

JINGHU: ROLES AND FUNCTION IN BEIJING OPERA

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Abstract

Jinghu, a traditional string instrument, within the context of Beijing Opera, highlights its integral place in Chinese arts, culture, and traditions. By examining how the Jinghu reflects the performers' beliefs and expresses themes rooted in historical narratives and religions, the study sheds light on its cultural significance and dramatic impact. Deeply embedded in the spiritual and philosophical foundations of Chinese society, Jinghu--through its role in Beijing Opera--embodies Confucian values of loyalty, righteousness, and filial piety, as well as Daoist and Buddhist concepts such as harmony with nature, karma, and the impermanence of life. The musical narratives performed with Jinghu often dramatize moral dilemmas, divine interventions, and historical legends, allowing the instrument to act as a spiritual bridge between past and present, between mortals and the divine. It is not merely an artistic tool, but a cultural voice that resonates with the collective consciousness of the Chinese people, carrying forward their reverence for tradition and the sacred. Jinghu is the core instrument of Beijing Opera accompaniment, playing a dual role in both artistic expression and structural support in opera performance. Its high-pitched and bright timbre characteristics have constructed the iconic auditory symbols of Peking Opera music, serving as a key link between singing, performance, and music through multiple functions such as tone preservation, emotional rendering, and rhythm control. In terms of artistic expression, Jinghu uses rich performance techniques to simulate the human voice and enhance dramatic tension. In terms of structure and function, it not only standardizes the vocal

style, but also coordinates the stage rhythm, while shaping the characteristics of the profession through differentiated timbre processing. The high integration of instrumental music and human voice in Jinghu transcends the scope of ordinary accompaniment instruments, adhering to traditional norms while promoting artistic innovation. It has become an indispensable subject of expression and carrier of inheritance in the music system of Peking Opera, demonstrating the unique aesthetic pursuit of Chinese traditional opera music of "performing with music."

Keywords: Jinghu; Beijing opera; Role and function; Performance style

Introduction

Beijing Opera, also known as Peking Opera, Beijing Opera, etc., is one of China's national treasures and the most influential traditional Chinese opera. It is distributed around Beijing and throughout the country. The Peking Opera performance system named after Mei Lanfang is regarded as a representative of the Eastern theatrical performance system and one of the three major performance systems in the world. Beijing Opera is an important manifestation of traditional Chinese culture, with various artistic elements used as symbols of Chinese traditional culture.

Beijing Opera is mainly characterized by the use of the Beihuang vocal system and the establishment of Jinghu as the main playing instrument. Jinghu art is a profound and extensive art form, which, as the soul of the overall Beijing Opera music, condenses the main characteristics of Beijing Opera music. In the thousands of years of development of the Chinese nation, its musical form has the characteristics of continuous variation and dynamic development, and Jinghu art has also undergone continuous variation and dynamic development in different periods of development.

Jinghu, it is a type of Chinese ethnic stringed instrument - the huqin. In the early years, the Jinghu qin had a short stem, a small barrel, covered with python or snake skin, stretched silk strings, and played with a soft bow, known as the Soft Bow Huqin, represented by Wang Xiaoshao. Subsequently, the soft bow was changed to a hard bow, and its playing techniques absorbed the characteristics of the Bangzi Huqin, represented by Li Chunquan. Jinghu has evolved from a soft bow to a hard bow, from a short bow to a long bow,

combined with a series of changes in finger techniques such as "chanting, kneading, smoothing, and polishing", and more than 200 years of continuous stage practice, ultimately forming a unique style of "lining, supporting, cushioning, and supplementing" performance (Wang, 2012).

Jinghu, singing along with the combination of complexity and simplicity, complementing the floral notes, forms its usual technique, and the core of playing technique is charm. It is precisely this endless chewing of rhyme that enables Jinghu to unleash infinite and mysterious musical rhythms in the narrow playing space. Jinghu, it is the soul of Beijing Opera vocal accompaniment. The singing skills of any Peking Opera performer cannot be separated from the tacit cooperation of Jinghu accompaniment. It can be said that the rapid development of Peking Opera singing style is inseparable from the musical skills of Jinghu performers throughout history, and the two are closely related and closely linked together. Jinghu, since its use in Peking Opera in the mid Qing Dynasty until today, innovative explorations have been made in both performance techniques and content. Especially in recent years, different types of Jinghu solos and concertos have emerged, bringing Jinghu from behind-the-scenes accompaniment to the field of instrument performance. This is undoubtedly an important measure to broaden Jinghu's performance content and techniques. However, ultimately, Jinghu is still an accompaniment instrument, and its primary task is to accompany the melody. Therefore, to summarize the performance of Jinghu, it is necessary to rationally summarize the characteristics of qin style performance and the unique singing and accompaniment skills of different schools in the history of Peking Opera, in order to promote the essence of traditional Peking Opera music (Zhao, 2011).

Jinghu's Role in Peking Opera

Jinghu, as the core instrument of Beijing Opera accompaniment, plays multiple important roles in Beijing Opera performances. It is not only the leader of music, but also the transmitter of emotions and the controller of dramatic rhythm. Its role can be analyzed in detail from the following aspects:

Core of Music Accompaniment: Leading instruments in the field: Jinghu plays a dominant role in the "Wen Chang" (orchestral part) of the Beijing Opera band, and is known as one of the "three major components" along with the Yueqin and Sanxian. However, Jinghu's timbre is the most

prominent, responsible for playing the main melody. In traditional Beijing opera accompaniment, Jinghu's performance directly affects the charm and style of the singing style, such as the musical expression of different styles such as Xipi and Erhuang.

Maintaining Tune and Stable Vocal Performance: One of Jinghu's main tasks is to "support the voice", which closely follows the actor's singing style to ensure accurate pitch and rhythm. At the moment when the actors take a breath or change their singing style, Jinghu fills the gaps with short transitional phrases, making the music smooth and natural (Du, 2011).

The Transmission of Emotional Expression

Rendering emotions through timbre: High pitched and passionate: like the old man and the flower faced singing piece (such as "The Empty City Plan" and "The Beautiful Case"), Jinghu expresses heroic spirit with strong and powerful archery. Lament and lingering: Like the singing passages of Dan roles (such as "Locking the Lin Bag" and "Drunken Concubine"), Jinghu enhances the tragic color with gentle glissando and vibrato.

Simulate vocals to enhance drama: Jinghu's performance techniques, such as "crying" and "laughing", can imitate the emotions of characters such as crying and laughter, making the performance more infectious. For example, in the song "Yutang Spring", Su San's tearful singing section and Jinghu's vibrato and glissando reinforce the character's sorrowful state of mind.

Master of Stage Rhythm: Guiding actors' singing rhythm: Jinghu's "Guo Men" (prelude, interlude) prompts actors when to start singing and when to stop singing, playing a commanding role. For example, actors often rely on Jinghu's guidance in their singing style after their appearance or recitation.

Coordinate civil and martial arts venues, connect performances: The Beijing Opera band is divided into "Wen Chang" (string music) and "Wu Chang" (percussion music), and Jinghu needs to closely cooperate with the drum board (Si Gu) to ensure the unity of music and performance rhythm. During martial arts or body movements, Jinghu fills in the gaps between movements through improvisational transitional phrases, making the stage rhythm coherent.

The builder of the character: Accompaniment styles for different professions: Lao Sheng and Hua Mian: Jinghu plays with strong and powerful force, often using short bows and hanging bows to highlight his heroic momentum. Dandan: Jinghu has a soft and gentle tone, often using longbows and glissandos to express delicate emotions.

Clown: Jinghu plays flexibly and playfully, often using jumping short bows and decorative sounds to enhance the comedic effect.

The embodiment of the genre style: Different schools of Peking Opera (such as Mei School, Cheng School, Ma School) have different requirements for Jinghu's performance. For example, Mei School (Mei Lanfang): Jinghu's accompaniment is gorgeous and smooth, emphasizing rounded tones. Cheng Pai (Cheng Yanqiu): Jinghu often uses low and gentle strings to highlight the color of sadness (Zhou, 2012).

Symbols of Peking Opera Art: Iconic features of jinghu timbre: The high-pitched sound of jinghu has become a typical representative of Beijing opera music. As soon as the jinghu sound is heard, the audience can immediately associate it with the Beijing opera stage. For example, the use of Jinghu in the movie "Farewell My Concubine" enhances the artistic atmosphere of Peking Opera.

The Bridge between Tradition and Innovation: In modern Peking Opera, Jinghu still maintains its core position, while attempting to combine with symphonic and electronic music to promote the innovative development of Peking Opera music. Jinghu's role in Peking Opera goes far beyond accompaniment. It is the soul of music, the amplifier of emotions, the conductor of rhythm, and an indispensable component of Peking Opera art. Its unique timbre and performance techniques make Peking Opera performances more vivid and lively, becoming an important link between actors and audiences. In the future, the development of Jinghu still needs to explore innovation on the basis of inheriting tradition, in order to continue its unique charm in Peking Opera.

Functional Analysis of Jinghu in Peking Opera

Jinghu has multiple important functions in the art of Peking Opera, and its high pitched and bright tone and unique performance techniques make it the soul of Peking Opera music. As the core of literary instruments, the primary function of Jinghu is to maintain pitch and melody. Through precise pitch control and flexible rhythm control, it provides solid musical support for actors' singing, ensuring that different styles of singing such as Xipi and Erhuang can be accurately and smoothly presented. In terms of emotional expression, Jinghu has become an amplifier of dramatic emotions with its rich playing techniques. The strong and powerful short bow expresses the passionate and impassioned heroic characters, while the gentle and lingering glissando conveys the sorrowful and tender feelings of the Dan characters. It can even simulate human voices through special "crying" and "laughing" techniques, greatly enhancing the emotional appeal of the drama. Jinghu also plays the role of the central rhythm of the stage, with its entrance music prompting actors to enter their singing style, and string phrases filling in performance gaps. The close coordination with the drums ensures a seamless connection between the music of the civil and martial arts stage. In terms of character development, Jinghu highlights the characteristics of his profession through different playing styles. The upright and vigorous singing style of Laosheng, the rough and unrestrained singing style of Huamian, and the gentle and graceful singing style of Dan Dan are all strengthened in Jinghu's accompaniment. As an iconic timbre of Peking Opera music, Jinghu not only adheres to traditional accompaniment norms, but also expands its expressive space in modern innovation. Its unique artistic charm makes it an indispensable sound symbol in Peking Opera art, constantly radiating new vitality while maintaining traditional charm (Gu, 2013).

Jinghu style and Performers

The founding fathers Mei Yutian and Sun Zuochen, two masters of the qin world, laid the foundation for the standardization of Jinghu's performance style. Mei Yutian's piano playing shows characteristics such as steady archery, skilled finger techniques, and pure tone. The huqin originally had no unusual sounds (Zhang, 1980). Since its inception, it has been able to reach any throat and string, pioneering the elegant style of the qin. Sun Zuochen, on the other hand, is known for his sharp ears, fast hands, complex and intricate melodies, as

well as his ability to distinguish between dangerous and peculiar sounds when playing the qin. He can be considered a pioneer in playing fast bow and double notes in Jinghu. In the decades following Mei and Sun Qinfeng, the Jinghu community has produced over a hundred renowned qin players and formed several major qin schools, pushing the art of playing the qin to the pinnacle of the 20th century.

Xu Lanyuan embodies the peaceful and upright style of the qin. The characteristics of Xu Lanyuan's piano playing are flatness, elegance, roundness, and clarity. Whether he plays slow paced riffs or fast-paced archery, he demonstrates a profound skill of slow but not warm, fast but not fiery. He is knowledgeable and talented, and has summarized the seven-character technique of "Shan, Nian, Smooth, Pad, Xu, Dou, and Rub" for the Huqin, which has been widely circulated. Back then, he had been playing the qin for Tan Xinpei and Mei Lanfang for many years. He was well versed in the theory of drama and could adapt to emotions without hesitation. His evenly arranged tone and characters, as well as the divine and expressive melody of the qin, were particularly captivating. The establishment of this qin style has set a model for the Beijing opera and huqin world of "easy to learn and difficult to work".

Li Peiqing and Wang Ruizhi, with their ancient charm and deep qin style. Through the eighteen and a half albums recorded by Yu Shuyan, it is not difficult to distinguish the elegant and graceful old Tan Xin singer of Yu Shi, as well as the natural and harmonious singing companions of Li and Wang. Yu Paiqin sings: The sound of the characters is perfectly balanced and the energy is extraordinary, making it a wonderful piece of music; The ancient and profound style of the qin is not only reflected in its appropriateness to the singing quality, but also in its ambiguous accompaniment concept, which is the winning treasure of the Yu school of huqin. Taking the "Xipi Liushui" section of "Selling Horses" sung by Yu as an example, the intricate and unique intonation and repeated sentences are enveloped by several fixed accompaniment patterns in a dense and orderly manner. The two melodic lines in the accompaniment are orderly and parallel, forming a polyphony. The "ancient and profound" qin style that is not like it, is like a refined fairyland.

Yang Baozhong, known for his fast bow and close playing of the qin. After Sun Zuochen, Yang Baozhong pushed the skill of fast archery to the extreme. He boldly applied the bow finger technique of the violin to Jinghu performance, creating fast, double, and continuous right-handed bow techniques and pure left-handed tension with dense finger tones. The sound of the qin he pulled out was as unpredictable as the shuttling of the bow and finger techniques on a jade plate. For Jinghu's basic skill training, he is particularly unique and original. He combined the performance of Jinghu instruments and absorbed violin techniques to create highly practical Jinghu exercises, effectively improving the training methods of Jinghu scale and left and right-hand coordination. He collaborated with Yang Baosen to create the Yang School art, interweaving and complementing the framework of the Yu School's vocal style with the fast bow and piano playing style. Yang Baozhong leads Jinghu performance to the Xintiandi of Sino Western cooperation.

Wang Shaoqing, known for his innovative and unique piano style. If we talk about Wang Shaoqing's characteristics of playing the qin, his left- and right-hand skills are outstanding. When he wants to be fast, his archery is calm and graceful, and when he wants to be slow, his hands are compact and tight. The sound he plays is rich, lively, and melodious. He inherited the virtues of Mei Yutian and Sun Zuochen, but failed to abide by the established rules. He is proficient in music and knows the principles of craftsmanship and change. The flower sounds he creates are both complex and simple, using the method of following the tone to create them. His passionate and logical singing style is not just about winning with more words, but also about creating unique backgrounds and supplements that make the singer's movements more comfortable and exciting. He used various types of instruments played by Jinghu, such as "Liu Yaojin", and composed the "Anti Siping Original Board" singing style for "Life and Death Hate", all of which are excellent works. Wang Shaoqing's "novel and unique" piano style has had a profound impact on the performance of Jinghu in later generations.

Entering the realm of Qin style, Fei Wenzhi. Fei Wenzhi is widely recognized in the Beijing opera industry as a model of deep and melodious qin music, as well as cohesive singing. In terms of art, he is a talented individual who has achieved great success by leading bands and stages. His exceptional skill in playing the qin is prominently displayed: lifting the bowstring with his

right hand is like doing qigong, and the bow can be opened very wide and used very short; Pressing the string with the left hand is exquisite, unique, agile, and sharp. The Huqin was pulled out by him, and the water spirit sound revealed the natural quality of the qin, with a continuous "round" character throughout the performance of "clear, transparent, bright, and thick". He is proficient in singing for various genres including Sheng, Dan, Jing, and Chou. In the past, he performed on stage with Wu Suqiu, Yan Huizhu, and Tong Zhiling, and his piano style could be described as exquisite and unparalleled. In addition, in 1956, he personally accompanied Xun Huisheng with the recording of "Zhuo Wenjun", which is a masterpiece that has survived. He accompanied Tan Fuying, Li Hezeng, and Ye Shenglan, highlighting his extraordinary demeanor of "full of energy and spirit, conveying emotions with a lively style". Fei Wenzhi stands out in the Beijing Opera music scene with his elegant and refined style of playing the qin, which has taken him to the forefront (Wang, 2012).

Li Muliang, known for his magnificent and beautiful piano style. Just vigorous and elegant, graceful and elegant, wise and interesting, gorgeous and beautiful, it can be called the Confucian style, summarizing Li Muliang's temperament of playing the qin. His archery is fast and fluent, his finger movements are lively and varied, and the sound he plays is smooth, lively, and eye-catching. He makes good use of new and personalized sounds to transform the tension of Jinghu's performance, and can explore a unique and colorful music collection regardless of the type of syllable. He makes good use of the technique of "explosive sound" to enhance the stage atmosphere, which has a strong artistic appeal, and his sliding skills are even more beautiful. He has been playing the qin for Ma Lianliang for several years and has created many beautiful singing styles for him. Whether it's the famous line "Er Huang Dao Dao" in "Borrowing the East Wind" or the prelude to the Er Huang singing style in "The Orphan of Zhao" by Cheng Ying, they all demonstrate his superb spirituality and extraordinary qin playing art in mastering Peking Opera music. The "gorgeous and beautiful" piano style initiated by Li Muliang has established a new monument for the Jinghu music industry.

Words are the voice of the heart, extended to Jinghu - "the sound of the qin", which is actually the "voice of the musician". The Qin Fengliu School initiated by the Jinghu performers mentioned above represents the main performance style of Beijing Opera during its heyday. They have all made

outstanding historical contributions to the inheritance and development of Jinghu performance art (Yu, 2014).

New Knowledges

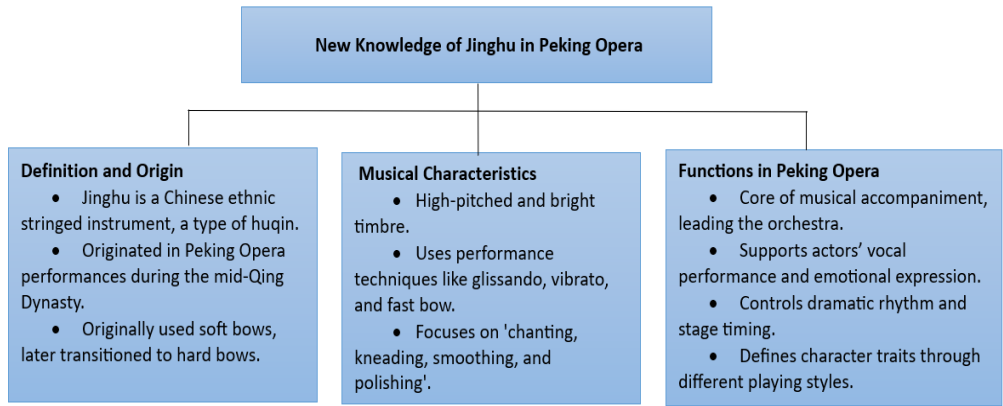


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Jinghu: Roles and Function in Beijing Opera.

Conclusions

As the soul instrument of Peking Opera music, Jinghu's role and function not only reflect the unique charm of traditional Chinese opera music, but also demonstrate the high integration of instrumental music and performing arts. It is both the pillar of singing style and the medium of emotions; It not only regulates the stage rhythm, but also shapes the character's personality. At the intersection of tradition and modernity, Jinghu has always maintained its irreplaceable artistic value, serving as both the guardian of Peking Opera music and a promoter of innovation. Its timbre and techniques carry profound cultural heritage and continue to inject new vitality into the art of Peking Opera. It can be said that without Jinghu, the charm and radiance of Peking Opera would be greatly reduced. In the future, Jinghu will continue to inherit and develop, writing its own colorful music.

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