



The Artistic Characteristics of the "Major Aria" in Chinese Tragic Opera

Mengping Ye¹, Chutima Maneewattana^{2*}, Lingling Liu³

Faculty of Fine and Applied Art, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand.

¹E-mail: 415522838@qq.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6914-8473>

²Corresponding E-mail: chutima.ma@ssru.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4065-7780>

³E-mail: 927629451@qq.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6025-2760>

Received 25/04/2024

Revised 16/05/2024

Accepted 10/06/2024

Abstract

Background and Aim: "Major Aria" is the last aria before the end of the tragic fate of the main character of the opera, as one of the most important arias of the whole opera, and its emergence of the fate of the characters to explain the direction, predicted the sad end of the drama, the most representative embodiment of the work of the "sadness" and the artistic charm of the work. This paper takes typical 6 operas of Chinese tragic opera and 7 "Major Arias" as samples for research, and analyzes the artistic characteristics of "Major Arias" from the aspects of intention, music form, and artistic connotation by combining the theatre part, music part, and so on.

Materials and Methods: This paper utilizes the qualitative research carried out by the literature research method, case study, observation method, interview method, data from the literature related to this study, observation record sheet, interview record booklet, according to the content of the study to target sampling, to derive the sampled score data and audio-visual data in line with the content of the study, as well as the analysis of the arias data, observation record study, and then derive data related to the arias of the artistic Characteristic data.

Results: In terms of drama the "Major Aria" has poetic language to express the characters' emotions, and it likes to use the Chinese folk song rhetoric of "Bi" and "Xing" techniques. In terms of characters, the "Major Aria" is mainly designed to be sung by female characters, which can be divided into two categories. "Major Aria" through "dual emotional lines" blend, make the drama theme sublimation, character image fullness, and strong lyricism. In terms of music, the "Major Aria" has a variety of musical forms, with more use of Chinese traditional opera, folk songs, and folk music, as well as Western operatic techniques, and under the attribute of "aria", it embodies the artistic characteristics of having an aria part and a recitative part.

Conclusion: The artistic characteristics of "Major Aria" are diverse, mainly in theatre and music. By analyzing the dramatic and musical parts, it is possible to further facilitate the analysis of the vocal aspects, and at the same time to provide ideas for the creators of the "Major Aria" as well as for the performers of the opera.

Keywords: Major Aria; Artistic Characteristics; Chinese Tragic Opera

Introduction

Opera art originated in Italy during the Baroque period, in which the dramatic story was a script for music creation, music was a means of expression of the dramatic story, the maximum show performers' exquisite skills at the same time, but also the music the drama of the conflict, resulting in a unique sense of artistic aesthetics, implying a unique artistic characteristic. Opera art is a highly integrated stage art and theater art, involving music, literature, drama, dance, stage art, and many other elements of the art field, the western opera in those popular opera is tragic. Puccini as the most representative of the history of Western opera composer created a total of 12 operas, including the four major operas ("The Career of the Artist", "Tosca", "Madame Butterfly", "Turandot") known around the world and never fails. In his masterpieces, the main characters of the opera have a tragic ending at the end of the plot, which also reveals the unique aesthetic art of tragic operation, and the tragic opera has a unique aesthetic thought and artistic implication with the beauty of "sadness".

In the development of Chinese opera, tragic opera has always played the role of "protagonist". Mr. Li Shiyuan, an expert in the field of Chinese opera and a doctoral supervisor, mentioned in the "Yearbook of Chinese Opera" that: *since ancient times, the dichotomy of "life" and "death" has been an eternal theme of drama, and that if there is no death in a drama, then there seems to be no "opera"*. Chinese tragic opera refers to the tragic fate of the story of the drama contains the main character dies, the tragic theme of the emphasis and prominence of the main characters rely on the singing, in which the main character's dying "Major Aria" sung in the tragic performance played a role in the most. The "Major Aria" section emphasizes sadness by revealing the tragic direction of the characters' destinies under the profound dramatic contradictions, which further deepens and sublimates the tragic theme of the whole opera, and it is one of the "most important" sections of the opera. Due to the wide range of themes in Chinese tragic operas, the Chinese tragic operas covered in this study do not include works based on the deaths of Chinese historical



figures. This is because the audience is well aware of the development of the fate of historical figures, and has already known the tragic end of the characters, so there is not much suspense in the development of the opera's story.

At this stage, the research on "Major Aria" mainly focuses on the study of some operas or the study of the ontological characteristics of a certain area, while the research on "Major Aria" of Chinese tragic operas from the perspective of generalization and macroscopicity is relatively less. The research on the creation and singing of "Major Aria" mainly focuses on the works before 1980, but less on the new period. Therefore, based on previous research, this paper analyzes the "Major Aria" composed from 1980 to the end of 2020 and draws samples for the study, which has been affirmed by vocal teachers and opera singers. Through this study, the researcher hopes to contribute to the creation and performance of "Major Aria", and to make a modest contribution to the prosperity of Chinese opera theory research.

Literature review

According to the collection, there are not too many studies on "Major Aria" in Chinese tragic opera at this period, which can be categorized into master's theses and journal papers.

In terms of master's theses, the master's thesis Research on the "Major Aria" of Chinese national Operas (Bai, 2011) is the earliest document that puts forward the concept of the "Major Aria" of Chinese national operas. This thesis analyzes and discusses the "Major Aria" of four classic Chinese operas, "Red Glow," "Honghu Red Guards," "Jiang Zhujun," and "The Ancient City of Wildfire," analyzing and researching them in terms of their creative thinking and musical performance, and arriving at a certain amount of experience in the mode of creative linkage. "Red Glow," "Honghu Red Guards," and "Jiang Zhujun," were created in 1950-1960, only "The Ancient City of Wildfire" was created in 2000, from the representative point of view, the author believes that the period of nearly half a century of the big problem.

The master's thesis Exploring the Chinese Tragic Opera's "Major Aria" in the 1980s (Ye, 2014) focuses on the study of Chinese opera's "Major Aria" in the 1980s from the aspects of dramatic creation, musical performance, and singing, and puts forward reflections on the cultural and aesthetic appreciation of singing, such as diversified integration and singing.

In terms of journal articles, it is mainly a study of specific "Major Aria" works. The Opera's "Major" Element's Periodic Characteristics—Taking "I Will Love You in the Next Life" in "Canal Ballad" as an Example (Chu, 2018) analyzes it from the aspects of cultural main idea, musical structure, artistic characteristics, etc. It proposes that the innovative development and artistic value of the arias should be well connected with the era of creation.

An Analysis of the Chinese-Western Integration of Opera Composition and Singing Methods and Their Utilization--Taking the Creative Practice of the Opera "Sadness Dawn" and the Singing Grasp of Its Selection "How I Want" as an Example (Huang, 2014) provides an artistic interpretation of the singing section of How I Want and argues that the motivation for the creation of the composition, the characteristics of the melody, and the characteristics of the libretto are the key to the success of this section.

The study of the "Major Aria" of the opera "The Ancient City of Wildfire" (Cheng, 2013) analyzes the two "Major Arias" of the opera in terms of musical structure characteristics, melodic characteristics, connection between melody and lyrics, technical treatment of singing techniques, and artistic expression of character images, and puts forward the idea that "Major Arias" can inherit and carry forward the spirit of the nation.

It can be seen that the above articles are mainly on the specific aria for the analysis of the musical elements or singing, the design of the artistic characteristics of which is also mainly dependent on the analysis of the music and singing analysis; and specific several operas and their arias as a sample, to explore the artistic characteristics of the perspective of the literature is less, but nevertheless, also for the preparation of this paper to provide the idea.

Conceptual Framework

The History of Chinese Opera (1920-2000) (Editorial Committee, 2012) is the first real study of the history of Chinese opera in China. According to the timeline of historical development, Chinese opera is divided into "Birth in Exploration (1920-1949)", "National Opera Towards Prosperity (1949-1966)", "Desertion, Recovery and Diversification (1966-2000)", and "The Drought, Recovery and Diversification (1966-2000)". The General History of Chinese Opera Musical Theatre series (Ju, 2014) is the outcome of a major project of the Key Base for Humanities and Social Sciences of the Ministry of Education. Based

on this project and undertaken by the Nanjing Arts Institute, the series focuses on hundreds of plays of different genres and styles of Chinese opera musicals over the past hundred years, and comprehensively comprehends, analyses, and summarizes the current situation and problems of script and music creation, theories and trends of thought, the history of tableau directors and performances, and the history of reforms of professional troupes and institutional mechanisms.

This research has been influenced by the above two important theoretical works on opera, as well as Historical Review and Aesthetic Vision of Chinese Opera Literary Identity (Ge, 2014) and A Study of the Development and Transformation of Theoretical Thought in Chinese Opera and Musical Theatre (Man, 2014). Based on the classification of Chinese opera themes, this research is divided into Chinese national opera and other Chinese operas, and through the research methodology, combined with theatre and music to be analyzed. The conceptual framework of this paper is as follows:

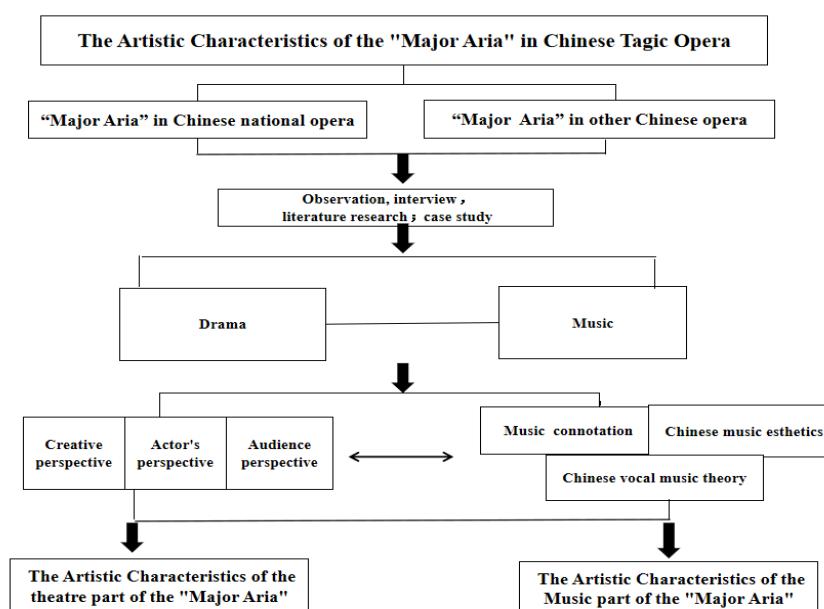


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Note: Constructed by the author

Methodology

This paper utilizes the qualitative research carried out by the literature research method, case study, observation method, interview method, data from the literature related to this study, observation record sheet, interview record booklet, according to the content of the study to target sampling, to derive the sampled score data and audio-visual data in line with the content of the study, as well as the analysis of the arias data, observation record study, and then derive data related to the arias of the artistic Characteristic data.

Population and sampling: The "Major Aria" in this paper is the last one before the end of the tragic fate of the protagonist, as one of the most important sung parts of the whole opera, its appearance explains the final direction of the storyline, predicts the sad ending of the drama, and most representative embodies the "Major Aria" and the artistic charm of the opera. The most representative embodiment of the opera's "sadness" and the artistic charm of the opera. In this paper, the research operas and "Major Arias" are published and distributed in authoritative journals, and can be purchased in the mainstream market, and the time of creation is after 1980, the Chinese tragedy operas and the operas with "Major Aria" are taken as the overall research works. The following conditions were taken into consideration in the selection of the overall research:

Condition 1: The selected Chinese tragic opera works are performed by well-known Chinese composers, choreographers, and performing artists.



Condition 2: The selected Chinese tragic opera works should be premiered in important cities in China.
Condition 3: The "Major Aria" canto of the selected Chinese tragic opera should be sung and spread in high-level concerts and competitions in China, with certain promotions.

Condition 4: The "Major Aria" canto of the selected Chinese tragic opera should be often used in vocal music teaching and opera performance teaching in China.

According to the statistics of regular copyright publications in China, such as Selections of Chinese Opera and Collection of Selected Arias from 100 Years of Chinese Opera, the researchers found that there were 20 Chinese tragic operas from 1980 to 2020, among which 13 contained "Major Aria" before the death of character protagonist, with a total of 15 arias. The 15 "Major Arias" are the total number of the study, from which the researcher selected 6 operas and their 7 "Major Aria" songs as the study sample, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample of Chinese tragic operas and "Major Arias"

NO.	Opera & Creator	Creation time	Major Aria
1	"Regret for the past" Wang Quan and Han Wei lyricist, Shi Guannan composition.	1981	(1)"An unhappy life"(Zijun Aria)
2	"Wild" Wan Fang lyricist, Jin Xiang composition.	1988	(2)"You are me; I am you - Oh, my old friend"(Jin Zi and Qiu Hu duet)
3	"The Party's Daughter" YanSu lyricist, WangZujie, Zhang Zhuoya composition.	1991	(3)"Thousands of Miles of Spring" (TianYumei Aria)
4	"Cangyuan" Huang Weire, Feng Baiming lyricist, Xu Zhanhai, liu hui composition.	1996	(4)"We Shall All Live Forever" (Narengaowa Aria)
5	"The Ancient City of Wildfire", Wang Xiaoling lyricist, Wang Zuji and Zhang Zhuoya composition.	2004	(5)"Smell the Flowers when you win" (Jin Huan Aria) (6)"Mother is In the Cloud" (Yang Mu Aira)
6	"Canal Ballad", Dong Ni lyricist, Yin Qing composition.	2012	(7)"I love you in the Afterlife" (Shui Hong Lian Aria)

Since the 1980s, two types of Chinese tragic operas have emerged from the perspective of compositional types: the first type is the continuation of the type of operas that existed before China's reform and opening up in 1978, which are Chinese national operas created mainly with elements of Chinese traditional opera and folk songs; the second type is other types of operas that are different from the Chinese national operas, with serious opera as a typical representative type. Based on this categorization, the seven "Major Arias" in the sample of this study can be divided into two categories:

Type I is the Chinese national opera type, a total of 4"Major Arias", is "Thousands of Miles of Spring"(1991), "Smell the Flowers when you win", "Mother is In the Cloud"(2004), "I love you in the Afterlife"(2012); Type II is the serious opera as a representative of other opera types, a total of 3 songs, is "An unhappy life" (1981), "You are me, I am you - Oh, my old friend"(1989), "We Shall All Live Forever"(1995).

Research Instruments: The research instruments of this paper will be literature research, sample study, observation form, and interview. Literature research mainly focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the background, conception, aesthetics, and comments of the sample operas and arias, to sort out the relevant contents through a large number of documents, and then summarize and analyze the artistic characteristics of the elements of the drama. The sample study is mainly to analyze the score of the sample "Major Aria" in terms of musical tonality, musical structure, weave, melody, and other musical elements,



as well as the content of the poem, dramatic structure, genre style, and other analyses, and to summarize its artistic characteristics. Observation form is mainly to observe the videos and audio of the artists during their performances to understand their performance characteristics and artistic skills. The interview mainly involves interviewing or asking questions to the artists to absorb their opinions and experiences on the artistic characteristics of the sample arias.

Data Collection: The process of data collection for this study was as follows:

- (1) Collecting appropriate information, data, etc., from literature and genealogical examples and performance cases related to this study;
- (2) Summarise, classify and refine the data;
- (3) Corresponding the data results to the research theme and integrating the connection between the literature data and the score example data;
- (4) Summaries experiences and conclusions.

Data Analysis: This paper adopts a qualitative research method, the results of which are based on the collection of literature, analysis of the samples of the "Major Arias", observation of the content of the area to obtain information and data, and finally, comprehensive research results.

Results

1. The Artistic Characteristics of the theatre part of the "Major Aria".

1.1 Poetizing the Dramatic Poem: using "Bi" and "Xing" techniques.

Compared with the Western countries that focus on real expression, Chinese theatre focuses on the expression of meaning. Yu Shangyuan, in his article "Evaluation of the Old Theatre" written in 1926, explicitly put forward the "pictorial" characteristic of Chinese theatre and connected the artistic expression of Chinese theatre with the "pictorial" of Chinese painting. It can be seen that "pictoriality" has always been an artistic characteristic of Chinese theatre. The "Major Aria" is in line with the "pictorial" character of theatre, and the poems are presented poetically to achieve the lyricism of the characters, which researchers believe is mainly due to the use of the techniques of "Bi" and "Xing".

Bi and Xing is a traditional expression in Chinese poetry, first used in the Spring and Autumn period in China's first poetry collection "Poetry Classic", Chinese scholar Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty in the "Poetry Collection Biography" in a more accurate explanation: "Bi, to compare this thing with the other thing; Xing, first said other things to cause the words of the chorus also".

Bi is the meaning of simile, equivalent to the current metaphorical rhetoric, used as a metaphor for things the body of the thing is always more vivid and specific, clear and known, and easy to associate and imagine. The role of simile is to explain the difficulty with simple, concrete to explain the abstract, which can cause people to imagine, imagine, and vivid, full poetic.

Zijun's dramatic poem in "Unhappy Life" sings: "O dreadful, father's summery majesty. Dreadful, the frosty taunts of the passers-by. At the end of that road is loneliness, desolation, and resentment.....". Here the "father's majesty" and "passers-by's mockery" are metaphors, implicitly expressing the intolerance of the feudal society towards Zijun's pursuit of free and beautiful love, and "it is a metaphor for Zijun's life, which is feeling lonely, desolate, and resentful. Loneliness, desolation, resentment also reveals her destiny towards death. Similarly, in "Thousands of miles so spring", Tian Yumei's dramatic poem "Chopping wood is not afraid of the roar of tigers and wolves, and climbing up the mountain is even more difficult" compares "tigers and wolves" to the enemy, and "climbing up the mountain" to the difficult process of revolution; In "You are me, I am a you-My old friend", the poem of Qiu Hu's play, "When he was born, he was heaven when he was born, he was earth", compares "heaven and earth" to the continuation of life and the hope of life is also similarly used.

Xing is a kind of "than" that is a more subtle and euphemistic expression, first saying other things, and then by association, leads to the things to be expressed, thoughts, and feelings, equivalent to the current symbolic rhetorical method. "Xing" is "touching things to raise feelings", "its things" for the poetry described by the scenery, and this scenery must contain the poet touching things raised by the feelings. "Xing" has the function of triggering association, rendering atmosphere, and mobilizing emotions, and is full of poetic meaning.

"Mother is in the Cloud" is the "Major Aria" of Yang's mother. The development of the drama is that Yang's mother was captured by the enemy to blackmail Yang Xiaodong into revealing the Party's



information, and Yang's mother, who met with her son, Yang Xiaodong, in prison, could not tell the truth directly, so she sang the "Major Aria" in the presence of the enemy. The beginning of Yang mother's dramatic poem is as follows: "Spring strikes the head of the six-nine, the seven-nine river opens and the eight-nine swallows come, and we see that spring is coming..." ("Spring hits the head of the six-nine, the seven-nine river opens and the eight-nine swallows come" is a traditional customary proverb in northern China, the "Song of the Nine Nine Seasons". China from the winter solstice, every nine days counts as a "nine", and so on, the coldest time of the year is "three nine", "five nine tail" and "six nine head". The coldest time of the year is "three nine", "five nine tail", "six nine head" is the spring, "seven nine" rivers melt open, "eight nine" swallows come. The Song of the Nine-Nine Seasons speaks of changes in the living environment according to the seasons and is popular in northern China.

Here is the technique of "Xing" with the help of the seasons, "double entendre", associating the present "cold winter" with the suffering of the revolution, and the coming "spring" with the coming revolution. The coming "spring" is symbolized by the imminent victory of the revolution.

1.2 "Central position" of female characters

Among the 7 "Major Aria" in this paper, except for the "Major Aria" of the opera "Wild", which is from the perspective of a male character, the rest of the "Major Aria" are female characters, and the "Central Position" of the female characters is a significant artistic feature of the "Major Aria". The "central position" of female characters in theatre is a significant artistic characteristic of "Major Aria".

According to the researcher, in the 7 samples "Major Arias", the female characters can be divided into two categories: the first category is the female characters who died for "love", i.e. Zijun in the opera "Regret for the Past", Narengaowa in "Cang Yuan", and Shui Honglian in "Canal Ballad". This kind of female characters exudes a kind of feminine softness; the second category is the heroine who dies for the victory of the revolution, i.e. Tian Yumei in "The Party's daughter", Jinhuan and Yang's mother in "The ancient city of wildfire". 2 categories of female characters embody the character temperament of feminine softness and masculinity, which is also the embodiment of the theatre's figurative expression.

Firstly, the female characters are soft and vulnerable. For example, Shui Honglian is a singer who travels alone on the canal; Zijun is a young student with progressive ideas; Jinhuan is a beautiful underground party member; Yang's mother is an elderly woman in the northern countryside, etc. The graceful shape of the female characters and the disadvantaged social status of the women in the traditional values are expressed in the theatre in a certain degree of "weakness", after which the deaths of the female characters have a tragic beauty that causes the audience to want to "protect" them. "After this, the death of the female characters has a tragic beauty that arouses the audience's desire to "protect" them.

In addition, the female characters have a softness and firmness. In Chinese history, many female heroes sacrificed their precious lives for the peace and defense of the country. The female characters in the opera - "Tian Yumei", "Yang Mu", "And Jinhuan" - who died gracefully and generously for the victory of the revolution and sacrificed their precious lives are a kind of masculinity and perseverance and epitomize the heroes of China's history. Similarly, "Zijun", "Narengaova" and "Shui Honglian" do not bow to fate and dare to sacrifice themselves for love, which is also a kind of toughness and perseverance, which can arouse the audience's empathy and highlight the powerful influence of theatre. It is also a kind of strong perseverance, which can resonate with the audience and highlight the strong infectious force of the drama.

The researcher attended the Master Lecture of Wan Shanhong in January 2022 (Compiled from the researcher's questions to Ms. Wan Shanhong during the questioning session at the Master Lecture; 9:00 am-12:00 pm, 19 January 2022 at the Guangxi Music Hall in Nanning, Guangxi, China). She is a first-class actress in China, who has appeared in many operas and has rich experience in role-playing operatic characters. She said: "When shaping operatic characters, I will think of the role I play that she is first a woman, then a revolutionary soldier, and finally a human being". It can be seen that the female characters of "Major Aria" have soft and masculine qualities, and the female characters as the core make the character image fuller and stronger, improving the dramatic effect and increasing the audience's empathy, which is also a typical characteristic of the "Major Aria" in Chinese tragic opera.

1.3 Intermingling of "dual emotional lines"

The inner emotional performance of the characters in the "Major Aria" of the opera is complex, and the researcher found in the 7 samples of "Major Aria" that the "Major Aria" revolves around "dual emotional lines" in the dramatic emotional performance. The first emotional line is the main storyline of the whole opera, which can be called the main line of emotion; the second emotional line is the "Major Aria" character line of emotion, which can be called the secondary line of emotion. The main line of emotion shows the



dramatic direction of the opera, and the secondary emotion reveals the expression of "love", and it is this "double line of emotion" that makes the "Major Aria" show the dramatic tension and heartfelt at the same time. Tension and at the same time touching, rich in theatre art characteristics. Table 2 is a summary of the "dual emotional lines" in the samples:

It can be seen that the main line of emotion is the drama towards the character's emotion, and the secondary line of emotion is the character singing "love" expression, this "love" can be the love of men and women, mother and child love, love of comrades and so on. This "dual emotional lines" blend, makes the drama theme sublimation, character image fullness, and strong lyricism.

Table 2 List of "Major Arias" - "Dual Emotional Lines"

No.	"Major Aria"	The main line of emotion	A secondary line of emotion
1	"An unhappy life" (Zijun Aria)	Pursuit of Happiness, Human Emotions	Zijun: romance
2	"You are me; I am you - my old friend" (Jin Zi and Qiu Hu duet)	Revenge. Father pays son.	Qiu Hu: romance
3	"Thousands of Miles of Spring" (Tian Yumei Aria)	Looking for a traitor. Patriotic feelings.	Tian Yumei: love between mother and child
4	"We Shall All Live Forever" (Narengaowa Aria)	Returning East, Homesickness	Narengaowa: romance
5	"Smell the Flowers when you win" (Jin Huan Aria)	Defending the ancient city, patriotic feelings	JinHuan: Comrades in arms.
6	"Mother is In the Cloud" (Yang Mu Aira)	Defending the ancient city, patriotic feelings	Yang's mother: love between mother and child
7	"I love you in the Afterlife" (Shui Hong Lian Aria)	Sue a corrupt official, saves a blind girl, the love of mankind.	Shui Honglian: romance

2. The Artistic Characteristics of the Music part of the "Major Aria".

2.1 Diversity of musical form

The "Major Aria", which usually appears in the last scene of the opera, is the core of the opera characters, has a large structure and complex musical form, with rich musical changes, reflecting the strong lyricism of the characters, and highlighting the climax effect of the drama. Table 3 summarizes the musical form of the "Major Aria" from the length of the arias, the musical beat, the range, the change of tonality and tempo, etc., and it can be found that the "Major Arias" of Chinese tragic opera presents a lot of rich musical variations in terms of the musical elements.

Table 3 Changes in the musical form of the "Major Arias"

"Major Aria"	Bar	Beat	Register	Harmonic change	Tempo change
"An unhappy life"	138	4/4--3/4--2/4--4/4	c1-b2	f-F- ^b A-f	Moderato-Andante-Meno Mosso -Andante
"You are me, I am you - my old friend"	95	3/4-5/4-4/4	c-e2	G-e	Andante-Rubato
"Thousands of Miles of Spring"	246	2/4--3/4--2/4	a-g2	D 羽-D 商	Rubato-Moderato-Allegro-Moderato—Adagio



"Major Aria"	Bar	Beat	Register	Harmonic change	Tempo change
"We Shall All Live Forever"	145	4/4	c1-d3	c-f-d-D	120-80-Rubato-80-Rubato
"Smell the Flowers when you win"	142	4/4--3/4--6/4	a-a2	F 宫-C 徵- G 商-F 宫	96-168-146-88-Rubato
"Mother is In the Cloud"	102	4/4	c1-c3	C 徵-D 羽- G 商-C 徵	82-56-88-138-68-108
"I love you in the Afterlife"	113	4/4-2/4-4/4	f1- ^b b2	F 商-bE 宫- bB 宫-bE 宫	74-68-74-152-64-74

First, the "Major Aria" sections are long and large. In the 7 samples, all the arias are more than 100 bars, with more than 3 parts, and 5 arias even reach more than 4 parts, among which "Unhappy Life" is a single three-part form, "You are me; I am you" - "My, old friend" is a compound two-part form, "Smell the flowers when you win", "Mother is in the clouds", "I will love you in the afterlife" is a four-part form and so on. Complex structure, but also explains the "Major Aria" singing music performance level, rich expressive power.

Secondly, "Major Aria" has rich beat changes. Most of the conventional vocal works are performed within a beat number, but the samples involved in this paper have beat changes in five of the seven "Major Aria" sections, which breaks the cyclic effect of the original beat, increases the sense of musical impetus, and is conducive to the lyrical expression of the character's emotions. Among them, "You are me; I am you" - "My, old friend" is in 3/4 time, and the rest of "Major Arias" adopt 4/4 time as the main beat (2/4 time of "Thousands of miles of Spring" is a single beat of 4/4 time, which is regarded by the researcher as the same category, which is explained herein).

Thirdly, the samples of "Major Aria" have a wide range and are difficult to sing. In the seven cantatas, "You are me; I am you" - "Heh, old friend" is sung in duet + baritone solo voice, the rest of the areas are sung by soprano voices, and the "Major Aria" involved are extremely difficult to sing, which can be regarded as the touchstone for soprano voices! Five of the "Major Arias" have a range of 14–15-degree intervals, and even the "We Shall All Live Forever" section has a range of more than three octaves. The aria "Mother is in the clouds" ends on the C3 pitch and lasts for 9 beats, which is very demanding on the singer's technique.

Fourthly, the "Major Aria" in the sample has many harmonic changes. All 7 "Major Arias" in the sample have been transposed at different levels, and four of them have been transposed four times. It was found that most of the transpositions were near-relative transpositions, or transpositions in the same group of the Chinese pentatonic scale system.

Fifthly, there are many tempo changes in the "Major Aria" sections of the samples. 7 "Major Aria" sections have many tempo changes, which also reflect the changes between the levels of the various parts of a "Major Aria" section, reflecting the contrast in tempo, and showing different musical moods and emotions.

2.2 Use of Chinese Traditional Opera and Folk Songs

The structure of the "Major Aria" in Chinese tragic opera likes to use the Chinese traditional opera plate structure, and musical elements to enrich the musical performance of the "Major Aria" section, reflecting the beauty of sadness, which can be said to be the characteristics of its musical part. Traditional Opera plate style refers to the structural forms of slow, medium, and loose plates, which can be slightly related to the "speed" and "rhythm" in Western music. Usually, the fast tempo is the expression of urgency, the slow tempo is used for lyricism, the middle tempo is often used for narration, and the loose tempo and rocking tempo are mostly used to express emotions controlled by the orderly rhythm. The Chinese traditional opera Banqiang-Style takes the symmetrical upper and lower lines as the basic unit of singing,

evolves into different plates according to certain principles, and constitutes the music of a scene or a whole initial scene through different plate transitions. The Chinese traditional opera Banqiang-Style can be said to be a kind of structural style of Chinese opera music, which presents the musical thinking of "Beginning, Bearing, Turning and Closing".

"Beginning" can be regarded as the first section of "Major Aria". The four "Major Arias" in the sample "Thousands of miles of Spring", "Smell the flowers when you win", "Mother is in the Clouds" and "I will love you in the afterlife" are mainly embodied in the opening section with high registers and long dragging beats, resulting in a rendering of the environment and the character's emotions. For example, at the beginning of Mother in the Clouds, the first line of the word "head" is on the f2 key, which is strong, and the second line is directly on the high pitch of the a2, with a free extension of the trailing beat, and a six-bar trailing cadence on the word "to come," reflecting the female protagonist, Yang's mother, looking forward to the triumph of the revolution when spring comes (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The opening section of "Mother is in the Clouds"

Note: Zhao (2020)

"Bearing" is the second part, can be regarded as the music relative to the calm of the narrative, music in the first part of the "start" of the high voice area, long trailing beat voice, marching to the middle and low voice area of the first kind of contrast, this part of the main lyrical melody, reflecting "Major Aria" the character of a reminiscence of the past and their own farewell stage. For example, "Thousands of miles of Spring" adopts a medium speed from the 50th measure, and sings four farewell phrases in the middle and low voice regions, bidding farewell to her hometown and the land that gave birth to her, the smoke from the thatched cottage, her lover, and her townspeople.

"Turning" is the third part, which is characterized by the use of the "shaking board" common in Chinese traditional opera, and the singing of "tightly pulling and slowly singing". It creates a musical effect of excitement and urgency. For example, in Figure 3, "I will love you in the afterlife", the music is suddenly fastened from $\text{♩}=72$ to $\text{♩}=152$, and under the strong intensity, after 4 bars of interlude, the singing is still accompanied by a dense part, and the melody part of the part has fewer words and more accents, reflecting the determination of Shui Honglian to "go die".



Figure 3. The middle part of "I will love you in the afterlife"

Note: Deshan Zhao. (2020). 100 Years of Chinese Opera (Vol.5). Chongqing: Southwest Normal University Press.

The "Closing" is the fourth part of this type of "Major Aria", and it is also the part before the end of the character's destiny, musically this part will appear as the highest musical phrase of the whole piece, the overall musical contrast is very strong, there is a large space for second creation, and a strong end in the treble, and so on. For instance, the fourth part of this type of "Major Aria" has such artistic characteristics as "Smell the flowers when you win", which ends on the g2 key in 9 beats, and "I will love you in the afterlife", which ends on the bb2 key in 5 beats.

In addition to the use of Chinese traditional opera, Chinese folk songs and folk music are also used in the "Major Aria". The 4 "Major Arias" analyzed in the previous section are in the Chinese pentatonic harmony, while the other 3 "Major Arias" are more or less influenced by the Western major and minor harmonic system, but not completely Westernized, with a lot of Chinese national harmonies and backbone tones added.

Such as the opera "Cang Yuan" plot theme depicts the Mongolian tribes returning to the east, in which Narengova's "Major Aria" named "We Shall All Live Forever", is a song structure with three relatively independent parts. The structure of the "Major Aria" is as follows Table 4:

Table 4 Structure of the musical form of "We Shall All Live Forever"

Structure of the musical form							
Intro. (1-10)	A (11-34) a+b+c+d	Inter. 35-42	B (43-62) e+e1+f+g	Inter. 63-70	B1(71-108) e2+e3+f1+g1	Inter. 109-114	C (110-145) h+h1+i+l
8	4+4+8+8	8	5+5+4+6	8	7+7+5+19	6	6+6+8+11
c	c	f	f	f	f--d	F	F-f-d-D

The key of A is c minor ending on the V chord, the music is open ending on the genitive chord, and after 8 bars of connection, the tonality does not follow the A progression but shifts to the f-flat key, and the backbone of the music unfolds around the Chinese scales, which emerges as a refreshing style of music. This musical backbone has the characteristic melodic method of Chinese Mongolian long-tone music, i.e.



(Jiang, 2001), the fourth and fifth intervals are used as the pivot point for continuous upward movement, and after reaching the high key, the downward movement skips in fourths, etc.

The composer chose the Chinese Mongolian long-tone music as the musical tone because "the style of long-toned pastoral music is almost synonymous with the national style of Mongolian music, which is known as the basic symbol of the nomadic music culture of the steppe"(Ulanjie,1988), but didn't turn the "Major Aria" into a Mongolian long-toned folk song completely. However he did not make the "Major Aria" completely into a Mongolian folk song, but the typical form of the long-tone music into the music melody, in the major and minor melody(Some scholars have suggested that the music of the opera "Cang Yuan" at the same time also use the characteristics of the Kyrgyz music, but the researcher believe that the composition of the Kyrgyz music has the northern steppe factors as well as the European, Arabian, Persian and other musical factors, and the music of the Kirghiz is mainly Chinese 7-tone scale, in the tonal scale construction of the natural major, minor, and Dorian, mixed Lydian modes are the same, so it can be regarded as "major and minor melody".). In the progression of the piece, the listener always feels that the tonality is changing, but in a short, it returns to the backbone of the phrase, and the melody seems to be very familiar, but it does not sound like it is specifically a piece of Mongolian music, which is a wonderful fusion of the ethnicity of the Mongolian theme and the music.

2.3 Use of Western Opera Technique

As we all know, aria and recitative are common types of operatic techniques, in which the aria expresses the inner activities and strong emotional experience of the character, and plays the role of lyricism. Recitative is often used to narrate the plot, explain the background, or describe the scene. It is relatively natural and calm, without the strong emotional color of aria, and plays a role in promoting the plot. Unlike Western operas, which have a clear distinction between recitative and aria, the "Major Aria" of Chinese tragic operas has absorbed the characteristics of Western operas' recitative, and under the attribute of "aria", it embodies the artistic characteristics of having both aria and recitative parts. Table 5 summarizes the aria and declamatory parts of the three samples of "Major Aria".

Table 5 The aria and recitative parts in "Major Aria"

"Major Aria"	Recitative/characteristics	Aria/characteristics
"An unhappy life"	Part I and III. Rests, changing beats, changing rhythms on fixed pitches, accompanied by column chords Part II.	Part II. Parallel phrases, squarer, forming a platitude, lyrical music, strong melodic drive in the backing parts
"You are me; I am you - my old friend"	Qiu Hu's monologue, untuned, accompanied in part by column chords, with the addition of chains and other acoustics	Part I. Melodic duet with smooth, melodic music
"Thousands of Miles of Spring"	Part I. Cross-bar legato lines, tonal wandering, accompanied by no melody, only chordal vibrations	The rest. The musical phrases of the character theme are repeated, the tonality returns, the accompaniment is melodically strong and propulsive, and Rubato lyricism.

Discussion

In the existing data, there are not many studies using "Major Aria" as a research perspective, and no scholars have been found to have conducted a more systematic study on "Major Aria" after 1980, and this paper fills a certain gap.



In the academic field, it is conducive to the creation of opera art, and performance research to provide a reference basis. Beneficial to the promotion, appreciation, and popularization of the elegant art of opera. It is conducive to the summing up and upgrading of the teaching experience of opera singing.

On the policy side, it is conducive to the formulation of policies by government cultural departments on activities related to the creation and performance of Chinese opera, as well as the cultivation of relevant opera talents.

Conclusion

Through the above analyses, it can be found that the artistic characteristics of "Major Aria" are diverse, mainly in drama and music.

In terms of theatre, the "Major Aria" has poetic language to express the characters' emotions, and it likes to use the Chinese folk song rhetoric of "Bi" and "Xing" techniques. In terms of characters, the "Major Aria" is mainly designed to be sung by female characters, which can be divided into two categories. "Major Aria" through "dual emotional lines" blend, make the drama theme sublimation, character image fullness, and strong lyricism.

In terms of music, the "Major Aria" has a variety of musical forms, with more use of Chinese traditional opera, folk songs, and folk music, as well as Western operatic techniques, and under the attribute of "aria", it embodies the artistic characteristics of having an aria part and a recitative part.

The artistic characteristics of "Major Aria" are diverse, mainly in theatre and music. By analyzing the dramatic and musical parts, the "Major Aria" section of the Chinese Tragic Opera has a Chinese style. It is possible to further facilitate the analysis of the vocal aspects, and at the same time to provide ideas for the creators of the "Major Aria" as well as for the performers of the opera.

Recommendation

This study has analyzed the artistic characteristics of "Major Aria" in Chinese tragic opera from the theatrical part and the musical part, and then it can be further explored from the singing part, the performance part, and the appreciation part to further enrich the study on the artistic characteristics of "Major Aria". The next step is to further explore the singing part, performing part, appreciation part, and other dimensions, to further enrich the research on the artistic characteristics of "Major Arias", to provide ideas for the creation and performance of "Major Aria" in Chinese tragic opera.

References

- Bai, Z. (2011). *Research on the "Major Aria" of Chinese national operas*. Master's thesis, Nanjing University of the Arts.
- Cheng, R. (2013). *A study on the "Lost Aria" of the opera "The Ancient City of Wildfire"*. Master's thesis, Sichuan Normal University.
- Chu, J. (2018). The opera's "Major" element's periodic characteristics—Take "I will love you in the next life" in "Canal Ballad" as an example. *Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts (Music and Performance)*, 1, 94-102.
- Committee. (2012). *The History of Chinese Opera (1920-2000)*. Culture and Arts Publishing House.
- Ge, X. (2014). *Historical Review and Aesthetic Vision of Chinese Opera Literary Identity*. Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Huang, R. (2014). An analysis of the Chinese-Western integration of opera composition and singing methods and their utilization—Take the creative practice of the opera "Sadness Dawn" and the singing grasp of its selection "How I Want" as an example. *Research on Ethnic Art*, 4, 80-87.
- Jiang, G.Q. (2001). *A Great View of Chinese Musical Culture*. Peking University Press.
- Ju, Q. (2014). *The General History of Chinese Opera Musical Theatre series*. Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Man, X. (2014). *A Study of the Development and Transformation of Theoretical Thought in Chinese Opera and Musical Theatre*. Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Ulanjie. (1988). *The history of Mongolian music*. Inner Mongolia People's Publishing House
- Ye, M. (2014). *Exploring the Chinese tragic opera's "Major Aria" in the 1980s*. Master's thesis, Guangxi Arts Institute.
- Zhao, D. (2020). *100 Years of Chinese Opera (Vol.5)*. Chongqing: Southwest Normal University Press.

