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A Study of the Da Kaikou Vocal Style in Xianghuo Opera: An Examination Based on Zhang Yue'e's Vocal Scores

Yuqi Liu
School of Liberal Arts, Yangzhou University, Yangzhou, Jiangsu, China

Abstract: Da Kaikou, a vocal style associated with Xianghuo Opera in northern Jiangsu, represents one of the most archaic and robust strands of the vocal tradition of Yangju Opera. Emerging from ritual gatherings in which performers sang and acted for ceremonial purposes, it gradually shifted from ritual to public entertainment and underwent a process of theatrical transformation, eventually becoming one of the sources of Yangju Opera's vocal repertoire. Its repertoire comprises more than thirty tune types, including Qizi Diao (Seven-Character Tune), Shizi Diao (Ten-Character Tune), Ganshan Saihai, and Niangniang Diao. This study examines Da Kaikou from three perspectives: historical origins, musical form, and the practice of celebrated performers. It offers close readings of notated examples of Qizi Ju, Kuai Qizi, Shizi Ju, and Yu Diao performed by the renowned Yangju artist Zhang Yue'e, and considers the style's value for contemporary Yangju Opera. The analysis provides score-based evidence for tracing the origins of Yangju vocal styles and offers practical reference for repertoire revival, vocal training, and stage innovation.

Keywords: Xianghuo Opera; Yangju Opera; Da Kaikou; Vocal Style; Zhang Yue'e

1. Introduction

Yangju Opera, formerly known as Weiyang Opera or Yangzhou Opera, is performed in Yangzhou, Zhenjiang, and Nanjing in Jiangsu Province, as well as in Shanghai and the Tianchang and Lai'an areas of Anhui. It is a major regional opera genre in Jiangsu and was included in the first batch of China's national intangible cultural heritage list. Musically, Yangju Opera did not originate from a single source. Its vocal style developed through the convergence of Xianghuo Opera, long established in the rural areas of northern Jiangsu, and Yangzhou Huagu Opera, with further contributions from Yangzhou qingqu and folk tunes. This interaction among three traditions produced the distinctive balance of strength and tenderness characteristic of Yangju Opera. The robust strand at the center of the present study is known as Da Kaikou.

Da Kaikou is the conventional name for the vocal style of Xianghuo Opera. According to Zhu Hengfu's Research on Chinese Opera Genres, Xianghuo singing traditionally took the form of unaccompanied song without instrumental ensembles. Its vocal materials included recitative, ballad-like and song-dance forms, as well as quasi-narrative tunes such as Qizi Diao and Shizi Diao. Rooted in the Nuo ritual traditions of rural northern Jiangsu, Xianghuo Opera is characterized by high, unrestrained, rugged, and unadorned singing. Its traditional accompaniment consists of gongs and drums rather than string and wind instruments. In this respect, Da Kaikou contrasts with Xiao Kaikou ("small opening"), the more delicate and sinuous style associated with Yangzhou qingqu and Huagu Opera. The distinction between "large" and "small" thus refers not only to vocal range and vocal force but also to accompaniment: ringing percussion as opposed to refined silk-and-bamboo instruments. It also reflects the different cultural lineages of Nuo ritual and urban qingqu. The concept of Da Kaikou is therefore central to understanding the vocal system of Yangju Opera.

2. Historical Origins: Incense Ritual Gatherings and the Da Kaikou Vocal Style

To understand Da Kaikou, it is necessary first to return to the origins of Xianghuo Opera. The Dictionary of Chinese Opera and Quyi describes Xianghuo Opera as having originated in folk incense-gathering activities intended for ceremonial entertainment. Such gatherings were Nuo ritual practices conducted by spirit-medium practitioners, known as tongzi, to expel

evil and disease and to pray for peace and good fortune [1]. Li Dou's Yangzhou Huafang Lu (Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou) also notes that "Nuo, when practiced in ordinary times, is called xianghuo." In describing Nuo performance in the Luhe and Yangzhou areas, Li records local customs in which people gathered on the nineteenth day of the second, sixth, and ninth lunar months to celebrate Guanyin's birthday, with festivities flourishing in the surrounding countryside. He further notes that local troupes performed ritual-related repertory outside the city and that these groups were known as huoban. On this basis, many researchers have identified Xianghuo Opera as the Nuo opera tradition of the Yangzhou region.

Xianghuo Opera thus grew out of ancient Nuo rites and began as entertainment for ceremonial purposes embedded in popular ritual. Both its name and its early form developed from this setting. A general incense burner has two parts. First, there was the ceremony itself, and more than twenty rituals were held to drive away evil spirits and wish for good luck. The second consisted of recreational performances inserted into the ceremony, commonly called "spirit dancing." These performances were not operas in the modern sense and most belonged to folk divination and mediumistic culture. Yet the principal item, Tiao Niangniang ("The Dance of the Goddess"), incorporated music, dance, and spoken lines and therefore contained basic dramatic elements. It is regarded as a prototype of Xianghuo Opera. In these performances, revered figures such as Niangniang were thoroughly localized, ruralized, and secularized, becoming rough-edged and comic figures. This strong everyday quality, together with an unpolished and vigorous performance manner, became the expressive foundation of Da Kaikou.

During the Taiping Rebellion, government authorities intensified their suppression of spirit-medium and shamanic practices, prompting many practitioners to abandon ritual work and become professional performers. After the 1911 Revolution, anti-mediumship policies spread through both cities and rural areas, and many people who had made their living from incense gatherings "left the ritual vocation for the performing arts." Some early ritual procedures already contained embryonic theatrical elements. By the Hongshan Opera stage, a saying had emerged that among the four role types—sheng, dan, jing, and chou — the clown (chou) was the foremost. Hongshan Opera later absorbed performance conventions from Hui Opera and Peking Opera, enriching its theatrical craft while retaining a rough-hewn, plainspoken, humorous, vividly everyday, and strongly local character. In 1905, the seventeen-year-old Hao Yuzhou led the formation of Hongshan Opera's first troupe, known as the "Little Haozi Troupe"; shortly afterward, following an engagement in Shanghai, it was renamed the Hao Yuzhou Troupe. In the early 1920s, the troupe joined a Yangzhou Huagu Opera troupe in Shanghai for joint performances. Hongshan's high, vigorous vocal style came to be called Da Kaikou, while Huagu's more graceful tunes were called Xiao Kaikou. The merger of the "large" and "small" openings—each complementing and influencing the other—gave rise to Weiyang Opera, now known as Yangju Opera.

Xianghuo Opera had by then completed its transition from folk ritual to an independent theatrical form. The evolution of an opera genre is inseparable from its historical circumstances, the needs of contemporary society, and changing public policy. Xianghuo Opera subsequently adopted additional acting techniques and role conventions from Hui Opera, Huagu Opera, and Peking Opera. Long ritual narratives known as shenshu were brought to the stage, and performance scripts gradually developed from sung texts. The vocal style that emerged from Xianghuo Opera and was accompanied by gongs and drums came to be called Da Kaikou by performers and audiences alike. Xianghuo singing was known for its high, bold, yet plain and expressive quality [2]. Yangzhou Xianghuo Opera used gongs and drums without bowed-string accompaniment and had become well developed by the late Qing period, with repertory including Taohua Nü, Shuang Ding Ji, Sai Pipa, Han Xiangzi, Pi Shan Jiu Mu, and Meng Lijun. References from the period also mention "six Tang books" and "ten divine books" [3]. The term kaikou literally refers to opening the mouth to sing; the voice is loud, bright, and direct, hence the qualifier da ("large"), which distinguishes it from the more subtle Xiao Kaikou in timbre, vocal force, and instrumental setup.

Da Kaikou is not a single tune but a family of vocal forms. In 1926, a troupe led by Xianghuo

artists from Luhe, including Xu Xilin, performed in a Nanjing market, bringing Yangzhou Xianghuo Opera to the Nanjing stage and marking a new phase in its development beyond the earlier combination of ritual and performance. Wei Ren notes in Weiyang Yizhi Hua: The Art of Yangju Opera in Yangzhou that in 1931, the twentieth year of the Republic of China, Yangzhou Xianghuo Opera was formally renamed "Weiyang Daban" by practitioners, while the public continued to call it Da Kaikou. The Jiangsu Yangju Opera Troupe began using string-and-wind instruments in its production of Ganshan Saihai in 1954. Common vocal forms included Qizi Ju, Shizi Ju, Bao Diao, Feng Diao, Sajing Diao, and Pos hui Diao, among more than twenty types. Qizi Ju and Shizi Ju each developed variant styles according to dramatic content, regional performance practice, and performer lineages.

3. Musical Characteristics of Da Kaikou

The two types of musical features of Da Kaikou are introduced here. First, the materials and methods are introduced; next, pitch collections and modes, the nuclear tune [4], phrase patterns, melodic units and the placement of syllables are examined to establish the pentatonic scale and zhi mode as the tonal foundation of Da Kaikou. Then, based on the rhythmic derivation from the moderate-tempo Qizi Ju to the fast Kuai Qizi, it accelerates the ban (metrical beat) and reduces the spacing of syllables, and also adjusts the rhythmic pattern of gongs and drums supporting the vocal line.

The musical examples examined here are four Da Kaikou excerpts sung by Zhang Yue'e and transcribed by Wu Junda: Example 1, "Pines on the Mountain, Flowers Below" (Qizi Ju, moderate tempo, 1 = D, 2/4); Example 2, "Fast Qizi" (Qizi Ju, fast tempo, 2/4); Example 3, "Butterfly Lovers" (Shizi Ju, 2/4); and Example 4, "Spring Winds Grow Stronger" (Yu Diao, 2/4). Together, the four examples provide a comparable sample across tune type (seven-character, ten-character, and fishing tunes), tempo pattern (moderate and fast), and accompaniment style, forming an empirical basis for identifying the defining traits of Da Kaikou.

The four examples use the five pitch syllables Do, Re, Mi, Sol, and La, corresponding to the Chinese scale degrees gong, shang, jue, zhi, and yu; Fa and Si (qingjiao and biangong) do not appear. This is a pentatonic modal system. The pentatonic scale occupies a dominant position in Han Chinese folk music, and its tuning basis is traditionally described through the "three-part loss-and-gain method" or the Pythagorean tuning system. The five degrees of the staff are Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi and Yu—represent five relative pitches [5]. Sol-La-Do-Re (5-6-1-2) is a four-note melodic system, and the mode can be identified by observing phrase endings and cadential tones. In Example 1, the four phrases end successively on La–Sol–La–Sol (6–5–6–5), and the piece closes on Sol with "2 1 6 5 | 5 — ." Therefore, the final pitch is D, and according to the score, it can be considered an A in the zhi mode of the D gong tonal system. One general division of the Chinese pentatonic modes into tonal-colour groups is the zhi-type and yu-type [6]. Gong and Zhi modes are members of the family of Zhi-color and are generally considered to be bright, magnificent and extensive, and are sometimes called the main mode. Zhi mode, in particular, has a bright, open and uplifting character [7], which is often found in mountain songs and work chants and is widely used in the folk music of the Jianghuai and Huaiyang regions. Da Kaikou employs a half-cadence for yu and a full-cadence for zhi to achieve the effect of high spirits and stability. The descent of "yu" is opposed by the stability of "zhi", and thus, the tune is neither high nor low but has a sense of anticipation and resolution. A typical descending cadence in "Pines on the Mountain, Flowers Below" is Re-Do-La (2-1-6), which is sometimes extended to Re-Do-La-Sol (2-1-6-5). It is not the end of that time. It recurs at the ends of melodic units in Shizi Ju and remains present in the fast version; it can therefore be regarded as the piece's nuclear tune. Comparison of the cadential gestures in the four examples shows two levels of core melodic formulas in Da Kaikou. The first nuclear tuning is Re-Do-La, or Re-Do-La-Sol; it is a descending chord progression of Re and Do to La and finally to Sol. It appears at the end of a phrase and is also in a reversed-ascending form within a phrase; this is a basic rule of melodic movement. The nuclear tune in Qizi Ju and Shizi Ju is the same. All four phrases in Example 1 close with "2 1 6" or "2 1 6 5," and Example 3 similarly uses "2 1 6 5 | 5." The secondary nuclear tune is the descending Mi–Re–Do pattern (3–2–1), as in "5 5 | 3 2 1 1"

and “5 3 | 3 2 1,” which contracts the melodic phrase toward its close. Qizi Ju uses syllabic groupings of 2/2/3 or 3/2/2, and Shizi Ju uses 3/3/4 or 3/4/3, and these groupings correspond to the divisions of the musical phrase. The connection between tune and text is the subject of vocal-style research [8]. This refers to how the tune relates to the words in a song and how the stress of words is changed by music [9]. Before the performance can be fully realised, one needs to consider how the tune will present the words and how the tonal changes in the language will be used in music. Yu Huiyong's system of research on tune-text relationships shows that when tune and text are in harmony, clear diction and graceful singing can be achieved; otherwise, there will be a lack of clarity in diction and stiffness in expression. Yangzhou dialect is a sub-dialect of the Hongchao group in Jianghuai Mandarin and has five single-syllable tone categories: yinping 31 (low falling), yangping 35 (high rising), shangsheng 42 (high falling), qusheng 55 (high level), and rusheng 5 (short and abrupt). The above features support the idea that Da Kaikou is organised according to a tune and the lyrics have been adapted to that tune. The main melodic formula should be used, and the placement of syllables and lexical tones need to comply with it; otherwise, melisma, ornamentation or inserted vocables can be employed to resolve the conflict. Many notes of a single syllable are used in the moderate-tempo Qizi Ju. The final characters are "hua", "ta", "da" and "hua", which are drawn out to create a lyrical effect with many notes per syllable. Shizi Ju extends the phrase and increases the scope by adding ornamental melismas within melodic units; the relationship between syllables and melodic notes moves away from conforming the melody to the text and begins to present the text through melody. Fast Qizi Ju has more syllables but fewer notes. The three are different types of organisations in the same phrase system and also provide a source of dramatic tension for Da Kaikou.

The gongs and drums in Da Kaikou are not only supports but also essential parts of the music. The three categories of percussion patterns in the four examples are as follows. First, the opening gong pattern appears in Examples 1 and 4: “kuang-kuang, ling-kuang yi-ling | kuang, 0.” Alternation of the large gong (kuang), drum and small gong (ling) forms a free-rhythm introduction to set the tempo and attract the attention of the audience. Second, dense gong patterns occur in Example 2: "cang-cang, cang-cang | cang, 0". Their even, continuous values combine with the fast vocal line’s near one-note-per-syllable setting to create a “tight percussion, tight singing” aesthetic. Third, Example 3 uses more finely divided combinations, including “cang-ling,” “cang, cang-ling,” “ling-cang, yi-ling,” and “cang-ge, qi-dong | cang, 0.” The interlocking large gong, cymbals, and drums produce comparatively intricate rhythmic figures. These patterns show that, as Da Kaikou absorbed the martial percussion vocabulary of Peking Opera during its theatrical development, its percussion language became more nuanced. They also offer a rhythmic foundation for the performance system of the ban or metrical beat.

4. Score-Based Analysis: Zhang Yue'e and the Da Kaikou Tune Types

Among contemporary practitioners of Da Kaikou, the celebrated Yangju dan performer Zhang Yue’e (1909–1956) is particularly representative. Zhang was originally named Zhang Wenlong and used the courtesy name Haiqing. Born in Gongdaoqiao, Hanjiang, Jiangsu, Zhang was a male performer specializing in dan roles. He was exposed to Xianghuo Opera from childhood and later studied with Xu Yunshan, specializing in huadan (young female roles). At the age of twelve, he went to Shanghai and joined a Xianghuo troupe—then known as Weiyang Daban, or Da Kaikou—to learn dan-role singing. He soon became the leading dan performer in Xianghuo Opera and later ranked first among the “Four Great Dan Performers” of Weiyang Opera, earning the epithet “the Mei Lanfang of northern Jiangsu”. According to Liu Yifei’s recollection, Zhang not only inherited Hu Yuhai’s singing style but also altered and developed it further, producing a vocal delivery that was free-flowing and brisk. He often performed in B-flat, a demanding range for many male performers. The surviving notated examples of Da Kaikou—including Qizi Ju, Kuai Qizi, Shizi Ju, and Yu Diao—are valuable primary evidence for studying the style’s musical form.

4.1 Example1: “Pines on the Mountain, Flowers Below”

Figure 1 presents Zhang Yue'e's performance of "Pines on the Mountain, Flowers Below," a Qizi Ju example in Da Kaikou notated by Wu Junda. It is in 1 = D, 2/4 time, and played at a moderate speed. A system of four-line sections is used, and the gong pattern repeats in all these sections. The structure is sixteen measures of singing followed by four percussion interludes, and this "voice-gong" design is repeated.

Melodically, the opening phrase begins with "3 2 1 6 | 5 6 | 3 2 1 2 | 2 1 6." The first drop is "3-2-1-6", and then, from the high notes of E and D, it goes down to C and finally to A. The second line, "3 2 2 1 | 1 1 2 | 2 1 6 5 | 5 —," continues the first phrase in a more settled manner and ends on Sol. In the third line, "3 2 2 | 5 6 | 2 1 2 | 2 1 6," the movement through "5 6" creates a moment of forward drive before the line again settles on La. The final line, "3 2 2 1 | 1 1 2 | 2 1 6 5 | 5 —," closes in the same way as the second and returns to Sol. The four phrase endings alternate as 6-5-6-5, and the last note is on the 5 (zhi). Their fixed descending cadences of "2-1-6" and "2-1-6-5" are simple and powerful, and they can express the resilience of the pine tree in winter economically.



Figure 1. Qizi Ju: "Pines on the Mountain, Flowers Below"

Sung by Zhang Yue'e; transcribed by Wu Junda; 1 = D, 2/4, moderate tempo.

4.2 Example2: "Fast Qizi"

Figure 2 is a typical fast-tempo work by Qizi Ju in Da Kaikou, written in 2/4 time, called "Fast Qizi". According to the Army's order, the soldiers have to move immediately. Those skilled in the saber take up the saber, and those skilled in the spear take up the spear; as shown in Example 1, the music is relatively short, and each section has been reduced from four measures to two, with almost all syllables receiving notes. Short syllables and a sense of urgency in the music are suitable for storytelling. The first line begins with the brisk figure "5 5 3 5 | 2 1 1"; the following phrases proceed through "5 2 5 5 | 3 1 1 1," "5 5 3 2 | 3 2 1 2," and "5 2 5 5 | 3 2 1 1." The first two kinds of tunes are repeated notes and steps and thirds. There is no melisma at phrase endings. Dense Gong patterns are employed to divide the lines.

The four phrases end in 1-1-2-1 and are based on the gong and shang scales. The main nuclear tune 2-1-6-5 is not fully implemented; instead, a short descent of 3-2-1 is used. The Cadence is now a Zhi (5) and a Gong (1). At the same time, there are also modifications to the position of syllables, phrases and rhythm. As shown in Examples 1 and 2, Da Kaikou Qizi Ju already has a relatively well-developed system of metrical and melodic variations. To express different emotions in drama, one can increase the density of syllables and reduce the melody for a sense of urgency, or expand the structure and slow down the tempo for a more lyrical effect.

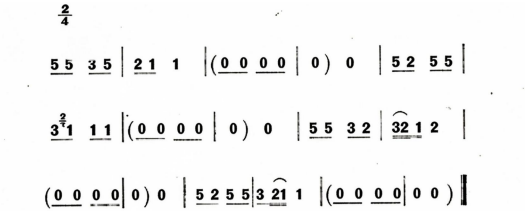


Figure 2. Qizi Ju: "Fast Qizi"

Sung by Zhang Yue, transcribed by Wu Junda; fast tempo, 2/4.

4.3 Example3: "Butterfly Lovers"

Figure 3 shows Zhang Yue's performance of "Butterfly Lovers", a Shizi Ju work notated by Wu Junda in 2/4 time. At the first watch, Zhu Yingtai is fully dressed for the ceremony. She is in a bad mood in the middle of the night and cries alone in her room. Shizi Ju is longer than Qizi Ju, has a larger range, and is a more developed vocal line than the plain. Its melody includes curved figures such as "3 6 5 3" and "2 3 2 6 5," as well as the ornamented connected notes in "32 1232." Combined with the descending cadences "2 1 6" and "2 1 6 5 | 5," these ornaments and falling figures evoke Zhu Yingtai's deep longing and melancholy as she lies in bed fully clothed.

The percussion in this Shizi Ju excerpt is notably more varied and intricate than in Qizi Ju. Although it remains part of the Da Kaikou family, Shizi Ju has selectively absorbed the accompaniment vocabulary of theatrical martial percussion, refining the formerly rough-hewn style. This points to an ongoing process of musical elaboration as Xianghuo vocal

performance developed into theatrical opera.

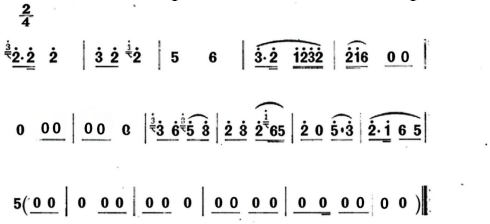


Figure 3. Shizi Ju: "Butterfly Lovers"

Source: Sung by Zhang Yue'e; transcribed by Wu Junda; 2/4.

4.4 Example4: "Spring Winds Grow Stronger"

Figure 4 presents "Spring Winds Grow Stronger," a Yu Diao ("fishing tune") example of Da Kaikou sung by Zhang Yue'e and transcribed by Wu Junda, in 2/4 time. The lyrics portray the life of fishers: "The spring breeze grows stronger and stronger (yo); hey there (ya-hai); the green waters of the rivers and lakes roll on (yo), wave after wave. The fisherman is delighted at the sight (yo); hey there (ya-hai); the boat makes another trip out into the river. The large fish are taken to market in the main street (yo); hey there (ya-hai); the small fish are kept aboard the boat (yo) and cooked." The vocables and imagery evoke the distinctive atmosphere of the region's riverine communities.

The Yu Diao melody is characterized by a wave-like, three-part contour, as in "6 6 1 5 | 0 6 5 3 | 6 1 5 3 | 2 1 1 | 2 —." This is followed by a descending, looping figure, "6 1 6 5 3 | 0 5 1 3 2 1 | 1 —," which recalls a boat moving across a river and water rippling in waves. Phrase lengths alternate between long and short. The final phrase closes with "0 3 5 | 5 5 3 | 3 2 1" and ends on gong, unlike Qizi Ju and Shizi Ju, which conclude on zhi (5). Its core melodic cells are descending three-note and four-note patterns, especially La–Sol–Mi (6–5–3) and La–Do–Sol–Mi (6–1–5–3).

The use of vocables is particularly prominent. Interjections such as "yo" and "ya-hai" appear within and at the ends of phrases. They fill out the musical line and relax the rhythm while also suggesting fishermen's work chants and the motion of rowing. These vocables give the otherwise unadorned Da Kaikou style a gently swaying lyrical quality. By using vocables to expand the expressive space available when there are relatively few lexical syllables and many notes, Yu Diao becomes one of the Da Kaikou forms closest to folk song. It also demonstrates that Da Kaikou is not uniformly coarse or forceful.

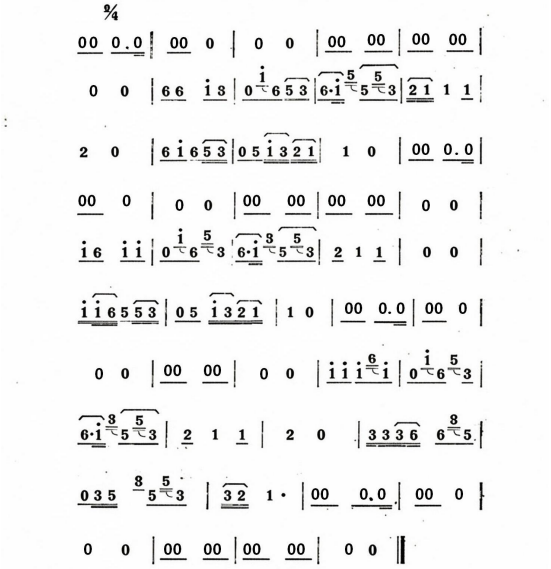


Figure 4. Yu Diao: "Spring Winds Grow Stronger"

Source: Sung by Zhang Yue'e; transcribed by Wu Junda; 2/4.

The handling of a genre's vocal style is closely related to the shaping of individual musical tones. Changes of intensity within a vocal gesture follow a principle comparable to brushwork in calligraphy and traditional Chinese painting: a single melodic inflection can be thought of as one brushstroke. A stroke may begin with a pause and then lift, lift and then pause, pause at both ends while lifting in the middle, or lift at both ends while pressing in the middle; it may be forceful or gentle, smooth or rough, full or delicate [10]. Because Chinese syllables retain a degree of independence, allow considerable flexibility in the relative weight of pitch levels, and possess contoured lexical tones as well as initial, medial, and final components, singing and Chinese poetic recitation can extend a syllable, moderately separate its initial, medial, and final portions, or shape its tonal contour through changes in vocal intensity. These techniques draw out latent meanings and emotional nuances that are not fully expressed by the word alone; the duration of a syllable may also be extended as needed. Such characteristics are directly manifested in vocal inflection [11]. Local dialects and vernacular speech, folk customs and mores, and folk belief practices together constituted the regional soil in which Xianghuo opera took root and flourished; in turn, this regional culture has

been preserved and perpetuated through the opera itself, exemplifying the transmission and continued evolution of culture [12]. This entails continuously refining legislative design, improving the supporting institutional framework, addressing emerging scenarios, and strengthening implementation safeguards — so as to advance the rule-of-law system for opera protection toward greater practical efficacy, and to harness legal governance in facilitating the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional opera [13].

5. Conclusion

This study finds that the rugged strength and vigor of Da Kaikou, the Xianghuo-derived vocal style within Yangju Opera, give it an advantage over Xiao Kaikou in expressing grand themes and heroic characters. As some scholars have observed in the twentieth century, Da Kaikou has considerable potential for expressing the wide range of life and emotion, and its application in Yangju Opera has been increasing in recent years.

As shown in the above examples, under Zhang Yue's leadership, Da Kaikou has moved away from a style that was powerful but lacked grace and achieved a more harmonious combination of strength and tenderness with emotional depth in the melody. Zhang also developed this method and increased the expressive power of the old vocal tradition in drama. He has a strong foundation in technology and has been exposed to many different schools. According to the ideas of the Kunqu master Wei Liangfu for clear diction, a pure melodic line and precise meter, Zhang used breath support from the dantian and a resonant voice, combined modal and falsetto registers, and his wide range and distinctive high notes were particularly outstanding. Bao Youwei, the head huqin accompanist of Xu Zhi, developed a method called "introduce, yield, sustain and send forward" to create an ideal of accompaniment for the mountain in Yangju, flowing like water; to position the principal performer as clouds around the moon; and importantly, never to overshadow the singer. He/She was able to use all of his/her power to express emotion. Zhang was one of the first to promote the professionalisation and standardisation of Da Kaikou, and a typical figure in the development of a strong-yet-tender style.

Zhang's work of innovation also shows how contemporary practitioners of Yangju Opera can learn from the Da Kaikou dialect. Rooted in the daily life of rural areas, this type of music was long called "rustic" or "vulgar". Although it is popular with the common people, it has sometimes been used less frequently due to this perception. Looking ahead, we need to base our work on the actual situation of local opera and the requirements of modern development. The problem now is not to choose between simplicity and popularity. Performers and companies should maintain the original charm of Da Kaikou and, with minor modifications to melody and orchestration, appeal to modern audiences. Only in this way will this old vocal style of the Nuo ritual be preserved and developed in the future.

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