APPLICATION OF "5I"PRINCIPLE TO COURSE OF AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF BEIJING OPERA

ZHANG XIA WUHAN

University of Science and Technology
E-mail: znxhu@163.com

Abstract - Beijing Opera, like other classic performance art, needs innovative channels of transmission to cultivate young audience loyalty. The campaign of introducing Beijing Opera into campus in China has been proved to meet this demand. This paper, based on a 16-year teaching practice of the course of Aesthetic Appreciation of Beijing Opera, proposes that a "5I"(imagine, immerse, interact, identify with, innovate) principle should be applied to enhance students' aesthetic experience. Seeing that the majority of students today are novice at appreciating Beijing Opera, this "5I " principle classifies unique aesthetic features of Beijing Opera and suggests corresponding techniques to better explore the beauty of this classical art. In specific, students are encouraged to employ imagination for better understanding stage art and stylized performance; to immerse themselves in historical contextfor better accepting cultural values; to interact with Beijing Opera performers and fans for better access to performance art; to identify with characters in operas for better transmitting cultural messages; to innovate publicity of Beijing Opera for better inheriting this cultured heritage.

Keywords - Stage Art And Stylized Performance, Historical Context , Performers, Characters, Publicity of Beijing Opera

I. INTRODUCTION

Beijing Opera, combining stylized performance, singing, dialogue, mime, acrobatic fighting and dancing, was listed as an intangible cultural heritage on November 16, 2010. Despite its past glory from century 18th to 20th, Beijing Opera is striving hard to cater to contemporary audience. Like other classic arts in Western countries which find it hard to retain audience loyalty as new entertainment takes over, Beijing Opera in the eyes of Chinese youth is just an a delicate antique--beautiful but inaccessible. Under such a condition, theaters and performers take the initiatives to publicize Beijing Opera among youngsters. Actions taken by the Beijing Opera Theater of China include introducing Western symphony in the performance and video recording of 355 classic operas, pairing the sound records of 47 late artists between the 1940s and 1960s with the performance of today's outstanding young and middle-agedperformers.[1] A more profound campaign, namely, introducing Beijing Opera into campus, was launched by Chinese Ministry of Education and courses to teach Beijing Opera or appreciation of Beijing Opera are open at all levels of schools. These courses are particularly welcome in universities, leading to establishment of National Association of Optional Courses of Beijing Opera and Contest of Beijing Opera Performance for national University Students. This is the background of setting up the Course of Aesthetic Appreciation of Beijing Operain Wuhan University of Science and Technology. Starting from 2007, this course attracted more than 200 students per year, and formed a systematic and effective teaching principle, namely, "5I" ((imagine, immerse, interact, identify with, innovate)principle. examples and reasons are presented In this paper to prove that this principle greatly promotes young audience loyalty and thus contributes to the transmission of Beijing Opera.

II. IMAGINATION AND STAGE ART AND PERFORMANCE

Minimalism is observed in stage art of Beijing Opera. In the eyes of young audience accustomed with subtle visual effects and spectacular views of Hollywood movies, the stage of Beijing Opera,made up of just one desk and two chairs basically, is simple. Even accompanied with other props like whips, fans, handkerchiefs, and flags held by the actors, the stage art of Beijing Opera is not to the taste of modern audience. Therefore, the first step of aesthetic appreciation of Beijing Opera is to stimulate students imagination. In this course, teachers explicate stage art rituals with the help of stage photos and video recordings. Functions of tables, chairs and props are taught with an elicitation method. For example, teachers show a picture of horsewhip and ask students to guess what it is. Students imagine what it is, producing several answers. Then they are given a picture of battle field where warriors are holding horsewhips and trotting around the stage. With this hint, most students can deduce that this is a scene of galloping the horse. According to the class feedback, students take this practice as a riddle game, and employing imagination in study triggers their interest and sense of achievement. Likewise, the one desk and two chairs arrangement can be imagined as indicators of various surroundings and scenes. A table can represent a dining table, a bed, a tomb, a tower and a mountain.A chair can be a inner chamber, a study, a wall,a door and a well. When chairs and desk are put together, they represent a suite, a gate tower and a boat. Since imagination helps students generate potential links between their life experiences with art of Beijing

Opera, better understanding of stage art is thereby developed. One characteristic of Beijing Opera is symbolism of stage performance, which leaves greater freedom for audience imagination. As Colin Mackerras observed, "hand gestures are used symbolically to express emotional reactions. " [2] Take Mei Lan-fang(one of the greatest Beijing Opera artists) for example. He developed 53 styles of hand gestures(orchid hand patterns) to show the inner world of characters, to indicate their age and social status, or to suggest a developing romantic relationship. That is one of the reasons why younger generation finds Beijing Opera to too subtle and implicit to understand. When teaching students to appreciate the beauty of such gestures, teachers just show them pictures and ask them to choose one to match a scene of a play. In such a case, students have to employ all the imagination and association skills, so as to profoundly understand these exceedingly graceful movement patterns.

III. IMMMERSING THEMSEVLES WITH HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Eugenio Barba's foreword for Li Ruru's work The Soul of Beijing Opera, such a comment was made, "From the Asians, Europeans could learn how how the actor could rediscover an effective language, able to capture the attention of the spectators and make them dream."[3] This comment is justified by researcher's observation on Chinese opera fans. They would rather go to the theatre to watch a play they've seen dozens of times just for the sake of their favorite actor. During the play, they secretly, softly but joyfully follow the actor to sing, giving applause occasionally. Etiquette here is to immerse themselves in the context set by actors and plots. There is an old saying about watching Beijing Opera: to read a new story but listen to a familiar play. By "listen to a play", fans mean the right way to appreciate Beijing Opera is to close eyes and get lost in lyric, melody and beat. By doing so, they free themselves from everyday life and find peace or thrill in the process of watching a play. Therefore, in order to cultivate audience loyalty among contemporary youngsters, a crucial step is to help them relax and slow down, forgetting all the fast pace of modern lifestyle. In the course of Aesthetic Appreciation of Beijing Opera, a common practice is to learn how to use breath, or the act of breathing to be exact. As Elizabeth Wichmann wrote in her book, "Specific methods of breathing ...are employed to control the way in which breath enters, leaves, and is held within this central breathing cavity; these methods allow the existing breath to then control the pitch, timbre or tone color, and energy of the sound produced..." [4] When students are taught this way of breathing, they not only reap great health benefits, but also free their minds of negative feelings like worries, anxieties, or impatience. Then they can be indulged in historical context of Beijing Opera, like all the opera fans. Jia Feng contends that teaching Beijing Opera bridges a gap between traditional and modern education in China. Since the former advocates human nature while the latter is elite education, Beijing Opera shoulders a mission to integrate art education into transmission of historical and cultural values.[5] From perspective of liberal arts education for college students, teaching Beijing Opera is closely linked with passing on history, philosophy and cultural values. Hence, they tend to take students back to specific historical context set in a play so that they personally experience what happens to characters.

IV. INTERACTION WITH PERFORMERS AND FANS

Gao Yan, the founder of the program of Aesthetic Appreciation of Beijing Opera in WUST, summarizes her teaching experience and acts as a tutor for two younger teachers, one of whom is the writer of this paper. She not only sets up the curriculum of the course, but also teaches two novice teachers about Beijing Opera from ABC. Her contribution also lies in establishing Beijing Opera Association of WUST in 2007, the exact year when this course was open to all the students. When she retired ten years later, her efforts has become so fruitful that she became a model of successfully transmitting this classical art form. Today, the course was taken over by two teachers and every year more than 200 students take this course, and more importantly, Beijing Opera Association of WUST fostered these gifted students and saw five of them win the first prize in annual Beijing Opera Performing Contest for National University Students. Also, this student association is affiliated with Beijing Opera Club organized by WUST teacher union. Over 14 years, a constructive and productive interaction has been kept between two or three generations of Beijing Opera fans. In her research paper, Gao reports that interaction enables teachers and students to share knowledge of Beijing Opera, promotes spiritual communication, and more importantly, spread positive cultural messages in the exploration of classical theatre. [6] Professional performers adopted the same interactive principle when teaching Beijing Opera to general university students. As written in a paper by Li Jian(a teacher from Beijing Opera and Arts College), the process of preserving Beijing Opera should be reversed--from classroom to stage rather than previous flow from stage to classroom. [7] This conception explains why celebrated artists like Wang Peiyu visits campus and interacts with students and even personally shows them how to perform. This reversed transmission leads to a growing number of student fans. The 14th National College Beijing Opera Concert held in 2019 attracted 93 universities and presented 336 performances. Student fans were highly praised by leading professional Beijing Opera artists as judges of this contest. Without interaction between students and teachers, amateur teachers and Beijing

Opera practitioners, older and younger generation of fans, Beijing Opera will never see such a boom in today's Chinese campus.

V. IDENTIFYING WITH CHARACTERS

According to Li Ruru, Bertotle Brecht acclaimed Mei Lan Fang as "a magician at the fair giving away his tricks... " and his conception of the Alienation Effect was confirmed via "this non-identification of the actor with the character in Mei's performance. "(p55) This points out the conventionalized or stylized quality of Beijing Opera. Training a total performer who have an expert-level competence in four skills(singing, speaking, dance-acting and combat) and five canons(the use of mouth, eyes, hands feet and body) takes over 10 years. Such a professional deserves respect and love any modern movie stars, singers, dancers, martial artist receive from their fans--not to mention the fact that a Beijing Opera performer is an aggregator of all their artistic skills. Attracted by masters' ability, Beijing Opera fans, at the very beginning of this theatre art, identify with characters played and some of the characters even find their way in Chinese people's daily life. An idiom, equivalent to English "good cop bad cop" is derived from painted face roles. When two two people are described as "one plays the red face while another white face" , the listener understand that red face is for good but white face is for treacherous. A performer is more often recognized as the role he/she plays rather than as a celebrity or idol. Performers are collectively remembered as some character they play. In today's cultural context, entertainment industry spares no efforts to publicize entertainers, which eclipses Beijing Opera performers who wears elaborate make-up and costumes on stage but keeps low profile in private. Consequently, Beijing Opera as well as its artists surrender their place.

To regain and retain young generation's interest in Beijing Opera, a strategy is to publicize its cultural icons and idols. Only when they identify with those maters can they willingly accept this art. In teaching Aesthetic Appreciation of Beijing Opera, stories serve as the most important techniques. Beginning with four big opera troupes from Anhui Province, the history of Beijing Opera is an epic of main regional dramas combined with the then royal drama Kunqu opera, Yiyang opera. For 200 years, numerous artists have devoted their life and talent to prosperity of this quintessence of culture, and now college students are expected to trace back the history and become a transmitter of this great asset. The most popular story told include Mei Lanfang's struggle against Japanese invaders, three generations of Tan Xinpei's family performing on the stage, legendary love story of Xun Huisheng, and etc. For starstruck youngsters, charisma of these performers are unique when compared with today's idols. Once students identify with masters of Beijing Opera, they are unknowingly taken closer to the theatre. Another way to help students identify with characters in Beijing Opera is to set a situation and ask students to write the plot and resolve dramatic conflicts. For example, when teaching Sha Jia Bang--about how villagers in Sha Jia Ban(Japanese occupied) protect anti-Japanese army, students are asked to write a few lines for the heroine to refute a traitor's charge. Despite the historical barrier, all the students produce perfect answers because they put themselves in the heroine's place.

VI. INNOVATING PUBLICITY OF BEIJING OPERA

The Course of Aesthetic Appreciation of Beijing Opera acts as a needle pulling thread, leading students to collect all the elements of beauty and thus come to appreciate Beijing Opera. Nothing is more direct and vivid to publicize Beijing Opera than facial make-up. Facial make-up used to help the audience recognize a character over a long distance and characters wearing make-up gradually developed into one of the four role types. It is a spectacle that after a Beijing Opera troupe finishes its performance in American or European city, a long queue of audience wait outside the backstage, asking performers to put a make-up on their face. In foreign visitors' view, souvenirs with facial make-up patterns are artistic and unique. If so, why not publicize Beijing Opera with the help of this make-up. People with such ideas are numerous. Therefore, facial-makeup becomes the theme of a popular song named "Shuo Chang Lian Pu"(a song about facial-makeup). When teaching this song to students, most of them sing aloud as if they are singing in a choir. In the final examination, singing this song is compulsory. From students feedback, they welcome such ways of examination.

Another element that combines beauty of Beijing Opera with today's aesthetic taste is costumes, from which students are taught to judge people from personality, age, occupation, and social status. In Beijing Opera's convention, clothes indeed make the man. Since recently, a game called Murder Mystery(Script Killing as called by Chinese youngster) is in vogue and students are mad at dressing costumes and play a role, teachers can make use of their interest and design classroom games. When they get dressed and act as historical figures, they really go into the inner world of that character. New media can never be neglected. When all the students are Generation Z born in the era of Iphone, twitter, facebook, and digital native, teachers must transform into a live streaming host, pod caster, blogger,etc. Any way accessible to their world is employed so that teachers can be their peers. Hence, even leading Beijing Opera artists resort to new media to publicize Beijing Opera. Here is a China Daily report: Meanwhile, she never hesitates to embrace new

media and modern forms of communication, such as online streaming, lectures and variety shows, and she introduces the Peking Opera whenever she's given the chance.[8] Today, more than 100 universities in China join Beijing Opera Association for National Universities, and hundreds of teachers are engaged in the preservation and celebration of Beijing Opera. 5I principle, summed up from a 17- year teaching experience, is becoming a contributing factor to retain younger audience.

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