

Femininity and Beyond: The Female Perspective and All-female Yue Opera

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Abstract

Yue Opera, a prominent genre in Chinese theater, originating in Zhejiang and thriving in Shanghai, stands out for its unique characteristic: almost all roles are portrayed by female performers. This tradition, rooted in ancient China, endures today, primarily featuring women in male roles. Throughout its history, Yue Opera has undergone transformations, notably the "New Yue Opera" period in the 1940s and a reshaping in the 1950s due to national reform. A distinctive aspect is the portrayal of female characters, depicting their multifaceted lives, resilience, and tenderness. Yue Opera's portrayal of gender roles reflects evolving societal ideologies, making it a lens into changing gender consciousness. This research explores Yue Opera's development, its impact on women's images across historical periods, and its connection to women's self-consciousness.

Keywords: Yue Opera, Gender Roles, Female Performers, Chinese Theater, Gender Consciousness

1. Introduction

Yue Opera, one of the main opera genres in China, originated in Shengzhou, Zhejiang, flourished in Shanghai, and was mainly popular in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai in China. The tune of Yue Opera is gentle and soft, and the Shengzhou dialect is used as the basis for singing and dialogue. It has a rich history and unique characteristics that set it apart from other regional opera genres.

In the early days, Yue Opera only had male actors, but after entering Shanghai, it was widely popular due to female performances, and it developed into a female Yue Opera in which all roles were played by actresses. After 1949, some male performers began to be recruited, but now it is still mainly female Yue Opera. The main script themes of Yue Opera - mainly popular with women, talented people and family themes. The main audience of Yue Opera is also more popular with female audiences due to the plot. By drawing on their emotions and life experiences, women who entered the public cultural sphere also shaped the opera's character and aesthetic.

The portrayal of female characters in Yue Opera showcases a wide range of narratives, capturing the multifaceted aspects of women's lives across various societal contexts and emotional layers. These characters often embody a blend of resilience and tenderness, depicting their determination and wisdom in the face of adversity. Their depiction goes beyond mere acting; it serves as a portrayal of women's complexity within family, society, and emotional spheres.

Yue Opera has received much attention from the keen admirers in China as a regional Chinese opera genre. Among them, Yue Opera should be the drama that can most stimulate the love, obsession and energy of female audiences. One of its most distinguishing features is that, since the 1940s, women have played almost all the roles in the opera, creating an avenue for the expression of female emotions and experiences on stage. This aspect has made Yue Opera a significant cultural phenomenon in Shanghai. This popular culture was characterized by an obsession with women and love, which reflected changes in gender ideologies and relations that were particularly pronounced in the modern metropolis.

Yue Opera reflects the changing landscape of gender consciousness within cultural and artistic contexts. As society evolved and ideologies shifted, so did the depiction and roles of women in theater. Yue Opera, as a cultural phenomenon, chronicles this transformation, offering a window into the trajectory of gender consciousness through different historical eras.

It is evident from the script and staging of Yue Opera how female perspectives and ideas have shaped and influenced the opera genre. The ancient Chinese stories on which the scripts are based have been adapted to reflect contemporary female viewpoints and values, highlighting women's unique life perspectives. Thus, this study aims to examine Yue Opera as a genre through the lens of gender studies theory and methodology. It also seeks to present readers with a feminist perspective on Yue Opera and culture by discussing its content, characteristics and contributions.

This research aims to explore the following questions: firstly reflect on the development process of Yue Opera itself, to explore the different expectations and shaping of women's images in China in different historical periods as well as the use of gender performance theory to make a transversal comparison with Peking Opera, and finally focus on the relationship between Yue Opera and women's self-consciousness in reality.

2 Literature Review

2.1. Theory of Gender Performativity

Given that style of Yue Opera is known for its delicate and feminine qualities, this research aims to use Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to investigate how the female perspective shapes the temperament of the Yue Opera and influences its themes and connotations. Gender performativity refers to the idea that gender is not a fixed or inherent characteristic, but rather something that is performed and constructed through social interactions and cultural norms. In introducing this concept, Judith Butler argues that gender is not something that one is born with, but rather something that is learned and performed through a process of imitation and repetition. She suggests that the societal expectations and norms associated with gender are so deeply ingrained in individuals that they often do not even realize they are performing their gender. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler argues that gender is not a fixed or inherent aspect of one's identity but a constantly performed and reinforced social construct. Gender performativity is the idea that individuals perform their gender through actions and expressions and that societal expectations and norms shape these performances.

In their book *Gender Theory in Troubled Times*, Lennon and Alsop (2019) evaluated Butler's Performativity, Precariousness and Queering. The performativity hypothesis was explored further, and it was connected to gender identity. They think that one can claim their own gender identification or that of another person. The definitions of "man" and "woman" are complex and include social identity. It will alter continuously in response to various social settings.

Similarly, according to Eliason and Schope (2007), the parenting style, environment, and social constructivism paradigm indicate that sexual and gender identity are influenced by various factors, such as temporal and spatial contexts, social surroundings, and historical epochs. These factors contribute to the malleability and perceptibility of gender identity.

During the first half of the 20th century, binaries are used to conceptualise sex, such as male/female, man/woman, and masculine/feminine. Male and female are viewed as "opposites" who, despite their differences, complement one another in this binary thinking. This 'opposite sexes' pairing is accepted as natural. The concept of gender in this context refers to a biological "fact," a person's "sex," which is pre-given and situated in the body. (Robinson, 2020) In society, there is a hierarchy based on gender, with one group of people (men) holding authority and privilege over another group of people (women). (Delphy, 1993).

According to Christine Delphy (2016) and Judith Butler (1990), the body is not immune to social interpretation and is actually a product of social construction. But Yue Opera, due to its all-female performance, actually breaks this binary, allowing gender to become fluid on stage.

2.2. The Female Opera

Yue Opera, originating from the rural areas of Zhejiang Province in China, began as a form of folk singing known as 落地唱书 (Luò dì chàng shū), sung spontaneously when the people are doing their agricultural work. Over time, it evolved into a distinct theatrical genre. Initially, all roles in Yue Opera were portrayed by male actors. However, as the repertoire expanded to include themes related to family and love, it gained popularity among female audiences. This popularity ultimately led to the emergence of all-female troupes (Jiang, 2009a). The male actors of Yue Opera declined and disappeared because they chose imperial themes similar to Peking Opera at this stage and blindly studied Peking opera in terms of style and performance procedures. At the same time, the actresses of Yue Opera chose to enter Shanghai with the trend of modern urbanization in

China. The rise of women's Yue Opera's popularity in Shanghai during the 1940s was remarkable. It surpassed even Beijing opera, which had long held the position of the most widely recognized and esteemed opera form in China. This shift in popularity highlights the cultural impact of women performers and the audience's growing appreciation for the female perspective in the arts.

As Jiang(2022) states, In the middle of the 20th century, the popularity of women's Yue Opera in Shanghai represented the rise of Chinese women in the special space of modern metropolis, and the New Yue Opera reform represented by Yuan Xuefen and other ten sisters of Yue Opera integrated the anti-feudal struggle of Chinese women into the trend of the times for the Chinese nation to fight for independence and self-determination, and put a distinct female imprint on the formation of modern national culture.

2.3. *The Historical Divisions of Yue Opera*

In the 1940s, Yue Opera captured a group of female audiences with its satisfaction of women's emotional needs. At that time, Shanghai was shrouded in the shadow of the Anti-Japanese War, and the plot development and stage presentation of Yue Opera precisely met people's psychological needs, secretly meeting people's expectations for emotional catharsis and finally ushering in a stable and happy ending in this panicked environment. As Zhang (2013) said, Yue Opera belongs to the legendary genre, and the content is mainly romance stories. Although its plot cannot be said to be tragic, the storyline generally follows the routine of Together-Challenge-Reunion, that is, it must usher in a happy ending in the end, and there will be tragic and tortuous life and death partings in the middle, and these life and death partings are the highlights of Yue Opera, so the seemingly tragic Yue Opera plot will be liked by people. At the same time, the female students have also become a new generation of audiences for Yue Opera, which has prompted Yue Opera to further explore the theme of romantic love stories, and also pay more attention to the elegance of singing and performance.

In the early years of the founding of New China in the 1950s, the female image in Yue Opera underwent a reshaping from the national level. The reform of opera, which began in the 50s of the 20th century, included the sorting out and reform of actors, traditional repertoire plots and the whole systems of Chinese Opera. During this period, Shanghai Yue Opera House, as a national theatre troupe, was the most affected by this reform, and among the Yue Opera repertoire launched at that time, the love and family stories of women as the main body that Yue Opera excelled in were closely linked to the discourse of anti-feudal or class struggle. As Dong (2017) reveals, in that day and age, the exposure of the tragic fate of women and their struggle for freedom was a major issue of the time. Take Yue Opera *A Test of Love* as an example, which is about Wang Kui's betrayal of Jiao Guiying. After Wang's betrayal, Guiying accomplishes her vengeance as she haunts him in the form of a ghost. The story can be traced back to the Southern Opera of the Song dynasty (960-1279). Back then, taking the Imperial Examination was common among aspiring young men from lower social classes. If they were to be successful, they could secure themselves a bureaucratic job posting, which would improve both their financial conditions and social status. During the exam preparation and after their unsuccessful attempts, these scholars experienced economic impoverishment, so that they developed a romantic relationship with a woman in order to get financial and emotional support from her. Under such premises, Tian Han and An E wrote *A Test of Love* in the 1950s, in which Guiying, the heroine of this story, takes pity on Wang's condition and saves Wang from destitution. Guiying marries him out of love, providing him with financial and emotional support so that he can succeed, and he does. Yet, like many scholars who leave their wives or remarry someone more elite for the sake of exaltation after garnering their newfound success (Huang 1991), Wang Kui divorces Guiying regardless of her total devotion to his success. Jiao Guiying belongs to the oppressed class, and Wang Kui, instead of being her anchor of salvation, becomes the one who oppresses her. On the stage, the "underprivileged, tender heroine" can take her revenge through the help of supernatural forces, exhibiting the liberation of women that cannot be achieved in real-life. This is not only a victory of "theirs," but a victory that belongs to "her"—the triumph of women (Zhang 2012). Yet such success only serves people's desire to punish the evil as well as to show their compassion for the women of the working class.

After the reform and opening up in 1979, Yue Opera gradually recovered. Although a number of traditional plays were lost due to the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, the female consciousness of the new era is flourishing: women do not only pursue the happiness of love or marriage, but focus on career development, personal self-awareness, etc. This is well reflected in the Yue Opera plot *Meng Lijun* written by Wu Zhaofen, which is based on the novel *The Destiny of Rebirth* by Qing dynasty female writer Chen Duansheng, tells the story of Meng Lijun, in order to help the family wash away the grievances, resolutely dressed as a man, pseudonym Junyu entered the officialdom, and served as the prime minister, in the face of the emperor and fiancé Huangfu Shaohua's questioning and temptation of their identity, Lijun skillfully prevaricated, her intelligence and eloquence, and the breaking of gender barriers in traditional feudal society made many Yue Opera fans very captivated.

2.4. *The Female Characteristics of Yue Opera*

In Yue Opera, female characters could be multifaceted, displaying a range of emotions, aspirations, and desires. They were not confined to stereotypical roles or limited by societal expectations. Instead, they emerged as powerful figures with agency and complexity. The genre's emphasis on women's emotional experiences allowed the audience, both male and female, to connect deeply with the performances and the characters portrayed.

The stories depicted in Yue Opera often centered around love, family relationships, and the struggles faced by women in a changing world. This focus resonated with the audience, as Shanghai was experiencing significant shifts in social norms and values. Women were increasingly stepping out of traditional roles and asserting their independence and aspirations. Yue Opera provided a platform for exploring and expressing these societal changes and the evolving position of women in a rapidly modernizing society.

Consequently, Yue Opera has consistently foregrounded the ideal of “love between kindred spirits,” a relationship founded upon shared ideals, mutual understanding, and common values. The classic Yue Opera adaptation of *The Butterfly Lovers* (*Liang Zhu*) provides a representative example. In adapting this well-known legend, Yue Opera removes many of the supernatural and overtly sensual elements found in earlier versions, instead presenting Liang Shanbo as the gentle, cultivated, and emotionally attentive “Brother Liang,” while portraying Zhu Yingtai as an independent and courageous woman who dares to pursue education and ultimately sacrifices her life for love. Their relationship is built upon mutual respect and intellectual companionship, beginning with Liang Shanbo’s recognition and support of Zhu Yingtai’s—disguised as the “Ninth Younger Brother”—right to seek an education. Rather than emphasising physical attraction, their romance develops through emotional intimacy, shared aspirations, and spiritual affinity. It is precisely this ideal of love grounded in profound emotional and intellectual resonance that continues to captivate contemporary audiences. At the same time, Yue Opera’s female-centered tradition privileges affection—understood as emotional connection, spiritual communion, and empathy with women’s experiences—while implicitly downplaying, or even marginalising, the bodily and erotic dimensions of desire.

2.5. Contemporary Perspectives on Gender and Yue Opera

Recent scholarship has further expanded our understanding of gender and Yue Opera. Scholars like Mu (2022) have explored how contemporary productions of Yue Opera incorporate queer narratives and non-binary gender expressions. These productions challenge traditional gender norms and explore the fluidity of gender on stage, aligning with Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity.

Yue Opera, with its rich history and unique position in Chinese theater, has served as a platform for exploring gender dynamics and the evolving roles of women in society. Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity has provided a valuable framework for understanding how gender is constructed and performed within this art form. Over the years, Yue Opera has evolved alongside societal changes, reflecting shifting perspectives on gender and women’s agency.

Contemporary scholarship has expanded our understanding of Yue Opera by examining its intersection with queer narratives, non-binary gender expressions, and intersectional feminism. The emergence of female playwrights and directors has contributed to a more diverse and inclusive portrayal of women’s experiences in Yue Opera.

While there are differences in the research methods, content, and dimensions between the aforementioned literature and this study, they have nonetheless facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of Yue Opera and its distinctive feminine characteristics, thereby facilitating their connection. Overall, the literature reviewed has proven to be a valuable and constructive resource for this research.

Although Yue Opera has attracted increasing scholarly attention, existing studies have primarily focused on its historical development, artistic characteristics, repertoire reform, and performance aesthetics. While these studies acknowledge the significance of the all-female performance tradition and its close relationship with women audiences, relatively little attention has been paid to how the female perspective systematically shapes Yue Opera’s aesthetic values, narrative logic, and representations of love and gender. More importantly, few studies have examined Yue Opera through the lens of contemporary gender theory, particularly Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity, which provides a productive framework for understanding how gender identities are performed, negotiated, and reconstructed on the Yue Opera stage.

This research is therefore necessary for three reasons. First, it addresses a gap in the existing literature by moving beyond historical description to analyse how Yue Opera constructs a distinct female perspective through its narratives, characterisation, and performance conventions. Second, by applying Butler’s theory of gender performativity, this study demonstrates how the all-female performance tradition destabilises conventional gender binaries and reveals gender as a performative and culturally constructed practice rather than a fixed biological identity. Finally, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of why Yue Opera has remained culturally influential across different historical periods. Rather than merely preserving traditional stories, Yue Opera continuously reinterprets them through women’s emotional experiences and values, constructing an aesthetic ideal centred on empathy, spiritual companionship, and female subjectivity. In doing so, the study not only enriches scholarship on Chinese opera and gender studies but also provides a new perspective for understanding the interaction between traditional performing arts and modern feminist discourse.

3 Methodology

In line with the objectives and purpose of this study, the research method used incorporated a combination of survey/questionnaire and case study.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the approach that was taken to determine the research methodology employed in the study. This will include a discussion of the research method and the survey questions used, a description of the study participants and the key benefits of researching the admirers of Yue Opera and see their attitudes towards Yue Opera as well as its femininity. The chapter will then set out the benefits and limitations of this design approach. Admirers of Yue Opera were selected as the participants because they are the audience most familiar with the genre's performance conventions, narrative structures, and aesthetic characteristics. As regular viewers, they possess sufficient knowledge and experience to recognise the distinctive features of Yue Opera, particularly its female-centered narratives, all-female performance tradition, and representations of love and gender. Their long-term engagement with Yue Opera also enables them to reflect on how these elements shape their understanding and appreciation of the art form.

Furthermore, this study seeks to examine how the female perspective in Yue Opera is perceived and interpreted by its audience. Since Yue Opera admirers actively consume, discuss, and evaluate performances, they are well positioned to provide rich insights into how female subjectivity, emotional expression, and gender representation influence audience reception. Their responses therefore offer valuable evidence for understanding the cultural significance and contemporary appeal of Yue Opera from the perspective of those most closely connected with the genre.

Finally, the chapter will conclude with a description of the process used for data collection and a description of how this data was analysed to answer the research question and meet the key objectives of the study.

3.1. Ethics Information

Before research commenced, an ethics form explaining the proposed methodological approach and confirmation of how data would be maintained and stored was completed and sent for assessment by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee. The University of Leeds School of Sociology and Social Policy approved the research and stated that it complied with the guidelines for ethical approval within the School's framework.

3.2. Research Question

This research aimed to investigate how female figures in Yue Opera are shaped and how they are influenced by the situation of women in reality, or, conversely, how they influence the situation of women in reality. Therefore, in the survey, respondents were asked to rate the respect and family status of female characters in Yue Opera. Respondents were also asked how well they knew about Yue Opera itself and asked for their personal favourite female characters in the genre.

Sample questions are listed below:

Yue Opera has been called 'women's theatre' because of its nearly all-female cast. What do you think are the causes of this phenomenon? (Multiple choice)

- The themes of the plays are mostly love stories between talented men and women.
- Yue Opera performers are mostly women, and their singing style is close to the characteristics of women's voices.
- Yue Opera masters (the 'Ten Sisters of Yue Opera', etc.) bring 'women's power' to their work.
- Women's perspectives are foregrounded in the Yue Opera repertoire.
- Other: _____

How do you think Yue Opera should be changed if it is to continue to develop in modern society?

- Keep the themes fresh and up-to-date and respond to the changes in women's consciousness.
- Innovate performance forms to adapt to the fast pace of modern life.
- Increase the promotion of Yue Opera's cultural background.
- Utilize streaming media and social software to spread the message.
- Increase financial support and emphasize talent cultivation.
- Other: _____

3.3. Methodological Approach of the Study

Questionnaires have been seen as an objective means of collecting information on people's knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, as well as their behaviour (Gillham, 2008). However, while questionnaires are often thought of as an objective research technique that can yield generalizable results, the lack of space for subjectivity may mean that people's attitudes are not easily reflected in answers to personal questions.

According to interpretivists, subjective experience is crucial to social research because it allows participants' feelings, personal beliefs, and opinions to be more fully and accurately represented (May, 2011). Following this principle, I have also designed open questions for the participants of this study. As May (2011) argues, open questions give respondents greater freedom in answering because they can answer in a way that suits their interpretation of the question.

According to Lydread (1991), five topics are covered by the questions in a questionnaire: qualities, what people are, what they do, what they say they want, and what they believe to be true.

Frequently, the goal of questions regarding beliefs is to learn more about the nature and genesis of such views as well as to gauge how the respondent thinks.

3.4. Sampling and Recruitment

The sampling and recruitment strategy used aimed to recruit Yue Opera lovers of different age groups, survey their understanding of the genre and ask them their views on the image and femininity of women in Yue Opera. The rationale for using this group in the research study was that this audience's love for Yue Opera supports their understanding and expectations of the genre and allows them to better reflect the impact of Yue Opera on real life.

The small environment on which Yue Opera, as a form of literary and artistic activity, depends is micrographically reflected in the family and social environment in which the survey participants live (Li, 2015). Therefore, their attitude actually reflects the audience's overall attitude towards the art of Yue Opera and offers insights into the factors influencing the development of Yue Opera from a personal perspective. Most of the participants in the survey were netizens who had contact with the researchers themselves in the relevant communities of Yue Opera, so there was a relatively large number of young people in the sample. The younger generation is more willing to be surveyed about the current situation of Yue Opera and their awareness of women and femininity.

Therefore, in this study, we will remain alert to the potential bias attached to this convenient sampling position and the attendant risk that the findings may not be truly representative of a wider population group (Bryman, 2016): participants in the survey may have made similar choices because their interests are similar to those of the researcher.

3.5. Demographic information

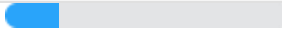
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Male	60	 19.54%
Female	247	 80.46%
Total	307	

Figure 1. Gender of the Participants

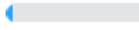
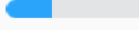
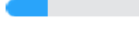
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Less than 18 years old	9	 2.93%
18-25 years old	81	 26.38%
26-45 years old	107	 34.85%
46-55 years old	57	 18.57%
55 years old and above	53	 17.26%
Total	307	

Figure 2. Age of the Participants

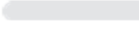
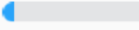
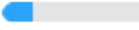
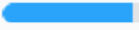
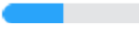
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Primary school and below	0	 0%
Junior high school	16	 5.21%
High School	41	 13.36%
Undergraduate	169	 55.05%
Postgraduate and above	81	 26.38%
Total	307	

Figure 3 Education Status of the Participants

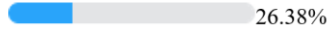
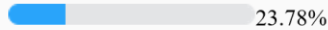
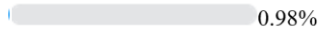
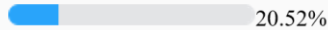
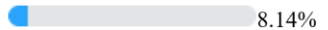
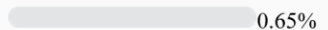
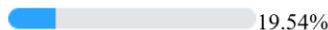
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Institution	81	 26.38%
Employee	73	 23.78%
Farmer and laborer	3	 0.98%
Student	63	 20.52%
Freelance	25	 8.14%
Yue Opera troupe member/researcher	2	 0.65%
Others	60	 19.54%
Total	307	

Figure 4 Occupation of the Participants

The charts presented above illustrate the responses obtained from individuals who took part in the questionnaire survey. The majority of respondents, specifically 80%, possessed a university education or higher. Similarly, individuals with either a university or graduate education comprised 80% of the total respondents. This pattern was also observed among female participants in terms of their representation. Additionally, it constituted 80% of the overall population of surveyors. Undoubtedly, the evidence presented strongly supports the assertion that Yue Opera can be classified as a female-oriented theatrical genre. Simultaneously, the questionnaire is transmitted via the Internet. The age range of individuals considered in this study is between 18 and 45 years. The majority of participants in the study were enthusiasts of Yue Opera, constituting over 60% of the total sample size. The questionnaire design exhibits a bias towards a younger demographic and places emphasis on the female perspective within the context of Yue Opera during the sample collection phase.

4 Finding and Results

4.1. Gender Swapping in Traditional Chinese Opera

According to Bulter (1990), gender is the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface upon which culture operates.

The practice of gender switching has endured for generations within the traditional domain of Chinese opera, engaging and puzzling audiences. This phenomenon encompasses the process by which a performer undergoes a metamorphosis of their biological gender to align with the gender identity of their stage role, thereby establishing a distinctive and nuanced approach to the representation of gender. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of gender swapping in traditional Chinese opera, one must undertake a meticulous analysis of the historical settings surrounding this practice, the traditional gender roles embedded within the art form and specific examples of gender switching observed in Peking and Yue Opera.

Chinese opera has a rich historical foundation, characterised by a strong adherence to tradition and symbolism, seen in the clearly delineated gender roles assigned to male and female characters. Since the time of imperial China, opera roles have often been performed by single-sex actors because there were strict boundaries between men and women, who were not allowed to share the same stage. In traditional theatrical performances, it was common for male performers of Peking opera, known as *Qidan* (乾旦), to assume the roles of female characters while female actors, referred to as *Nvxiaosheng* (女小生), who typically took on male parts. This particular artistic technique not only enhanced the complexity of character depictions but also facilitated the examination of intricate subjects pertaining to gender identity and expression.

Peking and Yue Opera have demonstrated notable instances of gender swapping, wherein performers adeptly assume the traits and behaviours associated with the other gender. The enduring nature of this enthralling tradition has persisted over centuries, providing audiences with a nuanced understanding of gender and identity within the intricate fabric of Chinese performing arts.

4.1.1. Gender Roles in Traditional Chinese Opera

Traditional Chinese opera is renowned for its diverse forms and regional variations, and it has long been characterised by distinctive gender roles deeply rooted in historical and cultural traditions. Typically, male roles (known as “sheng”) and female roles (known as “dan”) are played by male and female actors, respectively. However, when all roles are portrayed by actors of the same biological gender, the traditional binary opposition between male and female in theatrical performance is disrupted.

The practice of gender swapping in Chinese opera can be traced to various historical and cultural factors. Gender difference became independent from the sex of the actor – something to be produced and played via artistic skill – since cross-gender performance was a key element of Chinese indigenous theatre from at least the late eighteenth century (Goldstein, 2007). Because actors (mostly males until the 1920s) were educated to portray roles recognisable as “men” or “women” on stage, the link between gender performance and the actor’s sex was denaturalised; simultaneously, a strong codification of normative gendered embodiment resulted (Liu, 2013).

In ancient China, women were often excluded from stage performances, leading male actors to take on both male and female roles. The origins of Chinese opera can be traced to primitive forms of song and dance, often performed during ritual ceremonies. In these performances, men would often dress elaborately, and cross-dressing as a performance style emerged as early as the Tang Dynasty. In traditional opera troupes, due to the complexity of roles and limited personnel, it was common for a single actor to play multiple roles and characters. Additionally, Chinese traditional culture emphasises the concept of “harmony between yin and yang,” in which the balance between the male and female genders is sought. The phenomenon of “gender dislocation” in opera is essentially an artistic representation and interpretation of the dual-gender perspective inherent in the concept of “harmony between yin and yang” (Li, 2020).

As time passed and the status of women improved, this practice evolved, giving rise to instances in Yue Opera where female actors began to fill male roles. This evolution was driven by both artistic innovation and societal changes. Female performers developed the skills to convincingly portray male characters, challenging traditional gender boundaries and adding depth to characterisations.

The significance of gender swapping in Chinese opera extends beyond performance techniques; it reflects the complex interplay between culture, tradition and artistic expression. It also challenges conventional notions of gender identity and showcases the malleability of gender roles through the art of performance. Gender swapping in Chinese opera serves as a fascinating example of how an art form can both reflect and influence cultural perceptions of gender.

4.1.2. Gender Swapping in Peking Opera

The concept of “乾旦” (*Qiandan*) has had a significant impact on the portrayal of women in Peking opera (京剧). In the early stages of Peking opera’s development, most actors were male, and the female characters were also portrayed by male actors, referred to as “*Qiandan*”. This practice was deeply rooted in the social norms of the time, and both actors and audiences were accustomed to it. Therefore, male actors who learned to play female roles in Peking opera did so without any psychological preparation for gender transformation (Wang, 2007).

The emergence of “dan” roles was once a symbol of male dominance. *Qiandan*, as an idealised female image, emphasised the dominant position of men. Essentially, *Qiandan* was a male-created, ideal female image based on male aesthetic preferences, and many values in Peking opera demanded that women be subservient or obedient to men in romantic or marital relationships. Therefore, every movement of *Qiandan* on the stage was aimed at shaping the ideal female image in the minds of men. Even in terms of stage costumes and styling, it was not until the famous Peking opera actor Mei Lanfang’s performance in 1917’s *Tian Nu San Hua* that costumes emphasising graceful curves were innovatively created based on traditional Chinese paintings (Mei, 2017).

In Peking opera, had to sing in a delicate and gentle manner to convey femininity. However, to achieve the required level of vocal strength, *Qiandan* had to sing with great power and vigour. Even when female performers started playing dan roles on the Peking opera stage, they continued to learn from their *Qiandan* predecessors (Wang, 2007). From the stylised movements in performances to the choice of play themes, everything reflected the male aesthetic in Peking opera. Thus, gender swapping in Peking opera is essentially based on male aesthetic preferences, shaping unique gender norms on the Peking opera stage.

This practice of gender swapping not only challenged conventional gender roles but also highlighted the complexity of gender identity in the performing arts. It demonstrated how the art of Peking opera transcended biological sex, focusing more on the skill and artistry of the performer. While it originated in a society with rigid gender norms, it ultimately showcased the versatility and adaptability of the art form in accommodating diverse expressions of gender on the stage.

In essence, the concept of *Qiandan* in Peking opera represents a fascinating aspect of Chinese performing arts in which gender is fluid, roles are redefined and artistic expression transcends traditional boundaries. The concept serves as a testament to the enduring influence of culture, history and societal norms on artistic practices, ultimately creating a rich tapestry of gender representation within the world of Peking opera.

4.1.3. Gender Swapping in Yue Opera

Yue Opera originated in Zhejiang Province, and the practice of gender swapping is embraced even in all-female Yue Opera. Female actors excel at portraying both female and male characters, adding a unique characteristic to this genre. These female performers, often referred to as *Nvxiaosheng*, are skilled at portraying male roles. This practice results in male characters not only embodying typical male traits but also infusing a certain feminine quality into their actions and vocal styles.

Unlike male actors, who typically project passionate and forceful voices on stage, even when portraying male characters, female actors tend to convey a gentler and lyrical quality. Yue Opera itself features graceful and melodious tunes, often utilising true vocal techniques, which further contribute to the presentation of this unique trait. Jiang (2009) highlights that the complete

feminisation of male roles on the female body in women's Yue Opera has nurtured an exquisite feminine performance of heterosexual love that is unparalleled in gender-straight or mixed gender theatres. This feature has given Yue Opera performances an exceptionally soft and enchanting quality.

The complex performances by Nvxiaosheng challenge traditional gender norms in Chinese theatre. The male characters they portray often exhibit qualities of kindness and romanticism, and they prioritise love over career, reflecting women's emotional ideals and expectations of intimate relationships. As Jiang (2009) notes, this portrayal of male roles by female actors has captivated female audiences, creating a unique charm on stage. In Yue Opera, it is the way female actors bring out male allure that captivates the emotions of female spectators. The performance style of women portraying male characters in Yue Opera adds a layer of complexity to this art form, making it a unique subject of study within the traditional Chinese theatre realm.

In summary, the practice of gender swapping in Yue Opera, particularly when female actors fill male roles, introduces a captivating blend of masculine and feminine qualities that enrich the performances. This artistic choice challenges traditional gender perceptions and adds a distinctive allure to Yue Opera, captivating both the emotions and interests of audiences.

4.2. Results of Gender Swapping in Traditional Chinese Opera

Gender swapping in traditional Chinese opera has had multiple impacts, not only encompassing changes in themes but also influencing the depth and development of characters as well as perception and acceptance by the audience.

4.2.1. Thematic Impact of Gender Swapping

Gender swapping has injected new thematic elements into traditional Chinese opera. By swapping gender roles, opera works can delve more profoundly into topics such as gender identity, societal expectations and the complexity of gender roles. Through dramatic actions and different performing styles, audiences can witness how the performing arts in Chinese opera convey characters' gender identities.

Physical performance methods are used to communicate complex topics, including the development of psychological characters, subtle reflections on class and gender dynamics, and metaphorical connections between objects, meanings, and people (Wilcox, 2014). Despite various experiments and reforms, the foundation of Chinese opera has not undergone significant reconstruction as gender relations have evolved (Stenberg, 2021).

This phenomenon often prompts a re-examination of themes such as power, freedom, love and family within opera. For instance, some works in which males portray female characters emphasise the historical struggles and rights advocacy of women, highlighting the importance of gender equality. Gender swapping can also be used to satirise society's rigid stereotypes regarding male and female behaviour, prompting audiences to reflect on issues related to gender stereotypes.

One may consider the Yue Opera's *Meng Lijun*, which tells the story of a talented girl who disguises herself as a man to seek justice and revenge for her persecuted father and fiancé. As the character rises to become the emperor's trusted prime minister, the story explores themes of gender identity, loyalty and power dynamics. The emperor's pursuit of Meng Lijun, portrayed by a woman, blurs the lines between same-sex and opposite-sex attraction, adding complexity to the narrative. Meng Lijun's struggle to maintain her virtue while in a dire situation with the emperor showcases the challenges of her dual identity. The performance creates a fantasy world of dangerous seduction and gender ambiguity, ultimately emphasising traditional virtues of loyalty and chastity (Jiang, 2009b).

In conclusion, gender swapping in traditional Chinese opera enriches the art form by allowing the exploration of complex themes, the subversion of gender stereotypes and the portrayal of multifaceted characters. Gender swapping provides a platform for artists to challenge traditional norms and offers audiences new perspectives on gender and identity.

4.2.2. Character Depth and Development

Gender swapping has had a significant impact on the depth and development of characters in traditional Chinese opera. When women portray male characters, they must deeply understand and experience the emotions, motivations and life experiences of those characters to authentically represent them.

For example, while discussing the character development of Liang Yushu in *Seeking a Wife by Questioning Her*, Wang Qing, a female performer specialising in male roles in Yue Opera, (《盘妻索妻》) notes that they approach the role from the perspective of a young and talented man deeply in love with his wife, Xie Yunxia:

When portraying Liang Yushu, you must feel that when you look into Xie Yunxia's eyes, all that shines through is love. So, when you play Liang, in your eyes, every part of Xie Yunxia is full of virtues. You admire her so much. It's been three months since you got married, and she hasn't talked to you much, but you long to get closer to her and care for her. You must use this emotion to portray Liang Yushu, with loving eyes as you gaze at Xie Yunxia. (Sun, 2015)

Though this description starts from the perspective of character portrayal, it adopts a feminine viewpoint. It emphasises Xie Yunxia's attractiveness to Liang Yushu and Liang Yushu's tenderness and care for Xie Yunxia. In a sense, this portrayal reflects women's expectations and idealisation of love and family.

Similarly, Fan Ruanjuan, the renowned Yue Opera artist and founder of the “Fan School” of Yue Opera discusses how they approached the characterisation of the male protagonist, Jiao Zhongqing, from an emotional and character perspective in the play *The Peacock Flies Southeast*:

To prevent her husband from noticing her crying, Lan Zhi said she would go pour some tea. However, Jiao Zhongqing quickly stopped her, saying he wasn't thirsty. In reality, Jiao Zhongqing had been traveling all this time, and he was indeed thirsty at the moment. But one, due to his frequent absence from home, he cherished this moment with his beloved wife and wanted to spend more time with her. Two, because all the household responsibilities fell on Lan Zhi, and seeing her silently weaving cloth today, he felt grateful and guilty. Therefore, Jiao Zhongqing couldn't help but hold Lan Zhi's hand and gently ask her to sit down and rest. (Fan, 1989)

This in-depth portrayal adds complexity and emotional depth to the characters, allowing the audience to witness their inner struggles, desires and emotions. Furthermore, these attributes allow the audience to relate to the characters more easily. Gender swapping also provides actors with the opportunity to break free from the constraints of traditional gender roles, showcasing the multifaceted and multidimensional aspects of their characters.

4.3. Audience Perception and Reception

Yue Opera has traditionally had a predominantly female audience, with nearly 80% of the participants in this survey being women. This demographic undoubtedly enhances the delicate and graceful characteristics of the Yue Opera genre.

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Very well known, have studied and participated in it deeply	36	12.16%
I know a bit about Yue opera, but I like to listen to /learn about Yue opera in my daily life.	105	35.47%
I know a little about it, but have heard of it occasionally	152	51.35%
Don't know it at all, never heard of it	3	1.01%

Figure 5 The Knowledge of Yue Opera

Among the participants, over 70% have received higher education. This suggests that Yue Opera audiences tend to have a higher level of education. This may be related to the classical and modern elements combined in Yue Opera's lyrics, which may require a certain level of cultural understanding from the audience. Fu and He (1989) discussed in their biography of Yue Opera performer Fu Quanxiang how Yue Opera uses performance techniques to explain the meanings of classical Chinese words and phrases to the audience. This indicates that Yue Opera effectively approaches the audience's aesthetic sensibilities through the literary aspects of its lyrics and performance methods, facilitating a better understanding of the plot.

Among the surveyed audience members, approximately half of them have a relatively deep understanding or are very knowledgeable about Yue Opera. "Relatively knowledgeable" in this context might mean that they enjoy listening to Yue Opera arias or even practice singing them as part of their daily routine. "Very knowledgeable" individuals, on the other hand, might have engaged in in-depth research, reading relevant books and materials about Yue Opera. Interestingly, 12.16% of the respondents considered themselves "very well known," indicating a significant level of expertise and passion for Yue Opera.

Turning to the topic of gender paradigms and gender swapping, the perception and acceptance of gender swapping in traditional Chinese opera is an important area of study. Gender swapping on stage can arouse curiosity, excitement, and contemplation among the audience, especially when actors successfully portray characters of the opposite gender. The audience's perception and acceptance of this phenomenon vary depending on their cultural background, the era they live in, and their geographical location. Some audience members may have an open-minded attitude towards gender swapping, appreciating the novelty and challenge it brings to the theatrical experience.

Since ancient times in China, gender swapping on the theatrical stage has been regarded as a form of artistic enjoyment. In this context, a reference to Ming dynasty literati Zhang Dai is made, where he remarked, "Though not perfect, women's opera charms people because it is so pretty and coquettish, easy and relaxed, and softly enchanting." (Zhang, 2013) While Zhang Dai was referring to Kun opera, his description of the feminine beauty of women's Yue Opera holds true. This quote emphasizes the allure of feminine beauty and its impact on the audience's perception of opera.

4.4. Implications for Gender Representation in Traditional Arts

A. Promoting Gender Diversity: The phenomenon of gender swapping can encourage greater gender diversity in traditional arts, making the arts more inclusive. By breaking free from traditional gender roles, these art forms can embrace a broader spectrum of gender identities and expressions (Butler, 1990). This inclusivity can attract a more diverse audience and create a more welcoming environment for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

B. Challenging Traditional Gender Norms: Gender swapping in traditional arts has the potential to challenge and disrupt traditional gender norms and stereotypes. When audiences witness actors successfully portraying characters of the opposite

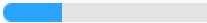
gender, it can spark reflection on entrenched gender roles in society (Mulvey, 1975). This, in turn, can stimulate discussions and awareness about gender equality and the need to break free from rigid gender expectations.

C. Blending Tradition and Modernity: Traditional art forms like Yue Opera can incorporate modern elements, such as gender swapping, to bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary society. By doing so, these art forms remain relevant and appealing to younger audiences who may be more accustomed to modern forms of entertainment (Hengen, 1998). This fusion of tradition and modernity helps preserve and revitalize traditional arts while connecting with a new generation.

These implications underscore the transformative power of gender representation in traditional arts. By challenging gender norms and embracing diversity, these art forms can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

4.5. The Findings of the Questionnaire

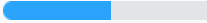
Does Yue opera make you pay more attention to women's groups after watching it?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	211	 72.01%
No	82	 27.99%
Total	293	

Do you think Yue opera affects the social status of women in real life?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	138	 47.1%
No	155	 52.9%
Total	293	

Do you think Yue opera affects your view of women as a whole group?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	143	 48.81%
No	150	 51.19%
Total	293	

Do you think the ideas of women presented in Yue operas are in line with the reality of the society?

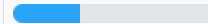
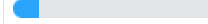
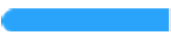
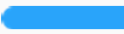
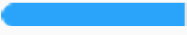
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	164	 55.97%
No	92	 31.4%
Ideas of women are not presented	37	 12.63%
Total	293	

Figure 6 Yue Opera and Female Consciousness

What aspects do you think should be emphasized in the portrayal of female characters in Yue Operas in the future? (Multiple choice)

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Diversity of character	178	 60.75%
Diversity of identity	134	 45.73%
Freedom to pursue love	108	 36.86%
Friendship	76	 25.94%
Family relationship	101	 34.47%
Self-worth realization	196	 66.89%
Others	12	 4.1%
Total	293	

What do you think in Yue Opera should be improved if it is to continue to develop in modern society? (Multiple choice)

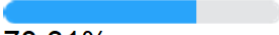
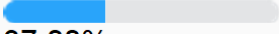
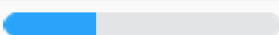
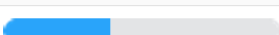
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
To keep the theme fresh and up-to-date, and to respond to the changes in women's consciousness	206	 70.31%
Innovate performance forms to adapt to the fast-paced life	111	 37.88%
Increase the promotion of Yue opera's cultural background	136	 46.42%
Utilize streaming media and social software to spread the message	101	 34.47%
Increase financial support and emphasize talent cultivation	114	 38.91%
Other: _____	11	 3.75%
Total	293	

Figure 7 What Audience Want to See in Yue Opera's Future



Figure 8 Favorite Female Characters in Yue Opera

Through the questionnaire survey, it is not difficult to find that although a considerable number of viewers have improved their female consciousness in the process of watching Yue Opera. However, more than half of the respondents believe that Yue Opera does not help improve the status of women in reality, and the reason for this fragmentation is likely to be that most of the stories depicted in the plot of Yue Opera still take place in ancient settings, and women are mostly trapped between marriage and family, and today, audiences may want to see a story related to self-realization or the pursuit of self-worth. The character Meng Lijun in *Meng Lijun* also received the most votes in Favorite Female Characters in Yue Opera with this.

5 Conclusion

Yue Opera, originating from the picturesque province of Zhejiang in China, is a remarkable regional theatrical genre known for its distinctive and groundbreaking feature: the vast majority of its characters are portrayed by female performers. This tradition, which has its roots in ancient China, continues to captivate audiences to this day, with some exceptions post-1949 when male actors made sporadic appearances on Yue Opera stages. Nonetheless, Yue Opera remains primarily characterized by women seamlessly slipping into the roles of male characters, a practice that has profound implications for both the art form and societal perceptions of gender.

Throughout its storied history, Yue Opera has undergone various transformative phases, each marked by innovation and adaptation. One such era was the 1940s, known as the "New Yue Opera" period, where prominent figures like Yuan Xuefen led a significant reform effort. This reform extended to vocal styles and subject matter, pushing the boundaries of the genre. The evolution of Yue Opera was not a one-sided affair; it was a collaborative journey involving both the audience and the actors. Over time, it emerged as a theatrical genre where women were at the forefront, both on and off the stage.

The 1950s brought another shift, with Yue Opera experiencing a reshaping at the national level. This was a result of the broader reform of traditional Chinese opera, emphasizing themes of "class struggle." This shift expanded the narrative beyond mere romantic relationships, linking them to broader societal issues. The art form became more deeply intertwined with the concept of "people's issues" Yue Opera was no longer just about entertainment but a medium through which societal complexities were explored.

With the advent of the reform and opening-up era in China, Yue Opera began to diversify its portrayal of female characters and explore a broader range of themes. This period saw a dynamic evolution of the art form, as it adapted to the changing tastes and values of contemporary society.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Yue Opera is its practice of “gender swapping.” This concept has been a long-standing theme in traditional Chinese opera, but Yue Opera takes it a step further by having women portray male characters. This challenges the conventional binary gender paradigm. When female Yue Opera performers assume male roles, they must not only embody the physicality but also the psychological and emotional aspects of these characters. Simultaneously, they are expected to meet the audience's expectations regarding romantic relationships. This challenge adds depth and complexity to the actors' performances and underscores the fluidity of gender identities during the gender transformation process.

Audiences' responses to the gender presentation of female actors on the Yue Opera stage are diverse, but almost universally, it is accepted as a natural and integral aspect of this unique theatrical space. Within the realm of Yue Opera, the breaking of binary gender norms is considered the norm.

However, it's worth noting that while Yue Opera has to some extent challenged gender norms within its artistic sphere, its direct contribution to elevating women's status in real life may not be readily apparent. Nonetheless, the female characters in Yue Opera serve as powerful symbols of hope for many audiences, especially women. These characters represent the aspiration to break free from traditional gender boundaries and to explore a more diverse and empowered role in society.

The impact of female performers in Yue Opera extends well beyond their performances. They have become influential cultural icons, their achievements in the opera world challenging prevailing gender norms and stereotypes. They serve as inspiring figures for other women, encouraging them to pursue their dreams and aspirations beyond the constraints of tradition. In doing so, Yue Opera has played a vital role in reshaping societal perceptions of women's roles and capabilities, both on and off the stage.

Acknowledgement

Dedicated to Wang Rousang for keeping me curious and in love with the Yue Opera stage.

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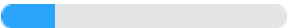
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Appendix: The Questions and the Results of the Questionnaire

A: Questionnaire on Female Characters and Womanhood in Yue opera

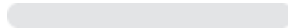
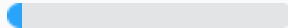
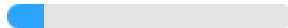
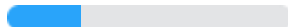
Your gender

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Male	60	 19.54%
Female	247	 80.46%
Total	307	

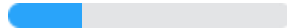
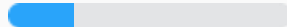
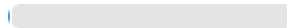
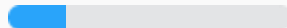
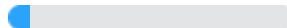
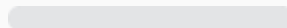
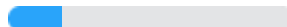
Your age

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Less than 18 years old	9	 2.93%
18-25 years old	81	 26.38%
26-45 years old	107	 34.85%
46-55 years old	57	 18.57%
55 years old and above	53	 17.26%
Total	307	

Your educational status:

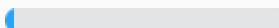
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Primary school and below	0	 0%
Junior high school	16	 5.21%
High School	41	 13.36%
Undergraduate	169	 55.05%
Postgraduate and above	81	 26.38%
Total	307	

Your occupation.

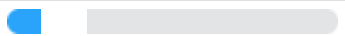
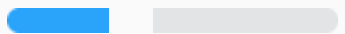
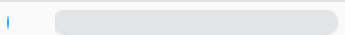
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Institution	81	 26.38%
Employee	73	 23.78%
Farmer and laborer	3	 0.98%
Student	63	 20.52%
Freelance	25	 8.14%
Yue opera troupe member/researcher	2	 0.65%
Others	60	 19.54%
Total	307	

B. the basic knowledge of Yue opera

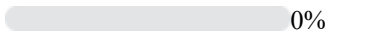
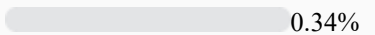
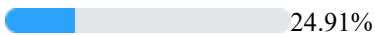
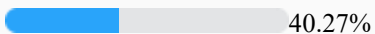
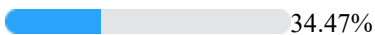
Do you know or have you heard of Yue opera?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	296	 96.42%
Don't know	11	 3.58%
Total	307	

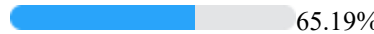
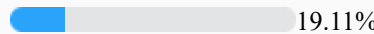
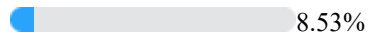
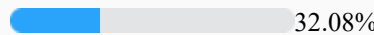
To what extent do you know Yue opera?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Very well known, have studied and participated in it deeply	36	 12.16%
I know a bit about Yue opera, but I like to listen to /learn about Yue opera in my daily life.	105	 35.47%
I know a little about it, but have heard of it occasionally	152	 51.35%
Don't know it at all, never heard of it	3	 1.01%
Total	296	

How much do you like Yue opera?

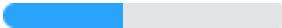
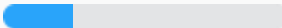
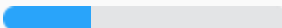
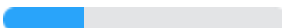
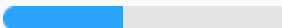
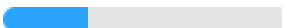
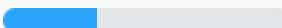
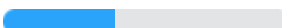
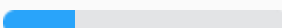
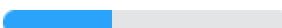
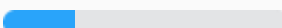
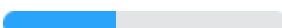
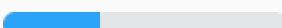
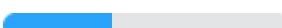
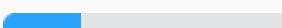
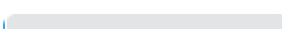
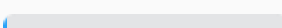
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Not at all	0	 0%
Dislike	1	 0.34%
Don't have any feeling	73	 24.91%
Liked	118	 40.27%
Very much	101	 34.47%
Total	293	

Are any of the following people in your social circle or yourself? (Multiple choice)

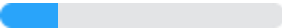
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yue opera fans, often listen to Yue opera	191	 65.19%
Yue opera practitioners	56	 19.11%
Researchers of Yue opera	25	 8.53%
None of them	94	 32.08%
Total	293	

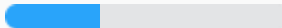
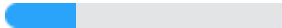
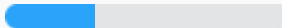
Have you heard/watched the following Yue opera plays? (Multiple choice)

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
<i>Butterfly Lovers</i>	228	 77.82%

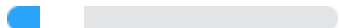
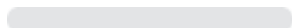
<i>The Story of the West Chamber</i>	160	 54.61%
<i>The Wife of Xianglin</i>	125	 42.66%
<i>Dream of the Red Chamber</i>	207	 70.65%
<i>The Five Daughters' Birthday Tribute</i>	133	 45.39%
<i>Tale of the West Garden</i>	74	 25.26%
<i>Meng Lijun</i>	133	 45.39%
<i>A Test of Love</i>	92	 31.4%
<i>Saving the Mother from the Mountain</i>	85	 29.01%
<i>Peacock Flying Southeast</i>	124	 42.32%
<i>The Jade Dragonfly</i>	88	 30.03%
<i>Du Shiniang</i>	99	 33.79%
<i>Chasing Fish</i>	116	 39.59%
<i>The Legend of Li Wa</i>	75	 25.6%
<i>The Pearl Tower</i>	113	 38.57%
<i>Blood Handprint</i>	75	 25.6%
<i>The Legend of the White Snake</i>	118	 40.27%
<i>The Civet Cat for the Prince</i>	103	 35.15%
<i>Mu Guiying's Marshalship</i>	112	 38.23%
All of them	82	 27.99%
None of them	4	 1.37%
Other	5	 1.71%
Total	293	

What type of Yue opera storyline do you like?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Ethics	61	 20.82%

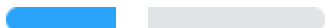
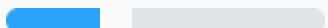
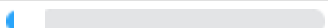
Myths and Legends	127	 43.34%
Love story	217	 74.06%
Human Justice	99	 33.79%
Comedy	74	 25.26%
Literary Adaptation	93	 31.74%
Others	8	 2.73%
Total	293	

Do you agree with the values presented in Yue opera?

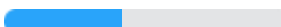
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
I would fully agree with the values presented in Yue operas.	35	 11.95%
I occasionally agree with the values presented in Yue operas, depending on specific examples.	257	 87.71%
I do not agree with the values in Yue opera at all.	1	 0.34%
Total	293	

C. Female Characters in Yue operas

Yue opera has been called ‘women’s theatre’ because of its nearly all-female cast. What do you think are the causes of this phenomenon? (Multiple choice)

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
The themes of the plays are mostly love stories between talented men and women.	112	 38.23%
Yue opera performers are mostly women, and their singing style is close to the characteristics of women’s voices.	180	 61.43%
Yue opera masters (the ‘Ten Sisters of Yue opera’, etc.) bring ‘women’s power’ to their work.	165	 56.31%
Women’s perspectives are foregrounded in the Yue opera repertoire.	95	 32.42%
Other: _____	8	 2.73%
Total	293	

What is your overall impression of the female characters in Yue opera?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Positive and inspiring	123	 41.98%

The main characters driving the storyline	150	51.19%
Not very present, not very impressive	6	2.05%
A tool for portraying male characters	6	2.05%
A weakened role	3	1.02%
Other	5	1.71%
Total	293	

Do you think there are stereotypes of female characters in Yue opera?

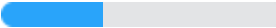
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	80	27.3%
No	130	44.37%
Not sure	83	28.33%
Total	293	

Do you think the images of women in Yue opera are close to women's real life?

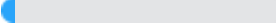
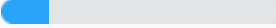
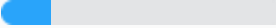
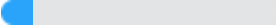
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Very close	28	9.56%
Quite close	187	63.82%
Not very close	76	25.94%
Not close at all	2	0.68%
Total	293	

What is your general impression of the intelligence of female characters in Yue operas (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being stupid and clumsy and 5 being smart and capable)?

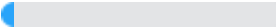
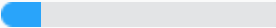
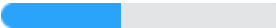
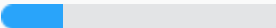
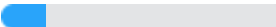
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1	2	0.68%
2	2	0.68%
3	75	25.6%
4	108	36.86%

5	106	 36.18%
Total	293	

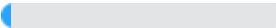
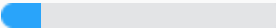
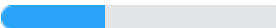
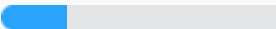
What is your general impression of the family status of female characters in Yue operas (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low status and 5 being have the right to speak)?

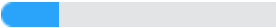
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1	16	 5.46%
2	50	 17.06%
3	140	 47.78%
4	53	 18.09%
5	34	 11.6%
Total	293	

What is your general impression of the social respect of female characters in Yue operas (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not respected and 5 being respected)?

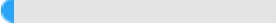
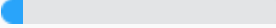
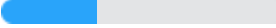
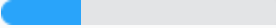
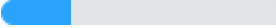
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1	14	 4.78%
2	43	 14.68%
3	125	 42.66%
4	65	 22.18%
5	46	 15.7%
Total	293	

What is your general impression of the autonomous and independent of female characters in Yue operas (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being dependent on others and 5 being independent)?

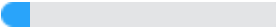
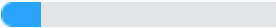
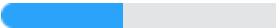
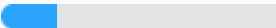
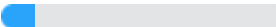
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1	12	 4.1%
2	42	 14.33%
3	108	 36.86%
4	70	 23.89%

5	61	 20.82%
Total	293	

What is your general impression of the resisting inequality of female characters in Yue operas (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being humiliated and patient and 5 being determined to resist)?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1	13	 4.44%
2	23	 7.85%
3	100	 34.13%
4	84	 28.67%
5	73	 24.91%
Total	293	

What is your general impression of the rationality and emotion of female characters in Yue opera (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being emotionally dominant and 5 being rationally dominant)?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
1	30	 10.24%
2	42	 14.33%
3	127	 43.34%
4	58	 19.8%
5	36	 12.29%
Total	293	

Please give examples of your favorite female characters in Yue opera _____ (optional)



D. Female Consciousness in Yue opera

Does Yue opera make you pay more attention to women's groups after watching it?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	211	72.01%
No	82	27.99%
Total	293	

Do you think Yue opera affects the social status of women in real life?

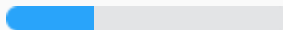
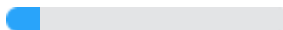
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	138	47.1%
No	155	52.9%
Total	293	

Do you think Yue opera affects your view of women as a whole group?

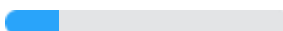
Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	143	48.81%
No	150	51.19%

Total	293	
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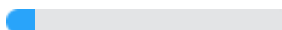
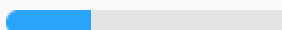
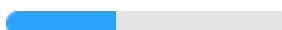
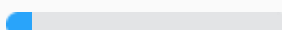
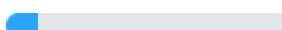
Do you think the ideas of women presented in Yue operas are in line with the reality of the society?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	164	 55.97%
No	92	 31.4%
Ideas of women are not presented	37	 12.63%
Total	293	

Do you think Yue opera will deepen the problem of gender inequality in society?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Yes	57	 19.45%
No	236	 80.55%
Total	293	

Do you agree that the image of women in Yue operas is in line with the current level of development of women's consciousness?

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Strongly agree	29	 9.9%
Slightly agree	88	 30.03%
Agree	114	 38.91%
Slightly disagree	27	 9.22%
Strongly disagree	35	 11.95%
Total	293	

What aspects do you think should be emphasized in the portrayal of female characters in Yue operas in the future? (Multiple choice)

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
Diversity of character	178	 60.75%
Diversity of identity	134	 45.73%

Freedom to pursue love	108	36.86%
Friendship	76	25.94%
Family relationship	101	34.47%
Self-worth realization	196	66.89%
Others	12	4.1%
Total	293	

What do you think Yue opera should be improved if it is to continue to develop in modern society?
(Multiple choice)

Choices	Subtotal	Proportion
To keep the theme fresh and up-to-date, and to respond to the changes in women's consciousness	206	70.31%
Innovate performance forms to adapt to the fast-paced life	111	37.88%
Increase the promotion of Yue opera's cultural background	136	46.42%
Utilize streaming media and social software to spread the message	101	34.47%
Increase financial support and emphasize talent cultivation	114	38.91%
Other: _____	11	3.75%
Total	293	