

# The Artistic Characteristics of Opera Funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund

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**Received** March 18, 2024; **Revised** April 23, 2024; **Accepted** April 30, 2024

## Abstract

The present state of Chinese opera, facilitated by the backing of the National Arts Fund, portrays a generally favorable progression marked by significant accomplishments, although it is not without its challenges. Previous studies have indeed concentrated on the creation and dissemination of Chinese opera. However, this study will delve deeper into the subject by exploring the artistic characteristics of operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund. The samples were 8 operas from the 76 operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund during the period from 2014 to 2019. The instruments for collecting data were case study and observation. The analysis data was obtained by content analysis. The research results were found as follows;

Operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund exhibit five key artistic characteristics: diversity in script themes, innovative script structures, richness and ethnic elements in music composition, the artistry in singing and performance, and ingenuity in stagecraft design. These distinctive characteristics contribute significantly to the selection of operas for funding by the National Arts Fund.

Understanding these characteristics not only enriches our understanding of contemporary Chinese opera but also paves the way for future works seeking support from the National Arts Fund. Continued support for opera creation and innovation will be pivotal in preserving and advancing the rich legacy of Chinese opera on both national and global platforms.

It was concluded that a deeper understanding of these five characteristics not only enriches our knowledge of contemporary Chinese opera but also paves the way for future works seeking support from the National Arts Fund. Continued support for opera creation and innovation

will play a crucial role in preserving and promoting the rich tradition of Chinese opera on both domestic and international stages.

**Keywords:** Chinese Opera; Artistic Characteristics; Chinese National Arts Fund

## Introduction

Chinese opera art began to develop in the first half of the last century. Thanks to the joint efforts of many Chinese artists, it has opened up the development route of national opera and created a number of classic landmark opera works, such as “The White-Haired Girl”, “Sister Jiang”, and “Red Guards on Honghu Lake”, which have influenced several generations of Chinese people. Since then, Chinese opera art has been developing along the direction of localization and nationalization and has created many popular works (Xu, 2016). After the reform and opening up, China's opera art creation is more open, free, and inclusive, and begins to seek coordination and echo with Western music creation theory and drama theory, constantly developing forward on the road of combining Chinese and Western opera art. Through unremitting efforts, more and more excellent opera art works have been created. The opera works on the Chinese art stage have become more and more rich. Since the beginning of the new century, China's comprehensive national strength has improved, the development of media technology and culture has shown outstanding performance, and the field of opera has also ushered in the field of opera creation (Wang, 2023). To make Chinese opera art can achieve more fruitful results, to create more exclusive to the Chinese appreciate the excellent works, the national cultural department set up the “national art fund” and “Chinese national opera heritage development project,” to guide help and financial support to Chinese opera art along the direction of faster and better development. At the same time, it has made important contributions to the creation and performance of various types, themes, and diversified operas, as well as the promotion of Chinese opera at home and abroad (Ju, 2003). Since 2014, with the support of the National Art Fund, a number of excellent operas works of various types and themes have been launched every year and landed on the art stage at home and abroad, which has won the recognition of the broad masses of the people. With the support of the National Art Fund, the field of opera creation also embodies a new thinking mode in terms of creative techniques and market operation (Zheng, 2021). These newly created opera works can be regarded as a model of Chinese contemporary opera creation, with a typical representative role and significance. Especially in this process, how to allow the National Art Fund to support these works, how to guide the direction, quality, and social extension of opera creation,

all need to be positioned and deeply understood through fruitful research, and thus explore the development path of Chinese opera art in the future.

Previous studies have examined the funding sources, musical projects, and application results within the Chinese National Arts Fund, highlighting its role in promoting artistic development (Wang, 2011; Yu, 2013; Zhou, 2013). Sun (2021) and Wu (2022) have discussed the contemporary phase of opera art development, emphasizing the innovation and creativity exhibited in recent works. Additionally, various theoretical articles stemming from case studies on dramas supported by the National Arts Fund have contributed to the discourse on opera creation and performance (Wang, 2023; Zheng, 2021). Despite these contributions, the specific artistic characteristics of opera funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund have not been comprehensively explored.

The motivation behind this study is twofold and underscores the pressing need for comprehensive investigation. Firstly, while numerous operas have received support from the Chinese National Arts Fund, there remains a substantial pool of talented creators and their operatic works that have yet to benefit from inclusion in the Fund's support programs. This glaring gap necessitates research to assist these creators in identifying the right avenues for advancement. The driving force behind these imperatives largely stems from the leadership and overarching influence of the National Arts Fund. Additionally, existing research predominantly focuses on exploring the dissemination and creation of operas; however, there exists a notable research lacuna regarding the artistic characteristics of operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund. Therefore, employing observational, analytical, and reflective methodologies, this study aims to uncover the prominent artistic features of Chinese opera projects supported by the National Arts Fund, enabling them to stand out. This inquiry is pivotal for fostering advancements in contemporary Chinese opera art and its dissemination into broader domains. It merits attention and warrants in-depth exploration for a more comprehensive understanding.

## Research Objective

This study aims to explore the artistic characteristics of opera funded by Chinese National Arts Fund.

## Literature Review

The Chinese National Arts Fund is a public welfare fund primarily funded by the central government and supplemented by donations from individuals, legal entities, or other organizations in accordance with the law. It focuses on four main areas: creation and production, publicity and promotion, collection, and talent training, with a particular emphasis on supporting artistic creation. Unlike other humanities funds, art funds are characterized by diversity, openness, universality, and complexity. They transcend system, industry, and regional limitations, offering opportunities for declaration and participation to entities and individuals across society. Currently, there is a scarcity of research papers on the topic of “data analysis and research of opera works in the National Arts Fund project” in China. A search across nearly ten academic databases, such as the Online Publishing Database of Chinese Academic Journals on CNKI, yielded over 60 relevant papers. The following is a brief review of the papers with significant reference value:

### Research on the Perception of the Opera

In Wen’s (2021) publication in “Chinese Drama”, the focus is on the exploration of heroism ideals through the portrayal of human nature in the national opera “Hong Liu Peng Pai”. This opera centers around the life of Comrade Peng, a pioneer of the Chinese peasant movement, and highlights his leadership in the peasant revolutionary movement, showcasing the history of events and the remarkable achievements of the Communist Party of China amidst various trials and tribulations. Cui (2018), in her paper titled “Reflections on Watching the Classic Red Opera ‘by the Jinsha River’” published in Drama Literature, emphasizes the positive reception of the red classic opera “By the Jinsha River” staged by the National Center for the Performing Arts. It compares this opera with other national operas sharing similar themes, highlighting the dramatic storyline, character relationships, emotional impact, and intricate stage design, all of which reflect the essence of national aesthetics. The study also delves into the characteristics of opera ontology. Regarding opera creation, Peng (2019) published a paper in the Sichuan Drama Journal titled “A New Perspective on the Creation of Ethnic Operas with a Red Theme in the Contemporary Cultural Environment.” This paper asserts that the creation of national operas with a red theme reflects the stylistic elements and themes of the new era. It explores how these operas portray stories of national epic heroes across different regions, incorporating traditional musical melodies and international elements representative of the era, thereby showcasing a blend of national and international characteristics. Additionally, the paper discusses the significance of realistic stage design concepts in visually conveying the grandeur of the opera’s theme and supporting

characterization and plot development. Zhu (2019) published “Reflections on the Music Composition of the Ethnic Opera ‘The Red Detachment of Women’”. As the opera's creator, he explained the inheritance and development of national opera, as well as the inheritance and innovation of writing techniques from the perspective of opera composition.

### **Research on the Value and Dissemination of Opera**

Regarding the value of opera, Fu and Kuang (2021) published a paper titled “The Significance of Red Opera Performances in Campus Cultural Communication” in the “Contemporary Music” journal. This paper examines the current state of cultural dissemination of “red” culture in universities, emphasizing the importance of red opera performances and discussing strategies for rehearsing and promoting red opera within university settings, providing their own perspectives on the matter. In addition, Wu (2022) contributed a paper in “Northern Music” titled “Application and Practice of Selected Sections of Chinese Red Classic Operas in Teaching”. This paper offers a summary of Chinese red classic operas and analyzes the artistic charm of “Red Guards on Honghu Lake”, discussing the opera's application in teaching and exploring strategies to enhance the teaching outcomes of Chinese red classic opera excerpts.

### **Research on the Objectives, Content, and Direction of the Chinese National Art Fund**

According to Yu (2012), the main sources of funds for the Chinese National Art Fund come from central fiscal allocations and donations from individuals, legal entities, or other organizations. To ensure the efficient use of these funds and truly promote the development of the arts, the auditing function's significant supervisory role must be fully played. Zhou (2013) researched the musical projects within the Chinese National Art Fund from 2014 to 2018, analyzing their rich national, distinct era-related, and profound intrinsic qualities. The musical language used combines tradition with modernity, emphasizing the transfer of positive energy and the interpretation of the Chinese spirit. Wang (2011) also sorted out the fund application results of local colleges. For example, the success of Jilin Art College in obtaining fund projects stems from years of creative exploration and study by its teachers and students.

### **Research on the Macro Dimension of Opera Creation**

Guo (2002) posits that contemporary opera art has entered a new phase of development. Yu (2012) points out that contemporary artists strive to carry forward the classics with new concepts and techniques, evoking the heroic era. Under the contemporary aesthetic direction, recent works demonstrate outstanding artistic creativity, fully expressing admiration for heroic

figures and inspiring the contemporary generation to advance. Sun (2021) also mentions that recent national operas reflect the characteristics of the new era in their creative expression, with themes celebrating heroic stories from different regions and nationalities. Furthermore, the theoretical results of case studies on dance dramas supported by the National Arts Fund are abundant. Operas such as “Love on Songmaoling”, “Nurse from Taihang”, “Guest on the Iceberg”, “Spark of Stars”, “Hero”, “Osmanthus in August”, and “Long March” have yielded numerous theoretical articles discussing various aspects of opera creation and performance.

From the above research results, researchers have indirectly detailed the importance and feasibility of studying operas supported by the National Art Fund. The consensus is that, with the support of the National Art Fund, operas should innovate and produce more high-quality works. However, research based on data analysis, quantitative research, and multi-dimensional in-depth discussions is not satisfactory. On the one hand, this indicates that existing research results are not detailed enough; on the other hand, it proves that this research’s starting point and foothold are innovative and can effectively fill some gaps in current research. This reaffirms the direction of this research topic, striving for breakthroughs in both theoretical research and practical application.

The Chinese National Arts Fund plays a crucial role in supporting opera creation and dissemination, aiming to promote cultural development and artistic innovation. Existing studies have focused on various aspects such as the perception of opera, its value and dissemination, objectives and content of the Chinese National Arts Fund, and the macro dimension of opera creation. These studies highlight the significance of the Chinese National Arts Fund in promoting artistic development. However, despite the existing research on opera supported by the National Arts Fund, there is a notable gap.

1. The majority of existing research efforts are concentrated on exploring the dissemination and creation of opera, yet there remains a conspicuous absence of attention towards the artistic characteristics of opera funded by Chinese National Arts Fund.

Therefore, the researcher decided to take operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund as research subject, to explore the artistic characteristics of opera funded by Chinese National Arts Fund. Based on the musicology theory, this paper uses the knowledge and theory of musicology to analyze the artistic characteristics of Chinese national opera art and its music creation, singing and performance. Approaching opera supported by the Chinese National Arts Fund from the perspective of artistic characteristics enables a systematic investigation that can offer new insights and theoretical support to the field of opera creation. This endeavor addresses existing research

gaps and provides valuable references and insights for the future development of Chinese national opera.

## Conceptual Framework

This research is qualitative research. The researcher defined the research conceptual framework based on the musicology theory. The details are as follows.

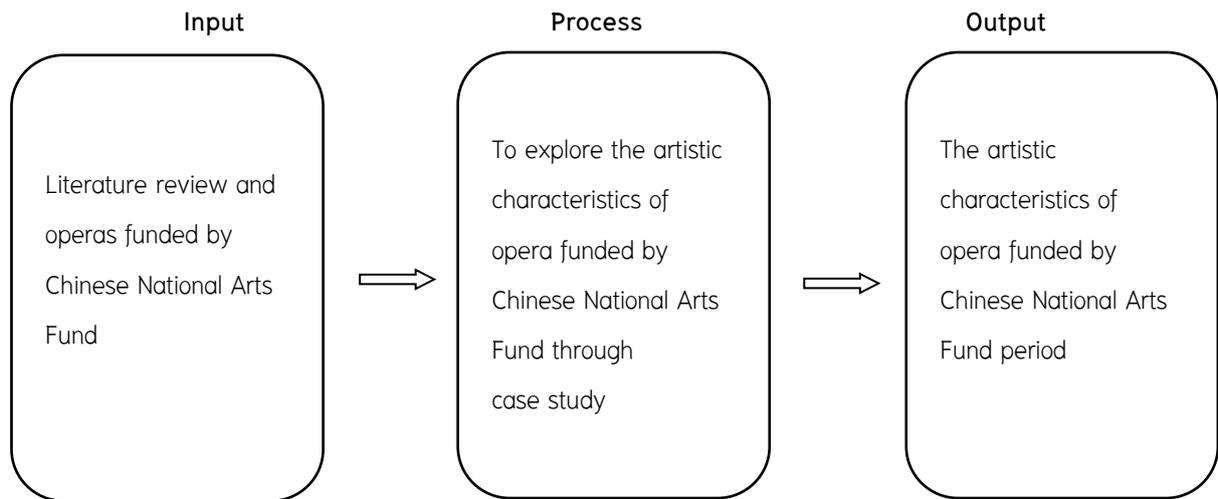


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

## Research Methodology

In this research, a qualitative method was employed, and the methodology is detailed as follows:

### Research Population

This study is centered around operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund, with the objective of exploring their artistic characteristics. The researchers chose the 76 operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund during the period from 2014 to 2019 as the population. These operas cover categories including large-scale stage operas, small-scale stage operas, operas funded for dissemination and promotion, as well as operas supported for cultivating young talent (Zheng, 2021).

### Research Sample

For the sample size in this study, the researcher employed simple random sampling to select 8 operas from the 76 operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund during the period from 2014 to 2019.

### **Data Collection**

Firstly, the researchers conducted a literature review of research related to operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund. This aided researchers in enhancing their observational and summarization skills in the process of conducting case analyses on the selected operas. Subsequently, the researchers conducted on-site observations of 8 operas through case study, aiming to synthesize the data by integrating knowledge from previous theories and studies.

The timeframe for the case study ranged from July 16, 2023, to August 16, 2023.

### **Data Analysis**

During the case study analysis, the data collected from on-site observations of the 8 operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund were transcribed and systematically organized. Subsequently, the data underwent coding based on recurring themes, characters, settings, musical styles, and other relevant factors. This process facilitated the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences among the operas, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their artistic characteristics. Moreover, the findings obtained from the case study were compared with those from the literature review, enabling the validation or extension of existing theories and concepts related to operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund.

## **Research Results**

Objective 1. Based on the results from case study on the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund and literature review, the artistic characteristics of the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund was categorized into 5 dimensions. The specific contents are as follows.

### **Overall Diversity in Script Themes**

The primary artistic characteristic of the operas funded by the National Arts Fund is the Overall Diversity in Script Themes. Since the introduction of opera art to China, it has undergone various stages of development and evolution. During the period of the Chinese New Democratic Revolution, opera art underwent a process of localization and nationalization, producing many revolutionary historical theme works imbued with the spirit of the time, which quickly integrated into the Chinese cultural and artistic landscape. Through nearly a century of exploration and practice, Chinese opera art has developed a unique national cultural spirit, creating many outstanding operas with a broad vision that combines Chinese and Western elements. The flourishing development of the cluster of opera works funded by the National Arts Fund closely

integrates with the latest trends in China's socialist political, economic, and cultural development. It observes real-life events emerging in the process of rural revitalization and construction with a spirit of realism and romanticism. This diversity in theme encompasses various aspects such as classical mythology, human anecdotes, historical cases, revolutionary themes, contemporary issues, major social events, ideological themes, and themes related to socialist construction. This characteristic has become particularly prominent in the past decade, with an astonishing number of operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund covering a wide range of themes, reflecting the openness and freedom of China's cultural policies and enabling creators to boldly innovate. For example, "Ma Xiangyang's Rural Diary" focuses on the rural reality theme, drawing on real-life events from the poverty alleviation and development process as its inspiration, dramatically adapting character portrayals to present a profound artistic impression to the audience. Through this diversity of themes, opera works funded by the National Arts Fund not only deeply reflect real-life experiences but also effectively educate and entertain the masses, earning widespread popularity among the people.



Fig.2 Ma Xiangyang's Rural Diary

### **Innovativeness in Script Creation Structure**

The innovativeness in script creation structure in contemporary Chinese National Art Fund opera productions is evident in several aspects. Firstly, these works strive to achieve a balance between commonality and individuality, aiming to express both the cultural attributes shared within opera and the unique artistic styles of individual creators. This unity not only generates significant societal responses upon the release of similar opera productions but also ensures that

each work possesses its own distinctiveness, leaving a lasting impression on the audience. Secondly, creators endeavor to infuse their cultural individuality into every element of the script, thereby endowing the overall work with a unique artistic flavor. Through meticulous attention to detail during the creation and staging processes, creators integrate their own knowledge, experiences, and creativity with the art of opera, resulting in innovative and emotionally resonant productions. This innovative structure of scriptwriting not only imbues opera productions with vitality and artistic appeal but also injects new cultural connotations and artistic expressions into contemporary Chinese opera. For example, “On the Road to Poverty Alleviation” is a representative opera production characterized by its cluster of vivid characters and complex dramatic conflicts, portraying the real-life scenes of poverty alleviation efforts in China. In this production, characters like Huang Wenxiu and others are depicted with distinct personalities and cultural traits. Huang Wenxiu, as a university graduate and leader in poverty alleviation efforts, exhibits resilience and wisdom, while other characters like Liu Shirong and Liu Yubin showcase different aspects of social reality and human nature. The lively portrayal and diverse characterization of these figures make “On the Road to Poverty Alleviation” a captivating gem on the opera stage, representing the pinnacle of contemporary Chinese National Art Fund opera productions.



**Fig.3** On the Road to Poverty Alleviation

### **Richness, Ethnicity, and Openness in Opera Music Composition**

The richness, ethnicity, and openness evident in opera music composition funded by the National Art Fund represent significant advancements in the art form. Firstly, the richness of music composition encompasses a diverse array of elements drawn from traditional Chinese folk music

and opera. This fusion of styles and techniques, including folk melodies, recitatives, and choruses, serves as a foundation for creating compelling narratives and evoking cultural nuances. For instance, in “On the Road to Poverty Alleviation”, the integration of regional folk tunes and operatic styles adds depth and authenticity to the storytelling, enhancing the audience’s engagement with the narrative. Secondly, the ethnicity of the compositions is prominently showcased through the incorporation of specific regional music elements. By drawing inspiration from local cultures across China, composers authentically portray the diversity and richness of the country’s musical heritage. In works like “The Three Locks”, the infusion of Shanxi local folk songs and operatic rhythms not only adds authenticity to the narrative but also serves as a vehicle for preserving and celebrating regional traditions. Lastly, the openness of contemporary opera compositions reflects a dynamic fusion of both traditional Chinese and Western musical influences. Composers actively embrace Western compositional techniques and symphonic elements, creating a harmonious blend that resonates with modern audiences. This openness to diverse influences fosters innovation and creativity within the genre, ensuring its continued relevance and appeal in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. Overall, these characteristics collectively contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary Chinese opera music, enriching the cultural tapestry and showcasing the evolution of Chinese artistic expression on the global stage.

### **The Artistry of Opera Singing and Performance**

In terms of the artistry of opera singing and performance, the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund exemplify a fusion of Eastern and Western approaches. The integration of singing with dialogue showcases the exceptional skills of opera artists and their confidence in the Chinese opera school, while also maintaining a rich sense of national cultural sentiment. The diverse vocal techniques employed in opera, such as bel canto, ethnic, pop, and authentic styles, offer new means for enriching character portrayal. Regarding stage performance, actors strive to move away from stereotypical acting styles, aiming to depict genuine and vivid character images through language, dialogue, and performance, thus deepening the audience’s understanding and immersion in the storyline. Overall, the music composition and stage performance of National Arts Fund operas demonstrate both the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture, as well as a commitment to enhancing the audience’s aesthetic experience, showcasing the richness and contemporaneity of opera art.

### The Ingenious Design of Opera Stagecraft

Since the beginning of the new century, Chinese opera creations have undergone significant changes in stage design supported by advancements in stage technology and internet technology. In addition to a well-crafted plot and melodious singing, opera productions require visually stunning stage elements for impactful performances. Unlike the grandeur of revolutionary historical works or the elegance of classical cultural themes, operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund showcase unique artistic styles in stage design. These productions focus on various life scenes within realistic social contexts, often depicting rural life with simplicity and authenticity. Stage designs portray rural cultural landscapes realistically, with meticulous attention to detail. For instance, in the opera “The Three Locks”, the stage layout is typical, featuring a central performance area for the main characters, a sloping backdrop allowing unobstructed views of supporting characters, and essential elements like a “well” and an ancient tree symbolizing village life. Such designs serve both functional and atmospheric purposes, displaying a realism characteristic of the productions. Moreover, in terms of stage decor, prop arrangement, and costume design, these operas exhibit a distinctive style reflecting themes of poverty alleviation. For instance, in productions like “The Three Locks” and “Ma Xiangyang's Rural Diary”, the stark contrast between the initial portrayal of impoverished villagers and the later depiction of golden rice fields and bright streetlights highlights the thematic progression.



Fig.4 The Three Locks

Similarly, in operas like “Listening to Soma” and “On the Road to Poverty Alleviation”, meticulous attention is paid to costume design, with hundreds of different costumes designed to represent various ethnic cultures, adding depth to the storytelling. In terms of individuality, operas with poverty alleviation themes demonstrate rich creativity in stage design, breaking away from

conventional templates to captivate audiences. For example, in “Listening to Soma”, the stage is covered in vegetation, and a multi-level platform, seamlessly integrated with multimedia backgrounds, depicts the rugged roads leading to the homes of the Yi people, effectively conveying the harsh living conditions. Similarly, in “On the Road to Poverty Alleviation”, the staging of scenes in the remote Bai’ni Village utilizes elevated platforms to create spatial depth and provide multiple performance spaces, enriching the narrative and enhancing visual appeal.

Overall, the artistic characteristics of the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund include five aspects, which are Overall Diversity in Script Themes, Innovativeness in Script Creation Structure, Richness, Ethnicity, and Openness in Opera Music Composition, The Artistry of Opera Singing and Performance, and Ingenious Design of Opera Stagecraft. These characteristics are the reasons why these operas are able to receive support from the National Arts Fund. It is precisely because they possess these characteristics that they can assist in further disseminating Chinese opera and provide valuable direction for subsequent opera creations.

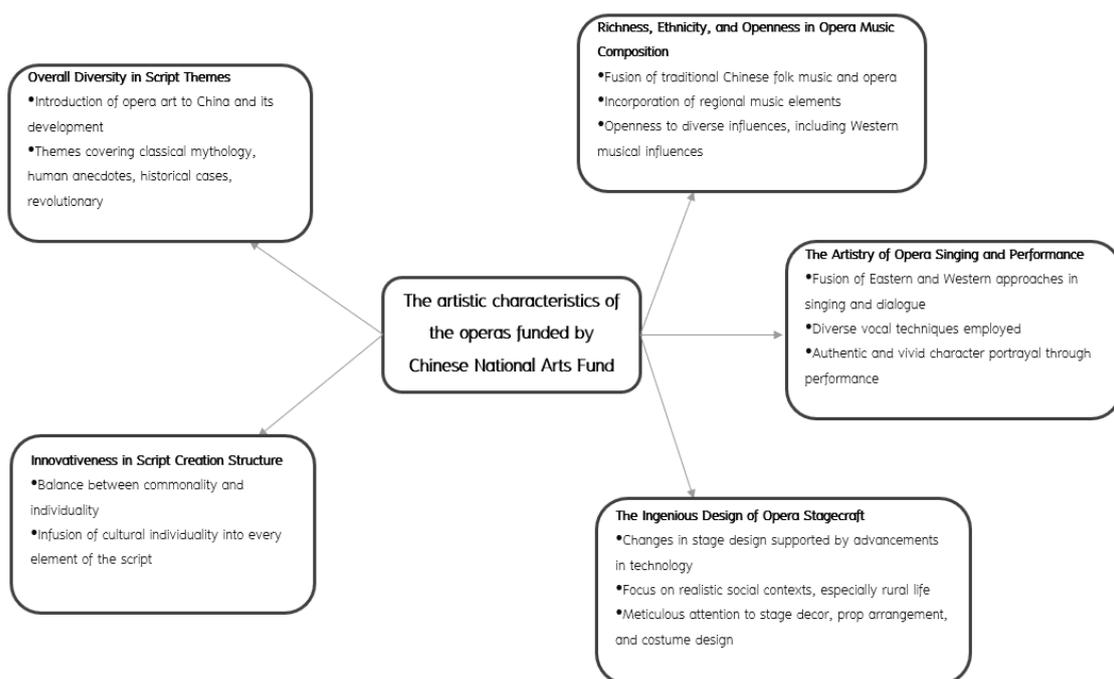


Fig.5 Mind mapping of the artistic characteristics of the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund.

## Discussions

The objectives of the study were to explore the artistic characteristics of opera funded by Chinese National Arts Fund. To achieve the objectives, the researchers selected 8 operas from the 76 operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund during the period from 2014 to 2019 as the

research objects. Through the methods of case study and literature review, the researchers attempted to conduct an in-depth exploration of the artistic characteristics of operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund.

Objective 1 of the research aimed to explore the artistic characteristics of opera funded by Chinese National Arts Fund.

Base on the result, the first artistic characteristic of opera funded by Chinese National Arts Fund was Overall Diversity in Script Themes. Firstly, Chinese opera art has undergone a long process of development, from introduction to localization, nationalization, and modernization, absorbing a rich variety of cultural elements. This historical evolution has provided opera creators with vast creative space, allowing them to draw inspiration from classical mythology, historical legends, and contemporary societal realities, covering a wide range of thematic materials. This finding was consistent with Sun (2021), who noted that recent national operas reflecting characteristic of the new era, celebrating heroic stories from various regions and nationalities. Secondly, operas funded by the National Arts Fund are closely aligned with the realistic needs of China's socialist development and cultural policy directives. Creators observe and depict various real-life events in China's social development process with a realist perspective, reflecting the characteristic of the times and the spirit of the Chinese people, from rural revitalization to social reform. This was reinforced by Cui's (2018) study, where she underscored that national operas serve as mirrors of national aesthetic sensibilities, depicting real-life events with powerful emotional resonance.

Innovativeness in Script Creation Structure was another characteristic of operas funded by Chinese National Fund. The study found that the operas funded by the National Arts Fund embody a delicate equilibrium between common cultural attributes inherent in opera and the distinctive artistic styles of individual creators. This equilibrium ensures that while these works may share overarching themes or elements, each work maintains its unique identity, sparking significant societal reactions and leaving enduring impressions on the audience. Moreover, creators painstakingly infuse their personal cultural knowledge, experiences, and creativity into every aspect of the script, imbuing the productions with a distinct artistic flavor. Through meticulous attention to detail during both the creation and staging processes, they inject fresh cultural connotations and artistic expressions into contemporary Chinese opera, resulting in productions that are both innovative and emotionally resonant. Guo (2002) and Yu (2012) both discussed the

development of contemporary opera art, emphasizing the creators need to strive to carry forward script with new concepts and techniques of their own, reflecting the characteristic of the new era.

The third characteristic of operas funded by Chinese National Fund was Richness, Ethnicity, and Openness in Opera Music Composition. The third characteristic encompasses the following aspects: Richness in Music Composition: Opera music composition integrates various elements from traditional Chinese folk music and opera, creating a fusion that forms the foundation for theatrical narratives and cultural depth. Zhu (2019) discussed the music composition of the ethnic opera, emphasizing the importance of integrating traditional and modern elements into the work. Ethnicity in Composition: By drawing inspiration from local cultures across China, composers authentically depict the country's rich and diverse musical heritage, showcasing the diversity and richness of ethnic cultures. Peng (2019) focused on a new perspective on ethnic opera composition in the contemporary cultural environment, exploring how stories of ethnic heroes from different regions are incorporated into works, showcasing a fusion of ethnic and international elements. Openness in Works: Contemporary opera composers actively incorporate Western compositional techniques and symphonic elements, creating a harmonious fusion of Eastern and Western music that fosters innovation and creativity within the genre. Sun (2021) mentioned in his research that recent national operas reflect the characteristic of the new era in their creative expression, with themes celebrating heroic stories from different regions and nationalities, showing an openness to Western musical influences.

The fourth characteristic of operas funded by Chinese National Fund was The Artistry of Opera Singing and Performance. The integration of singing with dialogue in these operas exemplifies a seamless fusion, showcasing the exceptional skills of opera artists and their confidence in the Chinese opera school. Opera singers employ a diverse range of vocal techniques, including bel canto, ethnic, pop, and authentic styles, providing new means for character portrayal and enriching the overall performance. Actors have moved away from outdated acting styles, crafting genuine and vivid character images through language, dialogue, and nuanced performances, deepening audience understanding and immersion in the storyline. This finding is in line with Gao's (2023) observation, wherein he emphasized that Chinese national operas demand proficiency in both vocal delivery and stage performance. Vocal singing plays a crucial role in opera, serving not only as a means of expressing characters' emotions and inner worlds but also as a bridge for emotional resonance with the audience. Meanwhile, stage performance and action design enhance the depth of character portrayal and audience engagement, making the entire

performance more vivid and captivating. Therefore, opera productions supported by the National Arts Fund must excel in both vocal singing and stage acting to provide audiences with a richer artistic experience.

The last characteristic was Ingenious Design of Opera Stagecraft. The stagecraft design of operas funded by the National Arts Fund aims to showcase the authenticity and vividness of various life scenes within realistic social contexts. It integrates functional and atmospheric stage elements to create impactful performance effects, presents original and creative stage designs to captivate audiences and deepen narrative storytelling, and emphasizes the realism of opera productions through meticulous attention to detail and diverse design techniques. Similar evidence can be found in previous studies (e.g., Cui, 2018; Peng, 2019; Wen 2021). Peng (2019) emphasized the significance of the concept of realistic stage design in visually conveying the grandeur of opera themes and supporting character development and plot progression. Cui (2018) highlighted the importance of stage design in portraying dramatic storylines, character relationships, and emotional impacts, reflecting the essence of national aesthetics. Wen (2021) particularly stressed the importance of stage design in showcasing the grandeur of opera themes and supporting character portrayal and plot development, indicating recognition of the concept of realistic stage design.

### **Knowledge from Research**

The study identified five artistic characteristics of the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund, which were Overall Diversity in Script Themes, Innovativeness in Script Creation Structure, Richness, Ethnicity, and Openness in Opera Music Composition, The Artistry of Opera Singing and Performance, and Ingenious Design of Opera Stagecraft (As shown in Figure 6). These characteristics collectively contribute to the value and excellence of the funded operas.

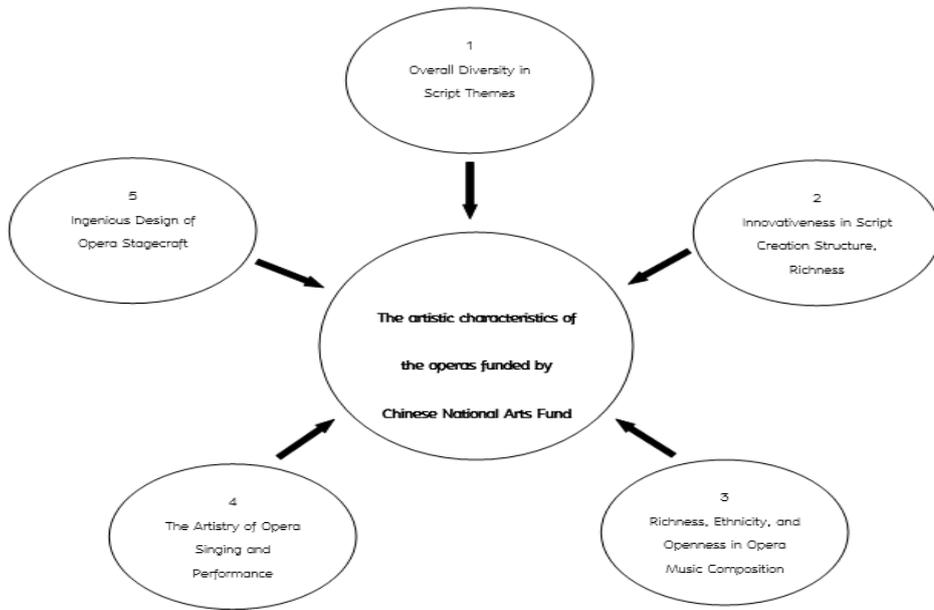


Fig.6 The artistic characteristics of the operas funded by Chinese National Arts Fund.

## Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussions, it is evident that operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund exhibit distinctive artistic characteristics across various dimensions. These characteristics not only showcase the richness and diversity of contemporary Chinese opera but also reflect the evolving cultural landscape and the innovative spirit of creators. The five identified dimensions—Overall Diversity in Script Themes, Innovativeness in Script Creation Structure, Richness, Ethnicity, and Openness in Opera Music Composition, The Artistry of Opera Singing and Performance, and Ingenious Design of Opera Stagecraft—underscore the multifaceted nature of these productions.

In conclusion, the artistic characteristics identified in operas funded by the Chinese National Arts Fund exemplify the richness, diversity, high quality and innovation of contemporary Chinese opera. These operas not only showcase the cultural heritage and creative prowess of Chinese artists but also contribute to the enrichment of global opera repertoire. The recognition of these characteristics also delineates the path for subsequent operas seeking support from the National Arts Fund. Moving forward, continued support for opera creation and innovation will be essential in preserving and advancing the rich tradition of Chinese opera on the national and world stage.

## Suggestions

Encouraging continued innovation in script creation structure and music composition is essential for the sustained vitality of Chinese opera. Funding agencies, cultural institutions, and opera companies should provide support and resources for creators to explore new techniques, experiment with diverse themes, and push the boundaries of traditional artistic conventions. Additionally, investing in training programs and talent development initiatives should be prioritized to recognize the importance of skilled performers and stagecraft professionals. This includes offering workshops, masterclasses, and mentorship opportunities for opera singers, actors, directors, composers, set designers, and technicians to hone their craft and expand their artistic horizons.

For the further studies, comparative studies could be undertaken to examine the artistic characteristics of Chinese National Arts Fund-funded operas in comparison to other forms of opera or theatrical productions both within China and internationally. This could shed light on the distinctive features, strengths, and challenges of Chinese opera versus global artistic traditions. This holds great importance for the dissemination of Chinese national opera on a global scale.

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