

# On the Knowledge Paradigm of the History Writing of Ancient Chinese Drama

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**Abstract:** Compared with the discussion of "Rewriting the history of literature", the discussion of "Rewriting the history of drama" has not caused such an upsurge and response. On the one hand, it may be because the subject of drama history has been incorporated into the discussion framework of literary history since Wang Guowei founded it. The construction of the subject of drama history in China also has a literary tendency, and the concept that drama history writing is independent and different from literary history writing has not been fully established. On the other hand, this may also reflect the difficulties and difficulties in the field of drama research and drama history research. The so-called "repeat" is not repetition, but rethinking and new creation, which is a new understanding and interpretation of the history. And development of drama on the basis of the development of theater, a new structure, which of course includes specific results and contents, but first of all, it is carried out under a clear academic concept and guiding ideology. Since the 1980s is indeed an era of ideological pluralism, throughout the development of contemporary literature and art we have experienced several stages of political discourse, artistic discourse, cultural discourse, the latter is the reflection, subversion and development of the former. The road is getting wider and wider, the vision is getting wider and wider, from the negation, beyond the non-academic return to art to the pursuit of a cultural understanding and causes, not only to make the discipline move towards the "broadband" era, but also to make the research understanding of the subject close to nature, close to the essence.

**Keywords:** Rewriting the History of Drama, Uniqueness of Chinese Drama, Evolution of Writing Style and Writing Idea

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## 1. Introduction

How to go about writing the history of ancient Chinese drama is a problem yet to be effectively solved. Finding, identifying and researching the facts of ancient Chinese drama is to write its history, and in order to verify them, drama historians have made great efforts to make the history of dramas buried in the depths of time clear to the world in the form of readable documents, deeds and other texts, as well as observable props, costumes, scenes, musical instruments, stages, and other cultural relics. This basis of cultural information and knowledge is not yet a systematic and complete history of ancient Chinese drama itself, which can only be constructed in the historical writing process of the knowledge paradigm of drama. Without the concept reorganization and logic integration of drama historians, the so-called historical facts of ancient Chinese drama are only isolated factual descriptions and explanations, which cannot

reveal the reasons behind or the relationship between the historical facts. Only through rational analysis, induction, judgment and reasoning can it be truly historic. The arrangement and classified collection of drama historical facts in the change of dynasties and life in ancient China should be of primary concern of drama historians in the paradigm of drama knowledge. In other words, the history of ancient Chinese drama should not only state historical facts, but also discuss their causes, how they are related, under what conditions, and in what process they are related, that is, the problems of "what", "why" and "how", all of which depend on the paradigm of historical drama knowledge.

From the mid-to-late 1980s to the early 1990s, there was a relatively large-scale international seminar on opera almost every year in China. In August 1987, the University of California, Berkeley held an international symposium on the theme of "Mulian", which is extremely rare in the academic and cultural circles. [1] Compared to the "craze" of the 80s

and early 90s, the number of studies in recent years from academic activity to published papers has indeed decreased. This shows that the pattern of excavation, collation and preliminary research of opera materials that has been shelved for a long time has been laid and formed, indicating a new and qualitative improvement and theoretical sublimation. [2] In the research team in this field, there are some well-known scholars abroad, such as Piet van der loon in the United Kingdom, Tian Zhongyicheng and Suwa Haruo in Japan, David Johnson in the United States, Jacques Pimpaneau in France, Kim Xue-ju and Shi Zaidong in South Korea, and so on. However, opera involves a cross-cutting and marginal discipline with a wide range of fields, and there are also a number of domestic drama and cultural workers who lack the necessary academic literacy, and the knowledge and cultural structure of many people cannot track academic changes. Therefore, in the mid-to-late 90s, it was relatively quiet, and it was indeed impossible to stay in shallow research, and it was necessary to nurture new fission and development.

## 2. Differences Between Eastern and Western Opera Ideas

There are great differences in culture and art between China and the West. Western opera was bred in an elegant and open environment, while Chinese opera was developed in the classical introversion of the East. These are related to factors such as history and culture, geographical location, social form, national background and so on. As a result, there are great differences in aesthetics between oriental people and Westerners, but both Western opera and Chinese opera contain profound historical accumulation and cultural heritage. They are the cultural products of the integration of national drama art and music art and continuous development and reform through historical changes.

Compared with their western counterparts, Chinese drama historians' knowledge paradigm and its historical view are unique. In the west, history is understood as an activity of investigating, studying and acquiring knowledge directly related to the scene; the basic connotation of history is understanding and expressing, not historical facts; the fundamental demand of historical activities is to acquire knowledge rather than confirm historical facts. [3] In his *Epic*, Homer regards revealing the truth as history, to which end he became acquainted with witnesses and clarified their testimony. In China, calendar and history are two different concepts. When tied together, they form a double basic meaning. The first meaning is historical facts, which refers to objective natural events, social events, life events and daily cultural events that have occurred. The second meaning is historical knowledge, which refers to the description, identification and interpretation of objective historical facts.

Chinese historians often restore "calendar" based on "history" and focus on "calendar", while their Western counterparts are persistent in narration and interpretation of "history", diverting attention on historical facts but attaching

importance to interpretation. [4] However, the east and the west are consistent in regard of using a specific knowledge paradigm to understand historical facts and construct knowledge about historical facts. Only in this way can history grow into a knowledge that can be perceived, experienced, understood and mastered by current readers. In particular, as one of the historical forms of human culture, different from the objective material development history of nature, the history of the East and the West is the history of human culture. Cultural historical facts refer to the facts created by specific people in specific needs, motives, environments, choices and actions. For example, Guan Hanqing's "Snow in Summer" is unique and cannot be recreated; like ancient Greek literature and art, it has attained a peak of human art in spite of its shortcomings. [5]

Throughout ancient and modern times, at home and abroad, the complete and logical history of drama constructed by the paradigm of dramatic knowledge is highly influential. The construction of ancient Western drama history depends mainly on Aristotle's drama knowledge paradigm. When Aristotle expounded upon ancient Greek tragedy, he adhered to the subjective paradigm of "art is imitation" to analyze it, and believed that tragedy came from imitation of actions that cause pity and fear. [6] The action that causes pity and fear is essentially a negligent act, and those characters in tragedies – similar to audience members themselves – make mistakes not because of sin, but because of fault or weakness, leading to great disaster and resulting in the emotional vent of the audience. Aristotle's tragic paradigm rationally explained and expounded the essence of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides in ancient Greece, and subverted the traditional drama paradigm of "tragedy originates from fate". For the first time, a systematic and complete history of Western drama had been formed in the knowledge system, which has become the source of the history of Western drama.

Hegel, a German master of thought in the 18th century, put forward the dramatic paradigm of "tragedy is conflict and reconciliation", meaning that the essence of tragedy lies in the conflict and reconciliation of social objective forces. The social objective forces in any specific era have their historical one-sidedness. The inevitable conflict between various reasonable but one-sided social objective forces is the essence of tragedy, and the result of tragedy shows that these forces sublate their one-sidedness in tragic conflict and realize reconciliation. Hegel's paradigm has written a western dramatic history that is completely different to Aristotle's accidental negligence knowledge paradigm. Since then, the history of Western drama is no longer a history of drama stories expressing personal accidental mistakes, but a process of continuous progress in the dialectics of conflict and reconciliation, which has deeply affected the paradigm of Marx's drama history and various western drama knowledge paradigms in the 20th century. [7]

As a stage performance form with a long history, Chinese opera and Western opera have many similarities. Both of them are dramatic arts that use music as a medium to express people's thoughts, emotions and life scenes at that time. They

integrate literary and artistic means such as music, drama, literature, dance and art. From the perspective of development, opera and drama are the exploration of creators who have integrated music into drama performance in order to meet people's pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty for thousands of years. In addition, both of them have been gradually improved and developed in the historical process. Western opera has experienced a process from pure performance to a complete theoretical system; After thousands of years of inheritance, Chinese opera has formed an unwritten but rigorous and mature creative pattern. These similarities or similarities are the cornerstone of the continuous communication and progress of eastern and Western dramas. Under the background of the new era, Western opera and Chinese opera are facing great challenges in performance form, audience demand and so on.

With the faster and faster pace of globalization, cultural exchanges between China and the West are becoming more and more frequent, world cultures are integrated with each other, and people's aesthetic level is constantly improving. Therefore, it is necessary to create more excellent classic plays. At the same time, in recent years, under the background of cultural power, China has improved national and cultural self-confidence, and vigorously publicized China's traditional culture. Continue to expand the influence of Chinese culture. [8] Traditional opera is the quintessence of China, and it should be compared with contemporary world culture. This is also the starting point of this paper to study similarities and differences between Western opera and Chinese opera. I believe that under the premise of losing its true colors, we can learn from each other and absorb each other's essence, so that we can create more expressive dramas.

In the new era, with the increasingly frequent cultural exchanges between the East and the west, Chinese opera culture also urgently needs to go to the world and communicate with other countries' drama culture. At this time, the compilation of Chinese and English versions of drama history works has obvious cultural publicity power and mission. Such motivation and goal make the content of opera history contained in such works more general and more approachable, so that more foreigners can understand the development of Chinese opera, and thus build a bridge between Chinese opera and Western culture.

### 3. The Uniqueness of Chinese Drama Paradigm

Opera has many advantages to be proud of and confident, especially its rapid development and maturity. On the whole, the opera that took shape only in the Song Dynasty entered its first heyday after only about a hundred years. Specific to a single type of drama, it took only half a century for Beijing opera to become famous all over the country, and only 30 years for Yue opera to become prosperous.[9] This is because opera artists are good at learning and absorbing.

They are not only good at taking the advantages of other art categories for their own use, but also good at quickly organically integrating the artistic achievements of other operas into the overall aesthetic structure of this drama; He is not only good at inheriting his own historical experience, but also good at inheriting the heritage of other art categories and even the artistic creation of all mankind. This feature fully reflects the broad-minded culture of the Chinese nation and is the cultural gene that China can quickly catch up with and surpass the world's advanced level since modern times.

There were also many unique, exemplary and influential drama knowledge paradigms in ancient China. In the period when Southern Drama in Song and Yuan Dynasties and Zaju in Jin and Yuan Dynasties created brilliance of ancient Chinese drama, through the efforts of scholars of the Yuan Dynasty such as Zhong Sicheng and Hu Diyao, a drama knowledge paradigm with unique significance came into being. [10] Zhong Sicheng's *The Repertory of Drama Writers* casts the artistic function of "moving and chanting" of dramatic art into the concept of interpretation, understanding and evaluation of dramatic quality, social influence, and historical status. It has formed a far-reaching "novel" drama knowledge paradigm, and represented the history of Yuan drama. It describes zaju of Yuan Dynasty as expressing people's familiar daily life in the form of endorsement with a unique perspective expressed in scene, language and music and physical actions, so that viewers can resonate in areas of familiarity and listeners can find novelty in strangeness. Hu Diyao, a scholar of the Yuan Dynasty, put forward the standard of "nine beauties" of actors and actresses, laying emphasis on "seeking innovation and not following the routine", greatly promoting the "novel" drama knowledge paradigm of Zhong Sicheng, and helping it become the mainstream knowledge paradigm of ancient Chinese drama. In this "novel" drama knowledge paradigm, zaju of Yuan Dynasty views drama history with the unity of aesthetic effect and social function of "moving and chanting". It can be said that this is not only the first clear drama knowledge paradigm of Chinese drama, but also the most influential drama history writing knowledge paradigm in ancient China.

Gao Zecheng, a dramatist of late Yuan and early Ming Dynasty, taking *The Story of the Lute* as a model, introduced the orthodox literary view of "writings are for conveying truth" into the mainstream drama paradigm of "novelty". [11] The perfect unity of novel artistic methods and educational social functions has become the core thrust of various subjective paradigms in the history of Chinese drama. Both the "extravagantly gorgeous" and the "natural" drama knowledge paradigm, and the "elegant words" and the "prosody" drama knowledge paradigm in the Ming Dynasty are based on the perfect unity of novel artistic methods and educational social functions. This directed the literary creation of many drama writers and produced such recognized writers as Jiang Shiquan, a dramatist of the Qing Dynasty. We can clearly see the profound influence of the traditional drama paradigm of the unity of novelty and

enlightenment even in modern China's "improved" drama paradigm, "revolutionary" drama paradigm, modern China's "people's" drama paradigm, and "bringing forth the new through the old" drama paradigm.

Another controversial issue in the view of drama history is the maturity of drama. Many people advocate separating the formation and maturity of drama, think "Yuan Zaju and Song Yuan Nanxi are mature forms of Chinese drama. Behind this view is the development of drama based on the theory of evolution, that is, any art form is formed after a long time, so there must be a period of time between its formation and maturity, so the formation of drama should be before its maturity.[12] Under this understanding, the formation time of drama can be greatly advanced. The theory of "Lord Huang of the East China Sea" and the theory of "stepping on a shaking mother" are put forward based on this. Since it has been mentioned before that the vast majority of opera history works hold the view that opera was formed in the song and Yuan Dynasties, we will not specifically discuss the maturity of opera in opera history writing here.

In the history of Chinese drama, the "childlike innocence" drama knowledge paradigm put forward by Li Zhi, a dramatist of Ming Dynasty, is unique. Li Zhi believes that novelty and enlightenment are not the standard of drama, that the root of drama is the revelation of nature, and that the essence of drama is the expression of natural feelings. Under the guidance of this "childlike innocence", Li Zhi established two writing standards of drama history, namely "a chemical product" and "a work of a painter's". In his opinion, *The Story of the West Chamber* and *The Story of Lute* are both classic works of drama. [13] *The Story of the West Chamber* is a natural and artificial "chemical product", while *The Story of lute* is a "work of a painter" who follows the way of heaven and learns from nature. The subjective consciousness of natural humanity and naturalization in Li Zhi's "childlike innocence" drama knowledge paradigm was not consciously realized by Westerners until the European romantic cultural movement in the 18th century.

By combing the changes in the writing concept of drama history in the past century, we can find that the author often has different origins in writing drama history - academic mission, cultural mission and political mission, and these driving forces are not independent of each other and often show a state of blending. Combined with the changes of theoretical support and research methods, we can roughly find such a law: in the first period, most writers of drama history wrote drama history according to their personal academic point of view and research direction; In the second period, influenced by the political environment, the official ideology played an obvious role in the process of drama history works. It can also be said that the writing of drama history at this time served the society and politics; After the new era, there are two different writing trends of drama history compilation and "rewriting drama history" under the guidance and support of the state. The theoretical support and research methods of drama history are also more comprehensive and diversified, and the writing

perspective is richer, and the role of ideology is weaker than before.

#### 4. The Evolution of Writing Style and Writing Idea of Drama History

The spiritual and cultural connotation contained and transmitted in those outstanding works in the history of traditional Chinese opera imperceptibly affects every audience in the process of communication and plays an important role in the construction of the spiritual world of the Chinese nation. Traditional Chinese opera has been conveying the values with loyalty, filial piety and righteousness as the core, encouraging everyone to pay attention to dedication, sacrifice, sacrifice oneself for others, advocate good and abandon evil, and actively pursue rich emotional life while pursuing sound personality and moral perfection.

Opera does not mechanically and in principle impose these abstract moral concepts on the audience. It succinctly and vividly expresses the ethical and moral concepts commonly accepted by the Chinese nation through vivid story contents and characters. When it expresses the profound and vivid expression of life, it must touch the emotion and psychology of the audience and make the function of classical opera works. Far beyond the simple elaboration and dissemination of ethical and moral ideas. On the one hand, it makes use of the wonderful stage expression to let the audience naturally accept the traditional ethical and moral ideas in moving, and gradually form a correct outlook on life and values. On the other hand, excellent opera works always let us see the richness and complexity of social life. At the same time, they naturally contain the richness and complexity of ethics and morality.

The style of opera history is complicated. According to the style of history books, it is mainly divided into four categories, namely, the general history of opera, the dating history of opera, the special history of opera and the chronicles of opera. The special history of opera is subdivided into the history of opera types, regional opera, theater, acting, actor, voice and tune, etc. Among them, the publication quantity of special history and drama chronicles is the most considerable, followed by general history. After the 1980s, it began to emerge in large numbers and have a wide variety. Most of them are the history of opera and regional opera. In addition, there are the history of performance, actor, troupe, vocal cavity, opera communication, opera film and so on. The chronicles of traditional opera appeared after the 1980s, showing the trend of continuous specific segmentation from large regions to provincial and municipal regions and then to city and county regions. [14] The writing of the history of traditional Chinese opera has changed from general history and dynastic history to the emergence of a variety and a large number of special history.

This process shows that the writing style of the history of

traditional Chinese opera is constantly enriched, and the writing pedigree of the history of traditional Chinese opera is also constantly improved. In the history of writing opera history books, the style has experienced the development process from pure classical Chinese, literary and white mixture to pure vernacular. On the contrary, in the field of ancient Chinese literature, classical Chinese and vernacular are not only different in style, but also related to specific value forms. Generally speaking, classical Chinese is associated with the elite, while vernacular is more associated with the lower class. The transformation from classical Chinese to vernacular more or less means the orientation or trend of academic modernization and academic popularization. The stylistic change reflected in the writing history of Chinese opera history also reflects the continuous expansion of the acceptance scope of opera history in China. In this process, the author constantly shortens the distance with the audience by changing his way of speaking. The history of traditional opera is no longer limited to the field of professional research, but has become a subject that the general public can understand and master. When combing the works of drama history in the past century, we can find that there are not only drama history written in domestic language, but also drama history written in Japanese, English and other languages.

Opera has a wide range of themes, including both thick historical narration and gentle waves of love. From the pre Qin Dynasty to the contemporary era, almost all major events in the political and military field in Chinese history, from the conflict between King Wu on behalf of Zhou, Chu and Han, the chaos of the Three Kingdoms, the water margin in Sui and Tang Dynasties to the social unrest between the Ming and Qing Dynasties, are within the narrative scope of opera works; The sad and sentimental love tragedies, such as the romance of the west chamber, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, the match of immortals and so on, are masterpieces spanning time and space. Excellent opera works are full of strange and magnificent style. Liu Mengmei, the heroine Du Linjiang in the Peony Pavilion, met in her dream, came into reality. In exploring the Yin Mountain, Bao's out of body soul looked at her body from afar. In the detective, GUI Ying angrily committed suicide by asking a judge to preside over justice for her... [15] These are amazing wild imagination. Of course, there are also humorous and funny jokes in the opera, with lofty sentiments and boundless righteousness. Opera has created so many characters with distinctive characters, which are important contents of national memory.

The writing of drama history has its commonness, that is, it is necessary to put drama and activities related to drama into the framework of history and narrate in the style of history. At the same time, as a discourse activity of scholars, the flow and evolution of writing ideas are inevitable in the writing history. Therefore, the writing of drama history always has the possibility of renewal. The change of this writing idea may come from the different causes of writing, or it may be due to the different theories supporting writing and the different research methods brought about by them.

The differences of the three prompted researchers to adopt different writing perspectives, which gave birth to the history of drama with similar or even greatly different interests. Therefore, this section further grasps the development law of the history of drama writing by combing the evolution of writing ideas.

From the perspective of traditional opera, the connotation of traditional opera is in the process of constantly enriching, including not only literature, but also on-the-spot performance, including not only elegant department, but also flower Department, local opera, even Nuo opera and Mulian opera. Due to the different views of traditional opera, there are different value judgments on the works of traditional opera writers. In the view of opera history, the writing of opera history reflects the different views of opera origin, formation and development power. In the process of historical development, the discovery of new documents and the evolution of history itself also bring different views of opera history. It is precisely because of the difference between the above view of drama and the view of drama history that the writing of drama history presents a variety of possibilities.

## 5. Conclusion

Today, when we rewrite the history of drama, we must first catalogue, elucidate and judge the scattered and piecemeal objective historical facts of drama with the help of the knowledge paradigm of drama, so as to make the historical facts of drama present internal logic, time order and causal relationship, and to write the history of ancient Chinese drama with regular characteristics. Therefore, in the comparison between the concept and history of Chinese and Western drama history, it is possible to write a complete and systematic history of ancient Chinese drama by constructing a Chinese style drama knowledge paradigm through the authentic experience, true rational thinking and true understanding of drama practice.

The development of Chinese classical drama to the world is inseparable from the joint efforts of translation, communication, sociology, drama research and other disciplines. Further deepen the interdisciplinary, all-round and multi angle comparative study of Chinese and foreign classical dramas in terms of artistic connotation and forms of expression, so as to highlight the unique cultural elements, philosophical thought and aesthetic value of Chinese classical dramas, and explore the "core" themes of family, ethics and emotion presented together with foreign classical dramas across different historical stages and geographical locations. It attracts overseas audiences with the uniqueness of Chinese classical drama, and moves overseas audiences with its "universality" to stimulate deeper and stronger cultural resonance. More importantly, explore the effective path of China's foreign discourse communication, including Chinese classical drama, and realize the process of diversification, systematization and standardization of this research.

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