Stirring Stunts of Xinchang Diaqi and Ninghai Pingdiao Operas

Xinchang Diaqi Opera

Xinchang Diaqi Opera, an important operatic genre in Zhejiang, has a long history. The term diaqi first appeared in Ming scholar Zhang Dai’s book Tao An Yi (Memories of Tao An), in which he praised the actors and actresses performing Kunqu and Diaqi Operas as equally wonderful. In early Qing, Diaqi Opera was popular in the area of Fenghua; it flourished in Shaoshan in mid to late Qing. Diaqi Opera troupes had their heyday during the early Republic of China period and went into decline afterwards. Now this local theatre form is kept alive only in Xinchang.

Music of Xinchang Diaqi Opera belongs to the gupai (set tune) system, which means that it is made up of different set tunes arranged according to some rules and structures. (There are over three hundred pieces of gupai (set tune) in existence now). Its vocal styles include diaqi and two variations of sipingdiao, as well as kunqjing in occasions. As to the role types, traditionally there are three lualian (painted-face), four bai (young and old males), and five dan (young and old females). Collectively they are called the ‘Twelve Masters’. They can also be divided into the ‘Four Pillars’ (leading male, leading female, young male and little painted-face) and ‘Eight Supporting Roles’ (those other than the Four Pillars).
活靈現幻

新昌調腔與寧海平調的古老絕活

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Characteristics and Repertoires

In 2006, Xinchang Diaochang Opera was inscribed in the first listing of National Intangible Cultural Heritage of China. At present, 159 manuscripts of libretti dating from late Qing are kept in archives. Its repertoire can be divided into three main categories: the traditional (including nüxì (southern theatre) of Song and Yuan, zaju of Yuan and chuanxi of Ming and Qing), the topical (most of the works came from chuanxi of the mid to late Qing period) and the Monk Mullan series. Two of the topical operas, The Jade Hairpin and The Painting of Two Lovers became household names after being presented as Yue Opera. In the Monk Mullan series, Ghost of a Man who Hanged Himself, Ghost of a Woman who Hangs Herself and The Righteous Messenger of Deeds were originally performances peculiar to Xinchang Diaochang Opera and were not found in the Monk Mullan repertoire of other operatic genres; they were made famous through Shao Opera.

Existing Xinchang Diaochang Opera repertoire still retains many of the original characteristics. Examples include the romantic dance by the protagonists to express their lovesickness in Approaching in the Dream, Looking for Her Dream from The Pretty Parrotly with the masterly stunt of ‘rolling over and kicking off the boots’ in The Last Emperor’s Suicide from The Iron Headguard; the skillful ‘dwarf steps’, ‘chair walk’ and the swift ‘change of face’ in Catching Sanling Alive from The Water Margin. In some operas, singing in Kunju Opera is inserted, showing that this age-old characteristic since late Ming is still being kept alive.

Singing of Xinchang Diaochang Opera has a style of its own, which can be summarized as ‘ganchang’ (singing with percussion accompaniment only), ‘bangqiang’ (the percussion ensemble at the backstage also acts as a chorus to back up the on-stage singing) and ‘dielian’ (inserting spoken parts to the singing before returning to the main sung passage). These characteristics together with its impressive martial scenes make Xinchang Diaochang Opera a unique theatre form. The most famous traditional full-length opera of Diaochang Opera is The Battle at Jingzhou; its script can be traced back to 1896 during the reign of Guangxu, the late Qing Emperor. It is a story about the fighting for leadership between Zhu Yuanzhang and Chen Yuanliang at the end of the Yuan dynasty. The play is impressive because it makes full use of the strengths of Diaochang Opera in both of its martial and non-martial scenes. The singing and body movements of the actors bring the characters to life and heighten the dramatic effect, while retaining the unique vocal styles of Diaochang Opera. Adapted from The Bloodstained Garments of Shanghai Opera, The Old Water-carryer, a light-hearted court case drama, is in another work that fully demonstrates the ‘ganchang’, ‘bangqiang’ and ‘dielian’ vocal characteristics of Xinchang Diaochang Opera.
Ninghai Pingdiao Opera

Ninghai Pingdiao Opera is widely performed in Zhejiang province, and Ninghai Pingdiao Opera, an ancient theatre form, is one of its branches. In the old days, pingdiao troupes did not only sing Pingdiao Opera, but also kunqu and luantan. It became popular in Ninghai and Xiangshan during late Qing and early Republic of China, but went into decline subsequently. By the mid-twentieth century, professional pingdiao troupes could only be found in Ninghai, and that is why it is called Ninghai Pingdiao Opera.

In 2006, Ninghai Pingdiao Opera was inscribed in the first listing of National Intangible Cultural Heritage of China. Its traditional repertoire now in existence has over a hundred operas from the Ming and Qing period. 36 of them were divided into two groups called the 'Earlier Eighteen' and the 'Later Eighteen'. Some Kunqu and Luantan Operas are also included.

The music of Ninghai Pingdiao Opera belongs to the qupai (set tune) system. It has over 300 pieces of qupai (set tune). Its vocal style is gentler, more subtle and delicate when compared to Diaoqiao Opera. Hence it derives its name 'Pingdiao Opera which literally means 'smooth tune'.

In Ninghai Pingdiao Opera, the role types include three hualian (painted-face), five bei (young and old males), and six ainyung and old females). Traditionally, there is another division called the 'Four Upper Pillars' (young male, young female, old male and big painted-face) and the 'Four Lower Pillars' (little comic painted-face, second comic painted-face, middle-aged female and old male with high social status).
活靈活現
— 新昌調腔與寧海平調的古老絕活

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表演特點及特定劇目

寧海平調的表演特點是多種複雑的表演絕技，其中「耍牙」表演戲稱「兩小生」。演員口中表演的八顆牙，可根據戲劇需要而變化。有五種技巧：
一、含（將前面剪牙含在口中，又叫叉叉）。獨特的是讓雙
二、咬（表演者咬在手中的鐵把頭上，上下咬尖，磨出的格
三、笑（用木頭打在牙齒上，左右笑動，看上去
四、吞（用尖刺鼻吸入口腔內，似乎與一般人無異）
五、吐（忽發吐出鐵頭，排列上下，井然有序）

寧海平調有兩個獨具代表性的例子：《李翠娘·見判》和《金蓮斬蛟》。前者表演不同，但都運用到了「耍牙」絕技，使其不同於藝術技巧表現人物的特質。《李翠娘·見判》中，女表演員隨著節奏，用八顆八釐米長的倒

Characteristics and Repertoires

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Ninghai Pingqiao Opera is its unique skills in special facial actions such as the extraordinary shunyu (tusk stunt). The eight large wild boar teeth held in the mouth of the actor move according to the plot. There are five techniques in shunyu.
First, holding (the actor sings and speaks while holding the teeth in the mouth and the audience does not notice anything special).
Second, biting (the actor uses the teeth and bite them up and down to produce a rattling sound; the difficult part is to align the upper and lower teeth and hold them firmly).
Third, licking (the actor uses the tongue to drive the teeth up and down and left and right as if they are fighting each other).
Fourth, swallowing (the actor sucks the teeth into the mouth).
Fifth, spitting (the actor spits the teeth out and align them into the upper and lower rows in an orderly manner).

貿易演出
Stage Performances

22-23.6.2018 (星期五至六) Fri-Sat 7:30pm
24.6.2018 (星期日) Sun 2:30pm

獨立劇場新翼演藝廳
Auditorium, Ko Shan Theatre New Wing
$220, 250, 150

Meeting the judge from Li Huihui and Jinlan killers the Bandit Lijia are two excerpts that are most representative of Ninghai Pingqiao Operas. Though the characters are different, the acts in both excerpts make use of the techniques of shunyu to express the emotions and feelings of the roles they play. In Meeting the Judge from Li Huihui, the female painted-face plays the role of the underwater judge. She demonstrates the skill of shunyu thoroughly by playing the eight wild boar teeth, each measuring eight centimeters long, in her mouth brilliantly. The actor playing the role of Li Huihui puts on a dress with sleeves of four meters long and embroidered shoes for women with three-inches high bound feet. Yet she moves smoothly and gracefully like the flowing clouds. Each tiny step she takes looks like the gliding of a swan on the water. Apart from shunyu, Jinlan killers the Bandit Lijia also showcases other special facial actions like ‘qina shuangqun’ (two horse two saddles) and ‘baoping huazi’ (sliding while holding a vase). These special features together with the gapi (set tune) of Pingqiao Opera, the vocal styles and the percussion music make this excerpt particularly representative of the art of Ninghai Pingqiao Opera.