



# A Taoist Interpretation: Qiemo (Stage Props) Produced Peking Opera Space

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## Abstract

This research aims to explore the Taoist philosophical roots of the concept of “the unity of heaven and man” in the stage space of Peking opera, as created by Qiemo (stage props). It employs a case study approach, applies Lefebvre’s triadic spatial theory, and includes fieldwork at the Baoding Chinese Ancient Theater Museum. The findings reveal that the space formed by Qiemo reflects the dialectical relationship between heaven and humans. Specifically, the meaning of Qiemo is not fixed but is defined by the actor, symbolizing the human activation of the universe’s inherent meaning. Inspired by the natural order in Qiemo, actors strive for personal fulfillment, ultimately seeking to achieve “the unity of heaven and human” statue.

**Keywords:** “Peking opera Qiemo,” Taoist, “Unity of Heaven and Humanity,” Triadic space

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, Western stage design evolved from complex background decorations to constructing simplified, dynamic spaces. Howard (2002) highlights that this shift emphasized minimizing physical constraints, fostering more vivid interaction between performers and audiences. This approach closely resembles the space concept in ancient Eastern theater.

Laozi, the forefather of Chinese Taoism, explains in the TaoTeChin Chapter 11: “When clay is molded into a vessel, it is the emptiness within that gives it to use; when doors and windows are cut to make a room, it is the emptiness that gives it function. Thus, the presence of something provides utility, while the absence of space provides function.” (埴埴以为器, 当

其无, 有器之用。凿户牖以为室, 当其无, 有室之用。故有之以为利, 无之以为用). This philosophy is perfectly embodied in oriental theatre, where simple props are used to construct a flexible space rather than complex objects affecting the function of space.

Chinese opera, one of the oldest forms of Eastern drama, originated in the 13th century (Chinese Opera Journal Editorial Committee, 1990). The stage props and scenery in Chinese opera, known as Qiemo, create an almost “empty space.” Typically, the stage consists only of a ‘Men-LianTaiZhang’ (backdrop curtain) and ‘Tables and Chairs’ (Set props), which can produce a wide array of narrative settings (Li, 2020), as illustrated in Figure 1. This spatial arrangement has endured for centuries and is deeply rooted in Chinese

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culture.



**Figure 1.** The most common Qiemo: 'MenLianTaiZhang' (backdrop curtain) and 'Tables and chairs.'

Taoism, one of the oldest Chinese philosophies, emphasizes the 'unity of heaven and humans' (Song, 2013), which defines the relationship between humans and the universe. The universe is an endless space, which means the relationship between humans and space. This study explores the Taoist philosophical root of space product by Qiemo, contributing to the ongoing discourse on Eastern theatrical spaces. To support this analysis, the researcher will review the literature on Qiemo in Peking Opera, Taoist philosophy, and Lefebvre's "triple space" theoretical framework.

### Qiemo in Peking Opera

"Qiemo" refers to the props and scenery used in Chinese opera (Committee of the Encyclopedia of China, 1998). Originating from ancient ritual tools and dance props, Qiemo gradually integrated everyday items and performance instruments, evolving into an independent system of stage props by the 13th century (Shen, 2020). Over time, the range of props expanded, and standardized usage methods were developed, establishing Qiemo as a central feature in over 300 regional Chinese operas.

The Qiemo system in Peking Opera represents the most refined and comprehensive version of this tradition (Ma, 2005). Peking opera is a comprehensive theatrical work; it integrates elements from various ancient regional operas, creating a new

and innovative genre (Mackerras, 1994). In this sense, every aspect of Peking Opera can be seen as a synthesis of earlier theatrical traditions. Regarding Qiemo, it retains the basic structure of ancient props but incorporates more detailed visual styles and standardized usage guidelines. Each prop is crafted with unique characteristics and clear usage rules. As a result, Peking Opera's Qiemo serves as a representative example for understanding Chinese opera props in general.

In the 20th century, three major studies on Qiemo (QPO) focused primarily on its physical characteristics. In the first stage, Qi (1928) first suggested that 'Qiemo' was unlike the realistic props used in Western theater in that it serves as expressive tools for movement, similar to dance props. The second phase, by Zhou (1946), X. Wang & Jin (1960), A (1957), Jiang (1958), and Gong (1962), etc. expanded on this view, describing Qiemo as creating an "empty space" that is imbued with meaning through the actors' interaction.

Scholars began applying numerous Western theories to explain Qiemo in the third stage, including Lefebvre's spatial theory. Hu (2002) uses this framework to analyze the function of Qiemo in theater, highlighting its distinction from Western stage props, which directly represent the narrative environment; Qiemo serves as a structural support for the actor, enabling them to inhabit and perform the environment. Luan (1994) also explored Qiemo from a spatial perspective, focusing on how the physical theatrical environment shapes it. Overall, previous research suggests that Qiemo are dance tools of actors and exist in coexistence with the actor rather than functioning as a separate prop.

However, previous research has yet to fully explore the cultural roots that shape Qiemo's physical characteristics. Understanding these cultural underpinnings is essential to understanding Qiemo's characteristics. Key questions remain unanswered: Why does Qiemo adopt its unique visual style? This study seeks to address these questions by exploring the Taoist

philosophical roots of Qiemo.

### **Taoism: The Unity of Heaven and Man**

Taoism is an indigenous Chinese religion and philosophy rich in wisdom concerning the cosmos, nature, human life, and education. Central to Taoism is the belief in an interconnected world, where the cosmos, earth, and humanity are inextricably linked by Tao—the natural, self-organizing principle that governs all existence (Miller, 2022).

Laozi elaborates on this in the *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 42: “The Tao gives birth to One (the universe). One gives birth to Two (Yin and Yang). Two gives birth to Three (Heaven, Earth, and Human). Three birth to everything” (道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物) (Minford, 2018). This reflects that humans and the universe are interrelated, following the same universe order—Tao, Yin-Yang circle.

Regarding the universe, Taoism views it as an infinite space, made meaningful through human existence. Mozi described the universe as encompassing “east, west, home, south, and north,” where the term “universe” refers to a three-dimensional space encompassing all directions, and “home” signifies the starting and ending point of human activity, carrying both physical and cultural significance (Fan, 2017). In this view, humans are the physical origin of spatial order and the subjects who imbue space with meaning.

For humans, nature serves as the ultimate teacher, guiding individuals to understand the natural laws of Tao and, in doing so, fostering self-realization. For example, Traditional Chinese Medicine seeks to balance Yin and Yang within the body to promote physical and mental health. It is believed that any imbalance in Yin and Yang leads to discomfort and disease (Sun et al., 2018). Similarly, Taoist exercises such as Tai Chi and Qigong emphasize slow, deliberate movements, focusing on the connection between breath, body, and nature to achieve inner balance (Li, 2022). In short, they all emphasize that when humans attain complete harmony

with the cosmos, they reach the perfect state called “The Unity of Heaven and Human.”

The relationship between humans and space can be conceptualized as a concentric circle, with Tao at the center, forming the inner circle (humanity) and the outer circle (space). These two circles are mutually influential: humans, as the center of space, bring meaning to it, while space, in turn, inspires and shapes human experience.

However, the researcher wants to know whether this fundamental relationship between humans and the universe shapes the stage space of Peking Opera. Draw on Lefebvre’s (1991) theory of the production of space, deconstructing space into three layers.

### **Triadic space**

Lefebvre (1991) posits that space is produced not merely as a specific location but as something intrinsically connected to everything beyond its surface and behind each form. At its core, the occupation of space reflects a construction of power relations, and understanding these underlying power dynamics is essential to grasping the true nature of space.

Specifically, Lefebvre deconstructs space into three layers: perceived space, conceived space, and lived space. Perceived space refers to its physical characteristics and practical, everyday use. It is the tangible, measurable aspect of space as encountered in daily life. Conceived space encompasses intellectual and imaginative interpretations, reflecting design, planning intentions, and conceptualizing space. Lived space focuses on the experiential dimension, including the phenomenological impact of space as directly experienced by individuals, along with its associated signs and symbols.

Lefebvre’s (1991) space theory has been widely applied across various fields, including architectural space, interior design, and theatrical space. Scholars such as Nield (2001), Armstrong (2010), Khalil (2019), and Nicholas (2019) have explo-

red the political, social, and cultural messages conveyed through theatrical space. In the context of Chinese theater studies, Hu (2002) examined the influence of theatrical performance on the shaping of Qiemo, while Luan (1994) analyzed how the theatrical environment shapes Qiemo. Overall, Previous research demonstrates that Lefebvre's spatial theory holds great potential for achieving the objectives of this study; the researcher aims to identify the Taoist philosophy of 'unity of heaven and human' in the stage space of Peking Opera. Furthermore, this can be divided into three objectives: 1. Perceived space: Identifying the physical characteristics of Qiemo and usage reflects Taoist 'unity of heaven and human' values. 2. Conceived space: Understanding the spatial arrangement of Qiemo embodies these values. 3. Lived space: Exploring actors' "The Unity of Heaven and Human" experience within this space.

## METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore how experiences are created and imbued with meaning. Fieldwork was conducted at the Baoding Chinese Ancient Theater Museum during the summer performances from June to August 2024. The museum, renowned for its extensive collection of ancient Chinese theater artifacts, regularly stages traditional Peking opera performances.

A case study approach was employed to analyze representative examples of Qiemo and overall characteristics. The case studies are structured into two layers: Peking opera and Qiemo. First, six traditional Peking opera performances were selected: Sanchakou, Shouguansheng, Bawangbieji, Wenzhaoguan, and Cisangzheng, based on purposive sampling to balance civil plays (wen xi) and martial plays (Wuxi). This selection aimed to observe how Qiemo delineates the spatial layout of the stage and how actors experience the space within it.

Second, based on the above case studies, the selected props were Menli-

antaizhang (Scenery), Tables and Chairs, Table and Chair Covers, and Yao Dao (Ceremonial Knife). Aim to explore the physical characteristics of Qiemo in greater detail. These were selected for three reasons: they represent all four categories of Qiemo—large props, small props, decorative props, and hand props (Deng, 2009; Lin, 2007; Pan, 2020); they are among the most frequently used items within their respective categories.

Data collection involved two primary methods: observation and unstructured interviews. Observation entailed attending and closely observing performances, enabling the identification of relevant cases and interactions between actors and Qiemo. As Becker and Geer (1957) suggest, long-term participant observation provides more profound and comprehensive insights into specific events than other methods. In addition, unstructured interviews were conducted with four actors, supplementing the observations by capturing overlooked details and gathering personal experiences and perceptions.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2022), which involves familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and writing up the findings. The data were categorized according to the theoretical framework into three layers: 1) Perceived space, which focused on the usage and visual elements of the props, including visual elements: composition, lines, patterns, colors, and materials Wolf and Block, 2013); 2) Conceived space: which concerned the spatial arrangement of Qiemo; 3) Lived space, which explored the actors' personal experiences.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Perceive Space: The physical components and the usage of Qiemo.**

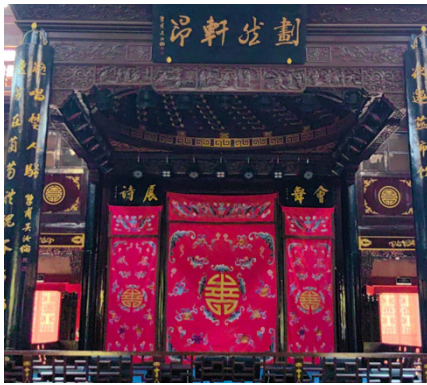
**Scenery: Menliantaizhang (MLTZ)**

Scenery typically refers to large scenic background elements (Gillette, 2012). In Qiemo, the scenery is named "Menliantaizhang"(MLTZ), and the usage



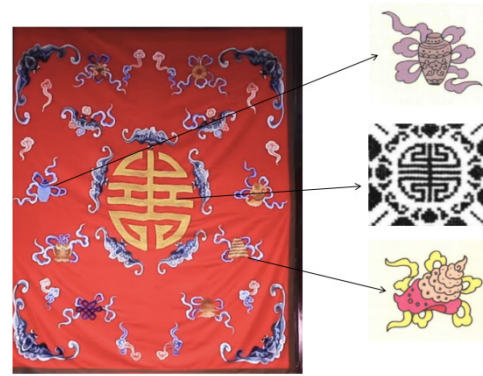
of MLTZ serves as the fixed backdrop of the stage, universally applied across performances. Luan (1992) explains that it creates an undefined space, only realizing its meaning when characters interact.

The MLTZ follows a symmetrical composition, mimicking the fundamental balance of the universe, such as the cycles of day and night (Tang & Chen, 2014). MLTZ comprises three curtains: a central “stage curtain” and two symmetrical “door curtains.” The stage curtain measures approximately 3.5 meters in width, while each door curtain is 1.5 meters wide (Figure 2). The style and pattern are all symmetrical.



**Figure 2.** The MLTZ used by Baoding Museum

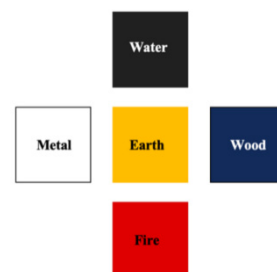
The motifs on MLTZ focus on natural objects, highlighting their unique qualities to inspire people. Prominent motifs include the “Shou” symbol and the “Eight Auspicious Symbols,” both traditional Chinese designs with fixed symbolic meanings (Figure 3). The “Shou” motif, derived from the Chinese character resembling the form of an elderly person, symbolizes longevity and represents blessings and long life. The “Eight Auspicious Symbols,” from Buddhist iconography, signify eternal good fortune. Among these symbols, the ‘Treasure Vase,’ depicted as holding water without spilling, symbolizes good fortune that remains contained. At the same time, the ‘Conch Shell’ represents the spread of wisdom through its deep, resonant sound (Gu, 2016).



**Figure 3.** ‘Treasure Vase’(Up)  
‘Shou’(Middle) ‘Conch Shell’(Down)

The patterns are composed of curling lines, which mimic the fundamental rhythms of the universe (Dong, 1987). These lines symbolize the Taoist concept of “yin-yang interdependence,” reflecting the coexistence and mutual generation of opposites and embodying the principle that all things are interconnected and interdependent.

Color strictly reflects Taoist interpretations of universe order. Chen (2015) emphasizes the importance of the “Five Primary Colors” (black, red, white, green, and yellow), which correspond to the five directions in space and five elements (water, fire, wood, metal, and earth), as shown in Figure 4. These primary colors, which generate countless secondary hues, embody the principle of “mutual creation.” For instance, the MLTZ employs pink and vibrant embroidery, which is classified as “intermediate colors” in the Chinese system and considered subordinate to the primary colors.



**Figure 4.** The relationship between the five fundamental colors and the cosmic orientation (Chen, 2015).

MLTZ is made from silk, emphasizing the Taoist philosophy of respect for nature. Silk production, with over 5,000 years of history in China, involves four meticulous steps: mulberry cultivation, silkworm farming, silk reeling, and weaving. Each step requires a deep reverence for nature to produce the highest quality silk (Zhao, 2005).

### Set props: 'Table and Chairs'

Set props are generally defined as large movable objects used by actors to facilitate performance (Gillette, 2012). Tables and chairs are the most essential props in Qimmo. The use of the table and chair by arranging these props creates different spatial relationships with the actors to create different performance environments (Gong, 2004), as shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Tables and chairs depict a typical household living room (left) and a commander's mansion (right).

The table and chair composition is also symmetrical (Figure 6), mirroring the balance inherent in the cosmos. Moreover, their simple, straight-line designs, with minimal ornate carvings, reflect an aesthetic that emphasizes harmony and balance, embody the Taoist principles of "natural beauty" and "unrefined refinement" (Liu & Wang, 2007).

The color scheme of tables and chairs follows Taoist color theory. The predominant use of red corresponds to the element of fire, known for its strength and protective properties. Red is commonly associated

with warding off evil and is frequently used in rituals and ceremonies. The tables and chairs were initially set for ceremonial occasions, so the red color has been retained (Jia, 2022).



**Figure 6.** 'Table and Chairs' from the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum, photo sourced from Chen (2015)

The material of the table and chairs is wood, further underscoring a reverence for nature. Traditional Chinese woodworking practices emphasize the unity of "heaven, earth, material, and craft." Heaven refers to the timely harvesting of wood, earth signifies understanding the material's growth conditions, material involves selecting appropriate wood types, and craft focuses on techniques that harmonize with the material's natural properties, ensuring a balance between craftsmanship and nature (Shang&Hong, 2014). Thus, creating wood materials must be a perfect collaboration between humans and nature.

### Decorative props: 'CaiTou'

Decorative props enhance the visual effects of stage performances (Gillette, 2002). In Qimmo, Caitou (table and chair cloth) is one of the most used decorative props, enriching the portrayal of dramatic environments through its vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and refined materials (Figure 7). Red is the most frequently used color for Caitou, as it depicts various settings, from official courts to festive celebrations.

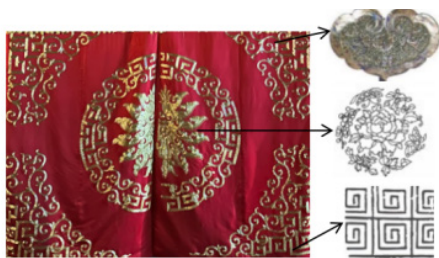
The layout of Caitou also follows a symmetrical composition, but it is strictly balanced, known as "One Heart Four Corners." This style, popular during the Qing

Dynasty, is commonly seen in palaces, temples, and residential buildings. It symbolizes the convergence of cosmic energy and balance (Fang, 2023).



**Figure 7.** Red Caitou represent official courts, wealthy households, and weddings (left); Yellow Caitou symbolize mourning halls (right).

The same logic applies to the motifs on the Caitou, which are based on natural objects, highlighting their unique qualities and inspiring people. The patterns are Peonies, Ruyi, and Hui (Figure 8). Peonies, with their large flowers and vibrant colors, symbolize prosperity and wealth. Ruyi patterns, derived from auspicious objects resembling the Big Dipper constellation, signify peace and well-being. Hui patterns, formed by interlocking lines, represent the infinite cycle of the universe and symbolize unending fortune, prosperity, and good luck (Gu, 2010).



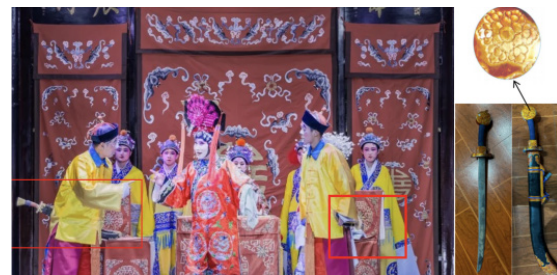
**Figure 8.** Ruyi patterns, Peonies patterns, and Hui patterns

The color scheme of CaiTou also follows Taoist color theory. The colors are red and gold. As mentioned earlier, red symbolizes protection and the power to ward off evil spirits. Gold, often used in rituals, represents purification, exorcism, and the sacred connection between heaven and earth (Chen, 2015). Additionally, Cai-

tou is made of silk, the same material used for scenery MLTZ. Embracing the perfect cooperation between humans and nature.

### Hand Props: YaoDao (Ceremonial Knife)

Hand props are small items that actors handle or carry during performances (Gillette, 2012). The YaoDao is one of the most used hand props, primarily worn by XiaoWei, the ancient Chinese military officer, as shown in Figure 9. While the dramatic meaning of the YaoDao is fixed, its significance can vary depending on the user, as it belongs to different characters with specific roles (Figure 9).



**Figure 9.** Yao Dao(Left). The Tuanhua pattern (Right up)

The YaoDao features a curved blade composed of several parts: the handle, guard, sword, and scabbard (Liu, 2002). The handle, guard, and blade are symmetrically arranged, while the sheath has a curved shape with patterns that follow a left-right symmetry. Therefore, the composition of YaoDao also basically follows the principle of symmetry, simulating the natural law of 'balance.'

The patterns on the Yao Dao follow the same logic as those on other props, including Hui, Ruyi, and Tuanhua motifs. The Hui and Ruyi patterns are like those on Caitou. The Tuanhua pattern is circular with radiating or spiral shapes, symbolizing harmony, happiness, and well-being (Gu, 2016).

The color scheme of Yao Dao also follows Taoist color theory. The sheath of the Yao Dao is black, blue, silver, and gold. Black and blue colors represent water and wood elements, convey inclusiveness and stability, and symbolize protection for



the wearer. The blade is coated in silver, which, like gold, represents a mystical connection between heaven and earth and is often used in rituals (Chen, 2015). In addition, the material of the YaoDao is bamboo, while the handle, guard, and sheath are made of wood. The use of bamboo is like wood, which reflects the Taoist reverence for nature.

In summary, both the use and visual elements of Qimo follow a discernible pattern. First, the dramatic meaning of 'Qimo' is not fixed and must be recognizably charged through the actor's performance. Second, the visual components of Qimo mimic the natural world or universe laws, incorporating symmetrical compositions, curling lines, natural curves, symbolic color schemes, and the thoughtful use of natural materials—each element consistently reflecting the universe. The deep connection with nature is reflected in the visual elements of Qimo and the space arrangement.

### Conceive Space: The space arrangement of Peking opera Qimo (POQ)

Space arrangement is usually planned by designers and planners, reflecting their intentions and concepts, and belongs to the intangible level (Bahauddin et al., 2022). In Peking Opera Qimo (POQ), the movement paths are not the personal creations of a single designer but are established through generations of tradition. It depicts a simple but spiritual 'Taiji diagram' route. The following section analyzes the current state of the POQ stage arrangement.

The Peking Opera stage is a thrust stage, shaped nearly like a square, the MLTZ (Scenery) serving as the backdrop. The stage has an entrance on the left (ShangChangMen) and an exit on the right (XiaChangMen). Actors enter through the entrance and exit through the opposite side, signaling the end of one scene. When the actor re-enters through the entrance, it marks the beginning of the next scene. This movement creates a continuous, cyclical path, forms a circular circle, and becomes

the most basic route, as shown in Figure 10.

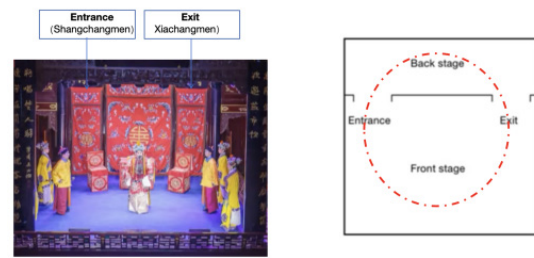


Figure 10. Entrance and exit points on stage (left); Movement route diagram (right).

Furthermore, building on this core circular route, the actor's movements on stage are further refined. Renowned actor Li (1992) explained that tables and chairs are typically placed slightly upstage center, marking the stage's central point (O). This positioning forms a symmetrical composition with five key focal points: the central point (O), the entrance (A), the exit (B), and two additional points (C and D) at the front of the stage. These points become the central base of the actor's action, as the actor repeatedly moves through delineate A, O, C, B, and D (Figure 11). In this repeated circular movement, the actor can perform without stopping.

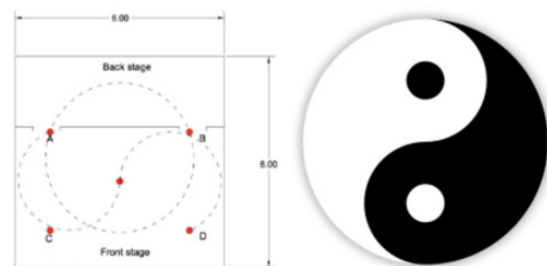


Figure 11. Movement routes on stage (left); Taiji diagram (right).

Qimo's infinite loop route is similar to the 'Tai Chi diagram,' as shown in Figure 11. Zhou (2009) explains that the 'Taiji diagram' illustrates the 'Tao,' which describes the natural principles of transformation. The universe is depicted as an infinite, cyclical circle, where black (yin) transitions into white (yang) and vice versa—black diminishes into white, and white



grows into black—symbolizing the perpetual, boundless motion of transformation. Drawing from these infinite principles, the actors' movements on stage form a continuous, endless cycle, much like the natural rhythms of the universe that repeat daily, year by year, without an end.

In summary, this space further emphasizes the actor's and Qiemo's relationship. Qiemo provides only a few simple pillars that are completed when the actor enters the space. Furthermore, the actor and Qiemo follow fixed rules, the 'Tai Chi' path. The actors evoke Qiemo's infinite theatrical significance. Meanwhile, actors (Humans), as the center of this space, can be these profound laws of the universe?

### **Live Space: The experience of characters on the stages**

The communal bond between the Qiemo, the actors, and the universe continuously forms and transforms through performance. For actors, performing on the Peking Opera stage is not merely an act of performance but also a form of spiritual practice, a way of experiencing the relationship between humans and the universe to gain enlightenment.

Actor ZD1 explains that every movement in Peking Opera is not just a physical action but emphasizes the unity of mind, body, and the universe. Firstly, before beginning any movement, the actor must maintain a calm state of mind, with energy sinking into the 'Dantian' (the body's energy center). Secondly, start different kinds of circular movements, known as "returning to the circle" (回圆); each action is synchronized with the breath. For example, when the performer needs to step to the left, they first move to the right; when the hands move softly, they are infused with strength; even decisive actions must be accompanied by gentleness. Zhang further reflects on how his long years of performance have led him to a peaceful state of mind, noting that nature teaches the cyclical rise and fall of all things. He believes humans must not always strive for suc-

cess, as this natural ebb and flow is part of life's inherent law.

Elderly actor ZDN3 describes Peking Opera as the mastery of energy rather than simple movement. He recalls an early experience when his master demonstrated the power of energy. On one occasion, the master asked him to push him lightly. Despite exerting force, ZDN3 quickly succeeded. The next time, however, when his master controlled his breath and concentrated his energy, ZDN3 could not push him, regardless of how hard he tried. This was his first lesson in the immense power of energy.

In the years that followed, ZDN3 honed his ability to control energy. Before each performance, he awakens his energy through meditation. During the makeup and costume preparation, he maintains silence, focusing on the energy rising within him. Once the performance begins, every movement flows seamlessly with energy and breath. ZDN3 describes this energy as tapping into cosmic forces, likening it to opening an antenna on his head to connect with the heavens and earth.

Reflecting on his long career, ZDN3 believes that human success is achieved through the power of heaven and earth. Success relies on three key elements: the right time (heaven), the right place (earth), and the right person (man). Without any of these, success is impossible. As a part of this equation, humans can only do their part; whether they succeed or not is in the hands of fate. Therefore, there is no need to be overly harsh on oneself.

The live space shows that the actor, as an experience of the space, is inspired by the cosmic laws embedded in Qiemo to pursue self-fulfillment.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study suggest that the space created by Qiemo is deeply rooted in Taoist philosophy, particularly the concept of "the unity of heaven and man." In the context of perceived space, Qiemo can be understood as a symbol of the universe because all its visual elements

are imitations of nature. Furthermore, the usage of Qimo has no inherent meaning based on the explanation of actors; this relationship symbolizes the human activation of the meaning of the universe.

In conceived space, the layout of Qimo closely mirrors the 'Taiji Diagram,' which describes the laws of the universe. When the actor enters this space, they complete the Taiji patterns, aligning with the natural laws that govern both human beings and Qimo. This relationship further explains human activation of the meaning of the universe, and they both adhere to the principles of the 'Tao.'

In the live space, the actor's experience transcends physical performance. They become attuned to the deeper natural order embodied in Qimo, ultimately achieving self-realization. This process reflects human enlightenment with the cosmos.

Overall, the data above show that the space created by Qimo embodies the dialectical relationship between humans and the world. On the one hand, actors activate the theatrical meaning of Qimo. On the other hand, the actor perceives the laws of the universe behind Qimo, gains insight, and achieves self-fulfillment.

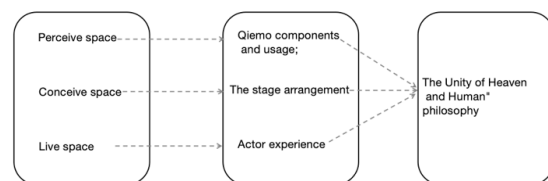
This study agrees with previous research emphasizing Qimo as a minimalist, human-centered space. However, the focus shifts from the space's physical characteristics to its cultural foundations, which helps explain the rationale behind its spatial occupation.

The key findings of this study are as follows: For the first time, this study reveals the symbolic significance of Qimo as a Taoist instrument of movement, similar to 'Tai Chi' or 'Qi Gong.' It allows the practitioner to repeatedly experience the 'Tao' and gain insights from nature and the cosmos, where physical movement and inner peace are harmonized, culminating in the realization of 'the unity of heaven and man.' This also explains why Qimo is used consistently in every scene rather than as a plot device. It is essentially a rite of passage.

Secondly, at a physical level, the spa-

tial characteristics of Qimo share minimalist features with contemporary Western theatre spaces but emphasize different aspects. Qimo creates an 'inspirational' space that encourages participants to contemplate the laws of nature and achieve inner peace. This prompts a rethinking of contemporary theatre: beyond the physical communication of performance, what more profound symbolic inspiration should theatre evoke? Or what does theatre mean when it is removed from its ritual function?

Thirdly, from Lefebvre's (1991) theoretical perspective, the spaces constructed in Qimo are not fixed entities but are dynamically produced through the actors' perceived, conceived, and lived experiences. In doing so, Qimo shapes the actors' perception and experience of the space and their cognition and behavior, demonstrating the profound interconnectedness of all elements involved, as shown in Figure 12.



**Figure 12.** The "unity of heaven and humanity" of Qimo based on Lefebvre's triadic conception of space.

Additionally, this study has several limitations. First, regarding the scope of the research, Qimo is influenced by multiple cultural traditions, including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. This study focuses solely on the Taoist philosophical foundation, as it is central to shaping the spatial characteristics of Qimo. Second, concerning the research methodology, the case study includes only four Qimo props. These were selected because they represent the core materials—fabric, wood, bamboo—and the visual logic behind Qimo props, primarily determined by material composition. Other props in Chinese opera share similar characteristics

but were not included in this study.

These findings contribute to the study of Eastern theatrical spaces by emphasizing the need to explore not only the physical features but also the symbolic significance behind them. Eastern theatrical spaces are deeply intertwined with ancient civilizations, where theater played a ceremonial role, serving as a mystical tool to connect humans with the divine. Therefore, if we focus only on its materialistic aspects, we may miss its real cultural connotations.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that Lefebvre's triadic conception of space—perceived, conceived, and lived—effectively encompasses the dynamic space produced by QPO. The dynamic space produced by QPO profoundly reflects the philosophy of “unity of heaven and human.” Perceived space reveals that Qiemo gains meaning through interaction with the characters, proving that humans are the center of space. Conceived space demonstrates how stage arrangements mirror the universe's cyclical and balanced rules. In lived space, characters continually cycle through and experience this philosophical unity, reinforcing the spatial philosophical experience and fostering new performances that further these principles.

This study finds that the minimalist space created by Qiemo simulates the Taoist concept of “the unity of heaven and man.” It integrates methodology, religion, and philosophy, emphasizing the dialectical relationship between humans and the cosmos. For the first time, this study unveils the symbolic significance of Qiemo, contributing to the field of Eastern theatrical space research and offering insights into contemporary theater. Additionally, this study reinforces Lefebvre's spatial theory, providing a framework to analyze and interpret the more profound significance of stage space. Finally, the researcher suggests that future studies of Eastern theatrical spaces should not only focus on their

physical characteristics but also explore their symbolic meanings.

However, Qiemo provides an almost empty stage space, emphasizing the interaction between the actors and Qiemo rather than complex props or scenery that oppose the actors. This approach aligns with contemporary scenic design, which is not merely decorative but participatory, co-creating the theatrical experience. Therefore, research on Qiemo preserves ancient culture and inspires modern stage design. Future research should focus on the physical components of Qiemo and the profound cultural significance behind them.

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