

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i6.2195>

The Musical Characteristics and Development of Puxian Opera Since 1949

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Abstract

This study focuses on Puxian Opera, an integral component of local culture deeply influenced by the socio-political and cultural context of Puxian since its inception. This research aims to systematically trace the historical changes and developments in Puxian Opera from 1949 to the present and to thoroughly analyze its musical characteristics, including tunes, modes, singing techniques, rhythmic structures, and accompanying instruments. The study explores how Puxian Opera evolved in response to social transformations over different historical periods by employing qualitative methods such as field investigations and in-depth interviews. Findings reveal that while the opera has experienced substantial musical evolution since 1949, adapting continuously to shifting social circumstances, it has successfully preserved its traditional essence. In contemporary society, Puxian Opera maintains its classical heritage and demonstrates renewed vitality and creativity, reflecting an ongoing cultural dynamism. Thus, the research underscores the significance of Puxian Opera as both a mirror of local social culture and a living tradition adaptable to modern contexts.

Keywords: Puxian Opera, Musical Characteristics, Historical Development, Cultural Context, Traditional Music.

Introduction

Puxian Opera, also known as "Xinghua Opera," is one of China's oldest local operas. During the Yongjia Rebellion in 311 AD and the Anshi Rebellion in 755 AD, many people from the Central Plains migrated south to Puxian, bringing the Central Plains culture to Puxian. Puxian Opera was initially derived from the "Bai Xi" of the Central Plains culture. During the Tang Dynasty, the prosperity of Buddhism and Taoism in the Puxian area provided innate conditions for the formation of Puxian opera, music, and dance. Among them, Buddhist and Taoist music tunes promoted the formation of Puxian opera music tunes. During the Song Dynasty, folk activities in the Puxian area were active, and arts were more active and prosperous than those in the Tang and Five Dynasties (Yu, 2021). These provided a good soil for the formation of Puxian Opera. During the Ming Dynasty, the Baixi Opera in the Puxian area absorbed the singing techniques of the Kunshan Opera in Jiangsu and the Yiyang Opera in Guangxi. They integrated them with the Puxian dialect to form the Xinghua Opera (Ruan, 2021). In the Ming Dynasty, Nanxi Opera was combined with many local operas, and Xinghua Zaju was combined with folk songs based on Nanxi Opera to form Puxian Opera.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, society became more stable, and Puxian Opera entered a

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period of development and prosperity. Folk opera troupes and opera clubs continued to grow. In the 27th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1762), a "Zhide Monument" was embedded in the Ruiyun Ancestral Temple outside the northern gate of Puxian, listing 32 opera troupes, reaching its peak. During the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty (1821-1850), Puxian Opera absorbed many legendary repertoires from Kunqu Opera, Yiyang Opera, and Luantan Opera. They changed the tunes to make the traditional repertoire of Puxian Opera richer.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, influenced by the Huiban Luantan Opera and the outbreak of the Opium War, various troupes competed with each other to attract audiences. Many troupes performed plays based on novels or adapted the Huiban Peking Opera, making their plays popular. After the Xinhai Revolution and the May Fourth Movement, the spread of democratic ideas inspired many troupes to hire people to write fashionable plays. Many plays that criticized feudal ideas and advocated freedom of men and women and social equality became popular, making the Puxian opera stage more colorful (Ye, 2007). In the 1920s and 1930s, Puxian Opera performances were very active. From the 9th to the 12th year of the Republic of China (1920-1923), the "Zixinglou" troupe went abroad for the first time and performed "Three Kingdoms" and "Investiture of the Gods" in Singapore and Malaysia. From the victory of the Anti-Japanese War to 1949, Puxian Opera was in a period of decline, with a large number of troupes and Puxian Opera artists changing careers or scattering in rural areas. After founding the People's Republic of China in 1949, Puxian Opera developed again (Chen, 1996).

In 2006, Puxian Opera was listed in the first national intangible cultural heritage list batch. With the development of the times and the diversification of entertainment methods, Puxian Opera faces new challenges in the contemporary era. This study sorts out the development of Puxian Opera from 1949 to the present and researches the musical characteristics of Puxian Opera, which will help better understand the relationship between Puxian Opera and social development and will help cultural inheritance and historical research and is of great significance for promoting cultural diversity and cultural confidence. It can also provide some ideas and research methods for the inheritance and protection of Puxian Opera.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the development of Puxian Opera since 1949 and analyze its musical characteristics, focusing on vocal techniques, instrumental elements, and stylistic features within modern Chinese performing arts.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology comprising systematic collection and analysis of diverse documentary and multimedia sources and field investigations. It begins with the comprehensive gathering of textual materials pertinent to the historical development and musical attributes of Puxian Opera, including scholarly papers, journals, books, musical scores, newspapers, and official documents. Additionally, multimedia materials such as photographs, audio recordings, and video footage of Puxian Opera performances are collected to enrich the research data. Furthermore, fieldwork involves direct, non-participant observations of live Puxian Opera performances, complemented by in-depth interviews with key informants, with the conversations systematically documented through audio and video recordings. These combined methods aim to facilitate a nuanced understanding of contemporary transformations within Puxian Opera.

Literature Review

Ye Mingsheng explored the value of Puxian Opera in Puxian culture and the relationship between Puxian Opera and other local arts and cultures from the perspective of the ecological environment of Puxian Opera and analyzed the music, musical instruments, and other aspects of Puxian Opera (Ye, 2007). Chen Junju explored the development process of Puxian Opera from the Tang Dynasty to 1996 from a historical perspective and briefly discussed the repertoire, music, and performing arts of Puxian Opera (Chen, 1996).

Yan Dong believes that the voice of traditional drama is closely related to the local dialect. He analyzed the musical structure of the tone of Puxian Opera, the performance method and script of Puxian Opera, and believed that irregular rhythm is one of the most significant characteristics of Puxian Opera music (Yan, 2021). Zheng Jian analyzed the musical instruments, singing, timbre, performance form, and accompaniment band. He believed that Puxian Opera absorbed the musical characteristics of the ten-tone and eight-music, such as integrating the "Wu Song" and "Chu Ballad" of the ten-tone and eight-music into the music of Puxian Opera and applying the singing and accompaniment instruments of the ten-tone and eight-music to the performance of Puxian Opera, breaking the traditional three-person ensemble mode of Puxian Opera with gongs, drums and blows (Zheng, 2010).

Result

The Development of Puxian Opera Since 1949

Since 1949, Puxian Opera has undergone different changes due to the influence of different Chinese political, social, and cultural factors. It can be roughly divided into the following stages:

Early years of the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949-1965)

After 1949, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, literary and artistic work began to flourish. In 1950, the Ministry of Culture of China held a national opera reform work conference in Beijing and put forward the "Suggestions on Opera Improvement to the Central Ministry of Culture" to promote the standardization of local operas to make them more in line with the cultural policies and performance needs at the time. The Puxian Municipal Government and relevant departments systematically sorted out the Puxian Opera, and many traditional tunes were rediscovered and standardized. In July 1962, when the Fujian Provincial Conference on Excavating and Rescuing Traditional Opera Heritage was held in Puxian, more than 1,000 musical tunes were collected. Through sorting these materials, the Puxian Opera was standardized and standardized to facilitate the study and promotion of the Puxian Opera. In order to meet the needs of modern theaters and audiences, some complex and lengthy tunes were simplified or adjusted to ensure that the performance was more compact and smooth. For example, Jinshi Middle School's "Forced to Liangshan" and Shizijie's "Fishing and Killing the Family" (Chen, 1996).

The traditional singing style of Puxian Opera has been sorted into different styles, such as slow, fast, and medium, forming a relatively systematic singing style classification system to facilitate the teaching and inheritance of opera schools. In order to promote Puxian Opera, especially when performing in areas outside the Puxian dialect, the troupe has adjusted the singing style, removing some local pronunciation characteristics, making the singing style easier to be accepted by non-Puxian dialect audiences.

In terms of musical instruments, the configuration of traditional Puxian Opera instruments is

retained to ensure that the instruments' playing style conforms to the opera's overall style. At the same time, in order to adapt to the stage performance and promotion of opera, the band composition of Puxian Opera has gradually been standardized. The traditional free combination method has been replaced by a more fixed band structure, usually composed of wind instruments (such as suona, huqin, etc.), string instruments (pipa, sanxian, octagonal harp, etc.), and percussion instruments (such as gongs, drums, cymbals, etc.). The coordination between instruments is more standardized, which is convenient for music teaching and daily rehearsals of the troupe.

The Cultural Revolution Period (1966-1976)

During the Cultural Revolution, Puxian Opera, like other local operas, was regarded as the dregs of the old society promoting feudal values and severely criticized. Many troupes were disbanded, Puxian Opera artists were sent to the countryside to participate in labor reform, and many scripts and scores were burned. During the "Great Union" period, some Puxian Opera staff were reassembled to form a "Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team" (Chen, 1996). In the Puxian Opera repertoire, the content related to the traditional historical feudal ethics, love themes, or religious beliefs of Puxian Opera was criticized as the product of "feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism," and was deleted or adapted and replaced by "model operas" or adapted operas that praised the working people, revolutionary fighting spirit and class struggle as the theme, and created the heroic image of "workers, peasants and soldiers." For example, in the spring of 1973, the Puxian Opera "Mao Zedong Thought Art Propaganda Team" of the Bangtou Commune Supply and Marketing Cooperative of Xianyou County, Puxian City, rehearsed the Puxian Opera short play "Dowry".

In order to adapt to the new repertoire and achieve the role of political propaganda, under the influence of model operas, the singing style of Puxian Opera tends to be high-pitched and grand, focusing on expressing the spirit of revolutionary struggle. Correspondingly, the number and types of accompaniment instruments in Puxian Opera were reduced, and more emphasis was placed on using percussion instruments to enhance the rhythm of the drama and match the passionate singing. The melody played was simplified to a more direct progressive rhythm or to play revolutionary songs. The accompaniment function was intended to cooperate with the political propaganda at the time, highlight the political content, and reflect the theme of the times, rather than theatrical art to set off the characters' emotions and the dramatic situation.

Although Puxian Opera was strictly controlled during the Cultural Revolution, some folk artists still retained some traditional singing methods in some more hidden private performances. Although this underground circulation was small in scale, it laid the foundation for the revival of Puxian Opera after the Cultural Revolution.

The Post-Cultural Revolution Revival Period (1977-1990)

After the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, especially after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978, the government realized the importance of Puxian Opera in representing local culture and art and began to encourage the emphasis on and inheritance of traditional culture and advocate cultural diversity. As a result, Puxian Opera has been redeveloped (Chen, 1996). The traditional tunes of Puxian Opera have gradually been restored, and many tunes that have disappeared or were originally banned have returned to the stage. The traditional lyrical singing style has been restored, sorted out, and protected. In the 1980s, Puxian Opera Troupes and cultural departments conducted in-depth excavation and

sorting of lost or endangered singing styles. The traditional tune system of Puxian Opera has also been further explored and inherited, striving to restore the traditional charm of Puxian Opera, especially those ancient tunes with local characteristics, which have become one of the focuses of local opera research. The use of traditional musical instruments in Puxian Opera has also gradually been restored, especially those with strong local characteristics have returned to the stage. Some old artists of Puxian Opera were invited back to the troupe to teach the original singing and instrument-playing skills, helping the younger generation of actors master the traditional performance techniques. Through opera schools and cultural training, the younger generation of musicians learned the unique playing styles of these instruments, ensuring the intergenerational inheritance of Puxian Opera music.

While the traditional repertoire of Puxian Opera was revived, Puxian drama writers also began to try to create scripts with modern content. Modern works also sprang up like mushrooms after rain, and many excellent modern short plays emerged. For example, "Family Planning Girl Unpacks the Burden," which reflects China's family planning policy at the time, "The Ugly Duck Story," which praises hard work and wealth, and "Agui's Blind Date" (Figure 1), which promotes modern love concepts, etc. During this period, Puxian Opera also participated in exhibitions and competitions at all levels and various activities, which once again attracted widespread attention to Puxian Opera.



Figure 1. Stills from Agui's Blind Date, provided by Lisheng Troupe

Contemporary Era (1991-Present)

With the inclusion of Puxian Opera as a national intangible cultural heritage of China and the rise of tourism in Fujian Province, Puxian Opera has gained popularity beyond local audiences. Puxian Opera has become part of local cultural tourism, attracting domestic and foreign tourists. Since 1990, Puxian Opera has been constantly innovating while inheriting traditional repertoires to meet the development and entertainment methods of the new era.

In order to attract modern audiences and broaden the subject matter, Puxian Opera has created new tunes, although the melodies of these music come from traditional music. However, in the arrangement, the harmony of modern music is integrated, the rhythm is brisk, and the melody is easy to understand, which adapts to the aesthetic needs of contemporary audiences. The singing

style of Puxian Opera has also made certain adjustments in performances, especially in tourist performances and television broadcasts. The singing style of Puxian Opera is more popular, which not only retains the traditional charm but also adapts to the tastes of contemporary audiences. The accompaniment band of Puxian Opera has also gradually introduced modern instruments (such as electronic piano) to enhance the expressiveness and stage effects of the music, especially in the performances of folk troupes; the volume and sound quality advantages of modern instruments have been brought into play.

Musical Characteristics of Puxian Opera

Musical Structure

The melody structure of Puxian Opera adopts the form of "qupai Liantai"; that is, taking qupai as the basic structural unit, multiple qupai are linked together, arranged together according to the development of the plot, forming a new musical unit, and forming a play (or a play). "Qupai", also known as "paizi", is a general term for the tune name of the melody selected for the song in traditional Chinese culture; that is, the melody framework remains unchanged, but the lyrics can be changed. Each qupai has a certain palace tone, melody, singing method, number of words, sentence structure, level and oblique tones, and has a special qupai name, such as "Dianjiangchun", "Shuixianzi", etc, which must be used as the basis for filling in the song or singing (Li, 1995). There is a saying that "big theme 360, small theme 720" for the qupai of Puxian Opera. "Big theme" refers to the Quai with a relatively long piece of music and few lyrics, which is often used for lyricism. The melody of the big theme is gentle, and the rhythm is changeable (Chen, 1996). "Small theme" is a tune with a short melody, many lyrics, brief structure, few rhythm changes, and a more colloquial style, suitable for narration, dialogue, and plot description. A small theme is usually played with one strong beat or no strong beat, and the tempo is usually "half-wide and tight" (moderato) or "tight" (allegro). It is often used for narration and dialogue, with brisk singing and a more colloquial style (Ke, 2003).

The music of Puxian Opera comes from different established melodies. Sometimes several different pieces of music are extracted from each (a sentence, a few sentences, or even the entire song) and then reorganized into a new piece of music. This creative technique is called a collection of music. For example, the song "Jintang Yue" in "Pipa Ji" is composed of the two songs "Shujintang" and "Yue Haitang." "Fan Diao" is a form of "borrowing the main tone." When a particular tune cannot fully express the character's feelings, one or more sentences from other tunes are borrowed and added to the current tune. "Fan Diao" is divided into one borrowing, two borrowing, three borrowing, and four borrowing (Xie, 2008).

Mode

The music of Puxian Opera is mainly based on the pentatonic scale, accompanied by the heptatonic scale. The most common modes are Gong mode and Yu mode, followed by Zhi mode, Shang mode, and Jue mode. The starting note of each tune is not necessarily the tonic, and its ending note generally ends on the dominant or subdominant in addition to the tonic. The modulation in the singing tune is most common in the lower fifth and lower fourth degrees. Especially when Fa appears as the main note, it is modulated to the lower fifth, and the original Fa is used as the new Do (Qing Jue is Gong). There are also modulation techniques, such as using the original Sol as the new Do (that is, Zhi is Gong), and modulation techniques, such as Yu as Shang or Zhi as Shang. Puxian opera music often uses modulation techniques, so the singing tunes of Sheng (male characters) and Dan (female characters) can be used

interchangeably. Before liberation, the singing melody was relatively simple. After the 1930s, Puxian Opera absorbed the local folk singing styles of "Shifan" and "Bayue," making the whole melody smooth and gorgeous. There are four main ways to improve the singing: adding ornaments, adding partial tones Si and Fa, focusing on glissando, and minor changes in the phrases (Zhan, 2007).

Rhythm

In the musical terminology of Puxian Opera, Ban refers to the heavy beat, and Yan refers to the weak beat. For example, one Ban and one Yan means one strong beat and one weak beat. When notating, "○" represents the Ban (strong beat), and its duration is two beats, and "●" represents the Yan (weak beat), and its duration is one beat. One Ban and one Yan is "○●", and one Ban and three Yan are "○●●●". "Drip Board" has a Ban but no Yan and is notated in one beat, generally with a faster speed. "Wide drip board" means one Ban and one Yan and is notated in two beats, generally with a medium speed. "Three decks" means one Ban and three Yan and is notated in four beats, generally with a slow speed.

The most characteristic feature of the rhythm of Puxian Opera is the use of an "irregular rhythm pattern" to make the whole music more dynamic. Mixed beats, syncopated rhythms, or rests at strong beats often appear in music. For example, in mixed beats, four beats are interspersed with five beats, and two beats are interspersed with three beats. The use of syncopated rhythms, such as extending the third Yan (fourth beat) of a four-beat melody to the next measure's Ban (next measure's strong beat). In the gong and drum accompaniment of Puxian Opera, "three, five, seven" is often used as the basis, and hundreds of gong and drum rhythms are derived through thousands of changes. These special rhythmic gong and drum rhythms permeate the singing, often in mixed beats, and are integrated with the singing and performance (Wu, 2003).

Singing Skills

Puxian Opera adopts the singing skills of "real voice as the main and false voice as the auxiliary" based on the "original voice." When singing in the lower range, pure voice is used, and when singing in the higher range, a certain proportion of false voice will be adjusted, and a mixed voice with a bias towards authentic voice is used (Lin, 2021).

The melody range of Puxian Opera is mainly in the middle and low range, which is close to the natural range of the human voice, so when singing, most of the time, only a natural voice is needed. Regarding the vocal position, the singing position of Puxian Opera is basically on the throat, that is, the original voice. Wang Shaoyuan, a famous actor of Puxian Opera, said, "It is sung with modification based on speaking (Yan, 2016)." When singing in the middle and low range with the "original voice," the pitch of the sound is adjusted by the contraction tension of the vocal cords, so the timbre is bright, solid, and straightforward. Especially when singing small theme suites, its bold and rough timbre characteristics can be fully reflected. Puxian Opera is a form of exaggerated artistic expression established based on speaking.

The concert of the Puxian Opera uses a certain falsetto in the high-pitched area. Especially in the singing of the big theme tune, the singing method of Geyang Opera and Peking Opera is borrowed to make the vocal cord vibrate faster, the vocal cord tension more substantial, and the vocal cord vibrate at the edge when it is stretched. It has the characteristics of bright sweetness, delicate euphemism, crispness, and smoothness (Lin, 2009).

Since Puxian Opera is performed and sung in the Puxian dialect, some characteristics and

language habits of the local dialect are also incorporated into the extension process. In the process of singing, it is not entirely by the tune melody, but some ornaments, such as a glissando, will be added (Yan, 2016).

5.2.5 Accompaniment instruments

The early Puxian opera accompaniment band was mainly composed of drums, gongs, and Bili, also known as "Luoguchui" (Figure 2). The formation of gongs, drums, and whistles is closely related to the performance form, musical characteristics, and historical factors of Puxian opera. With the development of the times, the Puxian opera accompaniment instruments have absorbed local instruments while retaining these three traditional instruments and gradually formed a unique accompaniment system of about ten people. These instruments are divided into four categories: percussion, wind, strung, and plucked.



Figure 2. "Luoguchui" of Puxian Opera, provided by Lisheng Troupe

Percussion Instruments

Drums are always dominant and commanding the accompaniment band of the Puxian Opera. It is a percussion accompaniment instrument of Puxian Opera and an important driving force for the drama's rhythm, emotional rendering, and scene transition. It adds dramatic tension and artistic appeal to the stage performance. It is the core of the entire accompaniment system and the conductor of the whole stage. Especially in fighting scenes or fast-paced scenes, the beating of the hall drum and the war drum can enhance the strength of the music and set off a tense or exciting atmosphere. The actors' "singing, acting, reciting, and beating" must be carried out according to the sound of the drum.

The drum instruments of Puxian Opera include the lion-pressing drum, hall drum, and war drum, among which the lion-pressing drum is a unique drum of Puxian Opera (Figure 3). On the leather surface of the drum, a stone lion carved from bluestone is placed, which is 9 cm long, 6.5 cm wide, 14 cm high, and weighs about 1.7 kg. Using stone lions to press the big drum is the most distinctive drumming technique of Puxian Opera. Once the stone lion presses the drum, the timbre changes immediately. The drummer can constantly change the position of the stone lion according to the needs of the plot and can produce different high and low, soft and symmetrical timbres.



Figure 3. Lion-Pressing Drum, Provided by Lisheng Troupe

Siluo, also known as Shaluo, is mainly used to match drum beats and create atmosphere (Figure 4). The gong surface is slightly wrinkled and slightly curved and is hung in the middle of a wooden frame. The diameter is about 32 cm, the edge is 2 cm high, and the gong is hung on the edge of a wooden frame.

Siluo players from all over China hold the gong in one hand and hit it with the other hand. Only the gong playing technique of the Puxian Opera is different. It is played with two different hammers held in both hands. The performer holds a flat gong hammer in the right hand, slightly shorter than the big drum hammer, and has different upper and lower widths. The left hand holds three bamboo fir boards slightly shorter than the gong hammer or about 2 cm wide and stacked together. Sometimes, the gong hammer and the fir board are hit in the center of the gong surface one after another. Sometimes, the left-hand presses the fir board tightly on the left side of the gong heart, and the right hand hits the right side of the gong heart with the gong hammer, sometimes the gong hammer is used to hit the center of the surface, and sometimes the gong hammer is used to hit the edge of the gong. Different gong scriptures are used for plots and scenes (Chen, 1996).

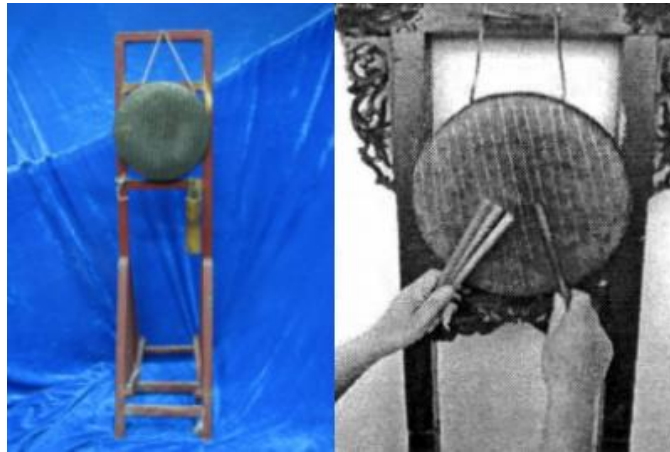


Figure 4. Siluo, Provided by Lisheng Troupe

Wind Instruments

The wind instruments of Puxian Opera refer to the flute and suona. The flute, known as the Bili in ancient times, is a characteristic and main instrument of Puxian Opera (Figure 5). It is composed of a whistle and a pipe. The pipe body is made of old mahogany, about 15 cm long, about 2 cm at the head, and about 1 cm at the tail. The whistle is made of a reed stem. The pipe body has eight holes, seven on the front and one on the back. The introductory notes are Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zheng, and Yu, and the rest of the notes must be played by controlling the breath on the adjacent holes. The flute's glissando playing technique can imitate the tone of speech (Shen, 1993).

The flute body is small, and the reed whistle is large. When playing, the speed of breath control, the depth of the whistle in the mouth, or the weight of the air blown are directly related to the pitch. Mastering the changing technique of fingering can produce a crisp and mellow tone. The flute sounds are high-pitched, sad, and mournful, suitable for sad and desolate tunes. It can play upward or downward glissando at will. Therefore, using the clown's colloquial singing is also very appropriate.



Figure 5. Bili, Provided by Lisheng Troupe

Suona, also known as "plum blossom" in the local area, is the most representative wind

instrument in Puxian Opera (Figure 6). It has a high-pitched and bright tone and is often used to express festive scenes, fierce battle scenes, or emotional plots. It can create strong dramatic tension and enhance the atmosphere of the performance. For example, when showing the characters fighting bravely or the scene is lively, the suona will be used as the main instrument to drive the emotions of the whole audience. The appearance of the suona in Puxian Opera is similar to that of ordinary suona, but the sound tube is more extended and bell-shaped. Puxian County generally uses four tunes of G, D, E, and F, while Xianyou County uses four tunes of A, D, F, and C. Although suona is also used in other dramas, it is distinguished by "male" and "female" when playing (high-pitched suona is female, and alto suona is male), which is a unique feature of Puxian Opera.



Figure 6. Suona, provided by Lisheng Troupe

Stringed Instruments

The main stringed instruments of the Puxian Opera are the Chehu, Sihü, and Dahu (Figure 7). They are often used as the main instrument to form a harmonious accompaniment system with other instruments. For example, when expressing affectionate dialogues or inner monologues, long notes and glissando create the fluidity of emotions.

The body of these stringed instruments is made of longan wood, and the top of the instrument is finely carved, called horseshoe crab fan tail. The pegs are made of boxwood and carved with plum branches. Due to the different lengths of the popular poles in different periods, the tuning of these stringed instruments is also different, with F tuning being the most common. These three instruments have the same appearance and materials and are distinguished by size. The smallest Sihü has a loud, bright sound and a sweet and lyrical tone. The Dahu is the largest, with a loud volume and a thick and rough tone. The Chehu has a simple and beautiful tone (Wu, 2003).



Figure 7. Sihou, Chehu, Dahu, provided by Lisheng Troupe

Plucked Instruments

Octagonal Qin is a unique accompaniment instrument of Puxian Opera characterized by its octagonal surface (Figure 8). Both sides of the surface are inlaid with paulownia boards, and the sound is crisp and bright. It is often used to express cheerful, relaxed, or lyrical scenes. The playing techniques of Octagonal Qin are flexible and can add layers and rhythm to the drama performance. For example, when expressing relaxed, happy, or love scenes, the accompaniment of Octagonal Qin makes the melody more beautiful and pleasant. The playing techniques are similar to the Sanxian. Its resonance box is more significant, so the resonance is strong. When it is played with other instruments, the sound is more harmonious.



Figure 8. Octagonal Qin, provided by Lisheng Troupe

Discussion

Puxian Opera carries rich historical and cultural information as a national intangible cultural heritage. Its tunes are rich and varied, and its singing is simple and ancient, retaining the characteristics of Southern Opera in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Since its birth, local people have deeply loved it and its long history. The society and politics of different periods deeply influence the development of Puxian Opera. At the same time, the development of Puxian Opera in different periods can also reflect the social outlook and cultural characteristics of different periods, providing valuable information for historical research.

From 1949 to the present, Puxian Opera has undergone several ups and downs in development and changes. In the contemporary multicultural environment, Puxian Opera has received

unprecedented attention. At the same time, as global media and entertainment increasingly influence the Chinese cultural landscape, Puxian Opera is also facing the challenge of better passing it on. For example, its young audience is gradually decreasing in the fiercely competitive entertainment market. The protection and inheritance of Puxian Opera also remind us to attach importance to protecting intangible cultural heritage and avoid the loss of cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Based on the review of the development of Puxian Opera in each stage since 1949, it can be concluded that: 1) In the early days of the founding of New China, the government sorted out and standardized the Puxian Opera, which revived the Puxian Opera from its weak state in the late Qing Dynasty. During the Cultural Revolution, due to political influence, the development of the Puxian Opera stagnated, and many transhumeral opera materials were destroyed. In order to achieve the purpose of political propaganda, the Puxian Opera was also influenced by the model opera. After the Cultural Revolution, the government once again realized the importance of the Puxian Opera to local culture and resumed its attention to the Puxian Opera. Since 1990, the Puxian Opera has entered a new era. While inheriting the tradition, all aspects of the Puxian Opera have been innovated to meet people's aesthetics in the new era. 2) Puxian Opera music adopts the structure of a set of quail, with the pentatonic scale as the leading tone; the rhythm is not fixed and varied; the singing technique is based on the original voice, with a mixture of true and false voices; the accompaniment instrument is a band with drums as the conductor, integrating percussion, wind, string, and plucked instruments. Since 1949, Puxian Opera has undergone social and cultural changes in different periods. The traditional tunes, singing styles, and musical instruments of the ancient local opera, Puxian Opera, have been fully protected and have shown new charm.

Acknowledgment

The author Ms. Liqun Wu, wishes to sincerely thank the university for facilitating the opportunity to conduct this academic research. Appreciation is also extended to the school and associated institutions for their administrative and technical support throughout this research process. Special thanks to supervisors' invaluable guidance, insights, and professional contributions, significantly enhancing the quality and rigor of this research. Their guidance and encouragement were essential in achieving the research outcomes presented in this paper.

Ethical Considerations

Not applicable

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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