A Study on the Singing Style of Yao Shuijuan

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Abstract: This article mainly starts from the perspective of the development and changes of Yue opera singing style in the study of Yao Shuijuan's Yue opera performance. Yao Shuijuan is the second most influential representative figure of women's Yue opera after Shi Yinhua. She was the first to improve Yue opera, choreograph and perform new plays, and brought Yue opera into a new stage of development. She made an indelible contribution to the rise of women's Yue opera in Shanghai.

Keywords: Yao Shuijuan, Yue Opera, Singing style, Women's Yue Opera.

1. Current Status of Research on Opera Music

Since 1949, the musicology community has made many achievements in the study of Chinese opera music. There are books of reference nature, such as Records of Chinese Opera, Integration of Chinese Opera Music, Research on Chinese Opera Music, Essays on Chinese Opera Music, Dictionary of Chinese Opera Art, Concise Dictionary of Chinese Opera Music, etc. as well as books dedicated to one type of opera, such as Qin Opera Music, Introduction to Yue Opera Tunes, Appreciation of Peking Opera Schools, Preliminary Exploration of Peking Opera Singing, and Random Talk of Han Opera Music. The rich achievements of music research.

If you want to study traditional Chinese opera music, "Integrated Chinese Opera Music" is an indispensable important literature material. The compilation of this book has established a solid and rich database for the subsequent research of opera music, and has carefully preserved and recorded some unclear and soon to be lost opera singing styles. When studying a specific type, it is necessary to grasp the characteristics of traditional Chinese opera music, namely its qualitative regularity, in order to distinguish it from other types of music such as folk songs, rap music, song and dance music, and instrumental music. According to the preface of "Integration of Chinese Opera Music", "Opera art is a song and dance drama with Chinese national characteristics. In addition to the common features of theatrical art, it also has its own independent theatrical variety, unique means of expression, namely its own language, movements, and the performance art forms formed from it." This is the "Four Skills": singing, recitation, composition, and beating. Among them, "singing, recitation" belong to the category of music, and "composition, beating" belong to the category of dance, which together constitute the theatrical characteristics with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, if you want to study opera music, you must first explore the relationship with music from the four aspects of singing, recitation, composition, and beating. Singing "refers to singing, including singing style and singing techniques; 'Nian' refers to recitation, including rhyme, recitation, counting board, and dialogue; 'Do' refers to body posture, including programmed actions; 'Da' refers to martial arts, including the use of martial arts and high difficulty techniques. Therefore, opera music is the 'soul' of opera art. It can perfectly integrate poetic language and programmed movements, combining melody and recitation, allowing people to appreciate the external form of opera characters while feeling the changes and conflicts in their emotions. It is worth mentioning that when the Zhejiang Institute of Culture and Arts compiled the "Zhejiang Volume of Chinese Opera Music Integration", it was found that there was a certain degree of irrationality in the arrangement of opera genres. Therefore, it re compiled the "Opera Music Categories" according to the structure of opera music, dividing opera music into three categories and nine categories.

After the compilation of encyclopedic works such as "Integration of Chinese Opera Music", research on opera music emerged one after another. Cai Jizhou and Hu Jian once searched and classified literature on opera music from 1950 to 2011. In the article "Overview of Contemporary Opera Music Research (1950-2011) - Research Report from" China Knowledge Network", it was divided into six categories. The first is the study of music ontology, which is a type of research on the internal structure and morphological characteristics of opera music; The second type of research is the study of historical origins, which aims to verify the origin of a certain vocal style or theatrical genre; The third is the study of geographical distribution, which examines the geographical spatial conditions of traditional Chinese opera music; The fourth is the study of dissemination and transformation, which is a type of research on the development and evolution of traditional Chinese opera music in different times and spaces; Five is the study of cultural background, which is the research on the living environment and interrelationships of traditional Chinese opera music; Six is the study of cultural connotations, which is a research that interprets and explains the cultural significance, characteristics, reasons, attributes, functions, etc. of opera music. The above classification methods clearly define the research results of opera music and provide clear ideas for later scholars' research.

2. Current Research Status on Yue Opera

Yue Opera, as one of the most influential traditional Chinese operas in Zhejiang Province, was first studied in the late 1930s. According to research, Shanghai published books introducing the style of Yue Opera, such as "Shaoxing Opera Exam" in 1939 and "Yue Opera King" in 1941. At the same time, Shanghai published "Yao Shuijuan Special Collection", "Zhu Su'e Special Edition", "Ma Zhanghua Special Collection" and other works in 1939 to introduce the actors of Yue Opera. Later, research on the systematic introduction of Yue Opera as an important genre began in the 1950s. In 1951, Sanlian Bookstore published "Yue Opera" (edited by Zhong Qin), in 1952, Shanghai New Literature and Art Publishing House published "Introduction to East China Local Opera"
(edited by the Art Management Department of the East China Literature and Art Department), in 1952, Shanghai Guoguang Bookstore published "Research on Yue Opera Tunes" (edited by Xun Tao), in 1953, Zhejiang People's Publishing House published "Introduction to Yue Opera Tunes" (edited by Lu Bingrong and Zhou Dafeng), and in 1952, Shanghai Labor Publishing House, 1956 Shanghai Culture Publishing House, and 1958 Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House all published "Yue Opera Tunes" (edited by Chen Jie and Xue Yan). In 1957, Donghai Literature and Art Publishing House published "New Compilation of Yue Opera Tunes" (compiled by the music group of Zhejiang Yue Opera Troupe). In 1960, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House published "Research on Yue Opera Singing Techniques" (edited by Zhou Dafeng) and others.

Later, with the continuous heating up of traditional music research in the Chinese musicology community, research on Yue opera art quickly sparked a wave of enthusiasm. As of 2021, there are mainly five types of monographs on Yue opera published in China, namely research on Yue opera actors, such as "Memoirs of Yue Opera Artists" published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1982 and compiled by the editorial department of "Culture and Entertainment", "Yuan Xuefen's Artistic Path" published by Zhang Lilhua and Gao Yilong in 1984, "Fan Ruijuan's Performing Arts" published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House and compiled by Wu Zhaofen, etc., "Qi Yaxian's Performing Arts" published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House and edited by Fu Jun in 1992, and "Nanjing Publishing House" in 1994. Published by Xie Zihua, entitled 'Famous Yue Opera, Excellent Shang Fangchen', The Collected Works of Yuan Xuefen published by China Opera Press in 2003.


The third type of research on historical Yue opera art mainly includes "Yue Opera Art" published by Shanghai Audio Visual Reading Press in 1993, and "Yue Opera Art Theory" published by China Drama Press in 2009.


As can be seen from the above, the research results on Yue Opera are very rich, laying a certain foundation for future generations' continued research.

3. Yao Shuijuan's Related Research

Yue Opera has been developing for 115 years and has risen from a local genre to the second largest in the country. This achievement is due to the super acting skills and graceful singing of Yue Opera actors. The author has compiled and analyzed the research results on Yao Shuijuan, and the results are as follows:

According to the preface of Zhou Dafeng's "Yue Opera School Singing", there are several standards for the formation of a school singing style: firstly, an actor has formed a very obvious and unique style in the organization of the melody, the refinement of the singing style, the characteristics of the pronunciation, the techniques of expression, and the use of sound. Secondly, its singing style is recognized and familiar to a wide audience. Thirdly, its singing style has been explored or utilized by other actors in this play, and even developed on this basis. Fourthly, its forms and techniques of expression have enriched and promoted the development of this genre to varying degrees. Zhou Dafeng believes that only when a certain actor's singing style meets the above requirements can it become a mature and convincing genre. Under this standard, the more popular offline schools include Yuan School, Fan School, Fu School, Xu School, Yin School,
Qi School, etc. Among them, Yuan School, which played a crucial role in the development of Yue Opera, was deeply influenced by Yao Shuijuans singing style. Therefore, research on Yao Shuijuans singing style is of certain value.

3.1 Research on Yao Shuijuans Autobiographical Literature

Yao Shuijuans life, like Yuan Xuefens, is from Shengxian County, Zhejiang Province. Her original name was Yao Wenxian and she was a famous performer of Yue Opera. With her exquisite skills and rich stage experience, she promoted the reform and development of Yue Opera and was once known as the "Queen of Yue Opera". Yao Shuijuans devoted herself entirely to the development of Yue Opera, but compared to popular Yue Opera singing styles such as Yuan School, Fan School, and Yin School, there is currently less research on Yao Shuijuans Yue Opera performance art in academia. The author has compiled her research results, and the results are as follows:

In the book "Yue Opera Actors Talk about Performance" published by Shandong Literature and Art Publishing House in 1957, Yao Shuijuans article based on her own industry experience titled "How I Play Dan Characters", which focuses on explaining the basic performance techniques of various roles, especially on performance procedures and how to analyze characters. In this article, Yao Shuijuang elaborated in detail from four perspectives: singing, reciting, acting, and hitting. Yao Shuijuang believes that Yue opera actors mainly attract audiences with their authentic and delicate performances, as well as their beautiful and easy to understand singing style, so singing style is equally important as performance. In terms of singing and recitation, the key for actors to practice "singing and recitation" well is to have clear pronunciation. If the pronunciation is not clear, it will cause the audience to feel uneasy due to the inability to satisfy their desire to watch the play. Yao Shuijuang said, "In order to handle the singing style well and make the pronunciation clear, I always study the lyrics paragraph by paragraph after studying the script for each character I accept, making sure the melody is smooth." In terms of stage steps, Yao Shuijuang recalled her childhood learning experience, which only had two sentences: the heel landed on the ground, and most of the soles of the feet were facing upwards. Later, she developed her own training mode by combining the dan stage steps from Peking Opera. In terms of Yue opera performance, Zhang Geng said, "Every book must have a program. The program is the foundation of artistic expression of life. Without a program, there would be no art." Yao Shuijuang added based on this viewpoint that using Yue opera "Panfu" to specifically describe the experience of performing Dan roles, "To play a role well, we must study and analyze the characters and plot well, that is, we must start from life."

In terms of autobiographical literature, it is worth mentioning the "Yao Shuijuans Special Collection". At that time, in order to promote Peking Opera actors, a special collection of top performers was edited and published. However, the "Yao Shuijuans Special Collection" edited to commemorate the first anniversary of Yao Shuijuans Shanghai performance was the first work by Yue Opera actors. As content: The cover has a title, photo, and header illustration; There are 41 still photos of Yao Shuijuans, 18 poems with titles, and 1 comic on the copperplate paper of the "Preface"; There are 45 articles in the "Lin Lang Man Paper" column; The "Pearl Jade" column has 14 short articles; There are 84 inscriptions, 2 couplets, 3 paintings, and 1 comic, with over 200 celebrity names on the book. The book found that the majority of the contributors in this monograph are friends of Fan Dimin, such as Wei Shaochang, Cai Yuying, etc. At the same time, although most of the contributors acknowledge that Yao Shuijuans is a pioneer of Yue opera, compared to Yao Shuijuans themselves, they are more female Yue opera writers in the column. Wei Shaochang said in the "Special Collection": "Of course, the content is mostly praising words, but it has a wide range of content, including many influential people from all walks of life. This reflects from another aspect that people from all walks of life had already attached great importance to Yue opera at that time.

3.2 Research on Yao Shuijuans Yue Opera Performance Art

There are many papers discussing Yao Shuijuans contribution to the development of Yue Opera, such as Zhongshan's "On the Yue Opera Improvement Movement of Yao Shuijuans and Fan Dimin", which systematically summarizes Yao Shuijuans practical trajectory in the women's Yue Opera improvement movement from the perspective of Yue Opera history. In the 1930s, in Shanghai, among many female classes, Yao Shuijuang had the highest box office revenue. However, after performing for six months, considering that the single purpose of the play would make the audience feel tired, she hired journalist Fan Dimin from Ta Kung Pao to write the script, such as "Mulan". In addition, Yao Shuijuang compared herself with Xiao Dangu: "Xiao Danguis appearance is more beautiful than mine, and her singing and acting are better. I am at my wit's end and particularly skilled in performing romantic dramas. However, I enjoy performing tragedies and am not skilled in acting romantic dramas. Compared to her, I am not as good as her. However, Yao Shuijuang carefully examined their respective strengths and weaknesses and found that simply repeating old plays was not enough. It was necessary to choreograph new plays that could appeal to Shanghai audiences and adapt to the times. Wei Shaochang believes that Yao Shuijuangs ability to capture strong fans and create good relationships with the media industry is the key to her opening up new paths. Therefore, Yao Shuijuang found capable directors and literary scripts that could showcase her acting skills, which coincides with the direction of the theater industry at that time.

In addition, there is also Wang Xinxis "Interpretation of Yao Shuijuans Yue Opera Performance and Innovation". She believes that under Yao Shuijuans leadership, Yue Opera has produced a large number of performance and editing plays, and the form of performance has also undergone significant changes: from lighting and scenery to costumes and headwear, there have been changes. The management system has been changed from a squad leader system to a cooperative manager system, and theater troupes named after actors, such as the "Shuijuans Theater Troupe", have emerged. Communication methods that are suitable for the urban performance market, such as advertisements, posters, and promotional reports, have also appeared in large numbers. All of these indicate that
Yue Opera has integrated into the city and embarked on the path of modernization with vitality. "It can be said without exaggeration that it was initiated by Yao Shujiang. The reform that began in 1938 made Shaoxing women's cultural opera become Yue opera, shining brightly in Shanghai and becoming an influential genre at that time.

Zheng Ruitang and Tian Chenggong once summarized Yao Shujiang's contribution to the reform of the performance mechanism of Yue Opera from the perspective of the development of Yue Opera in "Remembering the Pioneer of Yue Opera Reform and Promoting Male Female Joint Performance - Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Yao Shujiang's Death". "Yao Shujiang and Yue Opera's male female joint performance are closely connected and closely matched. If Yao Shujiang was the banner bearer of Yue Opera reform from the 1930s to the early 1940s, and she made great contributions to the development of Yue Opera and was one of the founders of women's Yue Opera, then we can say that Yao Shujiang was a pioneer of Yue Opera reform in the 1950s and a leader in male female joint performance, which is worth commemorating and learning from.

3.3 Yao Shujiang's Life and Artistic Experience

There are relatively many articles about Yao Shujiang's life and artistic experience. Yuan Sihong's "Remembering the Famous Yue Opera Actor Yao Shujiang" mainly tells the story of Yao Shujiang's performance experience from 1930 to 1938. During this period, Yao Shujiang gradually found her own performance style and was highly sought after by many opera fans. In Chen Yulin's article "Three Behind the Scenes Heroes of the Hundred Year Yue Opera", a detailed list of the plays that Yao Shujiang had appeared in was provided, as well as her relationship with the media and newspapers at the time, indirectly reflecting her high box office success in the fiercely competitive Shanghai performance market. Zhou Libo's "Chronology of Yao Shujiang's Life" provides a detailed account of the entire story from Yao Shujiang's birth in 1916 (the 5th year of the Republic of China) to her death in 1976, arranged in chronological order. Starting from the age of 15 when she joined Yuexin Stage to study opera, Yao Shujiang embarked on her life journey of working in Yuejiu and exploring the changes in Yuejiu. Especially after she entered Shanghai with her troupe in 1938 and left the stage in 1946 due to marriage, the plays and characters portrayed by Yao Shujiang left a profound impression on every fan who loved her.

Similar articles include Ge Baodong's "Fan Dimin and Yao Shujiang", Jiang Zhongqi's "On Yao Shujiang's Contribution to Chinese Yue Opera - Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Yao Shujiang's Birth", and Chen Jian's "Record of Famous Teachers at Zhejiang Vocational College of Arts: Yao Shujiang". Most of them explain Yao Shujiang's contributions from the perspective of her life experiences, and there is some repetition in the content. The author will not elaborate on them one by one here.

4. Epilogue

In summary, research related to Yao Shujiang currently involves many aspects and has achieved certain results. Among them, although the study of Yao Shujiang's vocal art based on music has some involvement, the research has a long history and a single level, and there is still room for further expansion.

References