

Research on the Development of Traditional Chinese Opera Films from the Perspective of Media Change

-- Taking Anhui Huangmei Opera Film as an Example

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese opera is a unique theatrical culture created by the Chinese nation, and traditional Chinese opera films are a special type of Chinese cinema. Huangmei opera films have had a huge impact on the development history of Chinese opera films, with excellent works such as "Heavenly Fairy Couple" and "Cowherd and Weaver Girl" appearing. Subsequently, Huangmei opera films have always played their unique cultural value in different eras, becoming an indispensable part of Chinese opera films. This article takes Huangmei Opera films as the research object, sorts out their development context, and explores how to create "new Huangmei Opera films" in the era of new media.

Keywords

Media; Opera films; Huangmei Opera; Film Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

Huangmei Opera, as a unique type of traditional Chinese opera in Anhui region, is an art form with great appreciation value. Movies, as products of technological development, have characteristics of realism, aesthetics, and interactivity. The fusion of film and traditional Chinese opera into a genre of film - opera films, deeply rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese traditional culture, is full of the essence of Chinese traditional art. The charm of traditional Chinese opera movies lies in their combination of traditional and modern art forms, fully showcasing the aesthetic characteristics of both traditional Chinese opera and movies. In 1955, China's first Huangmei Opera film was born, and since then, Huangmei Opera films have flourished in China. Over the past few decades, 23 works have been released. These movies are like brilliant stars, greatly enriching the unique Chinese opera films.

2. "Old Drama Cinematization" - The Development of Local Opera Films

At the beginning of the 19th century, when movies were introduced to China, they first combined with traditional Chinese opera, giving rise to a unique type of "theatrical film" in China. China's rich traditional Chinese opera culture has become an important resource for film production, and "Dingjun Mountain", shot in 1905, became China's first traditional Chinese opera film. Afterwards, various local operas were adapted into traditional Chinese opera films, from "The Peony Pavilion" and "The Song Girl Red Peony" to "Life and Death Hate". Traditional Chinese opera films completed the transformation from sound films to color films. As Director Fei Mu emphasized, the concept of "old drama filmmaking" not only attracts movie audiences through the attraction of famous actors in traditional Chinese opera, but also realizes the commercial value of traditional Chinese opera films; At the same time, it is also committed to

promoting national essence and enhancing the quality of films through exquisite performing arts.

Chinese opera films have gone through a century of ups and downs in development. By the late 1980s, the development of opera films was gradually overshadowed by the diversification of entertainment methods and the marketization of films; On the other hand, traditional Chinese opera films are conservative and rigid, and their development is gradually disconnected from the times. Since the 1990s, with the decline of traditional Chinese opera art and the restructuring of the Chinese film market, traditional Chinese opera films have gradually declined. Although the development of traditional Chinese opera films has encountered difficulties, elements of traditional Chinese opera frequently appear in other types of films, such as director Zhang Yimou's "Raise the Red Lantern" and "Hero", Chen Kaige's "Mei Lanfang", and so on. These elements of traditional Chinese opera are more or less present in the films, adding unique classical aesthetic connotations to the films.

The new Huangmei Opera culture, which has developed along the way with the help of film and television, has become popular in China with the Huangmei Opera film "Tianxian Pai", which has sparked a production frenzy in Hong Kong and Taiwan for more than 20 years since the 1960s. The creation and promotion of traditional Chinese opera films have even saved an endangered new genre, and regional limitations have been broken through through through the use of film and television media. [1]Huangmei Opera film is a product of the fusion of traditional Chinese opera and film, providing audiences with a unique aesthetic experience. The development of Huangmei Opera films and traditional Chinese opera has commonalities, and they are constantly exploring new paths of development through media changes. Over the past half century, the creation of Huangmei Opera films has presented the interaction and exploration between different genres of drama and films in this area, including the mutual accommodation between "shadow" and "play", as well as the mutual achievements between the stage and film versions of the same play.[2]

The flourishing development of digital film technology has brought new vitality to the creation of traditional Chinese opera films. In 2021, the emergence of the Cantonese film "The Legend of the White Snake: Love" once again sparked a "drama fever", earning over 20 million yuan in box office revenue in fierce market competition, breaking the highest box office record for traditional Chinese opera films in nearly 30 years. "[3]The Legend of the White Snake: Love" has successfully attracted a large number of young viewers. Throughout the development of Chinese opera films, the increase in production, improvement in quality, and excellent results have all proven that Chinese opera films are entering a period of prosperity and revival with modern characteristics.

3. "Stylization of Creation" - The Development Status of Huangmei Opera Movies

Huangmei Opera films began in the 1950s and sparked two creative waves in the 1950s and 1980s. Among them, in 1956, the movie "The Legend of Heaven" was listed as one of the "New Film Exhibition Week" films by the Ministry of Culture. Upon closer examination of the development of Huangmei Opera, it is clear that the development of Huangmei Opera films has gone through two major ups and downs, showing an overall trend of forward development. However, there are also some shortcomings, mainly reflected in the internalization of character settings and the singularity of plot settings.

3.1. Inherentization of character settings

The portrayal of the main characters that drive the development of the story in Huangmei Opera films is not deep enough, but overly portrays typical characters, leading to the internalization

of character settings. Some works spend too much space portraying talents and beauties, resulting in a clear imbalance in the structure of the works. In "Blood, Tears, Enmity, and Revenge", the work devotes a large amount of space to describing the ups and downs of Miss Bu's fate, resulting in the story being not detailed enough, the clues not being clear enough, and the overall structure appearing incomplete. This writing style may cause readers reading difficulties, making it difficult to fully understand and comprehend the theme and meaning of the story.

From a narrative perspective, the female images in Huangmei Opera films flow between "watching" and "being watched", representing a certain degree of freedom and liberation for women in the new era, and also indicating that women, as a landscape, cannot escape visual consumption.^[4]In Huangmei Opera movies, although male characters are the main characters, the story structure often has problems in order to leverage the advantages of female actors. This approach may lead to an imbalance in the plot and character development of the work, resulting in unclear storylines and incomplete overall structure. Classic films such as "Tian Xian Pai", "N ü Fu Ma", and "Dragon Girl" were once dominated by women. At the beginning of the film "Tian Xian Pei", thick clouds and mist obscure the view. As the fog gradually fades, several heavenly palaces are revealed in front of the audience from afar. The voiceover of the seven fairies is lamenting the desolate years in the heavenly palace.^[5]However, the actual situation did excessively depict his love story, affecting the main storyline and making Chen Wenyan a more important character in the movie. In "Shanxiangqing Youyou", the story was originally centered around the male protagonist, with his hard work and entrepreneurship as the core storyline. However, in actual presentation, the actress becomes the main character, and the love story becomes the core clue. This change may lead to deviations in the plot development and thematic expression of the work, making the originally prominent entrepreneurial struggle secondary and the love line dominant.

3.2. Single plot setting

In the development process of Huangmei Opera films, although the works were created by creators from different eras with different content, emotions, and themes, there are still many commonalities between them. Due to the unique cultural factors in China, the stories are mostly about love, hate, and hatred between men and women, leading to a single plot. For example, most works focus on the plot of talented individuals and beautiful women, with a background of green mountains and clear waters. The female protagonist is often depicted as beautiful and kind, with a beautiful and moving melody. However, these works display relatively few individual characteristics, and creators pay more attention to the use of traditional and classic elements in the creative process, lacking attempts to break through and innovate.

In addition, even Huangmei Opera films from different eras have differences mainly reflected in their era and character images, rather than differences in visual styles. Compared with Western music and dance films, such as Hollywood music films like "Song in the Rain" and "The Sound of Music", they can still be distinguished and have their own characteristics when the audience recalls them after watching. There are still certain differences in the creative techniques and visual styles of Huangmei Opera films. These differences reflect the aesthetic differences brought about by different cultural backgrounds and aesthetic concepts, as well as the uniqueness and innovation of Huangmei Opera films in the localization process.

3.3. Director's creation of "amphibization"

Although Huangmei Opera films have achieved some success, their influence has gradually weakened over time. The main reason is the lack of a dedicated creative team, resulting in uneven quality of works and a lack of sustained practical exploration and accumulation of artistic experience. The Huangmei Opera scripts specially created for movies are relatively scarce, and most of the Huangmei Opera movie scripts come from classic stage plays, such as

"Heavenly Fairy Couple" and "Female Consort". Similarly, most directors were originally other types of directors, while directors who focused on filming Huangmei Opera films were relatively rare. At present, people's understanding of Huangmei Opera films still remains at the level of "extension of stage plays" or "accessories of story films", and this marginalized cognitive state undoubtedly hinders their artistic progress.

Compared to those classic Huangmei Opera films, although some films strive to explore and innovate, there are very few works that can generate profound reactions and are deeply loved by audiences. Apart from those who are engaged in the drama or film industry, as well as opera enthusiasts, ordinary audiences are still familiar with early works, such as "Empress Dowager" and "Heavenly Fairy Couple". The lack of phenomenal theatrical films is due to the era in which they were produced, but the single content and low quality of the works themselves are the important reasons why they did not develop. Without a dedicated creative team, there is a lack of focused and lasting creative practice experience, as well as a lack of long-term accumulation of artistic experience.

4. Exploring the New Huangmei Opera Movies: "Film Outreach"

As an important carrier of traditional culture, traditional Chinese opera movies face enormous challenges in the rapidly developing digital technology today. In the highly entertaining era, traditional Chinese opera is gradually fading out of the public eye. As a new medium for the dissemination of traditional Chinese opera films, the Internet has the characteristics of fast dissemination, shareability, and strong interaction. It can quickly convey content to the audience, and its interactivity brings the audience and creators closer together. Creators can update and change the content of their works through feedback from the audience on online platforms. Compared to official content, user created content is more closely related to daily life, and there are a large number of short video users. The creative topics posted can easily form "explosive points", thus making Huangmei Opera "out of the circle".^[6]

The successful breakthrough of "The Legend of the White Snake: Love" provides a new creative and dissemination approach for the Huangmei Opera film, which is also a local opera film. It follows the traditional way of performing opera, removes complicated details, and leaves the word "love" throughout the entire film, making the story more focused and the characters more three-dimensional. "The Legend of the White Snake · Love" introduces special effects technology to present a ink wash like effect on the screen, bringing a brand new visual experience to the audience. This traditional Chinese opera film boldly innovates on the basis of traditional art, with high-quality content as the core, and successfully breaks through the barriers of traditional Chinese opera art dissemination through diversified, youthful, commercialized, and cross-cultural communication methods, winning the attention and praise of more audiences. This innovation is not only reflected in technology, but also in content and narrative methods. On the basis of retaining traditional storylines, "The Legend of the White Snake: Love" delves into and presents in-depth character settings, emotional expression, and other aspects, allowing audiences to appreciate beautiful performances while also feeling profound humanistic connotations. At the same time, "The Legend of the White Snake: Love" has also actively explored its dissemination methods. By combining traditional Chinese opera art with modern technology through diversified communication channels such as online platforms and social media, more young people have the opportunity to access and understand traditional Chinese opera culture, thereby expanding the audience of traditional Chinese opera art.

According to the 2021 Tiktok Data Report, Huangmei Opera ranked third among the ten most popular intangible cultural heritage projects in Tiktok in 2021, with 53.03 million praise ratings, followed by the second Yueju Opera (57.89 million).^[7] Whether it is Huangmei opera films,

Huangmei opera song and dance films, or Huangmei opera music films, they should be encouraged and efforts should be made to break away from the dichotomy of "acting for acting" and "acting for acting", and find the true way of expression that belongs to Huangmei opera films.

In terms of script creation, encourage more diverse creative techniques to enrich and diversify the storyline of Huangmei Opera films. For example, modern film narrative techniques such as non-linear storytelling and intertwining of multiple clues can be borrowed to increase the suspense and attractiveness of the plot. Meanwhile, by combining traditional cultural elements with modern themes, we can create Huangmei Opera films with a sense of the times. In terms of character development, emphasis is placed on the inner world and emotional expression of characters. Through delicate performances and in-depth depictions, the audience can gain a deeper understanding of the character's personality traits and emotional changes. At the same time, in character design, efforts can be made to break through traditional limitations and introduce more diverse character images and backgrounds to attract a wider audience. In terms of technological application, fully utilize modern film production techniques and special effects to enhance the visual effects and viewing experience of Huangmei Opera films. For example, digital special effects can be used to create stunning scenes and action effects, or sound effects and music can be used to enhance the emotional expression and atmosphere of the film. In terms of communication and promotion, we should actively explore diversified communication channels and marketing strategies. By collaborating with mainstream media, social media platforms, etc., we aim to promote Huangmei Opera films to a wider audience. At the same time, by organizing film exhibitions, cultural exchanges and other activities, we aim to enhance the international recognition and influence of Huangmei Opera films.

5. Conclusion

The artistic development of Chinese cinema has drawn nourishment from traditional Chinese opera, and the appreciation of both refined and popular elements in traditional Chinese opera has shaped the aesthetic habits of Chinese audiences. Continuously borrowing, integrating, and developing from other genres of Cantonese opera, it has become the cultural foundation for the inheritance of Huangmei opera to this day, condensing the narrative aesthetics and historical heritage of the Jiangnan region. The adaptation from traditional Chinese opera to film is an attempt to inherit and innovate Huangmei Opera as a local opera. It not only preserves the praiseworthy historical stories and cultural specimens of local dialects in the film, but also opens up a new path for the development of the new Huangmei Opera film and the construction of the Chinese School of Learning. The success of "The Legend of the White Snake · Love" has gone viral.

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