhou opera from the source.
<i>Qianju Qianxing</i>	May 30 th , 2021	Online watching (1 time)	The development and inheritance of Guizhou Opera	Zhu Hong, the director of Guizhou Theater, explained the development of Guizhou Opera and gave on-site teaching, which provided a platform for better dissemination and development of Guizhou Opera.
Yu Daling, an artist of Guizhou Opera	From January 16 th , 2022 to present	Demonstration teaching (12 times) face-to-face; at teacher Yu's home and Zunyi Art Activity Center for the Elderly	The specific singing and movements of Niangmei in <i>Qin Niangmei</i>	Traditional Guizhou Opera has its fixed performance mode, and the procedural mode is evident in this play.

Research Results

1. Analysis of the musical morphology of the classic scenes in Guizhou Opera *Qin Niangmei*

The development of the tunes of Guizhou operas can be largely divided into four stages from the perspective of historical development (Wei Xuwen, 1985). The first stage is from storytelling

and seated singing to Wenqin Opera³; the second one is the production and development of lianquti⁴ musical form; the third one is the production and development of banqiangti⁵ musical form; the forth one is the production and development of general music system, which is to express the ups and downs of characters' emotions, make plate-type connection more free, and perform vocal music connection according to the change criteria of characters and opera rhythm. *Qin Niangmei* belongs to the third stage of banqiangti musical form.

1.1 Plot: Repertoire 4 is selected from the first scene of “breaking the copper cash under the moon” (Score 1&Chart 3) in *Qin Niangmei*. It mainly described that after learning that her mother's brother would marry her in advance, Qin Niangmei went to an appointment with Zhulang secretly without her mother's knowledge. On the way to the destination, they sang this repertoire respectively to show their own determination, which included libretto such as “not being married to her mother's brother” and “remaining loyal forever”.

Score example 1: Repertoire 4, selected from the first scene of “Zuoyue Poqian (Breaking the Copper Cash under the Moon)” in *Qin Niangmei*⁶, searched and made by the author in 2022, as follows.

³ Wenqin Opera: there are four kinds of tune, with a total of seven tunes, namely, [erban], [yangdiao], [kubing] and [erhuang]; [qingban], [erban], [sanban], [yangdiao], [kubing], [erliu] and [erhuang].

⁴ [Lianquti]: it's one of the structural forms of opera and it combines various types of [danquti] selectively and skillfully for singing. It's also known as [qupai] music, and presents the development of different emotions through the replacement of multiple tunes; different characters and scenes also depend on the change of melodies. Compared with [danquti] forms, such as [yangdiao], [erban] and [sanban], etc., it has rich tunes and variations in melody.

⁵ [Banqiangti]: the basic unit of it is the symmetrical sentences, which evolves into different version types according to certain variation principles on that basis. [Banqiangti] of Guizhou Opera is to make development of a variations on the basic tune, such as [erban], to form the middle part of Guizhou Opera, so as to give full play to the unification of the theatricality and structure of music. At present, the mainstream musical form of Guizhou Opera is to follow the development of [banqiangti].

曲四
(扬调)

选自《秦娘美》第一场

珠郎: 那你.....
稍快

(娘美唱) 只等到这半夜

7 人都睡尽背着妈

13 悄悄地来把你寻

19 都只为我二人

25 早有情分我娘美纵然死

31 不嫁表亲

37 去年初送表记

43 (珠郎唱)

Chart 3: interview form of Guizhou Opera artists, as follows.

Character	Vocal Music	hythm ust Stop	hythm Plate Numbe r)	Structure (The number is subtitle)	S
Qin Niangmei	A [yangdiao] 6	e, so, la, so	2 +3+4=10	3	Only when everyone is asleep at midnight, Niangmei comes to see you quietly without her mother's knowledge. Only because we love each other in earlier time, I will not be married to my cousin even if dying
Zhulang	B [yangdiao]	e, so, la, so	4 +3+4=10	3	At the beginning of last year, I exchanged a bracelet for a flower belt by heart. Only the grass on the wall sways, I will remain loyal to you forever

⁶ [yangdiao]: it's one of the traditional music for voices of the original style, which is commonly used in Guizhou Opera, namely, Zhidiao Style. With a 4/4 rhythm, it includes one accented beat and three unaccented beats. It is composed of "the beginning of tune, the middle part of the tune and the ending of the tune".

Text analysis: Two librettos are both ten words and four sentences, which uses a “three-three-four” structure. Through the analysis of vocal music structure, we can clearly find that Repertoire 4 applies the general plate type of yangdiao. The aria of A Niangmei is [middle plate of yangdiao] slightly slower, and adopts a 2/4 beat score of one accented beat and one unaccented beat; the first three sentences of B zhulang’s aria are [original plate of yangdiao] with the typical characteristics of original plate. Despite it adopts a 2/4 beat score, it is one accented beat and three unaccented beats in fact; the fourth sentence is changed to [connecting plate of yangdiao], and the word “three” in the second group of the first half sentence is added with “number”, forming the unique form of Guizhou Opera, that is, to sing while taking and talk while singing. So speaking is widely used in Guizhou Opera, and the speaking parts of Guizhou Opera are simple, natural and melodic. The libretto is used for the expression of sincere feelings between “Niangmei” and “Zhulang” in the opera. Several librettos depict the conflict of protagonists in the opera.

1.2 Plot: Scene 5 (Score 2) mainly portrayed the situation that hero and heroine made an appointment. On a moonlit night, the hero and heroine express their love by singing, and they take copper cash as a love token, which showed the features of Dong people making their marriage promise by “singing under the moon”. So this scene is important to the whole opera. The “copper cash” in the repertoire was their love token. After meeting, this pair of lovers divided the copper cash into two under the moonlight, saying love vows to heaven and earth. Since then they would become husband and wife. The libretto “If I regretted, I would be punished. At that time, I would be stricken by the lightning and burned by fire” more vividly depicted their loyalty to love.

Score example 2: form analysis of Repertoire 5, selected from the first scene of “breaking the copper cash under the moon” in *Qin Niangmei*, searched by the author in 2022, as follows.

曲五
(二流)

选自《秦娘美》第一场

喜悦地

Chart 4: the morphological analysis of Repertoire 5 of the first scene in *Qin Niangmei* (made by the author in 2022), as follows.

Character	Vocal Music	Structure (The number is subtitle)	Libretto
Qin Niang mei	[erliu] ⁷	o /4 2 +2+3	Using the copper cash as the evidence of love
Zhulan g	[erliu]	o /4 2 +2+3	Announce the marriage promise to heaven and earth
Qin Niang mei	[erliu]	o /4 2 +2+3	If I am married to my mother's brother, I will cut off the cucumber vine with a knife
Zhulan g	[erliu]	o /4 2 +2+3	Lightning strikes me and burns me if I turn back

Text analysis: The libretto includes seven words and six sentences (It has four sentences in fact. The third and fourth sentences are expanded from the libretto of Niangmei, and the fifth and sixth sentences are expanded from the libretto of Zhulang to show the determination of their vows) and adopts a “two-two-three” structure. Among them, the first and second sentences have the completely same structure. The third sentence expands the “first half sentence and the second half sentence” and the tuo-qiang (four accented beats) at the end of the sentence. The fourth sentence is condensed into a single vocal music to realize clean vocal music-recovering. The fifth sentence adopts the form of talking librettos, and the vocal music is recovered when the sixth sentence is finished by lengthening the lot of moving into her mother's father household (eight accented beats). The rhythm is relatively lively, which is the [erliu] vocal music of playing rapidly and singing slowly. The vocal music for Zhu Lang and Niangmei's pledge to marry with the copper cash as evidence is sincere and vivid, and the libretto “the fear is that the shoulder pole will be broken and a pair of chopsticks will be divided on two” manifests the steadfast determination of the protagonists in the story with simple words.

2. Analysis of the musical structure and layout of classic clips

⁷ [erliu]: it's a kind of music for voices in Chinese opera and originated from the vocal music [erhuang] in the Guizhou Bangzi Opera, and later formed the current vocal music of Guizhou Opera by practice. With 1/4 rhythm, due to the different ways of notation, it also has a 2/4 rhythm, suitable for the expression of narrative, anger and unease, but also can show the warm and cheerful atmosphere.

2.1 Plot: Scene 3 “Ruguan Liusu” (Chart 5), after Niangmei and Zhu Lang escaped, their life was full of escaping and worries just like the libretto in song 14 “Go western of the village after stay eastern of the village a while, can not stay for a long time because afraid to be too close to Sanbao⁸ and worried about uncle’s family catches us”. Once they came to a village named Qibai Guandong, Zhu Lang temporarily settled Niangmei near the river, he went to find a residence. During this period, Nai Hua, the matchmaker came to the river to fetch water, and she saw Niangmei is very beautiful from a distance so she have a bad thought that introduce her to the local rich man, Yin Yi, as a concubine. Yin Yi was attracted by Niang Mei’s beauty so he cheated them to living in his house as farmers to cultivate his land. Da Ku⁹ and other kind villagers nearby wanted to dissuade them but were threatened by Yinyi. So without any awareness, Niangmei and Zhu Lang’s bad luck was started.

Chart 5: brief introduction of the third scene of *Guandong Liusu*, made by the author in 2022, as follows.

Session and Event	Character	Time and Place	Contradictions and Entanglements	Aria
The third scene of <i>Guandong Liusu</i>	Niangmei, Zhulang, Naihua, Yinyi, Daku and other villagers	At dusk, near the Qibai Guandong River	Dream to have a stable and happy life by farming; Yin Yi’s lustful thoughts	Repertoire 18: “Brother Yinyi is hospitable”

Text analysis: The role of Nai Hua in this section is the Laodan¹⁰ in opera characteristics⁹. She is an important role in the whole opera. To ingratiate with the rich man, she still introduced Niang Mei to the rich man even though she knew Niang Mei had married. Song 18 was sung by Nai hua. As a matchmaker, she is very voluble, and she knows that Niang Mei and Zhu Lang want a stable life so she cheated on Niang Mei and Zhu Lang just as the song 18 sang: “ You can still survive if live in his house, also you don’t need escape anymore”. This brings bad luck to Niang Mei and Zhu Lang, which makes the plot turn to an unexpected climax. It is directly related to the later tragedy and draws an important foreshadowing for “Xunshi Biangu”¹¹ in the ninth scene -- the climax of the whole opera.

2.2 Plot: Scene 9 “Xunshi Biangu” (Chart 6), Zhulang lost contact after leaving with Yinyi, and Niangmei guessed that Zhulang narrowly escaped death. In the barren mountains near Jiangjianpo, Niangmei met Daku, Biniang and Bimei. Daku told Niangmei that that day a hospitality meeting was convened in Jiangjianpo, extremely evil Yinyi and Mansong should framed Zhulang as a spy, and killed Zhulang by taking advantage of Zhulang eating Qiangjian meat¹². After hearing these words, Niangmei felt as if a knife were piercing her heart, and the headed to the depths of Jiangjianpo. She

⁹ Sanbao: it’s a name of a place where Niangmei used to live before escaped from the marriage.

⁹ Da ku: the name of an old man who helped Qin Niangmei on the way to escape the marriage.

¹⁰ Lao Dan: an old woman role in opera .Its features of performance are singing and speaking by natural and real voice, the voice cadenced as the female of the demure type, not so simple, straight and vigorous as Lao Sheng.

¹¹ Xunshi Biangu: it’s the name of the ninth scene in this play, which means to find and distinguish the bones.

¹² Qiangjian meat: it is the meat hung on a spear sword for people to eat, which belongs to a local ritual.

could hardly tell in face of piles of bones in the mountains. Finally she found a half copper cash beside a pile of bones. Niangmei picked up the copper cash, and took out the other half copper cash. She determined that that was exactly her beloved Zhulang, and greatly sorrowful.

Chart 6: brief introduction of *Xunshi Biangu* of the ninth scene, made by the author in 2022, as follows.

Session and Event	Character	Time and Place	Contradictions and Entanglements	Aria
Scene Nine- <i>Xunshi Biangu</i>	Niangmei, Daku, Biniang and Bimei	After Zhulang was killed, Jiangjianpo	One side is the grief of losing her lover, and the other side is the hatred of Yinyi's killing her husband	“To find and distinguish the bones.”

Text analysis: These intensity elements such as the strength, inflection and cadence in the vocal music of the opera, as well as the accent, weight and cadence in the music, are the romantic charm of the singing and accompaniment in the real sound, and the important nodes for the circulation, stagnation and spread of the artistic conception. According to the *Further Discussion on the Comparative Musicology* (Guan Jianhua, February 1988), in traditional Chinese musics, the inner hearing of performers and the auditory senses of the audience pay great attention to the subtle change of tones in the sound structure. In the scene of “looking for corpse and recognizing skeleton”, that Zhulang was killed by cruel means pushed the contradiction to the climax. When Niangmei sang that “Niangmei was sorrow-stricken when beautifying the skeleton”, we can vividly feel her despair and grief. Then she sang that “Head for head and blood for blood”¹³. Yinyi killed Zhulang, and we must kill him.” This sentence was used by Niangmei to directly attack the feudal class society. The impressive theme of anti feudal oppression ran through the whole opera. As above story, the victory of Niangmei represents the yearning of laboring people for an ideal life, where there is no oppression and exploitation in reality, and Niangmei is also the embodiment of a heroic figure image in the feudal society. These performances with great oriental artistic charm can be found sometimes in a small expression, sometimes in the control of the weight of a certain voice, and sometimes in the coordination of a delicate figure and percussion music. This is exactly what we called that it is too much with an inch added, too short with one inch cut.

Opera performance is a social activity, whose aesthetic subject and object present an interactive relationship. Changes in the aesthetic value of operas are the results of the long-term interaction between performers and audiences in the long history of time. Changes in the aesthetic value of opera arts can not be separated from the real reflection of the social real life while people use artistic performance to express life and culture. Obviously, in *Qin Niangmei*, the times of Qin niangmei and Zhulang has gone. However, how to make classic and traditional works of art improve with the changes of times and aesthetic forms on the premise of retaining excellent and classic

¹³ Head for head and blood for blood: it means “A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, a life for a life.”

performance forms is an urgent problem to be solved in the inheritance and dissemination of Guizhou Opera at present.

Discussion

Through the study of this paper, it is found that the music, language, dress, stage art and other parts of this opera are full of strong local colors, national characteristics, melodious melody, fresh and simple. The lyrics are colloquial, close to life, catchy, and close to the audience while fully expressing feelings. For example, "you broke the copper coin to express your heart of live and die together. We were not afraid of the old rules that the couple would not be separated for thousands of years. " "It is difficult to see the top of the love slope, while the road is flat if two people in the same heart. Suddenly the sky becomes dark clouds and the rainstorm will soon come." "Head for head, life for life, Silver should kill you and I kill him." It can be seen that the melody and lyrics play a key role in the spread of this play. The music uses different speeds, intonations and music to connect the notes together in order to accurately express the inner activities and emotional ups and downs of the characters. It changes the singing voice according to the plot changes of the drama thus achieving a strong artistic effect of rhythmic contrast. At the same time, people are used to the constructive "Positive connection effect" that is to establish a direct connection with the audience as a role. For example, actors will deliberately reserve simple interaction with the audience when singing, which is a direct connection with the audience. However, the rhythmical freehand performance of operas can create a poetic stage illusion, which can even be much stronger than the realistic illusion. It can close the distance from the audience more easily, so as to realize the "connection effect" (Sun Huizhu, June 2010). When the actors in Qin Niangmei walk on the stage in the performance, they draw circles inward with their hands. This way of walking comes from the way that the girls of Dong nationality walk in life. Such performance form makes the audience feel more involved. The earliest story about Qin Niangmei spread in the life of laboring people of Dong minority, which later presented on the stage after the artistic adaptation and creation of Guizhou Opera. As a classic story, *Qin Niangmei* is appreciated by audiences through conveying the intense emotions of its roles to audiences. *Qin Niangmei* has fought against the vicious power with her wisdom and courage. She used a hoe to kill the bully landlord and took revenge for her husband's murder. The theme of anti-feudal oppression run through the whole opera, and the music and language had strong local color of Guizhou region. It well absorbed folk songs in Guizhou Province, and catchy melody and libretto played a crucial role in the communication of this opera. In the opera, the traditional exquisite costumes and dances, and the unique enchanting melody of Dong minority, as well as Dong Operas, especially the independent thinking, and the spirit of breaking through the imprison of feudalism, and struggling with feudal influence of *Qin Niangmei*, allow the audience to understand the miserable side of China's feudal society, and show the audience a vivid image of a strong, kind, brave and wise female.

As for the character of *Qin Niangmei*, from a pure and romantic girl at the beginning to a hoe to fight against evil forces for revenge, which are certain changes in the character before and after the plot. *Qin Niangmei* acted by Yu Daling integrated the different performance skills of Huadan,

Zhengdan and Guimendan¹⁴. On the basis of the inner activities of the characters in the opera, Yu Daling¹⁵ used her own unique performing method to deliver the romantic charm of the different emotions carried by performances such as gait, gestures, eyes, props and others, so as to completely express “conveying the spirit, expressing the emotions, and defining the conception” emphasized by Chinese opera performances. Stella Adler (Adler, 2014) stressed in the *Art of Acting* that an actor should be equipped with the consciousness and ability of independent thinking in the performance, who should act with all his feelings by relying on his deep understanding of characters, rather than a fixed performance formula. Scene 9 “Xunshi Biangu” is the climax of the opera. Qin Niangmei looks for Zhu Lang’s dead body on the Jiangjian Slope no matter how hard the way is. After she finds the love token--the half of copper cash, which is fit to the half copper cash she holds, she knows this is Zhu Lang. In the interview, Yu Daling said: “the most impressive part is that there is a piece of pleading vocal music in the opera, and I will have tears in my eyes every time singing to here. I stepped into the role during the performance so I cried when singing this vocal music, and audiences under the stage cried together with me.” Such vocal music shows the inner crying and sadness of the characters. When Qin Niangmei acted by Yu Daling came to tears, the audience also came to tears, which is just the highest aesthetic form in consideration of the infectivity of its dramatic art and it is also a reflection of the audience's empathy with the performance. Although the era of Zhulang Niangmei has passed, the drama's distinctive aesthetic characteristics, unique local characteristics and unique national characteristics can enable us to deeply understand and experience the unique diachronic lifestyle, customs and thoughts through cultural performances.

Conclusion

The study explores the intensity elements, such as strength, inflection, cadence, accent, weight, and cadence, in the vocal and instrumental aspects of opera music. These elements contribute to the romantic charm of singing and accompaniment, playing a crucial role in conveying artistic conception and facilitating the circulation, stagnation, and spread of emotions. Traditional Chinese music, as discussed in Comparative Musicology (Guan Jianhua, February 1988), places significant emphasis on performers' inner hearing and audience auditory senses, particularly focusing on subtle changes in sound structure.

The analysis of a specific opera scene highlights the significance of tone changes in expressing emotions. For instance, the portrayal of Zhulang's death intensifies the contradiction, and Niangmei's lamentation vividly conveys her despair and grief. Furthermore, Niangmei's lyrics directly challenge the feudal class society, emphasizing the opera's overarching theme of anti-feudal oppression. The victory of Niangmei in the opera symbolizes the laboring people's yearning for an ideal life without oppression and exploitation. Niangmei becomes a heroic figure representing this aspiration within the

¹⁴ Huadan, Zhengdan and Guimendan: dan is a general term for female protagonist in China's traditional opera, which includes different character roles. Huadan means a main female role of a young or middle-aged woman; Zhengdan means vivacious and unmarried women; Guimendan means unmarried young girl.

¹⁵ Yu Daling: she played the part of Qin Niangmei in the live performance at the Guizhou Opera Theater in Zunyi city in 1961. This section came from the interview with Yu Daling on March 12th, 2021.

feudal society. The study underscores that the oriental artistic charm of opera performances lies in subtle expressions, voice modulation, and the coordination of figures with percussion music.

The research also recognizes opera as a social activity, where the aesthetic relationship between performers and audiences evolves over time. Changes in opera's aesthetic value reflect the long-term interaction between these two components and cannot be separated from the real-life context. The study acknowledges that while the era of Qin Niangmei and Zhulang may have passed, there is an urgent need to address how classic and traditional works can adapt to contemporary times without compromising their excellence and classic forms, particularly in the context of Guizhou Opera's inheritance and dissemination.

Suggestions

The State Council officially approved Guizhou Opera and listed it into "National Intangible Cultural Heritage List" in 2008. How should Guizhou Opera inherit and develop simultaneously especially under the new situation? In this paper, three suggestions are put forward. First, the rejuvenation of Guizhou Opera must follow the path of better works. Second, inheritance is the best way of protection. Finally, the commercial protection and inheritance mode of Guizhou Opera should be developed. Guizhou Opera will gradually develop into a well-known cultural brand with Chinese characteristics in Guizhou cultural industry. And the never-ending construction of Guizhou Opera is being actively called for by the culture of Guizhou province in the future.

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