

# THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LI'S SCHOOL OF VOCAL ART IN HUNAN BALING OPERA<sup>\*</sup>

Xia Gao<sup>1</sup>, Phakamas Jirajarupat<sup>2</sup> and Shufeng Zhao<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup>Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

<sup>3</sup>Hunan Normal University, China

Corresponding Author's Email: s64584947034@ssru.ac.th

## Abstract

Despite the vast body of literature on red culture, particularly regarding its ideological and political aspects, there remains a gap in research focused on the spiritual culture of martyrs within the context of red dance. While previous studies have extensively examined the function of red dance as a tool for political education and propaganda, few have explored its deeper role in promoting martyr spirit, especially in relation to contemporary youth. This paper discusses the historical development of the Li's School of singing in Hunan Baling Opera, and the Li's School created by Li Xiaofeng occupies an important position in the history of Baling Opera. The research objectives of this paper are: 1) to clarify the background of the rise of the Li's School of Vocal Art; 2) to sort out the generation process of the Li Vocal Art; 3) to explore the value and significance of the Li's School of Vocal Art in the cultural inheritance of contemporary opera. This paper adopts the field survey method and interview method to understand the background and generation history of the Li's School of Baling Opera, and then analyses Li Xiaofeng's artistic innovations and contributions through literature reading, so as to divide the Li's School of

---

<sup>\*</sup> Received 16 October 2024; Revised 28 October 2024; Accepted 24 December 2024

Singing into four stages of development according to the characteristics of different periods. This not only clarifies the development history of the Li's School, but also provides some theoretical references for later researchers. The study highlights that red dance, as an evolving art form, has consistently played a significant role in promoting the spirit of martyrs across different historical periods. From the early revolutionary struggles to the founding of New China, and through the reform era to contemporary times, red dance has served as both a celebratory and educational medium. Its ability to convey the sacrifices and values of martyrs has strengthened national identity and reinforced the ideals of patriotism, heroism, and selflessness among the Chinese people. Particularly for contemporary youth, red dance remains a powerful tool for instilling a sense of responsibility, bravery, and solidarity.

In conclusion, the integration of martyr spirit into red dance offers a unique fusion of cultural preservation and artistic expression, deeply intertwined with the development of Chinese national identity. The study demonstrates that red dance is not only an artistic form but also a significant medium for reinforcing the core values of patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice that the martyr spirit embodies. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of red dance by exploring its role in educating and inspiring contemporary youth, ensuring the continued relevance of red culture in modern China. The connection between red dance and martyr spirit continues to shape the cultural and moral fabric of Chinese society, serving as a reminder of the sacrifices made by past generations and their ongoing impact on the nation's future.

**Keywords:** Baling Opera, Li's School, Li Xiaofeng, Vocal Art

## Introduction

Chinese opera culture is profound and profound, and Balinese opera, as a unique form of opera art in Hunan, carries rich regional culture and historical information. In the development history of Baling Opera, the Li's School of singing has become an important and indispensable part of the genre with its unique artistic style and deep cultural heritage. Li Xiaofeng, the founder of the Li's School, has made indelible contributions to the inheritance and development of Baling Opera with his outstanding artistic talent and unremitting innovative spirit.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the historical development of the Li's School, to analyse its position and role in Baling Opera, as well as the innovations and contributions of Mr. Li Xiaofeng in his artistic practice. Through combing historical documents and analysing existing materials, this paper attempts to restore the background, development process and artistic characteristics of the Li's School, and then reveal its value and significance in the cultural inheritance of contemporary opera.

## Research objective

- 1) In order to clarify the background of the rise of the Li's School of Vocal Art.
- 2) In order to sort out the generation history of Li Vocal Art.
- 3) To explore the value and significance of the Li's School in the cultural inheritance of contemporary opera.

## Literature Review

With the in-depth study of Baling opera, some scholars began to pay attention to the performing art of the Li's School of Baling opera, and carried out a more detailed and multi-dimensional study. Pang Yi believes that the Li's

School singing, as an important part of the artistic research of Baling Opera, involves melodic lines, rhythmic characteristics, as well as intervallic jumps and timbral changes, etc. These musical elements together constitute the unique artistic charm of the Li's School (Pang Yi, Li's School). Together, these musical elements constitute the unique artistic charm of Li's School singing (Pang Yi and Li Qiming, 2023, 37-42). According to Yan Shan, it is also necessary to make good use of various plate changes, such as fast plate, slow plate, running plate, etc., in order to adapt to the needs of different plots and characters' emotions. In singing, interval jumps and timbre changes are also important features of the Li's School.

The use of intervals, especially the alternation of major and minor intervals, brings rich colours and layers to the singing (Yan Shan and Wang Yiren, 2021, 4-6). According to Luo Menghan, these musical features are fully embodied and utilised in the representative plays of the Li's School's singing style, *Wisdom Beats Yan Song* and *Whip of the Nine Sons*. The melody of the cantata in 'Wisdom Strikes Yan Song' is beautiful and smooth, the rhythm is bright and compact, and the intervals and timbral changes vividly express the emotional changes and inner world of the characters in the play. The singing in 'Nine Whips' is even more exuberant, full of heroism and fighting spirit, demonstrating the unique charm of the Li's School's singing in the presentation of historical themes (Luo Mengxin, 2021).

Pan Mengge studied the protection measures and promotion strategies of the Li's School of performing arts, providing practical directions for its inheritance. She proposes specific protection measures and promotion strategies for the current status of the Li's School performing arts inheritance. According to Pan Mengge, comprehensive measures are needed to protect and promote the Li's School performing arts, including strengthening the cultivation and protection of inheritors, promoting repertoire innovation, expanding the performance market, and strengthening publicity and promotion (Pan Mengge,

2020, 4). The above research results mainly analysed the characteristics of Li's School singing from the aspects of melodic lines and rhythm, which provided the theoretical basis for this paper.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research method, combining field research and documentary analysis, and through collecting and collating relevant historical documents, performance materials and oral history, it systematically analyses and researches the historical development of the Li's School of Vocal Art.

### 1. Research Concept

The primary focus of the study is to examine the historical trajectory and cultural significance of Li's School of Vocal Art. The study seeks to understand its origins, key developments, and the factors that have influenced its progression over time. Through qualitative methods, the study will provide insights into the school's contribution to the field of vocal art and its impact on broader cultural and artistic movements.

### 2. Research Process

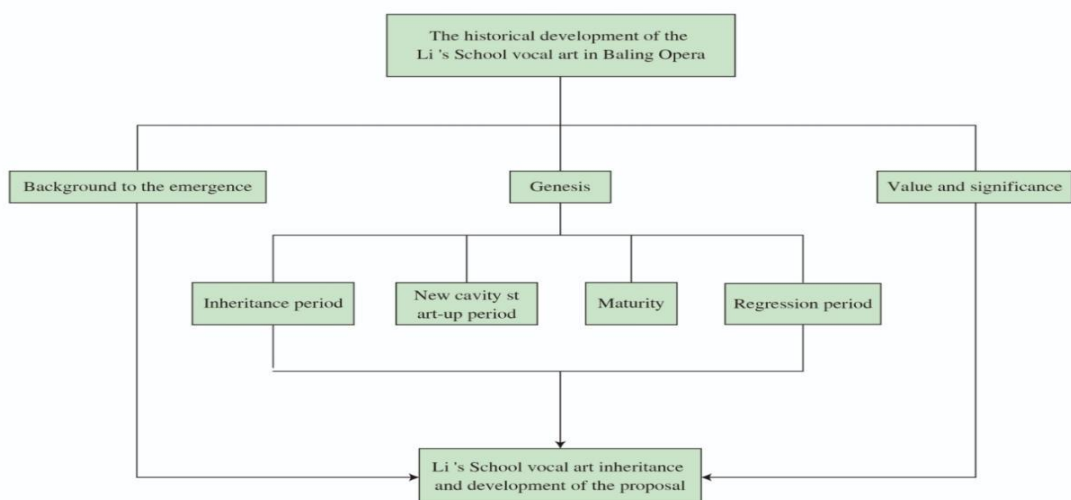
**Field Research:** The study involves conducting fieldwork to gather first-hand data from practitioners, experts, and individuals connected to the Li's School of Vocal Art. This may include interviews, observations, and participation in performances or training sessions to understand the practical aspects and current interpretations of the art form.

**Documentary Analysis:** The research also involves analyzing historical documents, performance materials, and other relevant texts that pertain to the Li's School of Vocal Art. These materials will be examined for their historical context, content, and significance in documenting the development of the school.

**Oral History:** To supplement the written records, the study collects oral histories from individuals who have been directly involved in or influenced by the Li's School of Vocal Art. These personal accounts offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of practitioners, teachers, and students, further enriching the understanding of the school's history and its cultural role.

**Data Synthesis and Analysis:** The collected data will be systematically analyzed to identify patterns, key events, and influential figures in the development of the Li's School of Vocal Art. This analysis will also explore the social, cultural, and political contexts that have shaped its evolution.

Through these methods, the study aims to provide a detailed and holistic view of the historical development of the Li's School of Vocal Art, contributing to the preservation and further study of this important cultural tradition.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## Results

Li Shiaofeng created the art of Baling Opera Li's School, which occupies a pivotal position in the history of Baling Opera in Hunan Province. He inherited from Ding Aitian and Xu Shengyun, and boldly innovated on the basis of inheriting the tradition, which created the first glorious period of history after

the establishment of the People's Republic of China of the Baling Opera, and exerted far-reaching influences on the inheritance and development of the Baling Opera in the subsequent years.

### **1. Background of the Rise of the Li's School of Vocal Art**

After the founding of New China, the government attached great importance to the reform and development of the art of opera. 1951, the State Council of the Central People's Government issued the 'Instructions on the Reform of the Opera', which put forward the basic policy of the reform of the opera of 'changing the theatre, changing the people, and changing the production system', the implementation of which pushed forward the modernization of the art of the opera and the socialist reform. After 1956, with the basic completion of the socialist transformation, the opera policy began to change from 'modern repertoire as the outline' to the policy of 'walking on two legs' for modern and historical operas, which later developed into 'three parallels' (modern opera, traditional opera, traditional opera, and traditional opera) and 'three parallels' (modern opera, traditional opera, and traditional opera). Later, it was developed into the policy of 'three parallels' (modern, traditional and new historical dramas), which further promoted the diversified development of the art of opera. During this period, the Party and the government attached great importance to the development of the opera business, and implemented a series of rescue and protection measures for traditional operas such as the Baling Opera. In 1958, the Baling Drama Troupe was transformed into a local state-run troupe, and the actors and actresses were provided with fixed salaries and livelihood security, which provided important political support for the revival of the Baling Opera.

The heyday of Li Xiaofeng's artistic activity was from 1952 to 1966, when the Chinese opera art was recovering. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the political status of opera artists was raised as



never before, and their enthusiasm for creativity was at an all-time high, ushering in a springtime for the development of the art of opera in this period.

In 1952, the two remaining groups of Hunan Balinese theatre, Yue Stage and Xin Yue Stage, merged to form the 'Balinese Drama Troupe', with Li Xiaofeng as the troupe leader. For the survival and development of the theatre, Li Shiao Feng took the lead in carrying bamboo and selling river water to tide over the difficulties, and he wrote many letters of advice. In the training of talents, he knew that without talents, there would be no future of Baling Opera, but in 1956, when the troupe was full of talents, he saved for a rainy day and tried every possible means to raise funds for the founding of a training class for young actors of Baling Opera, and in 1960, considering that there were only two troupes of a kind of theatre (the Baling Drama Troupe and the Jiangxi Xiu Shui Baling Drama Troupe), which restricted the development of the kind of theatre.

Li Shaofeng actively suggested that the leaders of Xiangtan Prefecture attach importance to Baling Opera, and actively recommended that the troupe should be given a special attention by the leaders. He chose young people with a good cultural foundation who were motivated and eager to learn from among the actors to train them, and taught them in person. In order to let the theory and practice of organic combination, he boldly let the young people direct small plays, big plays are personally led by the team to rewrite the director, etc., these initiatives in the troupe to create a good atmosphere of learning and advancement, and promote the overall quality of the cast and crew of the substantial improvement, to ensure that the BaLing theatre for nearly 20 years of prosperity.

Therefore, the social environment created favourable conditions for the prosperity of Balinese Opera in Hunan, and Li Xiaofeng also entered the golden age of his artistic development during this period. Li Shiao Feng portrayed 'Kong Ming' and 'Hai Rui' on the stage of Baling Opera.



## 2. The Generation History of Li's School Vocal Art

### 2.1 Succession Period - Before 1949

Li Xiaofeng (1921-1975), male, was born in Linxiang County, Yueyang City, Hunan Province. Because of his family's poverty, at the age of 15, he followed his uncle Li Qingkun (a famous old artist) into the Baling Opera Yongqing class to learn the opera, specialising in wushang, and then changed to laoxiang under the tutelage of Ding Aitian and Xu Shengyun. Li Shiao-feng's long-term insistence on diligent study and practice, learning from the best and studying hard, laid a solid foundation for his artistic path. As a teenager, Li Shiao-feng was eager to learn the theatre, and with her natural talent, she began to make a name for herself around 1940.

During this period, Li Shiao-feng was still in the stage of inheriting the tradition. He started singing in 1938, and later joined the Yue Stage, travelling to Changde, Yuanjiang and Xiangxi in Hunan province, where he initially performed as an actor. Later, he was highly valued by Ding Aitian, the 'opera master', who patiently taught him his skills, and he switched to learning to be a veteran. Later, he performed veteran plays, such as 'Whip of the Nine Sons', 'Fighting and Calculating Cereals', 'Collecting Jiang Wei', 'Changing Sons at the Court', 'Xue Gang Against the Tang Dynasty', 'Empty City', and 'Trial of an Assassin', among other classic and traditional Baling Opera repertoire. Li Xiaofeng's study and performance practice of different trades laid a solid foundation for her future creations and innovations.

### 2.2 The First Period of New Opera - 1956-1959

This period is the first golden period of Li Xiaofeng's creation and adaptation of new plays, the period when Li Xiaofeng gradually formed his own artistic style, and the period when the art of the Li's School of Baling Opera was formed. Since 1955, when Li Xiaofeng organised the excavation and rescue of traditional art materials, collated and adapted Nine Whips and Mending the

Back Corset, new works were produced, including not only some adapted traditional plays, but also modern plays and fashion plays, etc. The main plays created and adapted by Li Xiaofeng in this period are listed in the table below:

Li Xiaofeng Theatre List

Time	Traditional Adaptations	Modern Plays	New Historical Dramas
1956	The Whip of the Nine Sons, The Mending of the Back Corset		
1957	The Troubleshooter, The White Robe,	Dongting Red	
1958			He Tengjiao
1959	Fish-bellied Mountain		

In the repertoire created and adapted by Li Xiaofeng, he also implemented reforms in all aspects of the performance and costumes of Baling Opera, which made a significant contribution to the development of Baling Opera. Through continuous creation and practice, Li Shiao Feng gradually formed his own unique artistic style, and the Li's School of Baling Opera was initially formed.

Between 1956 and 1959, the Li's School of Baling Opera underwent an important innovation and development under the impetus of Li Xiaofeng. Li Shiao Feng was an important representative of Baling Opera. He made comprehensive and profound contributions to the art of singing, repertoire creation and adaptation, music and instrumental innovations, as well as leadership and cultivation of talents of Baling Opera, laying a solid foundation for the inheritance and development of Baling Opera, which is mainly reflected in the following four aspects. a) Innovation of singing: Li Shiao Feng innovated the art of singing by blending the 'Yan School' of Peking Opera and the 'Yan School' of Beijing Opera into one. He has integrated the rhyme of Beijing

Opera's 'Yan School' to make the singing voice of Balinese Opera more vigorous and full-bodied, with a rich flavour. He sings accurately and is good at giving play to his most expressive middle register, which enriches and develops the art of Balinese Opera's singing. He created the 'South One Character Board', 'North Kun Tune', 'South to North', 'South Pingwei Tune' and 'North Change Tune'. He created the 'South One Character Board', 'North Kun Tune', 'South to North', 'South Ping Mei Tune', 'North Reform Tune', and these new tunes added a new dimension to the musical expression of Balinese Opera. b) Contributions to the art of performance: Li Shiaofeng drew on the strengths of various styles of performance, and excelled in the use of the bearded gong and the winged gong to portray the characters in a subtle and lively manner. His acting style is known as 'mellow and robust, euphemistic and elegant', forming the unique 'Li School' style of art. His roles as Kong Ming in 'The Empty City' and Hai Rui in 'Counting Grain' were well received by the audience. c) Creation and Adaptation of Plays: Li Xiaofeng not only made great achievements in the performing arts, but also made great contributions to the creation and adaptation of plays. His repertoires such as 'Nine Whips', 'Counting Grain' and 'White Robes' won the first prize for scripts and excellent scripts in the Hunan Provincial Opera Festival. d) Leadership and Cultivation of Talents: Li Shiaofeng also demonstrated his outstanding talent in leading the troupe and cultivating talents. He raised funds to establish a training class for young actors and trained a large number of talents for the inheritance and development of Balinese theatre.

### 2.3 Mature Period - 1960-1965

This period was the second golden age of Li Xiaofeng's creation and adaptation of new plays, and it was the period when Li Xiaofeng's artistic style matured. Since 1960, Li Xiaofeng created, adapted, and directed a number of new works, which not only included some adapted traditional plays, but also

modern plays, etc. The main plays created and adapted by Li Xiaofeng during this period are listed in the table below:

**Table 1 Li Xiaofeng Theatre List**

Time	Traditional Adaptations	Modern Plays	New Historical Dramas
1960	Zhaojun's Exit from the Frontiers of the Frontier		
1961	Three Trials of an Assassin		
1962		The Rugged Mountain Paths	
1965		The Wind Hiding Pavilion ; The Family	

Between 1960 and 1966, the Li's School of Baling Opera achieved significant innovation and development under the impetus of Li Xiaofeng. As the founder of the Li's School of Baling Opera, Li Xiaofeng's artistic achievements and contributions to Baling Opera are mainly reflected in the following five aspects. a) Innovation in singing: Li Xiaofeng, on the basis of the traditional Baling Opera singing, created the 'Baling Gaoqiang' in this period, which enriched the vocal system of Baling Opera. b) Integration of performing arts Li Xiaofeng not only made innovations in singing, but also fused and innovated in performing arts. He was good at using programmers to portray Kong Ming, Hai Rui and other characters with distinctive personalities, and was praised by the audience as 'living Kong Ming' and 'living Hai Rui', and was

presented with a congratulatory plaque entitled ‘Sound Elegance and Divine Transmission’. c) Innovation in music and instrumental music: Li Xiaofeng's performances enriched the Baling Opera's vocal system. Innovations in music and instrumental music: In terms of music, Li Xiaofeng also made innovations, not only in singing, but also improved the accompanying music by adding Western orchestral music, forming a mixed orchestra of Chinese and Western orchestra, which set a good example for the music reform of Balinese Opera. d) Talent cultivation: Li Xiaofeng also contributed to the cultivation of talents by training a number of actors and actresses of Balinese Opera, such as Jiang Hanyin, Zhao Yuanlin, Chen Xiangyuan, Tu Hanhua and Li Xiaofeng, who were all very popular in Balinese opera. Chen Xiangyuan, Tu Hanbin, Tao Wujun, Xiong Yuegang, etc. These actors became the inheritors of the Li's School of Baling Opera, and continued to promote the development of Baling Opera. e) Leadership: Li Xiaofeng also demonstrated outstanding talent in leading the troupe and cultivating talents, and his leadership and artistic achievements left behind many fine masterpieces and invaluable spiritual treasures for the inheritance and development of Baling Opera.

#### 2.4 The Return Period - 1966-1975

Li Xiaofeng's artistic career and contribution to Baling opera remained significant during the special period from 1966 to 1975. During this period, despite the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, Li Xiaofeng continued to pass on and develop the art of Baling Opera. 1971, when she was sent down to the Jinxing Foundry, the leaders of the factory arranged for her to work as a general affairs officer and a doorman. In 1972, she was first seconded back to the county literary task force to participate in the music design for the transplantation of Shajiabang, and then transferred back to the literary team to take part in the scriptwriting. 1973, she was appointed as the deputy instructor of the county literary task force, and took part in the rehearsals for the creation

of Little Members of the Society, Ode to the Stone Dragon, and Storm over the Pigsty. 1974, she took part in the music design for the modern play Happy Post Road of the Baling Opera, and then took part in the rehearsals for the creation of the modern play Happy Post Road. In 1974, she took part in the music design and rehearsal of the modern play 'Happy Post Road', and played the role of an old man in the provincial performance, which was highly praised.

Li Xiaofeng's artistic achievements are not only reflected in the creation of repertoire and singing innovation, but he also founded the 'Li School' of Baling Opera with his superb performance skills and unique singing style. His life was an example of unremitting struggle for the cause of art, and set a noble example for future generations. Unfortunately, Li Xiaofeng died suddenly at the age of 55 in the spring of 1975 due to serious coronary heart disease in Changsha during the province's 'Transplantation of Local Opera to Revolutionary Model Opera Performance'. His death was a great loss to the art world of Balinese theatre, but his artistic spirit and contribution will always be remembered.

### **3. The value and significance of Li's School Vocal Art in the cultural inheritance of contemporary opera**

The Li's School of Baling Opera has irreplaceable value and significance in the cultural inheritance of contemporary opera, which is not only a valuable wealth of traditional culture, but also an important manifestation of modern cultural diversity and innovation. In terms of cultural inheritance and protection: as an important part of Baling Opera, the inheritance and protection of the Li's School Vocal Art is of great significance to the maintenance of cultural diversity. In the embodiment of artistic style: the Li's School of Vocal Art with its unique artistic style, such as strong and mellow singing and delicate performance, for the Baling Opera to add a unique artistic charm. In terms of the inheritance of performing skills: the inheritors of the Li's School of singing,

such as Zhao Yuanlin, have passed on the essence of the Li's School to the new generation of performers through the relationship between masters and stage practice, ensuring the continuation of the performing skills of this school. In terms of innovation and development: on the basis of tradition, the art of Li's School singing is also constantly innovating and developing. By absorbing new artistic elements and modern aesthetics, the Li's School art shows new vigour on the contemporary opera stage.

## Discussion

Through an in-depth discussion of the historical development of the Li's School of Vocal Art in Hunan's Balinese theatre, this study reveals Mr Li Xiaofeng's important role in the art of Balinese theatre as well as the characteristics and value of his Vocal Art. The following is a discussion of the research results:

1. Li Xiaofeng's vocal art is a cornerstone of Baling Opera, renowned for its unique performance style and musical characteristics. His approach to singing not only enriches the traditional opera form but also brings a modern sensibility to its execution. One of the most notable aspects of Li's vocal style is his incorporation of the 'Yan School' from Beijing Opera, which significantly enhances the vitality and expressiveness of Baling Opera. Li's innovation is evident in the way he blends traditional techniques with contemporary elements. The 'Yan School' is known for its emphasis on lyrical beauty and emotional expression (Liu, 2019). By integrating these principles into his performances, Li creates a singing style that is both vigorous and full-bodied, contributing to a richer auditory experience. This fusion allows Baling Opera to resonate with modern audiences while retaining its cultural roots.

Moreover, Li's vocal techniques showcase a remarkable versatility. His ability to switch between different vocal registers and styles demonstrates a

deep understanding of the operatic form, which is crucial for conveying the diverse emotions and narratives inherent in Baling Opera (Zhang, 2021; Wang & Maneewattana, 2024). His performances are characterized by dynamic phrasing and nuanced delivery, which serve to engage the audience more effectively. In addition to vocal technique, Li's artistic choices reflect a broader trend in the modernization of traditional Chinese opera. By reinterpreting classic pieces and introducing new thematic elements, he helps to bridge the gap between the traditional and the contemporary. This innovation not only revitalizes Baling Opera but also ensures its relevance in today's cultural landscape (Chen, 2020).

Li Xiaofeng's vocal art is a significant force within Baling Opera, marked by its rich integration of traditional and modern elements. His unique style, informed by the 'Yan School', infuses Baling Opera with a fresh vigor that captivates audiences and preserves the operatic tradition for future generations.

2. Existing studies on Baling Opera predominantly explore its overall artistic characteristics, emphasizing themes, performance styles, and the historical context of the genre (Wang, 2018; Li, 2017). While these works provide valuable insights into the opera's general framework, this study offers a focused examination of the formation and development of Li Xiaofeng's Vocal Art, thereby contributing a new perspective on the artistic diversity within Baling Opera. Li Xiaofeng's artistic practice is particularly significant when contextualized against the social and cultural backdrop of his time. As noted by Zhang (2020), the evolution of Baling Opera has been deeply intertwined with sociopolitical changes and cultural movements in China. This study underscores that Li's innovations were not merely personal achievements; they were reflective of broader cultural shifts that encouraged the modernization of traditional art forms. His ability to resonate with contemporary audiences while preserving the essence of Baling Opera is a key finding of this research.

Furthermore, Li's contributions have left a lasting impact on subsequent generations of Baling Opera artists. Comparative analyses reveal that many



artists who followed Li were influenced by his vocal techniques and stylistic choices. For instance, Xu (2019) argues that the resurgence of interest in Baling Opera in recent decades can be partially attributed to Li's pioneering spirit and his successful integration of traditional and modern elements. This aligns with the findings of this study, which emphasize how Li's artistic achievements paved the way for a more diverse and adaptive interpretation of Baling Opera in the modern era. In conclusion, while existing studies provide a broad understanding of Baling Opera's artistic characteristics, this research highlights the specific contributions of Li Xiaofeng's Vocal Art. By examining the interplay between his innovations and the socio-cultural context, this study enriches the discourse on the artistic diversity of Baling Opera and underscores the importance of individual artists in shaping the trajectory of this traditional art form.

3. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the systematic exploration of Li Xiaofeng's Vocal Art, a crucial aspect of Baling Opera that has received limited attention in existing literature. By focusing on Li's School of Vocal Art, this research fills a notable gap, providing both a historical basis and theoretical support for the inheritance and development of Baling Opera. As noted by Liu (2021), understanding the individual contributions of key figures like Li is essential for appreciating the broader dynamics of traditional Chinese opera. This study not only highlights Li's innovative techniques but also contextualizes his work within the evolving landscape of Baling Opera, thereby enriching the discourse around its artistic diversity. Moreover, this research underscores the importance of preserving and promoting Baling Opera's unique vocal traditions, as highlighted by Zhang (2020). By documenting Li's contributions, the study serves as a foundation for future practitioners and scholars who seek to further develop and innovate within this art form. It emphasizes the relevance of Li's legacy in contemporary performance and

education, ensuring that his artistic practices continue to influence new generations of artists.

However, the study does have limitations. One significant constraint is the availability of historical data concerning Mr. Li Xiaofeng's early artistic practice. Due to gaps in the archival record, our understanding of his formative years may not be comprehensive enough to fully capture the nuances of his development as an artist. As Wang (2018) notes, the historical documentation of many traditional artists often suffers from incomplete records, which can hinder thorough analysis. This limitation suggests that future research should aim to excavate and collate additional historical materials to provide a more nuanced understanding of Li's contributions and influences.

In conclusion, while this study significantly advances the understanding of Li Xiaofeng's Vocal Art and its importance to Baling Opera, it also highlights the need for further research to fill existing gaps in the historical narrative. Addressing these limitations will not only enhance scholarly understanding but also support the ongoing evolution of Baling Opera.

## Conclusion

The exploration of Li Xiaofeng's contributions to Baling Opera through the establishment of Li's School of Vocal Art reveals a pivotal chapter in the history of this traditional art form in Hunan Province. Li's artistic journey, marked by innovation and a deep respect for tradition, not only created a foundation for Baling Opera's revival after the establishment of the People's Republic of China but also laid the groundwork for its continued evolution. Li Xiaofeng's leadership during a transformative period in Chinese opera was instrumental. His ability to adapt and innovate in response to the changing cultural and political landscape, particularly after the reforms initiated in 1951, showcased his commitment to the survival and development of Baling Opera. By integrating influences from both traditional and contemporary sources, Li

shaped a distinctive vocal style that enriched the operatic experience. His emphasis on talent cultivation and the establishment of training programs ensured a legacy of skilled performers who would carry forward the traditions of Baling Opera. Despite the significant achievements of Li Xiaofeng and the Li School, the study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly concerning historical documentation of his early artistic practices. Future research efforts aimed at uncovering additional materials could provide a more comprehensive understanding of his formative years and the influences that shaped his innovative approach.

In conclusion, the significance of Li's School of Vocal Art extends beyond its historical context; it embodies the dynamic interplay of tradition and modernity, enriching the cultural tapestry of contemporary opera. As the inheritors of Li's legacy continue to innovate and adapt, the values of artistic integrity, creativity, and dedication to cultural preservation remain vital for the future of Baling Opera and its enduring relevance in the modern world.

## Recommendations

### 1.General Recommendations

a) Strengthen the protection and inheritance of the Li's School of singing. It is suggested that the local government and the cultural department increase the protection of Baling opera, especially the Li's School of singing, and ensure the inheritance of this traditional art form through policy support and financial investment.

b) Establish an archive of the Li's School. Collect and organise audio and video recordings, scripts, photographs and other materials of Mr. Li Xiaofeng's performances, and establish a complete archive of the Li's School, so as to provide resources for research and teaching.

c) Cultivate a new generation of artists. Encourage and support young artists to learn and practice the art of Li's School singing, and cultivate a new generation of Baling Opera artists.

## **2. Recommendation for future research**

a) In-depth study of the techniques and characteristics of the Li's School of Vocal Art. It is recommended that future researchers analyse in depth the vocal techniques, performance styles and musical features of the Li's School of singing, and how they integrate with the overall artistic style of Balinese opera.

b) Explore the innovation and development of the Li's School in contemporary times. To study the ways of innovation of the Li's School's Vocal Art in modern society, and to explore how to combine traditional art with modern aesthetics to create new works that meet the tastes of contemporary audiences.

## **Reference**

- Chen, Y. (2020). *Modern Interpretations in Traditional Chinese Opera*. Beijing: Arts Press.
- Li, S. (2017). *The Aesthetic Principles of Baling Opera*. Chengdu: Drama and Arts Press.
- Liu, J. (2019). *The Yan School of Beijing Opera: History and Influence*. Shanghai: Culture Publishing House.
- Liu, J. (2021). *Key Figures in Chinese Opera: A Study of Their Contributions*. Beijing: Traditional Arts Press.
- Luo Mengxuan. (2021). *A Study on the Inheritance Pattern of Hunan 'Nine Whips' from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Master's Degree Thesis*, South China University of Technology.

- Pan Mengge. (2020). Contemporary dissemination of traditional arts: An investigation and reflection on the promotion strategy of contemporary opera. *Theatre and Film Monthly* (5), 4.
- Pang, Y., and Q. Li. (2023). A classic case study of productive conservation and promotion of non-legacy heritage--Taking Yueyang City Baling Opera Inheritance Research Institute as an example. *Yunmeng Journal* (04), 37-42.
- Wang, H. (2018). *Challenges in Documenting Traditional Chinese Artists: A Historical Perspective*. Shanghai: Culture and History Publications.
- Wang, H. (2018). *Exploring the Roots of Baling Opera: A Cultural Analysis*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press.
- Wang, R., & Maneewattana, C. (2024). The Deconstruction Of The Character Of Tosca And The Method Of Performance. *Journal of Dhamma for Life*, 30(3), 24-40.
- Xu, Q. (2019). *Continuity and Change in Baling Opera: The Legacy of Li Xiaofeng*. Nanjing: Performing Arts Publishing House.
- Yan Shan, Wang Yiren. (2021). Artistic Characteristics of Instrumental Song Cards of Baling Opera. *Art Review* (09), 4-6.
- Zhang, M. (2021). *Vocal Techniques in Chinese Opera: A Comparative Study*. Guangzhou: Music University Press.
- Zhang, T. (2020). *Cultural Contexts of Chinese Opera: Baling Opera and Its Evolution*. Xi'an: Shaanxi Normal University Press.
- Zhang, T. (2020). *Preserving Tradition: The Role of Vocal Arts in Chinese Opera*. Guangzhou: Performing Arts Press.