



# The Performance Languages of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera: Contemporary Inheritance and Transformation

Ni Zhang<sup>1</sup> and Nataporn Rattanachaiwong<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral Degree Programs in Performing Arts, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

<sup>1</sup>E-mail: s64584947030@ssru.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2464-385X>

<sup>2</sup>E-mail: nataporn.ra@ssru.ac.th, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6525-9600>

Received 02/04/2025

Revised 27/04/2025

Accepted 21/05/2025

## Abstract

**Background and Aim:** Changde Han Opera, a significant regional opera genre in Changde, Hunan Province, is an important part of Chinese traditional theater. As its core vocal style, Gaoqiang is distinguished by its powerful and impassioned singing, distinctive accompaniment, and rich vocal techniques, all of which contribute to its unique artistic expression. However, in contemporary society, traditional Chinese opera as a whole faces challenges such as a shrinking audience base, transformations in transmission methods, and shifts in cultural consumption patterns. These factors have also impacted the survival and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. This study aims to: 1. Trace the historical origins of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera and clarify its artistic characteristics and cultural significance. 2. Analyze the core features of its performance language, including vocal techniques, accompaniment styles, and singing forms. 3. Explore effective strategies for the inheritance and innovation of Gaoqiang to support its modernization and sustainable development.

**Materials and Methods:** This study used a combination of literature research and field research methods. Through textual analysis, field research, and interviews, the evolution of Gaoqiang, the high-pitched style of Changde Han Opera, was systematically analysed, the artistic characteristics of its performance language were explored, and contemporary approaches to inheritance and innovation were discussed.

**Results:** This study deepens the understanding of the intrinsic value of Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang and explores a feasible path for the modern transformation of traditional art. The research shows that the inheritance and innovation of the performing language is the key to activating the vitality of traditional opera. Based on maintaining the authenticity of the art, modern aesthetic and technical means need to be integrated to expand the audience base. In the future, a three-in-one inheritance system of 'archival protection + digital dissemination + creative development' can be further constructed to promote the transformation of Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang from a local opera resource into a cultural asset shared across the country and even the world.

**Conclusion:** The study found that Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang not only carries a profound cultural heritage and artistic wisdom but also demonstrates a unique identity as a vehicle for regional culture in the inheritance and development of the arts in the new era. The study of its performance language helps to strengthen cultural identity while promoting the vitality of traditional art through innovation.

**Keywords:** Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera; Performing Language; Transmission; Changes; Art of Chinese Opera

## Introduction

Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is both a national intangible cultural heritage and an important part of the opera culture of the Changde region. It incorporates local dialects, music melodies, and singing techniques into a unique performance language, creating a unique artistic style. However, with the accelerating process of modernisation and ever-changing aesthetic concepts, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is facing extremely severe challenges in its inheritance and development. In January 2025, the central government's No. 1 document, 'Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Further Deepening Rural Reform and Solidly Promoting the Comprehensive Revitalisation of Rural Areas,' (CPC Central Committee and State Council, 2025) pointed out that to 'improve the level of rural industrial development, rural construction, and rural governance'. The protection and inheritance of traditional culture and art is an effective way to comprehensively revitalise and develop the countryside. Therefore, the inheritance and development of traditional culture and art play a very important role in enriching rural cultural life and enhancing the soft power of rural culture. Therefore, in the face of the opportunities and challenges of the modern era, we should strive to inherit and develop the



performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera in a comprehensive understanding of the process of inheritance and change, comprehensively promote traditional Chinese culture, effectively promote the prosperity of local opera art, and enable the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera to play a positive role in the development of art, life and economy.

## Objectives

1. To trace the historical origins of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera and clarify its artistic characteristics and cultural significance.
2. To analyze the core features of its performance language, including vocal techniques, accompaniment styles, and singing forms.
3. To explore effective strategies for the inheritance and innovation of Gaoqiang to support its modernization and sustainable development.

## Literature review

Chen (2017) writes in his article 'Research on the Protection and Inheritance of Changde's "Intangible Cultural Heritage" in the Category of Traditional Opera' that scholars generally agree that the government should increase investment in Changde's 'intangible cultural heritage' in the category of traditional opera, formulate corresponding protection policies, set up special funds, provide the necessary venues and facilities, and at the same time strengthen supervision of 'intangible cultural heritage' projects to ensure the effective implementation of protection work. Faced with market challenges and changes in audience demand, scholars suggest that traditional troupes need to reform and innovate to improve the quality of their repertoire. This includes introducing modern elements, innovating performance formats, and enriching plot content. Through innovation, they can attract young audiences, expand market space, and inject new vitality into the inheritance of traditional operas. From the perspective of cultural ecology theory, Changde Han Opera's gaoqiang is a form of local traditional theater culture whose survival and development depend on a specific cultural-ecological environment. However, with the acceleration of modernization, the original cultural-ecological conditions have undergone significant changes—shifts in social structures, lifestyles, and aesthetic preferences have all contributed to the challenges faced in transmitting this art form. Cultural ecology emphasizes the interactive relationship between culture and environment, and sustainable development can only be achieved when culture can adapt to environmental changes. Therefore, Changde Han Opera's high-pitched style needs to constantly adjust itself to adapt to the cultural environment of modern society. From the perspective of cultural inheritance theory, cultural inheritance is a dynamic process that requires continuous innovation and development. Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang is an intangible cultural heritage, and its inheritance process is not only simple replication and preservation, but also requires the comprehensive integration of modern elements to achieve an organic combination of tradition and modernity, attracting more young audiences' attention and ensuring the inheritance and development of Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang.

Yu and Liang (2019) point out from the perspective of inheritance that with the development of society and the diversification of entertainment forms, young people's interest in traditional operas has gradually declined, resulting in an increasingly ageing audience for Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. This not only limits the dissemination and influence of the opera but also poses a threat to its future development. The inheritance and development of traditional operas require stable financial support, including troupe operations, actor salaries, equipment maintenance, etc. However, due to insufficient government support or imperfect market mechanisms, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera faces a shortage of funds, which directly affects its normal performances, talent training, publicity and promotion, and other activities. With the rapid development of society, traditional operas face conflicts with modern aesthetic concepts, communication methods, and cultural environments.

Wu and Zhou (2006) 'The Development and Confusion of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera' reflects on the current research status and proposes possible future research directions from the perspective of the development and confusion of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. The article believes that the limitations





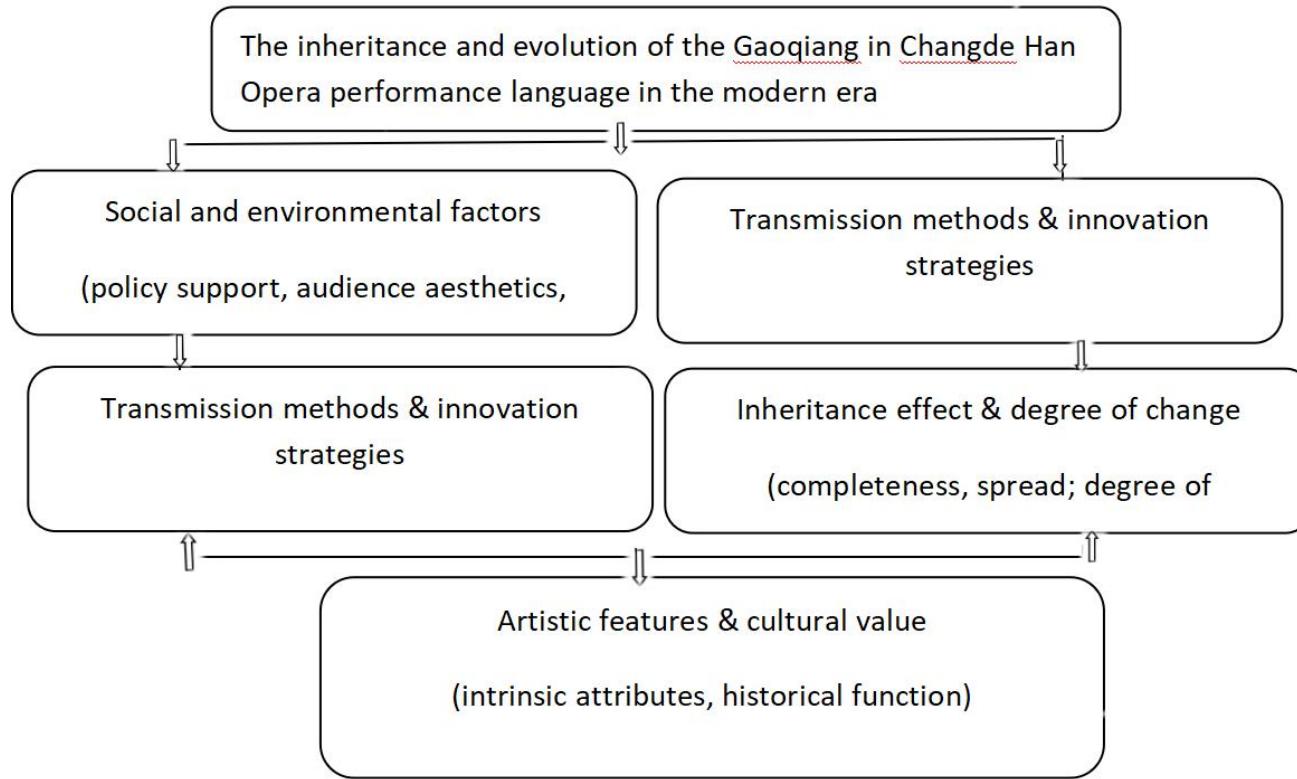
and deficiencies of current research are its lack of interdisciplinary research, lack of empirical research, and single research methods. In other words, current research on Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is mainly focused on areas such as the history of opera and musicology, and lacks interdisciplinary research with other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and communication studies. This has led to a relatively one-sided understanding and perception of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. Existing research is mostly based on documentary materials, lacking field surveys and empirical research. This has led to a lack of in-depth understanding of the transmission, evolution, and influence of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. Current research methods are mostly qualitative, with relatively little quantitative research. This has, to some extent, limited the comprehensive understanding and depth of research on Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. The article argues that forward-looking research and foresight are needed to escape the current confusion over the development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

Tan (2009) argues in his article 'Reform and Innovation of Xiang Opera Gaoqiang' that Xiang Opera Gaoqiang must change. Because Xiang Opera has a history of several hundred years from the Ming Dynasty to the present, its Gaoqiang music and performance techniques have formed a unique style and unique artistic charm through long-term artistic practice. In particular, it is characterised by its musical material, melodic methods, song structure, characteristic tones, specific rhythms, linguistic sounds and rhyme, tonal characteristics, and the different, that is to say, dozens of tunes, which also contain many similar phrases. First of all, the forms of Xiang opera Gaoqiang are also relatively poor. They lack variety and only have three types: single-board, sandwich-board, and free-form. Ninety per cent of them are single-board, that is, 2/4 form, which lacks expressiveness. Second, due to its monotonous style and simple tunes, the rhythm is too drawn out. In addition, the accompaniment of Xiang Opera Gaoqiang was completely done by percussion in the past, or used to set off the singing. Later, although string and wind instruments and orchestral instruments were added, the feeling given is of a stiff accompaniment, passively and negatively adapting to the needs of the singing, and not effectively functioning. In addition, the slow rhythm of the singing not only fails to meet the requirements of many modern plays, but also distances itself from the audience's appreciation rhythm, even creating a marked contrast. Facts have proven that a singing form with a serious disconnect between the performance rhythm and the appreciation rhythm will inevitably lead to the lagging of the genre if it is not reformed, and even risks being eliminated over time. From the perspective of artistic innovation theory, the development and innovation of art are closely related. Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang is a traditional Chinese opera art, so its performance language, music, repertoire, and other aspects need to be constantly innovated to better meet the aesthetic needs of modern audiences. The theory of artistic innovation emphasizes the uniqueness and novelty of art, and practice has shown that only continuous innovation can make Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang stand out among many art forms. Therefore, we need to constantly attract more audience attention. At the same time, innovation also needs to follow artistic laws and maintain the artistic characteristics and traditional charm of Changde Han Opera Gaoqiang.

In summary, the literature analysis shows that Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, as an important intangible cultural heritage, is of great significance for the prosperity of traditional Chinese opera in terms of its inheritance and development. In the face of the challenges and problems brought about by modern society, the government and all sectors of society need to work together to create favourable conditions for the inheritance and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.



## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## Methodology

This study mainly used a literature review method, a field research method, and an interview method to explore. Relevant literature was reviewed during the specific research process to gain a better understanding of the historical origins and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. Field research was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera performances, and to observe its performance forms and content. The role of the interview method was to communicate with the inheritors, actors, and audience members of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera to obtain first-hand information.

## Results

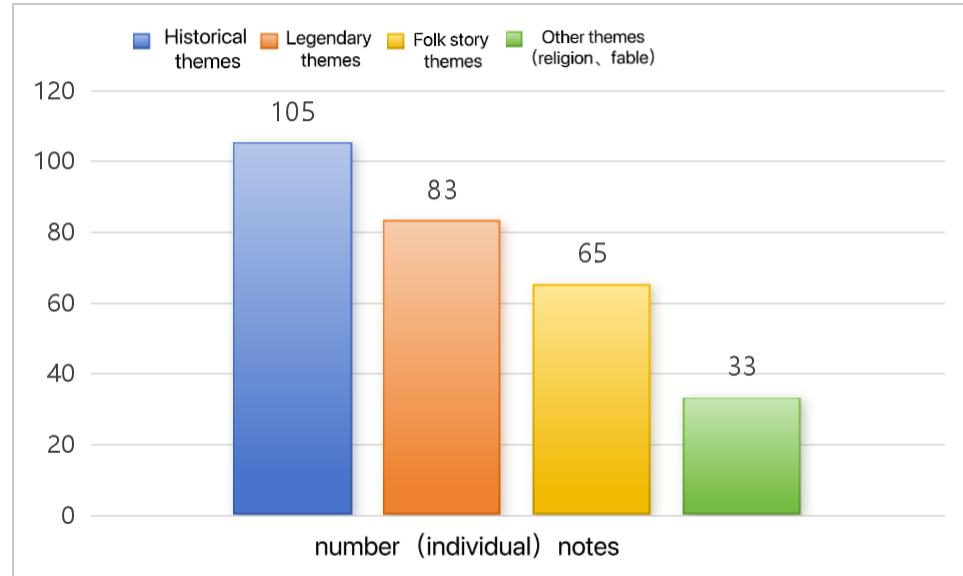
1. The historical origins of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera
  - 1.1. The origins of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera

From a historical perspective, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has a long history. Historical records show that it can be traced back to the Ming Dynasty and originated from the Yiyangqiang at the time. After hundreds of years of continuous evolution and development, it gradually formed its current unique style. Since the Qing Dynasty, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has gradually spread in Changde and the surrounding areas, and people at the time liked this opera art. Further analysis found that the formation and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera in the Changde area originated from the area's unique geographical environment, rich and colourful history and culture, and diverse folk music. Geographically, Changde is in northwestern Hunan Province and occupies a very important gateway position in Hunan Province. Therefore, the art form here is more open to accepting and incorporating theatrical elements from surrounding areas, thus gradually enriching the local art form. At the same time,

Changde itself has a very profound historical and cultural heritage, which has given rise to a rich variety of folk music, thus providing fertile soil for the formation and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera (Hu, 2024). To date, the traditional repertoire of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is already very rich. According to incomplete statistics, it mainly includes the following:

Type of play	Quantity (no.)	remarks
Historical subject matter	105	It mainly includes historical stories of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties, such as the common Sui-Tang drama and the Three Kingdoms drama.
Legend has it	83	It mainly includes myths and legends, folk stories, such as "The Legend of the White Snake" and "Meng Jiangnu".
Folk story subject matter	65	It mainly reflects the life of ordinary people, family ethics and love, and marriage stories.
Other subjects (religion, fable)	33	It mainly involves religious stories, fables, and so on.

Note: The above statistics are only a rough number, because the objective conditions are limited, and some content cannot be more comprehensive and accurate to reflect.

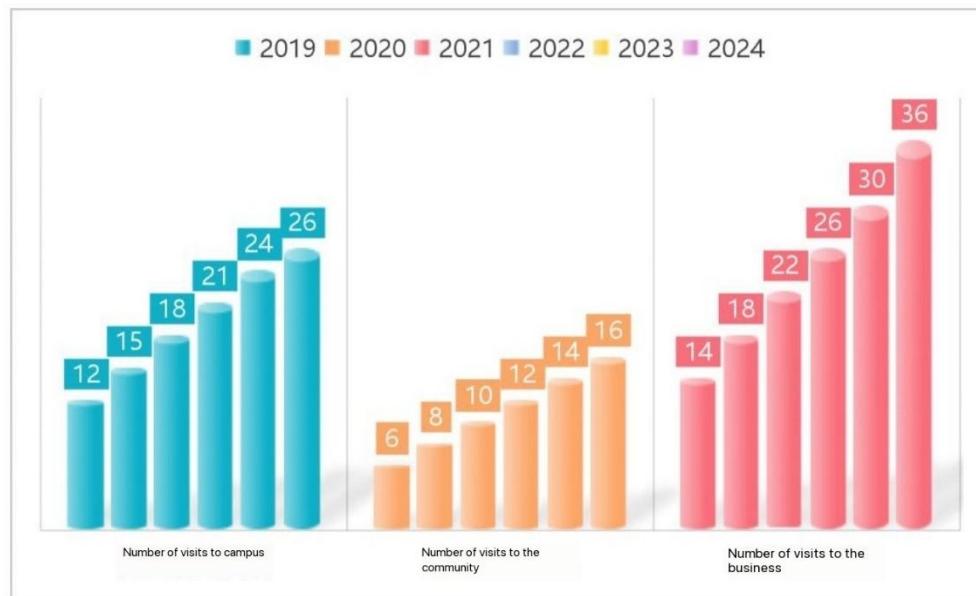


As can be seen from the above, after the vicissitudes of time and the test of the ages, the current traditional repertoire of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has reached more than 400. In terms of specific content, it is mainly related to history, legends, folk stories, etc., which fully demonstrate the artistic charm and cultural value of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

## 1.2 The evolution of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera

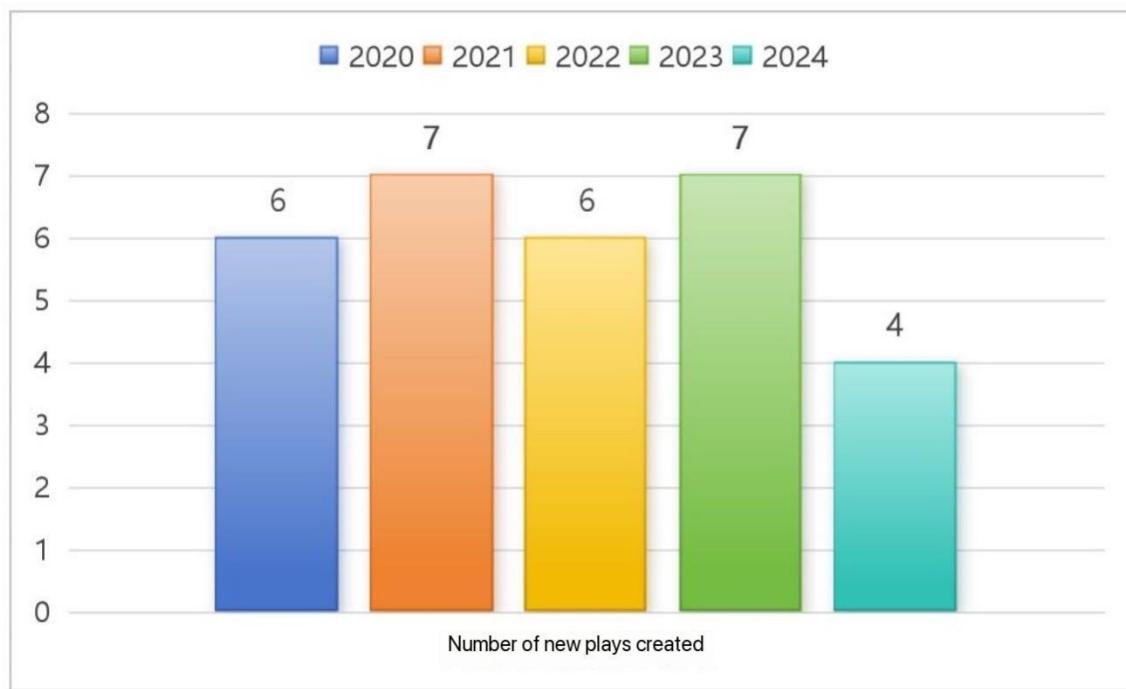
Art comes from life and will continue to change with it. As times change, so too will the aesthetic needs of the audience. Further analysis reveals that Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has undergone extremely significant changes in terms of both form and content, as well as musical style.

In terms of performance format, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has gradually shifted from a single theatrical performance to the development of diversified performance scenes. For example, since 2019, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has gradually performed in schools, communities, and companies many times. According to incomplete statistics as of December 2024, in 2019, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera performed in schools, communities, and enterprises were 12, 6, and 14 times, respectively. In the future, the number of performances will gradually increase. As of December 2024, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has performed 26 times in schools, 16 times in communities, and 36 times in enterprises, with a total of 78 performances. The data shows that Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has received more attention in its development process.



In addition, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is actively exploring the integration of modern technology into its performance format. At present, people have begun to experiment with using digital multimedia technology for stage set design and sound effects, which greatly enhances the performance's watchability and artistic quality.

In terms of content, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has not only retained traditional classic repertoire, but has also actively created many new plays that reflect contemporary social reality. According to incomplete statistics, in the past five years, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has created more than 30 new plays, including many masterpieces that have won provincial and national awards. These new plays not only retain the melodiousness of traditional singing but also incorporate modern dramatic narrative techniques and performance elements into the performance process, which makes Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera more in line with the aesthetic needs of contemporary audiences (Li, 2023).



In terms of musical style, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has actively innovated and practiced by drawing on existing forms. For example, while maintaining the original high-pitched and intense characteristics, it has absorbed elements of folk vocal music and popular music, further promoting a richer and more contemporary singing style. In addition, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera also focuses on cross-border integration with other art forms such as dance and instrumental music, making performances more lively, interesting, and exciting.

## 2. The characteristics of the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera

### 2.1 The singing style is high-pitched and intense

From the perspective of the singing style of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, it is known for its high-pitched and intense style with a loud voice. This requires that the singing style of Gaoqiang not only have excellent vocal conditions, but also master unique singing techniques to achieve the artistic effect of having both voice and emotion.

Analyzed from specific causes, the high-pitched and intense singing style of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is closely related to its historical origins and regional characteristics. Historical records indicate that Gaoqiang originated from Yiyangqiang in the Ming Dynasty, and gradually developed into its unique style today after hundreds of years of evolution and development. Geographically, Changde is located in the northwest of Hunan Province, with rolling hills and beautiful mountains, and rivers. This geographical environment has given birth to the bold and straightforward character traits of the people of Changde, which naturally also influenced the singing style of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. For example, the singing in operas such as 'Thinking of the Worldly' and 'Sacrifice to the Turban' fully demonstrates the characteristics of high-pitched and intense singing. In 'Thinking of the Worldly Life', the female protagonist, the nun Xikong, fully expresses the character's inner struggles and desires through her high-pitched and impassioned singing and the ups and downs of the melody. Therefore, when singing, the actor needs to use the technique of combining the real voice with the falsetto to make the singing both penetrating and expressive. Especially during the climax, the actor needs to use a high-pitched singing voice to push the character's emotions to the extreme, so that the audience is deeply moved (Jiang, 2023). For example, when an actor expresses strong emotions such as anger or excitement, they will use a high-pitched and



impassioned singing style, and the volume will be increased accordingly. Conversely, they will use a soft and delicate singing style, and the volume will be appropriately reduced. In addition, the singing in Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera also emphasises the changes in melody and rhythm. The changes in melody and rhythm are used to express the character's emotional changes and the relevant development of the plot. For example, when the actor wants to express the character's internal conflict and struggle, he will use a tortuous and ever-changing melody and a rhythm that alternates between fast and slow, making the singing more vivid and interesting.

### 2.2 One person sings while the others join in

Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera adopts a unique performance format in which one person sings while the others join in. This not only enhances the artistic effect of the performance, but also embodies the team spirit and collective wisdom of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

The form of one person singing while the others harmonise is known as 'helping the lead singer' in Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. It is an integral part of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, and the singers need to work closely with the lead singer to complete the performance together. It should be noted that the supporting singers need to follow the lead singer's melody and rhythm closely when singing and provide strong support for the lead singer through harmonies and duets. In the classic repertoire of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, the form of supporting vocals is fully reflected. The heroine of the play, Shuai Mengqi, sings in a high-pitched and passionate manner, with rich and varied emotions. In the process, the supporting actors work closely with the lead actor in duets and other ways to complete the performance together, especially during the climax, when the supporting actors push the plot to the extreme with their high-pitched and passionate singing, deeply affecting the audience (Zhang et al., 2023).

In this form, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera not only enhances the artistic effect of the performance but also reflects its unique artistic style. At this time, the supporting actors need to pay attention to the timbre and harmonic unity as well as the moderate control of the volume. At the same time, they need to maintain close and tacit cooperation with the lead actors to create a beautiful musical effect together. The supporting actors need to flexibly adjust their singing methods and techniques according to the plot and the emotional changes of the characters, to achieve the main artistic effect. In addition to the supporting actors, the accompanying orchestra of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera also plays an important role. The accompaniment band needs to follow the melody and rhythm of the lead singer closely during the performance, providing strong support for the lead singer through instrumental music. The performance of the accompaniment band not only needs to pay attention to the harmonious unity of sound and the accuracy of rhythm, but also actively adjust the emotions of the lead singer driven by the plot, and actively explore more effective ways to do so. Therefore, the form of one person singing while everyone else joins in Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera not only reflects its unique artistic style, but also injects new vitality into its inheritance and development in the contemporary era. Throughout today's society, ever-changing aesthetic concepts and diverse forms of entertainment have made this form of one person singing while everyone else joins in even more appealing, which in turn has attracted more audiences, provided more effective development for the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, and also attracted many young audiences with its unique performance form, providing a basic premise for the development and change of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera's performance language in the new era.

### 2.3 The singing style is closely integrated with the local dialect

The performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is characterised by its close integration with the local dialect, which makes the singing style of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera more lively and interesting, and gives it a more unique cultural value and regional characteristics (Xie, 2020).

Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is rich in local dialect, and a unique artistic style is formed in the unique singing techniques and melodies. For example, in the Changde dialect, there is a greater use of language features such as 'erhua yin' and 'qiao she yin'. These linguistic features are naturally fully reflected in the singing of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera. For this reason, actors need to pay attention to the use of these dialectical characteristics when singing, so that the singing can be more lively and interesting. From a practical point of view, the close integration of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera with





the local dialect not only enhances the artistic effect of the performance but also gives full play to its unique cultural value and local characteristics. In the process of combining singing and local dialect, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera can better express the lives and emotions of the local people, which makes the audience more likely to empathize.

Among the classic plays of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, the singing in 'Qin Xuemei Teaching Her Son' fully demonstrates the characteristics of being closely integrated with the local dialect. Taking 'Qin Xuemei Teaching Her Son' as an example, the heroine of the play, Qin Xuemei, has a beautiful and gentle singing style with delicate and rich emotions. Therefore, during the singing process, the actors use the phonetics, intonation, and lexical characteristics of the Changde dialect to actively make the singing style more vivid, interesting, and specific, using a unique language form to push the emotions of the character to the extreme, deeply affecting the audience. The singing style of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera not only reflects its unique artistic style but also provides a broad space for its inheritance and development in the contemporary era. In modern society, with the changes in people's aesthetic concepts and the diversification of entertainment methods, the characteristics of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, which are closely integrated with the local dialect, have become even more prominent, injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

#### 2.4 Diverse embellishments

Runchang refers to the use of various techniques to embellish and polish the singing during the performance, making the singing more lively, interesting, and expressive. Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has a variety of Runchang techniques, and its artistic forms are also diverse. Therefore, in the performance of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, it is necessary to explore various types of Runchang, such as pitch Runchang, rhythmic Runchang, and Runchang with ornamental sounds (Zhou & Gong, 2007).

For example, in the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, the technique of pitch-based embellishment is used to express complex emotions such as struggle. For example, the ups and downs and changes in the melody push the character's emotions to the extreme, enhancing the expressiveness of the singing and making it easier for the audience to empathise. Rhythmical embellishment refers to the use of different rhythms and speeds to sing a 'characteristic rhythm' during the singing process, and on this basis, a unique sense of rhythm is formed. In Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, rhythmical embellishment requires the use of rhythmical embellishment techniques to express strong emotions such as anger and excitement. By singing at a fast tempo and with a strong volume, the singer strives to bring the character's emotions to the extreme, which not only enhances the appeal of the singing but also allows the audience to empathise with the character. Ornamented vocal embellishment refers to the use of various ornaments to embellish and polish the singing voice during the singing process. The purpose is to make the singing voice more lively and interesting. In Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, ornamented vocal embellishment can be used to express the character's gentle, delicate emotions (using ornaments such as glissandi and trills), which makes the singing voice more beautiful and evocative, and makes it easier for the audience to empathise. For example, the technique is fully demonstrated in the classic Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera play, Disturbing the Tavern. In Disturbing the Tavern, the male lead Li Kui's singing style is rough and unrestrained, with rich and varied emotions. Therefore, during the singing, the actor will use various techniques such as pitch embellishment, rhythmic embellishment, and ornamental embellishment to bring the character's emotions to the extreme. Especially during the climax, the actor can move the audience by expressing Li Kui's unrestrained and heroic fearlessness vividly through his high-pitched and impassioned singing and a variety of vocal techniques.

### 3. The inheritance and evolution of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera

#### 3.1 The intermingling of inheritance and innovation

The inheritance of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera is first reflected in its adherence to its traditional performance language. From what has been passed down in the past, the older generation of artists passed on the high-pitched and passionate singing style, the unique techniques for moistening the voice, and the close integration with the local dialect through oral transmission. This performance style was



then passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, these traditional performance languages are the artistic soul of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera and also the main identifier that distinguishes it from other forms of drama.

It should be noted that inheritance does not mean sticking to the old rules. Therefore, based on inheritance, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera needs to constantly innovate. For example, while inheriting the traditional performing language, it actively explores new singing techniques and performance methods, so that Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera can better meet the aesthetic needs of modern audiences. For example, a new generation of artists can adapt and create traditional singing through electronic music, mixing techniques, etc., making the music of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera more colourful and more contemporary. In addition, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera can also innovate in stage performances. For example, modern dance, martial arts, and other elements can be incorporated into the use of stage performance techniques that emphasise body language, expressions, and movements, making the stage performances more lively, interesting, and enjoyable. This not only enriches the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, but also injects new vitality into it.

### 3.2 Integration and development with ethnic vocal music

The integration and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera with ethnic vocal music is an important part of the evolution of its performance language. As we all know, ethnic vocal music is an important part of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Its unique singing techniques and expressive methods can give rich inspiration in the evolution of the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

In the process of integration and development, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera has absorbed a wealth of excellent elements of folk vocal music, such as breath control and resonance, which make the singing more mellow, full, and expressive. In addition, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera also closely integrates its unique techniques of vocal lubrication with the local dialect, which gives folk vocal music a more regional character and ethnic charm.

Therefore, the fusion not only enriches the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera and ethnic vocal music but also allows the two to learn from each other, inspire each other, and gradually promote their respective innovation and development, showing new artistic charm and contemporary value.

### 3.3 Keeping the essence and innovating with popular music

The combination of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera and popular music is the only way to change its performance language. As the mainstream form of modern music, popular music provides Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera with new inspiration and creative space with its unique sense of rhythm and fashionable elements. For example, in the process of maintaining tradition while embracing innovation, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera needs to maintain its traditional artistic style and performance language, while also actively absorbing the outstanding elements of popular music. Therefore, in the new era, it will be presented in the form of combining traditional singing with modern music rhythms, so that the younger generation of audiences will find it more acceptable and like Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, providing more paths and opportunities for its future inheritance and development.

### 3.4 Crossover with other theatrical forms

The cross-border integration of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera with other theatrical forms is closely linked to the evolution of its performance language. Practice has proved that the development and evolution of art are inseparable from its surroundings. Therefore, mutual learning and borrowing from different theatrical forms can bring new artistic inspiration and creative ideas to Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

For example, in the process of cross-border integration, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera actively absorbs the singing techniques of Peking Opera and the performance techniques of drama, and further enriches its performance language in the process of effective application. At this time, Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera can also integrate its unique artistic style and performance language into other theatrical forms, which can inject new vitality into itself in the process of integration with other theatrical forms. Therefore,



cross-border integration has promoted the innovation and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera in modern theatrical art, broadened its artistic vision, and provided more possibilities for expansion in the modern theatrical market.

## Discussion

Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, as a traditional Chinese theatrical art, stands at a critical juncture where the balance between inheritance and innovation has become essential. While its roots lie in centuries-old performance techniques, musical structures, and narrative frameworks, evolving audience preferences in the modern era demand adaptive strategies. The preservation of Gaoqiang's traditional essence must be accompanied by deliberate and thoughtful innovations that integrate contemporary aesthetics, such as modern staging, lighting, or multimedia effects. Only through such a synthesis can the opera maintain its authenticity while engaging newer generations who are accustomed to rapidly changing cultural and entertainment landscapes (Liu & Zhang, 2020).

In tandem with innovation, the integration of Gaoqiang with other art forms presents promising opportunities for revitalization. The crossover of Changde Han Opera with film, modern dance, or even digital animation could allow it to transcend traditional theatre spaces and reach broader audiences. Such interdisciplinary collaborations can breathe new life into classical forms, enabling a richer and more diverse performance language. For instance, utilizing visual arts to depict thematic elements or incorporating contemporary music styles can enhance the emotional impact of performances while retaining the opera's unique vocal and narrative structures (Wang, 2018).

Moreover, fostering social awareness and encouraging the popularization of Gaoqiang are imperative for its sustainability. Many traditional art forms struggle with declining audience numbers due to limited exposure and generational disconnect. Comprehensive publicity strategies — including online media campaigns, educational outreach in schools, and public workshops — can cultivate appreciation and interest in Gaoqiang. These initiatives can demystify the art form for unacquainted audiences, offering them accessible entry points to engage with its cultural depth and artistic sophistication (Chen, 2021).

Beyond raising awareness, institutional support plays a crucial role in ensuring the opera's survival and relevance. Government policies, academic research, and cultural funding can jointly create a supportive ecosystem for performers, directors, and scholars working within Gaoqiang. Establishing training programs and cultural preservation centers not only nurtures future talent but also facilitates innovation within a respectful framework. These efforts can act as a catalyst for further development, ensuring that Gaoqiang evolves while remaining anchored in its rich heritage (Li, 2019).

Furthermore, audience engagement must remain at the heart of these revitalization efforts. By understanding the tastes, preferences, and behaviors of contemporary viewers, artists and producers can tailor performances that resonate without compromising authenticity. For example, incorporating interactive storytelling or themes relevant to modern societal issues could render Gaoqiang more relatable. This responsiveness to audience feedback can result in a dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation, fostering an enduring cultural dialogue (Sun & He, 2022).

In conclusion, the future of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera hinges on a strategic blend of inheritance, artistic integration, and cultural promotion. Balancing the traditional with the contemporary, merging different art forms, and expanding social visibility are all critical pathways toward revitalization. These efforts must be collaborative and multifaceted, engaging artists, cultural institutions, policymakers, and the public alike. Only then can Gaoqiang continue to thrive as a living art form, retaining its cultural identity while dynamically adapting to the rhythms of the modern world.

## Conclusion

To sum up, as a representative of the traditional opera art of Changde, Hunan Province, the inheritance and evolution of the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera requires that the essence of the traditional performance language be upheld in its inheritance, and that innovation be actively explored in its development. It is necessary to integrate modern elements into the process to make



Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera more in line with the aesthetic needs of modern audiences. Therefore, it is recommended that in future development, integration with ethnic vocal music and pop music should be strengthened, and the advantages of other drama forms should be drawn upon. Only in this way can the performance language of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera be continuously enriched and expanded, and Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera can be promoted to flourish in the artistic undertakings of the new era.

## Recommendation

### 1. Strengthen talent cultivation

Actively increase investment in talent cultivation for Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, to cultivate more actors and inheritors with professional qualities and artistic talent, and further provide a strong talent guarantee for the inheritance and development of Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera.

### 2. Expand communication channels

Timely use of modern media and Internet platforms to broaden the channels of communication for Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera, and comprehensively improve its popularity and influence among the public.

### 3. Promote cultural exchanges

Comprehensively strengthen exchanges and cooperation between Gaoqiang in Changde Han Opera and other regional opera arts, draw on the successful experiences of other regions, and jointly promote the prosperity and development of traditional Chinese opera art.

## References

Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, & State Council. (2025). *Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on further deepening rural reform and solidly promoting the comprehensive revitalisation of rural areas*. Authorized release by Xinhua News Agency.

Chen, W. M. (2017). *Research on the protection and inheritance of opera-related intangible cultural heritage in the Changde area* (Master's thesis, Hunan University of Science and Technology).

Chen, Y. (2021). *Revitalization of traditional Chinese opera in the digital age*. *Journal of Chinese Performing Arts*, 14(2), 89–103.

Hu, Y. (2024). Research on the Banqiang-style transformation of the Qupai [Shanpo Yang] in Hunan Gaoqiang Opera. *Musical Instrument*, 11, 64–67.

Jiang, H. Y. (2023). Reflections on the research of the sound origin of Hunan Gaoqiang Opera. *Theatre Research*, 4, 212–225.

Li, H. (2019). *Policy support and cultural heritage preservation: A study of local opera forms in Hunan*. *Cultural Studies and Heritage Journal*, 7(3), 66–74.

Li, R. (2023). The artistic characteristics of Peng Jiagui's Laosheng performance in Changde Han Opera. *Art Ocean*, (1), 41–43.

Liu, X., & Zhang, M. (2020). *Tradition and innovation in regional Chinese opera*. *Theatre and Performance Studies*, 25(1), 21–35.

Sun, J., & He, Q. (2022). *Audience-centered strategies in Chinese opera development*. *Contemporary Arts Review*, 18(4), 112–127.

Tan, J. X. (2009). The reform and innovation of Xiangju Gaoqiang. *Art Ocean*, 3, 42–43.

Wang, L. (2018). *Interdisciplinary integration in performing arts: A case study of Chinese traditional opera*. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 35(2), 145–163.

Wu, J. J., & Zhou, X. L. (2006). The development and puzzles of Changde Gaoqiang. *Art Ocean*, 2, 32–33.

Xie, X. R. (2020). *Research on the protection and inheritance of Changde Sixian from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage* (Master's thesis, Hunan University).

Yu, D. L., & Liang, Y. H. (2019). The current situation, problems, and countermeasures of Han Opera inheritance. *Old Area Construction*, 2, 65–67.

Zhang, Z. H., Lin, H., Feng, J. X., et al. (2023). The excavation and inheritance of Changde Han Opera culture – Taking *The Legend of Meng Jiangnu* as an example. *Shenzhen Youth*, 6, 123–125.

Zhou, X. L., & Gong, W. M. (2007). On the historical and cultural status of the "Four Famous Troupes" in Changde Han Opera. *Art Ocean*, 6, 1–10.

