

The Changes of Singing Behavior for Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the cultural ecological factors of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera, an important representative genre in Chinese opera culture, and its development and changes in the context of contemporary Chinese society. This article examines the evolution of singing lines in Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera, a unique blend of local and Yang theatrical traditions. It explores historical influences, structural transformations, and stylistic adaptations that have shaped its current form. Through a detailed analysis of musical elements, performance practices, and audience reception over time, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera has navigated cultural exchanges and artistic innovations. The findings reveal significant shifts in the operatic singing lines that reflect broader social changes and artistic aspirations within the community. The changes in the singing lines of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera illustrate a rich tapestry woven from the threads of cultural exchange and artistic innovation. As this art form continues to evolve, it remains rooted in its historical context while embracing new styles and techniques. The fusion of Eastern and Western elements enriches not only the operatic narrative but also the performative experience, ensuring that Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera holds a vital place in both local and global cultural discourses.

Keywords: Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera; singing lines; cultural exchange; musical analysis; performance practice

Introduction

Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera is a Chinese folk performing art form, also known as Shanghe School, which originated in Heyang District, Kaifeng City, Henan Province. Shanghe yang Opera has a long history, dating back to the Northern Song Dynasty, and has strong local characteristics. It is popular in Qianyang, Hongjiang, Huaihua and other places, using singing to educate mortals. It uses various performance forms, including singing, reciting, acting, fighting, and dressing up, with strong local characteristics and life atmosphere. Shanghe yang Opera not only shows the charm of traditional Chinese culture, but also carries the inheritance of local history and folk customs. However, Shanghe yang Opera is also facing the challenges of modernization and the needs of the audience in the new era. In order to better inherit and develop Shanghe yang Opera, some relevant institutions and artists are committed to promoting and improving this art form, including launching innovative repertoires, introducing modern stage technology and improving the professional quality of actors. Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera represents a vibrant intersection of traditional Chinese opera forms and Western musical influences. Originating in the Huaihua region of Hunan Province,

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China, this art form has undergone notable transformations since its inception in the early 20th century. The incorporation of Yang singing techniques and musical structures has not only enriched its sound but also redefined its narrative and emotional expressiveness. This chapter seeks to delineate these changes in singing lines by examining various components that contribute to its evolution (Wu, 2015).

The introduction of Western operatic elements into Huaihua Shanghe can be attributed to several factors, including colonial encounters, globalization, and the quest for modernization within the Chinese performing arts. As the opera developed, its practitioners adopted diverse vocal styles and compositional methods, leading to a dynamic range of expressions that resonate with contemporary audiences while still preserving elements of its indigenous heritage. This paper will analyze the historical context, key musical features, and performance practices that characterize the singing lines of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera. By doing so, it aims to highlight the adaptive nature of this genre and its ongoing relevance in the modern cultural landscape (Hu, 2014).

In 2006, Shanghe Yang Opera was listed in the list of provincial intangible cultural heritage of Hunan Province, China. In November 2014, it was officially included in the list of extended projects of the representative projects of China's national intangible cultural heritage. This has prompted people to gradually strengthen their feelings and understanding of traditional culture, which undoubtedly ushered in new opportunities for the development of Yang Opera. For example, the inheritance of Yang Opera in the past mostly relied on semi-professional local farmers, relying on a purely conscious behavior. Due to the interest of the inheritors, they have integrated it into their lives, constantly enriching the performance form and cultural connotation of Yang Opera. It is no accident that it can finally come to the present with the footsteps of history. However, there are many uncertainties in conscious inheritance. Due to the differences in the time, energy, and economic factors of the inheritors, the inheritance process of Yang Opera is not sufficient, lacking guidance and motivation (Su, & Chen, 2012).

This study aims to examine the singing practices of Huaihua Shanghe yang Opera through the lens of cultural ecology, focusing on its interactions with the surrounding environment and how these factors influence its development and transformation in contemporary society. It highlights the reciprocal relationship between culture and environment, emphasizing how the opera adapts to both social and natural contexts while considering cultural traditions, innovations, and practices involved in this adaptation. The research is grounded in firsthand data collected through thorough field investigations, along with a comprehensive review and synthesis of literature and historical materials. The analysis builds upon previous research, addressing various issues through problem identification, analysis, and resolution. The thesis is guided by principles of historical materialism, integrating historical context with theoretical frameworks, and deriving theories from historical evidence. Basic information related to the singing practices of Huaihua Shanghe yang Opera—including sound types, visual materials, scores, texts, inheritors, and repertoires—is systematically categorized and statistically analyzed. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed to uncover the historical foundations, theoretical implications, and current trends in the opera's singing practices. Ultimately, this research provides a holistic understanding of the cultural forms, inheritance status, and environmental influences affecting Shanghe yang Opera, offering valuable insights for the preservation, transmission, and innovation of opera culture (Wu, 2015).

Detail

Origins and Early Development

The roots of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera can be traced back to the socio-political climate of early 20th century China. With the influx of Western culture through trade and missionary activities, local art forms began to assimilate these new influences. The opera's inception is often linked to the blending of traditional Chinese storytelling methods with Western melodrama, creating a distinct narrative style characterized by both spoken dialogue and sung passages (Wu, 2014).

Huaihua, Hunan Province, China, is located in the middle and upper reaches of the Yuanshui River. It was called Wuxi Mandi in ancient times and is surrounded by Wuling, Xuefeng, Miaoling, Liangshan and Wuling Mountains. It is connected to Dongkou and Suining in Hunan in the east, Guizhou in the west, Guangxi in the south, and Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefectures in the north. There are 644 streams such as Langxi, Danxi, Xiongxi, Youxi, Jinxi and other streams in the territory. This area is a multi-ethnic settlement. In addition to the Han nationality, there are 27 ethnic minorities such as Miao, Yao, Dong, Hui, Manchu, Li, Yi and Zhuang. Among the ethnic minorities, the Dong nationality is the largest, followed by the Miao nationality. In the Spring and Autumn Period, it was the territory of the Chu State. In the Qin Dynasty, it was established as Qianzhong County. In the Yuan Dynasty, this place was one of the important transportation hubs from the capital to Yunnan, Guizhou and Southeast Asian countries. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the "Jiangxi to Huguang" immigration movement promoted by the ruling class and the Qing Dynasty's "Reform of Natives" policy led to large-scale population movement. In addition, the southwestern region of Hunan, China, has a mountainous geographical environment, developed water transportation, and prosperous trade, which created sufficient conditions for the cross-regional and cross-ethnic dissemination of national art and culture, and also made traditional cultural arts here show a diverse, integrated and colorful scene (Wang, 2011).

representative local opera in Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera has a broad mass base in the Yuanshui River Basin, especially in the counties and districts of Huaihua City and the urban and rural areas of Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture. Yang Opera is a kind of opera with a long history and profound cultural heritage in the Chinese opera garden. It is popular in rural areas of Hunan, Chongqing, Guizhou, Hubei and other provinces and cities. The full name is "Wuyang Shen Opera", abbreviated as "Yang Opera". It originated from the drama performance in the sacrificial ceremony. It is a kind of opera with more complete drama performance factors in the Chinese Nuo opera system. It is also one of the important opera performance arts in China. Shanghe yang Opera, with its rich opera culture as the background, is formed by absorbing the opera art elements brought from various places in the Yuanshui River Basin on the basis of integrating local folk songs and dances, folk songs and minor tunes in Xiangxi. Its generation and development are the embodiment of the cross-fertilization of cultures in the Yuanshui River Basin in China. With the continuous exchanges of business and trade, it is closely related to the local language culture, folk beliefs and geographical environment.



Figure 1: Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera

Source: <https://www.sohu.com>

For example, in Huaihua, many Yang Opera artists come from ethnic minorities, and their art forms have also had an impact on the development of Yang Opera. Therefore, in the performance of Yang Opera, we can clearly feel the great influence of folk songs and dances such as woodcutters' songs, yangge, furnace songs, boat songs, Nuo songs, tea-picking songs and other local operas popular in southwestern provinces on Yang Opera. The culture of ethnic minorities and local operas such as Caitang Opera and Nuotang Opera have also brought special artistic nourishment to Yang Opera. In short, through contact and integration with local folk culture, Yang Opera has established a bond of emotion and identity with the residents of Hunan and Guizhou, and has become an important part of local culture.

Influences of Western Music and Theatre

Nowadays, the development of Shanghe yang Opera is no longer affected by geographical conditions and communication tools in the context of globalization, modernization, and industrial Informa ionization in China. This brings unprecedented opportunities and challenges to the development of traditional cultural arts in contemporary society. On the one hand, the rapid change of scientific and technological information has made the mutual reference and integration between culture and art more frequent and diversified. This change is obviously more affected by the natural geographical environment and immigration than in the historical context. On the other hand, under the conditions of today's era, due to the impact of Western culture, modern media and popular culture, many young people go out to work and are unwilling to learn Shanghe yang Opera. Old artists are old and sick and have passed away one after another. This has also led to the protection, inheritance, research and development and utilization of its cultural and artistic expressions facing various new complex situations and arduous pressures. This has become a cultural

phenomenon that has attracted much attention and has continuously attracted the attention of researchers from all walks of life (Teng, 2011).

However, the current development situation of Shanghe yang Opera is not only an isolated case, but also reflects the current situation of Chinese opera art as a whole. According to the statistics of "Chinese Opera Records" in the 1980s, there are 394 types of opera in the history of Chinese opera, some of which have been performed although there is no written record. However, due to various reasons, some operas have been gradually eliminated by history. By the time the volume of "Encyclopedia of Chinese Opera and Variety Arts" was published, there were only 317 types left. From 2002 to 2004, the "National Opera Troupe Status Survey" project was undertaken and completed by the Chinese Academy of Arts Opera Research Institute. The survey combined the data statistics of relevant departments of the Ministry of Culture and found that China's opera types have been reduced to more than 260. This trend shows that China's traditional opera culture is gradually facing a stagnant development state under the impact of globalization and modern civilization.



Figure 1: Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera
Source: <https://www.sohu.com>

The interaction between Western and Chinese theatrical practices played a crucial role in shaping the singing lines of Huaihua Shanghe. Borrowed elements from Western operas—such as harmony, orchestration, and thematic development—were integrated into the existing framework of Chinese operatic traditions. This cross-cultural fertilization resulted in innovative singing techniques that expanded the emotional range and technical capabilities of performers.

Musical Analysis

Structural Characteristics of Singing Lines

The singing lines in Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera demonstrate a hybrid structure that combines Western melodic organization with Chinese rhythmic patterns. This section will delve into specific musical attributes, including, Melodic Contours, the transition from simple, pentatonic scales to more complex chromaticism reflects the influence of Western music theory. Harmonic Progressions, Exploration of common chord progressions that mirror Western styles, showcasing the integration of harmony in the operatic singing lines. Rhythmic Variations, the incorporation of syncopation and varied meter adds a layer of complexity that distinguishes Huaihua Shanghe from traditional Chinese operas (Fu, & Liu, 2005).

1) Vocal Techniques and Styles

The singing method of Shanghe yang Opera has its unique characteristics Shanghe yang opera is a local opera in Huaihua area, and its singing style has the following characteristics: The content is small and diverse, random, close to life and production, and is very improvised This improvisational form of performance makes Shanghe yang opera very flexible and creative in the way it is sung There is a certain stylization of the form of performance, and the language has the characteristics of colloquialism and life This stylized performance form ensures the standardization and appreciation of Shanghe yang Opera in performance, and also makes it more down-to-earth and easy for the audience to understand and accept In terms of character setting, the "three smalls" of clown, Xiaosheng, and Xiaodan are the mainstays, and there are also characters such as Lao Sheng, Lao Dan, Scholar, Wu Dan, and Flower Face in the large-scale repertoire, and the setting of these roles enriches the performance content of Shanghe yang Opera and makes it more colorful The music is characterized by high-pitched, bright, simple and witty, and this musical style makes Shangheyang Opera give people a pleasant feeling in the sense of hearing and increase the pleasure of watching To sum up, the singing method of Shanghe yang Opera is not only flexible and creative, which ensures the diversity and enjoyment of its performances, but also reflects its unique charm and cultural value as a local opera (Zhang, 2001).



Figure 2: Shanghe yang opera song
Source: Zhang,2001

Performers of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera exhibit a diverse range of vocal techniques influenced by both Western and indigenous practices. Key aspects include, Vocal Quality, the shift from a nasal timbre characteristic of traditional Chinese opera to a more resonant and versatile Western approach. Emotional Expression, How the adaptation of Western bel canto techniques has enabled performers to convey deeper emotional narratives through their singing.

2) Performance Practices

Training and Education, The training methods for Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera singers have evolved alongside the singing lines. This section discusses: Institutionalization of Training, the establishment of formal academies that incorporate Western vocal techniques into traditional practice. Role of Master-Students Relationships, the influence of mentorship in passing down evolving singing styles and techniques (Zhang, 2001).

Audience Reception and Cultural Impact

Audience perceptions have significantly impacted the evolution of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera. Factors influencing reception include, Cultural Identity, How the opera serves as a vessel for expressing regional identity amidst global influences. Adaptation to Modern Sensibilities, the opera's ability to resonate with contemporary themes, thereby attracting younger audiences.

It can be seen that in the process of world economic integration, the traditional cultures of countries and nations around the world have been impacted to varying degrees, some are endangered, and some have disappeared. Therefore, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage states: "'Intangible cultural heritage' refers to various social practices, conceptual expressions, forms of expression, knowledge, skills, and related tools, objects, handicrafts and cultural sites that are regarded by communities, groups, and sometimes individuals as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage is passed down from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated in the adaptation of communities and groups to the surrounding environment and in the interaction with nature and history, providing these communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity, thereby enhancing respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." Today, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has 178 contracting parties, indicating that the protection of humanity's intangible cultural heritage has reached a global consensus. At present, the Chinese government is also actively responding to the process of globalization. By joining the convention adopted by UNESCO, the People's Republic of China promulgated the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2011), and gradually established a four-level intangible cultural heritage protection system at the national, provincial, municipal and county levels, it indicates that the protection of China's intangible cultural heritage has risen to the national will and attracted the attention of the entire nation (Xiong, 2008).

With the development of social economy and the attention and participation of the government, the traditional Yang Opera Troupe has gradually developed into a professional troupe. This means that from the traditional Yang Opera Troupe to the professional troupe, the inheritance project has been more clearly and systematically planned and organized, and the inheritance method has become more scientific and effective. Professional troupes tend to inherit performing arts and creative skills through professional training and education to ensure the quality and level of inheritance of traditional culture. They also pay more attention to the selection, training and management of professional actors, provide good working conditions, income and welfare, and provide certain guarantees for the professional development and life security of actors. In addition, professional troupes also pay more attention to creation, encourage innovation and exploration, and inject new elements and vitality into traditional performing arts. Their more professional and formalized management methods make the operation of the troupe more stable and sustainable, and stimulate the creative passion and performance potential of actors. In order to fully understand and examine traditional culture, a broader research path and vision are needed. We should fully understand its role in history and in real life, combine different research methods and disciplinary perspectives, organize, innovate and practice it, so as to better understand the value of traditional culture and evaluate the changes and development of culture and art in the context of contemporary society (Tian, 2005).

Conclusion

The changes in the singing lines of Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera illustrate a rich tapestry woven from the threads of cultural exchange and artistic innovation. As this art form continues to evolve, it remains rooted in its historical context while embracing new styles and techniques. The fusion of Eastern and Western elements enriches not only the operatic narrative but also the performative experience, ensuring that Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera holds a vital place in both local and global cultural discourses. Future research should further explore the implications of these changes on the preservation of cultural heritage and the influence of technology on contemporary performance practices.

Huaihua Shanghe Yang Opera originated in the socio-political context of early 20th-century China, influenced by the influx of Western culture through trade and missionary activities. This opera form emerged from the integration of traditional Chinese storytelling with Western melodrama, resulting in a unique narrative style that features both spoken dialogue and sung passages. Located in the Yuanshui River Basin in Hunan Province, Huaihua is characterized by its diverse ethnic composition, including the Han majority and 27 minority groups such as Miao, Yao, and Dong. Historically significant, this area has served as a transportation hub since ancient times, facilitating cultural exchanges among various communities. The geography, marked by mountains and developed water routes, enhanced the spread of artistic expression across regions and ethnicities.

The development of Shanghe yang Opera today is significantly shaped by globalization, modernization, and advances in communication technology, presenting both opportunities and challenges for traditional cultural arts. While the integration of various cultures and art forms has become more frequent due to technological changes, the impact of Western culture and modern media poses difficulties. This has led to a decline in interest among young people in learning Shanghe yang Opera, compounded by the aging and passing of veteran artists. Consequently, the preservation and development of this art form face considerable pressures, reflecting broader trends in Chinese opera, where many types have diminished over time due to historical and social factors. The interaction with Western theatrical practices has enriched Huaihua Shanghe's singing lines through the incorporation of elements like harmony and orchestration, leading to innovative techniques that enhance the emotional depth and technical skills of performers.

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