

The Application of Traditional Beijing Opera Artistic Elements in the Narrative of Modern Dining Space —Taking *Havoc in Heaven* as an Example

Wenrui Li

The Glasgow school of Art, 167 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G3 6RQ
 Email: iris_lwr@163.com

ABSTRACT

Beijing Opera, a significant representation of traditional Chinese culture, its artistic elements have been employed as a symbol of the classic culture all along. As of today, as Beijing Opera is somewhat detached both from the times and the entire young generation however, the quintessence of this national treasure is progressively going into decline. What merits attention is the critical role it plays in inheriting Chinese national culture can be overlooked by no means. With respect to space, a concrete vehicle for bearing culture, it becomes a field where people receive and disseminate information. This leads to the question on how to apply elements of Beijing Opera to space design so that more people can have in-depth understanding of Chinese traditional culture of this kind, which will be conducive to promoting its inheritance, further development and wide acceptance. Question of such kind shall be addressed at the time being. In view of the above fact, this research, by selecting and deconstructing the facial make-ups in Beijing Opera, proposes to apply them to the design of Beijing Opera-themed dining space. A brand-new way as it is, such method can integrate the Opera into people's daily life, whereas diners can be a better place for people to receive and disseminate information. And therefore, incorporating the themes of Beijing Opera and storylines of certain Peking Opera works to the design of dining space can render more people understand Chinese traditional culture, thereby enhancing the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

Keywords: *traditional culture; Beijing Opera facial make-ups; dining space; Narrative*

1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst the diversified forms of entertainment of nowadays, Beijing Opera is confronting a situation where it is gradually being forgotten. Art is ever-changing, while traditional culture cannot be stagnant neither, in terms of Beijing Opera, the culture necessitates to explore its own way of inheritance to keep abreast with the development of the times. In other words, finding out its own social positioning among the currents of diversified art forms merits close attention. Research on the development of Beijing opera has revealed that exceeding 70% of the post-90s have never been to the theater to watch Beijing opera, while over 90% of them have merely learned about Beijing Opera via TV. Phenomenon of such kind explicitly indicates that the culture is progressively passing away from our daily lives. Moreover, 80% of the ancient theatres in Beijing have been deprived of their original function and become tenement yard or even warehouses. It is safe to predict

that in the time to come, there will be fewer and fewer people watch Beijing Opera, unless it can re-emerge in a disguise of new form and bring a distinct visual experience to the new generation of young people.

On the other side, as a city renowned for its rich culture, Beijing's dining space showcases the city's culture and the habits of its residents. From this perspective, this research attempts to combine the traditional Chinese culture of Beijing Opera with the design of dining space so as to evoke people's memories of the city. In the actual practice of the design, the historical culture and modern design style have converged, hailing the harmonious coexistence of the old and the new. Hopefully in the near future, the restaurant space will lend a new channel to propagate Beijing Opera so that more people will glimpse and accept the quintessence of this national culture. Starting with Chinese traditional culture of Beijing Opera, this research has deconstructed its facial make-ups via extracting the

artistic elements and applied them to the space design.

2. TRADITIONAL BEIJING OPERA

Beijing Opera, also renowned as Ping Opera and Jing Opera, is the most influential opera genre in China with its distribution centered in Beijing and spreading throughout the country. ^[2] Taking historical stories as its focal point, Beijing Opera includes over 1,300 traditional plays, among which exceeding 300 or 400 are performed frequently, and majority of them are derived from historical stories and novels. Without any doubt, everything on the stage of Beijing Opera is highly connotative and symbolic, which does not necessarily appear in strict accordance with the genuine appearance of them in life, while roles on the stage do not appear as they are in real life, but are exaggerated artistically in terms of makeup and costume as per their gender, character, age, occupation, and social status etc. And thereby such efforts categories the roles on stage into four types, namely, Sheng, Dan, Jing, and Chou, the technical term of which is called “Hangdang”. ^[4] Beijing Opera as a highly comprehensive national art, its facial make-ups are one of the key features for performance and an indispensably representative element. ^[5] Colors and patterns are the two most essential elements of the facial make-ups. With its stark contrast in color, rich styles and exquisite expressions, Beijing Opera facial make-ups stand for unique personality and aesthetic value that are always appealing to audience at the very first sight and is the first and foremost clues for the audience to understand and follow up the storyline. ^[13]



Figure 1. Sheng, Dan, Jing and Chou in Beijing Opera (Images obtained from online)

2.1. Colors of Beijing Opera Facial Make-ups

Facial make-ups of Beijing Opera are mostly determined by the gender, personality and temperament of the characters. The color of red suggests positive connotation, such as loyalty and courage; black is the color of neutral, revealing fierceness and wisdom; blue and green are also neutral, representing reckless heroes; yellow and white imply the derogatory meaning, showcasing fierceness and viciousness; while golden and silver face are used on the face of immortals, demons and monsters. And thus, the seven colors of red, white, blue, yellow, black, purple and green are deemed as “dominant colors” (Figure 2), while the others are called “matching colors”. In addition, the colors of Beijing Opera facial make-ups, bright and saturated, are extremely stylized by

stark contrast of hues. By and large, color and pattern are the two most critical, holistic and artistic features in the Beijing Opera facial make-ups. Pattern is the vehicle of color, whereas the color is demonstrated via the pattern, both of which are endowed with unique characteristics and aesthetic value. The painting approaches of Beijing Opera facial make-ups are generally divided into three categories: rubbing face, wiping face, and hooking face. The initial function of facial make-ups is merely to exaggerate the character’s countenance and facial texture, and to magnify the personality, psychological and physical attributes of characters in order to serve the plot of the entire play. ^[12] Yet the development course of this artistic representation, using human faces as a means of expression, has witnessed a series of changes, i.e., from simple to complex, from coarse to fine etc., and become a form of art itself with ethnic flavors.



Figure 2. The dominant colors of Beijing Opera facial make-ups (Images obtained from online)

2.2. Patterns of Beijing Opera Facial Make-ups

Beijing Opera facial make-ups are closely intertwined with traditional Chinese folk arts and crafts. Most of the employed features come from folklore and folk customs, some of which are directly from mature patterns and textures that are bearing with the sense of national identity. Ensuing the stage processing and fusion, the forms of facial make-ups were gradually finalized. Beijing Opera facial make-ups originated from totems, whose elements are made by deforming traditional Chinese patterns with exaggerated artistic techniques, including the outlined bat shapes, swallow wings, butterfly wings, sparks, clouds, golden beads, longevity character of different patterns, etc. (Figure 3). ^[11] Following the extraction in the abstract manner, those pictorial pattern and styles were further simplified for painting, to name just a few typical ones, gods, Buddhas, monks and Taoists with magical power are painted with flames, clouds, seven stars, bats, Tai Chi diagrams etc. Tai Chi diagram, in the facial make-ups culture, represents divine ability and clever strategy of the character; the pattern of cloud stands for blessing from heaven and symbolizes infinite happiness (Figure 4); while the golden bead is deemed as a kind of Buddha bead to avoid fire, meaning a prayer to avoid evil and disaster and to embrace good luck.



Figure 3. Patterns of Beijing Opera facial make-ups
(Images obtained from online)



Figure 4. Patterns of clouds of Beijing Opera facial make-ups (Images obtained from online)

2.3. Narrative Structure and Criticism in Beijing Opera

Beijing Opera unfolds the development of the storyline via different spatial scenes, which implies strong narrative structures. The change of the Opera stage background suggests the developing of the story, while different stories all reflect, insinuate or criticize the reality by all means. *Great Sage Equaling Heaven*, a famous opera, indicates the acute conflict and struggle

between the oppressor and the downtrodden in the form of a myth. The writer of the opera, with ardent enthusiasm, extols Sun Wukong's rebellion against the Heaven Court, his character of opposing bondage, demanding freedom, defying tradition, denying the authority, daring and afraid of nothing.¹¹ On the strength of such a character, the writer criticizes the social status quo of feudal authoritarianism through the narrative plot of the story.

2.3.1. Feudal Authoritarianism

From the perspective of the general public, Sun Wukong's havoc in heaven is a manifestation of rebellion, and his actions is indisputably justified. When Sun Wukong, the monkey was just born out of the hard stone, he was nothing but free. As a divine monkey, he was endowed with the ability to defeat the demons. And he also got a very powerful weapon, the Golden Cudgel. The monkey friends persuaded him to seek a position in the Heaven. The Jade Emperor put fine timber to petty use, naming Sun Wukong a nominal yet unsubstantial title of Great Sage Equaling Heaven and dispatching him to work as "Protector of the Horse", i.e., a stable-boy. All of the above exposed the arrogance, tyranny, brutality and incompetency of Jade Emperor, the Dragon King, the other gods and generals, which also criticizes the image of the feudal emperor on earth, and vice versa.

2.3.2. Class Struggle

The Royal Banquet serves as a turning point and the climax of the whole storyline, which depicts the story of the birthday banquet of the Queen Mother. Many gods and inviting many gods and goddesses were invited, but he was excluded from invitation. The Monkey King inquired the heavenly maidens who were sent to pluck peaches for Royal Banquet, and found out only gods and goddesses with lower official positions were not invited. Following knowing the fact, he roams Heaven, upon which the Jade Emperor was so scared that he fled from the throne. The vivid depiction of the plot assails the incompetence and cowardice of the ruler, and alludes to the traditional feudal hierarchy, and the struggle between the oppressor and the downtrodden in the actual society.

This research selected the story of Queen Mother's Royal Banquet and applied it to the restaurant design, the reasons of such strategy are as follows: firstly, the climax of the storyline is retained; moreover, the Royal Banquet itself also embodies the dining space, in which the Monkey King transfers from a guard looking after the peach garden, and roaming the Heaven, to a convert of Buddhism, this narrative as matter of fact, corresponds to the spatial structure, and thereby the two are perfectly fused; secondly, the traditional Chinese culture, represented by this story, is integrated into the modern design. At the time of preserving the traditional theater, the performance space is also well combined with the

dining space, which forgoes the traditional Chinese hierarchy under feudal authoritarianism that the imperial aristocracy enjoys privileges. Such endeavors have render people appreciate the culture of Beijing Opera in this space and even interact with the performers.

3. THE COMBINATION OF BEIJING OPERA FACIAL MAKE-UPS AND DINING SPACE

This research designs a Beijing Opera themed artistic restaurant based on the culture of Beijing Opera facial make-ups. It is in fact, an imitation and replication of the culture of havoc in heaven, exerting the restaurant a space available for performance so that audience can also be a part and parcel of the space. The features of the Beijing Opera facial make-ups themed artistic restaurant are the integration of the performance space, the viewing space, the performers and customers, highlight the process of participation and fusion. The artistic symbols of Beijing Opera are visualized and given full play in the space design, so that the visual symbols of the interior space become a continuation of the historical traditional culture, combining the traditional opera stage with modern design.^[7] The ingenious efforts integrates and echoes with each other, contributing a new vibrant life to the deserted opera stage and the space as well.

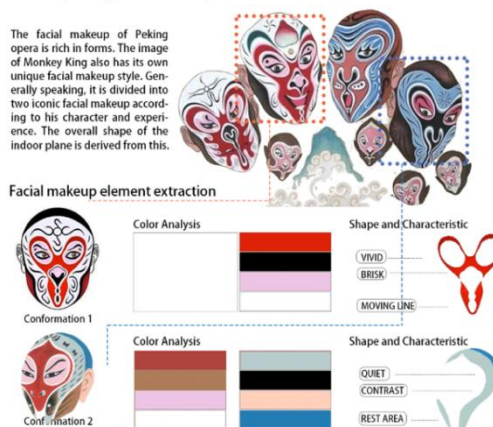
3.1. The Relationship between the Art of Facial Make-ups and Structure of Dinning Space

The famous architect Robert Venturi proposed the notion of “less is a bore”, arguing that ornaments merely “satisfy the existing needs for variety and communication” and no more. He suggests that spatial design should incorporate historical elements and distinctive colors to form a unique spatial structure.^[9] As to the cloud patterns in the Beijing Opera facial make-ups, they are part and parcel of the traditional Chinese auspicious patterns and playing a key role in traditional Chinese interior design, whether they are decoration on the beams, pillars, doors, windows, carpets or other fabrics. In other words, the cloud patterns can be applied to add extra decorative and aesthetic flavors. This paper selects the features of cloud patterns and applies them to the roof design of the space. Likewise, color is another indispensable factors in interior design, conveying a tint of aesthetics, expressing and highlighting the vibe of interior space.^[6] For instance, the stark color contrast between red and blue in the Beijing Opera facial make-up of Sun Wukong exercise an overwhelming visual impact. Pertinent psychological impact and physiological impacts may be exerted onto audience via their perception and impression to the facial make-ups.

3.2. The Combination of Color Contrast and Space Structure

As aforementioned, color is one of the most crucial factors in the dining space, for it can not only express the theme of the restaurant, also light up its vibe. Specifically speaking, the color of green and red are originated from wood and fire respectively, which are closer to the people’s daily lives. As a result, the two kinds of color are widely used to set a warm and intense mood for festivals and ceremonies.^[14] On the other side, the red and blue color in the Beijing Opera facial make-ups of Sun Wukong is aligned with the design style and tone of the dining space (Figure 5). This explains why those colors are selected as two main colors of interior decoration. As it is known to all, the design of the dining space should be featured by lively and bold forms, and bright colors to light up the atmosphere. The color change from red to blue in the facial make-ups also exerts a sense of visual impact, and prepares itself for the selection of the space design elements afterwards. In Beijing opera, there is a standard for judging the personalities of characters, such as “from the red and the blue on can distinguish good from evil, while from the black and the white one can tell the loyalty from treachery”. Regarding the case of the red color on the Monkey King’s facial make-ups, it delineates his brave and aggressive image as a martial artist, and therefore, the red color is used in the design of the performance space. Whereas the blue color is employed in the design of the dining table, representing Monkey King’s conversion to Buddhism and becoming calm and level-headed, and blue lines of the pattern also changes from curves to smoothness.

Monkey King Facial Analysis



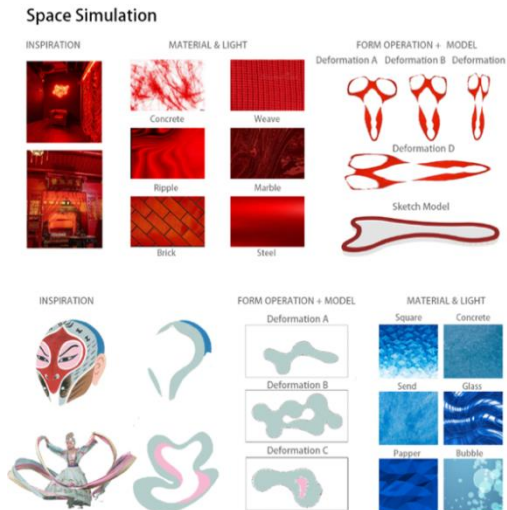


Figure 5. Color contrast of the facial make-ups of the character Sun Wukong

3.3. Application of Patterns in Spatial Structure

Patterns of Beijing Opera facial make-ups, easy to understand and profound in connotations, are widely applied in both spatial design and interior design of furnishings. Beijing Opera facial make-ups, in essence, is an abstract figure with a strong sense of form by employing the arrangement and combination of dots, lines and surfaces, and thus, it is highly symbolic.

As for the modeling, dots have spatiality, shape, position and size as well, but not the connectivity and orientation. The temperament of the dot can be reflected by means of spatiality, connectivity and contrast, which entails a sense of space in the front and rear levels, i.e., the near is large while the far is small. Regarding the line in space, it is a metaphor for liberalization and individuality, while space is based on vision, following the interlacing, transmission and interaction of objects to entails a sense of flow. In view of the above philosophy, the use of lines in the design of space modeling is ready to attract people's vision to forward, enhancing the vividness of the space thereof, and enriching the decorative effect while maintaining the relationship between the light and the dark. With respect to the surface, the bright and stable sense of order as it is, surface takes up the most area in the space design, arousing an overwhelming feeling within people than dots and lines.

The local elements of Beijing Opera facial make-ups are integrated into those dots, lines and surfaces of the space to express the traditional elements with modern design concept, which is a diversified combination of symbolic elements, materials and technology. The art of Beijing Opera facial make-ups contains both the interconnection between each different design patterns of the facial make-ups and its symbolic meaning of the color. From this perspective, the dining space of the restaurant with the theme of Beijing Opera facial make-ups should also express both rigorous and natural tone, emphasizing

the artificial architectural elements without lacking displaying the artistic facade of Beijing Opera face painting. By doing so, it can satisfy people's spiritual and psychological demands needs from a higher level and promote traditional culture at one and the same time.

3.4. The Integration of Narrative Plot and Spatial Design

The plot of havoc in Heaven is all the more classic in the Monkey King of Beijing Opera, for it highlights the heroic and rebellious spirit of the figure, because of which it becomes the core philosophy of the design. (Figure 6) This diagram analyzes the storyline in a detail of the Beijing Opera *Havoc in Heaven* and the lifestory of the protagonist, Sun Wukong, the Monkey King. Born from a stone, he is a divine monkey with ample skills; and early as he is in youth, the Monkey King becomes the so-called Great Sage Equaling Heaven who does nothing but punishing evil and promoting good. Albeit a courageous hero, he eventually converts to Buddhism and become an immortal. The ups and downs of Monkey King's life draws inspiration for the spatial design afterwards. At the climax of the story, Sun Wukong roams the Royal Banquet, in other words, the whole story scene is unfolded on the dining table, which becomes unremitting inspiration for the design of the dining table in the following. As the story develops, Sun Wukong is locked into Laozi's eight-way trigram Crucible in order to be distilled-down, yet the Monkey King not only survives also gets reinforced with golden-gaze fiery-eyes, which also explains the golden bead pattern in the Beijing Opera facial make-ups, i.e., it simply derives from the narrative plot. Apart from examining the color and material of Sun Wukong, the character's facial make-ups, this research also draws inspirations from the decoration of classical architecture to establish a sense of opposition and conflict in the spatial design; moreover, the combination of the color of the scorching flame and the metal material generates a new spatial model that suggesting the classic plots of the golden-gaze fiery-eyes and the discernment of right and wrong.

Analysis of the plot of Havoc in Tiangong

Rape in the Heavenly Palace is a classic plot in the Peking Opera Monkey King, highlighting the heroic and rebellious spirit of Monkey King, which is also the core of the design.

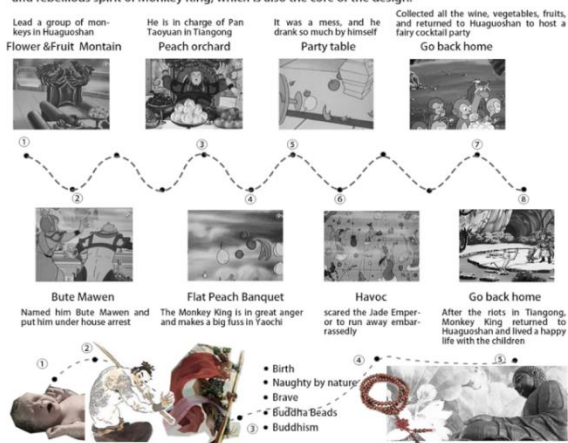


Figure 6. Analysis on the narrative plot of havoc in heaven

4. THE APPLICATION OF BEIJING OPERA FACIAL MAKE-UPS IN DINING SPACE DESIGN

4.1. Composition of the Dining Space

The dining space is composed of three partitions, namely, indoor dining space, performance space and transition space. The dining space is in fact, a renovation of the ancient theater, which is built themed on the theater space. ^[10] In order to attract visitors and satisfy customers' curiosity and pining for the past, the restaurant retains the original wall appearance and column structure and restores the dining environment of the Royal Banquet in accordance with the narrative plot in the Beijing king Opera *Havoc in Heaven*.

The red dining table on the left side is shaped as per the shape of the Monkey King's face, which stresses the personality of the character. The main red color suggests the bravery and militant. The cyan area at the bottom is the performer's space, which is partially overlapping with the dining area, thus it brings the performer and the diner closer, making the diner immersed in the Beijing Opera performance and enhancing the interactivity of the space. (Figure 7) While on the right side, the single-story ancient theater stage preserved is built on a pedestal with a height of about one meter and a three-sided view from the opening angle. In ancient times, the stage was generally used three times a year, i.e., three plays were performed a year. One was in February for the Flower Festival; one was in April for the birthday of the old official; and another was in August for the Harvest Play. ^[8] Upon the time of performance, the surrounding people will come, some were just for watching the play, while some others were watching while dining. It was very crowded, and the restaurant was full every day. Therefore, similar ancient theater is set up here, appealing the attention of crowd

with the dining space, also attracting those who want to watch play. Such design further enhances the atmosphere of traditional Beijing Opera culture in no small degree.



Figure 7. Planar graph

4.2. Decorative Structure of the Roof

The design of the roof has considered the consistency and continuity with the contemporaneous environment, the application and translation of historical events. ^[3] In this research, the patterns of artistic features of auspicious clouds, golden pearls and longevity peaches etc. (Figure 8) are applied in the design of the roof of the space with reference to the dots, lines and surfaces of Beijing Opera facial make-ups. First of all, the large area of pink color and shape are extracted from the peach, which has metaphorical implication in the story of Beijing Opera. Peaches are narrow at the top and wide at the bottom, rendering people unable to see their whole silhouette provided that they stand upright. In light of such fact, the design does its utmost for humanistic care, taking into account the design theory of ergonomics. Specifically speaking, the direction of all peaches is adjusted to face downward to ensure better ornamental effect. Secondly, the height of the abstracted peaches ranges from 400mm to 900mm, as per the changes of their light and shade, they are subject to the artistic abstraction. As a result, they are akin to the real peaches in proportion, yet they will not hinder the view. At one and the same time, performance in the scene of heaven is one of focal points in Beijing Opera *Great Sage Equaling Heaven*. The clouds is a common element in traditional Beijing Opera, facial make-ups and costumes, and also a representative feature referring to the sky. The vertical blue platforms are the result of changes in the form of the auspicious clouds and referring to the sky as well. When performing on the stage, these blue platforms can be used to assist the high-altitude performance. The size of the auspicious

clouds tends to be small at the bottom while large at the top, which is more than a simulation of natural clouds, but for ergonomic considerations, to decrease the possibility of hindering the customer's sight. (Figure 9)

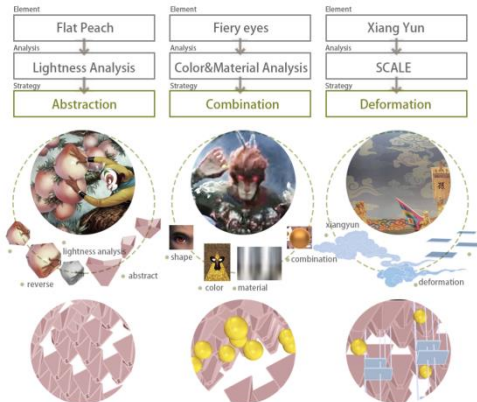


Figure 8. Element extraction for the ornament of the roof

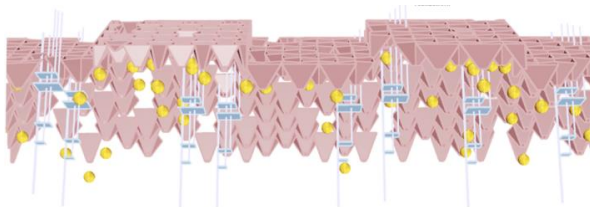


Figure 9. The design of the roof

4.3. Functional Partition

The entire space is divided into three functional areas (Figure 10), namely, the performance area, the exhibition area and the dining area. The performance area preserves both the traditional Beijing Opera performance form and the historical building of the traditional stage so that it maximizes its function and integrates the old with the new; simultaneously, diners can watch the Opera performance from a distance and experience the traditional culture. As to the design of exhibition area, by and large it aims to emphasize the storyline of the famous work of *Havoc in Heaven* by means of constructing a roof akin to that of the Heavenly Peach Garden, leaving visitors an impression of being in such a surreal area. In addition, the decoration of those typical clouds is applied in this space following their artistic deformation. Such efforts not only enhance the aesthetic attributes also unfold the storyline in a more intuitive manner. Regarding the dining area, it is a dining environment of modern style, the shape of whose dining table is designed in accordance with the heart-shaped face pattern of Sun Wukong. On the other side, the inner dining area is reserved for the performers to perform, whereas the outer area is a normal dining space; such arrangement promotes the interaction between the diner and the performer, not to mention its contribution of redefining the “spatial environment” and “traditional performance style”, rather than confining to the ordinary form of “performers on

stage while audience in auditorium” or “dining at the four-person square table”. The confluence of modern design techniques and traditional culture has increased the interactivity of the space in no small degree.



Figure 10. Functional partition

4.4. The Final Results

The final rendering adopts materials of Chinese style, retaining the exterior appearance of traditional buildings as well as the opera stage, which will make customers immersed in the intense artistic vibe of Beijing Opera. The green bricks and red pillars, with striking and mature colors and decorative materials mainly made of wood, it pursues a sense of metaphorical and historical state (Figure 11). The interior part, on the other hand, adopts exaggerated modelling design and distinctive color (Figure 12), transforming the traditional structural forms into a new design of another symbol of national characteristics. By doing so, the spatial layout and practical function are both taken into account.



Figure 11. Design sketch 1

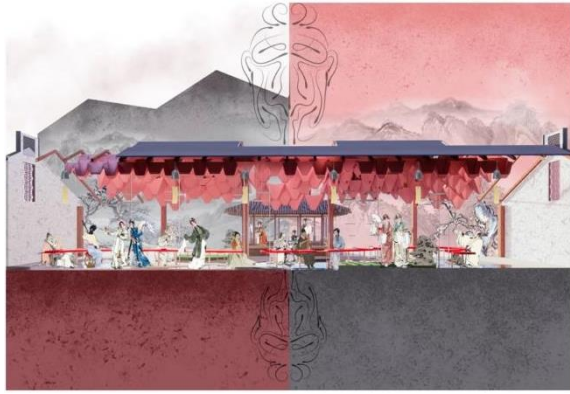


Figure 12. Design sketch 2

5. CONCLUSION

The research on the art of Beijing Opera has a long history, nevertheless, majority of researchers inherit the form of such national treasure and develop or incorporate its features into modern decorative design discourse or modern design application. What merits attention is that the national and ethnic design concept shall be of paramount importance. While in actual application of design in terms of the Beijing Opera facial make-ups is anything but a sheer superposition, but to take a figurative or abstract treatment for the style, color and patterns of the facial make-ups. Via extracting the special artistic elements and symbols embodied in the Beijing Opera facial make-ups, it can be fused in the modern design field. Endeavors of this kind can highlight the integration of the old and the new. By analyzing the examples of applications in this regard, this research explores the combination of tradition and modernity, and makes innovates in the national traditional space in this new era, which has shed some light on the actual practice.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ding Jin, Research on the Design of Sichuan Opera Facial Makeup Exhibition Space, 2020.
- [2] Gee, J. A book of Chinese opera masks. Osoyoos, B.C.: Steam RR/Chingee Publications. 1990.
- [3] Guan Yezhen; Chinese Ancient Architecture and Art[M], Hu Zhen/Yu Shanshan (translated), China Pictorial Publishing House, 2017.
- [4] Halson, E. Peking opera. Hongkong: Oxford Univ. Press. 1982.
- [5] He Miao, Research on the Postmodernism Expression Method of Chinese Traditional Architectural Decoration Art.
- [6] Li Jingxin, The Application of Chinese Peking Opera Elements in Modern Art Design, Art and Design Theory, 11. 2016.
- [7] Li Hui, Application of Folk Decoration Elements in Modern Interior Design, 12, 2010.
- [8] Liu zeng fu, Jing ju lian pu yi gai. Bei jing: chinese book store. 2006.
- [9] Jencks, C. The language of post-modern architecture. London: Academy Editions. 1991.
- [10] Wang Xiaolu, Research on the Application of Peking Opera Masks in the Design of Dining Space, 04, 2015.
- [11] Wei Jie, study on the language of facial makeups of Peking opera in modern decoration design, 12,2009.
- [12] Wu Guixiang, "The Application of Traditional Design Elements in Modern Design", 2009.
- [13] Yue Jin, Talking about the Application of Chinese Peking Opera Elements in Art Design, Art Education, 2018.
- [14] Zheng Chongyang, Discussion on the Application of Peking Opera Elements in Modern Art Design, Modern Enterprise Education, 04.2014.