



**TRADITION, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN ANSHUN DIXI
OPERA OF THE TUNPU COMMUNITY, GUIZHOU, CHINA**

By

WU HENG

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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July 2024

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Anshun Dixi is a traditional opera popular in the Tunpu Community, Anshun City, Guizhou Province, China. According to the classification system of Chinese opera, the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi is still controversial. The Tunpu people have consistently upheld the custom of engaging in Dixi performances, highlighting the essential significance that Dixi plays in the military identity and the immigrant identity of the Tunpu community. This study aims to examine the operatic identity and musical meaning of Anshun Dixi. The concept of “great tradition and little tradition”, Bohlman’s (2005) proposition of “music as a representation”, and the “intertextuality” theory of Kristeva (1969) and Tokumaru (2000) are adopted as discourse. Anshun Dixi’s operatic identity is analyzed within its musical framework and intertextual connection with several other operatic traditions in China. To investigate the musical representation of Anshun Dixi, a functioning network is constructed to connect music and non-musical components.

Based on an ethnomusicology approach, this study carried out a field survey for three years in nine Tunpu communities, including Tianlong Village, Jiuxi Village, Fanhua Village, Guojiatun Village, Wuguan Village, Xinshao Village, Xiaojia Village, Xiayuan Village, and Zhouguan Village, spanning from 2021 to 2023. A series of representational symbols about the Tunpu context, ritual activities, opera performances, music texts, costumes and props, and dance movements were collected through field observation, audio and video recording. The relationship and significance of many symbols were elucidated through the specialized methods of music analysis, textual analysis, and performance analysis. By establishing an interactive network with a central focus on music, the connection between music and non-musical categories and the role of music in Dixi was examined. Furthermore, the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi is explored through the intertextual approach, which links Dixi to other Chinese operas and performing arts.

The research findings indicate that Anshun Dixi is the product of the combined influence of several cultural components. The ritual part absorbs elements from the opera component, while the opera component does not encompass elements of rituals. Specifically, the opera segment does not serve as an offering to amuse the deities. However, its programmatic and virtual nature is flexible and does not adhere to the conventions of appreciative opera. Therefore, Anshun Dixi is a loose, unofficial, both ritualistic and appreciative folk opera. Despite being a ‘little tradition’, Anshun Dixi encompasses great elements. Music plays a central role in Anshun Dixi, as it combines different structural elements. The representation of music beyond itself reflects the divinity, military nature, immigrant status, and spirit of loyalty, righteousness, and bravery, which are related to the representation of

Anshun Dixi. Furthermore, the music of Dixi also represents the uniqueness of sound, structure, and signs, which is the self-identity of music. In conclusion, while Anshun Dixi may be considered a folk tradition only transmitted among the Tunpu groups, for the community, Anshun Dixi serves as a representation of their culture.

Keywords: Anshun Dixi, Opera Tradition, Operatic Identity, Musical Representation, Tunpu Culture

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**TRADISI, IDENTITI DAN PERWAKILAN DALAM OPERA ANSHUN DIXI
MASYARAKAT TUNPU, GUIZHOU, CHINA**

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Anshun Dixi ialah opera tradisional yang popular di Komuniti Tunpu, Bandar Anshun, Wilayah Guizhou, China. Menurut sistem klasifikasi opera Cina, identiti opera Anshun Dixi masih menjadi kontroversi. Orang Tunpu secara konsisten menjunjung adat resam melibatkan diri dalam persembahan Dixi, menonjolkan kepentingan penting yang dimainkan Dixi dalam identiti tentera dan identiti pendatang komuniti Tunpu. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji identiti opera dan makna muzik Anshun Dixi. Konsep “tradisi hebat dan tradisi kecil”, cadangan Bohlman (2005) tentang “muzik sebagai perwakilan”, dan teori “intertekstualiti” Kristeva (1969) dan Tokumaru (2000) diterima pakai sebagai wacana. Identiti opera Anshun Dixi dianalisis dalam rangka kerja muziknya dan hubungan intertekstual dengan beberapa tradisi opera lain di China. Untuk menyiasat perwakilan muzik Anshun Dixi, rangkaian berfungsi dibina untuk menyambungkan komponen muzik dan bukan muzik.

Berdasarkan pendekatan etnomusikologi, kajian ini menjalankan tinjauan lapangan selama tiga tahun di sembilan komuniti Tunpu, termasuk Kampung Tianlong, Kampung Jiuxi, Kampung Fanhua, Kampung Guojiatun, Kampung Wuguan, Kampung Xinshao, Kampung Xiaojia, Kampung Xiayuan, dan Kampung Zhouguan, menjangkau dari 2021 hingga 2023. Satu siri simbol perwakilan tentang konteks Tunpu, aktiviti ritual, persembahan opera, teks muzik, pakaian dan prop, dan pergerakan tarian dikumpulkan melalui pemerhatian lapangan, rakaman audio dan video. Hubungan dan kepentingan banyak simbol telah dijelaskan melalui kaedah khusus analisis muzik, analisis tekstual, dan analisis prestasi. Dengan mewujudkan rangkaian interaktif dengan tumpuan utama pada muzik, hubungan antara muzik dan kategori bukan muzik dan peranan muzik dalam Dixi telah diperiksa. Tambahan pula, identiti opera Anshun Dixi diterokai melalui pendekatan intertekstual, yang menghubungkan Dixi dengan opera Cina yang lain dan seni persembahan.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Anshun Dixi adalah hasil gabungan pengaruh beberapa komponen budaya. Bahagian ritual menyerap unsur daripada komponen opera, manakala komponen opera tidak merangkumi unsur ritual. Secara khusus, segmen opera tidak berfungsi sebagai persembahan untuk menghiburkan dewa. Walau bagaimanapun, sifat program dan mayanya adalah fleksibel dan tidak mematuhi konvensyen opera apresiasi. Oleh itu, Anshun Dixi ialah opera rakyat yang longgar, tidak rasmi, bersifat ritualistik dan menghargai. Walaupun menjadi 'tradisi kecil', Anshun Dixi merangkumi elemen hebat. Muzik memainkan peranan utama dalam Anshun Dixi, kerana ia menggabungkan elemen struktur yang berbeza. Perwakilan muzik di luar dirinya mencerminkan ketuhanan, sifat ketenteraan, status pendatang, dan semangat kesetiaan, kebenaran, dan keberanian, yang berkaitan

dengan perwakilan Anshun Dixi. Tambahan pula, muzik Dixi juga mewakili keunikan bunyi, struktur, dan tanda, yang merupakan identiti diri muzik. Kesimpulannya, walaupun Anshun Dixi boleh dianggap sebagai tradisi rakyat yang hanya disebarkan di kalangan kumpulan Tunpu, bagi masyarakat, Anshun Dixi berfungsi sebagai representasi budaya mereka.

Kata Kunci: Anshun Dixi, Tradisi Opera, Identiti Operatik, Perwakilan Muzik, Budaya Tunpu

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Research

Chinese opera is among the three most ancient theatrical traditions globally, featuring a diverse range of plays and various performing styles. Currently, the Chinese opera scene is mainly composed of two central opera systems: ritual opera and appreciative opera (Wang Zhifeng, 2016: 7). The term appreciative opera or professional opera refers to theatre opera, which includes *Jingju*¹ (京剧, Peking Opera), *Yuju*² (豫剧, Yu Opera), *Yueju*³ (越剧, Yue Opera), *Pingju*⁴ (评剧, Ping Opera), and *Huangmeixi*⁵ (黄梅戏, Huangmei Opera), among the five major categories of Chinese opera. The ritual opera paying the gods for sacrificial purposes includes *Nuoxi*⁶ (傩戏, Nuo opera) and *Choushenxi*⁷ (酬神戏, Choushen opera), ect.

¹ Peking Opera is one of the most influential opera types in China and one of the five major opera types in China. Peking Opera is known as “National Opera” because it is performed across the country and its performances are mature and magnificent. Peking Opera is named after it was formed in Beijing. It has a unique artistic style and performance skills and is regarded as an essential part of traditional Chinese culture.

² Yu Opera is one of the local opera types in Henan Province. Yu opera is characterized by fluent singing and distinctive rhythm and is extremely colloquial. Yu opera is also good at performing majestic and grand scenes with emotional solid power. It is also one of the quintessences of China. It has distinctive characteristics and is deeply loved by the people.

³ Yue Opera is one of the five major opera types in China. It originated in Shengxian County, Zhejiang Province, developed in Shanghai, and spread throughout the country. It is the most widely spread local opera. Yue Opera is mainly about singing with beautiful voices, touching performances, and a beautiful and elegant style. It is mainly popular in Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and other places, as well as in most northern areas such as Beijing and Tianjin.

⁴ Ping opera is a traditional opera in northern China. Ping Opera became popular in the late Qing Dynasty, and the early Republic of China and later gradually developed into an independent type of opera. It is trendy in northern China and is deeply loved by people.

⁵ Huangmei Opera is one of the five major opera types in China. It originated in Huangmei area, Hubei province, and developed in Anqing region, Anhui province. Huangmei Opera is an opera that gradually developed from folk songs, yangko, tea songs, and flower drum tunes, first in rural areas and then in cities. Huangmei Opera's singing style is simple and smooth, its performance is meticulous.

⁶ *Nuoxi*, also known as ghost opera, is the oldest dance performed by the *Han* people to entertain gods and ghosts, to ward off plague and to express purpose of prayer. In the early days, *Nuo* was a ritual to exorcise evil spirits, and later evolved into a dance form to entertain the gods.

⁷ *Choushenxi* is a form of song and dance performed in village temple beliefs to express gratitude to

The ritual opera presents deep-rooted folk culture, the artistic content of which cannot be underestimated and is particularly noteworthy in the history of opera (Zhou Huabin, 2007). It can even be said that before appreciative opera took shape and prospered, ritual opera was the mainstream of Chinese drama (Hu Tiancheng, 2005: 101-102).

Nevertheless, the categorization of this particular type of opera, characterized by its ritualistic elements, has been referred to by other names like “religious drama”, “ritual drama”, “original drama”, “sacrificial drama” and numerous other designations (Wang Zhifeng, 2016: 7). The conceptual nomenclature of this sort of opera remains varied due to its complexity and plurality. This genre of traditional opera performed during ritualistic activities can be referred to as sacrifice opera or *Choushenxi*; concerning its function as an essential component of ceremonial rituals, it is sometimes referred to as ritual opera (Huang Zhusan, 2008). Anshun Dixi is a opera that is controversial as to whether it is a ritual opera. Some scholars consider Anshun Dixi to be sacrificial opera (Wang Zhifeng, 2016: 61) or *Nuoxi* (Shen Fuxin, 1995). Nevertheless, certain academics argue that Dixi belongs to something other than the *Nuoxi* category (Fan Zengru, 1994:10). At present, the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi has not yet been determined.

Anshun Dixi is a conventional form of theatrical performance that enjoys widespread popularity in Tunpu villages located in Anshun City, as well as the adjacent counties and cities in Guizhou Province, China. It is a highly comprehensive opera tradition that includes religion, dance, music, literature and other artistic categories. Annually,

gods and seek their favor and protection. In addition to offering rich sacrifices to the gods during performances, it is also an essential purpose to reward and entertain the gods through acting.

during the Spring Festival and around the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, the residents of Tunpu village convene to partake in worship rituals and watch Dixi performances, which typically span from one week to two weeks. The participants and spectators of the Dixi are local villagers known as Tunpu people.

The Tunpu people are not the indigenous residents of Anshun City. In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Tunpu ancestors received a directive to relocate from the *Zhongyuan*⁸ (中原) and *Jiangnan*⁹ (江南) regions to Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces to suppress the conflict. Following the cessation of the war, instead of returning to their homeland, they were ordered to stay in the Anshun region, where the Tunpu village gradually emerged. The Tunpu people have diligently preserved their traditional customs, language, attire, cultural pastimes, and religious beliefs for 600 years (Shuai Xuejian, 1990: 29). While Tunpu culture is a subset of *Han*¹⁰ (汉) culture, it distinguishes itself considerably from the cultures of other *Han* groups, earning it the label of an “isolated island culture” within the *Han* community (Jiang Lisong, 2007). Dixi holds a crucial role within the Tunpu culture.

⁸ *Zhongyuan* (中原, Central Plains), a direct translation using *Pinyin* system, China’s geographical region. The broad sense of the *Zhongyuan*, refers to the present-day middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River or the entire Yellow River basin. The narrow sense of the *Zhongyuan* refers to the area of present-day Henan Province. The *Zhongyuan* referred to in this study is the location of the hometowns of some of the Tunpu people during the Ming Dynasty. This region includes the central and lower sections of the Yellow River in China, specifically the provinces of Jiangxi, Anhui, Hunan, Hubei, and Henan.

⁹ *Jiangnan* (江南), a term derived from the *Pinyin* system, refers to the southern bank area of the middle and lower portions of the Yangtze River in China. In its broader definition, *Jiangnan* encompasses the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, and Shanghai City, which are situated south of the Yangtze River. In a narrower sense, geographic *Jiangnan* refers mainly to Shanghai, southern Jiangsu, northern Zhejiang, and southern Anhui, geographically south of the Yangtze River. The term *Jiangnan* in this study denotes the geographical region where the hometowns of specific Tunpu individuals were situated during the Ming Dynasty. Their hometowns were extensively spread out, leading to the adoption of a broader understanding of *Jiangnan*.

¹⁰ There are 56 ethnic groups in China, of which the *Han* nationality has the largest population, accounting for about 91.56% of the total population of the country. The total population of the other 55 ethnic groups is relatively small, accounting for about 8.49% of the total population of the country, so they are called ethnic minorities.

The majority of Tunpu villages possess Dixi, and while the performance formats are similar, the content of the scripts varies. Before the opera performance, several devotional rituals must be conducted. The objective of the worship is to avert malevolent entities and bestow prosperity upon the village. Based on the opera part, their scripts encompass works such as *San Guo Yan Yi* (三国演义, the Romance of the Three Kingdoms), and *Feng Shen Yan Yi*¹¹ (封神演义), etc. The content of the script mainly revolves around the military theme of the change of Chinese dynasties. Throughout the performance, they donned *Zhanqun* (战裙, war skirts), brandished weapons, and adorned masks, and conveyed the narrative through choreographed combat gestures. Anshun Dixi has been bestowed with the moniker “living fossil in the opera” because of its uncomplicated yet impressive performances, distinctive vocal techniques, and unique costumes and masks (Tuo Xiuming, 2009: 430).

Music, being a structured arrangement of sounds, can uphold the cohesion of an ethnic community. It appears it can do this task more expeditiously due to the widespread recognition of ethnic groups’ music throughout the community. Music is crucial in shaping one’s identity, particularly for immigrants (Stokes, 2022: 19). Regarding the essence of music, as stated by Rice (2013):

Music is a resource with psychological and social functions; music is a cultural form; music is a social behavior; music is a text to be read and interpreted; music a system of signs; music is art. These metaphors illustrate the richness of music’s significance in human life (Rice, 2013:26).

¹¹ *Feng Shen Yan Yi* (封神演义), also commonly known as *Feng Shen Bang* (封神榜), a fictionalized novel of the Ming Dynasty depicting the story of King Wu (武王) conquest to the King Zhou (纣王), which shows the war between the Shang and Zhou States. The story ends with the defeat of King Zhou of Shang and the capture of the world by King Wu of Zhou.

As Gu Puguang (1990) asserts that without Anshun Dixi, Tunpu culture would lose its charm. The Tunpu people have a deep affection for Dixi, which they transmit from one generation to the next. They consistently dance the same narrative and reenact the same stories annually (Guo Ming, 1997). It can be said that the emergence of Dixi is inseparable from the Tunpu people, and the Tunpu people also regard Dixi as a spiritual support and cohesive force (Tuo Xiuming, 2009: 430). Anshun Dixi has become a prominent form of communal art in the Tunpu community and serves a crucial ethnic purpose due to its significant musical value.

1.2 Problem Statement

There is much controversy over the “operatic identity” of Anshun Dixi. Famous director Zhang Yimou¹² used Yunnan Mask Opera (云南面具戏) to refer to Anshun Dixi in his film *Qian Li Zou Dan Qi*¹³ (千里走单骑), misleading the audience (Liu Nanyong, 2011-06-22). In November 2004, a group of eight individuals who are experts in their cultural traditions, including Zhan Xueyan¹⁴ from the *San Guo Yan Yi* Dixi team in Zhanjiatun Village, Anshun City, were extended an invitation to take part in the production of Zhang Yimou’s film *Qian Li Zou Dan Qi*. The culture

¹² Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, a Chinese film director and screenwriter, one of the representatives of China’s “Fifth Generation Directors”, an honorary doctor of Boston University and Yale University, and a distinguished professor of Beijing Film Academy. He was the chairman of the jury of the 18th Tokyo International Film Festival and the 64th Venice International Film Festival. In 2008, he served as the chief director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games. He won the 2008 World Influence Chinese Award and the CCTV-sponsored Top Ten People Who Moved China, and was nominated as the Person of the Year by Time Magazine. He is the chief director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

¹³ *Qian Li Zou Dan Qi* 千里走单骑 is an excerpt of the story of *San Guo Yan Yi* (三国演义 The Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

¹⁴ Zhan Xueyan 詹学彦 is a native of Zhanjiatun Village, Anshun City, Guizhou Province. He is a representative inheritor of Anshun Dixi, a national intangible cultural heritage project of the second batch.

bearers have diligently showcased Anshun Dixi's distinctive allure in the film, rendering it a crucial element of the movie. However, Zhang Yimou mis-interpreted Anshun Dixi to Yunnan Mask Opera. He has been sued by the Cultural Bureau of Anshun City for violating the authorship rights of Anshun Dixi. Nevertheless, in September 2011, the Beijing No.1 Intermediate People's Court delivered a conclusive verdict stating that the film did not violate Anshun Dixi's authorship rights. As a result, the lawsuit filed by the Anshun Municipal Cultural Bureau was ultimately dismissed (Shen Kun & Mu Jiangfeng, 2018). This Anshun Dixi case, also being one of China's inaugural intangible heritage case, has garnered significant societal interest.

The debate over whether Anshun Dixi belongs to *Nuoxi*¹⁵ (傩戏 *Nuo* opera) has been going on for about 30 years. Some scholars believe that Dixi can be categorized as *Nuoxi* (Shen Fuxin, 1995; Chen Jijun, 2012) or *Jun Nuo* (军傩, military *Nuo* opera) (Xue Ruolin, 1990; Tou Xiuming, 1995: 2010-11-01; Guang Yi, 2017; Yang Lan, 1996). Some scholars emphasized that the Dixi should be attributed to something other than *Nuoxi* (Xu Xinjian, 1989; Fan Zengru, 1994: 10; Gao Shouying, 2018-10-30:1). In these different views, Chen Zhongsong (2011b: 58) argued that rituals are not the basis for defining the nature of Dixi and that although there are religious elements in the ritual part, this does not simply generalize that Dixi is an act of *Nuo*. So, this prompts the question of what is the relationship between ritual and opera in Dixi? Can they be separated from each other? Can Anshun Dixi be considered an independent form of opera without the ritual part? There is a lack of

¹⁵ *Nuoxi* 傩戏, also known as ghost opera, is the oldest dance performed by the *Han* people to entertain gods and ghosts, to ward off plague and to express purpose of prayer. In the early days, *Nuo* was a ritual to exorcise evil spirits, and later evolved into a dance form to entertain the gods.

research that discusses the “operatic identity” of Dixi from the perspective of the relationship between rituals and opera parts.

Some scholars have proposed that Anshun Dixi has certain connections with other opera arts. However, research on the specific manifestations of the intertextuality between Dixi and other opera forms is lacking. The majority of academics have claimed that the vocal patterns of the Dixi can be traced back to the *Yiyangqiang*¹⁶ (弋阳腔) (He Ping, 1983: 108; Zhang Xiaoyan, 2009: 87; Fu Limin, 2005) or were impacted by the *Yiyangqiang* (Xie Zheng, 2007). According to He Ping (1983: 108), Fan Zengru (1990), and Chen Zhongsong (2017b), the tune of the mountain song and the *Gaoqiang*¹⁷ (高腔) also influence the formation of the vocal style of the Dixi. The fact that Dixi is considered *Nuoxi* also reflects the intertextual relationship between the two. In addition, what other operas are related to Dixi regarding performance practice? Is Anshun Dixi’s uniqueness reflected in the intertextual relationship with other opera traditions? As proposed in this study, examining the intertextuality between Dixi and other opera arts may help clarify Anshun Dixi’s operatic identity and position in Chinese opera traditions.

The definitions of the two terms *Tiaoshen* (跳神, dance of the gods) and *Dixi* (地戏) are not clear enough (Xu Xinjian, 1989: 30), which affects people’s understanding of the musical meaning of Anshun Dixi. Anshun Dixi is presented to the public as opera art, which relies on music to tell stories. The Tunpu people refer to Anshun Dixi as

¹⁶ *Yiyangqiang* 弋阳腔 is originated in the Yiyang area of Jiangxi Province, China and is a vocal genre in opera art.

¹⁷ *Gaoqiang* 高腔 is one of the four significant voice style of Chinese opera and was initially called *Yiyangqiang* because it originated in Yiyang County, Jiangxi Province. It is characterized by simple performances, high-pitched and exciting singing, a person sings, and other performers help sing, and only use the percussion instruments, without orchestral accompaniment.

Tiaoshen; however, scholars prefer to use the name *Dixi*. Regarding the interpretation of this term, some scholars define *Dixi* as an opera that does not dance on the stage but on the ground (Qi Congwen, 1985: 58; Fu Limin, 2005: 18). Some scholars also define *Dixi* as rural opera based on region and group (Chen Zhongsong, 2016a). According to some experts, *Dixi* can be classified as a sacrificial opera due to its performance procedures (Wang Zhifeng, 2016: 61). The term *Dixi* is commonly used in numerous research materials to refer to the traditional opera of the Tunpu community. However, what is the difference between the terms *Tiaoshen* and *Dixi*? Why do the Tunpu people always insist on using the term *Tiaoshen*? What is the significance of the *Tiaoshen* to the Tunpu people? What does music emphasize or represent? The definitions of the terms need to be further specified to avoid people's vague understanding of the meaning of Anshun Dixi.

There are different understandings of the representation of music and the representation of Anshun Dixi. Anshun Dixi preserves an unaltered transmission and performance model that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries, forming a "living fossil in Chinese opera" (Tuo Xiuming, 2009: 430). Even when China entered the modernizing society, faced with multiculturalism's impact, Tunpu culture remained relatively stable (Zhang Dinggui, 2008). This is not consistent with the regional development situation of "Anshun is located on the main transportation road in Guizhou Province, with convenient transportation and openness" (Shen Fuxin, 2003: 3). The Tunpu people's emphasis on the performance form of Anshun Dixi derives from the fact that "Anshun Dixi represents the Tunpu people's migration history, military-influenced lifestyle, and the worship style of the Tunpu community" (Wu Heng & Chan, 2021a). Adhering to the tradition of Anshun Dixi

might be seen as a means of preserving its ethnic identity. Nevertheless, particular academics have suggested that “singing is the key to clarifying the historical development context and defining its cultural attributes” (Chen Zhongsong, 2011a: 137). In terms of music development, Dixi’s mode and tonality were influenced by Anshun Mountain Song (Chen Zhongsong, 2016a), suggesting that the musical aspect of Dixi likely did not exist before the arrival of the Tunpu people in the Anshun area. In this case, how does its music represent the immigration and military characteristics of Anshun Dixi? This view implies that the representation of music and the representation of Anshun Dixi may diverge. Music is an indispensable structural element of Anshun Dixi. If the representation of music is different from Anshun Dixi, what role does music play in Anshun Dixi, and what is the relationship between music and other non-musical categories? Hence, it is imperative to investigate the musical representation and significance of Anshun Dixi to address the unwavering commitment of the Tunpu community towards Anshun Dixi.

Although research has been carried out on the origin, artistic characteristics, transmission, and development of Dixi, there is a scarcity of research specifically focused on the operatic aspect of Dixi (Chen Zhongsong, 2017a: 29). Therefore, the uniqueness of Anshun Dixi cannot be well demonstrated. Anshun Dixi is a form of opera art, ignoring any of its structural elements will affect its integrity. Most studies mainly focus on describing cultural events in Dixi and displaying these cultural components side by side without establishing a connection between them (Zhu Weihua, 2008). For example, some scholars have conducted research on the topic of Anshun Dixi masks (Li Yu, 1989; Wang Yi & Wang Wenying, 2014; Wu Chuanshuang, 2016; Zhu Xiaojun, Liu Sijin & Zhang Chao, 2015; Du Yimeng,

2019), but only focused on the mask art without mentioning other parts. Some scholars have studied the rituals of Dixi (Shuai Xuejian, 2005b; Zhang Dinggui, 2008), but have yet to pay attention to the music and opera components. Some studies focus on the musical form of gongs and drums (Wu Hai, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c) or the characteristics of the scripts (He Ping, 1983: 106; Gao Lun, 1990: 56; Li Shuangshuang & Yang Rong, 2022), but have not further explored the connection, function, and meaning between music and other parts. In addition, research on the dance movements of Dixi needs to be improved, and the connection between dance movements and music is rarely studied. Nevertheless, the present findings of Tunpu music need to adequately reflect its objective existence and its consequential social role (Chen Zhongsong, 2011a:137). In particular, how musical texts, including scripts, vocal style, and instrumental music, contribute to Dixi's presentation of their uniqueness should be a research topic that is addressed. Hence, based on the current research findings, it is imperative to investigate the roles of music from the standpoint of the music center and integrate it with other components. This will hopefully enable a better presentation of the function of music, explain the musical meaning of Anshun Dixi, and present its uniqueness.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to explore the musical representation of Anshun Dixi and its operatic identity in Chinese opera. Focusing on the above research aims, the key research problems of this study include:

- 1 What is the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi, viewed from musical points of view, and conceptualized within intertextual relationship with the many other operatic traditions of China in terms of its context, ritual and performance practice?

- 2 What is the musical meaning of Anshan Dixi, located within the discourse of representation, through the examination of musical text that includes script, vocal style, instrumental music, and their relation with the non-musical features, in comparison with the general representation of Anshan Dixi as a whole?

Focusing on the research questions, this study attempts to:

- 1) To examine the characteristics of Dixi's structural elements. This is divided into the musical text, including script, vocal style, instrumental music, and other parts such as dance, rituals, and non-musical features. The relation between the music and other components will be emphasized.
- 2) To explore the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi in terms of its context, rituals, and performance practices in its intertextual relationship with other Chinese operas, which have structural elements that indicate similarities or developmental relations.
- 3) To examine the differences and connections between the overall representation of Anshun Dixi and the representation of music by exploring the function of music within Dixi and the relationship between music and non-musical features.

1.4 Significant of Study

This study addresses the deficiencies in the current literature regarding the musical meaning and identity of Anshun Dixi. It fills the gaps by examining the relationship between the musical component and other aspects of Anshun Dixi, and by exploring the intertextuality between the Anshun Dixi and other performing arts. The analysis of the representation of Anshun Dixi and the representation of music investigates the societal importance of Anshun Dixi and the distinctiveness of music. It demonstrates how the Tunpu context is reflected in the representation of Anshun Dixi and

confirms that music as a representation, with its inherent duality and paradoxical nature.

This study provides a thorough analysis of the rituals, music, texts, dances, and other non-musical elements of Anshun Dixi, offering a comprehensive portrayal of the art form of Anshun Dixi. The music center's viewpoint is utilised to establish a functional relationship network between music and other structural aspects in Dixi. This network serves as a reference for studying the role of music in similar opera traditions. By comparing Anshun Dixi with other Chinese opera and performing arts, its operatic identity engages in a discussion with ongoing research debates and offers fresh ideas and research approaches for defining the identity of opera heritage.

1.5 Literature Review

The literature review section introduces the broad themes of opera studies in nearly years, the discourse of “operatic identity”, the identity controversy and music studies and related research findings of Anshun Dixi. It also covers discussions on many discourses related to this study, such as music as representation, the distinction between great tradition and little tradition, and the concept of intertextuality.

1.5.1 General Themes in Opera Studies

Over the last five years, opera research has encompassed a range of subjects such as artistic investigation, advancements in research methodologies, the application of artificial intelligence technology, transmission facilitated by social media, integration of multiple disciplines, difficulties in opera production, and the preservation and transmission of opera tradition.

Regarding artistic investigation, scholars have analysed the mediaeval stylistic elements in modern opera (Haggett, 2024), the historical context of Italian opera in Central Europe (Strohm, 2021), and the reliability of Puccini's *La Bohème* (Bartlam, 2020). In addition, the dramatic nature of Handel's opera (Hume, 2022), the innovative application of Chinese *Kunqu* (昆曲) elements in contemporary design (Chen & Krotova, 2024), and the Ideologies of voice type in opera (Kapusta, 2022).

Regarding opera production, Matamala and Orero (2022) consider collaborative translation and co-creation of art in audiovisual translation and accessibility. Giorcelli and Moser (2020) investigate the variations in opera production in several Italian states, analyzing the causal impact of copyright on creativity. Performing artists telling and presenting their thoughts on stage reflect the growth of discussion and interaction in the process of ideas creating works of art (Löfgren, 2024), and postmodern trends in contemporary opera production (Kirillova, 2022) are also one of the relevant studies. Chinese *Kunqu* art also aims to undertake experimental performances in its output to reconstruct the strong relationship between Kunqu and modern life. The hybridity, transcendence, and improvisation of the new concept of Kunqu Opera indicate this (He, 2020). Gender issues in the field of opera production have also attracted the attention of researchers. A study on the relationship between gender and cultural policies at the organizational level of Australian state-funded opera companies indicated that women are at a gender disadvantage in key creative positions in opera production (Vincent, Johanson & Coate, 2024). Another study that evaluated the impact of various forms of non-standard work in the American opera industry on gender inequality in the creative industry likewise indicated an imbalance of women in this profession (Vincent & Coles, 2024).

Innovations in research methods in opera studies demonstrate the researchers' broad thinking and critical spirit. Mani's (2021) study investigates novel approaches to analyzing historical music, including examining the fusion of early opera and Carnatic music and suggesting that hybrid vocal performance can be regarded as both a process and an artistic outcome. Körner (2020) disapproved of methodological nationalism while examining nineteenth-century Italian and German opera and raised doubts about the classification of opera strictly according to national culture. Achildieva and Ikromova (2022) conducted a detailed reflection and commentary on using maqom traditions and techniques in their analysis of Reingold Glier and Tolibjon Sodikov's opera *Leyli and Majnum*.

Incorporating technology into opera research has emerged as a popular topic, and artificial intelligence technology in analyzing Chinese and Japanese opera melodies exemplifies the increasing emphasis on opera study (Yao & Liu, 2024). The Cite Space visualization software examined the research hot spots, frontiers, and trends of Chinese opera from 2011 to 2020 (Wu Heng, Loo & Chan, 2022b). The automated detection of singing in opera recordings has been effectively achieved by contemporary machine learning methods (Krause, Müller & Weiß, 2021). An investigation conducted by Mimilakis, Weiß, Arifi-Müller, Abeßer, and Müller (2020) highlighted the potential of deep learning in addressing the complex task of detecting singing sounds in demanding situations, such as Wagner theatrical productions. It is also feasible to analyze opera scripts using computational methods. Giovannini and Skorinkin (2024) presented a model analysis of German and French opera scripts, assessing their distinct formal features and the evolution of traditional genres throughout history.

Opera transmission in the digital era is characterized by its capacity to successfully use technology and media to achieve a metamorphosis. Notable developments include the shift of the South African opera sector towards online performances (Yende, 2022), the integration of traditional Chinese opera with virtual reality technology to enhance its digital distribution by providing users with an immersive experience (Jiang, Su & Li, 2024), and the expansion of opera into broadcasting, internet, and immersive experiences (Schürmer, 2022). Furthermore, scholars have also investigated the influence of the TikTok social media networking site on the advertising and dissemination of opera, highlighting the significance of digital platforms in transmission and reception (Yang & Amirrul, 2024). Furthermore, the study conducted by Cen, Luo, Tian, Fu, Chen, Huang, and Huang (2024) also demonstrated that the Bilibili website can augment the distribution of Cantonese opera among the youth, facilitating the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Multidisciplinary methodologies are also applicable in opera research. A study conducted by Pesen (2022) investigated the singability of opera translation by integrating theoretical approaches from linguistics, musicology, and translation studies. An investigation assessed the effectiveness of traditional Chinese opera in treating Alzheimer's disease patients. It proposed that it may be a beneficial intervention for enhancing cognitive function and alleviating behavioural and psychiatric symptoms in this population (Chen, Li, Xu & Hu, 2020). A recent study conducted by Wells, Skrine Jeffers, and Mango (2023) also demonstrates the incorporation of opera art and health science in examining veterans' resilience and recovery. Interdisciplinary research on opera and criminology has revealed that some content in opera reveals certain aspects of crime in a condensed form (Brunt, 2021).

For instance, numerous operas are saturated with themes of rape and the threat of rape (Cormier, 2023). Nevertheless, Machura, Litvinova, and Cunningham (2023) propose using recorded operas to address the intricate socio-legal dimensions of opera adequately. Furthermore, opera is seen as a feasible effort by the tourism sector, and the existing interest in music tourism among modern enthusiasts of classical music and opera can be used as a benchmark for developing tourism destinations (Friel & Segre, 2023).

The transmission of opera culture and the protection of intangible cultural heritage are also research topics that have received much attention recently. Scholars have emphasized the importance of protecting and promoting national opera traditions. It can be seen in the research on modern Ukrainian opera genres (Shchitova, Brondzia Martynyuk, 2023), Ukrainian musicals in an era of changing artistic values (Kanyuka, 2022), the balance between transmission and innovation in *Nanjing Baiju* (南京白剧), China (Wu & Sharifah Faizah Syed Mohammed 2024), and the further transmission of China's intangible cultural heritage Yue Opera in the relationship between cultural policy and arts management (Jin, 2023).

The aforementioned research themes exemplify the wide range of opera research subjects and enhance people's comprehension of opera as an artistic expression and its role, dissemination, and evolving research methodologies in modern society. Winter (2023: 205) presents genres as a productive framework for elucidating the development and performance of music centered around women. Through an analysis of *Melinda and Her Sisters* (1916), a relatively obscure piece advocating for women's suffrage, Winter (2023: 205) underscores that when this piece was

promoted as an operetta, it symbolically distinguished itself from other prevalent musical genres of that era (such as musical comedy and pageantry) in terms of both style and purpose. It captures their fundraising objectives, the attitudes of their intended audiences, and the societal, political, and creative environment that limits women's engagement (Winter, 2023: 205). In essence, the concept of "opera identity" (such as the identity of the operetta) serves the purpose of comprehending the artwork itself and illustrating its broader social importance. While the concept of operatic identity has not been explicitly addressed in recent years, it remains a continuous research topic (which will be further discussed in the following section). The present findings indicate a deficiency in suitable discourse on opera research to facilitate the development of operatic identity. Hence, this work aims to employ the "operatic identity" discourse to create an opportunity for conversations about identity within a wide-ranging opera setting.

1.5.2 Discourse of Operatic Identity

Each individual possesses their own unique individuality, and the same applies to the music genre. "Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics" (Frith, 1996: 109). Consequently, music and identity are intricately connected. Music can serve as a vessel for identity, while music may simultaneously reflect the identity.

1.5.2.1 Concept of Identity

Many individuals often fail to appreciate and acknowledge their own identities fully. We possess a clear understanding of our own identity and a solid grasp of the

identities of the others in our social circle (Jenkins, 2014: 1). The term “identity” is commonly understood in a broad sense, referring to the relationship between individuals and one another (Benwell, 2006: 6). Nevertheless, other disciplines own distinct understandings of the concept of “identity”. Within social anthropology, identity initially emerged as ‘ethnic identity’ or ‘ethnicity’ (Sökefeld, 2001: 532). In linguistic approaches, the idea that identity is a process in which there is always implicitly or explicitly some “other” (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2011: 4). “Identity” can be defined as either a social category determined by membership rules and characteristic traits or expected behaviors, or as socially distinctive features that an individual values and considers unchangeable but socially significant (or both) simultaneously (Fearon, 1999).

Several academics have attempted to elucidate “identity” by providing concise definitions. Specifically, Abrams and Hogg (2006) suggested that identity refers to people’s concept of who they are, what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others. Jenkins (1996: 4) highlighted that Identity defines how people and groups distinguish themselves in their relationships with other individuals and groups. Identity refers to a characteristic or attribute of an individual that corresponds to the X in the sentence “I am an X” (Fearon, 1999: 12). Jenkins (2014: 5) argues that identification, as a basic essential, is the human ability, based on language, to determine the identities of individuals and so understand ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what’). Attempting to elucidate the notion of “Identity” implies tension in its interpretation. Just as everyone is familiar with its proper usage in ordinary conversation, it is challenging to provide a concise and sufficient summary statement that encompasses the spectrum of its present meanings (Fearon, 1999: 2).

As Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 2) emphasizes, “Whatever its suggestiveness, whatever its indispensability in certain practical contexts, ‘identity’ is too ambiguous, too torn between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demands of social analysis” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 2). It may “tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 1). However, identity is important because it is a fundamental cognitive mechanism that humans use to distinguish themselves from their fellows. It is a ‘base- line’ sorting that is fundamental to the organization of the human world: it is how we know who’s who and what’s what (Jenkins, 2014: 13). “The tensions in the interpretation of identity prove that a term is a powerful tool for exploring a variety of social and cultural transformations in the realms of politics, economics, gender, race, work and leisure, sexuality, and place” (Edensor, 2020:24).

The term “identity” is made to do a great deal of work (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 8). Nevertheless, Hall’s critique encompasses the philosophical concepts of originality, the psychological implications of continuity and integrity, and the sociological aspects of the structural nature inherent in identity (Xu Mingyu, 2020: 68). Hall (1989: 68) stressed that identity should not be seen as a completed historical account, but rather as a dynamic process of “production”, always present in representation. The concept of identity cannot be understood in its traditional interpretation. Yet, without it, some key issues cannot be thought of at all (Hall, 1996: 2). Therefore, the concept of identity should not be essentialist but a “strategic” and “positional one” (Hall, 1996: 3). It is reconstructed in multiple ways in intersecting and opposing

discourses, practices, and positions (Hall, 1996: 4).

Usually, individuals' and groups' social environment and living and production space tend to be somewhat stable. Existing roles and internalized identities eliminate the requirement for people and groups to actively develop and select their identities (Liu & Turner, 2018:1080-1081). The formation of "other" identities is a component of the process of establishing and reinforcing social divisions and disparities (Taylor, 2015:1). For example, people often seek national identity to protect themselves from the anxiety of uncertainty (Edensor, 2020:25). The concept of cultural identity is mainly studied in multicultural societies and societies with a history of modern Western colonialism (Chen & Mendy, 2014:1). That is to say, the intentional focus on "identity" typically takes place in a specific framework. Whenever boundaries are questioned, stability is disrupted, exclusion and inclusion are resisted, internal disparities emerge, authority is jeopardized, conflicts become more evident, and the consciousness of forging identity will be reinforced.

Although identity has undergone extensive historicization and is continually evolving and transforming (Hall, 1996: 4), this does not mean identity has become obscure and ungraspable. In Hall's opinion, we should pause at a "point" and analyze the concept of identity from the spot (Xu Mingyu, 2020: 119). This point can be regarded as a "discourse", and the identity that can be stopped and grasped is a "strategic" identity (Xu Mingyu, 2020: 119). Moreover, since this process spans distinctions, it requires discourse work, the binding and marking symbolic boundaries, and generating boundary effects (Hall, 1996: 3).

To avoid confusing interpretations when using the term ‘identity’, the approach of Brubaker and Cooper (2000:14) is to break the concept of ‘identity’ into several less crowded terms. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 14-21) outlines three terms as alternatives for identity: Identification and categorization, self-understanding and social location, commonality, connectedness, and groupness. Furthermore, Sollberger (2013: 3) contends that identity might be defined as self-sameness. Therefore, identity in this sense focuses on the uniqueness of the concerned object (Sollberger, 2013: 2). Furthermore, the concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘differences’, while entirely distinct, should be considered in conjunction (Jenkins, 2014: 22). Due to its inherent assumption of both similarity and diversity, identity classifies individuals based on their shared characteristics. Nevertheless, it ultimately refers to the uniqueness of the individual (Taylor, 2015:1).

When the primary emphasis of identity research is on the uniqueness of an individual, this distinctiveness is not inherent in oneself but is created through comparison with “others”. Within the context of this study, identity should encompass two dimensions: sameness and difference. On the one hand, it is necessary to comprehend the differences illustrated by comparison. Conversely, it is essential to establish a relationship between this distinctiveness and other comparable ethnic groups to determine the identities and characteristics of each group. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that the investigation of identity should be conducted within a particular discourse and context. Only by adopting this approach can the strategy construction process be accurately represented to establish a position for identity and achieve identification.

The purpose of the foregoing discussion is not to provide a straight definition of the concept of “identity,” but rather to highlight the significance of the complexity of identity from many viewpoints to prevent essentialization and centralisation within the framework of this study. This study acknowledges Hall’s (1996: 4) perspective that identity is formed through “discourse,” and that development of identity is “strategic” and completed through “representation”. Simultaneously, within music research, the crucial aspect of investigating a particular music category’s identity is to consider the artistic form’s uniqueness and relationship to other opera categories, such as sameness and difference. This approach is essential for determining its appropriate position and establishing a strategic identity. Consequently, it will clarify the question of “what is what?” in music genres.

1.5.2.2 Revelance to Operatic

Opera, in its fundamental essence, denotes a theatrical production where vocalists and instrumentalists combine text and music with visual spectacle, drama, and narrative (Costello, 2016: 23). There exist several genres of opera worldwide, such as Italian opera, ancient Greek opera, Indian Sanskrit opera, Japanese opera, Russian opera, Chinese opera, French opera, German opera, and others, which are distinguished by their respective originating countries. While the performance components may vary among different countries, the structural framework of the drama primarily encompasses music, dance, libretto, costumes, and props. Furthermore, the commonalities and differences in theatrical elements, such as form, theme, scriptwriting techniques, text and performance trends, drama criticism, and drama management, establish that comparative elements are parameters of transnational comparison (Aguoru, 2012:188). This implies that “opera” conceals a

specific shape, structure, or implicit pattern to establish a somewhat stable position within the performing arts context.

When scholars use “operatic,” it seems to imply an opera-related context; the topics discussed include music, libretto, creative techniques, performance forms, costumes and props, dance movements, and other opera-related contents. For example, Giger (2007) defined *Verismo* as an operatic term in his work. Other terms that emphasize drama are also combined with operatic, such as operatic verismo, operatic period, operatic history, operatic realism, operatic metres, operatic plots, operatic composition, operatic trends, operatic scholarship. The study conducted by Larrouy-Maestri, Magis and Morsomme (2014) also revealed evidence of the combination of operatic with other terms, such as operatic singing technique, operatic singing style, operatic performance, operatic voice, operatic character. Ther (2014) is also keen on the combination of “operatic” with other terms, including operatic culture, operatic institution, operatic book, operatic cities, operatic stage, operatic tradition, operatic works. Balteş, Avram, Miclea and Miu (2021: 146) proposed the concept of operatic music and believed that operatic music involves both singing and acting (as well as rich audiovisual background arising from the orchestra and elaborate scenery and costumes). Cancellieri, Cattani and Ferriani (2022) also used the terms operatic tradition, operatic classics, operatic connoisseurship, operatic world, operatic art, operatic context, operatic features, operatic production, operatic scene, and operatic material in his study of the operatic tradition in the Italian opera industry. Furthermore, Havlíčková Kysová (2022) extensively employed the term operatic in their investigation of the semantic formation of modern opera performances, including operatic production, operatic

spectatorship, operatic staging practice, operatic theatre, and operatic literary works. Despite frequently using the term “operatic”, scholars never provide precise explanations. This suggests that when the term operatic is employed, it indicates that the subject of discussion is opera-related.

The concept of operatic identity refers to various complex attributes that establish the fundamental essence and uniqueness of opera as an artistic expression. It integrates music, drama, visual arts, and cultural components to produce captivating shows that deeply connect with spectators (Wilson, 2019). Yong-Yi Zeng identifies three key features of Chinese opera: firstly, the plots are based on well-known historical or literary stories; secondly, the dialogue and song are presented in a poetic style; and thirdly, the performance incorporates music, dance, and acrobatics (Tseng & Lin, 2013: 306). This perspective illustrates the comprehensive attributes (the amalgamation of poetry, music, dance, and acrobatics), narrative (story), and performative (performing arts) features of Chinese opera. Furthermore, the underlying basis of Chinese opera is its programmatic nature (Tian Guolong, 2015a:139), and virtuality is the main method of reflecting real-life performances in Chinese opera (Yao Qiao, 2017). Furthermore, Chinese opera prominently features several representational symbols, including red for loyalty and justice, black for audacity and courage, blue and green for fury, and gold and silver for dignity (Tseng & Lin, 2013: 307). Hence, in the context of Chinese opera, “operatic” can be interpreted as the capacity of a particular opera genre to manifest programmatic, virtual, comprehensive, narrative, performative, and representative elements. For instance, Peking opera performances integrate several art forms such as music, dance, and ancient literature, so exemplifying its comprehensive qualities

(Fan Meihong, 2023: 57). These performances feature four distinct performance techniques: *Chang* (唱, singing), *Nian* (念, reciting), *Zuo* (做, acting), and *Da* (打, Martial Arts) (Tian Meiling, 2019), which serve as manifestations of its programmatic essence. Peking Opera employs non-physical performance techniques to evoke a virtual experience in viewers (Fan Meihong, 2023: 58). The Peking Opera repertoire *Yan Yi Tang* (燕翼堂) incorporates the narrative of the Liu family's rise and fall in southern Shandong province during the war (Liu Ziqi, 2023), so reflecting the narrative essence. Peking Opera costumes serve not only as an artistic component but also as a cultural symbol (Ma Hongguang, 2024), which embodies the essence of representation. As a kind of performance art, the performative aspect of Peking Opera is unquestionable.

Furthermore, operatic identity is intricately connected to subject matters such as power, gender, exoticism, authorship, and performance, enhancing the intricacy and profundity of opera as a genre (Yang, 2008). Fundamentally, operatic identity is an ongoing and developing concept that includes opera's essence and creative vision as a means of cultural representation and narrative. Hence, this study's definition of operatic identity is subject to limits. The objective is to analyze the unique characteristics of the opera genre to illustrate its sameness and differences with other opera traditions and to figure out a position that will facilitate the construction of its strategic identity. It does not involve other extensive discussions since identity is a complex subject with no universally accepted solution.

1.5.2.3 Studies Related to Operatic Identity

The globe opera art encompasses a tremendous variety of operas, contributing to its diversity. Firstly, these operas are given specific names, symbolizing their artistic identity. Secondly, they will emphasise their unique “style” to distinguish them from other opera genres. Italian, French, Russian, and Chinese operas often employ “exotic” methods to demonstrate their differences in performing approach, musical composition, script substance, costumes and props, and stage settings. As Aguoru (2012:166) pointed out, the significance of many opera genres seeking style is that theatre serves several functions in society, with a prominent one being the capacity to reflect distinct national and ethnic identities.

The “operatic identity” research idea is enduring and pervasive, starting with examining uniqueness as a model for distinguishing between different opera genres. Upon analyzing the uniqueness of British pantomime, Lipton (2008) observes that the conventional core character of the cross-dressing noblewoman represents the fundamental nature of contemporary British pantomime. Historically, genres such as pantomime, gothic theatre, and melodrama have served as symbolic representations of societal aspirations and anxieties, especially during the French Revolution and following European conflicts (Taylor, 2001). These findings indicate that British pantomime exhibits unique characteristics, including the dominance of the cross-dressing noblewoman, social stratification, and historical influences.

A significant feature of Italian opera is the focus on interpreting various performances from a musical perspective, underscoring that music is the fundamental component of the production. The development of the bel canto,

characterized by rigorous vocal demands, was shaped by renowned Italian composers, including Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini (Sugiyama, 2019). Italian opera houses' architectural design, illumination, and particular acoustic characteristics create a distinctive psychoacoustic experience (Tronchin, Merli, Manfren & Nastasi, 2020). Moreover, Italian opera is crucial for fostering cultural connections among nations, surpassing geographical boundaries, and facilitating cultural interactions (Körner, 2020). In brief, Italian opera uniquely exhibits its musical interpretation, distinctive architectural setting, and cultural importance in promoting international connections.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of French opera overtures is their deliberate opening followed by lively sections, setting them apart from other operatic traditions (Deane, 1972). Moreover, French opera, particularly lyric tragedy, derives inspiration from court ballet and masque, and these attributes have been present throughout the history of French opera (Faulkner, 2006). Historical and political contexts are intricately connected to French operas, exemplified by Bizet's opera *Carmen*, which is regarded as one of the most innovative French operas (Istel, 1921). Furthermore, French opera has a flexible dramatic structure, which deviates from the more rigid Italian opera seria model (Cabrini, 2009). It shows, that French opera's distinctive overtures, historical and political inspirations, and adaptable dramatic structure highlight its uniqueness.

Traditional Japanese Noh is a genre of opera characterized by several unique attributes. It is widely accepted that Noh has its origins in Sarugaku, an ancient Japanese theatrical art, although there are varying viewpoints on its exact origins

(Chen, 2024). Noh performances are characterized by their meticulous ritualization and reliance on masks, which play a crucial role in expressing a wide range of emotions and expressions (Miyata, Nishimura, Okanoya & Kawai, 2012). A unique blend of music, dance, and drama characterizes Noh's performances, resulting in a fascinating and engaging experience for the audience (Aneros & Herniwati, 2019). The complex choreography and subtle movements demonstrate an in-depth comprehension of Japanese cultural norms and storytelling traditions (Choi, Zhang, Sekiguchi & Hachimura, 2013). Thus, the finding reveals a unique Japanese Noh genre distinguished by its ritualistic nature, use of masks to express emotions, integration of music and dance, and complex choreography.

The literature on the investigation of the uniqueness of opera reveals that this uniqueness is an explicit representation of the operatic identity and a crucial characteristic for differentiating opera genres. Particularly in the context of multiculturalism in contemporary society, upholding an independent form of expression is challenging and meaningful. Whether it is British pantomime, Italian opera, Japanese Noh, or French opera, these styles have consistently maintained their characteristics, enabling the audience to readily recognize the opera genre and build a recognizable cultural identity.

Secondly, the discussion on “operatic identity” circles on the inquiry of opera classification. Some researchers consider *Bangsawan* as a form of traditional Malay theatre, furthermore, the Malaysian government has established a traditional past for *Bangsawan* (Tan Sooi Beng, 1993: viii). Nevertheless, the social and stylistic history of *Bangsawan* is gathered and reconstructed using the comparative research

approach. This involves examining its plot structure, scene types, music, character types, costumes, and language and the connection between *Bangsawan* and the broader social and historical contexts (Tan Sooi Beng, 1993). Finally, the work of Tan Sooi Beng (1993: vii) demonstrates that *Bangsawan* is an evolving genre with distinct features that distinguish it from traditional Malay theatre.

Another illustration of the dispute on the definition of opera arises from Korean opera. Both domestic and foreign observers have long regarded Korea as a “land without theatre” (Killick, 2003: 43). Consequently, Koreans have struggled to create a homegrown, “traditional” theatre form to show the world as a homegrown equivalent of China’s jingju (Peking opera) or Japan’s kabuki (Killick, 2003: 44). Eventually, the genre attains the magnitude of a grand opera by incorporating an accompanying orchestra, a chorus of more performers, musical genres beyond pansori, diverse dance styles, and the advanced technical capacities of contemporary theatre. This type of opera with pansori-style singing has been called different names. Nevertheless, it is currently commonly referred to as Ch’anggŭk, which directly translates to “sung drama” and is sometimes summarised in English-language promotional materials as “traditional Korean opera” (Killick, 2003: 46). In fact, the effort to develop this style within the context of modern opera has been marked by a constant quest for an advantageous position related to tradition (Killick, 2003: 44). Hence, the term “traditionesque” (Killick, 2003: 51), which enables cross-cultural comparisons, is more suitable than employing country-specific terminology like “Koreanesque” (Killick, 2001: 65). The usage of the term is meant to underscore that Ch’anggŭk should not aim to conform to “tradition”, but rather to seek a more suitable position for its own identity. This tradition may be invented, yet its operatic

essence can mirror the performance intention.

China currently has 348 distinct forms of opera (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2018-01-02). The concept of operatic identity is extensively explored in the thriving Chinese opera scene, and the academics employ a research approach that involves comparing one genre with other opera genres to highlight the unique characteristics and identity. For instance, *Taiwan Bangzi* (台湾梆子) initially developed in Henan Province, China, but gradually localized in Taiwan to become *Taiwan Bangzi*. Regarding script content, stage performance techniques, and music, *Taiwan Bangzi* exhibits a more localized tendency when compared to Henan *Bangzi* (梆子) (Ma Minghui, 2014: 127). Some real Taiwanese local stories are used in *Taiwan Bangzi*, involving the performance of Taiwanese elements, Taiwanese tunes, and integrated songs (Ma Minghui, 2014: 146-147). Hence, this opera genre is designated as *Taiwan Bangzi* rather than *Bangzi*, and its operatic essence embodies distinctive Taiwanese attributes.

Wang Xin-xin (2016) conducted a comparative study of the *Shigong* Opera (师公戏) and *Gaipai* Opera (盖派戏, Gai School Opera), observed some of the *Shigong* Opera performed by Mr. Gai Jiaotian (盖叫天), and found that Mr. Gai Jiaotian had many innovative performances. These innovations involve form, lines, plots, characters, etc., based on dramatic emotions and principles. They are the best examples of new performances of old operas and make the *Shigong* opera to be the Gai Jiaotian opera.

In light of the ongoing discussion on the relationship between the *Sanjiao* opera (三角戏) in northern Fujian and the *Sanjiao* opera in western Fujian province, China, Sun Xinyu (2022) undertook a comparative analysis of the two *Sanjiao* operas, beginning with their historical origins in Fujian. The study aimed to highlight the striking similarities and differences in singing, performance, accompaniment, and repertory, elucidating their operatic identities. Zan Yuting (2022) examined the uniqueness of *Ji* Opera (吉剧) and *Qin* Opera (秦剧) in their utilisation of regional dialects, focussing on the local dialects. Liu Zhiquan (2006) examined similarities and differences between *Han* (汉族) and Tibetan opera in four key areas: historical development and social and cultural essence, form and style structure, temporal and spatial freedom and virtual realism, overall aesthetics, and opera types and systems. The study also investigated Tibetan opera's unique position and significance within Chinese opera category. The study conducted by Han Li (2016) examined the distinctions between the *Guichi Nuo* dance (贵池傩舞) in Anhui province, China, and *Dixi* (地戏) in Guizhou, centred around the *Nuo* (傩) culture.

In summary, operatic identity is a consistent and extensive topic in opera studies. The primary focus of operatic identity research encompasses two primary features. Firstly, it thoroughly investigates the uniqueness of a particular opera genre to showcase a performance category with its exoticism. Secondly, to determine an appropriate position for the opera genre to overcome the inaccuracies or uncertainties of the classification issue. While researchers have offered a varied and distinct viewpoint on world opera art in the ongoing discussions on operatic identity, it is necessary to narrow down the main topic of the debate because of the absence of

coherent discourse creation. The concept of “operatic identity” serves as a starting point for this study, which aims to facilitate the development of various topics in opera research by integrating and expanding upon this discourse.

1.5.3 Researches on Anshun Dixi Tradition

1.5.3.1 Debate of the Identity of Anshun Dixi

Diverse scholarly perspectives exist on the genesis of Anshun Dixi. The main contention revolves around the origin of Anshun Dixi, debating whether it was introduced to the Anshun area from elsewhere or if it was formed locally inside Anshun. According to several academics, Anshun Dixi is thought to have originated in the *Jiangnan* region and was subsequently introduced to Guizhou by soldiers who conquered the southern territories during the early Ming Dynasty (He Ping, 1980). The reason for forming this view is that the area where the troops gathered was the area where Anshun Dixi was distributed (Shen Fuxin, 2003). Some academics argue that Anshun Dixi is an exceptional style of art that emerged among the Tunpu people upon their arrival in Anshun (Chen Yinxuan, 2016; Huang Xingyan, 2018).

Dixi incorporates ceremonial practices both preceding and following the opera performance, with the ritualistic structure encompassing acts of sacrifice. Hence, examining rituals frequently prompts deliberations regarding the essence of Dixi. Some scholars believe that the formation of Dixi is closely related to witchcraft or *Nuo*, and as a result, Dixi can be categorized as *Nuoxi* (Shen Fuxin, 1995; Chen Jijun, 2012) or *Jun Nuo* (军傩, military *Nuo* opera) (Xue Ruolin, 1990; Tou Xiuming, 1995: 2010-11-01; Guang Yi, 2017; Yang Lan, 1996). Some scholars emphasized that the

Dixi should be attributed to something other than *Nuoxi* (Xu Xinjian, 1989; Fan Zengru, 1994: 10; Gao Shouying, 2018-10-30:1). In these different views, Chen Zhongsong (2011b: 58) argued that rituals are not the basis for defining the nature of Dixi and that although there are religious elements in the ritual part, this does not simply generalize that Dixi is an act of *Nuo*. This point of view is based on his analysis of the *Kaixiang* (开箱, opening the box) and *Sao Shouchang* (扫收场, the final sweeping field ceremony) rituals from the ethnomusicological point of view of the materials, prayer words, ritual processes, and ritual music. However, Chen Zhongsong's (2011b) aim was not to explore the relationship between music and ritual but to verify that ritual is not an integral part of Dixi by comparing the differences between the ritual and operatic parts. Otherwise, there is very little research literature on ritual music, and most scholars, like Shuai Xuejian (2005) focused on describing the categories of rituals, or on the function of rituals for the Tunpu community (Zhang Dinggui, 2008). However, there is a lack of supplies that delve into the operatic identity of Dixi by examining the connection between ritual and opera.

1.5.3.2 Research Topics on Costumes and Props

The available literature on costumes and props in Dixi is notably scarce, with debates on these subjects often secondary to other research themes. Actors wear robes, masks on their heads, war flags on their backs, and wooden weapons such as spears and swords in their hands (Shen Fuxin, 2003: 1; Fu Limin, 2005: 18), and some culture bearers also wear decorations such as incense bags and fan bags around their waists (Tou Xiuming, 2004: 437). The above works provide a concise overview of the costumes and props used in the Dixi performance. However, a more detailed

and comprehensive study primarily examines the various aspects of Dixi masks.

Masks of Dixi have exaggerated images and brilliant colors and have entertainment, cultural, and commercial functions (He Guofu, 2020). It is a folk art (Qi Congwen, 1985: 61) as well as the craft of wood carving and painting art (Li Yu, 1989; Shen Fuxin, 2003: 4). Consequently, Dixi masks have been the primary subject of scholarly investigation and are currently a prominent area of interest. The research areas about masks encompass their manufacturing techniques (Wu Chuanshuang, 2016), plastic arts (Wang Yi & Wang Wenying, 2014), and the creative attributes of visual art language (Zhu Xiaojun, Liu Sijin & Zhang Chao, 2015). They also discussed the integration of Dixi masks into the tourism market (Dong Tianqian & Zhu Min, 2016), the application in interior decoration design (Hu Xuelian, 2020), the application in commodity packaging and tourism products (Li Jiabin, 2021). The distinctiveness of Dixi masks confers them with particular economic worth in the present-day setting. Regarding to the context of Tunpu, its “production process, mask colors, mask roles, and mask carving patterns represent a whole set of symbols” that expresses the social nature of Dixi masks (Wei Mingding, 2013). Its signifier is reflected in the coexistence of secularity, abstraction, and concreteness, while its referent is reflected in totem images and divine images (Du Yimeng, 2019). Therefore, the Dixi mask is not merely an essential prop or handicraft but holds significant symbolic importance as a cultural emblem within music tradition. However, scholars have paid less attention to the meaning of “symbols” in non-musical categories and their relationship with the music of Dixi, which has led to a lack of comprehensive display of the uniqueness of Dixi.

1.5.3.3 Musical Studies on Anshun Dixi

Among the results of the limited research on song texts, scholars generally acknowledge that Dixi scripts are ancient military themes (Gui Mei, 1990: 36) with solid military characteristics (Zhou Yaoming, 2002). He Ping (1983: 106) and Gao Lun (1990: 56) stated that Dixi scripts are derived from novels and employ a third-person narrative song style. Li Shuangshuang and Yang Rong (2022) analyzed the lyrics of Dixi during singing and concluded that the lyrics of Dixi were derived from famous literary works. According to Chen Zhongsong (2016b), the script of the Dixi continues to utilise the classical script's methods of expression, such as self-introduction, self-acts, matching explanation of actions and song text and expressing feelings and comments. It shows that, there is an "intertextual" relationship between the scripts and other texts, which could result from adapting, reorganizing, or incorporating elements from other texts.

Indeed, the scholarly investigation of the musical aspect of the Tunpu culture is not too much (Chen Zhongsong, 2011a: 172). The majority of academics have claimed that the vocal patterns of the Dixi can be traced back to the *Yiyangqiang*¹⁸ (弋阳腔) (He Ping, 1983: 108; Zhang Xiaoyan, 2009: 87; Fu Limin, 2005) or were impacted by the *Yiyangqiang* (Xie Zheng, 2007). The aforementioned perspectives are grounded in the musical style of Anshun Dixi, which is characterized by exclusively high-pitched voices devoid of melodious melodies (Gu Puguang, 1990). Additionally, the opera performance of Dixi incorporates the elements of *Bang* (帮, referring to the supporting voice), *Da* (打, representing the accompaniment of gongs and drums),

¹⁸ *Yiyangqiang* is originated in the Yiyang area of Jiangxi Province and is a vocal genre.

and *Chang* (唱, denoting the main vocal) (Fu Limin, 2005: 22). According to He Ping (1983: 108), Fan Zengru (1990) and Chen Zhongsong (2017b), the tune of the mountain song and the *Gaoqiang*¹⁹ (高腔) also influence the formation of the vocal style of the Dixi. Chen Zhongsong (2016a) argued that the music of the Dixi should be created by utilizing the Anshun mountain songs as the fundamental tones and by incorporating the musical structures of the shaped *Bangziqiang*²⁰ (梆子腔) and the *Gaoqiang*. In other words, the musical composition of Dixi is influenced by other music texts, and the musical identity can be confirmed by analyzing the connection between Dixi and other texts.

Wu Hai (2012c) highlighted in the field of accompaniment music that gongs and drums serve as the principal conductors in the entirety of the Dixi performance; nevertheless, the vocal portion is not accompanied by gongs and drums; instead, they are used to direct shows involving dance rather than singing. However, the accompaniment of gongs and drums also appears in the singing part (Gui Mei, 1990: 37). There remains a divergence of perspectives on the correlation between music and other components of Dixi. The reason may be that earlier studies on cultural events in Dixi have primarily focused on describing these events individually without establishing their interconnections (Zhu Weihua, 2008). This inevitably makes people ambiguous about the form of Dixi music and how to establish performance connections between music and other structural elements, thus affecting the interpretation of the overall uniqueness of Dixi.

¹⁹ *Gaoqiang* is one of the four significant voice style of Chinese opera and was initially called *Yiyangqiang* because it originated in Yiyang County, Jiangxi Province. It is characterized by simple performances, high-pitched and exciting singing, a person sings, and other performers help sing, and only use the percussion instruments, without orchestral accompaniment.

²⁰ *Bangziqiang* originated in Shanxi Province, China, one of the four significant voices of traditional Han opera, named for the hardwood clappers to beat, the musical style of high-pitched.

1.5.3.4 Existing Methodology Applied in the Study of Anshun Dixi

Zhang Dinggui (2007) conducted a field survey of the Dixi performance of “*Si Ma Tou Tang*”²¹ (四马投唐) in Jiuxi Village from an anthropological perspective. By employing the methods of observation and interviews, he concluded that Anshun Dixi plays a crucial function in discerning the social hierarchy within the society and preserving the collective memory of the nation and its history. Zhu Weihua (2008) also aims to investigate the cultural interpretation of Dixi. Nevertheless, he utilizes the narratological discourses of literary studies, including concepts such as “context,” “mimicry,” “intertextuality,” and “artistic imagination” to elucidate the cultural symbols of Dixi. Zhu Weihua (2008) argues that context is essential for creating any narrative, which should be acknowledged. What is particularly valuable is his utilization of the analytical approach known as intertextuality to categorize cultural occurrences of Dixi into three distinct dimensions: ritual, entertainment, and religion. Furthermore, he delves into the interrelationships among these dimensions (Zhu Weihua, 2008: 35-36). Nevertheless, they overlooked the musical dimension while analyzing the social importance of the Dixi to the community.

Chen Zhongsong (2011b) analyzed the connection between rituals and Dixi from an ethnomusicological standpoint to enhance the understanding of music. Chen Zhongsong (2011b: 60) underscores the need for a logical connection between the opera and ritual components by thoroughly examining the materials, worship words, ritual process, and ritual music involved in the *Kaixiang* and *Sao Shouchang* ceremonies. This conclusion is based on comparing the scripts and singing styles

²¹ *Si Ma Tou Tang* (四马投唐) is a story of the war between the late Sui and early Tang dynasties, and some of its contents and characters are fictionalized.

employed in both parts. Chen Zhongsong's (2011b) study adopts an ethnomusicological approach. However, its main emphasis is on the correlation between the ritual and the Dixi rather than the meaning and function of the music.

The support of music examples is indispensable to analyze the music of Dixi. Chen Zhongsong (2016a) adopted the field investigation to collect some music data, and then presented the music of Dixi in the form of music example through the work of transcription and analyzed the music text. Wu Hai (2012c) also proposed that conducting fieldwork to record and transcribe music would be beneficial to further analyze the musical aesthetic value of Dixi. In their respective works, Chen Zhongsong (2016a) and Wu Hai (2012a) emphasized the significance of conducting fieldwork, gathering musical materials, transcribing, and analyzing music texts while investigating Dixi music. These insights will serve as valuable references for the present study, particularly in the context of data collecting and analysis. Nevertheless, their research mostly centered on delineating the aesthetic attributes of music, whereas the musical meaning and function necessitated further discourse.

The present methodology mainly focuses on the cultural evaluation of Anshun Dixi and the aesthetic investigation of musical texts, often addressing these two domains separately. Nevertheless, it is imperative to consider music as a cultural phenomenon further to substantiate Anshun Dixi's uniqueness more thoroughly by analyzing its musical importance and its correlation with other structural components from an ethnomusicological standpoint. Furthermore, the field investigation study approach has emphasized its significance in gathering Dixi data, and the discourse analysis and intertextual approaches are equally deserving of praise. Nevertheless, it is crucial

to carefully consider the study of the identity of Anshun Dixi, drawing on the methodologies of discourse, intertextuality, and representation.

1.5.4 Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva (1969) initially introduced the concept of intertextuality. She believed that every text exists at the point where many texts cross and is essentially a reinterpretation, revision, consolidation, repositioning, and intensification of various texts. Intertextuality refers to the relationship between texts, which may be analyzed along two dimensions: horizontal axis (author-reader) and the vertical axis (text-background); the overlap between them reveals that a text represents another text from which we can at least read another text. The “intertextual” is a focus within the network or system, and the intertextual potential and status of the text are derived from its relationship to other texts in the past, present, and future (Orr, 2010). Therefore, intertextuality means between texts, but in addition to between texts, there are also intersubjective, between diachronic (i.e. historical) and synchronic, semiotics and conversational discourse, reader and author consciousness, writing and reading, old and new, etc.; and “between” is not opposition, but dialogue, translation, and connection (Tong Ming, 2015: 101-102).

Non-literary art forms have assimilated and modified intertextuality, despite the embedded word “text”, is not exclusively connected to literary works or written texts (Martin, 2011: 149). Tokumaru (2005) incorporated the concept of intertextuality into the field of ethnomusicology, considering music as a textual entity and recognizing the presence of an intertextual network connecting a musical composition with other musical works. Tokumaru (2005: 219) defined intertextuality

as a musical text cast into an intertextual relationship with other units. Chan, Kwan, Lee, and Boyle (2020) adopted Tokumaru's (2005) intertextuality concept and conducts some cross-examination of Jimmy Boyle's manuscripts during his lifetime and suggest that these units could potentially be other musical texts created by the same composer or different composers, or they could originate from other genres, conflicting traditions, or diverse forms (Chan, Kwan, Lee & Boyle, 2020: 140). Furthermore, the term "text" in music encompasses all the fundamental elements of music, such as composition, performance, and the resulting acoustic manifestation, which refers to the sound produced by the music (Chan, 2011: 37-38).

Inter-stylistic and intra-stylistic intertextuality are two categories of musical intertextuality (Tokumaru, 2000: 37). Intertextuality shows explicit and implicit relationships between a text or discourse and previous, contemporary, and potential future texts (Bazerman, 2003). Musical compositions contain both implicit and explicit dimensions; the explicit aspect can be found in the relatively direct relationship between similar or similar musical materials and structures and the "semantic" dimension of their interactions, while the implicit aspect refers to the potential relationship between musical materials, acoustic structures and the semantics of all musical texts (Wei Sheng, 2011: 125). The implicit relationship between musical texts can be reflected in the stylistic similarities between different genres in the same historical period due to the similarity of the organization of musical materials or in the different combinations of musical materials between different genres in different historical periods, resulting in different musical weaves (Wei Sheng, 2011: 125).

In the realm of music, Xiang Ting and Xiao Di (2021) have substantiated, using the concept of intertextuality, that the compositional procedure of *Daliuzi* (打溜子) involves the interplay of cited texts. Yang Wenhuan (2021) explored the aesthetic characteristics of Guangdong music through the perspective of intertextuality and found that Guangdong music is characterized by openness, inclusiveness, and plurality and that the construction process of its sound texts and non-musical texts is in the intertextuality of crisscrossing textual networks. Zhao Shufeng (2010) showed that, from the perspective of intertextuality on both vertical and horizontal axes, the formation of the musical text of the *Huanjiayuan* (还家愿, a ritual to pray for health and wealth for the whole family) ritual of Yao²² (瑶) ethnic group is closely related to the musical text of the Taoist ritual, as well as to the social and cultural history of the Yao people and the change of their ethnic groups.

1.5.5 Great Tradition and Little Tradition

Robert Redfield (1956) proposed the theory of “great tradition” and “little tradition”. Great traditions exist in schools or churches and are governed by rights, knowledge-controlled cultural traditions passed down through cultural classics as the carrier, while little traditions exist in rural society and are not passed down in writing or instilled through education. In short, Robert Redfield’s great tradition refers to the state and power, and the written cultural tradition is controlled by the urban intellectual class; the little tradition refers to the famous cultural tradition that represents the countryside and is passed down by the villagers through oral transmission and other methods (Ye Shuxian, 2011: 8).

²² The Yao ethnic group, one of the oldest ethnic groups in China, are the most widely distributed ethnic minority in South China.

However, Wu Chun (2017) believes that great tradition and little tradition should not be distinguished based on the elite and the masses, high and low, because that what is at the national level is not necessarily a great tradition, and what is at the folk level is not necessarily little traditions. For example, *Jiju* (吉剧, Ji Opera) did not arise spontaneously from the folk but was a category of opera organized and constructed by the cultural authorities (Jin Shiyou, 2018: 58). Based on Robert Redfield's theory of great and little traditions, *Jiju* can be classified as a member of the great tradition. However, *Jiju* is currently in a slump and has not been widely recognized by locals, and it is in a state of dissociation between great and little traditions (Jin Shiyou, 2018: 58).

Redfield's interpretation of great tradition closely aligns with the traditional concept found in Western classical culture, while the concept of little tradition relies on the folk understanding of tradition; that is, tradition is the other of modernity (Shoham, 2011: 331). According to Shoham (2011: 336), the sociological analysis of tradition needs to recognize the intricate relationships between different time structures to understand how tradition continues in modern society. Anjum (2007) referenced the influential model provided by Robert Redfield in 1956, distinguishing between the great and little traditions in the anthropological study of global religions. By exploring the research methods of modern Islamic movements and trends, mainly how Islam itself is conceptualized, Anjum (2007) criticizes the essentialist views of traditional Islamic scholars - Orientalists - and points out that they are insensitive to Islamic change, negotiation, development and diversity in their lives. Slawek (1988) found aspects of greatness in the little tradition of kirtan singing in Benares, the philosophical tradition of Sanskrit Brahman-ism, a concept rooted in faith, and the

musical characteristics of the Hindustani tradition of music. Frankfurter (2015) explores the use of the concept of “magic” in describing local forms of institutions or great traditions (according to Robert Redfield’s classic terminology of great and little traditions): ritual acts, symbols and materials, and construct with local ritual expertise in elements of the great tradition. It can be seen from this that the relationship between great and little tradition is not a simple opposition.

Great traditions always rely on little traditions as an intermediary to transmit to the people and finally form a strong folk perspective, famous quality, and secular feelings, the little traditional social ideology (Tian Guolong, 2015a: 138). For example, the little tradition of Tunpu has many elements from the great tradition of Chinese filial piety culture, and the Tunpu filial piety culture has also formed its local expression (Tao Wencai & Zhang Dinggui, 2014). The stories told by Chinese opera will be recorded by the local knowledge and the social life experiences of the villagers, and in Chinese opera, most great traditions will be transformed into little traditions, which is the primary method and means of expressing great traditions in Chinese opera (Tian Guolong, 2015a: 138). Because Chinese opera was born among the people, it is not only a product of little tradition but also an alternative folk interpretation of great tradition (Tian Guolong, 2015b).

1.5.6 Music as Representation

According to Xue Yibing (2003a: 29-30), music possesses two qualities: “artistic attributes” and “social attributes”. In its primary form, music can be defined as “the art of combining tones” (Nettl, 1983:15), therefore possessing artistic qualities. Nevertheless, music, being an art form, is inherently intertwined with a particular

culture, reliant on people's musical conduct, and dependent on the perception, assessment, and acknowledgment of individuals and collectives within a given society (Xue Yibing, 2003a: 30). Music, being a sound that humans organize (Blacking, 1974: 3), inherently possesses a social dimension. More precisely, music's material composition, physical properties, structure, and aesthetic qualities fall under its artistic attributes; On the other hand, the social qualities of music encompass its creative impact, social significance, and cultural associations (Xue Yibing, 2003a: 30).

Bohlman (2005: 206) believed that music represents both self and other; in order to be more than itself (other), music also must be itself (self). Bohlman's (2005) argument of "music as representation" and Xue Yibing's (2003b: 12) musical dual attributes are consistent with the concept. In other words, music representation is a self-contained structure or morphological system of musical sound form. On the other hand, the different representations serve as social and cultural correlates, fulfilling certain functions and embodying meaning systems. In addition, Bohlman (2005:210) provides an extensive framework of 10 distinct representations that can be used to analyse the dialectical connection between musical representations. He divided these ten representations into two groups. The first group concentrated on the "self" component of music representation, encompassing elements such as sound, sign, structure, secular/everyday, and self-identity; on the other hand, the second group emphasised the "other" parts of music representation, including silence, tale, senses, sacred, and power (Bohlman, 2005: 210). However, not all comparisons from group to group are straightforward; the ten practices and five comparison groups exhibit a certain level of tension and can reflect the broader framework (Bohlman,

2005: 211).

Representational metaphors conjoin through cultural translation (Bohlman, 2009: 92). Geertz (1973:5) pointed out that the concept of culture is essentially a semiotic one. Signs mark the space of transition and translation between music and its representation (Bohlman, 2005: 215). Hence, the depiction of music involves the manipulation of a sequence of “symbols”. For example, as a signifier, the musical tone itself is not entirely equivalent to the referent itself. However, under the influence of multiple combinations of history and traditional culture, its tone is often given a specific meaning—a certain degree of symbolism (Wei Sheng, 2011: 127).

Silva-Zurita (2022) analyzed the interactions among territory, identity, and spirituality that articulated a particular creative process and discussed how Anklaje represents Mapuche spirituality in its music. Lee Soo Foon (2019) examined the social importance of the Johor Old Temple’s parade of deities by analyzing the various symbols associated with rituals, dances, musical instruments, and operas that are part of the extensive and intricate parade events in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Dworsky (2019) considered clothing, attitude, and lyrics as symbols to understand the meaning behind the video itself and the message conveyed to the audience. Music symbols in musical works reflect more than just the expressive phenomenon of music. Therefore, the interpretation of music must strive to explore the meaning, aesthetics, values, and cognitive reality behind these visual symbols (Wei Linlin, 2023).

1.6 Methodology

The foundation of this research design is rooted in the subject of ethnomusicology. Ethnography is a significant framework ethnomusicologists use to conduct research (Stone, 2015). Fieldwork plays a crucial role in the investigation of ethnomusicology (Stock, 2004: 15). As stated by Rice (2013):

During fieldwork, ethnomusicologists typically live in a community; participate in and observe and record musical events; interview musicians, their patrons, and audiences; and learn to sing, play, and dance (Rice, 2013: 17) .

1.6.1 Conceptual Framework

This study was carried out within the “operatic identity” and “music as representation” discussions (Bohlman, 2005). Within the scope of this study, operatic identity focuses on analyzing the uniqueness of the opera genre, highlighting its idea of positioning while demonstrating both sameness and differences. The formulation of the concept of “operatic identity” aligns with Hall’s (1996: 4) perspective, recognizing that identity is formed through “discourse” and that shaping identity is “strategic”. This perspective highlights the diverse and dynamic nature of “identity”, and the discourse of operatic identity makes it feasible to examine the identity of Anshun Dixi. Strategic can be understood as something that is designed. Within the realm of music, it underscores the deliberate efforts of composers and performers to create and deliver the music that they want to present. The strategic objective embodies the significance of representation.

Examining the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi, one needs to consider the uniqueness of the art form and its connection to other opera categories, such as

sameness and difference. This analysis is important for understanding its positioning and strategic identity formation, which will help clarify the critical issue of “What is Anshun Dixi?” Intertextuality acknowledges that each text is situated at the point of intersection of multiple texts and essentially involves the reinterpretation, modification, consolidation, repositioning, and consolidation of various texts (Kristeva, 1969). As described by Tokumaru (2005: 219), the concept of intertextuality refers to the intertextual interaction between a musical text and other units. The intertextual relationship between Anshun Dixi and other Chinese opera traditions allows for a deeper understanding of its distinctiveness and the establishment of its operatic identity. Furthermore, the development of strategic identity depends on the individuals or groups who generate and operationalize it. Hence, it is imperative to consider the historical and cultural context of the Tunpu community and Tunpu people while examining the significance of the strategic identity formation of Anshun Dixi. Also, Hall (1996: 4) underscores that identity is completed within representation.

In the theory of cultural representation, Hall (1997: 24-25) put forward three representation approaches, including the reflective approach, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach. This study acknowledges the comprehensiveness and depth of the constructionist approach. Still, based on the subject of music research, the discourse of “music as representation” suggested by Bohlman (2005) is more appropriate. Bohlman (2005: 206) believed that music represents both self and other; to be more than itself (other), music also must be itself (self). It emphasizes that music as representation should also focus on “music itself.” Hence, when exploring the representation of Anshun Dixi music, it is

essential to consider both the constructed meaning it may bring and the attributes that the music itself will interpret.

Based on the comprehensiveness of the Anshun Dixi as an opera, it is necessary to consider both musical and non-musical aspects from a holistic perspective. Influenced by the works of Tan Sooi Beng (1993) and Lee Soo Foon (2019), relevant structural elements of Dixi were included in the study. Tan Sooi Beng (1993) presented a category analysis of Basawan's study, encompassing posters, performers, songs, scene types, story structures, characters, and the categories of *lagu* and their theatrical applications in various sections. This analysis eventually established Basawan's commercial theatre identity. Lee Soo Foon (2019) adopts a similar approach by presenting a comprehensive account of the vast and complex parade activities in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, through different chapters on rituals, dances, musical instruments, and operas and examining the cultural representation of parade activities. Influenced by their works, this study adopts a holistic perspective.

Initially, the study provides a complete account of the various components that constitute Dixi, encompassing rituals, music, scripts, dances, and non-musical attributes, with detail. The systematic description of Dixi is the basis for revealing its uniqueness and overall representation. Only when these parts are revealed can the complete appearance of Dixi be reflected. In addition, based on music as the center, although other parts are described in detail, but always centered around music-related discussions.

1.6.2 Location of the Field

The research venue for this study is specifically chosen as the Tunpu community, as Anshun Dixi is renowned and preserved alone inside this group. The choice of the fieldwork site is not arbitrary but rather determined by the distribution map of Dixi (refer to Figure 1.1) and its classification attributes. The Dixi located in the eastern part of Anshun City are referred to as *Donglu* (东路, east road) Dixi, while those in the western part are known as *Xilu* (西路, west road) Dixi. *Donglu* and *Xilu* Dixi exhibit distinctions in their performance approaches, singing styles, clothing, and props (Shen Fuxin, 1992). Throughout the research period, the investigator conducted visits to a total of nine Tunpu villages, including Tianlong Village, Jiuxi Village, Fanhua Village, Guojiatun Village, Wuguan Village, Xinshao Village, Xiaojia Village, Xiayuan Village, and Zhouguan Village. The primary fieldwork sites chosen were Tianlong Village, Jiuxi Village, Fanhua Village, and Guojiatun Village. The reasons are as follows:

Jiuxi Village stands out in its exceptional performance in the *Donglu* Dixi. The Dixi team, commanded by a provincial-level inheritor and two municipal-level inheritors, has consistently achieved outstanding success in numerous Dixi displays. The Dixi performance in Fanhua Village is categorized as the *Xilu* style, showcasing its distinctiveness through its performance style, costumes, and props. Guojiatun Village is known as the *Xilu* Dixi by the villagers. The Dixi team from Guojiatun Village was chosen to represent Anshun City at the First Guizhou Province Workers' and Peasants' Art Exhibition. They achieved a commendable second prize, demonstrating their exceptional performance skills (Guizhou Province's First Industrial and Agricultural Amateur Art Performance Conference, 1957: 134).

Besides, Tianlong Village is also an essential place for fieldwork. Dixi in Tianlong Village belongs to the *Donglu* style, and Tianlong Village was the site of an essential military fortress in history and also the place where the first group of Tunpu people settled. Furthermore, Tianlong Village stands out as one of the pioneering villages in the Tunpu region to foster cultural tourism. Notably, one of its distinctive tourism offerings is the Dixi performance. Through careful consideration, the relevant data of Anshun Dixi can be collected in the selected fieldwork site comprehensively.

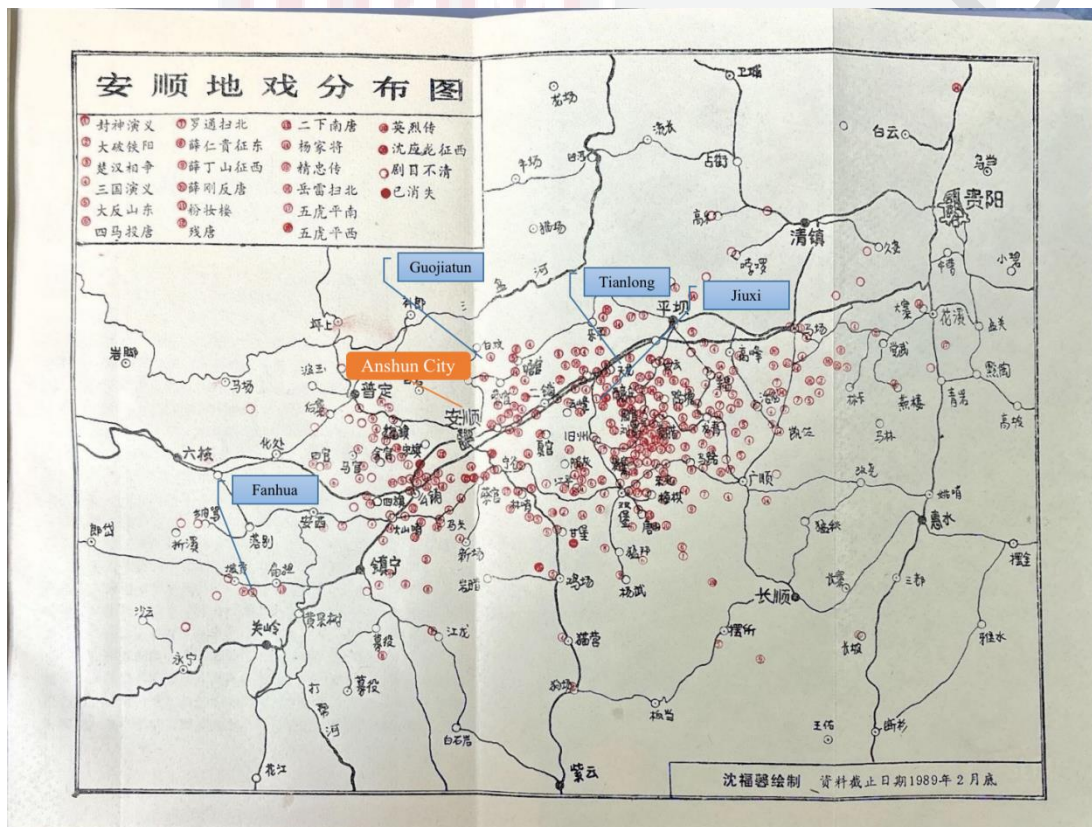


Figure 1.1 : Distribution map of Anshun Dixi (Shen Fuxin, 1990:5)

Additional villages, including Wuguan, Xinshao, Xiaojia, Xiayuan, and Zhouguan villages, were also investigated, and several Dixi performances were documented. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, access to Tunpu Village was restricted, resulting in a three-year field investigation conducted between 2021 and 2023. The Dixi

performance was primarily during the Spring Festival, necessitating the researcher to commute between villages. The specific time of field observation is indicated in the time distribution chart provided below:

Table 1.1 : Time distribution of fieldwork

Location of fieldwork	2021	2022	2023
Tianlong Village	January, August	April	March
Jiuxi Village	February, October	February	February
Fanhua Village	February, March	February	March
Guojiatun Village	February	February	March
Zhouguan Village	August		
Wuguan Village		March	
Xiaojia Village			March
Xiayuan Village			March
Xinshao Village			March

1.6.3 Data Collection

The data collected for this study encompass several elements, such as the characteristics of vocal style, gongs, drums, scripts, ritual events, costumes and props, dance, and opera performance practices. Furthermore, it is essential to comprehend the historical context of this custom to delve into the conventional opera of a particular society. Therefore, it is imperative to additionally focus on the historical and cultural facets of Tunpu in the research. This study primarily uses field observation and audio-video recording techniques to gather data.

- **Field Observation**

General observation was initially employed during the fieldwork. The natural environment, geographical features, and traditional buildings of the Tunpu community, as well as the Tunpu people's diet, clothing, living habits, folk activities, and religious beliefs, were included in the scope of observation, try to find “symbols”

that can represent the Tunpu context. An essential aspect of ethnographic research carried out by ethnomusicologists involves conducting field visits to performers (Stone, 2015:4). By engaging in prolonged contact and interaction with the individuals under observation, the researchers gathered information about the Tunpu context and acquired a substantial amount of observational data on the art form of Dixi. This was achieved through active participation in Dixi performance practice and learning to sing, dance, and play the gong and drum.

The art form of Anshun Dixi is the focus of this study. A comprehensive observation of the performance scene is required during the performance practice. As Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander (2018) mentioned:

Researcher should pay attention to the physical place, the actors present and connected with the situation, their activities and goals, the acts, the events, the physical objects, the sequencing over time, and emotions felt and expressed (Ciesielska, Boström & Öhlander, 2018: 36).

The observation of different parts of the Dixi is comprehensive and in-depth. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the ritual and try to find the “symbols” with representational, a detailed observation was conducted on various aspects, including the choice of the ritual performance location, the arrangement of the venue, the types of sacrificial items, their positioning, the role of the ritual host, the clothing and props of the actors, the identities of the participants, the sequence of sacrificial actions, the behavior during the ritual, the timing of the ritual, the style of music performance, and the interaction between performers and participants.

The field observation of the opera performance includes details such as the location and time of the performance, the number of performers, the gender and age characteristics of the performers, the form of the performance, the costumes and props used, the musical instruments accompanying the performance, the different groups of audience members, the interactions between actors and audience members, and any notable events or emergencies that occur during the practice. In-depth observation includes representational symbols in music text and non-musical categories. Specifically, the approach is observing the music text, including mode, rhythm, notes, syllables, lyrics structure, lyrics content, melody, volume processing, ending form, and how different musical texts are combined; Observe non-musical categories, including location, time, costumes, props, masks, and the relationship between non-musical texts and music.

This study employed a multi-site field observation approach to gather data from different villages. The collection of observational data was documented through photographs and the field notes. During the field observation, field notes recorded the daily behaviors and habits of the Tunpu people, the folk activities, the performance of Dixi rituals, and other exciting events and cultural phenomena. Some of the contents of the field notes were directly used in this study in the form of narratives and vignettes. Some photos of the cultural landscape and performance scenes of the Tunpu community used to verify the observation data are included in the meta-data. The interview was conducted during the fieldwork, and the interviewees were mainly the culture bearers of Dixi. The interview content included the artistic characteristics of Anshun Dixi, the music learning system, the context of Dixi performances, etc. (see the attachment for the interview outline).

- **Audio-Visual Recording**

The presence of persistent, replayable recordings enables a more precise transcription and study of the structure of musical performances (Rice, 2013: 22). Video and pictures provide additional data, enabling the researcher to examine specific components of the musical event in great depth that may not be caught in notation (Stock, 2004: 27). As an activity with a seasonal background, it is required to record audio-visual performances to overcome the limitation of performance time. Audio and video documents are utilized as crucial data to examine the attributes of many components in Dixi performances through repeated evaluation, particularly the dynamic interplay between music and other components.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the performance practice of Dixi in the Tunpu community, this study gathered audio and video materials from many villages. The audio and video data consist of recordings of ritual events, opera performance procedures, singing sessions, gong and drum performances, and a few interview recordings. Cameras and mobile phones are the primary instruments for gathering audio and visual data. Some audio and video materials involved in the study are stored in metadata in MP4 and MOV formats. The index of audio and visual recordings collected in the fieldwork on Anshun Dixi at Tunpu area between 2021 and 2023 are also presented in the attachment.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis includes constructing a functional network centered on music interacting with different components of Dixi. Provide descriptions of the characteristics of different parts of Dixi (rituals, non-musical features, music, scripts,

dances), and creat connections between different parts and music. When symbols with representational meanings are presented, the overall representation of Anshun Dixi is analyzed by combining all symbols. The representation of Dixi as a whole will be in dialogue with the representation of music to show the connections and differences between the two. To fully understand Anshun Dixi and the central role of music, one must carefully examine the ritual performance features, the opera performance system characteristics, and the purpose of music in Dixi. Comprehensive analysis of the essence of Anshun Dixi and its uniqueness reflected in the intertextual relationship with other opera arts to verify the operatic identity of Anshun Dixi.

The specialized approaches for data analysis in opera art include music analysis, text analysis, and performing analysis based on the comprehensive characteristics of opera art. Ritual events adopt the “ritual mapping” described (Cupchik, 2015: 57). What ritual mapping attempts is similar to the “thick description” process used in interpretive anthropology. Extracting non-musical characteristics involves identifying symbolic representations from the textual aspects of performance, such as time, location, clothes, and props, and these symbols are interpreted in the Tunpu context.

A performing analysis will investigate the classification system of dance movements, the style of movement performance, and the combination of actions. After describing the opera performance process in detail, find the operation mode of the action as symbols for further explanation. Similarly, the interplay between music and other components necessitates the assistance of performance analysis.

Conducting a musical analysis is essential for comprehending the functioning of a specific musical culture, identifying its distinctive characteristics, and precisely grasping its personal, social, and cultural significance (Rice, 2013: 23). Signs, structure, modality, rhythm, beat, melody are analyzed to understand the representation of the musical itself. If music becomes something other than itself, its meaning must be revealed through non-musical intermediaries, such as lyrics (Bohlman, 2009:84). By integrating music with scripted and other associated words, one can explore further dimensions of music representation. The self and other of musical representation in Anshun Dixi further examines the paradox of music as representation.

1.7 Definition of Terms

For a better understanding of this study, the following terms are defined in the context of this research.

The traditional opera of the Tunpu people is referred to as *Tiaoshen* (跳神, dance of the gods). Nevertheless, this study employs the academic term **Anshun Dixi**. Anshun is a prefecture-level city in Guizhou Province, China. The Dixi are mainly concentrated in the Tunpu community of Anshun City. Therefore, the traditional opera in the Tunpu community is called Anshun Dixi. In this study, the term “Dixi” is sometimes used instead of “Anshun Dixi”, when Dixi refers to Anshun Dixi.

Dixi is a term spelled according to the *Pinyin* (拼音, Mandarin spelling paradigm) system of the Chinese language in this study; the Chinese character for Dixi is “地戏”, interpreted as an opera performed on a flat ground. A direct translation of Dixi

into English would be “Ground Opera” or “Di Opera”. This study believes that the direct translation of Dixi seems to emphasise the characteristics of the performance venue, which lacks the consideration of the Tunpu context. Thus, this study explicitly utilises the *pinyin* method to offer this terminology.

Tunpu refers to villages named after *Tun* (屯) and *Pu* (堡). The Chinese term 屯 carries the connotation of assembling while also denoting a military garrison or a residential settlement. There are three ways to pronounce 堡 in Chinese: *bǎo*, *bǔ*, *pù*. When it is pronounced as *bǎo*, it refers to a building used for military defense, such as a fortress, castle, etc. When it is pronounced *bǔ*, it can refer to a village surrounded by walls. When it is pronounced as *pù*, it is often interpreted as a post station or some place name. Local people use the spelling *pù* to emphasize the military nature of the village, so this study uses *Pu* to refer to it. Around Anshun, there are many villages named *Tun*, *Pu*, *Shao* (哨, important places that require caution), and *Guan* (关, guard premises), and the villagers living in the Tunpu villages are called Tunpu people. The unique culture of the Tunpu people is called Tunpu culture.

Conversion names: In addition to the terms mentioned above, additional Chinese characters represented by the *Pinyin* system will appear in italics. However, italic characters are not used for some proper nouns, such as the names of people, places, and the Chinese dynasties. Texts in ancient books and lyrics in scripts are expressed in quotation marks and italics. Explanations in parentheses or footnotes will accompany these characters, and a *Pinyin* cross-reference table is in the appendix.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

This study primarily examines the realm of music. While efforts have been made to describe and analyze other aspects, it is inevitable that there may be limited explanations for other areas of knowledge. For instance, the phonetic system of Tunpu dialects in the field of language and the physical expression of dance movements in the field of dance, among others. This is a resulting from differences in areas of specialization, but the challenges posed by these deficiencies in taking a holistic account of the study need to be accepted.

As a result of the irresistible global epidemic attack, the Dixi performances in some Tunpu villages were forced to suspend or shorten the time, resulting in challenges for data collecting. The data-gathering approach for this study was protracted to ensure the acquisition of ample data. However, it was still impossible to avoid the phenomenon that some data resulted from the epidemic period, such as a decrease in live audiences, a reduction in the number of performance days, and the truncation or omission of certain ceremonies. Hence, the data in the study represent the outcomes of the research conducted within the study timeframe, with certain data reflecting the specific attributes of that period.

Multi-field ethnographies have the potential to expand the scope of the data collected. Therefore, the researcher must focus on more than just the performance of a particular Dixi. This portion also contributes to the absence of a comprehensive examination of the performance process of a particular village opera. This study conducted a simultaneous analysis of rituals, dancing motions, singing, gongs, and drums from many villages. However, it did not include a longitudinal analysis

specifically focusing on a single Dixi team. This aspect will be given greater emphasis in future research to address this study's limitations.

Furthermore, while this study incorporates Bohlman's (2005) perspective on music as representation, it may be seen as an expansion of Hall's (1997) theory of cultural representation in the context of music. Therefore, the analysis of musical representation should also be carried out using the approach of cultural representation theory. Hall (1997) proposed that cultural representation can be categorized into three distinct levels: the reflective approach, intentional approach, and constructionist approach. Hall's main concentration lies in the constructionist method. However, this research currently only examines the first two approaches and does not go in-depth on the underlying social meaning that the third approach emphasizes.

1.9 Organization of Thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters. The first chapter provides the background of the study, presents the problem statement and defines critical terms, identifies the research questions and objectives, and explores the significance and limitations of the study. Additionally, chapter one conducts a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, encompassing the broad themes of opera studies in nearly years, the discourse of "operatic identity", the identity controversy and music studies and related research findings of Anshun Dixi, and the discourse relevant to this study. The first chapter of the study also presents the conceptual framework and methodology, which primarily provide the method, process, and approach used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive account of the

natural environment, geographical location, historical background, social organization, and cultural aspects of the Tunpu community. This information is crucial for understanding the context in which Anshun Dixi survives. Chapter 3 introduces the rituals, ritual music, and performance process of Anshun Dixi, and explores the ritual function of music. Chapter 4 examines the performing time, physical area, and various performance equipment, such as masks, costumes, and props. The focus is mainly on the relationship between the non-musical aspects of the symbolic system and the music. Chapter 5 examines the musicality and narrativity of the music around the song texts, lyrics, and vocal style. Chapter 6 analyzes the artistic characteristics of dance movement and gong and drum music and their relationship. Chapter 7 demonstrates the connection between music and the various parts of the Dixi through a dynamical performance practice. Chapter 8 begins with a study summary, followed by answering the research questions, critically discussing the discourse, proposing implications of study and some valuable suggestions for future research.

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