

# 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 Lihua 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, titled 'Famous Yue Opera, Excellent Shang Fangchen', The Collected Works of Yuan Xuefen published by China Opera Press in 2003.

The second type is the study of the history of Yue Opera, such as the "Early History of Yue Opera Development" published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1983, compiled by the Cultural Bureau of Shengxian County and the Yue Opera Development History Compilation Group, the "Academic Discussion on Yue Opera Reform" jointly compiled by Shanghai Art Research Institute and Zhejiang Provincial Art Research Institute in 1983, the "Tracing the Origins of Yue Opera" published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House and the Cultural and Historical Materials Committee of Shengxian Political Consultative Conference in 1992, the "Returning to Brilliance - A Collection of Essays on the Fifty Years of Shanghai Yue Opera Reform" published by China Theatre Publishing House and edited by Gao Yilong and Lu Shijun in 1994, the "Yue Opera Chronicle" published by Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House and compiled by Shengzhou Municipal People's Government in 2008, and the "Yue Opera Chronicles" published by Zhejiang University Press in 2012, edited by Zhang Shijun. Yanmei's book "Where Chinese Drama is Heading: A Study of Chinese Yue Opera in the Past 20 Years" and others.

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.

The fourth type of research on music and aria of Shiyue Opera mainly includes: Selections of aria of Yueju Opera by

Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House in 1980, Selections of aria of Yueju Opera by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1981 (written by Zhou Dafeng), Collections of Ten sisters Songs of Yueju Opera by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1983 (edited by Xiang Guansen), Selections of 18 Famous Yueju Opera Actors by Shanghai Music Publishing House in 1989 (edited by Xiang Guansen), Selections of aria of Yueju Opera by Nanjing Publishing House (edited by Qian Fusheng), Introduction to Yueju Opera Music by Zhejiang People's Music Publishing House in 1995 (written by Zhou Dafeng), and Selections of 18 Famous Yueju Opera Actors by Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House in 1998 Songs of Yueju Opera (written by Jin Qinfu), A Collection of Small Hundred Flowers and Famous Pieces of Chinese Yueju Opera (edited by Gu Dingqing) published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1999, and Appreciation of Yueju Opera Songs (written by Lian Bo) published by Shanghai Music Publishing House in 2001, In 2006, the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles published "A New Discussion on the Music of Yue Opera over the Past Century" by Zhou Laida.

The fifth category is the study of Yue Opera plays, mainly including "Yue Opera Play Exam" published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1981 (compiled by Zhejiang People's Publishing House), "Yue Opera Small Play Exam" published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House in 1982 (compiled by Shanghai People's Broadcasting Station), "Yue Opera Play Exam Continuation" published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1986 (compiled by Fan Jingfen), and "New Yue Opera Play Exam" published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1998 (compiled by Xie Zhong and Wen Ning).

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 superb 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 Shuijuan's singing style. Therefore, research on Yao Shuijuan's singing style is of certain value.

### 3.1 Research on Yao Shuijuan's Autobiographical Literature

Yao Shuijuan, like Yuan Xuefen, 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan's 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 Shuijuan wrote an 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 Shuijuan elaborated in detail from four perspectives: singing, reciting, acting, and hitting. Yao Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan Special Collection" edited to commemorate the first anniversary of Yao Shuijuan's 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 Shuijuan, 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 author 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 Shuijuan is a pioneer of Yue opera, compared to Yao Shuijuan herself, 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 Shuijuan's Yue Opera Performance Art

There are many papers discussing Yao Shuijuan's contribution to the development of Yue Opera, such as Zhongshan's "On the Yue Opera Improvement Movement of Yao Shuijuan and Fan Dimin", which systematically summarizes Yao Shuijuan's 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan compared herself with Xiao Dangui: "Xiao Dangui's 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan's ability to capture strong fans and create good relationships with the media industry is the key to her opening up new paths. Therefore, Yao Shuijuan 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 Xinxin's "Interpretation of Yao Shuijuan's Yue Opera Performance and Innovation". She believes that under Yao Shuijuan's 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 "Shuiyun 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 Shuijuan. 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 Shuijuan'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 Shuijuan's Death". "Yao Shuijuan and Yue Opera's male female joint performance are closely connected and closely matched. If Yao Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan's Life and Artistic Experience

There are relatively many articles about Yao Shuijuan's life and artistic experience. Yuan Sihong's "Remembering the Famous Yue Opera Actor Yao Shuijuan" mainly tells the story of Yao Shuijuan's performance experience from 1930 to 1938. During this period, Yao Shuijuan gradually found her own performance style and was highly sought after by many opera fans. In Chen Yuanlin's article "Three Behind the Scenes Heroes of the Hundred Year Yue Opera", a detailed list of the plays that Yao Shuijuan 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 Shuijuan's Life" provides a detailed account of the entire story from Yao Shuijuan'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 Shuijuan embarked on her life journey of working in Yueju and exploring the changes in Yueju. 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 Shuijuan left a profound impression on every fan who loved her.

Similar articles include Ge Baodong's "Fan Dimin and Yao Shuijuan", Jiang Zhongqi's "On Yao Shuijuan's Contribution to Chinese Yue Opera - Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Yao Shuijuan's Birth", and Chen Jian's "Record of Famous Teachers at Zhejiang Vocational College of Arts: Yao Shuijuan". Most of them explain Yao Shuijuan'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 Shuijuan currently involves many aspects and has achieved certain results.

Among them, although the study of Yao Shuijuan'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.

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