

An Analysis and Research on the Characteristics of Chinese Jin Opera Costume Art

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Abstract

Originating from the heart of Shanxi, China, Jin opera, known as "Zhong Lu Bang Zi," manifests as a regional opera that has assimilated the melodious songs and rhythmic tunes of the Shanxi populace and the central region. Consequently, it has matured into a distinctive genre of operatic performance. Correspondingly, the traditional costumes worn by the characters in Jin opera have evolved in unison with the development of Chinese opera, ultimately giving rise to a distinguished system of attire during the illustrious Chinese Ming Dynasty the traditional costume designs within Jin opera intricately reflect a distinct structure, resplendent with a vibrant palette and ornate patterns, seamlessly carrying forth the quintessential features intrinsic to ancient Chinese opera costumes. To illuminate this subject matter, this research endeavors to adopt a qualitative research methodology, meticulously analyzing the myriad styles, colors, and fabrics employed in Jin opera costumes. Moreover, it diligently categorizes and delves into the inherent characteristics embodied by these costumes during Jin opera performances. By employing poignant examples as illustrative evidence, this study succinctly encapsulates the artistic attributes that hallmark Jin opera costumes. Furthermore, it expounds upon the present state of research pertaining to Jin opera costumes, while concurrently furnishing theoretical frameworks to guide their sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese opera holds a paramount position within Chinese culture, encapsulating its rich heritage. Regrettably, the realm of opera research predominantly fixates on the examination of scripts and the study of opera singing, while accorded less attention is the meticulous exploration of opera costumes. Jin opera, a venerable genre originating from Shanxi, holds a distinguished position as one of China's earliest intangible cultural heritages (Liu, K.X., Lin, K., and Zhu, C. 2023). The evolution of Jin opera costumes, tracing back to the traditional attire of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Yu Yaru. 2008), now stands as an integral component of Jin opera stage performances, bearing witness to the historical trajectory of Jin opera's development. The traditional costumes of Jin opera characters in Shanxi exude a unique artistic style and possess remarkable characteristics, featuring diverse styles, sumptuous fabrics, intricate patterns, and ornate details. They transcend their role as mere stage attire and are regarded as exquisite works of art. These costumes not only exhibit distinctiveness but also convey profound artistic expressions (Zhao Xianzheng, n.d.).

Referred to as "Xingtou," Jin opera costumes encompass a comprehensive range of garments worn by actors during Jin opera performances, encompassing head crowns, clothing, footwear, and accessories (Zhou Yi, and Tan Xin, 2008). Given the actor-centric nature of this performance form, costumes assume a pivotal role as conduits of Jin opera's essence. Jin opera costumes captivate with their vibrant and dazzling colors, leaving a lasting visual impact. The grandeur they exude holds immense artistic influence. Each Jin opera costume boasts brilliant hues and distinctive patterns that deliver a powerful visual spectacle (Zhao Jing, 2023). The patterns and motifs adorning Jin opera costumes are not merely decorative embellishments but rather serve to echo the character traits and identities portrayed within the opera (Liang Yidi, 2021). While existing literature tends to focus on Beijing opera when exploring the overall artistic characteristics of opera costumes, the significance of local opera costumes often gets overlooked. Consequently, this paper aims to examine the artistic merits of traditional Jin opera costumes, with the goal of preserving and advancing both Jin opera and its iconic attire.

This study endeavors to illuminate the essence of Jin Opera costumes by meticulously delving into their styles, color palettes, and materials. Through a discerning analysis of these three pivotal elements, it aims to encapsulate the distinctive artistic attributes inherent in Jin Opera attire. This exploration not only demarcates Jin Opera costumes from their counterparts in Chinese opera but also serves as a clarion call, allowing the unique characteristics of Jin Opera costumes to shine resplendently. In so doing, this study contributes invaluable theoretical foundations for future research and ushers in novel perspectives and methodologies for safeguarding the rich cultural heritage of Jin Opera.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research method mainly, collecting data related to Jin opera costume culture through interviews, observation, documents, and audiovisual, and analyzing through text, images, and video, studying theories and models with organized data in a logical manner derived from that. The specific methods used to obtain first-hand information by participant observation of Jin opera performances and in-depth interviews with Jin opera practitioners include participant observation, historical research method, combined fieldwork method, documentary research method, and inductive method. Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research focuses more on the perspectives of Jin opera performers and aims to understand the history and culture of Jin opera costumes, focusing on how different performers understand their respective acting roles to demonstrate the cultural innovation and social advantages of Jin opera costumes (Chen, C.M. 2022).

3. Results and Discussion

Utilizing a multifaceted approach encompassing fieldwork, exhaustive literature research, and insightful interviews, this comprehensive study on Jin Opera costumes is dissected into four pivotal facets: the intricate styles embodied by Jin Opera costumes, the rich and evocative color palette they employ, the carefully chosen materials that constitute their essence, and finally, the profound artistic nuances that define Jin Opera costumes.

3.1 Styles of Jin Opera Costumes

Jin opera costumes encompass seven main styles, namely Mang, Pi, Kao, Zhe, official coat, helmet, and opera shoes, each showcasing distinctive characteristics (Souto, C., and Monteiro, P. 2016).

The Mang costume, a quintessential traditional attire in Jin opera, features a round collar and long sleeves. Elaborate dragon patterns adorn the back, chest, shoulders, and knees, lending it the name "Mang [Zhang Jingting., 2011]." Therevid for an emperor, queen, consort, public officials, and noble characters in the drama, the Mang costume exudes regality and prestige. Notably, the Mang costume distinguishes itself as an unbundled attire, departing from the conventions of traditional life garments. This design allows for fluid movements during performances, a pivotal aspect of Jin opera. In this performance art, actors serve as the primary carriers of costumes and music, and the swaying motion of the Mang costume effectively conveys the characters' moods and states (Ma Fangfang. 2022). The slightly exaggerated long sleeves further enrich the performance movements, lending a touch of theatricality and enabling the characters to vividly express their emotions. Through this dynamic costume, the essence of Jin opera is effectively communicated, captivating the audience with its compelling narrative.

Pi, originating from the Ming Dynasty, were crafted to mimic the opulence of Ming Dynasty attire (Ma Suying. 2022). The essential style of Jin opera Pi features two long sleeves, a wide collar positioned above the chest, water sleeves beneath the cuffs, and open crotches on the left and right sides. Diverging from the resplendent python costume, Pi in Jin opera are differentiated based on gender, with distinct designs for male and female characters (Wang Xinyue. 2020).

The traditional costume known as "Zhajia" or "Jia" in ancient times, colloquially referred to as "Kao," is characterized by its close-fitting nature and was predominantly worn by military generals (Li Yueyan. 2023). It stands as one of the most iconic costumes not only in Jin opera but also in various Chinese opera genres, showcasing elaborate and intricate patterns that convey a sense of stability. The basic style of the Kao costume features a round neckline and snug cuffs, adorned with patterns and motifs reminiscent of armor, emphasizing the protective nature of the attire (Li Yonghong, 2023).

The Zhezi costume, also referred to as the "Dao Clothing," stands as a traditional attire within Jin opera (Qi Hongmei, 2018). It derives from the slant-neck "big-sleeved shirt" of the Ming Dynasty, skillfully modified through artistic techniques. This versatile and commonly seen costume holds a significant presence on the stage of Jin opera. Zhezi was primarily worn by the general populace, while a few officials and members of noble families also adorned them. While Zhezi garments featured a simple shape and served various functions, they were often employed as casual wear for everyday outings (Qi Hongmei. 2020). Despite their simple structure, Zhezi costumes boasted numerous decorative elements, showcasing eye-catching patterns and designs.

The official coat, on the other hand, symbolized the attire worn by civil officials of lower rank than generals (Zhao Zhuqing. 2018). When wearing the official coat, a jade belt would be fastened around the waist. The style of the official coat sometimes resembled that of the python costume, featuring a round collar, broad lapels, armpit hems, wide sleeves, and water sleeves. The entire garment was predominantly a single color, with only a square pattern embroidered on the chest and back, known as the "tonic," serving as a symbol of the official's rank and status (Zhang Mei. n.d).

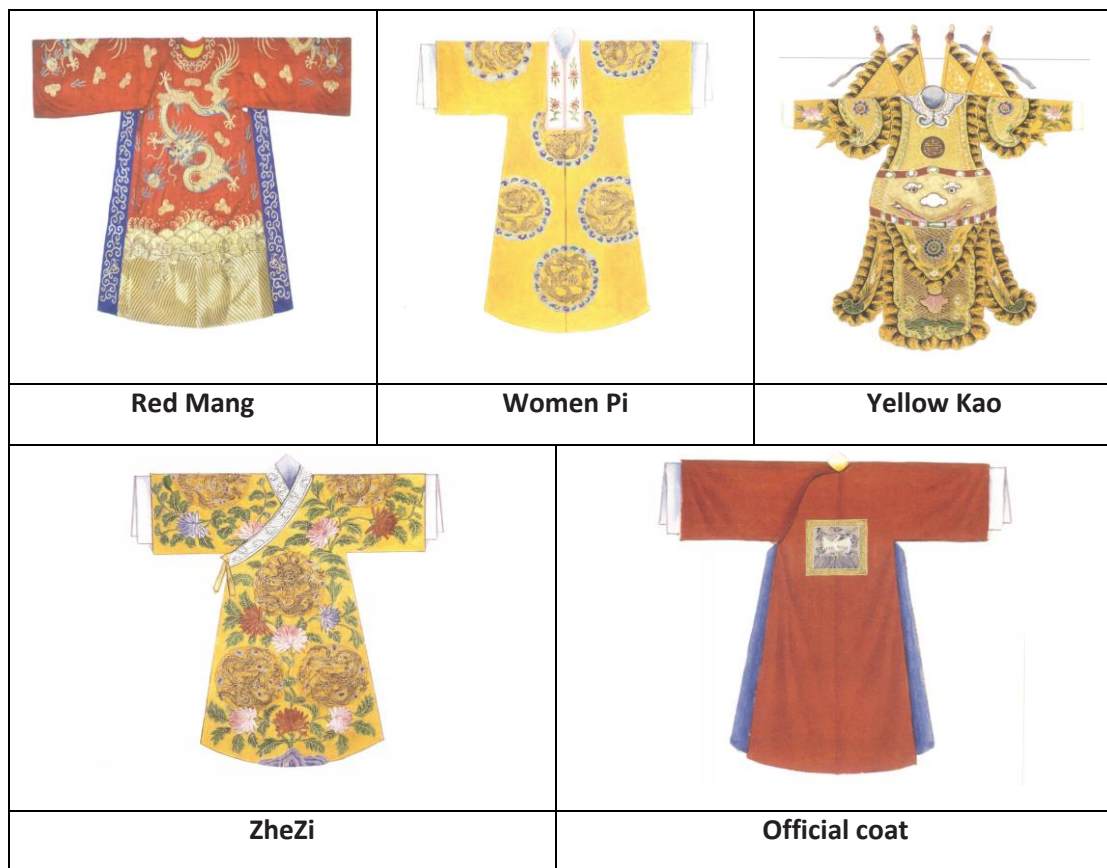


Figure 1: Styles of Jin Opera

3.2 Colors of Jin Opera Costumes

For over two millennia, the "five colors" have served as the fundamental means of expressing traditional Chinese colors (Lin, Y. P., 2016). Jin opera costumes adhere to the hierarchical structure of feudal society, and this hierarchical concept is evident in the use of colors within Jin opera costumes. The colors employed in Jin opera costumes serve as a concentrated embodiment of traditional Chinese culture, divided into the upper five colors and the lower five colors (Chen Zhihua, 2018). The upper five colors encompass red, green, yellow, white,

and black, while the lower five colors consist of purple, pink (red), blue, lake, and incense. The upper five colors are considered the primary colors, typically worn by the main characters, such as emperors and officials. Conversely, the lower five colors are worn by supporting characters, such as lower-ranking officials and commoners. This classification provides a clear distinction for the audience to swiftly identify the main and secondary characters during performances. Jin opera costumes themselves are also strictly categorized based on these colors. Reflecting the hierarchical nature of feudal society, the traditional costumes of Jin opera adhere to the notion that different colors and patterns represent different social statuses. Thus, the colors utilized in the traditional costumes of Jin opera align with feudal ideologies and the feudal system.

Upper five colors					
	 red	 green	 yellow	 white	 black
Lower five colors					
	 purple	 pink	 blue	 lake	 incense

Figure 2: Color Colors of Jin Opera Costumes

3.3 Fabrics for Jin Opera Costumes

In crafting traditional Jin opera costumes, a rich array of materials is employed, with some of the most used ones being highlighted here. These materials form the core of Jin opera attire, each serving a unique purpose in bringing this art form to life. The primary fabrics utilized in Jin opera costumes encompass tweed, grain cloth, large satin, and linen. Among these, the "Mang" attire stands out as an exclusive garment reserved for nobility, crafted primarily from sumptuous large satin. The elegant "Pi" relies on a combination of large satin and crepe satin to achieve its distinctive look. For the intricate "Kao" costume, brocade graces the exterior, silk lines the inside, and silk-cotton serves as the inner lining. Meanwhile, "Zhezi" predominantly feature satin as their main fabric, while official garments lean heavily on monochrome satin for their construction (Shan, W. B.2012).

In the early stages of Jin opera's development, most costumes were fashioned from modest, lower-quality fabrics. However, it wasn't until the aftermath of the Second World War that a significant shift occurred, leading to the elimination of these subpar materials from the scene (Zhang Jingting, 2011). These commonly used materials represent both the essence of Jin opera attire and its evolution over time. Some of these materials have slowly vanished from the public eye as years have passed, only to be preserved in museums as testaments to their craftsmanship or held as cherished private collections. Yet, the majority continue to play pivotal roles in the ongoing performances of Jin opera, gracing the stage with their enduring presence.

In our exploration of this art form, it is crucial to shift our focus towards the present and the living tradition of Jin opera, rather than dwelling solely on ancient texts and research. The art of Shanxi Jin opera is a vibrant and vital facet of folk culture that deserves our earnest attention and appreciation. It thrives as an ever-evolving expression of artistry and heritage, begging for our continued engagement and support.

3.4 The artistic characteristics of Jin opera costumes

Through a comprehensive analysis of the style, color, and fabric of Jin opera costumes, several artistic characteristics can be identified:

1. **Strong Hierarchy:** Jin opera costumes exhibit a pronounced sense of hierarchy. Originating from the Ming Dynasty, a period characterized by flourishing feudalism in China, the costumes in Jin opera effectively convey the social class system of that era. The costumes in Jin opera align with the narrative structure of feudal stories, reflecting the deeply ingrained ideas inherited from feudal society (Ji Li, and Zhang Jianping, 2012). The evolution of Jin opera costumes demonstrates the enduring presence of aesthetic concepts in costume design. Traditional costumes from feudal society were not only preserved in their form but, more importantly, specific costumes were employed to signify the hierarchy that held the greatest significance during that time (Yang, N., n.d). Through costumes, distinctions between rulers and the ruled were discernible, and the political landscape was more authentically represented. A study of the helmet headgear in Jin opera costumes, for example, readily reveals a progressive differentiation in the headgear worn by emperors, concubines, civil servants, and military generals.
2. **Aesthetic Appeal:** The artistry of Jin opera costumes lies in their harmonious integration with the demands of opera dance performances (Li Yuqing, 2023). The rhythmic artistry of the costumes finds expression through the actors, encompassing costume components, colors, and materials. The costumes exhibit artistic excellence in their form, utilizing colors, patterns, and production techniques with distinct Chinese characteristics. These elements render the costumes unique, enhancing the overall visual impact on the stage.
3. **Programmatic Nature:** Jin opera costumes assume a crucial role in the development of the performance's narrative. The distinctiveness of Jin opera lies in its ability to portray diverse character images and traits through different roles, accompanied by unique singing styles and movements that set them apart from other characters (Huangfu Juhan. 2000). The costumes serve as a medium through which the characters express their emotions. For instance, the flinging of sleeves when portraying anger or the shaking of the crown to convey joy. Ultimately, the artistry conveyed by Jin opera costumes primarily emerges from the seamless coordination between the costumes and the actors' movements.

Jin Opera performances carve out their distinct identity by masterfully crafting a repertoire of programs that cater to the multifaceted needs of various character types and their unique traits within different roles (Yu, L., Shan, S., and Inc, D.E.P. 2015). This meticulous design endeavor seeks to create bespoke vocalizations and movements that seamlessly align with each character's essence, offering an expressive method that sets them apart from their theatrical counterparts. While Jin Opera encompasses a variety of roles, it falls short of encapsulating the full spectrum of character attributes, ages, environments, and identities. For instance, the same "Mang" costume might grace both protagonists and antagonists. Yet, within this apparent uniformity, the costumes convey nuanced meanings to the audience through specific color schemes and patterns. A "Green Mang," typically adorns a fervent and loyal character with a red face, while a "White Mang" is often reserved for dashing and refined young generals (Luo, J., 2017). Conversely, black attire signals a character's rugged and audacious personality. Consequently, armed with this visual lexicon, the audience can intuitively discern that a character in a "Green Mang" cannot be a villain, and one in a "White Mang" is unlikely to be elderly.

Through this language of costumes, Jin opera attire provides the audience with a more immediate comprehension of characters' status and personality traits. "The symbolic role of stage costumes holds a pivotal place within opera attire, invoking the audience's emotions through style and color, forming a fusion of opera art's programmatic essence and the audience's psychological response." In terms of color and pattern, Jin opera costumes adeptly construct the identities and emotional states of characters, whether set amidst opulence or in the throes of destitution. This artistic refinement, cultivated over time, has solidified this programmatic branch, ushering in the maturity of Jin Opera as an art form. Through the establishment of performance conventions, the delineation of genres, and the standardization of costumes, Jin Opera has reached a level of sophistication where

attire serves as a potent tool for shaping characters' external appearances, thus opening exciting avenues for further research and exploration.

4. Conclusion

This study explores the artistic characteristics of Jin opera costumes, focusing on their hierarchy, aesthetics, and programmatic nature, while analyzing the elements of style, color, and fabric. The analysis of Jin opera character costumes reveals the absence of a dedicated costume society for Jin opera, leading to a reliance on purchasing costumes from Suzhou, which poses certain limitations for the future of costume design in each opera type. The traditional costumes of Jin opera exhibit a strong influence from ancient Chinese culture, particularly the political and cultural factors of the Ming Dynasty, emphasizing a well-defined hierarchical structure. The introduction of Beijing opera has greatly influenced Jin opera costumes, incorporated significant elements and established a standardized dress code for Jin opera performers. This study aims to delve into the cultural significance of traditional opera costumes through the ornamental aspects of Jin opera costumes. With the progress of reform and opening, the art of Shanxi opera has evolved into a complex and diverse form of performance and repertoire. Looking ahead, it is expected that traditional Jin opera costumes, as a cultural heritage of Chinese ethnic groups, will integrate more traditional elements in their future development, thereby expanding their programmatic scope.

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