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## **SHANXI DAOQING OPERA MUSIC ANALYSIS AS A RESOURCE FOR TEACHING CHINESE OPERA MUSIC HISTORY**

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# SHANXI DAOQING OPERA MUSIC ANALYSIS AS A RESOURCE FOR TEACHING CHINESE OPERA MUSIC HISTORY

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## Abstract

This qualitative research study aimed to explore the history of ancient Chinese opera music and analyze musical characteristics as a resource for teaching the history of Chinese opera music in Shanxi Province, China. The study involved three main informants and utilized a range of research methods, including literature review, fieldwork, and interviews. The analysis of the musical characteristics of early Shanxi Daoqing opera included an examination of its historical development, classical singing style, accompanying instruments, performance scenes, and vocal melody. The result suggest that Daoqing opera has undergone significant changes over time, influenced by various factors such as social and cultural trends. The analysis of the musical characteristics of "Qiong Gong Lei" provides insights into the formal structure, tempo, range, and melody contour of Daoqing opera music. Further research is needed to explore the unique features of different regional styles of Chinese opera and the role of technology in preserving and promoting this traditional art form.

*Keywords:* Shanxi Daoqing opera, Music analysis, Music education, Cultural heritage

## 1. Introduction

Daoqing is a form of Chinese opera that originated in Shanxi, a province in northern China known for its rich cultural heritage. It is believed to have emerged from ancient Daoist music and is divided into two distinct categories based on its tone and characteristics (Wu, 1997). One of these is "faqu Daoqing," a vast song and dance art that uses faqu as the tone. It originated during the Tang Dynasty's Kaiyuan era and thrived at the courts of the Tang and Song dynasties. The second term is "folk song Daoqing," which combines folk songs as the tone and is available in a variety of styles such as songs, rap, opera, and shadow theater. This kind of Daoqing arose during the Tang Dynasty and flourished throughout the Song Dynasty (Wu, 1962).

Daoqing is a type of religious artwork that promotes Taoism's belief that it is best to move away from humanity and return to nature. The Tang and Song dynasties are known for their inception. In the vast Shanxi provinces of Jingle, Fanshi, Daixian, Guoxian (now Yuanping), Shenchu, Hequ, Shuo county (now Shuocheng district, Shuozhou city), Huairan, Yingxian, Pinglu (now Pinglu district, Shuozhou Datong), Youyu, Datong, and others, Daoism and rap were more prevalent throughout the Qing Dynasty. In order to express local customs and people's feelings, Li Chunrong, the discipline (official name) of Mayi county (now Mayi village district, Cheng district, and Shuozhou city), wrote the poem "One Hundred and Twenty Customs" during the Xianfeng Dynasty. (Zheng, 2018)

Shanxi Daoqing is a member of the "Lianqu style" operatic music system. It contains luscious, soaring songs, which are the most important aspect of the performance. Although Daoqing covers the four abilities of "singing, reading, doing, and fighting," the three talents of



"singing, reading, doing, and fighting" are the most important ones because of the subject matter of the singing (Wu, 1962).

Despite its rich history and cultural significance, there is relatively little research on Daoqing's musical characteristics. Most of the existing literature focuses on the historical background of Daoqing, with little attention paid to the musical analysis of this art form (Wu, 1997). Therefore, this paper aims to provide a detailed analysis and explanation of Shanxi Daoqing opera using a variety of Daoqing opera themes. Specifically, this study will focus on the musical characteristics of Shanxi Daoqing opera over the past 20 years, as well as the evolution and changes in Daoqing opera, including the performance characteristics and melodic features of the singing voice, lyrics, and accompanying instruments. By doing so, this paper aims to shed light on the unique features of this traditional art form and provide insight into the rich cultural heritage of Shanxi province (Liu, 2014; Shi, 2015; Chen, 2016; Ma, 2017; Dai, 2018; Li, 2018; Wang, 2019; Meng et al., 2022).

In conclusion, Daoqing is a significant cultural heritage of China that dates back to the Tang Dynasty. It is a form of Chinese opera that originated in Shanxi province and is divided into two categories based on its tone and characteristics. Despite its long history, there is still much to learn about Daoqing's musical characteristics. This study aims to provide a detailed analysis of Shanxi Daoqing opera and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on this traditional art form. By conducting a detailed analysis of Shanxi Daoqing opera music, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and accessible resource for scholars, students, and educators interested in teaching and learning about Chinese opera music history. Furthermore, this research will shed light on the unique features and cultural significance of Shanxi Daoqing opera, helping to promote and preserve this important aspect of Chinese culture.

## **2. Research objectives**

To explore the history of ancient Chinese opera music and analyze musical characteristics as a resource for teaching the history of Chinese opera music in Shanxi Province, China.

## **3. Review literature**

### **3.1 The General Knowledge of Shanxi Province, China**

Shanxi Province is located in northern China and is known for its rich history, cultural heritage, and natural resources. The province covers an area of 156,300 square kilometers and has a population of over 37 million people (Shanxi Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The province is divided into eleven prefecture-level cities, including Taiyuan, the provincial capital. Other major cities in Shanxi include Datong, Changzhi, and Yangquan. Shanxi Province is rich in mineral resources, including coal, iron, and salt. In fact, the province has been called the "cradle of Chinese civilization" due to its abundant mineral resources that have fueled China's economic growth for centuries (Chen, 2008). Shanxi Province is also known for its cultural heritage. The province has a long history and has been home to many important figures in Chinese history and culture, such as Confucius and the philosopher Han Fei. The province is home to many historic sites, including the Yungang Grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage site that features ancient Buddhist statues and carvings (UNESCO, n.d.). Shanxi Province is also famous for its traditional cuisine, which includes dishes such as sliced noodles, vinegar noodles, and Shanxi-style dumplings. The province is also known for its traditional crafts, such as paper cutting, embroidery, and pottery. In recent years, Shanxi Province has undergone rapid economic development and urbanization. The province has become an important hub for transportation, industry, and commerce in northern China. Despite these changes, Shanxi remains a region with a unique cultural identity and rich historical legacy.

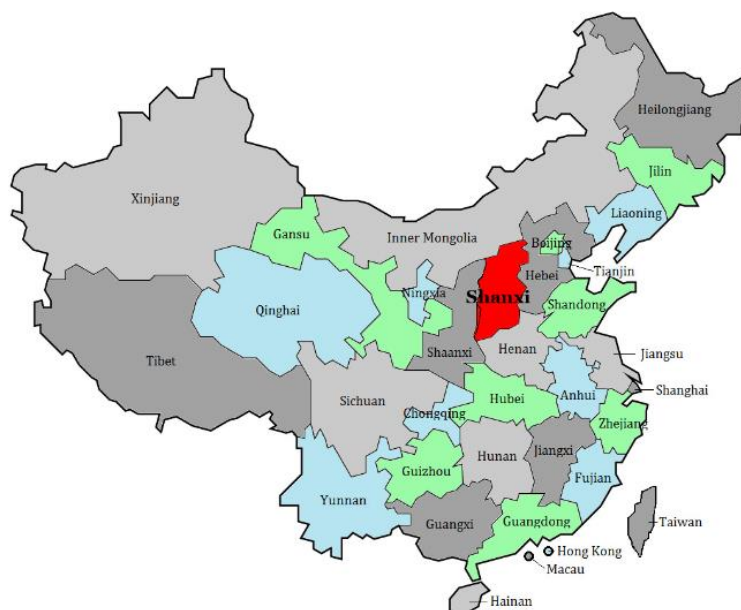


Figure 1. Map of Shanxi province, China

Source: <https://chinafolio.com/provinces/shanxi-province-2> (2021)

### 3.2 The Characteristics of Antique Shanxi Daoqing

Antique Shanxi Daoqing is characterized by its use of traditional musical instruments such as the dizi (Chinese bamboo flute), sheng (reed pipe wind instrument), and yueqin (a plucked string instrument), and the incorporation of elements from Chinese mythology and folklore. It is known for its "three arts" (singing, recitation, and martial arts), and is performed in a variety of styles including opera, rap, and shadow theater (Wu Yimin, 1997). One of the unique features of antique Shanxi Daoqing is its use of the "faqu" tone, which is a distinct style of singing characterized by its rapid pace and high pitch. This tone is used in the "faqu Daoqing" category of Daoqing, which originated during the Tang Dynasty and was popular at the courts of the Tang and Song Dynasties (Wu Yimin, 1997). Antique Shanxi Daoqing is deeply rooted in Chinese Daoist traditions and reflects the belief that it is best to move away from humanity and return to nature. It has a rich history that dates back to the Tang Dynasty and has evolved over time to incorporate new musical elements while retaining its traditional roots (Zheng Jiaojiao, 2018). In summary, antique Shanxi Daoqing is characterized by its use of traditional instruments, incorporation of Chinese mythology and folklore, "three arts" performance style, and deep connection to Daoist traditions. Its unique features and rich history make it a valuable resource for teaching Chinese opera music history.

### 4. Methodology

For my field survey, I created two forms: an interview transcript and a video interview. The interview questions were designed to gather information about the Shanxi Daoqing Opera performance style, songs, events, and musical era.

The key informants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they were local residents who grew up in the area, (2) they understood and were familiar with the development and changes of Shanxi Daoqing opera music, (3) they were representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and national intangible cultural heritage, and (4) they had many years of performance and organizational experience, were older, and were the head of the local opera troupe with local research and performance experience.

1) Zhang Ruifeng is a middle-aged man from Linxian county, Shanxi province, who is the representative inheritor of the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage project Daoqing Opera and the national third-class performer. He has studied with Du Shoucheng and Du Enyu and has been engaged in the performance and creation of the opera independently or in cooperation with others.



*Figure 2. Inheritor: Zhang Ruifeng  
Source: Li Jie*

2) Wu Zhaopeng is a CPC member, opera music theorist, composer, music activist, and national first-class composer. He served as an actor, composer, screenwriter, deputy head and head of Shenchi Daoqing drama troupe, deputy director of Shenchi County Cultural Bureau, and Secretary General of the Xinzhou District Federation of Literary and Art circles.



*Figure 3. Inheritor: Wu Zhaopeng  
Source: Li Jie*

3) Huang Fenglan is a representative inheritor of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative project Daoqing Opera. She has played many popular roles, such as Ke Xiang, Liu Hulan, Tiemei, and Xiao Lan. In 1972, Huang Fenglan went to the province to participate in the performance and was praised by Shi Ding, the chairman of the provincial drama association. This further strengthened her determination and confidence in singing the Taoist Drama.



Figure 4. Inheritor: Huang Fenglan  
Source: Li Jie

4) General investigators: There are actors, directors of theater companies, directors of cultural centers, etc.

Table 1. General investigators

Name	Gender	Age	Position
Li Ming	Male	40	Director of Shanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Center
Hao Qiang	Male	57	Former head of Youyu County Taoist Drama Troupe
Li Peng	Male	51	Director of Hongdong County Cultural Center
Head Yang	Male	65	Head of Hongdong Taoist Drama Troupe
Wang Haicheng	Male	53	Is the head of Youyu Taoist Drama Troupe
Ren Yanmei	female	36	Performer of Linxian Daoqing drama troupe

In addition, I conducted participant observation by attending Shanxi Daoqing Opera performances and events to supplement the data collected through interviews.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews and participant observation was analyzed through content analysis to identify themes and patterns in the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The data were coded into categories and subcategories, and the relationships between categories were examined to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

## 4.2 Research tools

In this study, observations and interviews were the primary research methods utilized. To collect the research data, the researcher created appropriate interview and observation tables in accordance with the study objectives. The process of making the questionnaire involved several steps. Firstly, the data was consulted to make the questionnaire. Secondly, the questionnaire was consulted with professionals for identification. Thirdly, the questionnaire was modified based on the professional suggestions. Fourthly, the questionnaire was sent to professional

researchers for inspection before use. Finally, before the on-site interview, the questionnaire was modified and supplemented based on the expert's suggestions.

### 4.3 Data collection

To gather information about the Shanxi Daoqing Opera music style, the researcher conducted a field survey using interviews and observations. The researcher created appropriate interview and observation tables according to the study's objectives to collect data. Through the investigation, a significant amount of historical and cultural heritage, rhythm, interval, and melody characteristics, and the development of Shanxi Daoqing Opera have been accumulated, providing real data for later research in this paper.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 The History of antique Chinese opera music in Shanxi province, China

In this section on the history of antique Shanxi Daoqing , show the changes in the Daoqing through three areas .

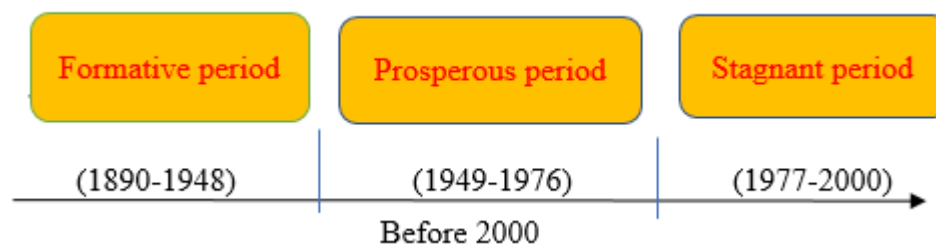


Figure 4. The development stages before 2000

Source: Li Jie

From this figure, we can clearly see the development stage of Shanxi Daoqing. Opera from the shape of Daoqing Opera to 2000 years ago, as well as the division of years.

This section includes three points: (1) the typical musical melody of the play; (2) the accompanying instruments; and (3) the performance scenes.

The majority of the antique Chinese Daoqing operas used a more robust instrumentation configuration while adhering to the old classical vocal approach. By the 2000s, Daoqing opera no longer used traditional instruments like the Yugu and the Jianban, and the performance locations had changed from dowdy country theaters to settings with elaborate backdrops. Daoqing Opera is developed from Quyi Daoqing Opera. The tradition of winning by singing and stressing singing over doing has led to the development of Daoqing Opera's "literary arena". Later, under the influence of other operas, it gradually increased traditional martial arts, and its stage art started a little later due to congenital factors.

In the early stages of Daoqing Opera, it was mostly composed of folk troupes. The performance from village to house was highly mobile, and the staff was simple and flexible. Therefore, the role of the profession was rough, and the financial resources of the folk troupes were limited. The costume makeup and stage design were often very simple. Daoqing opera activities are in the vast countryside, with high mountains and high ground and inconvenient viewing. The audience relies more on listening than on body dancing. As a result, the stage art of Shanxi Daoqing Opera started late, developed slowly, learned more, and created less.

Still, the stage art of Daoqing Opera has grown and changed over time, thanks to the work of Daoqing Opera artists from one generation to the next and the influence of other arts.

## 5.2 The characteristics of antique Chinese opera music in Shanxi province, China

In order to employ a typical Shanxi Daoqing opera, "Qiong Gong Lei," author will examine the musical characteristics of a piece from the Daoqing opera in this essay. This is an ancient transplant of the opera. The singer's performance of this part, sung by Empress Chen, shows the joy of the couple in the opera when they meet again after a long and delicate reunion. The song is very distinctive, with a lot of liner notes in the verses, and the piece is divided into Three phrase in total.

This analysis uses the concept of Narongruch Woramitmaitree (2017), which consists of the formal structure, tempo, range, and melody contour are as follows:

琼宫泪  
Qiong gong lei

China Tradition song  
Transcription by Jie Li

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a tempo marking of quarter note = 70. The piece is divided into three phrases:

- Phrase 1:** Measures 1-16. Lyrics: 数年来 (shu nian lai), 从未 (cong wei), 有呀 嗽号 咳咳 号咳 (you ya ao hao hai hai hao hai), 啊号咳 (a hao hai), 啊好咳 (a hao hai), 啊号咳 (a hao hai).
- Phrase 2:** Measures 17-23. Lyrics: 喜开 (xi kai), 颜 (yan), 哈 (ha), 哈 (ha), 今日里 (jin ri li).
- Phrase 3:** Measures 24-30. Lyrics: 孔雀开屏为人哎 (kong que kai ping wei ren ai), 咳咳欢哈哎 (hai hai huan ha ai), 咳 (hai).

Figure 5. The song of Qiong gong lei

Source: Li Jie

Following chart shows the formal structure of "Qiong gong lei" can be divided as follow: In this table, the piece is divided into three phrases, the first of which is measure (1-16), the second is measure (17-23) and the third is measure (24-30).



Table 2. Formal structure of “Qiong gong lei”

Phrase	1	2	3
Measure	1-16	17-23	24-30

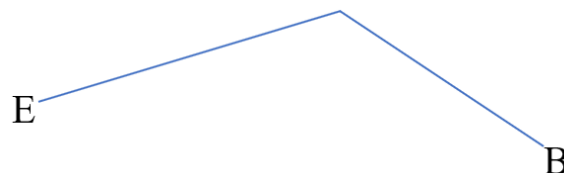
The first phrase has 16 bars, a 2/4 time beat, an andante tempo, and a range where the phrase begins on E and ends on B. The melody contour is Moves to the highest note and moves down at the end.

Phrase 1:

数 年 来                      从 未                      有 呀 嗽 号 咳 咳 号 咳  
 shu nian lai                      cong wei                      you ya ao hao hai hai hao hai

9  
 啊 号 咳                      啊 好 咳                      啊 号 咳  
 a hao hai                      a hao hai                      a hao hai

- The beat of this piece is 2/4
- Tempo                      Andante
- Range                      From E to B
- Melody contour                      Moves to the highest note and moves down at the end



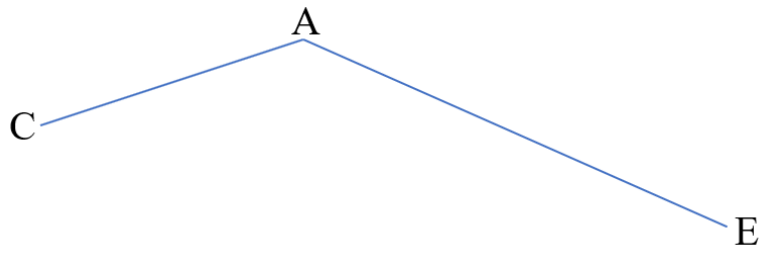
The second phrase is (17-23), a 2/4 time beat, an andante tempo, and a range where the phrase begins on C and ends on E. The melody contour is Moves to the highest note and moves down at the end.

Phrase 2:

喜 开                      颜 哈                      哈  
 xi kai                      yan ha                      ha

- The beat of this piece is 2/4
- Tempo                      Andante
- Range                      From C to E
- Melody contour                      Moves to the highest note and moves down at the end

Phrase 2:



The third phrase is (24-30), a 2/4 time beat, an andante tempo, and a range where the phrase begins on A and ends on E. The Musical melodies are on a downward direction.

Phrase 3:

今日里孔雀开屏为人哎 咳咳欢哈哎 咳  
 jin ri li kong que kai ping wei ren ai hai hai huan ha ai hai

The beat of this piece is 2/4

Tempo Andante

Range From A to E

Melody contour Musical melodies are on a downward direction

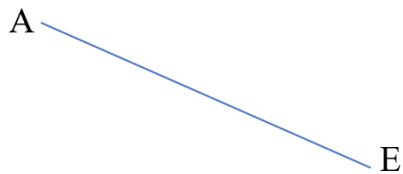


Figure 6. The example performance  
Source: Li Jie

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

This study provides an insight into the history and characteristics of antique Chinese opera music in Shanxi province, China, with a focus on Daoqing opera. The findings suggest that the development of Daoqing opera can be divided into several stages, with changes in musical melody, accompanying instruments, and performance scenes. The study also analyzes the musical characteristics of a typical Daoqing opera piece, "Qiong Gong Lei," using the concept of Narongruch Woramitmaitee (2017).

The results of this study are consistent with previous research on Chinese opera. For instance, Li (2019) notes that the development of Chinese opera is a long process of cultural accumulation, influenced by various factors such as social customs, folk beliefs, and aesthetic concepts. Similarly, Huang and Wang (2018) point out that Chinese opera is a form of traditional art that has undergone significant changes over time due to factors such as politics, economics, and cultural exchange. Moreover, Liu and Li (2021) emphasize the importance of studying the musical features of Chinese opera, including the use of tonal systems, melodic patterns, and instrumental accompaniment. However, some differences can be observed between this study and previous research. For instance, Chen (2018) argues that Shanxi opera is a distinct regional style of Chinese opera that has its own unique characteristics, such as its use of local dialects, vocal techniques, and stage design. Additionally, Wang and Hu (2019) highlight the role of modern technology in promoting and preserving Chinese opera, such as the use of digital archives and online platforms for performance and education.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of the history and musical characteristics of antique Chinese opera music in Shanxi province, China, with a focus on Daoqing opera. The findings suggest that Daoqing opera has undergone significant changes over time, influenced by various factors such as social and cultural trends. The analysis of the musical characteristics of "Qiong Gong Lei" provides insights into the formal structure, tempo, range, and melody contour of Daoqing opera music. Further research is needed to explore the unique features of different regional styles of Chinese opera and the role of technology in preserving and promoting this traditional art form. Provide background information about Chinese opera music history, introduce the study and its methodology, discuss the results, connect to broader themes, provide opportunities for students to engage, and actively engage with the material. This will help students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the material.

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