

The Application of Opera Art in Music Therapy for the Aged

Yan Wang¹

¹ Shandong University of Arts

Correspondence: Yan Wang, Shandong University of Arts.

doi:10.56397/SAA.2022.12.03

Abstract

This paper takes the aged in “Freda” Nursing Center in Jinan, Shandong as the research objects to carry out the individual music therapy and group music therapy. This paper adopts the experimental investigation method, observation method and comparison method. The study found that all the aged group showed different degrees of psychological problems in a certain extent. The aged in nursing homes are more likely to be lonely. With music therapy, the improvement is remarkable. Different operas have different effects on the aged in different regions and at different ages. Opera art is very beneficial to the physical and mental health of the aged. Through the training of opera singing for the aged, the body physiological functions and physical and mental health have been greatly improved.

Keywords: music therapy, the aged, opera art, singing therapy

1. Introduction to Chinese Opera

1.1 The Origin of Opera

The origin of Chinese opera is very early, as early as in the ancient primitive society in the song and dance has been sprout. Chinese opera mainly consists of three different art forms: folk songs and dances, rap, and burlesque. Originating from the primitive song and dance, opera is a comprehensive stage art style with a long history. After the Han, Tang, Song and Jin dynasties, a relatively complete traditional Chinese opera art was formed. It consists of literature, music, dance, art, martial arts, acrobatics and performing arts, with more than 360 varieties.

1.2 The Principle of Music Therapy in Ancient Chinese Dance Accompanied by Music

The ancient dance accompanied by music can be regarded as the rudiment of Chinese traditional opera. It is to say that China has developed music therapy technology in ancient times. The long history of China and the music and dance culture are extensive and profound because of the generation-by-generation inheritance of long history, which is very beneficial to the research of materials. According to historical records, as early as in the Shang Dynasty, Yang was too heavy and there was often strong wind, so all kinds of things were destroyed, and the plants and trees could not bear fruit. Therefore, Se composed of banjo was

created to attract *Yin* and stabilize people's life. During the reign of the Yin Kang family, the *Yin* was so diffuse that the humidity was so high that people were prone to anger and muscles and bones could not stretch. So, people created a dance to stretch the muscles and bones. The music and dance were known as the "Six Dance" in Zhou dynasty and the ancient Chinese dance was one of China's local cultures. The music therapy inspired by dance ideology is based on a large number of basic music and dance art culture in our country. It is also influenced by many factors, such as social environment. Local music therapy is better and more suitable for Chinese situation after experience. It will be easier to be accepted. Therefore, it is necessary to explore and refine the concept of the local music therapy art from the perspective of Chinese traditional and characteristic culture. Pentatonic mode can regulate and channel people's different emotions, and each of them has its own function and restricts each other. Through sorting out and analyzing the data of ancient music and dance and comparing the relevant data of music therapy, the relationship between ancient Chinese music and dance and music therapy is established. It is found that the content, meaning, principle and function of ancient Chinese music and dance are similar to the origin, principle and function of music therapy, and some contents are even identical. Therefore, the idea of music therapy can be found entirely in the music and dance of ancient China. The origin of music therapy has elements of myth and witchcraft. In ancient China, sorcerers used music, dance, and witchcraft to perform healing activities. Therefore, we can learn the common ideas of music therapy from ancient Chinese music and dance. Thus, the aesthetic function of ancient Chinese music and dance reflects the aesthetic significance of music therapy.

1.3 The Development of Opera

The period from pre-Qin to Tang dynasty was the embryonic time of Chinese ancient opera. This art eventually developed into a comprehensive opera art. The recording and comments of the artists on the opera became the germ of the opera theory in the middle and ancient times, which had an impact on the formation of the later opera theory. During the Song and Jin dynasties, various performing arts were developed and integrated to

form the embryonic form of ancient Chinese opera. With the emergence of Zaju and other forms, art critics have been constantly discussing the origin, form, artistic characteristics, and development of ancient Chinese opera. The Yuan dynasty was the first golden period after the formal formation of ancient Chinese opera. A number of excellent opera writers and opera works appeared in the Southern Opera and the Northern Opera. In the folk, opera performance activities were also extensive, which laid the foundation for opera theory. The ancient opera boomed in Ming dynasty. A large number of opera works came out, and the opera scholars were also very active thinking to explore some problems in the creation of opera. The first systematic and perfect monograph in the history of drama theory, *Qu Lv*, appeared.

1.4 The Artistic Characteristics of Opera

Opera has three artistic characteristics: comprehensiveness, virtuality and procedure. Chinese opera is a highly integrated folk art. The comprehensiveness is reflected in the superb performing arts, among which singing, reading, acting, and playing are the most concentrated and outstanding embodiment of the comprehensiveness of Chinese opera; virtuality is also known as freehand art. It means that people use the form of transformation to compare with the real environment and objects. The stage arrangement of the ancient opera is very simple, and the stage technology is relatively backward. It is basically required that "the pursuit of the likeness of spirit, Describing spirit in shape". Procedure is the basic technique to reflect the aspect of opera life. When an actor performs in a way that compares a real environment or object in a different way to highlight life.

2. Characteristics and Problems of the Aged Group

2.1 Changes of Cognitive Function in the Aged group

(1) Impaired ability to see and hear. It is shown that sixty-four out of every 100 aged people have severe hearing loss, according to the data. The decline of audiovisual ability causes the obstacles to understand the outside world, which has a great negative impact on their mental activities. If they are not properly treated, it will aggravate the degree of psychological aging and result in serious

psychological problems.

(2) Slow motor response. With the aging of the body, the sensory system of the aged will have a slow response. The signal transmission ability will weaken both in the physical and mental aspect.

(3) Memory loss. Through psychological observation experiments, it is shown by experts that memory changes in the aged will decline as they get older. Memory loss is likely to lead to old negative emotions, which have a very serious negative impact on various diseases such as cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases.

(4) Impaired thinking ability. Studies have shown that the thinking ability to learn and solve problems will decline with the growth of age. Different the aged have different levels of thinking ability. Therefore, whether an individual's thinking ability declines with the growth of age is closely related to the individual's lifestyle and life attitude. Sticking to healthy activities and enhancing the ability to communicate or think will have great benefits.

2.2 Living Characteristics and Existing Problems of the Aged in Nursing Homes Featured in Lushang Freda International Nursing Center

2.2.1 Characteristics of the Aged in Nursing Homes

Most of the aged in Freda Nursing Center are from good families, but their children cannot take care of them due to work. There are qualified staff in the nursing home. Sometimes, they do some small activities with the staff, but they are reluctant to share with others. They are alone when they go out for a walk or a meal. It is easier for the aged who are withdrawn personality withdrawn to catch physical disease, if they do not like to go out for activities. The activity form of music therapy is to let the aged actively participate, so as to achieve the expected therapeutic effect. It is found that the aged are more rational and their emotional experiences of negative and stressful events last longer than those of younger people. Some the aged will be more prone to negative emotions, due to the influence of personality, environment, and other factors.

2.2.2 The Problems of the Aged in Nursing Homes

After getting close to the life of the aged in Freida

Nursing Center, it is found that loneliness is the biggest problem for the aged. Most of them who go into nursing homes are alone and their children are too busy to take care of them. Loneliness is the result of a lack of communication and is a negative personality trait. Lonely the aged are easily hurt by criticism from others and try to avoid social activities that require interaction with others. Its main characteristic is self-isolation and a refusal to communicate with others.

Reasons for Loneliness:

(1) It is shown that more than half of Chinese aged households will be living alone by 2005 according to the data. In this case, if the aged lack the ability to self-regulate, it is easy to have a severe sense of loneliness.

(2) It has to do with the personality of the aged. A large number of studies show that the aged tend to be calm, indifferent, timid and introverted. They are sentimental and not easy to reveal their heart. Introverted old people pay more attention to their inner world and don't like to communicate with others.

(3) The aged often have a full understanding of and tend to underestimate themselves. The older they get with the different psychological idea, the more they will lose their enthusiasm, expectations and hopes for the life and future, which will affect the change of personality and increase the sense of loneliness.

3. The Intervention of Chinese Opera in Music Therapy for the Aged

3.1 The Intervention of Opera Art on Individual Music Therapy

The author conducted one-on-one music therapy for Ms. Wang in Freda Nursing Center. Ms. Wang likes singing very much and she is very good at singing. However, in the communication process, Ms. Wang always sat in her seat and did not take the initiative to say hello to the therapist, but she cooperated with the treatment and fully participated in the activities. Most of them listened to me but rarely showed themselves actively, and they were not focused. Ms. Wang did not show anxiety and fear during the treatment, and there were no obvious emotional disorders. Although Ms. Wang did not like to take the initiative to communicate, as long as we had an active

communication with her, she was willing to communicate and talk about things that happened in her young age. The first time I met Ms. Wang, she was in a wheelchair. She was very surprised to see us and kept asking who we were. We introduced our names by singing greeting song. Through communication with Ms. Wang, I knew that she grew up in Beijing when she was young, so she likes Peking Opera. Therefore, in the one-to-one treatment, a large number of Peking Opera clips were used, which enhanced Ms. Wang's enthusiasm. The second time I came, Ms. Wang couldn't remember my name and didn't even remember seeing me. Through this communication practice, I found that music therapy should be based on the psychological characteristics of the aged. Different aged people need different treatment methods and different music. The treated subjects had different musical literacy, different historical memory and different music. Music therapy can be performed in different ways depending on the different treatment targets. Learning from the previous example of Ms. Wang, I have a conclusion that the treatment time should be limited as short as possible, and the way to treat patients should be diversified and interesting. Through some performances of the opera, I asked Ms. Wang to exercise her body in order to promote blood circulation and her enthusiasm. I have found that activities can improve the cognition of body parts and functions, develop concepts of direction and space, and improve the ability to coordinate movement, promote interaction, enhance the sensory experience of sight, hearing, touch the body and the ability to cope with changes in speed, rhythm and physical intensity. It can promote people's physical and mental health through specific musical activities from the aspects of physicality, mentality, emotionality, cognition, and behavior.

3.2 The Intervention of Opera Art in Group Music Therapy

The author conducted voice training for the aged with the method of group music therapy and emphasized the position of singing and breathing after self-introduction and initial relationship with ladies and gentlemen. The chest and abdominal breathing are adopted to keep the body upright, relax, promote respiratory circulation and

improve lung function. The method is to breathe a lot of air into abdomen and vibrate the vocal cords by breath. First, practice vocalizing with simple melodic scales.

5 4 3 2 | 1 — ||

En

Start with a closed accent hum to open the sound channel and find the vibration point of the sound.

1 3 5 3 | 1 — ||

yi

Then, open up the voice with an open accent and breathe to vibrate vocal cords.

5 5 5 5 | 5 4 3 2 | 1 — ||

Wu Wu Wu Wu Wu

The way to sing in a martellato allows the aged to experience the benefits of proper breathing and diaphragm tension. Based on the lyrics of *Farewell to My Concubine*, we asked the aged to read and recite the lyrics together, so as to generate resonance that can vibrate the nerves and internal organs and stimulate the movement of the whole body to enhance the physical strength. While reading the lyrics aloud, the author asked aged to recite the lyrics in a state of singing with emotion. The aged in the nursing home lived in a time when the general cognition of opera was far more than that of the modern young people. Most of them love opera, but they can only listen to it. The group music therapy enables the aged to actively participate in singing activities. In the activity, some aged people who were a little passive or not very interested in singing were led by some active ones to form a positive situation, which is the biggest benefit of group music therapy. The content reflected by the lyrics could not only make them recall the good times of the past with pleasure, but also enhance the function of the heart and lung. The last part was the singing of the opera segment. Before the singing, the story origin of the opera segment was told to the aged, so as to promote their understanding and word-for-word demonstration. It can convey the cadence of the opera to them. The ordinary songs are more therapeutic than other forms for foreign, while the patriotic songs and opera can play a therapeutic role for domestic aged people.

4. The Application and Practice of Opera Art in

the Activities of the Aged

4.1 The Different Influences of Different Kinds of Opera

Through the contact with the aged in Freda, I found that different kinds of opera bring different stimulation to different aged people, which is different from the life experience of the aged and the opera they like. Among the aged in the nursing home, Ms. Wang, who had been in Beijing when she was young, showed greater enthusiasm for Peking Opera and could recall the singing with others when she was young. The last part of the Peking Opera film that the aged people liked most was the singing of Yu Ji in *Farewell to My Concubine* and the singing of Princess Iron Mirror in the palace. Several ladies born in the south have a special love for Kunqu Opera and could sing many of it, such as *The Peony Pavilion*, *Hall of Eternal Life* and *Peach Blossom Fan*. Pingju is one of the most influential local operas in China, also known as Lianhualuo, which is similar to the “errenzhuang” in Northeast China. Compared with other operas, the aged knew less about Pingju, mainly the gentlemen in Northeast China. Huangmei Opera singing is smooth and vivid with real and lively expression. Heavenly Match makes our Huangmei Opera popular at home and abroad. The younger and older people are the most interested in Huangmei Opera because it has been made into many TV series and most of the aged know the plots.

4.2 The Practical Results of Opera Art in Music Therapy

The purpose of this music therapy is to make the limbic system, cerebral cortex and other central nervous system structure of the patient produce different psychology and emotion through opera singing. Opera singing therapy is used to improve their interpersonal skills, but the aged in nursing homes have a psychological barrier to communicate and contact with outsiders. However, through music therapy, the aged can get in touch with the outside world and make music therapy activities become a medium of emotional communication. People also enable the aged to communicate with others. Opera performance is a kind of singing therapy, which is a specific method and technique in music therapy. Opera singing can promote blood circulation,

metabolism and digestive function; thus, it can make people happy and excited. Singing therapy is also a practical method of music therapy. Different opera performances produce different psychological situations and achieve different effects.

(1) Breath and human health. Patients can get the coordinated movement of contraction and relaxation through the breathing method of opera singing, which can improve the blood flow of the aged and reduce muscle tension, thus strengthening the lung function.

(2) Vocalization and depression relief. Before the opera singing, the patients should practice relaxation and meditation, so as to release the depression in the heart by voice. The voice training also has a significant effect on relieving the depressed mood.

(3) Sing songs and depression relief. Opera singing can vent and relieve the depressed mood in the heart and eliminate the frustration. Singing some light and lively tunes can relieve anxiety and regulate the body and mind.

(4) Songs stimulate the memory function of the brain. Operas are mostly adapted from ancient events, and they are the memories that the aged have heard when they were young or in the past. The opera can stimulate the brain through the recall method. The patients are familiar with the opera segments to stimulate the brain memory and arouse the patients’ memories of the past. From familiar passages and storylines, the aged can recall the past and reconfirm the true self.

5. Conclusion

At present, music therapy in China is still in its infancy and lacks research support. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the attention and support of relevant management organizations to enable the healthy development of this discipline. The idea of music therapy in Chinese opera art is a subject worthy of further study. Through this study, the theory and practice of music therapy will be further explored. The idea of music therapy in Chinese opera art is the product of the continuous development of human society and has positive significance. At the same time, as the carrier of human emotion expression, Chinese opera art is affected by complex social life, and the content, function and meaning of opera art will

change and diversify. Opera art will become a unique, novel and independent music therapy technology. The music therapy of Chinese opera art in the aged provides the foundation for the study of Chinese traditional music in music therapy. In the future, there will be a wider range of research materials and more specialized system branches. It is hoped that the traditional music therapy theory and technique will develop as soon as possible and finally have a place in the field of music therapy in the world.

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