

The Interweaving and Continuation of the “Soundscape Fabric” Attribute and Cultural Symbols of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera

Yuanshan Li

Jingchu University of Technology, Jingmen 448000, Hubei, China

Corresponding author: Yuanshan Li (e-mail: LYS20251128@163.com)

ABSTRACT Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is an important local opera of Hubei Province and embodies the cultural heritage and folk art wisdom of the Jiangnan Plain. This paper interprets its soundscape from the perspective of “soundscape structure,” examining how different sound elements overlap, interweave, and form a distinctive auditory texture. Starting from the soundscape attributes of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera, the study analyzes the spatial composition of its soundscape, the layered structure of its musical texture, and the aesthetic appeal of its performance sound field. It further examines the multidimensional presentation of cultural symbols through singing style, dialect, and stage conventions. On this basis, the paper explores practical paths for the continuation of soundscape and symbolic systems in contemporary contexts. The study shows that the opera’s vocal systems, dialectal expression, instrumental texture, and stage routines jointly construct a regional cultural meaning network, providing a structured perspective for the preservation, revitalization, and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

INDEX TERMS jingzhou flower drum opera, soundscape structure, cultural symbols, musical texture, intangible cultural heritage

I. INTRODUCTION

JINGZHOU Flower Drum Opera originated in the Jiangnan Plain and, through hundreds of years of development and evolution, has become a significant form of Hubei’s local opera art, and was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006. Rooted in the folk culture of the Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera, with its unique singing style, vivid dialect expression, and rich stage performance, authentically portrays the life and spiritual world of the people of the Jiangnan Plain. How to understand and interpret the essential characteristics of traditional art in the current cultural context has become a topic of great importance to the academic community. This article proposes the concept of “soundscape fabric,” viewing the various sound elements of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera as an interwoven fabric. From the intersection of soundscape studies and semiotics, it explores the connotation of its soundscape attributes and the multi-dimensional presentation of its cultural symbols.

A. THEORETICAL GROUNDING: SOUNDSCAPE, SEMIOTICS, AND THE FABRIC METAPHOR

Before proceeding to the specific analysis of the “soundscape fabric” attribute of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera, it is necessary to define its theoretical foundation. The concept

of “soundscape” in this paper is rooted in the field of Soundscape Studies pioneered by scholars like R. Murray Schafer. This approach views the acoustic environment not merely as a physical space but as a cultural phenomenon that reflects culture, history, and community. Building on this, this paper introduces the “fabric” structural metaphor. This metaphor is not arbitrary but is methodologically extended from Semiotics and musical texture analysis. Within the semiotic framework, sound elements (such as singing styles and instruments) are treated as symbols possessing signifying meaning. The “soundscape fabric” metaphor is not merely a descriptive flourish for musical texture, but a crucial analytical framework. While standard musical analysis focuses solely on the structural organization of sound (e.g., distinguishing between homophony and polyphony), and Schafer’s Soundscape theory primarily addresses the cultural interpretation of the auditory environment, the “soundscape fabric” framework offers a unique structural model for cultural-acoustic integration. Its analytical power lies in the following:

Modeling Integration: It structurally integrates the musical texture (the ‘warp’ and ‘weft’ defined in Section 1) with the cultural symbols (the ‘patterns’ and ‘dye’ detailed in Section 2). It analytically defines the relationship: the texture

is the material basis, and the symbols (dialect, singing style) are the encoded meanings structurally embedded within that material.

Highlighting Regional Specificity: Unlike general texture concepts, the "fabric" metaphor emphasizes the unique regional density and pattern of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera's heterophony—its specific mix of Gaoqiang, Qishui, and Daluo—as an irreplaceable cultural artifact woven by the Jiangnan Plain's folk traditions.

Explaining Continuation: By treating the soundscape as a physically and culturally woven structure, it provides the necessary framework to explore the paper's thesis of "interweaving and continuation," arguing that the cultural patterns can only survive and evolve if the structural fabric remains intact.

Through this "soundscape fabric" theoretical construction, this study aims to move beyond simple acoustic description to provide an in-depth structural interpretation of how sound elements in Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera build its unique cultural meaning network and aesthetic experience.

II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONNOTATION OF THE "SOUNDSCAPE FABRIC" ATTRIBUTE IN JINGZHOU FLOWER DRUM OPERA

A. SPATIAL COMPOSITION AND REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUND LANDSCAPE

The sound landscape of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera has obvious spatial composition characteristics, and the sound elements form a distinct distribution pattern in physical and cultural spaces. From a physical point of view, the production of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera requires a specific performance venue. Traditional grass stage theaters and modern theaters each form their own different acoustic environments [1]. From a cultural geography perspective, the sound landscape of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is deeply embedded in the regional cultural fabric of the Jiangnan Plain. The natural environment of the water town, the production rhythm of agricultural civilization, and the atmosphere of the port and commercial area have all left their mark on its sound form [2,3].

B. THE TEXTURAL STRUCTURE AND LAYERED EXPRESSION OF MUSICAL FORMS

The musical form of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera has a texture structure similar to that of textiles, with various sound elements interwoven like warp and weft threads, forming a multi-layered auditory space. This textile analogy can be substantiated by a structural analysis of its heterophonic texture, a characteristic unique to many regional Chinese operas, but which manifests distinctly in the three major vocal systems. In terms of the horizontal aspect, the singing melody extends continuously like the warp threads in the fabric, and the three vocal systems (Gaoqiang, Qishui, and Daluo) each possess a unique melodic contour that serves as the main thread of the musical narrative. For instance, the Gaoqiang system frequently uses large melodic leaps

and a free, smooth extension that creates a broader, more tensile 'warp' thread, supporting epic or tragic narratives. Conversely, the Qishui system employs a texture dominated by stepwise movement and flexible ornaments, forming a finer, more densely woven 'warp' ideal for intricate, lyrical passages [4].

C. PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE AND AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE PERFORMANCE SOUND FIELD

The sound field of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera creates an immersive auditory experience space, where the audience and performers interact and resonate with each other. The sound field is formed not only on the basis of physical acoustics, but also on the basis of the shared cultural psychology between the performers and the audience [5]. The actors' singing, recitation, acting and fighting resonate in the sound field, and the audience's cheers and applause echo in response, forming a unique interactive soundscape of traditional opera. In terms of aesthetic connotation, the sound field of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is a shared aesthetic memory and emotional identity of the people of the Jiangnan Plain. The high-pitched and passionate Gaoqiang expresses the romantic feelings of the Chu people, while the gentle and delicate Qishuiqiang expresses the tender feelings of the water town [6].

D. THE INTERWEAVING OF "SOUNDSCAPE FABRIC" ATTRIBUTES AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS

The "soundscape fabric" attributes, analyzed through spatial composition, textural structure, and perceptual experience, are fundamentally and structurally interwoven with the cultural symbols of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera. The very texture of the opera's sound is the medium through which its core cultural meanings are expressed and preserved. For example, the textural structure (II), defined by the continuous melody of the three vocal systems (Gaoqiang, Qishui, Daluo) acting as warp threads and the accompaniment instruments as weft threads, directly forms the material basis for the emotional encoding and symbolic markings of the singing styles. Similarly, the spatial composition rooted in the regional cultural fabric of the Jiangnan Plain shapes the phonetic features and tone sandhi of the Jingzhou dialect, thus embedding the dialect's cultural carrying and identity recognition into the musical landscape. Therefore, the soundscape is not merely a background but the dynamic, interwoven structure that gives form and life to the opera's multidimensional cultural symbols, establishing a cohesive meaning network.

III. THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL PRESENTATION OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS OF JINGZHOU FLOWER DRUM OPERA

A. SYMBOLIC MARKINGS AND EMOTIONAL ENCODING OF SINGING STYLES AND MELODIES

The singing style and melody are the cultural symbols that best represent the uniqueness of Jingzhou Flower Drum

Opera. Over a long period of time, through long-term artistic practice, a complete set of symbolic identification systems and emotional coding mechanisms with different timbres and characteristics have been formed. The three vocal systems of Gaoqiang, Qishui, and Daluo respectively undertake different dramatic functions and emotional orientations. They are the symbolic codes for the audience to interpret the plot and experience emotions. The three complement each other and have their own advantages, together forming the rich and diverse vocal system of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera [7]. The high-pitched and bright timbre of the Gaoqiang system is generally used to express the exciting and tragic situation. The large leaps in the melody and the free and smooth extension of the melody constitute the unique emotional symbol characteristics of the Gaoqiang system. In the tragic section, its strong appeal and shock are even more prominent. Qishui uses a gentle and delicate melody to express the emotions. It is mostly used in the lyrical section. The melody direction with stepwise movement and the flexible use of ornaments constitute the lingering emotional imagery and meticulously depict the complex emotions and psychological changes of the characters. The gong-beating style is known for its brisk rhythm and is very good at performing humorous comedic scenes. Its rhythmic rules and the interspersed use of filler words and embellishments constitute its unique comedic symbol vocabulary, making the stage atmosphere relaxed and pleasant [8]. The three major vocal systems of gong-beating, gong-beating, and gong-beating respectively undertake different dramatic functions and emotional orientations.

Crucially, the symbolic encoding of these singing styles is directly interwoven with the material basis of the "soundscape fabric" defined. The contrasting textural structures—the broad, tensile 'warp' of Gaoqiang versus the finer, densely woven 'warp' of Qishui—provide the underlying acoustic framework. The Gaoqiang's tragic emotion is not merely expressed by, but is structurally embedded within, its melodic 'warp' of large leaps, while the Qishui's delicate lyricism is materially realized by its stepwise movement and flexible ornamentation. This structural-symbolic interweaving confirms the 'fabric' as the essential medium for the opera's core emotional transmission.

B. CULTURAL CARRYING AND IDENTITY RECOGNITION OF DIALECTS AND SLANG

Dialects and slang play an important role as cultural symbols in Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera. They are not only the direct carriers of regional culture, but also the main medium for constructing identity and the link between artistic performance and people's lives. Jingzhou dialect belongs to the Southwestern Mandarin system. Its unique phonetic features, vocabulary system and expression have fundamentally influenced the language style of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera, giving it a strong regional identity and pronounced local characteristics [9]. The tone system and tone sandhi rules of Jingzhou dialect directly affect the melody direction

and rhythm arrangement of the singing, forming a musical language feature that is different from other opera genres. This deep integration of speech and music makes the singing more natural and sustains aesthetic appeal. In terms of vocabulary, a large number of local slang and colloquialisms are incorporated into the lyrics and recitations, making the opera expression closer to people's daily life, enhancing the affinity and appeal of the art, and making the audience feel more familiar and intimate. As cultural symbols, dialects and slang integrate the historical memory, folk traditions and values of the Jiangnan Plain into the opera performance, and realize the intergenerational transmission through opera performance, becoming a key carrier for the continuation of local culture. For local audiences, the familiar local dialect evokes strong emotional resonance and identity recognition. As a result, Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera has become a symbolic resource for uniting local cultural identity and strengthening community belonging. It plays an irreplaceable role in maintaining the local cultural community and enhancing group emotional connection [10]. A critical tension emerges when considering modern cross-media dissemination. While the traditional, unmediated presentation relies on the regional dialect to reinforce identity among local audiences, translation or subtitling necessary for broader, non-local film and television distribution (e.g., *The Flower Wall Meeting*) risks fundamentally altering the emotional encoding. The full, culturally-loaded phonetic features and tone sandhi of the Jingzhou dialect, which are structurally integral to the original melodic line, may be smoothed over or lost in translation, substituting a universal (Mandarin) emotional code for the specific local one. This is a potential contradiction between the dialect's core function as a regional identity marker and the goal of wider cultural dissemination.

The cultural symbol system of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera covers two dimensions: auditory and visual. The three types of symbols each perform their own functions and cooperate with each other to form a complete meaning network.

C. VISUAL SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF STAGE SCRIPTS

The stage routines of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera form a visual cultural symbol system, using standardized body movements and stage choreography to convey a variety of symbolic meanings and create a unique visual expression language. The routines are the most basic performance means of opera art. They are formed by artistically refining and symbolizing the movements in life. In Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera, a set of routine vocabulary with local characteristics has been formed, which not only conforms to the general rules of opera art, but also reflects a distinct regional style [11]. In terms of gestures and body movements, Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera inherits the routines of Han Opera and Chu Opera, while also incorporating the movements of folk dances in the Jiangnan Plain, showing a

graceful, simple and natural body movement. The gestures and postures of its movements have a certain conventionality, and each movement has a special narrative function and expressive value. In terms of stage choreography, the routes of actors going on and off the stage, the movement of their positions, and the changes in their formations all follow certain routines, forming a corresponding symbolic relationship with the plot and the characters. The use of space itself is a kind of meaning generation. Although the facial makeup and costumes are not as complicated as those in Peking Opera, they form a simple and clear visual symbol system. The characters' identities and personalities are externalized through specific makeup and costumes, and the audience can quickly distinguish which type of character they are and what kind of personality they have. The visual symbols are interwoven with the auditory "soundscape fabric" through a principle of multi-sensory reinforcement. The distinct tempo and rhythmic structures of the vocal systems (e.g., the brisk rhythm of Gong-beating for comedy) directly dictate the speed and intensity of the accompanying stylized movements. The body movements thus become a visible, kinetic 'weft' that structurally aligns with the auditory 'warp' of the melody. For example, a large, sweeping gesture accompanying a high-pitched Gaoqiang note ensures that the emotional encoding of the singing style (passion/tragedy) is delivered and intensified across both the auditory and visual channels. This echoes the concept of the complete symbolic meaning network [12].

IV. THE PATH OF INTERWEAVING AND CONTINUATION OF SOUNDSCAPES AND SYMBOLS IN JINGZHOU FLOWER DRUM OPERA

A. CONTEMPORARY REVITALIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF TRADITIONAL SOUNDSCAPE ELEMENTS

The contemporary revitalization and reconstruction of traditional soundscape elements is a key link in realizing

the inheritance and development of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera. On the basis of preserving the traditional essence, we should explore creative transformation paths. There are 197 plays in the repertoire of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera. Its singing style is divided into two categories: main melody and ditties. The main melody is the board melody, which includes high melody, gong melody, siping melody, and Qishui melody. The rich soundscape resources provide a solid material foundation for contemporary revitalization. To revitalize traditional soundscape, we must first conduct in-depth research on classic sound elements and systematically organize them. We should use field surveys, oral interviews, and audio-visual collection methods to collect and organize the singing recordings, accompaniment sounds, and performance records of the older generation of artists as comprehensively as possible, and establish a complete soundscape archive resource database [13]. In 1981, the Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera Society was established. The Jingzhou Administrative Office Cultural Bureau organized a lecture by famous artists, sorted out traditional plays and performance art experience, made live recordings of excellent traditional plays, edited and published the Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera Music Collection, and collected, recorded and sorted out traditional singing styles. On this basis, we explored ways to connect traditional soundscapes with contemporary aesthetic tastes. In the 1950s, we added orchestral accompaniment and interludes, realizing the first integration of tradition and modernity. Soundscape reconstruction also includes the music creation of newly created plays. "Wilderness Love and Hatred" won the China Cao Yu Drama Literature Award and the China Wenhua New Play Award. "Life Fairy Tale" won the China Wenhua Excellent Play Award. These excellent works inherited the traditional soundscape aesthetics while adding the spirit of the times and innovative elements [14]. The composition and revitalization effects of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera soundscape resources are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Overview of the composition and revitalization results of the soundscape resources of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera

Category	Specific Content	Quantity/Time	Activation Results
Traditional repertoire	"Standing on the Flower Wall", "Sanguantang", "Farewell to the Shop", etc.	197 out	Edited, adapted, and archived from live video recordings.
Main cavity system	High-pitched, zigzag, gong-beating, and siping tunes	4 types	Editing and publishing music collections
Minor tune interlude	Single-piece plaque, special melody, interlude	More than 200 kinds	Traditional singing style recording and transcription
Accompaniment innovation	Orchestral accompaniment, interlude	1950s	The first fusion of tradition and modernity
Academic organizations	Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera Association established	1981	Celebrity workshops and experience compilation
Award-winning new works	Love and Hatred in the Wilderness	1990s	Cao Yu Drama Literature Award and Wenhua New Drama Award
Award-winning new works	Fairy Tales of Life	2010	China Wenhua Outstanding Drama Award

B. CROSS-MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND INNOVATIVE EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS

Cross-media dissemination and innovative expression of cultural symbols are important means to expand the dissemination space of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera and increase its cultural influence. It is necessary to fully understand the

characteristics and dissemination laws of the contemporary media environment. The performance form of traditional theaters is limited by time and space, so its influence is relatively limited. However, with the development of digital media technology, opera symbols can circulate across media and are no longer limited to a certain field or region. In

film and television media, the excellent traditional opera "Standing on the Flower Wall" was renamed "Flower Wall Meeting" after being reorganized and adapted. It was filmed by Pearl River Film Studio as a color opera film and distributed and screened throughout the country, pioneering the visual dissemination of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera [15]. The area covered by Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is not limited to the Jiangnan Plain and more than 20 surrounding counties and cities, but even extends to parts of Hunan and Henan. The number of beneficiaries exceeds 20 million, which shows the role of cross-media dissemination in expanding the audience. In terms of new media, short videos, live streaming and other new forms of communi-

cation provide a platform for the fragmented dissemination and interactive experience of opera symbols. Core symbolic elements such as singing segments and stylized movements can be made into content products suitable for online dissemination, attracting the attention and participation of young audiences. The special program on Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera, "Appreciation of Famous Excerpts", broadcast by CCTV11 Opera Channel of China Central Television, is a typical case of the integration of traditional opera and modern media [16]. The cross media dissemination channels and effectiveness comparison of cultural symbols in Jingzhou Huagu Opera are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Comparison of Cross-Media Communication Channels and Effectiveness of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera Cultural Symbols

Media	Representative Case	Forms of dissemination	Dissemination effectiveness
Film media	"The Flower Wall Meeting" (Pearl River Film Studio)	Color opera film	Nationwide distribution and screening, pioneering the era of film and television.
Television media	CCTV-11 "Appreciation of Famous Excerpts" Special	Special programs on traditional Chinese opera	A model of the integration of traditional opera and modern media
New media platforms	Short video and live streaming	Fragmented dissemination	Attracting young audiences to pay attention and participate
Geographical coverage	Jiangnan Plain and surrounding areas	Theater performance	Covering more than 20 counties and cities, extending to Hunan and Henan provinces.
Audience size	Jiangnan Plain people	Multi-channel integration	More than 20 million people have benefited.

C. LIVING HERITAGE AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUATION THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community-based, dynamic inheritance and intergenerational continuity are fundamental to the vitality of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera. It is essential to create an inheritance ecosystem rooted in the community and involving multiple stakeholders. The basic concept of dynamic inheritance is that intangible cultural heritage is alive. traditional art only thrives through continuous practice within a vibrant cultural ecosystem. Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is popular in Mianyang, Honghu, Tianmen, Qianjiang, Jianli, Hanchuan, and Jingshan, and later gradually spread to neighboring Zhongxiang, Jingmen, and Jiangling, forming a broad community inheritance network. There are eight professional Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera troupes, six of which are state-run and two have been restructured into enterprises. These professional troupes are a vital force in the inheritance of opera. Promoting the intergenerational transmission mechanism requires opening up channels of transmission between veteran artists and the younger generation. Currently, there are eight professional Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera troupes, all of which send their students to provincial art schools for systematic professional training. After six years of training, the students return to work in the troupes. The Jianli County Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera Art Research Institute launched the "Opera Enters Campus" activity, providing classes at the school and sending some students to Wuhan for training to enhance the cultivation of flower drum opera talents. From 2000 to 2005, Qianjiang City and Central China Normal University cooperated to

train 22 flower drum opera students. In 2006, a flower drum opera junior college class was opened at Central China Normal University and Hubei Vocational College of Arts, and more than 20 professional flower drum opera actors trained through this program all graduated and were assigned to jobs. An overview of the main body and talent cultivation mechanism of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera's living heritage is shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Overview of the Main Entities and Talent Cultivation Mechanisms for the Living Heritage of Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera

Inheritance type	Main body/project	Quantity/Time	Specific measures
Professional troupes	State-run troupes	6	Daily performances and theatrical creation
Professional troupes	Restructured enterprise troupes	2	Market-oriented operation and performances benefiting the people
University cooperation	Qianjiang City and Central China Normal University	2000–2005	Train 22 Flower Drum Art College students
Targeted training	Associate Degree Programs at East China Normal University and Hubei Art Vocational College	Since 2006	More than 20 professional actors graduated and started working.
System training	Provincial Art School Professional Training	6-year system	All students from the college/department returned to their respective units after receiving training.
Campus promotion	“Traditional Opera Enters Schools” Activity in Jianli County	Continue to carry out	In-school classes were held, and some students were sent to Wuhan for training.
Benefit performance	Hubei Provincial Experimental Flower Drum Theatre	Each year	More than 100 performances were delivered to rural areas, benefiting hundreds of thousands of people.

V. CONCLUSION

Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is an artistic treasure nurtured in the Jiangnan Plain. Its unique artistic charm and cultural value are formed by the fusion of its “soundscape fabric” characteristics and cultural symbols. Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera is one of the four major local opera genres in Hubei Province, originating from the late Ming Dynasty to the Kangxi and Qianlong periods of the Qing Dynasty, with a history of over 200 years. From the spatial creation of its soundscape and the layered presentation of its musical texture, to the emotional encoding of its singing symbols and the identity construction of its dialect and slang, Jingzhou Flower Drum Opera weaves a vibrant tapestry of sound and color. On May 20, 2006, the State Council approved its inclusion in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists, and on June 7, 2008, the State Council further approved its inclusion in the third batch of national intangible cultural heritage extended lists.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yuanshan Li designed, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript. Yuanshan Li conducted the study, critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content, and gave final approval of the version to be published. Yuanshan Li participated fully in the work, takes public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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