

The Application and Exploration of Cello in Teochew Opera Accompaniment—Based on the Dual Perspective of Historical Evolution and Artistic Innovation

Yanlin Chen

School of Music, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, China

Abstract: Teochew opera is one of the top ten operas in China and the representative of local operas and local culture in eastern Guangdong Province. Its performance and music have distinctive regional ethnic characteristics. In the performing arts of Teochew opera, there is a saying that "seven partners and three singers", which reflects that band accompaniment is particularly important in Teochew opera performance. Since the founding of the people's Republic of China, the accompaniment instrument group of Teochew opera has also experienced continuous improvement and perfection. In particular, the addition of cello has made up for the limitations of the performance of ethnic instruments, widened the space of accompaniment music, improved the artistic level of Teochew opera art, made it more expressive, and has a wider audience, providing certain conditions for Teochew opera to gradually move towards prosperity. Therefore, from the perspective of performance effect, inheritance and innovation, the addition of cello is an important step to improve the art of Teochew opera, and is also an important measure to improve and integrate under the background of globalization, and realize the dialectical unity of ethnic cultural inheritance and innovation.

Keywords: Teochew Opera, Cello, Teochew Opera Band

1. Introduction

Teochew opera originated from southern opera in the song and Yuan Dynasties. In the Ming Dynasty, it was called Chaozhou Opera and chaodiao. It is a unique opera that takes "southern opera" in the song and Yuan Dynasties as its skeleton, integrates Shaanxi opera and Yiyang opera, and gradually grows up by absorbing local folk music. It has extremely distinctive ethnic characteristics. Geographically, Teochew opera is not far from the "brother opera" Guangdong opera, but the impact is relatively small. So far, Teochew opera has experienced more than 400 years, but it still retains the uniqueness of Chaozhou music in singing and accompaniment. However, in the process of modernization, the development of Teochew opera art has not been complacent. While retaining its ethnic characteristics, it is also changing with the development of the times. In particular, the addition of cello enriches the musical color of the original traditional ethnic accompaniment instruments, and plays an important role in the artistic effect of Teochew opera and the inheritance and innovation of art. For communication, the integration of cello into the accompaniment system of Teochew opera helps to improve the artistic level of Teochew opera and meet the increasing aesthetic needs of the audience. From the perspective of the internal reform of art, this is a great progress in the innovation and integration of stage practice and practices the concept of daring to explore innovation in opera art [1].

2. Cello, As a Western Musical Instrument, First Entered The Teochew Opera Band

Teochew opera accompaniment bands are mainly divided into two parts, namely aspect of literature and aspect of martial. Aspect of literature refers to orchestral and plucked instruments, and aspect of martial refers to percussion instruments. The western instrument cello introduced from Teochew opera belongs to aspect of literature. On April 28, 1956, Chairman Mao Zedong put forward the "double hundred" policy of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend". Its basic spirit included that different forms and styles of art could develop freely, which also promoted the mutual integration of the world and Chinese ethnic culture and art. Therefore, China's "quintessence" Peking opera was the first to introduce western musical instruments. Cello was the first batch of

imported musical instruments and was used in the "model opera" of Peking Opera. In the mutual exchange and study of Chinese opera circles, Teochew opera has also learned the model operas of Beijing opera. At the same time, it has introduced the cello from Beijing opera, which is responsible for playing the bass of the accompaniment band. After continuous running in attempts, in the 1970s, the cello replaced the original instrument "Da Wu", which is responsible for playing bass but has shortcomings such as poor flexibility and single timbre, and has become one of the indispensable instruments in Teochew opera[2-3].

3. The Application of Cello in Teochew Opera Band

There is a folk proverb in Teochew, "a good play needs a good back shed." it means that a high-quality Teochew opera performance cannot be separated from the good and unified music organization of the backstage accompaniment band, which mainly highlights the importance of the coordination ability of the backstage accompaniment band. The cello, as an imported western musical instrument, needs to be able to obey the drum scheduling of Teochew opera opera, which is different from the Western symphony conductor, and adapt to the ability to play with other ethnic musical instruments, so as to realize cross-border integration and expand the artistic expression dimension of traditional opera.

3.1 Role in the Band

The cello in the band is mainly responsible for the performance of the mid bass. It is accompanied by the plucking technique in the interlude of Teochew opera, and the melody of the aria is played by the bow and string in the actors' aria. In the Teochew opera opera band, the aspect of literature part, which is mainly composed of orchestral and plucked instruments, is mainly composed of high musical instruments, while the cello has a wide range, with four octaves in common use. The cello can balance the harmony of the band's high and low sounds, and combine the singers' singing to make the music fuller. At the same time, the deep and stable middle and low sounds are used to create the opera situation, which further promotes the deep emotion of the work.

3.2 New Playing Techniques

Cellists in Teochew opera band need to change or adjust their traditional Western intonation concept according to the specific melody of Teochow music, and the intonation should also closely follow the actors' singing. It is a major technical difficulty to not only "support" the actors' intonation, but also pay attention to "maintain the tone" to maintain the voice balance. From the perspective of the characteristics of Teochew opera or Teochow music, it is generally a relative seven flat rhythm or mixed rhythm. The most important feature is that the relationship between EF and BC is not a semitone, but that f is slightly higher and B is slightly lower on the basis of the twelve average rhythm. Moreover, due to the ethnic music characteristics of some traditional music, its pitch is not fixed. In particular, the unique "living five tones" of Teochow music is slightly higher than the D of the twelve average rhythm, but it is also in an unstable state. Another example is the "heavy six tones" in Teochow string Poetry music, which is characterized by B and e. The sound drops by one third each. In the famous Teochew opera opera play "sweep the yarn window", the lyrics of "looking up at the misty mountains, my hometown is thousands of miles away" and the words "once I saw my face in a mirror, my face has become older and older" sung by Wang Jinzhen are all reflected. Therefore, the cellist of Teochew opera opera band needs to adjust the intonation and music processing according to the characteristics of Teochow ethnic music, be familiar with the changing laws of Teochow string poetry and music, adjust the bow method according to the trend of music, and closely follow the singing of the stage actors, so as to cooperate with other wenpan and wupan instruments to achieve real harmony. The effect of "making foreign things serve China".

4. The Necessity of Teochew Opera Band Introducing Cello

4.1 Meet the Performance Needs of the Times

With the rise of the reform of model operas in the 1960s and 1970s, Teochew opera, as a local genre, learned from Beijing opera, and also added the repertoire of model operas and adapted them. However, in order to pursue the rigor of artistic expression, in the process of adaptation, in addition to changing the actors' singing lines to Chaoshan dialect, the accompaniment of opera entrance and actors'

singing lines basically copied the tunes of Beijing opera. In particular, the witty selection in the representative play Shajiabang was the same as the lines and melodies of the original version of Beijing opera. Therefore, in order to adapt to the performance of Model Operas, the accompaniment instruments of Teochew opera also learned from Beijing Opera and introduced the Western musical instrument Cello in order to present the model operas.

4.2 Conform to the Trend of Artistic Progress of Teochew Opera

The introduction of cello in Teochew opera conforms to the trend of continuous improvement and perfection of Teochew opera art, and is a sign of innovation, improvement and progress in the development of Teochew opera art. Teochew opera in the 1920s was influenced by the style of "ban aria" and had the characteristics of high tone. In the old society, Teochew opera practiced the "child actor system". Most of the minor Teochew opera actors' range positions were basically high, and the two adapted to each other. Therefore, the melody of composition and creation also tended to be in the high tone area, and the accompanying instruments were basically high musical instruments. The most representative one was the sentence "Wang Jinlong hit the unfortunate" in the Aria "Wang Jinlong laments", which was a dual sentence of "ban aria". Its first tone to the second is from G1 to a1. Therefore, in order to support the singing of actors and meet the needs of creation, the accompaniment instruments of Teochew opera add two-stringed fiddles on the basis of high musical instruments. However, the two-stringed fiddles only have one and a half positions, with high and narrow range, sharp, thin and bright voice, and play the leading role, making the high musical instruments in Teochew opera accompaniment more surplus. After the founding of the people's Republic of China, when Teochew opera came to Beijing to study and exchange operas, it was often criticized that the timbre of the two strings was too sharp and there were too many highs. However, the use of the only bass instrument in Teochew opera was ignored in Teochew opera. The main reasons were that the timbre was difficult to integrate, the volume was difficult to meet the tension of the drama, and the production process was complex and the range was limited, which was difficult to meet the performance needs. The development of the cello instrument was relatively complete and mature, especially the intonation, adaptability, flexibility and expressiveness were far superior to those of the traditional bass instruments in Teochew opera. Its compatibility and excellent stage effect also made Teochew opera pay attention to bass instruments. Therefore, the cello it also quickly replaced Dayo, making up for the long-standing vacancy of Teochew opera bass, making the music matching of Teochew opera more scientific and harmonious, and meeting the needs of Teochew opera performance, This innovative measure has also enhanced the creative space of Teochew opera in music[4-6].

4.3 Adapt to the Development of the Times and the Audience's Aesthetic Needs

Absorption and introduction are the only way for the development and innovation of art, which is a basic principle in aesthetics and art science. To make traditional art dynamic in the new era, it needs to be allowed to have space for dynamic development. Moreover, the dissemination of traditional art in the new era should first focus on the migration of audience groups from the elderly audience to the young audience. The improvement of the aesthetic level of young audiences in the new era also requires that traditional art should keep pace with the times, develop and innovate, and be inclusive. Therefore, in adhering to the artistic principle of taking ethnic music as the noumenon feature, we should dare to explore and innovate, so as to adapt to the development of the times and meet the aesthetic needs of young audiences.

Just as the Teochew opera band, while introducing western musical instruments such as the cello, still maintains the ethnic group of its art and organically combines it with ethnic musical instruments on the basis of not moving the traditional artistic foundation, which not only improves the balance between the overall intonation and orchestration of ethnic musical instruments in music, but also strengthens the rendering of the situation in stage effect and brightens the audience's eyes, so the introduction of cello has improved the overall artistic level of Teochew opera, which not only retains the local culture, but also gives the audience novel listening and viewing feelings, so that Teochew opera can give better play to the charm of traditional art in the new era, so as to attract more young audiences to pay attention to Teochew opera and love Teochew opera makes Teochew opera more competitive in the cultural trend of the new era.

5. Innovative significance of Teochew opera opera band introducing Cello

5.1 Clarify the artistic innovation principles of Teochew Opera

The successful practice of the cello, a foreign musical instrument, in the Teochew opera band has clarified the principles of innovation in the traditional art of Teochew opera opera and widened the space for innovation and integration. Comrade Mao Zedong once pointed out that "our policy is to learn the strengths of all nations and countries, and to learn all the really good things in politics, economy, science, technology, literature and art." he also pointed out that "if we can digest foreign music and absorb its strengths, it will be beneficial to us." the introduction of cello, a Western musical instrument in Teochew opera, belongs to the practice of making foreign countries serve China, that is, absorbing foreign strengths to develop China's ethnic music. However, the more the traditional art with stronger ethnic regionality, the more controversial the introduction of foreign musical instruments or musical elements. This controversy mainly comes from two aspects, one is the artistic method, that is, the compatibility of Chinese and Western musical instruments, and the other is art. The concept, that is, "non-ethnic", is worried about the loss of the ethnic group of traditional opera art.

This controversy has also been gradually broken with the continuous running in and stage practice in recent decades. The foundation and key to success is that the addition of cello follows the principle of traditional artistic innovation, that is, highlighting the ethnic main instrument, not abusing it while understanding the functional characteristics of cello instruments, and the style is the core of ethnic group. Therefore, it is necessary to keep consistent with the style of Teochow music and artistic integration in the application, and give priority to highlighting the dominant position of ethnic instruments in the orchestration to achieve the effect of icing on the cake. Based on this principle, Teochew opera will be applied and adjusted, and there will be enough space for the accompaniment band to make full use of Western musical instruments and give full play to their effectiveness. This principle can also provide a standard for the follow-up combination of Chinese and Western musical instruments, ensuring the integration and innovation while ensuring that the ontological characteristics of traditional opera art will not be lost.

5.2 Stimulate the possibility of future innovation of Teochew Opera

In the historical development process of Teochew opera, it has been in a state of dynamic development in all aspects, always on the road of improvement and progress, especially in the introduction of accompaniment instruments, leaving aside the pipa, erhu and dulcimer introduced from ethnic instruments, the cello is the first precedent for Teochew opera to introduce western instruments. With the successful integration of cello, it will also inspire Teochew opera to explore and try more Western or modern instruments later. In recent years, more and more Teochew opera composers have begun to combine the orchestration theory of western music, citing many Western musical instruments such as violin, Viola, cello, double cello, flute, clarinet, Oboe, trumpet, horn, trombone, timpani and so on. For example, the Teochew opera "Su liuniang" staged at the Spring Festival Gala in 2024 was adapted from the orchestration of Western musical instruments in comparison with the old version in 1957, and has been widely praised. In recent years, the newly compiled Teochew opera, such as "the infanta of Wu Kingdom", which won the Lu Xun Literature and Art Award of Guangdong Province in 2005, and "the Shufang Pavilion" in 2016, have also been well received. The use of Western musical instruments has been added. In 2023, the newly edited Teochew opera opera "embroidered tiger" staged at the Mei Lanfang Grand Theater in Beijing used an electronic music synthesizer for the first time. It can be seen that Teochew opera has huge room for innovation and progress in the future, There are more possibilities in the orchestration of Teochew opera music.

6. Conclusion

Teochew opera is an excellent opera with distinctive ethnic and regional culture. It is an art treasure rooted in the fertile land of Chaoshan. It has a long history, deep-rooted and has formed its own unique artistic style. However, it has always maintained an open and inclusive attitude and the idea of inclusiveness in its development path. In the middle of the last century, the integration of the Western musical instrument cello into the accompaniment system was a major initiative in the development of Teochew opera art. This is inseparable from the courage and practice of Teochew opera people who dare to break through the Convention. It also reflects that Teochew opera people are rooted in the charm of Chaozhou Opera and have a profound grasp of integrity and innovation. In the 21st century,

globalization has led to multilateral exchanges and multiple integration of cultures and arts around the world. The spirit of Teochew opera, which is based on the ethnic culture itself and dares to explore and innovate, is an important support for standing firmly in the tide of the times and standing in the forest of ethnic culture in the world. Adhering to the dialectical unity of ethnic culture inheritance and innovation will also promote the continuous development of Teochew opera.

References

- [1] Li Ling. *The "Double Six" in Teochew Opera Music—A Rare New Lyrical Mode*[J]. *People's Music*, 1957, Issue 6, pp. 44-45.
- [2] Yin Xinchun. *On the Introduction of Foreign Musical Instruments by Opera Bands*[J]. *Sichuan Drama*, 2005, Issue 3, pp. 45-46.
- [3] Cai Zemei. *On the Formation and Combination of Teochew Opera Musical Instruments*[J]. *Drama House*, 2015, Issue 8, p. 99.
- [4] Wu Fei. *On the Important Role of Cello in the Performance of Chinese Opera Bands*[J]. *Popular Literature and Art*, 2013, Issue 1, p. 168.
- [5] Wang Qingsu. *An Exploration of the Musical Orchestration of Teochew Opera Shufang Pavilion*[J]. *Popular Literature and Art*, No. 15, 2017, p. 187.
- [6] Lin Yaqin. *Analysis of the Role of Cello in the Performance of Chinese Opera Bands*[J]. *Voice of the Yellow River*, 2018, Issue 13, p. 132.