

## **The Rise and Development of Opera Under the Influence of Western Renaissance Culture**

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**Abstract:** When western music and western art entered China, modern China opera also developed rapidly and became a new performance form in China art. China's modern opera art originated from the western opera art, and under the impact of the new trend, new dramatic aesthetic principles have emerged. China's modern opera has a solid foundation of the masses, and its uniqueness and creativity promote the development of China's modern opera art faster and faster. With the long-term development of modern China opera performance, it has gradually manifested its own characteristics on the basis of its commonness with western opera art. This paper discusses the social background and aesthetic characteristics of European opera art from Renaissance to Baroque, and discusses the rise and development of China opera art under the influence of Western Renaissance culture, aiming at further exploring the social value and cultural significance of modern China opera performance.

**Keywords:** Renaissance; Opera; Social Value; Development History

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The development of works of art generally changes with the changes of the times. Opera is a new genre that meets the requirements of the times, and it is a comprehensive art that combines dance, music, sculpture, poetry, architecture and other artistic types (Glixon, 2009). It plays an important role in the music life of western European countries. Since the birth of opera, it has been widely loved by people because of its unique expression and unique singing art (Forsyth, 2020). As an independent music genre, opera has gone through a long and arduous process of exploration and perfection from its embryonic form to its formation and then to its real birth (Radice, 2019). The Renaissance in the West refers to an ideological and cultural movement that rose in Italian cities at the end of the 14th century, then spread to western European countries, and prevailed in Europe in the 16th century, bringing a period of scientific and artistic

revolution and opening the curtain of modern European history (Song, 2016). Under the feudal power, the church occupied an absolute dominant position in all aspects of thought and culture, but the emergence of new ideas and culture made the bourgeoisie urgently need to get rid of the control of the church (Zhang, 2020). At first, the development of opera lagged behind the revival of literature and plastic arts. After absorbing the nourishment of countless Greek dramas and the essence of medieval church music, secular music, German troubadours' love songs and French minstrels' pastoral songs, the opera developed rapidly, showing its unique artistic characteristics and charm (Dong, 2017). Opera is regarded as a part of the western classical music tradition, so like classical music, it is not as popular as contemporary pop music, while modern musicals are regarded as modern versions of opera (Yang, 2018). When western music and western art entered China, modern China opera also developed rapidly and became a new performance form in China art. After the founding of New China, the thinking mode of opera creation has changed, some inherited the drama tradition, some adapted the folk song and dance dramas, and some still learned from the experience of western operas, and gradually tended to be refined or vulgar (Xu, 2018a). Modern China opera is a blend of China's traditional national style on the basis of western opera, and contains symbolic expressions in western culture, with outstanding cultural connotations (Liu & Liu, 2020). Before the May 4th New Culture Movement, China's operas were mainly performed in the form of drama, which was greatly influenced by European opera culture. However, the cultural and historical background of China is very different from that of Europe, so the development of China's operas cannot completely copy the model of European operas (Xu, 2018b). Opera, representing the highest level of music culture, also reflects the depth of cultural heritage. The development of opera technology under the influence of Renaissance shows people's artistic thinking and aesthetic orientation at that time from a unique angle. Interpreting the artistic characteristics of opera in this period is helpful to understand and understand the artistic connotation of opera works in this period, which has high academic value.

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPERA ART FROM THE RENAISSANCE TO THE BAROQUE

"Renaissance" is the ideological and cultural reflection of the emerging bourgeoisie's struggle against feudalism and theocracy, marking the decline

of feudal culture and the birth of capitalist culture. The trend of thought of Renaissance also played a great role in promoting the development of European music. It is under the influence of this trend of thought that an unprecedented melody of European secular professional culture appeared (Ning, 2018). The "Renaissance" movement was called "the greatest movement in history" by Engels. Because of its influence, natural science has made a historic stride, which has also promoted the overall progress of the whole West from economy, politics to culture (Dou & Wang, 2018). Before the Renaissance, there were many kinds of musical dramas, including pastoral dramas, pastoral operas, masked dramas and inter-act dramas. Although religious music was still the mainstream in this period, the development of secular music and its application in real life laid a solid musical foundation for the emergence of drama. After the long and dark Middle Ages, Europe began to think about ancient books, their roots, and civilizations that they didn't know existed objectively. With the progress of the times and the change of ideas, people advocate and attach importance to real life and spiritual needs. The "humanism" of the Renaissance movement is in direct opposition to the asceticism advocated by religious churches (Li & Qi, 2017). The earliest music produced under the influence of the Renaissance thought was the "new art" of France and Italy in the 14th century. This "new art" is actually the music art of France and Italy in the early Renaissance, which refers to the further development of polyphonic music art under the new historical conditions. Influenced by the Italian palace entertainment tradition in the Renaissance, the pattern of this period belongs to the palace pattern, and many performances belong to the luxury entertainment projects for the distinguished guests in the palace. During the Renaissance, the theme of opera did not deviate from the theme of drama, so people viewed and accepted a new type of drama from different perspectives in the context of drama (Bai, 2016). The Renaissance broke the situation that religious Mysticism dominated the world, effectively promoted the religious movement, and also freed people's thoughts from the shackles of religion. The outbreak of the Renaissance injected a new vitality into Europe at that time, in terms of religion, politics, economy, and culture. The medieval culture under Christian rule also gradually tended towards secular culture. At the beginning of the birth of opera, both the audience and the creator were still exploring, but opera did not appear out of thin air. Its musical accumulation and comedy foundation had already existed a long time ago. In other words, although its form is novel, its music genre and social and cultural forms of content are not separated from people's lives, and everything

seems to be conventional. Music has transformed from intangible to tangible, changing its rigid and difficult to understand face, and merging with artistic forms such as dance and poetry, forming a new form of music art. This musical form laid the groundwork for the emergence of opera.

### 3. THE INFLUENCE OF RENAISSANCE MUSIC ON OPERA

With the deepening of global integration, the communication and integration between different cultures provides a new vision. Opera, as a musical, is not accidental. It is the product of the development of music art in many aspects during the Renaissance. China's original ecological opera also showed a diversified tendency in creative ideas, which created a broader development space for it. In the 15th century, some composers regarded the creation of religious music and secular music as two important parts of their career. Secular music gradually infiltrated into religious music. By the 16th century, all ethnic groups had their own styles, and the secular music style quickly became popular, and the religious style in music was gradually broken. China's original ecological opera should not only learn from other countries' opera expressions, but also absorb our profound traditional culture, so as to avoid the situation of "total westernization" in its creation. Opera is not only based on music, but also on humanistic spirit. During the Renaissance, the musical style of opera merged with various musical styles of the 16th century and introduced them into a new musical style. Art is an expression of life and a reflection of people's lives. However, our original operas pay too much attention to ancient history and folklore, and do not draw enough inspiration from our current national life to create. Besides vocal music, instrumental music plays an important role in opera. In the Renaissance of western music history, behind the prosperity of vocal music art, instrumental music finally got rid of its dependence on vocal music art and embarked on its own independent development path. Opera art not only has its own artistic charm, but also has its ideological advance and secularity. When a person gets rid of the shackles of thinking, he will not object to a drama that can express his feelings and make his body and soul feel happy. Creation comes from life and is higher than life. For example, when the living environment is constantly changing, people's living habits are also changing. Renaissance endowed some basic elements necessary for opera creation, which reflected the ideological trend at that time, and every element in opera was deeply influenced at that time. China's original operas have no specific requirements in terms of creative content.

Only by grasping the spirit of China, grasping the reality of China's development and change, making appropriate choices on traditional art and making more bold innovations can we always provide a steady stream of new strength for China's original operas and make China's original operas more contemporary.

#### 4. AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OPERA ART FROM RENAISSANCE TO BAROQUE

##### 4.1 Formal Aesthetic Feeling

The formal beauty of the Renaissance is mainly manifested in its formal elements. The Renaissance was the infancy of opera, at which time opera appeared through a dramatic work. The change of music culture in Renaissance is mainly reflected in the rapid development of polyphony. Before polyphonic music, Gregorian chant was a religious musical canon. Modern China opera performance art is a unique scenery in the history of China's music development, which is of great practical significance to China's music creation and music culture dissemination. In Florence, artists have a passion for creating opera, which is not due to their yearning for opera aesthetics, but to their longing for ancient Greek tragedies and strong revival vision. The profound influence of music on people's spirit was fully utilized by the church at that time. The content sung by this single melody music could clearly express the religious teachings and spirit, and it was the most ideal religious tool for Christian rulers at that time.

Opera is a comprehensive art developed from simple music and performed on the stage. Opera performance art originated in the west. At first, opera popular in western countries is a musical form which is based on singing and combined with various artistic forms such as stage performance, music rhythm, drama and stage art.

Renaissance opera also made innovations in music transformation: first, it transformed polyphonic music into theme and melodic aria; Secondly, it innovatively puts forward the recitative narrative tone. In ancient Greek civilization, drama occupies an important position, including tragedy and comedy. In the performance of tragedy, the image of heroes is often closely related to the fate of the country and the nation, which sets off lofty heroism. Florence gradually replaced polyphonic chorus with harmony accompaniment melody, realizing the full integration between music and drama.

#### 4.2 Stage Aesthetic Feeling

As a performing art, opera is mainly performed in the theater. Therefore, stage art has naturally become the most basic component of opera. Early Italian operas were more in pursuit of simple style, and from the aesthetic pursuit, they preferred realistic style. People's feelings need a transition. When they are vented to a certain extent, they need to restrain their sensibility rationally. When people are still immersed in a noisy and flashy environment. Music is heralding a kind of custom and pastoral style. From the establishment of the central position of aria to the formation of the basic structure of Italian overture, all of them reflect the transformation of musical style. Western music art began to develop into a systematic formal system from the Middle Ages, which was mainly reflected in the logical speculation of the harmony system. This is a sign that western music is mature in form, just like the formation of a huge hull. Traditional opera takes the stage as the main form of expression, which also limits the development of opera to a great extent. China's original operas should break this limitation and use modern and developed media technology to make the creative forms of operas richer and more diversified.

#### 4.3 Aesthetic Feeling of Content

The content of opera is similar to that of drama, which consists of philosophy, theme, plot, characters and their relationships. Although Protestant chants were popular in the sixteenth century, some composers continued to create according to the tradition of Nederland polyphonic music in Germany and France. Renaissance opera serves for emotion, and the content of opera is mainly to promote artists' artistic ideas. If music endows opera with soul, then drama becomes the body of opera. At the end of the Renaissance, the Catholic Church believed that the music sung at the mass at that time could only satisfy the desire of hearing, not the need of "rationality". Instead of strengthening people's religious belief, they would make people morally degenerate. Music in the Renaissance was mainly lyrical and tragic. With the death of Monteverdi, the Opera House in Venice declined, and its focus gradually shifted to Naples, Italy. This has led to a change in the form of music. Although people are still immersed in prosperity and noise, music has begun to turn to pastoral and folk art. From the establishment of aria to the emergence of Italian movements, it is a change in the form of music. The main body of western opera is singing, combined with stage performance, music rhythm, etc., and stage art will be integrated into it. During the May 4th Movement, the development of the democratic revolution made China open its doors, and

western culture also entered China, and western opera art entered the field of vision of China people.

## 5. THE ARTISTIC FORM OF MODERN CHINESE OPERA PERFORMANCE AND ITS AESTHETIC MANIFESTATION

The Chinese nation has a long history and splendid civilization, and it has also nurtured a rich music culture. Today, in building a harmonious society, promoting the music culture of the Chinese nation is the need for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and a contribution to the culture of all mankind. Modern China opera performance art is an important part in the history of music development in China, which is of great practical significance to the creation and dissemination of music art in China. Modern China opera developed from music, and it is a comprehensive artistic expression with stage drama performance as the carrier. The trend of social development and music changes with the political and economic progress of a country or region, and the purpose of modern China opera creation is to absorb the spiritual connotation of people or things reflected by social reality, so as to show the essence of human nature through artistic performances on the stage. From its initial formation to its subsequent development, China's modern operas all express the times and society with the help of musical images and dramatic factors. The aesthetic pursuit of China's operas is based on the basic principles of musical aesthetics, and its later development can not be separated from the emotion expressed by the music in the pattern that conforms to the current trend. In its own development and performance, modern China opera has a strong social value. Modern China opera has experienced a long development process from its inception to becoming an important part of China's culture and art. The pursuit of aesthetics in China's operas has always been nationalization and popularization, and the key factor of its development is to learn from the form and artistic characteristics of western operas. The artistic form of modern China opera is mainly reflected in the strong skill and transformation in the process of opera performance. From the aspects of content and rhythm, the performance content of modern China opera mainly presents a simple style. Modern China opera has added many dances with strong aesthetics, which makes modern China opera more agile. On the premise of normal plot, some music with China folk characteristics has been added. By using this musical tone that China people are very familiar with, the musical aria of modern China opera will be richer, and the

characterization of characters in the opera will become more stereoscopic and vivid. China's operas not only have the uniqueness of China culture, but also combine the valuable experience of western operas. They are both nationalized and break the national character, and the composer creates and reproduces the artistic forms in reality.

## 6. THE VALUE OF MODERN CHINESE OPERA PERFORMANCE

The development and change of society and the development trend of music are directly related to the political and economic development of countries and regions, while the creation of modern China operas draws creative themes from social reality and human spiritual connotation, and most modern China opera plays will show strong human nature. The theme of modern China opera performance art can never be separated from the real human nature with passion, ideals, love and hate, flesh and blood and its humanistic care. Accurate and clear story, vivid and vivid image, rich and colorful musicality, strong emotion, aesthetic imagination, stage appeal and nationality constitute the special artistic charm of opera singing art. A glimpse of the aesthetic characteristics of operas from the Renaissance to the Baroque period, an interpretation of the classical works of composers in the history of opera, and a search for their artistic quality and aesthetic characteristics can make people feel the depth of artistic thinking and the breadth of aesthetic taste in different periods, and can provide comprehensive reference, understanding and enlightenment for accurately interpreting early operas and realizing the innovation of modern opera forms today. They are not only integrated and unified, but also serve to express artistic images and express emotions. From the perspective of cultural value, modern China opera inherits the spirit of traditional opera and traditional culture, and absorbs the characteristics of diverse cultures. With the changes of China times, it is constantly innovating, and it incorporates extremely distinctive characteristics of the times. From the perspective of melody and composition techniques, the composition techniques of modern China opera performances are varied, and the frequency of rhythm change and beat conversion is also very high. Modern China opera has strong characteristics of China, and gradually formed the artistic form of opera localization and its own unique aesthetic style. Modern China opera has strong conversion and skill, and its content and rhythm show a relatively simple style atmosphere. The lyrics of modern China opera are relatively simple, fresh and easy for the audience



to understand, which can lead the audience into the artistic conception of the opera. With the continuous development of science and technology and the progress of the times, the modern opera art in China keeps up with the pace of development. Appropriate use of media means can transform the presentation form of opera into play online, break the limitations of space and time, and let more people who like opera art enjoy good modern opera. In the process of continuous innovation and reform of modern China opera performance, its cultural essence and musical concept always follow the important principles of creating classics and perfecting the opera performance system. Therefore, as an important cultural essence, humanistic characteristics and national characteristics have always remained in the content of opera performance art creation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Renaissance European music has a very important position in the history of European music. It gradually got rid of the shackles of religion, which made music develop rapidly to its own laws in the form of polyphony and greatly matured European music in form. Renaissance is an important turning point for the western world to move towards modern society. A glimpse of the aesthetic characteristics of operas from the Renaissance to the Baroque period, an interpretation of the classical works of composers in the history of opera, and a search for their artistic quality and aesthetic characteristics can make people feel the depth of artistic thinking and the breadth of aesthetic taste in different periods, and can provide comprehensive reference, understanding and enlightenment for accurately interpreting early operas and realizing the innovation of modern opera forms today. The development of modern China opera performance art incorporates new aesthetic factors and national factors, and the aesthetics of opera works reflects the concern of humanistic spirit. Modern China opera art forms are developed on the basis of traditional western opera art forms, incorporating China's aesthetic factors and national characteristics, with strong humanistic spirit and aesthetic characteristics with China characteristics. To promote the better development of modern China opera, it is necessary to adhere to the national creative road of opera performance, absorb spiritual nourishment and musical essence from traditional culture and western culture, constantly realize the artistic form innovation of opera performance, and pursue a higher artistic ideal.

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