

SPECIFICITY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMING SKILLS OF A BEIJING OPERA ARTIST

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Abstract. This article delves into unique pedagogical and performing aspects critical to the cultivation of Beijing Opera artists. It emphasizes the comprehensive skill set necessitated by the traditional Chinese operatic form, highlighting the contrast between the narrative and expressive techniques of Beijing Opera and those of Western operatic traditions. The article highlights the importance of a multifaceted educational framework that balances the physical demands of the art with its deep symbolic meanings, thus maintaining the vitality and relevance of Beijing Opera in the contemporary artistic landscape.

Keywords: Beijing Opera, Chinese drama, pedagogical skills, performing skills, artistic pedagogy, symbolic makeup.

ОСОБЕННОСТИ РАЗВИТИЯ ИСПОЛНИТЕЛЬСКИХ НАВЫКОВ АРТИСТА ПЕКИНСКОЙ ОПЕРЫ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются уникальные педагогические и исполнительские аспекты, имеющие решающее значение для воспитания артистов Пекинской оперы. Описываются навыки, необходимые для традиционной китайской оперной формы, подчеркивается контраст исполнительных техник между Пекинской оперой и западными оперными традициями. В статье подчеркивается важность многогранной образовательной системы, которая уравнивает фактические требования искусства с его глубокими символическими значениями, тем самым сохраняя жизнеспособность и актуальность Пекинской оперы в современном художественном ландшафте.

Ключевые слова: Пекинская опера, китайская драматургия, педагогическое мастерство, исполнительское мастерство, художественная педагогика, символический грим.

The Chinese operatic form, notably exemplified by Peking Opera, diverges significantly in its approach to narrative delivery and stagecraft. The musical and lyrical compositions within this tradition are notably unfixed, with scenography being either markedly absent or executed in a stylized, minimalistic manner. A quintessential attribute of Peking Opera is its concentrated temporal narrative delivery, encapsulating a dense

amalgam of semantic depth, character delineation, and spatiotemporal context. Given the sparse scenic design, the performer's role in conveying the narrative's essence is paramount, demanding a comprehensive skill set that surpasses that required of their Western counterparts. This encompasses:

- vocal technique,
- recitational prowess,
- proficiency in physical expressivity, incorporating dance, martial arts (Wushu and Kung Fu), acrobatics, and gestural precision.

Moreover, Peking Opera heavily relies on a rich tapestry of symbolic elements, including color theory, makeup, costuming, and gestural language, to communicate its narratives. The pedagogical framework for training Peking Opera artists integrates these multifaceted expressive tools, underscoring their indispensability in the artistic rendition of narratives.

An illustrative example of the intricate performance artistry in Peking Opera can be gleaned from a scene in "Zhaojun chu sai" ("Zhaojun's Departure beyond the Great Wall"), as detailed by Lia Chao in "Beijing Opera. Dance, music, pantomime". This segment, focusing on the simple yet symbolically charged act of horse saddling and departure, showcases the roles of Zhaojun (daomadan – female warrior), the Horse Guide (chow – comedic figure), and Wang Lung (Zhaojun's brother, also chow), highlighting the complexity and nuanced craftsmanship inherent in Peking Opera performance [1, p. 75].

In the context of educational pedagogy, the intricate staging of a pivotal scene from a traditional Peking Opera, as elucidated through an analytical lens, underscores the multifaceted dimensions of performance art. The transformation of Zhaojun, the protagonist, from regal attire to a functional equestrian ensemble, embodies a visual and symbolic transition aligned with her narrative journey to a distant northern realm. Her attire, meticulously curated with a fusion of wide shalwars beneath a slit-adorned floor-length gown, cinched at the waist, and accentuated by a fur-trimmed traditional cape and an ornate headdress, serves as a semiotic conduit, evoking imagery of the foreign lands to which she is destined. The headdress, adorned with pheasant feathers, and the flowing sleeves of her costume are emblematic of the daomadan role, signifying a warrior woman adept in equestrian and martial skills.

Zhaojun's preparatory stance for the saddle ascent, executed in synchrony with the gong's resonances, culminates in a "hawk somersault" rotation, a physical articulation mirroring the agility and finesse required of her character. The visual spectacle is augmented by the dynamic motion of her costume's sleeves, framing her visage within a circular trajectory, metaphorically encapsulating the essence of her character's journey.

The culmination of this performance segment, marked by the final gong strike, visually encapsulates Zhaojun as a poised equestrian, her posture and gaze meticulously directed to convey her mastery over the steed. This moment of stasis, in concert with the

Equine Custodian's complementary movement, solidifies a shared focal point on the imagined horse, thereby bridging the physical and imagined realms through a tableau vivant of symbolic and narrative depth.

The narrative transition to the journey's depiction is artistically conveyed through a stylized dance sequence, emblematic of the *tan style ma* ("horse riding"), marking the onset of a new ensemble episode. This segment, enriched by the complexity of its musical accompaniment, unfolds in three distinct phases. Initially, the actors' movements are synchronized with the rhythmic cadences of *logu-dianzi* percussion instruments. The subsequent duet phase maintains the percussive backdrop, occasionally interwoven with the heroine's vocalizations or the instrumental melodies of *Qu-pai*. The concluding trio section intensifies with the vocal contributions of the heroine and her brother, excluding the Horseman in accordance with his narrative role and societal stature.

This detailed exposition of the saddling and journey initiation scene, though lasting but a few seconds, encapsulates the meticulous canonical precision characteristic of the entire forty-four-minute performance. Every gesture, facial expression, and movement, refined through generations of performers, adheres to a rigorously codified tradition. The adherence to these established conventions is paramount, as deviations are readily discerned by the discerning Chinese audience, attuned to the nuanced symbolism and traditional integrity of the performance. This intricate "interplay of musical, vocal, and physical elements not only enriches the narrative but also underscores the pedagogical imperative in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage within the realm of traditional Peking Opera" [2, p. 48].

The cultivation of an appreciation for the symbolic dimensions of traditional theatre, a practice steeped in centuries of cultural tradition, has endowed Chinese audiences with a sophisticated comprehension of the artistic lexicon and evaluative criteria essential for discerning the nuances of performance in Beijing Opera. This profound immersion in the theatrical tradition renders Beijing Opera a captivating spectacle for its native viewers, who engage with performances with rapt attention and deep emotional investment. Conversely, the absence of a parallel artistic and aesthetic framework renders Western opera an enigma to these audiences, challenging their acclimatization to its dynamic scenic shifts, the sonorous expanse of orchestral accompaniment, and a style of vocal performance divergent from their familiar symbolic idiom.

The narrative conveyance within Beijing Opera diverges fundamentally from the conventions of Western musical theatre, anchored in an elaborate lexicon of symbolic expression that permeates every facet of performance. This symbolic system demands from the performer a level of technical and expressive versatility far exceeding that typically required of Western opera artists. The mastery requisite for Beijing Opera encapsulates an extensive array of competencies, including nuanced body control and vocal modulation, attained through rigorous and physically demanding training.

Central to the pedagogical framework for Beijing Opera artists is the comprehensive mastery over one's physicality and vocal prowess. This is underpinned by an exhaustive regimen of physical conditioning that borders on the acrobatic, indispensable across all character roles but especially critical for portraying martial heroines and warriors, where the dramatization of conflict relies heavily on acrobatic prowess. This includes specialized training modules such as "Tanqi training" for acrobatics on mats, "Bazi training" for the artful manipulation of weapons, "Leg training" for foundational stage postures, and "Waist training" for the development of a core strength essential for executing rapid rotational movements integral to dance and martial routines.

Initiation into the performance arts of Beijing Opera involves foundational training in movement virtuosity, encompassing diverse elements from martial arts to acrobatics, tailored to fortify the physical and expressive capacities requisite for the demanding repertoire of traditional Chinese musical drama. This comprehensive training ensures that performers possess the agility, strength, flexibility, and coordination necessary for the physically articulate execution of their roles, underscoring the pedagogical emphasis on the interrelation of physical training, acrobatic skill, and martial artistry in the cultivation of Beijing Opera artists.

Emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, Beijing Opera emerged as a repository and innovator upon the extensive heritage of traditional Chinese musical drama and its diverse regional expressions, crafting a distinct vocal and recitative style. This art form "demands mastery over unique vocal characteristics, including timbre and respiratory techniques, to maximize theatrical impact" [3, p. 32].

In the realm of Beijing Opera, the performer's prowess is predominantly evaluated based on vocal ability, although the articulation of poetic text is also a critical factor in this appraisal. Singing within this genre is markedly distinct from other forms of traditional Chinese musical drama and stands in stark contrast to European operatic traditions. Beijing Opera encompasses a spectrum of performance styles, each with its own vocal execution and stylistic nuances.

The vocal characterization of roles diverges from the classifications typical in European opera, with each role embodying a unique vocal mannerism and sound production technique. For instance, the portrayal of elder female characters utilizes a natural voice, whereas younger female roles are often executed using falsetto. Similarly, the vocal styles for young men, elder men, and warriors differ significantly, with variations not only in vocal technique but also in pronunciation, diction, and respiratory methods, alongside the utilization of thematic musical motifs.

Within this vocal tradition, two distinct vocalization styles are identified: "sipi" and "erhuan." "Sipi" is indicative of a character's vivacity or exuberance, whereas "erhuan" conveys a tragic or somber state.

The vocal technique in Beijing Opera is intricately linked to specialized breathing methodologies. Performers employ a variety of techniques such as "change of breath," "secret breathing," and other respiratory strategies, underscoring the critical role of breath control in the effective delivery of Beijing Opera's vocal repertoire.

In the domain of vocal pedagogy, the production of sound and its auditory perception are of paramount importance, predicated upon an extensive understanding of phonological principles, vocal techniques, and the attainment of a harmonic balance between Yin and Yang principles. The sound emanated by the vocalist is expected not merely to captivate through its aesthetic appeal but also to resonate with the audience on a profound emotional level. This necessitates the performer's immersive embodiment of the character, encompassing both the persona and linguistic nuances of the role, thereby achieving a physical and emotive alignment with the character portrayed.

Upon mastering foundational physical and vocal techniques, instructors assess students' potential to guide them towards specialized training paths: vocal or acrobatic. This bifurcation leads to role specialization within professional practice, prioritizing either physical expressiveness or vocal and recitative prowess.

Makeup, in the comprehensive artistry of Peking Opera, stands alongside singing, recitation, and movement as a crucial element. The application of makeup, performed by the artists themselves, necessitates meticulous preparation and is integral to the portrayal, harmonizing with the theatrical costume and props. This aspect of performance, while ubiquitous across various theatrical traditions globally, assumes a unique stylistic significance within traditional Chinese musical drama and Peking Opera, deeply rooted in the ancient performance arts of the Eastern region. The tradition of exaggerated makeup ensures visibility across the entire auditorium, maintaining visual clarity for both proximal and distal audience members. Moreover, the influence of traditional Chinese painting techniques on makeup artistry cannot be overstated, emphasizing not the literal representation but the essence of the subject as perceived through the artist's interpretive lens.

Given the historical and biographical narratives central to traditional Chinese drama, makeup execution demands a nuanced approach that honors the depicted characters' historical authenticity and external characteristics, thereby necessitating a blend of artistic creativity and historical reverence.

The primary palette for "beautiful makeup" encompasses flesh tones, red, and black, aiming to articulate the characters' gravity and elegance. The interplay of lighter flesh tones against denser red hues in the makeup of youthful characters "...evokes the imagery of "blood and milk," whereas the makeup of elder characters features a reversal in the density of these colors to reflect their seasoned nature" [4, p. 61]. This strategic employment of color and technique in makeup artistry not only serves to distinguish between character

archetypes but also enriches the visual storytelling of Peking Opera, embedding within it a deep cultural and pedagogical significance.

The makeup for young female protagonists accentuates ocular and labial delineations vigorously. A profound application of black outlines the ocular perimeters, extending towards the temples to elongate the eye shape dramatically; the lips are highlighted with a vivid scarlet, crisply defining their contour. For male characters, a cardinal red streak drawn vertically from the nasal bridge to the forehead's midpoint is imperative, symbolizing the character's valiance or royal lineage.

Peking Opera's aesthetic philosophy encompasses a nuanced perception of human allure, amalgamating attributes such as vigor, integrity, and allure into the embodiment of a positive persona. The technique known as "eyebrow raising" or "makeup stretching" for the beautification of virtuous characters involves an intricate process of facial skin tightening to elevate the temporal region, thereby enhancing the expressiveness of the gaze.

The evolution of makeup designs in Peking Opera, reflecting shifts in repertoire and audience predilections, has solidified by the mid-19th century, maintaining a degree of stability across roles. This divergence from Western musical theater's representational style is anchored in a lexicon of symbolic gestures and visual motifs, demanding an intricate understanding and physical dexterity from the performers, cultivated through rigorous and enduring training.

In summary, the development of pedagogical and performing skills in a Beijing Opera artist is a comprehensive process that intertwines physical, vocal, and interpretative training within a rich cultural and historical context. This pedagogy nurtures not just individual talent but also a deep connection to the collective heritage of Chinese musical drama, ensuring the continued vitality and relevance of Beijing Opera in the contemporary artistic landscape.

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