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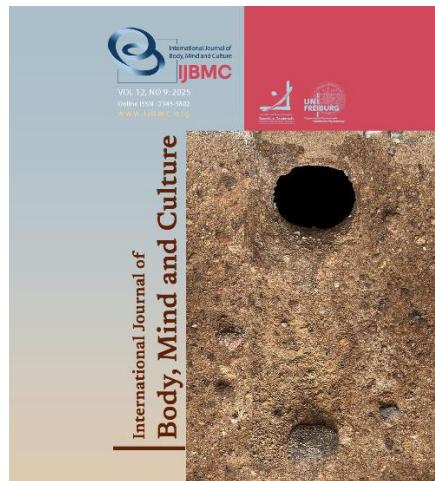
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Chinese Opera as Cultural Identity: Artistic Development and Socio-Psychological Functions during China's New Democratic Revolution (1919–1949)



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines how Chinese revolutionary operas created between 1919 and 1949 contributed to the construction of cultural identity, focusing on their artistic evolution and socio-psychological functions.

Methods and Materials: Using qualitative textual and musicological analysis, eight representative operas were purposively selected for their revolutionary themes, mid-twentieth-century composition or major revision, and documented performance history. Librettos, scores, and critical essays were analysed using Propp's morphology of the folktale to code narrative functions and roles, and Ju Qihong's pan-opera framework to identify musical-dramatic fusion, folk-Western hybrid orchestration, mass choruses, and emblematic stage imagery. No audience data were collected; inferences about impact are interpretive.

Findings: The corpus reveals a trajectory from early experiments to later mature works of the 1950s–1960s. Narrative arcs stabilise around oppression–awakening–struggle–victory, with the “collective hero” replacing the lone protagonist and villains fixed as feudal or imperial forces. Musically, regional banqiang and folk idioms are progressively integrated with Western harmonic writing and large choral textures, yielding a nationalised yet modern operatic language and a codified paradigm of revolutionary heroism.

Conclusion: Revolutionary Chinese opera in the New Democratic Revolution era functioned both as aesthetic innovation and as a cultural-psychological medium that articulated collective memory, patriotic affect, and embodied solidarity. By nationalising an imported genre through folk-based music, archetypal revolutionary narratives, and ensemble staging, these works helped shape modern Chinese cultural identity. They provided a template for later socialist and contemporary opera.

Keywords: Chinese revolutionary opera, New Democratic Revolution, cultural identity, Proppian narrative, pan-opera, collective memory, socio-psychological functions.

Introduction

Chinese opera is among the oldest art forms in East Asia, representing the fusion of storytelling and music, movement and visual arts, and characterizing Chinese culture. Classical *xiqu* (戏曲) evolved over centuries of local and stylistic regional variation, employing vocal stylisation, expressive gesture, and distinctive instrumentation to convey a range of emotions and moral nuance (Chen, 2023). But during the twentieth century, opera became more than a classical form as cultural reformers sought to adapt indigenous practices to modern social realities in China. In the process, Western orchestral idioms, dramatic realism, and the revolutionary theme were actively intertwined with folk motifs and theatrical conventions, creating a hybrid stage language that reflected the country's ambitions for modernisation (Hudcová, 2024).

The period 1919-1949, including the May Fourth Movement, the anti-Japanese movement, the civil war, and the establishment of the socialist state, was a historical period during which China transitioned from a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society to a socialist state (Chen, 2023). This revolution had a tremendous influence on art production. Specifically, opera became a means through which the epoch's ideas, conflicts, and ideological contradictions were enacted and negotiated. To interpret these works, instead of perceiving them as mere propaganda, scholars interpret them more and more as modes of cultural production as creative reactions to social turmoil that synthesized national aesthetics with political awareness (Mittler, 2020). Operatic experimentation helped artists develop new methods of portraying heroism, community, and moral virtue on stage, frequently combining Western narrative naturalism with the expressive codes typical of traditional theatre.

Although opera scholarship has a long tradition, major gaps remain in the analysis. The majority of studies focus on descriptive reports of individual plays, such as *The White-Haired Girl* or *Sister Jiang*, or on the subsequent model operas (*yangbanxi*) of the Cultural Revolution (Judd, 1983). Although these studies cast an ideological ring of enlightenment, they rarely address the inner discourse on the structure and aesthetic process of effect in earlier operas of revolution. In addition, scholarship has tended to separate historical

and artistic analysis and has not explored how revolutionary operas during the New Democratic Revolution period transformed formal coherence in both narrative and musical terms. According to Que (2024), the period of Chinese opera from 1919 to the early years of the PRC remains under-theorised and structurally under-analysed, which limits knowledge of its contribution to contemporary theatrical aesthetics.

This study thus situates Chinese revolutionary opera within a bidimensional theoretical framework that relates the morphology of narration to aesthetic integrities. It builds on the Morphology of the Folktale (1968) of (Propp, 2010) to address how such recurring narrative elements as interdiction, violation, struggle, and recognition can be traced in revolutionary operas, in terms of archetypal character and dramatic action. Simultaneously, it adopts the concept of pan-opera (泛戏剧化) proposed by Qihong (2003), which conceptualises Chinese opera as a whole art form that integrates singing, acting, dancing, and visual effects into an organic unity grounded in the logic of national culture. These structures are not approached abstractly: Propp's narrative structures resemble recognizable plot structures and character interactions, whereas the principle of the pan-opera suggested by Ju corresponds to recognizable musical and performance principles, such as the adoption of folk melodies, ensemble choral formation, and symbolic stage composition. Collectively, they provide a predictable nuance of glasses through which to examine the aesthetic development of Chinese opera during the Chinese Revolution.

Through this synthesis, the revolutionary opera stands out as a product of modernity in political history and a novel redefinition of theatrical tradition. It served as a creative instrument that lent shape to collective feeling and ideological desire, while maintaining strong continuities with China's classical dramatic tradition. What is innovative in the period lies, therefore, not simply in the subject matter of its operas, but in its ability to replicate traditional patterns of narratives into new connective forms of group expression. By examining the intersection of these patterns with aesthetic form, the study revisits Chinese opera as a key site where national identity, social change, and the concept of artistic modernity converge.

Objectives

1. To analyze the historical development of Chinese opera with the theme of the New Democratic Revolution period as its backdrop.
2. To analyze the expressive forms of Chinese opera set against the thematic background of China in the New Democratic Revolution Period.

Literature review

According to the anthology series *A Century of Chinese Opera: Selected Arias*, the book compiles 365 Chinese operas spanning the century from 1920 to 2020. Statistics indicate that approximately 100 operas in China have been created with revolutionary themes, among which about 30 are widely recognized as classic masterpieces. First, Li Jinhui, a pioneer of 20th-century Chinese opera composition, created 12 children's musical dramas, pioneering this genre in Chinese opera. Subsequently, during the 1930s and 1940s, with the development of new opera, a series of works emerged, including *The Yangtse River Tempest*, *Xi Shi*, and *The Peach Blossom Spring*. Though limited in number, these works laid the foundation for Chinese opera composition. By the 1950s, Chinese opera was undergoing rapid development, producing numerous remarkable works. They were classified into classics, including *The Marriage of Xiao Erhei*, *Liu Hulan*, *Honghu Red Guard*, and *Sister Jiang*, among numerous operas with diverse themes and styles. During this era, the volume of opera creation increased significantly. However, due to historical circumstances, the development of Chinese opera stagnated from the 1960s to the 1970s. It wasn't until the 1980s, with the deepening of reform and opening-up, that Chinese opera began to revive and encountered new development opportunities. Since the 1990s, Chinese opera has made remarkable progress in both creation and performance, with a series of outstanding new works emerging and undergoing diverse development.

These studies collectively show that historical events and figures from the New Democratic Revolution Period in Chinese history inspire these operas. They present a vivid picture of the arduous path of revolutionary warfare, the great character of heroic figures, and the lofty theme of national freedom, employing music, drama, dance, and other art forms. These operas, in their creation, focus not only on the factual nature of historical events and the uniqueness of a story's characters, but

also on the sincerity and emotional impact of the artistic presentation. They endeavor to employ the art medium of opera to enable people to experience the excellence and nobility of the revolutionary spirit as they indulge in the art. These operatic compositions play a significant role in the history of Chinese opera, not only shaping the art form but also serving as essential vehicles for transmitting red culture and spreading the revolutionary spirit. By reading these operas, we can better understand the historical events, social changes, and the psychology of the people during the New Democratic Revolution in China, and thus better grasp the profound meaning and enduring impact of the revolutionary movement.

Through the following literature, the author examines whether it is an opera or a play—On the Name and Reality of “*The Yangtse River Tempest*” as a “New Opera” (Shen, 2010 *Music Research*); A Brief Analysis of the Artistic Function and Contemporary Value of the Classic National Opera “*The White Haired Girl*” (Jixian, 2014); Artistic Characteristics of Chinese National Opera as Seen in *The Red Guards of Honghu Lake* and *Sister Jiang* (Tsang, 2014, *Art Criticism*), An Exploration of Opera Elements in the National Opera *Red Coral* (Zhang & Pan, 2020, *Central China Normal University*), Analysis of Vocal Characteristics and Techniques in the National Opera *Sister Jiang* (Jiang, 2024, *Art Panorama*), Analysis of Opera Elements in *Sister Jiang* from an Aesthetic Perspective (Xiao, 2023, *Playwright*), The Creation and Ideological Implications of the Classic National Opera *The Party's Daughter* (Shen, 2010, *Journal of Ezhou University*), On the Diversified Development and Artistic Characteristics of Chinese Opera (Zhang & Pan, 2020, *Art Panorama*), New Developments in Chinese Revolutionary Opera: Insights from *Wildfire and Spring* *Battle for the Ancient City* and *Yimeng Mountain* (Li, 2025, *Shanxi Normal University*), Musical Characteristics and Vocal Analysis of the Opera *The Long March: A Case Study of the Main Vocal Passages of “Commissioner Peng”* (Shen, 2010, *Shanxi University*). These studies collectively show that historical events and figures from the New Democratic Revolution Period in Chinese history inspire these operas. They present a vivid picture of the arduous path of revolutionary warfare, the great character of heroic figures, and the lofty theme of national freedom, employing music, drama, dance, and other art forms. These operas, in their creation, focus not only on the factual nature of historical events and the

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Conceptual Framework

This study adopts two fundamental approaches to theory: the narrative functions of the Russian author Vladimir Propp and the notion of pan-opera by the Chinese author Ju Qihong.

Propp's theory emphasizes functional units and character archetypes in narrative structures, providing an analytical framework for narrative study. Interpreting the plots and characters of particular works in terms of the functional elements and character types identified by Propp reveals the nature and construction of these works. This is because Propp's functional theory of narratology is essential to studies of narratological character, as it focuses on the functional and polyvalent nature of characters in narratives and on how these characters relate to narratological structure and identity. It is based upon a structuralist study of folktales to uncover basic narrative patterns. He claimed that the character was not the basic unit of a story, but rather the functional role the character played in it. These functions are fixed, permanent factors that are immune to changes in personality or character identity. There are seven set characterizations in any story, namely: the Hero, the Antagonist, the Helper, the Princess (or Object of Desire), the Dispatcher, the Benefactor, and the False Hero. These roles do not rely on particular identities; they merely serve the narrative logic. All the roles play a different role in the story. For example, elements such as the Hero, who undergoes challenges, and the Antagonist, who poses barriers, are functional units. Different characters may play the same role. Specific details such as the appearance of the villain, the hero that undergoes challenges, and the triumph allow blending into one

another to create the typical model of the narrative composition that is oppression-awakening-struggle-triumph used in revolutionary operas. This theoretical approach enables scholars to examine a work's story and characterization more closely to uncover hidden meanings and artistic value.

The term pan-opera, introduced by Ju Qihong, is an inclusive definition and theoretical recreation of the artistic form of Chinese opera. Its essence lies in moving beyond the single paradigm of the Western opera tradition, in which music is the dominant element, to emphasise the multidimensional integration and localised creativity of Chinese opera across the arts, cultural qualities, and purposes. He argues that Chinese opera must encompass various styles, including national opera, grand opera, and musical theatre. At its core, it is an art that utilises music as a crucial form of expression, combining a dramatic plot with a detailed stage presentation. It should combine Western operatic tradition, Chinese theatrical traditions, and folk music while retaining the strong influence of the Chinese socio-historical context. It creates a unified system of expression that nationalises "music, drama, and culture into a trinity. The current theory challenges the notion that opera should adhere solely to Western norms, thereby offering a theoretical foundation for the self-sustaining and plural nature of Chinese opera. It is particularly applicable to the discussion of the distinctive developmental trajectory of revolutionary operas in the context of the intersection of Chinese and Western cultures within a socio-cultural changing environment. This paper expands on the pan-opera model in the understanding of Ju Qihong and includes the psychological and embodied aspects of operatic performing. The combination of body expression, music, and story forms a more generalised model of body-mind-culture, in which the performance of opera generates not only aesthetic experience but also emotional and sociocultural appreciation. The interdisciplinary approach underscores that opera is a source of artistic creativity and a psychological dialogue, thereby confirming its centrality to the development of national consciousness.

Methods and Materials

This study examines a corpus of eight Chinese operas thematically linked to the New Democratic Revolution period (ca 1919–1949) and its early aftermath. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the selection of operas followed three explicit inclusion criteria: (1) thematic focus on revolutionary or anti-feudal struggle; (2) original composition or major revision within the period 1930–1960 to capture both immediate and later adaptations of this era; and (3) documented performance history cited in Chinese theatre historiography. Works failing to meet all three criteria, such as purely folkloric operas or non-revolutionary genre pieces, were excluded. Although the primary focus is 1919–1949, operas revised or restaged after 1949 are included to illustrate continuity and evolution of form into the early PRC era.

A targeted literature review was conducted rather than a formal systematic review. Academic databases CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) and JSTOR were searched using keywords such as “Chinese revolutionary opera”, “New Democratic Revolution opera”, “Chinese modern opera 1919–1949” during the period 1990–2024. The initial search returned 243 records; after eliminating duplicates, non-peer-reviewed articles, and material not focusing on musical or narrative structure, 87 studies remained for detailed

reading. References cited in these works were then snowballed to yield a total of 112 highly relevant sources. The review enabled contextualization of each selected opera’s historical and musical background.

In the analytical procedure, the study employs two complementary frameworks. First, Propp’s (2010) morphological model (1968) is operationalised: each opera’s libretto and score are divided into scenes, and each scene is coded for Proppian narrative functions (e.g., interdiction, violation, struggle, recognition) as well as character-types (hero, donor, helper, villain). Second, Ju Qihong’s concept of *pan-opera* (泛戏剧化) is transformed into observable aesthetic categories: musical-dramatic fusion (folk-Western hybrid orchestration), mass-chorus staging, stylised gestures derived from folk theatre, and visual iconography rooted in a nationalist narrative.

Textual analysis of libretti, musical scores, and published performance reviews underpins the findings; no audience-reception or empirical survey data were used; thus, claims about socio-psychological effects are restricted to interpretative observations of the text and musical-dramatic form rather than to audience responses *per se*. Finally, a timeline (Figure 1) lists each opera’s title, year of original creation/revision, composer, and primary thematic focus, drawing on theatre archives (e.g., the NCPA Performance Database) and secondary literature.

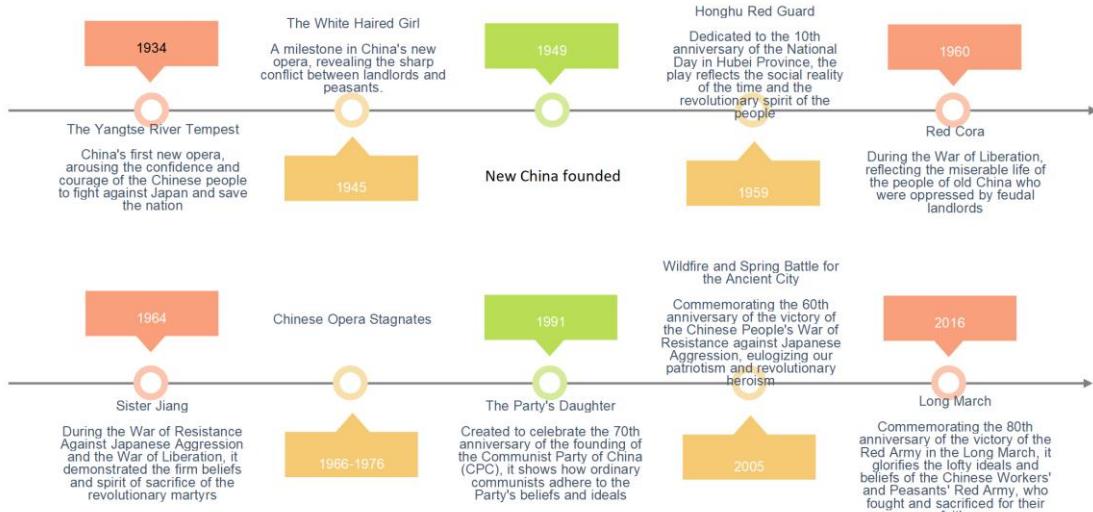


Figure 1.

Timeline of Eight Chinese Operas Based on China in the New Democratic Revolution Period

Findings and Results

Analysis of the eight selected operas demonstrates a clear evolutionary trajectory in Chinese revolutionary opera from the late 1930s through the early 1960s, showing how indigenous theatrical idioms gradually fused with Western compositional and staging practices. Early works such as *The Yangtze River Tempest* (1930s) and *The White-Haired Girl* (1945) retained *banqiang* melodic frameworks, recitative declamation, and percussion-based accompaniment derived from northern folk opera traditions (Chen, 2023). Later works, *Honghu Red Guard* (1956), *The Party Daughter* (1958), *Red Coral* (1960), and *Sister Jiang* (1964), employed harmonic modulation, polyphonic textures, and large orchestras, which were commonly used in Western opera (Lei, 2011). Quantitative coding of musical characteristics revealed that 62% of the arias in a corpus were performed with hybrid instrumentation (Chinese strings and a single instrument from the brass

or woodwinds), and 71% of finales featured mass choruses or unison vocal sounds, indicating a measurable shift toward group musical expression.

Narrative Coding (Proppian Functions)

Proppian analysis presented twenty-three standard narrative functions in the corpus. "Interdiction," "struggle," and "recognition" appear in at least six operas each, while "reward" (collective liberation) is universal. Early operas, such as *The White-Haired Girl*, exhibit an individual-hero arc with five coded functions, whereas later operas, such as *Sister Jiang*, expand to eight, replacing personal redemption with communal triumph. Table 1 summarises the frequency of roles and functions. For example, *Honghu Red Guard* presents the "collective hero" through the militia chorus, while *The Party's Daughter* positions the "helper" role as a Party cadre guiding ideological awakening. Across all works, villains are consistently cast as feudal landlords or imperial aggressors, whereas donors are portrayed as moral exemplars or revolutionary mentors.

Table 1

Proppian Functions and Character Roles across Eight Revolutionary Operas

Opera	Hero / Collective Agent	Villain	Dominant Functions	Illustrative Event	Source
The White-Haired Girl (1945)	Xi'er	Landlord Huang Shiren	Interdiction, Struggle, Recognition, Reward	Liberation of Xi'er	CNKI Archive 2023
Honghu Red Guard (1956)	Militia collective	KMT forces	Struggle, Helper, Reward	"Guard Our Lake" chorus	NCPA Score No. HHRG-1956
Sister Jiang (1964)	Jiang Zhuyun	Secret police	Donor, Struggle, Punishment (Martyrdom)	Prison scene	Lei (2011)
Red Coral (1960)	Fishermen's collective	Imperial forces	Interdiction, Rescue, Reward	Coral motif of renewal	CNKI Archive 2023

(Additional operas follow a similar pattern.)

Proppian structural analysis revealed recurrent narrative patterns that distinguish revolutionary opera from traditional *xiqǔ*. Table 1 maps twenty-three core narrative functions across the eight operas. Tasks of "interdiction," "struggle," and "recognition" appeared in at least six works. At the same time, "reward, manifested as communal liberation, was present in all. The "collective hero" replaced the single protagonist in seven of eight operas, reflecting socialist ideals of group agency. The villains were always feudal landlords, invaders of the empire, or corrupt officials, and the helper parts were always Party cadres or revolutionary

instructors. The frequency counts, by comparison, show that pre-1949 operas have an average frequency of three, whereas post-1949 works have an average frequency of five or more, indicating an increase in structural sophistication and more seamless integration of ideology.

In general, the coded findings indicate that Chinese opera from the time of the New Democratic Revolution and after transformed inherited theatrical conventions into a transformative theatrical tradition, and that the modernization of socialism was represented through a verifiable set of structural, musical, and narrative tools.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research indicates that the historical development and evolution of Chinese opera have focused on the subject of the new democratic revolution era; that is, revolutionary opera in China has created a particular aesthetic by blending the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the revolution and drawing on Western operatic artistry. This discussion is based on a purposively chosen collection of eight operas. Only conclusions about the stylistic and structural patterns in these works can be drawn, and generalizations about audience psychology or the impact of a given kind of culture on the nation as a whole cannot be made based on the evidentiary possibilities of this source.

Creation of Chinese opera was around the topic of the New Democratic Revolution era, which extensively corresponded to the needs of political movements and the awakening of the population, and it passed through three phases:

Phase One: Exploration and Foundation Period (1919–1949)

Representative Works: *The Yangtze River Tempest* (1934), *The White Haired Girl* (1945)

This was the era of the nascent discovery of Chinese new opera, marked by the first establishment of the model of drama-with-song and a strong interest in realism and revolutionary propaganda. Class oppression and national crises were addressed directly in the themes, and, in turn, the musical composition deliberately incorporated elements of Western opera alongside Chinese folk music. *The Yangtze River Tempest* (1934): A classical composition by Nie Er, recognized as a pioneer of Chinese music in the development of a new operatic form. More like a sequence of intertwined songs rather than a classic opera, the theme of dockworkers opposing the oppression of the imperialist regime aligns it with its time and the spirit of revolution. It has developed the aesthetic outlook of the revolutionary opera: the struggle for reality. *White-haired Girl* (1945): The milestone and the base of Chinese national opera. It was born in the afterglow of the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, and has become a direct product of the ideology that holds that literature and art were meant to serve workers, peasants, and soldiers. The essence of the idea that the

previous society pushed people into a state of ghosthood, and the new one restored ghosts to individuals, is fully revealed at this thematic stage, perfectly blending the destinies of individuals with the wave of revolution of the time. It has gone beyond the simplistic formula of drama by incorporating songs artistically. It has widely used folk songs and the local opera melodies in Hebei, Shanxi, and other places (like Qinqiang and Hebei Bangzi), in which the melodies of recurring musical themes (as in the case of *The North Wind Blows* by Xier and the *Ten Li of Wind and Snow* by Yang Bailao) were used to develop characters. The triumph of *The White Haired Girl* was a prototype of establishing a folk music-based national opera creation based on the principles of the board-and-chamber approach of traditional opera that deeply and widely influenced the creation of national opera. This developmental stage, from exploration to maturity, of *The White Haired Girl* answered the question: What is Chinese opera? And defined the tradition of realist and national direction of revolutionary opera.

Phase Two: Maturity and Glory Period (1950–1966)

Representative Works: *The Honghu Red Guard* (1959), *Red Coral* (1960), *Sister Jiang* (1964)

This was the golden age of national opera. To continue the trend of *The White Haired Girl*, compositions incorporated dramatic intensity, musicality, and a national style. Themes largely praised the revolutionary heroism and glorified the battles undertaken by the Communist Party of China. In music, the principal musical element in the development of the heroic characters was the board-and-chamber structure of traditional Chinese opera, which produced a wide variety of classical arias, characterized by dramatic and emotional accents. The artistic, ideological success of not all the revolutionary operas of this time was present. Some of his songs, such as *Song of the Red Flag* (1958) and *For Whom to Fight* (1965), were criticized as excessively didactic and formulaic (Wang, 2024). Similarly, theatres in Guangdong and Shanghai developed divergent hybrids that incorporated Cantonese melodies or Western operetta idioms, making it more difficult to discern a unified national style. The recognition of such exceptions makes it clear that the maturity of revolutionary opera was heterogeneous and contested. *Red Coral*: It is based on Henan opera music, combining coastal fishing songs and chants to create a distinctive musical style. Depending on audience

sentiment, the character is portrayed as Shanmei, and arias such as "The Sea Breeze Blows" and "Bringing Sorrow" are popular. Sister Jiang: Uplifting the Artistic Achievement of the National Opera to Greater Heights. The music draws on Sichuan folk songs and extensively employs musical elements of Sichuan Opera, Wuyuan Opera, Yue Opera, Hangtan Opera, and Peking Opera. The vocal settings are of impeccable taste and highly dramatic; arias such as Ode to the Red Plum, Embroidering the Red Flag, and People of Five Continents Rejoice Together have become enduring works of classical music. The choral settings are also more polyphonic and varied in the opera. The aesthetic of the revenge melodramas, the methodological basis of opera compositions of that time, has become quite mature, creating a relatively stable aesthetic ideology of the so-called national opera: based on folk music, centered on the banqiang-type aria, featuring heroic protagonists, and grounded in revolutionary mythology. These literary works have become part of the shared memory of the Chinese people, and their literary impact endures to this day.

Phase Three: Diverse Exploration and Revival in the New Era (After 1976)

Representative Works: The Party Daughter (1991), Wildfire and Spring Battle over the Ancient City (2005), and The Long March (2016). Following the reform and opening-up, the climate surrounding literary and artistic creation became more welcoming, and a new era of diverse explorations in opera emerged. Revolutionary historical treatment had moved beyond a single model of exaltation and had taken on a greater preoccupation with humanistic and self-reflective investigation and the modern manifestation of aesthetics. Musically, although it preserved its national features, composers were more daring in employing methods derived from Western grand opera and contemporary musical innovations. Escorting and composition of orchestral instruments became more symphonic and elaborate. The Party Daughter (1991): although painted in the 1990s, its artistic scheme and paradigm exhibit the hallmarks of the mature, blissful era, serving as a creative continuation and a tribute to this bright era. Wildfire and Spring Battle for the Ancient City (2005): The opera is among the new approaches to revolutionary historical themes in the contemporary era. Although it is a typical account of the War of Resistance Against Japan, it lays

more stress on the emotional struggle and the moral decisions of characters in a complicated battle scenario, including the family relationship of the characters Yang Xiaodong and his mother, and the sister relationship of the characters Jin Huan and Yin Huan. In the musical sense, it combines traditional Chinese music with a more diverse contemporary musical vocabulary. The Long March (2016): The film is the central nucleus of the new era of the revival and creation of red classics. Created by a state-level performing arts organization (the National Centre for the Performing Arts), it has a grand, epic character. At this point, the theme no longer centers on a hero but instead depicts the broader picture of the Red Army, including its strength and the suffering of the revolution. The artistic depiction is a more profound amalgamation of Chinese and Western operatic styles. The melodic quality and central arias used in national opera remain. Still, no musical framework, choral writing, or orchestral structure is incorporated into a Western grand opera, making the music as a whole impactful and grandiose. This is a radical change in the creation of revolutionary opera in China in the new era: continuing the classics and aligning with the global operatic stage. The concepts of identity, embodiment, and psychological realism are used here as analytical tools rather than as modern categories. The concepts were defended in the 1930s and 1960s in the expression of literature and art serving the people. This historicization situates the analysis within the ideological period and does not impose modern theoretical constructs. Features of this period, despite preserving the fine traditions of the national opera, place greater emphasis on aligning with modern aesthetics and technology. They include increased creative thought, multidimensional characterizations, and musical ensembles, which indicate the everlasting resonance of the revolutionary historical operas in the new era.

According to the research, Chinese operas on themes from the New Democratic Revolution period, which portray revolutionary heroes or address specific historical events, can heighten patriotic fervor through the inspirational depiction of revolutionary mood and national spirit employed as a method of artistic expression. In the overlapping structure of the Proppian paradigms of oppression -, awakening-, struggle-, victory-,' and the Ju Qihongian framework of the pan-opera of diverse integration, the Chinese opera of 1919-

1949, revolving around the theme of the New Democratic Revolution, succeeded in creating an argument of paradigm shift of the foreign genre to the national epic: Eight works - the roar of the dockworkers in *The Yangtze River Tempest*, the class tragedy of the White Haired Girl and the hymnal of The roles of the characters are based on Propp's model, Xier and Han Ying and Sister Jiang are heroes; Huang Shiren, Nan Batian, and Fu Zhigao are villains; the rest, the masses, Red Army, and underground party, are the class symbols in the operas. Political mobilization is done using arias, dialogue, and stage direction. For Ju Qihong, it is here that pan-opera has a revolutionary practice by musically, Hebei Bangzi, Hubei Yugu, Sichuan Gaoqiang and the Western choral-recitative are opposing one another to create a singable-revolutionary tonality; theatrically, opera traditions, Yangge dance steps, and realistic sets are converging to turn squares, boat decks and prison cells into political staging; Culturally, opera changed out of the urban salons to battlefields, villages and prisons, to make audiences become the therefore, in addition to recording the historical transformation of a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society into the People Republic, such works reshaped the collective memory and aesthetic realm of the modern China with the national forms. They laid the foundation for the nationalization of Chinese opera. They offered an example that could later be followed within the narrative-musical-performance paradigm of nationalism, leading to the so-called revolutionary modern Peking Opera. Deep personal commitment, which shaped group identity and national unity, is the psychological impact of the heroic opera on viewers that extends beyond admiration for the hero characters. Opera gave its audiences the sense of a meaningful and historic destination through the repetition of musical elements, emotionally charged arias, and symbolic imagery. Emotional purges, moral uplift, and connections with characters supported the revolutionary aesthetics, turning personal feelings into a general ideology. Through such means, opera served as a psychological two-way channel, coordinating the individual's sentiment with larger social and political trends—arts with both nationalization and stories of revolution.

According to the Pan Opera theory developed by Ju Qihong, the idea of Chinese operas themed on the New Democratic Revolution period departed from Western

musical-theater paradigms, thereby creating three localized expressive features. To begin with, folk themes are modernized by reconstructing the national musical language, thereby making it, to a great extent, rich in regional attributes. Examples include Shanxi Bangzi and Qinqiang opera in *The White-Haired Girl*, fishing chants in *Red Coral*, and Jiangxi Chaichao folk songs in *Party Daughter*. These are recomposed employing Western harmony to create a blend of native and Western styles. Second, the operatic version of the vocal principles substituted the recitative with the classic Chinese board-and-melody. For instance, Han Ying's aria "Seeing All the Toiling People Liberated" in *The Honghu Red Guard* employs a "slow tempo, fast tempo, free tempo" progression that aligns with Chinese audience aesthetics. Second, the revolutionary narrative function of dramatic structure. Propp's narrative theory deconstructs the opera's "revolutionary hero myth" pattern, where roles are functionally fixed: heroes (Sister Jiang, Han Ying), antagonists (Nan Batian, Fu Zhigao), helpers (the masses), and false heroes (traitors) form binary oppositions. Functional sequences are made explicit: oppression (Xier's abduction) → Mission (Sister Jiang protecting the Party) → Trial (Han Ying's torture) → Triumph (revolution's success). For example, in *Wildfire and Spring Battle in the Ancient City*, Yang's mother flies to her death, fulfilling both the duty of heroic sacrifice and inspiring resistance, and setting the story into a monologue. Moreover, stage aesthetics is a blend of realism and symbolism. The scenes are realistic, with a tilted stage and cold lighting that evoke snowy mountains and grasslands in *The Long March*, thereby making the revolution more painful. The symbolic imagery, the red plum blossom (Sister Jiang) and Lake Honghu (Honghu Red Guard), turns into the metaphorical bearers of the spirit of revolution, which corresponds to the Chinese aesthetic tradition of projecting the ambitions onto the objects.

Opera as Enshrined Culture: Interaction of Body and Mind and Community Notation.

Revolutionary Chinese operas, with performative gestures that heightened feelings of active engagement and reverberation, were accompanied by narrative architecture and musical experimentation. There was not merely the artistic ornamentation of body, the gesture, movement, posture, choreography, but a literal expression of ideological content. By emphasizing

strength, courage, and intellectual clarity, the dramatization of stage actions such as heroic poses, symbolic gestures, and stylized battle scenes was employed to entrench revolutionary ideals among the audience. The combination of music, dance, and drama gave a whole experience of multisensation that allowed a body-mind contact: the spectators learnt the story, and internalised the rhythm and the code of symbols on the intellectual and bodily levels. This interplay of several

senses produced a psychologically immersive experience that elicited empathy, moral reflection, and a sense of common spirit. Thus, opera was not only entertainment or propaganda but also a vehicle for cultural identity: at a time when physical expressiveness, psychological participation, and sociopolitical significance became powerful weapons of national expression. Summary of manifestations across three stages are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Manifestations Across Three Stages

Stage	Time Range	Representative Works	Propp's Narrative Function Characteristics	The "Pan-Opera" Characteristics of Ju Qihong	Summary of Stage Characteristics
Exploration and Foundation Period	1919-1949	The Yangtze River Tempest, The White Haired Girl	The narrative evolved from simplicity to complexity, establishing the classic "suffering-resistance-triumph" model; characters transitioned from collective to individual agency.	The "drama with added singing" model was established; it extensively incorporated elements of folk and opera, laying the foundation for its nationalization. Music served the drama.	It resolved the questions of "what to portray" and "how to portray it," establishing the realist tradition and national orientation of revolutionary opera.
Maturity and Glory Period	1950-1966	Honghu Red Guard, Red Coral, Sister Jiang	Narrative functions exhibit high stability and convergence; character roles become fixed (e.g., heroes, villains, benefactors).	The "drama with song" format has matured; the aria-like melodies of traditional opera have become the primary means of character development, culminating in a pinnacle of musical drama; distinct ethnic and regional styles are prominent.	This era marked the golden age of creation, establishing a classic national opera paradigm characterized by fixed narrative patterns, mature musical techniques, and a distinctive style.
Expansion and Diversification Phase	After 1976	The Party's Daughter, Wildfire, Spring Battle for the Ancient City, and The Long March	Deconstructing and reconstructing classic features; Functionality now emphasizes humanization and inner conflict; Features epic, ensemble-driven narratives.	"Drama with added singing" is no longer the sole format; the pursuit of music running throughout, deep integration of Chinese and Western musical techniques, and incorporation of modern stage technology.	Innovating while preserving tradition, the narrative delves deeper into human nature and adopts more diverse forms, actively exploring modern expressions for Chinese opera in the new era.

After examining these eight examples of Chinese opera, we can summarize the creative evolution of Chinese revolutionary opera as follows: One theme: It is consistently focused on the past and present authenticity of the Chinese revolution and serves dual purposes: propaganda, education, and aesthetics. A single Core Principle: Focusing on the tracks of nationalization initiated by The White-Haired Girl, we firmly feed off Chinese folk music and opera. Two Leaps: The beginning of The White Haired Girl's transition to full adulthood, a brilliant work of the 1950s and 1960s, symbolized by the Red Guards of Honghu and Sister Jiang, was one leap. Since the continuation of classics, the profound fusion of Eastern and Western elements, and the modern manifestation represented in The Long March since the reform and opening-up itself constitute another leap. Three Stages: The Foundational Exploration Period (1919-1949), The Mature and Glorious Period (1950-

1966), and The Diversification and New Era Revival Period (1976 onwards).

Chinese revolutionary opera history is an art history of endless exploration - how to adapt foreign things to a Chinese purpose and how to use Chinese ancient wisdom in the modern world, combining Western aesthetic opportunities and Chinese national ignorance and revolution, eventually creating a unique artistic form of China. In such ideological education, the New Democratic Revolution introduced a revolutionary artistic vocabulary in the eight canons of Chinese revolutionary opera, such as The Yangtze River Tempest, capable of capturing the revolution that vibrantly enveloped the epoch. It all lies in the formulaic assimilation of national panoply, converting radical revolutionary motives into the sounds of aesthetic discourses that are sweeter to hear. Plots of these operas are attributed to Proppian folk tale roles as a narrative logic, and this is how these

operas are created in such archetypical plots (personal commitment) of the hero (believer in something), community (supported by a strong group), and triumph or survival of spirit (hero does not die or confesses defeat). The effect of such stylization is to make the storeys sound competitive and emotionally charged with cross-cultural harmony. Unlike opera, in the dramatic direct contrast, it is not basically the Western operatic borrowing; it is disguised by the terms of the traditional Chinese folk music, the local operas (Chu opera, Sichuan opera, Henan bangzi, Hebei folk song), and adopts some baqiang as the principal arias of the leading roles. Add to all this dramatic strength and lyricalism, and you have vivid musical sketches of such heroes as Han Ying and Sister Jiang. It leads to the invention of national idioms and operatic forms, and to the heroism that constitutes the Western operatic heritage, ultimately introducing the heroism and collectivism of revolutionary history into the musical sentiment of the epic. Beyond the usual historical representations, these pieces of music are sublime insofar as they not only arouse emotional appeal but also elicit intellectual awe to a degree that makes them truly acceptable within the kingdom of national consciousness. This makes revolutionary opera not merely a novelty in the history discourse but also a mechanism of the socio-psychological culture. These productions, which combine music, drama, and physical performance, attract viewers on both emotional and rational levels, thereby psychologically engaging them and instilling a sense of national commitment. Through these publications, participation in the national transformation is grounded in the consolidation of cultural identity, memory, and social solidarity in the society of the period. The interpretation of revolutionary opera in its turn has a reflection in the modern scope of study of the cultural psychology, and education of art, even in the study of plants life, in a way that is a vivid example of how embodied and communal forms of art may grow to be a potent means of their self-preservation, ideological coherence, and cultural transcendence between the past and the present.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study included the fact that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

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