

# A Brief Analysis of the Role of Traditional Chinese Opera Body in Character Shaping

-- A Case Study of Beijing Opera

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**Abstract:** Beijing Opera, as a treasure of Chinese traditional art, has been widely spread and has been called "the quintessence of China". Beijing Opera is not only notable for its unique singing, music, costumes and facial makeup, but also for its rich body performance to shape the character and inner world. Body section, which is a variety of physical movements using props or no props on the opera stage, is an important means to shape characters. In the performance of Beijing Opera, the actors should use the delicate body performance to show the character, emotion, heart, and status of the role. Create fresh and vivid characters for the audience, so that the audience can deeply understand the characteristics of each role in the process of appreciation.

**Keywords:** Opera Body; Beijing Opera; Shaping Characters.

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## 1. Introduction

The body performance is the main content of "Zuo Gong" and "Da Gong" in the "four Gong" of opera performance, which mainly refers to the external movement technology. Through continuous inheritance and development and creative practice, the opera body has formed a unique artistic program. Opera figure originates from life, but it is definitely not the use and imitation of life. It is a form of opera performance based on the continuous refinement of life by generations of opera performing artists, with movement as the main means of expression. Opera figure is one of the ways for actors to shape characters in addition to singing and chanting. In order to better shape characters, they can use any props, such as fans, swords, sleeves, hair, handkerchiefs and other props to stimulate the audience's senses, arouse the audience's interest, promote the development of the plot, and strengthen the character characteristics.

## 2. The Basic Characteristics of Opera Body

The figure of the opera is highly stylized, virtualized and exaggerated. These characteristics enable the opera figures to vividly show the inner emotions and actions of the characters in the performance, so that the audience can feel the tense rhythm on the stage and the interactive relationship between the characters through the exquisite performance of the actors.

(1) The stylization of the figure of the opera

There are some exercises in opera, although they are not as imposing as the magnificent routines of dance, but they are more standardized than life itself and have a strong rhythm. This is often referred to as "stylization". On the opera stage, the characters walk, stage scheduling, upstairs and downstairs, eat wine, light lamps, appear, beat the back, open and close doors... The movements are almost regular and often accompanied by music and drums. For example, the actors will almost appear at Kowloon Port, and then begin to tidy up their clothes, mostly touch the flowers on their heads, pull a button, and so on. There are also some stylized body combinations, such as rising, riding, walking and some

martial arts routines. For example, starting to dominate: Starting to dominate is a more common body combination on the stage of Beijing Opera, meaning that it means to rise and dominate. It is generally applicable to a set of stylized body movements such as a full helmet and a girdled armor made by a military general before going into battle; Walking, generally means the samurai chivalry light at night or stealth speed of the stylized body movement, is one of the basic skills of martial arts actors, mainly with a variety of kicks, flying feet, spinning, sweeping legs and other actions combined, giving a person a flexible movement, vigorous, martial arts superb, extraordinary feeling. These are all stylized performances of the opera body.

(2) Virtualization of opera body

Virtualization is one of the commonly used performance techniques on the stage of Beijing Opera. On the stage of Beijing Opera, there are not too many stage stage props, and the complex scenery furnishings, all through the virtual movement, in the limited stage to show unlimited scenes, using virtual techniques can make the stage thousands of soldiers, thousands of horses, mountains, tsunami, clothing, food and daily living can be performed vividly. This virtual body performance is also very testing actors, if the performance on the ship when the two must be fixed distance to show the size of the ship; When acting in the door, the actor should fix the position of the door, and all the actors on the stage should enter and go out from this fixed door, and there can be no deviation. For example, in the play Autumn River, the changes of Old Weng and Chen Miaochang's movements are very consistent with the development of the plot. The two people are showing the feeling of being in a boat with "cloud walking" on the stage. The dance movements of the two actors in the bow and stern, one high and the other low, show the scene of the waves on the water surface. There are also some special body movements without physical objects, such as the more representative "Picking Up Jade Bracelet" in Hua Dan's repertoire, which is performed on an empty stage, showing Sun Yujiao's mood of falling in love at first sight when she saw Fu Peng. Most of them use no physical performance, for example, there are several times in the play to open and close the door, enter the door, thread the needle,

bang the chicken, feed the chicken, and other performances are no physical virtual body performance.

### (3) Exaggeration of the figure of the opera

The exaggeration of the figure of opera is a unique form of artistic expression. Through exaggerated body performance, the character's characteristics can be more clearly displayed, while pushing the character's emotions to the extreme, and promoting the audience to be more immersed in it. Exaggeration is the artistic processing of the action of life to make it more vivid. For example: on the stage of Beijing Opera, the characters laugh heartily, each line is different, among which the laughter of the flower face line is the most exaggerated, and his laughter is very bold and imposing. And Xiao Sheng's laughter makes people feel a little strange, and even a little scary. Exaggerated movements can make the connotation and emotion of opera characters more vivid and vivid, and at the same time can better make up for the lack of language expression, so that the audience can have a deeper understanding of the content to be conveyed by opera works. Such as: through a large swing sleeve, stomp and other actions to strengthen the character. In the Peking Opera drama "Sitting on the Floor and Killing Xi Xi", Yan Xijiao uses a lot of sleeve shaking and stamping feet to vividly express her wicked and mean character image.

## 3. The Performance Form of Opera Body Scene Rendering

Scene rendering this artistic technique, actors through the exquisite body skills, the life of the movement, emotion, through a variety of forms to beautify the scene to strengthen the artistic effect, so that the plot is more complete, vivid and real. For example: appreciating flowers and smelling flowers in life may be that ordinary looking at flowers and squatting down to smell flowers will not make an outgoing appreciation gesture. However, on the stage of Peking Opera, the body shape will be used to beautifying the action of seeing and smelling flowers. Usually, the posture of appreciating flowers will be supported by one hand first, and then the direction of the flowers should be pointed and the eyes should be concrete, indicating that the audience "I want to enjoy this flower" and then walking to the side of the flowers with the rhythm of gongs and drums. Then began to smell the flower action, feet step slightly squat to lean forward, hands do back action after the nose tip close to smell the flowers, and then put the flowers back, slowly get up to give people a sense of beauty; This kind of scene rendering is not only limited to the presentation of visual effects, but also pays more attention to guiding the audience to deeply understand the plot and characters through sensory experience, so as to achieve the aesthetic realm of "conveying spirit through form and combining form and spirit".

## 4. The Application of Opera Figure in Peking Opera Repertoire

### (1) Shaping the character image

In Beijing Opera performance, the use of the actors' bodies is closely related to the shaping of the characters' personalities. Through different body performances, actors can show the character, temperament and character image of the role. For example, the steadiness of the old role needs to be shown from a steady pace and deliberate action. The dignified Athens of Qingyi needs to be expressed by light and steady walking, delicate gestures and facial expressions. In the Peking Opera

drama Mu Guiying, the role of Mu Guiying has a lot of body movements in the play. For example, in the scene of "going out", Mu Guiying wears a garrison costume and performs with a large body length, such as a large swing of sleeves, showing her fearless, bold and confident character image. In "Hanging the head", through delicate gestures and steady steps, she showed her deep planning, wisdom and responsibility in crisis. The biggest characteristic of Huadan is that his performance form is mainly detailed and rich performance, focusing on the spiritual performance of the role and the externalization of internal psychological activities. Most of the roles they play are in the youth period, little experience in life, so they will have a lively, frank, just, romantic character characteristics, to have the courage to boldly express their emotions, and these emotions need to be smooth, clever performance can be released. In the Peking Opera drama "Little Cattle", although the village maid sings with Ma Chang Zi, but this Ma Chang Zi is not like Wu Dan's Ma Chang Zi is very heroic, small cattle Ma Chang Zi is to show the girl is very innocent and lively, out to play for everything is full of freshness, creating a lovely, frank character image of the village maid.

### (2) Present the story plot

Stage performance is characterized by continuity, which requires actors not only to show characters through action, but also to use appropriate methods to better present continuous plot changes to the audience. Compared with other performance forms, in the process of stage characterization, the figure of the opera has more advantages in presenting the story situation [1]. The presentation of the opera body not only depends on the skills and skills of the actors, but also needs their thorough understanding of the script and the role. Only by having a deep understanding of the story and the characters can the actor bring the story situation more vividly to the stage through the body performance. Example: In the Peking Opera drama "Picking Up Jade Bracelet", Sun Yujiao's heart activity when she first saw Fu Peng, first "frightened" at the discovery of a man in the courtyard, then "curious" pretended to peep at Fu Peng, and finally Fu Peng talked to buy chickens but because his mother was not at home and could not deal and finally had to say goodbye, both sides were reluctant to part. This figure suggests that they have feelings for each other. Then Fu Peng will take down a family bracelet at the door of her house, Sun Yujiao found jade bracelet, surprised and happy, want to take and embarrassed to take, deliberately the handkerchief fell on the jade bracelet, fake pick up the handkerchief really picked up the jade bracelet, came into the house to take out the jade bracelet. In this body performance expressed the desire to pick up and put the inner action, to promote the later plot: Liu matchmaker found Sun Yujiao's small mind, and then by her to match two people, and finally achieved their marriage. This episode not only shows the complex and delicate heart of the two of them in their first love, but also shows the contradiction between love and feudal ethics. The addition of the above body movements makes its plot development more smooth, but also creates a good performance atmosphere, prompting the audience to be able to concentrate on the appreciation, so as to more deeply depict the performance of the stage.

### (3) Depict the character's heart

There are many profound and subtle emotions on the stage of Beijing Opera that are difficult to express clearly by language, so the use of body movements is one of the important means of expression to convey the psychological

conditions and emotional changes of the characters. Actors can depict the inner emotional changes of characters through body movements, such as joy, sorrow, love, hate and hatred. To depict the inner hearts of characters, actors use exaggerated and expressive performances as well as the externalization of facial expressions, eyes and body posture, etc., thus combining them into a set of dramatic figures with strong dynamic and emotional charm to reflect the inner hearts of characters [2]. When opera characters express anxiety, they often move quickly or shake their hands, rub their hands, and rub their chest to show their anxious inner activities. For example, in the Peking Opera drama "Killing on the Floor", Song Jiang finds himself looking for a letter again after losing it. The hurried steps at his feet, rubbing his hands, blowing , and significantly increasing the range of body movements all reflect his anxiety. The figure of the opera often uses props to extend the inner emotions of the characters. For example, "water sleeves" is one of them, water sleeves can show the emotions of the characters in the play, such as anger, sadness and happiness, "shoulder sleeves" that is, cross the shoulder sleeves, the left and right sleeves cross to the shoulders into a hug, and can also be matched with squatting and lying as shoulder sleeves. This action usually shows the character frightened, afraid of cold, pain or walking difficult emotional action; "Sleeve-throwing" is the action of throwing water sleeves to both sides or diagonally down. The activity range of sleeve-throwing sleeves is in the middle and lower area, and emotions are mostly directed at others. For example, expressing dissatisfaction with people or things, or resentment, scolding, tension, frustration, rejection, etc., can be expressed by throwing sleeve actions of different ranges of action; In addition, there are some skillful gestures using props. For example, the sword dance in the Peking Opera drama Farewell My Concubine belongs to the "dance in the drama". This sword dance not only shows Yu Ji's feelings for Xiang Yu, but also comforts and encourages Xiang Yu. Through the sword dance with bright rhythm and swaying variety, it reveals Yu Ji's contradictions in the face of adversity and defeat. This sword dance of Yu Ji is not only a wonderful performance in Farewell My Concubine, but also a deep understanding of Yu Ji's complex and contradictory psychological status. Through the above art form of body performance, the audience can more deeply feel the inner world of the characters and the profound core of the opera.

(4) The use of skilled body movements to shape the role identity status

The acrobatic figure in the opera performance mainly refers to the skills and unique works with special techniques, dance movements and the foundation and style of martial arts

performance. The use of special skill body movements to shape the character characteristics, status, ability and quality. Generally speaking, the main characters on the stage of Peking Opera often have instruments and props and skillful movements that are in line with their own status, so as to cooperate with or strengthen the effect of expressing their emotional expression and strengthening their status characteristics [2]. In the Peking Opera drama "The Goddess of Heaven Scatters Flowers", the swinging long silk is dancing to express the artistic conception of "the Goddess of Heaven" walking in the wind, visiting all over the world, and "the Goddess of Heaven" thinking about the peng and spreading her wings, the dragon entering the sea, the fairy birds fluttering and the Buddha's light shining. "Princess Drunk" "Yang Guifei" on the stage of the body movements are elegant and dignified, including fan dance, the performance of "Yang Guifei" exquisite, skilled, soft dance skills, thus won the favor of Tang Xuanzong. These movements not only promote the development of the story, but also effectively shape the identity of the characters by introducing the atmosphere of the whole scene to the climax. Moreover, these opera figures also correspond to the images of specific characters in historical or mythological stories, which accords with the public's subjective understanding and imagination of these characters. Therefore, the effective use of the skilled figure in the opera performance also plays a very important role in character shaping.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, Beijing Opera performance is a highly comprehensive and diversified art. The figure of opera plays an important role in shaping the character image of Beijing Opera. Actors should not only show characters through singing, reciting, etc., but also pay attention to the importance of showing characters. Through the in-depth study of the body performance and the display of exquisite skills, the actors can make the characters more vivid and three-dimensional, so as to bring profound artistic enjoyment to the audience.

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