

Delineating Modern Chinese Opera Through “White-Haired Girl”

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/20789>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/20789

Published Online: 11 February 2024

Abstract

Chinese opera is generally divided into two types, old and new. “Old opera” is defined by its use of traditional instruments and singing styles, such as that found in Peking opera and Cantonese opera. New Chinese opera, often referred to as modern Chinese opera is characterized by a combination of Western compositional structures juxtaposed with Chinese musical elements. Discrepancies and generalisations have been noted through a preliminary review of literature pointing to a gap in understanding of what actually constitutes “modernity” in the definition and practice of contemporary Chinese opera. This paper elucidates some outcomes of a larger study. The first objective of this paper is to delineate the essence of modern Chinese opera by tracing its socio-cultural and musicological roots. The second objective is to examine the musical evolution and practice of *White-Haired Girl*, a highly performed composition since its premiere in 1945 and generally regarded as representative of modern Chinese opera in China. In this study, a qualitative methodology is used to collect primary and secondary data, including the analysis of extant literature, outcomes of semi-structured interviews and score analysis. The findings point to new knowledge and better understandings of what has been generally labelled as ‘modern’ opera with due consideration of its socio-cultural and musical intricacies. The results of this study will enable scholars to better understand the nature and key characteristics of modern Chinese opera and assist musicians to develop effective approaches to modern operatic compositions and performances.

Keywords: Modern Chinese Opera, White-Haired Girl, Musical Elements

Introduction

Modern Chinese opera has emerged since the 1920’s in tandem with its quest for modernisation. Contemporary scholars have referred to modern Chinese opera as ‘New Opera’ Bohenkemp (2020); Deng (2012); Brando (1997), demarcating the old from the new

based on the inherent art of enacting traditional Chinese opera in a Westernised medium. In the early 20th century, modern China was becoming increasingly influenced by Western culture and art practices. During this period, professional Chinese composers adopted Western composition techniques to create and develop new operatic forms and interpretations, while simultaneously retaining some of the characteristics of traditional Chinese operatic practices. A review of literature found a lack in academic research on contemporary Chinese opera, more so of publications in the English Language (Howard, 2022). Existing research is largely confined to the fields of theatre studies, literature and cultural history rather than focusing on the performance, composition and associated musicological aspects of modern Chinese opera.

This paper is part of a larger study of how modern Chinese opera has developed and how socio-cultural and political agendas have shaped its musical evolution and practice, thereby addressing a research gap uncovered. It selects a well-known Chinese opera, *White-Haired Girl* by a leading Chinese composer, Ma Ke, as a point of embarkation to enable an in-depth understanding of what constitutes 'modernity' and 'Westernisation' in the art of opera making. Why this work? *White-Haired Girl* is about class struggle and women's liberation. It has been enthusiastically promoted and played all over China, having become famous soon after it was premiered on 22 April 1945 at the seventh Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Yunnan Zhuo (2003), serendipitously growing in popularity in tandem with the rise of the CCP from a border district government to a national regime.

Today, it is recognized as one of the most revolutionary classics (Bohnenkamp, 2014). It is possible to understand the evolution of different versions of *The White-Haired Girl* by reviewing the literature. Its development is more than coincidental. It reflects literary and artistic trends from 1945 to 2015. This is closely related to the process of modernization in China, which permeated and condensed the political context of each historical period at that time. Musically, *White-Haired Girl* is credited with establishing a new paradigm for modern Chinese opera (Jixian, 2014). Consequently, it is necessary to examine how this opera adapted and adopted traditional Chinese operatic music forms and structures in order to influence future generations of Chinese opera composers, musicians and scholars. Perhaps the Chinese audiences found themselves relating to modernity and prosperity with changing musical practice portrayed in new operatic practices. As China is a huge nation with deeply rich and diverse cultural practices, any attempt to generalise artistic actions would be futile. Nevertheless, there are clear indications of socio-musicological relationships that are worthy of study. This paper presents some of the findings of a larger study conducted over a period of three years. The outcomes of two of its objectives are presented. The first objective is to delineate the essence of modern Chinese opera by tracing its socio-cultural and musicological roots. The second objective is to examine the musical evolution and practice of *White-Haired Girl*, a highly performed composition since its premiere in 1945 and generally regarded as representative of "modern" Chinese opera. A critical study of this work therefore provides invaluable insights into understanding its unique musical features and how it adopts and adapts authentic practices of Chinese opera as well as infuse new ways of Chinese operatic composition and production.

Research Methods

The Oxford Handbook of Opera (Greenwald, 2015) provided useful guidelines when researching elements of operatic practices. It advocates a study of the score, libretto, performance, production, transmission and societal reception, much of which were taken into consideration in constructing the methodological design of this investigation. Additionally, the conceptual framework of this study incorporated a multi-dimensional approach to rich qualitative data acquisition from both primary and secondary resources, namely (i) socio-cultural and historical influences (ii) musical elements (iii) score and libretto and (iv) performance, production, audio-visual resources.

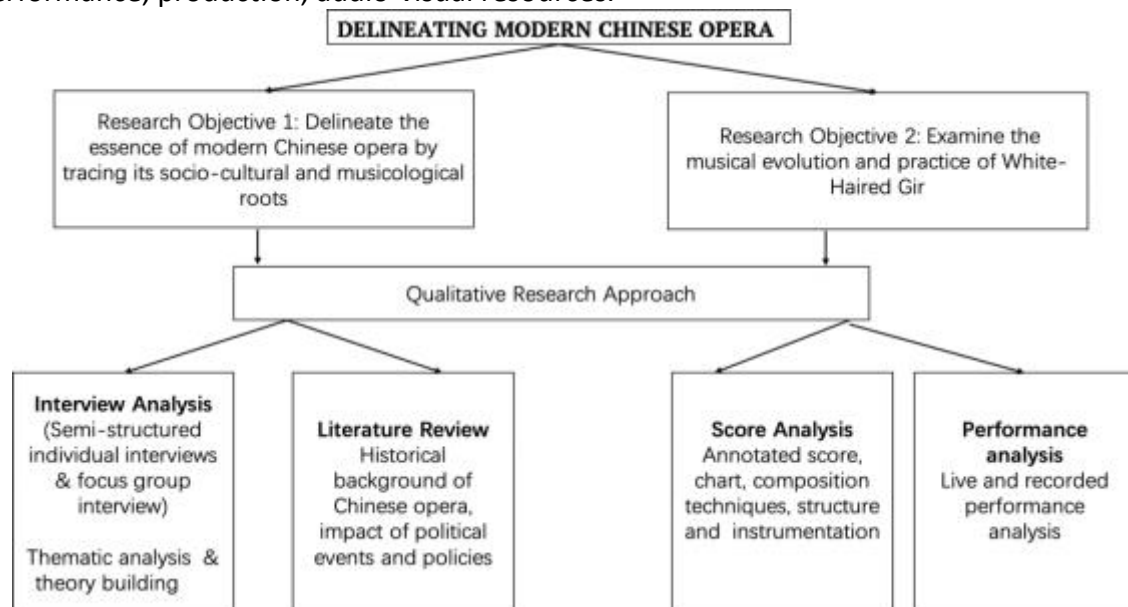


Figure 1: Research design of this study (adapted from Ross, 2016)

Types of research

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in the principles of grounded theory, serving as the framework for empirical data collection and analysis. The research received ethical clearance from the UiTM Research Ethics Committee (REC/06/2023PG/MR/194), ensuring adherence to ethical standards throughout the study. Secondary data were derived from a meticulous review and analysis of literature, documents, audio-visual resources, and score evaluations. The inclusion of diverse sources enriched the research context. Primary data collection involved conducting focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews with composers, performers, and musicologists. This dual-method approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject by integrating existing knowledge from diverse sources with firsthand perspectives from key stakeholders in the fields of music composition and performance. The qualitative methodology facilitated a nuanced exploration of the intricacies involved, allowing for a deeper understanding of the subject matter. By combining rigorous data collection and ethical considerations, this study aspires to contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse in the realm of music research.

Data Collection Process

In this paper, outcomes of interviews from ten opera practitioners and experts are reported. All the interviewees have extensive knowledge of the history of Chinese opera and *White-Haired Girl*. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. An open coding approach using NVivo14 software was used to condense and convert the raw conversations into basic

concepts. Related categories of Chinese modern opera were integrated using axial coding and the stories' timeline will be based on selective coding. The musical characteristics of modern Chinese opera were deconstructed using formative music analysis techniques. The main melodic thrust of the opera was identified in order to extract and distinguish the leitmotiv. The rhythms in *White-Haired Girl* were analyzed. The signifiers of rhythmic structures and peculiar use of percussion instruments and playing techniques in traditional Chinese opera was used as a benchmark to determine the extent to which modern opera techniques preserves or digresses from tradition. The instrumentation, harmonies and polyphonic textures were examined as with singing styles adopted in modern China opera. Outcomes of the data collection and analysis are presented in the following segment.

Results and Discussion

This segment summarises the answer to two research questions poised, namely

- (i) What socio-cultural and musicological developments in China contributed to the development of modern Chinese opera?
- (ii) What is the significance of 'White-haired Girl' in defining and influencing the practice of modern Chinese opera?

Socio-cultural and musicological developments

Chinese composers embarked on a challenging journey of opera creation during the 1920s. At that time, China was nominally independent but actually under foreign dominance, people struggled for independence. Traditional opera was criticized by artists as outdated and corrupt, China began to seek new operas. It was in these historical conditions that the modern opera was emerging. The May 4 Movement, which began in 1919, ushered in a period of Chinese literary renaissance, which inspired the creation of modern Chinese opera. The pioneer in this field was Li Jinhui (1891-1967) who wrote Children's operas had a great influence on China (Witzleben, 2001). While they could not be considered to be operas in the truest sense, they were the prototype of modern Chinese operas. Operas different from children's operas appeared in the mid-1930s, such as *The Storm on the Yangtze River* and *Akiko*. The "Yangko Movement" kicked off after Mao Tse Tung gave a speech at the Yanan Forum on literature and the arts in 1942 (Kagan, 1963). According to the speech, works by artists must serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers. As Yangko opera uses folk songs and folk dances to express the new life of civilians in liberated areas, it was immediately well received by the masses. *The White-haired Girl* premiered in 1945 under the guidance of Mao's Speech and is considered to be a milestone work in the history of Chinese opera. Mao Dun (1896-1981), the Chinese literary critic and author, asserted that "Today, we do not hesitate to praise the *White-haired Girl* as China's first opera, and I believe it is more qualified to be called Chinese opera than traditional Chinese opera. Hong & Day (2007)" This assertion was followed by a heated discussion and echo. For instance, Feng Naichao (1901-1983), who was a literary critic at the time, wrote: "The *White-haired Girl* is a national opera and the first of its kind in China (姚, 2022)." Opera creations have followed the line of the *White-Haired Girl* since then.

The White-haired Girl tells the story of a landlord, Huang Shiren, forcing Yang Bailao to die and taking his daughter, Hsi-erh, on New Year's Eve. After being raped, Hsi-erh escaped

from Huang Shiren's house and hid in a cave where her hair became white as the result of a miserable life. The Eighth Route Army (major Chinese communist forces) finally rescued Hsi-erh from the cave after a few years. The villagers complained about the landlord's oppression and exploitation, and Hsi-erh denounced his heinous crimes. After a public trial by the communist regime, Huang Shiren was executed. *White-haired Girl's* main theme is "liberation", not only for Hsi-erh, but also for thousands of working classes. The Chinese Communist Party confiscated land from the landowner class and distributed it to the poor and lower-middle class. This effectively aroused peasants' enthusiasm. There is a sharp contrast between the old and new societies in this opera. Meanwhile, a new image of Chinese women emerged after the premiere of *The White-haired Girl*. Although many creations had been focused on women's imagination before *The White-haired Girl*, it was the first to have had such a wide-ranging and far-reaching influence. Women are subordinate to men in patriarchal societies, and they have always had a low social status in China due to thousands of years of feudal culture. For example, female roles are played by men in traditional Chinese opera, and women are not even allowed onstage. In the first half of *The White-haired Girl*, Hsi-erh still has the shadow of the old society, but in the second half, she has grown into a woman with a sense of struggle and resistance. This kind of resistance involves awakening the awareness of one's own destiny from within.

For decades, *White-Haired Girl* have been re-arranged and adapted, many versions exist (see Table 1). The general idea of the revisions before 1962 was to strengthen the fighting spirit of the peasant class, to further intensify the antagonism between the peasant class and the landlord class, and to strengthen the revolutionary narrative of the opera (Wu, 2013). *White-Haired Girl* was created prior to the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, when China's major social contradiction changed from ethnic contradiction to class contradiction, and the problem of the peasants' resistance to the oppression and exploitation of the landlord class became the essential issue of the Chinese revolution. In the following three years, the great war of liberation occurred. The opera mobilized the vast peasants to rise up against the oppression and exploitation of the landlord class, and to actively join the army and support the front line. The adaptation after 1977 no longer emphasizes class struggle (Liu, 2009). It is more important to highlight the correct leadership direction of the Chinese Communist Party, carry forward the successful revolutionary tradition and ensure the right values are delivered (Ibid). Towards the 21st century, China has proposed promoting rule the country in accordance with law. Therefore, the ending of the opera's most notorious villain, Huang Shiren, has been revised. As the opera ended, the crowd shouted, "Send Huang Shiren to the government for a public trial and justice." In light of this fact, there is no doubt that the feudal landlord bullies represented by Huang Shiren will accept fair and impartial trials and dispositions by the people's government. So, the opera plot after 2011 is in line with the spirit of the times in China.

Table 1

Musical Rearrangements of White-Haired Girl since 1945

Time	Version	Time	Version
22 Apr. 1945	Premiere at the seventh Chinese Communist Party Congress in Yanan.	1985	To commemorate the 40th anniversary of the victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese, China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater rearranged it.
1946	The north China United University perform for all the troops and villagers in China Communist Party controlled areas.	1995	To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Anti-Fascist War, China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater rearranged it one again.
1947	Performing the revised version in Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Liberated Area.	2011	China Oriental Performing Arts Group performed a new version.
1948	Public performance in Hong Kong.	2012	A new version launch during the 770th anniversary of Mao Tse Tung's speech at the Yanan Literary and Arts Forum.
1952	The Northeast version	2015	New version born to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Anti-Fascist War.
1962	Revised and rearranged in Beijing.		
1977	China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater rearrangement after the Cultural Revolution.		

White-Haired Girl not only profoundly revealed the principal contradictions in Chinese society at that time and adopted the artistic expressions popular with the masses, but also embodied the cultural psychology, values, and aesthetic experiences contained in Chinese theater traditions, and obtained value identification based on cultural identity.

Interview Analysis and Findings

Feedback from ten musicians interviewed have collated and analyzed. The musicians consisted of one composer, two performers, five musicologists and two historians. Transcripts of the recorded interviews were analyzed, selected sentences that were closely related to the research questions were classified and themed for further categorization. NVivo14 software was used for coding purposes. In open coding, the researcher collated similar words in the transcript of the interviewees to determine the concept and dimension of the conversation. Open coding yielded forty-six initial categories and concepts. A frequency of less than two times were removed. Using axial coding, the data was read a second time. In axial coding, the data were reconnected in a new way after being broken up in open coding. This process generated eleven main categories, including performance forms, performance style, *White-Haired Girl* creative process, creative principle, evolution of creative content, creative development based on political movements, traditional opera, Western Opera, relationship with the Chinese Revolution and significance of *White-Haired Girl*. In selective coding, a core category was selected and other proposed categories merged and integrated, thereby identifying the 'story'. This analysis identified four core categories based on selective coding, namely the (i) definition of modern Chinese opera, (ii) development of *White-Haired Girl* (iii) creation of modern Chinese opera and the (iv) spirit/power of modern Chinese opera (Table 2).

Table 2

Identification of the main category through selective coding

Main category	Subcategory	Frequency
Definition of Modern Chinese Opera	Forms of performance	4
	Performance style	5
The Development of Modern Chinese Opera	Creative Process	6
	Creative principle	4
	Evolution of creative content	10
	Creative development based on political movements	5
	Exploring the Path of Opera	9
The Creation of Modern Chinese Opera	Tradition Chinese opera	10
	Western Opera	8
The spiritual of Modern Chinese Opera	Relationship with the Chinese Revolution	7
	Significance of <i>White-Haired</i>	14

The interview analysis demonstrated that modern Chinese opera uses national themes to depict the Chinese story. Whether it is the theme of the War of Resistance against Japanese or a representation of feudal society, they all reflected profound Chinese culture. Its creative presentation personifies the claims of the China Communist Party. The “mass”, “leaders” and “artists” in the revision process of *The White-Haired Girl* represent three types of power: civil power, political power, and scholarly power. This represents a significant finding of the study. There is a deep entwinement between these three aspects of discourse power that lies at the core of *White-Haired Girl*. A unique phenomenon of the artistic evolution of *The White-haired Girl* is unveiled. This is a theme that directly expresses the idea of class struggle. The opera involves explicit class theories, and skillfully utilizes the method of class analysis to explain and construct the historical and real scenes, as well as class relations of rural China. Yang Bailao was portrayed as a typical peasant of the older generation, who was not yet awakened under the long-term oppression of the landlord class. Hsi-erh was molded into a typical rebellious peasant with a tenacious will to live and a strong desire for revenge. Huang Shiren was the representative of the murderous, cunning, greedy, and corrupt landlord class. The drama focuses on the contradiction and struggle between the two opposing classes of peasants and landlords, revealing the latter's political oppression, economic exploitation, and occupation and plunder of the former's right to life and property right, manifesting the sufferings and tragic fate of peasants in Chinese history and reality, and highly praising the spirit of resistance of the peasant class.

This work maximizes the emotional affect and political impact on the basis of a formal integration of elements of Chinese and Western and folk and elite performing arts. In the 1940's, Western music culture influenced the emergence of modern Chinese opera. Meanwhile, modern Chinese opera continues to draw lessons from Western opera art while integrating Chinese folk music and traditional opera. Chinese and Western elements are best reflected in the combination of the leading motive and Ban Qiang style. A leading motive refers to the use of a certain musical theme and developing it to represent a character in Western opera. *White-Haired Girl* combined leading motive with folk tunes by using Ban Qiang style. The creation methods of modern Chinese opera were summarized as producing

“national tone” by using folk singing style and Chinese music instruments, producing “national melody” with melodic materials of folk music and composing common “Banqiang style” in Chinese opera arias. These three creation “routines” are often applied in the creation of Chinese opera. The creative systems and paradigms formed by the creative ideas of *White-Haired Girl* have affected later generations of composers and influenced Chinese people’s cognition of the Western comprehensive musical genre. This work has become a classic and maintains its popularity on the Chinese stage. Its success lies in the distinctive Chinese characteristics of its music, its lyrics and serves as a memory of China’s social-political struggles.

Significance of White-Haired Girl

This study found that *White-Haired Girl* has had a profound influence on later operatic creations. Operas since then can roughly be divided into two categories. One continues to represent the struggle between the peasant class and the landlord class and represents the reality of rural life. The Communist Party led the peasant class to become society’s masters. Another category focuses on female Communist revolutionary fighters who were not afraid of sacrifice, resist tenaciously, and fight against reactionary forces. How was *White Haired Girl* able to ignite such fervor?

In this study, the music analysis was conducted with a focus on musical structure, melodic development, harmonic organization, rhythmic development and texture. *White-Haired Girl* promoted the development of Chinese national orchestral music and developed a form of accompaniment belonging to modern Chinese opera, it was also the birthplace of folk style singing. Modern Chinese opera is a synthesis of Western and traditional Chinese opera which gradually formed its own artistic style over time.

In terms of the music, 12 Chinese music pieces contribute to the composition (Table 2). There are: 4 Hebei folk song and 1 song from Hebei Opera; 3 songs from Shanxi province; 4 songs from Shaanxi province. Composer took into account the regional characteristics of folk songs. These three provinces fall under the same cultural area and belong to the Yellow River Basin of music, so they form a relatively concentrated collection of songs. To achieve the overall unity of music style, the composer synthesized folk music with little difference in style and close to the opera characters.

Table 3

White-Haired Girl uses 12 songs in order of appearance

Name of the song	The type of song	The province
Little Cabbage	Folk song	Hebei
The Legend of <u>Qingyang</u>	Folk song	Hebei
Picking up the Wheat Roots	Folk song	Shanxi
Taiping Tune	Buddhist song	Hebei
Wedding Ceremony	Instrument song (<u>Suona</u> , 唢呐)	Shaanxi
Chao <u>Tianzi</u>	Wu Tai Mountain Temple song	Shanxi
<u>Mulian</u> Save Mother	Buddhist song	Shaanxi
<u>Shanshu</u> Tune	Hebei local opera	Hebei
Blossoming Walnut Tree	Folk song	Shanxi
The Stepmother Beats the Child	Folk song	Hebei
<u>Dabai</u> Team	Instrument song (<u>Suona</u>)	Shaanxi
<u>Yao Haozi</u>	Work song	Shaanxi

At the beginning of the first act, the *White-Haired Girl* borrowed the main melody of *Little Cabbage*. It is not directly quote, it just has the same function notes. Little Cabbage is a traditional nursery folk song prevailing in Hebei. It exhibits the grief of an orphan kid who was deeply devastated and missed his dead mother. Hsi-erh's tragic life experience led the composer to choose the folk song *Little Cabbage* for this opera. Act 1, Scene 1, Xier confesses that "my mother died at my age of three", which the *Little Cabbage* song is exactly a motherless little girl. Here is the score of Little Cabbage.

Little Cabbage

Hebei Folk Song

小白菜呀，地里黄呀，三两岁上，没了娘呀。
A lit - the cabbage, fades in gale and snow, I lost my mother three years old.

亲娘呀，亲娘呀！
My dear mama, my dear mama!

Ex. 1 The score of *Little Cabbage*

This folk song follows the D Zhi mode, Zhi mode is mostly used in northern folk songs, reflecting northern people's bold temperaments, it has the Hebei Clapper Opera's musical characteristics. The song is one octave of range, while the melody is short and dominated by descending tones. The *North Wind Blow* (Example 2) sang by Hsi-erh is adapted from *Little Cabbage*. It is D Zhi Qing Jue mode. These two songs are largely similar in melody, and the composers only made simple alterations in the span and rhythm of the music. In *North Wind Blow*, every two bars can be divided into one sentence, so there are four sentences in total. Therefore, its structure can be shown as 2+2+2+2. The four sentences are developed from each of the 1-4 bars of Little Cabbage. Meanwhile, the range of the melody is expanded and changed, and the descending melody direction of the original tune is consciously altered.

Snowstorm

Desfalienciado, Adagio

Three miles through a snowstorm I've come home

After hiding a week from the duns, I returned home.

Ex. 4 Snowstorm (The 7th song from *White-Haired Girl*)

The analysis of the songs reveals the use of 'local' musical materials which were either adapted or adopted. It took Chinese folk music from different regions and of different styles to depict the emotions of its operatic characters. The characters and arias were derived from familiar tunes and loved by the masses, and then became widely known. Its influence on composers was impactful. In traditional Chinese opera, composers choose songs from a complete series of existing music to form an opera. Consequently, the same tune can appear in different sets of repertoires. With *White-Haired Girl*, this one-song-multi-use status is broken. Although it borrowed folk tunes, it developed them and composed special melodies for each character. A manifestation of its modernity.

The musical element of *White-Haired Girl* is not limited to folk songs, but also extensively use the Ban Qiang style from traditional opera. The *White-haired Girl* contains eleven arias in the Ban Qiang style. *My Hate is Mountain-high and Sea-deep* is the most dramatic of them. It is the first time that a national opera systematically uses the method of the Ban Qiang style. In this aria, Hsi-erh makes accusations against the landlord after her hair turns white. *My Hate is Mountain-high and Sea-deep's* Ban Qiang structure is Loose Clapper (Rubato)--Original Clapper (Moderato)--Slow Clapper (Lento)--Loose Clapper (Rubato)--Swing Clapper (Allegro)-Loose Clapper (Rubato). As a consequence, this song can be divided into 6 sections. The Example 5 display the six different types of Ban Qiang styles. It uses free rhythm in the first sentence of the song, typical Loose Clapper. At the same time, it uses a dragging accent which come from traditional Chinese opera too. A dragging tone is used in each sentence's ending. This can express Hsi-erh's hatred of seeing Huang Shiren. Following that, in section B, the speed is changed from rubato to original speed, returning to 4/4 times. When transfer the Loose Clapper to the Original Clapper, the tempo and rhythmic characteristics of the two are clearly different, which can make the music more contrasted. In the Original Clapper, Hsi-erh's hatred is further expressed. Section C begins with Lento, with a strong melody, which is primarily responsible for the narrative function, close to a mood of sadness and self-pity. Turn next to the Loose Clapper, where the lyrics are read first and then sung, with spoken drama and singing opera combined. The Ban Qiang type changes from Loose Clapper to Swing Clapper immediately after the D section. It vividly and logically portrays Hsi-erh's inner emotions from helplessness to bold resistance. The music in section E is dominated by sixteenth notes, triplets and other compact notes, reaching its climax emotionally. The Loose Clapper appeared again in the coda to underscore His-erh's firm heart at this moment and sublimated the theme. Different functional characteristics of Ban Qiang provide a variety of methods

The image displays six musical excerpts, labeled A through F, from the opera *My Hate is Mountain-high and Sea-deep*. Each excerpt is presented on a single staff of music in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or F minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The excerpts are as follows:

- A**: *Tempo rubato*. Lyrics: "My hate is mountain-high... and see deep".
- B**: *A Tempo*. Lyrics: "Thunderstorms and rain I'm here again! Hey! Hey!".
- C**: *Lento*. Lyrics: "Lightning! Tear apart the black clouds. Thunder! Split the sky open!".
- D**: Lyrics: "Dear all! I am Hsi-erh who's been ruined, I'm human being".
- E**: *Allegro*. Lyrics: "I need you to testify to my grievances... what happen to Hsi erh... You you you you don't speak! Is it fear of thunder and lightning?"
- F**: *Tempo rubato*. Lyrics: "Okay! I am the ghost! I am the ghost of humiliating I am the ghost!".

Ex. 5 Six music excerpts from *My Hate is Mountain-high and Sea-deep*

White Haired Girl not only signifies a nationalized breakthrough in opera art, but also shows that national elements have always been an important cornerstone for the development of Chinese opera. Furthermore, it combines Western orchestral instruments with traditional Chinese opera accompaniments. Cello, double bass, and timpani were added along with Chinese string and woodwind instruments and percussion, resulting in a unique Chinese orchestra. It promoted the reform of the Chinese orchestra which expanded its range, diversified its instruments and allowed modulations to be freely switched. It provided valuable experience for later opera accompaniment.

Conclusion

This paper extrapolated the socio-cultural and musical dimension of modern Chinese opera as personified by the legendary opera, *White-Haired Girl*. To conclude, the study found that music had a significant influence in shaping the socio-cultural landscape of modern China. *White-Haired Girl* premiered at the time the Chinese Communist Party when it was trying to mobilize its citizens to resist the Japanese invasion and attain national liberation. Using the 'power of music' to fan patriotism the masses became more sympathetic to the Communist Party's ideas and support the revolutionary movement. Over the years, the same composition has been rearranged and revised as the nation transformed itself to one of the most powerful nations in the world today. Musically, modern Chinese opera is a synthesis of Western and traditional Chinese opera developing into an artistic style over time. *White-Haired Girl* respects the Chinese aesthetic habit of preferring melody expressions, which integrates folk tunes with traditional Chinese opera, therein perfectly echoing the nation's unique cultural characteristic. This investigation focuses on the theme of Chinese operatic modernity in the hope that it will promote a productive and inspiring discourse by sharing findings that serve to contribute to new knowledge in delineating modern Chinese opera.

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