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**Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* – analysis and interpretation of the
modern Chinese opera**

Study program: Music performance (Vocal performance)

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: lecturer dr. Giedrė Muralytė-Eriksonė

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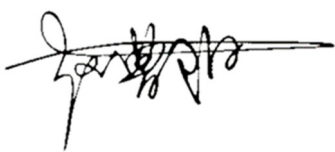
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Title: **Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* – analysis and interpretation of the modern Chinese opera**

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Summary:

Chinese opera has a rich history dating back to the Tang Dynasty. From primitive songs and dances Chinese opera has evolved into a comprehensive art form with a fusion of folk songs, dances, drama and comedic plays. It combines music, dance, acrobatics, and martial arts to convey stories from Chinese literature and folklore, encompassing over three hundred and sixty different genres. Chinese opera showcases individual art forms while highlighting their shared qualities.

Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*, introduced in 2018, marked a significant milestone in bringing Chinese opera to a wider audience in Europe. The opera explores themes of social inequality and personal struggle in 20th-century China. *Rickshaw Boy* highlights various artistic elements of Chinese opera, including singing, acting, elaborate costumes, makeup and intricate stage design. The integration of traditional Chinese music with Western symphonic arrangements adds a distinctive flavor to the opera and enhances its accessibility to a broader audience. Integration of modern technology, such as multimedia projections and innovative lighting effects, enhances the visual and auditory experience, making it more engaging and captivating.

This research reveals a modern Chinese opera from the singer's perspective. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the arias of Xiangzi and Huniu, exploring the possible difficulties in singing, also the relationship between their artistic charm and characters.

The methods were used: historical, comparative, analytical, formal.

Keywords: Wenjing Guo, Chinese Opera, *Rickshaw Boy*, analysis, interpretation.

Antros pakopos **Muzikos atlikimo studijų** programos magistro baigiamojo darbo anotacija
Pavadinimas: Wenjing Guo opera *Rickshaw Boy* („Berniukas rikša“) – modernios kinų operos analizė ir interpretacija

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Darbo kalba: anglų

Santrauka:

Kinų opera turi turtingą, Tangų dinastiją siekiančią, istoriją. Iš primityvių dainų ir šokių kinų opera virto visapusiška meno forma - liaudies dainų, šokių, dramos ir komiškų pjesių sinteze. Kad perteiktų istorijas iš kinų literatūros ir folkloro, apimančio daugiau nei tris šimtus šešiasdešimt skirtingų žanrų, ji sujungia muziką, šokį, akrobatiką ir kovos menus. Kinų opera demonstruoja atskiras meno formas, išryškindamas bendrąsias jų savybes.

Wenjing Guo opera *Rickshaw Boy* („Berniukas rikša“), pristatyta 2018 m., buvo reikšmingas įvykis pristatant kinų operą platesnei Europos auditorijai. Operoje nagrinėjamos socialinės nelygybės ir asmeninės kovos XX amžiaus Kinijoje temos. *Rickshaw Boy* („Berniukas rikša“), pabrėžia įvairius meninius kinų operos elementus, įskaitant dainavimą, vaidybą, įmantrius kostiumus, makiažą ir sudėtingą scenos dizainą. Tradicinės kinų muzikos integravimas su Vakarų simfoninėmis aranžuotėmis suteikia operai savitų spalvų ir padidina jos prieinamumą platesnei auditorijai. Šiuolaikinių technologijų, tokių kaip daugialypės terpės projekcijos ir naujoviški apšvietimo efektai, integravimas pagerina vaizdinį ir klausos potyrį.

Šio tyrimo tikslas - atskleisti šiuolaikinę kinų operą iš dainininkų perspektyvos. Šiame darbe pateikiama nuodugni Xiangzi ir Huniu arijų analizė, nagrinėjami galimi dainavimo sunkumai, taip pat jų meninio žavesio ir personažų santykis. Darbe buvo naudojami šie analizės metodai: lyginamasis, formalusis, istorinis ir analitinis.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Wenjing Guo, kinų opera, analizė, interpretacija.

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INTRODUCTION

Opera is an art form with a long history, originating in Italy at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, boasting a legacy of over 400 years. As a highly comprehensive art form, its unique feature mainly lies in the combination of drama and music. “Opera primarily conveys people's conflicts, emotions, and thoughts through actions and events. In this process, music assumes the main expressive function, which is also a significant factor that sets it apart from dance drama, drama and other forms of theatrical performance” (Mo, 2018).

Opera is a form of staged drama set to music, which includes vocal pieces accompanied by orchestra. Operas may have continuous music throughout an act or be divided into separate pieces with recitative or spoken dialogue.

Chinese opera has a rich history dating back to the Tang Dynasty. From primitive songs and dances Chinese opera has evolved into a comprehensive art form. Chinese opera is a fusion of folk songs, dances, drama and comedic plays. It combines music, dance, acrobatics, and martial arts to convey stories from Chinese literature and folklore, encompassing over three hundred and sixty different genres. Chinese opera showcases individual art forms while highlighting their shared qualities.

Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*, introduced in 2018, marked a significant milestone in bringing Chinese opera to a wider audience in Europe. The opera explores themes of social inequality and personal struggle in 20th-century China. Chinese opera has a rich cultural heritage and is a distinctive art form that has captivated audiences worldwide for centuries. Chinese opera has gained increasing popularity and recognition in Europe in recent years. The paper aims to analyze the impact of *Rickshaw Boy* on the future trends of Chinese opera in Europe. It examines the potential direction and challenges faced by Chinese opera in Europe, with a focus on the classic singing sections of the male and female protagonists. Additionally, it explores the future trends of cross-cultural dissemination of this opera.

Rickshaw Boy highlights various artistic elements of Chinese opera, including singing, acting, elaborate costumes, makeup and intricate stage design. The integration of traditional Chinese music with Western symphonic arrangements adds a distinctive flavor to the opera and enhances its accessibility to a broader audience. Integration of modern technology, such as multimedia projections and innovative lighting effects, enhances the visual and auditory experience, making it more engaging and captivating.

As a singer, one must have a deep understanding about Chinese opera culture and traditions. The musician has to study a background of the opera's history to understand and interpretate the characters not only by singing in a good technique, but also have a deeper knowledge. That is one of the main aspects to present the first chapter of the thesis to the wider audience. I believe it can help young singers to increase interest in Chinese opera.

Rickshaw Boy has been well-received in Europe, receiving critical acclaim for its performances and *libretto*. The opera has been praised for bridging cultural divides and providing audiences with a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. The success of *Rickshaw Boy* has led to potential future collaborations between Chinese and European opera companies. It has also opened doors for more Chinese opera productions to be staged in Europe.

Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* has increased interest of Chinese opera in Europe. This has led to an increasing demand for more Chinese opera productions and collaborations. Current trends include a greater emphasis on cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations. European directors, composers, and performers are incorporating elements of Chinese opera into their works. This fusion of artistic styles and traditions is expected to diversify the repertoire of Chinese opera in Europe.

However, challenges persist on the path to the future of Chinese opera in Europe. Language and cultural barriers may pose difficulties for non-Chinese audiences in fully grasping the subtleties and nuances of Chinese opera. Efforts must be made to provide translations, subtitles, and educational programs to enhance audience understanding and appreciation. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the arias of Xiangzi and Huniu, exploring the possible difficulties in singing, also the relationship between their artistic charm and characters. The poetry translations are made by the author.

The research object is a modern Chinese opera from the singer's perspective -researching the musical features and artistic style of Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the arias of Xiangzi and Huniu, exploring the possible difficulties in singing, also the relationship between their artistic charm and characters. The poetry translations are made by the author.

The aim of the research: Through the in-depth analysis of the arias of Xiangzi and Huniu in the original opera, this paper will explore the musical characteristics and artistic style of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*. It also investigates the value and various artistic developmen

t opportunities of Wenjing Guo's original opera *Rickshaw Boy* within the context of European opera influences.

Research objectives:

1. To describe and analyze the difference between traditional and modern Chinese opera.
2. To analyze the background of Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*.
3. To illustrate the main characters in the Chinese opera *Rickshaw Boy*.
4. Analyze Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act and Xiangzi and Huniu's duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy* in the aspects of artistic style, musical characteristics and difficulties for the singers.

Research methods:

1. Stylistic and historical analysis of the opera;
2. Analysis of methodological and scientific literature;
3. Analysis of the aspects of traditional methods (form, harmony, tonal plan, etc.);
4. Psychological analysis of the main characters;
5. Comparative and interpretation analysis of Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act and Xiangzi and Huniu's duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*.

The novelty of the topic was predetermined not only by the analysis of certain aspects of Chinese modern opera *Rickshaw Boy*. But also, the interpretation of the Xiangzi role. It examines the potential direction and challenges faced by Chinese opera in Europe, with a focus on the classic singing sections of the male and female protagonists. Additionally, it explores the future trends of cross-cultural dissemination of this opera.

Literature and source: In June 2014, *Rickshaw Boy* had its world premiere as the fifth original opera produced by the National Grand Theater. As the opera was established only four years ago, there is limited research on it both domestically and internationally. As of May 2018, there were only 39 articles related to the opera *Rickshaw Boy* on China Zhiwang.com. Among them, 5 were master's and doctoral papers, while the rest were published in newspapers (13) and periodicals (21). Master's thesis titled "Chinese Opera Cross cultural Communication Path Analysis and Research" was written by Zeng Shuai from the China Conservatory of

Music in 2017. Wu Jisi published "Tragedy of the Times from the Perspective of the People, the Taste of Beijing under the International Benchmarking: Guo Wenjing's Opera Creation Analysis" in the 12th issue of Music Creation in 2014. The article analyzes the creative techniques of music through several remarkable passages. Unfortunately, these sources do not cover all the aspects of analysis. These master theses were based also on musical dictionaries and books like Fabian D. A Musicology of Performance (2015) and websites.

The structure of the work comprises the introduction, findings, two chapters, bibliography and annexes, illustrations, tables and musical examples.

The first chapter **The history of Chinese opera** is based on the analysis of historical background and the difference between traditional and modern Chinese opera.

The second chapter **Wenjing Guo's opera's *Rickshaw Boy*** is based on Wenjing Guo's composition style in opera *Rickshaw Boy*. In four semi-chapters the analysis is made on the different aspects: stylistic and peculiarities of composing methods, the characteristics of the main characters, analysis of Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act and Xiangzi and Huniu's duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*. This aria and duet were chosen as the most important in the entire opera and the most difficult for the singer. The annex includes the scores of the analyzed aria and duet.

1. THE HISTORY OF CHINESE OPERA

1.1. The historical background of Chinese opera

Traditional opera is a unique form of artistic expression that has been cherished and passed down for centuries. Composing traditional opera requires a profound comprehension of its cultural significance and a mastery of the intricate techniques involved.

Chinese opera is one of the world's three ancient theater cultures, along with Greek tragedies and comedies, and Indian Sanskrit drama. It encompasses three different art forms: folk song and dance, rap, and burlesque opera. Chinese opera seamlessly integrates music, dance, visual art, literature, acrobatics, and martial arts. There are over 360 types of opera in various ethnic regions in China, offering a wealth of traditional operas to explore. The well-known opera genres include Beijing (Peking) Opera, Yue Opera, Huangmei Opera¹, Kunqu Opera², Cantonese Opera, and many more.

"Chinese opera" encompasses two active branches in music and theater: xiqu (Chinese traditional drama) and a branch influenced by European opera traditions. Xiqu developed independently without significant European influences, representing an original art form with distinctive aesthetics and expressive systems. Beijing (Peking) opera is one of the most well-known genres within the xiqu branch, originating in the 18th century and later labeled as "opera" by Europeans. "The birth of a new field of knowledge related to national drama was marked by the collection of theatrical materials and texts. Qi Rushan³ was celebrated as an expert in the scholarly study of national drama. The Exhibition Hall of National Drama and a research library were established by Qi and his fellow researchers. The Exhibition Hall focused on collecting artifacts and written objects related to Chinese theater, while the res

¹ **Huangmei Opera** or **Huangmei tone** (黄梅戲 or 黄梅調, *pinyin*: *Huángméixì* or *Huángméidiào*) is a form of [Chinese opera](#) originating from [Anhui province](#) as a form of [rural](#) folk song and dance. It's also called Anhui Opera.^[1] It has been in existence for the last 200 years and possibly longer. Huangmei opera is one of the most famous and mainstream opera in China (others are [Beijing opera](#), [Yue opera](#), [Ping opera](#) and [Yu opera](#)), and is a class of the typical Anhui opera. Based on the information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huangmei_opera.

² **Kunqu**, form of [Chinese drama](#) that developed in the 16th century.

The term *kunshan qiang* ("Kunshan tune") originally referred to a style of [music](#) that emerged in the late [Yuan dynasty](#) (early 14th century). It was created by Gu Jian, a musician of Kunshan (near Suzhou), who combined the music of the region with an improvement on the music of *nanyin* ("southern drama"). Based on the information: Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "kunqu". Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 May. 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/art/kunqu>. Accessed 12 November 2023.

³ **Qi Rushan** (born December 12, 1877, Gaoyang, Hebei province, China—died March 18, 1962, Taiwan) was a playwright and scholar who [revived](#) interest in traditional Chinese [drama](#) in 20th-century [China](#) and in the West.

Born into a prosperous and well-educated family, Qi received a classical Chinese education. He also studied traditional Chinese theatre from childhood and learned European languages as a young man. Between 1908 and 1913 he traveled to Paris several times, first on family business and later as the supervisor of a group of Chinese students. While in Paris Qi managed to take in a great deal of European drama, which spurred his desire to restore traditional Chinese theatre to its former place of importance.

Based on the information: Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Qi Rushan". Encyclopedia Britannica, 14 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Qi-Rushan>. Accessed 15 March 2024.

earch library preserved scripts from various theatrical genres and historical documents” (Wu, 2021). The collections in both institutions provided a solid material basis for scholars to conduct research in this emerging field of knowledge. Also, Music scores are carriers of musical works, and Chinese opera is a significant part of traditional Chinese folk music. Before 1949, only a few operatic scores, such as Kunqu Opera and Peking Opera, had been published. In the 1950s, the rise in music specialists prompted initiatives to record operatic works, culminating in the release of Chinese Opera and vocal music. After the 1980s, various operatic texts were discovered, including those found during the Seventh Five-Year Plan's key scientific research project. The "Chinese Opera Music Integration" series was established to compile a comprehensive collection of vocal scores from various operas. As Chen Xiaojuan said, “Creating a database allows for easy access to many resources on opera music, promoting academic research in the field. The database offers functions for searching and browsing vocal scores and images online, improving access to operatic works and facilitating academic research in opera music” (Xiaojuan, 2020: 23). The second branch of Chinese opera emerged in the first half of the 20th century, influenced by European opera traditions, and has since undergone significant development. The second branch, which is influenced by European opera traditions, is the focus of the current study. "Terms such as "modern Chinese opera", "new Chinese opera", and "Chinese national opera" are utilized in scholarly discourse" (Wang Weng, 2011).

“Overall, Jewish musicians have the most extensive and in-depth contact with Chinese society among foreign musicians. They are mainly engaged between 1910 to 1920. Chinese composers were not only influenced by their opera composition method and musical concepts, but also trained modern Chinese opera composers with their methods and aesthetic views of Nationalistic music. Opera has begun to be localized in China in various ways.” (Rong & Jamalludin 2023: 8).

Traditional opera is distinct from other forms of music due to its deep connection to cultural heritage and historical or mythological themes. Composers of traditional opera need to have a comprehensive understanding of the traditions, values, and customs of the culture they are representing. A deep connection to cultural context is essential for accurately portraying the emotions and messages conveyed through music. As Shi Haijing said:

"Between Chinese opera and European opera stage art there are many similarities in both, and there is the difference between "qualities". The former represents is an important form

of Chinese opera, which represents is an important form of western drama, because of unfamiliar cultural background, there are big differences between the two art forms is a cultural history" (Shi 2017: 280).

Performing arts involve artists using their bodies or voices to convey artistic expression. The performing arts encompass three aspects: people, performance, and venue. Types of performances include opera, theatrical plays, music, and dance, while acts of performance involve physical, vocal, or instrumental expression by the performers. Performances take place in specific venues, typically theaters, that are divided into viewing and performing areas. The stage serves as the location for artists to carry out their performances and is the focal point of audience attention. Ning Yu, Dingding Jia argued that:

"In Chinese culture, the key elements of the performing arts are the performer, opera, and stage. These are the main focal points in their respective aspects. In all cultures with performing arts, the performer and stage are the most important elements. Performers, especially the lead performers, are the center of attention, and the stage is the focus in theatrical settings. It is important to note that Chinese culture uniquely selects opera (戏剧xìjù or戏曲xìqǔ) as the prototype for all types of performing arts"(Ning, Ding 2017: 150-151).

Chinese opera has a long history, dating back to the Three Kingdoms Period and becoming more formalized during the Tang Dynasty. The first known opera troupe in China, called the "Pear Garden"⁴ was founded during the Tang Dynasty. Chinese opera evolved from song and dance in the earliest primitive society and went through various stages of development, reaching its peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Western opera can be traced back to ancient Greek tragedy and evolved during the medieval and Renaissance periods before emerging as a distinct art form in the 16th century. Both Chinese and Western opera are comprehensive art forms that combine singing, acting, music, and dance, but they emphasize different elements and structures. Traditional Chinese opera is a significant component of national music and utilizes traditional singing techniques to foster the development and progression of vocal music. Opera music plays a crucial role in Chinese national music, and its significance, preservation, and growth are emphasized in the era of globalization. Shanghai Peking Opera highlights innovation in performance content, props, scenery, and

⁴The information is based on "Canadian Museum of History": <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cantoneseopera/hist-e.shtml>.

techniques, reflecting the transformation of Chinese aesthetics from classical to modern (as shown in figure 1).



Figure 1. The images of traditional Chinese Opera.

According to Noël Goodwin: “The classical Peking opera (*ching-hsi*⁵) in China is a form of musical theatre in which music is one among several elements rather than a governing factor, as in Western opera” (Goodwin, 2023). Also, Peking Opera is a traditional form of Chinese musical theater that showcases alternating vocal styles, including recitative and song. Male singers use high falsetto tones, and there are variations such as the all-female *yüeh ch’ü*⁶ and the Manchurian p’ing Hsi⁷. Since 1964, classical Peking opera in China has primarily been performed during festivals, while state-sponsored schools have continued to train performers. There has been more emphasis on Western-style musicals with contemporary dialogue and less stylized music in recent times. Mittler Barbara stated that: “The Cultural Revolution was considered a cultural experience by many and was seen as “fun.” During the Cultural Revolution, cultural activities became popular and introduced new art forms to people who had

⁵ **Jingxi**, (Chinese: “opera of the capital”), [Wade-Giles romanization ching-hsi](#), English conventional **Peking opera**, also called **Beijing opera**, popular [Chinese theatrical form](#) that developed in the mid-19th century. It incorporated elements of *huidiao* from [Anhui](#), *dandiao* from [Hubei](#), and *kunqu*, the traditional opera that had predominated since the 16th century. Sung in Mandarin, the [dialect](#) of [Beijing](#) and of the traditional elite, the *jingxi* musical verse plays came to be performed throughout [China](#), although most provinces and many major cities also [cultivated](#) their own operatic variants using local dialect. Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “jingxi”. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1 Nov. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/jingxi>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

⁶ [Wade-Giles romanization yüeh ch’ü](#), English conventional **Cantonese opera** is one of the major categories in [Chinese opera](#), originating in southern China’s [Guangdong](#) Province. It is popular in Guangdong, [Guangxi](#), [Hong Kong](#), [Macau](#) and among Chinese communities in [Southeast Asia](#). Like all versions of Chinese opera, it is a traditional Chinese art form, involving music, singing, [martial arts](#), [acrobatics](#), and acting. Based on information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantonese_opera.

⁷ **Pingju** or **Ping opera** (Chinese: 评剧; [pinyin](#): *píngjù*) is a form of [Chinese opera](#) from [northern China](#). *Not to be confused with Peking opera, which used to be called Pingju. Based on information:* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantonese_opera.

never experienced them before. Propaganda products helped urban youth learn about Peking opera, and peasants learn about ballet. The revolutionary model operas endeared people to Peking opera or helped them become accustomed to it. The Cultural Revolution exposed more people to Peking opera and offered many opportunities to learn about culture” (Barbara, 2008). Peking Opera has been utilized for political and social purposes, showcasing innovative dramatic ballets and musical plays.

Therefore, traditional opera composition involves a complex interplay between music, singing and *libretto*. Composers must carefully consider the dramatic structure and pacing of the performance. The music must blend seamlessly with the *libretto* to create a cohesive and emotionally engaging experience for the audience. Traditional opera incorporates specific musical elements, such as melodic patterns, rhythms and harmonies. Composers need a profound understanding of musical conventions and the ability to adeptly incorporate them into their compositions. Traditional opera is typically performed by a large ensemble, which includes singers, musicians, and dancers. Composers must carefully consider the capabilities and limitations of each performer. Composing traditional opera requires a deep understanding of cultural traditions, mastery of dramatic structure, and skillful integration of musical elements. The collaborative nature of traditional opera composition adds an extra layer of complexity. In the following chapters, I will mention some of the differences between traditional opera and modern Chinese opera.

1.2. The difference between traditional and modern Chinese Opera

Chinese opera has a long history dating back centuries. It is a multifaceted art form that combines music, dance, acrobatics, and elaborate costumes to convey stories and evoke emotions. Traditional Chinese opera has ancient roots, but modern Chinese opera has emerged, incorporating contemporary elements and themes. Canran Li stated that:

“Traditional Chinese opera is mainly performed by actors using a variety of cavity structures. After the May Fourth Movement⁸, Chinese musicians gradually accepted western music culture and incorporated national elements for bold innovation. The first are the children’s dance and music drama that emerged in the 1920s and

⁸ **May Fourth Movement**, [intellectual](#) revolution and sociopolitical reform movement that occurred in [China](#) in 1917–21. The movement was directed toward national independence, emancipation of the individual, and rebuilding society and [culture](#). Based on the information: Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "May Fourth Movement". Encyclopedia Britannica, 14 Feb. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/May-Fourth-Movement>. Accessed 12 November 2023.

1930s, with representative works such as “Sparrow and Child” and “Little Painter” by Li Jinhui (....). These works played a leading role in exploring and absorbing the characteristics of western opera” (Canran, 2022: 10).

The formation of traditional Chinese opera is closely related to the reform movement before and after the Cultural Revolution. As Rao, Nancy Yunhwa said: “Model operas⁹ in China began before the revolution, with the Communist Party focusing on reforming Chinese opera in the 1940s. The party emphasized the ideological and political educational role of the performing arts. In the 1950s, there was a significant effort to revolutionize Chinese opera through new scripts, musical and theatrical innovations, and denunciations of bourgeois elements. The 1964 National Festival of Chinese Contemporary Opera showcased thirty-five revolutionary operas, with troupes from Peking, Shandong, and Shanghai presenting influential works. A cultural synthesis that combined Peking opera with Western harmonic language was notable in these efforts” (Rao, Nancy Yunhwa 2017: 165).

Furthermore, model operas were created as political propaganda to glorify revolutionary heroes. “The creation of model operas was a collaborative effort involving highly regarded musicians, singers, instrumentalists, scholars, composers, scriptwriters, stage directors, and dancers. The creation process involved the use of specific formulas prescribed by officials at different levels. Model operas were not hastily or cheaply put together by lesser talents” (Rao, Nancy Yunhwa 2017: 166). On May 31, 1967, the editorial "Excellent Model of Revolutionary Literature and Art" in the People's Daily officially put forward the term "model opera". The list is as follows: *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, Peking opera. *Shajiabang* (formerly Romanized as *Shachi pang*), Peking opera. *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, Peking opera. *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*, Peking opera. *On the Docks* (also known as *The Harbor*), Peking opera. *Red Detachment of Women*, ballet. *The White Haired Girl*, ballet. *Shajiabang* the symphony. As Rao, Nancy Yunhwa stated that, “Approval of the model opera "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" led to subsequent works adopting the same orchestration style. The model operas were closely supervised and monitored to ensure they represented a refined synthesis of Chinese operatic practices, traditional vocal genres, and Western symphonic traditions. The Communist Party considered these model operas as appropriate musical theatricalizations of the political ideology” (Rao, Nancy Yunhwa 2017: 166).

⁹ In [People's Republic of China](#) (1949–), **revolutionary operas** or **model operas** (Simplified Chinese: *yangban xi*, 样板戏) were a series of shows planned and engineered during the [Cultural Revolution](#) (1966–1976) by [Jiang Qing](#), the wife of Chairman [Mao Zedong](#). They were considered revolutionary and modern in terms of thematic and musical features when compared with traditional [Chinese operas](#). Many of them were adapted to film.
Based on the information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_opera

In addition, the primary function of the traditional Peking Opera band is accompaniment. Instruments used for singing accompaniment and Qupai¹⁰ performance on specific occasions (commonly referred to as "Wenchang") mainly include: The "three major pieces" include Jinghu¹¹, Beijing Erhu¹², and Yueqin¹³. If the small three strings are added, they become the "four major pieces." Additionally, suona, sheng, and other plucked, pulled, and blown instruments are used for playing Qupai. Used to coordinate character movements, dances, appearances, and other performances, especially the intense opening fight, percussion is employed to enhance the dramatic atmosphere (referred to as the "martial field"). This typically involves the use of the "four big pieces" composition, which includes drums, a large gong¹⁴, cymbals¹⁵, and a small gong¹⁶. Among them, the drummer is responsible for mastering the

¹⁰ A *qupai* (Chinese: 曲牌; pinyin: qǔpái; also called Chinese: 牌子; pinyin: paizi) is the generic term for a fixed melody used in traditional Chinese music. The literal meaning is "named tune," "labeled melody," "titled tune," or "titled song". *Qupai* are relatively brief, most comprising between 20 and 70 measures in 2/4 meter. Many *qupai* are centuries old, but only a few of these have been handed down to the present.

Qupai are commonly used in Chinese opera, such as *kunqu* and *Beijing opera*, as well as by folk and ritual ensembles, including *Jiangnan sizhu* and *Taoist* ritual music. *Qupai* have also been used as the basis for 20th century compositions for Chinese instruments, both solo and ensemble. In these contexts, these stock melodies very often serve as a basis for melodic elaboration and variation. This variation is particularly well codified in the *taoqu* structure of *Chaoyzhou xianshi* music. Based on the information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qupai>.

¹¹ The *jinghu* (京胡; pinyin: jīnghú) is a Chinese bowed string instrument in the *huqin* family, used primarily in *Beijing opera*. It is the smallest and highest pitched instrument in the *huqin* family. The *jinghu* has a tone similar to a violin but raspier. Based on the information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jinghu_\(instrument\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jinghu_(instrument)).

¹² The *erhu* (Chinese: 二胡; pinyin: èrhú; [aɿ˥xu˥˥]) is a Chinese two-stringed bowed musical instrument, more specifically a spike fiddle, which may also be called a *Southern Fiddle*, and is sometimes known in the Western world as the *Chinese violin* or a *Chinese two-stringed fiddle*.

It is used as a solo instrument as well as in small ensembles and large orchestras. It is the most popular of the *huqin* family of traditional bowed string instruments used by various ethnic groups of China. As a very versatile instrument, the *erhu* is used in both traditional and contemporary music arrangements, such as pop, rock and jazz.

Based on the information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erhu>.

¹³ The *yueqin* (Chinese: 月琴; pinyin: Yuèqín; Japanese: 月琴, romanized: *Gekkin*; Korean: 월금/月琴, romanized: *Wolgeum*; Vietnamese: Nguyệt cầm or Vietnamese: Đàn nguyệt), also called a *moon lute* or *moon guitar*, is a traditional Chinese string instrument. It is a lute with a round, hollow soundboard, a short fretted neck, and usually four strings. It is an important instrument in the *Peking opera* orchestra, often taking the role of main melodic instrument in lieu of the bowed string section.

The instrument was invented in China in the 3rd to 5th centuries AD, during the Jin dynasty. The *ruan*, another Chinese instrument, is the ancestor of the *yueqin*. The name *yueqin* once applied to all instruments with a moon-shaped soundboard, including the *ruan*; however, "yueqin" now applies to a separate category from the *ruan* family.

Based on the information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yueqin>.

¹⁴ It is a type of gong, hence it is referred to as a big gong due to its large face. It is made of copper, about 30 cm in diameter, with a flat round body, sides, small holes, and tied with a rope. When playing, the left hand carries the gong, and the right hand holds the mallet, which is commonly used in opera accompaniment and instrumental ensembles.

Based on the information: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A4%A7%E9%94%A3/2856386>.

¹⁵ The *bo* (simplified Chinese: 钹; traditional Chinese: 鈸; pinyin: bó; Wade-Giles: *po*) is a percussion instrument originating in China, a type of cymbal. It consists of two plates that are clashed together. It is a concussion idiophone.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has one from nineteenth century China. Both parts have a diameter of 56.5 centimeters.

China cymbals used by rock and jazz drummers are similar to the *bo*, but are mounted on stands and played with drumsticks. *Bo* are usually realized in bronze. In the *Sichuan opera* they are used to emphasize the movements of actors.

Xiaobo is a variant of cymbals whose diameter ranges from 12 cm to 14 cm. Other variants are *zhongbo* (medium cymbals), *shuibō* (water cymbals) and *dabō* (large cymbals).

Based on the information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bo_\(instrument\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bo_(instrument)).

¹⁶ It is also a type of gong, named for its small surface area. The copper object is round, approximately 22 cm in diameter, with a slightly raised center, and it is untethered. When playing, the left hand points towards the inner edge of the gong, while the right hand holds a thin piece of wood to strike the sound. The tone is bright and crisp. The small gong, also known as the *Jing Xiao Gong* in *Beijing Opera*, and the large gong strike with the rhythm of the performance movement in *Beijing Opera*, playing a role in setting off and strengthening the overall effect. In gongs and drums, in addition to highlighting their timbre characteristics, they also strike focal points, creating a rich ensemble effect.

Based on the information: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B0%8F%E9%94%A3/2856462>.

rhythm. Although the orchestra of traditional Peking Opera is relatively complete compared to that of other operas, there are two main issues. Firstly, the "Wenchang"¹⁷ instruments are all high-pitched, resulting in a monotonous and shrill timbre. Secondly, the "Wuchang"¹⁸ instruments used in battle scenes on the open field stage are too loud and overly "explosive" in the theater. These weaknesses are not very prominent in terms of the original accompaniment function of the traditional Peking Opera.

Furthermore, the characteristics of opera music retain traditional accompaniment instruments such as the "three big pieces" and "four big pieces," and include additional percussion instruments like the small tang gong, Wu gong, high school sound big gong, big screen gong, dumb cymbal, cymbal, and big hat cymbal set. These instruments are utilized to their full potential, showcasing their unique characteristics and functions. According to the requirements for balancing musical range and volume, the band aims to enhance the "three main elements" by focusing on thickness, strength, brightness, intensity, and tension. This is achieved by incorporating instruments such as Banhu, pipa, keyboard, sheng, Qu Di, sea di, suona, and bamboo flute. The Western orchestral ensemble consisted of a piccolo, two flutes, an oboe, a clarinet, two horns, two trumpets, a trombone, an aluminum glockenspiel, two timpani, cymbals, four first violins, three second violins, two violas, a cello, and a double bass. On the one hand, the orchestra can embody the unique accompaniment style and strong national flavor of Peking Opera. On the other hand, the band's high, middle, and low musical instruments have a fundamental balance of Chinese and Western musical elements, offering a rich timbre and diverse strength. This variety presents numerous possibilities for the optimal performance of Chinese and Western fusion music in Peking Opera. The new band structure also changed the way the band performed. The conductor replaced the drummer as the band's leader. To address the issue of excessive volume in the percussion section of the theater, a curved plexiglass cover was installed in front of the percussion group to reduce the sound levels.

¹⁷ Arena performance terms. A general term for an orchestra in a dramatic band other than martial arts. Traditional musical instruments include Erhu, Banhu, Yangqin, Jinghu, Jingerhu, Yueqin, Nanxian (small three-string), dizi, Sheng, Haidi (small suona), and so on. Cloud gongs are also included. With the creation of newly edited ancient and modern dramas, some have also incorporated traditional national instruments such as pipa, Ruan, etc., and even integrated Western instruments.

Based on the information: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%96%87%E5%9C%BA/7137059>.

¹⁸ Opposite of the "literary field". The traditional martial instruments generally include a single leather drum, sandalboard, big gong, cymbals, small gong, small tang drum, water cymbals, big cymbals, small cymbals, Qi cymbals, clapper, star (touch bell), small tang gong, big screen gong, and more. The orchestra also included hanging cymbals, large cymbals, timpani, and so on. It used to mean a percussionist. The term is sometimes used in theatre groups. Opera Terms. Part of the scene. Opposite to "literary field". Refers to the percussion of musical instruments, such as big gong, small gong, cymbals, and tang drum, in Beijing Opera.

Based on the information: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%AD%A6%E5%9C%BA/7137040>.

“Luogu dianzi¹⁹ is considered the soul of Peking opera music and has influenced contemporary Chinese orchestral music” (Ibid.: 181). Model opera played a significant role in shaping Chinese musical culture during a specific historical period. Model operas had a profound impact on Chinese audiences, influencing their preferences, emotions, and aesthetic assessments. The effects of model operas on audiences are relevant to the works of composers being discussed.

Introduction of European Music in China through School Songs. The creation of the first officially recognized Chinese opera, *Grey-hair Girl*, incorporated European elements while preserving its melodic structure. The Evolution of European Influences in Chinese Opera alongside Western Opera's Compositional and Dramatic Patterns. Chinese composers strive to achieve a fusion of Western form and Chinese content. Harmonious integration of European opera organizational aspects with Chinese identity in the later part of the 20th century led to the emergence of contemporary Chinese opera, also known as new-style Chinese opera. This development made the art form more accessible while still preserving its traditional essence and incorporating Western elements. As Zhang Zhonghui said: “In the second half of the 20th century, opera in China grew rapidly. New theaters were built, and performers were trained, allowing Chinese artists to present European opera to the audience” (Zhonghui 2023: 226). “

“Carmen”, in 1956, and continued to showcase various European operas in subsequent productions. This development marked an important milestone in the integration of European opera into the Chinese opera scene” (Jiang 1999: 315). Modern Chinese opera resonates with a younger audience and reflects contemporary life. It incorporates modern technology and multimedia, creating visually stunning and immersive performances. Modern Chinese opera embraces experimentation and innovation in its music and choreography. It blends traditional Chinese elements with Western music, dance, and theater, resulting in a unique and vibrant performance.

Guo Wenjing (1956) is a Chinese composer, born in Chongqing. He graduated from the Composition Department of the Central Conservatory of Music. In 1977, he was admitted to the Composition Department of the Central Conservatory of Music and studied under

¹⁹ The gongs and drums are essential components of the play's rhythm. It is an indispensable instrument in Han folk culture. The singing, performance, dancing, and fighting in opera all have a strong rhythm, accompanied by the powerful sound and distinct rhythm of gongs and drums, which are musical instruments. The accompaniment of gongs and drums can enhance the sense of rhythm and the accuracy of actions in opera singing and performance. It helps express the emotions of characters, adds color to the drama, and sets off and enhances the stage atmosphere.

Based on the information: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%94%A3%E9%BC%93/1263546>

professors Li Yinghai and Su Xia. In 1984, the graduation work *Sichuan Cliff Hanging* premiered in the United States. In 1987, he performed a solo symphony concert in Beijing. In 1988, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Choir performed *Sichuan Road* and *Sichuan Cliff Hanging*. In June 1994, Guo Wenjing's opera *Diary of a Madman* premiered in Chinese in the Netherlands. In 1995, he held a solo concert at the Paris Autumn Festival, and in 1996, he composed the chamber music piece *Oracle Bones* on commission from the Dutch Festival. In May 1997, the Chinese Musicians Association held a seminar on Guo Wenjing's works. In 1999, a solo concert was held at the Edinburgh Festival. In 2002, a solo concert was held at the Lincoln Center Festival in the United States. In 2003, he was named "Artist of the Year" at the 6th Beijing International Art Festival. In 2004, he performed a solo concert at the September Festival in Turin. In 2006, the China Radio Chinese Orchestra held a special performance featuring Guo Wenjing's folk music works. In 2008, he won the sixth China Golden Record Award for "Music Creation Special Award." That same year, he composed music for the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games titled "Words." In 2014, he created the opera, *Rickshaw Boy*. In September 2020, the Hangzhou Grand Theatre hosted a concert featuring Guo Wenjing's compositions. On October 2, 2021, the Central Chinese Orchestra performed the new themed folk concert "The Great Wall" at the Concert Hall of the National Center for the Performing Arts. The concert was conducted by the renowned conductor Tang Muhai and featured compositions by well-known composers Guo Wenjing, Zhang Qianyi, Hao Weiya, and Wang Danhong. Notably, the instrumental concerto *Flesh and Blood: The Great Wall* was composed by Guo Wenjing²⁰. In subchapter 2.1, the features of the composer style will be shown in the opera's *Rickshaw Boy* by Wenjing Guo.

1.3. Stylistic and peculiarities of Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* composing features

Guo Wenjing can be considered one of the outstanding representatives of the Chinese modern opera creation group. In June 1946, Guo Wenjing's first opera, *Diary of a Madman*, was successfully premiered in Amsterdam. This marked the first time that Chinese opera had a presence on the international opera stage. In the following years, he created *Night Banquet*, *Fengyi Pavilion* and *Poet Li Bai*. All three operas were commissioned by foreign institutions and premiered abroad. In June 2014, *Rickshaw Boy* was released after three years of preparation.

²⁰Based on the information:
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%83%AD%E6%96%87%E6%99%AF/10071508>.

This marked the 20th anniversary of the author's first opera. *Rickshaw Boy* is the author's fifth opera and the first one to be performed in China. It was commissioned by the National Center for the Performing Arts and successfully staged there. After the premiere, Guo Wenjing said: *Rickshaw Boy* is my first Chinese opera draft and China's first opera. I've been looking forward to this day for 20 years. Today, my wish came true.²¹ Compared with the first four operas commissioned by foreign institutions, *Rickshaw Boy*, which was released in May 2014, is undoubtedly special

As one of the classic works of Chinese national original opera, the opera *Rickshaw Boy* is the first modern Chinese original opera adapted from the original works of modern Chinese literature by the National Grand Theater. After three years from gestation to creation, the composer Guo Wenjing not only integrated Chinese national elements into opera but also incorporated the Chinese flavors of Beijing Sound and Beijing Rhyme. It is also a classic thematic work of old Beijing, full of regional charm and unique aesthetic value. The opera features a magnificent symphony, a wide range of bel canto, a full chorus, and combines Chinese folk music with Western symphony. It presents China's splendid national culture to a global audience in the style of a typical Western opera.

Wenjing Guo skillfully incorporates traditional Beijing opera elements into the score of *Rickshaw Boy*. Traditional Chinese instruments, such as the erhu, pipa, and guzheng, are prominently featured, creating a distinct soundscape reminiscent of old Beijing. Guo's utilization of melodic motifs and rhythmic patterns also mirrors the city's folk music traditions, thereby amplifying the opera's regional essence. As Jie Mo said:

“The composer focuses on symphonic, lyricism, and dramatization in his creations. The composer's writing style involves transitioning from avant-garde musical language to incorporating folk songs, folk arts, and Chinese folk music materials. He combines his interest in folk art with modern composition techniques, elevating folk music and everyday materials to contemporary art. This approach is seen as a successful development in Chinese contemporary opera” (Jie 2018: 10).

In terms of music, the opera *Rickshaw Boy* is considered a model of national opera. Due to the solemnity and grandeur of its theme, the musical language of Orthodox Opera is characterized by formality, solemnity, and exquisiteness in the alternating use of narration and aria. It rarely incorporates a chorus and duet, especially in the adoption of the ABA three-paragraph singing structure.

²¹ Based on the information: https://www.sohu.com/a/119867117_488619

The opera *Rickshaw Boy* focuses on the lives of ordinary people, which is a departure from the traditional heroic themes found in Western operas. However, in terms of music composition, *Rickshaw Boy* employs a comprehensive musical structure with a dominant motif, evident from the prelude to the finale. This approach is reflected not only in the narrative development but also in the interactions between characters. The opera meticulously follows established music norms to ensure emotional communication between the roles and the audience, as well as emotional sublimation. This adherence results in typical opera music norms being evident in opera arias, narratives, choruses, and duets. The reason why the writer believes that *Rickshaw Boy* is a "new model" of Chinese contemporary opera is that the entire opera employs complete and dramatic musical elements to demonstrate the rare "formal integrity" and "content adequacy" of local opera. It can be said that the opera *Rickshaw Boy* is pure and thorough in its use of music in orthodox opera. It is also considered a "model" work that expresses mass themes in the form of Western Orthodox opera.

In fact, when I investigated the major theaters in the first-tier cities in China in recent years, I can see that the domestic opera market has no shortage of audiences. Why has the exploration of original opera always been challenging? The main reason is that the script and melody of the opera are unfamiliar to the audience. Therefore, Guo Wenjing's opera begins with the story and text, emphasizing themes that resonate with the audience. The *libretto* of *Rickshaw Boy* is written in the Beijing dialect, capturing the linguistic nuances and colloquialisms of the city. The dialogue and *libretto* are infused with local expressions, proverbs, and idioms, which add authenticity to the characters' interactions. By incorporating the distinctive language of old Beijing, the *libretto* transports the audience to the streets and neighborhoods of a bygone era.

To explore the narrative theme of "Beijing accent and Beijing Rhyme," the opera *Rickshaw Boy* extensively incorporates Chinese national elements within its framework. For example, Fuzi's aria incorporates the poignant melody of the Hebei folk song *Little Cabbage*, the theme of Fourth Master Liu is inspired by the *Deep Night* from Beijing Opera, and the four words in the chorus *Beijing City* at the conclusion of the opera are drawn from the Beijing Rhyme *Wee hours of the morning*²², among others. This creative technique blends the opera

²² "Choumu Yin Chu", also known as "Three Spring Scenes", is a popular traditional song that has been sung by generations of artists. The song consists of nine pairs of sentences, each of which is a multi-level long sentence. In the early years, it was only sung as the "MAO Er" of "Nanyang Pass" and later became an independent song. The proponents of the Liu School and the Locke School are skilled in rhetoric. With very simple brushstrokes, the work vividly describes the life of the ancient Chinese people during the transition from chaos to order, akin to a vivid and simple picture. The tone is smooth, the rhythm is lively, and the short sentences are cleverly matched. Through melodious and graceful singing, people can experience complete artistic enjoyment. Based on the information:

with Chinese national elements, making it brilliant and cordial. In addition to directly citing music materials, the composer also incorporated the well-known traditional instruments, such as the erhu, pipa, and suona, into the symphony orchestra to blend with Western instruments at the timbre level.

On the other hand, the large third string and suona also serve an important dramatic function in creating a simulated atmosphere by combining Quyi (Chinese folk-art forms), folk songs, hawking, and other elements to carve out a unique blend, integrating the characteristics of opera with the charm of old Beijing.

Rickshaw Boy showcases the customs, traditions, and social dynamics of old Beijing. The opera portrays scenes from daily life, such as teahouse gatherings, street markets, and temple fairs, offering a glimpse into the unique cultural tapestry of the city. Traditional Beijing opera gestures, makeup, and costumes are utilized to accurately portray the characters and their societal roles, enhancing the audience's immersion in the regional ambiance.

The stage design of *Rickshaw Boy* recreates the architectural elements and landmarks of old Beijing. The sets feature iconic structures such as the Forbidden City, ancient hutongs (narrow alleyways), and traditional courtyard houses. The attention to detail in the set design, props, and costumes contributes to an authentic visual representation of the city, enhancing the overall regional flavor of the opera. *Rickshaw Boy* is based on the acclaimed novel of the same name by Lao She, a renowned Beijing-born writer. “The screenplay by screenwriter Xu Ying draws on the language style of Lao She's works, utilizing dialects to depict the authentic lives of working people at the bottom of society during the old era. This approach effectively brings Lao She's compassion and the fate of his characters in novels to life on the opera stage” (Wu, 2014: 112).

By adapting this literary work into an opera, Guo captures the essence of the novel and preserves the historical context of old Beijing. “Guo Wenjing's music also closely aligns with the script. He incorporates a plethora of self-created Chinese expression symbols in the score, including "happy," "hippie," "fierce," and even "eager white face," along with other Beijing local terminologies. This approach not only aligns with the music's style and the script but also helps the performer grasp the emotional essence of each musical piece. It provides the most precise interpretation” (Wu, 2014: 112). The narrative explores themes of poverty,

perseverance, and the struggle for survival, presenting a socio-economic snapshot of the city during a specific period.

Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* effectively captures the regional flavor of old Beijing through its musical composition, *libretto*, cultural references, setting and historical context. As Jisi Wu said: "The magnificent orchestral style of the opera was so impressive that many people in the industry exclaimed, "Wagner is here," after watching the performance. Additionally, many audience members wept during the wonderful music" (Jisi 2014: 112). The opera *Rickshaw Boy* has also received unanimous praise and acclaim worldwide. "The Florence Post commented, "This is the first opera produced entirely in China on the Italian stage." It tells the story of a young rickshaw driver that takes place at the beginning of the 20th century. The tragic tone of the story is reminiscent of Hugo and Dickens. The Turin Viewpoint stated, "We are currently in a low period of culture and art, so the arrival of this opera is a surprise for Italy."" (Ying, 2022: 105).

According to Puran Sun: "Wenjing Guo once commented on his opera: "The first difficulty in performing this opera is that the singer needs to complete a huge amount of works; second, the music is dramatic, rhythm changes, and tonal changes are very many." Han Peng, who played the role of Xiangzi, once said, "In some paragraphs, one bar or two bars can change the beat once, and two pages of music can change the beat dozens of times" (Puran, 2016: 10). To perform the whole opera perfectly, actors should not only have profound singing skills but also spend a lot of time and experience.

Therefore, the opera *Rickshaw Boy* employs diverse artistic techniques, blending national and Western musical instruments, fusing folk song melodies with *bel canto* melodies, and merging folk customs with elegance. In the stage design, it fully retains the urban characteristics of old Beijing and the ancient culture of the old Beijing charm. This allows the audience to experience the stories of sadness and joy, sorrow and joy, bitterness and sweetness, love and hate, life and death in the play! The modern literary novel serves as a representative of Chinese culture, narrating Chinese cultural stories through the lens of opera and enriching the essence of the literary novel with distinct Chinese national characteristics.

As E Mingjing said: "The musical temperament of the opera "Rickshaw Boy" is mainly reflected in the incorporation of national music and dramatic elements" (Mingjing, 2020: 43). By immersing audiences in the sights, sounds and language of a bygone era, the opera offers a nostalgic journey into the heart of the city, preserving its rich heritage and cultural legacy for generations to come. In the subchapter 2.2, the specific principal character characteristics will

be shown in the description of main characters in the Chinese opera-Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*. In the second chapter, concrete examples will be shown in the opera *Rickshaw Boy* composed by Wen Jing Guo.

2. WEN JING GUO OPERA *RICKSHAW BOY*

2.1. The characteristics of the main characters in Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*

The original Chinese opera *Rickshaw Boy* successfully premiered at the National Center for the Performing Arts (Peking, China) in June 2014. The composer of the opera has meticulously refined and enhanced it, resulting in a more concise and ingenious musical composition. The dramatic arrangement is now more sophisticated and complete, while the stage design has been elevated to highlight the old Beijing charm, in March 2015, from the 5th to the 8th, the "sublimated version" of the opera *Rickshaw Boy* was once again presented to the audience.

As Yajun Wang said: "The plot of the original opera "Rickshaw Boy" primarily revolves around the struggles of workers at the lower echelons of old society. The story narrates the life of Xiangzi, a diligent, uncomplicated, and compassionate young charioteer who moves to the city from the countryside. Xiangzi wants to achieve his dream through diligence and perseverance, but he faces three major challenges in his life and becomes entangled in a tumultuous marriage with the Huniu. Watching the people around him die, Xiangzi is finally crushed by the reality of life. Like the other charioteers, he becomes a "degenerate, selfish, unhappy, socially diseased child, the last ghost of individualism" (Yajun 2018: 14). The structure of this opera contents - seven acts with an epilogue in the end. To understand the opera as a whole it is very important to know the *libretto*. Below one can find a description of every act.

I act

The hero Xiangzi, through hard work and thrift, saved enough money over three years to buy a new car. He aimed to create a better future with his own hands. However, during the war in Peiping, the car was stolen by officers and soldiers. This incident marked the first time he fell

into despair, realizing that his three years of hard work had been in vain. Just then, he found two lost camels and led them away. He did not want to return empty-handed.

II act

As night fell, the rickshaw pullers finished their work and returned to the depot. Fourth Master Liu and Huniu were arrogantly waiting at the gate of the depot to collect their money. The rickshaw pullers obediently handed in the money and gathered to play. Xiangzi returned, and they laughed at him, but Huniu scolded them. Huniu invited Xiangzi into the house, treated him to delicious food and drinks, and tempted him with strong liquor. Xiangzi woke up after the incident and quickly escaped.

III act

Xiangzi sent Mr. Cao to school to be followed. He ran home, and Huniu came to the door and scolded Xiangzi. She then revealed that she was pregnant and asked Xiangzi to propose on Huniu's father's 60th birthday. Xiangzi felt compelled to do so. Coincidentally, a detective claiming to be from the police station came to the door, attempting to extort money, and thoroughly searched Xiangzi's body.

VI act

On Fourth Master Liu's significant birthday, everyone arrived to offer gifts and well-wishes. Xiangzi also attended, bringing peaches. The neighborhood advised Master Liu to accept Xiangzi as his son-in-law. Fourth Master Liu berated Xiangzi with harsh words, severely damaging his self-esteem and nearly causing a rift with the other rickshaw pullers. When Huniu showed him the bill for the gift, Fourth Master Liu became even angrier and quarreled with Huniu. Huniu told him about her pregnancy, and the fourth Master Liu immediately drove them out the door. Huniu and Xiangzi then held a wedding ceremony and expressed the deepest emotions in their hearts through a duet. Huniu admitted to the fake pregnancy, and Xiangzi left angrily.

V act

In the lively bazaar, the common people lived happily, and Huniu was very happy. This was the life she wanted, but Xiangzi was very miserable. He wanted to pull a rickshaw and didn't want to be idle at home. During the argument, the rickshaw puller told them that fourth Master Liu

had sold the car factory and ran away. Huniu was desperate when she found out, Xiangzi comforted her, hoping that Huniu would buy him a car to support their family.

VI act

Er Qiangzi was drunk and wanted to sell her daughter-Fuzi. Huniu gave her bad advice while making sarcastic remarks. Xiangzi came back dejected, dragging his rickshaw, and with a broken leg. Fuzi bandaged him and was scolded by Huniu. Xiangzi could not bear to shout at Huniu, "Go to hell!" Huniu's heart ached a lot.

VII act

When Huniu was in labor, Xiangzi begged the midwife to save his wife, but the midwife took advantage of the chaos and ran away. Fuzi returned from the hospital and was informed that it would cost 20 yuan to see a doctor. Additionally, she was told that if she needed to give birth, she would be admitted to the hospital. Before her death, Huniu once again expressed her love for Xiangzi and asked him to take good care of himself. Xiangzi sold his rickshaw and buried Huniu. Fuzi wanted to take care of Xiangzi, and Xiangzi told her to take him away when he was ready. However, Er Qiangzi forced her to attend to the guests. In despair, she chose to hang herself.

In the end, as the crowd gathered in front of the city gate singing "Beijing City," Xiangzi emerged in a disheveled state, devoid of life's fighting spirit, and knelt on the ground to pick up cigarette butts to eat²³.

In the opera there are five main characters. Table 1 presents more important characters in the opera *Rickshaw Boy*: one tenor, two sopranos, one bass and one baritone.

²³Based on the information:
<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%AA%86%E9%A9%BC%E7%A5%A5%E5%AD%90>.

Characters	Voice type
Xiangzi	Tenor
Huniu (Fourth Master Liu's daughter)	Soprano
Fourth Master Liu (Huniu's father)	Bass
Fuzi (Er Qiangzi's daughter)	Soprano
Er Qiangzi (Fuzi's father)	Baritone

Table 1. The main characters in the opera *Rickshaw Boy*.

The opera *Rickshaw Boy* effectively integrates the emotional structure with the dramatic structure, creating a cohesive opera with compelling conflicts and emphasizing dramatic tension on the stage. The main characters in the opera are Xiangzi and Huniu. Besides, I will also list the main singers who performed Xiangzi and Huniu both in China and abroad.

Performing year	Xiangzi (Tenor)	Huniu (Soprano)
2014	Han Peng	Sun Xiuwei
2015	Zhang Yalin, Wang Xin, Han Peng	Sun Xiuwei, Shen Na, Zhou Xiaolin
2015	Han Peng	Sun Xiuwei

Table 2. The main singers, who performed opera abroad in the period 2014-2015.

In Table 2 we can see names of the singers who performed as the main characters in the opera.

Xiangzi, as the most important role, is the main character throughout the play, exuding immense prominence, sharp contradictions, and distinct antagonism, thereby accentuating the dramatic tension of the stage. The composer utilizes unique musical creation techniques to employ a variety of musical elements to vividly depict every event, scene, and psychological activity in the play. Take the three peaks and valleys of Xiangzi's life as the main storyline to design the characters' dialogue, narrative, and conflicts.



Example 1. Xiangzi's aria *Look at this rickshaw* from the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, in the first scene of first act, 106-115 bars.

Examples 1 and 2 features the different character representation. Through the first scene of the first act, on the one hand, Xiangzi bought a new rickshaw and sang one aria *Look at this rickshaw* with delight, he was ridiculed by Er Qiangzi and other rickshaw pullers.

Example 2. Er Qiangzi and other rickshaw pullers ensemble part from the Xiangzi's aria *Look at this rickshaw*, 142-148 bars.

On the other hand, this duet depicted a lively conversation, capturing everyone's thoughts with precision and vividness. We could say, that the Xiangzi was still an honest young man who

worked hard. It formed a sharp contrast with other rickshaw pullers and laid the groundwork for his gradual decline.

The musical score is a duet between two characters, Huniu and Xiangzi, from the opera *Rickshaw Boy*. The score is written in staff notation with lyrics in Chinese. It includes dynamic markings like *ff* (fortissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *mp* (mezzo-piano), and tempo markings like 125 and 60. The lyrics express Xiangzi's desire for a better life and Huniu's response.

虎妞: 我想放声大笑。
祥子: 我想破口大骂。
虎妞: 我想嚎陶大哭。
祥子: 我想
虎妞: 我想让
祥子: 找人打架。 我想让
虎妞: 世上的人都知道。 祥子是我的
祥子: 世上的人都知道。 祥子我不好
虎妞: 丈夫! 嫁了。
祥子: 欺负!

Example 3. Huniu and Xiangzi's duet *I want the world to know* from the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, in the fourth act, 124-139 bars.

In the fourth act, for instance, Xiangzi and Huniu got married. They stood in opposite corners on the stage, each expressing mixed emotions. On the one hand, Xiangzi's anger, helplessness, and sadness juxtaposed. On the other hand, Huniu's joy after her success created a powerful sense of contradiction and dramatic tension. Furthermore, Huniu confessed to the fake pregnancy, which directly led to the escalation of the conflict. One fell in love with him, and the other let her die (as shown in Example 3).

硬面儿饽饽年糕坨, 黄面儿
黄面儿火烧, 冰糖葫芦
黄面儿火烧艾窝窝, 焦圈, 烧饼, 驴打滚儿, 冰糖葫芦, 那个
那个冰糖多, 焦圈儿火烧
火烧艾窝窝, 焦圈儿烧饼驴打滚儿, 冰糖葫芦, 那个冰糖多,
冰糖多, 烤白薯, 水萝卜, 羊头肉, 酥饽饽, 涩
冰糖多, 烤白薯, 水萝卜, 羊头肉, 酥饽饽, 柿子海棠
冰糖多, 烤白薯, 羊头肉, 酥饽饽
烤白薯, 水萝卜, 羊头肉, 酥饽饽, 柿子海棠涩了
了, 换, 刚开锅
涩了, 换, 刚开锅
涩了, 换, 刚开锅
换, 油炸的丸子, 刚开锅

Example 4. The chorus of Fifth act from the *opera Rickshaw Boy*, 78-105 bars.

In addition, the *Temple Fair* in the fifth act of the play features a lively choral tune. The Beijing accent and the rhyme of the chorus are extremely rich. The choir joyfully counted various snacks at the temple fair in Beijing, such as the *libretto* meaning: *hard noodle cake year cake block / yellow noodle burning Steamed Rice Cakes with Sweet Stuffing / coke circle baked donkey roll / Crispy Sugar-Coated Fruit with rock sugar / roasted sweet potato, water radish / lamb head meat, crispy cake / The persimmon and begonia are astringent and changed. The*

fried balls were just boiled, and so on. The plot also included the drama of Sheng Dan's role in the stall selling art performance clips. It showcases the characteristic snacks of old Beijing, depicts the folk customs of the common people, and marks the appearance of Huniu and Xiangzi after their wedding. Between them revealed two completely different mindsets of their singing. Xiangzi despised a life of idleness, while Huniu, on the contrary, relished the lifestyle of eating, drinking and playing. We could say that it lays the groundwork for more acute contradictions and stronger dramatic tension and sets the stage for the fate of later tragedies (as shown in Example 4).



Example 5. *I will die in peace if I marry a man I like!* from the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, in the fourth act., 150-155Bars.

In Example 5 one can see the reason why Huniu's artistic image is distinct and impressive is mainly due to her courage. She dares to love, dares to hate, and dares to sacrifice everything for love. For example, when Huniu got married, she sang, *I will die in peace if I marry a man I like!* She is known for her straightforward, capable, and spiteful character.

But such a brave Huniu finally died of dystocia caused by gluttony and laziness. *The Death of Huniu* is the most prominent scene in the play, showcasing a concentrated display of the tragic plot and filled with tension in the stage drama.

Moreover, Fourth Master Liu was Huniu's father. He was a big brother in old society. He set up a car factory with a distinctive personality and appearance. Although her daughter Huniu was adept at assisting him in managing the car factory and overseeing both the rickshaw puller and the factory efficiently, she was, after all, his daughter. Fourth Master Liu was unwilling to let Huniu marry Xiangzi and hesitant to entrust him hard-working family property to a low-class rickshaw puller. Consequently, she severed their father-daughter relationship. Huniu was taken aback by her father's decision to abandon her and sell the factory to another location. However, overall, we could see that Huniu was willing to do anything for Xiangzi.



Example 6. The melody of Hebei folk song *Little Cabbage*, 1-12 bars.

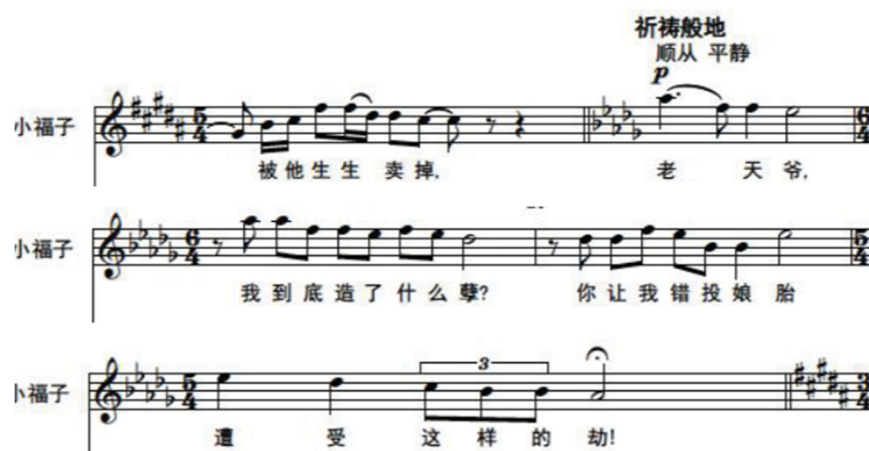
In the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, Fuzi is portrayed as a wretched woman who witnessed her father, Er Qiangzi, beat her mother to death and then forced her to sell her body to earn money. Despite her miserable background, Huniu snatched her beloved Xiangzi. However, the composer assigned Fuzi - the role of extremely tender music, which sharply contrasts with Fuzi's experience of living in a dark, old society. Before her death, Fuzi sang an aria called "Fuzi," which has a clear narrative. On the one hand, it outlines Fuzi's bumpy and painful experiences in a few concise sentences, such as the *libretto* saying: "Is this a human world or a ghost world? Who has ever seen such a cruel father? Wife beaten to death, his own daughter sold by him", which promotes the development of the plot and reveals the story's clues. On the other hand, it has a strong lyrical quality, beautiful melody, expressing Fuzi's helplessness and despair. In this aria, Fuzi, the only positive character in the opera, sings a beautiful melody reminiscent of a hymn before her death. The composer used the melody of the Hebei folk song *Little Cabbage*²⁴ as inspiration, evoking a sense of pity in the audience (as shown in Example 6).

In the aria *Fuzi*, sections 18 to 21 skillfully incorporate elements from the melody of *little cabbage* and push them to their limits. For example, *Heaven* in section 18 is composed of continuous descending tones. It develops from two tones to one tone, with the vocal range divided into two groups of small characters in the high voice area. The singing strength at *p* (piano) highlights the euphemistic and desolate tone. "What have I done? You made me cast the wrong womb. Suffering such a robbery", the melody descends gradually, growing deeper and

²⁴ "Little Cabbage" is a folk song that is popular in Hebei Province and other regions of China. It creates the image of a naive, poor young girl in the countryside with beautiful musical materials and refined artistic techniques. It is a profound expression of the sad and painful mood of a girl who lost her mother, was abused, and felt lonely. It also serves as an indictment of the unreasonable family relations in the old society. Based on the information:

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B0%8F%E7%99%BD%E8%8F%9C/2615647?inChinese> (in Chinese).

darker, conveying the choking pain in the character's heart with a pause, which enhances her pitiful character (as shown in Example 7).



Example 7. Fuzi's aria *Fuzi* from the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 18-21 bars.

Er Qiangzi is a lazy, low-class rickshaw puller. He has a kind, but weak, gentle, and beautiful, sad daughter named Fuzi. The heavy pressure and blows of life distorted Er Qiangzi's human nature, leaving him downtrodden, indifferent, and unreasonable. He slept on the road while drunk, beat his wife to death, and even forced his daughter, Fuzi, to pick up guests to make money. In the end, Er Qiangzi's cruel indifference drove Fuzi to the depths of despair, leading her to choose to hang herself and end his tragic life.

From the opera, it is not difficult to see that although Er Qiangzi is called "Er Qiangzi," in fact, he is not strong. He has a distinct personality and a great contrast in character. Once upon a time, he had an intense sense of justice, self-esteem, competitiveness, and enjoyed socializing; simultaneously, he was also compassionate, righteous, devoted to his family, and cared deeply for his less fortunate friends. In his old age, however, he became self-abandoning, narrow-minded, and selfish, in sharp contrast to his previous character and experience. Like other rickshaw pullers, Er Qiangzi shared the same breath and fate, and experienced the same miserable life cycle of hope, frustration, earning, and despair. He was a typical representative of many hardworking rickshaw pullers at that time and ended up tragically. Opera is also used to expose and accuse old society of turning people into ghosts of darkness and evil. Chen xuehan stated that, "With the shaping of the characters as the means and the dramatic conflicts as the sublimation basis, the opera shows the darkness of society and the weakness of human nature in the living environment of the common people and becomes one of the platforms for

foreign audiences to understand the history of Chinese society” (Xuehan, 2022: 24). It is a Chinese opera that truly records the reality of China's old society in the 20th century.

2.2. Interpretation analysis of Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the opera *Rickshaw Boy*

Like I have mentioned earlier, this aria by Xiangzi is the most important in the opera. Here the singer has a lot of problematic areas and young singers might have difficulties in performing. In this semi-chapter, I will give some recommendations on how to solve these difficulties from an analysis of the breathing, articulation and cavity of this aria.

Example 8. Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 1-5 bars.

In the seventh act, after Huniu's death, we can notice that Xiangzi sold a rickshaw to pay for Huniu's funeral. As the pallbearers walked past carrying Huniu's coffin, they still said, *if you're dead, you're dead. If you are dead, you will die, everyone will die, and if you die, you will die.* Then, put the coffin down slowly and prepare for burial. Xiangzi followed all the way, and after Huniu was buried, he was distraught, and he said to himself, *if you live, you live; if you die, you die!* Here, the composer marked the expression numb as sleepwalking with the *p* (weak) dynamic marking and *ad lib* indication. During impromptu singing, facial expression marks should precisely reflect Xiangzi's emotional state at that moment. Singers need to pay more attention to this aspect while performing.

Meanwhile, the word "death" appears frequently as the focus of the whole song, and it is a whole spelling structure in Chinese grammar. In singing, it is necessary to pay attention to the need to keep the whole lyrics in a unified channel cavity and at the focal point of the vocal

cords, that is, the vocal cords are closed correctly, while paying attention to the maintenance and flow of breath.

From the perspective of breathing, the difference between 1 bar and 5 bar is more noticeable. To convey the protagonist's grief and complex psychological state, the composer has incorporated more "free extensions of rest" and "quarter note, eighth note" rests. After the phrase "die, die," the utilization of "free extension of rest" necessitates the singer to convey a mood of "despair" and psychological engagement. The term "despair" in this context pertains to the psychological state of the characters. During the actual singing performance, the singer must uphold a sense of enthusiasm and cannot afford to relax. While maintaining the "relaxed and decadent" physical posture required by the song's plot, the internal vocal organs of the body need to remain tense. The extension of the freedom of rest does not truly allow the singer to relax. Instead of relaxing after singing the first sentence, we should aim to maintain a positive state during the break to prepare for the next sentence. It is important not to relax prematurely, as this can cause the sound and breath to "collapse." At the same time, the "breathing speed" of "breathing" also maintains the normal state of slow breathing and breathing when speaking. This helps the singer feel the psychological activities of the characters in the play, which is beneficial for entering into the character's heart (as shown in Example 8).

Example 9. Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 1-16 bars.

Example 9. Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 1-16 bars.

In this movement, Xiangzi cried out sadly to Huniu, the pitch goes one high and one low, we can notice, that it looks like Xiangzi is talking with Huniu through the libretto meaning: *I sold the car and brought you to the ground. It is also a blessing to walk away*. This sentence reads like a dreamy conversation with a desolate heart, where the suona²⁵ and chanting sounds of the accompaniment echo Xiangzi's plea with a simple, monotonous tone. We could say that Xiangzi seemed to wake up as if from a dream, and he shouted "Huniu" two more times, using a high-pitched voice and the medium strength of dynamics to indicate that Xiangzi was now fully awake. He remembered what had happened.

²⁵ Suona is a traditional Chinese double-reed woodwind instrument. As early as the 3rd century AD, the suona was introduced into China from Eastern Europe and West Asia with the development of the Silk Road. It is a member of the oboe family in the world. After thousands of years of development, the suona has acquired its unique temperament and timbre, making it a representative national wind instrument in China. Based on the information: https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%94%A2%E5%91%90?fromModule=lemma_search-box (In Chinese).

However, as the *libretto* means: “Watching you go to the grave; I became a rickshaw puller without a rickshaw again. Die.” Overall, the term "rickshaw puller" is Xiangzi's aspiration and his identity. that was recognized to be subjective. But unfortunately, will he still be considered a rickshaw puller after the rise and fall, even without a rickshaw? Here, Xiangzi's focus on the "rickshaw puller" was also an obsession in his heart

Furthermore, the key words (ㄅ) to pay attention to are *Niu*, *car*, and *send*. The syllable *Niu* is pronounced as *niou*. In Chinese phonetics, the middle *o* is omitted and simplified to *niu*. In singing, it is necessary to return the rhyme to *ou*. In actual singing, if you cannot quickly return to the rhyme of *ou* but linger excessively on *n* or *I* and sing the word *Niu* as *niyou*, it will not only make the articulation ambiguous but also disrupt the rhythm, causing procrastination or even a wrong beat. This can significantly impact the mood and atmosphere of the aria (as shown in Example 9).

Example 10 shows a musical score for Xiangzi's aria "Let her die" from the opera *Rickshaw Boy*. The score is written in staff notation with lyrics in Chinese. It includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *mf*, *mp*, and *accel.*. The tempo is marked as 100 and 92. The score is divided into measures with bar numbers 80, 95, and 100. The lyrics are: 人走了, 我不知道去往何处, 车没了, 这辈子已没了前途, 冷冷清清的, 家, 想留, 留不住, 空空荡荡的屋, 想哭, 哭不出, 虎妞, 啊虎妞, 你走上了一条不归路, 样子啊, 样子, 你这么, 努力为什么还是输?!, 我想知道哪里, 是我的归宿, 哪里是我的归宿.

Example 10. Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 18-42 bars.

Example 10 features the tragic life of Xiangzi. On the one hand, that the Huniu and the rickshaw had disappeared, Xiangzi's future seemed bleak. On the other hand, through the *libretto's* aspect, Xiangzi wanted to cry. He could not help asking, as the *libretto* means: *Huniu, Huniu, have you embarked on a road of no return? Xiangzi, Xiangzi, why do you still lose so hard? With the dense vibrations between the two bars, he cried out sadly to the sky, I want to know where my destination is. Where is my destination?*

However, The "a2" treble of continuous two-lined octave, the perfect fourth jump, and the maintenance of long notes, along with *I want to know where my destination is. Where is my destination?* the fifth jump of "b2" and "b2 flat" in bar 45 (as shown in Example 11), require not only the support of waist and belly strength and breath but also clear articulation to effectively project the sound. To maintain the correct focus of the vocal cords while strengthening the use of the head resonance cavity, and ensuring the unity of the overall singing, it is important to coordinate the use of the resonance cavity according to the needs of different voice regions. In conclusion, the unity and coordination of timbre are relative. When the overall timbre is unified in singing, it is necessary to adjust the proportion of the resonant cavity in real-time according to the changes in different sound areas to meet the requirements of melody and plot development.



Example 11. Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 43-50 bars.

The above song is another highlight of Xiangzi, with each sentence in a high pitch (two-lined octave) and delivered with strong intensity (forte). In the vocal part, singers should pay more attention to the dramatic performance, ensuring that their voice is full of emotion. We can notice that the tempo of "disobedience" in bar 47 accelerates to 118, and speaking is favored

over singing in line with the opera director's arrangement. Therefore, after the liberty of bar 48 is prolonged, the word "disobedience" should be pronounced rapidly, forcefully, and with vigor to portray the protagonist's inherent stubbornness and determination. The breath here must be "pulled up," meaning the singer should actively feel the breath being "Throughout" and "Spin off" rather than getting "stuck" in the throat or "compressed" in the abdomen. This will help the singer complete the more challenging parts of the song's ending and elevate the protagonist's mood to its climax.

Overall, the young Xiangzi was once extremely excited when he thought about his dream. After experiencing numerous challenges, he believed there was nothing wrong with him, so he refused to admit defeat. Moreover, he always believed he had the strength to resist fate, so he refused to accept it (as shown in Example 11).

2.3. Analysis of Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*

In the fourth act of the opera, Huniu must resort to the carrot and stick approach to successfully trick Xiangzi into marrying Xiangzi with a fake pregnancy and finally make her beloved Xiangzi her husband. marriage was a happy event, but with an element of deception, it was a tragedy. In this scene, all the lights on the stage went out, leaving only two traces of light. Xiangzi and Huniu are dressed in a red wedding dress and a gorgeous red flower on their chest, but the festive costume contrasts sharply with the painful expression on Xiangzi's face.

The musical score is for a piano duet. It begins with a tempo marking of *Lento* at 56 beats per minute, with the title '悲喜交加' (Mixed Joy and Sorrow) and the character name '喷呐' (Suona). The first system shows a piano part with dynamics *p* and *mf*. The second system introduces a second piano part (Pno.) with dynamics *f* and *pp*, and a tempo change to *Più mosso* at 72 beats per minute. The third system continues with *ff* dynamics. The fourth system shows a tempo change to 106 beats per minute with the marking 'accel.' and dynamics *ff* and *mp*. The final system ends with *pp* dynamics.

Example 12. Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 1-33 bars.

Before the Duet *Get married* began, there was a prelude to obvious mood swing. The composer only used a suona and interpreted the foregoing introduction with the *Lento* (adagio) of "joys and sorrows". The use of dense decorative notes set off a nervous and ominous foreboding, and the intensity also showed fabulous changes: *P* (piano)-*mf* (mezzo forte)-*sf* (subito forte)-*f* (forte). Bad luck is approaching step by step, and then the speed is slightly faster, adding the harmony part, the continuous vibrating sound makes the heart unable to calm down. This great fluctuation in volume and sudden change in speed enhanced the unrest of the plot and set off and paved the way for Huniu's sad and joyful mood. Marriage is a festive event, but for Huniu and Xiangzi, it is the beginning of a tragic fate (as shown in Example 12).



Example 13. Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 34-42 bars.

Example 13 demonstrates the personal features of Huniu, through the *libretto's* aspect: she is fierce, her dedication and loyalty to love is admirable; To be with the man she loves, she doesn't even recognize her own father, but her determination is obvious to all; She thinks that if she can marry Xiangzi, she doesn't care about anything else. This is why she sang: *God has an eye; I married the husband I want to marry!* However, the melody in this sentence adds several temporary changes (b flat, e flat, a flat), the tone changes, but also highlights the change of mood, the crescendo of the mark, that shows firmness of Huniu.



Example 14. Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 35-48 bars.

Meanwhile, the concept of the next fragment, *ff* (*fortissimo*) is used. Although the melody is more lyrical, the long notes of two beats, four beats and five beats are used to keep the mood, but these words contain great energy. We can notice, that Huniu wanted to *laugh out loud* is true, because she finally got what she wanted. On the one hand, the word "laugh" is two-tone, the short one in front and the long one in back, and the fifth interval shows the rise of emotion. On the other hand, Huniu wants to *wail loudly* is also true, because her own father does not recognize her, outsiders will point behind her, she has nothing but Xiangzi, but Xiangzi hates her, in which the word *big* uses dotted note, there is a short front tone, two beats and five notes, tactfully and sonorously, showing Huniu swallowing all the grievances, but all sorrow is not worth Xiangzi already belongs to her, overall, we can see that, she wants to let the world know Xiangzi is her husband (as shown in Example 14).



Example 15. Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 48-52 bars

In this fragment, the crescendo and the legato of high register for the use of the singer's breath. The singer needs to adjust the mood in the prelude.

The beginning of the piece perfectly shows what Huniu wanted to say: “*I want to get married. No one can stop me. I don't care if there is no dowry.*” *I want to laugh. I want to cry. I want everyone in the world to know that Xiangzi is my husband!*” At that time, Xiangzi was in a different extreme mood. He felt that his life had reached a low ebb, but he did not have any resistance, we can notice, that he muttered to himself in one lined octave of the middle register: “*who is depressed and angry with? Let others kill and live a very suffocating life*”. On the one hand, the melody was gentle and all repeated in the same sound, which depicted that Xiangzi had no expectations for life at this time. On the other hand, the strength of *mp* (*mezzo forte*), the low volume but grasping of the heart, and the quaver rest broke the law of melody dynamics. Overall, this sense of tension is a portrayal of Xiangzi's extreme entanglement. Therefore, in the vocal part, the breath should be full, make a dedicated support for each word, the tone is low and dull, the words should not be sonorous and forceful, and there is a slight drag between words, to show a lifeless sense of powerlessness (as shown in Example 15).



Example 16. Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 53-59 bars.

In the duet *Get married* (Example 16), we can notice that the melody had a feeling of self-pity. Xiangzi blamed himself for not being strong-willed. As a result, he was cheated into marriage by Huniu, but he had no resistance at all. On the one hand, In the vocal part, every two words on the melody are the descending tone. Such as "self-made", "self-inflicted", "forced", "helpless"; On the other hand, the band's accompaniment is also accompanied by the same melodic lines. Strong regret, sigh, and helplessness are reflected in the integration of singing and accompaniment music; As the *libretto* showed that the last sentence sings the truest words in Xiangzi's heart, "*I married an unwanted shrew!*" However, the whole *libretto* was marked with a stronger expression, which was finally pushed to the dynamics of *f* (forte), which thoroughly broke out the resentment and helplessness in the heart (as shown in Example 16).

祥子

我想破口大

骂,

我想找人打

架,

我想破口大 骂,

我想找人打架,

我想让世上的人都知道,

祥子

祥子我不好欺负!

Example 17. Xiangzi and Huniu duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*, 71-82 bars.

This song is composed very seamlessly, we can notice that it is more like talking to himself. However, the singer needs to put himself in a state of weakness and despair of life, the mouth should not be opened too wide, the breath is deep, as if with a deep sigh, the performance

should be expressionless, the eyes wander and look down, reflecting this sense of helplessness. The volume of *I married an unwanted shrew* gets louder, the vocal range increases, preparing for the culmination of the song and paying attention to the facial expression marks when singing.

Meanwhile, Xiangzi broke out completely, and the mark of *ff* (*fortissimo*) dealt with the backlog of anger, grievances, and other negative emotions in the bottom of his heart through *scolding* and *finding someone to fight* (as shown in Example 17).

At this time, Xiangzi was so strong that he did not allow himself to be looked down upon by others. Although he was in the *thief ship*, he always clung to a piece of pure land in spirit and was unwilling to fall, but under the heavy pressure of life, under the opportunity of marriage, he gave a good vent. Therefore, singers need to pay more attention to the stability of breath when singing, and the strength of this vocal range is also on *ff* (*fortissimo*), release their energy completely, and look for a feeling of breaking away and breaking out.

In this duet "Marriage", Xiangzi's progress from the *libretto* to the melody implies infinite explosive power, and all the grievances, helplessness, grief, and indignation in his heart are shown. The song is also the best part of the play, which expresses the opposition and contradiction between Huniu and Xiangzi through clear *libretto* and fluctuating melodies.

Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* is very interesting and important in Chinese musical literature and, I believe, this thesis can help young singer to get interested in this opera.

CONCLUSIONS

Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy* stands as a significant contribution to the modern Chinese opera landscape, offering a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of timeless themes within a contemporary context. Its blend of tradition and innovation, coupled with its profound storytelling, cements its place as a compelling work that resonates with audiences both in China and beyond. Guo's masterful use of music and lyrics effectively conveys the emotional depth of the characters and the societal issues they face, drawing the audience into their world and eliciting empathy and reflection. To create the character, the depth of understanding of the piece in details, it is extraordinary and very important to analyze the opera from the singer's perspective. It might solve to rising difficulties in vocal part. Through this research these conclusions were found:

1. The results of analysis of the Wenjing Guo's opera has shown the features of modern Chinese opera influenced by Western music – the composer combines Western and modern composing techniques to express classic Chinese stories. The opera serves as a "living inheritance" of traditional literary works. It is an innovative way to promote Chinese culture.
2. By embracing a synthesis of Eastern and Western artistic traditions, Guo has paved the way for a new era of cross-cultural exchange and artistic innovation within the realm of operatic performance.
3. In preparing the whole opera, proper breathing, articulation, and resonance in the vocal cavity are essential for the best interpretation of the opera.
4. The research from singers perspective has shown possible technique difficulties which are analysed in the aria Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* in the Seventh act and Xiangzi and Huiyu's duet *Get married* in the Fourth act of the opera *Rickshaw Boy*.

This thesis was predetermined not only by the analysis of certain aspects of the Chinese modern opera *Rickshaw Boy*, but also provided an opportunity to deepen the examination of opera by linking practical vocal difficulties research and performance studies. A deeper and more perceptive observation would help performers find an individual key to the music.

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Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*, Xiangzi's aria *Let her die* from the Seventh act

第八场 曲二 离别

Oboe 1.2 $\text{♩} = 62$
 Clarinet in B \flat 1.2
 Trumpet in C 1.2
 Trombone 1.2
 F 大喇叭 $\text{♩} = 62$
 Violin I $\text{♩} = 62$
 Violin II $\text{♩} = 62$
 Viola $\text{♩} = 62$
 Violoncello $\text{♩} = 62$
 Double Bass $\text{♩} = 62$

Musical score for the aria "Let her die" (曲二 离别) from the Seventh act of Wenjing Guo's opera *Rickshaw Boy*. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Oboe 1.2, Clarinet in B \flat 1.2, Trumpet in C 1.2, Trombone 1.2, F 大喇叭 (F Trumpet), Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 62. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is in Chinese and includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *f*, *mp*, *pp*, and *sf*, as well as performance instructions like "sul G espr." and "espress.".

Picc.
 Fl. 1, 2
 Ob. 1, 2
 Cl. 1, 2
 Bas. 1, 2
 Hn. 1, 2
 Hn. 3, 4
 C Tpt. 1, 2
 C Tpt. 3
 Tbn. 1, 2
 R. Tbn. 3
 Tba.
 Timp.
 Perc. 1.
 Perc. 2.
 Perc. 3.
 F大唢呐
 男声独唱 红头们
 红头们抬棺材上
 红喜事
 Vin. I
 Vin. II
 Vla.
 Vcl.
 Db.

20 3

Bsn. 1.2 a2

Tba.

男声合唱 杠夫们

白喜事 都事喜事。 死就死了吧! 你出钱 我出力 帮你收尸。

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf *p* *mf*

31

Cl. 1.2 a2

Bsn. 1.2

Tba.

男声合唱 杠夫们

死就死了吧! 死 了的 就死 了 谁都会 死。 死就死了吧! 活着的

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p *div.* *mf* *unis.* *p*

This musical score page contains staves for various instruments and vocal parts. The instruments include Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Ban.), Trombone (Tba.), Timpani (Timp.), Bass Drum (B.D.), Fagott (F大唢呐), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Via.), Cello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The vocal parts are for Male Chorus (男声合唱) and Red Guard Men (红卫们). The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *a2*. A rehearsal mark "42" is present at the top left.

[illegible]

62 如歌地 (箫声)

F大唢呐

p

T. Solo 样子

cantabile
伤心地

死就死了吧... 虎妞! 虎妞! 我卖了车 送你入土。 死就死了吧。 一走了之 也是有

男声合唱 杠夫们

70 1.

Cl. 1,2

mp *mf*

F大唢呐

mf

T. Solo 样子

福。 虎妞! 虎妞! 眼睁睁看着你进了坟墓。 我又成了没有车的车夫!

Vln. II

mp

Vla.

mp

Vc.

mp

77

Ob. 1,2

Cl. 1,2

p *f* *fp* *f* *mf*

Bsn. 1,2

(箫声止)

F大唢呐

p *f* *mf*

T. Solo 样子

死就死了吧... 人走了。 我不知道去往何

Vln. I

non div. arco

Vln. II

p *f* *arco*

Vla.

p *f* *non div. arco* *arco*

Vc.

p *f* *mp* *div. unis.* *f* *mp*

Db.

f *f*



Ob. 1,2

Cl. 1,2

F大喇叭

T. Solo 样子

想留留不住 空空荡荡的屋 想哭哭不出 虎妞 啊虎 妞 你 走 上了一条不归

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

95

Ob. 1.2

1.

mf

mp

f

accel. ♩=82

7

Cl. 1.2

mf

f

mp

f

2.

1.

Bsn. 1.2

f

mp

f

2.

Hn. 1.2

1.

f

Tbn. 1.2

f

B. Tbn. 3.

f

F大喇叭

(箫声止)

f

mp

f

T. Solo 样子

路。 样子啊 样 子, 你这么 努力为什么还 是输?! 我想

Vln. I

arco

f

mp

f

accel. ♩=82

Vln. II

arco

f

Vla.

arco

f

mp

f

Vc.

arco

f

mp

f

Db.

arco

f

101

Fl. 1.2

Ob. 1.2

Cl. 1.2

Bsn. 1.2

Hrn. 1.2

B. Tbn. 3.

Tbn.

T. Solo 样子

知道 哪里是我的归宿, 哪里是我的归宿, 我有力气 我不认命

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

9