

# Analysis of the Basic Forms of Traditional Qinqiang Opera

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Fund Project: 2021 key research project in Shaanxi Vocational Academy of Art, No.: 2021XYA11.

**Abstract:** With the development of history, Qinqiang Opera has gradually improved and eventually owned his own style, forming a musical culture form with unique charm. Qinqiang Opera is developing in Shaanxi and Gansu Province since its birth. Under such a small and closed social environment, it generally spread in form of small workshop and many Qinqiang actor can't read and write. However, its singing mode is widely spread, from the past to the present. How does this happen? In order to further explore traditional Qinqiang Opera, this paper analyzes its basic forms, origin and development, hoping to provide a reference for the development of Qinqiang Opera.

**Keywords:** Traditional Qinqiang Opera; Qinqiang Opera; Basic Forms; Qin Han Culture

Music is a kind of cultural phenomena and also a particularly important portion in cultural composition. It not only reflects people's real life, but also romances the way people living and thinking. China has always been a multi-ethnic country, and different ethnic groups have their own unique national culture. For example, there forms a unique kind of music form known as Qinqiang Opera especially in Gansu Province, Shaanxi Province and other places. Qinqiang Opera together with other music forms constitute China's traditional music.

## 1. Origin of Qinqiang Opera

Qinqiang Opera originated from Qin and Han Dynasty. It can be literally interpreted as a kind of music form developed on the base of Qin culture. The theoretic research on Qinqiang began to develop in the middle of Ming Dynasty. Characterized by its fine design and arrangement of long tune and rhythm, Qinqiang Opera lay emphasis on four vocal organs, namely "lip, throat, soft palate and tongue". And its melody is characterized by different plate-types like rhythm and high tongue with ups and downs in its melody. The development of Qinqiang Opera is characterized by its combination of technique and artistry. The proper combination of plate-types and beats in music makes Qinqiang Opera rich in culture and charm. Modern Qinqiang Opera is mainly divided into six plate-types. Among these types, the "two-six plate-type" with "one beat and one plate" is the direct system in Qinqiang Opera and also the basis of six plate-types. There are various sing expressions for statements and words in Qinqiang Opera and there are some more complicated plate-types formed by combining different simple plate-types. The plate-type is the core of Qinqiang Opera and it varies according to the tone in actual performance, sometimes high and other times low, which is specifically embodied in the rhythm of melody. Qinqiang Opera continuously evolved and developed along the long history and gradually form a kind of music with its own unique characteristics.

Since Qinqiang Opera originated in a very early time, it is impossible for us to find out what the exact period when it produced in modern society. In addition, Qinqiang Opera itself is continuously evolving and developing and it owns a rather complicated cultural future according to its developing history. Therefore, different scholars have different views and points

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doi: 10.18686/ahe.v5i3.3455

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on the study of Qinqiang Opera. Some scholars believe that Qinqiang Opera originated in the Qin and Han Dynasties, while others believe that it originated in the Sui, Tang, Jin and Yuan Dynasties, or the late Ming Dynasty. At the end of 20th century, at a Clapper Opera conference held in Taiyuan of Shanxi Province, China, many experts agreed after discussion that the opera originated during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty. The earliest written records of Qinqiang Opera can date back to the Qing Dynasty, which is very similar to the music of that time according to the historical records. It is recorded that Qinqiang Opera had already come into being in the Qing Dynasty, and there were two modes: three beats and one plate and one beat and one plate. This kind of language record is similar to the two-six plate-type and slow plate-type in Qinqiang Opera at that time, which is also a more complicated one among the different plate-types in Qinqiang Opera. Therefore, the slow plate-type is the basic expression of Qinqiang Opera. Thus it can be seen that although Qinqiang music originated in the Qin and Han Dynasties, it had been basically formed in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The plate-type is the core of Qinqiang Opera, which is the framework of the expression of Qinqiang Opera. With complete plate-type, it can be seen that Qinqiang Opera has already owned a basic structure.

According to the research of relevant scholars, the vocal cavity of Qinqiang Opera originated in the Tang Dynasty, which has been widely recognized in the music field. There appeared a form of transformation text (Bian Wen) of rapping music among people in Shanxi Province in the Tang Dynasty, mainly composed of prose and verse with Buddhist stories as its the specific content, which gradually evolved into folklore and ancient historical poetry. It is not only a kind of music form, but also a literary structure. This kind of plate cavity music owns unified features, which is very similar to the structure of transformation text. Thus these features gradually developed into plate cavity opera. By comparison, we can find that the exhortations(Quan Shan) in Guanzhong region are very similar to the transformation text in Tang Dynasty both in expression contents and the form and structure of the prose. There were antiphonal singing and chorus, which embodies more characteristic of the transformation texts in Tang Dynasty. This is also an expression form originated from religious preaching, which can arouse beliefs and emotions among its audience after listening to the music by combining the music content with religious thoughts, and make its audience generate meliorism(Xiang Shan) in their inner heart. In the process of exhortations, the relationship between the two parties needs to be optimized and improved. From the perspective of music content and expression form, there are many similarities between Qinqiang Opera and exhortation in their formats and expressions of lyrics. Therefore, there is a close relationship between Qinqiang Opera music and exhortation. By analyzing the development of Qinqiang Opera, it can be found that folks can sing different stories and religious texts by limited the tunes. In the spreading and singing process of traditional Qinqiang Opera, there are no music scores and the lyrics can use the same words and names and its rhythm and expressions varies differently in the long-term oral singing and performance, which provides a powerful reference for the development of later plate cavity music.

## 2. Basic forms of Qinqiang Opera

After hundreds or even thousands of years of change and development, Qinqiang Opera has gradually formed a relatively complete form of artistic expression under the continuous creation and practice of its performers. Singing tune refers to the singing part in addition to spoken parts in Chinese opera(Nian Bai), which is also the most important part in the music structure of Qinqiang Opera. Singing tune plays an important part in depicting the characters and expressing emotions, and it can promote the development of the story. The sing tunes of Qinqiang Opera is divided into two kinds: happy cavity (Huan Yin Qiang) and bitter cavity (Ku Yin Qiang), and they are different in expressions, which is also the main characteristics between Qinqiang Opera and other local operas.

Qinqiang Opera plays a connecting role in the development of Chinese opera music, and also opens a new structural form of opera music with plate cavity style. The plate cavity of Qinqiang Opera refers to the main rhythm form of Qinqiang Opera, including beat, rhythm and speed, which is also the core of Qinqiang Opera.

Two-six plate is the base and its context constitutes the basic transformation of singing tune in Qinqiang Opera, which is a segment composed of two lyrical phrases acting in cooperation with the same length. Each sentences has two lyrical phrases and there are three and a half phrases in the first lyrical phrases while two and a half in the second phrase, with a total amount of six phrases. The basis beat of “two-six plate” is “one beat and one plate”. Base on lyrical phrases, it gradually formed some

derivation plates such as slow plate, dai ban plate, er dao ban plate, dian ban plate and gun ban plate according to the changes of rhythms and beats. And then it can further express the singing subjects of Qinqiang Opera like lyrics, dramas, narratives and so on. The singing tune of Qinqiang Opera mainly consists of two materials and four kinds of music, of which the two materials are respectively: the basic tune of the context on the Zhen mode (namely, the singing tone similar to the exhortations of Guanzhong Opera); and an instrumental tune in Gong mode, namely the three rings (also known as the prelude to the two-six plate and sloe plate). The four kinds of music are as follows: Variation technique; repetitive change technique; extension technique and shifting and inserting technique. It is on the basis of basic materials that artists use different techniques to constantly reform and develop Qinqiang Opera.

### 3. Conclusion

Music is a kind of culture and also the accumulation of social civilization and history. There are significant regional characteristics in Qinqiang Opera, which is the representative of Shaanxi and Gansu traditional culture. Its tones and expressions are gradually formed through continuous refinement and perfection, with a very strong historical atmosphere. Qinqiang Opera requires richer experience and artistic expressions to make itself a place in modern music. Moreover, it is necessary to find the formation rules of traditional Qinqiang Opera and make full use of its wonderful singing and plate types so as to provide continuous vitality and power for the development of Chinese Qinqiang Opera culture.

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