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Development of the Instrumental Group of the Peking Opera from the 19th to the Early 21st Century in the Context of the Academisation of Chinese Musical Art

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Abstract. This article explores the century-long process of synthesis of the traditional instrumental group of Peking opera with Western academic symphonic instrumentation. The main focus is on the “mixed academisation” model, which views development as a dynamic equilibrium between artificial intervention and natural evolution. The article traces the key stages: the penetration of Western music into Chinese culture and the modernisation of Chinese traditional instruments in the late 19th — early 21st centuries; early experiments in incorporating Western instruments; the formation of a stable mixed model with the dominance of the “three great instruments” of Peking opera during the “cultural revolution”; modern trends of “symphonisation,” leading to the risk of losing traditional identity. The authors conclude that successful modernisation requires preservation of the traditional instrumental composition and aesthetic foundations of the nation while enriching expressiveness with borrowed elements. It is additionally proposed that the principles of mixed academisation be applied more broadly to vocals, composition, and the holistic artistic system of Peking opera.

Keywords: Peking opera, instrumental group of Peking opera, academisation, mixed academisation, post-academic syndrome, symphonisation

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Развитие инструментальной группы пекинской оперы XIX–XXI веков в контексте академизации китайского музыкального искусства

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Аннотация. Данная статья исследует столетний процесс синтеза традиционной инструментальной группы пекинской оперы с западным академическим симфоническим инструментарием. Основное внимание уделяется модели «смешанной академизации», рассматривающей развитие как динамическое равновесие между искусственным вмешательством и естественной эволюцией. В работе прослеживаются ключевые этапы: проникновение западной музыки в культуру Китая и модернизация китайских традиционных инструментов в конце XIX — начале XXI века; ранние эксперименты по включению западных инструментов; формирование устойчивой смешанной модели при доминировании «трёх великих инструментов» пекинской оперы в эпоху «культурной революции»; современные тенденции «симфонизации», ведущие к рискам утраты традиционной идентичности. Авторы делают вывод, что успешная модернизация требует сохранения традиционного инструментального состава и эстетических основ нации при обогащении выразительности заимствованными элементами, а также предлагает применять принципы смешанной академизации шире — к вокалу, композиции и целостной художественной системе пекинской оперы.

Ключевые слова: пекинская опера, инструментальная группа пекинской оперы, академизация, академизация смешанного типа, постакадемический синдром, симфонизация

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a noticeable increase in global interest in Chinese music. The practice of musicians in this country — from world-famous performers (Lang Lang, Liao Changyong, etc.) to composers synthesising Chinese and Western traditions (Tan Dun, Chen Qigang, etc.) — is redrawing the world musical map and stimulating in-depth attention from the international academic community to Chinese musical traditions. In this context, the central problem is the preservation of the aesthetic essence and cultural identity of traditional performing arts under the conditions of globalisation while

simultaneously implementing its creative transformation. Peking opera, as perhaps the most outstanding Chinese cultural treasure, serves as a demonstrative example for studying the aforementioned problem, thanks to wide-ranging experiments aimed at integrating its instrumental ensemble with Western academic symphonic instrumentation.

This transformation is rooted in a historical context: following the penetration of Western academic music into China in the mid-19th century, the domestic musical environment evolved from “complete Westernisation” and “confrontation between Chinese and the West” to “synthesis between Chinese and the West” (see: [1]).

The key mechanism of this process is revealed by the theory of “academisation.” Dmitry Varlamov defines it as the evolution of thinking, language, and creativity from syncretic folklore to universal academic. [2] In academisation, the researcher identified two main types: “natural,” which is characterised by the desire to search for a new paradigm of a musical work, generated by the fantasy and creative imagination of the creative author, and “artificial,” which finds its ideal in previously created examples of art and therefore strives not for creative work, but for imitation. Varlamov also points out the risks of “post-academic syndrome.” [Ibid.]

This theory explains the basis for China’s rapid adoption of the Western system of academic music: long before its penetration, Chinese music had already demonstrated a pronounced tendency toward academisation through centuries-long counter-processes of desyncretisation and unification, as evidenced by the emergence of musical genres, the transition from oral to written system of storing and transmitting musical information, and the formation of synthetic theatrical-musical genres (especially Peking opera).

However, the theory of academisation developed by Varlamov could not explain the mechanism of the deep synthesis of Chinese and Western music. The “mixed-type academisation” model proposed by Chinese scholar Yang Teng overcomes this limitation by striving for a dynamic balance between borrowing from the Western academic musical system (“artificial intervention”) and being rooted in local tradition (“natural evolution”). [1]

The objectives of this article are to utilise Yan Teng’s theory of “mixed-type academisation” as the key analytical framework for systematising the historical trajectory and key stages of the instrumental ensemble of Peking opera from the mid-19th century to the present; to analyse the interaction between

“artificial intervention” and “natural evolution” in the practices of various periods; to focus on the underlying causes and controversial aspects of the current manifestation of “post-academic syndrome” (expressed in the decline of art’s communicative function, the erosion of traditions, elitisation, and the like); and, finally, based on this theory, to reflect upon and explore paths for cautious borrowing of the instrumentation from the Western academic symphonic orchestra (“artificial intervention”) while preserving the ontology of Peking opera art (the foundation of “natural evolution”), in order to find a balanced path for its living inheritance and innovative development in the era of globalisation, capable of avoiding the “post-academic syndrome” and gaining new vitality.

Traditional Composition of the Peking Opera Instrumental Group

In order to study the further synthesis of the instrumental group of the Peking opera with the Western instrumentation of the academic type, it is necessary to briefly highlight the genre of the Peking opera itself and the forms of the traditional instrumental ensemble in it. “Traditional” here refers to the ensemble composition that functioned until the middle of the 19th century, when Western academic music did not yet have a significant influence on the thinking of Chinese musicians. This time reference is fundamental, since, as Tuyana Budayeva has established, “Peking opera, having originated at the very end of the 18th century and having already reached its peak by the middle of the 19th century, was the result of centuries of experience accumulated by many generations of musicians and actors in Chinese *Xiqu* (戏曲) musical dramas...” [3, p. 9] This indicates that the key forms of Peking opera were formed before the significant influence of Western-style academic music. However, the very principles of thinking

and organisation of Peking opera, including the written tradition and the presence of various participants in the creative process (for example, vocal and instrumental performers, the author of the libretto, creators of music, etc.), already demonstrate structural features that confirm the presence of academic thinking of a sufficiently high level.

Researchers from different countries take different approaches to classifying the instrumental group of Peking opera. Having analysed these methods in detail, the Russian musicologist Tuyana Budayeva proposed the following system:

- chordophones — two-stringed bowed *jinghu* (京胡), *jing erhu* (京二胡), the *yueqin* (月琴) plucked lute or “moon guitar” and the long-necked, three-stringed *xiao sanxian* (小三弦);

- aerophones — *suona* or Chinese oboe (唢呐, a type of *zurna*) with a metal bell, transverse bamboo flute *gudi* (骨笛, a type of the more widely known *dizi* — 笛子);

- membranophones — *tangu* (堂鼓) ceremonial drum;

- idiophones — *paiban* (拍板) rattle-castanet; *luo* (锣) copper gongs, including *daluo* (大锣 — large gong), *xiaoluo* (小锣 — small gong), cymbals *nao* (铙), and *bo* (钹). [Ibid., p. 17]

The most important and widespread in practice is the functional classification by scenes of application on *wenchang* (文场, lit. “civil scene”) and *wuchang* (武场, lit. “military scene”). The instruments of the civil scene mainly use strings and wind instruments to accompany vocal parts, as well as in solo instrumental episodes. The instruments of the military scene (percussion) accompany battle scenes, acrobatic scenes, and pantomimes. [Ibid., p. 18]

It is on the basis of this functional division that the key instruments of both groups are distinguished — a total of six types of main

instruments: for the civil scene these are *jinghu* (京胡), *yueqin* (月琴), and *sanxian* (三弦), together known as the “three great instruments of the civil scene” (文场三大件). For the military scene, these are *danpigu* (单皮鼓), *daluo* (大锣), and *xiaoluo* (小锣) — the “three great instruments of the military scene” (武场三大件). As the researcher Xu Jia established, from the moment of the emergence of the Peking opera and throughout the subsequent hundred-plus years of historical development, these six instruments, in essence, did not undergo significant changes in their basis. [4, p. 120] We would like to especially emphasise that these three instruments of the civil scene (Il. 1, 2, 3), demonstrating such stability, have always played and continue to play the role of the primary framework in the timbre fabric of the Peking opera.



Il. 1. *Jinghu*



Il. 2. Yueqin



Il. 3. Sanxian

Prerequisites for the Synthesis of the Peking Opera Instrumental Group with Academic Instruments (Mid-19th Century – 1930s)

Having become acquainted with the traditional composition of the instrumental group of Peking opera, we move on to its synthesis with the Western academic symphony orchestra. To present this process clearly, we will try to systematise its key stages (see Table 1).

Let us analyse this table. We will start with the prerequisites for synthesis.

The massive penetration of Western classical music into China during the Industrial Revolution radically transformed the artistic thinking of Chinese musicians. The key innovation was the concept of ensemble functions of instruments — prior to this, the Chinese instrumental tradition had practically no developed practice of timbre-functional division, limiting itself instead to unison performance of a melody on homogeneous or heterogeneous instruments. [5, p. 80]

Thus, Chinese musicians launched a campaign to modernise traditional instruments, but this activity acquired a targeted nature only in January 1931, when the rector of the first conservatory in China, Xiao Youmei (萧友梅) published a programmatic article on the improvement of musical instruments. He outlined a number of principles that he proposed to take into account in the matter of renewal, based on the degree of value of a particular instrument. A musical instrument had to meet a number of conditions: (1) have good sound quality (good timbre), (2) have a wide range (more than three octaves), (3) permit the playing of a chromatic scale, (4) the sound should have dynamic flexibility (from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*). [6, p. 74] The modernisation of traditional instruments was gradually carried out according to the following directions:

- transition from the untempered system to the equal tempered system, which makes it possible to perform chromatic sounds;
- expanding the sound range of traditional instruments while maximising timbral authenticity;
- unification of the dynamic capabilities of instruments (balanced volume);
- standardisation of designs, uniformity of production, and unification of the reference pitch ($A_1 = 440$ Hz).

Table 1. The Process of Synthesis of the Instrumental Group of the Peking Opera with Academic Instrumentation

Time	Stage	Event	Result
Mid-19th century – 1930s	Prerequisites for synthesis	Modernisation of traditional national instruments (standardisation of manufacture, expansion of range)	The material basis for the integration of traditional instruments with Western academic instruments was established
1950–1960	Initial experiments	The first attempts to include instruments of a Western academic orchestra (for example, cello, double bass) in a performance of the Peking opera <i>Three Sad Hills</i>	As a result of the positive reception of the country's leadership and the public, the enthusiasm of the reformers was awakened
1960–1980	Formation of a new model	Approval of the string section from the academic orchestra according to the “4-3-2-1-1” model in the process of creating the Peking opera repertoire	The influence of the Cultural Revolution unexpectedly contributed to the consolidation of a hybrid composition of Chinese and Western academic instrumental groups, which became the standard for subsequent productions
21st century	Manifestation of post-academic syndrome	Emergence of the “symphonic Peking opera”	Modern symphonic Peking opera is gradually moving away from tradition; Western academic symphony orchestras are even replacing traditional instruments in Peking opera, generating debate among specialists

At the same time, the modernisation of musical instruments contributed to the formation of orchestral compositions based on traditional instruments. For example, using the string section of a Western symphony orchestra as a model, musicians created a whole family of instruments with different registers on the basis of the *erhu*: the high *gaohu* (高胡) is analogous to the first violins, the middle *zhonghu* (中胡) is analogous to the viola, the mid-low *gehu* (革胡) is the cello and the low *dahu* (大胡) is the double bass (Il. 4), as well as other national instruments. This process significantly expanded the composition and capabilities of the string

section in the Chinese National Orchestra. These new instruments were also introduced into the compositions of Peking opera.

The modernisation of traditional instruments created the material preconditions for the introduction of Western academic instruments into the traditional group of Peking opera.

Experiments of the 1950s–1960s

The idea of introducing academic symphonic instruments into the instrumental group of the Peking opera arose against the backdrop of the modernisation of traditional instruments. The first practical implementation



Il. 4. String Group from the *Erhu* Family

of this approach took place in 1955 during the production of the Peking opera *Three Sad Hills* (京剧《三座山》), which was an adaptation of the opera of the same name of the Mongolian People's Republic. Its creative team was made up of the composer Liu Jidian (刘吉典), librettist Fan Junhong (范钧宏), and conductor/director Ma Yanxiang (马彦祥). [7, p. 13]

The composer introduced into the traditional instrumental composition of Peking opera both Western academic instruments (cello, double bass, clarinet, French horn) and, at the same time, modernised traditional instruments (for example, the *zhonghu* (中胡), which has been described above as an analogue of the viola). This innovation partially solved the following problems: (1) deficiency of the mid-low register; (2) timbral monotony; (3) limited expressive palette of the traditional instrumental group. [8, p. 1]

The reviews of this new production of Peking opera were divided: some critics called it a valuable experiment, a bold step forward, while others ridiculed it metaphorically as “neither donkey nor horse” (非驴非马), [7, p. 13] implying that it was neither Western academic tradition nor Chinese. Regarding this judgment, the famous composer Ma Ke (马可) noted that the cello does not necessarily indicate Western influence — the main thing is that it corresponds to the aesthetic preferences of the Chinese people. [9, p. 15] Mao Zedong supported the experiment with characteristic humour: “If it’s not a donkey or a horse, a mule is also not bad!” [7, p. 13]

However, this was not merely a joke from the Chinese leader. Mao’s unique political position gave his words enormous weight. His approval — the comparison to a “mule” that absorbed the characteristics of “neither a donkey nor a horse” — gave the daring experiment political protection and legitimacy, further inspiring reformers. In the following period, encouraged by the leader’s stance and the policy of “let a hundred flowers bloom” (百花齐放), experiments in combining Chinese and Western instruments in Peking opera productions multiplied.

As a result, the composer Liu Jidian concluded that the lack of experience and superficial knowledge of traditional and new academic music led to an imperfect result. But the creation of this production provided invaluable experience for the future development of Peking opera. [10, p. 17]

Experiments with the instrumental group in the production of the Peking opera *Three Sad Hills* became an early practice of “mixed-type academisation,” which consisted, on the one hand, in the conscious introduction of mature instrumental groups of the Western academic system (“artificial intervention”) in order to compensate for the “deficiencies” of the traditional instrumental group by technical

means, and on the other hand, in the desire to take root in the deep national soil of the art of Peking opera by preserving traditional and using new modernised instruments (“natural evolution”). Although the initial “synthesis” was still “clumsy” and controversial, it revealed a key problem: how to find a dynamic balance between artificially grafted “technique” and the national artistry of the soil, so as to ultimately forge a “new” synthesis that simultaneously preserves the spirit of the genre and imbues it with fresh vitality. It was precisely this direction of the “ideal artistic paradigm” that became the subject of continuous searches in the process of academisation of Peking opera and the entire Chinese theater.

This path is inevitably fraught with difficulties (for example, criticism of like “neither a donkey nor a horse”), but it also contains creative potential (like the “mule” in the eyes of Mao Zedong). While external factors such as Mao’s proclamation certainly influenced the speed and scale of its spread, the key to its success or failure ultimately lies in whether this “synthesis,” as Ma Ke put it, can truly correspond to the aesthetic foundations of the nation, generating a new “naturalness” through the interplay of intervention and evolution.

The production of the Peking opera *Three Sad Hills* was not the only example; after it, similar productions of Peking opera using the instruments of the academic orchestra began to appear actively, like bamboo shoots after rain. Among well-known examples are *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女, 1958), adapted from the eponymous opera; *White Cloud, Red Flag* (白云红旗, 1958); and *The Story of the Western*

Wing (西厢记, 1959) — all representing early experiments in integrating Western symphonic instrumentation with Peking opera’s traditional ensemble during China’s cultural reform period. The researcher Yuan Shouyu called these three productions “a successful example of the combination of Chinese and Western instruments in the work of Peking opera in new China.” [11, p. 153]

Formation of the String Group Model (1960–1980s)

Between 1966 and 1976, China experienced the so-called “Cultural Revolution” (文化大革命). Against the backdrop of associated political events, the practice of synthesising Chinese and Western music during this period demonstrated a complex and profound historical logic. Although artistic creativity in general was limited and the Western academic music system was criticised, the experiments represented by the “model performances” (样板戏)¹ brought the exploration of mixed-type academisation from the production of the Peking opera *Three Sad Hills* to a new level.

One of the most significant achievements of these experiments was that they preserved the traditional musical group of Peking opera as much as possible, while skilfully synthesising elements of the Western academic orchestra. According to the research of the scholar Wan Yu, “model performances,” guaranteeing the leading role of traditional instruments of the Peking opera (both new and modernised. — *Ya.T., D.V.*), established a synthesis model based on the string group “43211” (that is, 4 first violins, 3 second violins, 2 violas, 1 cello, and 1 double bass). [12, p. 22]

¹ Model performances are a series of stage works that were officially recognised as artistic standards during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and received the general designation of “revolutionary model performances.” These works were based on theatrical productions, including a small number of musical works, which represented the result of the close interweaving of politics and art in specific historical conditions. Among the most famous works based on Peking opera are *The Red Lantern*, *Shajiang*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, and others.

In the production of the Peking opera from the exemplary performance *The Red Lantern* (红灯记), along with observing the above-mentioned principle of synthesis “43211,” a piano was added to accompany the vocal parts of the characters; while, in *Shajiabang* (沙家浜), they went even further, introducing wooden and brass wind instruments into the composition according to the academic Western principle; in the work *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (智取威虎山), the percussion section of the academic orchestra was also used. [11, p. 154]

After analysing the scores of these productions, scholar Chen Tian came to the conclusion that traditional instruments in Peking opera still carry the main melody. The added string and wind instruments of the Western academic orchestra, in addition to emphasising the harmonic effect, most often play the main melody together with the traditional. [13, p. 102] This practice clearly shows that the main goal of introducing instruments into the academic orchestra is to enrich the overall timbre palette and compensate for some of the limited expressive possibilities of traditional instruments, rather than to replace them.

Additional confirmation of this principle of synthesis is provided by the scholar Yao Bo who cites “three key points” (三突出) clearly prescribed in the rules of accompaniment of the instrumental group of “model performances”:

1. When accompanied by an instrumental group, emphasise the string group (above the brass).
2. In the string section, emphasise national traditional instruments (over Western academic ones).
3. Among the national traditional instruments, the “three great instruments” are emphasised. [14, p. 28]

These prescriptions, formed at the policy level, reinforced the logic of synthesis based on

the dominance of national traditional instruments (and especially their key components).

The development of the instrumental group of Peking opera in “model performances” during the Cultural Revolution became a characteristic embodiment of the path of “mixed-type academisation,” whose features were manifested as follows:

- artificial intervention (borrowing from a Western academic orchestra): systematic implementation of a model for constructing an orchestra according to the Western academic model (the core was the basic string group “43211,” to which other instruments from a Western academic orchestra were added in different performances);
- natural evolution (rooted in national soil): strict preservation of the dominant role of the “three great instruments” of Peking opera; Western instruments were limited to auxiliary functions (doubling the melody, creating a harmonic background, filling in expressive possibilities);
- under the influence of the “three emphases” principle, a functionally nested structure was formed: carefully selected elements of Western academic music were hierarchically introduced into the “backbone” of the instrumental group of Peking opera, built around traditional national instruments, and served to support it. Here the goal was functional enhancement, and certainly not replacement.

Manifestation of “Post-academic” Syndrome (21st Century)

The Chinese musical “New Wave” of the 1980s, which originated in the conservatories (represented by such figures as Tan Dun, Qu Xiaosong, and others), became a striking phenomenon after the end of the Cultural Revolution. This avant-garde movement was imbued with a desire to break with the doctrine of socialist realism. Composers actively mastered Western avant-garde techniques of the 20th

century, while simultaneously experimenting with the integration of elements of traditional Chinese music and philosophy. Developing in parallel with the New Wave in the visual arts against the backdrop of ideological liberalisation and openness to the West during the era of reforms, this movement cultivated artistic pluralism and conceptualism. However, its development was abruptly interrupted after the events of 1989 and the campaign against “bourgeois liberalisation,” which imposed severe restrictions on avant-garde experiments; however, the movement did not disappear completely.

Although the direct avant-garde searches in academic music suffered significant losses, the essential artistic idea that drove the “New Wave” (namely: “the synthesis of Chinese and Western” and “a break with traditional frameworks”) has by no means died out. This creative energy and thirst for experimentation found an outlet in other areas of Chinese musical culture, in particular, manifesting itself in an unexpected form in the sphere of traditional opera, and above all in the instrumental group of Peking opera.

This transfer and transformation of the spirit of experimentation became especially noticeable with the advent of the 21st century, which marked a new phase in the development of the instrumental group of Peking opera. As the researcher Liu Yanzi accurately notes, in a wave of symphonisation quietly arose in traditional Chinese theatrical culture. [9, p. 14] This “wave” is expressed in the active use of academic symphonic instruments as the main force in new productions (both Peking opera and other genres of Chinese folk opera). Vivid examples of this trend were the performances *The Beautiful Concubine of the Tang Dynasty* (大唐贵妃), *Princess Turandot* (图兰朵公主), *Yang Jingyu* (杨靖宇), *Chen Sanliang* (陈三两), *Qin Xianglian* (秦香莲), etc.

Delving into the deep study and influence of this wave of symphonism, Wang Jun

focused on a new example of Peking opera, *The Beautiful Concubine of the Tang Dynasty*. [15] He emphasised that this Peking opera with an academic symphony orchestra not only integrated elements of Western music, but also boldly borrowed operatic performance techniques, right down to the introduction of a 70-person choir. [Ibid., p. 25] Wang Jun highly praised this experiment, noting that such examples represent an excellent synthesis of the Eastern artistic form of Peking opera with Western academic symphonic music. *The Beautiful Concubine of the Tang Dynasty* can be called a symphonic Peking opera, and not just a Peking opera with symphony orchestra accompaniment. [Ibid.]

Wang Jun also cited as an example of another experimental project that sparked widespread discussion: the concert *Europeanisation of Peking Opera* (京剧歌剧化音乐会), held on October 21 and 22, 2005 at the Century Theater in Beijing (世纪剧院). He explained that the key innovations of the event were manifested in two aspects: firstly, the vocal parts that were supposed to be performed by Peking opera actors were transferred to Western-style academic singers; secondly, the traditional Peking opera instrumental group with its “three great instruments” was completely replaced by an academic symphony orchestra. Some media outlets assessed this step as a “revolutionary transformation of Peking opera.” [Ibid.]

Despite recognising the value of these experiments, Wang Jun concluded by taking a cautious stance, believing that the return of Peking opera to tradition did not mean marking time: innovation was necessary, but new methods should emphasise authentic art. [Ibid., p. 26] The title of his article *Can Peking Opera Symphonisation Make a Miraculous Comeback?* highlights the author’s deep doubts about the risks of “substituting the essence” that such a path of transformation carries.

The search for a “synthesis” under the auspices of symphonic/operatic models has also been subjected to harsher criticism. Yao Bo took a clear position, arguing that, while the development of the instrumental group of Peking opera certainly needs to move with the times, the complete replacement of the traditional “three great instruments” by the Western academic symphony orchestra and orientation towards the opera model would be tantamount to “dismembering” the key elements of Peking opera. [14] In essence, this serves the “expansion of symphonic creativity,” which will ultimately lead to the “loss of the essence of Peking opera.” [Ibid., p. 29] For this reason, the author is convinced that the development of the instrumental group of the Peking opera should be based on its traditional instruments.

The scholar Yuan Shouyu expressed even harsher criticism of the new production of the Peking opera *Princess Turandot*, believing that such attempts, although carried out under the slogan of “synthesis of China and the West,” in fact use Peking opera only as a “shell” (external form), remaining within the framework of Western symphonic or operatic practice. [11] As a result, the essence of traditional theater is lost, and the absence of the original “skeleton” (power structure) makes the work “indistinguishably Chinese-Western.” [Ibid., p. 154] However, Yuan Shouyu acknowledges the courage of innovative research. In his view, reform and innovation in practice have revealed serious problems, especially the excessive erosion of traditional essence and hypertrophied dependence on Western forms, which has caused heated debates and deep disagreements in the theater community. Therefore, the development path of the instrumental group of Peking opera — how to meet the challenges of the times while preserving its essence and how to achieve meaningful innovations without alienation — still requires intense efforts and deep research from musical figures.

Reflecting on the controversial phenomena and their potential risks (such as “substitution of essence,” “Sino-Western indistinguishability,” “erosion of tradition”), which were brought into the spotlight by the doubts of Wang Jun and critically identified by the scholars Yao Bo and Yuan Shouyu, the scholar Liu Yanzi points to the deep source of the problem consisting in the transformation of the creative worldview and attitudes. [9] She believes that the root of the question of how exactly to construct the “mixture” between traditional theater and symphonic music and how to avoid “chaos” lies not in the scale, duration or number of experiments, but in the dichotomy of consciousness in the creative approach. This position is consistent with the core idea of academisation theory as an evolutionary process affecting thinking, language, and creativity. To be more specific, the above-mentioned ideological liberation movement of the late 20th century, especially the spirit of “breaking with traditional frameworks,” influenced the creative thinking of composers. This prompted some of them, firstly, to move away from national traditions, and secondly, to shift the focus towards an artificial type of academisation, which ultimately served as the basis for the aforementioned disagreements.

Conclusion

The development of the instrumental group of Peking opera in the 21st century has become a vivid reflection of the typical dilemmas of the “post-academic syndrome.” The introduction of symphonic instruments according to the standardised Western model of “numbered opuses” replaced the improvisational essence of the traditional ensemble with the “three great instruments,” weakening the expressiveness of authentic art. Professionalisation and the concert format gave rise to an elitism that distanced the traditional audience, while the dominance of the symphony

orchestra as the “main force” dissolved the unique musical language of Peking opera (timbres, intonations, performance form, etc.) in Western academic sound, provoking an identity crisis experienced in terms of “the blurring of the boundaries between China and the West.” This confirms the criticisms of scholars such as Yuan Shouyu and Yao Bo about the “substitution of essence” and “dismemberment” of key elements.

The counterweight to the post-academic syndrome is the strategy of “mixed-type academisation,” which requires deep rooting in the soil of national art (“natural evolution”) when borrowing symphonic practices (“artificial intervention”). Wang Jun’s principle of “emphasising authenticity” and Yao Bo’s thesis of “traditional instruments as the basis” provide a possible means for establishing such a balance. According to these principles, a successful synthesis would involve preserving the traditional core (for example, the “three great instruments”), using symphonic elements as supplements (expansion of the instrumental group, background arrangements) without

replacing the core, and refusing to sacrifice essence for the sake of formal innovation. Only artificial intervention that safeguards natural evolution will prevent a recurrence of the post-academic syndrome, opening the path for Peking opera to renew itself in a contemporary context without losing its identity.

The century-long evolution of the Peking opera instrumental group convincingly demonstrates that successful cultural modernisation can never be reduced to a dichotomous choice between tradition and innovation. As the theory of “academisation of the mixed type” shows, this is a dynamic model of development, balancing between the assimilation of the Western academic system while remaining rooted in national musical soil. It is within this mixed framework that the viability of cultural transformation is formed.

Although the present research focuses on the development of the instrumental group, it is considered promising to apply the mixed-type academisation methodology to the broader dimensions of the art of Peking opera.

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