

EMBRACING TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS OF SUIXI LION HEADS IN LION DANCE PERFORMANCES IN CHINA

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Abstract: This study investigates the incorporation of traditions and innovations in the use of Suixi Lion Heads in lion dance performances in China. Suixi Lion Heads are a form of folk art that has been passed down through generations, and their design incorporates new elements while still maintaining their traditional essence. Through an analysis of the visual symbols and production process of Suixi Lion Heads, this study explores how the balance between tradition and innovation has contributed to their popularity and success in lion dance performances. The simplified production process of Suixi Lion Heads allows for faster and more cost-effective production, resulting in streamlined designs that are better suited to contemporary aesthetics and market demands. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of promoting and developing Suixi Lion Head culture through lion dance performances, which can facilitate the preservation and evolution of the tradition. By embracing both traditions and innovations, Suixi Lion Heads continue to play a vital role in the cultural heritage of China, providing a link between the past and the present in lion dance performances.

Keywords: Suixi Lion Heads; traditions; innovations; lion dance performances; cultural heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The lion dance is a symbol of auspiciousness and is widely recognized by the Chinese people. People may not be able to distinguish the difference between the expressive and flamboyant Southern lion dance and the realistic Northern lion dance by the performance's steps and rhythms. However, they can understand their characteristics through the props used in their performances, such as the gong, drum, cymbal, lion head, lion cloth, lion pants, shirt, lettuce, and couplets for the Southern lion. The lion head, in particular, best represents its cultural features. The shape, colour, and decorations of the lion head all have unique visual symbolism. Suixi lion heads have a long history and rich cultural connotations, bearing the beliefs, customs, and folk arts of the Suixi people of Zhanjiang, located in western Guangdong, and becoming a cultural icon of the region.

This study aims to conduct a case analysis of the Suixi Lion Head craftsmanship at the Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation. Interviews will be conducted with the inheritors of this project to qualitatively investigate the visual symbols and cultural significance of the Suixi Lion Head. Through this research, the study seeks to understand the differences and connections between traditional lion heads and the contemporary Suixi Lion Head. The findings of this study will provide valuable supplementary information for the research on visual elements in the design of lion head masks in lion dance performances.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical and Cultural Background of Suixi Lion Head

The existence of Suixi Lion Head can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty, as recorded in the Suixi County Annals (Customs Volume) of the 28th year of the Daoguang period (1848), which mentioned dancing lions and elephant plays during the Shangyuan Festival. Suixi Lion Head was recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage of Guangdong in 2006. There have been studies on the history and culture of lion dance, such as Sun (2013) who traced the origins, development, and historical background of lion dance through literature and historical relics, and Ji (2017) who analyzed the evolution of lion image, artistic style, and visual elements through stone carvings, textual materials, and image materials, including the lion head of southern lion dance. Xie and Li (2019) conducted a comprehensive study on the historical evolution, multi-dimensional values, inheritance, modeling technology, performance art, etiquette,

skills, traditional routines, and other aspects of Nanhai Lion Dance. Despite the numerous studies, there are not many detailed articles on the Suixi Lion Head specifically. More research on this unique cultural tradition is needed to fully understand its historical, cultural, and symbolic significance.

Zhang (2020) investigated Suixi Lion Dance culture from the perspective of symbiosis theory, arguing that the unique geographical conditions and social environment of Suixi have created a unique Suixi Lion Dance culture and analyzed the ocean culture, immigrant culture, clan culture, and religious culture that rooted Suixi Lion Dance culture. Although both are characteristic cultures of Southern Lion Dance, there are not many studies related to visual symbols. After expanding the scope of research to Southern Lion Dance and Guangdong Lion Dance, literature related to dance steps and cultural background is prevalent, while studies on visual symbols are relatively rare. Xue (2022) interviewed Li Rongzai, a representative inheritor of Suixi Lion Dance, to understand the history and cultural overview of Suixi Lion Dance and Suixi Lion Head and explore the development status of Suixi Lion Head, which is of reference value.

2.2 Theoretical Basis of Visual Symbols

The present study focuses on the analysis of visual symbols and, therefore, requires an understanding of the relevant concepts of semiotics. According to Peirce (2014), the theory of triadic semiotics is an important method for the study of symbols, which divides symbols into three levels: symbol, index, and icon. In the case of Suixi lion head, the symbols used in the decorations can be classified into all three levels. For example, the symbol of a lion head represents bravery and strength, while the index of a red tongue sticking out of the lion head represents enthusiasm and excitement. The icon of the lion head's whiskers represents ferocity and aggression. As mentioned above, the meanings represented by the red tongue and the length of the whiskers differ, which is why careful attention is required during the production process of lion heads regarding their shape, colour, decorations, and patterns. In the traditional production process of lion head masks, the steps of "tying, attaching, painting, and assembling" are carried out by a skilled craftsman who completes each stage independently. Each step has high craftsmanship requirements, and the master incorporates their personal understanding of lion head aesthetics into the creation process. However, the use of industrial assembly lines in lion head factories presents significant challenges to traditional lion head artisans (Fang et al., 2021). The production process of lion dance at the Suixi Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation follows an assembly line approach, yet the final products still retain the aesthetic beauty of traditional lion heads. However, due to the simplified production process, there may be variations in the visual elements of the lion heads.

Zhu (2019) conducted a study comparing the visual elements and origins of the lion dance masks in Pizhou and Qing lion masks in Jieyang, exploring the necessary connections between the production process and cultural values, as well as identifying the reasons for the differences between the two masks. From this study, we can conclude that visual symbols play an important role in the production process and cultural values of traditional Chinese art forms.

Furthermore, Han and Cheng (2014) analyzed the visual symbols of the lion dance masks in Foshan and Pizhou and found that the similarities and differences in the expression of the two masks come from different personal and societal environmental consciousness. This suggests that visual symbols in traditional art forms are not only a means of expressing cultural values but also reflect the social and historical contexts in which they were created.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study first provides background information on the research status of Guangdong lion dance and Guangdong lion dance masks. It then reviews the basic theories of semiotics and relevant research on the visual symbols and social meanings of Guangdong lion dance masks both domestically and internationally. With the support of semiotics theory, the author organizes, interviews, and conducts research based on the information provided by the Suixi lion head handcrafted intangible cultural heritage workshop. This process aims to summarize the visual elements of Suixi lion dance masks and establish a comprehensive framework for the visual elements of Guangdong lion dance masks. The results from literature, interviews, and research are analyzed qualitatively, leading to the final conclusions.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Literature research method

This study collects relevant literature on Suixi lion head handcrafting, traditional Chinese patterns analysis, visual semiotics, and other related topics from sources such as the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), foreign databases, libraries, and online reports. By collecting and organizing literature, the author gains an understanding of the history and research status of lion head handcrafting, the main visual features of lion dance masks, and the meaning of visual elements in lion dance masks. This forms the theoretical foundation for the subsequent writing.

3.2.2 Case Study

The data for this study is sourced from the "Suixi Lion Head Handcrafting Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop". A visitation list is first prepared, and interviews are conducted with the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and relevant staff members at the workshop. During the interviews, written records, audio recordings, videos, and observations are made. After organizing the texts, NVIVO software is used for qualitative analysis to identify high-frequency keywords. By combining these keywords with the content from literature, the basic appearance of Suixi lion heads can be understood. This helps in understanding the traditional, innovative, and mixed characteristics of lion dance masks.

3.2.3 Comparative Analysis

Through literature analysis and interviews, the characteristics of Suixi lion dance masks are understood. Line drawings are then created based on the collected data and on-site observations captured through photographs. The proportions of length, width, and height from the front, side, and back perspectives are calculated using the collected data. This provides a proportional framework for the appearance of Suixi lion heads. This data fills in the gaps in visual element information for lion head masks. The colour data of Suixi lion dance masks are listed and compared to understand the visual symbol changes brought about by mass production. Finally, the decorations and patterns of Suixi lion dance masks are listed to present the differences between traditional and innovative visual symbols.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysis of Interview Records

The main subject of this study is "Suixi lion dance masks," and the author has developed a "Professional Interview Record Form" specifically for this purpose. The interview content is divided into three main sections: the first section is "Inheritors' Understanding of Suixi Lion Dance Masks"; the second section is "Visual Elements of Suixi Lion Dance Masks"; and the third section is the inheritors' views on "Tradition and Innovation." A word cloud image depicting the interview data is shown in Figure 1. (The interview data was sourced from the "Suixi Lion Head Craft Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation." Word frequency summarization was then conducted using Nvivo software, which resulted in the generation of a word cloud, as shown in Figure 1.)



Figure 1: Word Cloud Image of Interview Data(July 21, 2022)

4.2 Morphological Characteristics of the Lion Head

The shape of the Suixi lion head is diverse, but can be generally classified into two types: the Foshan-style lion and the Heshan-style lion. In addition, there are many modern and innovative styles of lion heads, but they are mostly based on these two traditional styles. According to Huang Tao, a provincial-level inheritor of the Suixi lion head making technique, the shape and proportion of the lion head masks in the Suixi Lion Dance Culture Museum have become the standard for the production of traditional southern lion masks worldwide. As lion dance competitions are a sports event, fair and competitive props require standardized equipment, and the standardized production of lion head masks is favored by lion dance performers.

As shown in Figure 2, the left image is a modified Heshan-style lion head frame, and the right image is a modified Foshan-style lion head frame. Using the frame as the main analysis material, the visual differences between the two styles can be perceived. Based on on-site photos and size data provided by the Suixi Lion Dance Museum, simple contour diagrams were drawn to show the proportion characteristics of the two styles from the front and side views. Through the drawn line draft (the line draft is extracted after being simplified according to the pictures actually taken at a fixed angle) and specific data (the data is provided by the Suixi Lion Head Craftsmanship Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation, Appendix 1), one can also gain a clear understanding

of the proportions of the Heshan-style and Foshan-style lion heads, as well as the production characteristics of the Suixi lion head frame.



Figure 2: Heshan-style lion No. 3 (left side) and Foshan-style lion No. 3 (right side)
(Photos by Zhan Sudan on July 21, 2022)

Figure 3 shows the proportion diagram of the front view of the Foshan-style and Heshan-style lion heads in Suixi. It can be seen that the heights of the eyes, nose, and mouth of the Foshan-style lion head mask are relatively similar and slightly staggered, maximizing the expansion of the lion's facial features. The enlarged eyes look sharp, the garlic-shaped nose occupies the central area of the mask, and the upward-triangle-shaped mouth is the most distinctive characteristic of the Foshan-style lion head. In comparison, the proportion of the Heshan-style lion head is not as balanced as the Foshan-style lion head, with similar eye and nose heights, but a straight mouth shape.

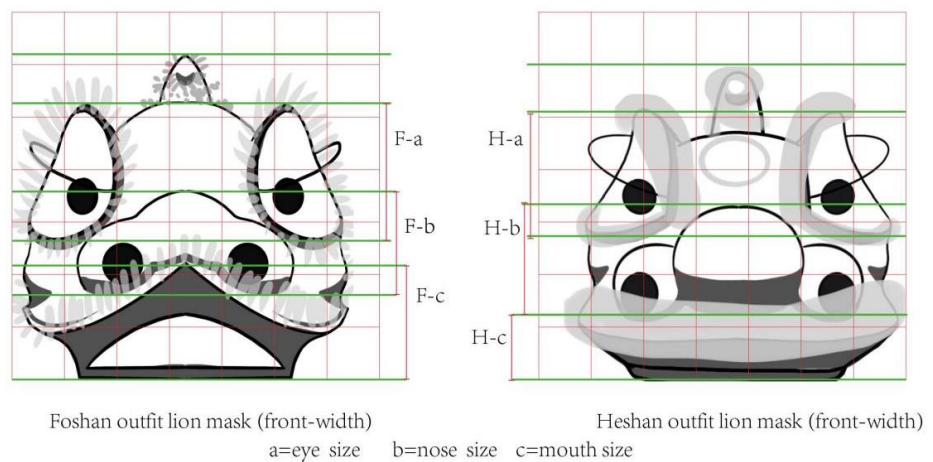


Figure 3: Analysis of the frontal ratio of Foshan-style lion and Heshan-style lion made in Suixi

During a local interview, inheritor Li Zujie stated that since all lion head masks are handmade, there are no two identical ones. All lion head masks have a size difference of 1-2cm during production. Therefore, the data and diagrams below may have a deviation of 1-2cm. In the proportion diagram, “a”represents the size of the eyes, “b”represents the size of the nose, “c”represents the size of the mouth, “F” represents the Foshan-style lion head, and “H”represents the Heshan-style lion head.

As shown in Table 1, among the facial features of Foshan-style lion head, the total length ratio of the eyes is the largest (42.3%), while the nose has the smallest ratio (31.8%), and the mouth (35%) has a similar ratio to the nose. In contrast, the eyes of Heshan-style lion head account for 40% of the total length ratio, which is still the most prominent feature in the overall proportion. The most significant difference between Heshan-style and Foshan-style lion heads is the proportion of the mouth, which only accounts for 21% of the total length ratio in Heshan-style lion head. Based on the above data, the three-part ratio of Foshan-style lion head is F-a>F-c>F-b (figure 3) .This analysis method references the calculation method of Zhu (2019) in "Comparative Study on the Design of Lion Dance Masks in North and South China". However, since the maximum ratio difference is only 7.3%([F-c]-[F-a]=maximum ratio), the facial features' proportions are relatively similar visually. In contrast, the three-part ratio of Heshan-style lion head is H-a>H-b>H-c, with a maximum data difference of 19% ([H-a]-[H-c]=maximum ratio) . Therefore, the eyes of Heshan-style lion head appear larger and more prominent.

Table 1: Suixi Lion Mask Three Court Numerical Ratio

Name	Value (mm)	Percentage of total length (%)
F-a	26.2	42.3
F-b	19.7	31.8
F-c	21.7	35
H-a	24.0	40
H-b	21.4	35.7
H-c	12.6	21

As shown in Figure 4, which is a side view of the lion head, although there are many differences in the shapes of Foshan-style and Heshan-style lion heads, the eyes occupy the largest space in the mask and are almost the same in proportion. In order to clearly show the comparison of the eye sizes between the two, the yellow transparent square in the figure covers the position occupied by the eyes. The length of the Foshan-style lion head's eyes is set as F-a-length and its height is F-a, which is approximately the same as that of the Heshan-style lion head. The data can be seen in Table 2. It shows that the large eyes of both types of Suixi lion heads, although different in shape

(the former is in an expanded state, and the latter is in a more natural state), are relatively large in size. This is the main feature of the lion head in lion dance.

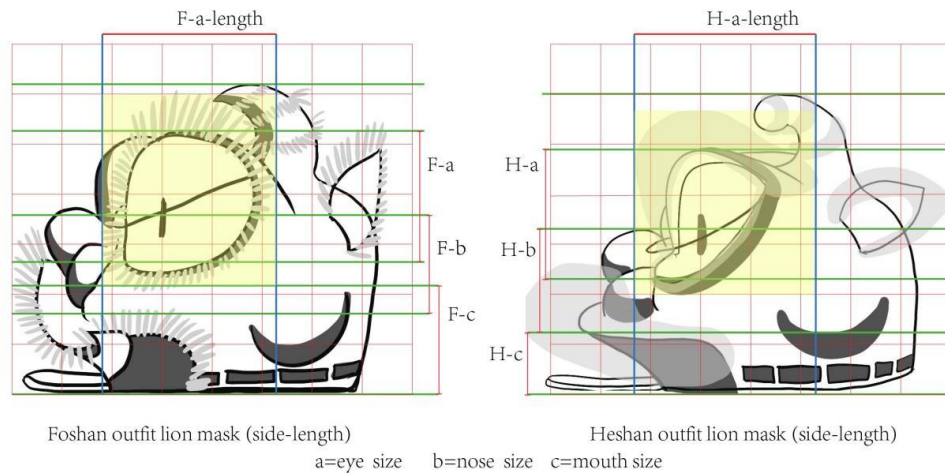


Figure 4: Analysis diagram of the side ratio of Foshan-style lion and Heshan-style (The illustrations were produced by Zhan Sudan.)

Table 2: The numerical proportion of the eyes of Suixi Lion Mask

Name	Value (mm)	Percentage of total length(%)
F-a	26.2	42.3
F-a-length	34.8	46.4
H-a	24.0	40
H-a-length	36.3	42.7

The frontal profile of the Suixi lion is square-shaped. As shown in Figure 5, the width and height of the Foshan-style lion face profile are set as F-w and F-h respectively, with a width-to-height ratio of about 1:0.95. The width and height of the Heshan-style lion face profile are set as H-w and H-h respectively, with a width-to-height ratio of about 1:0.92. When these two profiles are overlapped, it can be seen that the basic proportions of the two profiles are not significantly different, but the shapes of the profiles are slightly different, which are influenced by the type of lion hair.

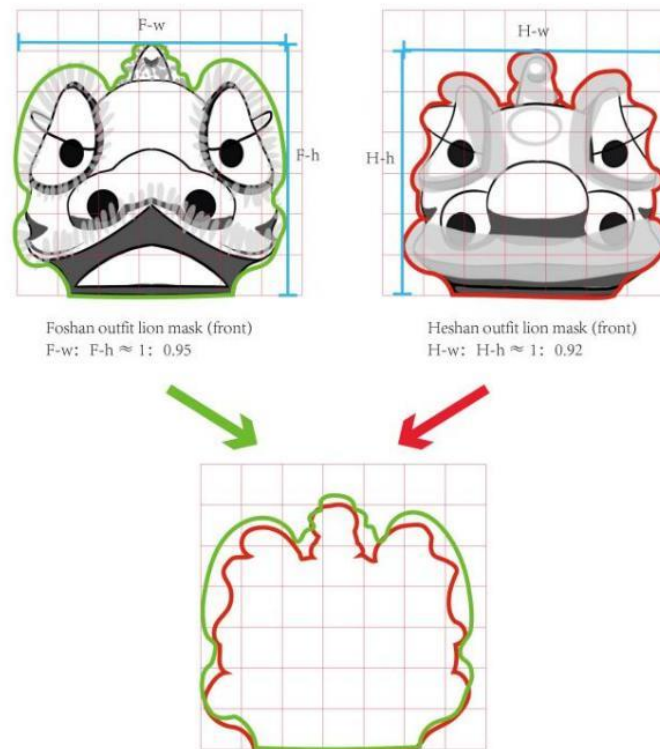


Figure 5: Comparison of the front contours of Foshan-style lion and Heshan-style lion made in Suixi. (The illustrations were produced by Zhan Sudan.)

In addition to analyzing the shape by overlapping the outer contours, attention should also be paid to the outer characteristics of the front, such as the position of the forehead. The forehead of the Foshan-style lion is more prominent, while that of the Heshan-style lion is flatter. The nose of the former is compact with sharp lines, while the nose of the latter is flatter with rounder lines. In fact, the shapes of the Foshan-style and Heshan-style lions are quite different, but the Suixi lion simplifies and merges the two to varying degrees, preserving the basic features while making them easier to produce. This has gradually created the visual symbolic characteristics of the Suixi lion.

The profile differences of Suixi lion heads are evident. Foshan-style lion head is shown in green, while Heshan-style lion head is shown in red. A simplified blue contour line with key points enhances the clarity of the side profile. As shown in Figure 6, the highest point of the forehead and the position of the eyelash around the eye of the Foshan-style lion head overlap, and it is set as F-1.

The point where the eye meets the nose is set as F-2, and the angle of the side face is about 72 degrees. F-3 is set as the highest point of the nose and mouth section (its height is influenced by the type of hair), and F-4 is the position where the mouth is

open, with an angle of about 99 degrees. Analyzing the side profile of the Heshan-style lion head, key points include H-1 (highest point of the lion's eyelash), H-2 (intersection of eye and nose), H-3 (highest point of the nose and mouth section), and H-4 (position of open mouth).

From the auxiliary lines, it can be seen that there are significant differences between the side profiles of Foshan-style and Heshan-style lion heads, and the most obvious difference is the angle at which the mouth is open and the horn on the top of the head. The mouth of the Foshan-style lion head is wide open with the upper lip raised at an obtuse angle, and the nose is tilted upwards, making the overall shape fiercer and more majestic. The pointed horn on the top of the head is bent forward, with stiff horsehair, making the overall contour of the Foshan-style lion head more powerful and robust. In contrast, the mouth of the Heshan-style lion head is only open at an angle of about 22 degrees, with the upper lip angled sharply downwards towards the tongue, and the nose shape is flatter than that of the Foshan-style lion head.

The overall shape looks gentle and cute, and the horn on the top of the head is fist-shaped, with soft and dense sheep wool, making the overall shape of the Heshan-style lion head appear softer and more gentle. Although the side profile of the two lion heads is so different, the similarities can also be seen from the data, such as the angle of F-2 and H-2 being basically the same. Therefore, the lion heads produced by the Suixi Lion Dance Workstation have prominent facial features and strong visual recognition. Systematically summarizing the shape of Suixi lion heads helps to improve the textual documentation of lion head craftsmanship.

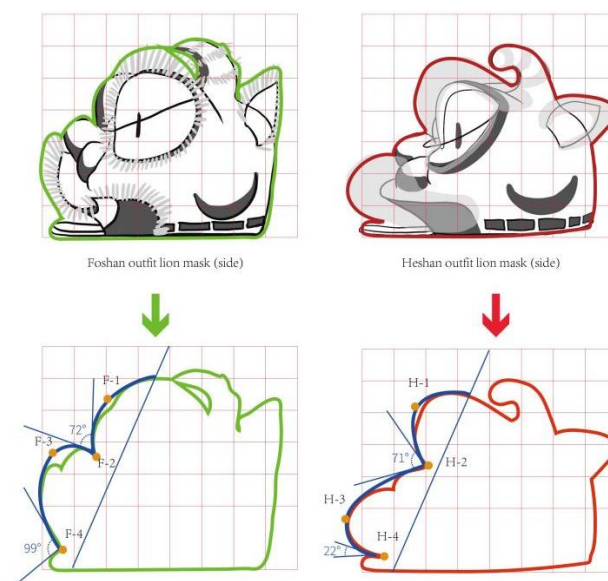


Figure 6: Comparison of the side contours of Foshan-style lion and Heshan-style lion made in Suixi. (The illustrations were produced by Zhan Sudan.)

5. EMBRACING TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE VISUAL SYMBOLS OF SUIXI LION HEAD

5.1 The Symbolic Meaning and Cultural Connotation of the Lion Head

5.1.1 Colour Extraction Analysis of Suixi Classic Character Lion Mask

Based on qualitative data through interviews, Suixi Lion Dance has extremely high colour saturation, a wide range of colours, and is dazzlingly colourful. At the production site of the intangible cultural heritage workstation, a series of lion dance masks made by Suixi Lion Dance colour weaving inheritor Huang Tao can be seen displayed in the exhibition area (Figure 7). At the site where lion dance masks are made, lion masks of various colours can be seen. According to the introduction of the inheritor, lions of different colours represent different roles. Traditional lion dance has six roles, all of which originate from the classic characters in the novel 'The Romance of the Three Kingdoms'.



Figure 7 : Lion Head Masks Exhibition Site in Suixi Lion Head Craftsmanship Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation (Photos by Zhan Sudan on July 21, 2022)

Table 3 is a colour schematic of Suixi Lion Dance masks, mainly used to present the colours of the masks for the six roles of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, Ma Chao, and Huang Zhong. CMYK values are used for printing colour calibration, while RGB values are used for electronic device colour calibration. As one of the objectives of this study is to extract the visual elements of lion dance and organize and summarize them for publicity and promotion through printing or digital output, the colour elements

of these six lion head roles are organized, and their CMYK and RGB colour values are recorded to ensure that the subsequent colour analysis work is more based on reliable data.

Table 3: Colour schematic diagram of Suixi lion awakening mask

Name	Photos	CMYK	RGB	Theme colour
Liu Bei Lion				
Guan Gong Lion				
Zhang Fei Lion				
Zhao Yun Lion				

Ma Chao Lion				
Huan g Zhong g Lion				

Table 3 is a colour schematic of Suixi Lion Dance masks, mainly used to present the colours of the masks for the six roles of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, Ma Chao, and Huang Zhong. CMYK values are used for printing colour calibration, while RGB values are used for electronic device colour calibration. As one of the objectives of this study is to extract the visual elements of lion dance and organize and summarize them for publicity and promotion through printing or digital output, the colour elements of these six lion head roles are organized, and their CMYK and RGB colour values are recorded to ensure that the subsequent colour analysis work is more based on reliable data.

From the colour values in the above table, it can be seen that Suixi Lion Dance has a high colour purity and bold use of colour. Each lion mask role has a theme colour, and in addition to the theme colour, the other colour schemes are very similar. Almost every lion head has auxiliary colours such as green, blue, purple, and magenta. According to the mask makers, in order to cater to the public's aesthetic taste, a variety of bright colours are used in the colouring process. However, at the same time, this can also cause problems with low role recognition.

In order to analyze the colour composition of different roles of lion masks more effectively, I have conducted a detailed colour analysis of the front, side, and back views of these six typical lion masks.

The following image (Figure 8) shows the colour analysis of the front view of the six roles lion masks. Each lion mask is placed in a 10x10 grid, and the number of squares

occupied by each colour is calculated to determine the percentage of each colour in the lion mask. Let's assume that a colour accounts for N% and occupies n squares, while the number of blank squares in the grid is b. Therefore, $N=n/(100-b)$. For example, the orange colour (R:234 G:80 B:6) in the front view of the Liu Bei lion mask accounts for $N=34/(100-20)=42.5\%$ of the overall composition.

It should be noted that there may be some deviation in calculating the number of squares occupied by each colour. Folk art cannot be subjected to absolute rationality in terms of data requirements, so the resulting percentage can only be approximate.



Figure 8: The colour analysis of the six roles lion masks (front),(Zhan Sudan , 2022).

According to the calculation formula $N=n/(100-b)$, the main colour proportions of the six lion masks are as shown in the figure 9. The front view of the lion mask primarily determines people's understanding and impression of it, followed by the side views from different angles, and finally the back view. A pie chart is used to display the proportion of the main colours in the front view, while gray colour is used to represent miscellaneous colours. It can be seen that the proportions of the main colours are all above 43%, while the proportions of the miscellaneous colours range from 20% to 43%. The higher the proportion of the main colours and the lower the proportion of the miscellaneous colours, the more distinct the character traits of the lion mask.

Conversely, if the proportion of the main colours is lower and the proportion of the miscellaneous colours is higher, the character traits become more blurred.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the two charts, it can be observed that the Guangong Lion mask has the most distinct character traits, while the Huangzhong Lion mask has the weakest character traits. In terms of visual effects, there is not much difference between the Guangong Lion mask and the Huangzhong Lion mask. The main reason is that the proportion of black colour is relatively similar, and the secondary main colours are both in the red colour range. Therefore, such colour choices make it difficult for the audience to distinguish the character traits in the masks.

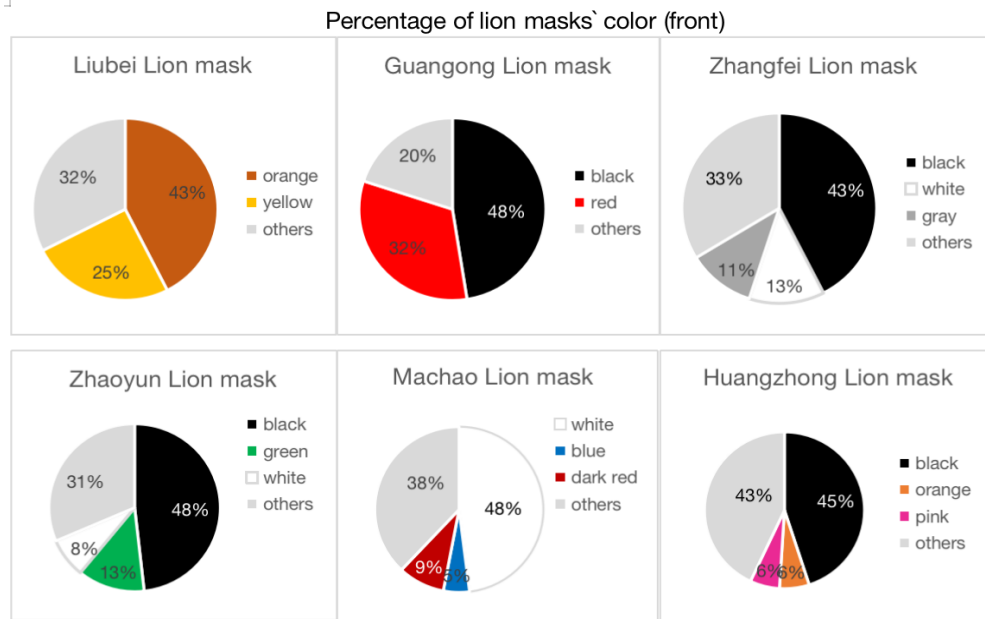


Figure 9: The percentage of the six roles lion masks` colour (front), Zhan Sudan conducted data analysis by importing the data into Excel.

Here are the colour composition percentages for the side view of the lion masks (Figure 10) , calculated using the same method:



Figure 10: The colour analysis of the six roles lion masks (side),(Zhan Sudan, 2022).

Presenting the data in the form of pie charts allows for a clearer understanding of the colour proportions (Figure11). Interestingly, the colour composition data reveals a noticeable change in the percentages for Huangzhong Lion mask between the front and side views. The main colours for the front view of Huangzhong Lion mask are black and orange, while the side view showcases black and lemon yellow as the dominant colours. As shown in the two figures above, there is a significant distinction in the colour compositions of Guangong Lion mask and Huangzhong Lion mask, highlighting the distinct characteristics of the six lion mask characters. The key element determining the overall colour theme of the lion masks is the colour of the fur, which constitutes the largest proportion of colour. Additionally, the accent colours, such as high-purity shades of pink, green, blue, and purple, appear relatively similar across the masks.

Percentage of lion masks` colour (side)

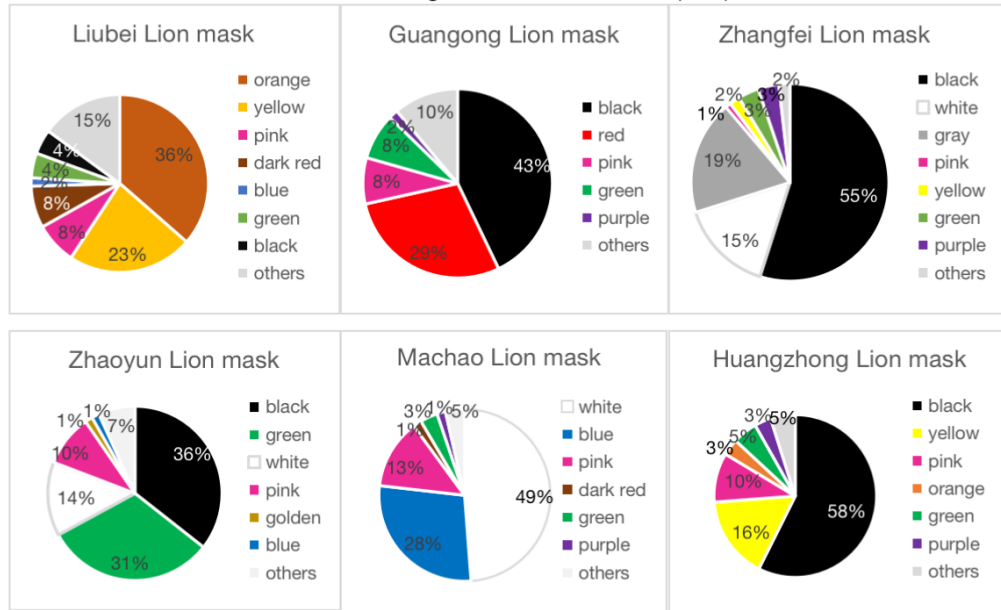


Figure 11: The percentage of the six roles lion masks` colour (side), Zhan Sudan conducted data analysis by importing the data into Excel.

The back of the lion masks, specifically the occiput region, remains vibrant and rich in colour. As seen in the following image (Figure12) , the lion masks exhibit high colour saturation and a diverse colour palette. Due to the reduced proportion of fur in the occiput area, there is more surface available for colouring and embellishment. .



Figure 12: The colour analysis of the six roles lion masks (back),(Zhan Sudan, 2022)

From the pie chart (Figure13) we can observe the colour distribution in the back of the lion head. The dominant colours still hold a significant proportion, but the other painted areas exhibit similar colours, such as pink, green, blue, purple, and other commonly used colour combinations.

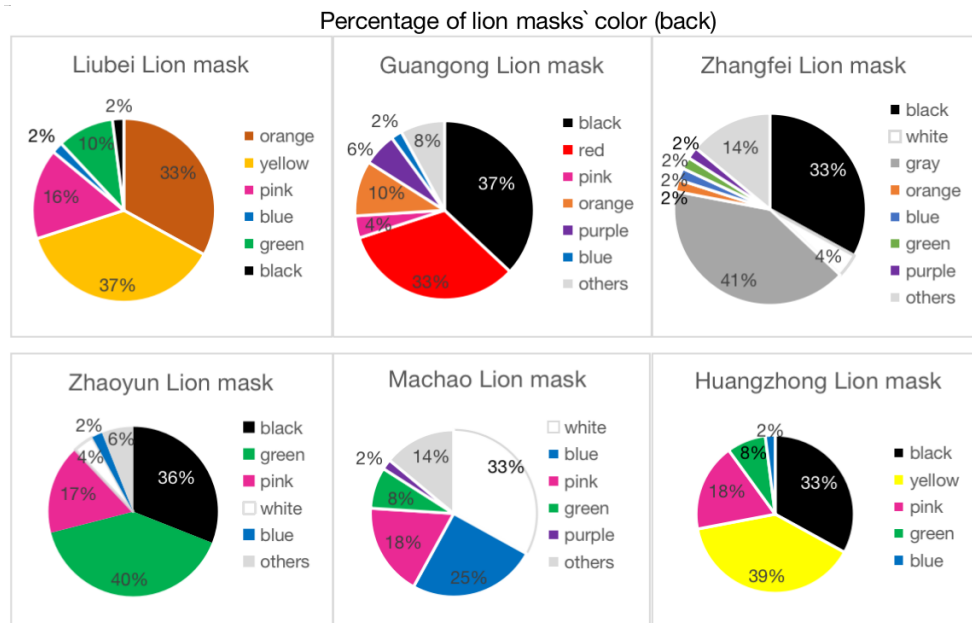


Figure 13: The percentage of the six roles lion masks` colour (back), Zhan Sudan conducted data analysis by importing the data into Excel.

5.1.2 Meaning of the Suixi Lion Head Visual Symbolism

According to the above data, the prototypes of the lion heads in Suixi area all come from the Buddha-style lion and crane-style lion, but their colours have their unique features. The main roles of traditional lion masks in Foshan are Liu Bei lion, Guan Gong lion, and Zhang Fei lion, while the Suixi lion head expands on this basis with several characters such as Zhao Yun lion, Ma Chao lion, and Huang Zhong lion.

Liu Bei's main colour scheme is golden yellow and orange-yellow, and the lion head is decorated with five-coloured patterns. The five-coloured patterns represent the five blessings and the five directions of east, west, south, north, and centre, meaning unifying the country. In the ancient Chinese yin-yang and five-element theory, the universe is composed of gold, wood, water, fire, and earth, which also represent the directions of east, south, west, north, and centre, and the expression of colours corresponds to white, green, black, red, and yellow. Yellow symbolizes land, territory, and the centre. The emperor is the god of the centre, so yellow has been favoured and monopolized by emperors throughout history and is called the colour of the emperor.

The lion head mask with the main colour scheme of golden yellow and orange-yellow conforms to the Chinese people's association with wealth and prosperity. The additional colours used in the lion head include red and pink, warm colours, supplemented with a small amount of green, blue, and black, which are consistent with the 'five blessings' mentioned above. It can be seen that the colour of Liu Bei's lion head in Suixi has a distinct role character and high recognition.

The traditional style of the old Guan Gong in Foshan's lion dance has a significant difference from the Guan Gong lion produced in Suixi. However, its main colour scheme is black and red. In the improved style of Suixi's Guan Gong lion, the creators added elements of golden yellow to better reflect its 'god of wealth and war' characteristics. The addition of blue, green, and purple colours is only used as small embellishments in the overall colour scheme, not as the main colours. From the above colour analysis, the proportion of the main colour of Guan Gong lion on the front, side, and back is all above 70%, and the colour characteristics are very distinct. Therefore, although the shape does not differ from other roles, the recognition of the colour is still high.

The traditional colour of Zhang Fei lion is black and white, with blue edges, black and white stripes, iron horns, red eyes, blue nose, fangs in front, black eyebrows, and short black beard. The blue nose of Zhang Fei lion represents immaturity, rebelliousness, and impulsivity, and green is a secondary colour in its overall design, which adds visual elements that highlight the character's personality to the originally black and white mask. Traditionally, Zhang Fei lion represents bravery, strength, and belligerence. However, the locally made Zhang Fei lion in Suixi uses silver-gray as the base colour, and the tongue is decorated with high-purity yellow and purple. The back of the lion's head uses fluorescent pink, purple, orange, blue, and other colours as embellishments. The Zhao Yun lion, also known as the 'ever-victorious general', is themed with green, representing vitality and the idea that heroes come from young people. Its black tiger stripes, black eyes, blue nose, fierce expression, black eyebrows, and short black beard give it a heroic and valiant appearance. The back and sides of the lion head are decorated with fluorescent pink, blue, purple, and a small amount of gold.

The Ma Chao lion is also known as the 'filial lion' or the 'funerary lion'. The traditional Ma Chao lion has a visual image of white fur with black stripes, half-closed black eyes with tears in the corners, even a white cloth hanging from the horns. White eyebrows, white temples, and the entire lion should be white with a haggard appearance. However, the Ma Chao lion produced in Suixi does not follow this traditional image. Instead, it uses blue as the background colour, white beard, white texture, and is decorated with fluorescent pink, green, purple, and gold on the sides. The lion's

forehead even has a festive red tassel. The heirs claimed that people who buy lion masks do so for celebration, so the Ma Chao lion was modified to look more festive, which is a huge difference from the traditional meaning of the 'funerary lion'.

The Huang Zhong lion symbolizes loyalty and is mainly yellow in colour. Huang Zhong is a respected veteran, the traditional image of it should have a yellow background, black eyes, white eyebrows and beard. However, in this survey, the Huang Zhong lion's visual effect is yellow with black eyes, eyebrows, and beard. The heir Huang Tao stated that the design of this Huang Zhong lion was based on Huang Zhong's appearance when he was young, so black hair was used for artistic creation. In the photos, the side face and back of the Huang Zhong lion are decorated with fluorescent pink, purple, and green.

The summary of the colour analysis reflects a significant difference between the colour of the Suixi lion head and the traditional lion head in Foshan. The homogenized colour matching pattern can speed up the colouring process and accelerate the production speed of the lion head. Although this may lead to the loss of the traditional meaning of the lion's colours, the Suixi lion head makers still strive to integrate innovative colours into the traditional character's colour schemes, giving each character (including the Ma Chao lion, which symbolizes filial piety and funeral) a bright and eye-catching colour, which is in line with the expectations of the Guangxi region for a bountiful harvest and good weather. This is the main characteristic of the Suixi lion head.

5.2 The Innovative Use of Tassels and Fur in Suixi Lion Dance

The decoration of tassels on the lion's head is a unique feature of southern lion, and the decoration of tassels on the lion's head in Foshan is clearly borrowed from the headwear of Cantonese opera characters. Similarly, this is also true for the Suixi lion head, but there are differences. According to field research, traditional Fozhuang lion heads use more tassels for decoration, while Suixi lion heads use fewer tassels. (Figure 13).



Figure 14: Liu Beishi's tassels (Left image: in Foshan Liangsheng studio; right one : in Suixi Head Craftsmanship Workstation)(Zhan Sudan, 2022)

The materials used to make the tassels are wool, silk, or artificial fur. The more tassels used on the lion head, the higher the production cost. In the Suixi lion head, the number of tassels used is small, only one circle is wrapped around the centre of the lion's forehead, which not only reduces the production cost, but also makes the overall shape of the lion head more concise in visual effect, and reduces the resistance generated when the lion head is dancing.

Due to the constant innovation of modern materials, the horse mane representing 'teeth brushing whiskers' has gradually been replaced by artificial fur. Suixi lion head workshop prefers to use wool, rabbit hair and artificial plush as lion hair decorations. The furry decorations make the lion look lovelier and more approachable, and installing wool and other decorations also greatly shortens the production time, reduces the weight of the lion head, and makes it easier for more lion dancers to perform.

5.3 The Innovation of Patterns and Relationship with Consumer Intention

The exaggerated shape and bright colours of the lion head distract the public from the rich meaning behind the patterns on the lion head. In addition to traditional patterns such as Tang grass, Guandao, and Hui character patterns, the decoration patterns of Suixi lion head also include many innovative patterns. As shown in Figure 15, 1 is a Lianzhu (Like a chain of pearls or a string of beads) pattern, 2 is a Hui (The shape of

the Chinese character “回” pattern, 3 is a Guandao (Long-handled sword for fighting on horseback) pattern, 4 is a fire pattern, 5 is a water pattern, and 6 is a Tang grass (The Grass Patterns of the Tang Dynasty) pattern. Among them, the water pattern, fire pattern, and Hui pattern represent auspicious meanings such as prosperity, wealth, and endlessness, all of which are well-documented auspicious traditional patterns. The landscape painting texture, fish jumping dragon gate texture, and four-pointed star and six-pointed star patterns shown in the figure below (Figure 16) are modern styles of patterns. These patterns can intuitively express the creator's intentions and convey their love of life and vision for the future.



Figure 15. Traditional Patterns in Suixi Lion Head (Zhan Sudan, 2022, in Suixi Head Craftsmanship Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation)



Figure 16. Innovative Patterns in Suixi Lion Head (Zhan Sudan, 2022, in Suixi Head Craftsmanship Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation)

The innovative patterns on the lion's head not only reflect the maker's exploration of consumer preferences but also add a contemporary touch to the traditional lion head symbol. Visual symbols in folk crafts always reflect the lifestyle and aesthetic preferences of the people during that period.

The visual elements of Suixi lion head are derived from the Foshan lion head but not a complete replica. The Suixi lion head has a simpler design and pattern, which reduces the production process and cost. Its bright colours and large colour blocks, as well as

its minimalist decoration, make the visual elements of Suixi lion head easier to replicate and popularize.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In today's context, where there is a strong push to promote national cultural trends, it has become an essential task for inheritors of handcrafting, relevant designers, and promoters of this culture to accurately promote traditional Chinese culture to the world. Accurate promotion reflects a form of respect for intangible cultural heritage. The neglect of tradition and sole emphasis on innovation may result in the loss of the cultural significance of valuable heritage during inheritance and development. Through an analysis of the visual symbols of Suixi lion heads, one can effectively summarize the key visual elements and characteristics, providing guidance to craftsmen and visual designers engaged in related crafts and design. In Chinese lion dance performances, Suixi lion heads combine tradition and innovation. They preserve the most distinctive elements of traditional visual aesthetics, such as auspicious colours and patterns. However, they also make adjustments in terms of design and decoration to cater to the needs and preferences of users, making them more in line with contemporary aesthetics and demands. This can enhance the development potential and vitality of Guangdong lion dance with its unique features, which are characteristic of the western Guangdong region.

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Appendix 1

Suixi Xingshi Mask Models				
Type of Lion head masks	Model	Size (length, width, height) cm	Frame circumference cm	notes
Traditional Foshan-style lion mask	2	80*73*72	145	
Improved version Foshan-style lion mask	L3	80*70*65	137	
Improved version Foshan-style lion mask	M3	75*65*62	135	Default size (commonly used)
Improved version Foshan-style lion mask	S3	75*63*61	130	
Improved version Foshan-style lion mask	4	68*60*57	125	
Improved version Foshan-style lion mask	5	60*55*55	110	
Improved version Foshan-style lion mask (for kids)	6	55*55*48	90	Size used by primary school students
Traditional Heshan-style lion mask		88*70*65		
Improved version Heshan-style lion mask	L3	88*70*65	137	
Improved version Heshan-style lion mask	M3	85*65*60	135	
Improved version Heshan-style lion mask	4	75*60*57	125	
Improved version Heshan-style lion mask	6	68*45*45	90	
The data was provided by Suixi Lion Head Craftsmanship Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation				