

= Peking opera =

Peking opera or Beijing opera ( simplified Chinese : 京剧 ; traditional Chinese : 京劇 ; pinyin : Jīngjù ) is a form of traditional Chinese theatre which combines music , vocal performance , mime , dance , and acrobatics . It arose in the late 18th century and became fully developed and recognized by the mid 19th century . The form was extremely popular in the Qing dynasty court and has come to be regarded as one of the cultural treasures of China . Major performance troupes are based in Beijing and Tianjin in the north , and Shanghai in the south . The art form is also preserved in Taiwan ( Republic of China ) , where it is known as Guójù ( traditional Chinese : 國劇 ; simplified Chinese : 国剧 ; literally : " National theatre " ) . It has also spread to other countries such as the United States and Japan .

Peking opera features four main types of performers . Performing troupes often have several of each variety , as well as numerous secondary and tertiary performers . With their elaborate and colorful costumes , performers are the only focal points on Peking opera 's characteristically sparse stage . They use the skills of speech , song , dance , and combat in movements that are symbolic and suggestive , rather than realistic . Above all else , the skill of performers is evaluated according to the beauty of their movements . Performers also adhere to a variety of stylistic conventions that help audiences navigate the plot of the production . The layers of meaning within each movement must be expressed in time with music . The music of Peking opera can be divided into the Xipi ( 西皮 ) and Erhuang ( 二黄 ) styles . Melodies include arias , fixed tune melodies , and percussion patterns . The repertoire of Peking opera includes over 1,400 works , which are based on Chinese history , folklore , and , increasingly , contemporary life .

Peking opera was denounced as ' feudalistic ' and ' bourgeois ' during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s , and replaced with the eight revolutionary model operas as a means of propaganda and indoctrination . After the Cultural Revolution , these transformations were largely undone . In recent years , Peking opera has attempted numerous reforms in response to sagging audience numbers . These reforms , which include improving performance quality , adapting new performance elements , and performing new and original plays , have met with mixed success .

= = Etymology = =

" Peking opera " is the English term for the art form ; the term entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 1953 . Beijing opera is a more recent equivalent .

In China , the art form has been known by many other names in different times and places . The earliest Chinese name was a combination of the Xipi and Erhuang melodies , and was called Pi Huang . As it increased in popularity , its name became Jingju or Jingxi , which reflected its start in the capital city , Jing , and the form of the performance , Xi . From 1927 to 1949 , Beijing was known as Beiping , and Peking opera was known as Pingxi or Pingju ( Traditional 平劇 , Simplified 平剧 ) to reflect this change . Finally , with the establishment of the People 's Republic of China , the name of the capital city was reverted to Beijing , and the formal name of Beijing theatre in Mainland China was established as Jingju . The Taiwanese name for this type of opera , Guoju , national theatre style , reflects disputes over the true seat of the Chinese government .

= = History = =

= = = Origins = = =

Peking opera was born when the ' Four Great Anhui Troupes ' brought Anhui opera , or what is now called Huiju , in 1790 to Beijing , for the eightieth birthday of the Qianlong Emperor on 25 September . It was originally staged for the court and only made available to the public later . In 1828 , several famous Hubei troupes arrived in Beijing and performed jointly with Anhui troupes . The combination gradually formed Peking opera 's melodies . Peking opera is generally regarded as having fully

formed by 1845 . Although it is called Peking opera ( Beijing theatre style ) , its origins are in the southern Anhui and eastern Hubei , which share the same dialect of Xiajiang Mandarin ( Lower Yangtze Mandarin ) . Peking opera 's two main melodies , Xipi and Erhuang , were derived from Han Opera after about 1750 . The tune of Peking opera is extremely similar to that of Han opera , therefore Han opera is widely known as the Mother of Peking opera . Xipi literally means ' Skin Puppet Show ' , referring to the puppet show that originated in Shaanxi province . Chinese puppet shows always involve singing . Much dialogue is also carried out in an archaic form of Mandarin Chinese , in which the Zhongyuan Mandarin dialects of Henan and Shaanxi are closest . This form of Mandarin is recorded in the book Zhongyuan Yinyun . It also absorbed music from other operas and local Zhili musical art forms . Some scholars believe that the Xipi musical form was derived from the historic Qinqiang , while many conventions of staging , performance elements , and aesthetic principles were retained from Kunqu , the form that preceded it as court art .

Thus , Peking opera is not a monolithic form , but rather a coalescence of many older forms . However , the new form also creates its own innovations . The vocal requirements for all of the major roles were greatly reduced for Peking opera . The Chou , in particular , rarely has a singing part in Peking opera , unlike the equivalent role in Kunqu style . The melodies that accompany each play were also simplified , and are played with different traditional instruments than in earlier forms . Perhaps most noticeably , true acrobatic elements were introduced with Peking opera . The form grew in popularity throughout the 19th century . The Anhui troupes reached their peak of excellence in the middle of the century , and were invited to perform in the court of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom that had been established during the Taiping Rebellion . Beginning in 1884 , the Empress Dowager Cixi became a regular patron of Peking opera , cementing its status over earlier forms like Kunqu . The popularity of Peking opera has been attributed to the simplicity of the form , with only a few voices and singing patterns . This allowed anyone to sing the arias themselves .

Peking opera was initially an exclusively male pursuit . The Qianlong Emperor had banned all female performers in Beijing in 1772 . The appearance of women on the stage began unofficially during the 1870s . Female performers began to impersonate male roles and declared equality with men . They were given a venue for their talents when Li Maoer , himself a former Peking @-@ opera performer , founded the first female Peking @-@ opera troupe in Shanghai . By 1894 , the first commercial venue showcasing female performance troupes appeared in Shanghai . This encouraged other female troupes to form , which gradually increased in popularity . As a result , theatre artist Yu Zhenting petitioned for the lifting of the ban after the founding of the Republic of China in 1911 . This was accepted , and the ban was lifted in 1912 , although male Dan continued to be popular after this period .

= = = Model " revolutionary opera " and Peking opera in Taiwan = = =

After the Chinese Civil War , Peking opera became a focal point of identity for both involved parties . When the Communist Party of China came to power in Mainland China in 1949 , the newly formed government moved to bring art into line with Communist ideology , and " to make art and literature a component of the whole revolutionary machine " . To this end , dramatic works without Communist themes were considered subversive , and were ultimately banned during the Cultural Revolution ( 1966 ? 1976 ) .

The use of opera as a tool to transmit communist ideology reached its climax in the Cultural Revolution , under the purview of Jiang Qing , wife of Mao Zedong . The ' model operas ' were considered one of the great achievements of the Cultural Revolution , and were meant to express Mao 's view that " art must serve the interests of the workers , peasants , and soldiers and must conform to proletarian ideology . "

Among the eight model plays eventually retained during that time were five Peking operas . Notable among these operas was The Legend of the Red Lantern , which was approved as a concert with piano accompaniment based on a suggestion from Jiang Qing . Performances of works beyond the eight model plays were allowed only in heavily modified form . The endings of many traditional plays were changed , and visible stage assistants in Peking opera were eliminated . After the end of the

Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s , traditional Peking opera began to be performed again . Peking opera and other theatrical art forms were a controversial subject both before and during the Twelfth National People 's Congress in 1982 . A study carried in the People 's Daily revealed that over 80 percent of musical dramas staged in the country were traditional plays from the pre @-@ Communist era , as opposed to newly written historical dramas promoting socialist values . In response , Communist party officials enacted reforms to curb liberalism and foreign influence in theatrical works .

After the retreat of the Republic of China to Taiwan in 1949 , Peking opera there took on a special status of " political symbolism " , in which the Kuomintang government encouraged the art form over other forms of performance in an attempt to claim a position as the sole representative of Chinese culture . This often occurred at the expense of traditional Taiwanese opera . Due to its status as a prestigious art form with a long history , Peking opera has indeed been studied more and received more monetary support than other forms of theater in Taiwan . However , there has also been a competing movement towards advocating native opera to differentiate Taiwan from the mainland . In September 1990 , when the Kuomintang government participated in a state @-@ sponsored mainland cultural event for the first time , a Taiwanese opera group was sent , possibly to emphasize " Taiwaneseness " .

= = = Modern Peking opera = = =

During the second half of the 20th century , Peking opera witnessed a steady decline in audience numbers . This has been attributed both to a decrease in performance quality and an inability of the traditional opera form to capture modern life . Furthermore , the archaic language of Peking opera required productions to use electronic subtitles , which hampered the development of the form . The influence of Western culture has also left the younger generations impatient with the slow pacing of Peking opera . In response , Peking opera began to see reform starting in the 1980s . Such reforms have taken the form of creating a school of performance theory to increase performance quality , employing modern elements to attract new audiences , and performing new plays outside of the traditional canon . However , these reforms have been hampered by both a lack of funding and an adverse political climate that makes the performance of new plays difficult .

In addition to more formal reform measures , Peking @-@ opera troupes during the 1980s also adopted more unofficial changes . Some of those seen in traditional works have been called " technique for technique 's sake " . This has included the use of extended high pitch sequences by female Dan , and the addition of lengthier movement sections and percussion sequences to traditional works . Such changes have generally met with disdain from Peking @-@ opera performers , who see them as ploys to gain immediate audience appeal . Plays with repetitive sequences have also been shortened to hold audience interest . New works have naturally experienced a greater freedom to experiment . Regional , popular , and foreign techniques have been adopted , including Western style makeup and beards and new face paint designs for Jing characters . The spirit of reform continued during the 1990s . To survive in an increasingly open market , troupes like the Shanghai Peking Opera Company needed to bring traditional Peking opera to new audiences . To do this , they have offered an increasing number of free performances in public areas .

There has also been a general feeling of a shift in the creative attribution of Peking @-@ opera works . The performer has traditionally played a large role in the scripting and staging of Peking @-@ opera works . However , perhaps following the lead of the West , Peking opera in recent decades has shifted to a more director and playwright centered model . Performers have striven to introduce innovation in their work while heeding the call for reform from this new upper level of Peking @-@ opera producers .

Channel CCTV @-@ 11 in Mainland China is currently dedicated to broadcasting classic Chinese opera productions , including Peking opera .

= = = Peking opera around the world = = =

In addition to its presence in China , Peking opera has spread to many other places . It can be found in Hong Kong , Taiwan , and overseas Chinese communities elsewhere .

Mei Lanfang , one of the most famous Dan performers of all time , was also one of the greatest popularizers of Peking opera abroad . During the 1920s , he performed Peking opera in Japan . This inspired an American tour in February 1930 . Although some , such as the actor Otis Skinner , believed that Peking opera could never be a success in the United States , the favorable reception of Mei and his troupe in New York City disproved this notion . The performances had to be relocated from the 49th Street Theater to the larger National Theater , and the duration of the tour extended from two weeks to five . Mei traveled across the United States , receiving honorary degrees from the University of California and Pomona College . He followed this tour with a tour in the Soviet Union in 1935 .

The theatre department at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa has been home to English language Jingju for more than twenty @-@ five years . The school offers Asian Theatre as a major and has regular Jingju performances , the most recent being Lady Mu and the Yang Family Generals in 2014 .

= = Performers and roles = =

= = Classification of performers and roles = =

The roles on the Peking Opera stage fall into four major roles @-@ Sheng ( ? ) , Dan ( ? ) , Jing ( ? ) , Chou ( ? ) .

Sheng ( ? ) : refer to men , divided into Laosheng ( ?? ) ? Xiaosheng ( ?? ) ? Wusheng ( ?? )

Dan ( ? ) : refer to women , divided into Zhengdan ( ?? ) , Laodan ( ?? ) , Huadan ( ?? ) , Wudan ( ?? ) , Daomadan ( ??? )

Jing ( ? ) : refer to painted @-@ face role , know popularly as Hualian , divided into Zhengjing ( ?? ) , Fuming ( ?? ) , Wuming ( ?? ) , Maojing ( ?? )

Chou ( ? ) : refer to painted @-@ face role , know popularly as Xiao hualian , divided into Wenchou ( ?? ) , Wuchou ( ?? ) , Nüchou ( ?? )

= = = Training = = =

Becoming a Peking opera performer requires a long and arduous apprenticeship beginning from an early age . Before the 20th century , pupils were often handpicked at a young age by a teacher and trained for seven years on contract from the child 's parents . Since the teacher fully provided for the pupil during this period , the student accrued a debt to his master that was later repaid through performance earnings . After 1911 , training took place in more formally organized schools . Students at these schools rose as early as five o'clock in the morning for exercises . Daytime was spent learning the skills of acting and combat , and senior students performed in outside theatres in the evening . If they made any mistakes during such performances , the entire group was beaten with bamboo canes . Schools with less harsh training methods began to appear in 1930 , but all schools were closed down in 1931 after the Japanese invasion . New schools were not opened until 1952 .

Performers are first trained in acrobatics , followed by singing and gestures . Several performing schools , all based on the styles of famous performers , are taught . Some examples are the Mei Lanfang school , the Cheng Yanqiu school , the Ma Lianliang school , and the Qi Lintong school . Students previously trained exclusively in the art of performance , but modern performance schools now include academic studies as well . Teachers assess the qualifications of each student and assign them roles as primary , secondary , or tertiary characters accordingly . Students with little acting talent often become Peking @-@ opera musicians . They may also serve as the supporting cast of foot soldiers , attendants , and servants that is present in every Peking @-@ opera troupe .

In Taiwan , the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China runs a national Peking @-@ opera training school .

= = = Sheng = = =

The Sheng ( ? ) is the main male role in Peking opera . This role has numerous subtypes . The laosheng is a dignified older role . These characters have a gentle and cultivated disposition and wear sensible costumes . One type of laosheng role is the hongsheng , a red @-@ faced older male . The only two hongsheng roles are Guan Gong , the Chinese god of sworn brotherhood , loyalty and righteousness , and Zhao Kuang @-@ yin , the first Song Dynasty emperor . Young male characters are known as xiaosheng . These characters sing in a high , shrill voice with occasional breaks to represent the voice changing period of adolescence . Depending on the character 's rank in society , the costume of the xiaosheng may be either elaborate or simple . On @-@ stage , xiaosheng actors are often involved with beautiful women by virtue of the handsome and young image they project . The wusheng is a martial character for roles involving combat . They are highly trained in acrobatics , and have a natural voice when singing . Troupes will always have a laosheng actor . A xiaosheng actor may also be added to play roles fitting to his age . In addition to these main Sheng , the troupe will also have a secondary laosheng .

= = = Dan = = =

The Dan ( ? ) refers to any female role in Peking opera . Dan roles were originally divided into five subtypes . Old women were played by laodan , martial women were wudan , young female warriors were daomadan , virtuous and elite women were qingyi , and vivacious and unmarried women were huadan . One of Mei Lanfang 's most important contributions to Peking opera was in pioneering a sixth type of role , the huashan . This role type combines the status of the qingyi with the sensuality of the huadan . A troupe will have a young Dan to play main roles , as well as an older Dan for secondary parts . Four examples of famous Dans are Mei Lanfang , Cheng Yanqiu , Shang Xiaoyun , and Xun Huisheng . In the early years of Peking opera , all Dan roles were played by men . Wei Changsheng , a male Dan performer in the Qing court , developed the cai qiao , or " false foot " technique , to simulate the bound feet of women and the characteristic gait that resulted from the practice . The ban on female performers also led to a controversial form of brothel , known as the xianggong tangzi , in which men paid to have sex with young boys dressed as females . Ironically , the performing skills taught to the youths employed in these brothels led many of them to become professional Dan later in life .

= = = Jing = = =

The Jing ( ? ) is a painted face male role . Depending on the repertoire of the particular troupe , he will play either primary or secondary roles . This type of role will entail a forceful character , so a Jing must have a strong voice and be able to exaggerate gestures . Peking opera boasts 15 basic facial patterns , but there are over 1000 specific variations . Each design is unique to a specific character . The patterns and coloring are thought to be derived from traditional Chinese color symbolism and divination on the lines of a person 's face , which is said to reveal personality . Easily recognizable examples of coloring include red , which denotes uprightness and loyalty , white , which represents evil or crafty characters , and black , which is given to characters of soundness and integrity . Three main types of Jing roles are often seen . These include tongchui , roles that heavily involve singing , jiazi , roles with less emphasis on singing and more on physical performance , and wujing , martial and acrobatic roles .

= = = Chou = = =

The Chou ( ? ) is a male clown role . The Chou usually plays secondary roles in a troupe . Indeed ,

most studies of Peking opera classify the Chou as a minor role . Chou roles can be divided into Wen Chou , civilian roles such as merchants and jailers , and Wu Chou , minor military roles . The Wu Chou is one of the most demanding in Peking opera , because of its combination of comic acting , acrobatics , and a strong voice . Chou characters are generally amusing and likable , if a bit foolish . Their costumes range from simple for characters of lower status to elaborate , perhaps overly so , for high status characters . Chou characters wear special face paint , called xiaohualian , that differs from that of Jing characters . The defining characteristic of this type of face paint is a small patch of white chalk around the nose . This can represent either a mean and secretive nature or a quick wit . Originally , there were five roles in Beijing Opera , but the last role " Mo " became a part of " Chou " .

Beneath the whimsical persona of the Chou , a serious connection to the form of Peking opera exists . The Chou is the character most connected to the guban , the drums and clapper commonly used for musically accompaniment during performances . The Chou actor often uses the guban in solo performance , especially when performing Shu Ban , light @-@ hearted verses spoken for comedic effect . The clown is also connected to the small gong and cymbals , percussion instruments that symbolize the lower classes and the raucous atmosphere inspired by the role . Although Chou characters do not sing frequently , their arias feature large amounts of improvisation . This is considered a license of the role , and the orchestra will accompany the Chou actor even as he bursts into an unscripted folk song . However , due to the standardization of Peking opera and political pressure from government authorities , Chou improvisation has lessened in recent years . The Chou has a vocal timbre that is distinct from other characters , as the character will often speak in the common Beijing dialect , as opposed to the more formal dialects of other characters .

= = Visual performance elements = =

Peking @-@ opera performers use four main skills . The first two are song and speech . The third is dance @-@ acting . This includes pure dance , pantomime , and all other types of dance . The final skill is combat , which includes both acrobatics and fighting with all manner of weaponry . All of these skills are expected to be performed effortlessly , in keeping with the spirit of the art form .

= = Aesthetic aims and principles of movement = =

Peking opera follows other traditional Chinese arts in emphasizing meaning , rather than accuracy . The highest aim of performers is to put beauty into every motion . Indeed , performers are strictly criticized for lacking beauty during training . Additionally , performers are taught to create a synthesis between the different aspects of Peking opera . The four skills of Peking opera are not separate , but rather should be combined in a single performance . One skill may take precedence at certain moments during a play , but this does not mean that other actions should cease . Much attention is paid to tradition in the art form , and gestures , settings , music , and character types are determined by long held convention . This includes conventions of movement , which are used to signal particular actions to the audience . For example , walking in a large circle always symbolizes traveling a long distance , and a character straightening his or her costume and headdress symbolizes that an important character is about to speak . Some conventions , such as the pantomimic opening and closing of doors and mounting and descending of stairs , are more readily apparent .

Many performances deal with behaviors that occur in daily life . However , in accordance with the overriding principle of beauty , such behaviors are stylized to be presented on stage . Peking opera does not aim to accurately represent reality . Experts of the art form contrast the principles of Peking opera with the principle of Mo , mimes or imitation , that is found in western dramas . Peking opera should be suggestive , not imitative . The literal aspects of scenes are removed or stylized to better represent intangible emotions and characters . The most common stylization method in Peking opera is roundness . Every motion and pose is carefully manipulated to avoid sharp angles and straight lines . A character looking upon an object above them will sweep their eyes in a circular

motion from low to high before landing on the object . Similarly , a character will sweep their hand in an arc from left to right in order to indicate an object on the right . This avoidance of sharp angles extends to three @-@ dimensional movement as well ; reversals of orientation often take the form of a smooth , S @-@ shaped curve . All of these general principles of aesthetics are present within other performance elements as well .

= = = Staging and costumes = = =

Peking opera stages have traditionally been square platforms . The action on stage is usually visible from at least three sides . The stage is divided into two parts by an embroidered curtain called a shoujiu . Musicians are visible to the audience on the front part of the stage . Traditional Peking opera stages were built above the line of sight of the viewers , but some modern stages have been constructed with higher audience seating . Viewers are always seated south of the stage . Therefore , north is the most important direction in Peking opera , and performers will immediately move to " center north " upon entering the stage . All characters enter from the east and exit from the west . In line with the highly symbolic nature of Peking opera , the form uses very few props . This reflects seven centuries of Chinese performance tradition . The presence of large objects is frequently indicated through conventions . The stage will almost always have a table and at least one chair , which can be turned through convention into such diverse objects as a city wall , a mountain , or a bed . Peripheral objects will often be used to signify the presence of a larger , main object . For example , a whip is used to indicate a horse and an oar symbolizes a boat .

The length and internal structure of Peking @-@ opera plays is highly variable . Prior to 1949 , zhezixi , short plays or plays made up of short scenes from longer plays , were often performed . These plays usually center on one simple situation or feature a selection of scenes designed to include all four of the main Peking opera skills and showcase the virtuosity of the performers . This format has become less prevalent in recent times , but plays of one act are still performed . These short works , as well as individual scenes within longer works , are marked by an emotional progression from the beginning of the play to the end . For example , the concubine in the one act play The Favorite Concubine Becomes Intoxicated begins in a state of joy , and then moves to anger and jealousy , drunken playfulness , and finally to a feeling of defeat and resignation . A full @-@ length play usually has from six to fifteen or more scenes . The overall story in these longer works is told through contrasting scenes . Plays will alternate between civil and martial scenes , or scenes involve protagonists and antagonists . There are several major scenes within the work that follow the pattern of emotional progression . It is these scenes that are usually excerpted for later zhezixi productions . Some of the most complex plays may even have an emotional progression from scene to scene .

Due to the scarcity of props in Peking opera , costumes take on added importance . Costumes function first to distinguish the rank of the character being played . Emperors and their families wear yellow robes , and high @-@ ranking officials wear purple . The robe worn by these two classes is called a mang , or python robe . It is a costume suitable for the high rank of the character , featuring brilliant colors and rich embroidery , often in the design of a dragon . Persons of high rank or virtue wear red , lower @-@ ranking officials wear blue , young characters wear white , the old wear white , brown , or olive , and all other men wear black . On formal occasions , lower officials may wear the kuan yi , a simple gown with patches of embroidery on both the front and back . All other characters , and officials on informal occasions , wear the chezi , a basic gown with varying levels of embroidery and no jade girdle to denote rank . All three types of gowns have water sleeves , long flowing sleeves that can be flicked and waved like water , attached to facilitate emotive gestures . Tertiary characters of no rank wear simple clothing without embroidery . Hats are intended to blend in with the rest of the costume and will usually have a matching level of embroidery . Shoes may be high or low soled , the former being worn by characters of high rank , and the latter by characters of low rank or acrobatic characters .

= = Aural performance elements = =

## == = Vocal production == =

Vocal production in Peking opera is conceived of as being composed of " four levels of song " : songs with music , verse recitation , prose dialogue , and non @-@ verbal vocalizations . The conception of a sliding scale of vocalization creates a sense of smooth continuity between songs and speech . The three basic categories of vocal production technique are the use of breath ( yongqi ) , pronunciation ( fayin ) , and special Peking @-@ opera pronunciation ( shangkouzi ) .

In Chinese opera , breath is based in the pubic region and supported by the abdominal muscles . Performers follow the basic principle that " Strong centralized breath moves the melodic @-@ passages " ( zhong qi xing xiang ) . Breath is visualized being drawn up through a central breathing cavity extending from the pubic region to the top of the head . This " cavity " must be under the performer 's control at all times , and he or she develops special techniques to control both entering and exiting air . The two major methods of taking in breath are known as " exchanging breath " ( huan qi ) and " stealing breath " ( tou qi ) . " Exchanging breath " is a slow , unhurried process of breathing out old air and taking in new . It is used at moments when the performer is not under time constraint , such as during a purely instrumental musical passage or when another character is speaking . " Stealing breath " is a sharp intake of air without prior exhalation , and is used during long passages of prose or song when a pause would be undesirable . Both techniques should be invisible to the audience and take in only the precise amount of air required for the intended vocalization . The most important principle in exhalation is " saving the breath " ( cun qi ) . Breath should not be expended all at once at the beginning of a spoken or sung passage , but rather expelled slowly and evenly over its length . Most songs and some prose contain precise written intervals for when breath should be " exchanged " or " stolen " . These intervals are often marked by carats .

Pronunciation is conceptualized as shaping the throat and mouth into the shape necessary to produce the desired vowel sound , and clearly articulating the initial consonant . There are four basic shapes for the throat and mouth , corresponding to four vowel types , and five methods of articulating consonants , one for each type of consonant . The four throat and mouth shapes are " opened @-@ mouth " ( kaikou ) , " level @-@ teeth " ( qichi ) , " closed @-@ mouth " ( hekou or huokou ) , and " scooped @-@ lips " ( cuochun ) . The five consonant types are denoted by the portion of the mouth most critical to each type 's production : throat , or larynx ( hou ) ; tongue ( she ) ; molars , or the jaws and palate ( chi ) ; front teeth ( ya ) ; and lips ( chun ) .

Some syllables ( written Chinese characters ) have special pronunciations in Peking opera . This is due to the collaboration with regional forms and kunqu that occurred during the development of Peking opera . For example , 你 , meaning " you " , may be pronounced li , as it is in the Anhui dialect , rather than the Standard Chinese ni . 我 , meaning " I " and pronounced wo in Standard Chinese , becomes ngo , as it is pronounced in the dialect of Suzhou . In addition to pronunciation differences that are due to the influence of regional forms , the readings of some characters have been changed to promote ease of performance or vocal variety . For example , zhi , chi , shi , and ri sounds do not carry well and are difficult to sustain , because they are produced far back in the mouth . Therefore , they are performed with an additional i sound , as in zhii .

These techniques and conventions of vocal production are used to create the two main categories of vocalizations in Peking opera : stage speech and song .

## == = Stage speech == =

Peking opera is performed using both Classical Chinese and Modern Standard Chinese with some slang terms added for color . The social position of the character being played determines the type of language that he or she uses . Peking opera features three major types of stage speech ( nianbai ) . Monologues and dialogue , which make up the majority of most plays , consist of prose speeches . The purpose of prose speech is to advance the plot of the play or inject humor into a scene . They



are usually short , and are performed mostly using vernacular language . However , as Elizabeth Wichmann points out , they also have rhythmic and musical elements , achieved through the " stylized articulation of monosyllabic sound units " and the " stylized pronunciation of speech @-@ tones " , respectively . Prose speeches were frequently improvised during the early period of Peking opera 's development , and chou performers carry on that tradition today .

The second main type of stage speech consists of quotations drawn from classical Chinese poetry . This type is rarely used in Peking opera ; plays have one or two such quotations at most , and often none at all . In most instances , the use of classical poetry is intended to heighten the impact of a scene . However , Chou and more whimsical Dan characters may misquote or misinterpret the classical lines , creating a comical effect .

The final category of stage speech is conventionalized stage speeches ( chengshi nianbai ) . These are rigid formulations that mark important transition points . When a character enters for the first time , an " entrance speech " ( shangchang ) or " self @-@ introduction speech " ( zi bao jiamen ) is given , which includes a prelude poem , a set @-@ the @-@ scene poem , and a prose set @-@ the @-@ scene speech , in that order . The style and structure of each entrance speech is inherited from earlier Yuan Dynasty , Ming Dynasty , folk , and regional forms of Chinese opera . Another conventionalized stage speech is the exit speech , which may take the form of a poem followed by a single spoken line . This speech is usually delivered by a supporting character , and describes his or her present situation and state of mind . Finally , there is the recapitulation speech , in which a character will use prose to recount the story up to that point . These speeches came about as a result of the zhezixi tradition of performing only one part of a larger play .

== = Song = = =

There are six main types of song lyrics in Peking opera : emotive , condemnatory , narrative , descriptive , disputive , and " shared space separate sensations " lyrics . Each type uses the same basic lyrical structure , differing only in kind and degree of emotions portrayed . Lyrics are written in couplets ( lian ) consisting of two lines ( ju ) . Couplets can consist of two ten character lines , or two seven character lines . The lines are further subdivided into three dou ( lit . " pause " ) , typically in a 3 @-@ 3 @-@ 4 or 2 @-@ 2 @-@ 3 pattern . Lines may be " padded " with extra characters for the purpose of clarifying meaning . Rhyme is an extremely important device in Peking opera , with thirteen identified rhyme categories . Song lyrics also use the speech tones of Mandarin Chinese in ways that are pleasing to the ear and convey proper meaning and emotion . The first and second of Chinese 's four tones are normally known as " level " ( ping ) tones in Peking opera , while the third and fourth are called " oblique " ( ze ) . The closing line of every couplet in a song ends in a level tone .

Songs in Peking opera are proscribed by a set of common aesthetic values . A majority of songs are within a pitch range of an octave and a fifth . High pitch is a positive aesthetic value , so a performer will pitch songs at the very top of his or her vocal range . For this reason , the idea of a song 's key has value in Peking opera only as a technical tool for the performer . Different performers in the same performance may sing in different keys , requiring the accompanying musicians to constantly retune their instruments or switch out with other players . Elizabeth Wichmann describes the ideal basic timbre for Peking opera songs as a " controlled nasal tone " . Performers make extensive use of vocal vibrato during songs , in a way that is " slower " and " wider " than vibrato used in Western performances . The Peking opera aesthetic for songs is summed up by the expression zi zheng qiang yuan , meaning that the written characters should be delivered accurately and precisely , and the melodic passages should be weaving , or " round " .

== = Music = = =

The accompaniment for a Peking opera performance usually consists of a small ensemble of traditional melodic and percussion instruments . The lead melodic instrument is the jinghu , a small , high @-@ pitched , two @-@ string spike fiddle . The jinghu is the primary accompaniment for

performers during songs . Accompaniment is heterophonic ? the jinghu player follows the basic contours of the song 's melody , but diverges in pitch and other elements . The jinghu often plays more notes per measure than the performer sings , and does so an octave lower . During rehearsal , the jinghu player adopts his or her own signature version of the song 's melody , but also must adapt to spontaneous improvisations on the part of the performer due to changed performance conditions . Thus , the jinghu player must have an instinctive ability to change his or her performance without warning to properly accompany the performer .

The second is the circular bodied plucked lute , the yueqin . Percussion instruments include the daluo , xiaoluo , and naobo . The player of the gu and ban , a small high pitch drum and clapper , is the conductor of the entire ensemble . The two main musical styles of Peking opera , Xipi and Erhuang , originally differed in subtle ways . In the Xipi style , the strings of the jinghu are tuned to the keys of A and D. The melodies in this style are very disjointed , possibly reflecting the style 's derivation from the high and loud melodies of the Qinqiang opera of northwestern China . It is commonly used to tell joyous stories . In Erhuang , on the other hand , the strings are tuned to the keys of C and G. This reflects the low , soft , and despondent folk tunes of south @-@ central Hubei province , the style 's place of origin . As a result , it is used for lyrical stories . Both musical styles have a standard meter of two beats per bar . The two musical styles share six different tempos , including manban ( a slow tempo ) , yuanban ( a standard , medium @-@ fast tempo ) , kuai sanyan ( " leading beat " ) , daoban ( " leading beat " ) , sanban ( " rubato beat " ) , and yaoban ( " shaking beat " ) . The xipi style also uses several unique tempos , including erliu ( " two @-@ six " ) , and kuaiban ( a fast tempo ) . Of these tempos , yuanban , manban , and kuaiban are most commonly seen . The tempo at any given time is controlled by a percussion player who acts as director . Erhuang has been seen as more improvisational , and Xipi as more tranquil . The lack of defined standards among performance troupes and the passage of time may have made the two styles more similar to each other today .

The melodies played by the accompaniment mainly fall into three broad categories . The first is the aria . The arias of Peking opera can be further divided into those of the Erhuang and Xipi varieties . An example of an aria is wawa diao , an aria in the Xipi style that is sung by a young Sheng to indicate heightened emotion . The second type of melody heard in Peking opera is the fixed @-@ tune melody , or qupai . These are instrumental tunes that serve a wider range of purposes than arias . Examples include the " Water Dragon Tune " ( shui long yin ) , which generally denotes the arrival of an important person , and " Triple Thrust " ( ji san qiang ) , which may signal a feast or banquet . The final type of musical accompaniment is the percussion pattern . Such patterns provide context to the music in ways similar to the fixed @-@ tune melodies . For example , there are as many as 48 different percussion patterns that accompany stage entrances . Each one identifies the entering character by his or her individual rank and personality .

= = Repertoire = =

The repertoire of Peking opera includes nearly 1 @, @ 400 works . The plays are mostly taken from historical novels or traditional stories about civil , political and military struggles . Early plays were often adaptations from earlier Chinese theatre styles , such as kunqu . Nearly half of 272 plays listed in 1824 were derived from earlier styles . Many classification systems have been used to sort the plays . Two traditional methods have existed since Peking opera first appeared in China . The oldest and most generally used system is to sort plays into civil and martial types . Civil plays focus on the relationships between characters , and feature personal , domestic , and romantic situations . The element of singing is frequently used to express emotion in this type of play . Martial plays feature a greater emphasis on action and combat skill . The two types of play also feature different arrays of performers . Martial plays predominantly feature young sheng , jing , and chou , while civil plays have a greater need for older roles and dan . In addition to being civil or martial , plays are also classified as either daxi ( serious ) or xiaoxi ( light ) . The performance elements and performers used in serious and light plays greatly resemble those used in martial and civil plays , respectively . Of course , the aesthetic principle of synthesis frequently leads to the use of these contrasting

elements in combination , yielding plays that defy such dichotomous classification .

Since 1949 , a more detailed classification system has been put into use based on thematic content and the historical period of a play 's creation . The first category in this system is chuantongxi , traditional plays that were in performance before 1949 . The second category is xinbian de lishixi , historical plays written after 1949 . This type of play was not produced at all during the Cultural Revolution , but is a major focus today . The final category is xiandaixi , contemporary plays . The subject matter of these plays is taken from the 20th century and beyond . Contemporary productions are also frequently experimental in nature , and may incorporate Western influences . In the second half of the 20th century , Western works have increasingly been adapted for Peking opera . The works of Shakespeare have been especially popular . The movement to adapt Shakespeare to the stage has encompassed all forms of Chinese theatre . Peking opera in particular has seen versions of A Midsummer Night 's Dream and King Lear , among others .

= = Film = =

Peking opera and its stylistic devices have appeared in many Chinese films . It often was used to signify a unique " Chineseness " in contrast to sense of culture being presented in Japanese films . Fei Mu , a director of the pre @-@ Communist era , used Peking opera in a number of plays , sometimes within " Westernized " , realistic plots . King Hu , a later Chinese film director , used many of the formal norms of Peking opera in his films , such as the parallelism between music , voice , and gesture . In the 1993 film Farewell My Concubine , by Chen Kaige , Peking opera serves as the object of pursuit for the protagonists and a backdrop for their romance . However , the film 's portrayal of Peking opera has been criticized as one @-@ dimensional . Chen returned to the subject again in 2008 with the Mei Lanfang biopic Forever Enthralled . Peking opera is also featured in Peking Opera Blues by Tsui Hark .

= = Peking @-@ opera houses in Beijing = =

Fundamental to the performance and overall ambience of traditional Peking opera is the venue . There are many restored venues in Beijing dating from the late 17th century onwards , the opera stage at Prince Gong Mansion , Zhengyici @-@ xi @-@ lou and Huguang Guild Hall , being among them . However , modern venues for the general operatic and theatre stage are also common , such as the National Centre for the Performing Arts , and the Chang 'an Grand Theatre located on the East Chang 'an Avenue is an example of modern Peking opera theatre .