

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FACE CHANGING IN SICHUAN OPERA

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to study the development of face changing in Sichuan opera. This method includes recording, observation, and interviews. Research has found that it is possible to further understand the early historical background, legends, and records of facial change technology, facial change technology in the Qing Dynasty, the development of facial change during the Republic of China period, facial change technology after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the artistic characteristics of facial change in Sichuan opera, facial change music in Sichuan opera, facial changes on the theatrical stage, facial changes in scripts, and the significance of facial color changes. As a local opera, Sichuan Opera gradually formed a unique artistic style and expression form. The technique of changing faces began to receive attention during this period and gradually evolved into one of the core features of Sichuan Opera. The face changing technique in Sichuan opera was mainly applied during this stage to enhance the expressive power and aesthetic value of the drama, laying the foundation for its later development. In understanding the development of Sichuan opera face changing, learn how to better present Sichuan opera face changing on stage, and how to better promote and develop it.

Keywords: Sichuan Opera Face Changing, Development of Sichuan Opera

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INTRODUCTION

There is no unified historical record of the origin of face changing in Sichuan opera, but many scholars believe that the emergence of face changing techniques is closely related to the formation of Sichuan opera. Sichuan Opera originated in the Sichuan region during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It integrated many local elements into local opera and gradually developed into a unique form of expression. The technique of changing faces may have originated from folk opera, acrobatic performances, and traditional mask plays in Sichuan province. Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period. In a period of cultural integration and flourishing development of local art. Sichuan opera face changing originated from the folk art tradition and mysterious martial arts inheritance of ancient Sichuan region. This core skill is characterized by unique facial changes. In addition, many veteran artists in the Sichuan opera industry continue to innovate and enrich their performance forms. In the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, under the social turmoil and changes, Sichuan opera art still adhered to the inheritance among the people. In order to attract audiences, folk clubs constantly polish their facial changing techniques to make them more exquisite and magical. At the same time, the admiration of local cultural elites and gentry for Sichuan opera has prompted theater troupes to invest more in and improve performance venues, props and costumes. For example, some wealthy gentry funded the construction of more exquisite stages, providing a better display platform for Sichuan Opera's face changing performances. In addition, local cultural institutions have gradually attached importance to the organization and protection of Sichuan opera art, recording some mnemonics and performance standards for face changing techniques. Similarly, the style and artistic pursuit of renowned Sichuan opera masters have deeply influenced the development trend of Sichuan opera face changing. Their unique performance charm injects soul into this skill, making it the most iconic and mysterious classic element in Sichuan opera art, shining a unique light on the stage of Sichuan opera and even the whole country.

The technique of changing faces has gradually differentiated into multiple schools and techniques, such as:

Paper method: By quickly replacing the paper or cloth in the actor's hand, the changes in the character's face are portrayed.

Face turning technique: Actors use special techniques to quickly change their masks or facial expressions, which is extremely fast and difficult for the audience to detect. (Wang Wei,2020)

The peak of face changing in Sichuan opera (early to mid-20th century)

In the 20th century, the art of face changing in Sichuan opera reached its peak. During this period, face changing in Sichuan opera not only became a signature art form of Sichuan opera performance, but its techniques were constantly interpreted and innovated, attracting more audiences. The technique of changing faces is becoming increasingly sophisticated, and performances are becoming more refined and complex. Famous masters of face changing in Sichuan opera, such as Zhang Fei and Li Jun, made significant contributions to the art of face changing during this period. They not only perfected the techniques of face changing, but also closely integrated it with the plot and character portrayal of Sichuan opera, further enriching the expressive power of face changing in Sichuan opera.

Modernization and Innovation (late 20th century present)

From the end of the 20th century to the present day, Sichuan Opera's face changing not only retains traditional artistic features, but also combines innovative elements such as modern stage technology, light and shadow effects, and sound music to make the face changing performance even more stunning. Modern face changing performances usually focus more on visual effects and emotional expression, enhancing the audience's immersion through high-tech stage techniques and theater design. (Li Jing, 2020)

At the same time, Sichuan Opera's face changing has also gone international, becoming one of the important representatives of traditional Chinese culture. The image of Sichuan opera face changing can be seen on many international stages and in movies, which has led to global attention and recognition of the face changing technique.

Studying the development of Sichuan opera face changing has significant implications in various aspects, which can be reflected in cultural inheritance and protection. As a national intangible cultural heritage, studying the development of Sichuan opera face changing can help inherit this precious cultural heritage. By delving into the various stages and related techniques of its development, we can better pass on this unique art form to future generations and avoid its gradual loss in modern society. Meanwhile, Sichuan Opera Face Changing is one of the important representatives of Sichuan culture, carrying the history, customs, values, and other aspects of Sichuan region. Studying its development can help to deeply explore and promote Sichuan's local culture, enhance regional cultural identity and pride, and promote the prosperity and development of local culture.

At the artistic level, Sichuan opera face changing has gradually developed from a simple performance form to a highly mature and exquisite artistic technique. Studying its development process can help us understand the artists' continuous innovation and exploratory spirit in performing arts. For example, from the initial paper face shell face changing to later silk face pulling and other technological improvements, it reflects the artist's pursuit of performance effects and technical difficulty. As a unique form of performance art, Sichuan opera face changing has provided valuable materials for the enrichment and improvement of performance art theory through the performance techniques and techniques involved in its development process. By studying it, we can delve into the laws and methods of character shaping, emotional expression, and stage effect creation in performing arts, providing reference for the development of modern performing arts.

It can also witness cultural integration, and the development of Sichuan opera face changing reflects the mutual influence of different cultural elements. Studying its development, we can clearly see the exchange and integration of local and foreign cultures in the field of art in Sichuan, such as the influence of different opera genres and performance styles brought by immigrants from various regions on the face changing of Sichuan opera. This is of great significance for studying the diverse and integrated pattern of Chinese culture and the history of cultural exchange.

Problem of research is understand the development process, evolution, and how to continue to promote Sichuan opera face changing in today's streaming media era.

Intensify the promotion of traditional culture and cultivate talents in Sichuan opera face changing performances

Sichuan Opera Face Changing, as a part of China's intangible cultural heritage, plays an important role in the inheritance and development of traditional culture. It incorporates various singing styles, dance movements, facial pulling, facial wiping and other techniques in its performance, and its artistic and cultural value is very rich. Artistic creation originates from the practical life of the masses, while also being higher than practice. Therefore, when inheriting and developing Sichuan opera face changing, we should pay attention to the interaction between culture and the masses, deeply explore the folk cultural value of Sichuan opera face changing, identify the emotional commonalities between Sichuan opera face changing and the social masses, and increase publicity based on these commonalities. This is conducive to establishing a good cultural brand of Sichuan opera face changing, improving the understanding of Sichuan opera face changing among the public, and strengthening the training of young Sichuan opera face changing actors, providing a good talent guarantee for the better development of Sichuan opera face changing, thus effectively promoting the inheritance and development of Sichuan opera face changing.

Update the content and form of face changing expressions in Sichuan Opera, keeping up with the times

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period. During the period of cultural integration and flourishing development of local art, the changes in the appearance of Sichuan opera originated from the folk art traditions and mysterious martial arts inheritance of ancient Sichuan region. The characteristic of this core skill is unique facial changes. In addition, many senior artists in the Sichuan opera industry constantly innovate and enrich their performance forms. In the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, against the backdrop of social turmoil and change, Sichuan opera art still adhered to folk inheritance. In order to attract the audience, folk clubs constantly polish their facial transformation techniques to make them more exquisite and magical. At the same time, the admiration of local cultural elites and gentry for Sichuan opera prompted the theater troupe to increase investment and improvement in performance venues, props, and costumes. For example, some wealthy gentlemen sponsored the construction of more exquisite stages, providing a better display platform for Sichuan opera face changing performances. In addition, local cultural institutions have gradually attached importance to the organization and protection of Sichuan opera art, recording the memory and performance standards of some face changing techniques. Similarly, the style and artistic pursuit of famous Sichuan opera masters have profoundly influenced the development trend of face changing in Sichuan opera. Their unique performance charm injected soul into this technique, making it the most iconic and mysterious classic element in Sichuan opera art, bringing unique brilliance to the stage of Sichuan opera and even the entire country. (Liu Fang, 2021)

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Studying the development of face changing in Sichuan opera has significant implications in various aspects, which can be reflected in cultural inheritance and protection. As a national intangible cultural heritage, studying the development of Sichuan opera face changing can help inherit this valuable cultural heritage. By delving into the various stages of its development and related technologies, we can better pass on this unique art form to future generations and avoid its gradual loss in modern society. Meanwhile, Sichuan Opera Face Changing is one of the

important representatives of Sichuan culture, carrying the history, customs, values and other aspects of Sichuan region. Studying its development helps to deepen the exploration and promotion of local culture in Sichuan, enhance regional cultural identity and pride, and promote the prosperity and development of local culture.

On the artistic level, Sichuan Opera's face changing has gradually evolved from a simple performance form to a highly mature and exquisite artistic technique. Studying its development process helps us understand the continuous innovation and exploratory spirit of artists in performing arts. For example, the change from the initial paper shell surface to later silk surface pulling and other technological improvements reflects the artist's pursuit of performance effects and technical difficulty. Sichuan opera face changing, as a unique form of performance art, provides valuable materials for enriching and improving the theory of performance art through the performance techniques and techniques involved in its development process. Through research, we can delve into the laws and methods of character shaping, emotional expression, and stage effect creation in performing arts, providing reference for the development of modern performing arts. (Wu Bin, 2024)

It can also witness the integration of cultures, and the changes in the appearance of Sichuan opera reflect the mutual influence of different cultural elements. By studying its development process, we can clearly see the exchange and integration of Chinese and foreign cultures in the field of Sichuan art, such as the influence of different opera genres and performance styles brought by immigrants from different regions on the changes in the appearance of Sichuan opera. This is of great significance for studying the diverse and integrated pattern of Chinese culture and the history of cultural exchange. The theory of cultural semiotics (Lotman, 1990) further reveals the duality of face changing techniques: on the one hand, its color symbol system (red loyalty, black rigidity, white treachery) has a high degree of standardization, and 78% of the audience can accurately identify the symbolic meaning (n=182); On the other hand, the material evolution of technology (from tung oil paper shells to nanomaterials) reflects the dynamic game between art and technology. This symbiotic relationship between symbols and technology is particularly evident in cross-cultural comparisons. For example, although Chinese Nuo opera also uses masks, their function is limited to exorcism rituals, while Sichuan opera's face changing is reconstructed through stage adaptation, making masks an externalized carrier of character psychology. Looking at Western opera again, such as the *Prosopeia* in ancient Greek tragedy, although it enhances the soundstage effect, it cannot achieve emotional layering due to fixed expressions, highlighting the uniqueness of Sichuan opera's face changing in "instant narrative" (Fischer Lichte, 2008).

Under the wave of globalization, Sichuan Opera's face changing is facing the challenge of "cultural discount". According to Huang's (2018) overseas audience survey, 34% of the international audience only sees it as "Eastern magic", cutting off its connection with opera narrative. In response to this, Chengdu Sichuan Opera House attempted AR technology in "Face Changing Metaverse" (2023), enhancing cultural interpretability through digital plot mapping (such as the "blackening of the green snake" in "The Legend of the White Snake" corresponding to facial discoloration). This grafting of "tradition technology" echoes the digital dissemination strategy of facial painting in India's Kathakali dance - both breaking through the "othering" gaze through media innovation (Appadurai, 1996), but Sichuan opera face changing faces a more severe inheritance crisis due to the confidentiality of technology (such as only 27 national intangible cultural heritage inheritors).

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Literature research

Through the methods of literature research, interview, observation and data analysis, in-depth research was conducted. During the interview, recording equipment or taking notes were used to record the conversation with the respondents. After the interview, carefully organize and analyze the interview content to obtain meaningful opinions and opinions. Through questionnaires, experiments and other methods to collect a large number of data, and then use statistical methods to analyze, draw universal and repeatable conclusions.

Interview method

Mixed research design

Qualitative data: Interview 12 actors (including 3 inheritors of intangible cultural heritage) and observe rehearsals of 3 theater troupes;

Quantitative data: 182 audience questionnaires (effective rate 91%), statistics on actor training duration ($M = 8.2$ years).

Data collection and processing

Interview outline: Focus on "skill inheritance (such as teacher led system vs institutional system)" and "innovation boundaries (such as holographic projection application)";

Encoding analysis: Use Nvivo to extract high-frequency words (Figure 2), such as "traditional" (68 times) and "survival pressure" (53 times).

Interview active Sichuan opera actors to obtain first-hand information on face changing techniques and their cultural significance.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Early historical background

The origin of Sichuan opera face changing can be traced back to local dramas during the Ming and Qing dynasties. At that time, masks and makeup techniques were often used in local dramas to depict the emotional changes and personality traits of characters. As a type of local drama, Sichuan opera has gradually developed a unique artistic style and form of expression. The technique of changing faces began to receive attention during this period and gradually evolved into one of the core characteristics of Sichuan opera.

Early face changing techniques mainly achieved character transformation through simple masks and makeup techniques. Due to the lack of systematic skills and norms, the expression form of face changing technique is relatively simple, but it has already possessed preliminary artistic characteristics. The face changing technique in Sichuan opera was mainly used at this stage to enhance the expressiveness and ornamental value of the drama, laying the foundation for its later development. (Tian Yuqi, 2023)

The Legend and Historical Records of Face Changing Technique

There are many folk legends about the origin of face changing in Sichuan opera. The most famous legend is about Sichuan opera actors using mysterious techniques to achieve rapid mask transformations. Legend has it that the technique of changing faces is regarded as a mysterious magic that can quickly alter the appearance of characters, thereby influencing the development of the plot.

In addition to legends, the theatrical literature of the Ming and Qing dynasties also recorded in detail the technique of changing faces. For example, the "Qing Dynasty Opera Magazine" mentioned that face changing technique had become an important expressive technique in Sichuan opera performances at that time. In addition, many historians and opera critics have also conducted research on the development of face changing in Sichuan opera, providing valuable first-hand information. (Yang Haoyu, 2022)

Face changing techniques in the Qing Dynasty

The Qing Dynasty was an important period for the development of face changing techniques in Sichuan opera. During this period, facial changing techniques gradually matured and formed various schools. Among them, "Gold Medal Face Changing" is the most famous. The face changing technique of this school not only occupies an important position in Sichuan opera, but is also widely spread throughout the country.

The face changing technique of the Qing Dynasty was significantly improved in terms of performance form and skills. Actors use their superb skills and clever techniques to vividly portray the rapid transformation of masks. The face changing technique during this period was not only applied in Sichuan opera, but also gradually influenced other regional dramas, promoting the development of Chinese theatrical art. (Wang Yisu, 2021)



Figure 1 Peng Denghuai The master of face changing in Sichuan opera, known as the "Face Changing Master" by some due to his ability to transform 14 faces in 25 seconds.

The development of facial changes during the Republic of China period

The Republican era was a time when Sichuan opera's face changing technique faced challenges and changes. The social unrest and changes in the theater environment have had an impact on the art of face changing. However, despite facing challenges, the face changing technique still maintains its unique charm and expressive form. During this period, face changing techniques began to be showcased to the public and gradually gained wider attention.

During the Republic of China period, there were innovations in facial changing techniques, and actors began to explore new ways and skills of expression. For example, the technique of changing faces adds more dramatic effects and visual impact to performances, enhancing the audience's viewing experience. In addition, the dissemination of face changing techniques

during this period also received more support and recognition, laying the foundation for its subsequent development. (Li Jing, 2018)

Face changing techniques after the establishment of the People's Republic of China

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Sichuan opera and facial changing techniques were protected and developed with policy support. The government has systematically organized and promoted traditional theatrical arts, and facial changing techniques have also gained more stages and audiences. The face changing technique during this period not only gained widespread dissemination domestically, but also gradually moved onto the international stage.

In the development process after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the protection and inheritance of face changing techniques have become important tasks. The government and relevant institutions have systematically organized and standardized facial changing techniques, promoting the inheritance and innovation of these skills. At the same time, the performance forms of face changing techniques have also been enriched and diversified, providing new opportunities for their development in modern society. (Zhang Ming, 2019)

The artistic characteristics of face changing in Sichuan opera

The techniques of face changing in Sichuan opera mainly include three methods: mask changing, makeup techniques, and technical skills. Mask transformation is the core of face changing techniques, which involves quickly removing or replacing different masks from an actor's face. Makeup techniques use different makeup techniques to achieve different facial expressions of characters, including facial makeup and the use of props. Technical skills are the core part that actors master proficiently, achieving the effect of changing faces through clever movements and techniques.

In the technique of changing faces, the performance of actors not only relies on proficient mastery of skills, but also requires good physical fitness and stage performance. The essence of face changing technique lies in the rapid transformation of masks and the clever use of makeup, which requires actors to maintain a high level of focus and agile reaction ability during the performance. By mastering these techniques, actors can quickly transform the appearance of their characters, enhancing the expressiveness and visual appeal of the drama.

The technique of changing faces is mainly used in Sichuan opera to depict the emotional changes and plot development of characters. Through the rapid transformation of masks, actors can quickly showcase the different facial expressions and emotional states of their characters, thereby enhancing the expressiveness and viewing value of the drama. In Sichuan opera, the technique of changing faces is often combined with other artistic elements such as music, dance, and theatrical performances to create rich performance effects.

The technique of changing faces not only enriches the expressive forms of Sichuan opera, but also enhances the viewing value of the drama. In Sichuan opera performances, face changing techniques can effectively attract the audience's attention and enhance the expression of dramatic emotions. This unique form of artistic expression not only showcases the actors' skills, but also brings great visual enjoyment to the audience. (Zhao Hong, 2017)

Music of Sichuan Opera's Face Changing

The performance of changing faces is usually accompanied by the unique musical style of Sichuan opera, including traditional instruments such as suona, erhu, and percussion. These instruments provide rich timbres and rhythms, adding dramatic effects to face changing.

The rhythm of music often changes with the development of the plot. At the critical moment of changing faces, the music will accelerate to enhance tension and impact, emphasizing the emotional changes of the character. The commonly used music in face changing performances includes classic pieces such as "Wu Song Beats the Tiger" and "Beating the Dragon Robe". These pieces themselves contain strong emotions and dramatic tension, which can effectively complement the effect of face changing. (Liu Fang, 2021)

Face changing in drama stage

Face changing on the theatrical stage is a unique performance art of Sichuan opera, and the core of face changing lies in the actors' superb skills. Through clever techniques, actors can instantly change masks or makeup, showcasing the rapid emotional changes of their characters. This kind of change often requires a lot of practice and proficient skills. Face changing is often closely integrated with dramatic plot, appearing at emotional climax or critical moments, enhancing the dramatic effect. By changing faces, actors can convey their characters' inner struggles, anger, happiness, and other emotions. (Wang Wei, 2020)

Script in face changing

The script of Sichuan opera face changing usually revolves around plot development, character conflicts, and emotional changes. Although face changing itself is not part of the dialogue script, it plays a crucial role in the play. The script usually sets a central conflict, such as love, betrayal, revenge, etc. Face changing, as a technique of expression, often appears at the climax of the plot to help reveal the true emotions or identity of the character.

Color meaning of face changing

In Sichuan opera, the use of facial colors has rich symbolic meanings, with each color usually representing different personalities, identities, and emotions.

Red: symbolizes loyalty, justice, and bravery. Usually representing heroic or righteous characters, such as Guan Yu.

Black: represents firmness, integrity, and decisiveness. Usually used to depict impartial characters, such as respected generals.

White: symbolizes a sinister, treacherous, and dark personality. Commonly used in villainous characters to portray their cunning and ruthlessness.

Through these colors, the audience can quickly identify the character's personality traits and emotional state, thus better understanding the plot development. (Wu Bin, 2024)

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Sichuan opera face changing is a traditional technique with profound local characteristics in Sichuan. It not only showcases the subtlety and complexity of Sichuan opera performance art, but also reflects the profoundness and depth of traditional Chinese culture. With the development of the times, changing faces is no longer just a performance technique in Sichuan opera. It has become one of the symbols of traditional Chinese art, attracting the attention of audiences from all over the world. From the techniques of facial changes, the artistic features of facial changes in Sichuan opera, the music of facial changes in Sichuan opera, facial changes on stage, facial changes in scripts, and the significance of facial color changes, we can understand and feel the profoundness of facial changes in Sichuan opera.

As a treasure of traditional Chinese theatrical art, Sichuan Opera's face changing has gone through multiple historical evolution periods in its development process. Through in-depth research on facial transformation techniques, we can better understand their artistic features and cultural significance. In modern society, face changing technology not only continues to develop, but also plays an important cultural dissemination role on a global scale. Future research should focus on adapting and innovating face changing technology in the context of globalization, in order to better inherit and promote this traditional art. (Yang Zenghui, 2024)

The development process of Sichuan opera face changing is a process from folk origin to artistic formation, and then to internationalization. It is not only a technique in Sichuan opera performance, but also a symbol of the inheritance of local culture and art in Sichuan. With the passage of time, the appearance of Sichuan opera has constantly changed, attracting more and more audiences and showcasing the unique charm of traditional Chinese art. (Wang Wei, 2020)

Exploring new areas of Sichuan opera and improving its economic added value

In this era of keeping up with the times, combining Sichuan opera face changing with new media can better promote and publicize Sichuan opera face changing, allowing more people to understand it. Therefore, according to the changes in the market and the characteristics of the Internet, we should explore new areas of Sichuan Opera based on the development of traditional Sichuan Opera and the general preference of modern society and young people, constantly improve its economic added value, make the economy respond to culture, and spread Sichuan Opera more widely.

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