

On the Re-practice of the Artistic Style of "Zaifen Series" Huangmei Opera—From the Newly-composed Huangmei Opera "Liu Chi Alley - Width"

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Abstract: *"Liu Chi Alley - Width" is another newly-composed Huangmei Opera produced by Anqing Zaifen Huangmei Opera Troupe. This opera presents multifaceted character portrayals, drawing materials and inspiration from both history and reality, and collaborating with cross-disciplinary arts in terms of expression techniques. It inherits the characteristics of the "Zaifen Huangmei" series in artistic style. Taking this opera as an entry point, one can glimpse some of the artistic style features of the newly-composed Huangmei Operas in the "Zaifen Series".*

Keywords: Huangmei Opera, Liu Chi Alley, Han Zaifen.

1. Introduction

The 10th China (Anqing) Huangmei Opera Art Festival was successfully held during the National Day Golden Opera Week in Anqing, the "Hometown of Huangmei Opera." Numerous opera fans traveled to Anqing to attend this grand event, resulting in a booming ticket sales. Some performances were sold out immediately upon release, making tickets highly sought-after. During the festival, due to audience demand, an additional performance of "Huizhou Women," starring renowned Huangmei Opera artist Han Zaifen, was arranged. At the closing ceremony, the newly created repertory "Liu Chi Alley - Width" (formerly known as "Lady Qingning") was staged and received widespread acclaim, particularly its concluding part, the concise and powerful "Song of the Character 'Xiu,'" which sang out the impressive values embodied by the character "Xiu."

As early as April 2023, this repertory premiered at the Anqing Zaifen Huangmei Opera Art Theatre as part of the "Opera in Campus Theatre Performance Month." It opened the event with six consecutive performances for teachers and students from Anqing's municipal middle schools. In October of the same year, the repertory was staged three times at the Wanping Theatre in Shanghai and subsequently performed three times at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, with every performance sold out, echoing through the capital. Following that, it made its debut in Anqing, Hefei, Shanghai, Suzhou, and Shenzhen, with every seat occupied and impressive ticket sales.

Han Zaifen is the third-generation leader of Huangmei Opera after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Over the years, she has been rooted in Anqing, the hometown of Huangmei Opera, and has worked with her team to dedicate herself to the inheritance, development, and innovation of Huangmei Opera. Through continuous practice and exploration, they have created a series of outstanding and enduring classic repertories. From "Huizhou Women", "Mei Renjiao", "Memories of Huizhou", "The Immortal Yang" to "Liu Chi Alley - Width," these repertories are the exploration

results of the creative team centered around renowned Huangmei Opera actress Han Zaifen. With Han Zaifen's participation in both creation and starring roles, they share a consistent artistic style, forming the "Zaifen Series" of Huangmei Opera. After seven years of polishing, the newly created repertory "Liu Chi Alley - Width" finally debuted on stage, showcasing strong stylistic characteristics of the "Zaifen Series" in terms of artistry, ideology, and innovation. It is another masterpiece following the previous "Zaifen Series" repertories and another practice of the "Zaifen Series" artistic style.

2. Shaping Multifaceted Characters from Multiple Perspectives

The successful portrayal of characters is crucial to the success of an opera. Three-dimensional, distinctive, and moving characters are vital for fully presenting and conveying the content of the repertory to the audience. Moreover, the artistic and ideological qualities of a work can only be embodied and deepened through the successful portrayal of characters. The opera "Liu Chi Alley - Width" consists of five acts, with an additional prologue and epilogue. Led by Huangmei Opera artist Han Zaifen and joined by several excellent first-class national Huangmei Opera actors, the opera creates multiple vivid and three-dimensional artistic images, which are important reasons for the perfect presentation of the entire repertory.

2.1 The Thorny Rose: The Female Protagonist

Similar to previous newly created Huangmei Opera repertories in the "Zaifen Series," this opera still features a female protagonist, who connects the entire story of the "Liu Chi Alley" incident. The protagonist of this opera is Lady Qingning, played by Han Zaifen. Her image is more like a thorny rose, possessing the beauty known to others and the thorns hidden in her personality.

As a woman living in a feudal society, Lady Qingning is

well-read, sensible, and talented, serving as the daily head of the Zhang family. She is kind and caring even to the servants. These characteristics make her incredibly beautiful. In the prologue, the patriarch and others praise the announcement and calligraphy written by Lady Qingning. She then formally enters the stage holding a scroll, presenting a talented and elegant female image to the audience. She has a deep affection for her husband and takes charge of the daily affairs of the Zhang family after his death, caring about the studies and growth of her younger relative, Liren. She treats the steward of the family equally and worries about his marital affairs. Even when she is in court with Mr. Wu Youli during the day, she still removes the threshold and serves new tea to him with courtesy during his secret visit.

In the face of the dispute over land between the Zhang and Wu families, she demonstrates her strength and sharpness, her thorny side. Although she is the daily head of the Zhang family, her voice is still not heard in matters of principle. However, when faced with coercion, she resolutely stands up for her principles, the family's reputation, and seeks justice. She faces Mr. Wu with dignity and argues forcefully to safeguard the family's legitimate interests. When confronted with the patriarch's threats and coercion by exploiting her sensitive identity, she still steps in to prevent the deterioration of the situation at a crucial moment when the Zhang family resumes work and strives to counteract him. In the end, she even writes a "self-blame divorce letter," demonstrating a courage that contradicts common perceptions. These actions of Lady Qingning reflect her principles in life and her determination, which is an important manifestation of her rebellion against family authority.

Under Han Zaifen's interpretation, Lady Qingning's image combines the soft beauty with a steady and resolute core. The overall vocal music of the female protagonist tends to be plain and steady, without excessive prominent or high-pitched arias even when emotions are intense. Conflicts arise continuously in the opera, but there is no shouting, tearing, or fighting. Instead, there is more reason and contemplation. Han Zaifen has a sweet voice and a rounded, clear singing tone. However, to fit the character setting of Lady Qingning, she incorporates more richness and simplicity into her vocal control. She processes different emotions such as joy, sadness, and intensity into her plain vocal music, which differs from her previous agile female role images on stage and adds more steadiness. With her exceptional singing skills and precise understanding, Han Zaifen perfectly portrays Lady Qingning as a cultivated, elegant, and steady character with inner sorrow. She is imperfect but full and real, like a thorny rose that still blooms after experiencing the wind and rain.

2.2 Vivid Green Leaves: Supporting Characters

"There are no small roles, only small actors." This famous quote from the renowned Russian theatrical educator Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski has been circulated within the industry as an "insider term" since its emergence in the 19th century. In the play "Liu Chi Alley: Width," the screenwriter provides fully justified reasons for the existence of supporting characters, and the actors' portrayal of these characters is also commendable. Unlike traditional opera, which often focuses more on the protagonist than the

supporting characters, these supporting characters are portrayed as vivid, three-dimensional, and authentic without affectation. They seamlessly integrate into the overall play, making the plot development logically reasonable and meticulous, without any sense of them being "small roles."

From the Wu family patriarch, the Tongcheng county magistrate, the Cheng steward, the Patriarch, to the clerk in the bureaucracy, they all possess distinct personalities, and the actors' performances make these characters sufficiently real and vivid. Viewing from multiple angles, it can be seen that these supporting characters are no longer one-dimensional or tool-like figures, but rather have the contradictory multifaceted nature of real ordinary people. The Wu family patriarch voluntarily repairs roads for the neighbors, embodying kindness and a broad perspective, yet he is also vain and competitive; the Tongcheng county magistrate holds the justice of serving the people, but is swayed by reality and power, making his beliefs uncertain; the magistrate's clerk is logically rigorous and experienced when drafting letters, yet he gives the magistrate a bad idea for a vague verdict; Liren, as a young member of the Zhang family, is cute and lively but also impulsive; the Patriarch vigorously defends the family's interests when faced with problems, yet his methods are biased. These supporting characters all have their own shining points in personality, which can be glimpsed by the audience during the performance.

The distinct personalities of the supporting characters also provide appropriate footholds for the development of plot conflicts, without a sense of "forced arrangement," especially exemplified by Wu Youli and the county magistrate He Xini. Wu Youli, the Wu family patriarch, being vain is his most prominent personality trait and the initial spark that ignites the conflict. Due to his vanity and reluctance to be encroached upon, Wu Youli adopts extreme measures. Without fully understanding the situation beforehand and without communicating with the parties involved, he directly files a lawsuit against the Zhang family with the bureaucracy, thus unfolding the conflict and struggle between the Zhang and Wu families over the land.

Looking at the Tongcheng county magistrate He Xini, his uncertain belief in serving the people in the face of power exacerbates and transforms the existing conflicts. After the Zhang and Wu families are brought to trial, the Tongcheng county magistrate sends people to investigate the situation, demonstrating his awareness of justice for the people. However, after being torn between the clerk's analysis of the letter, he seeks self-preservation by avoiding the crucial issues and not adhering to the law in judgment, instead opting for vagueness. From the perspective of plot development, the Tongcheng county magistrate's vague handling successfully transforms the conflict from a land dispute between two families into a conflict between the interests of civilians and bureaucrats, escalating the conflict to a higher level and intensifying the plot development, adding more intrigue inadvertently.

Interestingly, the screenwriter's portrayal of these two characters even extends to their names. The name "Wu Youli" not only prompts the audience to ponder whether he is reasonable or unreasonable, which coincidentally aligns with

Wu Youli's deeds in the play that are both reasonable and unreasonable. Wu Youli holds a deed for three feet of land and states firmly in court, "Your family really encroached on my family's land." Later, dissatisfied with the official verdict, he bravely defends his reasonable rights as a civilian, which are his reasonable actions. However, his frequent extreme behaviors, such as directly bringing the Zhang family to trial and asking Lady Qingning to write a note distorting the facts, and irrationally causing a disturbance at the scene after the Zhang family resumes work, reveal his unreasonable side. The name of the Tongcheng county magistrate, "He Xini," is a homophone of "huo xi ni" (a colloquial expression in Anqing dialect and Huangmei Opera recitation, means that mixing water and handling things vaguely), which fits his attitude of mixing water and handling things vaguely between the Zhang and Wu families. Naming reinforces the personality traits of these two supporting characters while adding a humorous touch, neutralizing the tension of the ongoing plot conflicts.

From the "rose-like" protagonists to the "green leaf-like" supporting characters, these characters each have their own places in the play while also possessing independent characteristics. They break away from the traditional opera's "stereotyped" thinking of clear distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, and each character is able to shine appropriately, making them more real and intriguing.

3. Interconnection between History and Reality

From the perspective of the material selection and theme of the play, the connection between history and reality is a major highlight. This play is based on historical facts, interpreting them from a realistic life perspective, and gaining insights into the truth of reality in the mundane routine. In terms of its theme, it attempts to project historical experience onto contemporary reality and prompt the audience to ponder over current events.

3.1 Historical Facts and Realistic Foundations

This play is based on the influential historical event of "Liu Chi Alley," which actually occurred, rather than being invented. The combination of historical facts and realistic foundations gives the entire story a historical and authentic feel. The story of "Liu Chi Alley" has been circulating among the people for hundreds of years, and its values have been tested over time, becoming familiar, recognized, and praised by people. By choosing this theme and transforming it from oral tradition into a dynamic presentation on stage, using Huangmei Opera, a beloved art form of the people, it is evident that this play is market-oriented and accessible to the masses, grounded in solid reality. The respect for history on stage, combined with appropriate imagination and enrichment, places the characters of the original "Liu Chi Alley" story in their historical context, making the simple records on the dark stone stele in Tongcheng's "Liu Chit Alley" come alive.

Although the entire plot depicts a historical event in the Qing Dynasty, its unfolding is firmly rooted in reality. Presented from the perspective of ordinary people's lives, it incorporates local cultural elements filled with life's breath in its details, restoring historical facts and strengthening its realistic

foundation.

Notably, the play reverses the common perception that the main character must be Zhang Ying or that Zhang Ying must appear in important scenes; however, Zhang Ying never appears in this play. Nie Shengzhe, the playwright, believes that if the story of "Lady Qingning" follows traditional ideas and values, merely praising the magnanimity and modesty of the high-ranking official Zhang Ying would fall into a cliché. Although Zhang Ying is an indispensable character driving the plot, his role is cleverly replaced by family letters, without involving debates in the officialdom. The audience's focus remains locked on the life scenes of the Zhang and Wu families, focusing on family trivia and neighborhood friction, which brings the audience closer to the characters in the play.

Representative elements of regional culture are integrated everywhere. The backdrop of Hui-style architecture in the stage setting sets the scene and context of the event. When Mr. Wu secretly visits the mansion of the prime minister, Lady Qingning orders her servants to serve Tongcheng's famous tea, "Tongcheng Xiaohua". When Lady Qingning sends Liren to Capital, she reminds him to bring some local specialties that his uncle likes, mentioning the "Yutai Tea Shop," which upholds quality and credibility as its creed. These local cultural elements integrated into the details provide the audience with strong cultural cues, making the entire story full of life and more intimate and sensible.

The virtual historical space on the stage and the realistic interconnection off the stage give this play a stronger sense of history and authenticity, making it easier to establish a resonance with the audience.

3.2 Historical Experience and Contemporary Reflection

Through the reinterpretation of the story of "Liu Chi Alley," the traditional virtue represented by humility and compromise, as embodied in "Liu Chi Alley," is disseminated once again. The different outcomes of the Zhang and Wu families' handling of neighborhood relations, whether through compromise or not, reflect the current situation of frequent neighborhood conflicts. The story of building Liu Chi Alley has been circulating for hundreds of years, emphasizing humility, compromise, and the pursuit of harmonious neighborhood relations. This is a historical experience gained through the personal efforts of our ancestors and is also a virtue that contemporary society should continue to inherit and promote.

Drama is an important spiritual pursuit of humanity, and the dramatic works of an era always reflect the ideological height and depth achieved by people of that time. Besides the traditional virtue of humility and compromise, the entire play also incorporates projections and reflections on multiple contemporary levels, including individuals, families, society, and the country, through the restoration of historical events.

For individuals, it demonstrates the importance of education and enlightenment. The scholars holding scrolls visible in the streets in the prologue showcase the local atmosphere of respecting culture and education. Comparing Lady Qingning with the "woman" in "Woman of Huizhou," both being

women in the feudal era, the biggest difference between them lies in their self-awareness and rebellion against feudal ideology. An important reason for their differences is that the "woman" is illiterate and has not received cultural and educational training. She is like a "thorn-removed rose" confined by feudal ethics in the deep courtyard, without access to self-awareness and self-awakening. In contrast, Lady Qingning is talented and learned, able to read and understand texts, manage trivia, preserve the family's reputation, and argue convincingly in court. These traits endow her with a resilient personality. In today's rapidly developing society, the importance of education and enlightenment for personal growth and development is self-evident.

For families, establishing good family traditions and precepts is of great significance for the personal growth of family members and the long-term prosperity of the family. The play emphasizes family precepts multiple times. Lady Qingning gains the strength to rebel against the patriarchal because of the family precepts and helps preserve the family's reputation by adhering to them. The Zhang Ying family in history was a renowned official family in Tongcheng. According to incomplete statistics, there were 13 scholars in the Zhang family. Zhang Ying was an honest official deeply appreciated and trusted by Emperor Kangxi. His son, Zhang Tingyu, was an important minister for three emperors and was honored with a place in the Temple of Ancestors. Their career achievements can be described as "reaching the position of prime minister." Perhaps this is the profound reason why the Lady Qingning in the play always adheres to the family precepts and is willing to write a "self-blame divorce letter" to preserve the family's reputation. She is the representative and epitome of several generations of the Zhang family in Tongcheng who adhere to family precepts and live with integrity. Good family traditions and precepts provide a guarantee for family education, which has a far-reaching impact on life. This is also an excellent tradition that needs to be promoted and inherited today.

Similarly, for society, the methods adopted for social governance should reasonably address the interests of all parties. It is worth considering how ordinary people like Wu Youli can safeguard their rights through appropriate means. For the country, cultivating officials who serve the people and advocating honest official ethics is the right path. At the end of the play, the song "The Song of the Character 'Xiu'" aptly uses Lady Qingning's voice to introduce "self-cultivation" through "repairing houses" and "repairing alleys," summarizing these reflective points with the character "xiu".

"The stage is a small world, and the world is a big stage." History is the reality of the past, while the present reality is the continuation and development of history. "Liu Chi Alley: Width" connects history and reality in dramatic creation, re-narrates and conveys re-understandings and reflections on history and reality from a new perspective, fully exerts the educational function of drama, and inherits and transmits its cultural connotations and values subtly.

4. Pursuing Cross-Artistic Collisions

Modern operatic works are more or less seeking collaboration

with other arts, drawing on and absorbing their strengths to adapt to the demands of the times and the aesthetic changes of audiences. "Liu Chi Alley-Width", a new Huangmei Opera production in the "Zaifen Series," is one such example. Its scripting, direction, acting, music, and choreography all demonstrate its pursuit of breaking through the traditional confines of Huangmei Opera and seeking collisions with other arts.

4.1 Cross-Artistic Collaboration for Mutual Learning and Promotion

To innovate operatic works, it is entirely necessary to learn from the strengths of plays. The director of "Liu Chi Alley-Width" is a senior theatrical director from Hong Kong, China, primarily engaged in play-related work. For Han Zaifen, this is not the first collaboration with a non-dedicated Huangmei Opera director. In this opera, the renewed cross-artistic collaboration between Huangmei Opera and plays introduces new narrative methods and expressive techniques into Huangmei Opera creations, elevating the work's ideological and artistic expression to a new height to some extent. This aligns with Han Zaifen's philosophy of "one opera, one character; one opera, one style," continuously bringing audiences new artistic experiences.

The narrative approach of the entire opera influences how its inner ideas are conveyed. It avoids the didactic, direct, and emphatic narrative methods. There is no deliberate criticism, nor is it purely humorous just for audience entertainment and amusement. Instead, the expression of the core ideas is naturally communicated to the audience through the characters' performances and dialogue as the plot progresses. In the final line, Lady Qingning sincerely exclaims, "The Liu Chi Alley is wide, and the world is vast." The epilogue features a song on the character "xiu" (means repair) sung amidst bamboo groves, succinctly expressing her values in just a few lines. Without being vague or failing to express its ideas, it fully respects the audience and guides them to think independently, as the opera's director, Mao Junhui, said: "This is not just about presenting a lively story; there must be something else it wants to say behind it."

The organic fusion of the two expressive techniques of operatic impressionism and play realism not only does not undermine the original traditional operatic aesthetic spirit and principles of Huangmei Opera but also, to some extent, gives the work deeper artistic qualities between the virtual and the real. The prominent yet natural background frame on the stage, sketched with just a few impressionistic black and white lines, outlines the distinctive features of Anhui-style houses, creating a "living field" for the entire stage. With the adjustment of lighting, the scenes on the stage change freely as the plot develops. The county yamen scene uses red as part of the background to emphasize a serious atmosphere. The image of bamboo repeatedly appears on the stage, using the "virtue of the gentleman" embodied in bamboo to metaphorically represent the Zhang family's pursuit of noble character and cultivation. Especially in the epilogue, a lush bamboo forest appears, and Lady Qingning turns and walks into the depths of the bamboo forest as the music plays, closely aligning with her lyrics "Bamboo cultivates integrity, and people cultivate character," making the entire stage space

poetic.

The involvement of a play director has brought more highlights to the entire opera. Plays seek truthfulness, rationality, logic, and a certain process. Therefore, some performances, although known to be secondary, cannot be deleted. The integration of this characteristic with operatic works that have opposite characteristics results in a tighter, smoother internal structure with stronger logic. The setup of suspense and foreshadowing enhances the opera's viewing experience. To highlight Lady Qingning's image as knowledgeable and reasonable, the opera lays out her character from multiple perspectives, including front, side, macro, and micro aspects, providing support for her wise actions in the conflict between the Zhang and Wu families over land. The vague "hidden payment" mentioned in the "substitute letter" from the capital prompts the county clerk to make a careful conjecture, leading to a foolish verdict by the county magistrate and further escalating and transforming the conflict between the Zhang and Wu families. The development of the plot is interconnected, with all conflicts having clear origins and evidence, which is also an important manifestation of its respect for the audience.

4.2 Powerful Collaboration and Teamwork

The creation method characterized by powerful collaborations with professionals from various fields and teamwork is a key feature of the "Zaifen series" of repertoires. Centered around Han Zaifen, this creative team continuously selects different members to produce new repertoires while maintaining a relatively fixed model. Seeking cooperation with professionals in different artistic fields has also assembled a relatively comprehensive and professional team for repertoire creation. Looking at the newly written repertoires of the "Zaifen Series" starting with "Women of Huizhou," this model is being repeatedly practiced and gradually evolving into a seemingly replicable and referable operatic creation model.

"Liu Chi Alley-Width" similarly continues this team creation model. The director of this drama, Mao Junhui, is a renowned Hong Kong theatrical director known as the "Godfather of Hong Kong Theatre," an artist with outstanding achievements and a wide influence. Although his collaboration with Han Zaifen is his first time directing Huangmei Opera, he has previously successfully directed Peking Opera "Dawn in the Forbidden City" and Cantonese Opera "Presenting the Sword at Baihua Pavilion," both receiving favorable reviews. The composers, scriptwriter, and costume designer are relatively "familiar faces." Composer Chen Rutian is known as Han Zaifen's "exclusive composer"; scriptwriter Nie Shengzhe has also collaborated with Han Zaifen multiple times, serving as the scriptwriter for "Memories of Huizhou" and "Company"; and the costume designer is renowned costume design master Shi Yanqin, who designed over two thousand exquisite costumes for the 1987 version of "Dream of the Red Chamber" and previously served as the costume designer for "Women of Huizhou" and "Memories of Huizhou," earning widespread acclaim.

Excellent theaters invite renowned experts to join, forming a solid creative team. This teamwork model combines

professionalism, tacit understanding, and freshness, providing diverse possibilities for the presentation of newly written repertoires. To some extent, it effectively avoids the possibility of "poor dramas" and provides a guarantee for repertoire quality. At the same time, this teamwork model aligns with the development needs of Huangmei Opera and increases artistic collisions between the two parties during the collaboration process, providing a possibility for the emergence of "sparks" for new artistic creations.

4.3 Balancing Tradition and Innovation: A Long and Arduous Journey

Compared to previous dramas, this production handles the relationship between preserving tradition and incorporating innovative elements in a way that shows a significant difference from traditional Huangmei Opera while retaining its unique style and flavor. It gradually finds a suitable "balance" between adhering to tradition and innovating. Throughout the drama, a large number of dialogue features characteristic of plays are used to advance the plot, and the performance routines incorporate appropriate daily actions based on tradition, making the performance more natural. This is the innovative aspect. From the perspective of vocal melodies, it is fully grounded in tradition, with traditional vocal melodies and forms such as Pingci Tune, Erxing Tune, Baban Tune, Xianqiang Tune, and Yinsiqiang Tune all being utilized. The accompaniment is mainly traditional percussion and string instruments, especially with tightly rhythmic drum beats to enhance the atmosphere whenever conflicts erupt and characters' emotions are tense. These are all preservations of tradition. The organic integration of the two expressive techniques mentioned earlier—the abstract style of traditional opera and the realistic style of plays—is one of the best manifestations of exploring the "balance" between adhering to tradition and innovating.

The entire drama strikes a good balance between adhering to tradition and innovating. Overall, the drama prioritizes art while also catering to the market, once again finding a path suitable for its own development. During an interview at the "Hefei Performance Season," lead actress Han Zaifen said, "Lady Qingning is a major drama that I newly arranged this year. I want more Hefei audiences to see this drama and judge whether our creation has firmly adhered to tradition." In the future, "balancing tradition and innovation" will remain a theme worthy of continuous and in-depth exploration, which requires even longer-term practice and greater investment. The journey of exploring the balance between tradition and innovation is long and arduous.

5. Conclusion and Further Thoughts

From the analysis of "Liu Chi Alley-Width" above, it can be seen as a member of the "Zaifen Series" of newly composed dramas, inheriting the artistic style of this series in its creation. This inheritance is evident in its techniques for shaping artistic images, its orientation towards the market and audience needs, and its ongoing innovation through seeking cross-artistic collaborations.

We can observe that from "Woman of Huizhou" to "Liu Chi Alley - Width," the female protagonists in the "Zaifen

Series" of new dramas have been prominent, and the importance of supporting characters has also been elevated. In terms of themes, these dramas have transcended gender opposition and adopted a female perspective different from tradition, with ongoing exploration of narrative techniques from this perspective. The artistic images of female protagonists have continued to evolve, from unnamed and illiterate "women" to knowledgeable and sensible Lady Qingning, with diverse female images appearing on the Huangmei Opera stage. The portrayal of supporting characters emphasizes individuality, such as the suona-playing brother who carries the sedan chair and delivers telegrams, the old scholar who says, "The character 'wait' has a smile on top," the slick and cunning Cong Weihuan, and the Tongcheng county magistrate He Xini, who tries to mediate conflicts. Their necessity and role in serving the overall narrative have become increasingly prominent.

For opera to develop, it must handle its relationship with the audience well, and the "Zaifen Series" dramas also demonstrate a proactive orientation towards the market and respect for the audience. The dramas pursue relevance to reality in their subject matter and themes, rooted in the soil of everyday life, and starting with "Woman of Huizhou," they respect the increasingly strong independent consciousness of the audience and freely give them the freedom to think. A year after "Liu Chi Alley - Width " was staged, on October 17, 2024, General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Liu Chi Alley in Tongcheng, Anhui province, pointing out that contradictions among the people should be resolved through mediation and that the wisdom of "Liu Chi Alley" should be used to serve the people. This also confirms that the "Zaifen Series," including "Liu Chi Alley - Width " has grasped and valued the contemporary nature of its creations, actively faced the audience, responded to the needs of the times, and led a trend in the development of modern opera.

As always, the series seeks collaborations and collisions with cross-artistic forms, persisting in exploration and practice on the path of innovation. Cross-artistic elements are integrated into stage performances, with elements of classical dance, ballet, and playwriting added to traditional body movement routines to further stage them. Attempts are made to combine modern music with traditional music, with symphony orchestras and electronic instruments added to traditional accompaniment orchestras to find a suitable "balance" between the two.

Huangmei Opera is both an ancient and young genre, and the launch of the "Zaifen Series" of Huangmei Opera dramas has made significant contributions to the modernization of Huangmei Opera, which is inseparable from the efforts led by Han Zaifen. The "Zaifen Series" dramas are the result of their years of persistent exploration and experimentation, demonstrating their great courage and wisdom in facing the inheritance and development of traditional opera art.

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