

was oppressed by the "three mountains" of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism and had become a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, the advanced Chinese intellectuals started the "New Culture Movement" from 1915. During this movement, Marxism-Leninism spread and the Chinese working class ascended the stage of history as an independent political force, laying the ideological and mass foundation for the birth of the Communist Party of China in 1921. Under this historical background, Chinese opera was born almost at the same time as the Communist Party of China.

In the modern history of China, Western opera was introduced as a strong culture into China, which was then a weak country, and thus became the object of study and imitation. From the beginning of the 20th century, with the construction of the Middle East Railway, Russians flooded into China and brought Western opera to China. In the 1920s and 1930s, Western opera quickly became popular in China's big cities such as Harbin and Shanghai, where many well-known European classical operas were staged, setting off a Western opera boom. However, Western opera is not a native Chinese art. In order to take root in China and be widely accepted by Chinese audiences, it must adapt to China's national conditions and culture after undergoing national transformation and make it more in line with the aesthetic habits and cultural traditions of Chinese people. This includes local innovations in language, themes, musical styles and performing arts. The actual situation is also that since entering Chinese society, Western opera has been "foreign as Chinese", shouldering the historical mission of saving the Chinese nation from the grave crisis and becoming one of the midwives of Chinese opera, new culture and even new social forms.

2.1. The cultural and historical background of the birth of Chinese Opera

Chinese operas, including song operas, minor operas, Yangko operas and musicals, came into being in the process of China's new-democratic revolution. They could quickly reflect real life, were easy to understand and suitable for promotion, and met the needs of efficient political, economic and military mobilization of peasants and workers at the lowest level of society at that time, who were mostly illiterate. For example, works such as Rural Music and March of the Army and People combined mass songs with Western operatic experience, and adopted musical forms such as chorus, chorus and recitation, which enriched the means of musical expression and enhanced the appeal. Yangko opera integrates drama, traditional opera and Yangko, absorbs the advantages of drama and folk keys, adopts the forms of cut stage music, chorus singing, duet singing, etc., and uses Chinese and Western Musical Instruments to express a complete story, providing valuable experience for the development of Chinese opera, such as "Brother and Sister Open Land", "Husband and Wife Reading" and "Supporting the Army Flower Drum".

In the mid-1940s, a breakthrough was made in the creation of Chinese opera. Literary and artistic workers in Yan 'an, the holy land of revolution, composed a large-scale opera, The White-Haired Girl, which reflected that the cruel exploitation and oppression of the landlord class had driven the peasant class to the point where there was no way out but revolution. It was an important milestone in the development of Chinese opera. Drawing on the experience of Western operas on the basis of folk tunes, the composer used characters' main keys to run through the development of the plot, tried multi-voice musical techniques such as chorus, chorus, harmony and polyphony, and mixed Chinese and Western Musical Instruments to create masterpieces with Chinese style and style. The success of The White Haired Girl lies in the fact that it reflected the sufferings of the peasant class at the lowest level of society at that time and

the revolutionary demands of overthrowing the landlord class, and was in line with the revolutionary aspirations, appreciation habits and aesthetic tastes of the broad masses of the people.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China as a result of the revolution, the National Opera Symposium in 1957 promoted the peak of opera creation, and excellent works such as *Red Guard on Honghu Lake* and *Sister Jiang* emerged. With its beautiful melody, vivid characters and strong artistic appeal, *Sister Jiang* has become one of the finest operas of the Chinese nation, and its classic verses have influenced generations of audiences. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, artists created excellent operas such as "*The Wilderness*" and "*The Daughter of the Party*," showcasing China's ethnic music culture to the world.

In a word, since its birth, Chinese opera has gradually embarked on a unique development path that is different from that of European and American operas. On the basis of inheriting the traditional opera, Chinese opera has absorbed some elements of Western opera and formed an opera art with Chinese characteristics. It not only retains the charm of traditional opera, but also integrates the techniques of opera to create a novel art form. On the one hand, the development of Chinese opera reflects the inclusive and innovative spirit of Chinese culture. It innovates through inheritance and surpasses through reference, forming a unique artistic style and aesthetic value. This art form, which blends China and the West and connects ancient and modern times, not only enriches China's art stage, but also contributes to the development of opera art in the world. On the other hand, the development of Chinese opera is also a manifestation of the self-confidence of Chinese culture. It tells us that the development of culture needs openness and inclusiveness, and more importantly, independent innovation. Only by deeply rooted in the soil of one's own national culture and extensively absorbing the excellent achievements of human civilization can one create works of art with the spirit of The Times and national style.

2. The representative works of Chinese opera in the 20th century

Before 1920, there had already been a long history and a wide variety of traditional opera art and literature on the Chinese drama stage. At the same time, emerging drama and drama literature had appeared in Tianjin, Shanghai and other places in China. In addition, European opera troupes often perform in China, giving the Chinese people a taste of European opera and its literature. However, during this period, there was no original Chinese opera literature by Chinese artists, let alone an opera performance based on such opera literature.

In the early development of Chinese opera literature, song and dance drama literature occupied an important position. In 1920, Li Jinhui's children's song and dance drama *Sparrow and Child* set a precedent for Chinese opera literature creation. After a long time of exploration and practice, its form of expression has experienced the creation process of "singing-expressive singing (children's song and dance) -children's song and dance drama". Its essence is to realize the transformation from "song" to "drama". Although this process is deeply influenced by Chinese traditional opera, Western drama and opera art, its form is not directly inherited from Chinese traditional opera literature, Western drama or opera literature. In fact, it developed and evolved from the category of lyrics in music literature. The vernacular movement from 1917 to 1920 advocated that Chinese people should abandon classical Chinese, which only a few people could understand and use, in favor of the colloquial language used by the majority of people in their daily lives, thus making articles comprehensible to the majority of people and greatly

improving the efficiency of the dissemination of information, especially modern ideas. Influenced by this, Li Jinhui created 12 children's song and dance dramas from 1920 to 1929, which laid the initial foundation for the start of Chinese opera. Among them, "Sparrow and Child", "Grape Fairy" and "Little Painter" are Li Jinhui's representative works. "Sparrow and Child" is the source of Chinese opera scripts written in vernacular. Li Jinhui's children's Song and dance drama, which draws on Western opera and traditional Chinese opera and has its own family, is the bud of Chinese opera and already possesses various elements of musical drama, especially the Little Painter, which is fully developed in both aspects of music and drama, and the combination of the two is relatively natural. However, the children's song and dance drama cannot carry major social themes. Moreover, the explorers are still faced with the problem of how to learn from western dramatic means according to the aesthetic needs of Chinese audiences and find local cultural space for the creation of song and dance drama.

The arrival of the Red Army in northern Shaanxi in the Long March led by the Communist Party of China provided a new opportunity and space for the nationalized development of Chinese opera. Starting from October 1934, the Central Red Army, after a long march of 25,000 li, surrounded and blocked by hundreds of thousands of Kuomintang reactionary troops, traversed 14 provinces, over 18 mountains, over 24 rivers, over mountains covered with snow all the year round, through the vast and dangerous swamps, and reached the revolutionary base of Northern Shaanxi in October 1935. In order to liberate the Chinese people from the fascist reactionaries of the Chinese Kuomintang and the Japanese fascist invading forces, the Communist Party of China spared no effort to develop a new culture commensurate with the tasks of the national democratic revolution. To develop a new national, scientific and popular culture with workers, peasants and ordinary soldiers of the people's army as teachers and targets of service, and to oppose the feudal, bureaucratic-bourgeois, imperialist and comprador culture that serves the exploiting classes. He advocated that primary school students, starting with themselves, should be willing to serve the people and that serving the people in all aspects should be the aim of the Communist Party of China. This includes, of course, that in the creation and performance of Chinese operas, the quality of the works should be measured by whether the broad masses of the people enjoy them and whether they can promote social progress in China. This speech has pointed out the direction for the progressive creation of literature and art in China, including opera. Since then, this orientation of popularization of revolutionary literature and art has had an important influence on the creation and development of Chinese opera.

In the 1940s, literary and artistic workers created a large number of Yangko operas that reflected realistic struggles and had a strong national style. Among them, "Brother and Sister Open Land" and "Husband and Wife Can Read" are the most influential and representative Yangko operas in Yan 'an. These works are musical compositions of traditional Chinese opera tunes and folk music. Both lyrics and dialogues are sung and expressed in northern Shaanxi dialect. They have become "new national operas" favored by the masses of the people. The White-Haired Girl is a large-scale stage opera staged in Yan 'an in the 1940s. It has fully absorbed Chinese traditional opera tunes and folk music components in music, forming a "new ethnic opera" with distinctive national characteristics. The success of the White Haired Girl not only made great achievements in art, but also played an important role in political mobilization and international influence, becoming a classic work of Chinese opera.

In the 1950s and 1960s, classic operas such as "Little Erhei Marriage", "Red Cloud", "Red Guard on Honghu Lake", "Red Coral", "Sister Jiang" and "Sister Liu Sanjie" were born on the stage of Chinese national opera. Among them, the large-scale song and dance drama "Liu

Sanjie" combined singing, dancing and dramatic performance, showing the rich ethnic customs and regional characteristics of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous region. Liu Sanjie's artistic achievements, especially its exploration in the arts of performance and directing, have provided a new direction and inspiration for the development of Chinese opera.

3. The application and influence of Western operatic elements in 20th century Chinese opera

The introduction of Western music theory had a profound influence on the development of Chinese opera. Chinese composers not only learned the Western theories of harmony, counterpoint and musical form structure, but also tried to apply them to the creation of Chinese opera. For example, Western harmony theory has made the musical language of Chinese opera more colorful, while the use of counterpoint and polyphony techniques has added layers and dimensions to the music. In orchestration, the rich timbre and playing skills of Western orchestras were introduced and combined with traditional Chinese instruments to create unique acoustics. Western opera stage design elements have also been borrowed and absorbed by Chinese operas. This localized application has not only enriched the musical expression of Chinese opera, but also made it more in line with international aesthetic standards. Here, the application and influence of Western operatic elements in the masterpieces of Chinese operas in the 20th century are taken as examples to illustrate their overall influence on Chinese operas in the 20th century.

Due to different cultural backgrounds, the means of expression used by Western opera and Chinese traditional opera art are very different. The virtuality of traditional opera art is an important manifestation of its artistic imagination and expressive force. It does not need complicated props and usually takes "one table and two chairs" as its basic configuration. By rapping, chanting and fighting, actors can complete the entire performance of a traditional opera, combined with action performances and a small number of indicative props. In sharp contrast, the stage design of Western opera is famous for its exquisite and gorgeous scenery, rich historical and cultural elements, clever use of lighting and special effects, sophisticated costumes and props, and the integration of stage machinery and director's creativity, aiming to create an immersive artistic experience for the audience that attaches equal importance to sight and hearing, and integrates emotion and culture. European opera writers use various musical expression techniques to make all kinds of musical forms form an integrated artistic effect that can give full play to its own advantages. The use of various singing methods, such as aria, recital, chorus, and the execution of various musical forms, such as sonata form, cycloform, variation form, and verse, bring the symphonic nature of the band to its peak and make it serve a higher dramatic purpose. Sometimes, it is like an overwhelming mountain and sometimes, like the sound of birds singing and nightingales. It is both magnificent and soft, giving powerful support to the actors.

Qiu Zi, a two-act opera on the theme of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, which was born in the Kuomintang-ruled area in 1941, is an important work in the history of Chinese opera. It fully adopts the concept and structure of Western opera. The large-scale opera originated from a documentary piece published in Ta Kung Pao in 1938, which tells the story of the brutality of the invading Japanese army at the top and the anti-war sentiment at the bottom. When composer Huang Yuanluo created Qiu Zi, he did away with dialogue entirely and gave music the lead role, using 44 pieces of original music throughout the opera. The music

includes 39 vocal pieces and nine instrumental pieces, covering various forms such as arias, recitals, entos, duets and choruses. The musical style of Qiu Zi is relatively unified, with the exception of a section in the dream of the second act in the elegant mode, the rest of the music is based on the traditional major and minor modes of Europe. In the instrumental part, Huang uses the Western musical form framework to promote the development of the drama plot, and successfully portrays the protagonist Akiko as a delicate, beautiful, kind and helpless Japanese woman full of hope through moving melodies. Akiko's arias, "Akiko's Heart" and "I'm Thinking of Him for My Sake," are popular with audiences for their beautiful and touching tunes and easy to sing. It is worth noting that Qiu Zi embodies a distinct national style in music creation. Although most of the music in the drama adopts Western musical forms, the melodic style is not purely "foreign dialect", but closely related to the tones of art songs and mass songs during the Anti-Japanese War. This tone with a sense of The Times not only shows national characteristics, but also conforms to the aesthetic habits of the Chinese people at that time. The success of Qiu Zi proves that Chinese people can combine Western opera forms with their own national conditions and culture to create opera works with national characteristics and the spirit of The Times. This has opened up a new path for the exploration and development of Chinese opera, showing the great potential and broad prospects of Chinese opera art.

Similarly, in terms of art form and writing style, the White Haired Girl, which was born in the Yan 'an Yangko Movement in 1945, marks the founding of a new style of Chinese national opera. It is an opera in five acts, closer to Western opera but more distant from traditional opera forms. Its music creation process draws on the creative experience of Yangko opera, absorbing folk songs, Yangko, flower drum and other musical forms that are widely spread and continuously evolving among the folk, and combining them with local drama music through dramatization. Most of the creators and performers of these folk songs, yangko dances and local traditional operas were ordinary people who participated in labor. In terms of music, The White Haired Girl adopts the way that Chinese instruments and western instruments are played together. After watching the revised version of the White Haired Girl in 1962, Li Jianwu pointed out that while it absorbed the tones of local traditional opera musically, it also incorporated western musical elements -- chorus in the first three main singing parts. In the accompaniment part, the first three acts mainly used Chinese music, supplemented by western music, and the fourth act directly switched to western instruments⁴.

Next, the Chinese classic opera Red Coral, written by Zhao Zhong, Zhong Yibing, Lin Yinwu and Shan Wen and composed by Wang Xiren and Hu Shiping, was premiered in Beijing in 1960. It has the following characteristics: First, it ensures that the melody's charm is reflected in the music score, so that the actors can perfectly convey this charm to the audience through singing skills such as enunciation, embellishing the tune and GUI rhyme. Secondly, it skillfully uses the traditional opera structure of "plate cavity", which is conducive to melody writing, to combine it with western music form, breaking through the limitations of western music form, and opening up a new space for the structural innovation of opera music. Thirdly, the drawl, which usually appears in the last sentence and has the characteristics of traditional opera singing, extends the emotion of the characters, shows the singing skills of the actors, and enhances the expressive force of the music. In addition, it draws on other traditional opera music techniques, such as drum and drum of Beijing Opera, and carries out innovation in the orchestration and orchestration of the band, mainly preserving the tune of the backing tune, and then adds a group

⁴ Jing Lan & Shu Tiemin, 2012. *A History of Chinese Opera*, vol. 1. Beijing: Culture and Arts Publishing House, p. 364.

of violins, which not only retains the traditional flavor of the traditional opera music, but also adds the elements of western music.

The opera *Sister Jiang*, premiered in Chongqing in 1963, was adapted from the novel *Red Rock*. It showed the story of the Chinese Communists, represented by the revolutionary martyr *Sister Jiang*, who fought bravely against the Kuomintang reactionaries in their prisons at *Refuse Pit* and *Bai Mansion*, until they died. The composer used the Sichuan dulcimer style, borrowed the Sichuan opera style, and used Western operatic techniques such as solo, accompaniment, chorus, and pure instrumental depiction.

The opera *Ayiguri*, which premiered in Beijing in 1966, was adapted from the Xinjiang film *The Red Flower on the Tianshan Mountain*. The composer borrowed the development techniques of Western opera music and the principles of the structure of the plate-and-resonator of traditional opera. Based on the Kazakh tones, the composer absorbed the styles of Kirgiz and Uyghur folk songs, and designed the structure of the work based on the theme and song development techniques, which enhanced the expression and appeal of the music.

4. Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Western opera works in the 20th century

4.1. Comparison of musical language and expression techniques

The musical language of Western opera is based on harmony and uses rich polyphony techniques and orchestral orchestration to create complex sound effects. In contrast, Chinese opera relies more on the fluency of melodic lines and changes in rhythm, emphasizing the close integration of singing and language, as well as the use of ethnic instruments. In 20th century Chinese opera, composers tried to combine Western harmony and polyphonic techniques with the melodies and rhythms of traditional Chinese music to create unique musical styles. The *White-Haired Girl*, for example, combines Western harmonic language with Chinese folk melody to form a musical language that has both national characteristics and international influence.

4.2. Differences in dramatic structure and narrative methods

Western opera usually follows the structure of three or four acts, and the plot often revolves around the conflict of the main characters, while traditional Chinese opera adopts a more flexible narrative mode. The plot can be developed through various means such as singing, reading, acting and playing, and emphasizes the drama of the plot. In the 20th century, Chinese operas absorbed the rigor of Western operas in their dramatic structure, while retaining the narrative characteristics of traditional Chinese operas. For example, in *Red Guards on Honghu Lake*, the plot develops in a clear way, with some exaggeration and symbolism common in traditional operas.

4.3. The contrast between cultural connotation and aesthetic value

The cultural connotation of Western opera is often closely related to its social background and philosophical thoughts, emphasizing the expression of personal emotions and the discussion of human nature. Chinese opera, on the other hand, reflects more traditional

Chinese moral concepts and value orientations, such as loyalty, bravery and sacrifice. In terms of aesthetic value, Western opera pursues a high degree of unity between music and drama, while Chinese opera emphasizes the harmony between music and drama, as well as the comprehension of performing arts. In the 20th century, Chinese operas have realized the complementarity of Chinese and Western cultures in terms of cultural connotation. For example, *The Wilderness* not only shows the life of rural China, but also expresses profound thoughts on human nature and society.

4.4. The integration of stage art and visual effects

The stage design of Western opera often pursues realism and delicacy, using complex sets and props to create atmosphere. Traditional Chinese operas, on the other hand, pay more attention to symbolism and freehand brushwork, conveying character, emotion and meaning through simple stage arrangements and exaggerated facial makeup and costumes. In the 20th century, Chinese opera integrated the characteristics of China and the West in stage art, adopting costumes and props with national characteristics and drawing on Western stage techniques to create visual effects with both ethnic style and modern sense.

4.5. Exchange and reference of performing arts

The performing arts of Western opera emphasize vocal skills and the inner portrayal of roles, while traditional Chinese opera emphasizes the stylization and artistry of virtual forms. In the 20th century, Chinese opera has realized the exchange and reference between China and the West in the performing arts. For example, in *Sister Jiang*, the performers' performances not only show the vocal expression of Western opera, but also integrate the figure and performance formula of traditional Chinese opera.

From the above analysis, it is visible that while inheriting and carrying forward the tradition of national music, Chinese opera in the 20th century also actively absorbed and learned from the elements of western opera, forming an opera art with Chinese characteristics.

4. Conclusion

In the more than 100 years since its birth, Chinese opera has not only absorbed and applied the elements of Western opera, but also absorbed inspiration and resources from the excellent traditional Chinese culture represented by traditional Chinese opera, and embarked on a path of localization that suits China's national conditions, serves the Chinese people and has Chinese characteristics. This path goes in the same direction and has mutual influence with the journey led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) to overthrow the "three mountains" of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism and transform the Chinese people from a "poor and white" agricultural country into the world's largest industrial country. Since its birth, Chinese opera, faced with the crisis of the Chinese nation's collapse and extinction, has shouldered the historical task of inspiring and educating the Chinese people in a form that is popular with them. It has produced a series of classic plays that meet the aesthetic tastes of the Chinese people. In the process of the growth and expansion of Chinese opera, the mature singing techniques, harmony and polyphony techniques, orchestral instruments, dramatic structure, stage

art design and other elements of Western opera have been closely integrated into the Chinese cultural connotation, narrative mode, emotional expression, aesthetic tendency, folk song melody, national Musical Instruments, stage art, costumes and props, thus forming a unique style of Chinese opera. By combining with excellent traditional Chinese culture, Western opera elements have been given new interpretations and performances, and the innovative practice of Chinese opera has also provided new perspectives and inspiration for the Western opera community. In the information age, the constantly updated intelligent communication technology and the Internet have penetrated the geographical space, making the long distance no longer a barrier for people to communicate with each other, and there will be more and more opportunities for opera practitioners around the world to exchange and learn from each other. On this field cultivated with friendship and watered with soul, the flower of opera art will surely blossom and the more it blossom, the more beautiful it will become.

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