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A Semiotic Perspective of Cantonese Opera

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Abstract

Cantonese opera is one of the world's intangible cultural heritages and a treasure trove of Chinese civilization knowledge. It requires comprehensive exploration and interpretation to ensure its inheritance and reproduction. It is a medium for inheriting traditional culture and has strong regional and cultural significance. This article attempts to interpret the semiotic style of Cantonese opera culture from the perspective of semiotics, combined with relevant theories of Western philosophy and closely linked to traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: *Cantonese Opera, Semiotics, Traditional Chinese Culture*

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to: (1) identify the unique symbolic features of Cantonese opera; (2) Study the interpretation of symbols in Cantonese opera performances and seek the significance represented by cultural symbols in Cantonese opera; (3) Interpreting the unique characteristics of Cantonese opera performance from a semiotic perspective. Use text analysis, case analysis, and comparative analysis methods to analyze the research data. The dataanalysis process includes three stages.

The methods of on-site investigation include conducting research at the Cantonese Opera Museum; The case study method includes selecting classic Cantonese opera plays and conducting in-depth analysis of performances and movements; Finally, through the symbol extraction experiment of Cantonese opera culture, verify and explore the logical reasoning mode and explanatory scope of Cantonese opera culture, and conduct a comprehensive analysis of Cantonese opera culture.

The main research findings are as follows: 1. Fill the research gap. The study of the comprehensiveness and dynamism of Cantonese opera symbols has filled the gap in people's understanding of Cantonese opera symbols; 2. New perspective. This article organically combines the cultural symbols of Cantonese opera with the narrative nature of Cantonese opera performances, opening up a new path for the study of cultural semiotics in Cantonese opera; 3. The innovative interpretation model of Cantonese opera symbols has made an effective attempt for the new media dissemination of Cantonese opera culture.

Research Objectives

Given the identified shortcomings in current research, this study aims to address the following three major objectives:

1. Identify the unique symbolic features of Cantonese opera.

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2. Study the comprehensive interpretation of symbols in Cantonese opera performances.
3. Establish a unique interpretation model for Cantonese opera performance from a semiotic perspective.

Literature Review

I searched CNKI (China Knowledge Journal Network) and other ways to see as many academic research results about "Cultural Symbols of Cantonese Opera" as possible. After sorting and summarizing, the research on Cantonese opera culture and semiotics is as follows.

A Brief Introduction to Semiotics Related Theories

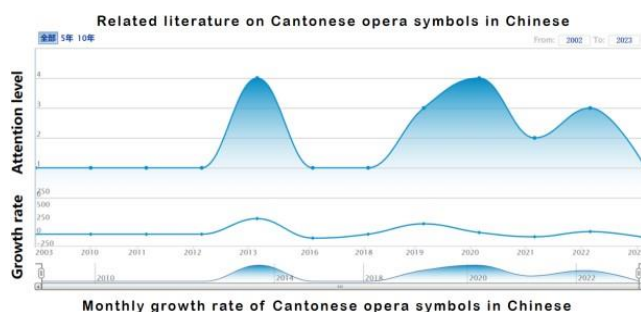
Symbolism is the theory of the relationship or way of meaning. The semiotics study subjects are included namely semiosis: signification, communication and interpretation. In the symbol system used by humans: language is a large system, and semiotics is an independent discipline. However, the narrow semiotics on cultural civilization phenomena pay more attention to the relationship and link between graphics and meaning. The concept of semiotics is based on human reflection of the world and cognition. China is one of the four ancient civilizations in the world, and the traditional ancient philosophy and wisdom of the Chinese nation are important components of world semiotics. The academic community and scholars should pay more attention to the era of "Chinese semiotics" (Jordan & Smith, 2019)

Current academic research status of Cantonese opera culture

Cantonese opera after years of development has formed a unique regional induction and classification are undoubtedly helpful to understand and learn Cantonese opera culture. However, the results are different from different perspectives. Cantonese Opera (Zhejiang People's Publishing House: 2012) compiled by Wang Kui divides Cantonese opera culture into performing arts (including trade : ostentation, southern martial arts, stage art), music art (including Cantonese music, singing and Musical Instruments) and Cantonese opera literature. In the Communication of Cantonese Opera in the Internet Era: Wang Qin divided Cantonese opera into non-language elements such as language elements, costumes: Musical Instruments, singing style: figure, work frame and stage steps. Yan Li's journal article "A Study on the Change History of Cantonese Opera Cultural Symbols" (Sichuan Drama: 201,2019) divides Cantonese opera into Cantonese sound: Cantonese ornaments and Guangdong from the perspective of cultural symbols." Cantonese" includes singing and music; "Cantonese" includes makeup, headdress and costumes; "Cantonese" refers to the stage set in Cantonese opera. Although the aboveclassification of Cantonese opera cultural elements is different, they provide an important reference for understanding and promoting Cantonese opera culture (Rivera-Castro et al., 2019)

Related Research

Table 1: Monthly growth rate of Cantonese opera symbols in Chinese



On CNKI, a search was conducted on Cantonese opera, using Cantonese opera symbols and Cantonese opera narratives combined with titles (TI), themes (TS), and author keywords (AK) for data comparison and analysis. It was found that the overall level of attention to Cantonese opera culture research has been increasing annually, and it has become a hot topic of concern for scholars since 2017.

Analyze Cantonese opera symbols through keyword co-occurrence analysis in VOSviewer to reveal research hotspots. Run VOSviewer to perform co-occurrence analysis on 207 keywords from 36 literatures and obtain a keyword co-occurrence graph through system calculation.

By analyzing Cantonese opera narratives through keyword co-occurrence in VOSviewer, we aim to reveal research hotspots. Run VOSviewer to perform co-occurrence analysis on 320 keywords from 57 literatures and obtain a keyword co-occurrence graph through system calculation (Siqueira et al., 2019).

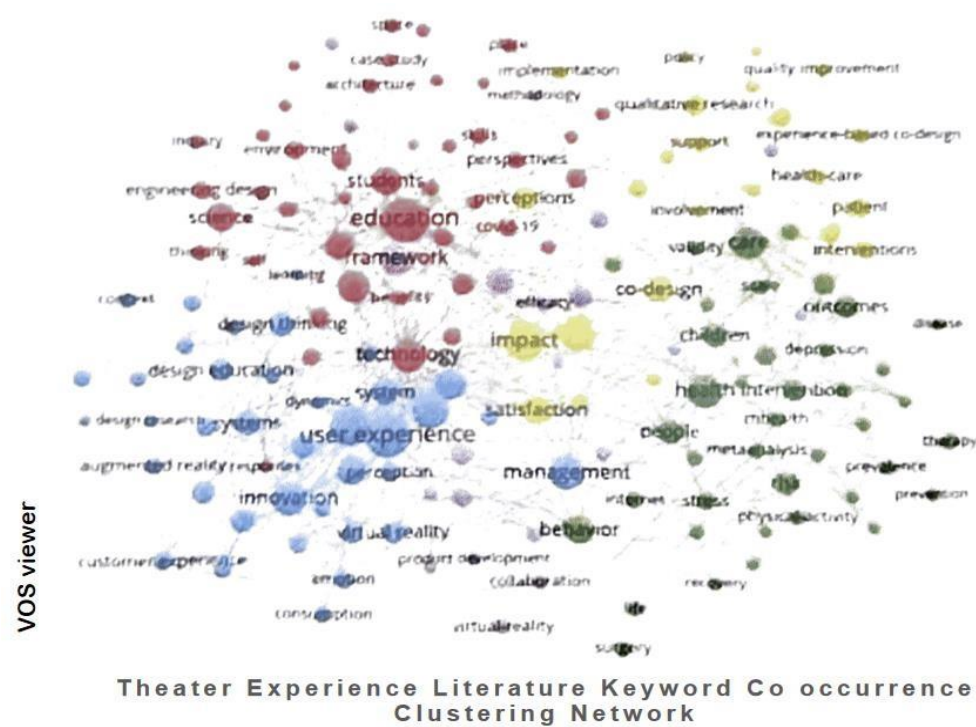


Table 2: Theater Experience Literature Keyword Co-occurrence Clustering Network

Chapter Summary

An important gap in the current research on Cantonese opera culture is the lack of in-depth research on Cantonese opera symbols. Some studies only touch on the surface level of various Cantonese opera performances, providing an overview of these phenomena without delving into their potential symbolic meanings. This limited scope of analysis fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of Cantonese opera.

Research Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative research method to study the symbols and performances of Cantonese opera. The research design will answer research questions and attempt to achieve research objectives. In this

chapter, we provide a detailed description of the research design, including population, sample size, and research subjects, as well as a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the expected results of the study.

Qualitative methods enable us to deeply explore the unique symbol composition of Cantonese opera, dynamically study the process of Cantonese opera performance, and gain a deeper understanding of the significance of Cantonese opera culture. The findings of this study will contribute to existing literature on the cultural symbols of Cantonese opera and provide a research foundation for the inheritance and reproduction of Cantonese opera.

1. Subject of the research program

1) Population and Samples

About age: Under 12 years old (Figure cognition period); Between 13 and 18 (Traditional culture and basic theory learning period); Between 19 and 30 (Work social period); Between 31 and 50 (Culture precipitation period); Between 51 and 80 (Cultural heritage period).

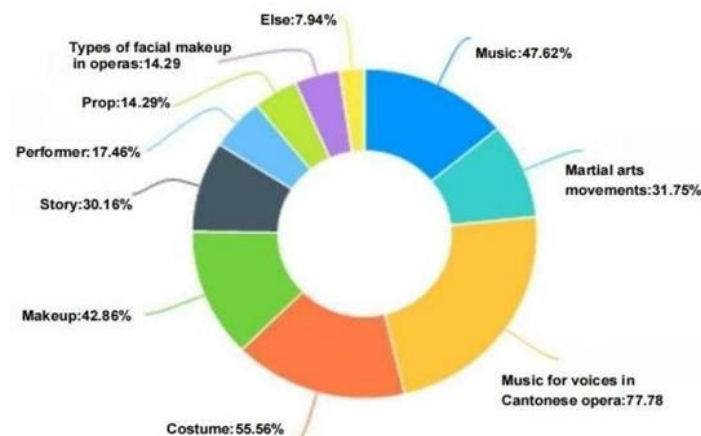
About region: Guangdong area; Outside Guangdong; Cantonese speaking areas (parts of Guangdong and Guangxi).

Research Design

I designed six different versions of the questionnaire about Cantonese opera. I made 1000 copies more perfect questionnaires about "cultural promotion of Cantonese Opera" and make a summary as the basis of my research. The first stage of the questionnaire is mainly to investigate the public's understanding and love of Cantonese opera, and the conclusion drawn is:

- 1) Due to the limited dissemination channels and insufficient popularity of Cantonese opera, most people have relatively limited understanding of Cantonese opera.
- 2) Most young people have a positive attitude towards Cantonese opera. They believe that Cantonese opera is an artistic performance with lasting charm and is worth appreciating. They are even willing to let the next generation understand Cantonese opera culture. Most people hope to see the inheritance and promotion of Cantonese opera culture, and also very much hope to see interesting and fashionable Cantonese opera elements in their daily lives.

Table 3: Statistical Table



The second phase of the survey is based on a preliminary understanding of Cantonese opera, analyzing the audience's different impressions of Cantonese opera through questionnaires, and further exploring the development direction of Cantonese opera. From the research report, it can be concluded that most people learn about Cantonese opera culture through film and television videos. Although they find Cantonese opera videos monotonous and boring, they still believe that the essence of Cantonese opera lies in its own traditional Chinese culture. They also hope to integrate the symbolic features of Cantonese opera into modern culture for promotion, break through the inherent impression of traditional Cantonese opera, enhance the cultural confidence and identity of contemporary Chinese people, and ensure the sustainable development of Cantonese opera culture.

Table 4: Statistical Table



The third stage is to test the results of the preliminary semiotic experiment on Cantonese opera culture from a semiotic perspective through a questionnaire survey. At the same time, it is hoped to find a more feasible direction and systematic method for the symbolic interpretation of Cantonese opera culture, opening up a future path for the inheritance of traditional culture.

Table 5: Statistical Table

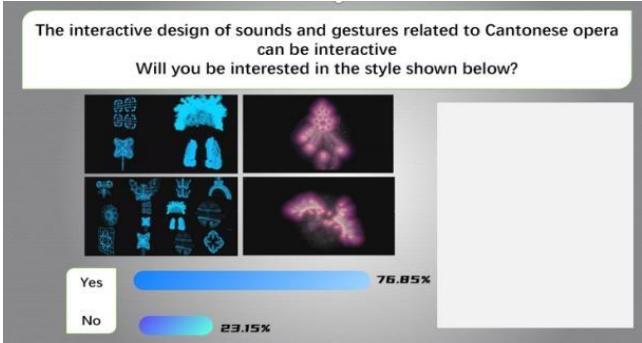
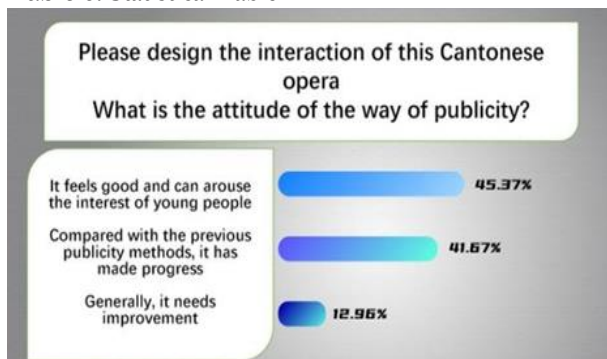


Table 6: Statistical Table

Research Results and Findings

The Extraction and Evolution of Characters and Symbols in Cantonese Opera.

1、Cantonese Opera Facial Symbol Experiment

The author carefully studied the symbolic features of classic characters in Cantonese opera and attempted to extract graphics and design symbol derivatives. The makeup of Cantonese opera changes the actors' true colors, lines, and patterns with unrealistic colors, exaggerating and symbolizing these various character types.

The author carefully studied the symbolic features of classic characters in Cantonese opera, extracted the character temperament of Cantonese opera characters, attempted to extract graphics and derive symbols, and used modern symbols to summarize and summarize the image of Cantonese opera characters.

Sheng/male role.

Sheng is the most handsome character in Cantonese Opera. He is the hero in the drama. His eyebrows are straight into his forehead, his nose is straight, his eyes are big and bright, and his lips are red. The most common makeup is "red and white face".

First, he applies white foundation make-up to his whole face, and then applies red rouge around his eyes and cheekbones. Sometimes Sheng even drew long eyebrows and used bright red lipstick. Generous image, a positive and good character.

Mo.

Mo is often considered a handsome and bearded middle-aged man, so his eyebrows are depicted thicker and stronger, his eyes are large and round, giving a sense of authority, reliability, and justice.

According to the description of Guan Yu in "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms", a deep black reclining silkworm eyebrow and a red phoenix eye are depicted, with a white top and five strands of long whiskers hanging from the top.

The entire facial makeup lines are symmetrically distributed from the center, vividly depicting Guan Yu's slightly vertical eyebrows and slightly closed eyes, appearing elegant, resolute, and solemn, in

order to depict the character's awe inspiring and upright demeanor.

Jing/net

Jing uses highly tensile and symbolic patterns and colors to depict the image characteristics and personality traits of characters, highlighting the unique charm and style of Cantonese opera. The facial makeup is designed with thick eyebrows flying sideways and forks, exaggerated eyeliner, eyes protruding, and black lines on the nose. The treacherous and insidious image leaps on the face. In addition, the facial expression changes of the actors in the performance can further portray the role's insidious and vicious.

Dan/female role

Dan is a beautiful female protagonist with eyebrows raised slightly in the middle and pointed in a crescent shaped shape at both ends. Qing Yi, Hua Dan painted willow leaf eyebrows, Wu Dan, Dao Ma Dan painted sword eyebrows. When drawing eyeliner, carefully describe it from the inside out. The tail wing of the upper eyeliner should be longer than the corner of the eye. The tail end of the upper eyeliner should be sharp and sharp. The lines should be smooth and smooth, with clear contours that appear very energetic. Dan also has headgear, which can be used to improve her face shape and make it the "melon seed shaped face" of traditional Chinese beauties.

Ugly

Ugly is a humorous character who usually transforms into a peach shaped face, with white as the background, and black eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, face, and cloud patterns around the mouth can all bring strong comedy effects.



Figure 1: Experiments on Cantonese Opera Characters and Graphical Symbols of Cantonese Opera Characters

The experiment on the graphic symbols of Cantonese opera characters has proven that Pierce's semiotic trichotomy is effective, with representative terms and objects of symbols leading to interpretive terms. A symbol refers to something that represents something relative to a person in some way. It indicates that it has produced an equivalent symbol in a person's mind: or perhaps a higher level symbol. The symbol produced in a person's mind: I call it: the explanatory term for the first symbol. "The jocular white symbol on the clown's face, It quickly reminds people of the distorted face of a Cantonese opera clown due to exaggerated performances; The petal shape of peach blossoms makes people feel as if

they have seen a beautiful Dan. The black semicircle is the beautiful hair patch on Dan's forehead, very charming; Of course, without any explanation, people can feel the general's power brought by eyebrows like swords. Here, simple graphical symbols are derived from common symbols in nature, such as petals, and from the most common tools in people's daily social life, such as the sword representing the superb martial arts. A symbol represents something, and at the same time, a symbol points to meaning.

Experiment on Color Symbols in Cantonese Opera

Beijing Opera is the main source of Cantonese opera, and its main popular area is the capital of China, reflecting China's national image. The colors of Beijing Opera are mostly concentrated and saturated, such as "Chinese Red" and derived from sapphire lapis lazuli, representing the supreme and noble "precious blue" - ultramarine which also represents China's national spirit, atmosphere, grace, and luxury. Cantonese opera is a popular folk drama in the Lingnan region. Lingnan people have a gentle and gentle personality, and their lives are simple. The natural scenery of Lingnan is mainly characterized by bright colors, such as the famous Lingnan fruits such as lychee and banana. The colors of Cantonese opera are mainly based on the unique colors of the Lingnan region, such as "lychee red", "banana green", and "rice yellow". These representative colors of Cantonese opera make people feel friendly and have a sense of belonging. Cassirer believes that in real life, people use symbols to describe the world, explain the world, and provide feedback to the world. They create civilization through symbols, and on the basis of the natural world, a civilized world of humanity was born. Humanity has transformed from a natural person to a civilized person. The unique color of Cantonese opera is the color of Lingnan people, not only the natural color of Lingnan, but also the color symbol of Lingnan civilization.



Figure 2: Color symbols of Cantonese Opera



Figure 3: Color symbols of Cantonese Opera



Figure 4: Color symbols of Cantonese Opera

Conclusion

The main contribution of this study is the interpretation model of Cantonese opera cultural symbols proposed, which provides a clearer analysis of Cantonese opera, emphasizes the role of human thinking in the interpretation process, and focuses on the possibility of dynamic interpretation of Cantonese opera cultural symbols.

Innovative Cantonese opera symbol interpretation mode. This article creates a new mode of interpreting Cantonese opera symbols, providing reference for future research. This model provides a new approach to interpreting the cultural symbols of Cantonese opera, which helps researchers better understand the meaning and cultural significance of these symbols.

Cultural heritage. The study of Cantonese opera culture contributes to the protection and promotion of its material cultural heritage. By revealing the meaning and significance of Cantonese opera symbols, it helps to enhance people's understanding and appreciation of Cantonese opera culture, and makes effective attempts and examples for the modern dissemination of Cantonese opera.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of the dissertation, there are several future perspectives that could be explored:

1) Apply advanced technology. With the development of new technologies, there is an opportunity to use advanced tools such as machine learning and data mining to analyze the data collected in this study.

This can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the interpretation mode of cultural symbols in Cantonese opera.

2) Examine the impact of modernization. This study only briefly discusses the influence of the interpretation of Cantonese opera cultural symbols. Future research can examine this theme in more detail and explore how the continuous evolution and development of Cantonese opera will affect the interpretation of cultural symbols in Cantonese opera.

3) Explore the role and status of Cantonese opera symbols in modern communication. As intangible cultural heritage becomes increasingly popular cultural disseminators, exploring how Cantonese opera

cultural symbols can be used as tools to promote regional cultural exchange will be even more interesting. This may involve collaborating with modern brands to develop new ways to showcase their cultural heritage through Cantonese opera cultural symbols.

Overall, the research findings of this article provide valuable insights into the interpretation mode of cultural symbols in Cantonese opera. By addressing the limitations of research and exploring these future perspectives, future research can further deepen our understanding of this fascinating cultural phenomenon.

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