



A comparative study of the Northern and Southern Styles of Zhuang Opera in the
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China

Wenying Chen

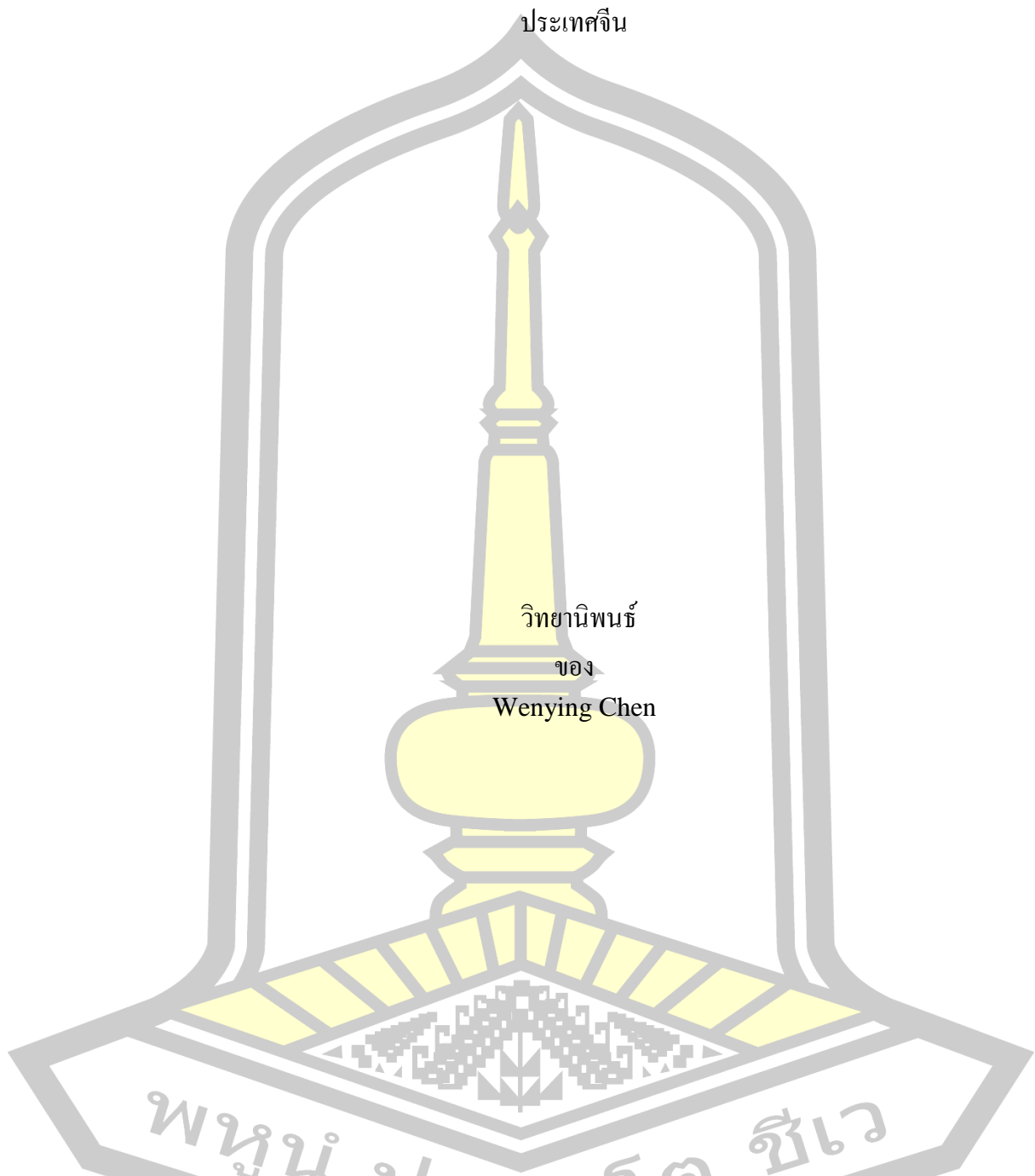
A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music

March 2025

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ของ

Wenying Chen

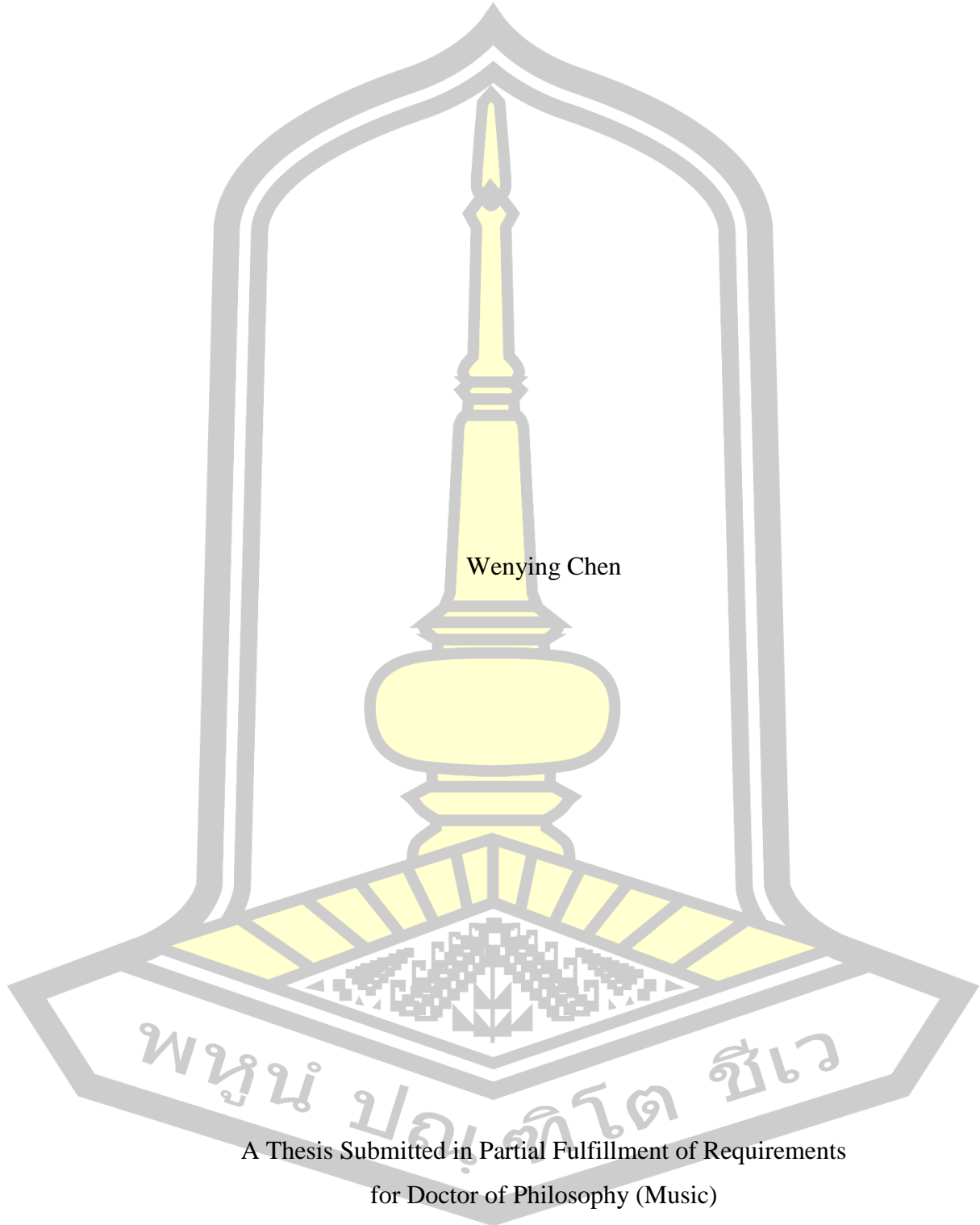
เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร

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March 2025

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation takes Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China as the research object. The research objectives of this paper are: 1) To study the current status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. 2) To compare the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. 3) To propose guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. This research adopts a qualitative research method, applying theories such as ethnomusicology theory, cultural anthropology, comparative musicology, and traditional Chinese music analysis. Key informants working on the ground were interviewed, and a large amount of data was collected. Subsequently, the data from the field investigation were classified and analyzed.

The results of this study indicate that: 1) Zhuang Opera is a unique artistic expression form of the Zhuang ethnic group, embodying the will, thoughts, and character traits of the Zhuang people. Despite experiencing different historical stages, Zhuang Opera still demonstrates extraordinary vitality. At the same time, Zhuang Opera also faces issues such as language problems and the integration of the Southern and Northern styles of Zhuang Opera. 2) The Northern and Southern Zhuang Operas are two branches of Zhuang Opera in Guangxi. Due to differences in dialects, musical singing, performance styles, and popular areas, there are variations in stories, singing tones, lyrics, accompanying instruments, and performances. 3) Before being listed as a Chinese intangible cultural heritage, the inheritance of Zhuang Opera mainly relied on oral instruction and personal guidance by inheritors. After being listed as a Chinese intangible cultural heritage, achievements have been made in the protection of inheritors, the construction of troupes, and the establishment of performance platforms. This paper puts forward guidelines for the next stage of protection of Zhuang Opera.

Keyword : Zhuang Opera, Northern and Southern styles, Comparative study, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

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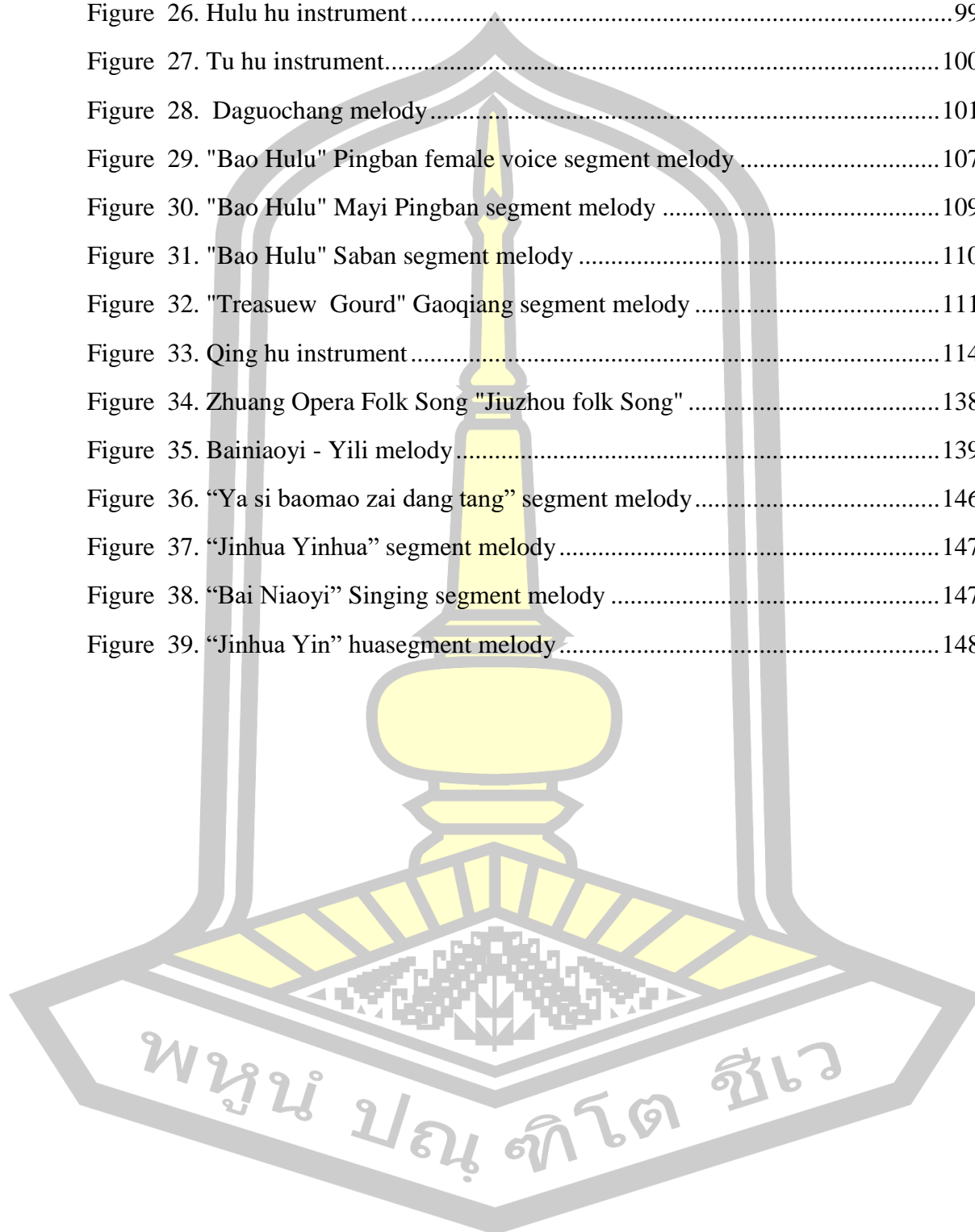
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Zhuang ethnic group, the largest minority group in China, has a long and rich cultural heritage, which includes a deep-rooted tradition of music and performing arts. Zhuang Opera, an integral part of this heritage, has evolved from Zhuang folk songs and dances, encapsulating the unique cultural, psychological, and aesthetic values of the Zhuang people. Historically, Zhuang opera has held an essential place in the spiritual life of the Zhuang people, serving not only as entertainment but also as a means of preserving cultural identity and communicating social values. However, the continuing challenges of globalization, technological advancement, and the shift in cultural preferences have placed this art form under significant threat. (Gaomin, 2015)

In the late 20th century, the proliferation of Western cultural influences and modern technologies posed a major risk to the survival of traditional art forms like Zhuang Opera. With the advent of mass media, urbanization, and the increasing popularity of globalized entertainment, the younger generations of the Zhuang people began to gravitate toward more mainstream cultural practices, leaving traditional forms such as Zhuang Opera to face the risk of extinction. This crisis was further compounded by the lack of formal institutions for training performers and a general decline in the number of skilled practitioners. Moreover, the opera faced competition from other forms of Chinese traditional theatre, such as Peking Opera, which overshadowed regional art forms in the national cultural landscape. (Liaomingjun, 2008)

The situation began to change with the recognition of Zhuang Opera as part of China's first national list of "intangible cultural heritage" in 2006, a move that breathed new life into the art form. The inclusion of Zhuang Opera, along with other cultural elements of the Zhuang people, provided an official framework for its protection and revival. This recognition served as a catalyst for efforts by local governments, heritage centers, and cultural inheritors to promote and preserve Zhuang Opera, leading to an increase in performances, festivals, and educational initiatives. Despite these efforts, the long-term sustainability of Zhuang Opera remains uncertain, especially considering the ongoing

cultural shifts and the demographic changes in the region. The opera still faces a significant gap in terms of academic research, institutional support, and the cultivation of new generations of practitioners. Furthermore, while efforts have been made to protect Zhuang Opera, a systematic and comprehensive understanding of its development, challenges, and variations is lacking. (Gaomin, 2015)

One of the most pressing issues surrounding the study and preservation of Zhuang Opera is the lack of a detailed exploration of its regional variations, particularly the differences between the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera. These two regional forms are characterized by distinct musical structures, performance techniques, and thematic focuses. The Northern style, which is more prevalent in the northern parts of Guangxi, tends to feature a forceful and dynamic performance style, emphasizing drama and theatricality. In contrast, the Southern style, common in the southern areas of Guangxi, is more lyrical and refined, incorporating elements of folk songs and highlighting a softer, more melodic approach to storytelling. The cultural, linguistic, and historical factors that have influenced these two styles remain poorly understood, and no comprehensive comparative study has been conducted to fully explore their similarities and differences. (Wuxu, 2017)

Understanding the Northern and Southern styles is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows for a deeper insight into the cultural diversity within the Zhuang people and their regional expressions of art. Second, this comparative approach provides an opportunity to explore how different musical practices and theatrical techniques have developed within the same ethnic group, shaped by varying social, environmental, and historical contexts. Finally, a thorough understanding of these regional variations can contribute to the development of preservation strategies that respect and protect both the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera, ensuring their continued relevance in the modern world. (Chenli, 2015)

Furthermore, the preservation and transmission of Zhuang Opera remain key concerns in its revitalization efforts. Traditional methods of transmission, such as master-apprentice relationships and oral instruction, have become increasingly ineffective as younger generations are less inclined to engage with these traditional practices. The lack of a formalized educational infrastructure for training Zhuang Opera performers and researchers exacerbates the problem. While some progress has been made in creating

cultural heritage bases and performance platforms, these efforts are often fragmented and lack the necessary institutional backing to ensure long-term sustainability. (Zhangyang, 2020)

Given these challenges, the preservation of Zhuang Opera requires more than just recognition as an intangible cultural heritage. It demands a concerted, multidisciplinary approach that includes academic research, the establishment of professional training programs, and the development of new performance formats that appeal to contemporary audiences. Moreover, strategies for preserving both the Northern and Southern styles must be developed in tandem, ensuring that both styles receive equal attention and are not overshadowed by one another or by external influences. (Liao, 2008)

For this reason, how to protect and develop on Zhuang Opera is an urgent issue at present. It is crucial to explore the current status of the development of Zhuang Opera, and it is also crucial to explore the differences between the two main classifications of Zhuang Opera: the Northern Style Zhuang Opera and the Southern Style Zhuang Opera, and then to propose how to preserve this art form. Given these considerations, the topic warrants comprehensive and detailed research.

1.2 Research objectives

1.2.1 To study the current status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1.2.2 To compare the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1.2.3 To propose guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 How is the current state of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region?

1.3.2 What is the differences between the two types of Zhuang in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region?

1.3.3 How is Zhuang opera should be preserved and transmitted in the future in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region?

1.4 Research Benefit

1.4.1 We will understand the current status of Zhuang opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1.4.2 We will understand the differences between the two types of Zhuang opera: Northern Style Zhuang Opera and Southern Style Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1.4.3 We will put forward the differences between the two types of Zhuang opera: Northern Style Zhuang Opera and Southern Style Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1.5 Definition of terms

1.5.1 Zhuang Opera is refer to a traditional local drama of the Zhuang ethnic group in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and is recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage. Zhuang Opera developed based on Zhuang folk literature, song and dance, and oral storytelling techniques. It is divided into several regional styles due to differences in dialects, musical tunes, performance styles, and geographical distribution, including Guangxi Zhuang Opera (Northern Zhuang Opera, Southern Zhuang Opera, Zhuang Master Opera) and Yunnan Zhuang Opera (Funing Zhuang Opera, Guangnan Zhuang Opera). It is typically performed in the local Zhuang dialect, with a rich variety of singing styles and melodies.

1.5.2 Southern Style Zhuang Opera is refer to a type of Zhuang Opera popular in certain regions of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, such as Debao, Jingxi, Napo, and Daxin. Its music is based on the Zhuang folk rap music "Mulun" and "Shuang huang opera," incorporating elements of Zhuang folk songs and puppet theater singing. The main tunes include Pingban, Caihua Tune, and Xi Tune, while instrumental tunes such as Guochang Tune, Bayin Tune, and Xitong are also used. The overall musical style is simple and rugged, blending plate cadence and linked tunes, with accompaniment mainly from gongs and drums, creating an energetic and lively atmosphere.

1.5.3 Northern Style Zhuang Opera is refer to a type of Zhuang Opera popular in regions such as Tianlin, Longlin, Xilin, Lingyun, Leye, and Baise in Guangxi. Its music and singing are derived from folk poetry and the folk rap form known as

"bench theatre." The music system features a joint song structure, with main tunes including Zheng tone, Ping tone, Tan tone, Wugong tone, and Clown tone. The musical style is lyrical and euphemistic, characterized by sincerity, naturalness, and a fresh, fluent quality. The lyrics are sung in the Zhuang language, reflecting strong national characteristics.

1.5.4 The Current Status of Zhuang Opera refers to the dissemination, development, innovation, and challenges faced by this traditional theatrical form in contemporary society. It encompasses four key aspects: (1) The characteristics of Zhuang opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region; (2) The social function of Zhuang Opera; and (3) The current status of Zhuang Opera performances.

1.5.5 A compare the differences between the two types of Zhuang Opera is refers to a comparative study of the Northern Style Zhuang Opera and Southern Style Zhuang Opera, both popular in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. This analysis is structured around four key dimensions: The Story of the Opera, Songs in the Opera, Musical Instruments in the Opera and Performance, Costumes, and Props in the Opera. Through this analysis, the commonalities and differences between these two types of Zhuang Opera are further clarified and elucidated.

1.5.6 A guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region refers to It encompasses both the transmission and preservation of the art form, addressing various key aspects. The transmission of Zhuang Opera is divided into two sections: the transmission of Northern Style Zhuang Opera and the transmission of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. In addition, the preservation of Zhuang Opera focuses on both Northern and Southern Style Zhuang Opera. These elements collectively lead to a comprehensive set of guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the region. These guidelines include safeguarding the linguistic and repertoire heritage, sustaining the lineage of performers, protecting the cultural ecosystem, leveraging educational institutions, encouraging creative development, expanding public awareness and institutional support, and integrating Zhuang Opera with tourism.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

This research on Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region draws upon theories from ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, cultural heritage studies, and traditional Chinese music analysis. The theoretical framework aims to analyze the current status of Zhuang Opera, compare the Northern and Southern styles, and propose guidelines for its transmission and preservation. The research method is based on the following conceptual framework.

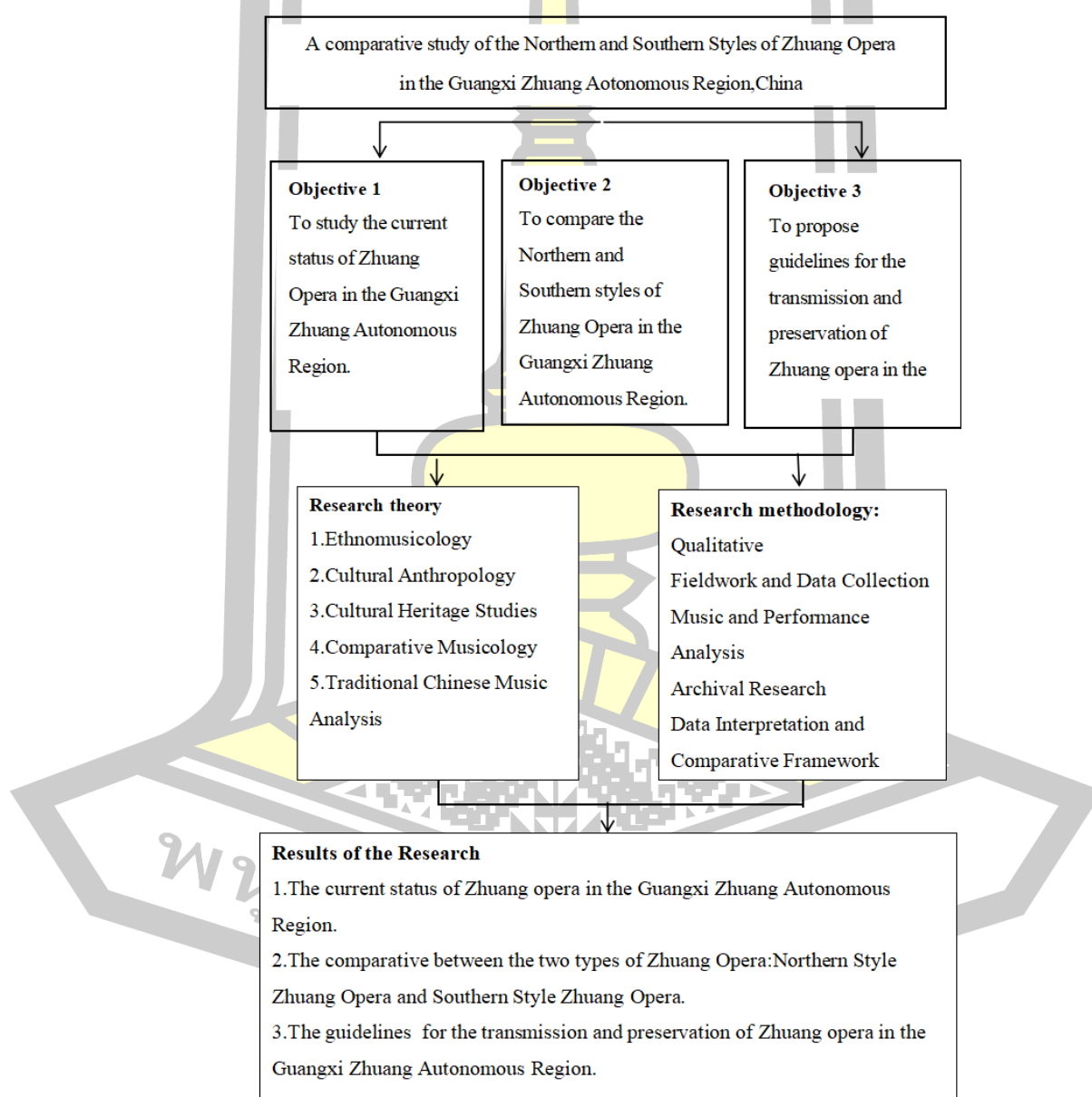


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this research study the researchers reviewed the relevant literature. which in order to obtain relevant information that can be used as a guideline for research planning, data analysis as well for the study in order to obtain the most complete research.

The researcher conducted a review according to the following topics:

- 2.1 The knowledge of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
- 2.2 The origin and history of Zhuang Opera
- 2.3 The elements of Zhuang Opera
- 2.4 The theory used in this research
- 2.5 The document and research related

2.1 The knowledge of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Zhuang opera is the most popular opera genre of the Zhuang people. The Zhuang are the ethnic minority with the largest English population, and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is the province with the largest concentration of the Zhuang population. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, referred to as "Guangxi," is the capital of Nanning city. It borders the Beibu Gulf to the south, Guangdong Province to the east, Hunan Province to the north, Guizhou Province to the northwest, Yunnan Province to the west, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the southwest. With a land border of 696 kilometers, a land coastline of 1,595 kilometers, and a total land area of 237,600 square kilometers, the region is the only ethnic minority autonomous region with coastal, border, and river advantages in China. On December 11, 1949, the whole territory of Guangxi was liberated, and Guangxi Province was established in the early days of liberation. On March 5, 1958, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was established. Dec 11 marks the anniversary of the founding of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. (Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2024)

2.1.1 The geographical environment of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region



Figure 2. Research site Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,
Source:<http://Guangxi.tianditu.gov.cn>

Guangxi is located in the south of China, between $20^{\circ}54'09''$ 'nd $26^{\circ}23'19''$ north latitude and $104^{\circ}26'48''$ 'd $112^{\circ}03'24''$ " east longitude. It borders Guangdong Province to the east, Beibu Gulf and Hainan Province to the south, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the southwest, Yunnan Province to the west, Guizhou Province to the northwest, and Hunan Province to the northeast. With its superior location, Guangxi is the most convenient passage to the sea in Southwest China, and it is also the combination of a resource-based economy in Western China and an open economy in Southeast China. It plays an important role in the economic exchanges between China and Southeast Asia. Guangxi has an administrative area of 237,600 square kilometers and a maritime area of 7,000 square kilometers. (Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2024)

From the information provided, it can be summarized that the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, located in southern China, plays a significant role in both the cultural and economic landscape of the region. Geographically, it lies between 20°54'09" and 26°23'19" north latitude and 104°26'48" and 112°03'24" east longitude. Guangxi borders several provinces and countries, including Guangdong Province to the east, Hainan Province to the south, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the southwest, and Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hunan provinces to the west and northeast. This strategic location makes Guangxi the most accessible gateway to the sea in Southwest China and a vital link between the resource-rich western part of China and the economically open southeastern region.

Guangxi's significance is also evident in its role in economic exchanges between China and Southeast Asia. The region spans an area of 237,600 square kilometers, with an additional 7,000 square kilometers of maritime territory. Its geographical and economic position further emphasizes Guangxi's importance, not only within China but also in the context of international trade and cultural exchange.

Based on the given information, it can be concluded that the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, located in southern China, holds significant cultural and economic importance due to its geographical position connecting western and southeastern China. It shares borders with Guangdong, Hainan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hunan provinces, as well as Vietnam, making it the most convenient maritime gateway for southwestern China. Covering an area of 237,600 square kilometers with an additional 7,000 square kilometers of maritime territory, Guangxi plays a crucial role in trade and cultural exchanges between China and Southeast Asia.

2.1.2 The Culture of Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Throughout their historical development, the Zhuang people have cultivated a rich cultural heritage, encompassing diverse elements such as folk tales, music, raps, temple fairs, and juggling. Their handicrafts, including brocade and embroidery, are colorful and unique, significantly enriching the stage art of Zhuangju. Known for their affinity for singing, the Zhuang people often express themselves through song, a practice deeply rooted in their tradition of "song and xu' Xi. Regular folk song gatherings are held annually, especially in spring and autumn, attracting participants from miles around. These gatherings, often described as the "ocean of Zhuang songs,"

serve as a vital source of inspiration for Zhuang opera. The Zhuang people's traditional belief system, primarily based on Maoism, exhibits a unique synthesis of Buddhist and Taoist elements. The plethora of deities worshipped by the Zhuang, encompassing natural, social, and guardian gods, each with distinct rituals, also significantly influenced Zhuang opera. Historically, the Zhuang's primary mode of production was agriculture, and Zhuang opera was predominantly performed during agricultural downtime, playing a key role in their entertainment and cultural life. (Wang Kaiqing, 2017)

From the information provided, it can be summarized that the Zhuang people have cultivated a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which includes elements such as folk tales, music, raps, temple fairs, and juggling. Their traditional handicrafts, particularly brocade and embroidery, are vibrant and distinctive, contributing significantly to the stage art of Zhuang opera. Singing is a deeply rooted tradition among the Zhuang, with "song and xu' Xi" being central to their cultural expression.

Folk song gatherings, particularly held during the spring and autumn, serve as important cultural events, providing a vital source of inspiration for Zhuang opera. These gatherings, often referred to as the "ocean of Zhuang songs," emphasize the communal and celebratory nature of their music. Additionally, the Zhuang people's belief system, which blends elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Maoism, has influenced their cultural practices, including opera. The worship of various deities, including natural, social, and guardian gods, has shaped the thematic content of Zhuang opera.

Historically, as agriculture was the main livelihood for the Zhuang people, Zhuang opera flourished during agricultural downtime, playing a key role in their entertainment and cultural life.

Based on the information provided, it can be concluded that the Zhuang people have a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which includes folk tales, music, singing, temple fairs, and acrobatics. Their traditional handicrafts, such as brocade and embroidery, are colorful and unique, playing a significant role in the stage art of Zhuang opera. Singing is deeply rooted in Zhuang culture, with folk song gatherings held in spring and autumn, often referred to as the "ocean of Zhuang songs," serving as an important source of inspiration for Zhuang opera. Additionally, the Zhuang

people's beliefs, which combine Buddhism, Taoism, and Maoist thought, are reflected in their rituals for worshipping various deities, influencing the themes of Zhuang opera. In the past, agriculture was the primary occupation of the Zhuang people, and Zhuang opera was typically performed during agricultural downtime, playing a vital role in their entertainment and cultural life.

2.2 The origin and history of Zhuang Opera

The Zhuang Opera, with a history exceeding 300 years, was originally known as "local opera" and "Yaha opera." "A Brief History of the Zhuang Nationality" records that Guangxi has hosted grand dramas since the Qianlong and Jiaqing eras of the Qing Dynasty. Originating from folk songs, poems, and arts, Zhuang opera initially featured sitting performances of Zhuang folk rap. Post-work, small groups would gather on a bench to sing stories. The hand-copied "Taiping Chun" from the Kangxi period is an early example of bench opera. In 1765, Tianlin County's Longcheng class staged "Baohulu," marking the North Style Zhuang Opera's earliest organized performance. The South Style emerged in the Daoguang period. Huang Xianjiong, originally from Ma Pass and a former member of the Yong Opera Troupe in Nanning, introduced Yong opera to his hometown in 1845, leading to the formation of Ma Pass Tu Opera. Initially performed in English, language barriers necessitated background singing by a master, with actors performing visually. Around the Xinhai Revolution, the South Style evolved to integrate singing and acting, transitioning to local folk songs and the Zhuang language while retaining backstage teleprompting. Post-1949, the popular Zhuang puppet singing style was incorporated, enriching the Southern Style Zhuang Opera's vocal diversity. (Ding Shibo, 1995)

From the information provided, it can be summarized that Zhuang Opera, with a history spanning over 300 years, originally began as "local opera" and "Yaha opera." Historical records indicate that Guangxi hosted grand dramatic performances during the Qianlong and Jiaqing eras of the Qing Dynasty. Zhuang opera originated from folk songs, poems, and arts, with early performances featuring sitting gatherings where small groups would sing narrative stories, often accompanied by Zhuang folk rap. The "Taiping Chun," a hand-copied text from the Kangxi period, is considered an early example of bench opera.

By 1765, the Longcheng class in Tianlin County staged "Baohulu," marking the first organized performance of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. Southern Style Zhuang Opera emerged during the Daoguang period, with Huang Xianjiong, a former member of the Yong Opera Troupe, introducing the style to Ma Pass in 1845, leading to the formation of Ma Pass Tu Opera. Initially, the performances involved background singing by a master with actors performing visually, due to language barriers.

Around the time of the Xinhai Revolution, the Southern Style evolved, integrating singing and acting while shifting to local folk songs and the Zhuang language, though backstage teleprompting was still retained. After 1949, the incorporation of the popular Zhuang puppet singing style further enriched the vocal diversity of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, contributing to its continued evolution.

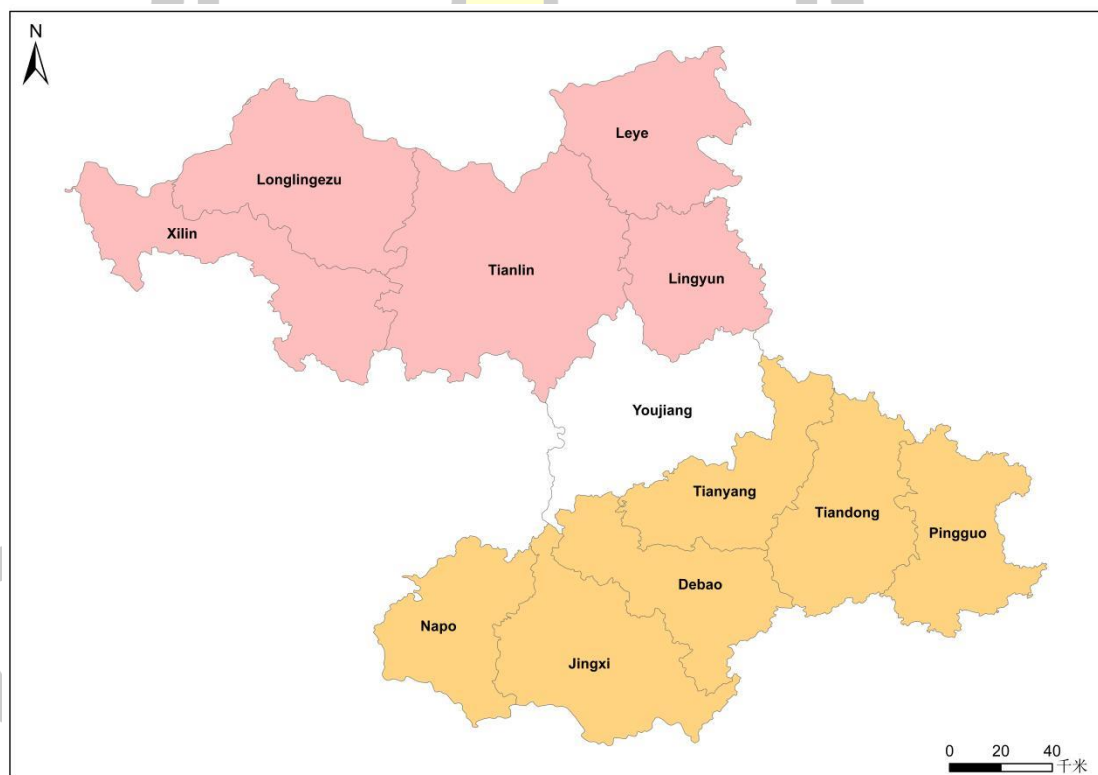


Figure 3. Research site Baise City

Source: Chen Wenying, 2023

Based on the information provided, it can be concluded that Zhuang Opera has a history of over 300 years, originating as "local opera" and "Yaha opera." Historical records indicate that Guangxi hosted grand theatrical performances during the Qianlong and Jiaqing eras of the Qing Dynasty. Rooted in folk songs, poetry, and arts, early performances involved small groups sitting together after work, singing narrative stories accompanied by Zhuang folk rap. The Taiping Chun, a hand-copied text from the Kangxi period, is considered an early example of "bench opera." In 1765, the Longcheng class in Tianlin County staged Baohulu, marking the first organized performance of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, while the Southern Style emerged during the Daoguang period. In 1845, Huang Xianjiong, a former member of the Yong Opera Troupe, introduced opera to Ma Pass, leading to the formation of Ma Pass Tu Opera. Initially, due to language barriers, performances relied on background singing by a master while actors performed visually. Around the Xinhai Revolution, the Southern Style evolved, integrating singing and acting, adopting local folk songs and the Zhuang language while retaining backstage prompting. After 1949, the incorporation of Zhuang puppet opera further enriched the vocal diversity of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, contributing to its continued development.

2.2.1 The origin and history of Northern Style Zhuang Opera

Weiwei,Xiangfan (1990) explained the origin and history of Northern Style Zhuang Opera as follows:

2.2.1.1 Initial Stage: Early Exploration from "Bench Opera" to "Doorway Opera" (1681 – 1702 A.D.)

In the initial stage of exploring performing arts from "Bench Opera" to "Doorway Opera," which took place from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, this form of performance originated from the Zhuang people's folk tradition of sitting and singing. It was characterized by narrative poems with strong storytelling elements. During this period, performances were typically conducted by two or three performers seated on benches, using simple props and melodies. Over time, this gradually developed into a distinct form known as "Bench Opera."

Historical evidence of the development of this performing art can be found in a handwritten manuscript from the 20th year of the Kangxi reign (1681), which

reflects the prototype of the "Northern Style Zhuang Opera," serving as a crucial foundation for its subsequent evolution.

2.2.1.2 Formation Stage: Transition from "Flatland Opera" to "Courtyard Opera" (1702– 1765 A.D.)

During the Qianlong to Daoguang periods, the development of Zhuang opera progressed from simple indoor performances to outdoor theatrical presentations. This transition saw a shift in singing styles from solo performances to duets, enhancing the artistic complexity and audience engagement.

In terms of artistic characteristics, this stage introduced basic stage designs, making performances more theatrical and interactive with the audience. The evolution from a simple storytelling format to a more structured theatrical performance played a crucial role in shaping the identity of Zhuang opera.

A key milestone in this developmental phase was the establishment of the Longcheng Troupe and the performance of the self-composed repertoire Baohulu. These events marked the initial formation of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, laying a strong foundation for its future growth and refinement.

2.2.1.3 Development Stage: Comprehensive Advancement of Singing and Repertoires (1796 – 1860 A.D.)

During the Jiaqing to early Guangxu periods, Zhuang opera experienced significant advancements in both singing techniques and repertoire content. The complexity and refinement of performances increased, leading to a notable rise in the number of opera troupes and a broader social influence.

In terms of artistic characteristics, singing styles became more diverse, with repertoire content shifting from traditional themes to more life-oriented topics. Performances placed greater emphasis on vocal techniques and emotional expression, enhancing the depth and impact of theatrical presentations.

A key milestone in this stage was the emergence of distinctive singing styles such as "Positive Tune" and "Dressing Tune." Additionally, representative repertoires such as *Sending Winter Clothes at Night* and *Mulan Joins the Army* played a crucial role in shaping the artistic development of Northern Style Zhuang Opera during this period.

2.2.1.4 Peak Stage: The Golden Age of Zhuang Opera (1851 – 1908 A.D.)

During the Xianfeng to late Guangxu periods, Zhuang opera reached its golden age, becoming a dominant form of local cultural expression. The number of opera troupes expanded significantly to approximately 25, with a repertoire of around 180 distinct performances. This period marked the height of its social and artistic influence, solidifying its status as a mainstream cultural tradition.

In terms of artistic characteristics, performances during this stage exhibited remarkable technical proficiency, incorporating a total of 15 distinctive singing styles. Additionally, elements of martial arts and dance were integrated into the performances, enhancing their visual and dramatic appeal. This diversification of artistic expression contributed to the richness and sophistication of Zhuang opera.

A significant milestone in this period was the performance of Nong Zhigao, a representative work that symbolized the artistic and cultural peak of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. This production reflected the culmination of artistic refinement and widespread popularity that defined this golden era.

2.2.1.5 Decline Stage: Cultural Disruption and Artistic Loss (1912 – 2006 A.D.)

During the late Republic of China period through 2006, Zhuang opera faced a severe decline due to the impact of political movements that significantly disrupted traditional cultural practices. Many opera troupes were disbanded, actors were forced to change professions, and a vast number of repertoires and artistic techniques were lost. This period marked one of the most challenging times for the preservation of Zhuang opera.

In terms of artistic characteristics, performance forms were heavily suppressed, leading to a sharp decline in the number of troupes. The stagnation of artistic development further contributed to the erosion of this once-thriving cultural tradition. The lack of opportunities for performance and transmission of skills resulted in a loss of both artistic depth and audience engagement.

A key milestone of this stage was the classification of Northern Style Zhuang Opera as an endangered art form. Many of its traditional repertoires and singing styles were nearly lost, posing a significant threat to the survival of this cultural heritage.

2.2.1.6 Revitalization Stage: Redevelopment under Policy Support (2006 – Present)

Following its inclusion in China's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2006, Zhuang Opera has experienced a period of revitalization and cultural resurgence. Efforts to preserve and promote this traditional art form have led to a renewed interest in its performance and transmission, securing its place in contemporary cultural discourse.

Artistically, the number of opera troupes has expanded to over 100, reflecting a significant revival in participation and audience engagement. Singing styles, repertoires, and performance forms have evolved to incorporate modern elements, creating a fusion of tradition and innovation. This integration has contributed to the continued expansion and adaptation of Zhuang Opera in the modern era.

A key milestone in this stage has been the creation of new repertoires and the systematic training of new generations of performers. These efforts have enabled Zhuang Opera to gradually establish a presence on a broader cultural stage, ensuring its sustainability and relevance in contemporary performing arts.

Based on the information provided, it can be summarized that Northern Style Zhuang Opera has undergone significant development from the late Ming Dynasty to the present. It began with "Bench Opera" between 1681-1702, a folk tradition where performances involved sitting and singing narrative stories. It then evolved into "Doorway Opera" and "Courtyard Opera" during 1702-1765, where performances transitioned to duets and incorporated more artistic elements. From 1796-1860, Zhuang opera advanced in both singing techniques and repertoire, introducing distinctive styles like "Positive Tune" and "Dressing Tune." The golden age of Northern Style Zhuang Opera occurred from 1851-1908, with the emergence of approximately 25 opera troupes and famous works such as Nong Zhigao. However, from 1912 to 2006, the opera faced a significant decline due to political upheaval, leading to the loss of many performances and techniques. Since 2006, after being included in China's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, Zhuang Opera has experienced

revitalization, with over 100 opera troupes and the integration of modern elements, ensuring its preservation and relevance in contemporary performing arts.

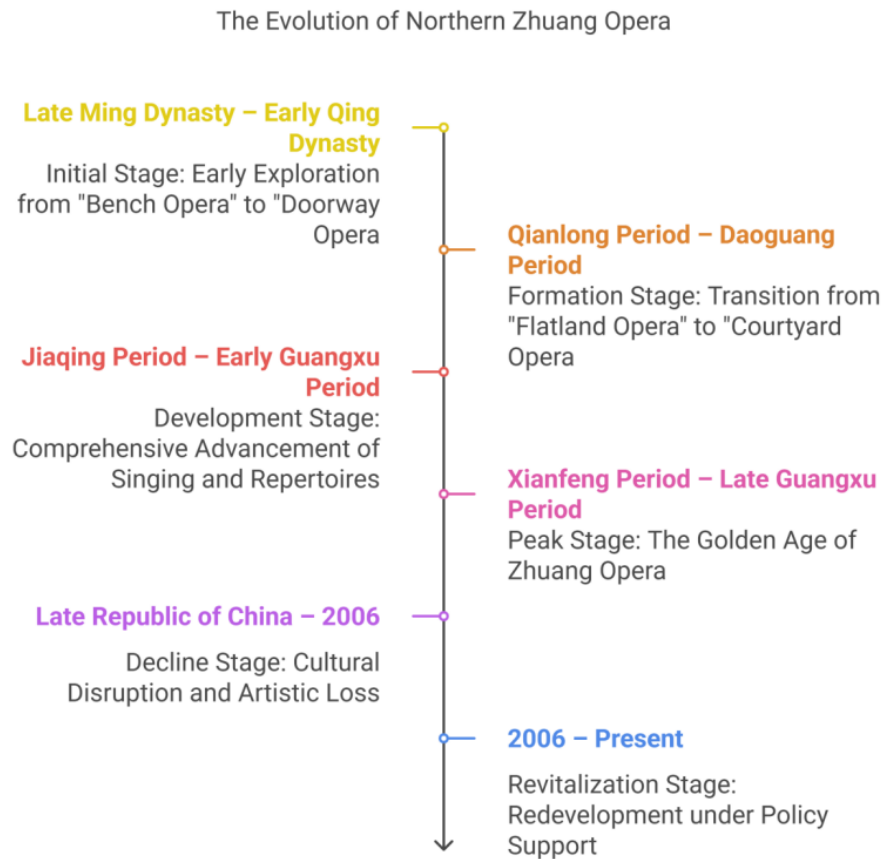


Figure 4. The Evolution of Northern Zhuang Opera

Source: Chen Wenying, 2024

2.2.2 The origin and history of Southern Style Zhuang Opera

Ding Shibo (1995) explained the origin and history of Southern Style Zhuang Opera as follows:

2.2.2.1 Initial Stage: From Folk Art to the Formation of Mo Lun Tunes (1680 – 1846 A.D.)

The origin of Southern Style Zhuang Opera traces its roots to the shamanic culture and sacrificial rituals of the Zhuang ancestors, where the early performances were led by "witches" and "masters" who sung the distinctive "Mo Lun" tunes. These

performances, deeply connected to spiritual practices, laid the foundation for the development of this unique form of opera.

In terms of artistic characteristics, these early performances were primarily narrative in nature, often recounting life experiences, local stories, and heroic tales. The Mo Lun tunes, particularly in the Jingxi and Debao regions, evolved into some of the earliest singing styles associated with Zhuang Opera, contributing to the establishment of a distinct musical and theatrical tradition.

A key milestone in this developmental stage was the formalization of Mo Lun tunes as the core form of folk art, which became a critical foundation for the future evolution of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. These early tunes played a central role in shaping the identity and artistic direction of the genre in subsequent periods.

2.2.2.2 Formation Stage: From Puppet Shows to "Double Reed" Performances (1885 – 1911 A.D.)

During this stage, Southern Style Zhuang Opera was significantly influenced by puppet shows, which were originally a dominant form of entertainment. Over time, live performances gradually replaced puppetry, leading to the development of a separation between acting and singing. This transition gave rise to the "double reed" style, where one performer would act on stage while another provided the singing behind the scenes.

Artistically, performances during this period often involved pantomime-style movements to convey the storyline, while the singing was delivered offstage by the master singer. This method allowed for a greater focus on the visual storytelling of the actors, while the vocal performances were refined behind the scenes. Additionally, interaction between the actors and the audience steadily increased, making the performances more engaging and immersive.

A significant milestone in this stage was the shift from puppet-based shows to live performances. This transition paved the way for the development of theatrical stage performances, marking an important step in the evolution of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

2.2.2.3 Development Stage: Diversification of Theatrical Forms and Establishment of Local Features (1911 – 1949 A.D.)

In this stage, Southern Style Zhuang Opera experienced significant development through the introduction of Yong Opera by Huang Xianjiong to his hometown. By combining the singing styles of Yong Opera with the local Zhuang language, a unique form of Southern Style Zhuang Opera began to take shape, reflecting both regional and cultural influences.

Artistically, this period marked a significant shift toward the integration of acting and singing, with performances conducted entirely in the Zhuang language. The use of the interjection "Ya Ha Hi" became a defining characteristic, adding a local flavor to the performances and enhancing their connection with the audience. The combination of language and performance style created a distinct regional identity that differentiated Southern Style Zhuang Opera from other forms of Chinese opera.

A major milestone in this stage was the diversification of both repertoires and singing styles, which led to the creation of representative works such as *Hundred Bird Clothes* and *Double Zhuang Yuan*. These performances reflected the richness and complexity of the Southern Style Zhuang Opera, as it continued to evolve and establish its unique place within the broader tradition of Chinese theatrical arts.

2.2.2.4 Transformation Stage: Modern Innovations in a Traditional Art (1949-2006)

Following the liberation in 1949, Southern Style Zhuang Opera benefited from national policy support, which played a crucial role in its transformation into a key representative of Zhuang culture. This backing not only ensured its survival but also facilitated its growth and increased prominence within China's broader cultural landscape.

Artistically, the opera evolved by incorporating modern elements into its singing styles, reflecting contemporary themes and concerns. This fusion of traditional techniques with modern sensibilities allowed Southern Style Zhuang Opera to remain relevant and engage a wider audience while preserving its cultural essence. The diversity of performance forms also expanded, creating opportunities for artistic innovation and experimentation.

A significant milestone in this period was the expansion of theater troupes and the diversification of repertoires. This period also saw a parallel development of

innovative singing styles alongside efforts to preserve the cultural traditions of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. These advancements enabled the art form to modernize while still honoring its historical roots, ensuring its continued evolution and vitality.

2.2.1.5 Revitalization Stage: Redevelopment under Policy Support (2006 – Present)

Since being included in China's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2006, Zhuang Opera has entered a period of revitalization, supported by national policies aimed at preserving and promoting traditional arts. This recognition has provided a platform for Zhuang Opera to expand and thrive, ensuring its continued relevance in the modern cultural landscape.

Artistically, the number of troupes has increased to over 50, reflecting a growing interest and participation in this art form. Singing styles, repertoires, and performance forms have evolved to incorporate modern elements, enabling the opera to remain dynamic and engaging to contemporary audiences. The scope of development continues to broaden, with performances incorporating new themes and innovative artistic expressions.

A key milestone in this stage has been the creation of new repertoires and the training of new generations of actors. These efforts have allowed Zhuang Opera to gradually step onto a broader cultural stage, achieving greater visibility and recognition both within China and internationally.

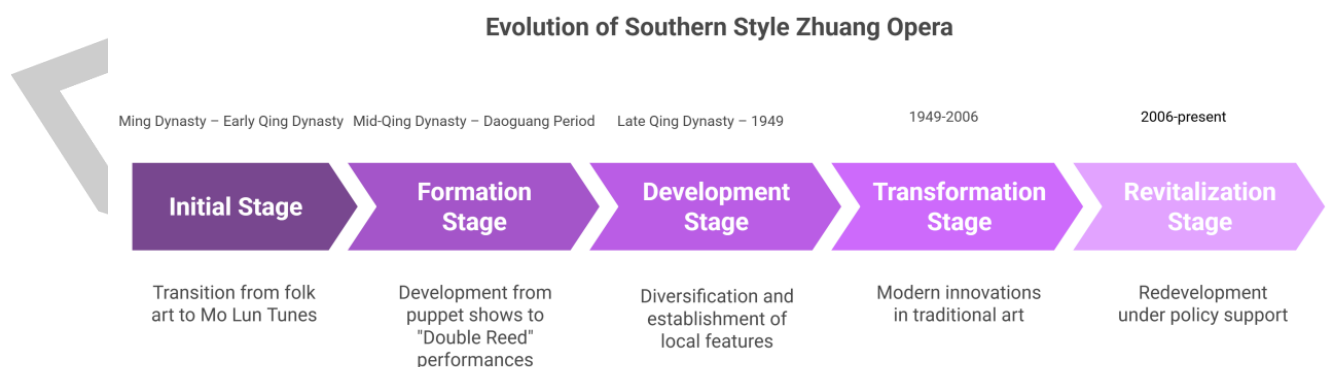


Figure 5. The Evolution of Southern Zhuang Opera

Source: Chen Wenying, 2024

From the information provided, it can be summarized that the development of Southern Style Zhuang Opera originated from the Zhuang people's shamanic culture and sacrificial rituals, with early performances led by "witches" and "masters" singing the distinctive "Mo Lun" tunes. These performances, which recounted life experiences and local legends, formed the foundation for the future development of the opera. Between 1885 and 1911, the form evolved from puppet shows to live performances, leading to the emergence of the "double reed" style, where actors performed on stage while singers performed behind the scenes. From 1911 to 1949, the opera integrated elements from Yong Opera with the Zhuang language, creating a unique identity for Southern Style Zhuang Opera. Key works, such as "Hundred Bird Clothes" and "Double Zhuang Yuan," contributed to its evolution. After 1949, national policy support facilitated its modernization, allowing the opera to incorporate contemporary elements while maintaining its cultural essence. From 2006 onwards, when it was included in China's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, Southern Style Zhuang Opera experienced revitalization, with an increased number of troupes and the development of new repertoires, ensuring its continued growth and international recognition.

2.3 The elements of Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera, rooted in the oral literature, music, dance, and storytelling traditions of the Zhuang people, represents the most cherished form of traditional opera within this ethnic group. Its artistic richness and cultural significance have garnered increasing attention from scholars. The structural framework of Zhuang Opera can be categorized into four primary elements: narrative (story), vocal performance (song), instrumental accompaniment, and theatrical presentation. Academic research into these elements has yielded substantial progress, laying a solid foundation for further exploration.

2.3.1 Stories in Zhuang Opera

The narrative tradition of Zhuang Opera is exemplified by its extensive repertoire, comprising 57 documented plays in Southern Zhuang Opera and 335 in Northern Zhuang Opera. The thematic content of these stories can be broadly classified into four categories.

2.3.1.1 Eulogizing Ethnic Heroes

Examples include Nong Zhigao and Hua Mulan, which glorify heroic figures and their contributions to society.

2.3.1.2 Critiquing Feudal Marriage Systems

Stories such as Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai and The Seventh Aunt expose the injustices of traditional marital practices.

2.3.1.3 Unveiling Social Inequalities and Evils

Plays like Wen Long and Xiao Ni and The Hundred-Bird Garment shed light on the oppressive nature of feudal society.

2.3.1.4 Exploring Moral Dichotomies

Works such as The Farmer's Treasure and The Magic Gourd depict the conflicts between good and evil, loyalty and betrayal, beauty and ugliness.

The narrative structure of Zhuang Opera is marked by clarity and coherence, with a well-defined progression through exposition, development, climax, and resolution. A prominent feature of these plays is their adherence to the moral principle of retribution—evil is punished, and good is rewarded. Most stories culminate in a triumphant resolution for the victims, often concluding with a joyful reunion. Even traditionally tragic narratives, such as Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, have been reimagined by performers to end on a positive note, reflecting the Zhuang people's preference for harmonious resolutions (Xiang Fan, 1990).

Table 1. Experts' descriptions of the stories in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera.

Northern Zhuang Opera	Southern Zhuang Opera
<p>The narratives emphasize themes of heroism and collective values, often centered on resistance against oppression, the manifestation of ethnic identity, and harmony between humanity and nature. Representative works include Nong Zhigao and Pangu. These themes reflect the Zhuang people's cultural ethos and</p>	<p>In contrast, Southern Zhuang Opera exhibits a romantic and allegorical style, with an emphasis on love stories and ethical dilemmas. Plays like Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai convey deeply emotional narratives, portraying the Zhuang people's aspirations for justice, harmony, and cultural ideals (Li Minghua, 2019).</p>

their historical struggles (Zhang Xiaohong, 2020).

Across both regions, the narrative framework of Zhuang Opera effectively balances realism with mythological elements, highlighting the Zhuang people's creative capacity to synthesize tradition and imagination (Wang Guoqiang, 2021).

From the information provided, it can be summarized that the narrative tradition of Zhuang Opera is characterized by a wide range of themes, with 57 documented plays in Southern Zhuang Opera and 335 in Northern Zhuang Opera. These plays are generally categorized into four main themes: eulogizing ethnic heroes, such as "Nong Zhigao" and "Hua Mulan"; critiquing feudal marriage systems, seen in "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai" and "The Seventh Aunt"; unveiling social inequalities, as shown in "Wen Long" and "The Hundred-Bird Garment"; and exploring moral dichotomies, like in "The Farmer's Treasure" and "The Magic Gourd." The narrative structure of these plays is clear and well-organized, progressing through exposition, development, climax, and resolution, with a strong moral message where evil is punished and good is rewarded. Most stories end in a joyful reunion, reflecting the Zhuang people's preference for harmonious resolutions. Northern Zhuang Opera focuses on themes of heroism, resistance against oppression, ethnic identity, and harmony with nature, with works like "Nong Zhigao" and "Pangu," while Southern Zhuang Opera places emphasis on romantic and ethical dilemmas, as seen in "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai," highlighting the Zhuang people's aspirations for justice and cultural ideals. Both regional styles balance realism with mythological elements, demonstrating the Zhuang people's ability to merge tradition and imagination.

2.3.2 Songs in Zhuang Opera

The vocal styles of Zhuang Opera are closely tied to regional dialects and folk music traditions, contributing to a rich and varied musical landscape (Zhao Lifang, 2018). Northern Zhuang Opera features two primary branches.

2.3.2.1 Northern Style Zhuang Opera

The first emphasizes slow and melodic styles, such as [Zhengtiao] (standard tune) and [Pingdiao] (level tune), characterized by their delicate and

nuanced delivery. The second incorporates folk-infused styles like [Heiyadiao], distinguished by its deep resonance with local mountain songs (Li Xiaoqing, 2020).

The Northern style predominantly employs five-syllable and seven-syllable verse forms, characterized by a strong cadence and emotional resonance (Wang Zhigang, 2020).

2.3.2.2 Southern Style Zhuang Opera

Southern Zhuang Opera, by contrast, is characterized by powerful and vigorous vocal delivery, with a wide array of vocal styles. These include slower melodic forms, such as [Pingdiao] and [Tandiao] (lament tune), as well as faster-paced and rhythmically dynamic forms like [Kuaiqidiao] (quick joyous tune) and [Handiao] (cold tune). The melodic and rhythmic expressiveness of these styles demonstrates the emotional depth and artistic vibrancy of Southern Zhuang Opera (Zhang Weiping, 2019).

In Southern Zhuang Opera, the lyrics adapt dynamically to the rhythm and phrasing of the vocal melodies. The use of extended pauses, elongated rhymes, and auxiliary notes enhances their expressive capacity (Huang Shihua, 2015).

From the information provided, it can be summarized that the songs in Zhuang Opera are closely connected to local dialects and folk music traditions, creating a rich and diverse musical landscape. Northern Style Zhuang Opera has two main branches. The first emphasizes slow and melodic styles, such as [Zhengtiao] (standard tune) and [Pingdiao] (level tune), characterized by delicate and nuanced delivery. The second branch incorporates folk-influenced styles like [Heiyadiao], which resonates deeply with local mountain songs. Northern style predominantly uses five-syllable and seven-syllable verse forms, marked by strong cadences and emotional depth. In contrast, Southern Style Zhuang Opera is known for its powerful and vigorous vocal delivery, featuring a wide range of vocal styles. These include slower, melodic forms like [Pingdiao] and [Tandiao] (lament tune), as well as faster, rhythmically dynamic forms such as [Kuaiqidiao] (quick joyous tune) and [Handiao] (cold tune). The melodic and rhythmic expressiveness of these styles reflects the emotional depth and vibrancy of Southern Zhuang Opera. In Southern Zhuang Opera, the lyrics adapt dynamically to the rhythm and phrasing of the vocal melodies, with

the use of extended pauses, elongated rhymes, and auxiliary notes enhancing their expressive capacity.

2.3.3. Musical Instruments in Zhuang Opera

2.3.3.1 Orchestral Structure

Traditional Zhuang Opera orchestras typically follow a minimalist "four-instrument" ensemble, comprising a drum, primary huqin, secondary huqin, and cymbals. This compact setup underscores its folk roots and simplicity (Zhang Jianhua, 2019). Modern orchestral adaptations, however, have incorporated Western instruments such as violins and clarinets, resulting in hybrid ensembles that enrich the tonal palette and expand the expressive range of Zhuang Opera (Zhao Yuxiang, 2021).

2.3.3.2 Instruments and Techniques

A hallmark of Zhuang Opera is its diverse instrumentation, particularly its emphasis on percussion. Instruments such as high-edge gongs, small gongs, bee drums, and bronze drums provide rhythmic foundations that are both dynamic and evocative (Wang Xiaodong, 2018). Performance techniques, including "dragging tones," "overlapping phrases," and "ornamental flourishes," are employed to achieve a seamless integration of melody and emotion (Li Huiling, 2020).

From the information provided, it can be summarized that Zhuang Opera orchestras traditionally follow a minimalist "four-instrument" ensemble, consisting of a drum, primary huqin, secondary huqin, and cymbals, highlighting its folk origins and simplicity. Modern adaptations, however, have incorporated Western instruments like violins and clarinets, creating hybrid ensembles that broaden the tonal and expressive range of Zhuang Opera. The instrumentation is notably diverse, with a focus on percussion instruments such as high-edge gongs, small gongs, bee drums, and bronze drums, which provide dynamic and evocative rhythmic foundations. Performance techniques like "dragging tones," "overlapping phrases," and "ornamental flourishes" are used to seamlessly blend melody and emotion, enhancing the overall expressiveness of the opera.

2.3.4 Performance, Costumes, and Props in Zhuang Opera

2.3.4.1 Performative Characteristics

The performative aspect of Zhuang Opera draws heavily from Zhuang folk dance traditions. Iconic scenes such as the embroidered ball dance in Jinhua and Yinhua and the bronze drum dance in The Red Bronze Drum reflect its rich regional aesthetic (Zhang Wenjun, 2018). Role classifications vary by region, with Northern Zhuang Opera adopting a more nuanced categorization, including subtypes like young male (xiaosheng) and scholarly male (wensheng), while Southern Zhuang Opera simplifies roles into the four archetypes: Sheng (male), Dan (female), Jing (painted face), and Chou (clown) (Zhao Xinran, 2019).

2.3.4.2 Costumes and Props

Costumes and props are integral to the ethnic identity of Zhuang Opera. Costumes often incorporate traditional Zhuang elements such as embroidery, silver ornaments, and woven patterns, reflecting the cultural heritage and artistic ingenuity of the Zhuang people. Props such as bronze drums and bamboo artifacts further underscore its cultural depth and historical resonance (Li Zhiqiang, 2020).

From the information provided, it can be summarized that Zhuang Opera is a profound cultural expression of the Zhuang people, integrating narrative, vocal performance, musical accompaniment, and theatrical presentation. Its stories, whether heroic and collective in the Northern style or romantic and allegorical in the Southern style, reflect the Zhuang people's cultural ideals and historical experiences. The diverse vocal styles, deeply rooted in regional traditions, combine emotional depth with artistic vibrancy, while traditional and modern orchestral elements enrich its musical dimension. The performative aspects, including folk-inspired dances, traditional costumes, and symbolic props, further highlight its cultural heritage. Together, these elements underscore the artistic richness and cultural significance of Zhuang Opera, ensuring its enduring legacy and continued academic interest.

From the information provided, it can be summarized that Zhuang Opera is a profound cultural expression of the Zhuang people, blending narrative, vocal performance, musical accompaniment, and theatrical presentation. The stories, whether heroic and collective in the Northern style or romantic and allegorical in the Southern style, reflect the Zhuang people's cultural ideals and historical experiences. The diverse vocal styles, deeply rooted in regional traditions, combine emotional depth with artistic vibrancy, while both traditional and modern orchestral elements

enhance its musical dimension. Performative aspects, including folk-inspired dances, traditional costumes with ethnic embroidery, silver ornaments, and symbolic props like bronze drums and bamboo artifacts, emphasize the cultural heritage of the Zhuang people. Together, these elements underscore the artistic richness and cultural significance of Zhuang Opera, ensuring its lasting legacy and continued academic interest.

2.3 The theory used in this research

This research applies theories from ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, cultural heritage studies, and traditional Chinese music analysis to support its three main objectives.

2.3.1 Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is the core theoretical framework of this study. It provides a foundation for analyzing Zhuang Opera as an ethnic musical tradition. This theory helps explore the cultural background, musical forms, and transmission of Zhuang Opera. It also examines its development and preservation within the historical and cultural context of Zhuang society (related to Objectives 1 and 3).

In addition, this study applies ethnomusicological fieldwork methods, such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and music documentation. These methods help investigate the role of Zhuang Opera in contemporary society and its challenges, such as the decline in audience numbers and competition from modern entertainment (Nettl, 2005; Turino, 2008).

This study applies Merriam's (1964) Tripartite Model of Music—music as sound, behavior, and concept—to analyze the differences between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera and provide theoretical support for their transmission and development. From the sound perspective, it compares their melodic patterns, tonal structures, and instrumentation (Objective 2). From the behavior perspective, it examines their performance practices and current state of development (Objectives 1 and 2). From the concept perspective, it explores their role in cultural identity, social function, and transmission while analyzing the impact of government policies, community participation, and digitalization (Objective 3). This framework not only

highlights their musical differences but also offers insights into their contemporary development and preservation.

2.3.2 Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology provides a theoretical basis for understanding the role of Zhuang Opera in Zhuang culture and social structure (related to Objective 1). This study applies concepts from cultural heritage preservation to examine the social function of Zhuang Opera.

Cultural anthropology also supports the comparison of the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera (related to Objective 2). It helps analyze how regional culture influences the evolution of Zhuang Opera styles, such as differences in thematic content and accompanying instruments.

Furthermore, cultural anthropology is an important theoretical tool for studying the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera (related to Objective 3). This study explores how intergenerational transmission, community participation, and government policies affect the sustainability of Zhuang Opera (Kuper, 2000; Clifford, 1988).

2.3.3 Cultural Heritage Studies

For Objective 3 (transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera), this study applies the Preservation and Transmission Model from cultural heritage studies. It views Zhuang Opera as intangible cultural heritage and explores its preservation mechanisms in the context of modernization.

2.3.4 Comparative Musicology

Comparative musicology provides a theoretical basis for comparing the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera (related to Objective 2). This study systematically compares melodic patterns, rhythmic structures, and instrumental arrangements between the two styles. This theory also helps analyze the historical influence of cross-cultural musical exchanges on their development (Merriam, 1964; Nettl, 2005).

2.3.5 Traditional Chinese Music Analysis

Traditional Chinese music analysis provides systematic tools for studying the melody, mode, and rhythm of Zhuang Opera (related to Objective 2).

Based on the review of all the theories discussed, it can be summarized that clarifying the relationship between each theory and the research objectives ensures a coherent conceptual framework for this study. Ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology help understand the cultural significance of Zhuang Opera. Comparative musicology and traditional Chinese music analysis provide systematic methods for comparing the Northern and Southern styles. The Preservation and Transmission Model from cultural heritage studies offers strategies for the sustainable development of Zhuang Opera.

2.4 Related research

2.4.1 Relevant Theories and Methodological

This section outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study, covering ethnomusicology, performance theory, cultural transmission theories, and comparative research methods. These perspectives provide a framework for analyzing the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera, examining its contemporary development, and exploring strategies for its transmission.

1) Ethnomusicology and Traditional Opera Studies

Ethnomusicology provides a key academic framework for studying traditional opera, emphasizing the cultural, social, and musical aspects of performance. Alan Merriam, in *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), proposed a tripartite model consisting of musical concepts, behaviors related to music, and musical sound. This model offers a holistic approach to Zhuang Opera, treating it not only as a musical form but also as a cultural phenomenon. Bruno Nettl, in *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (1983), highlighted the significance of fieldwork and oral tradition, which aligns closely with the transmission and performative nature of Zhuang Opera.

Chinese traditional opera studies, primarily based on theatrical and literary analysis, provide another perspective. Xiquxue (opera studies) explores the structural and stylistic characteristics of opera, while performance theories focus on the relationship between actors, audiences, and performance spaces. Additionally,

theories of cultural identity help analyze how Zhuang Opera functions as an expression of Zhuang ethnic identity in contemporary society.

2) Performance Theory and Cultural Transmission

Richard Schechner's performance theory provides an important perspective for understanding Zhuang Opera as a dynamic and evolving art form. His concept of "restored behavior" suggests that performance is not a simple repetition of tradition but a continuous reinterpretation in different contexts. This is particularly relevant to Zhuang Opera, which has undergone adaptations to meet the needs of modern audiences and to align with government cultural policies.

Cultural transmission theories, particularly Jan Vansina's research on oral traditions, emphasize the role of oral and embodied knowledge in preserving traditional performing arts. Since Zhuang Opera is primarily transmitted through apprenticeship and oral instruction rather than written notation, oral tradition theories provide valuable insights for this study.

Furthermore, cultural ecology and UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework contribute to research on the preservation and transmission of traditional opera. The cultural ecology perspective views traditional opera as part of a broader socio-cultural system, emphasizing the interdependence of art, environment, and social structures. UNESCO's ICH framework highlights the importance of safeguarding traditional performing arts while allowing for adaptive development.

3) Comparative Methodology in Ethnomusicology

Comparative musicology provides methodological tools for analyzing the differences and similarities between the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera. Early comparative studies, such as those advocated by Jaap Kunst, focused on cross-cultural analysis of musical structures. While modern ethnomusicology tends to emphasize cultural and contextual interpretations rather than purely structural comparisons, comparative research remains useful for examining regional variations in melody, instrumentation, and performance styles in Zhuang Opera.

Bruno Nettl's fieldwork methodologies, including participant observation, interviews, and music transcription analysis, are essential for studying Zhuang Opera in its social and cultural context. This study employs in-depth interviews with performers and cultural practitioners, combined with ethnographic observations of performances, to document and analyze the stylistic characteristics and transmission practices of both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera traditions.

By integrating these theoretical and methodological approaches, this study provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the characteristics, transmission, and transformation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The Zhuang Opera was born in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, and its singing, music, performance, and accompaniment have constituted various elements of opera and formed its own unique style.

2.4.2 Cultural Transmission and Intangible Heritage Protection

Research on cultural transmission and intangible heritage protection provides essential insights into the preservation and development of Zhuang Opera.

1) UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection

UNESCO's framework for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) protection serves as a global reference for safeguarding traditional performing arts. It emphasizes community involvement, sustainability, and the need for both preservation and adaptation. Relevant documents, including the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, outline strategies for protecting oral traditions, performing arts, and local knowledge systems.

2) Oral Tradition and Cultural Transmission

The study of oral traditions is crucial for understanding the transmission of Zhuang Opera, which primarily relies on master-apprentice relationships and community-based learning rather than written records. Jan Vansina's research on oral history provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing how knowledge is passed down through generations. His work highlights the role of memory, performance, and adaptation in sustaining oral traditions.

3) Cultural Ecology and Opera Protection

Cultural ecology offers a perspective that connects the survival of traditional opera with its surrounding social, economic, and environmental conditions. Chinese scholars such as He Yang and Wang Wenzhang have explored the relationship between cultural heritage and its ecological environment, advocating for policies that integrate traditional opera into contemporary cultural life. Their research emphasizes the need for dynamic protection strategies that balance conservation with innovation, ensuring that traditional performances remain relevant to modern audiences.

By incorporating these perspectives, this study examines how Zhuang Opera is preserved, transmitted, and adapted within the broader context of intangible heritage protection.

2.4.3 Related Books and Papers on Zhuang Opera

1) Related Books

In 1984, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Opera Research Office compiled the "Zhuang Opera Art Collection," covering research from the 1950s to the 1980s. It discusses the historical origins, transmission, development, singing, melody, and future of Zhuang Opera. Though comprehensive, some chapters are repetitive, and the development status of Zhuang Opera at the time is scarcely addressed.

In 1990, Wei Wei and Xiang Fan published *Research on the Art of Zhuang Opera*, the first monograph on the subject. It covers the opera's birth, growth, decline, and rebirth, analyzing repertoire, singing, and stage performances, offering important theoretical support for reform.

In 2008, Liao Mingjun's *Zhuang Opera Art and Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection* focused on the protection of Zhuang Opera after its inclusion in the national intangible cultural heritage list, discussing its historical origin and issues like singing music cards.

2) Related Papers

2.1) The Origin and History of Zhuang Opera

Liu Lingling (2011) analyzed the origins of Bouyei Opera and North Zhuang Opera, detailing their development and cultural context.

Wei Yulin (2013) examined the social-historical and cultural background of Zhuang opera in Guangxi, highlighting the influence of Zhuang folk music and interethnic integration in its origins and growth.

Wang Yan (2018) discussed how the Qing Dynasty's "flower section" fostered the development of local operas, with Guangxi Zhuang Opera evolving through exchange with Han Chinese opera, shaping its national and local identity.

Sun Ting (2013) categorized Guangxi Zhuang Opera into South Road, North Road, and Shigong styles, offering insights into their development and artistic forms.

Huang Youxia (2008) emphasized the folk nature of North Zhuang Opera, noting its appeal lies in aligning with audience values and cultural interests.

Chen Liqin (2011) analyzed the relationship between Zhuang Opera and folk culture, stressing the importance of protecting folk traditions for the opera's preservation.

Huang Bingxiang (2012) explored the role of North Zhuang Opera in cultural exchanges, regional communication, and leisure activities, asserting its importance in daily life.

Cai Heng (2016) examined Zhuang Opera's role in rituals, where it aids in expressing desires, connecting with spiritual forces, and enhancing cultural ceremonies like festivals and funerals.

Jiang Xiaohang (2020) explored the historical and modern cultural contexts of Zhuang opera, emphasizing its role as a national aesthetic culture reflecting both historical and contemporary themes.

Wang Kai (2020) discussed the educational values of Zhuang opera, advocating for a multi-sector approach to preserve and innovate its cultural significance.

Xu Yue (2023) analyzed the integration of Han Chinese elements in Guangxi Zhuang Opera, showing its adaptation while maintaining a distinct cultural identity in performance and repertoire.

2.2) The Singing and Musical Instruments of Zhuang Opera

Zhang Yi (2010) in "In The Characteristics of Singing Music in Jingxi South Road Zhuang Opera" analyzes 13 singing styles, 4 plate styles, and popular

characteristics in South Road Zhuang Opera, exploring tonal qualities, melodies, ornamentation, language, and overall singing techniques.

Sun Jie (2011) in "The Artistic Forms of North Road Zhuang Opera Music," studies distinctive singing styles, lyrics structure, and melody in North Road Zhuang Opera, highlighting how these features reflect the Zhuang people's cultural mentality and aesthetic values, contributing to its artistic significance.

Yang Danhua (2013) in "An Analysis of the Singing Methods of Zhuang Opera" divides Zhuang Opera singing into traditional, modern, ethnic singing, recitation, and form, emphasizing the importance of a vernacular foundation for showcasing the opera's artistic charm and vitality.

Gao Min (2015) in "Several Characteristics of Zhuang Music Research in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," discusses key features in Zhuang music studies, such as the multidisciplinary approach, independent creation, and regional cultural focus, while analyzing Zhuang opera music characteristics.

Gao Min (2015) in "Review and Reflections on the Research of Zhuang Music in the Middle of the Twentieth Century" revisits mid-20th-century Zhuang music research, recognizing its contribution to Chinese national music theory and Zhuang music's role in academic and cultural development.

Huang Shouheng (2015) in "The Differences and Similarities of Rhyming Characteristics between the North and South Roads of Guangxi Zhuang Opera" compares rhyme structures between the two styles of Zhuang Opera, analyzing the rhyming features of various sections and the influence of local folk songs.

Zhao Yining (2018) in "An Analysis of the Ethnic Music Formation of Guangxi Zhuang," uses the Zhuang Witch Tune and Zhuang Opera to examine tonal scales, melodic patterns, rhythmic beats, and lyric structures, employing traditional Chinese music theories in the analysis.

Liu Huaqing (2020) in "A Study on the Singing Music of Zhuang Opera in Guangxi Beilu," primarily focuses on analyzing the singing styles of Beilu Zhuang opera, using Qupi as a key example, though without offering deeper analytical insights.

Wang Yan (2024) in "Study on the Diffusion Pattern of the 'Pingban' Singing Voice of the South Road Zhuang Opera," explores the unique diffusion pattern of South Road Zhuang Opera's singing voice, providing insights into its differentiation from other opera genres and potential innovation.

Chai Yu (2020) in "Research on the Characteristics and Creation of Zhuang Music in the Right River Basin," analyzes Zhuang music in the Right River Basin, considering its cultural and geographical context, and examines modern works incorporating Zhuang music, especially focusing on the horse bone hu instrument.

Li Zhili (2018) in "Discussion on the Grassroots Nature of Guangxi Zhuang Opera," discusses Zhuang Opera's "grassroots nature," focusing on aspects like repertoire, lyrics, and performance forms, highlighting its connection to local culture and audience engagement.

2.3) The Performance and Repertoire of Zhuang Opera

Zhu Li (2018) in "On the Dramatic Conflict in North Road Zhuang Opera" examines the dramatic conflict in North Road Zhuang Opera, suggesting that clichés and undeveloped forms hinder its progress. He advocates for playwrights to improve their creative abilities to ensure the opera's better inheritance and development.

He Rongzhi (2019) in "Mining the value of Zhuang Jin and Serang themes and the construction of Zhuang Opera repertoire" explores the significance of Zhuang Jin and Snake Lang folk tales, highlighting their popularity and impact in Zhuang opera. The opera works like "A Piece of Zhuang Brocade" reflect artistic explorations of these themes, resonating with human nature and happiness.

Zhu Jiangyong (2023) in "Essay on the Creation of Guangxi Opera in the New Period" discusses Zhuang opera's creative evolution, from realism to social criticism, romanticism, and absurdism, emphasizing the portrayal of characters and the expression of Guangxi's ethnic cultures through diverse creative techniques.

Huang Shaozhi (2007) in "His Life is Wonderful because of Zhuang Opera" narrates the life of Shou Kejian, a national inheritor of Zhuang Opera, highlighting his dedication to the promotion and transmission of Zhuang Opera.

Wang Yan (2011) in "From the Program of 'Same but Different' to the Artistic Characteristics of Guangxi Zhuang Opera" compares Guangxi Zhuang

opera's performance programs with traditional opera, exploring its unique artistic traits in action, makeup, and performance.

Wang Jianping (2020) in "Review of Hadan's Performance in Zhuang Opera's The Cliffs of Pulling Clouds" reviews actor Hadan's performance, highlighting his use of singing, acting, and other techniques to bring out the distinct personality and emotional depth of his character.

Yang Yameng (2014) in "From the Zhuang Opera King of Song to see the cultural exchange between Zhuang and Han" analyzes the Zhuang opera's cultural richness and the fusion of Zhuang and Han cultures, emphasizing the unity and mutual understanding between the two ethnic groups.

Du Xiaojie (2014) in "The World Significance of Ethnic Narrative: An Exploration Centered on the Zhuang Opera Lady Washi" explores the unique cultural sentiments of the Zhuang people depicted in the opera, highlighting the shared values of the Chinese nation and offering insights for future ethnic works.

He Rongren (2016) in "The Watchers of Education in Mountain Villages—A Review of the Modern Zhuang Drama" reviews "Persuasion," a modern Zhuang opera about education, emphasizing its emotional resonance and portrayal of a dedicated teacher and a hardworking student.

Quan Jie (2017) in "Talking about the Artistic Highlights of the Zhuang Opera Feng Zi Cai" analyzes key elements of the opera, including its historical significance, unique musical features, and the heartfelt performances of local actors, while suggesting room for further refinement.

Li Sha (2018) in "The Aesthetic Value of the Rehearsal of the Zhuang Opera The Cliff of Pulling Clouds" examines the new Zhuang opera's creation, discussing its clear thematic direction and the transmission of Zhuang Opera, offering a valuable model for its development.

Dong Yingchun (2019) in "The Revelation of Drawn Cloud Cliff to the Exploration of Modern Zhuang Opera" discusses the opera's thematic, linguistic, and aesthetic features, reflecting its efforts to integrate traditional ethnic elements with modern aesthetics in its transformation.

Yang Zhi (2019) in "Ontological Consciousness and Aesthetic Pursuit of Modern Zhuang Opera" analyzes the evolution of modern Zhuang opera, focusing

on its integration of local dialects, music, and stage performances to better suit the audience's cultural habits and aesthetic preferences.

Yan Xuemei (2022) in "Spiritual Transmission and Expression Innovation of Revolutionary Historical Theme Drama Works" analyzes the Zhuang Opera Baise Uprising, highlighting its significance in promoting revolutionary history while offering innovative approaches in narrative style and stage structure for historical dramas.

2.4) The transmission and Preservation of Zhuang Opera

Zheng Haihua (2009) analyzes the transmission and development of North Road Zhuang Opera, emphasizing the role of the inheritor, Shou Kejian, in preserving its artistic ideology, historical transmission, and cultural continuity.

Chen Liqin (2012) explores the cultural ecology of Zhuang Opera, noting its development under the influence of Han Chinese opera, which enriched its repertoire, music, and performance techniques through a fusion with Zhuang traditional arts.

Wang Yang (2015) examines the evolution of teacher-transmission methods in North Road Zhuang Opera, addressing challenges in talent cultivation and the difficulties of transmission under modern conditions, while suggesting innovative strategies for talent development.

Tian Shen (2015) discusses the vitality of local drama transmission, using Longlin Autonomous County's North Road Zhuang Opera as a case study to explore its artistic characteristics, performance forms, and historical transmission.

Zhang Yingchun (2016) investigates the transmission of North Road Zhuang Opera in Tianlin County, noting Shou Kejian's success and the involvement of local troupes, but also highlighting the lack of full engagement from the audience and the need for government support.

Huang Shouheng (2017) studies the transmission of North Road Zhuang Opera by Shou Kejian, identifying challenges such as martial arts transmission and access to campuses, and urges government intervention for inheritor protection.

Huang Yiping (2018) analyzes the role of the audience in Zhuang Opera and suggests integrating Western aesthetics to enhance audience engagement and foster the opera's development.

Gao Shangxue (2018) introduces the concept of "cultural ecological niches" to address the protection and transmission of Guangxi Zhuang Opera, offering a framework for its preservation and sustainable development.

Gao Xinyan (2018) surveys the survival status of Zhuang Opera in Bianya Village, Longlin County, highlighting the integration of local ethnic characteristics with external influences, but noting the precarious survival of the art form.

Wu Man (2019) provides an in-depth study on North Road Zhuang Opera, covering its formation, development, transmission, and protection, and contributing to the understanding of its preservation.

Liang Jiasheng (2019) explores the exhibition and transmission paths of North Road Zhuang Opera in Tianlin County, offering suggestions for its protection and transmission strategies.

Wang Jiawei (2023) analyzes the oral tradition of North Road Zhuang Opera, examining its ethnical and regional characteristics, rooted in the everyday practices of the Zhuang people, and its transmission through oral programming.

Chen Liqin (2007) discusses Zhuang Opera's survival and development through communication, suggesting that scientific and integrated communication strategies are vital for enhancing its contemporary appeal while preserving its ethnic identity.

Huang Xiaojuan (2007) emphasizes Zhuang Opera as a cultural bridge, advocating for its transformation to adapt to modern theater while retaining its traditional essence through government and societal collaboration.

Yang Lijing (2008) analyzes the protection and transmission of North Road Zhuang Opera in Tianlin County, proposing strategies for overcoming the challenges it faces through field research.

Han Jianjun (2008) approaches the protection of North Road Zhuang Opera from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage, suggesting measures to improve its transmission and safeguard its future.

Yang Xiuzhao & Sun Jie (2009) offer an overview of Beilu Zhuang Opera's conservation and transmission, recommending improvements to its preservation and highlighting the need for a comprehensive transmission approach to ensure its long-term vitality.

Zhang Lianxiu (2012) explores the tourism development potential of Zhuang Opera, advocating for its integration into local cultural tourism to enhance its popularity and socio-economic impact.

Li Xin (2014) investigates Tianlin Zhuang Opera's development and the role of the Zhuang Opera Art Festival in promoting its transmission and socio-economic benefits.

Chen Liqin (2015) from an educational anthropology perspective, examines how Zhuang Opera's transmission functions in cultural education, suggesting integration of family, school, and social education to ensure its sustainable development.

Wei Yizhen & Yang Dong (2015) document the oral history of Shou Kejian, focusing on the challenges of transmitting martial arts scripts and the need for concerted efforts to promote Zhuang Opera as a cultural brand.

Sun Ting (2016) addresses the development issues of Zhuang Opera, such as an aging audience, and suggests methods for its preservation through innovation, resource integration, and cultural ecological protection.

Guo Shanshan (2018) explores the integration of Zhuang Opera with other cultural and art forms, offering suggestions on how it can continue its transmission and development while remaining a valuable part of cultural heritage.

Mo Qixun, Liao Wenshen, & Guo Shanshan (2018) analyze the "operaization" of Guangxi Zhuang Opera, emphasizing its transmission and innovation through interviews with experts, and proposing strategies for its modern adaptation and dissemination.

Zhou Xiumiao & Ma Shuchun (2018) discuss the survival crisis of South Road Zhuang Opera, advocating for comprehensive support from government, scholars, and the public to revitalize the opera.

Song Jingwen (2022) examines the influence of cultural geography on Zhuang Opera's development, highlighting its regional limitations and the potential for broader dissemination.

Lu Yixia (2022) investigates the challenges of Zhuang Opera under modern media influences, emphasizing the need for innovative approaches to reach contemporary audiences while maintaining traditional values.

2.5 Summary

In recent years, Zhuang opera, as a traditional form of drama in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, has gradually attracted academic attention. Research on Zhuang opera mainly focuses on its historical development, musical elements, performance arts, and social and cultural significance. Studies show that Zhuang opera has gone through several stages of evolution, from early folk performances to its current artistic form. Its music, stage presentation, and social roles have all undergone significant changes.

Zhuang opera is divided into two styles: Northern and Southern. These styles differ not only in regional and cultural background but also in performance techniques, musical structures, and the content of the plays. The Northern style features strong local characteristics and traditional folk music elements, while the Southern style incorporates more modern innovations in its stage presentation. Relevant literature highlights that the transmission of Zhuang opera faces multiple challenges, including cultural preservation, audience awareness, and artistic innovation. Therefore, research on the transmission and preservation of Zhuang opera has become an important topic in academic discussions, especially in the comparative study of the Northern and Southern styles, which has been largely unexplored. This study will deeply analyze the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang opera, aiming to find a better balance between cultural preservation and artistic innovation, and to provide theoretical and practical guidance for the future protection and transmission of Zhuang opera.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

In this research is qualitative research, My Methodology I went to field work to collect data. And found key informant. So, I had the methods follow as.

3.1 Research scope

3.1.1 Scope of content

3.1.2 Scope of research site

3.1.3 Scope of time

3.2 Research Process

3.2.1 Selection of the key informants

3.2.2 Selection of the opera

3.2.3 Research tools

3.2.4 Data collection

3.2.5 Data management

3.2.6 Data Analysis

3.2.7 Data Presentation

3.1 Research scope

The purpose of this study is to compare the two types of Zhuang Opera: the Southern Style Zhuang Opera and the Northern Style Zhuang Opera, mainly analyzing the differences in the history of their origins, the songs and tunes, the accompanying musical instruments, and the performance routines. In addition, this paper analyzes the current development of Zhuang Opera and then discusses the transmission and protection of Zhuang Opera.

3.1.1 Scope of content

1) Current status of the Zhuang Opera

This section is a study of Zhuang Operes, including the investigation and research on the protection of inheritors, the construction of theatre troupes, the creation of repertoire, development measures, and then comes up with the current status of the development of Zhuang Opera.

2) Comparison of the two types of Zhuang Opera

This section mainly focuses on two different genres of Guangxi Zhuang Opera: South Style Zhuang Opera and North Style Zhuang Opera, and the research content is mainly the musical characteristics of the two different genres, including singing, language, accompaniment, performance, as well as a comparative study of the two different genres.

3) Transmission and Protection of Zhuang Opera

This part mainly focuses on the problems existing in the protection of Zhuang opera and puts forward countermeasures for its transmission and development.

3.1.2 Scope of research site

This research will conduct field investigations in Nanning, Jingxi, and Tianlin in Guangxi, China.

1) Nanning is the capital of Guangxi Province, The Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe is located in Nanning City.



Figure 6. Research site Nanning City, Location of Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe

Source: <http://Guangxi.tianditu.gov.cn>

2) Jingxi is the main area of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.



Figure 7. Research site Jingxi county, the main area of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

Source: <http://Guangxi.tianditu.gov.cn>

3) Tianlin is the main area of Northern Style Zhuang Opera.

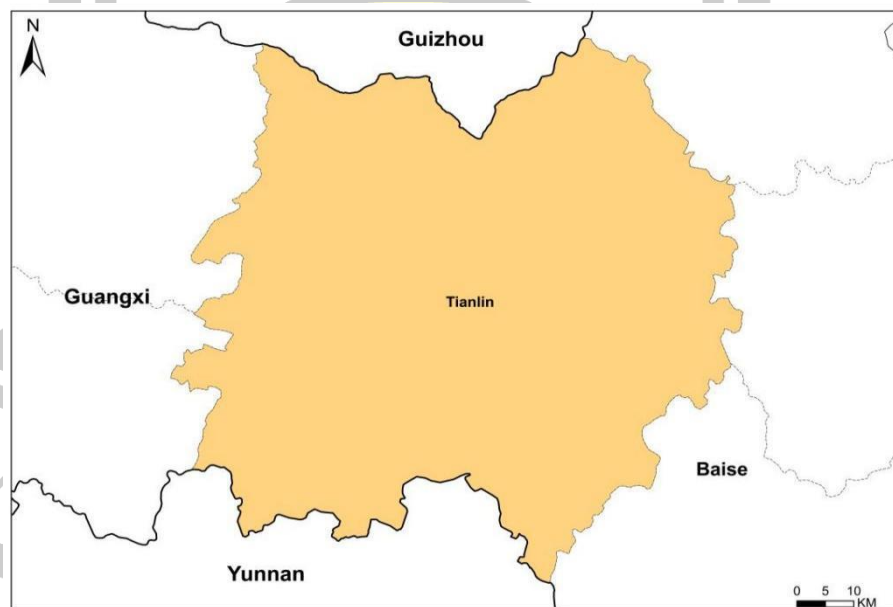


Figure 8. Research site Tianlin county, the main area of Northern Style Zhuang Opera.

Source: <http://Guangxi.tianditu.gov.cn>

3.1.3 Timeline of research

The whole time range of the study is from July 2023 to March 2025.

3.2 Research Process

3.2.1 Selection of the key Informants

In order to study Zhuang Opera, the purpose is to start with the Zhuang Opera practitioners and conduct in-depth interviews with them, attempting to understand the development of Southern Style Zhuang Opera and Northern Style Zhuang Opera from different perspectives. The criteria for choosing the informants are as follows:

- 1) More than 20 years of experience in the field.
- 2) Is a recognized representative person in the field.
- 3) Makes some essential contribution to the development of Zhuang Opera or won an influential award,

To study Zhuang Opera, this research has three key informants, One of them is Huang Zhiyuan, the inheritor of Zhuang Opera, the other is Liao Mingjun, an expert in the protection of tangible cultural heritage in Guangxi, The third is Hadan, an famous actor of Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe.

3.2.1.1 Huang Zhiyuan - Inheritor of Zhuang Opera

Huang Zhiyuan, the representative inheritor of the second batch of the intangible cultural heritage of Zhuang Opera in Guangxi, has been studying Zhuang Opera for 42 years and is capable of writing, singing, dancing, guiding, and acting, as well as applying make-up for theatre and playing erhu. He has organized and developed 28 amateur troupes in Tianlin County and organized the restoration of 18 amateur troupes. Huang Zhiyuan started with scripts to regulate the performing skills of the troupes. The scripts he wrote and adapted were rigorous and standardized. He also made significant reforms in the art of performance, developing from a single to a diversified singing style, composing and quoting more than 20 tunes, and enriching the music of Zhuang Opera.



Figure 9. Huang Zhiyuan

Source: Youjiang Daily (2022)

3.2.1.2 Liu yi--Famous Zhuang opera composer

Zhuang nationality, Guangxi Drama Theater Zhuang Opera Troupe National First-Class Composer, member of the Chinese Musicians Association, member of the Chinese Minority Music Society, member of the Guangxi Dramatists Association. The song "Moon Bay" won the 9th China Music Golden Bell Award for Vocal Music Excellence, the 13th Guangxi Spiritual Civilization Construction "Five One Project" and the 7th Guangxi Literary Creation "Bronze Drum" Award, the Zhuang opera "Feng Zicai" won the Best Music Creation Award at the 5th National Minority Literary Performance, the large-scale mythological Zhuang opera "Qianyun Cliff" won the 10th Guangxi Drama Exhibition Special Award, the large-scale epic Zhuang opera "Baise Uprising" won the 10th Guangxi Drama Exhibition Gold Award, and won the first place in the Guangxi 10th Drama Exhibition Osmanthus Music Creation Award.



Figure 10. Liu Yi

Source: Performance Magazine(2021)

3.2.1.3 Gaomin--Zhuang Ethnomusicology Expert

Gao Min is a professor and a master's supervisor. Her academic focus lies in traditional Chinese music and ethnomusicology, with a specialization in the cultural study of ethnic musical instruments.

As the chief editor of Research on Ethnic Music and Arts, Gao Min has made significant contributions to the field through her extensive research and publication efforts. She has authored over 20 scholarly articles, including the notable “A Study on the Musical Instruments of Guangxi Ethnic Minorities from an Anthropological Perspective” (republished in full in China Social Sciences Digest and awarded Third Prize in the Ninth Guangxi Outstanding Social Science Research Achievement Awards). Other influential works include “Abandoning the Flute for the Zither: The Transformation Trajectory of the Leading Accompanying Instrument in an Opera Genre,” “Musical Instruments as Cultural Embodiments: A Theoretical Interpretation of the ‘Sound-Object Relationship’,” and “Guangxi Tile Drums and Folk Customs.”

Gao Min's research provides valuable insights into the intersection of music, culture, and society, particularly in the context of ethnic minority traditions in China. Her work not only advances theoretical discourse in ethnomusicology but also enriches the understanding of the dynamic relationships between music, material culture, and cultural identity.



Figure 11. Gaomin
Source:Wenying Chen (2019)

Table 2. General investigators.

Name	Gender	Position
Shouheng Huang	male	Director of Tianlin Cultural Center
Shuqing Huang	male	Photojournalist and Zhuang Opera Enthusiast
Zhenggang Lu	male	Staff Member of the Tianlin County Publicity Department
Hongyun Ding	male	Chairperson of the Jingxi County Writers' Association

3.2.2 Selection of the opera

To study Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera, this research will select one representative work from each style for analysis. The criteria for selecting the representative works are as follows:

1) **Representativeness:** The selected works must reflect the core musical, linguistic, and performative characteristics of their respective regional styles, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

2) **Cultural and Artistic Significance:** The selected works should be culturally and historically important within the Zhuang community, reflecting traditional stories, social values, and aesthetic principles.

3) **Musical and Theatrical Features:** The selected works should showcase distinct musical structures, vocal techniques, instrumental arrangements, and performance practices specific to Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera.

4) **Availability of Resources:** The selected works must have enough documentation, recordings, or active performers to support in-depth analysis and field research.

By applying these selection criteria, this study ensures that the analysis is based on authentic and influential works that best represent the stylistic and cultural diversity of Zhuang Opera. The comparative study of Nongjia Baotie and Baohulu will provide a clear approach to understanding the musical and theatrical differences between the Northern and Southern styles, while contributing to the broader discussion of the opera's transmission and preservation.

3.2.2.1 The Northern Style of Zhuang Opera

The selected opera for the Northern style is Nongjia Baotie (The Baohulu). This opera embodies the unique stylistic and cultural elements of the Northern Zhuang Opera tradition. Its narrative structure, musical characteristics, and performance techniques will provide a comprehensive representation of the Northern style.

3.2.2.2 The Southern Style of Zhuang Opera

The selected opera for the Southern style is Baohulu (The Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)). This work highlights the distinctive features of the Southern

Zhuang Opera tradition, including its melodic styles, instrumental arrangements, and cultural motifs.

The selection of these two operas is based on their prominence within their respective traditions, their rich cultural and artistic significance, and their potential to serve as exemplary models for comparing the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera. Through the analysis of these operas, this study aims to deepen the understanding of the stylistic differences and shared cultural heritage of Zhuang Opera while addressing issues related to its transmission and preservation.

3.2.3 Research Tools

In this study, the following research tools will be used for data collection and analysis:

3.2.3.1 Literature Collection Tools

Electronic Databases: Electronic databases will be used to search for academic papers, books, and journal articles related to Zhuang opera, ethnomusicology, and comparative studies of traditional operatic genres.

Library Resources: Local literature, historical archives, and collections of artistic works related to Zhuang opera, with a particular focus on classical texts concerning the North and South Zhuang opera traditions, will be reviewed.

3.2.3.2 Field Research Tools

Audio Recording Devices: High-quality digital audio equipment will be used to record Zhuang opera performances and interviews with artists and scholars.

Video Recording Devices: High-definition cameras will be used for full recordings of Zhuang opera performances, especially focusing on the different performance styles and musical elements of the North and South Zhuang operatic traditions.

3.2.3.3 Interview Tools

Semi-Structured Interview Guide: A semi-structured interview guide will be designed for interviewing artists, performers, and scholars of the North and South Zhuang opera traditions, aiming to explore their perspectives on the characteristics, performance styles, and cultural nuances of the two operatic forms.

3.2.3.4 Data Analysis Tools

Qualitative Data Analysis Software: Software such as NVivo will be used for analyzing interview transcripts, literature, and other non-digital information sources.

3.2.4 Data Collection

The data will be collected through the following methods:

3.2.4.1 Literature Collection

Literature concerning the North and South Zhuang operas will be gathered, covering aspects such as their historical development, musical characteristics, and performance styles.

Emphasis will be placed on collecting local opera literature, academic research, and audiovisual materials related to both operatic traditions.

3.2.4.2 Field Observation

Attend performances of North and South Zhuang opera in Guangxi to document and observe musical elements, operatic styles, and performance techniques.

Sound materials will be collected through direct participation and observation of performances, with a comparative analysis of the two operatic forms.

3.2.4.3 Interview Surveys

Interviews will be conducted with performers, artists, and scholars from both North and South Zhuang operas to gather insights into their views on the stylistic and cultural differences between the two operatic traditions.

3.2.4.4 Audio and Video Materials

Audio recordings and video footage of performances from both operatic traditions will be collected and analyzed for musical structure, melodic patterns, rhythmic characteristics, and stylistic differences. Post-performance analysis of the recorded audiovisual data will be carried out.

3.2.5 Data Management

To ensure the security and efficient management of data, the following methods will be employed:

3.2.5.1 Data Storage

All audio, video, literature, and interview data will be stored in digital formats. Audio and video files will be saved on external hard drives or cloud storage, categorized by date, topic, and operatic tradition.

Literature and survey data will be stored in electronic archives, with file management systems organized by thematic categories.

3.2.5.2 Data Backup

Regular backups of all data will be performed to prevent data loss. Audio, video, and literature files will be stored in at least two separate backup locations, such as cloud storage, external hard drives, and servers.

3.2.5.3 Data Organization

All collected data will be systematically organized in a data management system. For example, interview recordings will be transcribed and matched with participants' identities. Audio and video data will be annotated with performance dates, locations, and performers to facilitate subsequent analysis.

3.2.5.4 Data Security

To ensure data privacy and security, sensitive data (such as interview content) will be encrypted and stored securely. Participants' personal information and interview content will be anonymized in accordance with ethical guidelines.

3.2.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods, as described below:

3.2.6.1 Qualitative Analysis

Literature Review and Analysis: The historical development, musical characteristics, and performance techniques of the North and South Zhuang operas will be analyzed through a thorough review of the relevant literature. This qualitative analysis will establish a theoretical framework for identifying the distinguishing features between the two operatic traditions.

Interview Analysis: Data from interviews will be analyzed to identify key themes and participant perspectives on the North and South Zhuang operas, especially regarding their musical styles, performance forms, and cultural differences.

3.2.6.2 Comparative Analysis

A systematic comparative analysis of the North and South Zhuang operas will be conducted, focusing on differences in narrative structure, vocal techniques, lyrical content, accompanying instruments, and overall performance styles.

A detailed examination of the cultural differences between the two operatic forms will be carried out, specifically in relation to their performance aesthetics, musical elements, and cultural expressions.

3.2.7 Data Presentation

In this paper, the researcher will introduce seven chapters:

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Literature Review

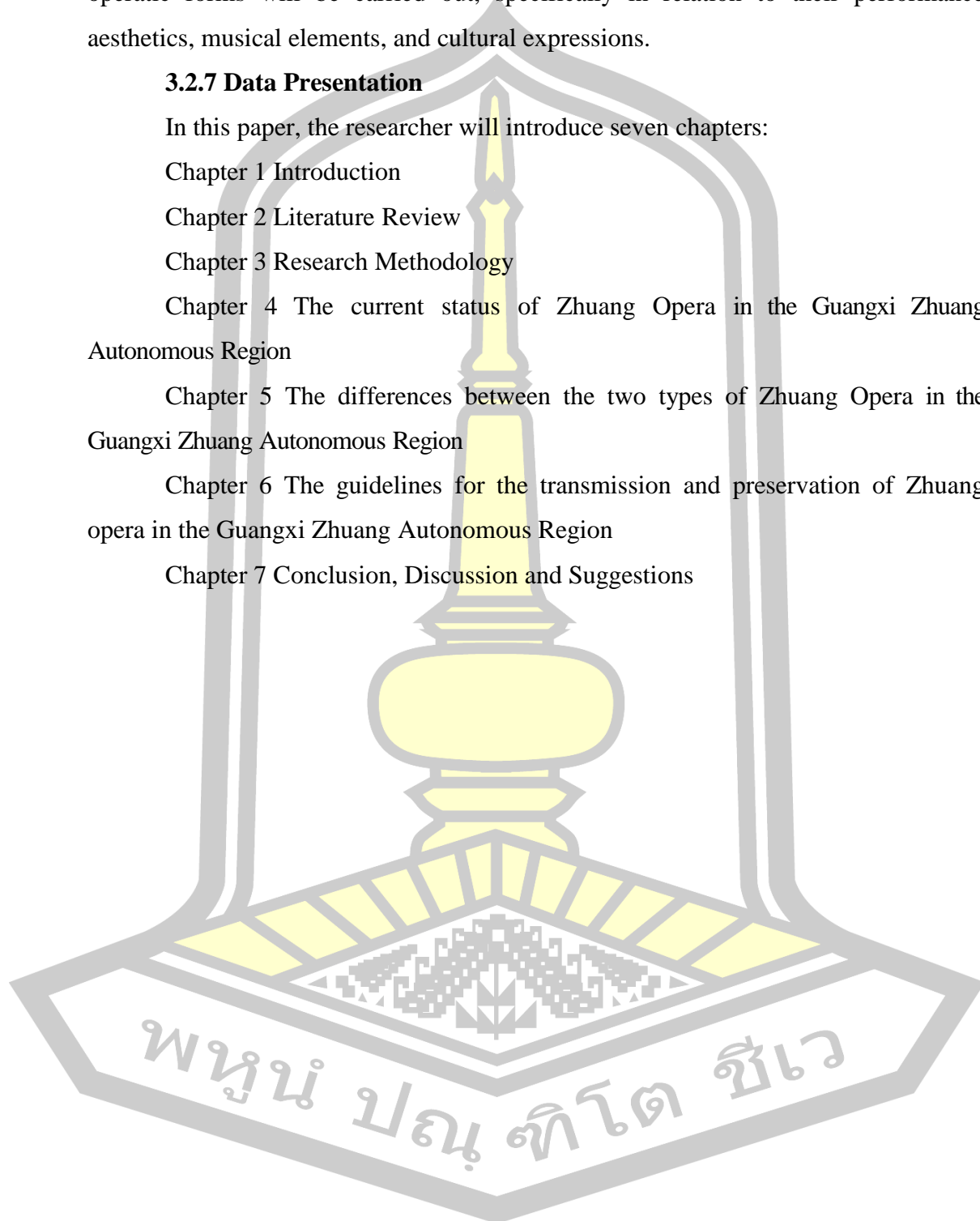
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CHAPTER IV

THE CURRENT STATUS OF ZHUANG OPERA IN THE GUANGXI ZHUANG AUTONOMOUS REGION

This chapter focuses on the current status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and presents the following topics:

4.1 The characteristics of Zhuang opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

4.1.1 Cultural Context of Zhuang Opera

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4.4 Summary

Based on the interview with the Key Information, it was found that Zhuang Opera includes Southern Style Zhuang Opera, Northern Style Zhuang Opera, Shigong Opera, and Funing Zhuang Opera, among which the best-preserved and developed are Southern Style Zhuang Opera and Northern Style Zhuang Opera in Guangxi, which are the main ones. Zhuang Opera originates from the life practices of the vast population and is the crystallization of the collective wisdom of the Zhuang people, reflecting their life aspirations and aesthetic habits. It also represents distinctive

national styles and local characteristics. Zhuang Opera has evolved over a long period of development and plays a significant role in the daily lives of the local Zhuang people and in the construction of local culture. And based on the information about the current status of Zhuang Opera gathered from the key information interview, the researcher presents each issue as follows:

4.1 The characteristics of Zhuang opera

4.1.1 Cultural Context of Zhuang Opera

As a significant representation of Zhuang culture, Zhuang Opera carries multiple social functions, including entertainment, emotional exchange, social interaction, educational dissemination, and ritual activities. Despite the increasing diversity of modern entertainment, Zhuang Opera remains an essential cultural vehicle for Zhuang communities. Particularly for the elderly, it serves not only as spiritual support but also as a symbol of cultural identity.

Huang Zhiyuan (2024) stated that in terms of entertainment and emotional exchange, Zhuang Opera not only provides cultural amusement but also helps relieve stress and regulate emotions, playing a central role in festivals, weddings, and village gatherings. Additionally, its storylines, drawn from real life, evoke emotional resonance among audiences.

Regarding social interaction and community cohesion, Zhuang Opera promotes cultural exchange between villages and regions, strengthening emotional connections. For example, interactions between different opera troupes enhance regional cultural ties, while the engagement between performers and audiences further reinforces social bonds.

In the field of education and cultural transmission, Zhuang Opera preserves Zhuang history and folk traditions while incorporating classic Han Chinese theatrical works, broadening audiences' cultural perspectives. Moreover, through its narratives, it conveys moral values, exerting a positive influence on social behavior.

In terms of ritual functions and cultural identity, Zhuang Opera frequently appears in ceremonies such as sacrifices, celebrations, and weddings, enhancing community cohesion and reinforcing Zhuang cultural identity.

4.1.2 Musical Elements in Zhuang Opera

In Zhuang Opera, the musical elements of the Northern and Southern styles exhibit significant differences, especially in terms of vocal styles, musical themes, and accompaniment.

4.1.2.1 The song of Zhuang Opera

Liu Yi (2024) stated that a Zhuang Opera musician, the vocal styles in Zhuang Opera are deeply rooted in folk traditions and vary significantly between the Northern and Southern styles.

1) Northern Zhuang Opera Vocal Style

The vocal style of Northern Zhuang Opera presents various types of musical forms commonly found in traditional opera. The structure gradually tends toward the variation of these forms but still retains many elements of folk songs, characterized by distinct individuality and independence. The vocal style of Northern Zhuang Opera is divided into two main branches:

First Branch: Dominated by the [Zhengdiao] (proper tone), it includes different types of tempo and rhythm: slow types such as [Zhengdiao] and [Pingdiao] (level tone); moderate types like [Wugongdiao] and [Laohandiao]; fast types such as [Mabian] (scolding tone) and [Henban] (resentment tone); and loose types like [Kudia] and [Aidia] (sorrowful tones).

Second Branch: Mainly prevalent in the southwestern areas of Baise, this style features softer and more delicate tones, with scales such as [Heyadiào], [Heiyiya Diao], [Wuguandiao], and [Bawangdiao]. The melodies are rich, and the forms are diverse, retaining the distinct characteristics of Zhuang folk songs. These vocals typically use a six-note pentatonic scale, with the upper phrase ending on “1” and the lower phrase ending on “5,” reflecting the transition from folk songs to Zhuang Opera vocal styles. The structure of the vocals maintains the traditional two-line structure of folk songs, often incorporating melismas to enhance emotional expression and vocal techniques. If the lyrics are incomplete, the melody can return to the starting phrase and repeat, increasing dramatic tension.

2) Southern Zhuang Opera Vocal Style

The vocal style of Southern Zhuang Opera originated from the Zhuang people's narrative and singing art "Maluan," and absorbed elements from local folk

dances and Zhuang puppet shows. Over time, it gradually formed a vocal system centered on [Pingban] (level tone). Through expansions and contractions in tempo, rhythm, and melody, the Southern Zhuang vocal style developed into a variety of different musical forms, moving toward the formalized structure of operatic music.

Southern Zhuang Opera's slow vocal forms include [Pingban], [Pinggao], and [Tandiao]. These melodies, scales, phrasing, and formats are similar, all evolving from [Pingban]. The main difference lies in the [Tandiao], which is faster, with more relaxed rhythms and a more intricate melody. Sometimes, ornamental notes are added to enhance the lyrical quality. These vocal styles are leisurely and can effectively express both narrative and sorrowful emotions, holding an important place in Southern Zhuang Opera. The richness of this style's rhythmic patterns makes it capable of strong emotional expression, gradually approaching the rhythmic formalities needed for operatic music.

4.1.2.2 Musical Themes

The musical themes in Zhuang Opera also differ significantly due to the regional variations between the Northern and Southern styles. Both styles possess unique instrumental transitions, with variations in instrumental configurations and improvisation, resulting in distinct harmonic effects. The performance techniques in the musical themes are diverse, including melismas, ornamentation, and added notes, which make the music more vivid and layered.

4.1.2.3 Accompaniment

The accompaniment in Zhuang Opera (commonly known as “pengmian”) varies in size, from a basic four-person ensemble to large-scale ethnic orchestras, even including a mix of Eastern and Western instruments. The initial four-person setup typically includes drums, huqin (Chinese bowed string instrument), and cymbals, mostly used in amateur troupes. Larger ensembles, often seen in professional troupes, gradually incorporate more instruments such as violins, woodwinds, and brass instruments, showcasing the diversity of Zhuang Opera's accompaniment. This development highlights the crucial role percussion instruments play in shaping the emotional and atmospheric aspects of the performance.

The accompaniment of Northern Zhuang Opera uses instruments like the Magu Hu (horsebone huqin), Huluhu (gourd huqin), and Yueqin (moon-shaped lute),

while Southern Zhuang Opera employs instruments like the Qinghu (clear huqin), Zhuhu (main huqin), and Xiaosanxian (small three-stringed instrument). Depending on the specific location and play, other instruments such as bamboo flutes and Shengna (a type of horn) may be added. Percussion typically consists of four performers, although amateur groups may simplify this setup to one drum player, one main huqin and one accompanying huqin player, one cymbal player, and the small gong may be played by the actor.

By analyzing the musical elements of Zhuang Opera, it is evident that the Northern and Southern styles exhibit significant differences in terms of vocal style, musical themes, and accompaniment. These differences not only reflect the diversity of regional cultures but also highlight the unique artistic evolution of Zhuang Opera. The Northern vocal style retains many folk elements and tends toward the formalization of music, while the Southern style evolves from traditional “Maluan” into a more diverse and theatrical vocal system. The differences in musical themes reflect unique configurations and improvisations of instruments, showcasing the expressive capabilities of each style. In accompaniment, the evolving scale and composition of the orchestra reveal the continual innovation of Zhuang Opera’s music. In summary, Zhuang Opera’s musical elements retain the roots of traditional folk music while continuously innovating and integrating, forming a distinctive regional identity and becoming an essential part of Zhuang culture.

4.1.3 Story Themes in Zhuang Opera

The stories in Zhuang Opera are diverse and encompass the history, culture, and social life of the Zhuang people. According to Huang Zhiyuan, a veteran playwright and performer of Zhuang Opera, the thematic structure of these stories has evolved over time while retaining its fundamental cultural elements.

4.1.3.1 Major Themes in Zhuang Opera Stories

Liu Yi (2024) stated that the themes of Zhuang Opera can be broadly classified into the following categories:

1) Heroic Narratives – These plays portray historical figures who embody courage, national spirit, and unwavering loyalty. For example, Nong Zhigao and Hua Mulan depict heroes leading their people in resisting foreign invasions and defending justice, emphasizing a strong sense of collective identity.

2) Marriage and Romance – Many Zhuang Opera stories critique the constraints of feudal marriage systems, highlighting the struggle of young individuals for love and personal freedom. These plays often incorporate tragic elements, such as *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* and *Seven Maidens*. However, through intricate dramatic structures, the endings are often adjusted to be more fulfilling, reflecting aspirations for a better life.

3) Social Criticism – Some plays center on the injustices of feudal society, exposing class conflicts and the struggles of marginalized people. For instance, *Wenlong and Xiaoni* and *The Hundred-Bird Garment* illustrate the contrast between justice and oppression, portraying how the weak rise against tyranny to achieve fairness and righteousness.

4) Moral Allegories and the Struggle Between Good and Evil – Many Zhuang Opera stories revolve around themes of morality, such as good versus evil, beauty versus ugliness, and loyalty versus betrayal. These narratives often feature dramatic twists in character fates to convey ethical values. Plays such as *Nongjiabaotie* and *The Magic Gourd* frequently incorporate mythological and legendary elements, enhancing their dramatic impact and symbolic significance.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, Zhuang Opera has expanded its thematic scope to include contemporary social issues. Modern Zhuang Opera integrates diverse theatrical techniques while maintaining its ethnic characteristics, making it more relevant and appealing to modern audiences. These new productions not only broaden the content of Zhuang Opera but also sustain its vitality and cultural influence in contemporary society.

4.1.3.2 Narrative Structure and Presentation

Zhuang Opera follows a well-defined narrative structure, typically adhering to the traditional Chinese dramatic framework of introduction, development, climax, and resolution. This structured approach ensures coherence in storytelling, allowing the plot to unfold in a logical and engaging manner.

Most Zhuang Opera stories conform to a moral logic in which good triumphs over evil. The resolution often brings justice, with protagonists achieving happiness and antagonists facing retribution. This "reunion" ending is a dominant

feature of Zhuang Opera. Even in originally tragic stories, later adaptations by performers have often modified the endings to be more satisfying, aligning with audience expectations.

4.1.3.3 Narrative Characteristics of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera exhibit distinct narrative styles. Northern Zhuang Opera tends to embrace romanticism, with stories often centered on love and moral allegories. For example, plays like *Liang Shanbo* and *Zhu Yingtai* emphasize delicate emotional expression, portraying the Zhuang people's pursuit of idealized love. These narratives focus on emotional conflicts and employ lyrical storytelling techniques to enhance dramatic appeal.

In contrast, Southern Zhuang Opera leans toward heroic narratives, with plots revolving around historical figures and emphasizing national identity, loyalty, and collective values. For example, *Nong Zhigao* and *Pangu* highlight the heroic struggles of individuals or groups against challenges. These works reflect the Zhuang people's harmonious relationship with nature and their cultural tradition of hero-centered storytelling.

Regardless of the regional variation, both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera strike a delicate balance between realism and mythology. This narrative approach enriches the theatrical expressiveness of Zhuang Opera while showcasing the Zhuang people's unique cultural creativity and aesthetic vision.

4.1.4 Performance, Costumes, and Props in Zhuang Opera

According to my field research at the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe, Zhuang Opera has its own distinctive style in performance, costumes, and props.

4.1.4.1 Performance Techniques

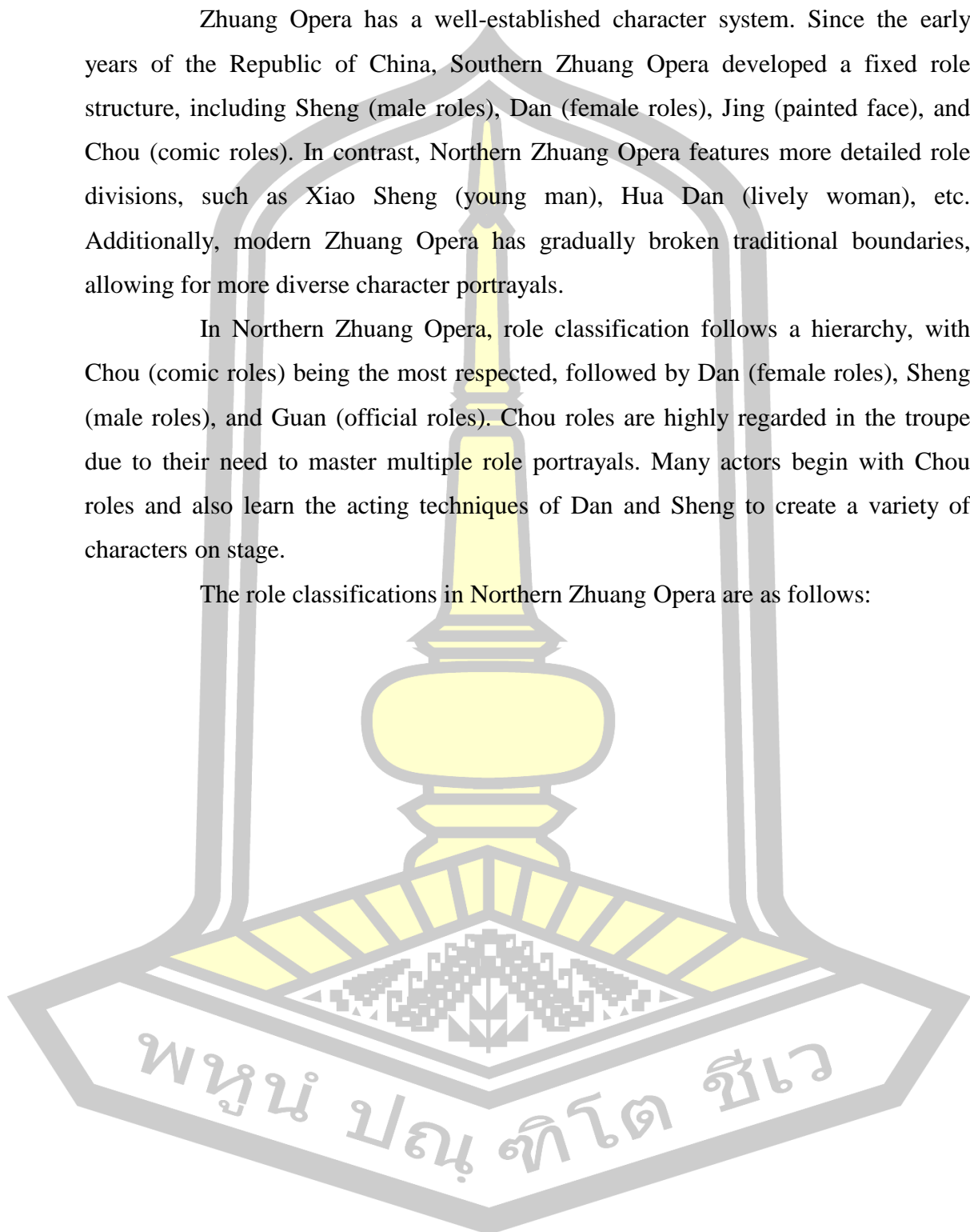
Zhuang Opera combines singing, reciting, and dancing, showcasing distinct ethnic characteristics. Both Northern and Southern Zhuang operas draw on folk art from the Zhuang people, incorporating elements from traditional Zhuang dance. Common folk dances, such as the embroidery ball dance, bamboo hat dance, and shrimp-catching dance in "*Golden Flowers and Silver Flowers*," enhance the stage presence and expressiveness.

4.1.4.2 Character Types

Zhuang Opera has a well-established character system. Since the early years of the Republic of China, Southern Zhuang Opera developed a fixed role structure, including Sheng (male roles), Dan (female roles), Jing (painted face), and Chou (comic roles). In contrast, Northern Zhuang Opera features more detailed role divisions, such as Xiao Sheng (young man), Hua Dan (lively woman), etc. Additionally, modern Zhuang Opera has gradually broken traditional boundaries, allowing for more diverse character portrayals.

In Northern Zhuang Opera, role classification follows a hierarchy, with Chou (comic roles) being the most respected, followed by Dan (female roles), Sheng (male roles), and Guan (official roles). Chou roles are highly regarded in the troupe due to their need to master multiple role portrayals. Many actors begin with Chou roles and also learn the acting techniques of Dan and Sheng to create a variety of characters on stage.

The role classifications in Northern Zhuang Opera are as follows:



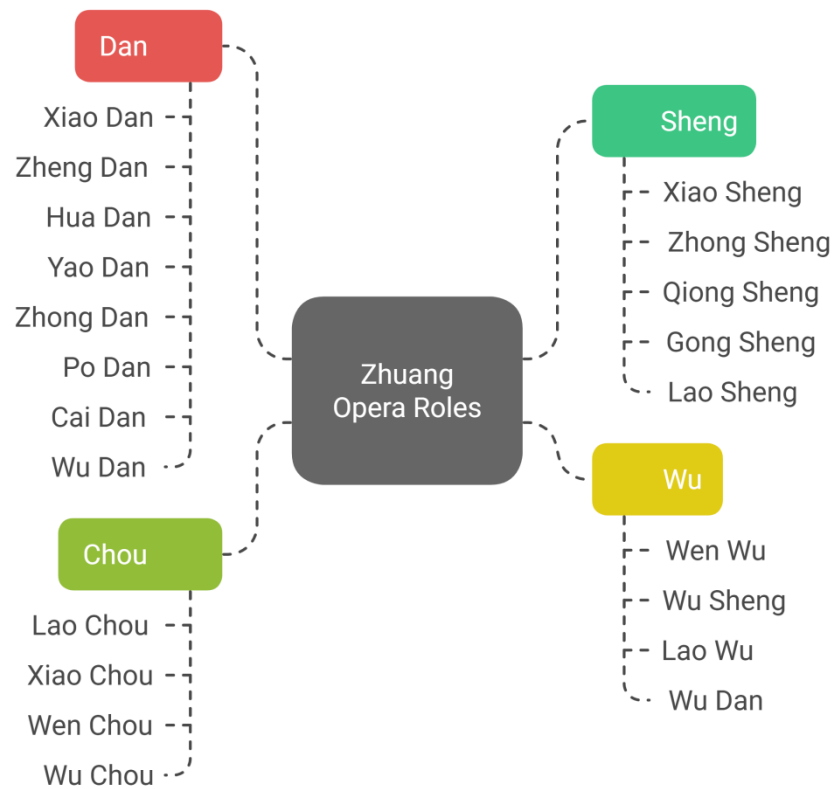


Figure 12. Zhuang Opera roles

Source: Chen Wenying, 2024

Southern Zhuang Opera has a simpler role division, following the traditional structure of Sheng, Dan, Jing, and Chou.

4.1.3.3 Performing Skills

Zhuang Opera performance emphasizes the "Four Skills and Five Methods," which include singing, reciting, acting, and combat (the four skills), as well as hand, eye, body, steps, and method (the five methods). These skills help actors create characters and enhance stage expressiveness.



Figure 13. Zhuang Opera actors perform using hand skills, eye skills, and body skills.

Source: Chen Wenying, 2023

Hand Skills: This includes hand gestures (such as drawing palms, pushing palms, separating palms, striking palms, pressing palms, and double palms) and finger techniques (single finger, double fingers, tiger fingers, lotus fingers, Buddha fingers, and frog fingers). Actors must first train wrist flexibility, especially for Chou, Dan, and Sheng actors.

Eye Skills: Techniques like watching, glancing, looking, squinting, and blinking are used to convey emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, surprise, fear, and confusion, helping to define character traits such as loyalty, treachery, vice, and virtue.

Body Skills: Proper posture is emphasized, with specific rules for standing, sitting, and walking.

Foot Skills:

Northern Zhuang Opera: The "eight-character step" (bazibu) is commonly used, with different roles having distinct walking styles, such as Dan and Sheng walking small eight-character steps, officials walking medium eight-character steps, and Wu roles walking large eight-character steps, adjusting according to character personality.

Southern Zhuang Opera: Hua Dan walks the "lotus step," Wen Sheng uses the "quick step," Wu Sheng performs the "arrow step," and combat or chase scenes involve "single-legged crossing steps." Officials, emperors, and local nobles walk "square steps," while officials use "point steps."

4.1.3.4 Costumes

Zhuang Opera costumes are beautifully crafted with distinct ethnic characteristics. Costumes are often made with vibrant colors and embroidered with traditional patterns such as lions, kylins, dragons, phoenixes, tung flowers, cotton flowers, and Zhuang brocade, reflecting unique Zhuang aesthetic values.



Figure 14. The costumes in Zhuang opera performances.

Source: Chen Wenying, 2023

Table 3. Costumes of Sheng (male roles)

Role	Costumes
Wen Sheng (scholar)	Wears a tall hat with a wide brim, long robes, and cloth shoes
Lao Sheng (elderly male)	Similar to Wen Sheng, but with a "eight-character" mustache.
Qiong Sheng (poor scholar)	Wears a worn-out scholar's hat or headscarf.
Xiao Wu (young martial male)	Wears a short martial costume with a "T" belt
Wu Sheng (martial general)	Wears a martial hat, armor, and carries a flag.

Table 4. Costumes of officials and noble Roles:

Role	Costumes
Yuan Wai (wealthy gentry)	Wears a square hat embroidered with "longevity" or "fortune" characters, a long robe, and an open-front coat.
Xian Guan (local official)	Wears a black official hat and court robes, similar to "dragon robes," with large sleeves, a wide waist, and a round collar, embroidered with "buzi" symbols. The color of the robes indicates rank: black for lower officials, blue for middle officials, red for high officials, purple for senior officials, and bronze for elderly ministers.

Table 5. Costumes of Dan (female roles):

Role	Costumes
Xiao Dan (young lady)	Wears a maiden's hat, red dress, flowered skirt, and embroidered shoes.
Cai Dan (humorous female)	Wears a flower decoration in her hair and a short outfit with silk pants.
Lao Dan (elderly female)	Wears a flower headscarf and a wide-sleeved dress; poor characters wear pants, while noble ones wear skirts.

Table 6. Costumes of other Roles:

Role	Costumes
Jia Nu (servant)	Wears a round hat, tattered clothes, and straw sandals.
Dian Zhu (shopkeeper)	Wears a round hat, short clothing, and a red belt.
Gods (e.g., Fire Star, Guanyin)	Wears phoenix or Buddha helmets, long robes, and short open-front coats with Ba Gua (eight trigrams) patterns.

4.1.3.5 Props

The props in Zhuang Opera not only enhance the dramatic atmosphere but also highlight ethnic cultural features. Among the most common props is the fan, used by Chou, Dan, Sheng, and Guan roles. The fan can be used for sweeping, pouring water, blocking rain, rowing boats, or even as a weapon to fend off enemies, showcasing its versatility.



Figure 15. Zhuang opera actors perform while holding fans and handkerchiefs. .

Source: Chen Wenying, 2023

Zhuang Opera fan techniques differ from those in Gui Opera and Cai Diao, developing into a unique form of fan dance. These techniques evolved from the "flower fan dance" and, after refinement, became various performance styles, such as:

Basic Techniques: Opening the fan, turning the fan, reversing the fan, and circular fan movements.

Special Techniques: Holding the fan, tea tray fan, pavilion fan, chest-supporting fan, butterfly fan, wave fan, shadow fan, waist-fan, spinning fan, vertical flipping fan, dialogue fan, and duet fan, among others.

These fan techniques not only enhance the stage's artistic expressiveness but also captivate the audience, becoming one of the key artistic features of Zhuang Opera.

Summary

Zhuang Opera, a vital part of Guangxi's Zhuang culture, embodies unique characteristics in its cultural function, music, narrative themes, and performance style. Beyond entertainment, it serves as a medium for emotional expression, social bonding, education, and ritual practice, often performed at festivals and village gatherings to strengthen community ties. Its narratives, inspired by real-life experiences, convey historical knowledge, folk customs, and moral values. Musically, northern and southern styles differ, with the north preserving folk song elements and distinct melodies like [Zheng Diao] and [Wu Gong Diao], while the south evolved from Ma Luo, developing a standardized vocal system based on [Ping Ban]. Accompanying music has expanded from small ensembles to larger orchestras. Thematically, Zhuang Opera features heroic tales, love stories, and moral allegories, with works like *Nong Jia Bao Tie* and *Bao Hulu* promoting justice and fairness. Structurally, it follows a traditional progression from introduction to resolution, with northern Zhuang Opera emphasizing emotional depth and southern Zhuang Opera focusing on historical themes. Performances blend singing, speaking, acting, and movement, incorporating traditional Zhuang dance elements. Role classifications include sheng, dan, jing, and chou, with the northern style refining these further. Costumes and props reflect Zhuang aesthetics and symbolism, such as the fan, which enhances dramatic expression. While rooted in tradition, Zhuang Opera continues to evolve, adapting to contemporary society while preserving its cultural essence.

4.2 The social function of Zhuang Opera

As a significant representation of Zhuang culture, Zhuang Opera carries multiple social functions, including entertainment, emotional expression, social interaction, educational dissemination, and ritual activities. Despite the increasing diversification of entertainment in modern society, Zhuang Opera remains an important part of Zhuang communities, especially for the elderly, serving as both a spiritual support and a vehicle for cultural identity.

4.2.1 Entertainment and Emotional Exchange

4.2.1.1 The Entertainment Function of Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera holds significant social value as a form of entertainment in the daily lives of the Zhuang people. Beyond its artistic and cultural significance, it serves as a means of stress relief and emotional regulation. Historically, the underdeveloped economy and limited access to cultural activities in Zhuang-populated areas made Zhuang Opera an essential entertainment event, particularly during village festivals and agricultural off-seasons.

Based on my field research in Tianlin and Jingxi, many Zhuang communities were situated in mountainous regions with harsh living conditions and limited access to external cultural influences. This was particularly evident in areas where Northern Zhuang Opera thrived, such as western Guangxi and the border regions of Yunnan and Guizhou. The combination of economic hardship, difficult transportation, and restricted information exchange led to a monotonous lifestyle with few entertainment options. However, based on my field research in Tianlin and Jingxi, the resilient and optimistic nature of the Zhuang people encouraged them to seek joy and emotional release through artistic expressions such as Zhuang Opera and folk songs. The custom of staging opera performances during festivals, weddings, and song fairs became deeply ingrained in their cultural life, fostering a strong community atmosphere where people could engage with the art form and experience collective joy. (Interview, 2024)

4.2.1.2 Emotional Resonance and Cultural Identity

One of the defining characteristics of Zhuang Opera is its ability to evoke deep emotional resonance among audiences. The narratives, characters, and lyrics often depict everyday life experiences, reflecting the emotional expressions and wisdom of the Zhuang people. This relatability strengthens the audience's emotional connection to the performances, making Zhuang Opera not only a source of entertainment but also a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural identity.

Even in contemporary society, where entertainment options have diversified with the advent of modern media such as movies, television, and digital platforms, Zhuang Opera continues to hold emotional significance, particularly for the older generations. In places like Tianlin County, elderly individuals still gather to listen to opera performances on television and radio, discuss the storylines, and even hum familiar tunes for personal enjoyment. This enduring attachment to Zhuang

Opera highlights its continued relevance as a cultural and emotional anchor within Zhuang communities.

4.2.1.3 The Folk Appeal and Widespread Transmission of Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera's widespread appeal among the general public distinguishes it as one of the most naturally popular folk operas among China's ethnic minorities. In the birthplace of Southern Zhuang Opera, Jingxi County, vendors still sell audiovisual materials related to the opera in cultural squares and along riverbanks. It is common to see groups of elderly individuals gathered together, listening to and singing along with traditional operatic tunes, further demonstrating the opera's enduring role in everyday life.



Figure 16. The Zhuang Opera competition site was packed with spectators.

Source: Chen Wenying, 2024

The emotional depth and relatability of Zhuang Opera ensure its continued significance within Zhuang communities. By portraying familiar life scenarios and shared experiences, the opera reinforces collective memory and cultural pride. Its ability to serve as both entertainment and a medium for emotional exchange highlights its unique position within the broader landscape of Chinese folk opera traditions.

4.2.2 Social Interaction and Community Cohesion

Huang Zhiyuan (2024) stated that the Social Interaction and Community Cohesion as follows:

4.2.2.1 Cross-Regional and Community-Based Cultural Exchange

Zhuang Opera serves as a vital medium for cultural interaction, fostering both regional and local community ties. Historically, interregional exchanges between opera troupes have strengthened artistic collaboration and emotional bonds among Zhuang communities. A notable example occurred in 1905, when a grand Zhuang Opera festival in Nalou Village, Xilin County, attracted 13 troupes from Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou, demonstrating the opera's role in uniting diverse regions.

At the community level, local Zhuang Opera troupes continue to rehearse and perform, reinforcing cultural identity and collective participation. In Tianlin, Jingxi, and Debao, nearly every village hosts at least one opera troupe, and at least one in every 100 residents actively engages in performances. Such widespread community involvement underscores the opera's enduring role in strengthening local social bonds.



Figure 17. The 2024 Zhuang Opera Competition held in the three provinces of Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou.

Source: Chen Wenying

4.2.2.2 Social Interaction and Communal Rituals in Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera performances serve as dynamic spaces for social engagement, bringing together actors, audiences, and entire communities. During major festivals and events, troupes travel between villages, where they are warmly received with traditional welcoming and farewell ceremonies. For instance, at the 2024 Zhuang Opera competition in Tianlin County, visiting performers from Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan were greeted with celebratory customs that reinforced intercommunity relationships.

Beyond performances, Zhuang Opera historically functioned as a social network, even playing a matchmaking role in Northern Zhuang regions. On-stage couples sometimes developed real-life romantic relationships, leading to marriages among performers. Meanwhile, audiences actively participated by gifting handmade items such as cloth shoes, scarves, and jewelry to their favorite actors, fostering deeper emotional connections between performers and spectators.

4.2.2.3 Zhuang Opera as a Platform for Cultural Continuity and Ethnic Unity

Despite the emergence of modern entertainment, Zhuang Opera remains a cornerstone of Zhuang cultural life, ensuring the continuity of traditions and reinforcing social cohesion. Live performances at festivals, weddings, and village gatherings continue to draw enthusiastic audiences, highlighting their importance in maintaining cultural heritage.

Moreover, Zhuang Opera serves as a bridge for interethnic exchange. Events like the Tianlin Song Fair showcase Zhuang Opera as the focal point, attracting large audiences from various ethnic backgrounds. These performances create opportunities for cross-cultural interactions, strengthening ties among different communities and preserving the opera's role as a shared cultural asset.

4.2.3 Educational Role and Ethical Significance

Huang Zhiyuan (2024) stated that the Educational Role and Ethical Significance as follows:

4.2.3.1 Zhuang Opera as a Medium for Cultural Education

stated that Zhuang Opera serves as a crucial vehicle for cultural transmission, encompassing Zhuang history, folklore, and practical wisdom. In regions with limited formal education, it plays a pivotal role in knowledge dissemination through accessible language and engaging narratives. Its repertoire not only reflects indigenous traditions but also incorporates classic Han Chinese theatrical works such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*, enriching its cultural content and facilitating cross-ethnic exchange.

Beyond its theatrical performances, Zhuang Opera embodies a rich repository of folk literature. Its dialogues and lyrics incorporate proverbs, allegories, and metaphors that encapsulate generations of local knowledge on nature, social customs, and daily life. The poetic, rhymed, and well-structured language of the opera ensures that audiences absorb knowledge in an engaging and memorable way, reinforcing cultural identity while expanding their linguistic and cognitive horizons.

4.2.3.2 Moral Instruction and Ethical Influence

One of the most profound educational functions of Zhuang Opera lies in its ability to shape ethical values and societal behavior. Echoing the traditional Chinese belief that literature and the arts should serve moral instruction, Zhuang Opera integrates themes of righteousness, loyalty, and family virtues into its narratives. Early creators of Northern Zhuang Opera upheld this tradition, embedding moral lessons within their works to guide audiences toward virtues such as filial piety, diligence, and social responsibility.

Many Zhuang Opera performances explicitly address moral and ethical dilemmas. For instance, *Nong Jia Bao Tie* and *Na You Girl* celebrate harmonious marriages, while *Wen Long and Xiao Ni* and *The Case of Long Tu* expose feudal corruption. Themes of national heroism and social justice are evident in *Nong Zhi Gao* and *Liu Er Fights Foreign Invaders*, while critiques of oppressive marriage customs appear in *Si Jie Descends to Earth* and *A Marriage of Blood and Tears*. These works not only entertain but also instill moral consciousness, shaping public attitudes toward justice, family values, and social ethics.

4.2.3.3 The Role of Zhuang Opera in Community Reform and Social Change

Zhuang Opera extends beyond passive education to actively influence social behavior and community well-being. Performances often serve as platforms for addressing contemporary social issues, subtly guiding individuals toward positive behavioral changes. A striking example is the play *Persuading My Husband to Quit Gambling*, written by Zhuang Opera playwright Huang Zhiyuan. Based on real-life events, the play highlights the detrimental effects of gambling and was performed in Tianlin County, where it significantly impacted young audience members—many of whom abandoned gambling habits after watching the production.

Moreover, opera troupes in local communities play an active role in fostering cultural continuity and social cohesion. Amateur troupes in Tianlin, Jingxi, and Debao ensure that traditional performances remain an integral part of communal life, reinforcing shared values through their artistic expressions. By offering both cultural enrichment and ethical guidance, Zhuang Opera remains a powerful instrument for education, moral development, and social transformation within Zhuang society.

4.2.4 Ritualistic and Ceremonial Roles of Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera also plays an indispensable role in Zhuang rituals and ceremonial events. It frequently appears in sacrifices, celebrations, and weddings as part of ritual practices to express respect for deities and ancestors. This ritualistic performance not only enhances community cohesion but also reinforces the cultural identity of the Zhuang people. In Tianlin County, the birthplace of Northern Zhuang Opera, the author conducted a field investigation at the Tianlin County Cultural Center in April 2024. From Huang Zhiyuan, a Zhuang Opera inheritor, the author learned that Tianlin has long had a tradition of theatrical performances closely tied to folk customs and local life. During the Spring Festival, the third day of the third lunar month (Song Festival), or any local family celebrations, Zhuang Opera performances are held to add to the festive atmosphere. For instance, Huang Zhiyuan's *Sacrificing to Yao Niang* was inspired by the local collective memorial ceremony for the female figure "Yao Niang." The play is performed annually during the Yao Niang memorial ceremony in Lucheng, Tianlin County. (Interviewed, 2024)

Summary

Zhuang Opera is not merely a theatrical art form but an essential component of Zhuang social and cultural systems, possessing irreplaceable social value. The key challenge lies in how to sustain its vitality in modern society and ensure its continued cultural significance in the contemporary era.

4.3 The current status of Zhuang Opera

Gaomin (2024) stated that In 2006, the first batch of Zhuang Opera entered the national "intangible cultural heritage" list in China, and in the same year, it entered the "intangible cultural heritage" list of Guangxi District, and its branch Southern Style Zhuang Opera entered the "intangible cultural heritage" list of Guangxi District in 2008, and the other branch Northern Style Zhuang Opera also entered the "intangible cultural heritage" list of Guangxi District in 2010. Historically, before being recognized as an "intangible cultural heritage," Zhuang Opera had already undergone a long process of artistic refinement. According to historical records in Chapter 2, Zhuang Opera originated in the mid-Qing Dynasty and gradually developed into a structured art form with distinct singing styles, performance routines, and instrumental accompaniments. In the first few years of becoming an "intangible cultural heritage", the protection of the spectacular opera was basically in a state of stagnation. After being included in the national list of "intangible cultural heritage" in 2006, the transmission and protection of Zhuang Opera has been affirmed by many experts and scholars, and Zhuang Opera has once again radiated new vitality.

4.3.1 Popularity and Cultural Reception of Zhuang Opera

Gaomin (2024) stated that since Zhuang Opera was first recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, and subsequently in 2008 and 2010, when Southern and Northern Zhuang Opera were included in Guangxi's intangible cultural heritage list, its visibility has significantly increased. However, before these recognitions, the transmission of Zhuang Opera had almost come to a standstill, facing serious challenges in inheritance and development. Historical accounts from Chapter 2 indicate that, during the Republican era (1912–1949), Zhuang Opera was

mostly performed in folk settings without systematic government recognition or financial support. The situation further deteriorated during the early reform period, when traditional folk operas were overshadowed by new cultural policies. This historical background helps explain why, by the time it was recognized as an intangible cultural heritage, Zhuang Opera faced serious inheritance challenges. (Interview, 2024)

In April 2024, my fieldwork in Baise City and Tianlin County, Guangxi, provided crucial firsthand data for my research. This investigation deepened my understanding of the current status and development of Zhuang Opera. Initially, like many other scholars, I believed that Zhuang Opera needed to "go global" by integrating the Northern and Southern styles to explore a path of reform and modernization. However, through this fieldwork, I came to realize that its vitality lies in its deep roots in local culture, which should be valued and preserved.

4.3.1.1 The Strong Grassroots Foundation of Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera is deeply embedded in local communities, thriving in rural villages and attracting a dedicated audience. In Tianlin County, Zhuang Opera artist Huang Zhiyuan from the local cultural bureau introduced me to the vibrant tradition of Gan Ge Xu (song fairs), where Zhuang Opera performances are a central feature. He explained, "In Tianlin, song fairs are mostly held during the third and fourth lunar months, with different townships taking turns to perform. In particular, Liulong Township has a long tradition of organizing performances one after another across different villages, lasting for about a month." This long-standing tradition highlights Northern Zhuang Opera's unique performance customs, its engaging artistic style, and its role as a platform for emotional expression and social interaction.

4.3.1.2 Progress in Competitions and Cultural Transmission

The 2024 "Zhuang Opera Competition of Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou," which I attended during my fieldwork, further demonstrated the vitality of Zhuang Opera. This competition, now in its 15th year, focused on cultural heritage preservation, with various troupes actively reviving and performing traditional plays, fostering a "hundred flowers bloom" artistic atmosphere. The event has even been recognized as a national model case for "One County, One Cultural Brand."

From the 92 performances in the preliminary round, the stage productions showcased a high level of artistic and professional quality. In the final round, 20 selected performances competed, including notable works from different regions, such as *The Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)* by the Fanghua Troupe from Debao County (Southern Zhuang Opera), *Fan Lihua Takes Command* by the Buyi Troupe from Banba Village in Ceheng County, Guizhou, and the newly created Zhuang Opera *Love Bond* by the Tianlin County Intangible Cultural Heritage Center (Northern Zhuang Opera). Each troupe demonstrated exceptional skill, and the competition reflected a maturing stagecraft and increasing performance standards. This suggests that Zhuang Opera in Baise is evolving with new characteristics.

4.3.1.3 Challenges in Expanding the Audience Base

Despite its continued success in rural areas, attracting broader audiences in formal theatrical settings remains a challenge for Zhuang Opera. Large-scale performances, such as those by the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe, often struggle to attract spontaneous audiences. For example, in the 2023 performance of *Hundred Birds' Clothing* at the Guangxi Ethnic Theatre, the majority of the audience consisted of the performers' relatives, friends, and industry professionals rather than members of the general public. This indicates that while Zhuang Opera is recognized and celebrated in certain circles, expanding its audience base and engaging a wider demographic remains a key issue for its sustainable development.

4.3.2 Integration with Modern Arts

Gaomin (2024) stated that In recent years, Zhuang Opera has increasingly incorporated modern artistic elements into its themes and performance styles. Traditionally, Zhuang Opera relied on historical narratives, myths, and romantic tales, emphasizing virtues such as truth, kindness, and beauty. However, contemporary playwrights and directors have made significant efforts to introduce modern themes and innovative stage designs, enhancing the artistic appeal and relevance of Zhuang Opera in today's cultural landscape.

4.3.2.1 Modernization in Theme and Narrative

Historically, the content of Zhuang Opera has been dominated by ancient stories, including myths, folktales, and romantic legends, often conveying moral messages. As discussed in Chapter 2, early Zhuang Opera scripts were adapted from Han Chinese opera traditions, with strong influences from local ballads and storytelling traditions. This historical evolution explains why, even in its modern development, Zhuang Opera retains a strong foundation in folklore and moral storytelling. However, recent years have seen a shift towards contemporary storytelling.

4.3.2.2 Experimentation with Modern Artistic Forms

The Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe has been at the forefront of integrating modern artistic elements into traditional performances. Over the decades, the troupe has produced numerous award-winning works that reflect both traditional and contemporary influences.

Mid-to-Late 20th Century Productions: Representative works such as *Baohulu*, *Hundred Bird Clothing*, and *A Piece of Zhuang Brocade* demonstrated a strong ethnic aesthetic while maintaining traditional storytelling approaches.

1980s and 1990s Innovations: Productions like *Jinhua* and *Yinhua*, *Dream of the Feathered Man*, *Madame Wa Shi*, and *Drunken Hero* introduced modern dramaturgy and stage techniques, significantly expanding Zhuang Opera's artistic vocabulary.

Breakthrough with *King of Songs* (1995-2000): This large-scale production marked a significant milestone in Zhuang Opera's integration with modern performing arts. It blended opera, dance, and innovative stagecraft, achieving a balance of ideological depth, artistic sophistication, and visual appeal. *King of Songs* won the national "Five One Project Award" and the Ministry of Culture's Wenhua Grand Prize, becoming the first Guangxi opera to receive this honor. The play was performed in three versions—premium, commercial, and rural—demonstrating its adaptability to different audiences. Over five years, it was staged 190 times, attracting nearly 400,000 spectators.

21st Century Developments: More recent productions, such as the reimagined *Madame Wa Shi*, have continued this tradition of artistic innovation. Through refined scripts, striking stage imagery, and bold narrative choices, the play vividly portrays the resilience and wisdom of the Zhuang people. It won multiple awards at the 7th China Drama Festival and received a nomination for the 14th Cao Yu Drama Literature Award.

4.3.2.3 Integration of Contemporary Stage Design and Technology

Beyond thematic evolution, Zhuang Opera has embraced modern stage aesthetics, including lighting, multimedia projections, and dynamic choreography. Productions such as *Hundred Bird Clothing* and *Cloud-Climbing Cliff*, which were performed in 2023 and observed during my field research in Nanning, exemplify these advancements. These performances utilized sophisticated lighting effects and contemporary scenic design, creating a more immersive theatrical experience while preserving traditional vocal and musical elements.

The ongoing integration of modern artistic elements into Zhuang Opera not only enhances its aesthetic appeal but also ensures its continued relevance in the contemporary cultural landscape. As this transformation progresses, striking a balance between innovation and tradition will be key to sustaining the vibrancy of Zhuang Opera in the future.

4.3.3 Support from Government and Cultural Organizations

Huang Zhiyuan (2024) stated that Government and institutional support play a crucial role in the preservation and promotion of Zhuang Opera. Since its inclusion in China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage List, various initiatives have been undertaken to revitalize this traditional art form. However, despite these efforts, challenges remain in attracting a broader audience and ensuring the sustainable development of Zhuang Opera.

4.3.3.1 Government Funding and Institutional Support

Founded in 1965, the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe remains the most significant government-funded institution dedicated to the development of Zhuang Opera. Over the years, the troupe has produced and performed numerous award-winning works. However, as historical documents in Chapter 2 indicate, Zhuang Opera had not always received formal institutional support. Before the mid-20th

century, most Zhuang Opera troupes were privately organized, and government involvement in opera funding only became prominent after the establishment of cultural heritage protection policies in the early 2000s. This historical trajectory helps contextualize the challenges that modern Zhuang Opera faces despite receiving institutional backing.

4.3.3.2 Regional Government Initiatives: A Comparative Perspective

Local governments have played varying roles in supporting Zhuang Opera, with notable differences between the development of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera.

In Tianlin County, the birthplace of Northern Zhuang Opera, government support has been particularly strong. Since the opera's recognition as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, local authorities have capitalized on this opportunity to establish Tianlin as the "Hometown of Zhuang Opera in China." Key initiatives include hosting Zhuang Opera festivals, establishing a Northern Zhuang Opera school, and providing substantial financial support. Each local opera troupe receives an annual grant of approximately 10,000 RMB, and additional funding is allocated for new equipment purchases, amounting to around 3 million RMB across Tianlin's 74 registered troupes. Furthermore, the annual Zhuang Opera festival requires millions more in government investment. Beyond financial aid, the government also actively supports educational initiatives, laying the groundwork for the opera's long-term sustainability. A recent government plan even involves inviting experts to develop a Zhuang Opera-themed film or television series to raise public awareness.

In contrast, local governments in Jingxi and Debao, key regions for Southern Zhuang Opera, have provided relatively less support, leading to a slower rate of development compared to their northern counterparts. Although Jingxi has increased funding for Zhuang Opera since its recognition as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage, and has taken steps to strengthen opera troupes and production efforts, these measures have had limited impact. In a rapidly globalizing cultural environment, where external cultural influences are strong, such efforts alone are insufficient to ensure the growth of Southern Zhuang Opera. Without more

comprehensive policies and greater investment, it risks being reduced to mere survival rather than achieving meaningful expansion.

In summary, while government and institutional support have played a foundational role in preserving Zhuang Opera, future strategies must prioritize innovation, accessibility, and sustainable development to ensure its continued vitality in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

4.3.4 The Role of Zhuang Opera in Cultural Tourism

Huang Zhiyuan (2024) stated that Tourism is a pillar industry of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Traditionally, Guangxi has been known for its stunning natural landscapes, but in recent years, the region has been actively promoting cultural heritage preservation and development. Additionally, Guangxi has been fostering cultural and tourism exchanges, particularly with ASEAN countries.

As a representative art form of Zhuang culture, Zhuang Opera possesses significant cultural and tourism value. Its appeal extends beyond aesthetic appreciation to cognitive, experiential, and economic dimensions. Integrating Zhuang Opera with the tourism industry not only contributes to its preservation and development but also generates considerable economic benefits for local communities. Recognizing this potential, government agencies and cultural organizations have been exploring innovative ways to merge Zhuang Opera with tourism.

4.3.4.1 Integration Efforts by Theatrical Troupes

In recent years, the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe has actively sought to enhance the accessibility of Zhuang Opera for a broader audience. One of its key initiatives has been adapting traditional performances by replacing the original Zhuang language with Guiliu dialect, which is more widely understood. However, as noted in Chapter 2, linguistic adaptation in Zhuang Opera is not a new phenomenon. Historical records suggest that Zhuang Opera has always been adaptable, with earlier performances incorporating Han Chinese linguistic elements and musical influences to appeal to diverse audiences. Understanding this historical flexibility helps explain why modern adaptations are necessary for Zhuang Opera's continued relevance.

4.3.4.2 Regional Cultural Festivals and Tourism

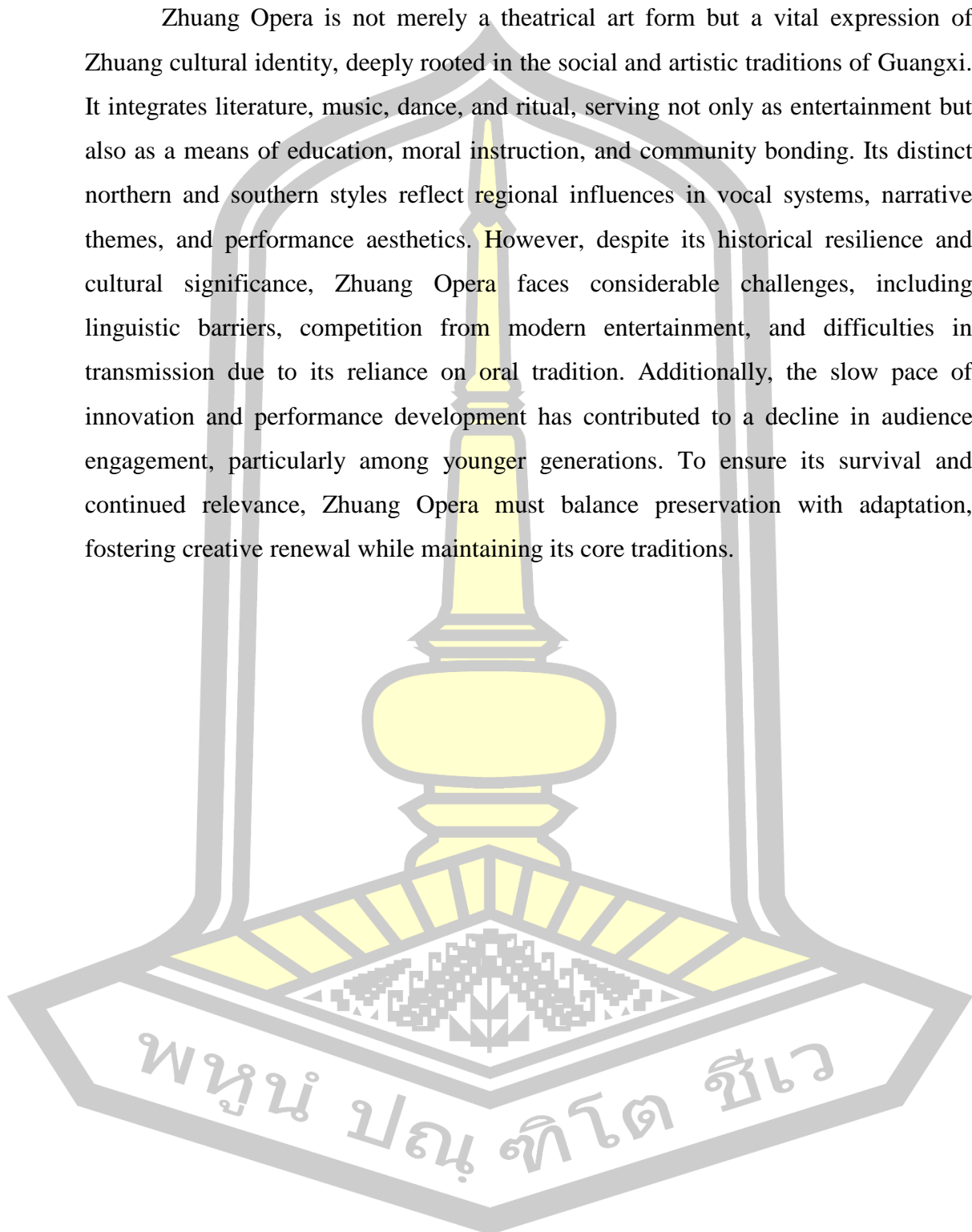
Beyond theatrical performances, various regions have initiated cultural events to strengthen the link between Zhuang Opera and tourism. In Tianlin County, the birthplace of Northern Zhuang Opera, several festivals have been established to promote the art form. Since 2007, the county has hosted the annual “Guangxi Northern Zhuang Opera Cultural and Arts Festival.” In 2010, the event expanded into the “China Zhuang Opera Cultural and Arts Festival,” and in 2023, it further evolved into the “Guizhou-Yunnan-Guangxi Zhuang Opera Competition.” This progression reflects the increasing recognition of Zhuang Opera, not only within Guangxi but also across a wider national and regional context. These festivals have played a significant role in raising awareness and attracting scholars, experts, and performers. However, their appeal to general tourists remains limited, as the primary audience still consists of participating troupes, researchers, and local spectators. Future efforts should focus on making these events more engaging for tourists by incorporating interactive experiences, guided tours, and multilingual explanations of Zhuang Opera’s history and artistic value.

The integration of Zhuang Opera with tourism must balance heritage preservation with commercial development. The guiding principle should be “protection through development, and development through protection.” Tourism initiatives should prioritize cultural integrity while seeking to expand the reach of Zhuang Opera. Selective and sustainable tourism development can help enhance its visibility, attract a broader audience, and ensure its continued transmission to future generations.

Zhuang Opera is not only a valuable intangible cultural heritage but also a rich resource for the tourism industry. The “Zhuang Opera + Tourism” model offers new possibilities for the opera’s survival and growth. By expanding its audience base and creating market opportunities, this approach helps Zhuang Opera move beyond its traditional niche and gain broader recognition. At the same time, integrating Zhuang Opera into Guangxi’s tourism sector adds depth and cultural significance to the region’s tourism offerings, injecting new vitality into the cultural tourism market.

4.4 Summary

Zhuang Opera is not merely a theatrical art form but a vital expression of Zhuang cultural identity, deeply rooted in the social and artistic traditions of Guangxi. It integrates literature, music, dance, and ritual, serving not only as entertainment but also as a means of education, moral instruction, and community bonding. Its distinct northern and southern styles reflect regional influences in vocal systems, narrative themes, and performance aesthetics. However, despite its historical resilience and cultural significance, Zhuang Opera faces considerable challenges, including linguistic barriers, competition from modern entertainment, and difficulties in transmission due to its reliance on oral tradition. Additionally, the slow pace of innovation and performance development has contributed to a decline in audience engagement, particularly among younger generations. To ensure its survival and continued relevance, Zhuang Opera must balance preservation with adaptation, fostering creative renewal while maintaining its core traditions.



CHAPTER V

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO TYPES OF ZHUANG OPERA IN THE GUANGXI ZHUANG AUTONOMOUS REGION

This chapter focuses on the comparative differences between the two types of Zhuang Opera: Northern Style Zhuang Opera and Southern Style Zhuang Opera and presents the following topics:

5.1 The Northern Zhuang Opera-Fazbauj Vunzmbanj (treasure villager)

5.1.1 The Story of the Opera

5.1.2 Songs in the Opera

5.1.3 Musical Instruments in the Opera

5.1.4 Performance, Costumes, and Props in the Opera

5.2 The Southern Zhuang Opera- 《Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)

5.2.1 The Story of the Opera

5.2.2 Songs in the Opera

5.2.3 Musical Instruments in the Opera

5.2.4 Performance, Costumes, and Props in the Opera

5.3 Results of comparing the two types of Zhuang Opera

5.4 Summary

5.1 The Northern Zhuang Opera-Nongjia Baotie (The Farmer's Precious Iron)

5.1.1 The story of the Opera.

"Nongjia Baotie" was rehearsed and performed by the first generation of Northern Zhuang Opera teachers. This play is the first act of Northern Zhuang Opera from bench play to courtyard play to stage play. After it was performed in Tianlin Jiuzhou, Sicheng Prefecture at that time in the 30th year of Qianlong, Northern Zhuang Opera was officially born. Therefore, the author selected "Nongjia Baotie" as the representative play of Northern Zhuang Opera for research. For more than 300 years, it has been performed continuously and is deeply loved by the Zhuang people in "Sanlin" and Youjiang District, Lingyun and other northwest Guangxi. The original handwritten copy of this script is now preserved by Bi Kejian, the tenth generation

new teacher of Northern Zhuang Opera in Guangxi. At present, it is only passed on to the Naba Amateur Zhuang Opera Troupe, a child of Chaoli Township, Lingyun County, for rehearsal. It has been the signature play of the Naba Amateur Zhuang Opera Troupe for many years.

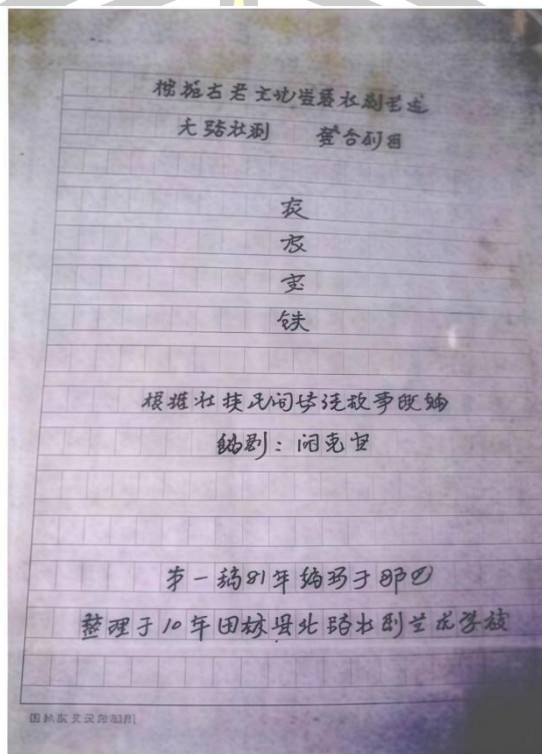


Figure 18. Nongjia Baotie original script

Source: Chen Wenying

When I went to Tianlin County, Baise, Guangxi for field research, I interviewed the head of the troupe, Wei Xiulian, and obtained the script of "Nongjia Baotie". However, the script only had lyrics, and there were no melody or music symbols. Regarding this issue, I also interviewed head Wei Xiulian. She said that for a long time, their scripts only had lyrics, no music scores, and if they were sung and played, they were all passed down orally by the older generation of Zhuang opera actors. (Interview, 2024)

The story of "Nongjia Baotie" comes from a legend of the Zhuang ethnic group. In the past, the Zhuang couple Chen Fengchun had a single daughter named Yuying. She was eighteen years old, with beautiful eyebrows and eyes, but she had never been promised. Her parents were very concerned about their daughter's

marriage and wanted to choose a satisfactory son-in-law to take care of her family. When young men from all over the world learned about it, they came to ask for marriage. The daughter refused to obey, and her parents had no choice but to obey her daughter's plan. They sang a song about their three generations of treasure iron as the theme to find a husband. Whoever could match the marriage would be recruited as a son-in-law.

The Zhuang opera "Nongjia Baotie" is divided into three acts, lasting about 40 minutes, with a total of 16 roles. The specific roles are as follows:

Table 7. Character Introduction of Nongjia Baotie

Name	Gender	Role Identity	Personality Traits
Chen Fengchun	Male	Chen yuying's father	Kind and simple
Wang	Female	Chen yuying's mother	Kind and simple
Chen Yuying	Female	Leading female role	Pretty, cute, smart
Zhang Aitian	Male	Leading male role	Industrious and simple
Li Wencai	Male	scholar	Smart, good memory, bad career
Liang Shengyi	Male	Merchant	Can't budget. Business is slow
Liang Shengcai	Male	shopkeeper	Be good at business
Aunt Li	Female	Woman matchmaker	Smart, articulate

The main characters in the first act are three male characters, Liang Shengyi, Li Wencai, and Zhang Aitian. The three of them appear at the same time and introduce their own characters. Liang Shengyi is a businessman, but because he can't calculate, his business situation is not optimistic. Li Wencai is a scholar, who is smart and has a good memory, but he doesn't have a good future. Zhang Aitian is a farmer, but because there are few people, the sowing situation of the farmland is not good. On this day, the three people were in a bad mood and had nothing to do, so they came to the street to see if they could meet a beautiful girl.

The second act is the most important section of the whole play. In this act, the heroine Chen Yuying and the maids appear. She uses the theme of her three generations of treasure iron as the theme, and asks for a duet. Who can answer the question will be recruited as a son-in-law. Chen Yuying sings with the three people

respectively. In the end, Chen Yuying thinks that Zhang Aitian is upright and honest, so she gets along with him and takes him home to meet her parents.

The third scene is the last scene of the whole play. Chen Yuying and Zhang Aitian return home together, meet Yuying's father Chen Quanchun and mother Wang, and hold a wedding ceremony for them. The two officially become husband and wife, showing the good qualities of the male and female protagonists' uprightness and people's pursuit of kindness and simplicity.

5.1.2 Songs in the Opera

The music of Northern Zhuang Opera primarily follows a suite structure, with only a rudimentary form of the banqiang system. Its vocal styles can be categorized into two main types: the zhengdiao system and the suite system.

Zhengdiao originates from Jiuzhou folk songs in Tianlin County, Guangxi, and serves as the primary melodic style of Northern Zhuang Opera. Jiuzhou folk songs are sung in the northern dialect of the Zhuang language, typically following a five-character, four-line structure (occasionally seven-character, four-line) with a waist-rhyme scheme. The first two lines, known as the "upper couplet," form a basic melodic phrase consisting of two musical sentences. The last two lines, known as the "lower couplet," repeat and vary the basic phrase. The complete structure of a Jiuzhou folk song is formed through variations of these phrases.

5.1.2.1 The Singing from the opera

The main tune system of Northern Zhuang Opera is the main tune and some variants developed from the main tune prototype. The structure of the main tune of Nongjia Baotie is a binary structure, and the most prominent one is the binary structure of the upper and lower sentences echoing each other. Banshi mainly includes two types: Youban and Sanban. The specific ones used are Zhengdiao Zhengban, Zhengdiao Manban, and Zhengdiao Gaoban.

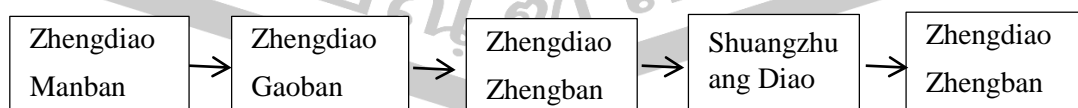


Figure 19. Singing Sequence of *Nongjia Baotie*

Source: Chen Wenying, 2024

1) Zhengdiao System

The Zhengdiao mode is primarily based on the Gong mode, followed by the Zhi mode. In some borrowed melodies, the Yu mode occasionally appears. Each phrase ends on either the Gong or Zhi tone. The melodic progression mainly consists of small-step motion and occasional leaps. The Gong tone serves as the central pitch, with other tones revolving around it. Musical phrases typically develop through Zhi and Shang tones before reaching the Gong tone for a complete cadence.

The singing section of "Nongjia Baotie" starts from the second scene. The first one is [Zhengdiao Manban], which is evolved from Tianlin Jiuzhou folk songs. It has a relatively stable presentation mode and is used for the paragraphs presented by Chen Yuying.

The musical score is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: Beix nuengh ha, Ranz raeuz gaiq faz ndei, Na Ha Yo Ra daeuj leh gwi, zmoq Na Ha Yo Ngoenz neix ha, Lwgm bauq lawz oeng mingz, Na Ha Ya Ha Ha Aeu de daeuj, guh doiq, NaHa Ya Ha.



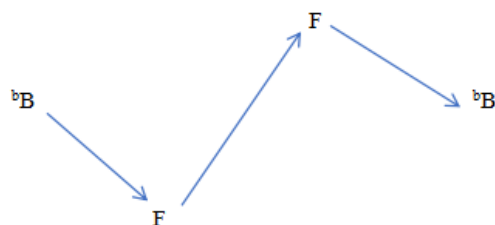
Figure 20. Zhengdiao-manban melody

Source:Guangxi Northern Style Zhuang Opera Course

The beat of [Zhengdiao Manban] is 2/4

Tempo 1 minute per 75 times

Melodic contour first descends, then ascends to the highest note, and finally descends again at the end.



Later, the sisters came on stage and the dialogue section with Yuying was sung in the tune of [Zhengdiao Gaoban], which is a variation of [Zhengdiao Zhengban] and was mainly developed from local folk songs. Although its presentation mode was appropriately changed with the development of the drama, such as [Zhengdiao Gaoban] with a higher range of voice due to excited emotions, its binary structure remained unchanged.

Dah cej mwngz naeuz ceiq habsaem
 Lah raen lwgmbauq lawz rox laex leix), Boux lawz saem gvai
 doiq ndaej deng, Couh deng aeu de
 daeuj guh doiq.



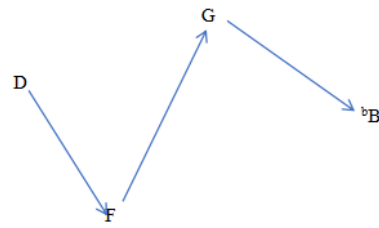
Figure 21. Zhengdiao-gaoban melody

Source:Guangxi Northern Style Zhuang Opera Course

The beat of [Zhengdiao Manban] is 2/4

Tempo 1 minute per 95 times

Melodic contour first descends, then ascends to the highest note, and finally descends again at the end.



The second half of the second scene is mainly a duet between a man and a woman, which is very characteristic of Guangxi and the Zhuang nationality. The most famous duet in Guangxi culture is Liu Sanjie's duet, so this duet also uses this form. The melody is also the traditional melody of the Zhuang nationality. By repeating the melody and filling in different lyrics, the duet is performed.



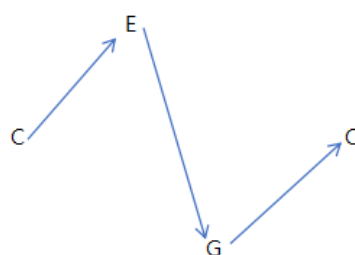
Figure 22. Zhengdiao-zhengban melody
Source: Guangxi Tianlin County Cultural Center

The third scene mainly uses [Zheng diao zheng ban] (正调正板)

The beat of [Zhengdiao Manban] is 2/4

Tempo 1 minute per 90 times

Melodic contour first ascends, then descends, and finally ascends again at the end.



2. Connected tune system

The main tune system and the linked song system of Northern Zhuang Opera singing style are very inclusive. The original form of the main tune was developed on the basis of the folk songs of Jiuzhou in Tianlin, Guangxi. It contains the charm and melody of the folk songs of Jiuzhou, and adds a lot of interludes and supporting words according to the opera model; the variant of the main tune also contains the genes of folk songs from all over Tianlin.

The linked song system constantly absorbs the elements of folk songs, rap music and song and dance music from other places, showing a dynamic development model with flexible and changeable forms. Its tunes incorporate Gui Opera, Caidiao and folk folk songs from all over the country. For example, the singing style [Shengtangdiao] is evolved from the tune of Gui Opera. The tune is majestic and steady, and has a strong legacy of Gui Opera. The singing style [Caihuadiao] is evolved from the Caidiao song and dance music, and there are relatively rich Caidiao melodies in its songs. The singing style [Sister Music] is evolved from the Anhui folk song "Fengyang Flower Drum" and has the flavor of Anhui folk songs. It can be seen that the singing style of Northern Zhuang Opera is the carrier of various musical singing styles. It incorporates folk elements from all over the country and is a good way to carry folk music.



Figure 23. Shuzhuangdiao melody
Source: Guangxi Tianlin County Cultural Center

5.1.2.2 The Lyrics used in the Opera.

The lyrics of The Northern Zhuang Opera are mainly sung in the northern dialect of Zhuang language. Occasionally, some of the transplanted plays use English or insert English words and sentences into Zhuang language. The commonly used sentence structures are mostly five-word sentences and seven-word sentences, and some of the singing segments also use uneven long and short sentences. Its paragraph structure is at least four sentences, such as four five-word sentences and four seven-word sentences. There is no limit to the number of sentences, but they must be in pairs, such as six sentences and eight sentences. There are two main modes of singing

in this word structure: one is that each sentence of lyrics is a musical phrase (often adding more supporting words); the other is that every two sentences of lyrics are a musical phrase (no supporting words or only a small number of supporting words). There are two main types of typical supporting words: one is the leading supporting words, which are added before the content words in the first sentence of the paragraph, and are mostly used as "guai hai le", "ai yi ya", "fu lao ya", "zhong zhong li", "shao ye ah", "hey, cousin li", etc., all of which are greetings. The second type is the end-of-sentence filler words, which are added after the content words in each sentence (or each paragraph). Some of them are repeated or partially repeated introductory filler words, and more of them contain syllables such as "lie - na - hey - ha - li - yo - la", which imply the end of the sentence or paragraph.

In the first scene of "Nong jia bao tie", "Seeking a Matchmaker", Zhang Aitian comes on stage and monologues:

(Zhuang) Haeuj /samngued /bae **naj**, fwx /caux gyaj/ linzlinz,

(English) March is the month of spring, and rice seedlings are being planted everywhere.

(Zhuang) Hunz noih /banq mij **hai**, hunz lai/ gonq fanghbiengq.

(English) It is difficult to accomplish things with a few people, but it is easier to accomplish things with many people.

(Zhuang) Lajndang Cangh Ngaiqdienz.

(English) My name is Zhang Aitian.

Only four sentences explain Zhang Aitian's identity as a farmer and reveal the knowledge of agricultural production - seedling cultivation begins in the third month of the lunar calendar. It is difficult to do things with few people, but it is easy to do things with more people. The rhythm of these four sentences is as shown by the "/" above. The first two sentences are in the "one-two-two" rhythm, and the last two sentences are in the "two-three" rhythm. The rhyme form is a combination of waist and foot rhymes and head and tail rhymes. The first and second sentences have waist and foot rhymes, and the rhyme foot is "a". The second and third sentences have head and tail rhymes, and the rhyme foot "in-un" is a non-strict rhyme foot. Although the rhyme is different, the throat and tongue positions are the same. This non-strict rhyme

foot also exists in the Tianlin Zhuang folk songs. The third and fourth sentences of Zhang Aitian's self-introduction return to the rhyme form of waist and foot rhymes, and the rhyme foot is "ai". After Zhang Aitian introduced himself, he continued:

(Zhuang) Lwgsai/ ra denhdih ndi/ haej boh,lwgmbwk /saeu saemsoh/
haej gvan,

(English) The boy found a good grave for his father, and the girl cultivated her mind and served her husband.

(Zhuang) ciuhlaeng /gonq **bingzan,** lwglan/ gonq funggvig.

(English) Only then will the future generations have peace and their descendants will be prosperous.

These four sentences are the moral principles of the Zhuang family, which are full of philosophy: parents should be respected when they are alive, and a good cemetery should be found for burial after their death. The wife should be diligent in cultivating her mind, taking care of the housework, and serving her husband well, so that the family can prosper and the descendants can be rich and noble. The combination of waist and foot rhymes and tail rhymes is used here, and the rhythm is shown as "/". Here, only four idioms are used to show Zhang Aitian's filial piety and simplicity, and at the same time, it also leads to his "just coming back from finding a cemetery for them today", and explains his background as an orphan. Then sing [main tune]:

(Zhuang) bak ngih yiengh/ daengz ndang, ciuhhunz/ gvang cin boenq.

(English) I am so busy with so many things.

After singing, leave the stage.

Li Wencai introduces himself:

(Zhuang) Lwgsai lij ij/ ndi gyiuzcoz, mbouj lox sw sa/ ij dangq **dai;**

(English) A young man should study hard. If he does not know how to read, he will suffer for the rest of his life.

(Zhuang) Lox sw lox sa/ baenz hunz **gvai,** ok log hunzlai/ **haenz**
liengzlih.

(English) A well-educated and well-mannered person is well-behaved.

When he goes out, everyone praises him for his cleverness.

(Zhuang) Lajndang Lij **Vwnzcaiz.**

Li Wencai also used four lines of poetry to show his identity as a scholar, which also implies that only by studying can one escape from poverty. The rhythm of the four lines of poetry is "four three", as shown by the "/" in the poem, and the rhyme form of the four lines of poetry is a combination of waist rhyme and tail rhyme.

In the second scene of "Nong jia bao tie", the matchmaker sang before she set off:

(Zhuang) mij byaij /loen laeuz gyaе, mij bae /ngoenz laeuz haemh.

(English) If you don't walk, you will go far, and if you don't walk, the sky will be dark.

This sentence directly quotes a folk proverb, which means: If you don't walk, the distance will not be shortened, but if you don't walk, the sky will still be dark. This is the Zhuang people's perception and description of time, which is full of philosophy. The same description of time, in the third scene of "Baohulu", Chen Yuying's father Chen Fengchun's opening remarks are:

(Zhuang) Gyim'henj nanh ndaej haеj **aengyaеu**, ngaenzhau nanh ndaej **wwenh ciuqyuenh.**

(English) Gold cannot make life long, and silver cannot change longevity.

(Zhuang) Laemxdah lae bae laj nanh **soengz**, bi'ndwen ngoenz gyet **ngoenz cixgyeq.**

(English) The river flows day and night, and time gradually makes people old.

(Zhuang) Ndanggyeq, Cinz Fungqcunh.

(English) The old man is called Chen Fengchun.

The old man Chen Fengchun's four opening remarks (also known as self-introduction) quoted two folk proverbs about time. The former used "gold and silver cannot replace life" to express the preciousness of time, and the latter used "flowing water" to express that time is gone forever. Both proverbs rhyme with the waist and foot rhymes, and the rhymes are "aeu-au (aeu is the staccato sound of au)" and "oeng-oen" (not a strict rhyme, the same as above).

In summary, The melody of Northern Zhuang Opera primarily progresses in stepwise motion, mainly employing natural intervals with small pitch spans

between adjacent notes. It frequently features unison, major second, and minor third intervals, creating a smooth, natural, and steady melodic flow. In addition, leaps of perfect fourths and perfect fifths are also present. The overall melodic movement is soft and graceful, reflecting the continuation and development of Zhuang folk mountain songs. Occasional large leaps introduce a sense of urgency, enhancing the liveliness of the melody. The lyrics of Northern Zhuang Opera are mainly sung in the northern dialect of the Zhuang language. In adapted performances, some arias may include Chinese lyrics or mix Chinese phrases within Zhuang-language singing. Common verse structures follow five-character and seven-character lines, though some sections incorporate irregular line lengths.

5.1.3 Musical Instruments in the Opera

Since the Tianlin Zhuang Opera was first performed, the main accompanying instruments include horse bone hu, gourd hu, small bamboo hu, bamboo tube hu, earthen flute, earthen sanxian, horse hoof drum, etc. During the Guangxu period, the seventh-generation artist Huang Yonggui introduced yangqin and suona, and added instruments such as big drum, big gong, and big drum. After liberation, wooden fish was added to the actors' action performance rendering and drum beats during singing.



Figure 24. Nongjia Baotie Accompaniment Instrument

Source: Chen Wenying (2024)

5.1.3.1 Magu Hu



Figure 25. Maguhu instrument

Source: Chen Wenying (2023)

The Magu Hu is one of the most distinctive instruments in Zhuang Opera, embodying both the ingenuity of local artisans and the deep cultural significance of musical traditions in the region. According to oral tradition, the Magu Hu was invented by the sixth-generation artist Yang Lian. In the first year of the Guangxu reign (1875), Tianlin Zhuang Opera gained widespread recognition, with its performances extending beyond Guangxi to neighboring provinces such as Yunnan and Guizhou. Yang Lian and his brother, Yang San, were invited to lead the Nadu troupe on a tour through Yangba, Yanghou, Bada, and other villages in Ceheng County, Guizhou Province. At that time, transportation was difficult, and Yang Lian relied on his sturdy horse to carry the troupe's costumes and props.

During their journey from Yanghou to Bada, tragedy struck—the horse fell ill and died. In Tianlin County, where mountainous terrain makes horses an invaluable mode of transportation, the loss of a horse was deeply distressing. Overcome with grief, Yang Lian refused to consume the horse's meat. Instead, he instructed his

disciples to distribute the meat to others while preserving four large rib bones and the horse's tail. The remaining parts of the horse were respectfully buried. After returning home, Yang Lian was initially unsure of how to repurpose these remains. However, after careful consideration, he selected two rib bones and crafted them into Magu Hu instruments—one for himself and one for his brother.

The Magu Hu quickly became a defining instrument in Tianlin Zhuang Opera. Its high-pitched, resonant, and melodious sound possessed a unique timbral quality that distinguished it from other traditional instruments. Yang Lian integrated it into the Zhuang Opera accompaniment ensemble, where it played a leading role in shaping the sonic identity of the genre. The instrument's soundbox was made from a horse's large barrel bone, with a resonator diameter of approximately 3.2 inches. The skin covering the resonator was traditionally crafted from patterned snake skin or antelope skin. The bow was made from white or black horsehair attached to a slender bamboo strip, while the strings—originally made from sheep gut—were later replaced with high-hu steel wires to improve durability and tonal clarity.

Despite its distinctive sound and historical importance, the Magu Hu gradually faded from the performance stage due to the scarcity of suitable materials. Today, only the Liuchi Troupe in Pingtang Township still possesses a Magu Hu, though it is no longer used in stage performances and has been largely replaced by a small cowhide drum. The decline of the Magu Hu also reflects broader shifts in the instrumental ensemble of Tianlin Zhuang Opera. In recent years, a shortage of skilled musicians has led to the diminishing presence of traditional instruments such as the yangqin, suona, and the Magu Hu "main line" in accompaniment bands. Flutes are now primarily found only in the troupes of Jiuzhou Town and Pingtang Township.

As instrument-making materials and craftsmanship evolve, many local instruments such as the gourd hu, bamboo hu, and earthen sanxian have become less common due to their high production demands. Meanwhile, the increasing availability of factory-made instruments with stable sound quality and easier maintenance has influenced the modern instrumental setup of Zhuang Opera troupes. The typical contemporary accompaniment ensemble now consists of one Magu Hu (reverse line),

two erhus (one "main line" and one "reverse line"), one qinqin, one drum, a pair of gongs and cymbals, and a pair of wooden fish.

The evolution of the Magu Hu in Tianlin Zhuang Opera illustrates not only the adaptability of traditional music practices but also the ongoing tension between cultural preservation and modernization in folk music traditions. While its presence on stage has diminished, the Magu Hu remains a symbol of innovation and resilience within Zhuang musical heritage.

5.1.3.2 Hulu Hu

The Hulu Hu is an important bowed string instrument in the accompaniment ensemble of Zhuang Opera. Known for its distinctive timbre and simple craftsmanship, it is widely used in Zhuang Opera performances. The body of the Hulu Hu is made from a natural gourd, with a soundboard typically crafted from snake skin or thin cowhide to enhance resonance. The neck is usually made of bamboo or wood, and while early versions used silk or gut strings, modern versions have adopted metal strings to improve tonal stability and projection.

The Hulu Hu produces a soft and mellow tone with a strong regional character. It is capable of expressing both lyrical and expressive melodies as well as lively and cheerful opera tunes. Although its playing technique is similar to that of the Erhu, its smaller soundbox results in weaker resonance and lower volume. As a result, it is primarily used as a supporting melodic instrument, complementing main instruments such as the Magu Hu or Erhu.

In Zhuang Opera accompaniment, the Hulu Hu enriches the overall musical texture and enhances the folk character of the music. Due to its readily available materials and simple construction, it remains widely used in rural Zhuang Opera troupes, serving as an essential component of the traditional Zhuang Opera music ensemble.



Figure 26. Hulu hu instrument

Source: Chen Wenying (2023)

5.1.3.3 Tu Hu

The Tu Hu is a traditional bowed string instrument in the accompaniment ensemble of Zhuang Opera. It is known for its rich and resonant tone, making it an important part of Zhuang Opera music. The body of the Tu Hu is typically made of fired clay, which gives the instrument its name. In some regions, wood or bamboo is also used as the main material for the soundbox. The soundboard is usually crafted from snake skin or cowhide to enhance resonance. The neck is made of bamboo or wood, and while early versions of the Tu Hu used silk or gut strings, modern versions have adopted metal strings to improve tonal stability and projection.

The Tu Hu produces a deep and mellow tone, making it well-suited for expressing solemn, lyrical, or poignant melodies in Zhuang Opera. Its playing technique is similar to that of the Erhu, but its unique resonance chamber gives it a distinctive regional timbre. In the Zhuang Opera accompaniment ensemble, the Tu Hu is typically used to provide a bass foundation, complementing higher-pitched bowed instruments such as the Erhu and the Magu Hu. This contrast in timbre enriches the overall musical texture and enhances the depth of the performance.

Due to the fragility of the clay soundbox and the complexity of its craftsmanship, the use of the Tu Hu has declined in modern Zhuang Opera ensembles. Some troupes have replaced it with instruments that are easier to manufacture and maintain. However, as an integral part of traditional Zhuang musical culture, the Tu Hu remains valuable for both research and preservation. It can still be found in certain folk opera troupes and in ethnomusicological studies focused on Zhuang traditional music.



Figure 27. Tu hu instrument

Source: Chen Wenying (2023)

5.1.3.4 Da Guochang

When the author participated in the collection of folk songs for Tianlin Zhuang Opera, teacher Huang Zhiyuan said: "If you learn [Da Guochang], you will also learn other tunes." Now, taking [Da Guochang] as an example, the ensemble logic of the Tianlin Zhuang Opera.

mu yin-teng lu hu
zheng xian1-5

gong yin-tu er hu
fan xian3-6

mu yin-xiao zu hu
zheng xian5-2

gong yin-ma gu hu
fan xian6-3

The musical score consists of four staves of music in 2/4 time. The first staff is for mu yin-teng lu hu (zheng xian1-5), the second for gong yin-tu er hu (fan xian3-6), the third for mu yin-xiao zu hu (zheng xian5-2), and the fourth for gong yin-ma gu hu (fan xian6-3). A '5' is written above the fifth measure of the first staff.



Figure 28. Daguochang melody

Source: Tianlin Cultural Center

The erhu's main string is tuned to "do-sol," with the lowest note of the inner string being "do." The erhu's reverse string is tuned to "mi-la," with the lowest note of the inner string being "mi." As shown in Example 1, the notes played by the "male hu" erhu's reverse string are almost the same as the notes played by the "female hu" erhu's main string. However, due to the different tunings, the erhu's reverse string cannot play notes lower than "mi," so it plays in a higher octave, such as in the 2nd, 4th, and 6th bars. When the erhu's reverse string cannot play notes lower than "mi," such as "doorre," the solution is to turn up an octave and play with the outer string. Therefore, when the two erhus are played, the "reverse" of the inner and outer strings and the "reverse" of high and low notes are formed. This is the logic and principle of the "positive and reverse strings" of the Tianlin Zhuang Opera accompaniment band. The same is true for the Magu's reverse string.

5.1.4 Performance, Costumes, and Props in the Opera

Using Nongjia Baotie as a case study, this section explores the performance techniques, role classifications, costumes, and props in Northern Zhuang Opera. As a representative work, Nongjia Baotie provides valuable insights into the stylistic features and structural characteristics of this opera tradition.

5.1.4.1 Performance Techniques

The performance in Nongjia Baotie exemplifies the organic integration of singing, recitation, acting, and movement, which is a core feature of Northern Zhuang Opera. The stage movements and physical techniques are deeply influenced by Zhuang folk traditions, incorporating elements of Zhuang dance and local narrative singing.

One of the distinctive features of this opera lies in the entrance and exit techniques of the performers:

1. Dan (female roles, e.g., Chen Yuying) enters with light and elegant steps, often compared to "a gentle breeze over the lake." Holding a fan in her right hand, she moves gracefully onto the stage, subtly swaying her upper body to enhance her delicate demeanor.

2. Sheng (male roles, e.g., Zhang Aitian) enters with a steady and upright posture, projecting an image of bravery and confidence. He holds the hat ribbon with his left hand and a fan in his right hand, unfolding the fan smoothly at key moments to emphasize his movements.

These choreographed actions reinforce the poetic aesthetics and rhythmic fluency of Northern Zhuang Opera, shaping vivid character portrayals and enhancing overall performance expressiveness.

5.1.4.2 Acting Skills

The performance system in Nongjia Baotie follows the "Four Skills and Five Techniques" framework:

1. Four Skills : Singing, Recitation, Acting, Acrobatics

2. Five Techniques: Hand Movements, Eye Expressions, Body Movements, Footwork, Performance Methods

These elements collectively shape character expression and stage aesthetics.

1. Hand Movements: The gestures in this opera are highly refined. Dan and Sheng roles use fluid and elegant hand movements, while Chou (comic roles) employ exaggerated gestures to enhance comedic effects.

2. Eye Expressions: Crucial for conveying emotions. Performers use side glances, squinting, and eyebrow raises to express hesitation, confidence, or cunning.

3. Footwork and Body Postures: Carefully choreographed: "Eight-Shaped Steps" are common, with variations based on role types. Dan roles often use "Lotus Steps", characterized by light and floating movements that convey grace and femininity. Sheng roles use firm and powerful footwork, emphasizing masculinity and status.

These techniques enhance the dynamic stage presence, making emotional expression more vivid and engaging.

5.1.4.4 Costumes

The costumes in Nongjia Baotie reflect both ethnic identity and social hierarchy. Their designs and color schemes follow the traditional Zhuang brocade embroidery style, featuring common motifs such as kirin, dragons, phoenixes, and floral patterns.

1. Sheng roles (male characters) wear embroidered robes with finely decorated cuffs and collars.

2. Wensheng (scholarly characters) wear a traditional scholar's hat.

3. Dan roles (female characters) wear embroidered skirts, often paired with ornate headpieces and colorful waist sashes.

4. Lao Dan (elderly female roles) wear more subdued colors and wide-sleeved garments, exuding dignity and composure.

These costumes not only enhance the visual appeal of the stage but also allow the audience to quickly identify different character types.

5.1.4.5 Props

Props in Nongjia Baotie serve both practical and symbolic functions, enriching theatrical expression and character development. The Folding Fan is one of the most important props:

1. Dan and Sheng characters use fans in coordination with graceful body movements.

2. Fan techniques are often choreographed into set movements, adding aesthetic and theatrical appeal.

3. Other Key Props:

Wooden Benches, frequently used in "Bench Opera", often combined with acrobatic performances. Gongs and Drums, which provide rhythmic cues for dramatic climaxes and scene transitions.

These props contribute to the rich stage language of Northern Zhuang Opera, embodying both traditional theatrical rituals and creative stagecraft.

Summary

Through the analysis of Nongjia Baotie, it is evident that Northern Zhuang Opera follows a highly stylized yet expressive performance system. Its graceful movement techniques, ethnic aesthetic expressions, and flexible use of props collectively define its artistic charm. However, as the opera tradition evolves in the modern era, the challenge remains: how to preserve its traditional essence while fostering innovation and adaptation. This issue warrants further exploration.

5.2 The Southern Zhuang Opera-Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)

5.2.1 The story of the Opera.

In 1955, the Zhuang opera "Bao Hulu" performed by the Dong'an Street Amateur Drama Troupe of Debao County participated in the National Mass Art Performance and won the Outstanding Program Award, which became a milestone in the development of Zhuang opera. From then on, the official name of "Zhuang opera" and its status as a national opera on the Chinese opera stage were established.

In 1956, the Debao County Professional Zhuang Opera Troupe was officially established on the basis of the Dong'an Street Amateur Drama Troupe, which was composed of old artists and young men and women who loved literature and art. In 1957, the Zhuang opera troupes of Debao and Jingxi counties merged, and the troupe was located in Debao, still called the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe. In 1959, after training and expansion, the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe was transferred to Baise to form the Baise Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe. On this basis, the Guangxi Zhuang

Autonomous Region Zhuang Opera Troupe was transferred to Nanning, the capital of the autonomous region, in 1961. The classic play "Bao Hulu" has made a historic contribution to the development of Zhuang opera art. In the 1970s, the original cast of the Beijing performance of "The Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)" rehearsed and filmed the performance, which is now preserved in the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe.

The Zhuang opera "Baohulu" tells a legend that is popular among the Zhuang opera people. In ancient times, Jia Dacheng, a wealthy man from the Buyi (Zhuang) ethnic group in northern Guangxi, was cunning. In order to seize the commoner girl You Xiuying, he falsely accused You's husband Jiao Dalang of crushing his family's "treasure cat" with a pile of firewood, which "could turn into a dog when sitting and a horse when walking, and was worth 550 yuan". He forced Jiao Dalang to pay compensation within three days, otherwise he would have to use Jiao's wife to compensate. Jiao's wife came up with the "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)" plan and hung the broken gourd on the door. When the rich man came to Jiao's house to ask for money, he kicked the door open and the gourd fell to the ground and "broke". Jiao's wife said that this gourd was a treasure that could be filled with water to make wine and wine to make oil. Others would pay 990 yuan to buy it, so the rich man Jia Dacheng had to pay 440 yuan. The "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)" not only compensated for the "treasure cat", but the farmers' wisdom also finally defeated evil.

The whole Zhuang opera performance of "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)" is divided into six acts, lasting about 1 hour, with a total of 11 roles, the specific roles are as follows:

Shengjiao: Jiao Da Danjiao: Xiuying

Laosheng: Jia Yuanwai Choujiao: Shiye

Villagers: 6 people

พมฺุณ ปณฺุ ทํโถ ชีเว

Table 8. Introduction of the characters in *Bao Hulu*.

Name	Gender	Role Identity	Personality Traits
Jiao Dalang	Male	Leading male role	Kind and simple
You Xiuying	Female	Leading female role	Pretty, cute, smart
Jia Dacheng	Male	Wealthy Landowner	Lustful, greedy, overbearing
Jiang Laoxing	Male	Butler	Treacherous and greedy

Act 1: The heroine Xiuying is waiting for her husband at home. Her husband Jiao Da went out to chop wood early in the morning and did not return home until noon. Xiuying has already prepared the meal and went out to call her husband to come home for dinner. Later, Jiao Da returned home with the chopped wood. The two had a good relationship. Jiao Da returned home for dinner, and Xiuying went to the river to wash clothes.

Act 2: Xiuying was washing clothes by the river. Jia Yuanwai and Shiye came to the river to see if they could find their ideal person and buy a beautiful woman with money to take home. At this time, the lawyer found Xiuying who was washing clothes and introduced her to Jia Yuanwai. Jia Yuanwai wanted to get to know Xiuying, but Xiuying cleverly used her singing to describe the two as a turtle and a crow, and rejected the lawyer's advances.

Act 3: At Jia Yuanwai's house, Jia Yuanwai hoped to get Xiuying, so he asked the lawyer to come up with a solution. The lawyer came up with a bad idea, tricked Jiao Da back home, and used the treasure cat to frame Jiao Da.

Act 4: The lawyer took Jiao Da to Jia Yuanwai's house to buy his firewood. Jiao Da was very happy and put the firewood in the kitchen. At this time, the lawyer came to the kitchen and said that Jiao Da's firewood crushed Jia Yuanwai's treasure cat and asked him to compensate 550 taels of silver. The kind-hearted Jiao Da was framed and wrote a note to return the silver within 3 days, otherwise his wife would pay off the debt.

Act 5: Jiao Da returns home, worried. Xiuying sees this and tells her what happened. Xiuying knows that this is a trick by Jia Yuanwai to break up the couple, so she tries to deal with it. They think of using the "magic gourd" to deal with it, saying that Jia Yuanwai broke their "magic gourd".

Act 6: Three days later, Jia Yuanwai comes home and asks Xiuying to go home with him, but Xiuying has already put the broken gourd outside the door. Jia Yuanwai breaks into the house and happens to press the gourd. Xiuying asks Jia Yuanwai to compensate her with 660 taels of silver. Then the people come to help the couple and finally help them out. Everyone praises Xiuying for being smart and fearless of power.

5.2.2 Songs in the Opera

5.2.2.1 The Singing from the opera

1. Pingban

Analysis of the mode and tonal characteristics of Southern Zhuang Opera. Its singing style is in the Zhengtong style, with few modulations. Let's take the "Pan" sung by Xiuying in "Bao Hulu" as an example. Sometimes the sound of "Gong" falls on the upper sentence, and the sound of "Zheng" falls on the second sentence. What appears in the middle is the sound of Qingjiao. "C" sound, in singing, this "C" is used as the inner string sound of Ma Guhu, and the color of the mode basically revolves around the C-D-E-G-A-B tone sequence, thus forming a six-tone tone.

pan ya wang hai ya ha

jiao ya ha ya ha lang lie ya ha yo

tai yang sheng qi

yo ya san ya gan ya ya

ha ya ha ya ya ha hai



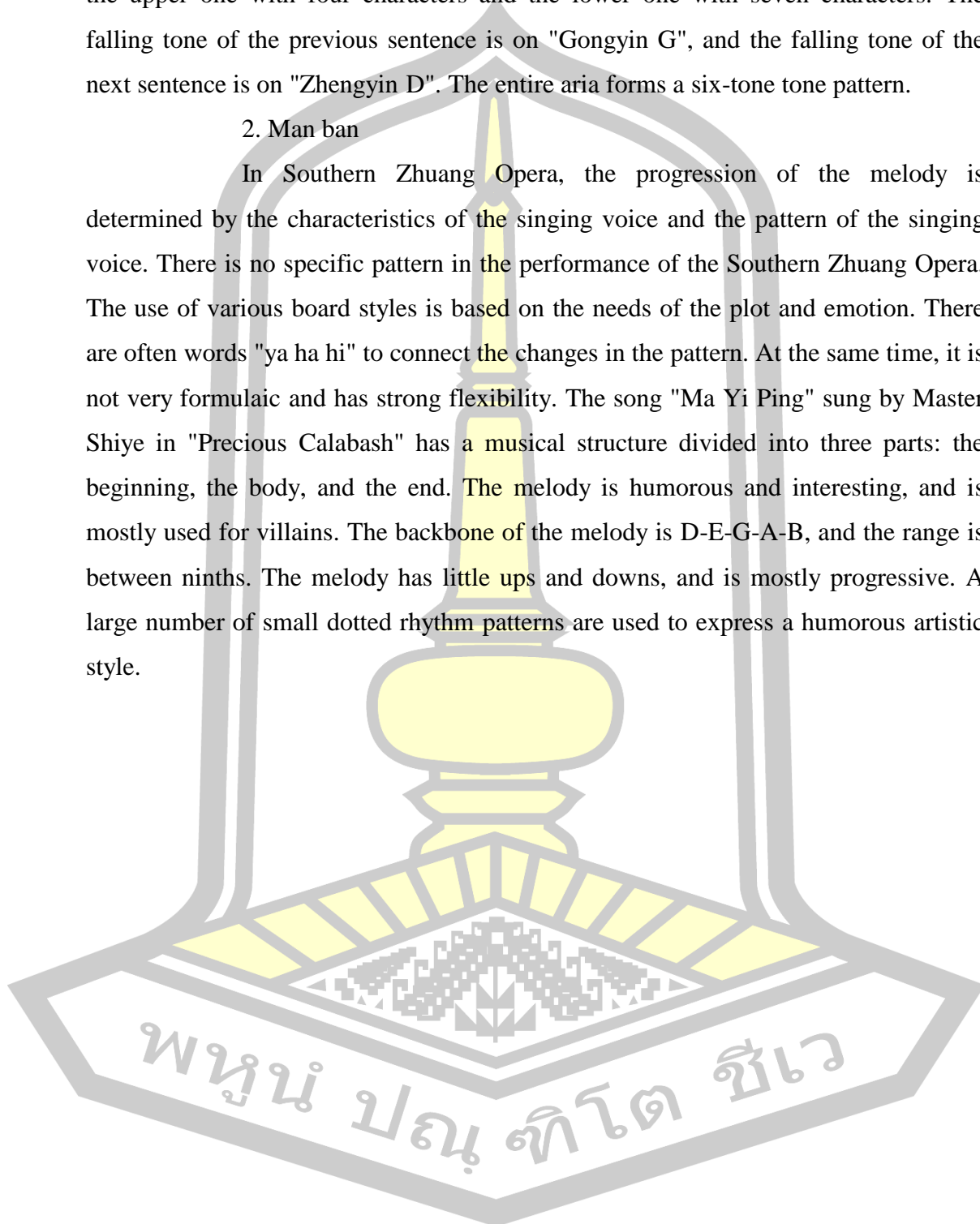
Figure 29. "Bao Hulu" Pingban female voice segment melody

Source: Debaozhuang Theatre

This is a single section with a single mode, consisting of two phrases, the upper one with four characters and the lower one with seven characters. The falling tone of the previous sentence is on "Gongyin G", and the falling tone of the next sentence is on "Zhengyin D". The entire aria forms a six-tone tone pattern.

2. Man ban

In Southern Zhuang Opera, the progression of the melody is determined by the characteristics of the singing voice and the pattern of the singing voice. There is no specific pattern in the performance of the Southern Zhuang Opera. The use of various board styles is based on the needs of the plot and emotion. There are often words "ya ha hi" to connect the changes in the pattern. At the same time, it is not very formulaic and has strong flexibility. The song "Ma Yi Ping" sung by Master Shiye in "Precious Calabash" has a musical structure divided into three parts: the beginning, the body, and the end. The melody is humorous and interesting, and is mostly used for villains. The backbone of the melody is D-E-G-A-B, and the range is between ninths. The melody has little ups and downs, and is mostly progressive. A large number of small dotted rhythm patterns are used to express a humorous artistic style.



ya ha ya ha ha ya ha

yuan wai bu zhi xiang ya ha ha

deng wo cong tou jiang ya ha ya ya ha ya ha

ya ha ya ha ya ha ha ya ha

gang cai mei jiao e ya ha ha

jiu shi jiao da qi ya ha ya ha ya ha ya ha ha

ya ha ya ha ya ha ha



Figure 30. "Bao Hulu" Mayi Pingban segment melody

Source: Debaozhuang Theatre

3.San ban

Sanban type, taking one of Xiuying's singing segments in "Bao Hulu" as an example, the melody is sung in a tight and loose manner. The singing is performed at a free rhythm, while the accompaniment is performed at a slightly faster speed. At the fastest speed, the clappers are not held but double drums are used to make the atmosphere more tense. The transition adopts the method of repeating the ending note. For example, when the ending note is "B", the "B" note is used repeatedly.

gae Loih kaeu

rueng Laep gyaec gya

Cing gyan vcih Sach Cacng dou (ya)

ran? mo fe byong Loh ndang bing.

Caen boi Ciu ying

Sacm mci (ya) an.

Figure 31. "Bao Hulu" Saban segment melody

Source: Debaozhuang Theatre

4. Kuai ban

Take Gaoqiang as an example of the fast-paced style. The part in "Bao Hulu" where Jiao Da sells firewood is Gaoqiang. Each beat of Gaoqiang is a re-beat, and according to the customary notation method, it is a 1/4 beat, but the intensity of each beat is not balanced. The first sentence ends with "A" and the second sentence

ends with "D". Starting from the second half of the beat, syncopation is often used, forming the biggest feature of the rhythm.

mai de bai lei ba ya quan ya
 ha ya ha lie ya ha ha ha
 mai de bai ba qian ha ha
 ha huan de xie you ya yan ya
 lie
 ya ya ha ya ya ha hai



Figure 32. "Treasew Gourd" Gaoqiang segment melody

Source: Chen Wenying, transcription from fieldwork in April 2023

5.2.3.2 The Language used in the Opera.

The lyrics of the southern Zhuang opera are all in the rhythm of Zhuang folk songs, especially the Pingban and sighing tunes, which often use waist and foot rhymes. The rhyme method of "waist and foot rhymes" is: the last word of the first sentence rhymes with the fifth or third word of the second sentence (the fifth word of the seven-word sentence and the third word of the five-word sentence). The last word of the third sentence rhymes with the fifth or third word of the fourth sentence. Take the Zhuang transliteration of the sighing lyrics sung by Jiao Da in the third scene of "Bao Hulu" as an example:

Mw kai fwn de aeu gang gva
 Aet bak ha Cen mabah yen kai
 De Laih raeu nyaen tai meu bau
 Dang dang ndah vam kauh gang kaen
 Yeuh boi ha bak haig ying ngaen

South Zhuang Opera is limited by the fixed number of words in the lyrics when singing, and the relationship between the lyrics and the singing tune is partly "following the tune and the words". Take "Panban" as an example. The singing structure of "Panban" in Jingxi South Road Zhuang Opera can be divided into three parts: the opening, the main text, and the ending. The opening is two sentences, the first sentence is four words, and the second sentence is seven words. It is a Pingban head, which can be used as an inner singing and a guide; the upper and lower sentences of the main text are a small paragraph (there are five-word sentences and seven-word sentences), which can be repeated at will. If there is no change to other tunes, it can be connected to the ending; the ending is a seven-word heavy sentence.

In the above example, the first sentence is four words "please listen to the lecture", and the second sentence is seven words "wait for me to tell you from the beginning", which is used as a Pingban inner singing here. As mentioned above, the most prominent feature of the South Road Zhuang Opera is the "Ya Ha, Hi" filler word. In the history of the development of the South Road Zhuang Opera, it was named "Ya Hai Opera" because of this filler word. Therefore, "filler words" are an important content in the study of the relationship between words and tunes in Jingxi South Road Zhuang Opera. In the singing of Jingxi South Road Zhuang Opera, the supporting words are responsible for determining the ending tone of the phrase and the entire singing style, and often become a form of dragging the tone to set off the atmosphere and express emotions.

In the above example, the supporting word "Ha" falls on the Gong sound "G" and the Zhi sound "D" respectively. The combination of the supporting words and the sound clearly divides the phrase. From this, we can see the relationship between the supporting words and music of "Ya Ha, Hai" in the South Road Zhuang Opera. The supporting words divide the sentences from the meaning of the words, and

the combination of the supporting words and music contains the sentences of the meaning of the words, which also makes the division of the phrases clearer.

5.2.3 The musical instrument used in the Opera.

The musical instrument of Southern Zhuang Opera primarily features the Maguhu as the main instrument, with supporting instruments including the Tuhu, Huluhu, and Qinghu. Occasionally, leaf-blowing is used as an auxiliary element. Additionally, percussion instruments such as the wooden fish, small drum, large cymbals, Xing gong, Gaobian gong, and bronze cymbals are also employed. The accompaniment music of Southern Zhuang Opera adopts a multi-part technique, creating various harmonic relationships in melody execution. The tunings of different accompaniment instruments also vary. In terms of performance, the distinction between the main string (Maguhu playing the main melody) and the counter string (other instruments playing secondary parts) is clear and well-coordinated, forming a multi-part symphonic performance style that complements the aesthetic effect of Zhuang multi-part folk songs.

The Maguhu, Huluhu, and Tuhu used in Southern Zhuang Opera are the same as those in Northern Zhuang Opera. However, the Qinghu, a commonly used instrument in Southern Zhuang Opera, is unique to this style. The Qinghu is a bowed string instrument of the Zhuang ethnic group, primarily found in Debao, Jingxi, and other counties in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Structurally, the Qinghu is similar to other huqin-style instruments. Its soundbox is made from locally sourced milled wood, hollowed into a cylindrical shape with a length of approximately 12 cm, an outer diameter of about 7 cm, and a wall thickness of around 0.8 cm. The front of the soundbox is covered with either snake or frog skin. The wooden neck is about 60 cm long, with two wooden tuning pegs inserted horizontally at the top rear of the neck, each measuring approximately 12 cm in length. The bridge is made of wood, and the strings are secured with a silk thread serving as the nut. The bow is crafted from a small bamboo stick strung with horsehair, measuring around 55 to 60 cm in length, with the bow hair threaded between the two strings. The Qinghu is typically tuned to a_1 and e_2 , with a playing range spanning two octaves from a to a_2 . When played, the soundbox is placed on the left thigh or held between the knees, with the left hand pressing the strings and the right hand drawing the bow across them. The

Qinghu produces a bright and piercing tone and serves as the primary melodic instrument in the Southern Zhuang Opera.



Figure 33. Qing hu instrument

Source: Chen Wenying (2023)

5.2.4 The Performance used in the Opera.

To structure the section on Performance, Costumes, and Props for Bao Hulu in Southern Zhuang Opera, we can expand on each aspect in the following way:

5.2.5.1 Performance

The performance style in Southern Zhuang Opera is marked by energetic and dynamic movements, influenced heavily by the tradition of Zhuang puppetry. Unlike the more delicate and graceful movements of Northern Zhuang Opera, the Southern style is characterized by rough, robust, and lively actions that are both strong and engaging.

In Bao Hulu, the female roles follow a specific set of performance techniques. When entering or exiting the stage, female characters must walk at right angles, lifting their heels and making rapid, energetic steps. The steps themselves are small jumps, and the performers' bodies sway gently with each movement. The hands swing in circles at about 45 degrees from the body, further enhancing the fluidity and rhythm of the movement.

The patterns in the performers' movement are unique, such as the "Z" shape for one performer, the "∞" shape for two performers, and the "three-through-flower" shape for three performers, demonstrating the stylized nature of the movements. These choreographic patterns have their roots in Zhuang puppetry, where movements like the slow left-to-right head shake are transferred into human performance, such as Xiuying's entrance in Baohulu.

For male characters, such as Jiao Da, the performance emphasizes strength and grandeur. Jiao Da's entrance often involves rapid running, arms spread wide, and dramatic gestures, including T-steps and a squat. The T-step is especially important, as it is used for a striking visual effect, symbolizing strength and elegance. This type of performance draws influence from the ancient dance styles depicted on the Huashan murals, where the rough and majestic postures convey a sense of power.

These dynamic movements contrast with the more gentle, refined movements of Northern Zhuang Opera, showcasing the Southern Zhuang's emphasis on robust physicality and dramatic presence.

5.2.5.2 Costumes

In Bao Hulu, costumes play an essential role in enhancing the visual storytelling and reflecting the roles and personalities of the characters. The costumes are designed to be functional for the energetic and dynamic movements of the performance while also adding a layer of symbolism and identity to the characters.

For the female roles, such as Zhengdan, Huadan, and Laodan, the costumes consist of flowing robes that allow for ease of movement, while still being elaborate enough to convey the character's status and role in the narrative. The fabric choices are often bright and eye-catching, using vibrant colors that correspond to specific emotions or roles. For example, the higher-ranking characters wear more

ornate and embellished costumes, while lower-ranking characters like servants or comedic roles may have simpler attire, often in muted tones.

Male characters, particularly those with warrior or authoritative roles like Jiao Da, wear costumes that reflect their strength and power. These costumes are typically more robust, with larger, more impressive headpieces and reinforced clothing that highlight their importance on stage. The use of symbolic colors in the male costumes—such as red for power or black for solemnity—further adds to the characterization.

One notable costume feature in Baohulu is the use of props such as fans and handkerchiefs, which are frequently used during performances. These props are not just practical but are also integral to the characters' expressions and actions, further enhancing the visual language of the performance.

5.2.5.3 Props

Props in Southern Zhuang Opera, and specifically in Bao Hulu, serve both symbolic and functional purposes. The most significant prop in this opera is the magic gourd itself, central to the plot. It represents the mystical element of the story and is integral to the character's journey. The gourd is often used in magical transformations or key moments, enhancing the fantasy aspect of the performance.

In addition to the gourd, other props like fans, handkerchiefs, and sometimes symbolic animals, are used to create visual impact and support the performers' gestures. These props are not just accessories; they help to define the character's personality and add depth to the performance. For example, a fan may be used to accentuate a character's elegance or charm, while a handkerchief could represent gentleness or servitude.

A particularly vivid example of prop use comes from the character of Yasan, Jia Yuanwai's servant. Yasan's actions, based on the observation of domestic animals, involve a lot of playful and exaggerated gestures, such as wagging his "tail" and bending over in a mock bow, with a fan tucked behind his back. These gestures help create a humorous and endearing character, with the prop serving as a visual cue for the character's dog-like behavior.

Overall, the props are integrated seamlessly into the performance, adding layers of meaning and enhancing the overall atmosphere of the opera.

Summary

In conclusion, the performance, costumes, and props in Baohulu are deeply intertwined with the traditions of Southern Zhuang Opera, blending energetic movement, rich costumes, and symbolic props to tell the story in a visually engaging and culturally rich manner. The influence of Zhuang puppetry on the performance style, the strategic use of costumes to define characters, and the integration of props to enhance the narrative all contribute to the unique flavor of this opera.

5.3 Results of comparing the two types of Zhuang Opera

Looking at the four aspects of the singing, lyrics, accompaniment and melody of the Southern Zhuang Opera and the Northern Zhuang Opera, it can be seen that Zhuang Opera is a comprehensive artistic embodiment of the accumulation and sublimation of the life philosophy, cultural psychology and aesthetic concepts formed by the Zhuang people in long-term social practice. It has irreplaceable artistic value in the spiritual life of the Zhuang people. As the most populous ethnic opera among my country's ethnic minorities, Zhuang Opera occupies a certain position in my country's drama art field, and also has irreplaceable artistic value in the diverse and unified Chinese national culture.

5.3.1 Similarities and Differences in the Storytelling of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

In terms of storytelling, both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera exhibit rich narratives and profound cultural heritage. The repertoire of both styles covers various aspects of social life, drawing from folk myths and legends, local historical events, and dramatized adaptations of daily life experiences. These stories not only preserve the collective memory of Zhuang culture but also shape the distinctive narrative traditions of Zhuang Opera through theatrical expression. However, despite these shared elements, Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera differ significantly in thematic focus, plot structure, and social significance.

Table 9. Similarities in the Storytelling of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Similarities	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
Themes	
① Wisdom and Justice in Folk Beliefs Both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera emphasize how ordinary people use wisdom and moral strength to overcome power and adversity, reflecting the ethical values and social ideals deeply embedded in Zhuang culture.	
② Marriage and Romance Many Zhuang Opera stories revolve around marriage, portraying young lovers striving to break free from feudal restrictions in pursuit of love and happiness. These narratives often include dramatic conflicts such as trials, misunderstandings, and reconciliations, illustrating the desire for romantic freedom.	
③ Social Justice and Moral Critique Numerous plays critique the injustices of feudal society, addressing issues such as arranged marriages, oppressive hierarchies, and class exploitation. These stories serve as a medium for ordinary people to express their aspirations for fairness and justice.	

Table 10. Differences in the Storytelling of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Differences	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
Story Themes Northern Zhuang Opera primarily focuses on folk myths and legends, often featuring supernatural or fantastical elements that reflect rural beliefs and moral values.	Story Themes Southern Zhuang Opera predominantly tells stories of heroic figures and ethnic conflicts. This thematic focus is closely tied to its geographic context, as the southern Zhuang regions border Vietnam and have historically experienced frequent warfare, leading to a stronger

	presence of war and heroism in their storytelling.
<p>Northern Zhuang Opera: Linear Plot, Concise Narrative</p> <p>The stories in Northern Zhuang Opera are relatively simple, usually centered around a single core event, such as choosing a spouse or overcoming trials in marriage. The conflicts are direct, and the main storyline is easy to follow. The performance length is shorter, typically around 40 minutes, making it well-suited for village gatherings and temple fairs.</p>	<p>Southern Zhuang Opera: Multi-layered Plot, Greater Dramatic Complexity</p> <p>Southern Zhuang Opera features more intricate narratives with multiple layers of conflict, involving elements such as deception, betrayal, and resistance. The tension gradually escalates, requiring the protagonist to undergo multiple struggles before achieving victory. This complexity results in longer performances, often exceeding one hour, and enhances the theatrical intensity.</p>
<p>Northern Zhuang Opera: Focus on Personal Growth and Family Ethics</p> <p>Stories in Northern Zhuang Opera often reflect traditional rural values, emphasizing family relationships and the transmission of moral principles. They explore how individuals can seek happiness within the constraints of existing social structures. These plays frequently carry an educational function, reinforcing ethical teachings through entertainment.</p>	<p>Southern Zhuang Opera: Focus on Social Justice and Resistance to Oppression</p> <p>Southern Zhuang Opera exhibits a stronger sense of social critique, frequently depicting class struggles and societal transformations. Many stories portray how oppressed individuals rise against feudal authority to demand justice and equality. This thematic focus not only heightens the dramatic tension but also aligns with the historical experiences of resistance and reform in the southern Zhuang regions.</p>

5.3.2 Comparison of Singing and Lyrics in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera, as a traditional performing art of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi, China, embodies rich musical and lyrical characteristics that reflect the region's cultural diversity. From an ethnomusicological perspective, the vocal styles and lyric structures of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera provide significant insights into their historical evolution, regional influences, and the interplay between folk traditions and theatrical forms. By analyzing their similarities and differences in singing style and lyrics, we can better understand how these operatic traditions have preserved indigenous musical elements while also adapting to changing cultural and artistic contexts.

5.3.2.1 Comparison of Singing

1) Similarities

The vocal styles of both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera demonstrate a close connection to Zhuang folk music traditions. The singing techniques, melodic structures, and rhythmic patterns show clear traces of oral transmission, emphasizing expressiveness and improvisation.

Table 11. Similarities of Singing in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Similarities	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
Retention of folk song elements	
Both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera preserve the characteristics of Zhuang folk songs, particularly in melody, scale, and structure.	
Bànqiāngtǐ structure (Fixed melodic-rhythmic pattern)	
The singing styles of both operas follow a relatively fixed structural pattern, with variations in rhythm and melody.	
Use of ornamental notes	
Both styles employ ornamental notes (such as grace notes and glissandos) to enhance emotional expression.	

2) Differences

Despite their shared folk origins, the two styles of Zhuang Opera have developed distinct vocal characteristics due to geographical, linguistic, and performance practice differences. These differences reflect the stylistic diversity within Zhuang musical traditions and the varying degrees of operatic formalization in different regions.

Table 12. Differences of Singing in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Differences	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
<p>Musical Structure</p> <p>Shows diverse musical forms while maintaining the independence of folk song styles.</p>	<p>Musical Structure</p> <p>Evolved from the narrative singing art "Maluan," gradually developing a more structured operatic style.</p>
<p>Singing Style</p> <p>Strongly influenced by folk ballads, emphasizing melodic independence.</p>	<p>Singing Style</p> <p>More structured and influenced by operatic traditions.</p>
<p>Main Scales</p> <p>Primarily uses a six-tone scale, emphasizing the perfect fifth cadence (the upper phrase ending on "1," the lower phrase ending on "5").</p>	<p>Main Scales</p> <p>Melodies are mainly based on the Pingban (level-tone) mode, which evolved into various rhythmic styles.</p>
<p>Timbre</p> <p>Divided into two branches: one with a bright and powerful tone, and the other with a softer, more delicate tone.</p>	<p>Timbre</p> <p>Generally more gentle and fluid, emphasizing storytelling and emotional expression.</p>
<p>Rhythmic Features</p> <p>Greater variation in tempo, with some passages featuring rapid-paced singing.</p>	<p>Rhythmic Features</p> <p>Primarily slow-paced and lyrical, though certain styles exhibit flexible rhythms.</p>

5.3.2.2 Comparison of Lyrics

1) Similarities

Lyrics in Zhuang Opera serve not only as a medium for storytelling but also as a crucial component of musical expression. The structure of Zhuang Opera lyrics retains characteristics of traditional Zhuang folk songs, particularly in terms of rhyme scheme and phrasing. Both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera exhibit the following lyrical similarities:

Table 13. Similarities of Lyrics in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Similarities	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
Use of "foot-waist" rhyme	
Both styles commonly use the foot-waist rhyme scheme, where the end word (foot) of one line rhymes with the mid-section (waist) of the next line. This pattern is characteristic of Zhuang folk songs and is widely adopted in Zhuang opera lyrics.	
Oral tradition influence	
Both styles inherit the characteristics of Zhuang oral literature, maintaining their narrative quality, rhythmic structure, and improvisational flexibility.	
Rhyme structure	
The basic structure typically consists of four-line stanzas, with rhymes occurring mainly in the second and fourth lines.	

2) Differences

Although both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera share common lyrical traditions, they also exhibit distinct variations in rhyme schemes and sentence structures. These differences reflect regional stylistic preferences and the impact of different performance traditions on lyrical composition.

Table 14. Differences of Lyrics in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Differences	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
Rhyme Scheme	Rhyme Scheme
Uses foot-waist rhyme, or foot-head	Uses both foot-waist and foot-foot

rhyme; the final line cannot follow a foot-foot rhyme pattern.	rhymes, with rhyme placement influenced by the singing style.
Rhyme Restrictions The last line of a stanza must not use foot-foot rhyme.	Rhyme Restrictions Foot-foot rhymes are acceptable, especially in certain fixed singing styles.
Sentence Structure Primarily four-line stanzas, with flexible word count per line.	Sentence Structure Mostly seven-character lines, though some singing styles use a five-line format.
Rhythmic Patterns in Lyrics More variation in melody and rhythm, allowing flexibility in lyrical content.	Rhythmic Patterns in Lyrics More structured rhythmic patterns, where lyrics must conform to established melodic templates.
Relationship Between Rhyme and Melody Rhyme scheme is relatively free and does not strictly follow the melodic structure.	Relationship Between Rhyme and Melody Melody determines the rhyme scheme, and different singing styles have distinct rhyme placement rules.

The comparative analysis of singing and lyrics in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera highlights both shared cultural heritage and distinctive regional characteristics. While both styles retain strong connections to Zhuang folk song traditions, Northern Zhuang Opera emphasizes melodic independence and diverse rhythmic patterns, whereas Southern Zhuang Opera exhibits a more structured and operatic approach. Similarly, while both styles employ the foot-waist rhyme scheme, Northern Zhuang Opera allows greater flexibility in rhyme placement, whereas Southern Zhuang Opera adheres more strictly to fixed melodic structures.

5.3.3 Comparison of Musical Instruments in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Zhuang Opera, an important traditional performance art of the Zhuang ethnic group, features a rich and diverse accompaniment system known as "pengmian". This

accompaniment varies in scale, from small amateur ensembles to large professional orchestras that integrate traditional Chinese and Western instruments. Despite these variations, percussion instruments remain central to setting the atmosphere and emotional tone of the performance. The distinction between Northern Zhuang Opera and Southern Zhuang Opera extends to their choice of musical instruments, which reflect regional musical traditions and cultural influences.

5.3.3.1 Similarities

Despite their differences, Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera share several common features in their instrumental accompaniment:

Table 15. Similarities of Musical Instruments in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Similarities	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
<p>Use of Bowed String Instruments</p> <p>Both styles feature Maguhu, Huluhu, and Tuhu as central bowed string instruments. These instruments have a similar playing technique to the Chinese Erhu but possess distinctive timbres due to their unique construction materials, such as horse bone, gourd, and clay.</p> <p>The Maguhu, in particular, plays a dominant role in both styles, leading the melody and shaping the opera's characteristic sound.</p>	
<p>Percussion as the Rhythmic Foundation</p> <p>Both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera emphasize percussion, typically performed by a four-person ensemble.</p> <p>Common percussion instruments include small drums, wooden fish, cymbals, and gongs, which mark rhythmic changes and enhance dramatic expression.</p> <p>In amateur performances, simplified percussion setups are used, sometimes involving actors playing small gongs.</p>	
<p>Integration of Additional Instruments</p> <p>Both styles incorporate bamboo flutes and shengna, a type of horn) for additional melodic color.</p>	

Historical adaptations have led to the inclusion of Western instruments, such as violins in professional troupes, reflecting a trend towards modernization.

5.3.3.2 Differences

The main differences between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera instruments arise from regional craftsmanship, tuning systems, and performance roles.

Table 16. Differences of Musical Instruments in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Differences	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
<p>Primary Bowed String Instruments</p> <p>Magu Hu: This distinctive instrument, crafted from horse bones, produces a bright, penetrating tone, making it the leading melodic instrument.</p> <p>Huluhu: Made from gourds, it has a softer, more delicate sound, often serving as a supporting instrument.</p> <p>Yueqin: A moon-shaped lute commonly used for harmonic accompaniment.</p>	<p>Primary Bowed String Instruments</p> <p>Qinghu: A unique bowed string instrument found only in Southern Zhuang Opera, known for its bright and piercing sound.</p> <p>Zhuhu: Functions as the principal bowed instrument, similar to the Magu Hu but with a slightly different timbre.</p> <p>Xiaosanxian: A small three-stringed instrument used for rhythmic and harmonic support.</p>
<p>Role of the Magu Hu</p> <p>In Northern Zhuang Opera, the Magu Hu serves as the primary melodic instrument and is often the highlight of the instrumental ensemble.</p>	<p>Role of the Magu Hu</p> <p>In Southern Zhuang Opera, while the Magu Hu is still used, it does not dominate the ensemble as much as in the north. Instead, the Qinghu often takes a leading role.</p>
<p>Accompaniment Style and Harmony</p>	<p>Accompaniment Style and Harmony</p>

<p>Tends to favor monophonic (single-line melody) textures, with bowed instruments leading the melodic line.</p> <p>Harmonization is less pronounced, with emphasis on strong, direct melodic expression.</p>	<p>Features a multi-part accompaniment style, creating a richer harmonic structure.</p> <p>Instruments such as the Qinghu, Zhuhu, and Xiaosanxian contribute to an ensemble sound that mimics Zhuang multi-part folk singing traditions.</p> <p>This polyphonic texture makes the Southern style more harmonically intricate compared to the Northern style.</p>
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5.3.4 Comparison of performance, costumes, and props in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

Zhuang opera, as a traditional form of drama of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi, carries a profound cultural heritage. Throughout its development, two distinct styles have emerged: the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang opera, each with unique characteristics. This paper will analyze the similarities and differences between the two styles in terms of performance, costumes, and props to better understand the artistic features of each style.

5.3.4.1 Similarities

Using Nongjia Baotie as a case study, this section explores the performance techniques, role classifications, costumes, and props in Northern Zhuang Opera. As a representative work, Nongjia Baotie provides valuable insights into the stylistic features and structural characteristics of this opera tradition.

Table 17. Similarities of performance, costumes, and props in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera.

Similarities	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
Performance	

Both styles include the four major performance elements: singing, recitation, acting, and martial arts. They also incorporate elements of Zhuang folk dance, such as the embroidery ball dance and bamboo hat dance, enriching the stage presentation.

Role Types

Both styles are influenced by the traditional Chinese theatrical role types: Sheng (male), Dan (female), Jing (painted face), and Chou (clown), with distinct roles and a variety of character traits.

Acting Techniques

Both styles emphasize the "Four Skills and Five Methods" (Four Skills: singing, reciting, acting, martial arts; Five Methods: hands, eyes, body, steps, methods), using performance techniques to express characters' emotions and personalities.

Costumes

Both styles reflect the Zhuang ethnic group's aesthetic, featuring bright colors and embroidered patterns, showcasing the unique cultural traits of the Zhuang people.

Props

Props in both styles play an important role in the performance, helping to shape character images and advancing the plot.

5.3.4.2 Differences

Table 18. Differences of performance, costumes, and props in Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera.

Differences	
Northern Style Zhuang Opera	Southern Style Zhuang Opera
<p>Performance</p> <p>The performance style is more graceful and fluid, with light and elegant steps, emphasizing the "eight-character step" to</p>	<p>Performance</p> <p>The performance style is rougher, with larger physical movements, influenced more by Zhuang puppet shows, and</p>

convey poetic beauty.	characterized by vitality and dynamism.
<p>Role Types</p> <p>Role division is more detailed, with additional categories such as the "Xiao Sheng" (young male) and "Hua Dan" (lively female), creating more complex character layers.</p>	<p>Role Types</p> <p>The role types are simpler, mainly adhering to the traditional categories of Sheng, Dan, Jing, and Chou, with a more straightforward division.</p>
<p>Acting Techniques</p> <p>Particularly focuses on hand techniques and eye expressions, such as side glances, raised eyebrows, and slanted looks, with a fine attention to detailed body and facial expressions.</p>	<p>Acting Techniques</p> <p>Emphasizes larger physical movements, using more robust actions to portray strength and power, such as T-steps and squatting movements in male roles.</p>
<p>Costumes</p> <p>Costumes are more decorative, with intricate embroidery on cuffs, collars, and waistbands, often depicting symbols like dragons, phoenixes, and Zhuang brocade. There is a clear distinction of social status through the costumes, such as officials wearing robes with "buttons" signifying rank.</p>	<p>Costumes</p> <p>Costumes are simpler and more practical, designed for characters to perform large physical movements. Female roles often wear flowing robes, while male roles, especially martial characters, wear tighter clothing to enhance dynamic effects.</p>
<p>Props</p> <p>The folding fan is a commonly used prop, with unique techniques such as "opening the fan," "flipping the fan," and "spinning the fan." Long benches are also frequently used, often incorporating acrobatic movements to enhance the stage effects.</p>	<p>Props</p> <p>Props are more symbolic, such as the magical gourd in "The Precious Gourd," which represents mysterious power and runs throughout the play. Clown characters also use props like fans and handkerchiefs in distinctive ways, often to enhance comedic effects.</p>

Northern and Southern Zhuang operas share some similarities in terms of performance, costumes, and props, yet each maintains its unique characteristics. Northern Zhuang opera emphasizes delicate, graceful performance, highlighting the decorative and hierarchical aspects of costumes, while using props flexibly. In contrast, Southern Zhuang opera focuses on robust physical expression, prioritizing practicality in costumes and using symbolic and exaggerated props. These differences reflect the regional cultural and aesthetic variations, while also enriching the overall form of Zhuang opera.

5.4 Summary

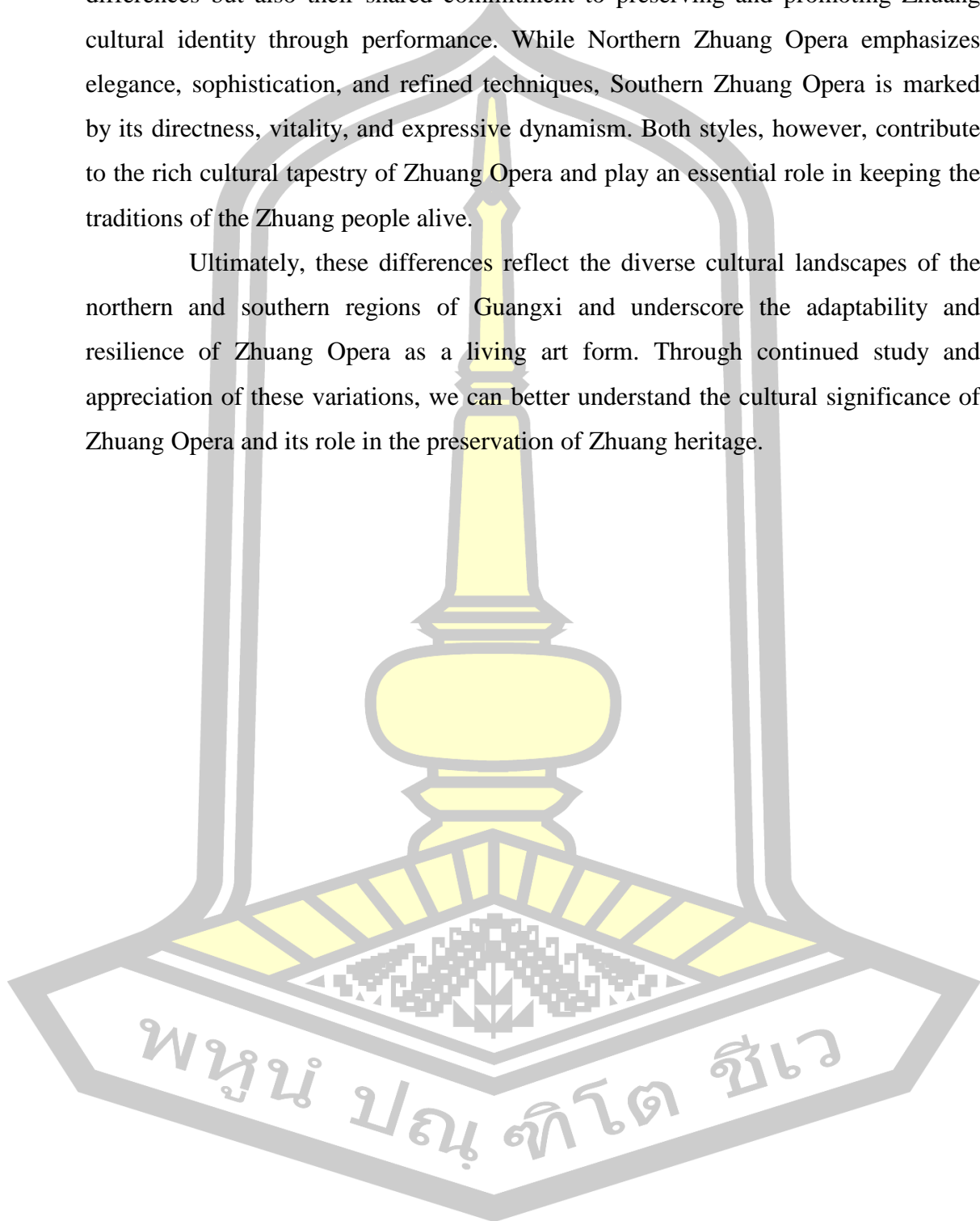
In this chapter, we have explored the distinctive features of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera, focusing on their narratives, musical elements, language, accompaniment, and performance styles. The comparison reveals both shared cultural roots and unique regional characteristics that shape these two major styles of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The Northern Zhuang Opera, exemplified by Fazbauj Vunzmbanj (Treasure Villager), is characterized by its more delicate, refined performance style, intricate singing techniques, and complex use of language and accompaniment. The northern style places significant emphasis on elegant and sophisticated performance techniques, particularly in its choreography and vocal expressions, reflecting the region's cultural appreciation for grace and artistry. The language used in this style tends to be more formal and poetic, closely aligned with the traditional Zhuang linguistic patterns.

In contrast, the Southern Zhuang Opera, represented by Baohulu (The Precious Gourd), features a more robust and dynamic performance style. The singing and language in the Southern style are often more straightforward and grounded in everyday communication, reflecting the region's cultural emphasis on simplicity and directness. The accompaniment is also more lively and energetic, complementing the physicality of the performance, which is characterized by larger, more exaggerated movements. The Southern style is deeply influenced by local folklore and is designed to engage the audience through its raw expressiveness and vibrant performances.

The comparison between the two styles demonstrates not only their regional differences but also their shared commitment to preserving and promoting Zhuang cultural identity through performance. While Northern Zhuang Opera emphasizes elegance, sophistication, and refined techniques, Southern Zhuang Opera is marked by its directness, vitality, and expressive dynamism. Both styles, however, contribute to the rich cultural tapestry of Zhuang Opera and play an essential role in keeping the traditions of the Zhuang people alive.

Ultimately, these differences reflect the diverse cultural landscapes of the northern and southern regions of Guangxi and underscore the adaptability and resilience of Zhuang Opera as a living art form. Through continued study and appreciation of these variations, we can better understand the cultural significance of Zhuang Opera and its role in the preservation of Zhuang heritage.



CHAPTER VI

THE GUIDELINES FOR THE TRANSMISSION AND PRESERVATION OF ZHUANG OPERA IN THE GUANGXI ZHUANG AUTONOMOUS REGION

This chapter proposes guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Based on interviews with key informants, the following key areas are presented:

6.1 The transmission of Zhuang opera

6.1.1 The transmission of Northern Style Zhuang Opera

6.1.2 The transmission of Southern Style Zhuang Opera

6.2 The preservation of Zhuang opera

6.2.1 The preservation of Northern Style Zhuang Opera

6.2.2 The preservation of Southern Style Zhuang Opera

6.3 The guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

6.1 The transmission of Zhuang opera

Gao min (2023) stated that traditional transmission can be broadly divided into four ways: group transmission, family transmission, social transmission, and divine transmission.

Group transmission sometimes refers to a cultural region and sometimes to an ethnic community, where a large number of community members participate in the transmission of the same category or form of intangible cultural heritage. This mode of transmission is generally associated with customs, seasonal rituals, and large-scale folk activities.

Family transmission primarily manifests in fields such as handicrafts, traditional medicine, and other specialized industries. This form of transmission occurs exclusively within family members and is rarely passed on to outsiders.

Social transmission occurs in two primary ways: through a master-apprentice system, where skills related to crafts or performing arts are directly taught; and

through informal learning, where individuals acquire knowledge and skills by frequently watching and listening to experienced artists, singers, or performers.

Divine transmission remains a relatively controversial concept, mainly observed in the transmission of epic traditions in northern regions. In this form, an individual is believed to receive artistic abilities through dreams or divine inspiration, eventually becoming a recognized local artist.

Zhuang Opera embodies the rich historical memory and cultural heritage of the Zhuang people. It carries profound cultural significance and preserves the foundational elements of Zhuang identity. As with any cultural tradition, its continuity depends on sustained transmission across generations. However, despite the existence of various transmission methods, the development of Zhuang Opera has faced challenges, particularly during periods of social instability. The reliance on traditional transmission alone has often resulted in stagnation, limiting its broader influence and development. This highlights the inherent limitations of traditional transmission methods.

Based on the classification of traditional transmission methods and supported by literature and field investigations, the author categorizes the transmission methods of Zhuang Opera into three primary types: oral transmission, singing transmission, and troupe-based community transmission. The following section will provide a detailed analysis of the traditional transmission of both Southern Style and Northern Style Zhuang Opera.

6.1.1 The transmission of Northern Style Zhuang Opera

1) Oral transmission

The main transmission method of Northern Style Zhuang Opera is consistent with that of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, which is mainly oral transmission. As discussed in Chapter 2, oral transmission has been the primary means of preserving and passing down Zhuang Opera since its inception, shaping its unique artistic characteristics and ensuring its continuity across generations. Compared with Southern Style Zhuang Opera, the transmission system of Northern Style Zhuang Opera is more complete. Each generation of inheritors enriches and recreates the singing and performance of Northern Style Zhuang Opera on the basis of

their predecessors, and makes outstanding contributions to the development and growth of Northern Style Zhuang Opera.

The definition of inheritor is: "In the process of inheriting intangible cultural heritage of important value, he represents the profound ethnic and folk cultural traditions of a certain heritage, masters outstanding techniques, skills, and is recognized as an influential person by the community, group, and ethnic group." This aligns with the cultural preservation efforts discussed in Chapter 4, where modern strategies such as government support and cultural institutions' involvement are supplementing traditional oral transmission methods. In the traditional transmission of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, the Zhuang people call these inheritors Taishi.

From the birth of Northern Style Zhuang Opera to the present, there are ten generations of Taishi. According to Huang Zhiyuan, the transmission genealogy of Northern Style Zhuang Opera from the first generation Taishi Yang Liulian is as follows:

The first generation of stage teacher Yang Liulian was born during the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty. He lived in Nadu Village, Jiuzhou, Tianlin, and was a Zhuang. He studied opera in Sichuan for two years, and then returned to Nadu. He felt that the 'platform opera' was crowded with the audience and was not as prestigious as the stage opera, so he led the Nadu singing troupe to join the 'youyuan opera troupe' on Jiuzhou Street to form the 'Longcheng Troupe'. In the 30th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1765), he set up a stage more than two meters wide on the street of Jiuzhou to perform his own play "Nongjia Bao" based on folk legends. The performance was very sensational at the time, and nearby villagers came to Longcheng Troupe to learn opera. This was the first time that Zhuang opera was performed on stage, and Yang Liulian became the first generation of "stage teacher" of Zhuang opera. Yang Liulian was from Nadu, and had a master-disciple relationship. There is a saying that "Pingtang learns Banjian, Banjian learns Yangbai, and Yangbai learns Nadu". There are six main roles in "Nong Jia Bao": Sheng, Dan, Jing, and Chou. Each role has its own performance routine, all of which are sung and recited in Beilu Zhuang dialect, which also marks the birth of Northern Style Zhuang Opera.

The second generation of the stage teacher Cen Ru was originally a singer in Yangbai Village, Jiuzhou Town. He could sing different folk songs for several consecutive days, so many people chose him and his brother Cen Zhong to rehearse the play to enrich the singing and lyrics of Zhuang Opera. After that, he followed Yang Liulian to learn opera, and later returned to Yangbai to establish a "opera song class". Most of the plays he rehearsed used the tunes of Zhuang opera folk songs for singing, such as "Double Throwing into the Red River" and "Singing Couples". These Zhuang operas have solo, duet and chorus, and the four-sentence Pingban tune is changed to the upper and lower sentence pattern, making the melody more euphemistic and the rhythm more harmonious, so people call Cen Ru "local opera singer".

The third generation of the stage teacher Cen Xiulong is the son of Cen Ru. Unlike his father, he advocates less singing and more performance when singing local opera, and pays attention to performance movements. He transplanted many plays, such as "Sending Winter Clothes at Night", "Double Nobles", "Zhu Maichen", "Mulan Joins the Army", etc. The dressing tune was compiled by Cen Xiulong, so people call him "the original master of local opera".

The fourth generation of stage master Huang Congshan felt that local opera only sang [pingdiao], which was not much different from folk songs and could not fully adapt to stage performances, so he processed and sorted out [pingdiao] and changed it to [zhengdiao]. From then on, [zhengdiao] became the main singing style of Zhuang opera. In addition, he also changed the form of one song with four sentences to two sentences. He changed the playing method of the main instrument horse bone hu to a combination of positive and negative lines. In addition, he also changed the ancient mountain songs popular in Tianlin to [buya tune], enriching the singing style of Zhuang opera. He also went to other towns and villages in Tianlin County and Funing County in Yunnan many times to spread his art, which played an important role in the spread of Zhuang opera. In memory of him, people call him "the pioneer of local opera".

The fifth generation of the Taishi Yang Lian is a descendant of Yang Liulian. When he was young, he studied Tuxi opera under Huang Congshan. During the learning process, he loved Ma Gu Hu and could play and sing by himself. It is said

that Yang Lian was a Taoist priest who often sang Zhuang opera to pray for the gods to bless the villagers, so he was respected by the villagers. In order to increase the repertoire of Tuxi opera, he personally went to Nanning to buy folk novels to write plays, and transplanted and adapted "The Second Plum Blossom", "Renzong Recognizes His Mother", "Five Sons Pay Homage", "Bao Gong's Strange Case", etc. These plays were performed in Yangbai, Jiuzhou, and Nadu successively, and received people's praise. Therefore, people from all over the country invited him to sing and teach opera, and people called him the "ancestor" of Tuxi opera.

The sixth generation of the Taishi Liao Falun loved Tuxi opera since he was a child. When he was eight years old, he secretly read and copied Tuxi opera scripts when he was studying in a library. At the age of fifteen, he became a master of both opera and Taoism. It is said that he was very good at worshipping gods, and people called him "Living Buddha". He can write and direct plays. Because he loves martial arts, he likes to create fighting plays. He has written, directed and starred in "Nong Zhigao", "Double Fighting the Southern Snake Spirit", etc. He has also transplanted and adapted plays such as "Mulan Joins the Army", "Xue Rengui's Expedition to the East", "Three Visits to the Southern Tang", and "Xue Dingshan's Expedition to the West". He once created [Killing Chicken Tune], which became a common tune in local opera. Throughout his life, he made many achievements in the development of local opera and taught many apprentices, so he was hailed as the "Master of Local Opera".

The seventh generation of Taiwanese master "Tu Feihou" Huang Yonggui, studied in a private school at the age of eight. He loved local opera since he was a child. He once worshipped Liao Falun as his teacher, studying during the day and learning opera at night. In the second year of Guangxu in the Qing Dynasty, he went to Nanning to take the exam, but decided to give up the exam and learn opera. He studied Cantonese opera for three years, studied hard, and returned to Tianlin, bringing back 64 scripts. He absorbed the essence of Cantonese opera, reformed Zhuang opera, adjusted the stage steps, improved the performance skills, and was invited to perform in Baise, Leli, Jiuzhou, Longlin and other places. He also went to Ceheng and Anlong in Guizhou Province to perform. He fully absorbed the essence of Cantonese opera, added [shouting board], [angry tune], [king tune] singing, and added

yangqin, suona, drum, and gong as accompaniment instruments. He boldly absorbed and integrated other opera forms, which greatly enriched the singing and performance of Zhuang opera. People called him "all-round teacher".

The eighth generation of stage teacher Huang Fuxiang is the third son of Huang Yonggui. He followed his father to learn art since he was a child. He started to perform on stage at the age of 16 and showed his talent in various local opera troupes. He is good at playing both male and female roles, and is good at both civil and military affairs. He has played Hua Mulan, Mu Guiying, Fan Lihua, etc., and has the reputation of "Fan Lihua Reincarnation". He has loved calligraphy and painting since he was a child. He once learned opera costumes and standardized the style of costumes. He has been in the art world for more than 40 years. In addition to acting, he is also good at directing. He has taught in more than 20 classes in Tianlin, Baise, Funing, Yunnan, etc., and has made great contributions to the popularization and development of Zhuang Opera. People call him "teacher" or "teacher". The ninth generation of the stage teacher Huang Fangsheng, the son of Huang Fuxiang, and the grandson of the seventh generation of the artist Huang Yonggui, among the ten generations of artists in Northern Style Zhuang Opera, there is a legend that "three generations of artists come from one family", which refers to the three generations of descendants of their family. At the age of 21, he really began to learn from his father. In addition to the young male and the young female, he could play all other roles in the play, especially the clown and the shopkeeper. At that time, in addition to performing in Bentun, he also performed in Bagui, Huayuan, Bantu, Lingtun, Xiaolan (now Liulong Town was part of Bagui Township at that time) and Nongdu in Lucheng Township. After the reform and opening up, in the early 1980s, he personally established a new troupe and began to teach art. He could teach drama, martial arts and musical instruments, and draw costumes and props. He went to Bamu, Gongyang, Xiaolan, Lingtun and other places in his hometown to preach. He went to Nashao, Yunnan Province for two consecutive years to teach art, each time for half a year. The plays he rehearsed were all transplanted and written from storybooks, including "Tian Zijin", "Guanyin Hall Meeting Mother", "Woman Selling Man", "One Flower", "Three Wives and Two Champions", "Three Night Pearls" and so on. He was awarded the title of "Successor Master" of the ninth generation of art teachers.

The tenth generation of stage master Bi Kejian, he loved Zhuang opera since he was a child. He learned to play the gourd hu from his father at the age of 8, went on stage to accompany at the age of 9, learned to perform at the age of 10, and studied art under Huang Fuxiang at the age of 12. In order to inherit the artistic heritage of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, in addition to learning from teacher Huang Fuxiang, he also paid his own way to visit old artists in Jiuzhou, Bagui, Badu, Ding'an, and Bantao in Tianlin County; Shali, Zhelang in Longlin County, and Nalao in Xilin County, and learned a lot of repertoires and performing arts, and mastered the transmission history of successive artists, providing reliable materials for studying the origin of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. He can write, direct, sing, dance, act, and play. He is proficient in Sheng, Dan, Wu, and Chou. Due to his certain achievements in art, Bi Kejian was absorbed by Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe as an actor and musician in 1960. Later, when teacher Huang Fuxiang learned about it, considering that there was no successor to Zhuang Opera, he asked him to return to his hometown to teach Zhuang Opera. So Bi Kejian did not hesitate to bid farewell to Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe and returned to Tianlin to concentrate on acting and teaching. Bi Kejian concentrated on researching and developing a lot of Zhuang Opera music. Northern Style Zhuang Opera originally had only nine singing styles. That is, the big pass, dressing tune, main tune, chicken-killing tune, tooth-buying tune, eight immortals tune, hall tune, shouting board, angry board, etc. The tune is relatively simple. Bi Kejian innovated on this basis, adding the original singing method of the main tune to the main tune continuous board, main tune middle board, main tune reverse board, main tune high board, main tune slow board, etc. In terms of interlude music, the night touch tune and the second pass (cold stage tune) were newly compiled. In terms of dance music, the flower picking tune, the December flower tune, the Taiping song, the sister music, the peony tune, the New Year celebration, the toast song, the happy tune, the music tune, etc. were created. The number of tunes increased from the traditional 9 to 36. The music of Northern Style Zhuang Opera is richer, with literary tunes, martial arts tunes, music tunes, and sad tunes. The stage atmosphere and artistic appeal are enhanced. Over the years, Bi Kejian created and adapted more than 30 plays, including "The Clam Girl", "Tian Zijin", "The Story of the Two Nails", "The Engagement in the Garden", and "Bai Meilian", making positive

contributions to the transmission and development of the Northern Zhuang Opera. For decades, Bi Kejian has gone through many hardships and worked hard to spread the Northern Zhuang Opera. He has been running around in the narrow paths of the countryside for many years to spread the Zhuang Opera. He has successively spread the Zhuang Opera to 33 troupes in three provinces, including Aishan and Baida in Tianlin; Tangxing and Wangxun in Baise; Changshe in Yunnan Province; and Yangba in Guizhou Province. There are many flags and plaques presented by troupes from all over the country. The silk banner presented by the Changshe Troupe in Yunnan Province reads: "The fragrant flowers of the Gui land first bloomed in Yunnan", and the silk banner presented by Yangba in Guizhou Province reads "Cultivating the sea of art, and the peaches and plums are fragrant". People call him "the new teacher of Zhuang Opera".

2) Transmission of singing style and tune patterns

The singing style of Northern Style Zhuang Opera mainly originates from [Jiuzhou folk songs]; [Hey Ya tune] originates from [Napo folk songs]. Because their word patterns, structures, sentence patterns, scales, and modes are very similar.



Figure 34. Zhuang Opera Folk Song "Jiuzhou folk Song"

Source: Chen Wenying

The medium-tempo singing styles evolved from the main tune include Shali Tune, Wugong Tune, Laohan Tune, etc. They still maintain the starting, transition and ending of the main tune, but the rhythm is tightened. Some omit the transition, and some omit the singing style.



Figure 35. Bainiaoyi - Yili melody
Source: Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe

The medium-tempo singing style then evolved into the fast-tempo style, including [Maban], [Henban], etc., which are rhythmic forms with no details, mostly one word and one tone, and the upper and lower sentences constitute a paragraph. It is still the main tune, but the rhythm is compressed, and it is mostly used when the emotions are excited.

From the fast-paced style, it developed into the free-paced style, including [crying tune], [sad tune], etc. The lyrics are still five-character sentences, with a crying head and then the main part of the song. It has a strong narrative nature, free rhythm, and is often used to express grief and excitement.

The development of Northern Style Zhuang Opera singing style basically possesses all kinds of opera music styles, and its structure gradually tends to change, but it still retains more folk song colors and has a more obvious independence.

3) Transmission of troupes

The main performing units of Northern Style Zhuang Opera are folk troupes scattered around. These folk troupes were originally called "opera troupes". Troupes in different places were named with different characters because of the different masters. The troupe passed down by the fourth-generation master Huang Congshan was named "Long", the troupe passed down by the sixth-generation master Yang Lian was named "Tong", and the troupe passed down by the seventh-generation

master Huang Yonggui was named "He". However, with the development of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, troupes were built in various places, and the names of the troupes were not as particular as they were in the beginning. Most of them were decided by the troupe owner, sometimes named after the local place name, and sometimes named after the troupe owner's personal preferences, which made the names of the troupes tend to be diversified. This reflects the regional influence on the naming of troupes, which is closely tied to the study of the current state of Zhuang opera in the second chapter of this dissertation. The following is a basic table of five troupes.

Many of the owners of these five troupes are stage masters of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, and they will appear repeatedly in several different troupes. It is too simple to simply call these artists the troupe owners. In my opinion, they are not only troupe owners, but also teachers and masters of these troupes. They often set up a troupe in a place to teach opera. When the troupe can perform independently and has a certain level, they will entrust the troupe to others and go to other places to set up troupes to teach opera. For example, the first generation of artist Yang Liulian was the first generation of troupe owners of Jiuzhou Longcheng Troupe (1976) and Pingxie Tongyi Troupe (time unknown). In fact, he first led the bench opera troupe in Nadu and the Youyuanxi troupe in Jiuzhou to establish the "Longcheng Troupe" in Jiuzhou, and he was the main editor and star. The performance of the Longcheng Troupe was welcomed by the masses, and attracted people from all over the country to Jiuzhou to find Yang Liulian to learn opera. Later, he handed over the Longcheng Troupe to Zhu Shengming, and returned to his hometown Nadu to establish the Tongyi Troupe and continue to teach opera. The names of the troupe owners in the Tongle Troupe in Table 500 are two people. According to the recollections of Lu Ruiye and Luo Huanfeng, two old artists who were the fifth and sixth generation owners of Tongleban, Tongleban was founded by Huang Butian, a businessman from Baida, who organized three local boxing classes and accompaniment classes to learn opera in the tenth year of Tongzhi. In order to commemorate the fact that they started learning opera during the Tongzhi period, they named it "Tongleban" and the owner was Huang Butian. When Tongleban was passed to the third generation Bi Bixi, because Bi Bixi was a scholar in the imperial examination, he transplanted many

stories of the Han nationality. It is said that Tongleban could perform operas for 49 consecutive days without repeating them. However, Bi Bixi was only a scholar. He could transplant operas, but he was not familiar with the performance skills of Northern Style Zhuang Opera, which led to the low performance level of the opera troupe. So Bi Bixi invited Huang Yonggui, an artist of the same generation, to teach opera in Tongleban during the Guangxu period. With good performance skills and a large number of operas, the operas of Tongleban were performed more outstandingly. In this way, to be more precise, one of the two people in the "Owner's Name" column in the table is the real owner of the troupe, and the other is the teacher who teaches opera. Calling the master who teaches opera the troupe owner is not only a respect for these masters who teach Zhuang opera, but also to some extent shows that the troupe has an excellent performance tradition. In the names of the troupe owners of Tongyi troupe in Table 3, we can see the development process of the troupe from the first generation to the seventh generation of the troupe owners of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. According to Ding'an artist Li Gong Risong, Tongyi troupe was originally Ding'an Street troupe, which was organized and preached by Liao Falun during the Tongzhi period. Later, Ding'an local opera activities were neglected, and Pingxie troupe inherited the name of Tongyi troupe. Although Pingxie also invited Huang Yonggui to teach opera, the name of the troupe remained unchanged. According to this artist, Tongyi troupe existed originally, and Liao Falun and Huang Yonggui had taught opera to this troupe respectively. It can be seen that among the troupe owners of Tongyi troupe in the table, at least before the seventh generation, these people were probably just masters who came to the troupe to teach opera, and the real troupe owner may not be known now. Sometimes people always consciously or unconsciously put their subjective wishes into reality. Maybe it was just a beautiful idea at first, but as time goes by, people gradually turn these wishes into real events and tell them to future generations, so that the transmission order of the troupe owner is consistent with the transmission order of the Northern Style Zhuang Opera stage teacher.

The above are all about some troupes with a long history. At that time, the troupes were professional in nature. They needed to ask for a certain amount of remuneration from the inviting party when performing. In addition, the actors in the

troupe had also undergone special training, were familiar with the performance process, and had their own expertise. The troupe was commercial in nature. After liberation, the original troupe had been in pieces after the impact of the war. The troupes built at this time were amateur troupes formed by farmers according to their own hobbies. They only invited old Zhuang opera artists to coach them during rehearsal. The purpose of the performance has changed a lot. The previous troupe performed to obtain certain economic benefits. Now the performance is a way of self-entertainment. Through performances, they satisfy the people's desire to watch Northern Style Zhuang Opera and get spiritual satisfaction.

Before being listed as "intangible cultural heritage", the southern and northern Zhuang operas were inherited in the above-mentioned traditional way. They experienced a period of prosperity, and entered a period of stagnation from the May Fourth Movement in 1919 to the liberation in 1949. There was a brief recovery from the liberation in 1949 to the "Cultural Revolution" in 1966, but it entered a trough period after the "Cultural Revolution" until 2006. Although Zhuang opera was still circulated among the Zhuang people during this period, it no longer had the vitality of the early period.

Before Zhuang opera was listed as "intangible cultural heritage", most performances were spontaneous behaviors of the Zhuang people. During the slack season, Zhuang opera became their way of entertainment, but if the farming season was busy, the development of the Zhuang people was stranded. At the same time, due to the limitations of social development and economic conditions at that time, people's pursuit of cultural life was not like it is now, and people's aesthetic vision was still very limited at that time, and the transmission and development of Zhuang opera was not standardized. The transmission of Zhuang opera was not a national act at that time, but a matter for some people who were professionally engaged in Zhuang opera. If the work of these disseminators stopped, the development of Zhuang opera would stagnate. Therefore, this traditional way of transmission has great limitations and cannot meet the needs of the times.

At this time, the concept of intangible cultural heritage came into being, which also brought new vitality to the development of Zhuang opera. After it was included in the "intangible cultural heritage" list, Zhuang opera regained its vitality.

The following author will explain the development of Zhuang opera under the protection of "intangible cultural heritage".

6.1.2 The transmission of the Southern Style Zhuang Opera

1) Oral teaching

The Southern Style Zhuang Opera was produced in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, and the intelligent Zhuang people combined the opera art from the Central Plains, the Zhuang rap and the folk tune, and gradually formed the unique Jingxi "Ya Hi" puppet show with Zhuang characteristics.

According to Kuang Huaiyin of Debao County, the organization of the Southern Style Zhuang Opera was Huang Xianjiong (1799-1864), a native of Tianbao County, Zhen'an Prefecture (now Debao), who served as a soldier in Guangdong when he was young and then studied opera locally and resigned from work in the 25th year of Guangxu (1864) to return to his hometown. After Huang Xianjiong settled in Majia, he organized local artists to imitate the form of puppet shows, singing local folk songs and doing music. The master sat in the tent, sang while beating the wooden fish made of bamboo tubes, and the actors performed the movements according to the content sung by the master in front of the stage. After the Xinhai Revolution, it gradually developed into a form of singing and doing, which is now the Nanlu Zhuangju, which was called "Tu Opera" at that time. Huang Xianjiong died in Tianbao County in his later years, and every time he came to Debao to perform the Southern Style Zhuang Opera Zhuangju troupe, he would go to his tomb to worship, which was the well-known local "drama champion" tomb. There are five generations of representative artists in the development of Southern Style Zhuang Opera to the present:

From the early days of liberation to the "Cultural Revolution" is an important period of development, during this period, the Southern Style Zhuang Opera from the countryside to the city, from the Zhuang Township to Beijing, which is inseparable from the contribution of the representative artists at that time, these artists played a role in connecting the past and the future.

Huang Dengwei (1920-1976) was a native of Dawantun, Jingxi County. Born into a family of puppeteers, his father was a well-known puppeteer, and at the age of 17, he officially followed his father to learn puppetry. Huang Dengwei is

proficient in English characters and Nanzhuang local characters, and when singing, he inherits his father's repertoire while adapting new plays based on folk tales, myths and legends. In that year, the spectacular drama "Orangutan Grandmother" written by him won the first performance award in the province. In 1957, he adapted the folk legend "Red Copper Drum" for the establishment of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which is also one of the excellent repertoire of Nanli Zhuang Opera. He has participated in the adaptation of many excellent plays such as "Bird's Clothes" and "Nong Zhigao". At the same time, he is also an excellent actor of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, known for his net angle, and his specialty in acting Zhuang Opera is his good face and vivid expression. In addition to his contributions to the performance and creation of Zhuang opera, Huang Dengwei has also done a lot of work for the transmission of Zhuang opera. In 1954, Huang Dengwei jointly established an amateur Zhuang Opera Troupe in Xinjing Town and Jipo Village, and in 1955, he participated in the formation of a semi-professional Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. He passed on the performance skills he had mastered to the amateur Zhuang Opera Team and the actors of the Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe he founded, and at the same time passed on the experience he had summarized over the years in the creation of Zhuang Opera to his screenwriters, cultivating a group of talent for the performance of Zhuang Opera screenwriters. In 1976, he unfortunately passed away, and his life made immortal contributions to the development of the drama.

Zhao Mengbo (1920-1975) was a native of Du'an Township, Debao County, and studied at the age of 15 with a puppet show master surnamed Huang in Du'an. Three years later, he graduated from the school, wrote and acted by himself, and sang puppet shows in Debao and Jingxi with his good voice. In 1954, he participated in the mass amateur art performance in Guixi Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture, participated in the creation and performance of the spectacular drama "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)", and won the Outstanding Actor Award. In 1955, he participated in the national mass amateur music and dance observation performance and won the Outstanding Program Award. In 1956, the Debao Zhuang Troupe was founded, and he was elected as the deputy director and engaged in playwriting. The scripts transplanted and translated in cooperation with Huang Dengwei include "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)", "Erdu Mei", "The Legend of the White Snake",

"Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", "Peacock Flying Southeast", "Qing Xianglian", "Pipa Story" and so on. The little students, old students, ugly students, flower faces, and Cai Dan he plays are very distinctive, and his performance is characterized by free and generous, and his movements are refined and beautiful. Zhao Mengbo and Huang Dengwei are both founders of Jingxi Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe, and while creating together with Huang Dengwei, they have cultivated a group of performing talents for Zhuang Opera, and Zhang Qinyin, the current inheritor of Zhuang Opera on South Road, has studied with him.

Nong Zhengfeng (1923-1985) was born in Dong'an Street, Debao County, Guangxi, and studied Yong Opera and Cantonese Opera with his father at the age of 15. In 1951, when he was the chairman of the street government, he supported the Dong'an Street amateur drama team to rehearse a spectacular play, and for the first time adapted "Wang Gui and Li Xiangxiang" based on the comic strip, he played the role of Wang Gui. In 1955, he participated in the performance of "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)" in Jinjing and won the Outstanding Performance Award. He is good at playing Wensheng, Chousheng, and Lao Sheng, and he has participated in hundreds of roles such as "Liang Shanbo also Zhu Yingtai" as Liang Shanbo, the drunkard in "Red Copper Drum", the old man in "Honghu Red Guards", and the master in "Bird's Clothes". Since the establishment of the Debao Zhuang Theatre Company, he has served as the deputy director and participated in the playwriting and directing. Nong Zhengfeng's acting skills have influenced a large number of Zhuang opera actors, and many famous actors in the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe have received his acting guidance in the 70s and 80s.

Zhang Qinyin, female, born in August 1933 in Debao County, Guangxi, participated in the county's amateur opera troupe in 1951, participated in the national amateur music and dance performance in 1955, and participated in "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)", "Shrimp Dance", won the Outstanding Program Award. In 1956, she played the leading role of "Picking Up Pig Vegetables" and won the Outstanding Actor Award, and played the heroine in important dramas such as "Red Copper Drum", "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)", "Rose", "Qin Xianglian", "Dou E's Injustice", "The Legend of the White Snake", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", and was the deputy head of Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe, deputy head of Guangxi

Zhuang Opera Troupe, and is now the national inheritor of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. Now 80 years old, Grandma Zhang is a kind grandmother, and we can often see Grandma Zhang in the rehearsal space and courtyard of the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. "Grandma's biggest hope is that the Nanlu drama can be loved by more people and better passed on."

2) Transmission of singing songs

The music of Southern Style Zhuang Opera is developed on the basis of the rap "Mo Lun" combined with local folk songs and puppet shows, and gradually formed a [Pingban plate] as the main body, through the change of speed, rhythm and melody, and gradually developed into a plate variation.

Zhuang Molun has Debao County, Jingxi County, Shangxiajia, etc., Molun basically maintains the local folk song style, and sometimes uses folk songs directly in Zhuang opera singing,

ai

faen mingz moiz nyaemx tai meuz bauq youb dang tangz, nyaengz yax
It was you who crushed the cat to death. And you

gaeu aeu moiz yemi vangj, geil goeng caiz cawj haet saem ndaez, song dolq
said I wronged you To day, Mr. Jia is kind. He can

moiz goi kae yenz lieng, ciz rangh moiz gyangj
fi nal ly for give you this time If you don't want

boh (ya) sate boiz ngaenz, gaen coux
to com - pen - sate

Figure 36. "Ya si baomao zai dang tang" segment melody

Source: Research on Zhuang Opera Art

The adagio singing voices of the Southern Style Zhuang Opera include [Pingban Plate], [Ping Gao], [Sigh] and so on. The melody, tonality, syntax, and format of these singing voices are very similar, and these singing voices are all

developed from [Pingban plate], and the speed of the exclamation is slower, the rhythm is more stretched, and the melody is more delicate, and some add flower notes to the melody to strengthen its lyricism. The singing and tone narrative of the adagio class is mainly in the Southern Style Zhuang Operadrama, which occupies a major position.



Figure 37. "Jinhua Yinhua" segment melody

Source: Zhuang Opera Art and the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The singing voice has developed from the slow board class to the middle board class, with [flower picking tune], [happy tune], etc., which is also developed from [Ping ban](平板). Except for the last sentence when closing the sentence with "Ya Ha Hi", the others are the same as [Ping ban](平板), and the other sentences are all sounded on the "re", with fewer intervals in between.



Figure 38. "Bai Niaoyi" Singing segment melody

Source: Zhuang Opera Art and the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage

From [Flower Picking Tune] and [Joy Tune] to evolve again, forming [High Tune], [Fast Joy Tune] and other Allegro singing tones, tightening the melody and speeding up, this kind of tune is a rhythmic form with a plate without eyes, and

every beat hits the board, and the speed is faster. The structure is still in the upper and lower sentences, and the previous sentence is often repeated. The passage is shortened, the melody is reduced, and the colloquialism is strengthened, and it is more recitative.

From the Allegro singing voice, it has evolved into [Crying Tune], [Cold Tune], [Poetry Tune], [Sweeping Board], [Thinking Tone], etc., with a strong narrative, and more painful and excited emotions.

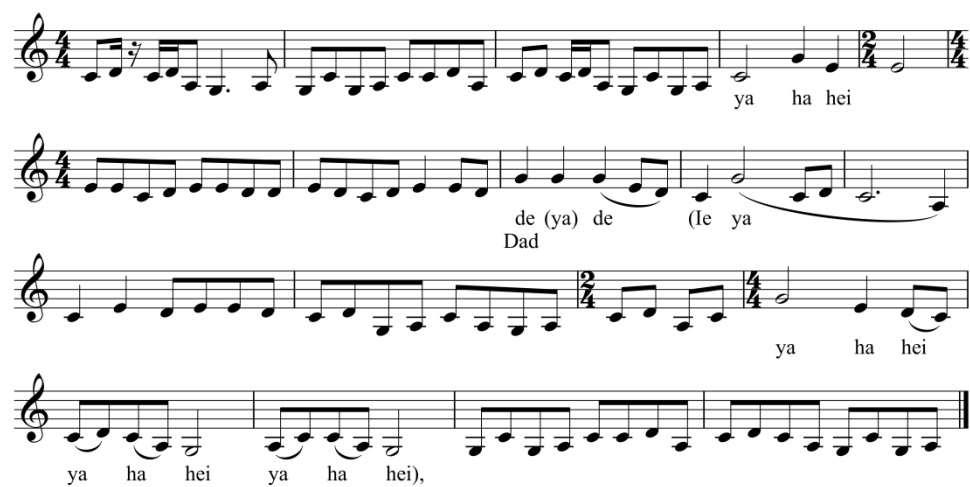


Figure 39. “Jinhua Yin” huasegment melody

Source: Zhuang Opera Art and the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Judging from the plate style of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, the adagio, medium and allegro are extended from the Pingban plate, which has the rhythm form of the board eye that opera music should have, and has a relatively rich expressiveness in singing.

3) Class transmission

The performance troupe is a product of the development of the genre. In the early days of Zhuang opera, the class club was mostly amateur, usually based on the village as a unit, named after words with the meaning of colleagues, concentric, and moral, the largest class had 50 or 60 people, and the smallest class had more than 20 people, and there was generally a class owner, who was responsible for all the affairs of the class. In the class, a master or a well-known actor is responsible for

directing, rehearsing, choreographing, and performing. The cast configuration mainly includes 10 raw corners, 5 Danjiao characters, two flower noodles, and two clowns. The band's Southern Style Zhuang Opera uses Qinghu, Tuhu, and Xiaosanxian as the main instruments.

In Jingxi, the troupe and even the current troupe are all initiated by the village who are enthusiastic about the grand opera or the highly respected grand opera lovers, and the funds are also raised by themselves. In the early days, the class hired a master to teach orally, and the apprentice was responsible for his own food, and the master generally did not receive remuneration. The name of the class society, in order to inherit and succeed people, is not easy to change, such as the restoration class in Nalao Township, Xilin County, from its establishment to the present. Each class is passed down from generation to generation, and now the older class has nearly ten generations of teachers.

The first troupe of Southern Style Zhuang Opera was established in the Tiandong Jiangcheng Native Opera Troupe in the third year of Guangxu, and the class owner was Huang Xiwen. Huang Xiwen once studied opera in Ma Zhang, and later returned to Jiangcheng to convene people and horses to form an opera troupe, and hired Ma Zhu as a master to teach opera. Later, Ma Jia also invited the Jiangcheng local opera troupe to perform, and there were frequent contacts between the two places in the future, which promoted the exchange of local opera. Now Jiangcheng still has the "Spiritual Seat of Huang Xiwen Patriarch", and an incense burner is set up to burn incense to commemorate this old artist. Starting from Huang Xiwen, there are five generations of Jiangcheng local opera troupes. Starting from the first generation of Huang Xiwen; the second generation is Huang Huaiqing, Huang Qinghe, and Huang Huaibang; The third generation is Huang Zhiju, Lu Zhenying, Huang Zhiying, Huang Huanzhang, etc.; The fourth generation is Huang Qingye, Huang Changxian, Huang Jinhan, etc.; The fifth generation is Huang Huantao, Zou Gengmin, Huang Shengsan, Huang Bingkun, etc. The main singing voice is [Ma Ji tune], [Pingban plate], [happy tune], [crying tune], [sigh tune], and the main performance repertoire is: "Qin Xianglian", "Peacock Flying Southeast", "Forcing Liangshan" and so on.

In addition, in the 11th year of Guangxu, the Zhuang Opera Troupe established by Jingxi puppet masters Wei Gongxian and Li Guaxuan is also more

famous. At the beginning of the performance, people were used instead of puppets, and the puppeteers sang backstage and the actors played in the foreground. The singing and performance are all according to the puppet show. Before and after the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, the opera troupe passed to the second generation of masters Nong Shoushan, Li Daxin, Wei Yehuan, etc., and its performance methods were improved. At this stage, it has developed into self-singing and self-doing, and the actor is no longer a puppeteer. From 1920 to 1930, the troupe was invited to perform in Tianbao County, Xinxing County, Yuewei County, and Siming County. The performance was loved by people everywhere. The repertoire mainly includes "Rui Niang Thief Order" and so on.

During the Anti-Japanese War, due to social turmoil, most of the classes were dying. However, with the liberation of New China and the revival of the spectacular drama, the class community began to gradually regain its vitality. In the early days of liberation, the Zhuang Opera Troupe was all amateur troupes in the rural areas, with flexible and diverse forms, singing and enjoying themselves, and bringing fun to the people's lives during the slack time.

In 1950, with the implementation of the government's "Instructions on the Reform of English Opera", a small number of troupes appeared, specializing in rehearsing "liberation opera", the most influential of which was the Dong'an Street Amateur Opera Troupe organized by Dong'an Street in Debao County, which cooperated with the political movement at that time and performed the Nanlu Opera "Red Leaf River", "History of Blood and Tears", "Wang Gui and Li Xiangxiang", etc., which played a positive role in uniting the people.

In addition, at the same time, Jingxi County combined Xinjinglian Street and Majipo Village to form a grand opera team. Subsequently, Ande, Bameng, Xintan, Longlin, Wuping, Guolao, Linghuai, Universiade and other villages and towns successively set up Zhuang Opera Troupes, and the repertoire of performances mainly included "The Legend of the White Snake", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai" and so on.

In addition to amateur troupes, the first professional Zhuang opera troupe appeared in 1956. The Debao Dong'an Street Amateur Zhuang Opera Troupe was semi-professionalized and then became a local state-owned professional troupe, and

was officially renamed the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe. In 1955, the team's "Bao Hulu", adapted from Zhuang folk tales, won the Outstanding Program Award at the National Mass Amateur Music and Dance Observation and Performance. During their stay in Beijing, they also performed at Tianqiao Theater, Mass Theater, and the Central Academy of Drama. After returning to Guangxi, they performed in Guilin, Liuzhou, Nanning, Baise and other places, and received unanimous praise. In 1956, a semi-professional troupe was established with the support of the county party committee. In 1957, the Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe and the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe were merged and named the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe. A large number of classic repertoires have been rehearsed, such as "Bao Hulu", "Red Bronze Drum", "Lu Wenlong's Counterattack", "Qin Xianglian", "The Second Plum Blossom", etc.

Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe, founded in November 1959, was formerly the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe. In February 1959, the Autonomous Region Cultural Bureau decided to develop the cause of ethnic minority operas, and mobilized professional and amateur Zhuang opera actors from Jingxi, Debao, Longlin, Xilin and other places to rehearse. Later, they returned to Baise to organize the Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe, which was the only professional Zhuang opera group in the autonomous region at that time, mainly rehearsing Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

In April 1965, it developed into the current Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. The predecessor of the troupe was the Debao Zhuang Opera Troupe. After its establishment, the troupe was moved to the capital Nanning under the care of the Autonomous Region Committee and the People's Government. Wei Guoqing, then Secretary of the Autonomous Region Party Committee and Chairman of the People's Government, had watched Zhuang opera performances many times and instructed that they should practice basic skills, serve the society, be based in Guangxi, and face Southeast Asia. In April 1982, Tan Yingji, then Secretary of the Communist Party of China Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Party Committee and Chairman of the Autonomous Region People's Government, also held a work report meeting on Zhuang opera creation, subject matter, form, language, costumes and service objects. After the meeting, the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Guangxi Autonomous Region Committee issued a meeting minutes in the form of a

document, pointing out that Zhuang opera must have the national characteristics of our ancestors from both content to form.

These professional and amateur troupes have continued to develop to the present day, experiencing the smashing of the "Gang of Four", the Cultural Revolution, and reform and opening up, and have played an important role in enriching the cultural life of the Zhuang people.

6.2 The preservation of Zhuang opera

After being listed as a national intangible cultural heritage, Zhuang opera has also achieved unprecedented development, and its protection work has received attention from governments at all levels, art groups and performers. The transmission unit of Zhuang opera is mainly in the Cultural Department of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Among them, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center and the Art Creation Research Institute play an important role in the protection of Zhuang opera. According to Gao Min (2023), Zhuang opera is a kind of opera deeply loved by the Zhuang people. What we have been doing is to return the opera to the people. While protecting the art form of Zhuang opera, we also protect its survival soil. Guangxi is the hub of my country's ASEAN trade and a channel for exchanges between the southwest region and foreign countries. Over the years, while the economy has been developing rapidly, it has also paid great attention to cultural transmission, providing a good soil for the survival and development of Zhuang opera.

However, as analyzed in Chapter 4, there are significant regional differences in the protection of Zhuang Opera, particularly in the south and north. There are still big differences in the protection of Zhuang Opera in the south and north. The transmission base of Zhuang Opera in the south is Jingxi County, and the transmission base of Zhuang Opera in the north is Tianlin County. Both places have made a lot of work in the protection of Zhuang Opera. In addition, the national transmission base of Zhuang Opera - Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe, which is also the only state-owned troupe of Zhuang Opera, also plays an important role in the transmission and protection of Zhuang Opera. From 2023 to 2024, the author went to Jingxi County and Tianlin County respectively to conduct field research on the protection of Zhuang

Opera in the local area. The following author will classify and sort out the protection measures of Zhuang Opera in the Southern and northern.

6.2.1 The preservation of Northern Style Zhuang Opera

1) Protection of inheritors

Bi Kejian (2024) stated that he is a national inheritor of Zhuang Opera and the tenth generation "stage master" of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. He has enriched and reformed the singing, stage performance and accompaniment of Zhuang Opera, making Zhuang Opera more popular among the Zhuang people. As a national inheritor, he is still active on the Zhuang Opera stage and is known as the "new master" of Zhuang Opera. Bi Kejian once said that Northern Style Zhuang Opera has only 9 tunes handed down from ancient times, all of which are relatively simple scores. After becoming the tenth generation inheritor, Bi Kejian innovated Northern Style Zhuang Opera. He did not know the score at first, but he taught himself the simple score and developed Northern Style Zhuang Opera to more than 40 tunes today. As analyzed in Chapter 4, this innovation is part of the broader efforts to modernize and preserve the traditions of Zhuang Opera. In order to change the traditional drawbacks of Northern Style Zhuang Opera being passed down by word of mouth by old artists, which is not conducive to promotion and teaching, Bi Kejian also published all the more than 40 Northern Style Zhuang Opera tunes and published a book "Northern Style Zhuang Opera Ancient and Modern Music Collection". Northern Style Zhuang Opera troupes in Guangxi, Yunnan and Guizhou all use this book as a textbook. In addition, Bi Kejian also saw the problem that the martial arts in traditional Northern Style Zhuang Opera lacked difficult movements and had weak stage effects. He adopted the method of "going out", went to other places to watch performances of other schools, and asked old artists of other operas such as Cantonese opera for experience, and reformed the martial arts of Zhuang opera. It was Bi Kejian's series of innovative actions that won him the title of "new teacher". And Northern Style Zhuang Opera, an ancient opera, has also ushered in new development under his continuous efforts and innovation. After becoming a national inheritor, Bi Kejian changed his focus on transmission. Before, he mainly focused on the reform and creation of Zhuang opera, but now he is really doing the work of a "inheritor", taking it as his responsibility to teach and spread Zhuang opera. He has visited

Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou and other places where Zhuang opera is popular many times to provide guidance for young Zhuang opera actors. At the same time, he was hired as the honorary principal of Northern Style Zhuang Opera Art School, making his own contribution to cultivating more Zhuang opera actors and creators.

Huang Zhiyuan is the son of the eighth-generation inheritor of Zhuang opera. He has learned Zhuang opera from his father since he was a child. He is now an art researcher at Tianlin County Cultural Center, mainly engaged in the research and creation of Zhuang opera. When I was collecting folk songs in Tianlin, I was fortunate to meet this hospitable Zhuang opera teacher. When I entered his office, he was still busy with the creation of Zhuang opera. During the interview, he told the author: "Zhuang opera is the spiritual food of the Zhuang people. In our Tianlin, everyone loves Zhuang opera and sings Zhuang opera." Now Huang Zhiyuan no longer performs Zhuang opera, and he creates about 15 scripts every year for various Zhuang opera troupes to rehearse. Mr. Wang Fangsheng is the ninth generation of Zhuang Opera "master" and has made great contributions to the transmission of Zhuang Opera. Now, due to his advanced age, he has been less engaged in Zhuang Opera performances and has turned to creation. He also creates about 10 Zhuang Operas every year.

The transmission base of Northern Style Zhuang Opera is mainly in Tianlin County. The Tianlin County Government attaches great importance to the protection of the inheritors of Zhuang Opera. Every year, it gives inheritors a certain subsidy to ensure their livelihood and at ease to create. At the same time, it also gives great support to the training of inheritors. The establishment of Northern Style Zhuang Opera Art School and the training of Zhuang Opera successors in primary and secondary schools are inseparable from the government's strong support for the Zhuang Opera cause.

Compared with the traditional transmission and the training of inheritors of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, the training of inheritors of Northern Style Zhuang Opera has achieved good results. As emphasized in Chapter 4, government intervention plays a critical role in these efforts. In Tianlin County, "no one knows Zhuang Opera, and no one does not sing Zhuang Opera", which stems from the importance attached to protection by the government, cultural center and inheritors.

However, there are still certain problems in the protection of inheritors of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. The scale of the work is fruitful, but the quality of the trained inheritors is still a problem to be solved. For example: Mr. Bi Kejian has trained many Zhuang opera talents, but there are no apprentices who can really carry the banner of transmission.

2) Troupe construction

Before being listed as an intangible cultural heritage, all Zhuang opera troupes were basically in a state of stagnation. Like the southern route, the northern route Zhuang opera was on the verge of extinction at this time. During the interview, Mr. Huang Zhiyuan said that the northern route Zhuang opera troupes were still popular after the Cultural Revolution and before the 1990s. At the peak, there were 109 troupes in the county. However, with the modern entertainment methods such as television and the Internet entering people's lives, Zhuang opera faces great challenges. Most young people like new things and have little interest in Zhuang opera performances. Therefore, before Zhuang opera became an intangible cultural heritage in 2006, there were only 12 troupes in the county, and there were few arrangements and performances. But after Zhuang opera became an "intangible cultural heritage", more and more people began to pay attention to Zhuang opera, and they were proud of the spread of Zhuang opera in Tianlin. Amateur Zhuang opera troupes also began to grow rapidly. By the end of 2013, there were 74 Zhuang opera troupes in the county, and almost every village, town and street had 1 or 2 Zhuang opera troupes. Most of these Zhuang opera troupes were spontaneously organized by the masses who loved Zhuang opera. At first, they rehearsed in the masses' homes. Later, the leaders of the village and town governments and street offices specially vacated venues for these amateur Zhuang opera troupes to rehearse. The government will also provide these Zhuang opera troupes with certain financial support. Each troupe in the county can receive 10,000 yuan of government funding each year, and Zhuang opera troupes in villages and towns can also receive 6,000-8,000 yuan as funding each year. In addition to financial support, the government also provides a large number of rehearsal equipment. Initially, each Zhuang opera troupe was equipped with a set of 30,000 yuan of audio equipment. After that, a set of Zhuang opera accompaniment instruments worth about 30,000 yuan will be provided every

year. In addition, every year the Tianlin County Government will build 8-10 small Zhuang opera stages in the county town and villages for daily rehearsal and performance of Zhuang opera. The government's strong support has given great support to the Zhuang opera troupe. These amateur Zhuang opera troupes will also rehearse 2-3 plays every year, adding great fun to the cultural life of the Zhuang people. (Bi Kejian, 2024)

In addition to a large number of amateur troupes, Tianlin County also has professional troupes such as the Tianlin Branch of the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. Its predecessor was the art troupe established in 1966, with Qin Zhongbin as the team leader. The art troupe has rehearsed the ancient Zhuang opera "Wenlong and Xiaoni", "Die Zha" and the modern Zhuang opera "Ren Yueyuan". In 1985, the art troupe at that time existed only as a professional performance team in the county. In 1994, the then Tianlin County Government and the Cultural Bureau proposed to the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe, hoping to establish a Zhuang opera troupe in Tianlin County, affiliated with the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe, with the Tianlin County Government paying for it, and the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe responsible for helping to train the members of the Tianlin Branch. With the consent of both parties, the Tianlin branch of Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe was established. Tianlin County Zhuang Opera Troupe conducts cultural activities in rural areas every year. The time of cultural activities in rural areas is generally at the end of each year and after the Spring Festival. The main purpose of the performance is to publicize various government policies and measures to rural areas through cultural programs. The establishment and operation of Tianlin County Zhuang Opera Troupe are operated by Tianlin County Government. The salaries of the troupe members are paid by the county's financial appropriations. Therefore, it is an institution affiliated to Tianlin County, and the entire activities of the troupe are largely under the leadership of Tianlin County Government. For any performance in the county, the Zhuang Opera Troupe must undertake the performance task. At the same time, the Tianlin branch also undertakes the task of training amateur troupes. While improving itself, it plays an important role in improving the overall performance level of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. (Bi Kejian, 2024)

The troupe construction work of Northern Style Zhuang Opera is the most effective measure for the protection of Zhuang Opera. The achievements made in both quantity and quality are worth learning from. In addition to the support of the government and relevant departments, the atmosphere of Zhuang Opera dissemination created locally is also one of the important reasons, which has made an important contribution to enriching the cultural life of the people.

3) Zhuang Opera Art Festival

Unlike material cultural heritage, the protection of "intangible cultural heritage" cannot be limited to a fixed form and closed protection method. "Intangible cultural heritage" is a manifestation of the basic way of survival of communities, groups or individuals to adapt to nature and the spiritual value of social life. It has the characteristics of vitality, life, mass participation and fluidity. Therefore, the development and utilization of intangible cultural heritage is particularly important. The Zhuang Opera Art Festival is a good example. Such development and utilization has been accepted by the general public and has shown strong vitality and transmission.

The Zhuang Opera Culture and Art Festival hosted by Tianlin County has become an important measure in the development of Zhuang Opera. This event allows more people from all over the country and even the world to understand Zhuang Opera, so that Zhuang Opera can truly go out of Tianlin and Guangxi. From 2010 to 2024, a total of eight China Zhuang Opera Culture and Art Festivals have been held, which have made positive contributions to protecting, inheriting and promoting this excellent traditional culture, invigorating the culture of ethnic minority areas, and promoting the harmonious development of all ethnic groups. Now the Zhuang Opera Culture and Art Festival has become a large-scale performance event, playing an important role in the prosperity of the Zhuang Opera. The first Zhuang Opera Art Festival was the most influential one, with a large-scale performance, and many experts and scholars were invited to offer suggestions for the development of Zhuang Opera. The second and third sessions basically continued the model of the first session, which also caused some problems. The unchanging activity model made it impossible for the Zhuang Opera Art Festival to break through. At the same time, there are too many elements in the art performances that are not related to Zhuang

Opera, which also makes more scholars lack expectations for the Zhuang Opera Art Festival.

4) Creation of plays

After being included in the list of "intangible cultural heritage", the development of Northern Style Zhuang Opera has reached a peak. Every year, a large number of Zhuang Opera plays are created for local Zhuang Opera troupes to rehearse. At the Tianlin County Cultural Center, the author learned that Tianlin County is now short of screenwriters. The two inheritors Huang Zhiyuan and Wang Fangsheng are the main screenwriters. Like the Southern Style Zhuang Opera, the main themes of the creation of Northern Style Zhuang Opera are also folk stories. These traditional stories are re-edited according to the pronunciation of Zhuang language. "Mu Guiying", "Fishing Fishermen", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", "Yulan Caisang" are all plays created in recent years. At the same time, Northern Style Zhuang Opera also has many themes of local people praising the Party, such as "English Sons and Daughters Casting Heroic Spirit" and "Zhuang Township Sons and Daughters Praise the Party's Grace". There are also many themes of Northern Style Zhuang Opera from the daily life of the people, such as "Father's Birthday", "Playing Couples", "Birthday Greetings", "Respecting Parents", etc. Since 2006, there are basically 20-30 new Zhuang operas every year, and the government will also provide a certain amount of funds for screenwriters to create. However, Mr. Huang Zhiyuan told me that the lack of Zhuang opera scriptwriters is also the biggest problem in the development of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. Most of the scriptwriters are now between 60 and 70 years old, but young scriptwriters are still unable to complete the scriptwriting tasks independently. Therefore, the local government decided to launch a Zhuang opera scriptwriting training class in the near future to allow more young scriptwriters to grow rapidly, and at the same time, more Zhuang opera actors can master certain scriptwriting knowledge and engage in scriptwriting work. In addition to the improvement in the number of Zhuang opera repertoires, the quality of the repertoire is also an issue that needs to be paid attention to in the development of Northern Style Zhuang Opera. The author learned that in the next step, they will hire experts to specially create high-quality repertoires of Northern Style Zhuang Opera,

so that Zhuang opera can develop among the Zhuang people and go out of Zhuang Township and be loved by more people. (Bi Kejian, 2024)

5) School education

The main means of promoting "intangible cultural heritage" is formal or informal education, which is the specific implementation of the protection measures of "intangible cultural heritage". The protection of Northern Style Zhuang Opera is better among many Zhuang music intangible cultural heritages, and this is precisely reflected in their emphasis on transmission. The local government attaches great importance to the role of Northern Style Zhuang Opera in school education. It has not only established the Northern Style Zhuang Opera Art School, but also added Zhuang Opera teaching to the local primary and secondary school music education, truly achieving "Zhuang Opera transmission, starting from childhood".

Tianlin County Northern Style Zhuang Opera Art School was established in 2010 and is located in the Tianlin Branch of Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. The national inheritor Bi Kejian is its honorary principal. Although the school does not offer classes all year round, it regularly conducts Northern Style Zhuang Opera training classes every year. From the local government, the author learned that the school is mainly funded by the government and regularly brings together some young people who love Zhuang Opera and members of amateur Zhuang Opera Troupes for training. The main teachers are Bi Kejian, Huang Zhiyuan and professional actors from the Tianlin Branch. The teaching content mainly includes scriptwriting classes, actor classes, director classes, band classes, and makeup classes. There are many young people who come here to study spontaneously. The school's courses have played an important role in the standardization of local Zhuang Opera performances and creations.

There is a saying in Tianlin that "Zhuang opera development starts from children". I personally felt this saying in Tianlin. When I was doing local research, I happened to watch the local primary and secondary school art festival in Tianlin Cultural Square. Each school would have a program to show, and the winning programs were selected through the show. The penultimate program that night was a Zhuang opera performed by Bagui Central Primary School. The young actors spoke fluent Zhuang language and sang Zhuang opera on the stage, and their movements

were also very standardized. This program won the second place in the end. According to the author's understanding, the three primary schools of Tianlin County No. 1 Primary School, Tianlin Middle School, and Bagui Central Primary School will select some students to participate in the rehearsal of the Zhuang opera team. These students are proud to be selected as members of the Zhuang opera team. Among them, Tianlin Middle School has performed twice in the Zhuang Opera Art Festival. Tianlin Children's Palace has also established a Zhuang opera team to rehearse Zhuang opera. In Tianlin, we see the future of Northern Style Zhuang Opera.

Northern Style Zhuang Opera's innovative school heritage has various Zhuang Opera training classes from primary school to adulthood. Primary and secondary schools have youth Zhuang Opera troupes, and adults have Zhuang Opera Art Schools and various training classes. The establishment of various training classes shows that the government has seen the importance of Zhuang Opera education. However, while establishing them, standardized management and a sound system are also indispensable. This needs to be further managed by local governments and schools so that Zhuang Opera school education can play a greater role.

6.2.2 The preservation of Southern Style Zhuang Opera

1) Protection of inheritors

Zhang Qinyin, a national inheritor of the Southern Style Zhuang Opera, played the leading female roles in a series of important Zhuang operas from the 1960s to the 1980s, including "Bao Hulu", "Shrimp Fishing Dance", "Picking Pig Food", "Red Bronze Drum", "Bao Hulu", "Rose", "Qin Xianglian", "The Injustice of Dou E", "The Legend of the White Snake", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", etc. She was the deputy director of Youjiang Zhuang Opera Troupe and the deputy director of Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. With her love for Zhuang Opera, Zhang Qinyin is still tirelessly spreading Zhuang Opera and teaching skills to young Zhuang Opera actors. The content of the teaching mainly includes the basic skills of Zhuang Opera, Zhuang Opera singing and Zhuang Opera skits. In October 2013, I was fortunate to meet Zhang Qinyin in the Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. She moved her small stool and sat in the rehearsal hall of the Zhuang Opera Troupe, watching the young Zhuang Opera actors rehearse. Sometimes I saw a smile on the old lady's face, and sometimes I saw her frowning, and she often stepped forward to explain the play to the actors in

person. This kind of personal involvement is a rare and precious example of traditional skill transfer and passionate dedication to the preservation of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

According to Liu Yi (2024), the inheritor of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, there are three district-level inheritors: Su Chaofu, Mo Shiliang, and Zhao Weiwei. The three inheritors mainly live in Jingxi and Debao, and have played an important role in the creation of amateur troupes and repertoires. Su Chaofu mainly collects and organizes folk music. On the Liaoren Home website, most of the singing and repertoire music audio of Southern Style Zhuang Opera are organized by him, which plays an important role in the spread of Southern Style Zhuang Opera on the Internet. Mo Shiliang and Zhao Weiwei mainly create repertoires and guide the actors of amateur troupes. Most of their creations are to adapt folk stories, fill them into the tunes of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, and rehearse them for amateur troupes. This adaptation and creative work play a key role in ensuring that Southern Style Zhuang Opera remains relevant and continues to evolve with modern tastes while maintaining its traditional essence.

In 2011, the Ministry of Culture made the following regulations on the financial subsidies for inheritors: 10,000 yuan per year for each national inheritor and 2,000 yuan per year for each district-level inheritor. The author learned from the Jingxi County Cultural Center that the autonomous region and county governments give each person a subsidy of 3,000 yuan per year for their transmission of skills and the creation of repertoires. The author learned from the Jingxi County Cultural Center that they will organize a Southern Style Zhuang Opera training class in January 2014 to train young Zhuang Opera actors. The government's involvement in providing subsidies is an important step in ensuring the continuity of Zhuang Opera's preservation efforts.

Compared with the traditional oral transmission, the current transmission method is more standardized and the scale has also expanded compared with the past. However, the lack of successors in the transmission of Southern Style Zhuang Opera is the biggest problem in its development. Although several inheritors have been committed to finding and training successors, young people today are not very enthusiastic about Zhuang Opera and most of them go out to work. The apprentices

they have accepted now are unable to take on the responsibility of transmission, which is the main problem in the transmission of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. The lack of enthusiasm among young people and the insufficient number of apprentices is a critical issue that threatens the long-term sustainability of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

2) Troupe construction

In addition to inheritors, the transmission of "intangible cultural heritage" also requires an institution for transmission. For Zhuang Opera, to maintain its sustainability, there must be a troupe to rehearse and perform, so that Zhuang Opera can be inherited in a "living" manner. In 2006, Zhuang Opera was officially included in the list of national intangible cultural heritage. In 2009, Southern Style Zhuang Opera was included in the intangible cultural heritage of Guangxi. Before the "intangible cultural heritage application", Southern Style Zhuang Opera was in danger of being lost. At that time, there were less than ten amateur troupes in Jingxi and Debao, and these troupes rarely rehearsed and had no teachers to guide them. But after becoming an "intangible cultural heritage", the number of troupes has grown from less than ten to 60. There are 28 Zhuang troupes in Jingxi, 31 in Debao, and a few amateur Zhuang troupes in Tiandong and Tianyang. This increase in the number of troupes signifies a major step forward in the preservation of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, but more needs to be done to ensure these troupes have the support and resources they need to thrive.

The construction of Southern Style Zhuang Opera troupes is not only reflected in quantity, but also in quality. I learned from Ding Hongyun, deputy director of Jingxi Cultural Center, that before it was listed as an "intangible cultural heritage", the government gave less funds to Southern Style Zhuang Opera, about 300 yuan per year, which could not support the development of Zhuang Opera troupes at all. Amateur troupes were in a state of no equipment, no normal rehearsal time, and no performance opportunities. At that time, Zhuang Opera was just a leisure and entertainment activity for the Zhuang people during the busy farming season. But after becoming an "intangible cultural heritage", the government has increased its support for Southern Style Zhuang Opera, and has given Jingxi and Debao Cultural Centers a certain amount of funds each year for the construction of the troupe. In the

past two years, the cultural center has equipped each Zhuang troupe with a set of audio equipment, which costs about 30,000 to 40,000 yuan, and each troupe is given 2,000 yuan per year for rehearsal, performance, and costume production. While providing funds, there are also certain requirements for the troupe, requiring each troupe to rehearse regularly and participate in the Spring Festival National Folk Art Festival and the Southern Style Zhuang Opera Festival every year. Increased government investment in both financial support and infrastructure has significantly improved the ability of Southern Style Zhuang Opera troupes to function and perform.

Jingxi County Zhuang Opera Troupe is the only professional troupe in the Southern Style Zhuang Opera transmission area. It was established in 2006 to spread and protect Zhuang Opera. When the Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe was first established, it rehearsed many Zhuang Opera repertoires, such as "Bao Hulu" and "Hong Tonggu". At the same time, the Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe also regularly trains amateur Zhuang Opera troupes. However, the author learned from the Jingxi Cultural Center that the Jingxi branch troupe rarely rehearses Zhuang Opera at present, mostly rehearsing song and dance performances, and rarely provides guidance to amateur Zhuang Opera troupes. In the next step, they will increase support for amateur Zhuang opera troupes, and increase the funding of 5,000 yuan per troupe each year for the construction of the troupe. With the support of funds, the management, rehearsal and performance of the troupe will be greatly helped. Although there are still challenges, increased financial and organizational support for the troupes is a promising sign for the future of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

The earliest Zhuang opera troupe was the Longcheng troupe that appeared in the late Qing Dynasty. The troupe owner was Yang Liulian, the first generation of Zhuang opera stage master. At that time, the troupe was called a class club, which was mainly managed by the class owner, and the apprentices followed the master to learn. The fees from the performances were used to maintain the class club. This traditional class club has a strong spontaneity and randomness. In many cases, the class club will be closed when it encounters funding problems, which is not conducive to the transmission of Zhuang opera. However, after Zhuang opera was listed as "intangible cultural heritage" in 2006, the construction of the Southern Style Zhuang Opera troupe has become more standardized, and it has received strong support from the

local government. At the same time, the construction of the troupe has become more standardized, and it is responsible for the government and the state-owned Zhuang opera troupe provides regular guidance. Standardized management and systematic training will enable the Southern Style Zhuang Opera troupe to develop better and play the role that the troupe should play.

3) Regular performance platform

The protection of "intangible cultural heritage" is divided into three levels: confirmation, preservation and promotion. Regular performances are a specific measure to promote Zhuang opera. Before Zhuang opera became "intangible cultural heritage", there were few performances, no incentive for performances, no motivation for actors to rehearse, and the rehearsals of various troupes were also stagnant. After becoming "intangible cultural heritage", in addition to increasing the funds for troupe construction, the government also allocated funds to organize Zhuang opera performances every year. The autonomous region allocates 30,000 yuan of funds to Jingxi and Debao areas every year to organize the Southern Style Zhuang Opera performance and the Spring Festival folk art performance.

Since 2009, the annual Southern Style Zhuang Opera performance has been held in Debao every November. Every year, more than 30 from Jingxi County and Debao County are selected to participate in this Southern Style Zhuang Opera event, and the number of participating troupes will increase every year. The performance lasted for 3 days. In order to ensure the fairness, justice and openness of the performance, experts were invited to serve as judges. The competition has a total of awards including organization award, play award, director award, performance award, encouragement award, etc. This is the heyday of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. Every time, a large number of Zhuang people come to the venue early to wait for this cultural feast, which plays an important role in enriching people's cultural life. At the same time, it allows more people and young people inside and outside the district to understand the unique charm of Southern Style Zhuang Opera.

In addition to participating in the Southern Style Zhuang Opera Gala every year, the main Zhuang Opera performance of the Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe is the Spring Festival National Folk Art Gala. Every Spring Festival, the Zhuang people can not only feel the festive atmosphere of the New Year, but also enjoy the performance

of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. The annual Spring Festival Gala is the most important event for the Jingxi Zhuang Opera Troupe. Each troupe will send the best actors and the best plays to participate in this performance.

Before becoming an "intangible cultural heritage", the performances of Southern Style Zhuang Opera were mostly performed by troupes invited during festivals or when there was a happy occasion at home. The performances were not fixed in terms of location and time, and the number of viewers was also limited. Now that there are fixed performance times and performance forms, people will look forward to this once-a-year event, which has become a fixed cultural feast for the Zhuang people. However, the number of performances of Southern Style Zhuang Opera is relatively small, only two or three times a year, which still cannot meet people's demand for Zhuang Opera performances. The transformation of Southern Style Zhuang Opera performances into an anticipated annual event has created a solid cultural foundation for the continuation of the art form.

4) Creation of repertoires

The creation of new repertoires is the biggest driving force for the development of Southern Style Zhuang Opera. Before becoming an "intangible cultural heritage", the performances of Southern Style Zhuang Opera have always been mainly the traditional repertoires introduced above, and there are few new repertoires. After becoming an "intangible cultural heritage", Jingxi Cultural Center fully realized the importance of repertoire creation, so they invited old artists with various inheritors and creative abilities to create, and subsidized them with certain funds. From 2009 to the present, the creation of Southern Style Zhuang Opera has basically remained at 20-30 per year. After the creation, these repertoires are handed over to local amateur troupes for rehearsal and performed for the majority of Zhuang people at the annual performance. These newly created Zhuang operas are mainly adapted from folk stories, such as "Xing Niang", "Red Lantern Shining on the Mountain Village", "Legend of the White Snake", etc. These plots are all well-known folk stories. There are also some dramas that promote some policies of the Party and the country, such as "It doesn't matter whether you have a boy or a girl", "Promise", "Promote Virtue", etc. These Zhuang operas not only entertain people, but also promote national policies and play an educational role. There are also some scripts

that reflect the prosperous life of the Zhuang people, such as "True Love is Priceless" and "Watching Yaha Opera".

During the interview, the author learned that the screenwriters of Southern Style Zhuang Opera are about 50-70 years old, and there are very few young screenwriters. This is also an important issue that restricts the development of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, and the local government currently has few measures to solve this problem. The lack of young screenwriters remains a significant obstacle to the future development of Southern Style Zhuang Opera, and addressing this issue is vital for its continued evolution.

6.3 The guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

The preservation and transmission of Zhuang Opera require a multi-faceted approach that balances cultural authenticity with modern adaptation. This section outlines key strategies for safeguarding this unique art form while ensuring its sustainable development.

6.3.1 Safeguarding the Linguistic and Repertoire Heritage

Language is a defining characteristic of regional opera traditions. For Zhuang Opera, preserving its linguistic integrity is essential for maintaining cultural authenticity.

Retention of Local Dialects: Northern Zhuang Opera is traditionally performed in the Zhuang dialect of Tianlin, forming a key element of its identity. Past attempts to use Cantonese or Yong Opera dialects were unsuccessful, underscoring the importance of maintaining the original linguistic framework.

Selective Adaptation: While preserving dialectal authenticity is crucial, moderate adaptations can enhance accessibility. For instance, in urban centers like Nanning, the use of the Guangxi dialect (Gui-Liu) can help broaden audience reach while maintaining core stylistic elements.

Documentation and Standardization: Many traditional Zhuang Opera scripts have been transmitted orally, with few written records surviving. It is necessary to systematically document and standardize scripts to ensure their longevity.

Establishing archives and digital repositories for Zhuang Opera texts and recordings will aid in long-term preservation.

6.3.2 Sustaining the Lineage of Performers

The transmission of Zhuang Opera heavily relies on its practitioners, yet economic and social factors have led to a decline in active performers.

Recognition and Support for Practitioners: Government policies should provide economic incentives, social security, and institutional support for Zhuang Opera artists. This includes recognizing master artists as national or regional heritage bearers.

Establishment of a Performer Database: A comprehensive database documenting active and retired Zhuang Opera performers, their expertise, and repertoire should be created. This database will serve as a foundation for targeted preservation efforts.

Apprenticeship Programs: Encouraging younger generations to learn Zhuang Opera through mentorship programs with master artists can ensure the continuity of skills and knowledge.

6.3.3 Protecting the Cultural Ecosystem

Zhuang Opera is deeply embedded within the cultural and natural environment of Guangxi. Its preservation must therefore extend beyond performances to include the broader cultural ecosystem.

Preserving Traditional Venues and Spaces: The historic streets, temples, and village theaters that have long been centers of Zhuang Opera performances should be conserved and revitalized for community use.

Integration with Community Life: Encouraging local festivals, rituals, and ceremonies to incorporate Zhuang Opera performances will help sustain its presence in daily life.

Ecological and Cultural Synergy: Protection efforts should align with broader ecological and cultural conservation projects to ensure a holistic approach to heritage management.

6.3.4 Leveraging Educational Institutions

Academic institutions play a crucial role in the systematic transmission of Zhuang Opera knowledge.

Curriculum Development: Universities and schools should integrate Zhuang Opera into performing arts and cultural heritage courses. This includes training in its linguistic characteristics, costumes, musical compositions, and stage design.

Engagement with Traditional Practitioners: Collaborations between academic institutions and traditional performers can facilitate knowledge exchange. Inviting folk artists to teach and demonstrate their craft will provide students with hands-on experience.

Innovative Teaching Methods: Utilizing multimedia tools, digital platforms, and interactive workshops can enhance learning and engagement. Schools may also organize field trips to rural areas where Zhuang Opera is still actively performed.

6.3.5 Encouraging Creative Development

While preserving tradition is fundamental, Zhuang Opera must also adapt and evolve to remain relevant in contemporary society.

Modernization of Productions: Introducing improved lighting, stage effects, and narrative techniques can make performances more engaging while retaining their traditional essence.

Contextual Adaptations: Creating new works that reflect contemporary social themes and audience preferences can attract wider viewership. For example, hybrid productions incorporating both Southern and Northern Zhuang Opera elements have been well received.

Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration: Partnering with other art forms, such as modern theater and film, can help Zhuang Opera reach new audiences and develop innovative storytelling approaches.

6.3.6 Expanding Public Awareness and Institutional Support

Raising awareness about Zhuang Opera's cultural significance is critical for its survival.

Media Promotion: Utilizing television, social media, and digital platforms to broadcast performances, interviews, and documentaries can generate interest and appreciation for Zhuang Opera.

Government and Policy Support: Recognizing Zhuang Opera as an intangible cultural heritage asset at national and international levels can provide it with greater

institutional backing. This includes allocating funds for research, documentation, and performance subsidies.

Community Engagement Initiatives: Hosting public lectures, workshops, and interactive events can foster greater appreciation and participation in Zhuang Opera traditions.

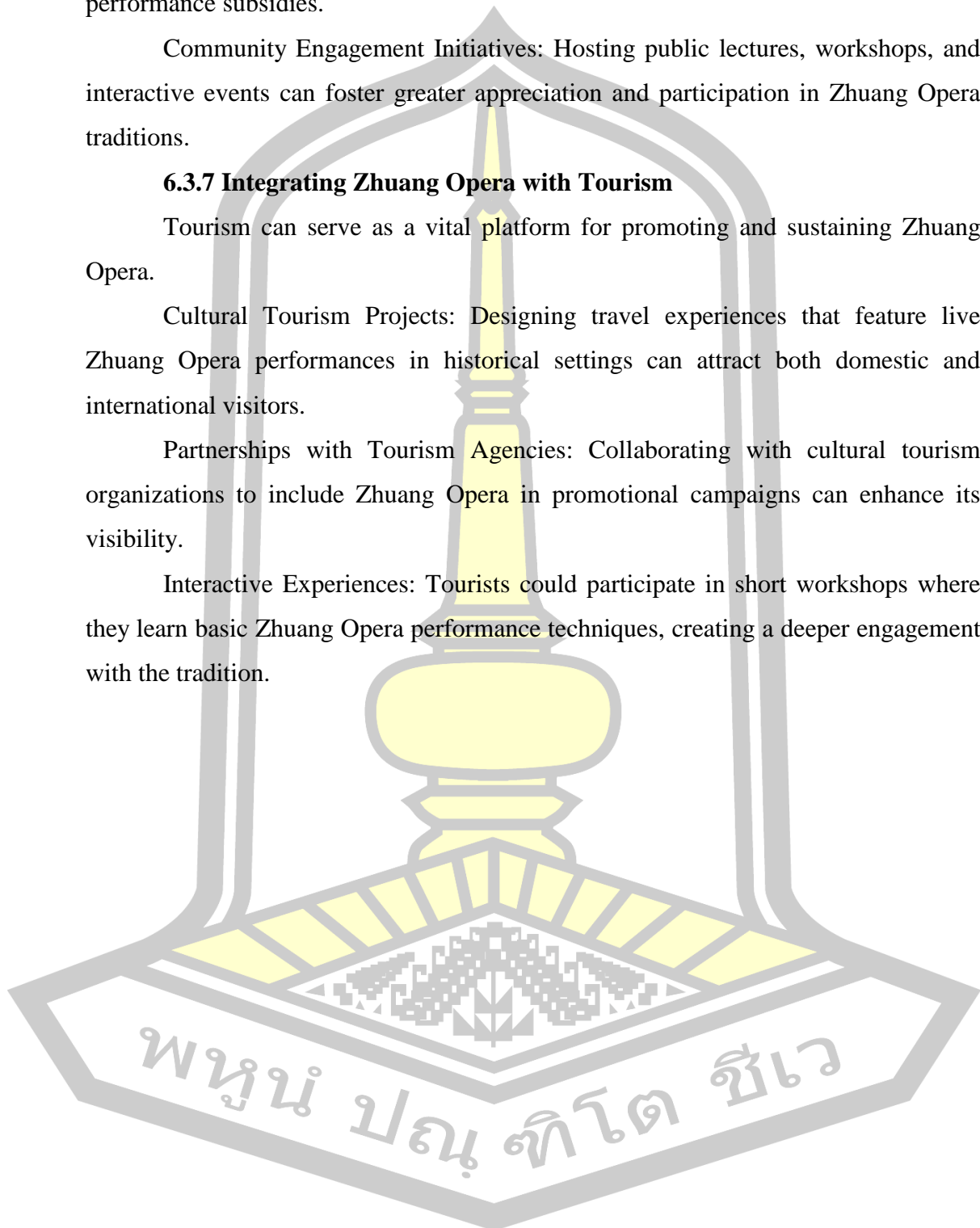
6.3.7 Integrating Zhuang Opera with Tourism

Tourism can serve as a vital platform for promoting and sustaining Zhuang Opera.

Cultural Tourism Projects: Designing travel experiences that feature live Zhuang Opera performances in historical settings can attract both domestic and international visitors.

Partnerships with Tourism Agencies: Collaborating with cultural tourism organizations to include Zhuang Opera in promotional campaigns can enhance its visibility.

Interactive Experiences: Tourists could participate in short workshops where they learn basic Zhuang Opera performance techniques, creating a deeper engagement with the tradition.



CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

The study has three main objectives: 1) to study the current status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2) to compare the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and 3) to propose guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Based on information from literature, field data, and relevant research methods, the results of the study can be summarized as follows:

- 7.1 Conclusion
- 7.2 Discussion
- 7.3 Suggestions

7.1 Conclusion

7.1.1 The Current Status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Zhuang Opera, as an important cultural tradition of the Zhuang people, plays an indispensable role in shaping regional identity. This art form is not only a crucial component of Zhuang social life but also an important medium for transmitting Zhuang history, values, and customs. Through vivid performances and rich music, Zhuang Opera conveys emotions and moral teachings, promoting community cohesion.

However, Zhuang Opera currently faces multiple challenges. Firstly, language barriers significantly impact the transmission of Zhuang Opera. It is primarily performed in the Zhuang language, but with the acceleration of modernization, many young audiences are losing their proficiency in Zhuang, creating a greater distance between them and this traditional art form. Additionally, the diversity of modern entertainment options has led to fierce competition, particularly in attracting young audiences.

Secondly, the transmission of Zhuang Opera mainly relies on oral instruction and apprenticeship, which has become increasingly limited in modern society. With the aging performer community, the opportunities for younger generations to engage with and learn Zhuang Opera have drastically decreased, exacerbating this issue. Furthermore, the slow pace of innovation and performance development has contributed to a decline in audience engagement, especially among younger people.

Despite these challenges, government and cultural organizations actively support the preservation and transmission of Zhuang Opera. Since its recognition as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage, the status of Zhuang Opera has been elevated, and relevant policies and funding have strengthened its protection efforts. Cultural organizations and communities are actively promoting performances and outreach of Zhuang Opera, helping to enhance its influence in local culture. Additionally, the role of Zhuang Opera in cultural tourism is gradually emerging, attracting more tourists and providing a new platform for its dissemination and promotion.

In terms of musical elements, Zhuang Opera showcases distinct stylistic differences. The Northern style retains elements of folk songs, characterized by unique melodies such as [Zheng Diao] and [Wu Gong Diao], while the Southern style has developed a standardized vocal system based on [Ping Ban], with musical accompaniment expanding from small ensembles to larger orchestras. This musical diversity not only enriches the artistic expression of Zhuang Opera but also enhances its appeal across different cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, the narrative themes of Zhuang Opera are rich and varied, encompassing heroic tales, love stories, and moral allegories, with works like *Nong Jia Bao Tie* and *Bao Hulu* promoting justice and fairness. These pieces convey the life wisdom and moral values of the Zhuang people. The performances blend singing, speaking, acting, and dance, incorporating traditional Zhuang dance elements, with role classifications including sheng, dan, jing, and chou, where the Northern style is more refined in its role differentiation.

Overall, Zhuang Opera is not merely a theatrical art form but a vital component of Zhuang social and cultural systems, possessing irreplaceable social value. In modern society, the key challenge lies in sustaining its vitality and ensuring its continued cultural significance. Through government support, cultural organization

efforts, and community participation, Zhuang Opera is expected to find new development paths in preservation and innovation, continuing to contribute to the prosperity of Zhuang culture.

7.1.2 A Comparison of the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

This study compares the differences between the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera in terms of performance, music, and language, highlighting the cultural diversity within the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The Northern style is known for its refined artistic approach, complex vocal techniques, and poetic language. For example, the Northern style, represented by "Nongjia Baotie" shows a more sophisticated and elegant performance style. This style emphasizes intricate singing techniques that reflect a cultural pursuit of elegance and artistry. The language used in Northern Zhuang Opera is more formal and poetic, closely aligned with traditional Zhuang language features, which adds depth to the overall narrative.

In contrast, the Southern style, represented by "Baohulu" exhibits a rougher and more dynamic performance style. Its melodies are simpler, and the movements are more expressive, making it more relatable to daily life. The singing style in Southern Zhuang Opera is typically direct and straightforward, reflecting a cultural preference for simplicity and authenticity. This accessibility is further enhanced by lively musical accompaniment, which supports the performers' large physical movements and creates a more vibrant and exaggerated expressiveness. Southern Zhuang Opera is also influenced by local folk legends, aiming to engage the audience through its dynamic performances and strong interactivity.

Comparing these two styles shows not only their regional differences but also their shared mission to pass on Zhuang cultural identity through performance. The Northern style focuses on elegance, precision, and detailed artistic expression, while the Southern style highlights directness, energy, and emotional richness. Both styles play significant roles in preserving and transmitting Zhuang cultural heritage.

Ultimately, these differences reflect the cultural landscapes of northern and southern Guangxi and demonstrate the adaptability and vitality of Zhuang Opera as a living art form. By studying and appreciating these differences, we can better

understand the cultural significance of Zhuang Opera and its important role in the transmission of Zhuang culture. This study emphasizes the need to recognize and protect these unique styles, as they represent the rich cultural heritage and evolving artistic expression of the Zhuang people.

7.1.3 A guidelines for the transmission and preservation of Zhuang opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Traditionally, Zhuang Opera has been passed down through oral instruction and apprenticeship. While this method was effective in the past, it now faces significant limitations. Since its recognition as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage, government support has increased, but challenges remain in script preservation, performer training, and integrating modern educational resources. Additionally, the Northern and Southern styles require distinct approaches to preservation, depending on government policies and community participation. This study proposes targeted strategies to support the sustainable development of both styles.

To effectively transmit and preserve Zhuang Opera, a multi-faceted approach is needed that balances cultural authenticity with modern adaptation. Language is a key feature, and preserving local dialects is crucial. For example, the Northern style uses the Tianlin Zhuang dialect, while moderate use of the Guangxi dialect in urban areas can enhance accessibility. Systematic documentation and standardization of scripts are essential for ensuring their longevity.

The transmission of Zhuang Opera relies heavily on its performers, yet economic and social factors have decreased the number of active practitioners. Therefore, policies should provide support and economic incentives, and a database of performers should be created. Encouraging younger generations to learn through apprenticeship programs is also vital.

Protecting the cultural ecosystem involves preserving traditional venues and integrating performances into community life. Academic institutions should incorporate Zhuang Opera into their curricula and promote collaboration with traditional practitioners to enhance students' practical experience. While maintaining tradition is important, Zhuang Opera must also adapt to modern society by modernizing productions and creating works that reflect contemporary themes.

Media promotion and policy support can raise public awareness of Zhuang Opera's cultural significance. Additionally, integrating Zhuang Opera with tourism by designing cultural experiences and interactive activities can open new opportunities for its promotion and development.

Despite the pressures of modernization and demographic changes, Zhuang Opera continues to hold cultural significance. Its regional variations demonstrate artistic diversity and create opportunities for innovation. This study emphasizes the need to engage younger audiences and utilize technology for development. Moving forward, academic research, policy measures, and community efforts will play key roles in ensuring the long-term preservation of Zhuang Opera as an essential part of Zhuang cultural heritage.

7.2 Discussion

7.2.1 The Current Status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

The current status of Zhuang Opera reflects its cultural significance and changing social functions. Historically, as discussed in Chapter 2, Zhuang Opera began as a form of folk entertainment connected to local customs, religious rituals, and agricultural celebrations. Over time, it developed into a structured theatrical performance supported by cultural institutions and the government. Zhou Zulian (2022) highlights the musical features and social roles of Tianlin Zhuang Opera, showing its deep connection to language, community, and identity. My research builds on this by analyzing the musical elements and storytelling themes of Zhuang Opera, which reflect local traditions and collective identity. The performance styles, costumes, and props also serve as important expressions of Zhuang cultural heritage.

Beyond its artistic and cultural value, Zhuang Opera plays many social roles. Traditionally, it has been a form of entertainment and emotional expression, bringing people together and strengthening social bonds. It also has an educational function, teaching audiences about ethical values and cultural traditions. In rural areas, ritual performances still help preserve traditional beliefs and cultural heritage. In recent years, Zhuang Opera has become more popular, partly because of its integration with modern arts and increasing support from the government. This trend aligns with Li

Jie's (2018) study, which discusses how Zhuang Opera contributes to cultural tourism and local economic development. My research confirms this trend, showing that Zhuang Opera's role in tourism not only increases its visibility but also supports its long-term sustainability.

7.2.2 A Comparison of the Northern and Southern Styles of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

The comparison of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera reveals clear artistic differences shaped by historical and regional factors. Chapter 2 traces their origins to different social and linguistic environments in Guangxi. Northern Zhuang Opera, which was traditionally performed in rural markets and temple fairs, developed a storytelling style that focuses on spoken drama, instrumental accompaniment, and structured narratives. Sun Jie (2011) studies the musical and performance features of Northern Zhuang Opera, which align with my findings on its use of storytelling and musical instruments. In contrast, Southern Zhuang Opera, especially in Jingxi and surrounding areas, developed a more lyrical style, with poetic lyrics and more complex vocal techniques. Zhang Yi (2010) discusses the singing styles of Southern Zhuang Opera, supporting my observations of its unique vocal ornaments and melodic flow.

Although both styles share basic elements, such as folk tunes and symbolic gestures, they also have clear differences in style and regional characteristics. My research, as presented in Chapter 5, provides a structured comparison of their storytelling methods, musical forms, and instrumental arrangements. Understanding these differences is important for placing each style in its historical and cultural context. The development of both styles shows that Zhuang Opera has continuously adapted to social changes while maintaining its core artistic identity.

7.2.3 Guidelines for the Transmission and Preservation of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

The challenges facing Zhuang Opera today require effective strategies for its transmission and preservation. Historically, as discussed in Chapter 2, Zhuang Opera was passed down through oral traditions and apprenticeship models, with performances playing an essential role in community life. However, modern

challenges such as a shrinking repertoire, an aging audience, and financial difficulties threaten its sustainability. Sun Ting (2016) identifies these as key issues affecting its future and emphasizes the need for solutions.

Building on these findings, my research proposes several guidelines for ensuring the sustainable transmission of Zhuang Opera. Section 6.1 highlights the importance of community involvement in maintaining the authenticity of both Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera. It suggests local mentorship programs and intergenerational teaching as key methods. Section 6.2 outlines preservation strategies for each style, emphasizing resource integration and environmental protection. Additionally, my research suggests that integrating Zhuang Opera with modern economic and cultural industries—such as digital media and tourism—can increase its visibility and relevance. Government support is also crucial, especially for Southern Zhuang Opera, which faces greater resource limitations. Lastly, innovative educational programs that combine traditional and modern teaching methods are essential for training a new generation of Zhuang Opera performers and scholars.

In conclusion, this discussion connects historical perspectives with current research findings to provide a comprehensive view of Zhuang Opera's status, artistic diversity, and future sustainability. By linking past developments with present challenges and opportunities, this study highlights the importance of Zhuang Opera in the cultural landscape of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and offers guidance for its continued preservation and innovation.

7.3 Suggestions

Based on the study of Southern and Northern Zhuang Opera, this section proposes several strategies for the further research, protection, and sustainable development of Zhuang Opera.

7.3.1 Suggestions of Applying this Research

7.3.1.1 The application of this study can help researchers understand the development and current status of Zhuang Opera in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

7.3.1.2 The application of this research can assist Zhuang Opera researchers in mastering the comparison of stories, music, instruments, and performances between the Northern and Southern styles of Zhuang Opera.

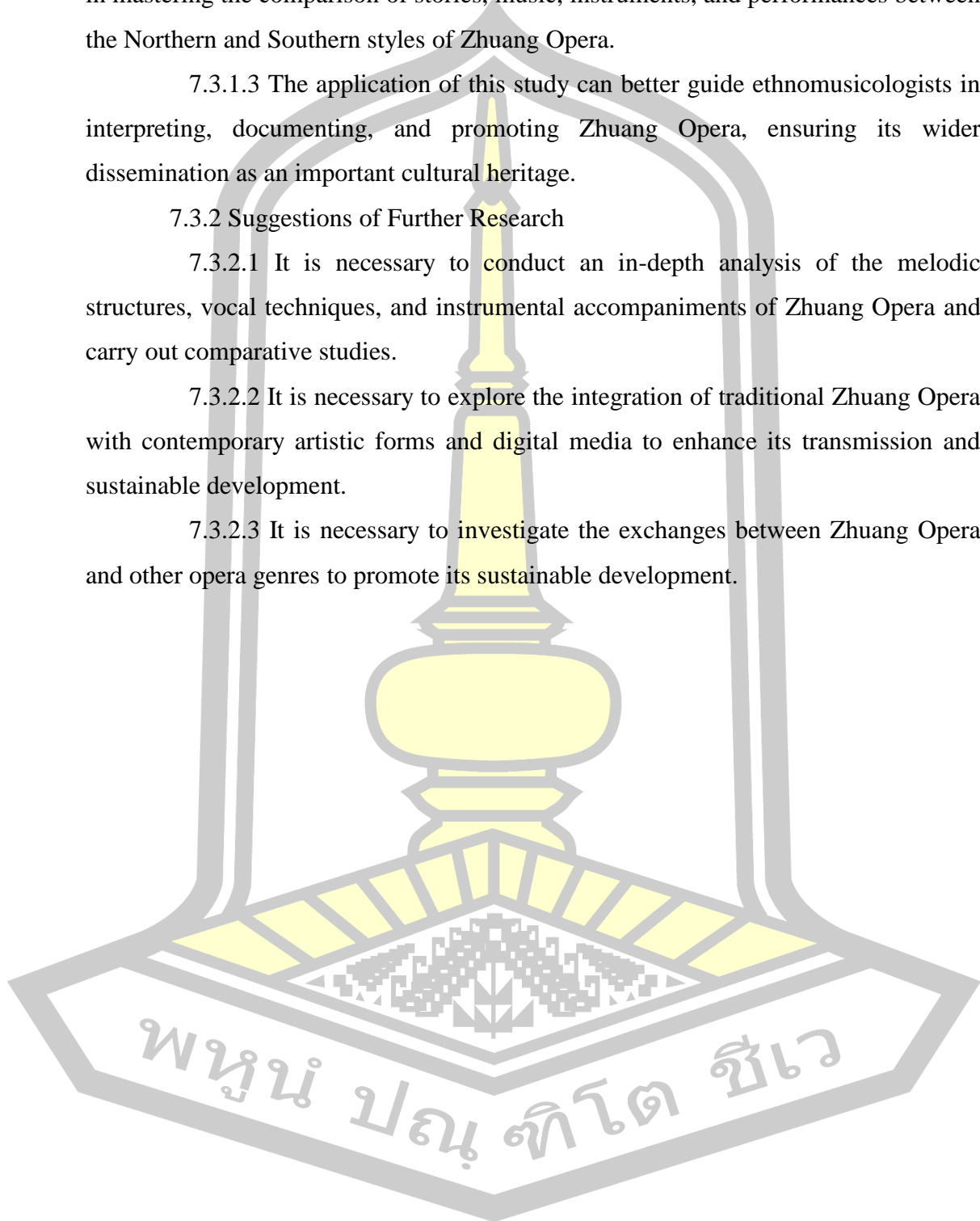
7.3.1.3 The application of this study can better guide ethnomusicologists in interpreting, documenting, and promoting Zhuang Opera, ensuring its wider dissemination as an important cultural heritage.

7.3.2 Suggestions of Further Research

7.3.2.1 It is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the melodic structures, vocal techniques, and instrumental accompaniments of Zhuang Opera and carry out comparative studies.

7.3.2.2 It is necessary to explore the integration of traditional Zhuang Opera with contemporary artistic forms and digital media to enhance its transmission and sustainable development.

7.3.2.3 It is necessary to investigate the exchanges between Zhuang Opera and other opera genres to promote its sustainable development.



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APPENDIX

Appendix I

Interview Outline: Huang Zhiyuan

1. Current State of Zhuang Opera Development

- 1) As an inheritor of Zhuang Opera, how do you view the origin and development of Zhuang Opera?
- 2) What significant changes and challenges has Zhuang Opera faced in the process of modernization?
- 3) What are the main characteristics of the artistic forms and performance styles of Zhuang Opera today?
- 4) What cultural or social functions does Zhuang Opera still serve in today's society?

2. Comparison Between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

- 1) What do you think are the significant differences between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera in terms of music, performance style, and language use?
- 2) What are the differences in the origins and development of these two styles? How has their cultural background influenced their expression?
- 3) What are the similarities and differences between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera in terms of singing techniques, vocal styles, and the use of instruments?
- 4) Is there a close relationship between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera and their respective cultural backgrounds? How do they reflect local ethnic features and cultural traditions?

3. Goals for the Inheritance and Protection of Zhuang Opera

- 1) What are the main challenges faced in the inheritance of Zhuang Opera? For example, how do younger generations accept and show interest in Zhuang Opera?
- 2) What measures do you think should be taken to protect and pass on the traditional artistic forms of Zhuang Opera?

3) What government or cultural organizations in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region support the inheritance and development of Zhuang Opera?

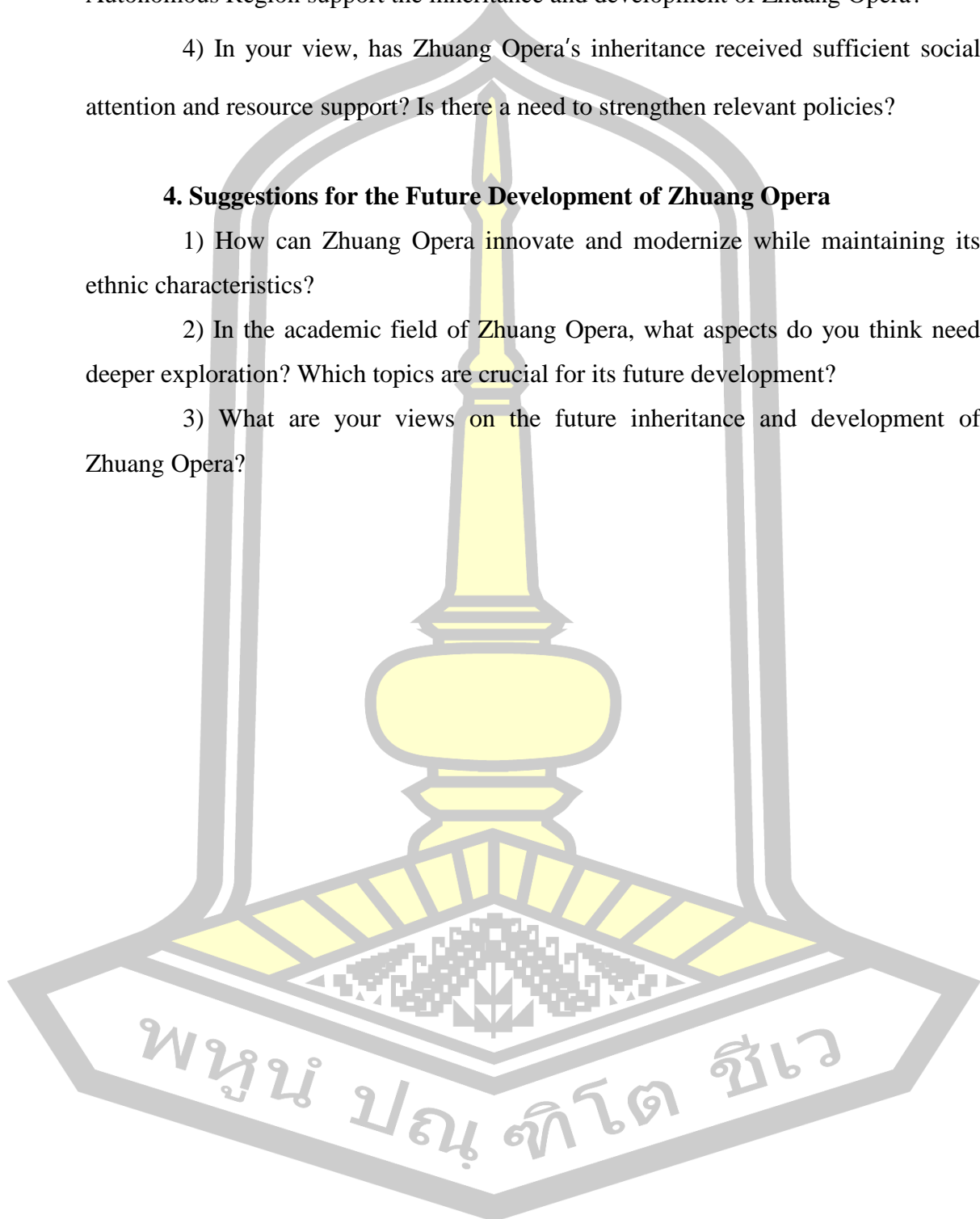
4) In your view, has Zhuang Opera's inheritance received sufficient social attention and resource support? Is there a need to strengthen relevant policies?

4. Suggestions for the Future Development of Zhuang Opera

1) How can Zhuang Opera innovate and modernize while maintaining its ethnic characteristics?

2) In the academic field of Zhuang Opera, what aspects do you think need deeper exploration? Which topics are crucial for its future development?

3) What are your views on the future inheritance and development of Zhuang Opera?



Interview Outline: Liu Yi**1. Background of Zhuang Opera Music Creation**

- 1) Can you briefly introduce the historical background and main characteristics of Zhuang Opera music?
- 2) How does Zhuang Opera music compare to other regional operas or ethnic music in terms of unique musical elements?
- 3) How does the music style of Zhuang Opera integrate with Zhuang culture and folk music traditions?
- 4) How do you view the relationship between the "traditional" and "innovative" aspects of Zhuang Opera music? Have you attempted to incorporate modern elements?

2. Music Styles of Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

- 1) What do you think are the main differences in music creation between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera? For example, how do they differ in melody, rhythm, and vocal style?
- 2) Have you had experience composing for both styles of Zhuang Opera? If so, how do you adjust your music creation based on the different styles?
- 3) How do Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera differ in the use of instruments? Are there differences in accompaniment instruments, percussion, and string instruments?

3. Challenges and Issues in Zhuang Opera Music Creation

- 1) What are the biggest challenges you face in the creation of Zhuang Opera music? For example, how do you balance artistic integrity with audience reception, or how do you protect traditional elements in the composition?
- 2) How do you view the relationship between tradition and innovation in Zhuang Opera music creation? How do you inherit tradition while introducing innovation?
- 3) In the process of modernization, what innovative directions or new artistic forms do you think are worth exploring in Zhuang Opera music?

4. Inheritance and Protection of Zhuang Opera Music

1) How are you involved in the inheritance of Zhuang Opera music in your creative process? Do you teach young composers or musicians relevant knowledge and skills?

2) What suggestions do you have for the protection and inheritance of Zhuang Opera music in the future? Are there specific measures that can help it better adapt to contemporary society?

3) How can music creation promote the artistic innovation and cultural dissemination of Zhuang Opera?

4) What are your expectations for the inheritance and innovation of Zhuang Opera music in the future?



Interview Outline: Gaomin

1. Background of Your Career in Zhuang Opera Performance

- 1) Could you briefly introduce your artistic background and how you entered the field of Zhuang Opera performance?
- 2) What inspired you to pursue Zhuang Opera performance? Are there any special stories or experiences that led you to this art form?
- 3) What differences do you find between Zhuang Opera and other forms of drama? What special challenges and joys has it brought to your performances?
- 4) What unique techniques or methods are involved in Zhuang Opera performance? How did you master these skills?

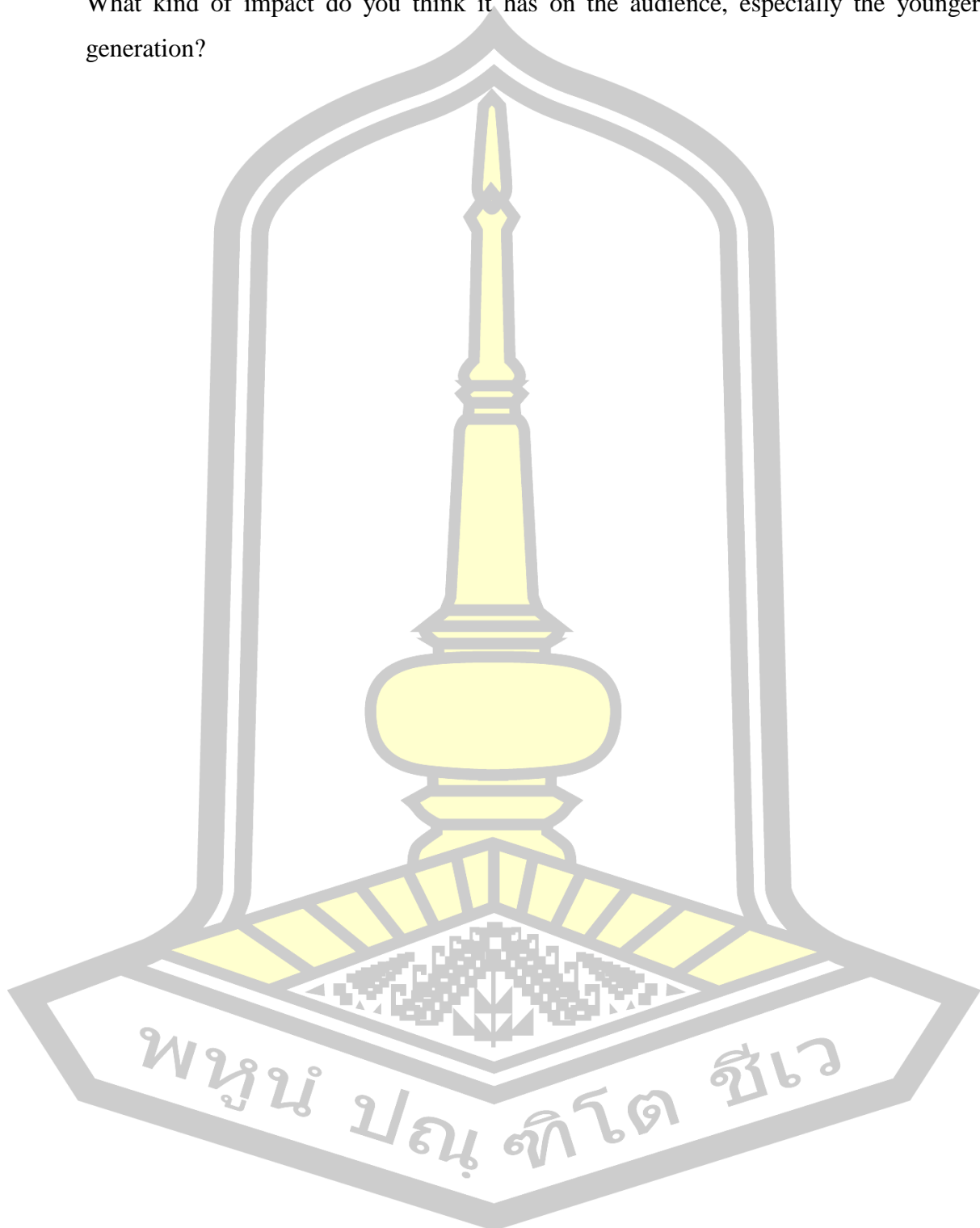
2. Performance Differences Between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera

- 1) In your experience, what are the differences between Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera in terms of performance style, such as rhythm, character portrayal, and emotional expression?
- 2) When performing Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera, do you need to adjust your acting style? If so, how do you usually make these adjustments?
- 3) How do Northern and Southern Zhuang Opera reflect local cultural characteristics?
- 4) How do you incorporate these cultural differences and features into your performance?

3. Inheritance and Modernization of Zhuang Opera

- 1) How do you view the current state of inheritance in Zhuang Opera? What difficulties do young actors face when learning and performing Zhuang Opera?
- 2) Have you personally participated in teaching and passing on Zhuang Opera? If so, how do you pass on the art and techniques of Zhuang Opera to the younger generation?
- 3) What cultural significance do you think Zhuang Opera still holds in today's society? How does it influence the cultural identity of the Zhuang ethnic group?

4) What role does Zhuang Opera play in cultural inheritance and education?
What kind of impact do you think it has on the audience, especially the younger generation?



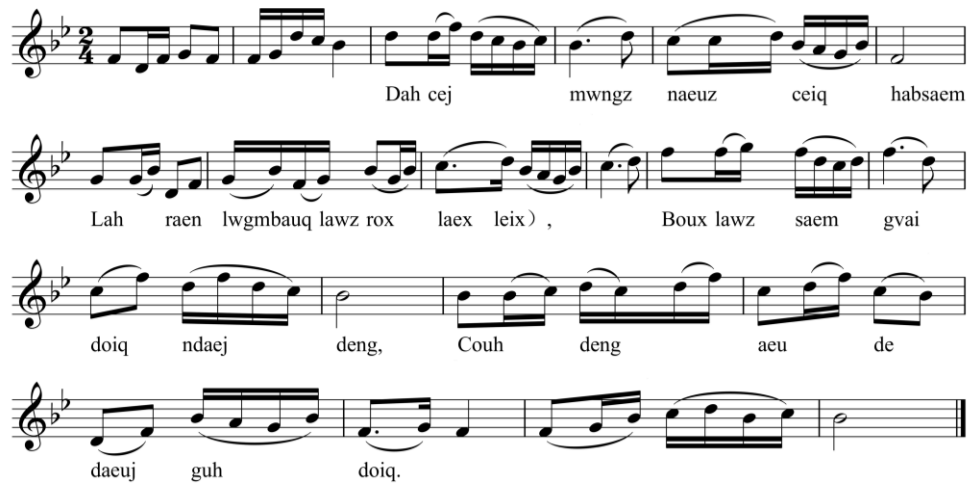
Appendix II

1. Zhengdiaomanban



Beix nuengh ha, Ranz raeuz gaiq faz ndei,
Na Ha Yo Ra daeuj leh gwi
zmoq Na Ha Yo Ngoenz neix ha,
Lwgm bauq lawz oeng mingz, Na Ha Ya Ha Ha
Aeu de daeuj
guh doiq. NaHa Ya Ha

2. Zhengdiao-gaoban



Dah cej mwngz naeuz ceiq habsaem
Lah raen lwgmbauq lawz rox laex leix), Boux lawz saem gvai
doiq ndaej deng, Couh deng aeu de
daeuj guh doiq.

3. Zhengdiao-zhengban



zhong ye lai, ban lou li lian li, (ha,

zhong ye lai!

qian bi ke (lie) cun (hei ha de) he,

(lie na hei zhong ye lie na

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4. Shuzhuangdiao

pan ya wang hai ya ha
 jiao ya ha ya ha lang lie ya ha yo
 tai yang sheng qi
 yo ya san ya gan ya ya
 ha ya ha ya ya ha hai

5. Pingban female voice segment melody

ya ha ya ha ha ya ha
 yuan wai bu zhi xiang ya ha ha
 deng wo cong tou jiang ya ha ya ya ha ya ha
 ya ha ya ha ya ha ha ya ha
 gang cai mei jiao e ya ha ha
 jiu shi jiao da qi ya ha ya ha ya ha ya ha ha
 ya ha ya ha ya ha ha

6.Mayi Pingban segment

ya ha ya ha ha ya ha

yuan wai bu zhi xiang ya ha ha

deng wo cong tou jiang ya ha ya ya ha ya ha

ya ha ya ha ya ha ha ya ha

gang cai mei jiao e ya ha ha

jiu shi jiao da qi ya ha ya ha ya ha ya ha ha

ya ha ya ha ya ha ha



7.Saban segment

gae Loih kaeu

rueng Laep gyaec gya

Cing gyan vcih Saeh Cacng dou (ya)

ran? mo fe byong Loh ndang bing.

Caen boi Ciu ying

Sacm mci (ya) an.

Gaoqiang segment

mai de bai lei ba ya quan ya
Sel ling fi re wood for some cop per coins

ha ya ha lie ya ha ha ha

mai de bai ba qian ha ha
Sel ling fi re wood for some cop per coins

ha huan de xie you ya yan ya
Change some oil and salt

lie

ya ya ha ya ya ha hai

Ya si bao mao zai gao tang segment melody

ai

faen mingz moiz nyaemx tai meuz bauq youb dang tangz, nyaengz yax

gaeu aeu moiz yemi vangj, geil goeng caiz cawj haet saem ndaez, song dolq

moiz goi kae yenz lieng, ciz rangh moiz gyangj

boh (ya) boiz ngaenz, gaen coux

Jin hua Yin hua segment



11. Bai niao yi Singing segment



12. Hong tong gu segment

Musical notation for the '12. Hong tong gu segment'. It consists of four staves of music in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The melody features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes with some slurs. The lyrics are written below the melody. A large grey 'L' shape is on the left side of the page.

ya ha hei
de (ya) de (le ya
ya ha hei
ya ha hei ya ha hei),

Appendix II

Some Photos from The Fieldwork



Picture 1: The 2024 Grand Performance Competition of Zhuang Opera from Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou Provinces
Photos by Wenying Chen (2024)



Picture 2: Zhuang opera inheritor Huang Zhiyuan (Tianlin county)



Picture 3: The 2024 Grand Performance Competition of Zhuang Opera from Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou Provinces (Tianlin county)



Picture 4: North road Zhuang opera "Farm treasure iron" accompaniment instrument
Photos by Wenying Chen (2024)



Picture 5: Huang Zhiyuan, an inheritor of Zhuang opera, applies makeup to the actors
Photos by Wenying Chen (2024)



Picture 6: Ding Hongyun, director of the South Road Zhuang Opera Chuanchengdi
Cultural Center (Jingxi County)



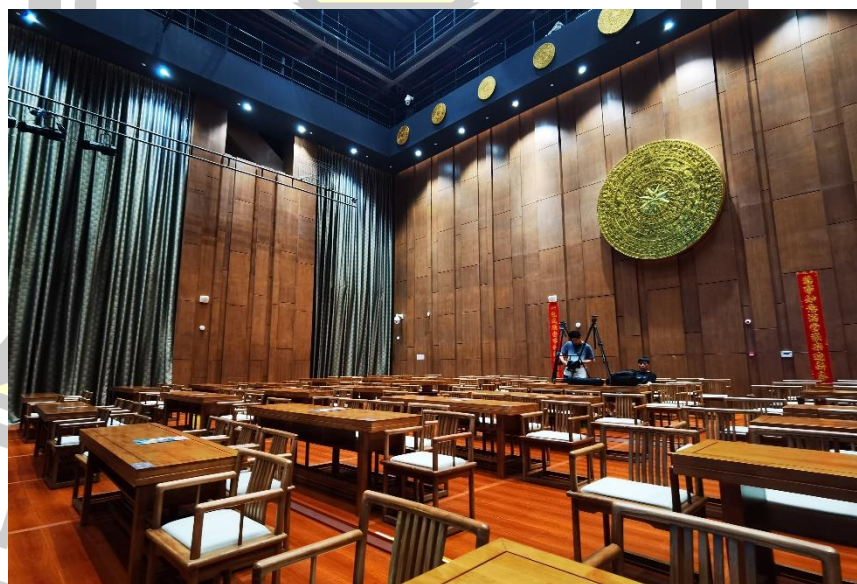
Picture 7: Nanlu Zhuang Opera has been named an intangible cultural heritage of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
Photos by Wenying Chen (2024)



Picture 8: Guangxi Zhuang Theatre opera "Hundred birds Clothes" performance
Photos by Wenying Chen (2023)



Picture 9: The writer visited Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe(Guangxi Ethnic Theatre)



Picture 10: Guangxi Zhuang Opera Troupe performance venue
Photos by Wenying Chen (2023)



Picture 11: The author investigated in Guangxi National Music Museum (Nanning City,2023)



Picture 12: Zhuang Opera exhibition at Guangxi National Music Museum
Photos by Wenying Chen (2023)



Picture 13: Zhuang opera main accompaniment instrument horse bone hu
Photos by Wenying Chen (2023)



Picture 14: Guangxi Zhuang Troupe has created plays in recent years
Photos by Wenying Chen (2023)



Picture 15: Zhuang opera "Farm treasure iron" performance

Photos by Wenying Chen (2024)



Picture 16: Zhuang opera "Baohulu (The Precious Gourd)" performance

Photos by Wenying Chen (2024)

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