

# The Expression of the Form of Chinese Opera Painting in Folk Art

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## ABSTRACT

In the ancient times without modern media, the visual communication mode of opera art mainly depends on fine arts. The forms and types of opera performance almost involve all kinds of fine art. From the perspective of ancient sculpture, New Year wood-block painting, ancient murals and other folk arts, combined with practical courses, this paper shows how the painting major of New Media Arts Department of National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts excavates formative arts language from folk art and traces back the traditional folk art form of opera art, and explores the new development of opera painting modeling language, which will combine the concept of inheriting and spreading opera art and extensive fine arts to embody the painting concept of inheriting culture and modeling.

**Keywords:** opera art, woodblock, mural, folk art

## I. INTRODUCTION

The inheritance and development of opera art cannot be separated from the media. Since ancient times, with the germination, development and maturity of opera art, the forms of communication and publicity of opera art have emerged as the times require. In the new media era, how to use the painting language to express the opera art is a subject that needs to be studied, with both cultural heritage and innovation, reflecting the ontological status of drama discipline. At present, the curriculum content of painting major in the new media arts department of National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts focuses on training innovative talents who can create and study traditional Chinese opera art and Chinese traditional culture in the form of painting, and disseminate and promote the art of traditional Chinese opera. Students are guided to carry out the design according to the elements of classical operas or contents of traditional Chinese opera. It emphasizes the teaching research of multi-media painting with opera painting as the core and traditional culture as its connotation, and leads students to explore new forms and contents of painting creation through various forms such as workshops.

Through the summary of practical teaching courses in recent years, "ancient residential architectural culture — visual practice exhibition of Grottoes culture in 2013", "visual practice exhibition of Hui culture in 2014", "2015 practice project of the opera 'twelve

flora", continuous "opera stamp practice project", "Sino-Russian opera painting exhibition in 2015 and 2016", "Dunhuang grotto murals and picture book creation exhibition in 2017", "practical research topic of New Year paintings in 2018" take practice teaching research as an important topic of teaching reform. In addition to completing the teaching requirements of the syllabus, it aims to cultivate students' data collection and artistic expression of traditional culture and cultural relics, and closely follows the 16-character policy of General Secretary Xi Jinping on the protection of cultural relics, that is, to let cultural relics "come alive" in the cultural life of the ordinary people. This is an important instruction.

The innovative means and methods of opera art should be scientific. Teachers should be motivated by teaching research and scientific research, and the relationship between painting and the inheritance, development and dissemination of opera art should be deeply explored, so as to take drama discipline as the noumenon. In recent years, people have explored the contents related to opera art from the perspective of extensive fine arts, and studied opera paintings with oriental aesthetic spirit and artistic height.

## II. EXPLORATION ON THE CHINESE OPERA PAINTING FORM IN SCULPTURE ART

The formation of Mei Lanfang's performance art system can't be separated from the inspiration from Chinese traditional culture and art. According to the investigation, the Guanyin statue of Wanfo cave in Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang is the prototype of Mei Lanfang's creation of goddess of the Luo River, Fuchen

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dance and other opera artistic images. The costume, headdress and horsetail whisk are directly used in stage performance. Unfortunately, the head of the statue was damaged in the war. In the series of activities named "commemorating the 120th anniversary of Mei Lanfang's birth — paying the respect to the master Mei Lanfang", the digital research restoration and digital art expression of Mei Lanfang's prototype of goddess of the Luo River is selected as the theme workshop. From the perspective of opera art and digital art, the formal beauty of Mei school's performance is studied, re-arousing people's attention to Mei Lanfang's idea and method of expressing the temperament and beauty of oriental ladies from the perspective of stage art language and transforming the excellent visual cultural heritage into the formal beauty of performance.

The teaching content of the workshop is digital research-based restoration of the incomplete Luoshen prototype and to lead students to create digital art works with beautiful performance form of Mei school. Students majoring in painting use scanning data to carry out digital carving (restoration and reproduction of original objects of the same size) and multi-form conversion. According to the digital art performance of Mei Lanfang's classic plays, the teacher guides the students to transform the gestures in Mei Lanfang's performance into 53 hand gesture atlas with visual art symbolization and make digital art works. It reflects new media arts department's application of digital language in the spiritual and aesthetic research, teaching and research process of opera culture and art, so as to pay tribute to master Mei Lanfang.

The Avalokitesvara statue of Wanfo cave in Longmen Grottoes plays an important role in Mei Lanfang's creation of the classic shape of goddess of the Luo River. One of the tasks of the workshop is to collect data from Yungang Grottoes and conduct digital scanning of the Avalokitesvara statue. It is planned to use modern digital means to restore the damaged Avalokitesvara statue in the computer. It is necessary to ask Professor Xiao En for technical guidance. In addition, the students are instructed to draw according to the figures of Mei Lanfang's classic plays. These include the color photography of Mei Lanfang's classic plays, the digital painting works derived from the contents or elements of traditional opera, and about 10 sculptures of Mei Lanfang's 53 atlas produced by cooperating with the digital image studio.

The development of new media technology makes the form of painting art more extensive. The change of tools brings about the change of painting types, which makes digital art become a new art and adds more abundant means for the study of opera painting.

### III. EXPLORATION ON THE CHINESE OPERA PAINTING FORM IN ANCIENT MURAL ART

Dunhuang art is a treasury for learning ancient arts such as painting, fresco, sculpture and other majors. According to the professional characteristics of the academy of traditional Chinese opera, people designed the art practice activities of copying Dunhuang murals, recreating Dunhuang murals and designing cultural and creative products with the theme of "performance". Students will combine practical training and workshops to carry out practical teaching activities with different themes, and combine the characteristics of the school to realize a kind of pursuit and exploration of traditional art. Around the cultural heritage, it is to carry out the cultural exploration and make in-depth study of the spread and inheritance of opera culture.

"Mulian saving his mother" is the earliest drama repertoire with textual research. The Dunhuang mural "Mulian Jinglian" is one of the earliest recorded Sutra paintings of "Mulian saving his mother". The students investigated the drama "Mulian saving his mother", compared the image materials in Dunhuang murals, studied and copied them, and linked the historical image research of opera art with the study of plastic arts. Through the study of Dunhuang practice, students love national culture more, build up self-confidence of national culture, and work together for the development and prosperity of national culture. The Chinese culture of Dunhuang has a long history and has been passed down from generation to generation. The cultural confidence of the Chinese nation is derived from the long cultural history. The future cultural confidence is created by young people. It is hoped that people can shoulder this sense of responsibility, do not forget the original intention, and contribute to China's cultural cause.

The activity of cultural special practice is composed of on-campus practice training and off-campus cultural special investigation courses. Animation graduate students take "Dunhuang culture and digital opera" as the creation theme, understand the internal cohesion of Dunhuang murals and digital opera, improve the awareness of innovation and aesthetic appreciation, strengthen the overall improvement of historical and cultural relics, national cultural evolution, intangible cultural heritage development and modern cutting-edge design ideas, and carry out practical inspections and complete works. Students majoring in painting focus on learning and understanding the shape and color rules of Dunhuang frescoes, flexible and free composition rules, magnificent and rich patterns and colorful colors with the same category, and also emphasize the cultivation and training of the ability to sketch from life of traditional buildings and grottoes.

#### IV. EXPLORATION ON THE CHINESE OPERA PAINTING FORM IN WOODBLOCK

New Year paintings flourished in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, precisely with the prosperity of opera art in the unification period. There have a lot of traditional opera performance works handed down from generation to generation in Yangliuqing New Year paintings, which is a rare performance of opera art form that has not been paid attention to. There is a close relationship between the formation of New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas and the cultural atmosphere of whole society at that time. With the popularity of popular novels in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, a large number of materials were provided for operas, such as "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", "Water Margin", "A Dream in Red Mansions", "Romance of the Western Chamber", and other folklore. Dramatists created and adapted a large number of folklore based on these popular novels and folklore, and a kind of opera culture was formed in the society at that time. With the popularity and prosperity of traditional Chinese opera, folk painters gradually introduced the theme of opera into the New Year pictures, which was loved by the ordinary people. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there were many theatrical troupes all over the country. Tianjin Yangliuqing was close to the two big cities of Beijing and Tianjin. The opera performances were rich and colorful, which was an inexhaustible source of creation of New Year pictures.

It can be seen that there are operas first and then New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas. The authors of New Year pictures obtain creative themes from operas. The figures in traditional operas are exaggerated and beautiful. On this basis, the figures in the New Year pictures are exaggerated. A complete story is condensed into a new year picture. The main characters, key plots and typical moments in the opera should be reflected in the pictures. Some New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas will not appear in one scene at the same time in real opera performance, but New Year pictures can. For example, in "Madam White Snake", the movements of the characters in Yangliuqing New Year pictures are mostly influenced by the appearance of the opera classics. Therefore, the opera actions are the reference for the New Year pictures, which make the figures sonorous and powerful, and the posture beautiful, so that the whole picture is fresh and refined, and the characters are more energetic. The teacher of New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas is opera, because opera is the real art. There are a large number of cultural people in the drama, singing, action and music of opera. Artists are creating and researching. Opera is a comprehensive art. It is people's love for opera that makes the New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas popular.

The creative process of the New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas is usually created by skillful folk painters who choose the masterpieces of the famous actors at that time, depict the touching plots and beautiful expressions on the spot, draw them into manuscripts, take them back to the workshop, and print them repeatedly. The new year pictures not only narrate the plot of the opera story, but also describe the colorful characters, clothes, postures and props on the stage. Through learning and copying New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas, students can understand the form and characteristics of this art creation, and develop the expression method of spreading opera art. The students made the study on visual image of Yangliuqing New Year pictures. The contents of the exhibition included costumes, props, scenes and other distinctive New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas, as well as creative practice works according to the modeling characteristics of New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas. Before departure, it is necessary to collect data in advance. According to the characteristics of the sketch, students can look for works of New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas, sort out the theoretical text content, and understand the historical development and artistic characteristics of Yangliuqing New Year painting. According to the operation steps of traditional artists' teaching New Year pictures, students copy them according to the requirements. The contents should select works with distinctive opera features, costumes and props, complete composition, faithful colors, details, unified style, rich colors and changes. It is required to explore the relationship between traditional Chinese opera art and Chinese traditional plastic arts through multi-media and multi-material art forms. The creative forms and application methods of traditional plastic arts can be understood from the opera archives of folk arts, which expands the new media arts department's research scope of visual cultural resources, and develops the expression methods of spreading opera art.

#### V. EXPLORATION ON THE CHINESE OPERA PAINTING FORMS IN OTHER FOLK ARTS

##### A. New Year pictures

The scenes, props and facial makeup in New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas are basically the same as those in opera. For example, a table, two chairs and a curtain make up a complete set and props. A wheel drawn on two pieces of cloth is a car. There are also some new year pictures of historical stories, which have real mountains and rivers, but the faces of the characters are opera faces, which should also be classified as New Year pictures of traditional Chinese operas.

The figures in the New Year pictures of traditional Chinese opera are exaggerated, and the costumes are in the style of opera costumes, but the clothing patterns are not realistic. The figures' body shapes and clothing patterns drawn from life or photos are not vivid in Yangliuqing paintings.

Most of the characters in the New Year pictures of traditional Chinese opera use the facial makeup of the opera. The personalities of Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo and Cho are distinct and they are also popular among the people.

The New Year pictures in various forms are pasted at home and become a part of home decoration, which is opposite face to face day and night throughout the year. Adults have nothing to do. They raise their eyes to appreciate and reflect on the success and failure of the characters from ancient times to the present, and express their feelings of "drama being like life, life being like a play"; or they tell children about the drama in the painting, so that children can understand the history and culture of the nation, and learn the truth of being a man and the lesson of ethics. New Year pictures of traditional Chinese opera not only decorates life, but also causes people to reflect on life.

The types of the New Year pictures of traditional Chinese opera are as follows: the stage as the background, the multi-sound scene, the natural scene, the screen form. It can also be divided into Wenxi (Chinese operas characterized by singing and acting), Wuxi (Chinese operas characterized by military play) and so on. In the students' graduation creation, they studied and created the New Year pictures of Zhuxian Town. As the originator of New Year pictures, Woodblock New Year pictures of Zhuxian Town are known as one of the four major new year pictures in China. Their characteristics are also very distinctive. They are different from other New Year pictures in terms of lines and colors. With the change of time, the New Year pictures of Zhuxian Town gradually fade out of people's vision. In 2006, the Woodblock New Year pictures of Zhuxian Town were listed in the national intangible cultural heritage list. By drawing lessons from the color of the New Year pictures of Zhuxian Town, the color configuration and reorganization are carried out in the computer painting software according to the needs of the picture, and a series of illustrations of the opera stories "Magic Warriors" are created. The creative intention of this traditional illustration style is to make the traditional color art reappear in people's vision.

### B. Paper cuttings

Opera paper cutting is a highlight of traditional folk paper cuttings. In the art of traditional Chinese opera paper cuttings, most of its modeling pays attention to the performance of the image gallery, and is good at

cutting out the thin shadow lines in the images. The details of the shadow lines make the image structure and the picture rhythm just right. The opera paper cutting of window decoration is a unique skill in Zhejiang Province. The appearance of paper cutting is mostly the old-fashioned patterns saved by women when they are girls. Some smart girls and daughters-in-law can either make their own samples or cut them themselves. Even after watching the opera, they can cut out a complete set of plays. Zhejiang opera paper cutting of window decoration is good at taking typical plot scenes, and fully reflects the beauty of the characters. Different from the simple character paper cutting, Zhejiang opera paper cutting usually chooses the background suitable for the plot, showing the unique artistic language advantage of paper cutting art. The opera window decorations in Jinhua area not only pay attention to the characterization of opera characters, but also pay attention to the scene performance of the drama. The stylized characteristics of Chinese opera performance can be displayed by the skillful hands of girls and daughters-in-law, which can not only enhance the authenticity of the story, but also make the picture more expressive. Cheng Zheng, a professor of Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, describes the window decorations of Jinhua opera in his book "Complete works of Chinese folk art · paper cutting": "window decorations are rare in southern China, but they are very popular in Pujiang and other areas in central Zhejiang Province. The traditional paper cutting in this area maintains a high level of art, and the most prominent type is opera characters. The themes are taken from local operas and historical stories such as Wu Opera and Yue opera. Different from the paper cutting figures in northern China and Chaozhou in the south, the paper cutting figures in central Zhejiang are all integrated into the vivid scenes, and they are in the scenery environment composed of trees, houses, boats, bridges, railings, furniture, etc., and have a strong sense of painting." Because of the scene description and being matched with the drama, the paper cutting art is more expressive and appealing.<sup>1</sup> The students have carried out art practice in Yangzhou, learned the basic techniques of traditional opera paper cuttings, and carried out the paper cuttings creation of opera characters.

### C. Shadow puppets

Shadow puppets are an ancient local traditional art. It is a popular puppet play. Qin-long culture is the product of the combination of ancient Taoism and shadow puppet. It is said that in the Song Dynasty, the shadow puppets were commonly known as "Dengying opera", "little drama" and "Laodaoqing". During the development of thousands of years, it used the means of

<sup>1</sup> <https://zj.zjol.com.cn/qihanghao/100042087.html>

"borrowing lights, passing shadows and making sound to play the story", "collecting the essence of Chinese shadow puppets, picking out the essence of the local folk art", integrating the music, art and oral literature among the people. Then, it has become a comprehensive art for local people to express their feelings, enrich their cultural life, and undertake the customs of offering sacrifices, passing customs, vowing vows and celebrating festivals. Huanxian Daoqing shadow puppet is a combination of Daoqing and shadow puppet, which has a history of thousands of years. Through the vicissitudes of life, the unique Daoqing shadow play in Huanxian county has been formed. Through the reform and innovation of Xie Changchun, "Daoqing shadow puppet master" and other generations of people in the late Qing Dynasty, it was more perfect. It is closely integrated with the customs and beliefs of the local people, forming the current situation of its distribution in Huanxian County, extending to surrounding Huachi, Qingcheng, Yanchi of Ningxia, Dingbian and other counties of Shaanxi. Its value is mainly reflected in the beautiful and unique Daoqing music singing and exquisite shadow puppet production and performance. During the performance of the troupe, one person at the front stage performs with a pole, and takes on all the singing and reciting of the roles, accompanied by four or five people in the backstage. And one singer is in harmony with others, which is rough and sonorous with unique style. Daoqing music is fine-tuning, which is divided into "shangyin" and "huayin". It is sung at two speeds of tanban and Feiban. Qupai style and plate style coexist. The four strings, drum, clapper and board are all self-made with unique timbre. Among the more than 180 plays, there are still some ancient cultural symbols such as "picture" and "volume". There are thousands of original shadow puppets of Qing Dynasty in the collection and folk circulation. They have wonderful conception, exquisite carving and high artistic and research value.<sup>2</sup>

According to the characteristics of shadow play and its application in creation, the students of this department draw lessons from the shadow play of Houma in Shanxi for the artistic modeling of 12 characters in their work "A Dream in Red Mansions". Shadow play transforms the characters from space to plane, simplifies many details of the characters, breaks the normal proportion of human body in modeling, enlarges the ratio of head to body about 1:5, and highlights Mu Guiying's head. There are exaggerated facial expression and the characteristics of shadow puppet facial makeup. For example, Mu Guiying's face is mainly simplified, with exaggerated eyes, eyebrows, nose and mouth. Most of Houma's body clothes are red, yellow, blue, white, black, purple, green light. Most of

Mu Guiying's body is red, and a small part is decorated with green. The dress pattern is simplified into hollow pattern. The head wear of the characters is roughly unified and closely matched. However, Mu Guiying's five fingers are changed into the shape of only hands. In this way, the artistic treatment of shadow puppetry is available. The composition of shadow play has both scatter perspective and been beyond scatter perspective. By using the method of decorative painting and generalization, a shadow figure with a full-scale and half-side and five-point figure shows both hierarchical and three-dimensional feeling, just like the Chinese freehand brushwork, which does not seek to be similar in shape and intriguing.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The spread of opera art is inseparable from art, and the history of opera painting is inseparable from the development of opera art. From the perspective of fine arts, it is of great significance to excavate the art forms of traditional Chinese opera and to find the source of opera art from Chinese cultural heritage. Also, it is of great significance for inheriting the cause of opera, promoting national culture and strengthening cultural confidence. Opera is not only a performing art, but its development is closely connected with visual art. Combining traditional opera painting form with modern media and transforming it into artistic form and creative product that can be accepted by modern people is an excellent way to continue the vitality of opera art. It has a wide range of topics for research and in-depth excavation of content.

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