

The Modernization of Musical Aesthetics in Model Opera

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Abstract: *The Revolutionary Model Opera, also known as modern Peking opera, emerged from the transformation of traditional Peking opera and is representative of musical theater during the Cultural Revolution (1966.5.16-1976.10.6). It reflects modern Chinese revolutionary themes and characters, imbuing traditional stylized artistic forms of Peking Opera with a distinct strategic characteristic. The Model Opera represents a peculiar phenomenon in the history of Chinese opera, showcasing both the historical memory of the era and possessing unique artistic qualities. After shedding the political vestiges of the “left,” the Revolutionary Model Opera’s distinctive artistic value has withstood historical scrutiny and continues to be transmitted to this day. This paper focuses on the study of the model opera Shachiapang and aims to explore the innovations by Model Operas on the foundation of traditional Peking Opera, and the significance of Model Operas on Chinese and Western music. Following the exchange between Eastern and Western musical cultures, this study will undertake a further analysis and discussion of the societal impacts brought about by the aesthetic evolution resulting from Model Operas, and the aesthetic trends they have spearheaded.*

Keywords: *Revolutionary, Model Opera, Western Orchestration, Aesthetics, modernization, political violence*

1. Introduction

In Mao Zedong’s speech at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942^[6] he emphasized the primary task of literary and artistic creation to serve the Anti-Japanese War, politics, and the interests of workers, peasants, and soldiers. He asserted that all culture and literary arts possess class characteristics, and that life is the sole source of artistic creation. Mao urged for artistic creation to be rooted in the proletariat and the working class, and the political standard should take precedence over the artistic standard. Furthermore, when he discusses the question of (Whose literature and art are ours?), Mao pointed out that there exists literature and art serving exploiters and oppressors, which are tailored for the landlord class and representative of feudalism. While the art of feudalism is incompatible with the revolutionary art of the proletariat against imperialism and feudalism, the creation of new cultures can also be built upon the transformation of old artistic forms, incorporating new content, thus transforming into revolutionary and people-oriented works. Therefore, the principle of utilizing and transforming old artistic forms to serve the revolutionary art of the proletariat became an important theoretical basis for reforms in Chinese Opera. In 1951, Mao Zedong composed the inscription “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, bring forth new ideas through the rejection of the old” for the Chinese Drama Research Institute, encapsulating the essence of his speech at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art.

Furthermore, the reform of Peking Opera in response to the Cultural Revolution was not an overnight process. At the beginning of 1944, Mao Zedong, after watching the genre of “Pingju”, or newly adapted historical drama Forcing the Bandits onto Liangshan in Yan’an, gave positive feedback in a subsequent letter to the author regarding the reform and innovation of traditional Peking Opera’s programmatic syntax. This included transforming the feudal ideology of the original drama content into new works depicting class oppression and mass struggles. Additionally, there were enhancements in the depiction of mass scenes within the play, and changes in facial makeup and performance attributes of characters, such as transforming oppressed masses with “colorful pattern” faces into handsome young men with clear brows and bright eyes, and portraying rulers as grotesque figures^[1].

In September 1962 during the Eighth Plenary Session of the Tenth Central Committee, Mao emphasized, “Never forget class struggle”. Then, from 1963 to 1964, to consolidate the ideology of class struggle, the Chinese government initiated nationwide socialist education campaigns in both urban and

rural areas, extensively conducting large-scale “Four Cleanups” and “Five counter” movements, and elevating the focus of these movements to rectifying the capitalist roaders within the Party. The “Four Cleanups” movement conducted in rural areas consisted of “cleaning up accounts,” “cleaning up warehouses,” “cleaning up finances,” and “cleaning up work points.” The “Five Counter” movement carried out in urban areas included “anti-corruption and bribery,” “anti-speculation and profiteering,” “anti-extravagance and waste,” “anti-decentralization,” and “anti-bureaucratism.” These policies significantly influenced the field of artistic creation, with many musicians being instructed to participate in a forementioned movements as part of their personal ideological reform. Therefore, the field became fraught with tension and apprehension^[2].

Following the conclusion of the Eighth Plenary Session, Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing, began to associate herself with Mao’s cultural directives, demanding that the theme and subject matter of artistic creation should primarily describe the socialist revolution, cultural construction, and the struggles of workers, peasants, and soldiers during the thirteen years since the founding of the People’s Republic of China. This ideology was also endorsed by the central government. On June 5, 1964, a modern Peking Opera performance was staged at the Great Hall of the People, which Mao Zedong personally attended. This reform became a climax in modern Peking Opera performances since the founding of the People’s Republic of China and marked a milestone in Chinese theatrical history^[5]. On May 1, 1967, eight works, *Red Lantern*, *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, *Shachiapang*, *Sea Port*, *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*, symphonic music *Shachiapang*, and ballets *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl* were staged in Beijing, collectively known as the “Eight Model Operas.” Later that year, the magazine *Red Flag* published an important editorial titled *Celebrating the Great Victory of the Peking Opera Revolution*, in which the term model opera began to be formally used in official discourse. Therefore, model operas, with their indisputable artistic dominance, entered the cultural life of the Chinese people.

2. The Version innovation of Shachiapang

The modern Peking Opera play *Shachiapang*, created by the Beijing Peking Opera Theater, has its precursor in the Shanghai Opera *Lu Dang Huo Zhong* (Reed Firestarter). The creative inspiration for this work originated from the 1943 anti-Japanese song titled *You Are a Guerrilla Fighter*, composed by Huang Wei with lyrics by Jian Qing^[4]. This song was based on the report *Blood-Stained Names: The Struggle Chronicles of Thirty-Six Wounded Soldiers*, which recounts the story of 36 wounded soldiers from the Communist New Fourth Army’s Sixth Regiment. In September 1939, they courageously persevered through hardship and adversity to continue their resistance during the war. Subsequently, this song was adapted into the Shanghai Opera *Green Water, Red Flag* by playwright Wen Mu of the Shanghai Opera Troupe in 1959 and was renamed *Lu Dang Huo Zhong* upon its premiere in 1960. Between 1964 and 1970, it underwent four significant revisions, ultimately evolving into the version we know today as *Shachiapang*.

After the premiere in 1960, the Shanghai Opera *Luwei Huozhong* underwent several revisions. In 1964, it received high praise from leaders of the central government. In this version, it not only depicted the life of revolutionary struggle but also exuded a rich traditional Peking Opera flavor. In addition to employing traditional Peking Opera creative techniques for script rewriting, the adaptors also integrated stage performance conventions such as singing, recitation, acting, and martial arts. They further refined the structure and plot of the Libretto and intensified the delineation of the main characters’ details and personalities^[7].

The initial version of *Shachiapang* is a “dan” role opera, with the central character being Sister A Ching. In Peking Opera, “dan” refers to the female roles portrayed by male actors. These roles are characterized by their graceful movements, delicate gestures, and emotive expressions. Dans are further categorized into several subtypes based on age, personality, and social status, such as “qingyi” (virtuous and refined roles), “huadan” (playful and vivacious roles), “laodan” (elderly female roles), and “wudan” (female warrior roles). This rendition of *Shachiapang* was directly transplanted from the Shanghai opera version of *Luwei Huozhong*^[9]. The two main characters are Sister A Ching and Diao Deyi. Sister A Ching is portrayed as clever and courageous, while Diao Deyi is depicted as cunning and treacherous. The drama unfolds through the interplay of these contrasting forces, leading to dramatic conflicts and climax. In this version, the vocal pattern and style primarily feature xipi and erhuang melodies, with no significant emphasis on the vocal segments of positive characters or overt caricaturing in the singing segments of negative characters. Xipi is a musical form of traditional Chinese operatic singing style. Originating from the Qinqiang during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, it spread from Xiangyang in Hubei province to the areas around Wuchang and Hankou, where it merged with some local folk melodies. Within various

Chinese opera genres such as Peking opera, Han opera, and Huizhou opera, Xipi is often combined with Erhuang style, collectively known as Pi Huang. Also, Peking opera's Xipi includes several vocal styles such as daoban (Introduction), manban (slow triplet), yuanban (original temple), erliu, kuaiban (fast board), liushui, sanban (rubato), etc. Compared to Erhuang, Xipi tends to be more vigorous, actively, and robust. Mao Zedong praised the actors after watching the opera and proposed three modifications: firstly, to distinctly highlight armed struggle and implement the dual policy of simultaneous armed and underground struggles. Secondly, to revise the ending, with the New Fourth Army actively infiltrating the enemy's stronghold. Thirdly, to rename the play Shachiapang, as the story takes place in Shachiapang.

The second version of Shachiapang was re-staged in March 1965, gaining nationwide recognition for its compelling dramatic conflicts, storyline, and the uniquely artistic vocal style. It was subsequently designated as one of the inaugural model operas in 1966. In this rendition, two changes were made based on Mao Zedong's suggestions: firstly, shifting from a single theme to the principle of parallel dual-themes, emphasizing armed struggle as primary and underground struggle as secondary, thereby enhancing the decisive role of the New Fourth Army in the struggle at Shachiapang. Secondly, modifications were made to storyline elements and character vocal segments, such as increasing the role of Guo Jianguang, a commander of the New Fourth Army, adding vocal segments, and highlighting his heroic image. Adjustments were also made to the vocal segments of Sister A Ching and Sha Granny to enhance their character portrayals, while modifications to Hu Chuankui's lyrics heightened the contradictions of negative characters.

The third version of Shachiapang (1967) served as a transitional edition to the fourth version, with minor adjustments to the Libretto of the characters. The fourth version of Shachiapang (1970) adhered to the contemporary "Three Prominences" principle. From Mao Zedong's speech, "The Three Prominences" principle refers to: 1. Highlighting positive characters among all characters; 2. Emphasizing heroic figures among the positive characters; 3. Focusing on the main heroic figures among the heroes^[8]. It is implementing the following changes: Firstly, increasing the singing segments of positive characters while reducing those of negative characters. Secondly, introducing non-realistic lyrics praising the Communism Mao Zedong, such as Chairman Mao guides the direction forward in Guo Jianguang's singing segment, and Chairman Mao, you give me wisdom and courage in Sister A Ching's vocal segment. Thirdly, incorporating tunes from red communism songs into the music and vocal styles, such as *The Three Major Disciplines* and *Eight Points for Attention* and *The East is Red*, and modifying the orchestra to include a mix of Chinese and Western instruments. Therefore, Shachiapang underwent its final revisions^[10].

3. The Musical Analysis of "Modernization"

Peking Opera originated in Beijing during the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty^[3]. By amalgamating and assimilating the strengths of various regional opera genres such as Qinqiang, Kunqu, Bangzi, and Yiyangqiang, it developed distinct characteristics and attained significant of artistic value. Firstly, in terms of genres and vocal styles, it established a comprehensive set of rigorous standards and procedures for vocal arrangement, transitions between styles, and the selection of vocal patterns. Additionally, different singing techniques and performance styles were developed for characters of different ages. Secondly, in terms of melody, it established two major melodic systems, "Sheng" system and "Dan" system, with the same tonal system but different scales, thus resolving the contradiction of overlapping vocal ranges and regions between male and female roles and allowing for gender differentiation in singing styles. Thirdly, in terms of accompanying musical instruments, it formed a vocal accompaniment system known as the "Wenchang (civil mode)" primarily featuring the mainly three major instruments of Jinghu (Peking opera fiddle), Jing Erhu (Peking two-stringed fiddle), and Yueqin (Four-stringed moon-shaped Chinese mandolin). Moreover, it developed a versatile "Wuchang (martial mode)" percussion and orchestral music system for performances involving singing, recitation, action, and percussion, facilitating the portrayal and embellishment of various theatrical scenes. Over more than a century of development, Peking Opera has exerted a profound influence nationwide, becoming the largest theatrical genre in China and being widely recognized as an essential element of Chinese cultural heritage.

However, it was believed that the traditional Peking opera had shortcomings in portraying modern life and character imagery. These included a formulaic vocal style that results in a lack of unique character expression and an inability to depict modern styles and zeitgeist. Additionally, the accompanying music band's monotonous and shrill style, besides serving the function of vocal accompaniment, has relatively limited capabilities in setting the stage, creating atmosphere, and

enhancing emotions and artistic imagery within the opera. Therefore, the modernization innovations of Model Operas on the basis of traditional Peking Opera primarily include: Firstly, enriching the repertoire of Peking Opera by introducing innovative musical structure and stage formats; Secondly, diversifying the utilization of varied sentence patterns and structures within the vocal system; Thirdly, endowing Peking Opera music with distinct character personalities and epochal features, and blending new revolutionary tunes; and lastly, expanding the expressive capabilities of Peking Opera orchestras through the adoption of hybrid Chinese and Western musical ensembles.

In traditional Peking Opera, the depiction of storylines, stage settings, and scene transitions often involves the use of musical techniques such as qupai, interludes, and civil and martial scenes. In contrast, the model opera *Shachiapang* draws inspiration from Western operatic music, employing musical forms such as overtures, intermezzos, finales, and transitional music to portray and intertwine storylines, delineate distinct character personalities and images, and enhance the stage atmosphere. For instance, the overture of the model opera *Shachiapang* draws inspiration from the overture format of European musical compositions. Although its musical structure is concise, the fusion of Eastern and Western musical expressions offers a refreshing aesthetic experience, making it more widely accessible compared to traditional operatic styles. In the first scene of *Shachiapang*, the overture begins with a very strong (ff) musical theme, adopting the musical form of a march with a fast-paced and dense rhythm in 4/4 and 2/4, accompanied by tight snare drumming to foreshadow intense battle scenes. This creates a powerful and stirring musical effect, depicting the intense and highly emotional scenes of the anti-Japanese war, and foreshadowing the theme of the entire drama, which revolves around the relentless struggle between the people and army of *Shachiapang* under the leadership of the Communist Party against the Loyal and Righteous Army and Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, *Shachiapang* incorporates intermezzos between different scenes, providing more time for stage transitions compared to traditional Peking Opera's reliance on drumming or transitions of qupai, thus enhancing narrative coherence.

This opera also revolutionized the traditional stage setting of Peking Opera by adopting a backdrop canvas reminiscent of traditional ink landscape paintings, aiming to evoke the picturesque scenery of the Jiangnan region in China. Additionally, elements of weather changes were introduced into both the stage and the plot to accentuate the development and transformations of the dramatic narrative. For example, in the second scene titled *Transformation*, as dawn breaks over Yangcheng Lake, the sky is clear without a single cloud, providing the backdrop for Guo Jianguang's singing segment of *Our motherland's splendid mountains and rivers will never yield an inch of territory*. Subsequently, as the plot progresses into the fourth scene "Wisdom Battle," the weather gradually turns gloomy, and by the fifth scene *Persistence*, the sky is shrouded in thick clouds. During the final chorus of (*Final Victory*) in the tenth scene of the soldiers' vocal segment *We should learn from the evergreen pine atop Mount Tai*, thunder and lightning accompany their performance, symbolizing the unwavering revolutionary spirit of the New Fourth Army in the face of adversity. Finally, in the concluding scene *Reunion and Annihilation*, the dark clouds disperse, and the sun rises, signifying the people of *Shachiapang* regaining hope under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party of China (In the SCENE X of Libretto, it mentioned: "Enter Aunty Sha. She sees again Chen Tien-min, Kuo Chien-kuang and Dragon. And the people of *Shachiapang* under the leadership of the Party once more see the light of day").

In *Shachiapang*, interlude music is introduced between different scenes for the first time, replacing the traditional Beijing opera method of using only qupai, drums, or musical cues for scene transitions. For instance, in the second scene of *Shachiapang*, titled *Transformation*, the music begins with a brief interlude serving as a transitional bridge. The music starts with an *f* dynamic and gradually intensifies, creating an increasingly tense musical atmosphere. In terms of instrumentation, a combination of traditional Chinese instruments and Western orchestral instruments is employed. The Chinese bamboo flute replaces vocal melody in this piece, maintaining a relatively unified rhythm. The ensemble utilizes a technique commonly found in traditional Chinese folk music, where multiple instruments play repeated melodies and rhythms simultaneously [Figure 1]. In this ensemble section, the traditional Chinese string instruments Erhu and Zhonghu replace the Western violins and violas, working together with the cello and double bass to form the string section [Figure 2]. Additionally, the keyboard instruments serving as harmonic voices are replaced by the traditional Chinese wind instrument Sheng [Figure 3]. Towards the end of the musical piece, the tempo gradually slows down, setting the stage for the subsequent solo by Shanaing, titled *The Communist Party is like the sun in the sky*.



Figure 1: Orchestration of the Second Scene in Shachiapang. The instrument arrangement, from top to bottom, includes Jing Erhu, Yueqin (Moon Guitar), Small Sanxian, Yangqin (Chinese Dulcimer), Large Sanxian, Daruan (Large Ruan), and Zhudi (Bamboo Flute).



Figure2: The ensemble section of Erhu, Zhonghu, Cello, and Double Bass



Figure 3: The keyboard instruments of Chinese wind instrument Sheng

Compared to traditional Peking Opera, the model opera “Shachiapang” exhibits greater diversity in the syntactical variations of vocal systems. For instance, in Guo Jianguang’s lyrical passage “Our motherland’s splendid mountains and rivers will never yield an inch of territory,” this segment can be divided into two parts according to the development of the plot. The first part describes Guo Jianguang’s admiration for the natural beauty of the Jiangnan towns, using the scenery of Jiangnan to praise the splendid landscapes. The second part expresses his hatred towards the enemy after being wounded, and his desire to return to the battlefield to fight the enemy as soon as possible. This passage consists of seven pairs of upper and lower phrases, with only the second and fourth pairs following the traditional “banqiang” style, it is a vocal form utilized in traditional Chinese opera, such as Bangzi and Pihuang. Unlike the qupai style, which comprises varying lengths of phrases, banqiang follows the poetic structure of five, seven, or ten-character lines divided into upper and lower phrases. The odd-numbered lines disregard rhyme, while the even-numbered lines rhyme. The final character of each line is typically in a different tonal category, with odd-numbered lines ending in a rising tone and even-numbered lines ending

in a level tone. There is no fixed limit on the number of lines, and there are no restrictions on the tonal patterns or melodies used. It was employing regular seven-character and ten-character structures. The remaining pairs exhibit irregular upper and lower phrases.

This segment employs the bright and stirring “Xipi” vocal system, with a design comprising [Original Xipi,] [Erliu,] [Liushui,] and [Fast/Scattered] styles. The tempo ranges from slow to medium to fast. The segment begins with the bold opening of the “Original Xipi” at a moderate speed, with a 2/4 beat, consisting of four pairs of upper and lower phrases with varied rhythmic patterns. The tone endings follow the regularity of the Xipi vocal style, with rich variations in the upper phrases, where the ending tones are E/D/D/A respectively, while all lower phrases end with C, consistent with the traditional Xipi tonal pattern. [Figure 4] Regarding the rhythm of “ban” and “yan” movements, the first, second, and fourth pairs of upper and lower phrases adhere to the traditional Xipi vocal style, with each “ban” followed by an “yan”, forming a pattern of “ban-yan-ban-yan...” The rhythm is moderate, allowing for a relaxed and expansive performance. However, the lower phrase “How could we tolerate the atrocities of the Japanese invaders!” [Figure5] in the third pair breaks the traditional pattern by beginning with a top “ban” and omitting trailing tones and transitions at the end of the upper phrase, vividly expressing Guo Janguang’s intense hatred towards the Japanese invaders.



Figure 4: The Second Musical Phase of Guo Janguang's Segment. In this phase, Guo Janguang sings of his unwavering love for the homeland and commitment to defending it: 'The morning glow reflects on Yangcheng Lake, reeds blossom, rice fields fragrant, willows line the shore. With the hard work of the people's hands, this land of fish and rice becomes a splendid southern paradise. Not an inch of our beautiful homeland will we yield. How can we allow the invaders' cruel rage?' This lyric phase captures both the natural beauty of the land and the resolve to protect it against invasion.



Figure 5: The second musical phase of Guo Janguang's segment

Furthermore, despite differences in syntactic structure, the composer employs variations of the “Original Xipi” to adjust the length of phrases by expanding or contracting the beginnings, middles, and ends of sentences. For instance, in the first phrase “The morning glow reflects on Yangcheng Lake,” [Figure 6] which consists of eight characters, a structure less common in traditional Peking Opera’s banqiang style, the composers base it on the more typical seven-character phrase. In the beginning of the third phrase, the character “yang” is added to the small trailing tone of the character “cheng”, thus maintaining the overall structure while simultaneously resolving the issue of character placement. Additionally, at the end of the sentence, an extension technique is applied, adding a 5-beat trailing tone, enhancing the lyrical quality of the vocal performance and enriching the expression of emotions.



Figure 6: The third musical phase of Guo Janguang's segment

The fourth act of this drama, titled *Intellectual Struggle*, stands out as one of the most renowned musical segments, depicting the aftermath of a three-day Japanese military sweep, leaving the village in ruins and its inhabitants utterly exhausted. In a bid to safeguard wounded soldiers of the New Fourth Army, A-qing tactfully departs ahead, engaging in a fierce intellectual duel with the Kuomintang reactionaries. Leveraging her status as a life-saving benefactor to Diao Deyi, she adeptly probes for enemy intelligence. Confronted by successive interrogations from Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi, she responds with finesse, maintaining composure, dignity, and precision in her words, deftly navigating the situation and ultimately averting disaster. Among these exchanges, the dialogic passages between Hu Chuankui, Diao Deyi, and A-Qin (*Reflections of the Past* sung by Hu Chuankui, the trio's counterpoint *I Must Observe Every Word and Gesture to Guard Against Him*, and the duet between A-qin and Diao Deyi—*Is There Anything Detailed or Not?*) stand out as the musical highlight of the act, vividly capturing the intricate maneuvering between A-qin and her adversaries.

This section is divided into three sections, and the entire work is a highly elaborate trio singing segment, employing the template of [Xipi Erliu] - [Liushui] - [Negative Xipi Yaoban] - [Xipi Yaoban] - [Liushui], with variations in speed transitioning from medium to fast to slow. The segment consists of 5 phrases, characterized by a tightly woven plot, rich and colorful melody, and diverse rhythms. Originally, this segment was a duet between A-qing and Diao Deyi, featured in the Shanghai opera *Luwei Huozhong*. However, in the adapted model opera *Shachiapang*, the segment was expanded to include a solo by Hu Chuankui, forming the classic trio singing segment. Additionally, a distinctive performance style was introduced by “Beigong”, which amidst the progression of the plot and with other characters present on stage, the main singer delivers soliloquy-like lines, commenting on the words or inner thoughts of their opponent, assumed to be unheard by other characters. While traditional Peking opera also features duets with “Beigong,” the lyrics are often simpler with fewer phrases, and the performance on stage is relatively rigid.

However, in *Shachiapang*, the “Beigong” breaks from the traditional form of duet performance, with each character adopting a distinct persona: Dan mode (A-qing vocal segment), Lao Sheng mode (Diao Deyi vocal segment) and Hua Lian mode (Hu Chuankui vocal segment), accompanied by alternating Erliu and Liushui templates in the music, conveying plot information and character development to the audience through the musical transitions and vocal exchanges. Furthermore, to accentuate the contrasting personalities of the quick-witted and calm A-qing against the cunning and devious Diao De, the melody employs a technique rarely seen in traditional Peking opera, alternating between Xipi and negative Xipi styles. This stark contrast in melody vividly showcases the inner workings and character traits of the three different individuals.

For instance, in the second section of *Shachiapang*, which is Diao Deyi, A-qing, and Hu Chuankui's trio segment, the first two phrases are characterized by a negative Xipi Yaoban style. Diao Deyi sings the upper phrase using the Lao Sheng singing mode with the lyrics “*This woman is extraordinary,*” while A-qing sings the lower phrase using the Dan singing mode with the line “*What a sinister heart Diao Deyi has.*” This musical phrase innovates upon the traditional Beijing opera Negative Xipi Yaoban in two aspects. Firstly, at the end of Diao Deyi's phrase, a low fourth-degree tail cadence transposition (#C-#G-#G-#F) replaces the traditional root cadence (#D-#C-#C-B). Secondly, the ending of Diao Deyi's phrase simplifies the traditional Lao Sheng mode's melodious drag (#C-E-#G-#F-E) and adopts a combination of staccato and sustained notes (B-E-#G) [Figure 7], effectively portraying the character's astute and cunning psychological activities and personality traits. Then, in A-qing's following phrase, sung in response, also undergoes transformation based on traditional singing styles. The phrase comprises three sub-phrases, all derived from transpositions of the traditional melody of Gong system, exhibiting similarities with Diao Deyi's phrase. The first sub-phrase employs a high pitch to emphasize the words “Diao Deyi,” the second sub-phrase transitions to a lower pitch, and the third sub-phrase repeats the second sub-phrase in a sequence, showcasing both the graceful beauty of the Dan singing mode's contrasting tones and A-qing's character traits of astuteness and calm reflection. Furthermore, this duet segment innovates on the depiction of the vocal scenes. The traditional negative Xipi vocal style, also known as crying tone, is typically used to convey scenes of characters lamenting. But, in *Shachiapang*, it is employed to portray the characters' “Beigong” segments, where the main singer performs phrases while interpreting the psychological activities of opposing characters.

Finally, in the third section, which is a duet between A-qing and Diao Deyi, starting from Diao Deyi's line “*Just heard the commander say.*” This section consists of fourteen pairs of phrases. It follows the musical format of [Liushui] and can be divided into two parts based on the different plot developments. The first section, from the lyrics by “*Just heard the commander say*” to “*Only then can misfortune turn into fortune.*” In this part, Diao Deyi indirectly probes Aunt Qing while Aunt Qing cleverly responds,

showcasing Diao De-yi's cunning side and A-qing's extraordinary intelligence. The vocal and rhythmic patterns in this part are relatively flexible, with the opening lines adhering to the traditional style of starting and ending. However, Diao Deyi innovates the structure in the last pair of lines, "Without the noble idea of resisting Japan and saving the nation, how could one remain calm in saving others?" He transforms the conventional 9+9 parallel structure of classical Peking opera into a less common 5+11 contrasting structure [Figure 8]. In this innovation, the melody of the first line is compressed, and then expanded and variation in the second line, creating a new melody. Through the lyrics, it's evident that this technique of condensing and developing the melody aligns with the characters' psychological activities. The compressed melody in the first line reflects Diao De-yi's urgency, while the more relaxed rhythm in the second line illustrates his psychological probing and tone.



Figure 7: The First Phrase of Diao Deyi's Vocal Segment in the Fourth Act of Shachiapang, titled Intellectual Struggle. In this segment, Diao Deyi admires Aqing Sao's cleverness in evading Japanese soldiers, hinting at her anti-Japanese sentiments: "Aqing Sao, just now I heard the commander say, you're truly remarkable. I admire your composure, courage, and cleverness for daring to mislead the enemies right in front of them. Without a strong belief in resisting Japan, how could one be so calm to save others in danger?"



Figure 8: The Second Phrase of Diao Deyi's Vocal Segment in the Fourth Act of Shachiapang, titled Intellectual Struggle. Here, Diao Deyi probes further, attempting to gauge her loyalty and connection to the New Fourth Army: "The New Fourth Army has long been here in Shachiapang; this great tree provides a cool shade. You often interact with them, so surely you've helped coordinate their affairs?"

To which Aqing Sao responds with sharp insight: "What planning? I just do business—people come and go, and I serve them all with tea. Once they leave, they're forgotten. What detailed planning could there be?"

4. Conclusion: The Aesthetic Evolution and Trends of Model Operas

The model operas emerged under the "left" literary policy, representing a unique artistic product born in an era characterized by left-leaning political violence and tightly intertwined with an extreme political system. During a decade of severe artistic scarcity, they became vital spiritual sustenance for the Chinese people, embodying the imprint of their times. However, they are not merely adjuncts to political violence or repositories of stale memories advocating red communism. The model operas possess an "aesthetic memory and subjectivity" capable of conveying aesthetic consciousness extracted from spiritual products. Their aesthetic subjectivity is constrained by various factors such as society, class, and politics, transmitting to the people revolutionary operas in a "model" format with strong subjective consciousness and serving multiple social functions and aesthetic categories.

The social functions of drama manifest differently in Western and Chinese contexts. In the West, opera serves as a tool to promote audience awareness of societal ideologies through its artistic manifestations, employing the comprehension of aesthetic objects to achieve educational aims. In essence, western opera facilitates a deeper understanding of societal values, thereby serving educational and inspirational purposes. For instance, in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, the intricate conflicts and complex character relationships reflect and explore critiques of human morality, the depth and complexity of human emotions, and highlight the philosophical implications of the theme of good versus evil, prompting audiences to contemplate sin, punishment, and redemption deeply. Conversely, traditional Chinese theater often directly utilizes artistic forms for the moral regulation of the aesthetic subject. Similarly, model operas during the Cultural Revolution continued the societal educational function of traditional Peking Opera. Rooted in red communism culture and national aesthetic elements, they conveyed communist ideals through performances and influenced audience thought and behavior by establishing new aesthetic standards and moral norms. These model operas became the mainstream aesthetic form during the Cultural Revolution and leaving a profound impression on subsequent Peking Opera performances.

The assessment of aesthetic categories of model operas in the cultural context primarily manifests in two aspects: first, the innovation in music design; and second, the epochal historical artistic value of model operas. Model operas retain the convention of spoken dialogue from traditional Peking opera, incorporating forms from drama and recitation, and adapting lyrics into more vernacular and understandable modern Chinese without sacrificing rhythmic beauty. Since Chinese is a tonal language, the pitch variations of syllables in character soliloquies affect the rise and fall of musical melodies, while pronunciation pauses or breaks also influence the fluctuation of musical rhythms. The aesthetic significance of spoken part lies in their seamless integration of semantic contextual of Chinese phonetics with rational melodies, fully exploiting the characteristics of textual language to depict rhythm changes, intonations, tones, and emotional expressions of characters vividly. The popularization of vernacularization in Peking opera model operas represents a transformation from traditional aesthetics to modern aesthetics. Its colloquial and lifelike spoken lines achieve maximum circulation, being easy to understand and learn, and facilitating dissemination. Moreover, this style of spoken dialogues in performance effectively renders stage atmosphere and advances plot development without feeling abrupt.

Additionally, model operas possess a highly elevated realm of musical aesthetics. They overturn the formalized patterns of traditional Peking opera, preserving and inheriting the cultural essence of Peking opera while integrating diverse musical elements. This integration includes the incorporation of revolutionary thematic melodies and the utilization of orchestras featuring a blend of Eastern and Western instruments. Building upon the foundation of the "Four main instrument," model operas incorporate a variety of ethnic and Western orchestral instruments, seeking optimal intersection between Eastern and Western musical traditions. Moreover, the musical melodies of Peking opera model operas are diverse, with rich harmonies. The music rises and falls in accordance with the changes in dramatic plotlines, with vocal performances and music working in tandem to depict the characters' inner emotions of joy and sorrow, thereby authentically reflecting the performers' subtle sentiments. Such emotional resonance in music enables the audience, as aesthetic subjects, to quickly establish points of connection with the dramatic characters, thereby experiencing spiritual transcendence through aesthetic communication and resonance.

Finally, from the perspective of the historical value, model operas can serve as "monuments" to carry forward historical memory in the context of the temporality. Their emergence coincided with the influence of leftist doctrinal thought, while also reflecting the revolutionary aesthetic trend under the proletarian struggle. Whether in the lyrics of characters, music, or stage settings, model operas embody the red revolutionary ideology of the Communist Party of China. Similarly, as a medium for revolutionary ideology, model operas also possess aesthetic identification. Through the interpretation of the dramatic texts of model operas, they further expound the political connotations of communism to the audience, subtly stimulating and guiding the audience to develop an aesthetic sense of identification with revolutionary ideology.

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