

## Musical Literacy and Education: A Historical Analysis of Huaibang Opera Development in Henan Province, China

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### ABSTRACT

This research employs a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating musicology and ethnomusicology, to explore the cultural significance of Huaibang Opera—a traditional Chinese Han ethnic local opera genre in Henan province, China. The investigation encompasses the historical evolution, cultural contexts, and musical attributes of Huaibang Opera, aiming to contribute to education, literacy, and a deeper comprehension of this traditional art form. The methodology involves interviews with key informants possessing professional experience in Huaibang Opera, coupled with live performance observations. Through the analysis of collected data and its alignment with existing literature and theoretical frameworks, the study delineates the evolution of Huaibang Opera from a folk song art form to a prototype opera and its subsequent establishment as a local opera. This comprehensive examination sheds light on the cultural and artistic dimensions of education and literacy within Huaibang Opera, providing valuable insights into the historical significance, artistic expressions, and cultural heritage of this distinctive Chinese opera.

**Key words:** Huaibang Opera, Chinese Opera, Cultural Literacy, Music History, Transmission

### INTRODUCTION

Huaibang Opera is a local opera popular in the Huaiqing area of Henan Province. Its birth and development depended on Huaiqing Mansion, which has a profound historical and cultural deposit, and it enriched its wings by constantly absorbing folk art achievements. Huaibang is one of the Bangzi tune systems. It exhibits the characteristic loud, high-pitched, rough, and exhilarating sound typical of the Bangzi style. Because it has been popular among people for a long time, its music, repertoire, recitation, singing, and other aspects have a strong local flavor, and at the same time, Huaibang also has a unique style in his singing and performance methods (Zhao, 2005). Additionally, Huaibang Opera has been acknowledged as one of the first batch of national intangible cultural heritages. However, since the 1980s, Huaibang Opera has faced a significant decline, necessitating urgent efforts for its preservation and transmission (Xi, 2017; Mu, 2022).

From ancient times to the present, the Huaiqing area has bred many historical celebrities, such as Zhu Zaiyu, the first musician in the Ming Dynasty who invented twelve equal temperaments worldwide. While the industrious and kind-hearted Huaiqing people thrive here, they have also nurtured Huaiqing's profound cultural heritage and nourished the prosperous local folk culture and art. Huaibang opera has a history of more than 300 years since it was born.

It has a very local flavor and is loved by the local people. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Huaibang opera developed rapidly, and Huaibang opera was performed in important events such as local festivals, sacrifices, weddings, and funerals (Zhu, 1988).

Huaibang is widely distributed from west to east, with ancient Huaiqing Mansion as the center. The geographical location of ancient Huaiqing Mansion is the main area of Jiaozuo City, Henan Province today. During the period when Huaibang was most popular, its scope of popularity gradually expanded. The five main prefectures north of the Yellow River (Zhangde Prefecture, Weihui Prefecture, Huaiqing Prefecture, Daming Prefecture, and Shunde Prefecture) all had "five prefecture troubles". The phrase "Huai Diao" epitomizes the remarkable momentum of that era. However, with the evolution of history and the changes of the times, the number of professional groups and professionals who perform Huaibang Opera has become increasingly weak, and the number of folk amateur performance groups and folk artists has also gradually decreased. Huaibang Opera is already on the verge of extinction. Faced with the increasing extinction of this ancient and rare local opera, in 2006, Huaibang was approved by the State Council of China to be included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists, and attracted great attention from the academic community (Ma & Wang, 2012).

In conclusion, as an “intangible culture”, Huaibang art is closely related to people’s way of life and production, daily life, folk customs, family relationships, and religious beliefs. Whether it is music, dance, celebrations, rituals, etc, these are all completed dynamically. These dynamic flows include: oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social customs, rituals, and festivals; knowledge and practices about the natural world and the universe; and traditional craft skills. Huaibang is a performing art, and it should be valued and protected from all aspects, including its historical origins and the cultural connotation behind it (He, 2024).

Considering the extensive history and unique characteristics of Huaibang Opera, this research aims to examine its development and analyze the various singing styles within Huaibang Opera. By doing so, it contributes to the dissemination of Huaibang Opera’s exceptional traditional culture, while also offering valuable insights to those with an interest in Huaibang Opera.

### Research Question

- How can the innovative integration of Huaibang Opera in educational contexts contribute to literacy development and cultural appreciation?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The General Knowledge of Huaibang Opera in Henan

As a large province in the Central Plains of China, Henan province has a long history and many local music and art forms, among which “Yu Opera” is the most famous. Henan Opera was developed based on the continuous inheritance, reform and innovation of Henan Bangzi, and is the largest local opera in China., is also the most representative local music in Henan Province. At present, most academic research on “Henan local music” focuses on Henan opera, and there are also many studies on folk songs and minor tunes (Zhang, 2019).

Huaibang Opera is an ancient and rare local opera in Henan Province. Because it originated from Huaiqing Mansion in the Ming Dynasty, it was called Huaibang, also known as “Huaiqing Bangzi” and “Old Huaibang”. Huaibang began in the late Ming Dynasty, was formed in the Qing Dynasty, and matured from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China. With a history spanning over 300 years, Huaibang Opera stands as a rare gem within the Bangzi Opera tradition, cherished by generations for its unique repertoire, singing style, recitations, and music, all infused with a distinctive local essence. Huaibang Opera is a unique local opera with passionate singing and rough and unrestrained performance. He has his own unique style in singing, performing and other arts. There are complete performances of Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo and Chou, and the repertoire mainly focuses on Twins, Double Dan and Double Flowered Faces. It is deeply loved by people in northwest Henan and southern Shanxi, and is mainly popular in ancient Huaiqing Mansion.

Since Huaibang belongs to the Bangzi style, Zaomu Bangzi must be played in rhythm when singing. The lyrics are mostly composed of seven-character sentences, intersecting sentences, long and short sentences, corresponding up and down, matching rhyme, and basically regular structure. Huaibang Opera has more than 300 traditional plays and has appeared in nearly a hundred modern fashion plays (<https://www.henan.gov.cn/>, retrieved 2024).

### The General Knowledge of the Musical Characteristics of Huaibang Opera

From the perspective of historical and cultural development, the relationship between cultural inheritance and the examination of ancient opera shows that Huaibang is a kind of Bangzi tune with strong local color. Li Xinxian’s (2008) article uses the historical status of the development of Huaibang Opera troupes as the background to elicit thoughts on the current development status of Huaibang art. Zhang Zhizhuang (2006) believes that the emergence of Huaibang Opera is not derived from a single Za Ju of the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties and later Shehuo Stories, Poseidon Opera, Henan Bangzi, Shanxi Shangdang Bangzi, and Wan Bang, but rather evolved from the rich local folk opera music. It is formed on the basis of absorbing the characteristics of Bangzi tune and combining it with the characteristics of local dialect.

Zhao Lina’s (2006) article studies the development process of Huaibang’s singing art. The research delves into the intricacies of Huaibang Opera singing, examining elements such as pattern, melody, mode, and word pattern. It conducts a comparative analysis of the two prominent singing schools within Huaibang, considering the distinct characteristics rooted in the local dialect. Li Haian (2007) studied the singing art of a certain inheritor through the historical background. Li Haian (2009). Comprehensive research on Huaibang art. Li Haian (2009) constructed the form of Huaibang music from its different language forms and rich opera music to the true and false transformation of vocal tunes (Cai, 2003).

The vocal melody of Huaibang Opera have evolved and expanded throughout its history. The introduction of the first professional accompaniment band in 1920 marked a significant milestone, and various singing styles, such as “chidiao qiang” and the “Xian-xia-tune,” have been incorporated and enriched by different actors. The creation of new singing techniques, such as the “six-character tone,” and the exploration of male and female duets have further diversified the repertoire and performance techniques of Huaibang Opera. Opera combines standardized movements and refined representations of life through formula and program. The formula includes standardized choreography and repetition of life movements, while the program is derived from life but refined and beautified according to certain norms. Good artists can break through some of the limitations of programming and create their personalized normative art. The program serves as a model of beauty and contributes to the continuous transmission of opera across generations (Liu et al., 2022; Jian et al., 2022).

Zhao (2009) mainly introduced various aspects of Huaibang’s music style such as Adagio (*Manban*),

*liushuiban*, *Er Ba Band*, etc. Huangfu (2007) article introduced the music singing of Huaibang Art, the rhymes of the singing, its narration, and the melody structure. The above are studies on the characteristics of Huaibang's artistic style. They are a summary of Huaibang's music art from the perspective of Huaibang's music, accompaniment instruments, singing characteristics, style characteristics, and diction.

### The Types of Chinese Opera

Chinese opera encompasses three primary art forms: folk song and dance, rap, and burlesque. Originating from primitive song and dance, Chinese opera is a comprehensive stage art with a history dating back to the Han, Tang, Song, and Jin dynasties. It integrates literature, music, dance, fine arts, martial arts, acrobatics, and performing arts, with over 360 different types. Chinese opera is characterized by the convergence of multiple art forms that express their respective individualities within a shared nature. Through centuries of development, five main opera types have emerged: Peking Opera, Huaibang Opera, Huangmei Opera, Pingju Opera, and Henan Opera, refer to Table 1.

### Research Theory

The research study aims to investigate cultural significance of Huaibang Opera. It employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining musicology and ethnomusicology, to explore different aspects of this traditional Chinese opera genre.

### Musicology

As a theoretical subject, provides a framework for understanding the various elements of music within Huaibang Opera. It encompasses fields such as music aesthetics, music history, music ethnology, music psychology, and music pedagogy.

### Ethnomusicology

On the other hand, focuses on the study of traditional music from different cultural contexts. It investigates how specific musical traditions, like Huaibang Opera, are constructed, utilized, disseminated, and developed within their cultural settings. By adopting an ethnomusicological perspective, the researchers will analyze the fundamental characteristics and cultural significance of Huaibang Opera. This will involve examining its historical development, cultural contexts, and the role it plays within the broader Chinese cultural landscape.

### METHOD

#### Key Informants

The key informants were selected based on five criteria established by the researcher, the heirs of Chinese intangible culture. These criteria include having a minimum of 20 years' experience in creating, singing, or performing Huaibang opera, a comprehensive understanding of Huaibang opera culture and development, winning the highest awards in various Huaibang opera competitions, being recognized as a provincial-level

**Table 1.** The types of Chinese opera

Opera Type	Description
Peking Opera (Bin, 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Originated in Beijing, integrated various regional opera styles with local folk tunes</li> <li>- Standardized forms in literature, performance, music, and stage art</li> <li>- Diverse singing styles, with Erhuang and Xipi as the main vocal types</li> <li>- Accompanied by huqin and drum instruments</li> <li>- Roles categorized as sheng, dan, jing, chou, gong, wu, and liu, each with unique performance routines and skills</li> <li>- Predominantly depicts historical stories, with over 1,300 traditional operas</li> </ul>
Huaibang Opera (Hong, 2006; Chen & Yu, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Second-largest opera type in China, also known as Shaoxing Opera</li> <li>- Originated in Sheng County, Zhejiang Province, and flourished in Shanghai</li> <li>- Long lyrical style, focusing on singing with beautiful and emotionally captivating performances</li> <li>- Multiple artistic schools, popular in southern regions such as Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Fujian, Jiangxi, and Anhui</li> </ul>
Huangmei Opera (Jianxin, 2006a; Jianxin, 2006b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primary local opera in Anhui, originated in Huangmei, Hubei Province</li> <li>- Influenced by various folk songs and regional operas, forming unique artistic characteristics</li> <li>- Known for simple and melodious singing style, expressing emotions with rich expressiveness</li> <li>- Performances characterized by simplicity, meticulousness, and vividness</li> </ul>
Pingju Opera (Bo, 2006; Fei, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional opera of the Han nationality, popular in northern China</li> <li>- Originated from Luanxian County, Hebei Province, gradually gaining popularity</li> <li>- Developed with influences from Peking Opera and Hebei Wooden Clappers</li> <li>- Divided into East Road and West Road, with East Road being the dominant style</li> </ul>
Henan Opera (Lin, 1986; Liangzhong, 1990; Jun & Yaxian, 1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Largest local opera in China, primarily performed by the Han nationality</li> <li>- Originated in central China, developed from the continuous inheritance and innovation of Henan Bangzi Opera</li> <li>- Known for sonorous atmosphere, rhythm, clear diction, and expressive charm</li> <li>- Performances vividly convey the inner feelings of the characters</li> </ul>

transmitter of Huaibang opera by the government, and making remarkable contributions to the dissemination and development of Huaibang opera. These key informants, including a scholar and two famous Huaibang opera actresses who also serve as transmitters of Henan's provincial intangible cultural heritage of Huaibang opera, are highly important sources of information for the research study, refer to Table 2.

### Research Tools

Interviews and observations are valuable research tools used to gather primary data and gain in-depth insights into the subject of study. The following research tools were utilized:

#### Interviews

Conducting structured or semi-structured interviews allowed for direct interaction with the key informants. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore their perspectives, insights, and personal experiences related to Huaibang Opera. Open-ended questions were utilized to encourage detailed and informative responses, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

#### Observation

Active observation was employed during live performances of Huaibang Opera and rehearsals to gather firsthand data. Additionally, observing rehearsals and interactions within the opera troupe provided insights into the collaborative process. Detailed notes and recordings were used to document and analyze the observed aspects.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential component of this research study as it enables the author to examine and interpret the collected data in relation to the research objectives, contributing to the literacy of Huaibang Opera. By employing relevant concepts and theories, the author seeks to acquire valuable insights and enhance the understanding of Huaibang Opera.

The data collection process involves conducting literature analysis, extensively reviewing pertinent sources to explore the development of Huaibang Opera. Historical documents, scholarly articles, and other written materials are carefully examined to gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Huaibang Opera over time. In addition, field investigations and interviews with key informants, including actors and experts in Huaibang Opera, are conducted to gather further data.

Through meticulous examination and interpretation of the collected data, the author aims to draw meaningful conclusions and identify patterns. By employing suitable theoretical frameworks, the research aims to provide a deeper comprehension of the cultural and artistic significance of Huaibang Opera's development. Ultimately, this study strives to contribute to the existing knowledge and enhance literacy regarding the unique characteristics and importance of Huaibang Opera.

### RESULTS

From an literacy studies perspective, the emergence and development of Huaibang Opera shed light on its relatively youthful position in the extensive historical trajectory of Chinese opera art that spans thousands of years. Throughout the span of over a century, Shaoxing Opera has achieved remarkable success, attained international recognition, and secured a significant place in the annals of Chinese opera. During its nearly 100-year evolution, Huaibang Opera has cultivated a distinct artistic and cultural style specific to southern China. Diverging from the trajectory of many other traditional opera genres in China, the birth and growth of Huaibang Opera were not directly rooted in traditional opera music. Instead, its progression was influenced by public aesthetic preferences and market demands, evolving in response to changes in the performing arts. Consequently, societal, and cultural influences, combined with shifting market dynamics, propelled Huaibang Opera from its "embryonic stage" to the "formation and development stage," ultimately reaching its "mature and prosperous stage."

**Table 2.** Key informant background and expertise

Key Informant	Background and Expertise
Scholar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National first-class actor</li> <li>- Extensive experience in Huaibang Opera creation, singing, and performance</li> <li>- Knowledgeable about the culture and development of Huaibang opera</li> <li>- Winner of top awards in various Huaibang opera competitions</li> <li>- Recognized as a provincial-level Huaibang opera transmitter by the government</li> <li>- Made outstanding contributions to the dissemination and development of Huaibang opera</li> </ul>
Performer 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National first-class actor</li> <li>- Prominent figure in Huaibang opera acting and performance</li> <li>- Well-versed in the culture and development of it</li> <li>- Achieved success in national competitions and received top accolades</li> <li>- Contributed significantly to the dissemination and development of Huaibang opera</li> </ul>
Performer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accomplished composer of Huaibang opera music</li> <li>- Recognized as a national first-class composer</li> <li>- Extensive knowledge of Huaibang opera development and vocal style</li> <li>- Notable achievements in creating excellent Henan music works</li> </ul>



### The Origin Period of Huaibang Opera

In the field of literacy studies, the origin and development of Huaibang Opera can be observed within the broader historical context of Chinese opera art, which spans thousands of years. Huaibang Opera, originating in the Henan Province, gradually expanded, and flourished in the Huaiqing area, where it gained national influence.

The origin of Huaibang remains a subject of debate, primarily due to the absence of historical documents. Researchers investigating Huaibang Opera often rely on diverse materials associated with the opera, gathering relevant details and organizing them to draw conclusions about its origins. The historical development of folk opera has gone through thousands of years, and the same or similar changes will occur with the evolution of history and the changes of the times. For example, some scholars once mentioned:

*The social soil on which Chinese opera relies for its survival cannot be cultivated by the mainstream cultural discourse of the society at that time but is determined by various folk customs, various festivals, entertainments, and prayers for blessings and disaster relief determined by marginalized folk discourse methods. Rituals and so on have become rich nutrients for the gestation and germination of Chinese opera.* (Qi, 2002).

“Ta Yao Niang”, according to the earliest historical records, recorded in “Old Tang Book·Music Records” and “Jiao Fang Ji” written by Cui Lingqin of the Tang Dynasty, the song and dance drama “Ta Yao Niang” in Hanoi County was produced in the late Sui Dynasty. It is the earliest prototype of Huaibang Opera, the ancient perform stage refer to Figure 1. The records of the “Henan New Chronicles” published in 1929 posit that Huaibang Opera is a branch of Henan Bangzi and Henan Opera. It suggests that the Henan Bangzi spread northward and entered the Qinyang area during its prosperous period, eventually becoming known as the Huaibang Opera. However, this conclusion, while supported by the author after extensive investigations, is acknowledged as a conjecture due to insufficient evidence.

Adding to the complexity, Li Guoan, a participant in Huaibang Opera who is over 90 years old, provides a different perspective. According to him, before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Qinyang did not know Yu opera, and this form of opera was only introduced from the south of the Yellow River in 1950. Notably, it was not called Yu opera at that time; people referred to it as Henan Bangzi. These differing accounts emphasize the challenge of conclusively tracing the origins of Huaibang Opera, indicating the need for further research and exploration to unravel its intricate history.

The “Qinyang Opera Chronicles” notes that in 1950, the “Henan Bang” opera troupe, led by figures like Chen Lanrong, Guan Lingfeng, Zhai Aiyun, and others, made their first appearance in Qin. According to the author’s investigations, Henan Opera entered Qin earlier than other operatic forms like Beijing Opera, Erjia Xian, and Yue Diao. During this period, as Henan Opera entered Qinyang, Huaibang Art had already permeated the eight counties of Huaiqing Prefecture and the surrounding areas, establishing a significant influence.



**Figure 1.** The Ancient Huaibang Opera Stage  
Source: Yingying Zhang, fieldwork in November 2023

The introduction of Henan Opera into Huaibang is acknowledged to have played a role in promoting innovation and development within Huaibang Art. This infusion of external influences injected new vitality into various aspects of Huaibang art, including music melody, band configuration, script, and stage performance.

However, this interaction also led to a certain degree of cultural assimilation. The powerful influence of Central Plains culture, represented by Henan Opera, posed a challenge to the independent dialect culture of Huaiqing Prefecture. The spread of Henan opera art north of the Yellow River, into the Huaibang region, had a profound impact. It compelled Huaibang art to adapt and absorb elements from Henan opera art.

In essence, the interplay between Henan Opera and Huaibang Art reflects a dynamic cultural exchange, where external influences contribute to the evolution and enrichment of local artistic traditions. This process, while presenting challenges to the preservation of a distinct local culture, also contributes to the broader tapestry of Chinese performing arts.

### The Early Development of Huaibang Opera

As mentioned before, Huaibang is a very old and rare local opera. It was produced as early as 1753, which is what we call the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Qianlong. Around 1800, Woban appeared again, so it can be said that Huaibang matured very long ago. Ma Zichen’s “Analysis of the Origin of Henan Opera” mentioned that “the Henan Clapper that truly belongs to the people of Henan Province and has the typical Zhongzhou style should be ready in the Daoguang Dynasty mentioned in the “Reconstruction of the Ming Palace Stele” in Zhuxian Town, Kaifeng Previously, after the Qianlong Dynasty, that is, the period from 1796 to 1820, it was less than two hundred years ago.” (Ma Zichen: “Analysis of the Origin of Henan Opera”, in Ma Zichen’s “Collected Essays on the History of Henan Opera”, Zhongzhou Ancient Books Publishing House 1989 edition, page 94) Chang Jingzhi also mentioned in “On Bangzi Opera” that “from the 1940s to the present, Bangzi opera has become the most widely spread among the types of Bangzi opera, with the largest number of performing groups...” (Chang, 2005).

Folk operas are typically transmitted orally and through direct teaching, with limited instances of written

documentation. Therefore, it is very difficult to give a complete and clear account of the historical situation of Huaibang Opera. Due to the lack of relevant historical written records, there is no definite statement on how long Huaibang's history is. However, different people have analyzed the information they have. Some say its history is more than 300 years, and some say it is more than 300 years old. It is five or six hundred years old, and some people say that Huaibang Opera has a history of nearly seven hundred years.

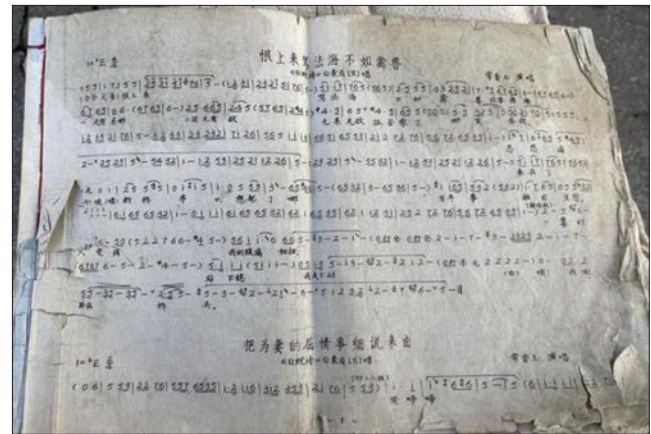
It is generally believed that the history of Huaibang ranges from 300 to 500 years. For example, Wang Xingya, a professor and historian at Zhengzhou University, described in "Huai Shang and Opera Culture" in the book "Henan Shang Bang": "The emergence of Huaibang Opera has a history of more than 500 years" (Wang, 2007). He is based on the poem written by Ni Jindao, the magistrate of Hanoi during the Hongzhi period of the Ming Dynasty, when he was watching a performance at the Guandi Temple Fair in the west of the city: "Thousands of Guangsha Group cloisters, department stores noisy The assembly hall of the formation. Since the foundation of the ancestral temple was passed down to the Shuifu Palace, the temple has a magnificent appearance.

According to the "Jiaozuo Opera Chronicles": "In the 52<sup>nd</sup> year of Qianlong (1787), Chou Ni, an actress with a bang beard, was already famous." "Yincheng, whose real name was Li Yongtai (1802-1895), was born in the west of Wuzhi County A native of Yancun. At the age of six, he joined the Huaibang Opera Troupe to learn skills. Five years later, he became quite famous. According to research, Xiyang Village, which was originally part of Jiyuan County (now Yuanqu County, Shanxi Province), had a Huaibang Opera Troupe during the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty. It can be proved that around 1800, there were more formal Huaibang troupes in Huaiqing Prefecture, namely the 'Xing Opera Troupe' and the 'Jianghu Troupe'" (Wang, 1990).

From this information, we can know that as early as the Qianlong and Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty, Huaibang had developed into a relatively mature opera and was active in Huaiqing Mansion. According to existing opera historical records, the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty were the periods when a large number of local operas were produced in my country. During this period, the country was prosperous, the people lived a comfortable and leisurely life, the economic and technological levels reached a very high level, and people's interest in life also changed from temple fairs every year to festivals. No longer waiting for the annual meeting, a dedicated venue for opera and vaudeville performances was formed. According to relevant historical circumstances, it can be inferred that Huaibang Opera also sprouted and developed during this period. Considering this situation, it is not an exaggeration to say that Huaibang Opera has a history of more than three hundred years. The ancient Huaibang Opera musical notation which still used today refer to Figure 2.

### The Relationship with Henan Bangzi (Henan Opera)

According to the records of "Henan New Chronicles" published in 1929, Huaibang Opera is a branch of Henan Bangzi



**Figure 2.** The number notation of *Huaibang* Opera  
Source: Yingying Zhang

and Henan Opera. It was the Henan Bangzi that spread northward and flowed into the Qinyang area during its prosperity, also known as Huaibang Opera." This kind of opera was only introduced from the south of the Yellow River in 1950. At that time, it was not called Yu opera, people called it Henan Bangzi." According to "Qinyang Opera Chronicles", in 1950, the "Henan Bang" opera troupe, headed by Chen Lanrong, Guan Lingfeng, Zhai Aiyun, etc. They came to Qin for the first time to perform. According to the author's investigation, Henan Opera entered Qin earlier than Beijing Opera, Erjia Xian, and Yue Diao.

During the period when Henan Opera made its entry into Qinyang, Huaibang Art had already permeated across the eight counties of Huaiqing Prefecture and its surrounding areas, exerting a significant influence. Especially in terms of music melody, band configuration, script, and stage performance. Bang art has had a profound impact, making Huaibang art have to learn from and absorb the essence of Henan opera art.

Therefore, we can find the influence of Henan Opera on Huaibang Art from the study of the music form of Huaibang Art. In particular, the format, stage performance skills, and scripts of Henan Opera have a profound impact on Huaibang Art. The Huaibang art in the Qinyang area "has a blood relationship with Henan Opera, meanwhile due to the large language difference and strong influence from dramas from other provinces, it shows different styles from Henan Opera in many places, and they are also obviously different from each other." (Meng Fanshu, "Research on the Origin of Chinese Banner Style Opera", page 268, Culture and Art Press, 2002). However, "Huaibang's profession and music singing format are the same as those of Henan Opera" (Guo, 1994).

### The Relationship with Shangdang Bangzi

*Shangdang Bangzi* is an ancient local opera popular in Jincheng, Yangcheng, and Changzhi areas in southeastern Shanxi Province. It was an ancient local opera in Shangdang County. Its titles include "Shangdang Bangzi", "Shangdang Opera", etc. *Shangdang Bangzi* is distinguished in two senses. One is in a broad sense, which refers to multi-tone operas, including Kun, Bang, Luo, Juan, and Huang. They are a type



of opera that has been performed together with Shangdang Bangzi from a historical perspective. The second is, in a narrow sense, the Bangzi opera genre developed locally in Shangdang. Shangdang Bangzi's opera style is simple, rough, high-pitched, and exciting, and each line of singing is a mixture of real and falsetto. Shangdang Bangzi has more than 700 repertoires and more than 100 suona tunes, making it a relatively large genre of Bangzi tunes. Because Shangdang Bangzi is a type of opera with a relatively ancient history, judging from historical records, Shangdang Bangzi has had an important impact on operas in surrounding and other areas. For example, Zao Bang is popular in Heze, Liangshan, and other places in the southwestern part of Shandong. Popular with Zezhou Diao, Xi Diao, and Sanqiao Ban in Handan, Hebei Province. These two different kinds of Bangzi tunes are both vocal operas with local characteristics formed after Shangdang Bangzi was spread to the local area and combined with local folk customs and habits.

From a geographical point of view, Huaiqing Mansion borders the Guangdong area of Shanxi. As early as the Ming Dynasty, a large number of Shanxi people immigrated to Huaiqing Mansion, which strengthened the connection between Huaiqing Mansion and Shanxi. Historically, these two Regional exchanges are very frequent. For example, the stele of the ancestor of the Li family erected in the 60<sup>th</sup> year of Qianlong's reign (1795) in Xiaosi Village, Baixiang Township, Qinyang, records: "The Duke was originally from Hongdong County, Pingyang Prefecture, Shanxi Province. He first settled here in the Hongwu Year of the Ming Dynasty. Of the five sons, four lived with their ancestors, and one moved to Wangliang Village. It has been more than four hundred years since then, and they have lived through fifteen lifetimes in total."

A large number of immigrants in history have maintained more or less close cultural ties between some areas in Shanxi and some areas in Huaiqing Prefecture. Long-term migration or intermarriage with locals in Huaiqing Prefecture is this kind of clan identity. The close exchanges between Huaiqing and Shanxi have made Huaiqing Mansion similar to some areas in Shanxi in terms of folk customs, religious beliefs, and worship.

For example, in terms of dialect accent, the dialect accent in Huaiqing Prefecture is quite different from the dialect accent in other areas of Henan, but it is very similar to the Shanxi dialect. "At the beginning of the establishment of the Jin-speaking area, the scope of the Jin-speaking area included: most areas of Shanxi Province except the southern and northeastern districts, western Inner Mongolia, east of the Yellow River, northern Shaanxi Province, western Hebei Province, and north of the Yellow River in Henan Province Areas adjacent to Shanxi Province" (Cui, 2004).

The evolution of Huaibang Opera is often linked to the influence of Shanxi Shangdang Bangzi. Similarities in repertoire between Shangdang Bangzi and Huaibang Opera contribute to the argument that Huaibang evolved from the traditions of Shangdang Bangzi. Scholars suggest that Huaibang Opera is the outcome of the spread of Shanxi Shangdang Bangzi into the Huaiqing Prefecture area. The

evolution is characterized by a process of mutual learning, absorption of local folk music and art, and the formation of a new type of Bangzi opera through integration and evolution. Zhao (2006) describes Huaibang Opera as a multi-cultural symbiotic Banqiang opera art form that has emerged from the fusion of Shangdang Bangzi and local influences.

Cheng Feng (2004), in his research on the opera art in the Jiaozuo area, echoes this sentiment, stating that Huaibang Opera in the Jiaozuo area is a result of the combination of Shanxi Middle Road (Shangdang) Bangzi flowing into the region and merging with local folk tunes. This perspective on the evolution of Huaibang Opera is further emphasized in Yang Yudong's paper on the origin of Huaibang. The notion is that the opera's development involved a dynamic interchange between the Shangdang Bangzi traditions and the local musical and artistic expressions in the Huaiqing Prefecture area.

### The Prosperity of Huaibang Opera

During the period of 1851 to 1874, during the Xianfeng and Tongzhi years of the Qing Dynasty, Huaibang Opera experienced a notable period of growth in the eight municipalities directly under the central government of Huaiqing Prefecture. Various groups, theater troupes, joke classes, and table-top singing groups emerged to perform Huaibang. However, the opera faced local authorities' restrictions due to perceived vulgarity, leading to the ban of some performances, including the Wai Drum Circle. Despite these prohibitions, other Huaibang troupe societies, like the "Jianghu Troupe," flourished among the people.

In the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic of China, Huaibang's development reached an unstoppable zenith. Termed the "Five Prefectures Nao Huai Diao," the five prefectures surrounding Huaiqing Prefecture witnessed a golden period in Huaibang's development. Each prefecture, including Zhangde, Weihui, Huaiqing, Daming, and Shunde, saw rapid growth in Huaibang Opera. It expanded beyond festival celebrations, becoming a part of daily life where people gathered to sing Huaibang Opera for leisure and entertainment. This flourishing period marked a cultural heyday for Huaibang, fostering its presence and popularity among the masses.

This era marked a transformative phase for Huaibang Opera in terms of both thematic content and artistic presentation. Pioneering plays like "Huamulan," "Huaiqing Bangzi," and "Old Huaibang" emerged, epitomizing the distinctive style of Huaibang Opera and setting the trajectory for the development of "talent and beauty drama" within the genre. Artists found inspiration in a variety of established operas, including Yu Opera, Bangzi Opera, and Beijing Opera, incorporating elements from ancient costume plays and serial-script operas into the Huaibang repertoire. This period was characterized by a fervent dedication to learning, innovation, and daring reforms, leading to notable advancements in musical performance and artistic expression within Huaibang Opera.

### Literacy and Cultural Appreciation

The early development of Huaibang Opera during the period of 1851-1874 laid a solid foundation for its future growth and cultural significance. The birth of the “taniangyao” marked a significant milestone in the evolution of Huaibang Opera from a folk-art form to a recognized opera genre. The expansion of performances to Beijing and the establishment of a full-time ensemble further enhanced its artistic expression and musical richness.

From a literacy perspective, the study of Huaibang Opera’s early development provides valuable insights into its cultural significance and artistic evolution. Understanding the historical context, musical innovations, and audience reception during this period contributes to a deeper appreciation of Huaibang Opera’s unique characteristics.

The integration of Huaibang Opera in educational contexts promotes cultural appreciation and fosters a sense of cultural identity among students. By studying the early development of Huaibang Opera, students can gain a comprehensive understanding of its origins, growth, and artistic transformations. This knowledge enhances their literacy skills, including language proficiency, critical thinking, and cultural understanding.

### The Challenges and Renaissance of Huaibang Opera

The outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression marked a significant turning point in the history of Huaibang Opera. This prosperous situation lasted until Japan invaded China and began to gradually decline. In the 1930s and 1940s, Japan launched a large-scale invasion of China. Many troupes engaged in Huaibang performances were disbanded, and many Huaibang performing artists stopped performing and left the troupes. Huaibang Opera, an ancient opera, is on the verge of extinction for the first time.

Huaibang’s revival occurred in the period after the founding of New China. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the party and government attached great importance to the development of folk music. The government has increased its support and revitalization of Huaibang art, laying a solid foundation for the revival of Huaibang art. According to incomplete statistics, in just ten years from 1953 to 1963, there were no fewer than 500 folk troupes or semi-professional Huaibang actors in several counties in Huaqing Prefecture. With time, Huaibang Opera has rekindled the flame of recovery, but in the coming “Cultural Revolution” and the subsequent reform and opening up, Huaibang’s survival will be severely tested again.

From 1962 to 1964, the Wuzhi County Culture Department carried out a major reorganization of rural amateur theater troupes. It criticized the three Huaibang theater troupes of Beiwang, Beixi Tang, and Dongmaqu for not insisting on being amateur and performing commercial performances. It also criticized Qianyangcheng and Dongmaqu. The Hanyuan Village Huaibang Troupe spent 400 yuan and 600 kilograms of food stamps on their performances, which they considered wasteful and criticized.

On February 8, 1964, the Wuzhi County Cultural Center issued the “Opinions on Several Issues Concerning Rural Amateur Theater Troupes’ Programs for Spring Festival Literary Activities”. The Zhoucun Huaibang Troupe performed a costume play for three days, and the Qiaomiao Commune Party Committee asked Zhoucun brigade cadres to conduct two inspections. The Jiabu Village Huaibang Troupe performed two costume plays, and the Dafeng Commune Party Committee criticized the Jiabu Village brigade cadres. Gangtou Village of Xiaodong Commune raised funds from the masses to buy opera boxes and hired teachers from outside to teach costume dramas. The Wuzhi County Party Committee issued a county-wide circular to criticize the person in charge of the Gangtou Village Huaibang Theater Troupe. From then on, all theater troupes in Wuzhi County no longer dared to perform costume dramas. (Wang, 2005)

In the 1950s and 1960s, natural disasters, political movements, and other factors in China also had a great impact on the development of Huaibang Opera to varying degrees. At the beginning of the “Cultural Revolution”, the blow to Huaibang was fatal. All theater troupes or folk artists engaged in Huaibang Opera performances were not allowed to perform Huaibang Opera. In addition to banning performances, the troupe’s costumes and props were also burned, and demolition tools were smashed. A stage for performances. Huaibang Opera disappeared from people’s sight in an instant.

The period spanning the “Cultural Revolution” posed significant challenges to the dissemination and promotion of Huaibang Opera. The harsh natural environment and national policies of the time imposed restrictions on the activities of Huaibang Opera, necessitating adjustments to adapt to the prevailing conditions. Unfortunately, during the “Cultural Revolution,” many folk arts, including Huaibang Opera, faced suppression and had to either conceal themselves or vanish entirely due to the misguided political and cultural movements of that era.

This tumultuous period had a devastating impact on traditional folk music culture, disrupting its recovery and shattering the aspirations of countless individuals who cherished folk music. While some argue that such changes are an inevitable part of historical processes and that adaptable elements survive societal evolution, this perspective seems inadequate when applied to folk music and art. The “Cultural Revolution” was particularly harsh on Huaibang Opera, eroding a cultural heritage that, under different circumstances, might have continued to thrive. The abrupt decline during this period cannot be attributed to an inherent inability to adapt, especially considering the resurgence of interest in Huaibang Opera with the establishment of more than 500 theater troupes after the reform and opening up. The halt in its decline suggests that people’s enduring need for and love of Huaibang Opera played a crucial role in its survival.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The interdisciplinary research on the cultural significance of Huaibang Opera employed a methodologically diverse approach, combining elements of musicology and



ethnomusicology. The primary objective was to comprehensively investigate various facets of Huaibang Opera, encompassing its historical evolution, cultural contextualization, and its place within the broader spectrum of Chinese cultural traditions. The methodological framework involved conducting interviews with key informants and directly observing live performances, thereby securing firsthand data to facilitate a nuanced analysis.

The research findings are in congruence with prevailing literature on Huaibang Opera. The study verifies the opera's roots in Henan Province and its gradual ascendancy, particularly within Qinyang. The developmental journey of Huaibang Opera, evolving from its early "singing along the door" stage to the establishment of "Small folk song" and its subsequent transformation into "Laohuaibang Opera," aligns cohesively with the historical chronicles and progression elucidated in scholarly works (Chen & Yu, 2006; Wu, 2018).

The outcomes of the research also substantiate the theoretical foundations of musicology and ethnomusicology. Through the analysis of musical components, performance techniques, and cultural implications of Huaibang Opera, the study adheres to the theoretical frameworks and concepts inherent in these disciplines. Musicology offers a structured lens for comprehending the diverse musical elements encapsulated within Huaibang Opera, while ethnomusicology delves into the construction, dissemination, and evolution of the opera within its cultural contexts (Bo, 2006; Fei, 2006).

The utilization of interviews and observations as research methodologies in this study is integral to acquiring primary data and gaining profound insights into Huaibang Opera. The interviews conducted with key informants, possessing significant experience and expertise in Huaibang Opera, yield valuable perspectives, insights, and historical knowledge.

In conclusion, the research study on the cultural significance of Huaibang Opera has yielded valuable insights into the historical development, cultural contexts, and artistic characteristics of this traditional Chinese opera genre. The findings align with existing literature, adhere to the theoretical principles of musicology and ethnomusicology, and are supported by the chosen research methods. By augmenting literacy and fostering a deeper understanding of Huaibang Opera, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the broader domains of education studies and cultural research.

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