

# An Introduction to the Use of Chinese Opera Expressions in Experimental Drama

Zhengyu Si<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Producing, New York Film Academy 3300 W Riverside Dr, Burbank

**Abstract.** The paper's focus is on the operatic elements' use in experimental theater, and it begins with an analysis of how opera expression means have been used in this context before moving on to investigate the operatic elements' crucial role in this type of performance. The author investigates pieces like *The Wound Disappeared in the Boundless Night* and *The Green Snake* for references to and applications of experimental drama in opera performances, thereby revealing the inextricable bond between opera and experimental drama. While exploring the legacy of operatic conventions in experimental drama, this paper argues that the field would benefit from taking inspiration from even more classical sources if it were to advance at a steady clip.

## 1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

It is essential for the growth of experimental drama as a distinct kind of drama that incorporates elements from various creative forms. There is no doubt that Chinese opera is an age-old theatrical practice with deep roots in the culture's past. As a scholar of cross-genre performance, you might find it interesting to learn more about how the incorporation of operatic aesthetics into experimental theatre has contributed to the growth and development of experimental play itself.

## 2 RESEARCH STATUS

Studies of China's rich cultural heritage have proven lucrative and exhaustive. Professors Yu Weimin, Liao Ben, and Zhu Hengfu are just a few of the well-known academics who have contributed extensively to this field. Examples include Luo Huaizhen's "Research on Chinese Opera Species," which defines drama species in detail and analyzes the history, geography, and cultural significance of Chinese opera. We looked into the history of Chinese opera, dissected it from a morphological standpoint, and inspected and investigated folk-custom theatre practices. In his book "General Theory of Chinese Opera Art," Professor Yu Weimin analyzed the history, development, structure, and presentation of Chinese opera. His research into the 'Four Chinese Songs and Yuan Opera' and the 'Pipa Xing' gave a great boost to the growth of drama.

## 3 OPERA PERFORMANCE METHODS

### 3.1 The use of characterization

Characters in experimental dramas are often modeled after opera singers because of the influence of opera's performance style [1]. Using the principle of honoring the original, filmmaker Tian Qinxin showed the two snakes in a different light in his experimental drama "Green Snake," which was based on Li Bihua's novel of the same name. The new green snake is an explanation, from the viewpoint and perspective of this era, of the joys, sorrows, joys, sorrows, joys, and reunions in the human world, as well as the emotional love between different identities and different races, but the wandering and sadness that had to be given up because of the secular world. Most notable in terms of change is Fahai. He now knows what love is and how to live. He's no longer in the sky, and he's covered in pyrotechnics. He could no longer take White Snake's love for naught or Xu Xian's patience, and so he stopped forcibly keeping them apart. The white snake's true nature is more clearly established in the play. A green snake who she spends all day and night with tells her that she is human and not a monster when they finally meet face to face. White Snake says her Taoism goes back thousands of years further than Xu Xian's. She has the tools to navigate this relationship, but she also succumbs to the tired trope of wanting to settle down with Xu Xian and raise a family. But she took the initiative to abandon her meticulous thinking, abandon her intense love for Xu Xian, and enter Leifeng Pagoda on her own, despite the identification and morality hurdles she faced. White Snake, in contrast to the "forced" in the original novel "Green Snake," is more like a young lady who has undergone a transformation and progressively developed. Character development in the experimental drama "Green Snake" is

\* Corresponding author. Email: [zh.si@student.nyfa.edu](mailto:zh.si@student.nyfa.edu)

where the show breaks away from the pack and offers its unique take on the novel of the same name.

### **3.2 The use of externalized characters' psychological emotions**

"Experimental drama is to externally reveal the inner sentiments and emotions of the protagonist on the stage of the drama and present it to his audience, he enriches the vocabulary of the stage and avoids the repetition and tedium of acting in pure words." There is a substantial distinction between experimental drama and conventional drama. The spectator will be exposed to the protagonist's illusory, lonely, silent, and passionate inner world through unconventional techniques. Let the actors use both monologues and subtexts." [3] With the additional constraints of the stage on the drama's storyline, the characters' hearts are released and the dramatic conflict is weakened. Memory, hallucination, imagination, and other aspects are projected before the audience's eyes, enhancing the visual impression on the audience. How does the audience comprehend the entire narrative? It is also what the creator must conceive, which is why he or she demonstrates both the exterior and internal causes of the action through stage actions. When rehearsing *Savage*, Lin Zhaohua, the head of experimental drama, discovered the essence of the classical drama performance system. He said: "Chinese opera includes the sky, the earth, the mountains, and the rivers. It is capable of being acted out by actors. The stage of Chinese opera is vacant." Chinese opera performances can illustrate the flow of life consciousness. To portray this "flow" - the dancing movements of virtual and afterimages - he utilized the most suitable and appropriate phrase. The director and actors of "*Savage*" have added numerous features, including the huge scene of Pangu's creation of the planet and the wild virgin forest. These dances have been incorporated into the genre of actor performances, and they have been refined numerous times. Through singing ancient and enigmatic songs, the players in the show convey the grandeur of the universe. Alongside him, dancers portrayed rivers, mountains, trees, and the creatures between heaven and earth, creating a stunning audio-visual feast that had a strong visual impression on the audience. Induce in the audience the same emotions as the actors.

### **3.3. Flexible transformation of the use of stage time and space**

"Illusion is a crucial concept in the art of authentic play. It refers to the restoration of lifelike features on the stage of a theater and the design of the stage, which creates a sense of visual realism" [4]. The experimental theater workers of the new era racked their brains to break the fourth wall, and eventually adopted the stage changeover, shattering the three-walled stage and interacting with the audience. "The employment of artistic tools in traditional play can also modify the staging of the drama and create different spaces to facilitate time and space transitions." [5]. Ding Yiteng was concerned with "new programming" in "The

Wound Disappears in the Vast Dark Night," which was derived from the first horror story, Hugo's *Frankenstein*. Ding Yiteng aspires to merge the stylized performance of Chinese opera with Western physical theater, and his stage is very flexible. In contrast to prior plays, only one stage is utilized. A performance in Hangzhou, for instance, utilized two stages: an open-air venue for the first portion of the real play, followed by a theater for the second part of the dream performance. Thus, the audience enters the protagonist's universe.

During the realistic portion of the performance, Wei Duo had a robotic smile and her movements resembled those of a zombie. As a result of her boyfriend's death, Wei Duo became despondent and saddened by the slow music. His feelings were expressed through music. At this point, the vast darkness in reality and the performance gradually assumed the role of a dream, and the audience entered the closed area as if entering the vast darkness with Wei Duo, the audience's visual darkness and Wei Duo's entering the vast darkness together. The blackness of their hearts echoed, and they joined Wei Duo's world, inhaling the same air and experiencing the same fate as Wei Duo. The masterwork of filmmaker Wang Xiaoying is the drama "*The Wasteland and People*." This performance's narrative technique is also unique.

The stage is utilized from a variety of perspectives and vantage points, and dancing is used to convey the significant movement in time and space. At the beginning of the play, for instance, the stage is separated into front and back regions to represent different times and locations. In the front of the stage, the elderly Ma Zhaoxin was portrayed to illustrate his mental state as an elderly person, while the back of the stage depicted Hao Zheren's joyful wedding decades ago. Everyone at the wedding sang and danced. As a young man in the city, he and the impoverished and lower-middle-class peasants worked together. They sang and danced, sharing the festive spirit of a rural gathering. On both sides of the stage, he possesses two distinct mentalities. The tiny dot in front of the stage represents a young, frivolous "he" who is full of emotion, occasionally inflamed by riding the wind and waves, and eager for a bright future.

In contrast, he is elderly and ill and sees through the world's burdens and tragedies. A young and frivolous "he" is perpetually optimistic and full of inexhaustible future fantasies. The exquisite piano music portrays the tranquil and soothing inner monologue of the elderly Ma Zhaoxin, transporting the audience beyond time and space, and resulting in a vast chasm. While the players experience conflicting emotions, the audience shed tears and reflected on the past.

## **4 THE APPLICATION OF THE DRAMA SETTING METHOD IN EXPERIMENTAL DRAMA**

"The performance art on the stage is all-encompassing. To capture the attention of the audience, theater employees prevent the monotony and boredom induced by the unbroken length of the drama" [6]. Therefore, altering the stage's setting is a helpful remedy, since it can disrupt the

original situation and allow the scene in the audience's mind to be shown accurately in front of the audience. "Relieving Trouble Grocery Store" - the proud work of director Liu Fangqi - employs a brand-new stage arrangement and video technique, as well as a number of unique stage elements. These new things are made of mechanical, exemplified by an enormous revolving Changed clock. The stage has entered a variety of times and spaces, including fencers, fish shop musicians, Kosuke's favorite musicians, Grandpa Langya, etc., displaying vivid effects. Tian Qinxin's "Green Snake" also features a nine-meter-high stage wall and three fog machines that create the illusion of water flowing. In the course of appreciating the play, the audience can observe the rushing airflow.

Under the background of the scene's supplementary gloomy lighting, the white and green snakes appear, creating a sinister atmosphere. Not only the green snake and the white snake, but also the arrival of Xu Xian, the stage is cleverly built to resemble a lovely legendary world: it consists of the gurgling rain, the fluttering rain threads, and the bursting ripples. Presenting an authentic White Snake Age setting to the audience.

#### **4.1. The Role of Poetic Stage Aesthetic Conception**

The incorporation of traditional theatrical performance elements is crucial to the artistic conception of experimental dramas [7]. "Sangshuping Chronicle" is the signature work of director Xu Xiaozhong, and it has a sequence that profoundly impacts the audience: the execution of a character named "Gengzi." This is the emotional and philosophical culmination of the entire play.

Through the performance of performers in a play, the audience experienced the ridiculous world of animals being thrashed to death. Not only was there a desolate atmosphere on stage, but the audience beneath the stage was also incensed by this silly yet lyrical image. The design of the cow shape and the construction of the cow dance transport the audience to the Pacific Northwest, where they experience the rebirth of folk art.

"Bake" is another example of an experimental drama. "Bacai" by Euripides, an ancient Greek dramatist, is a very classic tragic work. Following the play's introduction to China, numerous local adaptations were produced. Among these, the traditional chanting technique was replaced with a combination of rhyme and bai in the style of Peking Opera. For instance, when Dionysos walked on stage at the beginning of the play, there was such chanting: "My mother is the daughter of King Cadmore; please have compassion for her. I was hit by lightning and buried in front of this palace when I was born." Not only may it assist the audience to easily overcome cultural isolation, but it can also introduce them to the tragic yet poetic realm of Zeus mythology.

## **5 APPLICATION OF OPERA CREATION TECHNIQUES IN EXPERIMENTAL DRAMA**

### **5.1 The Application of the Procedural Techniques of Opera in Experimental Drama**

"The opera's program reflects the exaggeration, concretization, and sophistication of operatic life." [8] It continuously emerges on stage throughout the entirety of the drama, alluding to the further adornment of everyday occurrences and the aestheticization of freehand brushwork and vibrant performance. For instance, the traditional opera "Dou E's Injustice" also contains operatic thematic elements. The actors' performances use hand, eye, body, and footwork, and every movement is integrated quite naturally. Consider the genuine story "Bake" as an illustration.

The director utilized a variety of martial arts movements, borrowing all the exclusive moves of Chinese martial arts actors. On stage, Dionysos performs somersaults and uses kung fu with others. No other dramatic actor can achieve this feat. When Dionysos battled the enemy in a different narrative, there was more Peking Opera martial arts action. This inventive blend also distinguished "Bake" from other dramas.

### **5.2 Freehand techniques of opera**

Chinese opera is a distinct and unified form of national art. It consists of dance, quyi, acrobatics, and other forms of art. Through their four abilities and five methodologies, actors convey a wide variety of artistic disciplines. The "Four Gongs" and "Five Laws" represent the most promising characteristics of opera. Here, "steps" serves as an illustration: Consider the experimental drama Bakay as an illustration. The flute was added by the director of Onisuo. At this time, Dizi Oniso slowly floated off the stage, and the entire stage was engulfed in a dark and spooky atmosphere. , the director stole Mr. Cheng Yanqiu's "walking volume", the actor's performance is very feminine, and also displays a sense of irresistibility, delivering an unknown sense of mystery to the audience. This is a secondary step application.

### **5.3 The virtuality of opera**

Virtuality is an exaggerated reflection of reality in opera [9]. It refers to comparing real life in an exaggerated manner, such as in Chinese opera: "Three-five walks all over the world, Liuwei people millions of soldiers," "In an instant, a thousand-year career, abbot's land is ten thousand miles of rivers and mountains," etc. They all use a few seconds of stage design to illustrate the great changes in time. As depicted in "Dou E's Injustice," when Dou E was executed, her blood sprayed on Bai Lian. At this time, the sky in June began to snow peculiarly, and the opera "Tao" of justice debuted. This scenario depicts an aberrant state, unreal living, and unnatural civilization.

The universe's Dao is changed into emptiness by the righteousness of the human realm. Dou E's soul dimmed the lights next to Dou Tianzhang during the episode in which he chose lanterns. When Dou Tianzhang examined the documents, he saw that Dou E had rearranged the bottom document. Again, Dou E's soul darkened the lights in front of him. Three times back and forth till Dou Tianzhang felt the anomaly at this time. Through a lengthy section of songs, a sorrowful woman and a guilty man burst through the borders and gaps between realistic and unreal, conceivable and impossible in the conventional sense.

Virtuality is the most significant aspect of the visual presentation of Chinese opera. Taking the experimental modern drama "The Wound Disappears in the Vast Night" as an example, the movements and directions are conveyed skillfully. Through the virtual performances of the actors and the use of modern electric paddles, the spectator is shown with a series of realistic scenes." [10]

## 6 CONCLUSION

"Although the substance and essence of a nation's art differ greatly, its aesthetic principles are identical" [11]. The essence of culture and art, such as poetry, music, and martial arts, are also reflected in Chinese operas. Mr. Wang Guowei stated in the "Song and Yuan Opera Examinations" that opera performers tell a story through song and dance. The performance of Chinese opera is a "song with sound and dance without movement" [12].

Because how Chinese opera expresses life is distinct from that of other operas, its artistic traits are not readily apparent to the spectator. Their theoretical research is also increasingly expanded by the ongoing in-depth investigation of scholars on topics such as the aesthetics of freehand opera, opera's stylized stage action, and opera's comprehensiveness.

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