**History**

Puxian Opera has a long history. The earliest recorded history of folklore song and dance theatrical activity of these regions can be traced back to Tang dynasty Kaiyuan era. The art was spread to Putian and Xianyou from the imperial school of court musicians. *Gazetteer of Xiamen* in Song dynasty describes the Puxian music and dance this way, “It is the consummation of Tang golden age’s best antique tunes, reverberations of the most extravagant dance pieces, distinguished gathering of imperial school of court musicians and adoption of folk ditties in hilly village and fields.” The current appellation was adopted after the formation of the People’s Republic of China. Originally known as ‘Xinghua Opera’, Puxian Opera was popular in Putian, Xianyou and neighbouring regions using the Xinghua dialect. In Song dynasty, the theatres of song and dance of these regions absorbed miscellaneous song theatres and put up opera with story plus song and dance on the theatre stage. With development of commercial traffic between Xinghua and Zheijiang, Southern Opera of Wenhua was also spread to Xinghua. Most of the traditional Xinghua Opera repertory can be found in the Song and Yuan chapters in Ming dynasty’s *Collection of Southern Opera*. Xinghua Opera became even more prosperous in Qing dynasty. From mid to late Qing, there were a total of over a hundred and fifty troupes. After the reform and opening-up in 1978, the newly arranged repertoire *Chuncao Barging into the Court Room* and *The Imperial Scholar and the Beggar* were presented in Beijing and were awarded with prizes consecutively. After 2010, the City of Putian organizes Puxian Opera artists to collect, discuss and sort out repertories, as well as to promote the campaign ‘Puxian Opera In School’ and perform among the teenagers. The media regarded it as the second spring of Puxian Opera, the ‘living fossil’ of Chinese Opera.
音楽

莆仙戏的音乐风格独体，音乐唱腔非常多样化，历来吸收了民间歌谣、「十番」、「八乐」、佛曲法曲，具有很浓厚的地方色彩。莆仙戏的曲牌标示、音韵、韵格，与唐宋大曲和宋词皆相同。而古老南戏曲牌【太子遊四門】，僅見於《張筋狀元》，却是莆仙戏常用的一支，足见其保留的古调久远。莆仙戏有各行各业曲牌和通曲牌，唱腔变化有「犯调」和「集曲」等手法，丰富多彩。演唱是男女同唱，同样也用本嗓。传统伴奏乐器原本只由司鼓、司鍾、司笛（篒篒）三人，後增加尺胡、四胡、梯笛、洞箫、三弦、八角琴、琵琶、揚琴、大提琴等，扩大到十多人。莆仙戏伴奏音乐中具有特色的乐器之中，以其所用的篒篒极罕见，它保存了宋元南戏的旧貌和形制，演奏风格高亢悲壮哀婉。

Music

The music of Puxian Opera uses set tunes with extremely diversified music vocalization. Over the years, folk songs, Putian traditional folk music of shiyin and hale, Buddhist music and sound have been assimilated into it to foster a unique and strong local flavor. The titles, phonetics and metric patterns of the set tunes are the same as the large-scale song and dance music in Tang and Song dynasties as well as song ditties. The ancient Southern Opera set tune nei zai you ni men can only be found in the repertoire. Imperial Scholar Zhang Xin, yet this set tune is often used in Puxian Opera. It serves to show that Puxian Opera has preserved some very time-honored ancient tunes. Each of the stock role in Puxian Opera has his/her exclusive set tunes with colourful variations in vocalization like fandian (change of tune), pipu (merging of tunes) and others. Male and female roles use the same tune when singing and both use their natural voice too. Traditional music accompaniment consists of only drum, gong and huli (wood/bamboo flute) at first but later chhu, chhu (four-stringed fiddle), bangdi, dangguan (end-blown flute), sanxian (plucked lute), hajiaoqin (octagonal lute), pipu, yangqin, cello and others have been added to make it into a full band of over ten musicians. Among all the musical instruments, the most characteristic must be the huli for its rarity. This instrument still preserves the old look and structure of Southern Opera in Song and Yuan dynasties and can perform in robust and thrilling style.
Artistic Features

Xinghua Opera adopted an all-male cast originally. It was only in early Qing when female artists were invited to participate. There were even female artists organizing teaching classes from mid-Qing onwards. There were only seven stock roles at first, namely, sheng, dan, jing, mei, wu, ze, and chou, thus it was also named 'seven-role troupe'. By late Qing, the number of roles, musicians and stage crew have been increased to over twenty. With the arrival of Peking Opera and Puxun’s Fujian Opera in Puxun at the beginning of the Republic of China, the old Xinghua Opera was much influenced.

The fighting and acrobatic feats in Peking Opera as well as the stage equipment and machine-operated stage scenery of Fujian Opera were adopted to make it richer and more colourful. The performance of Puxun Opera has a simple and quaint charm with many movements reflecting the deep influence of puppetry theatre. The actor’s foundation movement is collectively known as puppet role which means hand gestures must not be higher than the eyebrows or lower than the belly button. Classic unique movements include the 'stamping' of dan role, the 'raised step' of sheng role, the 'striding' of jing role and the 'seven-step sequence' of chou roles, maintaining mostly the image of puppetry. Stylized movements are also used to reflect emotions of the characters like 'sandy steps' for happiness, 'swaying steps' for anger, 'covering face' for sadness and 'shoulder shake' for joy.

服飾

與化戲的服飾，原先都是窄而短。民國期間，受劇團影響，服飾仿效其制式，加水袖、且棄用包頭劇巾，改為梳水頭，並吸收閩班旦的碎步，叫「客班踏」。莆仙戲服飾穿藏階匠、主要服裝有蟒袍（俗稱「統」，帝王將相之服）、靠（俗稱「八掛」，將帥之戰甲戎服、脊背靠旗四面）、補袍（官場之「官衣」，祇有大、藍兩色）、瓦衫（書生瓦衫的布料、原藍色背衫，後增各種顏色）、女襖（有五種：大紅、淡紅、黑、白、自漿；白織織為旦之主要服裝）、男背心（原軍士之服；另皇帝微服，在黃瓦衫外加穿軍背心，代表九龍袍，穿反來腰，則可扮老虎、雷公、小鬼等）。

莆仙戲頭盔戴簡單，共四疊。演出其獨特目連戲時，頭盔則會戴十多疊，多是臨時租賃，用作扮神裝鬼之用。

Costume

The costume was at first tight and short. With the influence of Fujian Opera during the period of Republic of China, water sleeves were added. The dan role switched to comb the hair flat instead of using hair net whereas the mincing step was also adopted. Strict rules are applied in the use of costume and accessories in Puxun Opera. Main costumes include the imperial robe (for emperor and ministers), han (armor of military general with four peraments strapped to the back), guanyu (official's attire, only in red and blue), suan (for scholars, originally in blue, later other colours are added), mu (in red, light red, blue, black and white silk with white silk as dan's main costume) and military vest (originally for soldiers but also used by emperor when dressed as commoner and added on top of the yellow suan to represent the dragon robe). The wardrobe for Puxun Opera is rather simple, only four trunks in total. However when performing special Mianlun plays, the wardrobe might be increased to over ten trunks. They are mostly on temporary loan and for the roles of deities and ghosts.
傳統折子戲

莆仙戲傳統劇目有五千多個，1960年代整理改編了多

傳統和現代戲，好評獲獎。上世紀七十代的

一等獎改編傳統劇目《春草驚堂》，是莆仙戲的代

表劇目之一。《抬擔》一場，獨具特色，原是「知府

坐轎，春草伴行」，變成了「春草坐轎，知府跟班」一

大套喜劇「抬擔子」表演程式，對照了智勇雙全的春草

和世故圓滑的知府。《郭懷・胭脂鋪》，上演張鶴難劇

《留鞋記》，演莆劇鋪子女與潯陽秀才郭華的情事，

以「驚為天人」科介表現才子風流。《梁山伯與祝英台・卑崩》，

英台在山伯家哭靈，見山伯遺體，悲痛不已，旦角用

「伸肩」、「伸綢」的身段動作，虛擬了山伯再現，

幻想身旁相會。《瓜老種瓜》裏老丈的「三腳杖」，

「鑼頭功」等身段動作，體現了莆仙戲「奇、古、特」的藝術形態。

Traditional Excerpts

The traditional stock repertoire of Puxian Opera consists of over 5,000 titles. A lot of traditional and modern repertoire have been arranged in the 1960s winning acclaim and awards. Chuanxu Banging Into the Court Room, the award-winning traditional repertoire arranged in the 1970s is one of the representative repertoire of Puxian Opera. The scene Baring the Sedan-chair is unique in that the original scenario of magistrate on sedan-chair with Chuanxu walking by the side is changed into Chuanxu on sedan-chair with magistrate walking behind. The comic and funny performance routine reflects the contrast between the witty rebellious Chuanxue and the slick sophisticated magistrate. Cosmetics Shop from Guo Hua can be traced back to the Yuan zaju, Tale of the Short Left Behind. It tells of the love affair between the cosmetics shop lady and Luoyang scholar Guo Hua. The fan routine is used to demonstrate the scholar's romantic airs. In Mourning from The Butterfly Lovers, Yingta is mourning in Shanbo's house and on seeing Shanbo's chair, she gets extremely distressed. The dan role uses the 'chair routine' to simulate the reappearance of Shanbo and fantasizes meeting him again. The 'three-legged cane' and 'hoe routine' adopted by the laosi role in Guadal Grove Guards fully demonstrates the amazing, unique and ancient artistic features of Puxian Opera.

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