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The Evolution of Chinese Opera Performance: A Case Study of Qian Opera

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to study the evolution mechanism of Chinese opera performance using Qian Opera, which has strong local characteristics, a long history, and is loved by the people of Guizhou, as a research sample. The research method is to select the two classic and contemporary representative plays, "Qin Niangmei" and "Tianqu," and use research methods such as literature research and field surveys (interviews, observations) to carry out the changes and development of performance forms in a comparative study. The research results show that the performance form of Qian Opera will form a performance pattern with a fixed paradigm and beautiful features in a specific period, region, cultural category, and context. In addition, the past performance patterns (performer side) will create new performance forms due to the change in aesthetic form (audience side) to meet the aesthetic requirements of the contemporary era. The research results can help excellent artists break through certain limitations of the formula in their creative thinking and create their own personalized and standardized art.

Keywords: Chinese opera, Qian opera, Performance form, Evolution mechanism

Introduction

Guizhou Opera is a characteristic opera type in Guizhou, China. It originated from the playing and singing performance form of Wenqin Opera. It was formally named in the 1960s and has been developed since the 1960s. The content of the performance is mainly to show the lives of real people. The performance form has always adhered to the local ethnic



characteristics of Guizhou. In terms of the classification of art performance forms, Qian Opera can be classified as folk performance art.

Looking back at the definition of folklore performance, in terms of the common understanding of folklore performances, scholars at home and abroad basically agree that folklore performances are cultural exchange activities among people in a region, a nation, or a specific language environment. In terms of the differences in folklore performances, different scholars think more about folklore performances as an artistic medium of people's communication and the differences in performance content, functions, characteristics, and performance methods. This research focuses on the historical development process and historical development laws of folklore performance forms in specific contexts, so Qianju opera, a local Chinese opera, is specially selected as a research sample to study the evolution mechanism of Chinese opera performance forms.

In the course of its historical development, Chinese opera has developed a variety of performance patterns. Artists refine and process real-life phenomena through their own artistic patterns, forming operas with regional, language, national, and individual characteristics of the artist. culture and art. As Yang Yinliu said, Chinese opera, as a comprehensive stage art that integrates many art categories, was closely related to folk customs, society, and regional and national characteristics at the beginning of its birth. The changes in its interpretation form both reflect the local national characteristics and the people's spiritual outlook and artistic aesthetic concepts. Therefore, we might as well examine Chinese opera art from the perspective of artistic aesthetics. As a social activity, the aesthetics of opera is an interactive relationship between the aesthetic subject (audience) and the aesthetic object (performer) of opera. The change in the aesthetic value of drama is the result of long-term interaction between the performer and the audience in the long history of time. We can find that the social attributes of opera performance determine that the aesthetic value of opera art cannot be changed without a true reflection of social reality. The performance form and performance patterns as a means of performance always change with the change of aesthetic form.

Research purposes

1. To study the evolution of the Chinese opera performance and influence factors of the Chinese opera change.

2. To study the connotative relationship between "performance form, performance pattern, and aesthetic form".

3. To provide theoretical innovation and create artists standard with the aesthetic requirements of contemporary performances.



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Research Framework

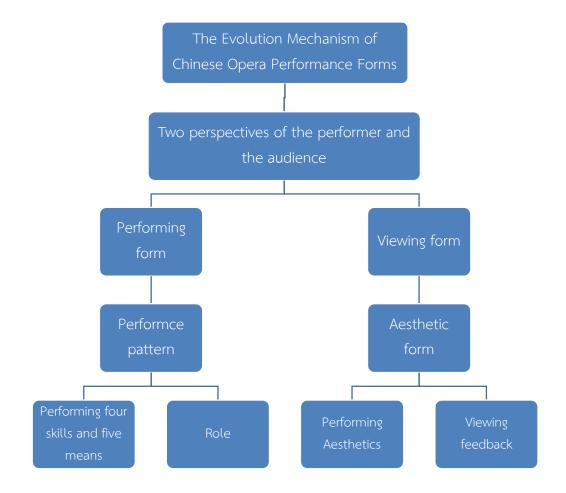


Figure 1 Research framework on the evolution mechanism of Chinese opera performance forms

Research methodology

1. Documentary Research Literature review

As a kind of social activity in a specific environment, folk performances have various forms. Rituals, dramas, storytelling, dance, playing, singing, and vaudeville are all forms of folk performances. Folk performances reflect the spirit of the people in a specific environment. Beliefs, values, and customs of life. (Zhang Geng, Guo Hancheng, 2013). This research focuses on the historical development process and historical development laws of folklore performance forms in specific situations, and the core purpose of this research is to



explain the evolution mechanism of Chinese opera performance forms. Therefore, the literature research is divided into three directions: folklore performance, Guizhou opera, and Chinese opera, philosophy, and artistic aesthetics, in order to find relevant theories, concepts, definitions, and other content that can analyze the evolution mechanism of Chinese opera performance, which provides evidence for the research conclusions of this article.

See opera performances from the perspective of folklore performances. Richard Bauman (1977) argued in "Oral Art as Performance" that dramas and concerts are often referred to as "cultural performances". At these events, the symbolic signs and values of a society are presented and displayed to the audience. Among them, the performer assumes the responsibility of showing communication skills to the audience. It focuses on how discourse production behavior can be completed. In the article "Inheritance and Innovation: The Staged Study of Folk Culture—Taking Shenzhen Chinese Folk Culture Village as an Example", Li Yu (2013) believes that the staged inheritance and innovative development of folk culture should be studied in conjunction with folklore, semiotics, aesthetic anthropology, and other related theories. Li Ying (2015) argued in the article "Research on the Communication Ecology of Folk Art" that the study of folk art communication must first establish the subject and object of communication, and the specific communication context reflects the spiritual dimension and social behavior dimension of the local people.

Looking at the evolution mechanism of the performance form of Chinese opera based on the contents described in the related literature of Qian Opera and Chinese opera, the performance form and performance pattern are in a relationship of mutual influence, opposition, and development. In "Problems of Traditional Chinese Opera Performance" (1995), Zhang Geng believes that the evolution and change of opera repertoire should try different innovative methods and repertoire-setting concepts. It does not matter if the performance form of opera cannot be combined with the traditional performance pattern. The important thing is that the exploration of the pattern should conform to the setting of the plot and the emotional expression of the characters. The brilliance of a good artist and Quyi creator lies in the reference and grasp of the pattern. Secondly, when Zhang Geng (1981) talked about patterns in opera, he believed that "artists cannot express complex life phenomena without mastering their respective patterns of art". Patterns are the basis for the artistic expression of life. Without patterns, there would be no art. The pattern in art is formed by concentrating and refining the phenomena of life, but the degree of concentration and refining is different due to the performance needs of various arts. Based on form alone, we cannot judge what is playing and what is not. The pattern itself does not determine whether an art form is realism or anti-realism; we should start from the content and see whether these patterns can express the plot and the characters. Decide whether it



should go or stay. Yang Yinliu (1981) described the creation process of ancient Chinese musical works (including opera, song and dance, playing or singing without accompaniment, rap, singing the tune without the words, etc.) in "The History of Ancient Chinese Music". He believed that opera (drama), as a long-term collective creation and processing of complex creative activities, is constantly developing and changing forms with the changes of society and the changes in the cultural requirements of the people (recipients). At the same time, Yang Yinliu also believes that drama is closely related to folk customs, society, and regional and national characteristics at the beginning of its birth. The change to its deductive form must be the evolution process of the local people's collective artistic processing and artistic re-creation.

Look at the performance form and evolution mechanism of Chinese opera from the perspective of artistic aesthetics. From the perspective of subjective aesthetics, Xue Yongwu (2015) argues that the relationship between aesthetics and the audience reflects human beings as subjective aesthetic objects. In terms of aesthetic value, it is a portrayal of experiencing the reality of life. From a philosophical point of view, looking at the performance form and evolution mechanism of Chinese opera, Suvorov (1985) stated in "Dialectics of Materialism" that the development of things in the objective world follows the law of cause and effect, that is, the three-stage law of development of things "the unity of opposites—interchange of quality and quantity—the negation of negation". It is particularly appropriate to quote it to explain the relationship between the three aspects of Qianju Opera's "performance form—performance pattern—aesthetic form".

2. Field studies

Interview

The interview was conducted on the basis of the interview form prepared in advance by well-known performing artists, composers, and theoretical scholars related to the art of Guizhou Opera, through interviews with the interviewees Zhu Hong, Yu Daling, and Liu Hao, three Guizhou Opera artists, to collect interview data related to Qian Opera content by means of audio recording and text recording. Please refer to Appendix I, Appendix II, and Appendix III for the interview forms.

Observation

The observation process is mainly carried out by watching stage plays and film and television drama videos (VCDs, online videos, etc.) related to Qian Opera art, followed by on-site observation. The observation location is Qian Theater in Guizhou Province. Use text-recorded commentary to collect observation data.



Research results

The theory and aesthetics of opera are produced in the process of interacting with the practice of opera creation. It is not only a summary of the creation activities, but also a guide and guidance for creation and performance viewing (aesthetic) activities. (2018)

Suvorov (1985) expounded the law of the development of things in the objective world in the "Dialectics of Materialism". That is, the relationship between the "performance form", "performance pattern", and "aesthetic form" of Qian Opera should conform to the philosophy of dialectics of materialism, the three-stage law of development of things, "the unity of opposites---interchange of quality and quantity----the negation of negation". This is the general law of the development of things that follows the "law of causality" in the development of things in the objective world, which shows that the development of things does not advance in a straight line but rises in a spiral. The principle of negation of negation has important guiding significance for people to correctly understand the tortuous and forward nature of the development of things. On the basis of the materialistic concept of material reflecting consciousness, Qian Opera performance as an artistic activity, its performance form develops into a performance pattern in a specific period, region, cultural category, and context. The aesthetic form and change will affect and change the performance pattern over time. The art of Qianju Opera should conform to this law in the development process of the relationship between the "performance form", "performance pattern", and the aesthetic form. Therefore, the entire study of Qian Opera should be guided by this theory, to observe and study the changes in the performance of Qian Opera in history and apply it to the contemporary creation and performance of Qian Opera.

Research results: The law of unity of opposites and the interchange of quality and quantity is reflected in the relationship between performance pattern and performance form conversion.

1. In a specific period, region, cultural category, and context, the form of opera performance will take on a performance pattern with a fixed paradigm and the aesthetic characteristics of the era.

In reality, there are contradictions in everything, and they have the relationship of unity of opposites. Performance form and performance pattern are two sides of the art development process of Qian Opera. The performance form is the embodiment of the "quantity" attribute, and the performance pattern is the embodiment of the "quality" attribute. Relatively diverse and infinitely changing performance forms and relatively fixed performance forms (i.e., performance patterns) are two forms of the development process of performance forms. The latter is the refinement, summary, and classification of the



former, while the formation of the latter means the former's demise as a form of performance. Therefore, the two are relatively opposed, but the formation of the latter is also the rebirth of the former as a form of performance pattern, so the two are also in a unified relationship.

Performance form and performance pattern are the relationships between development and evolution, and they are two stages of a process in the development of performance form. The process of forming a performance pattern by a performance form is the first negation of a performance pattern by a performance pattern. The scattered performance forms at this stage formed a systematic and fixed performance pattern with the aesthetic characteristics of the era. This is the first stage of the evolution of the performance form.

For example, singing with different ranges, volumes, and timbres is a form of performance. Then the performance pattern is that the actor connects these different vocal ranges, volumes, and timbres of singing voices to express the character, feelings, and mental state of the characters through the vocal technique, making it pleasant to the ears, coordinating with each other, and forming a kind of music for voices in Chinese opera (a system that categorizes singing characteristics).

Example: As a form of performance. Qian opera singing is all sung in Guizhou dialect, and its voice, rhyme, and tune have distinct characteristics, but they are not systematic. These scattered singing voices and minor tunes are categorized, and the complete set of songs is arranged in a specific style (beat) and according to the rules of level and oblique tones of ending words and the rhyme of even sentences to form the upper and lower sentence patterns, which form the music for voices in a Chinese opera system (i.e., performance pattern).

Research results: The law of "negation of negation" is reflected in the relationship between performance pattern and aesthetic form change.

2. The past performance pattern will create new performance forms due to changes in aesthetic forms to meet the aesthetic requirements of the current era.

In the second stage, the performance pattern is changed again due to the change in aesthetic form to conform to the current aesthetic habits of people. This is a second negation, which is the negation of the performance pattern by the aesthetic form. The denial is based on the original performance pattern, adding and changing new performance forms. This is a change required by the newness and creative connotation of performance. But this negation also inherited the content of the performance pattern's first negation of the form of performance, so it is called "the negation of negation". The second negation is the inheritance and development of the first negation, rather than simply abandoning it.



For example, in the 1950s, the dance moves in the drama "Qin Niangmei" were mostly purely technical performances, patterned performances with fixed routines, and the actors played less personally. The performers were required to "have a style of opera", such as making appearances or stage walks. However, the modern dramas of the Qian Opera do not have such aesthetic habits. The aesthetic requirements of modern drama are that the actors' actions must be consistent with the performance scene, and the chanting and singing must meet the situational requirements of the stage performance. In the modern drama "Tianqu", the actors can follow the protagonist Huang Dafa's emotional changes and add personal dance moves to express the protagonist's emotional changes.

Based on his performance experience, Zhu Hong, an actor with Guizhou Opera, dictated the difference between traditional performance and modern performance:

1) When performing crying in the traditional way, cover your eyes with your hands in a pattern to show crying;

2) In modern performances, on the basis of crying gestures with hands covering the face, tearful eyes use a series of expression changes and dance moves combined with dialogue to influence the audience.

This change in performance mode reflects the evolution and change process of the performance pattern of Qianju opera. Obviously, the performance mode of modern opera is more in line with the aesthetic habits of modern people. The improvement and re-creation of the performance pattern by the performers of Qian Opera is exactly the connotation reflected in the theory of the emergence and creativity (the emergent quality of performance) of performance as explained by Richard De Bowman.

Conclusion and discussion

1. Conclusion

The core conclusion of this research is that the evolution mechanism of the performance form of Chinese opera is mainly affected by the three factors of "performance form, performance pattern, and aesthetic form". Among them, performance form and performance pattern represent the relationship between development and evolution and are two stages of a process in the development of performance form. Both the performance form and the performance pattern have an influence on the aesthetic form, which is the cultural and entertaining interaction between the subject and the object of the performer and the audience. The second important finding of this article is that, in a specific period, region, cultural category, and context, the form of opera performance will take the form of a performance pattern with a fixed paradigm and features of beauty. In addition, the past performance patterns (performer side) will create new performance forms due to the change in



aesthetic form (audience side) to meet the aesthetic requirements of the contemporary era.

2. Discussion

Traditional (or classical) Chinese local opera has the characteristics of being "rooted in the country" and "extremely expressive". In the modern era, opera mainly focuses on serving reality. Therefore, there are more modern operas in the modern era, and they are deeply influenced by Western dramas and operas. The text creation has abandoned some traditional opera melody paradigms, and the style has also changed from ancient vernacular to modern vernacular. The original performance pattern is gradually being watered down because it is difficult to express modern life; the boundaries of the profession are gradually blurring as well, but are being replaced by modern, realistic, and personalized clothing. The rhythmic color of chanting is weakened, and it is close to the vernacular in reality; the performance's virtuality and locality have been reduced, while its realism has been increased. The stage setting is also more simulated, and the music creation is influenced by western music techniques and many western musical instruments are added. (2018). This marked the transition of Chinese opera from classical to modern. The three elements of opera, "performance form, performance pattern, and aesthetic form", have evolved into the specific characteristics of opera in the process of transformation. What role do they play? What kind of effect do they have? This is precisely the important content that needs to be explored, discovered, inherited, and developed by opera researchers and creators.

Suggestion

Music is the soul of Chinese opera, and the difference between opera types is mainly in music. The evolution of the text system of opera is closely related to the evolution of the music system. Opera music is rooted in dialects, local music, and Western music. The vocabulary, structure, singing form, method, and accompaniment of opera music created by the individual composer are very different. As a result, for related Chinese opera research and music creation, researchers and composers must fully understand the internal laws of the evolution mechanism of Chinese opera performance in the three aspects of "performance form", "performance pattern", and "aesthetic form", as well as the interaction between performance form ("art"), performance pattern ("techniques"), and aesthetic form (the aesthetic concept of the era). In the end, in terms of creative thinking, the composer can break through some of the limitations of the pattern and create his own individualized and standardized art.



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