



A Study on Wu'an Nuo Opera Costumes from the Perspective of Iconography

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Abstract: The discovery of Wuan Nuo Opera has rewritten the assertion that “there is no Nuo in Jiangbei”. Its existence shows the survival and development of Central Plains Nuo, and provides a complete and rich model for studying the essence and evolution of Central Plains Nuo. Wuan Nuo Opera costumes are an important local cultural heritage of my country. These image remains contain rich cultural values such as material, spiritual and institutional values, involving history, folklore, religion, art and other fields. In-depth research on Wuan Nuo Opera costumes has important practical significance. This article attempts to start with the Panofsky iconography theory research method, and interpret and analyze the theme, composition, color and pattern of Wuan Nuo Opera costumes from three levels, so as to explore the cultural value of regional local color paintings and clarify the trajectory of the integration of social culture and secular culture.

Keywords: Wu'an Nuo opera costumes, iconographic perspective, cultural value

1. Introduction

The term iconography was first proposed in the book *Italian Art and International Astrology* in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara. In the mid-20th century, art historian Panofsky made a clear explanation of the essence of pictures in his book *Iconographic Studies*. The book divides iconography into three levels: the first is to interpret the natural meaning of the image, that is, to identify the lines of natural objects such as people, animals, and plants in the work; the second is to discover and interpret the traditional meaning of the image, that is, the symbolic meaning; the third is to interpret the inner meaning or content of the image, that is, the essential meaning, which is also the ultimate goal of iconography[1]. Wu'an Nuo Opera originated from primitive religion, belief in ghosts and gods, and totem worship. It is a blessing activity with the main purpose of inviting gods to worship ancestors and exorcising evil spirits. Wu'an Nuo Opera is performed by clans. There is a lack of communication between different clans and it is relatively closed. Although it has gone through hundreds of years, its performance form still retains its original style and is called “the living fossil of opera”. Wu'an Nuo Opera is an ancient sacrificial ritual, which was evolved by absorbing folk opera. It integrates history, folklore, religion and traditional opera. It is the most representative traditional culture of Wu'an and can be used as an important medium for studying Hebei folklore, economy, thought and art. With the in-depth development of iconographic research methods, the patterns and patterns of Nuo Opera costumes and masks are used as media for pattern analysis, and the deep social culture is explored through the appearance of craftsmen's creation. “Placing specific works of art in the potential relationship of human conditions and in the interaction between objectivity and subjectivity” will become a major breakthrough in the study of Hebei local customs and colored paintings. This paper uses iconographic methods to explore the costumes of Wu'an Nuo Opera, analyzes and analyzes the significance of its existence from the perspective of iconography, sorts out its historical environment and cultural background as a whole, explains why this image is produced, and explains the connotation of Wu'an Nuo Opera from the three levels of iconography. The characteristics of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes, the source of patterns, and the symbol of patterns are respectively described in pre-iconography, analyzed in iconography, and analyzed in iconography, so as to further promote the depth of research on Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes in the field of art history.

2. Panofsky Iconography

As a classic method of art research, iconography goes beyond the scope of iconography's interpretation of images. It aims to examine the cultural, religious and historical background of the work from a more comprehensive perspective, starting from content analysis. Panofsky believes that iconography is the interpretation of the meaning beyond the work itself, and divides the process of using iconography to analyze works of art into three levels: the first level is pre-iconographic description, that is, the interpretation of primitive and natural themes, that is, the objective description of the image itself, and its interpretation is based on people's actual experience and understanding in life. The second level is iconographic

analysis, and the objects of interpretation are mostly conventional themes, stories and fables. The basic content of the image is interpreted, which requires a considerable degree of mastery of specific themes and related concepts.[2] The third level is iconographic interpretation, which is the process of decoding according to the cultural, historical background and ideology of the artwork to find out the symbolic meaning of the image. It is considered to be the highest level in the three-level theory of artistic symbols. The first two levels correspond to the content of “iconography”, and the last level corresponds to the content of “iconology”. The theory of Panofsky’s iconography is applied to the study of Wu’an Nuo opera images, that is, the intrinsic meaning of the image and the cultural background of its production.

3. Pre-iconographic description of Wuan Nuo opera costumes

As an important part of primitive culture, Nuo culture has passed down its splendid folk culture through the performance of Nuo opera, becoming a shining pearl in my country’s traditional culture.[3] Wu’an Nuo opera is a Central Plains Nuo opera under the influence of the Yellow River civilization. It has a unique form, rich content, mysterious colors, and magnificent momentum. It not only reflects people’s awe of nature, but also is a concrete testimony of the ancestors’ worship of nature and adaptation to nature. Wu’an Nuo opera costumes are the product of the long-term accumulation of Nuo culture, which contains rich social and historical cultural connotations. Costumes are an important carrier for strengthening divinity, and play a role in enhancing the sense of ritual in the entire Nuo opera performance. The overall shape of Wuan Nuo opera costumes is simple and rough, giving people a sense of simplicity and solemnity while having a strong local flavor. It mainly continues the clothing style of the Ming Dynasty, with the upper body adopting the style of Zhou and Han Dynasty clothing tops, and the lower body adopts the clothing style of the Tang and Song Dynasties. It is mainly derived from the styles of folk daily clothing, but there are also differences. The specific styles depend on the plot and the characters. The styles mostly use large-collared long clothes and large-collared short clothes. The colors are mostly bright and lively red, yellow, green, etc. The masks are simple, ferocious, and mighty, and some are even painted directly on the face to show a sense of intimidation. Nuo opera costumes are what people wear when playing roles in Nuo opera. They are an important link to express that people play divine roles. In order to achieve the smooth transformation of roles, Nuo opera costumes are of various types, which can be summarized into three categories: tops, skirts, and upper and lower parts. Tops include shirts, jackets, coats, and vests. The lower skirts include pants, knee-length pants, and pleated skirts. The upper and lower parts include python costumes, official costumes, pleats, and capes. Most of the accessories are simple-style scarves, cloud shoulders, leggings, and shoes. The styles and colors of the costumes are diverse, and the decorative patterns are relatively exquisite (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Wuan Nuo Opera Costumes

Wu’an Nuo Opera costumes are mainly designed based on the character’s personality characteristics, social status, etc., and the shape, pattern, color and regulations of the costumes are all based on showing the character attributes of the stage characters. Nuo Opera costumes have formed a relatively fixed combination according to the performance content. For example, each village uses “upper and lower pants” as the fixed combination of umbrella children in the Nuo Opera performance “Dancing Umbrella”; “Vest with leg support” is a fixed combination of costumes in the performance of “Danc-

ing Umbrella Money”; in addition, according to the role setting, the costumes of the main play also have a relatively fixed dressing style, such as officials wearing “python clothes” or “official clothes”, people wearing “plain pleats”, and women’s clothing wearing “jacket skirts”. Overall, Nuo Opera costumes fully cater to the ancient, simple and rich characteristics of Nuo culture, and the overall style tends to be secular and concise. Nuo Opera masks are commonly known as “faces”, and masks of various shapes are used to depict the image of gods in people’s hearts. As shown in Figure 2, in “Catching the Yellow Ghost”, the person who plays the yellow ghost has fluffy yellow hair, wears a thin yellow half-sleeved cotton shirt, the same thin half-pants, a wide belt around his waist, and is painted yellow all over. Four shiny prop knives are tied to his bare arms and calves, and the blades are bloody, which indicates that the yellow ghost in the village has been captured, which is auspicious. The person who plays the role of catching the yellow ghost has silver hair, wears a sleeveless or long-sleeved yellow shirt with three stripes on it, and a wide red waistband around his waist. The clown adopts the traditional Chinese opera face painting and makeup, with black, gray and blue stripes painted on his face, which echo the stripes on his clothes. A small colored flag is inserted behind him, and metal bracelets are worn on his left and right wrists. Most of the masks are used by various gods, with ferocious images and a sense of deterrence. The ghost mask is covered with black veil, with white circles around the eyes, nose and mouth, a long tasseled pointed hat on the head, and a black Tatar garment with yellow dragons embroidered in the middle and shoulders on both sides, and yellow water patterns embroidered on the hem and cuffs for decoration. The other costumes of Wu’an Nuo Opera are the same as most other Nuo Opera costumes, using the old opera costume box system. A box of civil costumes includes python costumes, official clothes, pleats, capes, and cloud shoulders.



Figure 2. Yellow ghost catching costume.

Masks are one of the most important accessories in Nuo opera performances. Nuo masks can vividly reflect the character’s personality and promote the development of the plot. They are known as the soul of Nuo opera and the symbol of gods. They enhance the aesthetics of costume entertainment and the function of dressing up. Wu’an Nuo masks are deeply rooted in traditional folk art with their rich connotations and unique artistic forms. They have been passed down for thousands of years and gradually evolved into the spiritual beliefs of the people. These Nuo masks, which symbolize souls, gods, ancestors, and heroes, are the medium of spiritual communication in Nuo opera rituals. They are usually used as symbolic symbols for communicating with society, nature, and the supernatural. People hope to get close to “gods” through masks to gain the sympathy and protection of “gods” and help themselves fulfill their wishes that are difficult to achieve in reality. In order to keep the Wu’an Nuo mask, a folk art, flourishing, Wu’an craftsmen of all generations have been constantly exploring how to give characters personality traits and style characteristics, and have also been exploring broader mask expression elements and symbols. Through the lifelike facial expressions and exaggerated character images of the masks, the audience is guided into the strange world of ghosts and gods. As it has long been rooted in folk labor and draws nourishment from folk spiritual culture and life, it has formed exaggerated and naive shapes, bright colors, and rough and funny art forms, reflecting the romantic imagination of folk artists and their unique regionality and naturalness.

Wuan Nuo Opera masks are mainly red, white, blue, yellow, black and other colors. Different colors show the charac-

ter's personality and identity. For example, Guan Yu's red mask strengthens his loyalty and righteousness, and Bao Gong's black mask highlights his integrity and honesty. It forms a fixed match with the costumes. According to the survey, Wuan Nuo Opera masks are mainly divided into five categories, including secular masks, positive god masks, fierce god masks, monk masks and clown masks, as shown in Table 1. Most Wu'an Nuo opera masks are made of wood, and the characters are realistically modeled. The overall shape is concave inside and convex outside. In order to facilitate the breathing, viewing and singing of the performers, the nose, eyes and mouth of the mask are hollowed out. From the production point of view, the masks can be divided into two types: with a crown and without a crown. The crowned masks carve the crown and the face into one piece according to the identity of the masked character, such as the God of Land wearing a clerk's scarf and Bao Zheng wearing a square-cornered black gauze. The without-crown masks are neatly cut off from the top of the forehead and leave a shallow groove so that the hat can be put on after the mask is worn. According to the size, the masks are divided into "full face" and "half face". The full face can cover the whole face during the performance and is mostly used to dress up characters that do not need to sing; the half face mainly covers the upper half of the face, leaving the mouth exposed to facilitate the performer's singing.

Table 1. Overview of Wuan Nuo Opera Masks

Character Type	Number	modeling	Facial color	Material	Function	wearing method	Representatives
Secular people	3-12	With/without crown	White, skin color, brown	Wood	Nuo Opera	Full/half face	Bao Gong, Guan Gong
True God	3-10	With crown	Red, white and gold	Wood	Nuo rituals and Nuo operas	Full face	Emperor, Heavenly Emperor, Heavenly Official, etc.
Fierce God	2-7	With/without crown	Red, green, black	Wood	Nuo rituals and dances	Full face	Yama, Door God
Monk	1-3	Without crown	White, skin color	Wood	Nuo Opera	Full face	Old and young monks
Clown	1-3	Without crown	Black, White	Wood	Nuo rituals and dances	Full face	Jipo, Huihui

4. Conclusion

This study explored the cultural information of Wu'an Nuo Opera through the methodology of iconography, tried different ways of thinking, and understood Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, through a large number of interpretations of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes, the regularity of pattern types, color matching, and subject matter expression of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes in the Han Dynasty was sorted out, thereby showing the combination of various units and elements of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes; on the other hand, the source of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes was obtained, and the humanistic thoughts and aesthetic pursuits in Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes under the influence of Confucianism were obtained. This study completed a multi-level understanding of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes, sorted out the research methods of iconography in Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes, and provided new ideas for the multi-dimensional and structured integration of Wu'an Nuo Opera costumes.

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