

INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND MODERN EXPRESSION IN THE NATIONAL OPERA YIMENGSHAN

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Received: July 22, 2025; **Revised:** December 27, 2025; **Accepted:**
December 27, 2025

Abstract

This article explores the integration of traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern artistic expression in the national opera Yimeng Mountain. Through detailed analysis of musical structure, character development, and stage design, the research illustrates how the opera honors folk traditions while advancing contemporary operatic innovation. The characters, particularly the female protagonist, are portrayed with emotional depth and symbolic richness, highlighting the opera's emphasis on humanistic values alongside historical narrative. The study also examines the application of the "music-first" creative approach, emphasizing how melody, orchestration, and vocal techniques reflect both regional characteristics and national artistic trends. By synthesizing revolutionary themes with refined artistic methods, Yimeng Mountain stands as a significant work that reflects the evolving identity of Chinese national opera in the 21st century.

Keywords: Integrating traditional culture; Modern expression; National opera

Introduction

Chinese national opera has long served as a powerful vehicle for conveying cultural heritage, historical memory, and social values. Yimeng Mountain, composed in the early 21st century, exemplifies a modern operatic work that skillfully blends traditional Chinese elements with contemporary

expression. Rooted in the folk music and revolutionary spirit of the Yimeng region, the opera celebrates the resilience, sacrifice, and unity of the people, particularly highlighting the contributions of women during wartime. This article investigates the ways in which Yimeng Mountain integrates musical, narrative, and visual components to construct a modern theatrical experience that remains deeply connected to its traditional roots. Drawing on musicological analysis, performance interpretation, and cultural theory, the research aims to uncover how the opera reflects broader shifts in Chinese performing arts—where regional identity, national sentiment, and modern creativity converge. The exploration of character symbolism, vocal techniques, and aesthetic design offers insights into how traditional culture continues to shape and inspire the evolution of Chinese opera today (Ma, 2022).

Yimengshan Opera

As of November 2024, I have systematically analyzed and organized existing research on the opera “Yimengshan” both domestically and internationally. By searching for the keyword “Yimengshan” in large databases such as CNKI, Web of Science, and Spring Link, a total of 308 relevant articles were identified. After screening and removing duplicates, 260 valid Chinese-language documents were retained. From these studies, it is evident that scholars currently focus on three main areas: the first category of research emphasizes the unique position of “Yimengshan” in the development of Chinese opera, analyzing its breakthroughs compared to traditional opera; the second category of research focuses on the characterization of the opera's characters, particularly how the main character, Haitang, embodies the spirit of the people in the Shandong base area; the third category of research specifically analyzes the classic arias in the opera, such as the melodic adaptation characteristics of “Yimengshan Folk Song.” There are also several interesting research angles: some scholars discuss the unique artistic value of this opera, while others examine the composer's creative process to explain why the work took on its current style. These diverse research perspectives complement one another, not only providing a more comprehensive understanding of the opera itself but also offering important insights into how to interpret red classic works in contemporary contexts (Chen, 2024).

The Humanistic Implications and Historical Context of the Work

Artistic Reconstruction Strategies for the Yimeng Spirit: The most touching aspect of the opera ‘Yimengshan’ lies in its refusal to reduce the Yimeng spirit to a simplistic, slogan-like ‘red symbol.’ For instance, in the scene where Hai Tang sends her husband Lin Sheng off to join the army, the stage lighting abruptly shifts from warm yellow to cold blue, the orchestra uses the sliding tones of the Shandong zither to mimic the howling wind, and the village women's chorus of ‘The Song of Sending Off My Husband’ is suddenly interrupted by a piercing military bugle call—these details transform ‘sacrifice’ from an abstract concept into concrete slices of life, such as a hairpin or a bowl of rice porridge. The composer deliberately avoids grand symphonic orchestration, instead using fragments of the Yimengshan folk tune as background music, like the scratches on an old photograph, allowing the audience to hear the roughness of history. The breathing in these vocal segments should carry a hint of ‘dustiness.’ For example, in the line ‘This mountain path has been walked for generations,’ Wang Lida deliberately pauses the tremor in her throat for half a beat, singing the resilience of the mountain villagers like wild grass sprouting from a rock crevice (Zhang, 2022).

The Balance of Epic and Lyrical Elements in the Textual Structure: The libretto of this opera is like a coarse cloth woven with interlacing warp and weft: the warp represents the timeline of the war, while the weft embodies the personal fate of the peony. The third act, ‘Birth in the Cave,’ is a prime example of this interweaving—on stage, the low drums of rumbling cannon fire, off stage, Hai Tang's piercing high-pitched aria, yet the composer inserts a children's choir singing the Yimeng Folk Song at this very moment. This contrast evokes the montage technique in films, where bloodshed and innocence are juxtaposed, yet the tragic grandeur strikes the heart all the more deeply. When teaching students to sing such passages, attention must be paid to the ‘spatial transition’ of the voice: when singing the cannon fire section, the chest resonance must be as deep as an earthquake; when transitioning to the folk song, the brow resonance must be immediately raised, making the voice transparent and trembling, as if a ray of light were shining through the cave ceiling (Wang, 2025).

Analysis of the Motif Development in the Core Aria ‘Wait for Me, My Dear’: This song is the ‘heart’ of the entire opera, yet its power stems precisely from its ‘imperfection.’ The main motif consists of only five notes (sol-la-sol-mi-re), resembling an unfinished mountain song. Wang Lida handled this brilliantly in the premiere: every time she sang the word ‘wait,’ she would suddenly hold her breath, leaving the note suspended in mid-air, like a sparrow that hasn’t landed yet. In the second act, this motif is broken down into the orchestra’s bass section, with the cello’s vibrato simulating a heartbeat; in the final act, when Haotang sacrifices herself, the motif appears in reverse order (re-mi-sol-la-sol), accompanied by the sheng’s tremolo, as if the soul is struggling to rise from the earth. In teaching, it is important for students to understand that simple melodies require ‘fragmented treatment’—the more repetitive the phrase, the more it needs to be given depth through changes in tone colour, such as using a natural voice to emphasise “mountain” and a falsetto to soften ‘road,’ so that each word gains its own texture.

Characteristics of Musical Composition

Diversified Stage Language: The ethnic opera Yimengshan uses diverse artistic means to construct its unique stage language, employing multidimensional presentation techniques to convey ideas and elevate aesthetic appreciation. The work organically blends vocal performance, melodic structure, and physical narrative to form a three-dimensional artistic expression system. For example, in core arias such as ‘Wait for Me, Dear One’ and ‘One Last Glance at My Loved Ones,’ the creators employ an aesthetic strategy of ‘concealing the backdrop of suffering to highlight spiritual brilliance,’ enveloping the tragic theme of life-and-death separation within an uplifting posture of facing death with resolve. Through bright tonal textures and expansive rhythms, they sculpt the noble image of revolutionaries, this artistic treatment, which deconstructs the tragic core with hopeful elements, not only deepens the traditional narrative but also enhances the emotional impact of the characters’ spiritual realm through contrasting tension. In terms of musical construction, ‘Yimeng Mountain’ creatively infuses the dramatic vocal system of Western opera into the DNA of ethnic music. While retaining the regional characteristics of the Yimeng folk tune, it emphasises the narrative tension and emotional intensity of the melody, its vocal style establishes a dynamic balance

between lyricism and conflict, continuing the essence of traditional opera while innovating the musical structure of national opera through symphonic vocal layers. In the resonance between tradition and modernity, it opens up a new aesthetic dimension.

The Construction of the Narrative System: The ethnic opera 'Yimengshan' is rooted in the aesthetic paradigm shift that occurred during historical evolution, blending regional and contemporary characteristics to construct a multi-dimensional artistic value system. Its creative core focuses on three pillars: leveraging the geographical landscape of Yimeng Mountain to create an immersive cultural environment, redefining the temporal and spatial coordinates of national spirit through revolutionary epic narratives, and weaving a rich collective memory using folk symbols, thereby achieving an organic symbiosis of geographical genes, historical bloodlines, and humanistic textures. The work achieves a precise fusion of vocal dramatic tension and instrumental narrative expression, interweaving the grand historical context with the rise and fall of individual destinies within the melodic texture—from the symphonic contrapuntal contrast in 'Blood-Stained Hills' that mirrors the brutality of war, to the lyrical aria in 'Eternal Starlight' that permeates the brilliance of humanity, achieving a breakthrough in the audiovisual aesthetics of epic opera. In the developmental lineage of Chinese musical theater, the milestone significance of Yi Meng Shan lies particularly in its groundbreaking narrative architecture. Through a six-act panoramic epic framework that interweaves the coming-of-age trajectories of grassroots heroes such as Hai Tang and Lin Sheng, the production creates mirrored resonance between individual awakening and the historical formation of the Yimeng revolutionary spirit. Diverging from previous red classics' emphasis on micro-level depictions of military-civilian interactions, this opera reconstructs revolutionary imagery through civilian perspectives. In the "Final Family Letter" scene, a peasant soldier's sacrificial decision transcends mere emotional appeals, employing the fractured progression of vocal motifs to collective destiny's turning point – preserving the regional tonalities of Yimeng folk melodies while enhancing theatrical grandeur through polyphonic fugue techniques. This creative approach of deconstructing heroic narratives via musical montage and revealing spiritual transcendence through vocal mutations not only subverts the formulaic expressions of mainstream revolutionary operas but also, through symphonic integration of

multidimensional artistic languages on stage, vividly charts the collective dedication blueprint during national existential crises. Ultimately, it achieves dimensional transcendence in red aesthetics – expanding from micro-level pathos to macrocosmic historical awe within the narrative depth of military-civilian blood-forged unity (Zhao & Shi, 2023).

Expression of Various Vocal Forms: The opera ‘Yimengshan’ encompasses a variety of vocal forms, including solo, duet, ensemble, and choral singing. The opera opens with the mixed chorus ‘Risking one’s life to protect one’s hometown,’ setting the stage for the fiery wedding of Hai Tang and Lin Sheng with its powerful sound effects. ‘Singing wedding songs as we head to the battlefield, daring to have the King of Hell as our best man,’ the villagers of Yazi Village express their resolve to fight to the death against foreign invaders and unite to defend their homeland with a grand and majestic spirit. The piece with the largest number of singers in the first act is ‘Five-Barrel Cannon,’ a song that combines solo, duet, and chorus elements. This is the opening climax of the entire opera. Accompanied by ‘Five-Barrel Cannon,’ the scene seamlessly transitions from the wedding to the battlefield, a highly ingenious design in the opera ‘Yimengshan.’ In the first part of ‘Five Cannon Shots,’ accompanied by three cannon blasts, Lin Sheng and Hai Tang bow to heaven and earth, then to their parents, and finally to each other as husband and wife, exuding an awe-inspiring grandeur. In the latter part of ‘Five Cannon Shots,’ Sun Jiulong swings his sword and charges toward the mountain peak, demonstrating his resolve to fight the enemy to the end. The second act features a quartet song performed by Lin Sheng, Hai Tang, Sun Jiulong, and Xia He titled ‘Hai Tang, Let Him Go.’ The characters express their thoughts and emotions through song. The song, told from Hai Tang’s perspective, conveys her inner conflict—both her concerns and reluctance toward Lin Sheng, as well as her support for his righteous actions and pursuit of ideals. Among the characters present, only Xia He knows that Hai Tang’s conflict stems not only from her concerns for Lin Sheng but also from the fact that she is pregnant with his child. Therefore, Xia He reveals the news of Hai Tang’s pregnancy to everyone at the end of the song, driving the plot forward. The song vividly portrays the characters’ inner turmoil. The duet ‘Wait for Me, Dear One’ in this scene features delicate lyrics and music, with sincere emotions. Before setting off for battle, Lin Sheng and Hai Tang exchange heartfelt words: ‘Wait for me, dear

one, wait for me, with an unchanging heart!’ The two sing in a call-and-response style, one line following the other, expressing that although they are separated, their hearts remain together. The song is filled with the sorrow of parting, while also showcasing their commitment and anticipation for future reunion. This song, ‘Wait for Me, My Dear,’ reappears in the fourth and fifth acts. In the fourth act, the song appears in Hai Tang’s dream, with the emotional tone shifting from reluctant farewell to endless longing. In the dream, the two drift further apart, foreshadowing the tragedy to come; in the fifth act, ‘Wait for Me, My Dear’ transforms from the previous duets into Hai Tang’s solo performance, with the vocal form evolving alongside the plot development, demonstrating meticulous artistic handling. Lin Sheng has already sacrificed his life, and he and Hai Tang are now separated by heaven and earth. At this point, Hai Tang is still unaware of this, and she performs the song one last time, filled with joy and anticipation for the return of the Eighth Route Army and her reunion with Lin Sheng. Although it is the same song, the opera ‘Yimengshan’ presents it in various vocal forms that evolve with the plot, conveying different emotional expressions and achieving a harmonious blend of sound and emotion. Another piece that appears multiple times is ‘A Pair of Shoes with Dense Stitches.’ This piece appears in the second act as a duet between a man and a woman and in the fifth act as a solo. It evolves from Hai Tang making new shoes for Lin Sheng in the second act to making new shoes for her child in the fifth act, expressing Hai Tang’s longing for Lin Sheng and foreshadowing her son’s tragic fate, similar to that of his father. In the sixth act, after learning of Lin Sheng’s sacrifice, Hai Tang sorrowfully performs the solo piece ‘Waiting for a Lifetime.’ Her monologue while holding Lin Sheng’s shoes in her hands is particularly heart-wrenching. The word “wait” echoes the earlier ‘Wait for Me, Dear One,’ not only showcasing Hai Tang’s pain at losing her beloved but also reflecting the immense misfortune war brings to ordinary people. The final piece of the play, ‘Yimengshan, Eternal Parents,’ is also sung solo by Hai Tang. The song is performed to the melody of ‘Yimengshan Folk Song,’ with a mixed chorus added in the final section. ‘The majestic Yimengshans rise high, the beloved Yimeng River flows long’ directly addresses the theme, expressing the growing revolutionary enthusiasm of the people of Yimengshan with a grand and powerful momentum. It deeply showcases the noble character of the military and civilian population of Yimengshan and the great Yimeng spirit, bringing the play to a perfect conclusion (Xu & Zhang, 2022).

Characterization in the Opera ‘Yimengshan’

The ‘Resilient Spirit’ of Female Characters: Life Narratives and Humanity in Revolutionary Epics: Chinese ethnic opera art is an artistic form that emerged from the fusion of traditional theatrical culture and Western opera art. Throughout its development on the global stage, it has weathered numerous challenges and experienced various ups and downs. In this process, the female artistic figures produced in each era have carried distinct era-specific and historical cultural characteristics. Their images have continuously evolved and developed, appearing in the aesthetic consciousness of audiences and offering them new directions for reflection. The female theme, as a special cultural subject, has been recorded in the annals of Chinese national opera development. On the stage of Chinese national opera, numerous successful female characters have emerged, inspiring the creation of Chinese national opera art and playing a significant role in aesthetic activities. They shine brilliantly in the depiction and expression of humanity. The female characters in ‘Yimengshan’ are a vivid illustration of Li Tong’s ‘shining humanistic brilliance.’ In this opera, women are no longer the ‘fragile symbols’ waiting to be rescued in traditional opera, nor the ‘embodiments of love’ commonly seen in Western opera. Instead, they embody independence, resilience, and vitality, becoming the chroniclers of revolutionary epics and the bearers of spiritual torches. Take the female lead, Hai Tang, as an example. Her journey of growth weaves together the tragic grandeur and nobility of the entire story—from a tender wife in the honeymoon phase, to a resilient military wife sending her husband off to war, to a mother who chooses the greater good despite the loss of her child. Each transformation is deeply rooted in the collective memory of the Yimengshans. When she sings in the aria ‘Child, Do Not Blame Your Mother,’ with a trembling voice, ‘A mother is not heartless; her heart is filled with the sun of the Yimengshans,’ the audience hears not only the heart-wrenching pain of a mother but also the spiritual totem of a nation that continues to look towards the light even in the face of suffering. This portrayal of the female character precisely embodies the artistic wisdom of Chinese national opera, which blends Eastern and Western elements. Hai Tang embodies the deep affection and sacrifice of traditional opera characters like ‘Meng Jiangnu Delivering Winter Clothes,’ while also incorporating the modern woman’s pursuit of independence and revolutionary awakening (Li, 2023). The contrast between her and Xia He, another female

character, is particularly ingenious: Hai Tang is an ordinary peasant woman propelled to the forefront of history by the revolutionary tide, representing the countless awakened women of the lower classes; Xia He, on the other hand, is an educated woman embracing new ideas, symbolising the vanguard force of idealism. The bond they forge amidst the chaos of war combines the classical sisterly affection of 'Liang Zhu' with the modern revolutionary camaraderie of 'comrades-in-arms.' This fusion of traditional opera's emotional heritage with modern spirit endows the female characters with both the poetic elegance of Eastern aesthetics and the overwhelming power of their era. More importantly, the women in 'Yimengshan' are never reduced to mere tools of revolution. The screenwriter uses delicate brushstrokes to preserve their complexity as 'human beings': Haotang silently weeps while caressing the sash left by her husband in the dead of night, and Xiahe trembles as she tidies her hairpin before her sacrifice. These mundane details bring the "heroes" back to life as flesh-and-blood 'human beings.' When they sing in the chorus of 'Love in Yimeng', using the distinctive high-pitched vocals of Yimengshan to proclaim, 'Born as Yimeng people, died as Yimeng souls,' the audience feels not only the nobility of revolutionary faith but also the deep-seated attachment of Chinese women to their land and homeland, unchanged for millennia. This creative approach, which dissolves grand narratives into the warmth of humanity, elevates the female characters in 'Yimengshan' beyond the constraints of a specific era—they are both the ripples in the river of history and the carriers of eternal human brilliance (Li, 2022).

Looking back at the century-long journey of Chinese national opera, from Xier in 'Baimaonv' to the blue cheongsam-clad figure in 'Jiang Jie', from Jinzi in 'The Wilderness' to Haitang in 'Yimengshan', each classic female character answers the questions of the era with her unique artistic language. They may be as resilient as bamboo or as fiery as flame, but they remain deeply connected to the land beneath their feet and the faith in their hearts. Just as the rocks on the summit of Mount Mengshan become more clearly defined through wind and rain erosion, these female characters' blossoming on the opera stage not only records the spiritual transformations of Chinese society but will also continue to illuminate the creative path for future generations, ensuring that the humanistic light of national opera remains as warm and enduring as ever (Li, 2023).

The ‘sound spectrum’ of male characters: a triple narrative of musical language and spiritual symbolism: In the opera ‘Yimengshan,’ each character is portrayed with a distinct personality and background. The work uses ordinary daily life to depict the patriotic sentiments and fearless spirit of ordinary people during a special historical period. The plot revolves around two female characters, “Haitang” and ‘Xiahe.’ In the harsh war years, the soft female characters embody a great and passionate love for the country, leaving a lasting impression. In these deeply moving national operas, there are always special female characters. They are outwardly weak but inwardly unbreakable, deeply embodying the indomitable spirit of the Chinese nation. In ‘Yimengshan,’ Hai Tang and Xia He are like two wildflowers deep in the mountains—their roots and stems covered in dirt and scars, yet they bloom defiantly towards the sky. As Li Yadong said, ‘the sense of national pride in ordinary daily life’ is embodied in them in the most concrete way: the Yimeng folk song that Haotang hums while sewing shoe soles hides her concern for the soldiers, and the trembling characters written by Xiahe under the oil lamp while teaching literacy engrave the spark of enlightenment. Their ‘greatness’ never floats in slogans but is hidden in the folds of their coarse cloth garments—when Hai Tang fills the stage with her back as she sends her husband off to war, when Xia He uses a bloodstained book to cover a wounded soldier's wound, the audience does not see mythologised ‘female heroes’ but the true likeness of countless Yimeng mothers and sisters. This technique of weaving patriotic sentiment into the mundane details of daily life gives the spirit of ordinary people a weight that strikes the heart. The portrayal of women as ‘soft yet strong’ in the play is like using a sewing needle to hold a torch. The contrast between Hai Tang and Xia He is particularly subtle: the former is a traditional woman waiting by the stove for her loved ones to return, using the heart-wrenching melody of ‘Call Out to Mother Once More’ to expose the devastation of war on motherhood; the latter is a revolutionary teacher with short hair and a grey shirt, using the rhythmic melody of ‘My Classroom Is in the Heavens and Earth’ to break through feudal constraints. But where they intersect lies the deepest resilience of the Chinese nation—when the hawthorn tree feeds the last half bowl of porridge to the dying lotus flower, when the lotus flower wraps the secret documents in the hawthorn tree's son's swaddling cloth, and the two women's hands clasp in the cold, the warmth of women is no longer about ‘small, trivial love,’ but is elevated to a life-sustaining mutual aid that transcends class and identity. This setting

transforms ‘patriotic sentiment’ from an abstract concept into a tangible, heartfelt texture: the family is the cell of the nation, the nation is an expanded family, and women are the bloodline that connects the two. What is even more touching is that the work does not shy away from the strength derived from women's vulnerability. Hai Tang's unsteady steps as she bids farewell to her husband, Xia He's silent moments as she sits alone under the moonlight, caressing her hairpin—these ‘soft’ details make their spiritual growth more believable. Like bamboo in a downpour, bending is not surrender, but a means to rebound with greater vitality. When Hai Tang cradles her son's body and sings the lullaby ‘The Stars Blink but Say Nothing,’ and when Xia He hums the tea-picking melody from her childhood before her execution, the melodious tunes transform into steel blades, piercing through the war's trampling of humanity. This narrative wisdom of using feminine softness to overcome the harshness of the times breaks free from the framework of ‘tough guy narratives,’ proving that tears and songs can also build a spiritual Great Wall. From ‘Baimaonv’ to ‘Yimengshan,’ women in Chinese national operas have always stood at the crossroads of history and humanity. They weave the threads of the times with their looms and nourish the soul of the nation with the milk they feed their infants. The figures of the hawthorns remind us: true spiritual monuments are never cold sculptures in the clouds, but living trees that grow from the smoky, earthly world, carrying the warmth of life. When the stage lights illuminate their flour-stained aprons and worn-out cloth shoes, illuminate those palms scorched by war yet still warm, we come to understand: the deepest strength of a nation often lies in the silent embers burning within these ‘fragile’ bodies (Li, 2022).

Intertextuality between the ordinary and the sublime: the fabric of home and country and monuments to humanity in everyday life: The opera ‘Yimengshan’ employs diverse compositional languages to depict distinct characters and emotions. By revealing the three male characters and their musical expressions, it conveys profound emotions and reflections to the audience. It is precisely the intertwining of the characterisation of the three male roles and the musical expression techniques that collectively construct a deeply moving story, prompting the audience to reflect on history, national sentiment, and humanity. Wu Xiao's mention of ‘different musical languages’ in the three core male characters of ‘Yimengshan’ is like three keys with distinct tones, precisely unlocking the door to the audience's understanding of different souls.

Lin Sheng, Sun Jiulong, and Zhao Tuangzhang—these three names are no longer simple character symbols but vibrant lives infused with notes and breathing in the melody. First, Lin Sheng, the husband of Hai Tang. His music is like the morning mist in the Yimengshans, gentle yet tinged with the dampness of farewell. The song ‘Wait for Me, Dear One’ features a long, lingering melody line, imbued with the simplicity and depth characteristic of Yimeng folk tunes. Each time it plays, it feels like a gentle caress on the audience's heart. When he bids farewell to his newlywed wife to head to the battlefield, the song lacks heroic grandeur, instead brimming with longing for ordinary life--“Don’t let the fire in the stove die out; the jujube tree by the door will wait for my return.” This pain of separation wrapped in the most everyday imagery pierces the heart more deeply than any grand rhetoric. Lin Sheng's musical language is the voice of millions of ordinary farmers' children. Their sacrifices are all the more profound because of their deep love for their ‘small family,’ making their contributions to the ‘greater good’ all the more weighty. Village Chief Sun Jiulong, meanwhile, is like a silent rock at the foot of Mount Meng. His music carries the weight of the earth and the weariness of time. The composer’s arrangements for him are often low-key and steady, with rhythms as steady as an old farmer’s steps, even blending the rugged charm of the old-man role in Shandong opera. Especially when he leads the villagers in their struggle against the enemy, his singing lacks the high-pitched shouts, instead using a melody line that is almost a whisper, yet full of resilience, to sing lines like ‘The green mountains bury the loyal bones, and the blood fertilises the soil of Yimeng.’ This restrained sense of strength seems to grow from the depths of the land. Sun Jiulong's music conveys the ‘rootedness’ spirit of being grounded in the countryside and protecting one's homeland, embodying the remarkable sense of responsibility that the silent majority unleashes in times of crisis. The music of Zhao Tuangzhang, the commander of the Eighth Route Army regiment, presents a different atmosphere, like a bugle piercing through the gloom. His melodies are often simple, powerful, and rhythmically distinct, carrying a march-like sense of determination, with the use of brass instruments highlighting his military demeanour (Jiang, 2023). When he sings ‘The Red Flag Flies on Daqing Mountain,’ his voice is loud and open, filled with idealistic passion and unwavering belief in victory. However, this ‘toughness’ is not superficial. When he comforts Hai Tang, who has lost her child, the music quietly slows down, incorporating a touch of the warmth of Yimengshan songs, revealing the

compassion hidden deep within the heart of this iron-blooded soldier. Zhao's musical language symbolises a guiding, unifying faith—a beacon of light piercing the darkness of an era. These three distinct ‘streams of sound’—Lin Sheng's tenderness, Sun Jiulong's resilience, and Zhao's resolve—do not flow in isolation within the play. They occasionally converge and collide, much like the awe-inspiring chorus in ‘Eternal Oath,’ where voices of different pitches and personalities ultimately merge into a single majestic river—the resounding harmony of the national spirit in times of crisis. It is this meticulous musical ‘weaving’ that imbues each character's sacrifices and choices with profound emotional weight, moving audiences not only to tears over the story but also, through the melody's guidance, to touch upon the subtle yet luminous humanity hidden within the folds of history, and to reflect on the value and brilliance of individual destinies amidst the torrent of the times. Wu Xiao puts it succinctly: it is precisely this symphony of ‘sounds’ that truly builds the emotionally resonant Great Wall of Yimengshan (Wu, 2024).

In summary, the opera ‘Yimengshan’ vividly portrays the patriotic sentiments and the brilliance of humanity amidst the chaos of war through the multi-dimensional portrayal of female and male characters. The female characters embody the core of the national spirit during the war era with their resilient qualities, depicting the fearless choices of individuals in extraordinary historical times through ordinary daily life; male characters are deeply intertwined with the musical language, using dramatic emotional expressions to enhance the characters' appeal, together weaving a narrative thread that provokes profound reflection on history and humanity. The artistic portrayal of both genders complements each other, continuing the classic creative tradition of Chinese national opera while also imparting a deeper emotional resonance to the revolutionary theme through delicate brushstrokes.

New Knowledges Remark

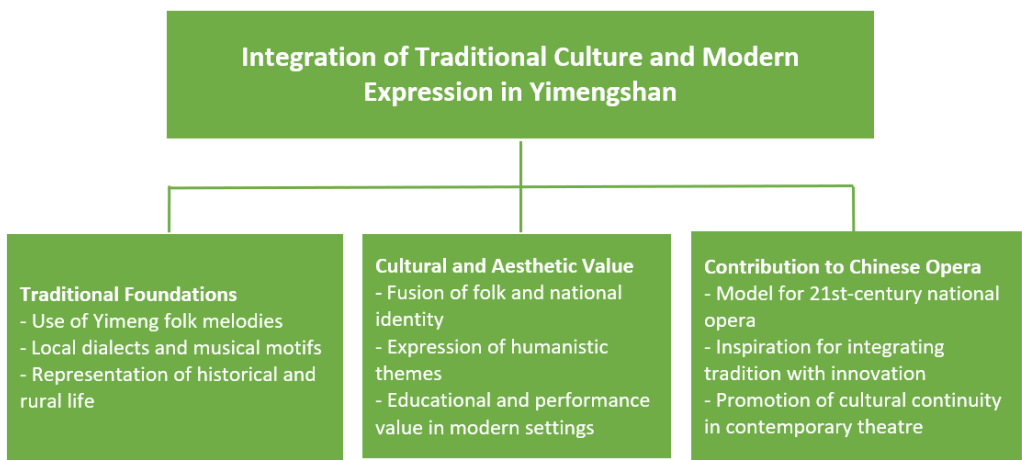


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Integrating Traditional Culture and Modern Expression in the National Opera Yimengshan.

Conclusions

The opera Yimeng Mountain demonstrates how traditional Chinese culture can be revitalized through the lens of modern artistic practice. By combining regional folk music, historically grounded storytelling, and innovative stagecraft, the opera succeeds in creating a narrative that is both emotionally resonant and culturally authentic. The human-centered portrayal of characters, particularly the emphasis on feminine strength and collective sacrifice, elevates the work beyond simple revolutionary tribute and into a broader humanistic expression. The integration of music-first composition, expressive performance, and symbolic stage design affirms the opera’s role as a cultural bridge between past and present. It reflects not only the richness of the Yimeng spirit but also the creative possibilities for Chinese opera in a rapidly changing artistic landscape. As such, Yimeng Mountain serves as a model for the continued growth and modernization of national opera, ensuring that traditional values remain alive and influential in contemporary performance.

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