



Artistic Characteristics and Inheritance Innovation of Instrumental Performance in Folk Professional Wuju Opera Troupes —A Case Study of Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 in Zhejiang

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Under the influence of globalization and modernization, traditional Chinese opera art faces survival challenges, especially for folk professional troupes. As an important national intangible cultural heritage of Zhejiang Province, the inheritance and innovation of Wuju Opera has become a key academic research topic. This study selects Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 as a case study, focusing on its instrumental performance to explore the survival mechanisms and innovation paths of traditional art.

Materials and Methods: Using musical anthropology as the theoretical framework through systematic fieldwork was conducted from January to June 2024. Research methods include participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and literature analysis. The investigation covered 30 formal performances, 10 rehearsals, and systematic interviews with 15 senior musicians, comprehensively collecting historical archives and relevant literature of the troupe.

Results: The research reveals three core artistic characteristics of instrumental performance in Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1. First is traditionality: although the orchestra size has expanded from 5 to 15 people, it maintains the traditional "Five Principal Positions" (Drum Master, Lead Huqin, Secondary Wind Instruments, Large Gong, Small Gong) collaborative mechanism, reflecting the organizational form of opera instrumental performance. Second is diversity: civil and martial music forms a rich performance pattern. Through the flexible use of percussion instruments, plucked instruments, wind instruments, and string instruments, it presents artistic characteristics that blend formula-based and improvisational elements. Third is functionality: constructing a multi-level functional system including stage-opening music, transitional music, and accompaniment music, reflecting the artistic logic of "character performance-centered" opera music.

Conclusion: The research reveals the inheritance and innovation mechanism of instrumental performance in folk professional Wuju Opera troupes. Wuju Opera's instrumental performance has formed a "core-periphery" structure inheritance model, maintaining traditional cores such as the "Five Principal Positions" while allowing flexible innovation in peripheral elements such as orchestra size and instrument types. Its artistic expression is deeply rooted in local cultural soil, constructing a diversified expression system that integrates formula-based and improvisational elements, reinforcing local cultural identity. Through the multi-level functional integration of stage-opening music, transitional music, and accompaniment music, it meets both artistic expression needs and realizes social and cultural values. These three dimensions together constitute the adaptive mechanism of traditional art, demonstrating the vitality of traditional art in modern society. The research enriches the theoretical connotation of "living inheritance" of intangible cultural heritage and provides new perspectives for the protection and development of traditional performing arts.

Keywords: Wuju Opera; Folk Professional Troupe; Instrumental Performance; Orchestra Organization; Fieldwork

Introduction

Under the dual influence of globalization and modernization, traditional Chinese opera art is facing unprecedented challenges, with the survival and development issues of folk professional troupes being the most prominent (Wang & Zhu, 2025). As an important component of the world's intangible cultural heritage, traditional Chinese opera occupies a unique position in the global cultural landscape with its diverse and rich artistic forms. However, under the impact of diversified modern entertainment methods, the survival of traditional opera faces severe tests, which has attracted widespread attention from academia (Lu, 2021; Wang et al., 2024).

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Wuju Opera, as one of the most representative local opera genres in Zhejiang Province, has a history that can be traced back to the Ming Dynasty and was listed in the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage in 2008. In its long-term development, Wuju Opera has integrated various artistic elements such as Southern Opera, Gaoqiang, and Huiju, forming a unique artistic system. As one of the opera genres with the most prominent original ecological characteristics in Chinese local opera, Wuju Opera not only retains rich vocal forms, but its instrumental performance also has distinctive regional characteristics (Shi, 2007).

Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1, established in 1999, currently has more than 60 performers and staff members, with over 600 performances annually, and enjoys high recognition in the region. Its 20-year development history intensively reflects the opportunities and challenges faced by contemporary local opera—audience loss, funding shortages, and talent scarcity (Lu, 2021), while also demonstrating the efforts of traditional art to explore transformation. Among these challenges and transformations, instrumental performance, as one of the core elements of Wuju Opera art, has characteristics and changes that are particularly worth noting.

Although academic research on Wuju Opera music is already quite rich, existing literature mainly focuses on the music system, vocal characteristics, and repertoire singing, while systematic research on instrumental performance remains relatively weak. Traditional opera music research paradigms often view instrumentation as a supporting role, neglecting its key role in overall artistic expression. Therefore, through a microscopic examination of the Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1, this study deeply analyzes the artistic characteristics of instrumental performance in contemporary folk professional Wuju Opera troupes, exploring its internal mechanisms in traditional inheritance, local integration, and contemporary transformation.

Specifically, the core research questions focus on the following three aspects:

First, how do folk professional troupes maintain and innovate traditional instrumental composition in the process of modernization?

Second, how is the balance between formula-based and improvisational elements achieved in instrumental performance?

Third, how does instrumental performance realize the organic unity of multiple artistic functions?

In terms of research significance, the exploration of these questions theoretically expands the academic boundaries of traditional opera music research, enriches the analytical dimensions of folk professional troupe research, and provides innovative paths for the sustainable development of folk professional troupes.

Objectives

1. To reveal the preservation status and transformation mechanisms of traditional instrumental composition in folk professional Wuju Opera troupes, this study examines the stability and modern development of the "Five Principal Positions" orchestra composition.

2. To clarify the artistic performance characteristics of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance, this study analyzes the systematic composition of civil and martial music and the diversified performance patterns.

3. To explore the role of Wuju Opera instrumentation in overall opera performance, this study examines the multi-level functional system and implementation mechanisms of stage-opening music, transitional music, and accompaniment music.

Literature review

1. Evolution of Opera Instrumental Research

Research on opera instrumentation has undergone an academic shift from periphery to center. In the 1980s, Chinese scholars began to systematically focus on opera instrumental performance. Zhang (1989) and Fu (1993) were the first to examine Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera instrumentation from various angles, including artistic characteristics, laying the theoretical foundation for subsequent research. Entering





the 21st century, research perspectives have become more diverse. Zhou (2020) focused on improvisation and formula in Chinese folk suona music, Sun (2023) expanded research on the functions of civil and martial music, and Guo (2022) began to focus on the important role and characteristics of Peking Opera percussion. These studies present a trend of expansion from technical aspects to cultural dimensions, strongly promoting the deepening of opera instrumental research.

However, existing research has three notable deficiencies: First, research objects mainly focus on mainstream opera genres such as Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, with insufficient attention to local opera instrumentation; second, research methods mostly adopt literature analysis and theoretical interpretation, lacking support from systematic fieldwork; third, research perspectives focus on technical form description, neglecting the social function and inheritance mechanism of instrumental performance as cultural practice. These limitations provide space for breakthroughs in this research in the field of local opera instrumental performance.

2. Progress in Folk Professional Troupe Research

With the intensification of the survival crisis of traditional opera, research on folk professional troupes has gradually become an academic focus. Fu & Cao (2021) and Ni (2021) focused on the historical evolution and survival status of Wuju Opera troupes, sorting out the historical context and realistic difficulties of troupe development. Sun's (2024) research expanded the perspective of interaction between local opera troupes and local society, revealing the complex role of troupes in social and cultural networks. These studies provide important perspectives for understanding the operational mechanisms of folk professional troupes.

However, existing research mainly focuses on the macro-development and survival status of troupes, with obviously insufficient attention to internal artistic practices, especially instrumental performance: First, there is insufficient exploration of the artistic inheritance mechanism of instrumental performance in folk professional troupes, lacking analysis of the adaptation strategies of traditional compositions such as the "Five Principal Positions" in modern transformation; second, there is a lack of research on the relationship between instrumental performance and troupe survival and development, neglecting the key role of instrumental performance in artistic innovation of troupes; third, there is insufficient microscopic examination of the interaction between instrumental performance and local society, failing to reveal the socio-cultural significance and function of instrumental performance in folk professional troupes.

3. Review of Wuju Opera Music Research

After China's reform and opening up, research on Wuju Opera music gradually deepened. Scholars such as Wang (1993) and Xu (1990) systematically sorted out the historical context and artistic characteristics of Wuju Opera music from aspects such as vocal tones and repertoire. "The History of Chinese Wuju Opera," compiled by the Jinhua Art Research Institute (2006), provided important literature for research on the Wuju Opera vocal system. Shi's (2007) research began to focus on Wuju Opera's instrumental research. These studies have constructed the basic framework of Wuju Opera music research, providing a foundation for in-depth research.

Meanwhile, Wuju Opera music research still has three notable deficiencies: First, research themes are too concentrated on vocal systems and repertoire analysis, with obviously insufficient systematic examination of instrumental performance, especially orchestra composition, performance patterns, and functional systems; second, research methods rely too much on literature and score analysis, lacking fieldwork and participatory observation of actual performances; third, research perspectives focus on static description, failing to fully reveal the dynamic generation mechanism and cultural adaptation strategies of musical performance. These research deficiencies make a systematic understanding of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance still significantly lacking.



Conceptual Framework

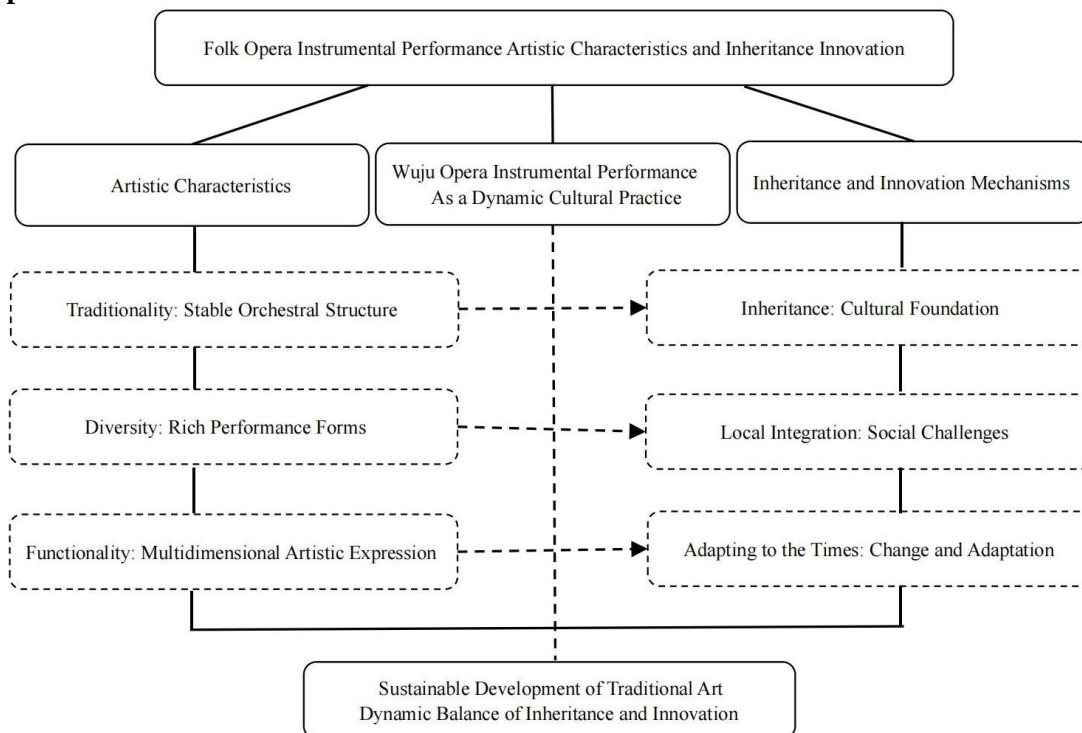


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

1. Theoretical Framework

This study uses musical anthropology as the basic theoretical framework, based on the following considerations: First, musical anthropology emphasizes examining musical phenomena in specific social and cultural contexts, which highly aligns with research on the artistic characteristics of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance. Traditional music research often only focuses on technical aspects such as instruments and scores, while the perspective of musical anthropology helps us understand the social and cultural mechanisms behind musical practices. Second, musical anthropology provides a complete set of research methodologies, especially methodological guidance in fieldwork, which helps to obtain in-depth first-hand information. Third, musical anthropology values the perspectives of participants in musical activities, which is important for understanding the practical logic of folk professional troupes.

In terms of specific theoretical guidance, this study mainly draws on two important theoretical perspectives:

One is the framework of "intangible heritage inheritance, cultural construction, and identity recognition" proposed by Yang (2021). It emphasizes that cultural inheritance is not only static preservation but also a creative practice, and that inheritance and construction are two major concepts and behavioral systems that exist and are included in the development process of traditional Chinese music and even the entire traditional culture. This theoretical view provides important inspiration for analyzing the inheritance and transformation of Wuju Opera instrumentation, enabling a better understanding of the internal mechanisms by which Wuju Opera's instrumental performance maintains traditional characteristics while achieving innovative development.

The other is the "time, place, and metaphor" analytical framework proposed by Timothy Rice (2003). He proposed this new theoretical framework for music research in the context of rapidly changing contemporary society, emphasizing that the dynamic change process of musical practice should be



understood from the three dimensions of time, place, and metaphor. This theoretical framework provides a systematic analytical perspective for analyzing Wuju Opera's instrumental performance, helping to understand how instrumental performance maintains characteristics in historical inheritance, gains recognition in local space, and achieves innovation in cultural practice.

2. Research Design

This study adopts a case study method, selecting Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 as the research object. This selection is based on the troupe's typicality, accessibility, and completeness: As one of the longest-established folk professional troupes in Zhejiang Province, the troupe not only retains a rich artistic tradition but also vividly presents the survival state of contemporary local opera. At the same time, the troupe's active level of over 600 performances per year provides ample observation opportunities for research.

The research team conducted a six-month in-depth field study from January to June 2024. The investigation adopted diversified data collection methods:

First is participatory observation. The researchers participated in 30 formal performances and 10 rehearsals and observed more than 20 orchestra collaborations. During observation, we not only focused on technical aspects such as orchestra composition and playing techniques but also paid attention to recording details such as interaction modes between musicians and rehearsal discussions to gain an in-depth understanding of the internal mechanisms of instrumental performance.

Second are in-depth interviews. The research team conducted systematic interviews with 15 senior musicians, each interview lasting 1-2 hours. The interviewees included performers of different instrument types, covering various roles of the "Five Principal Positions." Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, centering around themes such as skill inheritance, performance practice, and artistic concepts.

The third is the literature collection. The research team systematically collected historical archives, performance records, inheritance materials, and other documents of the troupe. These documents not only helped understand the development history of the troupe but also provided important references for analyzing the traditional characteristics of instrumental performance. Meanwhile, we also collected relevant academic research literature to expand the research vision.

Results

Using musical anthropology fieldwork methods, this study systematically analyzed the artistic characteristics of instrumental performance in contemporary folk professional Wuju Opera troupes through a six-month in-depth examination of Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 in Zhejiang Province. The research found that Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 has formed a distinctive instrumental performance style by inheriting traditional art, integrating local characteristics, and adapting to contemporary requirements. Its artistic characteristics are mainly reflected in three dimensions: traditionality, diversity, and functionality.

1. Traditionality: Stable and Resilient "Five Principal Positions" Orchestra Composition

Although traditional Wuju Opera orchestras are not large in scale, they have a refined structure, forming a distinctive "Five Principal Positions" (Drum Master, Lead Huguin, Secondary Wind Instruments, Large Gong, Small Gong) composition. This composition system is characterized by a clear division of labor and hierarchical order, originating from the artistic quality of opera that "centers on character performance, with instrumentation as the melodic foundation." In the process of modern development, this traditional composition has shown great vitality and adaptability.

1.1 Core Structure of the Traditional "Five Principal Positions"

The "Five Principal Positions" composition is the traditional organizational form of Wuju Opera instrumental performance, establishing a professional division of labor among musicians and reflecting a highly refined post-setting and organic collaborative artistic ecology. This composition is not only a technical arrangement but also an important carrier of traditional opera music culture. Specifically, these five key roles assume different artistic responsibilities:

The Drum Master is the conductor and rhythmic core of the orchestra, bearing the most critical coordination function. Through precise drum beats and expressive gestures, the Drum Master not only





controls the rhythm and tempo of the orchestra but also guides the instrumental performance of the entire opera. Managing various percussion instruments such as the single-skin drum, wooden clappers, and large hall drums, the Drum Master is the "commander" of the orchestra, and their artistic handling directly affects the overall quality of the performance.

The Lead Huqin is the musical soul of the orchestra, occupying a central position in instrumental performance. As the main lead player of string and wind instruments, the Lead Huqin is proficient in various instruments such as bamboo flute, Huihu, and Erhu, and also plays the Su cymbals and small hall drum. Their excellent musical skills and artistic expressiveness determine the musical style and artistic quality of Wuju Opera instrumentation. The Lead Huqin is not only a master of technique but also a core carrier of musical expression.

The Secondary Wind Instruments, as a capable assistant to the Lead Huqin, provide strong supplementation and support in musical expression by mastering instruments such as the Lihua, Huihu, Banhu, and Erhu. Traditionally, the Secondary Wind Instruments also bear half the responsibility of stage inspection, reflecting the highly tacit collaborative relationship between musicians. Their function is not only technical cooperation but also an extension and enrichment of musical expression.

The Large Gong ("Three-piece Player") is responsible for an important part of percussion instruments, managing the large gong, large cymbals, and small cymbals, and also playing the Banhu and Yueqin. This position requires musicians to possess rich percussion playing techniques, adding rich musical texture to Wuju Opera instrumentation through diverse rhythmic changes and timbre processing. The artistic handling of this role directly affects the rhythmic tension and musical expressiveness of the orchestra.

The Small Gong specializes in playing the small gong and other percussion instruments, also playing the "dog bark gong," bamboo clappers, and being responsible for stage inspection work. Although relatively peripheral in responsibility, the Small Gong player plays an indispensable role in detail control in the orchestra. Precise rhythm control and diverse timbre changes make the Small Gong role an important link in the orchestra's musical expression.

This composition system, with a clear division of labor and hierarchical order, reflects the essence of the Wuju Opera instrumental tradition. Each musician not only masters the main instruments of their position but also needs to play multiple instruments, fully reflecting the "multi-talented" artistic characteristic of traditional opera music. Musicians exert creativity in fixed positions, constructing Wuju Opera's unique musical expression system through fine division of labor and tacit coordination.

1.2 Modern Development of Traditional Composition

With social and economic development, the scale and complexity of Wuju Opera orchestras have gradually changed. Some larger folk Wuju Opera troupes have increased their orchestra size to more than 20 people, with a richer variety of instruments. In Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1, although the orchestra size has expanded to about 15 people, the traditional "Five Principal Positions" of "Drum Master, Lead Huqin, Secondary Wind Instruments, Large Gong, Small Gong" remains the compositional core of the orchestra.

Evidently, with the demands of the times and market, in terms of instrument use, the troupe has appropriately introduced some new instruments while maintaining traditional ones. This innovation is conducted on the premise of maintaining traditional characteristics, always adhering to the principle of not affecting the inherent musical style of Wuju Opera. Through this orderly, innovative development, Wuju Opera instrumentation has both maintained traditional characteristics and gained new expressiveness.

2. Diversity: Adaptable and Flexible Civil and Martial Music Performance Patterns

Wuju Opera is popular in areas such as Jinhua, Quzhou, and Lishui in Zhejiang. Due to differences in geography and culture, Wuju Opera in different regions presents different artistic features. As an important birthplace of Wuju Opera, the folk professional orchestras in the Jinhua region have inherited the rich heritage of various vocal styles such as Gaoqiang, Kunqu, Huiju, and Luantan, forming diverse instrument combinations and performance patterns.

2.1 Systematic Composition of Civil and Martial Music

Wuju Opera's civil and martial music reflects the complexity and artistic tension of opera music. As a precise musical expression system, civil and martial music not only undertakes the basic functions of supporting vocal tone and maintaining pitch but also accompanies character movements, martial arts, character entrances, and exits through refined instrumental language, and precisely regulates stage rhythm.





The division between civil and martial music originates from the artistic logic of traditional opera music. Civil music, dominated by wind and string instruments, mainly serves vocal accompaniment, emphasizing lyricism; martial music, centered on percussion instruments, focuses on enhancing martial arts scenes and dramatic conflicts. This division ensures both the professionalism of musical expression and the unity of overall artistic effect.

In terms of specific instrument composition, Wuju Opera's civil and martial music is mainly expressed through four major categories of instruments: percussion instruments, plucked instruments, wind instruments, and string instruments. Each category of the instrument has its unique expressive function and artistic context.

Percussion instruments are diverse, including single-skin drums, clappers, wooden blocks, large and small hall drums, large and small gongs, large and small cymbals, etc. Each instrument undertakes specific expressive tasks, creating rich rhythmic effects and dramatic atmospheres through different combinations and applications.

Plucked instruments are represented by the yangqin, sanxian, and yueqin. Although relatively singular in timbre, they possess unique artistic charm. These instruments play an important supporting role in Wuju Opera music and are important elements in shaping the unique musical style of Wuju Opera.

Wind instruments include large and small suona, bamboo flute, xianfeng, and trumpet. These instruments have important expressive roles in Wuju Opera music, especially in rendering specific scene atmospheres, creating unique artistic effects.

String instruments mainly include Huihu, Banhu, violin, and Erhu. These instruments have different functions in musical expression, jointly constructing rich musical layers. Among them, the Banhu, with its profound timbre, is mainly used to accompany vocals, while the Erhu, due to its flexible expressiveness, is widely applied in various musical passages.

2.2 Diversification of Performance Patterns

Wuju Opera's instrumental performance patterns show a high degree of improvisation and creativity. Musicians not only master their primary instruments but can also flexibly play multiple instruments, reflecting the "multi-talented" artistic characteristic. This organizational form transcends simple technical division of labor and is a cultural practice, reflecting the dialectical relationship between collaboration and the full expression of individual talents in traditional Chinese music.

With social change, Wuju Opera orchestras continue to absorb new musical elements. This process is not a simple imitation and substitution but a creative transformation of culture. Through continuous adjustment and reconstruction, Wuju Opera instrumentation has maintained the core spirit of traditional civil and martial music while gaining contemporary vitality.

3. Functionality: Adaptive and Distinctive Performance Techniques

Wuju Opera's instrumental performance, as a complex cultural system, has functional connotations far beyond simple musical accompaniment. This characteristic is deeply rooted in the artistic gene of opera that "centers on character performance," reflecting the unique expressive logic of traditional Chinese opera music. Through in-depth investigation, it was found that Wuju Opera instrumentation runs through the entire opera performance process, from the opening stage to character entrances and exits, from plot turns to post-performance farewells, forming a multi-level, multi-functional musical expression network.

From a functional dimension, Wuju Opera's civil and martial music can be divided into three core types: stage-opening music, transitional music, and accompaniment music. These three types are both relatively independent and intertwined, jointly forming the overall ecosystem of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance.

Stage-opening music, as an important ritual before opera performance, has profound cultural symbolic significance. Through repertoires such as "Huatoutai," the orchestra not only showcases the skills of the main instruments but also conveys the overall level of the opera troupe to the audience. This segment transcends pure musical performance and is a cultural performance, reflecting the complex relationship between music, ritual, and social interaction in traditional opera performances.

Transitional music is the core form of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance, accompanying all actions other than vocal parts in the entire repertoire performance, and its complexity reflects the high artistry of opera music. This type is divided into three basic patterns: Xingxian, Qupai, and Luogujing. Xingxian emphasizes improvisation and interaction, with musicians flexibly adjusting music according to actor performance; Qupai delicately matches different scenes, divided into stylistically different "fine work"

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Citation



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and "rough work"; Luogujing precisely depicts character emotions and dramatic conflicts through complex rhythmic patterns.

Accompaniment music pursues high alignment with vocals, constituting the essence of Wuju Opera's musical expression. Three forms—Qichang, Guomen, and Tuoqiang—jointly construct a precise musical expression system. Qichang music prepares actors to enter character states; Guomen music plays a key connecting and transitional role; Tuoqiang music embodies the most exquisite artistic characteristics of Wuju Opera music—seeking balance between standardization and flexibility.

More importantly, this functional performance is not a mechanical technical operation but a deeply cultural practice. Each form of instrumental performance contains rich aesthetic significance and cultural connotations, demonstrating the artistic wisdom of traditional Chinese opera music that "integrates form and spirit." Through this diversely unified instrumental performance system, Wuju Opera not only maintains the core spirit of traditional opera music but also demonstrates its culturally vital adaptability to changing times.

Discussion

Through an in-depth examination of Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1, this study systematically analyzed the artistic characteristics of instrumental performance in folk professional Wuju Opera troupes. The research found that Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 demonstrates unique artistic characteristics in three dimensions—traditionality, diversity, and functionality—forming an artistic practice model that both maintains tradition and continuously innovates.

1. Traditional Inheritance: Living Inheritance of Cultural Genes and Internal Mechanisms

The key to Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1's continuous development over more than 20 years lies in its creative transformation and innovative development of traditional instrumental art. In terms of artistic form, although the orchestra size has expanded from 5 to 15 people, the troupe has always adhered to the traditional compositional core of the "Five Principal Positions." This composition system not only establishes a professional division of labor but also forms a complete artistic inheritance context. Through traditional methods of "oral teaching" and "practical demonstration," Wuju Opera instrumental art has been passed down from generation to generation, revealing the adaptive changes of this traditional structure in the contemporary context.

An in-depth analysis reveals that the internal mechanism of this traditional inheritance can be understood as a "core-periphery" structure cultural inheritance model. In this model, core elements such as the "Five Principal Positions" are viewed as unshakable cultural genes, while peripheral elements such as instrument types allow moderate innovation. This inheritance strategy, distinguishing between core and periphery, enables traditional art to both maintain its characteristics and adapt to social changes. This cultural inheritance logic transcends the simple binary opposition of "conservative-innovative," forming a more complex mechanism of cultural continuation, reflecting the wisdom of "transforming the old into the new" in traditional Chinese art. This inheritance model of "intangible heritage inheritance being both conservative and creative" provides important inspiration for understanding how other traditional performing arts maintain vitality in modern society.

2. Local Integration: Cultural Expression and Identity Construction of Rural Experience

The instrumental performance of Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1 is deeply rooted in local cultural soil, forming a unique artistic expression system. This local integration is not only reflected in the regional characteristics of artistic form but also in the process of cultural identity construction.

First is the locality of musical language. Wuju Opera instrumentation absorbs a large number of local musical elements, including folk tunes, mountain songs, and various traditional instrumental melodies. In-depth analysis reveals that this locality of musical language is not a simple formal transplantation but a process of "cultural translation"—transforming local life experiences, emotional structures, and value concepts into artistic expression through musical language.

Second are the regional characteristics of performance patterns and the locality of cultural connotations. Wuju Opera's instrumental performance maintains close connections with cultural forms such as folk activities and religious rituals in the Jinhua area of Zhejiang, forming an important node in the local cultural network. This cultural embeddedness is an important foundation for the continued existence of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance in local society.

It is worth noting that this locality should not be simply understood as a regional limitation but should be viewed as a source of cultural creation and a basis for artistic characteristics. In the context of





globalization, emphasizing the locality of art is not cultural conservatism but a manifestation of cultural confidence and cultural subjectivity, an effective strategy against cultural homogenization, allowing Wuju Opera's instrumental performance to maintain unique cultural resilience in modern society.

3. Functional Interaction: Integration Mechanism of Multi-level Functional System

Wuju Opera's instrumental performance has formed a multi-level functional system of stage-opening music, transitional music, and accompaniment music. This functional diversity is not a simple functional juxtaposition but an organically integrated artistic system, reflecting the internal logic and cultural wisdom of traditional performing arts.

First, these three functional types reflect the holistic artistic concept of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance. Stage-opening music, as a ritualistic display, constructs the cultural framework of the performance; transitional music, as the core segment of the performance, carries the important functions of character shaping and situation creation; accompaniment music supports vocal expression and plot development through forms such as tone support and transitions. These three functions are not simply additive but form a complete artistic system from outside to inside, from form to content, revealing the internal structure and operational mechanism of this functional system.

Second, this multi-level functional system demonstrates the socio-cultural function of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance. Through the ritual of stage-opening music, Wuju Opera performance establishes close ties with community life; through the expressiveness of transitional music, it achieves emotional interaction between artists and audiences; through the supportiveness of accompaniment music, it ensures the completeness and precision of overall artistic expression. This functional layering both ensures the efficiency of artistic expression and enhances the social embeddedness of artistic practice, reflecting the core value of being "people-oriented" in traditional performing arts, allowing Wuju Opera's instrumental performance to maintain its cultural value and social significance in different social scenarios.

4. Adaptive Mechanism: Modern Transformation of Traditional Art and Theoretical Significance

The three dimensions of Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1's instrumental performance—traditional inheritance, local integration, and functional interaction—together form a complete adaptive mechanism, which is the key to the continuous development of traditional art in modern society. This adaptive mechanism transcends the simple binary opposition of protection and innovation, forming a dynamically balanced cultural inheritance system.

At the theoretical level, this adaptive mechanism enriches the theoretical perspective of intangible cultural heritage research. It echoes the framework of "intangible heritage inheritance, cultural construction, and identity recognition" proposed by Yang (2021), confirming the dual characteristics of both conservation and creation in the inheritance process of traditional culture. Meanwhile, it also expands Rice's (2003) "time, place, and metaphor" analytical framework, demonstrating how traditional musical practice achieves historical continuity in the time dimension, reinforces local identity in the spatial dimension, and reconstructs artistic meaning in the cultural dimension.

This finding has important implications for understanding the modern transformation of traditional performing arts. It indicates that the vitality of traditional art comes not only from its historical value but also from its dynamic ability to adapt to modern society. This ability is reflected in the stable inheritance of core elements and innovative development of peripheral elements, the deep maintenance of local cultural foundations, the systematic integration of diverse functional systems, etc., constituting the survival wisdom of traditional art in modern society.

Conclusion

Through case analysis of Yongkang Wuju Opera Troupe No. 1, this study systematically examined the artistic characteristics of instrumental performance in folk professional Wuju Opera troupes, revealing the inheritance and innovation mechanisms and survival strategies of traditional performing arts in modern society. The study draws the following conclusions:

1. Balance between Maintaining Traditional Core and Embracing Change

The research results show that folk professional Wuju Opera troupes have formed an inheritance model that both maintains the traditional core and allows peripheral change. The core compositional structure of the "Five Principal Positions" is strictly preserved, ensuring the traditional quality and artistic authenticity of Wuju Opera instrumental performance; at the same time, flexible adjustments are made in non-core elements such as orchestra size, instrument types, and playing techniques to respond to the aesthetic needs of contemporary society. This "core-periphery" structure inheritance model reflects the



wisdom of "transforming the old into the new" in traditional Chinese art, namely, achieving creative transformation of form and expression while maintaining the stability of the artistic entity.

This inheritance model provides important inspiration for understanding how local opera art maintains traditionality—truly vital traditional inheritance is not a simple replication of historical forms but, based on a profound understanding of the essence of tradition, achieves stable inheritance of core elements and innovative development of peripheral elements. This finding enriches the theoretical connotation of "living inheritance" of intangible cultural heritage and provides a new analytical dimension for traditional opera music research.

2. Multi-level Artistic Practice and Performance Diversity

This study found that instrumental performance in folk professional Wuju Opera troupes presents rich and diverse artistic expression forms. Through the flexible use of percussion instruments, plucked instruments, wind instruments, and string instruments, Wuju Opera's instrumental performance forms artistic characteristics that combine formula-based and improvisational elements. This diversity is reflected not only in instrument combinations but also in the rich variations of musical language, performance patterns, and artistic styles.

More importantly, this diversity is deeply rooted in local cultural soil. Wuju Opera's instrumental performance absorbs rich local musical elements, becoming an artistic expression of local culture. By transforming local life experiences, emotional structures, and value concepts into artistic language, Wuju Opera's instrumental performance constructs a unique local aesthetic system, forming deep cultural identification with local society. This indicates that the diversity of traditional art is not an abstract formal variation but an artistic expression with deep local cultural foundations, reflecting the cultural subjectivity and local characteristics of traditional art.

3. Functional Integration and Social Value Realization

This study reveals the multi-level functional system of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance and its integration mechanism. Stage-opening music, transitional music, and accompaniment music, as three functional types, form an organically integrated artistic system, achieving multiple functions such as ritual display, situation creation, and vocal support. This functional integration is not a simple juxtaposition but forms a complete artistic expression from outside to inside, from form to content.

This functional integration enables Wuju Opera's instrumental performance to simultaneously meet multiple needs, such as artistic appreciation, cultural inheritance, and social interaction, enhancing the social value and practical significance of traditional art. In particular, by participating in various cultural activities in local society, Wuju Opera's instrumental performance becomes an important medium for maintaining community relationships, constructing collective memory, and transmitting cultural values, demonstrating the social function of traditional art as a cultural bond. This finding provides a new perspective for understanding the modern value of traditional art, indicating that the significance of traditional art lies not only in its historical value and artistic achievements but also in its social function as a cultural practice.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings and conclusions, this study proposes the following theoretical and practical recommendations:

1. Theoretical Recommendations

1.1 Develop Diverse Cultural Heritage Inheritance Theories

This study recommends developing more diverse cultural heritage inheritance theories. Existing cultural heritage research frameworks have limitations when facing unique art forms such as Chinese local opera, often overemphasizing static preservation or excessive focus on formal innovation. The "traditionality-diversity-functionality" framework proposed by the research provides a new theoretical perspective for traditional art research. This framework is not only applicable to Chinese local opera but may also have inspirational value for research on traditional performing arts in other regions.

This theoretical framework emphasizes that: traditionality is not simple formal preservation but the continuation of core cultural genes; diversity is reflected not only in artistic expression but also in the diversification of social functions and cultural meanings; functionality focuses on how artistic practice responds to social needs and realizes the contemporary value of cultural traditions. This multi-dimensional analytical framework transcends the binary opposition of traditional protection and modern innovation,





providing a more comprehensive theoretical perspective for understanding the modern transformation of traditional art.

1.2 Construct Theoretical Standards for Evaluating Adaptability of Traditional Performing Arts

This study recommends constructing theoretical standards for evaluating the adaptability of traditional performing arts. The research found that the vitality of Wuju Opera's instrumental performance comes from its adaptability in multiple dimensions: maintaining core characteristics while achieving innovative development in artistic form; presenting diverse artistic styles in expressive forms; and forming a multi-level integration system at the functional level. Based on these findings, a set of theoretical standards can be established to evaluate the adaptability of traditional performing arts, including the balance of inheritance models, the diversity of artistic expression, the systematicity of functional integration, and the depth of cultural rootedness.

This set of theoretical standards is not a simple static evaluation tool but a dynamic analytical framework, aiming to reveal the survival state and development potential of traditional art in modern society. Through these standards, traditional performing arts from different regions and different opera genres can be more systematically compared, providing theoretical foundations and methodological tools for intangible cultural heritage protection research.

2. Practical Recommendations

2.1 Construct a Diverse Interactive Protection System for Traditional Art

This study recommends constructing a diverse interactive protection system for traditional art, transcending the single government-led model. Specifically, this protection system should include the following three dimensions:

First, policy support should shift from purely economic subsidies to diversified support, including providing performance platforms, conducting skill training, building exchange networks, and other forms, creating a good development environment for folk professional troupes. Second, social participation mechanisms should be strengthened through various forms such as educational promotion, community activities, and cultural tourism to expand the social influence and participation basis of traditional art. Finally, artistic inheritance should emphasize practicality and systematicity, focusing on both the teaching of artistic skills and the transmission of artistic thoughts and cultural values, ensuring the integrity and continuity of traditional art.

This diverse interactive protection system is not a simple integration of resources but an overall cultivation of the traditional art ecosystem, aiming to create a development environment for traditional art that has both historical continuity and modern adaptability. In particular, the subjectivity and innovative ability of folk professional troupes in artistic inheritance should be fully respected, supporting their exploration of artistic expression and dissemination methods that meet the demands of the times.

2.2 Strengthen Digital Preservation and Research of Traditional Performing Arts

This study recommends strengthening the digital preservation and research of traditional performing arts. Digital technology provides new possibilities for the recording, analysis, and dissemination of traditional art. Specifically, work can be carried out in the following three aspects:

First, build a systematic digital archive, using technical means such as high-definition video and audio recordings to comprehensively record the technical details and artistic characteristics of folk Wuju Opera instrumental performance, providing basic materials for research and inheritance. Second, develop analysis tools suitable for complex performing art forms, using music analysis software, motion capture technology, and other means to deeply study the technical patterns and artistic principles of traditional opera instrumental performance. Finally, establish an open database platform to promote academic exchange and cross-cultural comparative research, providing reference models for cultural heritage protection on a global scale.

This digital strategy is not a simple application of technology but an innovative extension of traditional research methods, aiming to deepen the understanding and protection of traditional art through modern technological means, creating new possibilities for the inheritance and development of traditional art in the digital age. Especially for the artistic practice of folk professional troupes, digital preservation not only helps the systematic recording of artistic skills but can also expand their social influence, opening up new channels and development spaces for the dissemination of traditional art.





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