

## RESEARCH ON THE ARTISTIC VALUE OF HUAIBANG OPERA

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the artistic value of Huaibang opera, the research method used is qualitative research. The author collected data and materials from the local people of Jiaozuo through documentary and interview analysis, dividing the interviewees into three parts: key information, casual information and general information. The key information came from the director of the Huaibang opera troupe, casual information came from the performing artists of Huaibang opera, general information came from the general information was obtained from media workers, local government officials and people. The research theory used in this paper is cultural ecology theory. Through the analysis of documentary materials, the paper attempts to explain the process of cultural adaptation of Huaibang opera to its environment under the influence of history and to theorise the artistic value of Huaibang opera.

The findings of this paper are that Huaibang opera has three important artistic values: the artistic value of singing, performance props, and scripts of Huaibang opera. As Huaibang Opera is an important representative of Chinese local theatre, its unique art has promoted the development of local culture and society in Jiaozuo, and has long been a spiritual comfort for the locals in Jiaozuo, which is still loved by many people today.

**Keywords:** Huaibang Opera, Artistic Value

### 1. Introduction



**Figure:** A still from the performance of Huaibang Opera

Huaibang Opera is an ancient and rare genre of local opera in Henan Province, known as "Huaibang" because it was produced and spread in Huaqing Province (the current area is

Qinyang, Wuzhi, Bo'ai, Wenxian, Xiuwu in Jiaozuo City and Jiyuan, Henan Province, China). In ancient times, the natural conditions in the Huaqingfu region were favourable, due to mild climate, numerous rivers and plains, rich in underground resources, this area was quite suitable for growing crops, such as grain, rice and wheat, etc. The good natural conditions and geographical conditions contributed to the economic and political prosperity of the ancient Huaqingfu region. After 1949, the name of the prefecture was changed to Jiaozuo. With the unique local accent, living habits and culture, Huaibang Opera has developed a rugged and impassioned musical style, with its recitation in Huaqing dialect, easy to understand and witty.

(*Xie Jianniang, 2018*) As the Qin River ran through Huaqing Prefecture from south to north in ancient times, the interaction between the east and west of Huaqing Prefecture was affected, creating differences in language, habits and the aesthetic sense of the people between the east and the west. Divided by the Qin River, the area in its west was known as West Huaibang, while the east of the river was known as East Huaibang.

The origin of Huaibang Opera was around 1368 AD. Some scholars believe that Huaibang Opera was an art form that evolved from the Hai Shen Opera, which was sung around a table to pray for rain, and was formed around the early Ming dynasty. (*Guo Quanren, 1988*) The performance style is "no costumes, no walking, no festival, no price, sitting around a table and singing in unison".(*Wei Lingxue, 2013*) This made the threshold for learning the opera extremely low, and most of the people who studied the opera were local farmers in Huaqing province who spent a lot of their time working in production and were only able to sing in their spare time, thus Huaibang Opera was formed, but the initial development was very slow as the actors did not have professional characteristics at the beginning of the formation. From 1662 to 1945, Huaibang Opera gradually entered a stage of prosperity and maturity. This stage was the middle of the Qing dynasty in China until the Republican period, according to the *Bo'ai County Opera Book*, "Huaibang Opera began to flourish in the late Qing dynasty and even spread widely to areas such as western Henan, northern Henan and southern Hebei". (*Li Yingfang, 1994*) Due to the rapid development, a large number of famous Huaibang artists emerged, such as Lv Lianren, Ma Chouniu, Qiao Qingyun and Li Yongtai, who had a great influence on the development of Huaibang art. The emergence of these famous artists has largely contributed to the development of Huaibang Opera. More Huaibang Opera groups emerged leading by them, adding vitality to the development of local folklore performing arts. At that time, there were nearly three hundred traditional Huaibang Operas, most of which were related to court disturbances, the deeds of loyal subjects and wise men. Certainly, there were also some folk myths, legends and plays depicting ordinary family life. In several counties and cities such as Qinyang in the Jiaozuo region, the ruins of the theatre buildings built for the performances of Huaibang Opera during the Ming, Qing dynasties and the Republican period still existed, as well as some inscriptions relating to the construction of the theatre buildings. In particular, during the heyday of Huaibang Opera, more and more Huaibang Opera buildings were built throughout Jiaozuo, basically in all counties and cities in the Jiaozuo area. According to the author's testimony, during the Ming and Qing dynasties alone, there were thirteen Huaibang Opera houses in a small town in Bo'ai County, and some places were even so narrow that they could only build half of the opera house, leaving an empty space for other uses, and then temporarily building another half of the opera house during performances. (*Wu Qianlin*

, 2017) During the Republic of China period, there were more than 400 opera houses in several counties and cities such as Qinyang, Jiyuan, Wenxian, Wuzhi and Bo'ai in Jiaozuo. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the development of Huaibang Opera gradually entered a phase of decline and revival. At first, there were more than 30 opera troupes in some towns and villages in the Jiaozuo area, and the opera troupes in the county, such as Nanguan, Bajie, Wuzhuang, Chengcun, Dongwanghe, Neidu, Wugezhai, Beijiao, Dayan, Bashan and Sanjie, were all professional troupes with a literary and martial belt. However, after the 1950s, with the implementation of the new policy of cultural management in China, the government began to reform and manage the theatre, and then imposing a ban on some of the old Huaibang Operas, which made it impossible to perform most of the old Huaibang Operas. Therefore, Huaibang Operas gradually went into decline. During the "Cultural Revolution" in the 1960s and 1970s, many cultural arts were destroyed, and Huaibang Opera was not spared. It was not until the end of the Cultural Revolution, after 1978, that Huaibang Opera recovered somewhat. (Ding Yongxiang, 2009) In 2004, China officially began the process of developing a domestic policy for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and in 2005 promulgated the first programmatic document for the protection of intangible cultural heritage: *Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in China*, which set out the objectives and eight principles for the protection of intangible cultural heritage and proposed that the relevant protection system should be improved as soon as possible, and that an effective working mechanism should be established to promote effective protection, On 20 May, 2006, Huaibang Opera was listed as one of the first national intangible cultural heritages in China, and under the promotion of the government, Huaibang Opera is gradually being revived.

The artistic value of Huaibang Opera lies in the fact that its development has always been closely linked to the life of the local people. This is the artistic characteristic of Huaibang Opera. Through the performance of Huaibang Opera, the local people can not only be entertained and rested, but also have a great effect on their spiritual and personality development. In recent years, the development of local opera in China has been extremely weak, and in this environment Huaibang Opera is also facing an embarrassing situation. However, Huaibang Opera's characteristic Huai Qingfu singing language and artistic form still have a place in folklore performances around Jiaozuo.

## **2. Research Objective**

2.1 To study the artistic value of Huaibang Opera

## **3. Research Method**



**Figure:** The author interviewed the old artists in Fengzhang village, Wuzhi County, Jiaozuo City

The research method used in this study is qualitative analysis, to sort out the historical development of Huaibang Opera through literature analysis; by analysis and interview the local people of Jiaozuo, to collect data and materials about Huaibang Opera. The interviewees are divided into three parts: key information, casual information and general information. The key information is from Huaibang Opera troupe leaders and Huaibang Opera artists, casual information came from media workers and government officials, while general information came from the local people of Jiaozuo. In the interviews, the author interviewed a total of 30 people, including five Huaibang Opera troupe leaders in KI group, ten Huaibang Opera artists in CI, five media workers, five government officials, and five local people in Jiaozuo in GI. Their interviews are important for sorting out and recording the artistic values of Huaibang Opera in terms of its historical heritage, singing methods, singing genres, performance props, performance costumes and repertoire stories.

Key information is the main driving force and practitioner of the operation and development of Huaibang Opera. As the director of Huaibang Opera has the right to speak and lead the operation of the opera company, the planning of commercial activities and the development of the heritage, and has a clear understanding of the artistic value of Huaibang Opera and a different opinion from that of ordinary people. The subject of the interview of the author with key information is the artistic value and historical development of Huaibang Opera. Casual information is a stage performer and inheritor of Huaibang Opera, and has thorough research and practical achievements on the artistic value and singing characteristics of Huaibang Opera, so the interviews were mainly on the methods of aria, instruments and costume. General information are those involved in media promotion, the staffs of local cultural preservationists and local people, with their promotional and audience attributes, they are the driving force behind Huaibang Opera, so most of the interviews with general information focus on the historical heritage of Huaibang Opera and the stories of the repertoire performed.

#### **4. Research results**

##### **4.1 The artistic value of singing in Huaibang Opera**

In *A Walk in Aesthetics*, Chinese scholar Zong Baihua said, "Only with music can the plot be more profoundly expressed and the emotions more deeply and fully expressed." (*Zong Baihua, 2005*) According to the theory of cultural ecology, the artistic development of music culture cannot be separated from the regional ecological environment. The music in Huaibang

Opera is the artistic expression of the true feelings of the local working people of Jiaozuo in their daily lives, and is an important embodiment of the art of opera performance. Huaibang Opera is a multi-cultural symbiosis of the art of opera in the form of a panel cavity, which is derived from the clapper cavity. The singing voice of Huaibang is to a large extent restricted by the local language, and the general view held by the majority of veteran artists is that the singing voice is the main body of Huaibang. Its formation and subsequent development is closely related to the tone and overall rhythm of the Huaiqing dialect, which is also a visual representation of the distinctive local characteristics of Huaibang in Henan. (*You Yinge, 2018*) The types of Huaibang singing can be divided into upper rhymes and lower rhymes. The upper rhyme includes the starting rhyme, the flat rhyme and the bitter rhyme, while the lower rhyme includes the ending rhyme. The rhymes are sung in unison, in single lines, and in even lines. This forms the basis of the musical structure of Huaibang, in which the upper and lower couplets correspond to each other, and each section of the play is made up of a number of these upper and lower lines repeated in a cycle. (*Wangjing, 2011*) The art of Huaibang singing is characterised by its simplicity and lack of showy singing, but there are also sections where the melody jumps in and out in order to show the character's emotional outburst after it has built up to its limit. The fact that it is easy to learn and easy to sing is a reflection of its artistic value, as it has become popular with the local people.

#### 4.2 The artistic value of props in Huaibang Opera

The performance props of Huaibang Opera can be divided into instrumental props and costume props. From the perspective of cultural ecology, the musical instruments and costumes in Huaibang Opera are not only tools for artistic performance, but also carriers of local culture. (*Zhangyu, 2014*) The musical instruments and costumes carry the values, aesthetics and cultural traditions of the local community, which are passed on and displayed through the performing arts of Huaibang Opera. Their selection and use not only reflect the characteristics and customs of the local society, but also, to a certain extent, shape the unique image and artistic style of Huaibang Opera.



**Figure:** Zhao Yuqing, an old Huaibang artist, teaches students her skills

##### 4.2.1 The artistic value of instrumental props in Huaibang Opera

The main instruments used in Huaibang Opera are strings and percussion instruments. The strings are mainly sharp strings, banhu, erhu, yueqin and yangqin. Among the string instruments, the pointy strings are unique in that they are a home-made instrument unique to Huaibang. The percussion instruments are the mainstay of the accompaniment of Huaibang Opera and are particularly important. (*Li Jinlu, 2020*) The tone of Huaibang Opera is high and impassioned, suitable for expressing the emotions and momentum of the opera characters,

and its use reflects the local community's quest for grandeur and majesty. At the same time, the performance of Huaibang Opera requires a certain level of skill and ability from the performers, which reflects the professionalism of Huaibang Opera performers and their pursuit of the art.

#### 4.2.2 The artistic value of costume props in Huaibang Opera

The costumes in Huaibang plays are similar to those in traditional Chinese theatre, representing the status and characteristics of the performing characters. There are five main categories, namely mang, kai, zhe, pei and yi. The "mang" is the common dress of high ranking figures such as emperors and generals and is often referred to as "official dress" and includes Longmang, Nvmang, Laodanmang, etc; "Kai" is the common military uniform of military generals, divided into hard kai, soft kai, female kai, bawang kai and improved kai; "Zhe" is a long shirt with a sloping collar, mainly including Xiaosheng Huazhe, Suzhe, Nvhuazhe and Laodanzhe; "Pei" is the clothing worn by officials and their dependents at all levels on domestic occasions, including Huangpei, Shengpei and Danpei, etc; "Yi" is the collective name for all the other costumes except the four main categories, which are generally grouped into four parts: long, short, special and accessories, the common ones being Chang, Gongyi, Baoyi, Sengyi, Kanjian, Doupeng, Shengyi and Jianyi. Of these, Shengyi is also divided into Wenshengyi and Wushengyi, and Jianyi is also divided into Longjian, Tuanhua jianyi and Pingfan jianyi.

#### 4.3 The Artistic Value of Huaibang Opera Scripts

The Huaibang plays are the bearers of the culture of the Jiaozuo region and cover the local values. The storyline, characterisation and social background portrayed in the plays reflect the human history, social style and values of the Jiaozuo region. These elements not only provide the audience with a window into the local culture, but also make an important contribution to the transmission and preservation of local culture for future generations.

Usually based on historical stories or traditional folk tales, Huaibang drama scripts express observations and criticisms of social reality through artistic techniques and plots. The plays explore themes such as social class, morality and ethics, and the good and evil of human nature, reflecting the realities and contradictions of local society and providing an opportunity for people to think about and reflect on social issues through artistic forms. In recent years, Huaibang drama scripts have been innovative and developed to a certain extent, based on the heritage of tradition and folk culture. The adaptation and creation of the plays often combine the aesthetic needs and artistic expression of contemporary audiences. Through changes to the plot, lines and characters, the plays are made more in line with the tastes and appreciation habits of modern audiences. (*Pengjun, 2013*) This innovation not only contributes to the heritage and development of Huaibang drama, but also gives the script a wider range of artistic expression. As an important part of artistic creation, the script embodies the characteristics of local culture, natural environment and social reality, and has a rich artistic value. By examining the scripts of Huaibang opera through the lens of cultural ecology, we can better understand and appreciate its cultural connotations and artistic charm, and providing useful references for their inheritance and development.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

### 5.1 Conclusion



**Figure:** Huaibang Opera has wide popular support in Jiaozuo

As one of the traditional Chinese opera art forms, Huaibang plays have a rich artistic value. Artistic value refers to the artistic, aesthetic and ornamental value that a work has in terms of aesthetics. It is not only an evaluation of the form, technique and creativity in a work, but also the expression of emotions, ideas and humanistic themes conveyed by the work as well as its impact and inspiration to the audience. Overall, artistic value is a subjective evaluation criterion, and different people may have different views and evaluations. However, it is usually related to the artistry, originality, aesthetic expression and emotional resonance of the works, while level of artistic value directly affects the status and influence of the work in the art field. As a performance form of traditional Chinese opera, Huaibang Opera has unique artistic value and demonstrates the charm of traditional Chinese culture. The art of singing and the art of performing props have profound connotations and a wide expressive space, and are an important part of Chinese opera culture.

#### **5.1.1 Conclusion on the artistic value of singing in Huaibang Opera**

With its unique singing style and form, Huaibang Operanshows the unique charm of traditional Chinese culture, its emphasis on vocal singing techniques and the rhythm of the music makes the actors' stage performances more vivid and infectious, and is able to express the rugged and bold atmosphere unique to the Jiaozuo region, while retaining the essence and artistic characteristics of opera.

#### **5.1.2 Conclusion on the artistic value of props in Huaibang Opera**

Huaibang Opera focuses on artistic delicacy and refinement in its performance forms, with stage movements, props and costumes expressing the inner world and emotional changes of the characters. Among them, characteristic musical instruments such as clappers, drums, boards and cymbals are often used. The ensemble and solo performances of these instruments and their cooperation with the actors give the whole performance a distinctive musical character and sense of rhythm. Stage instrumental music plays an important role in Huaibang Opera, highlighting the tension and intensity of the drama, as well as setting off the humorous and warm parts, creating a unique aural enjoyment for the audience. Costume design is also a rich source of artistic value. The colour scheme and detailing of the characters' costumes are carefully designed to highlight the characters' characteristics and emotions. When watching Huaibang Opera, the audience can appreciate not only the acting skills but also the inner world and emotional changes of the characters through the costumes. All in all, the props of Huaibang Opera are of great artistic value, as they bring unique audiovisual enjoyment to the audience

through the beautiful opera music and elaborate costumes, enriching the artistic expression of Huaibang Opera.

### 5.1.3 Conclusion on the artistic value of scripts in Huaibang Opera

The scripts of Huaibang Opera are rich and diverse, covering a wide range of fields such as history, literature and social life. The storylines in Huaibang Opera scripts usually have a deep historical and cultural background and social significance, and can lead the audience to think and experience all aspects of life, making their artistic value inestimable.

## 5.2 Discussion

Through literature combing and interviews, the author has discussed the artistic value of Huaibang Opera in all aspects.



**Figure:** Classification of characters in Huaibang Opera

### 5.2.1 Discussion of the artistic value of singing in Huaibang Opera

Regarding the discussion of the singing voice, the author mainly discusses the artistic value of the singing voice of the Dan role, the Sheng role and the Jing role. In traditional Chinese opera, the characters are usually divided into different trades according to their gender, character, age and status, and are usually divided into four types of roles: Sheng, Dan, Jing and Chou, whose characters are portrayed differently by the different occupations they engage in. In singing, the Zheng Dan role mainly uses a small voice, with a soft, rounded tone; the Hua Dan role has a sweet, flexible tone, and the Wu Dan role has a crisp, bright and strong tone. In the Sheng role, the tone of the voice should be childish and energetic. The net role is generally characterised by a straight, thick and brash singing voice, with the performance not being slow and steady, and polyester being old and pale.

### 5.2.2 Discussion of the artistic value of props in Huaibang Opera

Regarding the discussion of props, the author has studied and sorted out the costume classification, costume materials, costume colours and costume patterns of Huaibang opera, and has mainly focused on the value of the Bangzi, a percussion instrument. Firstly, the Bangzi instrument plays an important role in musical performances because of its unique sound, its loudness and its high recognition, and its ability to produce a strong sense of rhythm and musical rhythm. Bangzi is widely used in the fields of opera, folk music and dance, adding a unique timbre and artistic effect to works. Secondly, the Bangzi requires a great deal of musical expression and good coordination in terms of technique. The technique and rhythm of the bangzi is very demanding and requires a long period of training and practice before the player can master the instrument and bring out its unique musical beauty. Finally, the Bangzi instrument is also capable of expressing a wealth of emotion and mood in the performance of Huaibang opera. Through the skill and expressiveness of the player, the Bangzi instrument can express different emotions such as happiness, excitement and sadness, making the opera more infectious and expressive.

### 5.2.3 Discussion of the artistic value of scripts in Huaibang Opera

In the discussion of the scripts, the author categorised Huaibang scripts into historical, ethical and religious dramas according to their ideological connotations. In the course of the interviews, three forms of Huaibang scripts were uncovered, namely, performance books, collated books and published books. According to the interviews, these scripts were hand-copied in the 1940s and 1950s with a brush, and could be used directly in Huaibang opera performances. The script is more elegant than the Ming and Qing dynasty sagas, but it is simpler and more fluent. It is a vague trace of the evolution of miscellaneous dramas and legends into local operas, and its content is of great research value. Although they can also be used as performance texts, some of the lines have to be changed during rehearsals according to the actual situation. Although there are some typographical errors in these texts, they are much less frequent than in the performance texts that the artists transcribed by hand to consolidate their memory, which facilitates the study of the plays. The main purpose of the printed version is to be read by the general public, or to be kept as a research resource. It follows the principle of being readable and is issued entirely as popular reading, with the plays having a strong storytelling and literary character. The print run of these books is relatively small and their distribution is geographically restricted, circulating mostly among researchers and local cultural workers, with little general readership and a smaller sphere of influence.

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**APPENDICES** : The basic information about the interviewees in the study of the artistic value of Huaibang Opera

| <b>Basic information of interviewees</b> |               |              |   |   |
|--|---------------|--------------|---|---|
| <b>Name</b>                              | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b>   | <b>Occupation</b>   | <b>Interview topics</b>                         |
| Yang Zhanxiang                           | male          | 74 years old | Director of Huaibang Opera Troupe, Qinyang                              | The artistic value of Huaibang Opera            |
| Meng Shexiang                            | female        | 69           | Director of Fengying Huaibang Troupe in Jiaozuo City                    | The use of plate style, singing style and rhyme |
| Wang Shuangkui                           | female        | 42           | Huaibang Troupe director of Xijiaokou Village, Xiuwuxi Village township | West road Huaibang singing                      |
| Li Yuancai                               | male          | 58 years old | Director of Huaibang Opera troupe of Songzhai, Qinyang                  | The historical development of Huaibang Opera    |
| Zhao Xiaojing                            | female        | 67 years old | Huaibang art head of Dnanpo Village, Xiuwu                              | The artistic value of Huaibang Opera            |
| Zhao Yuqing                              | female        | 83           | Huaibang Opera entertainer  | Method of singing                               |
| Ding Rational                            | male          | 81 years old | Huaibang Opera entertainer  | Method of singing                               |
| Xue Shenyong                             | male          | 77 years old | Huaibang Opera entertainer  | Instrumental costumes                           |
| Xue Junyin                               | male          | 77 years old | Huaibang Opera entertainer  | Instrumental costumes                           |
| Ding Xiaoqing                            | male          | 77 years old | Huaibang Opera entertainer  | The singing of various characters               |
| Yang Qianyi                              | male          | 42 years old | Huaibang Opera artist   | The singing of various characters               |
| Yang Qiufen                              | male          | 38 years old | Huaibang opera artist   | The singing of various characters               |
| Liu Faqing                               | male          | 45 years old | Huaibang Opera artist   | Costumes for various characters                 |

|                |        |              |   |  |
|----------------|--------|--------------|---|--|
| Xue Fengchang  | male   | 61 years old | Huaibang Opera artist   | Costumes for various characters                |
| Huang Guiying  | female | 68 years old | Huaibang Opera artist   | Costumes for each character                    |
| Huang Yuyi     | male   | 32 years old | Media worker (Henan Shanhe Culture Communication Co. LTD.)                              | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance       |
| Xin Bingquan   | male   | 48 years old | Media worker (reporter for China.org.cn)  | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance       |
| Feng Jiazhi    | male   | 42 years old | Media worker (reporter for Henan Daily)   | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance       |
| Wang Changdong | male   | 45 years old | Media worker (reporter for China Civilization Network)                                  | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance       |
| Du Zhi         | male   | 45 years old | Media worker (Xiqu Publishing Network)  | The story of the play performed                |
| Xue Dongtao    | male   | 52 years old | Government official (head of Qiaomiao Township, Wuzhi county)                           | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance       |
| Xue Wanying    | male   | 56 years old | Government official (secretary of Qiaomiao Township, Wuzhi County)                      | Status quo of Huaibang opera inheritance       |
| Ding Zhenglai  | male   | 49 years old | Government official (deputy secretary of Qiaomiao Township, Wuzhi County)               | Published the story of this play               |
| Ding Yongxiang | male   | 59 years old | Government official (deputy dean of the College of Literature, Henan Normal University) | Published and published the story of this play |
| Zhang Qingfeng | male   | 56 years old | Government official (Wuzhi County Agricultural Machinery Bureau)                        | Published the story of this play               |
| Wang Junjie    | male   | 61 years old | Local resident in Jiaozuo   | Perform the story of this play                 |
| Fu Kangkang    | male   | 33 years old | Local resident in Jiaozuo   | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance       |

|               |        |              |                           |  |
|---------------|--------|--------------|---------------------------|--|
| Yue Yunpeng   | male   | 33 years old | Local resident in Jiaozuo | The story of the play performed          |
| Zhang Suqin   | female | 41           | Local resident in Jiaozuo | Organize the story of this play          |
| Zhang Menglin | male   | 21 years old | Local resident in Jiaozuo | Status quo of Huaibang Opera inheritance |