

Article

A Brief Discussion on the Inheritance and Innovation of Quzi Opera Singing Styles: Taking "One Family of Ethnic Love" as an Example

Yangyang Shen ^{1,*}

¹ School of Music and Dance, Changji University, Changji, Xinjiang, China

* Correspondence: Yangyang Shen, School of Music and Dance, Changji University, Changji, Xinjiang, China

Abstract: This paper takes "One Family of Ethnic Love" as a case study to explore the inheritance and innovation of the singing style of Quzi Opera. First, the paper briefly introduces the history, development, characteristics, and value of Quzi Opera, as well as the position of "One Family of Ethnic Love" in it. Then, a detailed analysis of the historical origin of the singing style of Quzi Opera, including its origin and formation, traditional style and characteristics, and taking "One Family of Ethnic Love" as an example, will specifically analyze how it embodies the traditional elements of the singing style. The paper explores the ways of inheritance of the singing style and, in combination with the example of "One Family of Ethnic Love", conducts an in-depth analysis of the inheritance examples of the singing style. Next, the paper emphasizes the necessity and possibility of innovation, elaborates on the demand for the renewal of Quzi Opera singing in the current social context, as well as the innovative space and direction of Quzi Opera singing. Finally, in terms of protecting and developing Quzi Opera and enriching and revitalizing the diversity of Chinese opera art, the significance of the inheritance and innovation of Quzi Opera singing style is expounded, and the contribution and influence of "One Family of Ethnic Love" in the inheritance and innovation of singing style are evaluated.

Keywords: Quzi; singing style; innovation; "All Nations Love One Family"

1. Introduction

Quzi Opera, also known as "Little Quzi", is a local Chinese opera genre. Its singing style is deeply influenced by Shaanxi-Gansu Quzi, Lanzhou guzi, Qinghai pingxian, and Northwest folk songs. It is the crystallization of the fusion of diverse cultural arts. "Ethnic Love as One Family" provides a typical example of the inheritance and innovation of the singing style of Quzi Opera. Its singing style represents the artistic development trend of Quzi Opera and is of great value for understanding and grasping the artistic essence of the development of Quzi Opera and its changes. The play embodies the integration and influence of various ethnic cultures, reflecting the symbiotic state of diverse cultures. It holds profound significance for the study of ethnic cultural exchanges and integration. The innovative singing style of the play can provide rich teaching materials for opera art education and play a positive role in cultivating students' singing ability, stage performance skills, and art appreciation. Its singing style represents the artistic development trend of Quzi Opera. Therefore, taking "One Family of Ethnic Love" as an example, studying the inheritance and innovation of the singing style of Quzi Opera can not only clarify the artistic characteristics and development trends of Quzi Opera, but also has practical significance for promoting cultural exchange and social harmony in the region.

Published: 11 October 2025



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1.1. An introduction to Quzi Opera

The history and development of Quzi Opera can be traced back to the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty. It mainly evolved from popular folk tunes, and its early performance form was sitting singing, including Yuetiao qupai and Pingdiao qupai. It is recorded that Quzi Opera may have been introduced in the early Qing Dynasty. Before Zuo Zongtang pacified Yaqub, "Little Quzi" likely spread through immigrants, especially in areas such as Shawan, Wusu, Urumqi, Changji, Hami, and Barkol. There were also small tune societies in the Qing army camps, and people and merchants often traveled between "inside and outside the pass" (i.e., the interior and exterior regions of China), gradually introducing the small tune. By 1890 (the sixteenth year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty), the tunes of Quzi Opera had become relatively mature, including the two major tunes of Pingdiao and Yuetiao. From then on, Quzi Opera was no longer just for self-entertainment but began to enter the market, reflecting social realities. Quzi Opera is mainly popular in Hami, Urumqi, Yili, Changji Prefecture, and other areas. The spoken language is primarily the Lanyin Mandarin of northern China. The repertoire of Quzi Opera is extensive, including historical dramas, immortal and Taoist dramas, family and love dramas, folk dramas, social life dramas, and many other genres. The characters are divided into three types: sheng, chou, and dan. It reflects the life interests and spiritual pursuits of the people in many aspects. In the process of inheritance and development, Quzi Opera continuously absorbs and incorporates new artistic elements, maintaining a strong vitality. As an important part of culture, Quzi Opera carries rich historical and cultural information and serves as an important window for studying history, culture, and ethnic relations. At the same time, it is an effective vehicle for promoting cultural exchanges among ethnic groups and enhancing ethnic unity [1].

1.2. Characteristics and Value

First of all, Quzi Opera was formed by the adaptation and integration of Shaan-xi-Gansu folk songs with local culture after its introduction. It is diverse and has a strong local character. The plots of Quzi Opera are mostly based on local historical stories and folk tales. It shares many similarities with the operatic traditions in the northwest, reflecting a common aesthetic between Quzi Opera and the audiences of various local operas. Additionally, Quzi Opera has similarities in recitation and lyrics, which are colloquial, lively, entertaining, and life-like [2]. Quzi Opera is an important intangible cultural heritage, and its protection and inheritance are of great value. Its existence promotes cultural exchange among different ethnic groups and enhances ethnic unity. In recent years, new creations of Quzi Opera have incorporated modern elements, building upon traditional art forms and providing new opportunities for innovation in the development of Chinese opera art.

2. Introduction to "One Family of Ethnic Love"

Written by Professor Li Xinrong of the School of Music and Dance of Changji University, composed by Mr. Yan Rong of the Changji Quzi Opera Troupe, and directed by Ma Xuguang, the Quzi drama with the theme of promoting ethnic unity as one family was approved for the Cultural and Artistic Support Fund Project in 2021. The script uses modern opera stage performance techniques, including monologue, singing, and acting, and is presented to the audience in a simple and humorous manner [3]. I was fortunate enough to watch the first performance of the play at the concert hall of Changji University in June 2023. All actors in the performance were junior students trained in the university's music course over the past two years.

The play, with vivid artistic images and affectionate artistic language, showcases the deep friendship and close relationships among ethnic compatriots. It presents a picture of unity, friendship, mutual assistance, and mutual trust among all ethnic groups. The story follows the protagonists Su Xianling and Zhang Guiying, who raise six children together

and build a happy and warm ethnic marriage family based on love and sincerity. They experience a series of twists and turns, from initial misunderstanding to eventual acceptance of their son's marriage to a minority girl [4]. By depicting interactions and events among the ethnic groups, the play demonstrates strong ethnic unity and promotes the spirit of national unity.

"Ethnic Love as One Family" embodies both the unique style of Quzi Opera and highlights its inclusive multicultural attributes. In addition, the play actively promotes the positive image of unity and harmony among all ethnic groups, which is of great value in enhancing mutual understanding and deepening cultural exchanges and interactions.

3. The Inheritance of the Singing Style of Quzi Opera in "All Ethnic Groups Love One Family"

3.1. The Historical Origin of the Singing Style of Quzi Opera

The styles of Quzi Opera are mainly divided into two categories: the Pingdiao style and the Yuetiao style. The Pingdiao tune system originated from the folk tunes popular in the northwest provinces. It is characterized by smooth melodies, plain language, and a strong sense of life and expressiveness, and is closely related to the tuning method of the sanxian, a major accompanying instrument [5]. The Yuetiao tune system, mainly derived from the small Yuetiao pieces in the Shaanxi-Gansu region, has a connected structure of musical pieces. With its high-pitched, passionate, and unrestrained characteristics, it enhances the impact of Quzi Opera when depicting scenes of battle or disagreement.

The two types of tones in Quzi Opera do not exist in isolation but often integrate. For example, in the flat tune "Dinggang", the Yue tune [Yue Head] and [Yue Tail] are incorporated, forming the "flat tune Yue sing" form. Similarly, in Yuetiao pieces, Pingdiao elements are also included; for instance, "Li Yangui Sells Water" features the Pingdiao piece "Cai Hua Diao". In general, the singing style of Quzi Opera is rich in layers and diverse in artistic forms, demonstrating the convergence and integration of multiple cultural influences [6].

3.2. The Inheritance Model of Quzi Opera at Changji University

With the development of society, there are more and more professional education courses or colleges on Quzi singing in the region, aiming to systematically teach and disseminate this art [7]. In 2019, the School of Music and Dance of Changji University established a teaching and research section of Opera and Hua'er Performance, and carried out teaching, research, professional training, and other work of Quzi Opera in a planned and large-scale manner. To ensure the quality of teaching, it hired experienced Quzi Opera actors from Changji Art Theatre as teaching and performance instructors, taking advantage of its geographical location. Through the mature teaching concepts and educational methods of vocal music courses, students' scientific vocalization is cultivated, and their singing ability is strengthened. Secondly, experienced Quzi Opera professional actors are hired to guide students in learning classic Quzi Opera plays and enhance students' opera performance and practical ability. Overall, a combined training model of professional group presentation and university teaching is adopted. Students trained through this model have several characteristics: 1. Solid basic knowledge, able to learn the singing segments of Quzi opera independently through sheet music; Solid professional basic skills: can quickly understand and master the skills and methods taught by the teacher when learning singing from the actors, and use the voice scientifically. 3 Dare to perform: In addition to participating in the regular phased professional examinations each semester, the college regularly holds various professional skills practice activities, and performance is a common occurrence for them, so there is no shyness or reluctance to perform during the learning process of Quzi Opera [8].

3.3. *An Example Analysis of the Inheritance of the Singing Style in "One Family of Ethnic Love"*

As a newly created Quzi Opera, although it has absorbed modern composition techniques and shifted its subject matter to modern social life, it still needs to retain the unique characteristics of Quzi Opera. When integrating the new with the old, the principle of seeking common ground while preserving differences should be adopted, ensuring that the original flavor is not lost and continuously enhancing the charm of ethnic musical art. There is a distinction between inheritance and innovation, but if the balance between the two is well maintained, the challenge can be successfully addressed. This was attempted in "Ethnic Love as One Family," producing a distinctive stage effect.

In the fourth part of the first act, there is a duet between Su and Zhang. When Su hears that Guli is coming to his house to celebrate his birthday, he throws a tantrum and wants to go out. Zhang Guiying, in an attempt to persuade him, engages in a duet and recitation. The first part of the monologue is spoken in the dialect commonly used in tunes, including expressions such as "Xuanhuang": "Nailahanshui" and "Stir the spoon" in the old local dialect of the Changji area, which sounds very down-to-earth and is highly engaging for the audience.

Musically, it inherits the melodic beauty of Quzi, with a moderate vocal range—from high notes (e in the second small group) to low notes (c in the first small group). Both male and female voices are in the same pitch and tone, suitable for narrative singing. Following the 2-8-4 rhythm pattern, with the ending note drawn out, the performance preserves the original melodic characteristics of Quzi.

4. Innovation in the Singing Style of Quzi Dramas

4.1. *The Necessity and Possibility of Innovation*

Innovation in the singing style of Quzi Opera is both necessary and feasible in modern society. The necessity arises from the need to adapt to contemporary aesthetics. With the development of times and the diversification of cultures, people's aesthetic tastes are changing. To attract more audiences, Quzi Opera must incorporate elements that align with modern aesthetic concepts while preserving its traditional style. Enhancing expressiveness, innovation in singing allows Quzi Opera to better convey social themes and reflect the lives and emotions of the people. Continuous innovation is essential for the development and progress of art, and innovations in the singing style of Quzi Opera contribute to the advancement of opera as a whole. In short, the singing style of Quzi Opera must evolve continuously to maintain the vitality and vigor of this traditional art form.

4.2. *Innovation Space and Direction for the Singing Style of Quzi Opera*

The singing style of Quzi Opera, while inheriting traditional elements, also offers broad potential for innovation. Integration of modern music elements: While maintaining the characteristics of ethnic music, elements of modern music such as pop, rock, and electronic music can be incorporated to align better with the musical aesthetics of contemporary youth. Cross-cultural integration: Musical art forms from other regions and ethnic groups can be drawn upon to enrich the expressive capacity of Quzi Opera through cross-cultural exchange and fusion. Innovative singing methods: In addition to traditional solo and choral singing, innovative methods such as dialogue singing and narrative singing can be introduced to make performances more dramatic and entertaining.

4.3. *Innovative Practices in Singing Style*

By maintaining the mode and intervals of the singing style of Quzi Music, the melodic techniques can be strengthened while breaking the rigidity of the traditional style. Within the basic structure of the tune, techniques such as organizing the melody, softening the voice, and altering the rhythm can be applied. Thoughtful arrangements should be made in terms of the connection and contrast between sections, allowing the audience

to experience modern melodies rather than traditional and stereotyped ones. Through careful melodic design, the performance can become more beautiful, melodious, and vigorous, achieving the principle of "keeping the audience in mind".

In shaping characters through the sound of the tunes, the role itself must serve as a support, yet the singing style should not be constrained by a rigid pattern that limits the distinct personality of the characters. The design of the singing style must be closely aligned with the vocal conditions and personality traits of the actors to achieve coordination between the music and the performers. Ensuring that the melody is both melodious and vigorous represents a new challenge in the creation of Quzi Music.4.4. An Analysis of Innovative Examples of Singing in "One Family of Ethnic Love".

It is gratifying that "One Family of Ethnic Love" has provided us with beneficial experiences and attempts, especially in the design of musical singing styles. Besides some single melodies, it has also incorporated multi-part musical presentation techniques in various ways. The performers are all outstanding junior students majoring in music performance. They have received professional vocal training since their freshman year. All of them have good scientific vocal techniques. When singing Quzi Opera, they can avoid the choking of the throat that occurs when folk artists sing. They can pronounce clearly and sing the pitch and rhythm marked on the sheet music accurately. Restore the original flavor and style of the tune. It can also better restore the design of the music creator when creating "One Family of Ethnic Love". The creation of the singing style of Quzi music should be rooted in the fertile soil of the masses, and its singers should also have a certain artistic accomplishment, draw on the strengths of many, have a deep cultural background and rich imagination, seek the beauty of the singing style of music, and meet the audiovisual aesthetic requirements of the people. Lead the creation of music and singing to a new realm and let it blossom more splendidly in the country's music ensemble.

5. Conclusions

5.1. The Inheritance and Innovation of the Singing Style of Quzi Opera Play an Important Role in Enriching Culture

The singing style of Quzi Opera fully absorbs the rich ethnic music elements of the region, making the genre have a strong local style and ethnic characteristics. In terms of singing style, Quzi Opera constantly innovates, especially with some novel changes in vocal style and singing method, which retain the characteristics of Quzi while adding the spirit of The Times. Quzi drama provides new impetus for the development of music culture in and helps to promote the diversification of regional culture. The national spirit contained therein also nourishes people's sense of national pride and belonging to a certain extent, and is of great significance for promoting social peace and harmony in and enhancing friendship and unity among people of all ethnic groups. music shows the rich and diverse ethnic culture of to the world, and plays a positive role in promoting the understanding and recognition of in other regions and countries, as well as cultural exchange and sharing.

5.2. The Contribution and Influence of "One Family of Ethnic Love" in the Inheritance and Innovation of Singing Style

As a newly created Quzi drama, "One Family of Ethnic Love" has further enriched opera culture with its beautiful melody and distinct local characteristics. Using music as a bridge, the work conveys a beautiful picture of the harmonious coexistence and friendly exchanges among all ethnic groups, which is of positive significance for enhancing mutual understanding and affection, and for promoting social harmony and stability.

While retaining traditional elements, the work boldly innovates and integrates modern musical elements, attracting audiences with more vivid and lively singing styles, and playing an important role in the development of Quzi Opera. Through its distinctive Quzi

opera singing, "One Family of Ethnic Love" showcases ethnic culture and spiritual outlook, enabling more people to understand and appreciate art and culture.

Overall, in terms of the inheritance and innovation of the singing style, "One Family of Ethnic Love" has made new attempts and innovations for the prosperity and development of Quzi Opera, while contributing to the promotion of ethnic unity, harmony, and cultural dissemination.

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