



# COMMENT ON “AN ANALYSIS OF THE ESSENCE OF CHINESE OPERA AND VOCAL MUSIC FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HERMENEUTICS AND RECEPTION AESTHETICS”


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## COMMENT ON “AN ANALYSIS OF THE ESSENCE OF CHINESE OPERA AND VOCAL MUSIC FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HERMENEUTICS AND RECEPTION AESTHETICS”

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Chinese vocal music has a rich and complex history, having undergone significant development and evolution over thousands of years of historical changes. This has resulted in a multifaceted development path with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics and historical heritage, which reflects an inclusive and open approach to the future. Amidst the convergence and blending of diverse cultures, Chinese vocal music has assimilated the nourishments of variegated customs and has fashioned a contemporary emblem of spirituality that employs both Chinese and Western genres, featuring unique aesthetic attributes and cultural flavors. The paper analyzes the nature of Vocal Art of Chinese Opera (VACO), using philosophical hermeneutics and the Receptive Aesthetics (RA) theory without incorporating subjective evaluations.

Xiang (2024) offers a concise overview of the three phases of VACO and asserts that, in the initial stage, the performance style was entirely drawn from Western opera. However, the content of the productions reflected China’s ongoing mass revolutionary battle against imperialism, emphasizing propaganda that promoted the ideals of science and democracy. In the second stage, the Western opera was merged with the Chinese Yangge art form to create a distinctive type of Yangge opera featuring local cultural traits. This section of Yangge Opera mainly focuses on people’s everyday life in the former revolutionary regions and serves

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as a medium for political propaganda. The third period was impacted by China's "Double Hundred Policies" strategy and commenced the bold exploration of new opera creation. Three distinct artistic forms emerged during this period, the first of which was closely integrated with traditional theater, exemplified by Red Coral. The second form was vocal art that employs Western drama and opera performance styles to convey China's local content, exemplified by "*Jiang Jie*". The third goal involves developing a musical language and style rooted in folk music, and incorporating elements of Western opera to create a new musical form. "*Aiguerei*" serves as a prime example of this approach.

Xiang (2024) shows that the receiver, as a subject, is included in the essential characteristics of opera and vocal works. Influenced by RA and philosophical interpretation, the article places the receiver in a very high position, alongside the work itself. In the exploration of the nature of subjectivity and objectivity in operatic vocal art, the original article mainly adopts the theory of RA to analyze the interrelationship between the receiver and the work, whereas the "fusion of fields of vision" and existential viewpoints, in the theory of hermeneutics, only serve to draw out the nature of subjectivity. According to Gadamer's theory, the value and significance of a piece of art are closely linked to the aesthetic subject of operatic vocal music and the object of the work. Gadamer suggests that pure music is merely a fluctuation of form and lacks any specific and tangible meaning that we can perceive. But understanding still acquires an association with something meaningful. The indeterminacy of this association becomes understanding and, at the same time, he constitutes the relation of meaning that characterizes such music. Xiang (2024) summarizes this idea as cognizability, in the nature of objectivity, in operatic vocal works. The cognizability of abstract works of art, such as operatic vocal music, can be expanded to include the relationship between the meaning of the work and the understanding of the subject. Gadamer maintains the position that works of art, such as operatic vocal music, contain meaning that conveys the content of truth, and therefore holds a critical attitude towards formalism in vocal art. Gadamer posits that the vocal artwork is not a subject existing in opposition to a self-consistent subject, but rather a product of the alter-experience. He rejects the idea that subject and object are opposed to each other and, instead, he suggests analyzing them as a unified relationship, similar to the exploration of essence in the article. Thus, vocal works, like operas, only become complete when they are received and appreciated. Therefore, the meaning of vocal art exists not only in the objective work or the subject's understanding, but in the subject's activity comprehending the object. Opera vocal works are the result of interaction and integration between the comprehender and the object of comprehension. Accordingly, Gadamer believes that the meaning of the work goes beyond the creator's intention during the original creation.

Gadamer's hermeneutics posits that understanding and interpretation are historically situated. As human existence is perpetually in flux throughout history, so too is our experience of the world, written texts and vocal works. Human comprehension of both past and present

is not fixed, but continuously evolving. Therefore, the meaning of a work can have varying impacts at different points in time and these effects shift throughout history. The meaning of the text of a work undergoes a continuous process of historical generation as it is understood by later readers, according to Gadamer's theory of the history of effects. The historical context conditions a person's understanding of a vocal work, and this understanding is always affected by the history of effects. Gadamer refuted the notion that any one interpretation of the work was definitively correct. Due to the history of the effect, the audience's understanding of vocal works is open-ended, and it is enriched and refined as historical experience accumulates. As a result, the understanding of vocal works is characterized by diversity (called randomness by Gadamer). The meaning of diversity means that meaning proceeds from the situation in which it unfolds, and continually specifies itself in terms of content, so that it contains more than it would do without that situation. Interpretation of an operatic vocal work is, thus, not a process of passive reception, but of active recreation. At the same time, Gadamer, while recognizing the diversity of the meaning of the work, also emphasizes that the meaning of the work cannot be interpreted arbitrarily, that it cannot be randomly generated by leaving the work itself, and that it cannot be imposed on the work solely on the basis of the receiver's subjective consciousness.

The act of receiving in the RA theory is equivalent to the active nature of understanding in hermeneutics. Reception in operatic vocal works and the meaning of work are intimately linked. As a result of human spiritual activity, a vocal work is not solely a mere fulfillment of formal concerns, but it necessitates the listener's subjective spiritual input. And it is from this subjective input that the significance of work is generated, an interpretation that RA extrapolates from Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. The meaning of vocal art, in the RA view, depends on the provisions of the object and it is subjective. The subject and object have different roles and responsibilities in creating musical meaning. The musical work, as a form and structure, provides a foundation for generating meaning. Any meaning derived must be built upon and perceived through this framework. The subject also plays a role in shaping meaning, but it is limited by the inherent structures of the musical work. Therefore, meaning cannot be arbitrarily created without regard for the form and structure that define it. It can be seen that RA and hermeneutics possess the same perception of the meaning of vocal works.

Polysemy, in the act of receptive comprehension of operatic vocal art, is essentially the variability of receptive behavior. This variability stems from the non-semantic character of vocal art and the variability among comprehending subjects. RA has not neglected its variability while emphasizing the initiative of comprehension. And, in the discourse on variability, RA reveals more qualities in terms of the comprehending subject's variability. It is well known that RA emphasizes the receiver's importance in literature, naturally due to their deep recognition of the subject's central role in the receptive activity. And the receptive

activity depends on the receiver's existence, so RA believes that, when examining the receptive activity, it is logical to take fully into account the inevitable differences that exist in the receiver as a living individual. This inter-subjective variability leads to variability in the activity of understanding. RA theory believes that, as long as there is a subject involved in the understanding activity, there is bound to be differences in understanding, and it does not indulge in understanding activities that are free of differences and complete consensus. However, the degree of difference, in the process of understanding, is different, which is directly related to the object provided by the directionality of the object. It is clear. The clearest and most specific is the object provided by the directionality of it, smallest is the degree of difference related to the understanding of the degree of difference between them, and most similar is the meaning given to them. RA proposes to use a combination of ephemeral and co-temporal approaches to the problem of aesthetic subject variability. RA asserts that the interpretation of a particular work varies across different eras and, consequently, it prompts a distinct social response and impact, including changes in social status. RA examines the temporal variability of interpretation and its effects. Correspondingly, the fact that a work is understood differently or even can be very different among different readers, in the same era, is the co-temporal examination of RA related to the variability of understanding.

Xiang (2024) analyzes the essence of the subjectivity and objectivity of the art of opera and vocal music from Gadamer's philosophical interpretations, and Yao Si and Yisrael's RA theories. From both the hermeneutic and RA perspectives, the object and essence of vocal art are in a unified relationship. By exploring the meaning of Gadamer's vocal art and analyzing comprehension acts, the unified subject-object nature of operatic vocal art can be deduced by combining hermeneutics and RA. Based on this, it is by adopting the theoretical stance of dialectical materialism and the historical materialism of the dialectical unity of subject and object, in the series of interrelationships between the understanding of the subject and the object, as well as the primordial vision and the understanding of the subject's vision, as much as the understanding of the self and the understanding of the object, that the problem of understanding the meaning of a vocal work can be finally and rationally solved.

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