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**HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CHINESE OPERA OF IMPERIAL PERIOD****ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ КОРНИ КИТАЙСКОЙ ОПЕРЫ ПЕРИОДА ИМПЕРИИ****Lu Weiran,***Ph. D Student, Chair for the History of Ancient World and Middle Ages, History Department of BSU***Лу Вейжан,***соискатель кафедры истории древнего мира и средних веков БГУ*

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The introduction marks that this article introduces the place of the Chinese opera in China history and its essence for the people. The main body shows the origin and development of Chinese opera from ancient times (Shang and Zhou Dynasties) to the Qing Dynasty, including the opera forms, characteristics, representative works, and both significant development stages and influencing factors of each period. It includes: 1) the origin and early forms of opera from ancient times to the Tang Dynasty, and the characteristics of Han and Tang opera, 2) the social background and development of opera in the Song Dynasty, including the form of Song Zaju, 3) history of opera in the north and south of the Yuan Dynasty and Ming Dynasty, 4) history of opera in Qing Dynasty. From its origin in ancient times, it has been undergoing continuous evolution in the Tang (唐), Song (宋), Yuan (元), Ming (明) and Qing (清) dynasties, presenting rich and diverse forms and characteristics, becoming a shining pearl in the cultural treasure house of the Chinese nation. The conclusion states that the development process of Chinese opera reflects the social outlook, cultural exchanges and integration in different historical periods. It is not only an art form, but also a vivid witness to the inheritance and development of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

**Keywords:** Chinese opera, Zaju, Kunqu, Chuanqi, China, history.

В статье рассмотрены этапы становления и развития китайской оперы с древних времен (династий Шан и Чжоу) до династии Цин. Проанализированы оперные формы, характеристики, репрезентативные произведения, а также факторы влияния каждого периода: 1) происхождение и ранние формы оперы с древних времен до династии Тан; характеристики оперы Хань и Тан; 2) социальный фон и развитие оперы в династии Сун, включая форму Сун Цзацзюй; 3) история оперы на севере и юге династии Юань и династии Мин; 4) история оперы в династии Цин. С момента своего возникновения в древние времена опера претерпевала непрерывную эволюцию при династиях Тан (唐), Сун (宋), Юань (元), Мин (明) и Цин (清), представляя богатые и разнообразные формы и становясь яркой жемчужиной в культурной сокровищнице китайской нации. В заключении отмечается, что процесс развития китайской оперы отражает социальные взгляды, культурные обмены и интеграцию в различные исторические периоды. Это не только форма искусства, но и яркий свидетель наследования и развития традиционной культуры китайской нации.

**Ключевые слова:** китайская опера, Цзацзюй, Кунцзюй, Чуаньци, Китай, исторические корни.

**Introduction.** Chinese drama has a long and complex history. Traditional Chinese drama regularly is musical in nature. These Chinese activities can trace its origin back a few millennia to ancient China. The origins of Chinese theatre can be traced back 2,500 years. At the beginning of Chinese civilization, shamans in tribal and ethnic groups held considerable power. Sacrificial ritual music and dance performances were considered ways in which shamans could communicate with the gods, and acted as a channel between the gods and man, thus unifying the human and spiritual worlds. Early Chinese theatre developed from, and was closely related to, these sacrificial ceremonies.

**Main part. 1. Opera from ancient times to the Tang Dynasty.**

The birth of Chinese opera did not happen overnight. When people have been exploring its origin and formation, some date it to the Song Dynasty (宋代), some trace it back to the Han (漢代) and Tang (唐朝) Dynasties, and some trace it back to the ancient pre-Qin period (先秦), i.e. before the late III century BC. This is because the above-mentioned

eras are of great significance to the occurrence and development of Chinese opera.

Similar to many nations in the World, the earliest worship of the Chinese nation was the worship of the Sun god. The most ancient legends said that the songs and dances created in the Yellow Emperor era had made a part of the Sun-welcoming sacrificial activities. A slightly later text, «Dongjun (東君)» in the «Chu Ci (楚辭)» [1], records the scene of the Sun god worshipped with songs and dances in the Chu area during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (VIII – III centuries BC). Among them, there was a performance by a shaman playing the role of the Sun god. The opera elements, such as the interpretation of stories with songs and dances and the role-playing of characters, contained there, have obtained their recognition within modern academic community [2].

China has been a large agricultural country since its ancient times, and agricultural sacrifices have been certainly extremely popular since there. Every spring and autumn farmers from all over the country were to

offer sacrifices to the gods of the land. People used various means such as singing, dancing, drumming, and funny acrobatics aimed to please the gods of the land. In the Spring Festival, farmers prayed for good weather and good harvests for the year; in the Autumn Festival (秋社), farmers thanked the gods of the land for their kindness through singing and dancing<sup>1</sup>. Later, that kind of entertainment and performing activities held in the Spring Festival and the Autumn Festival obtained a special term of «Shehuo (社火)»<sup>2</sup>. In the Jiangsu (江蘇) and Zhejiang (浙江) areas, the «Shehuo (社火)» activity further evolved into «Shexi (社戲)»<sup>3</sup>. Shexi was extremely popular in the Song Dynasty (宋代), and with the development history of «Shexi (社戲)», we can clearly see that the agricultural sacrificial activities such as Sheji brought a profound impact to the formation of later operas.



*A dance pattern on Neolithic painted pottery  
Unearthed in Qinghai (青海) [3]*

In addition to community sacrifices, another form of agricultural sacrifice in ancient times, the «Yu Dance (雩舞)», which had presupposed a singing and dancing activity held during the sacrificial activities for praying for rain, became also one of the sources of Chinese opera<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding various ancient witchcraft rituals, the Nuo ritual (儺祭), which had aimed at expelling ghosts and diseases, considered to be the most evident, comprehensive and long lasting source of influence to the occurrence of Chinese opera<sup>5</sup>.

The Nuo rituals started their origin in the Shang Dynasty (商朝, XVI – XI centuries BC). From then until the Sui Dynasty (隋朝, 581–618 AD), the form of Nuo rituals (儺祭) in the palace did not really change. The overall form used to be a «Fang Xiangshi (方相氏)» [4], wore a golden four-eyed mask, a black top and a red skirt, with bear skin on his palms, holding a spear in one hand and a shield in the other, and made a sound of «Nuo - Nuo -» from his mouth, leading the exorcism activities. Twelve people wore animal skins and animal horns on their heads and played animals, and another 120 children acted as «Yizi (依子)»<sup>6</sup>, thus formed a large exorcism team.

In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Nuo style of the palace completely inherited the Han (漢代) Nuo, but the folk Nuo had already shown a tendency to secularization and diversification, especially in the Western Regions<sup>7</sup>. Later, the Western Region Nuo in its turn influenced the ancient Nuo in the Central Plains. By the Song Dynasty (宋代, 960 AD), Nuo rituals had become highly personalized and theatrical, both in the imperial court and among the people. Those images were scattered in the performance segments zaju operas of the Song and Jin (金, 1115–1234 AD) Dynasties, and then integrated into the Yuan (元) Dynasty's northern and southern operas along with the Song and Jin (金) Dynasty zaju operas<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Yizi (依子) – a special ceremonial notion. In some Nuo sacrificial ceremonies, «Yizi» is the name of a specific role, which is responsible for communicating with gods, leading the ritual process, and assisting the main wizard in performing sacrificial activities, such as helping the wizard wear Nuo tools, prepare sacrificial supplies, etc., and playing a guiding role in the transition of ritual links.

<sup>7</sup> Due to its special geographical location, China's Western Regions became an important channel for exchanges between the Central Plains culture and the Western Regions culture during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Here, Nuo culture collided and merged with local culture, presenting a unique style. For example, music and dance elements from the Western Regions were incorporated into Nuo dance performances, making the music rhythm of Nuo dance more lively, the dance movements more graceful and agile, and enriching the artistic expression of Nuo dance. There are many religions coexisting in the Western Regions, and these religions have also had a certain impact on the local Nuo culture. In some Nuo dance performances, we can see the use of Buddhist hand seals, gestures and other elements, or the integration of Zoroastrian ritual movements with Nuo dance, which reflects the mutual penetration of religious culture and Nuo culture, and further promotes the diversified development of Nuo culture in the Western Regions.

<sup>8</sup> During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the Silk Road and other important transportation routes led to frequent exchanges between the cultures of the Western Regions and the Central Plains. In the long-term contact between the Western Region Nuo and the Central Plains culture, its unique artistic style and cultural connotation gradually attracted the attention of the Central Plains. The dance movements of the Western Region Nuo may be more unrestrained and free, and the music rhythm may be more complex and diverse, which contrasts with the relatively rigorous and regular style of the ancient Nuo in the Central Plains. For example, the Western Region Nuo may have its own unique features in the production and use of masks, and the shapes and colors of the masks are richer and more exaggerated. This feature has an impact on the production of Central Plains Nuo masks, making them more decorative and imaginative on the basis of tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Autumn Festival (秋社) – it is the day to worship the land god in autumn.

<sup>2</sup> Shehuo (社火) – a notion for various shows performed by the people during festivals.

<sup>3</sup> Shexi (社戲) – a dramatic performance performed during sacrificial ceremonies or traditional festivals.

<sup>4</sup> Yu Dance (雩舞) – a dance, originating in Ancient China, this dance form was combined with witchcraft beliefs and used in sacrificial ceremonies to pray for rain and a good harvest.

<sup>5</sup> Nuo sacrifice originated from primitive witchcraft. It was a religious ceremony performed by the ancients to drive away diseases and bad luck. In the Xia and Shang dynasties, Nuo culture had already taken shape. In the Zhou Dynasty, it was incorporated into the ritual system and became a national sacrificial activity. The exorcism rituals of the Han Dynasty court followed the Zhou Dynasty system. In the Tang Dynasty, the scale of Nuo sacrifice expanded and had a far-reaching influence, moving from the palace to the people. After the Song Dynasty, Nuo culture gradually became entertaining and combined with folk songs, dances and dramas. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Nuo culture developed rapidly in the southwest region and became an important way for ethnic minorities to worship and pray.

The Nuo mask form also indirectly influenced the facial makeup of the later Peking Opera and other local operas.



Chinese folk Nuo mask [5]

If the ancient sacrificial songs and dances made «the distant sources» of Chinese opera, then the various performances and music of the Han (漢代) and Tang dynasties (唐代) can be regarded as «the recent source» of Chinese opera. The Han (漢代) Dynasty was the first «long-term peace era» in Chinese history after entering the centralized society.

In the Han Dynasty, there was a very popular opera style called «Jiao'an Opera (角氍毹戲)». As the name suggests, it is a kind of sumo-like martial arts play. Because of the «prescribed scene», «Jiao'an Opera (角氍毹戲)» was a small «play» instead of a sports event<sup>1</sup>.

The Han Dynasty's Opera also included many acrobatic, martial arts, and song and dance performances. We can see that the song and dance opera and jiao'an Opera (角氍毹戲) of the Han Dynasty still have many similarities with the ancient sacrificial opera. It was the same appearance of gods and ghosts, the same coexistence of humans and beasts.

However, a closer look reveals that those two were essentially different. The gods and ghosts in the ancient sacrificial performance always possessed a material utilitarian purpose: praying for rain, or exorcising ghosts, or praying for victory over enemies, or praying for a good harvest. Furthermore, the gods, ghosts, beasts, humans, and immortals in the Han Dynasty event made people feel that it used to be a scene of common entertainment, with an obvious celebration nature<sup>2</sup>. From this point of view, we can probably say that the Han Dynasty opera

used to be the process of transformation from the material utilitarianism of ancient sacrificial performances to the spiritual utilitarianism. There is no doubt that the Han Dynasty performance became more operatic than before, and it was a great progression to the opera of later generations.

Some people starts Chinese opera from Tang Dynasty performances, known as «Tang Xilong (唐戲弄)» Like Han Dynasty opera, «Tang Xilong» is also mixed, and its degree of similarity to opera varied. There were a lot of simple singing and dancing, skills, and juggling elements, but there were also very decent singing and dancing actions that appeared to be similar to later operas<sup>3</sup>.

There was a famous play in Tang Dynasty opera known as «Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)». It was a rumor on the stage. It was about a beautiful young woman in Northern Qi Dynasty (北齊, 550–577 AD), who had an ugly husband who had been addicted to alcohol and appeared to be beaten quite often. The wife was full of resentment and could only complain to her neighbors. During the performance, the male actor wore women's clothes and walked slowly on stage, singing while walking and tapping the beat with his feet. After singing a section, the surrounding helpers sang along in unison. When her drunken husband came on stage, they pretended to fight, which made the audience laugh [6].

«Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)» was a small song-and-dance performance with a strong sense of opera, with a storyline, character costumes, singing, reciting, acting and fighting, which had indeed been very outstanding among Tang public shows. In «Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)», we can already feel the artistic characteristics of Chinese opera, such as «telling stories with songs and dances», the integration of singing, reciting, acting and fighting, the opposite roles of men and women, the contrast between beauty and ugliness, and the combination of lyricism and teasing. However, «Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)» is only an exception among Tang performances, and the integration of various artistic elements in «Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)» appeared to be just a «coincidence». It failed to consolidate that trend of integration of multiple artistic elements. She failed to lead an era of opera. After «Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)», i.e. after 907 AD, the history of Chinese opera fell almost silent for another five hundred years.

## 2. Operas of the Song Dynasty (宋代).

The Song Dynasty (宋代) was of extraordinary significance in the history of the development of

<sup>1</sup> Jiao'an Opera (角氍毹戲) – a wrestling entertainment activity that originated in the Liao and Jin Dynasties. As a comprehensive art form, Jiaosuo Opera combines multiple elements such as drama, music and dance. It not only has a storyline and characters, but also includes martial arts demonstrations and musical accompaniment, forming a unique performing art.

<sup>2</sup> During major festivals, drama performances in the Han Dynasty were an important celebration aimed at adding to the warm and cheerful atmosphere.

<sup>3</sup> Tang Xilong is similar to Han Baixi, showing mixed characteristics. It contains many art forms, such as singing and dancing, skills, juggling and other elements. Some performance forms in Tang Xilong were inherited by later dramas. For example, the way of expressing character emotions and plot development through dance movements in song and dance dramas was further developed and improved in later dramas. Many postures and gestures in later dramas can be traced back to dance movements in Tang Xilong. At the same time, the role-playing and simple dialogue forms in Tang Xilong also provided a basis for character creation and line creation in later dramas.



Chinese opera. Compared with the cities of the Tang Dynasty, the urban economy of the Song Dynasty (宋代) was more prosperous, and its urban system was closer to that of modern cities. The nature of the capital had changed from a political and military center to an economic and trade center. The number of urban residents increased significantly, and the citizen class rose rapidly. There were brothels and theaters of all sizes throughout the downtown area, becoming places for citizens to linger and entertain<sup>1</sup>.

Brothels and theaters became places where the performances of the geji (歌妓) had made standard commodities. The emergence of theaters marked the transition of the geji from the original festival performances to daily performances, which meant that the geji performances had started to move along the road to commercialization, and had thus indicated that the professional team of Chinese opera artists had initially taken its evident shape<sup>2</sup>.

The main form of opera in the Song Dynasty (宋代) was «The Song Zaju (宋雜劇)». «The Song Zaju (宋雜劇)» was a short opera performance style, with four to five characters. Before «the main opera», a section of ordinary and familiar things occurred in the neighborhood would have been performed. «The main opera» usually had two sections, and ended with a funny and provocative skit.

The content of the main opera was complicated, and the story presupposed a funny style often, containing the meaning of warning and remonstrance. «Song Zaju (宋雜劇)» used to have its base in a dialogue or accompanied by singing and dancing. Some sang large songs; some did chanson, various lyrics, and even folk songs. The form used to be very free.

Compared with the previous forms of opera, «Song Zaju (宋雜劇)» was already a grand spectacle and the level of performance had greatly improved, but it was still incomparable with opera of the Yuan (元) Dynasty and later. A careful analysis shows that «Song Zaju (宋雜劇)» was only a transitional product, and its focus was still on folk culture, such as various religious sacrificial activities, seasonal festivals, folk entertainment activities, and life rituals. Opera-like activities, dominated by Zaju performances, mixed themselves with a large number of folk activities, but they had the tendency to develop into independent opera<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Brothels and theaters: Fixed entertainment venues that emerged in large cities between the Song Dynasty and the Yuan Dynasty. These places usually had multiple performance studios for artists to perform various dramas, acrobatics and other programs.

<sup>2</sup> Brothels and theaters originated after the reign of Emperor Renzong of the Northern Song Dynasty. They experienced a period of prosperity of about 400 years and gradually declined until the middle of the Ming Dynasty. They were popular in the northern region at first, and then spread to the south with the migration of the Song Dynasty. The reasons for the decline: on the one hand, most of the theaters were destroyed due to wars; on the other hand, after Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming Dynasty, he restricted citizens' entertainment activities, which accelerated their demise.

<sup>3</sup> From the division of roles in Song Dynasty drama, it can be seen that the basic roles in later operas had been basically formed at this time.

In order to show clearly how many skills were integrated into opera-like actions during the Song Dynasty (宋代), we can propose our analysis of early opera scripts. Generally speaking, the Chinese opera possessed its three major sources: 1) a song and dance opera, 2) a comedy, and 3) singing only one. Thus, during the transition period between the Song (宋) and Yuan (元) Dynasties, the highly integrated oriental opera within singing, dancing and speaking used to be like a flower in bud.

### 3. Operas of the Yuan (元) and Ming dynasties.

Chinese opera has passed through a long process of gestation, germination, brewing and growth. During its development, various artistic and non-artistic factors experienced countless collisions, perceptions, integrations and synthesis, and finally ushered its most glorious phase. In XII and XIII centuries, the two forms of southern opera and «Northern Zaju (北雜劇)» have gradually obtained their forms in the north and south of China almost at the same time<sup>4</sup>. Since then, that artistic wonder «of two branches and two beauties» has been illuminating the Chinese theater for hundreds of years.

#### (1) «Northern Zaju (北雜劇)».

From the transition period between the Jin (金) and Yuan (元) dynasties to the middle of the Ming Dynasty (i.e. XV-XVI century), it was the entire process of the emergence, development, maturity and decline of «Northern Zaju (北雜劇)». In that long history of development and evolution, a large number of writers and works emerged.

For the sake of discussion, those hundreds of years of history of «Northern Zaju (北雜劇)» we can divide into four periods. The first period, or «emergence period», was from c. 1200 to 1234, when the Yuan (元) army had destroyed the Jin (金) Dynasty. During that period, the Pingyang area made the center of opera activities in northern China that was in southern Shanxi and northern Henan. Recently, the scholars have discovered many opera relics in that area, including ancient stages, tomb stone carvings, and carved bricks<sup>5</sup>. In addition, rural sacrificial opera activities in that area had always been very active, and in recent years, the scientists discovered original text of the sacrificial opera of «The Book of Rituals for Welcoming Gods and Festivals (迎神賽社禮節傳簿)». All signs indicate that that text has been the «cradle» of «Northern Zaju (北雜劇)».

The second period of Northern Zaju can be traced back to 1234, when the Yuan (元) Mongols ruled northern China, to the early XIV century. That was the most glorious golden age of Northern Zaju.

<sup>4</sup> Southern opera originated in Wenzhou, Zhejiang in the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty, and Northern Zaju was formed in the late Song Dynasty.

<sup>5</sup> Such as the dance pavilion of Hou Tu Temple in Qiaoshang Village, Wanquan County, built in the second year of Jingde in the Song Dynasty (1005), the brick carvings of Zaju in Song Dynasty tombs in Yanshi, Henan, and the murals of Zaju in the main hall of Mingyingwang Temple in Hongdong, Shanxi.

Both the script writing and the stage performance were excellent. Dadu (the capital of the Yuan (元) Dynasty, now BeiJing) was the center of Northern Zaju activities during that period. Many outstanding Zaju writers have emerged during that period, creating a large number of masterpieces that later have been handed down from generation to generation.

#### (2) Southern Opera (南戲).

Southern opera, named for its contrast to "Northern Zaju (北雜劇)", originated during the Xuanhe (宣和) period of the Northern Song Dynasty (北宋, 1119-1127 AD) and flourished during the reign of Emperor Guangzong (光宗, 1190-1194 AD) after the Song Dynasty (宋代) moved south. We can roughly divide the development of Southern opera into three periods.

The first period was the Wenzhou (溫州) Yongjia (永嘉) period. Wenzhou (溫州) Yongjia (永嘉) was the hometown of Southern Opera. That period was the infancy of Southern Opera, which had obvious folk cultural characteristics. Most of the works were collective creations of talented people in book clubs, with folk art characteristics such as collectivity, anonymity, inheritance, and variability.

The second period was the time of growth, centered on Hangzhou (杭州). After the Yuan (元) Dynasty destroyed the Southern Song Dynasty (宋代), the isolation between the north and the south was broken, and the "Northern Zaju (北雜劇)" moved south. The opera scene became temporarily prosperous in the north and declining in the south. However, soon the southern opera, which had appeared to be at a disadvantage in terms of artistic level, absorbed a lot of artistic nutrients from the "Northern Zaju (北雜劇)", and quickly grew stronger and matured. First, the southern opera made extensive use of the themes of the "Northern Zaju (北雜劇)". Secondly, it learned from the "Northern Zaju (北雜劇)" in terms of music and singing. The «north-south combination» appeared, making the southern opera music system richer and more expressive. In addition, personal creations with signed authors also appeared during that period<sup>1</sup>.

The third period was the mature period when it had widely spread itself to the south at the end of the Yuan (元) Dynasty and the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (i.e. at mid-XIV century AD). During that period, the spread of Southern Opera was no longer limited to the Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas, but also expanded to Jiangxi, Anhui and other places. In the Ming Dynasty (明代), the Southern opera system got its new name of Chuanqi (傳奇), which became very popular among the audience, especially in the Jiangnan area (江南地區). The formation of the «Four Major Vocal Styles» in the south was in line with the prosperity of the Ming Dynasty Chuanqi, we

mean namely the Yuyao Tune (餘姚腔), Haiyan Tune (海鹽腔), Yiyang Tune (弋陽腔) and Kunshan Tune (昆山腔). The rise of local vocal styles was related to the richness and complexity of the local language in the south.[7]

When a particular version of music spread to a new place, it must have been localized before local people would have accepted it. At the same time, it was to be combined with local folk culture to meet the entertainment needs of the local people. Kun Opera (昆曲) was the descendant of Kunshan Tune (昆山腔) in the Ming Dynasty, Yiyang Tune (弋陽腔), and finally developed into various Gaoqiang Opera (高腔), Bangzi Opera (梆子戲) and modern Peking Opera (京劇).

It should be said that during the Yuan (元) and Ming dynasties, the Chinese theatre scene presented a «two branches and two beauties» scene. Although each gained its rises and falls, one flourished while the other withered, or one flourished while the other declined, overall, the two were still accompanying each other, echoing each other from a distance, and reflecting each other for hundreds of years. Although the Northern Zaju declined greatly after the middle of the Ming Dynasty, the Southern Opera accepted its artistic influence and artistic nourishment partly, and it partly penetrated into folk literature and art. Until hundreds of years later, in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the Northern Zaju was visible in the local operas that had emerged in various places.

#### 4. Local operas in the Qing Dynasty.

The Qing Dynasty (清代) was another crucial era in the history of Chinese opera, especially after the middle of that time. The rise of local folk operas in various places became its symbol, showing a new look of its flourishing. The rise of local vocal styles and operas accompanied closely to the decline of Kunqu Opera and its inability to maintain a unified situation. The prosperity of local vocal styles after the middle of the Qing Dynasty was different from the «four major vocal styles» pattern limited to the Jiangnan area in the Ming Dynasty. It blossomed all over the country, from north of the Yellow River to Lingnan, and soon entered the city, with BeiJing (北京) and Yangzhou (揚州) as its bases<sup>2</sup>.

In 1790, the Sanqing Troupe (三慶班) from Anhui (安徽) came to BeiJing (北京) to perform. After the fusion of the Hui (徽), Qin (秦), Chu (楚) and other vocal styles, Peking Opera (京劇) appeared. Then it flourished and formed various schools during its development, becoming China's national opera [8].

Conclusion. The development of Chinese opera is like a magnificent epic. From its origin in ancient times, it has undergone continuous evolution in the Tang (唐), Song (宋), Yuan (元), Ming (明) and Qing (清) dynasties, presenting rich and diverse forms and characteristics, becoming a shining pearl in the cultural treasure house of the Chinese nation. From

<sup>1</sup> The personal works of named authors during this period include: «Pipa Ji (琵琶記)» by Gao Ming (高明), «Baiyueting Ji (拜月亭記)» by Shi Hui (施惠), «Jingchai Ji (荊釵記)» by Ke Danqiu (柯丹丘), «Wang Huan (王煥)» by Huang Kedao (黃可道), etc.

<sup>2</sup> BeiJing (北京) was the political and economic center of northern China at that time, and Yangzhou (揚州) was the economic center of southern China at that time.

the perspective of origin, the ancient sacrificial songs and dances, as the «distant source» of opera, contain elements such as story interpretation and role-playing with songs and dances, and are closely linked to the production, life and spiritual beliefs of the ancient people. The performances of the Han and Tang dynasties are the «near sources», such as the «jiao'an Opera (角氍毹戲)» of the Han Dynasty and «Tayao Niang (踏謠娘)» of the Tang Dynasty, which gradually turned to the direction of mass entertainment, making the entertainment and artistry of opera continuously enhanced. The Song Dynasty was an important turning point in the development of opera. The prosperity of the urban economy led to the rise of the citizen class. The emergence of the theater marked the commercialization of opera; also, Song Zaju came into being. Although it was still a transitional form, it laid the foundation for the development of opera in later generations. During the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, southern opera and northern Zaju complemented each other. Northern

opera originated in Pingyang, and later reached its peak with Dadu as its center, and many outstanding writers and works emerged; Southern opera sprouted in Yongjia (永嘉), Wenzhou (温州), and later developed and matured in Hangzhou. In the process of dissemination, it continuously absorbed the nutrients of northern opera, forming the «four major vocal styles» in the south, and promoted the prosperity of Chuanqi (傳奇). Local operas flourished in the Qing Dynasty, and the birth of Peking opera (京劇) was an important milestone in the development of Chinese opera. Peking opera integrates a variety of vocal styles, continues to develop and innovate, forms many schools, and becomes the quintessence of China. The development process of Chinese opera reflects the social outlook, cultural exchanges and integration in different historical periods. It is not only an art form, but also a vivid witness to the inheritance and development of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

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