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THE INFLUENCE OF DAYAK CULTURE ON ARTISTS IN SARAWAK: INSIGHTS FROM VISUAL ANALYSIS AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Natasha Binti Rusdy Wong

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Marzie Hatef Jalil

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Faridah Binti Sahari

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Abstract: This research explores the influence of Dayak culture on seven selected artists, comprising four Dayak and three non-Dayak individuals, residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia. Through semi-structured interviews, the study seeks to understand the significant inspiration that Dayak culture provides to these artists. The findings indicate a noticeable difference in the representation approaches used by each artist in depicting Dayak culture. Formal analysis of the paintings shows that Dayak artists often draw inspiration from local flora, fauna, and landscapes, leading to more abstract representations, whereas non-Dayak artists, influenced by their observations and research, tend to focus on figurative depictions, including traditional Dayak lifestyles and cultural elements like headgear and beads.

Keywords: Dayak Culture, Artist Influence, Visual Analysis, Semi-Structured Interviews, Cultural Representation, Sarawak Artists, Abstract vs Figurative Art

1. INTRODUCTION

Dayak culture has significantly influenced artists in Sarawak, with both Dayak and non-Dayak artists drawing inspiration from it. Historically, Dayak art was created using local resources to depict religious beliefs and traditional motifs. The Brooke period introduced Western artistic styles to Sarawak, leading to diverse representations of Dayak culture. This paper delves into the narratives of seven selected artists to understand why Dayak culture is a major source of inspiration for them, examining the differences in their representational approaches. By analysing the visual representation of Dayak culture in the artworks of these artists, this study explores how they employ various techniques and styles to portray their cultural heritage. Utilizing Stuart Hall's three approaches to representation—reflective, intentional, and constructive—this paper provides a comprehensive discussion of these artistic representations.

Furthermore, this research investigates the differences in how Dayak culture is represented by the selected artists in Sarawak, seeking to understand the diverse perspectives and methods they use. Through this exploration, the study aims to shed light on the broader implications of these representations, particularly in relation to identity politics in Sarawak. By examining how the depiction of Dayak culture in modern art reflects and influences identity, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics and artistic expressions within Sarawak.

In addressing these themes, this paper not only highlights the rich cultural heritage of the Dayak people but also underscores the ongoing dialogue between traditional and contemporary artistic practices in Sarawak. The insights gained from this study provide valuable contributions to the fields of visual arts and cultural studies, emphasizing the importance of representation in shaping and reflecting cultural identity.

1.1 Statement Of Problem

Misrepresentation is a major issue in cultural representation within art, leading to stereotypes and superficial perceptions. Essentialism, the idea that artworks must have specific properties to represent a culture, remains a debated topic. This study addresses the need for more research on the representation of Dayak culture in Sarawak's modern visual art to enhance education and understanding of Malaysian Art history.

1.2 Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the various methods used by seven selected artists to represent Dayak culture. By examining their narratives and the visual elements of their artworks, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between Dayak culture and the artists, as well as its influence on their artistic choices.

1.3 Significance Of The Study

The study will contribute to Malaysian Art history literature and improve understanding of cultural representation in Sarawak's visual arts. It aims to provide valuable insights for researchers, students, and artists, and promote the inclusion of Sarawak art history in Malaysian art education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping artistic expression, yet its specific impact on Sarawakian artists, particularly in relation to Dayak culture, remains insufficiently explored. This paper aims to examine how Dayak cultural influences manifest in the artworks of Sarawakian artists through visual analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Representation within visual arts has been extensively theorized by scholars such as Dyer (1993) and Hall (1997), who argue that media representations influence societal perceptions of identity and culture (Dyer, 1993; Hall, 1997). Sheriff (1996) explores European artists' engagements with non-Western cultures, highlighting how these interactions shaped modern European art (Sheriff, 1996). Such insights into cross-cultural artistic exchanges provide a framework for understanding how Dayak culture may influence Sarawakian artists.

Draper's (2000) study on South African artists underscores the intersection of racial identity and artistic representation, offering parallels for exploring Dayak cultural influences in Sarawakian art (Draper, 2000). Barbour (2015) critiques cultural representations within popular media, emphasizing the implications of misrepresentation and appropriation (Barbour, 2015).

Moreover, the literature underscores the critical role of culture in shaping artistic identities and expressions. Articles by Tettoni and Ong (1993) and Gill (1998) discuss traditional arts and crafts in Sarawak yet fail to explore contemporary artistic practices and their cultural dimensions. Avé and King (1996), Chin and Mashman (1999), and

Thung, Maunati, & Kedit (2003) provide glimpses into the multiethnic and multicultural identity of Sarawak, laying the groundwork for understanding how Dayak culture influences contemporary artistic practices.

Further exploration of Sarawak's visual arts reveals that despite advancements in documenting traditional arts, there remains a dearth of research on how contemporary Sarawakian artists interpret and incorporate Dayak cultural elements into their artworks (Avé & King, 1996; Tettoni & Ong, 1993; Gill, 1998).

The literature review reveals a comprehensive overview of how cultural representations influence artistic practices globally, with a particular focus on Sarawakian artists' engagement with Dayak culture. By examining visual artworks and conducting interviews with Sarawakian artists, this paper aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which Dayak culture influences artistic practices in Sarawak, contributing to a deeper understanding of cultural representation within visual arts.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative research investigates the profound influence of Dayak culture on contemporary artists practicing in Sarawak, exploring how cultural elements shape artistic identities, thematic choices, and creative expressions. Drawing on Stuart Hall's framework of representation (Hall, 1997), the study conceptualizes artworks as dynamic sites where cultural meanings and identities are constructed and negotiated, rather than static reflections of cultural heritage.

3.2 Sampling Method

The research employs purposive sampling to select a diverse group of artists whose works prominently feature Dayak motifs, symbols, or narratives, reflecting varied interpretations and engagements with Dayak culture within the local art scene.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with participating artists to explore their personal connections to Dayak culture, motivations for incorporating cultural elements into their art, and reflections on the cultural significance of their creative outputs. Through these interviews, the study captures rich qualitative data on artists' lived experiences, perspectives, and the interplay between personal heritage and artistic practice.

3.3 Selection Criteria

Artists were selected based on the following criteria:

- Active professional or semi-professional artists.
- Known to incorporate elements of Dayak culture in their artwork.
- Represent a mix of Dayak and non-Dayak backgrounds to provide diverse perspectives.

3.4 Selected Participants

The study involved seven artists, four of whom are of Dayak heritage and three of whom are non-Dayak. Below is a list of the participating artists along with a brief background for each:



Figure 1:
Narong Daun

Narong Daun: A celebrated Dayak artist for her vibrant batik silk paintings, a craft she has mastered over a span of 15 years. Her artistic themes draw inspiration from Sarawak's rich flora, fauna, and Dayak cultural heritage. Her works have graced exhibitions across Malaysia, Thailand, India, Australia, and even Hawaii. Despite being self-taught without formal art education, her talent and dedication shine through in her expressive creations.



Figure 2:
Petrus Alfred

Petrus Alfred: A Dayak artist and was a lecturer in the Faculty of Graphic Design at Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology and the current president of Sarawak Artists Society. He is renowned for his stylistic human figures and impressionist depictions of local landscapes, often highlighting rural Dayak lifestyles and environments. Known for his keen eye for light and shadow, he frequently incorporates movement into his paintings. Petrus also specializes in graphic design, metal sculptures, and caricatures. He studied at PA.LIN Art School in Singapore and Billy Blue School of Art in Australia, where he was introduced to impressionism and abstract art.



Figure 3:
Sylvester Wielding Anak Jussem

Sylvester Wielding Anak Jussem: A Dayak artist and a lecturer at the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts at University Malaysia Sarawak. His paintings feature a wide range of imagery reflecting his interactions, experiences, and observations of the Sarawak rainforest and Dayak culture. He earned a diploma in Fine Art & Design from the Institute of Technology, Shah Alam, Selangor, and a Master's in Fine Art from the Pratt Institute School of Art & Design, Brooklyn, New York, USA.



Figure 4:
Raphael Scott Ahbeng

Raphael Scott Ahbeng: One of Sarawak's most established and admired abstract Dayak artists. While studying in Europe, he travelled extensively and was heavily influenced by European masters. However, his heritage and culture remain his greatest inspirations. Raphael is renowned for his bold strokes and striking colour combinations, particularly in his depictions of Sarawak's natural landscapes. He studied Art and Photography at Bath Academy of Art in the UK and later took a drama course in London, during which he travelled to Germany, Spain, Italy, and France.



Figure 5:
Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo

Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo: A non-Dayak artist skilled in various mediums, including acrylic, watercolour, ink, charcoal, and mixed media. She primarily paints realistic subjects, with a particular focus on human figures, drawing inspiration from the Dayak community in Sarawak. Formerly a member of Atelier and Sarawak Fine Arts Society (2001-2002), she has been a member and the secretary of Sarawak Artists Society since 2002. Gabrielle studied at Sarawak Fine Art Academy, where she learned to paint in various mediums. She holds a Diploma in Graphic Design from the Malaysian Institute of Art and a bachelor's degree in graphic design from Berkeley International University.



Figure 6:
Emmanuel Osakue

Emmanuel Osakue: A West African visual artist now based in Kuching, Sarawak, is known for his unique technique of burning and scraping plywood to create images, earning him the nickname "the artist who paints with fire." His artworks are inspired by traditional cultures from both Nigeria and Sarawak. Currently a senior lecturer, Program Leader, and Academic Coordinator at Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology, Osakue holds a Bachelor's degree in painting from the University of Nigeria (1994), a Master's degree from UNIMAS (2003), and a Doctorate from UNIMAS (2015).



Figure 7:
Ramsay Ong Liang Thong

Ramsay Ong Liang Thong: A non-Dayak artist whom earned recognition as an award-winning batik artist. He travelled extensively in the 1960s, drawing inspiration from artists in Hawaii and Australia, and began using bark cloth as a canvas for his paintings. Upon his return, he further developed his painting career by using processed bark from the *Tekalong*, or wild breadfruit tree, which the Dayaks of Sarawak traditionally used to make garments. Ramsay is a self-taught artist without any formal education in art.

3.5 Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with each artist to gather detailed narratives about their inspirations, artistic processes, and perspectives on Dayak culture. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed to identify common themes and unique insights.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis integrates thematic analysis of interview transcripts with systematic examination of artworks, aiming to identify recurring themes, motifs, and stylistic approaches that characterize the influence of Dayak culture on Sarawakian artists. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and cultural sensitivity, are rigorously observed throughout the research process to ensure respectful engagement with participants and their cultural narratives. By synthesizing theoretical frameworks with empirical insights, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Dayak cultural heritage informs artistic expression in Sarawak, highlighting the role of artists as cultural interpreters and the significance of art in preserving and transmitting cultural identities across generations.

4. DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Dayak Culture as Inspiration

From the narratives gathered through the conducted interviews, a notable contrast emerges in how Dayak culture inspires selected artists, particularly between Dayak and non-Dayak artists. The Dayak artists are primarily inspired by nature and their childhood experiences, while non-Dayak artists draw inspiration from their observations and research on Dayak culture.

4.1.1 Getting Inspiration from Nature and Childhood Experience

Narong Daun, a self-taught artist, attributes her inspiration to the natural surroundings she has been exposed to since childhood. She recollects:

"I like to seek inspiration from nature because it exists without human interference. It's very peaceful and not busy. Nature is a beauty we often don't realize, and that's why I choose to paint it. If I paint it on silk and hang it on a wall, people will eventually see its beauty. Growing up in a Bidayuh community, we were always exposed to nature, which is why it remains my preferred subject matter. There's a lot of unnoticed beauty in nature that reveals itself only when we observe it properly."

In addition to nature, her childhood experiences living with her grandparents, who practiced native rituals, made her more aware of her cultural identity as an artist. She describes:

"My late grandfather was a ketua Gawai (Shaman). Watching him and my grandmother perform rituals during Gawai (Dayak festival) in traditional costumes with special beads left a lasting impression on me. I remember them performing chants on the veranda and wearing traditional garments. I loved seeing their costumes and helping with the rituals. These experiences deeply influenced my artistic expression."

Similarly, Petrus Alfred recalls his childhood in the Singgai army camp, where he often doodled scenes from his excursions in the jungle with friends. He states:

"As a child, I would go hunting for fruits and berries in the jungle. It was our source of entertainment. I loved the scenery, the different kinds of leaves, small streams, and water snails we found. These experiences inspired my drawings."

Sylvester Jussem's inspiration came after realizing how little was known about Dayak culture overseas during his studies. He recalls:

"In 1983, I participated in the ASEAN Youth Workshop in Thailand, where I met the late Thawan Duchanee, a great Thai painter. He critiqued my work, asking me about my roots and where I came from. This prompted me to return to Sarawak and explore my cultural heritage. I began drawing totem poles and researching Iban and Orang Ulu motifs. The native lifestyle, especially the Punan's wood carvings, inspired me deeply. Observing their daily lives and rituals gave me rich material for my art."

Raphael Scott Ahbeng credits his rough childhood experiences in a boarding school as part of his artistic inspiration and self-development. He recalls:

"My childhood memories, though not always pleasant, educated me and made me a better person. These experiences are reflected in my art. I used to draw cartoons of my schoolmates and whatever they were doing. My interest in art was natural and never waned. Living in a Bidayuh village also influenced my art, as I observed their daily routines and lifestyle."

These narratives emphasize how the selected Dayak artists draw significant inspiration from their natural surroundings and childhood experiences, shaping their unique artistic perspectives.

4.1.2 Getting Inspiration from Observation and Research

Gabrielle, a non-Dayak artist, respects Dayak culture and incorporates its elements into her work through careful observation and research. She explains:

"Dayak culture is a significant part of Sarawak's identity. Although I live a Sarawakian Chinese lifestyle, I find Dayak culture fascinating, especially their rituals and garments. To portray the culture respectfully, artists should research it thoroughly. With modernization, traditional rituals and garments are slowly forgotten. I travelled to Penan and Bidayuh rural areas to observe these traditions firsthand, aiming to celebrate and conserve them before they disappear."

Emmanuel also emphasizes the importance of research in his representation of Dayak culture. He states:

"Creativity is influenced by the environment. The Dayak culture, with its rich motifs, is beautiful and significant. After studying these motifs extensively, I reflect them in my work unconsciously. I've explored many Dayak cultural elements, particularly Iban and Bidayuh, through intensive research."

Ramsay Ong, captivated by Dayak culture, has dedicated significant effort to researching it. He recollects:

"I find Dayak culture enchanting and representative of Sarawak. I used to be obsessed with collecting hornbill carvings, which connected me to the culture. Observation is crucial for an artist, but it's also important to engage the mind and interpret the culture beyond what is seen. Developing a unique artistic identity requires going beyond mere observation."

These narratives reveal that the non-Dayak artists approach Dayak culture through extensive observation and research, resulting in a more reflective representation of the culture in their artworks.

4.2 Politics of Identity of Sarawak Through Representation of Dayak Culture in Modern Art

This section explores how representations of Dayak culture reflect the politics of identity in Sarawak, examining the cultural identity and perception of the selected artists regarding Dayak culture.

From an essentialist perspective, cultural identity is seen as having 'true meanings' that must be present for accurate representation. Most of the artists in this study exhibit essentialist tendencies by depicting traditional Dayak elements in their work. For example, Gabrielle's artworks highlight traditional Dayak cultural accessories, which she considers the 'true meaning' of the culture. This strict essentialist viewpoint can limit Dayak culture to specific objects and practices, potentially creating a reductive view of the culture.

However, there is a noticeable shift towards an anti-essentialist perspective among the artists, where identities are seen as fluid and ever-changing. This viewpoint is evident in the narratives of Petrus, Sylvester, and Raphael, who recognize that cultural identity is complex and constantly evolving. This shift allows for a more multifaceted representation of Dayak culture in Sarawak's modern art.

5. DISCUSSION

The data reveals a significant difference in the approaches to representation among the selected artists, influenced by their perceptions of Dayak culture. The non-Dayak artists, such as Gabrielle, Emmanuel, and Ramsay, exhibit a sense of separation from Dayak culture, often employing a reflective approach in their artworks. Their representations focus on traditional Dayak elements, reflecting their appreciation and admiration for the culture.

In contrast, the Dayak artists, such as Narong, Petrus, Sylvester, and Raphael, have a more flexible and indefinite perception of Dayak culture. Their representations are influenced by their rural childhood experiences and a deep connection to nature, leading to a more constructive approach in their artworks. The study highlights that the perception of Dayak culture and ideas about cultural identity significantly influence the representation approaches of the selected artists, showcasing the crucial role of culture in art.

Analysing the artworks and narratives from the interviews reveals a clear difference between Dayak and non-Dayak artists in their representation of Dayak culture. The Dayak artists draw inspiration from local sceneries and childhood experiences, resulting in a more suggestive and abstract representation of Dayak culture. In contrast, the non-Dayak artists' inspirations stem from their appreciation and admiration for Dayak culture, leading to more straightforward representations based on observation and research. Their respective perceptions of cultural identity and Dayak culture significantly influence their approaches to representation,

demonstrating the diverse ways in which Dayak culture is interpreted and expressed in Sarawak's modern art.

6. DISCUSSION

This study explored how representations of Dayak culture in modern art reflect identity politics in Sarawak. Through participant narratives, it became evident that while traditional aspects of Dayak culture remain prevalent in artworks, many artists have adopted a fluid and evolving view of cultural identity. This shift challenges rigid definitions, emphasizing a dynamic understanding of identity that evolves with time and experience. This research addresses a significant gap in the literature on Sarawak visual arts by examining the representation of Dayak culture. The findings highlight the pivotal role of Dayak culture in shaping artists' works and reveal distinct approaches to its representation. For non-Dayak artists, a perceived separation from Dayak culture influences their representation, often focusing on traditional elements. This contrasts with Dayak artists, who embody a more fluid and nuanced perspective, aligning with anti-essentialist viewpoints in Cultural Studies that reject static cultural definitions. These insights contribute to ongoing discussions on culture and identity in art, encouraging a deeper exploration of Dayak culture's impact on Sarawak's modern arts scene. It is anticipated that this study will stimulate further dialogue on the relationship between Dayak culture and Sarawak's modern arts, fostering awareness of diverse cultural representations and their significance within the artistic community.

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STUDY ON THE FUNCTION AND STRATEGY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES DESIGN IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF XINYANG CITY CULTURAL BRAND

Zhang Wei

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

*School of Art and Design, Xinyang University,
Xinyang, China*

Mastika b. Lamat

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Corresponding Author

21010301@siswa.unimas.my

Abstract: As an important part of the city, public facilities symbolize the city's image and a good carrier of regional culture. Excellent public facility design plays an important role in the construction of city cultural brands, which can highlight the city's cultural identity and enhance the recognition of cultural brands by shaping the image. However, as an important cultural city, the design of public facilities in Xinyang City fails to highlight the characteristics of the city's cultural brands. Therefore, this study aims to explain the role of city public facilities in the construction of city cultural brands, introduce excellent design practice cases, and then analyze the design status quo of Xinyang city public facilities, to provide targeted strategies and suggestions for the design of Xinyang city public facilities, and finally promote the sustainable development and the promotion of the cultural brand for Xinyang city.

Keywords: Cultural brand, Public facilities design, Strategy, Xinyang city

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

With the rapid development of the economy and the continuous deepening of city modernization, city development has shown a certain homogenization phenomenon, and many city constructions have failed to reflect their original unique cultural characteristics, without their own distinctive city cultural brand. A characteristic city cultural brand is established based on cultural development, it is of great significance to enhance the city's image, attract talent, and promote economic development. As an important part of city construction, public facilities can not only provide a convenient and high-quality public environment, but also reflect the cultural characteristics and quality of the city, show the spirit of the city, and play a key role in the construction of cultural brands. Suppose a city wants to have its cultural brand and develop sustainably. In that case, it is important to explore and develop the cultural characteristics of the city and reflect them through the design of public facilities. Every city has its own rich regional cultural characteristics, and Xinyang City, China, as a city with a rich history and cultural deposits, has unique conditions to promote its city's cultural brand. However, there is relatively little research on the role and strategy of public facility design in the construction of the Xinyang city cultural brand. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out relevant research to fill the gap in this field.

1.2 Research Significance

The construction of a cultural brand is of great significance to enhance the image of a city and attract talent. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to study the function and strategy of public facilities design in the construction of the Xinyang City cultural brand. First, through in-depth research on the role of public facility design in the construction of Xinyang cultural brand, we can enrich and improve relevant theories and provide new ideas and perspectives for the research in this field. Secondly, the research results can provide a scientific basis and guidance for the Xinyang City government and planning department to optimize the design strategy of public facilities, improve the city's image and quality, and promote the development of Xinyang City's cultural brand construction. Finally, the design of high-quality public facilities can attract more tourists and investment, promote the development of tourism and related industries, and promote the economic prosperity of Xinyang City. Therefore, an in-depth study of the role and strategy of public facility design in the construction of Xinyang City's cultural brand has important theoretical and practical significance and has a positive impact on sustainable development and the promotion of cultural soft power for Xinyang City.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Public Facilities

Urban public facilities, as an important part of modern and future cities, are an important medium for residents to play and enjoy the city's functions. Their setup and design directly affect the play of urban functions and the construction of urban culture.

The concept of public facilities is relatively complex, there is no unified consensus in the world. In general, Wang Yun (2016) believes that there are three concepts and contents in the field of city public facilities: city infrastructure, city furniture, and city public equipment. He makes a detailed classification diagram of city public facilities in a narrow sense. If we mainly look at it from the professional design perspective, Li Zhangchen et al. (2023) briefly classified city public facilities. From a functional point of view, they divide city public facilities into public information facilities (billboards, environmental signage, etc.), public health facilities (garbage cans, water fountains, public toilets, etc.), and public transportation facilities (bus shelters, Bicycle parking facilities, etc.), public lighting facilities, public rest facilities (leisure seats, rest booths, etc.), Public landscaping and skits (pools, fountains, art opuscles, sculptures, etc.)(shown in Table 1).

Table 1: The Classification of City Public Facilities

Public Facilities	Specific content
Public information facility	billboards, environmental signage, etc.
public health facility	Garbage cans, drinking fountains, public toilets, etc
public transit facilities	Shelters, bicycle parking facilities, etc
public lighting	City park, square, roadside, and other lamps
Public rest facilities	Leisure seats, lounges, etc
Public landscaping and skits	Fountain, art opuscles, sculpture, etc
Others	Public buildings (museums, libraries, art galleries, etc.)

2.2 City Culture Brand

City cultural brand refers to a city in the process of shaping and promoting the brand image through the analysis, refinement, integration of the city's unique cultural elements endowment, That is, a specific, systematic and perceptible brand image with cultural factors as the main component is created based on differentiated brand

elements such as historical and cultural accumulation and cultural industry advantages(Li,2009). Creating a strong city cultural brand can make the city beat other cities in market competition, become the audience's first choice for investment, tourism, residence, and employment, and make the city obtain a broader space for development. The city cultural brand is a special carrier symbolized in the process of city cultural development, which is used to concentrate on showing the city's spiritual style and city culture, and it is also a collection that can best reflect the current characteristics of the city and can best express the city cultural characteristics(Wang,2012). The concept is concise and abstract, mainly highlighting that the brand of city culture is the carrier of city culture. However, some scholars have noted the importance of city culture brands, they offered a Clear and specific definition from a comprehensive perspective. Su Xuan and Li Jinhua (2010) based on Philip Kotler's definition of a brand and combined with the academic research results on city brands, believed that a city cultural brand refers to a name, sign, symbol, or design and other related elements used to identify city culture, and its function is to identify the cultural difference between a city and another city and to make it different from the rival city culture, in the public mind to form an impression, produce the city's culture cognition. From this point of view, the city's cultural brand mainly highlights the city's distinctive cultural characteristics, which are different from other cities and rich in certain cultural values.

2.3 The relationship between public facility design and cultural brand construction

There is a close relationship between public facility design and cultural brand construction. First, the design of public facilities can convey the unique cultural characteristics and brand image of the city through architecture, landscape, and artistic elements. Secondly, the design of public facilities can create a public space with a unique atmosphere and personality, so that residents and tourists can have emotional resonance in it, and deepen the identity of city culture. This sense of identity helps to establish and consolidate the cultural brand, forming loyalty and a word-of-mouth effect. Thirdly, the design of public facilities is one of the important means of shaping a city image. Through design and layout elaborately, we can create a public space with iconic and unique charm, enhance the visibility and reputation of the city, and then promote the construction and development of cultural brands. Finally, the design of public facilities and the construction of cultural brands promote each other and provide support for cultural and creative industries. In short, the design of public facilities plays an important role in the construction of cultural brands. it provides effective means and strategies for cities to build unique cultural brands.

2.4 Correlational research on public Facilities design and City Cultural Brand

At present, there are not many research results on the connection between city public facilities design and city cultural brands, and most of them are only separate studies on city brands or city public facilities. There are a few studies that mention the correlation between city projects, city brand building, city image, and city sustainable development. For example, Yang Lulu (2016) analyzed the general situation of the development of the Shaanxi Tang cultural landscape project in combination with the fourth overall city planning of Xi 'an and clarified the importance and necessity of the Shaanxi Tang cultural landscape project in shaping city's cultural brand. She probes into how Xi 'an can fully and reasonably explore and use the Tang culture to create excellent landscape design works that unite the city culture so that the Tang cultural landscape project in Shaanxi province and the city cultural brand building can promote each other and perfectly combine, to enable the city to complete the important mission of continuing the city culture and highlighting the brand personality. Let us have a deep understanding of the combination of the landscape overall project and the city's cultural brand. There is some research on the application of regional culture in the design of city public facilities, mainly highlighting the importance of regional culture in the design of city public facilities, as Li Ya(2022) discussed the importance of regional culture in city construction. He proposed that by creatively extracting regional cultural elements and combining them with modern design techniques, excellent regional culture could be continued and inherited in city public space design. Through case analysis, he expounds on the concrete design and expression methods of city regional culture and proves that regional culture is very important and necessary in creating personalized city public space.

Many scholars will apply regional culture to the study of public facility design. Li Haixia(2019) explored the role and application of regional culture in city public facility design, Starting from the development track of the city, she proposed the close connection between the city and regional culture, analyzed the lack of regional cultural elements in the current design of city public facilities from an objective perspective, concluded the urgency of integrating regional cultural elements into the design of city public facilities, and made a new interpretation of the application of regional culture in the design of city public facilities. Summarize the effective strategies for cultural reconstruction in the future. Public facilities not only provide people with some functional information but also a window of city culture. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply explore and apply the cultural elements in the design of city public facilities. Xu Jian(2023) The application of regional culture in public facility design combined with the current application status of regional cultural elements in public facility design to analyze the problems, put forward several application principles that can be followed, and separately discussed the details of regional cultural elements in public facility

design such as materials, colors, shapes and cultural connotations. At the same time, with several specific public facilities design cases, the integration of regional cultural elements is deeply discussed. However, the above studies only mentioned the importance of regional culture in city construction but did not elaborate on the combination of city facility design and city cultural brand. Although they did not mention the city cultural brand, they made a specific analysis of the application of regional cultural elements in the design of city public facilities, which has a certain correlation with the city cultural brand and has a certain reference value. To sum up, there are a lot of research results on the embodiment and application of cultural elements in the design of city public facilities, but no research results have been found specifically targeting the role and strategy of public facilities design in the construction of cultural brands in Xinyang City. Therefore, in the context of today's cities actively promoting their cultural brands, Xinyang, as a famous historical and cultural city, livable city, capital of Maojian, garden city, and other increasing popularity in the 21st century, research on the role and strategy of public facility design in Xinyang's cultural brand construction has theoretical guiding significance and practical value.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research mainly uses the method of case studies, field investigation, simple interviews, and questionnaires. The case study mainly selects some urban public facilities design cases with local characteristics and culture in Chinese cities and analyzes their design implication and cultural connotations. The field investigation, simple interviews, and questionnaires mainly focus on the question of which public facilities in Xinyang city are rich in Xinyang city cultural characteristics and which aspects of Xinyang should strengthen the cultural brand building.

3.1 Case Study

Urban public facilities are the carriers of urban regional culture and an important medium of interaction between people and the urban environment. The public facilities with local cultural characteristics are of great significance in enhancing the city's visual image, clarifying the city's theme, shaping the city's characteristics, and demonstrating the quality of the city's service (Fang, 2017).

The types of public facilities are numerous, and we mainly take the lighting design that we are more familiar with and common as an example. Lamps can not only provide basic lighting services, but also set off the atmosphere. when it does not need their practical function, they can be used as an ornament to decorate the city environment, of course, but also to highlight the city's cultural characteristics, and enhance the city's cultural brand. For example, the streetlights such as the traditional rock sugar gourd,

birdcage (Figure 1), rattle-drum, etc. All of them are unique forms with profound cultural connotations combined with the old Beijing culture. They are both childlike and fit the atmosphere of the old street, giving people full memories. It can also give tourists a little novelty. Even if you are in the street, you can feel the regional characteristics of old Beijing, which not only beautify the function but also achieve a good publicity effect on the characteristic culture of old Beijing (Sun, 2019). In addition, Xi'an, known as the ancient capital of the Thirteen Dynasties, also has some public facilities designed to highlight the cultural characteristics of the city. For example, the lamps in the Lotus Palace of the Tang Dynasty are shaped like palace lamps, and the overall shape is integrated into the eaves design of the Tang Dynasty buildings, highlighting the cultural characteristics of the Tang Dynasty. The antique feeling is very attractive and enhances the charm of the historical and cultural city of Xi'an. Jingdezhen is famous both at home and abroad for its porcelain. The street lights, as city public facilities, are of course also made of local characteristic materials porcelain, forming their unique artistic characteristics. Looking at them alone, they are like a piece of art, which makes people stop to appreciate and have a deep impression.



Figure 1. Birdcage Street Lamp (Source:<http://xiaoyayu2000.blog.sohu.com>)

Therefore, as a city planner or designer, it is necessary to perfectly integrate the characteristic culture of the city in the design of city public facilities, so that the two can promote each other from an artistic force, and finally increase the artistic charm of the city, to enhance the cultural brand of the city.

3.2 General Situation of Xinyang City

Xinyang City is a prefecture-level city under the jurisdiction of Henan Province, China. It is in the southernmost part of Henan Province and the upper reaches of the Huaihe River. It used to be a place where Chu culture, Central Plains culture, and Wu culture blended. Zhumadian in the north, Tongbai Mountain in the west, is adjacent to Nanyang; it is connected to Hubei in the south, and Anhui in the east. It is known as the "Three Provinces thoroughfare" and is a strategic place between the Jianghuai River and the

Han River. Xinyang City is one of the important cultural centers of Henan Province, with a rich historical and cultural heritage and folk traditions. The Xinyang area has a rich variety of folk-art forms, such as Xinyang Flower Drum opera, Xinyang shadow play, etc., which show the creativity and artistic talent of local people. There are many historical sites and cultural attractions in Xinyang City, such as Chengyang City ruins, Hubei-Henan-Anhui Red Soviet area, Lingshan Temple, etc..

which attracts many tourists to come for sightseeing and learning. Of course, Xinyang people are proud of Xinyang Maojian tea cultural resources. In general, Xinyang City has a superior geographical location, a long history, and a profound cultural heritage, all of which provide rich resources and opportunities for the city's development and cultural brand construction.

3.3 Problems existing in the design of public facilities in Xinyang City

City public facilities represent the image of a city. As a livable city, the capital of Maojian, a famous historical and cultural city, and the hometown of generals, Xinyang has numerous historical and cultural heritages and folk cultures. However, the design of the city public facilities almost fails to reflect the brand value of Xinyang's city culture, making it impossible to distinguish it from other cities. Through field investigation and simple interviews with some people (the interviewees involved a variety of professions, including teachers, students, doctors, enterprise workers, community personnel, etc.), it is found that Xinyang residents think that few public facilities in Xinyang city can reflect the cultural characteristics of the city, the only one they can think of is Maojian Bridge on the Shihe River. When people face the problem of which aspects of Xinyang should strengthen cultural brand building, the result is shown in Figure 2. Therefore, the design of public facilities in Xinyang City need to attract our attention.

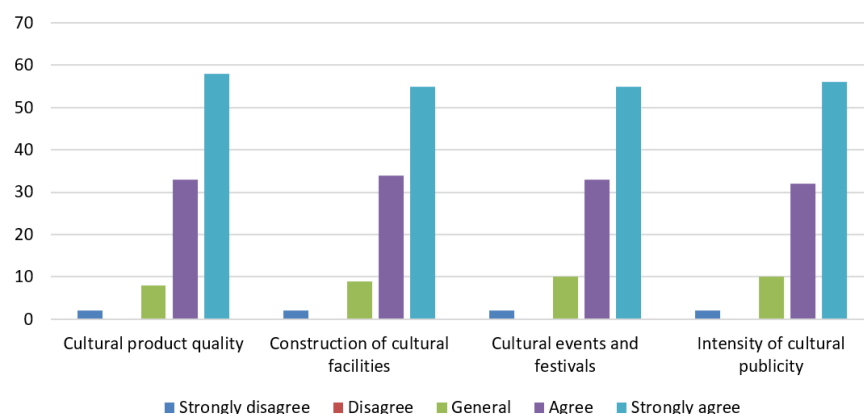


Figure 2. result of aspects of Xinyang should strengthen cultural brand building
Specific data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The data of which aspects of Xinyang should strengthen

Topic \ option	Strongly disagree	Disagree	General	Agree	Strongly agree	average score
Cultural product quality	2%	0%	8%	33%	58%	4.44
Construction of cultural facilities	2%	0%	9%	34%	55%	4.4
Cultural events and festivals	2%	0%	10%	33%	55%	4.38
Intensity of cultural publicity	2%	0%	10%	32%	56%	4.41
subtotal	2%	0%	9%	33%	56%	4.41

3.4 Analysis of the role of public facility design in the construction of Xinyang cultural brand

The design of public facilities plays an important role in the construction of the Xinyang cultural brand. First, image transmission and cognitive functions, public facilities design through architecture, landscape, and artistic elements to convey the unique cultural characteristics and brand image of Xinyang City. Secondly, it can enhance the sense of identity and belonging. Excellent design of public facilities can create a public space with a unique atmosphere and personality so that residents and tourists can have emotional resonance in it, and deepen the sense of identity of Xinyang City culture. This sense of identity helps to establish and consolidate the cultural brand of Xinyang City, forming loyalty and a word-of-mouth effect. Thirdly, to enhance the experience value and attractiveness, the design of public facilities can enhance people's experience value in Xinyang City. Finally, shaping the city image and brand building function, public facilities design is one of the important means to shape the image and brand of Xinyang City. Through careful design and layout, we can create a public space with iconic and unique charm, enhance the popularity and reputation of Xinyang City, and then promote the construction and development of cultural brands. To sum up, the design of public facilities plays an important role in the construction of Xinyang City's cultural brand. Reasonable design of public facilities can enhance the experience value, enhance the city's image, enhance the satisfaction of residents and tourists, and contribute to the construction of Xinyang city's cultural brand.

4. DATA FINDING AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Architectural style and traditional culture

The design of public buildings can integrate the traditional cultural elements of Xinyang city, such as traditional architectural style and folk characteristics. Using traditional

architectural elements and decoration, the architectural image with Xinyang characteristics is created to show the unique cultural charm of Xinyang city.

4.2 Art installations and folk art

Art installations and folk-art elements, such as sculptures, murals, and carvings, should be added to the design of public facilities to display the rich and diverse folk-art forms of Xinyang City. This can beautify the public space and inherit and carry forward the traditional culture of Xinyang City.

4.3 Public space and festival activities

The design of public facilities can consider the festival activities held by Xinyang City, and provide suitable places and facilities for these activities. For example, a stage or temporary exhibition space is set up in a square or park to accommodate various cultural performances and exhibition activities, increasing the atmosphere and participation of the festival.

4.4 Tourist attractions and guide system

For tourist attractions in Xinyang City, the design of public facilities can be combined with the guide system, set up information boards, signboards, guide maps, etc., to provide tourists with guided tour and interpretation services. This helps to enhance visitors' understanding and experience of Xinyang's cultural attractions.

By combining the design of public facilities with the cultural characteristics of Xinyang city, we can create a unique public space and architectural image, and further promote the construction and development of Xinyang cultural brand.

5. CONCLUSION

When we mention a city, we can first think of the characteristic description of the city, for example, when we mention Beijing, we can think of Beijing's courtyard, hutong, etc., when we mention Jingdezhen, we can think of ceramic culture when we mention Paris, we can think of the art capital, etc., of course, when we mention Xinyang, we all can think of the city of Maojian(the name of green tea). So, it seems that most people's impression of a city is about the cultural characteristics of the city, and culture is the most distinguishing thing between a city and other cities. Therefore, in the design of city public facilities, it is necessary to fully combine the local cultural characteristics, find a breakthrough point from the historical culture, regional culture, and other aspects of the city, extract classic regional cultural elements, and skillfully integrate them into the construction of city public facilities, to obtain a new look. For example, different cities in China have different material resources with local characteristics. Local materials can be used as materials in the design of public facilities, which can not only

save costs but also reflect local cultural characteristics. For example, bamboo material can be used as a good means of expression in the design. According to the cultural characteristics of Xinyang City, the design strategy of public facilities can be started with the following strategies:

5.1 The integration and innovation of cultural elements

The design of public facilities should highlight the cultural characteristics of Xinyang City, such as. By extracting some classic elements from these cultural resources and cleverly and innovatively integrating them into the design of public facilities, people can understand Xinyang culture while using public facilities, and have a fresh and unique feeling, which adds to the cultural charm of the city.

5.2 The use of story and emotional resonance

Public facilities design can tell stories and trigger emotional resonance to convey the cultural brand value of Xinyang City. Through sculptures, murals, signs, and other art installations, Xinyang City's history, traditions, and cultural stories are displayed to stimulate people's interest and identity in Xinyang City culture. For example, the famous Sima Guang smashed cylinder in Xinyang and the legend of the late repair can be set as art sculptures in parks or squares, It can let people understand the history and classic culture of Xinyang, and also learn the knowledge and skills we need to master in daily life.

5.3 Interaction and participation experience

The design of public facilities should encourage interaction and participation experience, so that residents and tourists can personally participate in Xinyang cultural activities, of course, but also reflect that human is the main body of city life, the design should consider the different needs of different groups. For example, some interactive installations, performance stages, etc., are set up in parks or squares to provide different groups of people with the opportunity to participate in performances, artistic creations, or traditional activities.

5.4 Sustainable development and environmental protection

The design of public facilities should pay attention to sustainable development and environmental protection, which is consistent with the cultural brand positioning of Xinyang City. Consider the use of environmentally friendly materials, energy-saving technologies, and renewable energy in the design to create green and sustainable public Spaces.

5.5 Community integration and sharing of resources

The design of public facilities should promote community integration and the sharing of cultural resources. By setting up multifunctional public facilities in the community, such as cultural centers, libraries, art studios, etc., to provide residents with places for learning, entertainment, and communication, strengthening community cohesion and cultural sharing. It is believed that through the above strategies, the design of public facilities can more effectively highlight the city cultural brand of Xinyang and enhance the image and attractiveness of the city.

6. DISCUSSION AND PROSPECT

Through the study on the role and strategy of public facilities design in the construction of Xinyang city cultural brand, this paper concludes that public facilities design plays an important role in the construction of city cultural brand. We should pay attention to it and actively explore the design strategy of public facilities to highlight the city cultural brand. As for the future development trend, we can continue to further study the relationship between public facility design and Xinyang cultural brand construction through research, and explore how to highlight the cultural characteristics and brand image of Xinyang city through public facility design. Of course, it is also necessary to encourage innovative public facility design, combine the regional characteristics and cultural elements of Xinyang city, create unique public facilities, and provide citizens and tourists with a good experience and feelings, and it is necessary to incorporate public facilities design into the overall city planning and cultural brand construction strategy, achieve the organic integration of public facilities, and improve the image and quality of the city. Encourage the cooperation and participation of academic circles, design circles, government departments, and all walks of life to jointly promote the development of public facility design in the construction of Xinyang cultural brand and form a multi-party force. Finally, we should pay attention to the sustainability of public facilities design, including environmental protection, resource conservation, and social responsibility, to promote the sustainable development of Xinyang City and the promotion of cultural soft power. Through corresponding guidance and promotion, the design of public facilities will play a more important role in the construction of the Xinyang City cultural brand and make greater contributions to the development and promotion of the city.

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FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY: DIGITAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE PRESERVATION AND INHERITANCE OF NEW YEAR PAINTINGS

Xin Zhang

College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Sarawak, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak

Valerie Anak Michael

College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Sarawak, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak

Shahrnizam bin Sulaiman

College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Perak, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Pera

Valerie Anak Michael
valeriemichael@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: The China New Year Paintings are folk painting that evolved from farming culture. It once fell into a cultural depression and nearly died out. With the joint efforts of the government, artists and researchers, the art of it has been preserved and inheritance. In order to verify whether the digitization of New Year Paintings can solve the low social awareness and confusing cultural dissemination problems, this paper reviews the literature of scholars, introduces the co-occurrence matrix and comparative learning framework, using Co-occurrence Matrix Analysis and Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) for similarity analysis, compares the attempts made by artists through digitization and identify the digital representation and outcomes of the New Year Paintings by examining the frequency and similarity of keyword occurrences. This paper compares and discusses the attempts made by artists through digitalization by reviewing the literature of scholars, introducing the co-occurrence matrix and comparative learning framework, and conducting similarity analysis. The results of this study show that New Year Paintings can be reasonably disseminated and accepted, thereby generating more diverse interpretations and applications. This study has sorted out the digital expressions of New Year paintings, broadened the research horizon, and provided ideas for subsequent conservation research.

Keywords: Conservation, Culture, Digitization,
Heritage, New Year Paintings

1. INTRODUCTION

New Year Paintings, which originated from the “Door God Paintings” of the Han Dynasty in China, are an important part of traditional Chinese culture, carrying the wisdom and aesthetic interests of the Chinese people with their unique art forms and rich cultural connotations. In Chinese agrarian society, New Year Paintings, usually featuring auspicious and festive motifs, are a cultural carrier for transmitting blessings and prayers, and are widely used for the decoration of traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, where every household posts New Year Paintings to pray for an auspicious New Year. Its art form matured during the Song Dynasty and reached its peak during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, forming five of the most famous production areas of New Year Paintings, such as Yangliuqing in Tianjin City, Yangjiabu in Shandong Province, Taohuawu in Suzhou City, Mianzhu in Sichuan Province, and Zhuxianzhen in Henan Province. However, with the decline of farming culture and the acceleration of urbanization, the art of New Year Paintings once fell into a trough. The single form of the product and the performance of the content cannot keep up with the development of the times are important factors that restrict the development of New Year Paintings in modern times.



Figure 1. Traditional New Year Paintings

(Source: Yang liuqing in Tianjin City)



Figure 2. Digital New Year Paintings

(Source: Zhuxianzhen in Henan Province , <https://zhongkui.com>)

Firstly, the problem of low social acceptance is particularly prominent. The fast pace of modern society and diversified forms of entertainment have caused traditional New Year Paintings to be gradually neglected by the younger generation. As a traditional art form, New Year Paintings are often considered to be out of touch with modern life, making it difficult to arouse the interest of the public, especially young people. Although some schools and pavilions are carrying out educational and promotional activities on New Year Paintings, the overall effect is still limited.

Secondly, cultural communication chaos is also an important issue that needs to be addressed in the process of passing down New Year Paintings. With the popularity of the Internet and social media, the way in which New Year Paintings are disseminated has changed dramatically. However, due to the lack of uniform standards and norms, some low-quality and commercialized New Year Paintings have flooded the market, resulting in the overall level of the art of New Year Paintings being uneven. In addition, some of the New Year Paintings have suffered from content distortion and cultural breaks in the process of dissemination, further weakening the cultural value and artistic charm of New Year Paintings.

In this context, the application of digital technology provides new possibilities for the protection and inheritance of New Year Paintings. For example, babies in New Year Paintings have been turned into anime characters for promotional videos and TikTok mini videos. Zhuxianzhen New Year Paintings chose to combine the woodcut New Year Paintings of Zhong Kui (Ghost King) and Shi Zun (Buddha) with NFT to create digital art works. Yangliuqing New Year Paintings used Extended Reality (XR) and 5G

networks to create a “Magic Wall” that can be interacted with by users. Through digital means, artists and researchers can preserve, disseminate and reproduce the art of New Year Paintings more conveniently. Digitization not only enhances the visual effect of New Year Paintings but also raises the public's awareness of and interest in New Year Paintings through virtual displays and interactive experiences. However, how to maintain the traditional characteristics of New Year Paintings in the process of digitization and effectively deal with the problems of low social acceptance and chaotic cultural dissemination is still an urgent issue to be resolved.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DIGITAL APPLICATIONS OF TRADITIONAL CHINA NEW YEAR PAINTINGS

This section discusses the digital representation of traditional New Year Paintings, and Kun Wang (2011) points out in his thesis that the Digital Survival of Chinese Woodblock Printed New Year Paintings project has established a complete archive of New Year Paintings that includes textual, photographic, and audio data, with the video data mainly in digital formats such as DV, HDV, or AVCHD. Heng Qian (2012) analyzed the relationship between the aesthetics of China New Year Paintings and digitalization in commercial animation advertisements and argued that the character modelling of New Year Paintings, which is characterized by planar generalization, is in line with the simplified treatment of animation modelling design, and that the qualities of simple and honest folk art are the pursuit of animation advertisement design. Hongmei Yang (2013) through a study of New Year Paintings on display in museums, proposed the adoption of dynamic display, openness, and the use of a variety of different materials and techniques. that dynamic display, open protection and digital dissemination should be adopted to maximize the protection of New Year Paintings and the social functions of museums. However, the digitization proposed by scholars ensures that the authenticity of the paintings is not lost. Therefore, it has a positive effect on the conservation of the year paintings. Han He (2013) suggests that for the old methods that cannot mobilize the attention and interest of the audience, Zhangzhou New Year Paintings can be brought closer to the distance between the New Year Paintings and the audience by establishing a database through the virtual reality technology and the Internet and displaying it dynamically. Bin Zhu (2014) argues that for the digital preservation of the Tantou New Year Paintings, it should be started from the digital storage, digital creation and display, and the maintenance of digital information property rights, to protect them while inheriting them, and to avoid the problem of chaotic cultural dissemination. Fanghao Song, Yan Liu, and Kehui Mao (2014) explored the application design relationship between Yangjiabu New Year Paintings and APPs, and argued that through the development of APPs, the

New Year Paintings can be used to stimulate the audience's interest in a more visually rich and interactive ways to stimulate the audience's interest and enhance the awareness of the inheritance and protection of the New Year Paintings. However, scholars have proposed very effective application methods to enhance the vitality of New Year paintings. Therefore, it is a favorable attempt for the development and preservation of New Year Paintings. Ruimin Zhang (2015) by studying The Italian Digital Library Portal and Cultural Tourist Network, Gallica and TATE, analyzed and found that the governments of Italy, France and the UK that all provide support for the digital protection and construction of cultural heritage, which provides a reference and reference for the protection of China New Year Paintings, affirming the importance of digital technology for New Year Paintings. Hongliang Li (2016) provides a strategy for the digital dissemination of New Year Paintings and argues that there is a need to disseminate the historical, cultural and value system of the New Year Paintings, on the platforms, and at the same time, to conduct audits and data analysis of the promotional scripts, with a fixed-point push. Dan Chen, Lu Ren (2017) elaborated on the current situation of Zhuxianzhen New Year paintings that are not easy to store, analyzed the necessity of using digital technology for protection and inheritance, and proposed that platform display, mobile dissemination and outdoor electronic media display should be carried out together. However, the digital platform display of New Year Paintings is favorable to the protection and inheritance of New Year Paintings. Therefore, the digital New Year Paintings are easy to be understood and supported by the audience.

2.2 DIGITAL APPLICATIONS OF MODERNITY CHINA NEW YEAR PAINTINGS

In this section, the digital expression of modern New Year Paintings will be discussed. Yu Xiao (2017) proposed that the digital teaching platform of Longhui Tantou New Year Paintings has the functions of resource and teaching management, learning community, and the integrated teaching mode adopted can activate the interaction between teachers and students, which promotes the cultivation of New Year Paintings inheritors. Xuemeng Huang (2018) explored the role of digital tools in the protection of Liangping New Year Paintings, and It is believed that the trend of community inheritance is being formed, and the appeal of modern New Year Paintings is to comply with the digital trend, which is also in line with the development law of Liangping New Year Paintings, while digital tools can also protect the inherited body of New Year Paintings and carry out auxiliary modelling and restoration of New Year Paintings. Juan Huangfu (2018) investigated the status of digital conservation of New Year Paintings in the Central Plains and believed that a single means of communication is not enough to attract the subjective initiative of the audience and suggested that virtual reality displays of New Year paintings and interactive experiences of printing techniques be carried out in museums, and an online platform

be established. However, modern New Year Paintings have a wider range of applications for digitalization. Therefore, digitalization is a mainstream trend for the future development of modern New Year Paintings. Yiding Lu (2019) analyzed the status quo that the New Year Paintings of Zhuxianzhen have been digitally protected, but there are still difficulties in inheritance, and concluded that the digital inheritance mode is also applicable, and more and better inheritors of New Year Paintings can be cultivated in this way. Xuan Qin, Jin Zhou (2020) studied from the perspective of Zhuxianzhen New Year Painting art, economy and inheritance, they think that digitalization is more in line with the modern aesthetic demand, the establishment of platform is conducive to the rapid dissemination of New Year Painting works, and the uploaded works can be well preserved, and put forward the idea of New Year Painting creative industry of clustering development. Ziyi Li (2021) mentions that Taohuawu New Year Painting unitary dissemination channel has led to the loss of economy, slow updating of themes and inheritance difficulties. loss, slow updating of themes and difficulties in inheritance. With the convenience of the mobile terminal, an APP was designed for Taohuawu New Year Paintings to establish a mobile publicity and communication platform. However, the digital preservation of modern New Year Paintings is still difficult to inherit. Therefore, it becomes more important to expand the digital inheritance of New Year Paintings. Xinwen Tian (2022), through the study of Laohekou New Year Paintings, found that it faces the problems of the lack of inheritors, the lack of preservation of New Year Paintings, the impact of the advanced technology, and the single inheritance method. With the support of augmented reality technology, an Android display platform is built with 3D models, animation and audio. Jinbo Xu, Yijie Zhu (2023) cited the method of cultural translation in their study, analyzed the significance of cultural symbols of Zhuxianzhen New Year Paintings at the material, behavioral and philosophical levels, and used it as a basis for exploring the functionality of the digital medium, preserving the cultural roots of New Year Paintings and innovating interaction methods. Yixuan Zhou, Lianyu Huang (2024) explore the digital status of Dongchangfu New Year Paintings and find that the current display form exists the phenomenon of props pattern, experience means singularity and information display dispersion. An experience design strategy is proposed from three aspects of multi-sensory, multi-scene and new carrier to integrate emotional and experiential into the digital design of New Year paintings. In any case, the digital application of modern New Year Paintings has evolved from mere conservation and inheritance to focus on the emotional and experiential aspects of the audience. It is therefore necessary to continue to use digital forms to express modern New Year Paintings.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 CO-OCCURRENCE ANALYSIS OF THEME KEYWORDS

This study analyses digital applications in traditional and modern New Year Paintings through a literature review, detailing and describing the role that digital technology plays in the preservation and transmission of New Year Paintings. Literature cases are analyzed and evaluated to sort out the changes made in the process of digitization of traditional New Year Paintings. Using “Co-occurrence Matrix Analysis”, which is used to record the frequency of simultaneous occurrences of keywords in the literature, to analyze the co-occurrence relationship between the primary theme T_i and the secondary theme keywords T_j , to show the number of occurrences of the theme keywords, and to identify the theme keywords that occur at high frequency by identifying the traditional to modern, the What are the main forms of digital representations of New Year Paintings.

$$M_{ij} = \sum_{k=1}^n \delta(T_i, D_k) \cdot \delta(T_j, D_k)$$

This M_{ij} represents the primary theme T_i and the secondary theme T_j , and is the data in row i and column j of M . It is the number of k where T_i and T_j are equal at the same time in all the D_k , which shows the frequency of co-occurrences of the theme terms among the literature. The number of documents is denoted by $\delta(T, D)$ denotes the function value of 1 when the topic T_i or T_j occurs in the document D , and the function value of 0 when $T_i = D_k$, $\delta(T_i, D_k)$ and $\delta(T_j, D_k)$ are used to check whether T_i and T_j are equal to D_k , which shows together or not. The frequency of occurrence of the subject keywords is then counted and the most co-occurring subject terms are labelled.

3.2 SIMILARITY ANALYSIS OF SUBJECT KEYWORDS

In order to facilitate the differentiation and statistics of the similarity and difference between the theme keywords, and at the same time to learn the representation of the theme keyword features, the use of SPSS will introduce the “Comparative Learning Framework” to be used to differentiate between the similarity or difference of the data, to analyze the similarity relationship between the main theme and the secondary theme keywords, and to optimize the New Year Paintings based on the keyword characteristics of the shape of digital representation and find out the most suitable digital representation for New Year Paintings representation.

$$z_i = f(x_i; \theta)$$

A feature extraction model is used to determine the set of feature vectors for two sets of subject keywords to train the model to increase the understanding of New Year Paintings and digital artistic representations. z_i represents the feature vectors extracted in f , which displays the output value of z on the i th sample. x_i is the content of the i sample of literature, and θ is the model parameter. $f(x_i; \theta)$ is used to output x_i as z_i , which displays the predictive model representing the similarity. After that, the similarity calculation is performed to find out the subject terms with high similarity.

4. DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Primary Theme and Secondary Theme

Primary Themes (T_i)	Secondary themes (T_j)
Digital Conservation	APP
Tantou Woodblock Prints	Digital Conservation
Digital Teaching Platform	Tantou Woodblock Prints
Taohuayu Woodblock Prints	Digital Technology
Digital Age	Branding
Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection	Digital Animation
New Year Painting Art	Teaching Reform
Digital Design	New Year Paintings Art
Zhuxianzhen Woodblock Prints	Key Protection
Liupanshan Woodblock Prints	Anyang Region
Protection and Inheritance	Cultural and Creative Products
Experience Design	Image Resources
Wuqiang Woodblock Prints	Carving Skills
Yangjiabu Woodblock Prints	User Experience
Experience Economy	Traditional Folk Art
Mianzhu New Year Paintings	Yangjiabu Woodblock Prints
Digital Representation	Folk Art
Digital Construction	Database
Intangible Cultural Heritage	Contextual Concept
Digital Dissemination	Virtual Reality
Digital Interpretation	Oral History
Zhuxianzhen New Year Paintings	Digital Construction
Tantou New Year Painting	Intangible Cultural Heritage
Cross-cultural	Digital Museum
Tantou New Year Paintings	Taohuawu New Year Paintings
New Media	Liangping New Year Painting
Woodblock Prints	Digital Age
Pingyang Woodblock Prints	Dissemination Methods
	Art Branding

	Cultural Industrialization
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Through the search of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) for the keyword “Digital New Year Painting”, the timeline from 2011 to the present, 32 academic journals, 16 dissertations, 1 conference paper and 1 newspaper were found. Expanding the keywords “New Year Painting” and “Digital”, are developed to produce a table of Table 1 (Primary Themes and Secondary Themes), in which the Primary Themes was to expand on the location and influence of digital representation on New Year Painting, and the Secondary Themes was to expand on the digital application of New Year Painting.

A literature search and co-occurrence matrix analysis of the expanded keywords revealed that the digital representation and application of New Year Paintings mainly focuses on the digital conservation of New Year Paintings, cultural and creative products, mobile APP design, and digital construction.

Table 2: Types of Woodblocks Prints and Digital Technology

Woodblocks Prints	Digital Technology
Tantou Woodblock Prints	Digital Teaching Platform
Wuqiang Woodblock Prints	Experience Design
Zhuxianzhen Woodblock Prints	Digital Representation
Yangjiabu Woodblock Prints	Digital Construction
Pingyang Woodblock Prints	Digital Dissemination
Taohuawu Woodblock Prints	Digital Interpretation
Liupanshan Woodblock Prints	New Media
	App
	Digital Age
	Digital Animation
	Virtual Reality
	Digital Museum

Table 2 “Woodblock Prints” includes woodblock prints from six cities, “Tantou, Taohuawu”, “Wuqiang”, “Zhuxianzhen”, “Yangjiabu”, “Pingyang” and “Liupanshan”, with a total frequency of 48 in Table 3. “Digital Technology” includes 12 keywords: “Digital Teaching Platform”, “Experience Design”, “Digital Representation”, “Digital Construction”, “Digital Dissemination”, “Digital Interpretation”, “New Media”, “App”,

“Digital Age”, “Digital Animation”, “Virtual Reality”, “Digital Museum”, with a total frequency of 45 in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the five most frequent themes in the literature, “Digital Conservation”, “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection”, “New Year Painting Art”, “Woodblock Prints” and “Digital Technology”. In the list of themes, “Digital Conservation” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection” are the most frequent combinations, which shows that there is a strong link between the two. This shows that there is a close connection between the two, and that it is feasible to use digital means for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. By comparing the keywords “Digital Conservation”, “New Year Painting Art”, “Digital Teaching Platform” and “Digital Age”, the digital representation of New Year Paintings is not only limited to itself, but also involves the social, pedagogical and stakeholder aspects.

Table 3: Co-occurrence Matrix Data

Themes	Frequency
Digital Conservation	78
Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection	65
New Year Painting Art	52
Woodblock Prints	48
Digital Technology	45

The most frequent combination of “Woodblock Prints” is “Tantou Woodblock Prints” and “Yangjiabu Woodblock Prints”, which is a good example of the digital representativeness of different locations for artists and scholars. This shows that for artists and scholars, New Year Paintings in different locations have the power of digital expression and shows that the digital expression of New Year Paintings is not affected by their location and cannot be digitally transformed. The high frequency of “Digital Teaching Platform”, “Digital Technology”, “New Media” and “User Experience” indicates that in terms of digital expression, apart from the protection of New Year Paintings, we should also explore New Year Paintings from the perspectives of digital technology, media communication and user experience. The study also illustrates that in addition to the preservation of traditional art, digital technology, media communication and user experience should also be explored.

Table 4 by using the similarity study method of comparative learning, we define those greater than 0.7 as highly similar, those between 0.5-0.7 as moderately similar, and those less than 0.5 as lowly similar. We can identify a very high similarity between the

highly similar keyword “Digital Conservation” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection” (similarity = 0.876), which indicates that digital conservation is an important part of New Year Paintings in the process of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection (NCH) protection. There is also a high similarity between “Digital Technology” and “Digital Conservation” (similarity = 0.743), which indicates that the updating of digital technology plays an important role in the conservation of New Year Paintings in digital conservation. “Digital Technology” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection” are highly similar (similarity = 0.712), indicating that digital technology can be widely used in the conservation of NCH.

Table 4: Similarity Matrix Data

Theme	Digital Conservation	Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection	New Year Painting Art	Woodblock Prints	Digital Technology
Digital Conservation	1.000	0.876	0.659	0.452	0.743
Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection	0.876	1.000	0.634	0.495	0.712
New Year Painting Art	0.659	0.634	1.000	0.512	0.678
Woodblock Prints	0.452	0.495	0.512	1.000	0.584
Digital Technology	0.743	0.712	0.678	0.584	1.000

The moderate similarity between the keywords “New Year Painting Art” and “Digital Conservation” is moderately (similarity = 0.659), which indicates that ensuring the artistry of New Year Paintings is the basis of digital conservation. “New Year Painting Art” is also like “Digital Technology” (similarity = 0.678), suggesting that the artistry of New Year Paintings may be affected by digital technology in digital expression. “New Year Painting Art” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection” have medium similarity (similarity=0.634), which shows that New Year Paintings, as one of the Non-Heritage Sites, is in urgent need of finding a way to protect and pass on its art. “Woodblock Prints” and “New Year Painting Art” are both forms of Chinese New Year Paintings (similarity=0.512), indicating that both woodblock printing and painting are part of New Year Paintings and bring different artistic styles.

The lower similarity between the keywords “Woodblock Prints” and “Digital Conservation” is low (similarity = 0.452), which may indicate that the combination of different locations of the New Year Paintings may not be consistent due to the

location of the New Year Paintings in the research process of digital conservation. The low similarity between “Woodblock Prints” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection” (similarity=0.495) suggests that in the process of inheriting and protecting New Year Paintings, the attention paid to woodblock prints may still be lacked.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through searching and analyzing the literature related to digital New Year Paintings, we can see that there have been some attempts and progresses in the digital representation of traditional and modern New Year Paintings, and some results have been achieved. At present, digital museums or databases have been established for different locations of Chinese New Year Paintings, and the artistry, techniques and culture of traditional New Year Paintings have been effectively preserved, and some attempts have been made on the artistic practice of digital application of traditional New Year Paintings, so that the research on the means of storage and display is no longer the primary goal of the digital representation of New Year Paintings.

According to the results of the co-occurrence matrix, it shows that there are fewer studies on the ability of AI to increase the digital representation of New Year Paintings, artistic expression and communication effects. At the same time, there is not enough attention to the user experience in the digital application of China New Year Paintings, which makes one think that some practices have deviated from the concept of human-centered art and become digital practices only for the sake of digital transformation. The results of the similarity calculations show that there is a correlation between the themes related to digital art that are relevant to the inheritance and preservation of the New Year Paintings, which suggests that the New Year Paintings can be digitized in a way that allows for more varied interpretations.

Despite the subtle relationship we have drawn between digital art applications and New Year Paintings, the data from this research is limited by the amount of literature available, and there is a small sample size. It is suggested that subsequent studies can use the current study as a basis to explore more forms of expression between New Year Paintings and digital art, and to provide more directions for the inheritance and preservation of New Year Paintings in terms of digital art practice.

Through the co-occurrence matrix and similarity study of the existing results, it is clarified that in the inheritance and protection of the New Year Paintings, between the New Year Paintings and the digital art, although the progress of the digital transformation of the New Year Paintings and the degree of integration are different in different locations due to the relationship of the social, educational, technological, and

media factors, the New Year Paintings can be digitized, and the subsequent research can have more different applications, and the current low social acceptance and chaotic dissemination can be solved with the continuous exploration and innovation. With continuous exploration and innovation, the current low social acceptance and communication chaos can be solved.

The analysis of the similarity results shows that digital conservation is an important part of the protection and inheritance of New Year Paintings, and if New Year Paintings want to be inherited and developed for a longer period, it is necessary to break the current dissemination limitations, increase the user experience, and broaden the digital technology. Artificial intelligence can also be introduced to help researchers develop trends and patterns in digital New Year Painting art to promote the inheritance and development of New Year Painting art.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ANTHROPOMORPHIC CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE-DRIVEN COMPUTER ANIMATION

Jinman Sun
1215122812@qq.com

Sharkawi Che Din
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Corresponding Author:
sharkawi237@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: This paper addresses the ethical issues involved in the portrayal of anthropomorphic characters in artificial intelligence (AI)-driven computer animation. Drawing from Dr. David Leslie's comprehensive analysis of the potential harms caused by AI systems, six key issues are identified-though they differ somewhat from our findings in the context of animation. This study adopts a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, summarizing the ethical concerns related to the anthropomorphic design of AI-driven animated characters through the analysis of representative films and expert interviews. The key issues include algorithmic discrimination and bias, transparency and deception, the marginalization of human labor through innovation, responsibility and accountability, privacy concerns regarding original creators, and social impact. In response to these issues, we present a framework for the sustainable development of AI in animation. This framework serves as a guide for the responsible use of AI technology in animation, promoting a balance between AI innovation and ethical considerations, while supporting the long-term sustainability of the animation industry.

Keywords: AI, Computer Animation, Character Anthropomorphization, Ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

AI is becoming increasingly popular in the 21st century, and its powerful problem-solving capabilities are increasingly permeating all levels of computer animation, a technology that is revolutionizing the industry and presenting enormous opportunities (Kazim & Koshiyama, 2021). The anthropomorphic portrayal of animated characters is a task that requires a high degree of creativity, and animation has evolved over the years from traditional hand drawing to computer-based production (Tang & Chen, 2024). In recent years, the emergence of AI has triggered changes in the field of animation. AI's portrayal of anthropomorphic characters has increased the realism of characters, shortened production time, and reduced costs, while also raising a series of ethical issues.

This study is relevant to the theme of the 7th International Conference of Applied and Creative Arts (ICACA): the transformation of AI animation as a creative art is necessary. This study has advanced the ethical improvement of AI-driven animation art. It received guidance and advice from numerous relevant practitioners, educators, and experts. The market-oriented analysis of ethical issues in AI animation aims to establish a sustainable development framework for the anthropomorphization of AI technology in the animation field, providing a moral direction for current practitioners in animation arts.

To fill the research gap in the literature on computer animation, this article aims to achieve three main objectives: (RO1) To explore the application of AI in computer animation, understand its historical background, analyze its potential impact on the animation industry, and examine the development of AI software in the market. (RO2) To investigate the ethical issues of anthropomorphism in AI-driven computer animation using phenomenological hermeneutics. This research method, based on subjective knowledge and the creation of knowledge through subjective experience and insight (Kafle, 2011), helps to explore the perceptions and interpretations of AI animation by animators and audiences. (RO3) To develop a framework for the anthropomorphism of AI computer animation characters, providing a basis for future researchers and practitioners to apply and consider in their work.

This paper explores the ethical considerations of anthropomorphism in AI-driven animated characters and the dimensions of this study, thereby introducing the research questions and laying the groundwork for the following research. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: the second section reviews the relevant literature, the third section explains the research methodology of this study,

the fourth section collects and analyzes the data, the fifth section discusses the research findings, and the sixth section concludes and looks to the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 AI in Animation

AI animation refers to the use of AI technology to create animations (Sharma, 2023). It leverages data-driven algorithms to achieve the desired effects envisioned by animators. A broad review of the literature has been conducted on the application of AI in the animation field. As early as 1986, Thalmann and Magnenat proposed that AI technology could facilitate intelligent human-computer interfaces in animation, allowing animators to interact with animation systems using natural language (Thalmann & Magnenat-Thalmann, 1986).

With the continuous improvement and enhancement of AI in animation production, generating animations from text is no longer difficult. AI animation generators such as DeepVoxels and Generated Character Animation can create relatively complex animations. Additionally, there are tools for generating animations from doodles. For example, Doodle-to-AI Animation uses neural network systems and deep learning algorithms to create animations through motion recognition technology (Sharma, 2023). These examples show that AI has already penetrated the field of animation creation, providing animators and some creators with ideas and even semi-finished products. Currently, popular AI animation tools include Stable Diffusion, Runway, Common Sense Machines, Mootion, Wonder Studio, Decoherence, Pika Labs, Zero Scope, Kaiber, etc.

2.2 The Anthropomorphism of AI Agents

The anthropomorphism of non-human characters in animation has been widely studied. Human-like qualities, will, emotions, and cognitive agency can foster empathy and emotional connections (Waytz et al., 2010). In the context of AI agents and human relationships, Kim suggests that as human lives become increasingly intertwined with AI systems, understanding how the anthropomorphism of AI agents affects human perceptions is crucial (Kim & Il, 2023). His research indicates that viewers' reactions to anthropomorphism depend on the AI agent's appearance, cognition, and emotional intelligence, enhancing our understanding of human-machine interaction. In this era, the rapid development of AI agent anthropomorphism shows that people are more inclined to approach anthropomorphized AI agents (Pfeuffer, 2019). Blut argue that AI mimics human cognitive functions, in which anthropomorphism becomes an important emotional bond (Blut et al., 2021). Stark,

(2024) argues that animated characters take advantage of the human tendency to anthropomorphize to generate two-way communication and empathy with humans.

2.3 Ethical Issues of AI Technology in the Anthropomorphization of Computer Animation Characters

In previous studies, the anthropomorphism of characters has become an indispensable factor for integrating AI into the field of animation. It is used to explain the cognitive factors of interaction and empathy. Therefore, as AI continues to advance in intelligence, the theoretical and practical value of character anthropomorphism in animation will be further explored, and new ethical decision-making dilemmas will continue to emerge. AI ethics encompass their values, morals, and technologies, with the ethical behavior in their development and application adhering to widely accepted standards of right and wrong (Lavery, 2003).

In 2019, Dr. David Leslie from London systematically analyzed the potential harms of AI agents and identified six risks: 1, Bias and discrimination; 2, Erosion of personal autonomy, recourse, and rights; 3, Lack of transparency, explainability, and unreasonable outcomes; 4, Privacy invasion; 5, Social isolation and fragmentation; 6, Unreliable, unsafe, and poor-quality results (Leslie, 2019). Dr. Leslie proposed that all AI projects will have ethical impacts on stakeholders and society, and therefore, future AI projects should be executed based on relevant policy frameworks (Leslie, 2019).

In 2023, Jack Yang's algorithm for studying machine learning (ML) in AI yielded the learning curve shown in Figure 1:

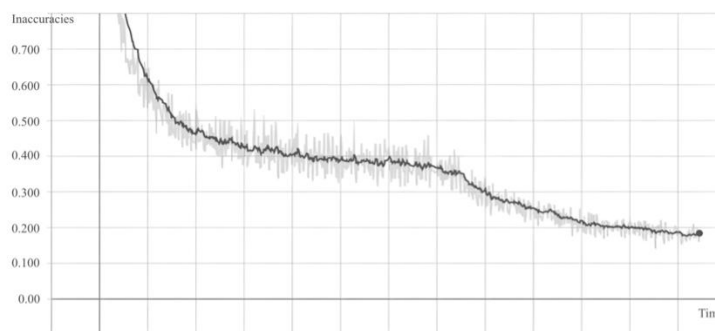


Figure 1. Machine Learning Curves (J. Yang, 2023)

Experiments have shown that although there are slight ups and downs, in the long run, the algorithmic failure problem decreases with time (J. Yang, 2023). AI-driven animation systems can handle animators' needs with increasingly faster algorithms. As theories related to anthropomorphism continue to evolve and AI animation matures, they progressively enhance our ethical responses to AI.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs phenomenological hermeneutics, a qualitative research methodology, to examine the ethical implications of anthropomorphic character portrayal in AI-driven computer animation. As espoused by Van Manen, Raquel Ayala and Miguel Martínez, phenomenological research is an experience for the researcher, who must see through the phenomena to the essence (Kafle, 2011). The researcher learns to reflect and experience from the perspective of existing biases and understandings of meaning (Van Manen, 2011).

In this research, a variety of instruments were employed, including content analysis and expert interviews. Content analysis was the primary instrument used to generate data, while expert interviews were utilized to provide additional insights, thus avoiding the potential subjectivity associated with content analysis. This approach proved to be particularly effective in exploring the intricate ethical dimensions of AI in animation.

3.1 Data Collection:

Content Analysis: Analyze representative computer-animated films featuring AI-driven anthropomorphic characters, such as "Toy Story 4," "The Lion King," and "Elemental." Selection criteria include popularity, evaluation of the anthropomorphic characteristics of the characters, and ethical issues related to the use of AI technology in character animation. This analysis aims to identify recurring themes and moral issues in these character portrayals.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with computer animators, AI trainers, ethicists, and audience members, with questions focused on the ethical challenges encountered in the creation and portrayal of AI-driven animated anthropomorphic characters.

3.2 Data Analysis:

In 2003, Laverly proposed that data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology is usually a rigorous application of the hermeneutic cycle consisting of reading, reflective writing, and interpreting, as illustrated below (Laverly):

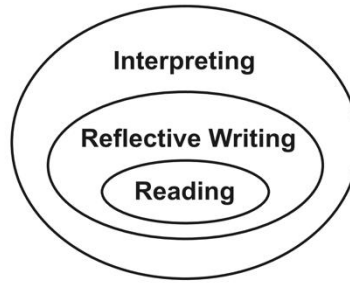


Figure 2. Hermeneutic Cycle (Kafle, 2011)

This study follows Figure 2. The hermeneutic cycle of data analysis involves three stages:

1, Immersion reading: Collecting film data and iteratively reading content and interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the material.

2, Reflective writing: The iterative process of coding and categorizing the final themes, avoiding preconceptions and doing reflective work.

3, Interpretation: The researcher interprets the themes in the context of the existing literature and the lived experiences of the participants. This stage involves constructing a coherent narrative that explains the ethical implications of AI-driven anthropomorphic characters' portrayals.

4. DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Content Analysis:

In 2019, Pixar release "Toy Story 4." Since the release of this film, Pixar has used AI deep learning technology—denoising technology as an auxiliary tool—in every one of its animated films.

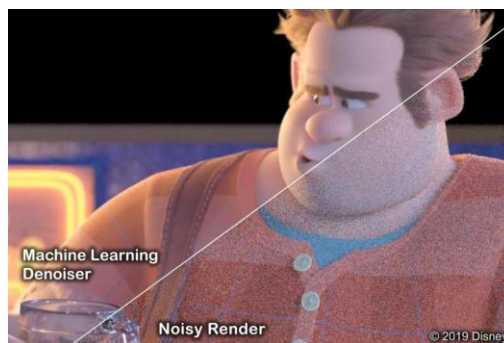


Figure 3. Finish an unfinished rendering simulation with deep learning.

©Disney/Pixar source

Using their past films, Disney has established a dataset (clean images, noisy images) and successfully trained a model that can be effectively applied to other movies. This auxiliary tool greatly enhances the speed and visual effects of characters (Ridge-Institute, 2022).

"Toy Story 4" received a score of 8.3 out of 10 on Rotten Tomatoes. Most people found the character performances aesthetically pleasing and humorous, making it a model of digital artistry. According to the self-consistency theory (L. Li et al., 2024), the anthropomorphism of characters creates an important link to the self-awareness of the audience, without causing the uncanny valley effect, indicating that the characters have a positive impact on the audience. Using AI as an auxiliary tool significantly reduces AI's involvement in a noticeable way. This approach is feasible, but attention should be given to the transparency of AI usage behind the animation, allowing more people to understand this technology.

In 2019, Walt Disney Pictures and Fairview Entertainment co-produced a remake of the 1944 traditional 2D animated film "The Lion King." It has been hailed as a technical marvel in the field of photorealistic animation (Sean Corp, 2020). This animated film was created using CGI, AI, and VR technologies. The animals in the animation are not real, they used AI to control the characters' facial expressions and language movements. Additionally, Disney employed virtual reality technology, with staff wearing HTC Vive VR devices to experience the scenes, determine the composition, and set up the shots (Sean Corp, 2020).

"The Lion King" received a score of 6 out of 10 on Rotten Tomatoes. Some critics feel that there is a lack of novelty, while others even experience discomfort, sensing that the concept of the "uncanny valley" has expanded to encompass animal characters. Excessive enhancement of AI technology and anthropomorphic portrayal of characters in animation might lead to uncanny valley phenomena. AI could replicate animators' preconceived notions and biases, which might result in a loss of creativity (Leslie, 2019).

In 2023, Pixar Animation Studios released an animated film titled "Elemental," which was created using AI. Its director, Peter Sohn, stated that they employed an AI-driven approach called "Neural style transfer" technology, which allows the characters to move like voxels in the animation. Consequently, animators used this AI-assisted technology to achieve perfect effects for flames moving and following (Ahmed, 2023). Once "Neural style transfer" technology is fully utilized, we will use it and then evaluate its ethics. It has been found that using certain machine learning techniques, such as neural network learning, makes it difficult to understand the reasons behind the machine's choices (Brian, 2020). Generally, the more powerful a person or thing becomes, the more transparent it should be otherwise, it can cause a sense of unease.



Figure 4. Neural Style Transfer Techniques Used in The Elements

"Elemental" received a score of 6.4 out of 10 on Rotten Tomatoes. Most people found the anthropomorphic elements in the animation to be detailed and lifelike, indicating that AI-driven computer animation has been positively received by the majority. Some critics noted that while the style is like "Inside Out" and "Zootopia," it lacks the creativity and plot twists of the former. AI might cause animators' creations to lack autonomy and creativity.

Reviews also mentioned, "Unfortunately, the film's handling of important issues such as immigration, cross-racial dating, and discrimination is too harsh and simplistic." Dr. David Leslie has noted that AI technology can lead to algorithmic discrimination and bias (Leslie, 2019). It can replicate, reinforce, and amplify existing social marginalization and inequalities, potentially leading to discriminatory issues for some viewers.

Content analysis summary: The above reveals three recurring ethical issues in AI-driven anthropomorphic characterization:

Algorithmic Discrimination and Bias: AI-driven animation introduces significant uncertainty in the anthropomorphism and design of characters. Some of the animators' preconceived notions may not accurately represent the needs of diverse groups, potentially causing errors or biases in the algorithm. AI can exacerbate social prejudices by over-simplifying or stereotyping certain group characteristics through big data training, thus reinforcing biases against these groups.

Transparency and Deception: The complex algorithms of AI technology can sometimes be difficult to explain concretely. Although certain aspects might be explained, the complexity can lead to a sense of mystery and unease among humans. This can blur the line between virtual and real, potentially deceiving the audience about the true nature of the characters.

Innovation and Marginalization of Human Labor: As AI technology becomes more prevalent in animation, traditional craftsmanship and creative work may be marginalized (Brian, 2020). This shift can affect the employment and motivation of

artistic creators, leading to homogenization and a decrease in innovation in animated works.

4.2 Interviews :

Summary of the interview with a computer animator:

First, the use of AI software has indeed increased efficiency and quality, but it has also led to character depictions becoming increasingly stereotyped, an issue that every animator needs to avoid gradually. Second, AI-driven animation has become highly advanced, sometimes producing results beyond the animator's expectations. This could lead to a lack of creativity, which is why they believe AI should remain a supportive tool rather than replace the core of creative work. Lastly, while AI can be trained to recognize and mimic subtle human emotional expressions, it struggles to fully grasp the deeper emotional layers of characters and the nuanced expression of their background stories. This may affect the audience's visual experience and psychological response. Anthropomorphization involves not only imitating appearance and actions but also expressing a character's inner world.

Summary of the interview with an AI animation (game) trainer:

First, the performance of AI is not solely dependent on data but is also constrained by the design of the training algorithms. Although they strive to prevent biases related to gender, race, etc., when portraying characters, these issues still occasionally occur. Second, AI uses deep learning algorithms to recognize human expressions, movements, language, interactions, or social behaviors and replicate them in animations. However, achieving human-like emotional depth and complexity remains a challenge during training. The "uncanny valley" effect also needs to be considered, as it can impact the audience's psychological response. Third, according to big data statistics, the widespread use of AI has led to the overuse and reuse of content, which could make original or handmade works increasingly rare and valued, possibly turning them into "luxury items." This could also spark disputes between original works and AI-generated content. Finally, the efficiency of AI character training may replace a large amount of manual work, posing a potential unemployment risk for animators. However, this could also lead to the emergence and transformation of new industries.

Summary of the interview with a professor researching AI animation ethics:

Firstly, one of the major difficulties that AI faces is the bias in AI algorithms, a lot of bias and discrimination is caused by the uncertainty of AI production. Second, AI technology is generated from big data, which may lead to the infringement of original creators' rights. Thirdly, there must be reasonable and legitimate accountability

mechanisms in place to ensure that the rapid development of AI is accompanied by an equivalent pace of moral and ethical requirements. Finally, the potential for AI-driven anthropomorphic characters to have an impact on the social behavior and psychology of viewers, including influencing interpersonal relationships and how social interactions are carried out, are potentially hidden issues for the future and must be taken seriously.

Summary of interviews with viewers who have watched computer animation:

A large portion of viewers found AI-generated characters to be very realistic, but some felt they appeared unnatural, especially in the depiction of animal characters. Many still prefer creative, hand-drawn designs. Some viewers were unaware of which characters were AI-generated and felt both curious and uneasy about them. Others even questioned the technology behind training AI characters, asking, "Is it safe?" or "Could it be misused?" Some parents expressed concern about whether AI-driven characters could resonate with children and potentially affect their psychology and behavior.

Summary of interviews:

Through interviews with computer animators, AI trainers, ethics experts, and viewers, we can see that the use of AI technology in creating anthropomorphic characters in animation has sparked a range of viewpoints and reflections.

Computer animators believe that while AI can improve animation efficiency, it can also lead to stereotypical character designs and a decline in creativity. AI trainers emphasize the importance of fairness in data training and algorithm design. They all agree that AI-generated characters lack emotional depth. Ethics experts point out issues such as discrimination, bias, and privacy concerns brought about by AI. Viewers are generally accepting of AI-generated characters but may feel curious and uneasy, with concerns about potential misuse and the impact on children's mental development.

5. DISCUSSION

The application of AI technology in animation production has undoubtedly brought unprecedented innovation and convenience. However, these technological advancements are accompanied by a series of moral and ethical issues. Through the analysis of animated film content and expert interviews, six points have been identified: algorithmic discrimination and bias, transparency and deception, innovation and the marginalization of human labor, issues of responsibility and accountability, privacy concerns of original creators, and societal impact. By comparing these with

the issues raised by Dr. David Leslie regarding AI systems and evaluating other literature, this study has developed a sustainable development framework for the anthropomorphism of AI computer animation characters:

Table 1: Ethical issues and findings on anthropomorphic character portrayal in AI-driven computer animation

issue	Results of the discussion
Algorithmic discrimination and bias	Ensure that the data used in training AI models is diverse and fair. Animation creators should carefully check AI-generated characters or character movements, etc., to avoid unconsciously spreading harmful stereotypes
Transparency and deception	In animation production and promotion, it is important to clearly communicate the AI technology used in character generation to the audience. Increasing the transparency of AI production helps the audience better understand how characters are created, enhancing their ability to discern, especially among children and teenagers. This can prevent any feelings of unease or discomfort that may arise from the mysteriousness of the characters afterward.
Innovativeness and the Marginalization of Human Labor	The importance of human creators in animation creation should be maintained, ensuring that AI is used as a supporting tool, encouraging the integration of AI with the art of transmission animation, and promoting innovation and diversity in the animation industry.
Responsibility and accountability issues	It is essential to define the specific roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in AI-driven animation production to guarantee accountability in the event of any ethical concerns. Furthermore, it is vital to implement effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms for AI to ensure the long-term sustainability of this technology.
Privacy concerns of the originator	In the context of big data, the privacy of the originator is significant. It is therefore essential to ensure that recourse mechanisms against infringement are clearly defined. Furthermore, maintaining transparent usage instructions that explain how the data will be used is crucial for ensuring that the originator has a comprehensive understanding and control over the utilization of the data.
Impact on society	Animation professionals should observe whether the use of AI technology in animation has an impact on viewers' psychology and behaviors and develop strategies to deal with it. Develop appropriate standards and social responsibility guidelines for the use of AI in the industry. Ensure that the use of AI technology in animation is ethical.

Through discussions with computer animators and experts, we realized that the development of AI is an irreversible historical trend. The existing ethical issues must be addressed through the joint participation and supervision of technology developers, animation production companies, the government, and all sectors of society.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper addresses three main objectives: the application of AI in computer animation, the ethical issues of anthropomorphism in AI-driven computer animation characters, and the development of a framework for the anthropomorphism of AI computer animation characters. As times evolve, AI-animated anthropomorphic characters continuously advance in the use of algorithms and models. Machine learning, neural networks, deep learning generative adversarial networks, and fields like image recognition are constantly being updated or even replaced, continuously pushing the boundaries of what animation can achieve. Therefore, the study of AI animation ethics must also continually evolve, as new issues will inevitably arise. The limitations of this study may only represent the ethical issues at the current stage.

In the future, the integration of AI technology and human creativity is an inevitable path in the field of animation. We must maintain a high degree of social responsibility in the application of AI technology to ensure that AI not only advances the industry but also brings positive impacts to society. Addressing the ethical issues in the anthropomorphic portrayal of AI-driven computer animation characters is essential to achieving sustainable development of AI technology in animation. As AI technology continues to update and iterate, ethical standards must keep pace to protect our interests.

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THE POJA BUGIS DANCE IN SELANGOR: CULTURAL RE-CREATION AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Khairul Anuar Bin Zainudin

khairulanuarz@uitm.edu.my

Ahmad Kamal Basyah Sallehuddin

akamalbasyah@uitm.edu.my

Mohamed Na'im Syah Razad Mohamed Zin

naimsyah@uitm.edu.my

Universiti Teknologi MARA,
40150 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA.

Corresponding Author
khairulanuarz@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: This study investigates the evolution and re-creation of the Poja Bugis dance in Selangor as a pivotal mechanism for cultural identity formation within the Bugis community. Despite its prominence in state ceremonies, the dance remains critically under-documented and lacks comprehensive academic analysis. This study employs a qualitative case study methodology and draws on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and rigorous document analysis to examine its development. The theoretical framework synthesizes Shils' conceptualization of tradition, Hobsbawm and Ranger's "invention of tradition," and Hall's theory of cultural identity. The findings indicate that the Poja dance emerged through a process of cultural adaptation and reconstruction from the Pakkuru Sumange dance of South Sulawesi, shaped significantly by the institutional, political, and social dynamics of Selangor. The study further demonstrates that the dance embodies the concept of "identity as becoming," whereby cultural identity is continually negotiated and reconstructed within a diasporic context. This research significantly contributes to the discourse on cultural sustainability, ethnic identity construction, and the politics of heritage performance in Malaysia.

Keywords: Poja dance, Bugis identity, cultural reconstruction, heritage performance, Selangor

1. INTRODUCTION

The Poja dance emerged as a prominent cultural expression in Selangor during the late 20th century, particularly gaining visibility in the 1990s as a symbol of Bugis heritage within the Malaysian cultural landscape. Historical accounts and oral testimonies suggest that the Poja dance is a localized reconstruction of the Pakkuru Sumange from South Sulawesi, introduced to Selangor in 1988 through the efforts of cultural practitioners such as Andi Ugie Kamariah. This initiative was strategically supported by the Selangor State Government through the Sultan Alam Shah Museum, now the Selangor Malay Custom and Heritage Corporation (PADAT) with the objective of studying and applying cultural elements from Indonesia, including customs, attire, and architecture, to the local context (Sunarti et al., 2022; Taim et al., 2025).

The development of the Poja dance is fundamentally rooted in the theory of tradition as defined by Edward Shils, which emphasizes the transmission of heritage through the interaction of internal and external factors (Oromaner, 1983; Roth, 1984). Furthermore, the formalization of this dance in Selangor serves as a clear example of the "invention of tradition" as conceptualized by Hobsbawm and Ranger (Ross, 1983). This process involves the reconstruction of cultural practices to establish symbolic continuity with a historic past, often tailored for specific modern functions and institutional purposes (Picton, 1989; Ross, 1983). Within the Bugis diaspora in Malaysia, such artistic revivals are essential for maintaining collective memory and negotiating a distinct cultural identity amidst a multicultural society (Georgiou, 2005; Sunarti et al., 2022).



Figure 1. Sultan Alam Shah Museum/ Selangor Malay Custom and Heritage Corporation (PADAT)

While the Poja dance retains symbolic elements of the original Pakkuru Sumange specifically as a gesture of respect and a prayer for the well-being of guests its transition to the Selangor stage has necessitated significant adaptations. The reconstruction process often results in changes to the dance's form, structure, and style to suit contemporary performance contexts (Nor, 2023; Taim et al., 2025). These adaptations reflect what Stuart Hall describes as "identity as becoming," where cultural identity is not a static inheritance but a dynamic process of reconstruction through representation and history (Escosteguy, 2008, 2024). Consequently, the Poja dance in Selangor is not merely a preserved relic but a living manifestation of cultural sustainability and the integration of civilizational elements into modern Malaysian choreography (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Taim et al., 2025).



Figure 2. Opening Ceremony of the Sultan Alam Shah Museum in 1989

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study is constructed upon a robust theoretical foundation, drawing from seminal works in dance scholarship, sociology, and cultural studies to analyze the re-creation and development of the Poja Bugis dance. Central to this inquiry is the concept of "invented tradition" as articulated by Hobsbawm and Ranger, which provides a critical lens for examining how contemporary practices are formalized to establish symbolic continuity with the past (Picton, 1989; Ross, 1983). Their work illustrates that traditions are often constructed through a set of practices governed by rules and rituals, designed to instill certain values and norms of behavior (Ross, 1983). In the context of this research, the transition of the Poja dance from its origins in South Sulawesi to its current form in Selangor mirrors the Scottish Highland tradition described by Trevor-Roper, where a new cultural identity was forged through replication, creative adaptation, and the influence of political and institutional intervention (Picton, 1989; Ross, 1983).

Complementing this perspective, the research integrates Edward Shils' comprehensive analysis of tradition, which defines it as a traditum anything handed down from the past to the present across generations (Oromaner, 1983). Shils identifies both endogenous (internal) and exogenous (external) factors as primary drivers of change within a tradition (Oromaner, 1983; Roth, 1984). This framework is instrumental in analyzing how the reconstruction of the Pakkuru Sumange dance into the Poja Bugis dance was shaped by external institutional pressures in Selangor while maintaining internal cultural resonances within the Bugis community (Sunarti et al., 2022). The study examines how these factors allowed the dance to evolve from a historic Sulawesi practice into a contemporary symbol of Selangor's heritage, ensuring its survival through a process of continuous transmission and adaptation (Roth, 1984; Taim et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the study utilizes Stuart Hall's dual conceptualization of cultural identity "identity as being" and "identity as becoming" to justify the Poja dance as a modern ethnic signifier (2024). Hall argues that identity is not a static essence but a dynamic process that is perpetually negotiated through representation, history, and culture (2024). For the Bugis diaspora in Malaysia, the Poja dance represents "identity as becoming," where the community reconstructs its heritage to navigate its position within a multicultural society (Georgiou, 2005; Sunarti et al., 2022). This perspective allows the research to view the Poja dance not merely as a relic of the past, but as a living manifestation of collective memory and a "quest for cultural identity" among the Bugis descendants in Selangor (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Sunarti et al., 2022).

Methodologically, the analysis of the dance's form and structure is guided by Adrienne Kaeppler's structural approach, which employs a linguistic analogy to decode human movement (Nor, 2023). This model categorizes dance into hierarchical units from the smallest movement components known as kinemes and morphokines to larger structures such as motifs, choremes, and phrases culminating in the complete dance form (Nor, 2023). By applying this "emic" approach, the research systematically categorizes the re-creation of the Poja dance, distinguishing its unique choreographic style from its Indonesian precursors (Taim et al., 2025). This structural analysis is further enriched by local historical accounts, such as those by Syed Mahadzir, which highlight the diversity of versions and the fluid authenticity of the Poja dance, providing essential data on the specific movements, attire, and musical ornaments that characterize its performance in Selangor.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study is based on a qualitative research approach, as defined by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña who describe it as an emphasis on "the word" to support descriptive reporting and verbatim accounts, avoiding reliance on statistical data. This process-oriented framework aligns with Patton's conceptualization of qualitative inquiry, which encompasses ethnographic, phenomenological, and case study approaches. According to Merriam (2009), the primary justification for such a methodology is its ability to foster a deep understanding of a phenomenon within its natural environment, enabling the researcher to examine complex cultural issues as they manifest in real-world settings.

The specific design chosen for this research is a sociocultural case study utilizing discourse analysis to interpret the meanings behind the practices, ethics, and philosophies of the Bugis community in Selangor (Sunarti et al., 2022). Central to this investigation is the reconstruction of the Poja dance, analyzed through the theoretical lens of the "invention of tradition" as proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (Ross, 1983). This approach follows the systematic process outlined by Bryman, which initiates with the formulation of general research questions and proceeds through the selection of subjects, data collection, and the iterative interpretation of findings to determine how theories and concepts, such as cultural identity, are manifested in heritage performance (Sunarti et al., 2022, 2024).

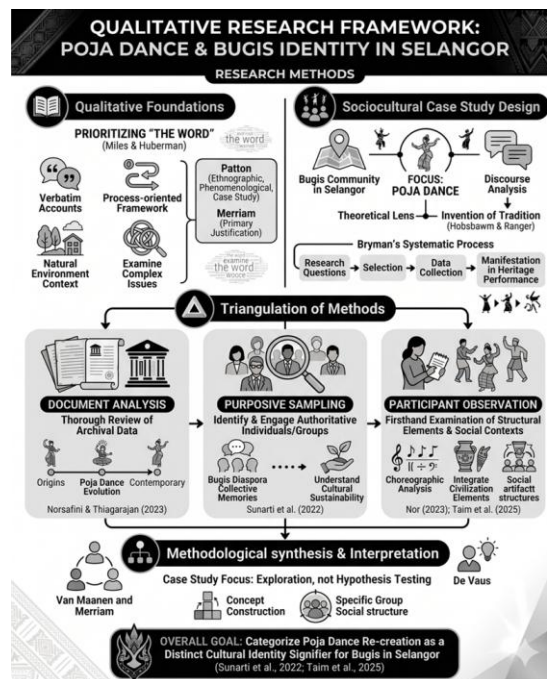


Figure 3. Qualitative Research Framework: Poja Dance & Bugis Identity in Selangor

The implementation of this study involves the systematic collection of information through a triangulation of methods: document analysis, purposive sampling, and internal participant observation. Document analysis involves a thorough review of archival data and dance reconstruction records to trace the evolution of the Poja dance from its origins to its contemporary state in Selangor (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023). Purposive sampling is employed to identify and engage authoritative individuals and groups within the Bugis diaspora whose collective memories are vital for understanding the dance's role in cultural sustainability (Sunarti et al., 2022). Furthermore, participant observation allows for a firsthand examination of the dance's structural elements and the social contexts of its performance, ensuring the integration of civilization elements is accurately captured in the choreographic analysis (Nor, 2023; Taim et al., 2025).

As a form of inquiry, the case study focuses on a specific location or phenomenon to explore interpretations rather than to test rigid hypotheses, a distinction emphasized by Van Maanen and Merriam. De Vaus further notes that such in-depth exploration is essential for concept construction, particularly in cultural studies where the research aims to observe phenomena specific to a group of individuals. By integrating these methodological authorities with an observational focus, the research effectively categorizes the re-creation of the Poja dance as a distinct cultural identity signifier for the Bugis community in Selangor (Sunarti et al., 2022; Taim et al., 2025).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research indicate that the development of the Poja Bugis dance in Selangor is not a mere chronological progression but a deliberate historical-cultural reconfiguration initiated by the Selangor state government's official visit to South Sulawesi in 1987. This event served as the primary catalyst for a cross-cultural "quest for cultural identity," enabling the strategic transfer of Bugis civilizational elements into a localized Malaysian context (Sunarti et al., 2022; Taim et al., 2025). By interpreting this visit as a transformative "turning point," the study reveals how the subsequent introduction of the Pakkuru Sumange dance in 1988 by Andi Ugie Kamariah provided the raw cultural material for what would eventually be institutionalized as the Poja dance. This process highlights a significant shift from the dance's original Sulawesi roots to a symbolic representation of the Bugis diaspora within the social and political landscape of Selangor (Omar et al., 2020; Sunarti et al., 2022).



Figure 4. Poja Dance Performance for Honored Guests

The transition from the ancestral Pakkuru Sumange to the contemporary Poja dance exemplifies the "invention of tradition" as conceptualized by Hobsbawm and Ranger (Ross, 1983). The dance was not a direct, unmodified continuation of a prehistoric practice; rather, it was selectively adapted and formalized to meet the institutional requirements of the Sultan Alam Shah Museum for its 1989 opening ceremony (Picton, 1989; Ross, 1983). This deliberate reconstruction confirms that cultural practices are often formalized to establish a sense of symbolic continuity with a historic past, even when the specific form is modified to serve modern functions in this case, the legitimization of a distinct Bugis-Selangor heritage (Ross, 1983; Sunarti et al., 2022). The formalization of the dance through the Selangor Malay Custom and Heritage Corporation underscores how state-led initiatives can "invent" traditions to strengthen regional identity and provide a structured medium for heritage performance (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Sunarti et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the analytical results demonstrate that the Poja dance functions as a dynamic signifier of "identity as becoming," rather than a static "identity as being" (Escosteguy, 2008, 2024). In alignment with Stuart Hall's theoretical framework, the Poja dance represents a continuous process of negotiation where the Bugis community in Selangor reconstructs its *jati diri* (identity) through the lens of migration and cultural adaptation (Sunarti et al., 2022, 2024). The dance acts as a living bridge between the collective memories of the diaspora and their current multicultural environment, illustrating that identity is perpetually "under construction" (Georgiou, 2005; Sunarti et al., 2022). By performing a reconstructed version of their ancestral dance, the Bugis community in Malaysia actively negotiates its position within the broader Malaysian cultural narrative while maintaining a symbolic and psychological link to its origins in South Sulawesi (Omar et al., 2020; Sunarti et al., 2022).

The structural evolution of the Poja dance characterized by changes in movement, music, and performance style reflects the interplay of endogenous and exogenous factors as defined by Edward Shils (Oromaner, 1983; Roth, 1984). The simplification of complex choreographic elements was a pragmatic, exogenous adaptation necessitated by the involvement of non-professional performers within the museum's art group (Nor, 2023; Taim et al., 2025). This functional adaptation ensures the continuity of the tradition in a new cultural setting, as it allows the dance to be transmitted across generations of performers who may not possess specialized training in classical Sulawesi forms (Oromaner, 1983; Taim et al., 2025). Ultimately, the Poja dance in Selangor is a dynamic cultural construct that successfully integrates ancient civilizational elements into a contemporary choreographic framework, serving as a foundational model for the sustainability and creative expansion of performing arts within the region (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Taim et al., 2025).

5. ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND THE HISTORY OF THE POJA DANCE

The development of the Poja Bugis dance in Selangor exemplifies a complex process of cultural identity formation, intricately shaped by historical, social, and institutional contingencies. While the dance has achieved prominence in state-level ceremonies, its historical lineage is characterized by a "lack of systematic documentation," forcing a heavy reliance on oral transmission and social memory (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Sunarti et al., 2022). This absence of a verifiable archival trail has led to a fluid interpretation of its origins, where the dance is viewed not as a static relic of the past, but as a "reconstructed cultural form" emerging from the historical interaction between Selangor and South Sulawesi (Omar et al., 2020; Sunarti et al., 2022). The 1987 official state visit to Indonesia serves as the primary "critical juncture," initiating a strategic transfer of civilizational elements that would eventually be formalized into the Poja tradition (Sunarti et al., 2022; Taim et al., 2025).

Applying Stuart Hall's theoretical lens, the Poja dance is best understood through the concept of "identity as becoming" (2024). This perspective posits that cultural identity is a dynamic, ongoing process of negotiation rather than a fixed inheritance (Escosteguy, 2008, 2024). The Poja dance, therefore, does not represent a "frozen" Bugis tradition; instead, it reflects a continuous dialogue between the ancestral heritage of South Sulawesi and the contemporary social realities of the Bugis diaspora in Malaysia (Georgiou, 2005; Sunarti et al., 2022). Through this "quest for cultural identity," the community utilizes the dance as a medium to bridge their

historical roots with their localized existence in Selangor, transforming the original Pakkuru Sumange into a distinct signifier of ethnic presence (Omar et al., 2020; Sunarti et al., 2022).

However, the establishment of the Poja dance as a formal cultural identity in Selangor faces several dialectical challenges. First, the tension between "oral transmission" and the need for "systematic documentation" creates a perceived crisis of authenticity (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023). Without a rigorous archival basis, the dance's legitimacy is often contested by those seeking "exact authenticity" rather than "functional continuity" (Oromaner, 1983; Ross, 1983). Second, the multi-ethnic demographic of Selangor complicates the institutionalization of a single ethnic form, as the state must navigate the "politics of representation" in a multicultural society (Georgiou, 2005; Taim et al., 2025). Third, the dance's external origins in South Sulawesi can lead to perceptions of it being a "foreign" rather than a "local" form, necessitating a deliberate process of "cultural adaptation" to ensure its acceptance within the Selangor heritage framework (Sunarti et al., 2022; Taim et al., 2025).

Despite these obstacles, the findings suggest that the Poja dance has been successfully "institutionalized" and accepted as a legitimate cultural signifier. This transition was facilitated by the interaction of "endogenous" community desires for continuity and "exogenous" institutional support from the Sultan Alam Shah Museum and the Selangor state government (Oromaner, 1983; Sunarti et al., 2022). The 1988 reconstruction by Andi Ugie Kamariah was a pivotal act of "inventing tradition," where traditional elements were purposefully modified to suit local performance contexts and modern institutional functions (Nor, 2023; Ross, 1983). Since its formal debut in 1989, the Poja dance has evolved from a state-sponsored performance into a meaningful reference point for collective memory, demonstrating how "reconstructed traditions" can gain deep-rooted cultural legitimacy over time (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Sunarti et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the Poja Bugis dance in Selangor serves as a living testament to the "dynamic nature of cultural identity" (2024). It bridges the gap between the ancestral Pakkuru Sumange and the contemporary aspirations of the Bugis community, illustrating how heritage is not merely inherited but actively "constructed and redefined" through the integration of civilizational elements into the performing arts (Norsafini & Thiagarajan, 2023; Taim et al., 2025).

6. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the development and re-creation of the Poja Bugis dance in Selangor, framing it as a pivotal mechanism for cultural identity formation within the Bugis diaspora. The research findings confirm that the Poja dance is not a static heirloom but a "reconstructed" tradition, born out of a strategic historical-cultural exchange initiated by the Selangor state government in 1987. By transforming the Pakkuru Sumange of South Sulawesi into the Poja dance of Selangor, cultural practitioners and institutional actors notably Andi Ugie Kamariah and the Sultan Alam Shah Museum successfully "invented" a tradition that establishes symbolic continuity with an ancestral past while serving contemporary social and political functions.

Theoretically, this research demonstrates the utility of integrating Shils', Hobsbawm's, and Hall's frameworks to understand heritage performance. The evolution of the dance through endogenous community desires and exogenous institutional support illustrates Shils' view of tradition as a dynamic traditum that adapts to ensure its survival across generations. Furthermore, the transition of the dance from a localized Sulawesi greeting into a formalized signifier of Selangor's heritage epitomizes the "invention of tradition," where cultural forms are modified to bolster regional identity and legitimize institutional narratives. Most significantly, the Poja dance encapsulates Stuart Hall's concept of "identity as becoming," proving that for the Bugis community in Malaysia, cultural identity is an ongoing process of negotiation, representation, and reconstruction.

In conclusion, the Poja Bugis dance serves as a living manifestation of cultural sustainability in a multicultural society. Despite the challenges posed by a lack of systematic historical documentation and the reliance on oral transmission, the dance has gained deep-rooted legitimacy as a marker of ethnic presence in Selangor. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Malaysian heritage by highlighting how the integration of civilizational elements into modern choreography allows diaspora communities to maintain collective memory while navigating their position within a new national landscape. Ultimately, the Poja dance stands as a testament to the resilience of Bugis culture, demonstrating that tradition is most vibrant when it is allowed to evolve, adapt, and be redefined by the community

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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EMOTIONAL DESIGN IN PACKAGING: ENHANCING THE UNBOXING EXPERIENCE

Saiful Hairi Othman

*Institute of Creative Arts and Technology
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak*

Musdi Shanat

*Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak*

Corresponding Author
hosaiful@unimas.my

Abstract: The unboxing experience has become a vital touchpoint for consumer engagement with the rise of e-commerce and digital platforms like YouTube and TikTok. Originally meant to protect products, packaging now functions as a multi-sensory brand interaction shaping first impressions and loyalty. However, limited research explores how emotional design principles enhance unboxing experiences, particularly for technology and limited-edition products. This study applies Donald Norman's emotional design framework visceral, behavioural, and reflective levels to examine how packaging creates meaningful and memorable interactions. A qualitative thematic case study analyses nine high-engagement YouTube unboxing videos of premium technology products to capture authentic consumer perceptions. Findings show that packaging integrating sensory appeal, usability, and brand storytelling increases perceived value and encourages user-generated content. Such integration turns unboxing into an emotionally resonant experience that strengthens brand relationships. The study emphasizes packaging as a strategic tool for improving satisfaction, loyalty, and organic brand promotion.

Keywords: Packaging Design, Unboxing Experience, Emotional Design, Consumer Behavior, Levels of Design

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the unboxing experience has become an influential part of consumer engagement, driven by the rapid growth of e-commerce and digital platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Unboxing videos, which capture the anticipation and process of opening new products, have evolved into a global marketing phenomenon that shapes consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour (Bhattacharya & Dhingra, 2023). Packaging now goes beyond protection; it functions as an emotional medium that communicates brand identity and enhances user satisfaction (Liu et al., 2024).

Emotional design, as introduced by Donald Norman, emphasizes how products evoke emotional responses at three levels: visceral, behavioural, and reflective. While these principles are widely applied in product and interface design, their systematic integration into packaging remains limited. This gap is particularly evident in the context of technology products, where packaging often serves as the first tactile and visual interaction between consumer and brand. Understanding how emotional design can enhance this interaction is therefore essential for creating memorable unboxing experiences.

This study aims to explore how emotional design principles specifically visceral, behavioural, and reflective elements, enhance consumer engagement through the unboxing experience of technology product packaging. It addresses the following research question: How do emotional design elements within packaging influence the unboxing experience and perceived product value?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines emotional design in relation to packaging and the unboxing experience. It is structured according to Donald Norman's (2004) emotional design framework; visceral, behavioural, and reflective levels and explores how each level contributes to consumers' emotional responses when engaging with packaging. This framework serves as the foundation for understanding how design elements can transform unboxing from a functional process into an emotional experience.

2.1 *Emotional Design Framework*

Emotional design theory explains how users form affective connections with products through three hierarchical levels: visceral, behavioural, and reflective (Norman, 2004). The visceral level focuses on instinctive reactions driven by sensory qualities such as colour, form, and texture, which create immediate aesthetic appeal. The behavioural

level concerns the product's usability and interaction, where satisfaction arises from ease of use and the sense of control. Finally, the reflective level involves personal meaning, memory, and symbolic associations that contribute to brand attachment and long-term value.

Emotional responses at these three levels influence how consumers perceive, evaluate, and remember products. Recent studies have extended Norman's model to product packaging, suggesting that visual and tactile stimuli trigger sensory pleasure, while usability and storytelling strengthen engagement (Liu et al., 2024; Álvarez-González et al., 2023). This study adopts Norman's framework as a conceptual guide for analysing packaging elements that evoke emotional responses during unboxing.

2.2 Emotional Design and Packaging

Packaging has evolved from a protective layer to an essential medium of brand communication and emotional expression. Researchers note that visual aesthetics, structural design, and tactile quality all play a role in influencing consumer perceptions and expectations (Kwok & Lin, 2023; Ferreira, 2019). The unboxing moment, in particular, provides an opportunity for brands to establish an emotional connection before the product itself is experienced.

At the visceral level, high-quality materials, contrast of colours, and surface finishes can generate excitement and anticipation (Su & Wang, 2024). Behavioural design is reflected in how intuitive and organized the unboxing process feels, features like layered compartments or smooth opening mechanisms enhance usability and satisfaction (Gibai & Banele, 2023). At the reflective level, storytelling, personalization, and limited-edition details reinforce brand identity and consumer pride (Norris et al., 2024).

Despite the growing literature on packaging aesthetics and usability, few studies systematically integrate all three emotional levels to explain the holistic experience of unboxing. This study addresses that gap by examining how visceral, behavioural, and reflective design elements jointly shape consumer emotions in packaging contexts.

2.3 Reflective Design and Emerging Trends

The reflective level of design concerns meaning-making and self-identity (Norman, 2004). In packaging, this manifests through narrative cues, brand symbolism, and design coherence that resonate with personal or cultural values (Marozzo et al., 2019). Consumers increasingly associate packaging with social and ethical values, turning sustainable and eco-conscious design into a form of emotional reflection. Eco-friendly

materials, minimalist aesthetics, and recyclable structures communicate care and responsibility, enhancing emotional attachment and brand trust (Oyeyemi et al., 2024).

These trends show that reflective design is expanding beyond personal emotion to include collective values, such as environmental awareness and authenticity. As a result, packaging serves not only as a carrier of products but also as a medium for expressing shared identity and meaning between consumers and brands.

2.4 Linking Emotional Design and Unboxing Experience

The literature reveals that emotional design enhances consumer satisfaction, brand perception, and purchase intent. Packaging operates as a sensory and emotional interface, where visceral aesthetics, behavioural usability, and reflective meaning converge to shape holistic experiences. However, limited research examines this convergence specifically during the unboxing process, a context rich with anticipation and emotional resonance.

This study bridges that gap by applying Norman's (2004) framework to explore how emotional design principles manifest within technology product packaging. Through a qualitative thematic analysis of YouTube unboxing videos, it investigates how visceral, behavioural, and reflective elements influence emotional engagement, perceived value, and consumer–brand connection. By synthesizing previous literature and addressing its limitations, this study contributes a more integrated understanding of emotional design's role in shaping memorable unboxing experiences.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine how emotional design elements influence the unboxing experience. Unboxing videos were selected as the primary data source because they capture authentic, real-time reactions and provide visual and narrative insight into how consumers interact with packaging. This approach allows the study to analyse emotional and experiential elements that may not be easily captured through written reviews or surveys.

3.1 Case Study Focus Area

Nine unboxing videos of premium and limited-edition technology products were selected from YouTube. The videos were chosen based on two criteria:

- i. High viewership: indicating strong consumer interest and engagement; and

- ii. Content relevance: focusing on creators known for detailed product presentation and commentary, such as Unbox Therapy and Marques Brownlee.

Technology products were selected because they often employ refined and distinctive packaging strategies designed to enhance perceived product value and anticipation during the unboxing moment.

3.2 Data Recording and Analysis

Each video was reviewed multiple times to observe packaging interactions, presentation flow, and emotional responses expressed verbally or visually. Notes were taken systematically to document key design elements, user reactions, and descriptive impressions. A structured observation table was used to maintain consistency when recording material quality, opening mechanisms, internal arrangement, and branding elements.

3.3 Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted manually. The analysis was guided by Norman's emotional design framework, using the visceral, behavioural, and reflective levels as predefined coding categories. Observations from the videos were grouped based on similarities in visual appeal, usability during unboxing, and conveyed meaning or brand narrative. This approach allowed patterns to emerge regarding how packaging design influences the emotional and experiential dimensions of unboxing.





3.4 Ethical Consideration



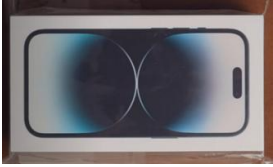
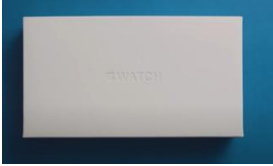

All videos analysed were publicly available on YouTube and did not involve direct interaction with human subjects. No personal identifying data was collected, and content was used solely for academic analysis.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the qualitative analysis of nine unboxing videos, organised according to Norman's three levels of emotional design: visceral, behavioural, and reflective. The analysis identifies how these design elements influence emotional engagement and shape consumer perceptions of value during the unboxing experience. *Table 1* summarises the visual and functional attributes observed in each product case.

Table 1: Summary of Observed Emotional Design Elements in Unboxing Experiences

No	Product	Visceral Design	Behavioral Design	Reflective Design
1	 <p>Figure 1. ROG Phone 6 Pro</p>	Hexagonal-shaped pearl white box, futuristic aesthetic	Pull-tab opening, structured layout with layered compartments	Gaming-themed packaging reinforces ROG's brand identity
2	 <p>Figure 2. Oppo Reno7 Pro (League of Legends Limited Edition)</p>	Rocket-shaped box, inspired by the in-game weapon	Bottom cap opening, multi-compartment storage for accessories	Game-themed collectibles and branding enhances emotional connection
3	 <p>Figure 3. OnePlus 9RT (Genshin Impact Limited Edition)</p>	Rectangular green box, visually striking graphics	Sliding compartment design, structured placement of items	Includes game code, badge, and poster, enhancing player engagement
4	 <p>Figure 4. OnePlus Pac-Man Edition</p>	A white and orange box with PacMan-themed graphics	Flap opening, hidden compartments	Nostalgic theme tied to classic gaming, interactive packaging elements

No	Product	Visceral Design	Behavioral Design	Reflective Design
5	 <p>Figure 5. Red Magic (Transformers Decepticon Edition)</p>	Steel grey and purple box, Decepticon-inspired design	Flap and sliding compartments, hidden storage sections	Collectible case, stickers, and accessories aligned with Transformers fandom
6	 <p>Figure 6. Samsung Galaxy Fold</p>	Black, white, and blue minimalist box, premium look	Flap and sliding compartments, box-within-a-box experience	Layered unboxing enhances exclusivity, reinforcing high-end branding
7	 <p>Figure 7. iPhone 14 Pro</p>	Sleek minimalist white box with Apple logo	Tear strip opening, simple yet elegant organisation	Apple's signature unboxing experience, consistent brand identity
8	 <p>Figure 8. Apple Watch Ultra</p>	Clean white & grey packaging with embossed Apple Watch logo	Flap and tear strip opening, a structured component organization	Premium unboxing aligned with Apple's minimalist branding
9	 <p>Figure 9. Samsung Galaxy S23 Ultra BMW M Edition</p>	Replica BMW car front model, red and black theme	A hood-like opening mechanism, segmented storage	Collectible BMW-themed accessories, reinforcing luxury branding

The emotional impact of packaging extends beyond its basic function of protecting the product. Packaging design shapes consumer perceptions and experiences, making it a critical element in branding and marketing strategies. The analysis and findings highlight how different design aspects; visceral, behavioural, and reflective interact to enhance the unboxing experience and foster long-term consumer engagement.

4.1 Visceral Design Level

At the visceral level, packaging design triggers immediate sensory and emotional responses through visual appeal, colour contrast, form, and material quality. The analysis reveals that first impressions during unboxing are often shaped by aesthetic cues that convey a sense of exclusivity and anticipation. Products such as the ROG Phone 6 Pro and Oppo Reno7 Pro (League of Legends Edition) employed bold geometric forms and themed colour palettes to evoke excitement even before opening. Similarly, minimalist packaging designs such as the iPhone 14 Pro and Apple Watch Ultra projected refinement through clean lines, precise proportions, and subtle embossing, eliciting feelings of trust and admiration. These visceral qualities establish the emotional foundation for the subsequent unboxing stages by visually communicating quality, identity, and brand prestige.

4.2 Behavioural Design Level

The behavioural level concerns usability, interaction flow, and the physical process of unboxing. Findings indicate that ease of opening, logical arrangement, and tactile satisfaction play a vital role in shaping user perception of quality and care. Many products adopted layered structures, magnetic flaps, or sliding compartments that guided the user through an organised sequence of discovery. For instance, Samsung Galaxy Fold employed a box-within-a-box system that invited curiosity, while Oppo Reno7 Pro featured an intuitive multi-compartment design that balanced protection and accessibility. In contrast, Apple's tear-strip mechanism provided a sense of precision and control, enhancing the perception of technical excellence. When functionality aligns with user expectation, the unboxing experience produces feelings of satisfaction and control, reinforcing positive behavioural engagement.

4.3 Reflective Design Level

At the reflective level, emotional meaning and brand storytelling transform the unboxing act into a memorable narrative. This study found that limited-edition and themed packaging, such as the Samsung Galaxy S23 Ultra BMW M Edition and OnePlus 9RT Genshin Impact Edition, extended the experience beyond physical interaction by invoking personal or cultural symbolism. Collectible inserts, artwork sleeves, and thematic accessories created a sense of pride and ownership associated with brand identity. The OnePlus Pac-Man Edition and Red Magic Transformers Edition further demonstrated how nostalgia and cultural references generate emotional depth, encouraging users to share their experiences online. Reflective design thus strengthens the psychological bond between consumer and brand by embedding storytelling and self-expression into the product encounter.

By successfully integrating visceral, behavioural, and reflective design elements, brands can transform unboxing into a memorable and emotionally engaging experience that enhances product desirability and consumer loyalty. Beyond functionality and aesthetics, packaging nurtures emotional connections through brand storytelling, collectible items, and cultural relevance. Limited editions like the OnePlus Genshin Impact Edition include posters, in-game codes, and themed accessories, deepening consumer engagement. The Apple Watch Ultra, though minimalist, aligns its packaging with Apple's brand philosophy, reinforcing its premium identity.

4.4 Interaction Between the Three Levels

The findings suggest that these three emotional design levels are not isolated but interdependent. A visually striking form (visceral) captures attention and draws users into the experience; intuitive interaction (behavioural) sustains engagement; and meaningful narrative (reflective) transforms satisfaction into attachment. Together, they create an emotional continuum in which sensory appeal, usability, and storytelling reinforce one another to enhance perceived product value and brand connection.

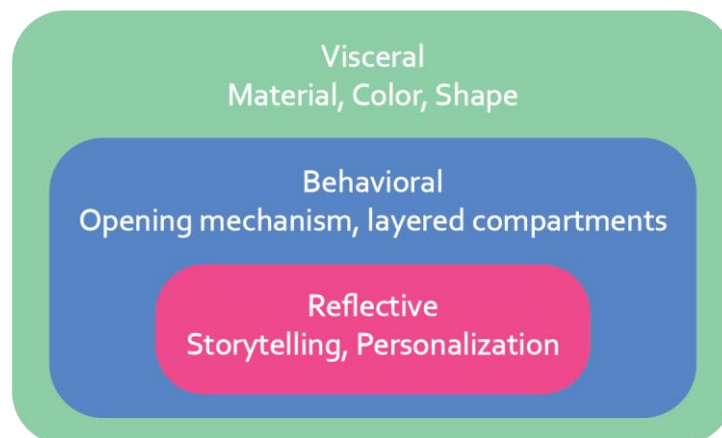


Figure 10. Interaction of visceral, behavioural, and reflective design levels in packaging design

Figure 10 visualises the layered relationship between visceral, behavioural, and reflective design levels in packaging. The outer layer represents visceral design, where materials, colour, and form generate immediate sensory responses that attract attention and trigger anticipation. The behavioural level, situated within, governs the user's interaction with the packaging through mechanisms such as opening sequences, compartment organisation, and tactile flow. At the core lies the reflective level, encompassing storytelling, personalization, and symbolic meaning that extend the experience beyond functionality. Together, these layers form a holistic emotional system in which visual appeal, interaction quality, and narrative meaning combine to produce memorable and emotionally engaging unboxing experiences.

5. DISCUSSION

The study highlights how emotional design elements visceral, behavioural, and reflective work together to create memorable and emotionally engaging unboxing experiences. Packaging that appeals to the senses, supports usability, and communicates brand storytelling enhances perceived product value and strengthens consumer–brand relationships. These findings provide practical implications for designers and brands seeking to transform packaging into a strategic tool for engagement, loyalty, and organic promotion.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The findings reveal that the unboxing experience is not merely a functional step in product delivery but a strategic emotional touchpoint that reinforces consumer–brand relationships. By applying Norman’s (2004) emotional design framework, this study demonstrates how visceral, behavioural, and reflective elements work together to create holistic and memorable unboxing interactions. Across all nine cases, the unboxing process engages consumers through sensory appeal, usability, and storytelling, each contributing to heightened emotional responses and perceived product value.

Visceral design elements such as form, material, and colour trigger initial attraction and excitement, setting an anticipatory tone before the product is revealed. Behavioural features, including intuitive opening mechanisms and structured compartment layouts, sustain engagement and reinforce perceptions of product quality and craftsmanship. Reflective elements, represented through brand narratives, limited-edition storytelling, and symbolic associations, create lasting emotional meaning that transcends the physical packaging. Together, these findings confirm that emotional design is essential to transforming packaging from a protective shell into a medium of experience and identity formation (Liu et al., 2024).

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study extends the theoretical understanding of emotional design by demonstrating its application within packaging and unboxing contexts. Previous studies have primarily discussed Norman’s (2004) framework in relation to product design and usability, but its systematic integration into packaging design remains underexplored (Liu, C., 2024). By interpreting unboxing through the three levels of design, this research highlights that emotional engagement is a dynamic and multi-layered process rather than a singular visual or functional response.

The findings also support prior literature suggesting that packaging contributes to emotional value creation by shaping consumer perceptions and memory recall

(Bhattacharya & Dhingra, 2023). The present study, however, adds depth by revealing how emotional design layers interact sequentially, where visceral appeal initiates engagement, behavioural design sustains satisfaction, and reflective meaning consolidates brand loyalty. This layered interpretation contributes to the growing discourse on experiential consumption, providing a structured framework for understanding the emotional mechanisms underlying unboxing experiences.

5.3 Practical Implications for Designers and Brands

The results provide actionable insights for designers and brand strategists aiming to enhance consumer engagement through packaging. Effective packaging should address the three emotional levels simultaneously to create balance between sensory stimulation, usability, and meaning.

At the visceral level, designers should prioritize sensory cues that immediately attract attention and convey product quality. Choices of texture, colour palette, and structural form can evoke specific emotions such as excitement, curiosity, or luxury perception that define the initial impression.

At the behavioural level, brands should focus on usability and intuitive sequencing. Features like tear strips, magnetic flaps, or multi-layered reveals enhance the sense of guided discovery while maintaining functionality and protection.

At the reflective level, embedding brand storytelling, personalization, and thematic coherence can transform unboxing into a memorable emotional narrative. Strategies such as thank you notes, collectible inserts, or environmentally conscious messaging can deepen brand connection and encourage social sharing (Oyeyemi et al., 2024).

By aligning packaging decisions with emotional design principles, brands can enhance perceived value, reinforce identity, and leverage unboxing as a form of organic marketing in social media environments. These insights are particularly valuable for technology and lifestyle sectors, where anticipation and aesthetic expression play a central role in consumer satisfaction.

5.4 Limitation and Future Research

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data from publicly available YouTube videos, which may not capture all contextual factors influencing user emotion. Video content can be edited or influenced by brand sponsorship, potentially shaping consumer reactions. Additionally, the focus on technology products, particularly premium and limited-edition models, means the results may not generalize to other industries with simpler or mass-market packaging. Future research could expand this analysis by incorporating consumer interviews or experimental testing to validate emotional responses in real-time settings. Exploring cross-cultural perspectives or the

role of sustainability cues in emotional design would further enhance understanding of evolving consumer values.

Conclusion

This study extends the application of emotional design principles to packaging, demonstrating how visceral, behavioural, and reflective elements collectively enhance consumer engagement and elevate the unboxing experience into a strategic brand interaction. The integration of sensory aesthetics, functional usability, and symbolic meaning enables packaging to act not only as a container but as a narrative medium, transforming product unboxing into a multisensory, emotionally resonant brand experience.

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CROSS-MEDIA TRANSLATION OF CHINESE OPERA CULTURAL GENES IN POPULAR MUSIC

Xueyun Geng

Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Malaya,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Marlenny Deenerwan

Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Malaya,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Author
marlenny@um.edu.my

Abstract: In an era shaped by digital transformation and renewed engagement with traditional culture, the question of how Chinese opera continues to function within contemporary media environments has gained increasing relevance. This study examines the cross-media translation of Chinese opera cultural elements in popular music, focusing on how these elements are adapted and restructured within modern musical forms. Drawing on a combination of literature review, audience survey, and multi-platform case observation, the research analyzes the evolving role of Chinese opera in popular music contexts. The findings indicate that the integration of elements follows a gradual trajectory: from symbolic citation to structural incorporation, and ultimately to technologically mediated recombination. At the same time, this process is shaped by platform-specific conditions. Certain operatic genres are more frequently represented, audience expectations of integration vary across cultural backgrounds, and complex operatic structures are often simplified within short-form, high-frequency media formats. Rather than framing these changes as a process of loss or preservation, this study interprets them as adaptive transformations driven by the interaction of artistic form, media technology, and cultural context. In doing so, it provides a clearer account of how Chinese opera continues to evolve and maintain relevance within contemporary media ecosystems.

Keywords: Chinese opera cultural genes;
Cross-media translation; Structural integration;
Popular music; Platform circulation

1. INTRODUCTION

In a context where digital technologies are continuously reshaping modes of cultural production, traditional Chinese opera no longer exists solely within the theatrical stage but has gradually entered the contemporary sound world constituted by recording studios, digital platforms, and mobile media. Understanding the formal transformation of opera within this transition concerns not only the expansion of its communicative reach, but also the reorganization of artistic form itself. The integration of opera and popular music represents one of the most representative practices in this process. As a cross-disciplinary creative form, opera-infused popular music both sustains the formal logic of traditional vocal systems such as Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, and incorporates expressive strategies from popular music and digital production technologies, thereby forming a new cultural landscape within today's music market. Changes in policy and market environments have provided a practical foundation for this integration. In 2015, the State Council of China issued the *Several Policies on Supporting the Inheritance and Development of Traditional Opera*, explicitly encouraging innovative expressions of operatic elements across multiple media forms. According to the *2021 China Digital Music Annual Report* (Figure 1), Chinese-style popular music with strong cultural characteristics accounted for 26.2% of the market share in 2020. This trend suggests that traditional musical elements possess sustained potential for transformation and dissemination under contemporary media conditions, making the presentation of Chinese opera cultural genes in popular music a topic worthy of further examination within the fields of applied arts and creative industries.

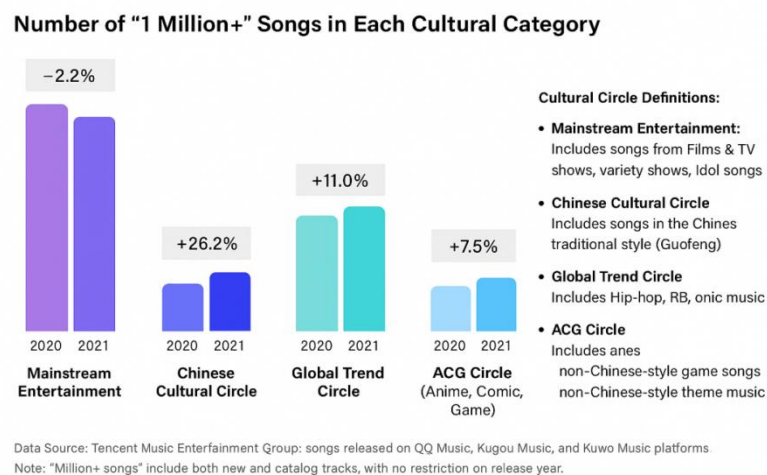


Figure 1. Statistics on Newly Released and Million-Stream Songs in 2021
(**Source:** 2021 China Digital Music Annual Report)

Against the backdrop of an expanding creative industry system, cross-media practices of traditional arts reflect not only the reorganization of creativity and artistic skill, but also the ways in which cultural resources acquire renewed expressive space within market and platform logics. The incorporation of Chinese opera cultural genes into popular music is therefore not merely a stylistic fusion, but a process of structural reconfiguration. It concerns how traditional art maintains its formal logic within modern production systems while adapting to the temporal rhythms and modes of reception shaped by digital technologies and platform-based dissemination.

However, when operatic elements enter digital music production and platform circulation systems, their structural relations and expressive contexts do not simply continue unchanged. Different stages of creative development, varying media conditions, and diverse audience understandings all influence the degree of structural participation of operatic elements within musical works. Existing studies have primarily focused on modes of stylistic integration or broader cultural meanings, yet systematic analysis of how internal structural relations of opera shift during cross-media migration remains limited. Moreover, distinctions between different developmental stages are often insufficiently articulated. In a contemporary context characterized by intensive technological intervention, closer empirical observation is needed to understand how operatic elements are reorganized across distinct dissemination scenarios.

Accordingly, this article takes the “cross-media translation of Chinese opera cultural genes in popular music” as its central theme. Through a combination of literature review, questionnaire survey, and multi-platform case observation, it seeks to trace the evolving structural roles of operatic elements within popular music contexts. The study focuses on the reorganization of operatic form in cross-media circulation and examines how these transformations generate new interactions among creative practice, audience perception, and platform environments. The core research question is therefore: How do Chinese opera cultural genes undergo structural transformation in the process of cross-media translation within popular music, and how are these transformations shaped by modes of creative practice, audience cognition, and media-platform conditions.

By integrating stage-based analysis with empirical evidence, this study aims to provide a structurally informed and media-conscious analytical framework for understanding the continued expression of traditional opera within contemporary media ecologies. At the same time, it responds to ongoing discussions in the fields of applied and creative arts concerning cultural innovation, creative practice mechanisms, and industrial adaptation, offering practical insights into strategies for sustaining traditional arts within

digital creative environments.

2. BACKGROUND

As operatic elements have gradually entered the context of popular music, existing scholarship has developed along three relatively distinct lines of inquiry. Together, these strands provide a foundational understanding of the interaction between traditional opera and contemporary popular music.

First, at the level of compositional technique and integration strategies, research has primarily focused on how operatic elements are embedded within musical structures. Huang (2022) systematically examines the technical pathways through which operatic elements are transformed within popular music, analyzing four dimensions: lyrical expression, vocal style, *qupai* (fixed melodic patterns), and instrumentation. He argues that formal innovation not only reshapes stylistic presentation but also reconfigures cultural meaning. Studies in this vein emphasize creative mechanisms and technical operations, demonstrating how operatic materials enter the popular music system through structural modification and vocal recontextualization.

Second, at the level of dissemination and audience reception, research has increasingly shifted toward meaning-making processes within digital platform environments. Xu (2024), drawing on discussions from the Zhihu platform regarding “opera-style singing” in popular music, analyzes how audience discourse participates in the reproduction of operatic meaning and explores whether such hybrid musical forms can function as effective vehicles for the transmission of traditional opera. This line of inquiry highlights that the reception of operatic elements in new media contexts is shaped not only by compositional structure but also by platform environments and discursive frameworks. Media conditions thus play a significant role in shaping how operatic fusion practices are understood.

Third, at the level of specific works and cultural expression, some scholars have adopted case-study approaches to explore stylistic transformation in contemporary popular music. Dai (2024), using songs performed by Hetu as examples, analyzes how “ancient-style” elements are incorporated into popular music and discusses the aesthetic effects produced by the juxtaposition of traditional vocal techniques and modern melodic structures. Similarly, Liu (2021) examines the use of Peking Opera vocal style in songs such as *Chiling* and *Tanchuang*, analyzing how operatic timbre functions symbolically within popular music and influences contemporary modes of transmission. These studies focus primarily on aesthetic interpretation and cultural expression at the level of individual works.

Taken together, existing research has offered multi-layered perspectives on the interaction between opera and popular music from technical, communicative, and case-based viewpoints. However, from a structural perspective, two limitations remain evident. First, operatic elements are often treated as stylistic resources subject to quotation or adaptation, while relatively limited attention is given to how their internal structural relations shift during cross-media migration. Second, discussions frequently center on isolated cases or fusion phenomena without systematically distinguishing between different developmental stages, making it difficult to trace the broader trajectory of transformation.

To address the structural limitations identified in previous scholarship, this study introduces two key analytical concepts, “opera cultural gene”, “cross-media transposition”, and integrates them within a unified theoretical framework. Together, these concepts provide a structure-oriented lens through which the transformation of Chinese opera elements in popular music can be more precisely examined.

In this study, the term “opera cultural gene” is not intended as a direct borrowing from biological discourse, but rather as an operational analytical construct. Drawing on discussions of cultural units and memetic transmission in cultural communication theory (Dawkins, 1976), the concept is used here in a limited and metaphorical sense to emphasize identifiable and reproducible structural features within traditional artistic forms. Specifically, Chinese opera cultural genes refer to the fundamental expressive units that shape operatic form, including melodic contour patterns in vocal lines, modal-rhythmic organization within *banqiang* systems, and the timbral and intonational structuring of spoken-sung delivery. These elements do not function independently; rather, they form relatively stable structural relationships through long-term theatrical practice, collectively supporting narrative progression and emotional articulation. In this sense, the notion of “gene” highlights internal structural organization rather than surface-level stylistic markers.

Correspondingly, “cross-media transposition” describes the process through which these structural expressive units are reconfigured as they migrate across media systems. This concept resonates with intermediality research, which emphasizes the transformation and reorganization of expressive forms between media environments (Rajewsky, 2005), and may also be understood in relation to Jakobson’s (1959) notion of intersemiotic translation, which addresses shifts across sign systems. However, rather than equating transposition with stylistic borrowing or aesthetic collage, this study foregrounds structural reconfiguration as its central concern. When Chinese opera cultural genes enter recording technologies and digital platform-based Chinese opera elements distribution systems, their temporal unfolding, sonic layering, and

reception conditions are inevitably altered. Under these new technological and production logics, are not transferred as intact structural wholes; instead, they are recombined, compressed, or intensified within new media frameworks. Cross-media transposition, therefore, is best understood as a process of structural reorganization shaped by changing media conditions.

From this perspective, cross-media transposition does not signify the simple preservation or replacement of tradition, but rather an ongoing negotiation in which structural relationships are continuously adjusted across media contexts. By conceptualizing “gene” as a structural unit and “transposition” as the reconfiguration of structural relations, this study seeks to trace the evolving trajectory of Chinese opera elements within popular music and to examine how media conditions participate in shaping these transformations.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, the study further proposes a stage-based analytical framework. It argues that the cross-media transposition of Chinese opera cultural genes does not unfold uniformly but rather progresses from “symbolic assemblage” to “ritual integration,” and subsequently to “technological interaction.” This phased model enables a clearer articulation of structural shifts over time and provides a more structurally grounded explanation for the tensions and challenges that emerge across different media environments.

3. METHODOLOGY, VARIABLES AND DATA

Following the clarification of core concepts and the construction of the theoretical framework in the preceding sections, this study outlines the research methods, data sources, and analytical procedures employed in the study. To enhance methodological transparency and reproducibility, particular attention is given to clarifying the sample size, data collection procedures, case selection criteria, and analytical methods. Centered on the question of how Chinese opera cultural genes undergo cross-media translation within popular music, the research adopts three complementary approaches: literature analysis, questionnaire survey, and multi-platform case study. These methods correspond respectively to the identification of historical development patterns, the verification of audience cognitive structures, and the observation of structural manifestations within media practice. As illustrated in Figure 2, these three approaches are organized as a complementary analytical framework, moving from historical mapping to audience-level empirical validation and then to structural observation in media contexts.

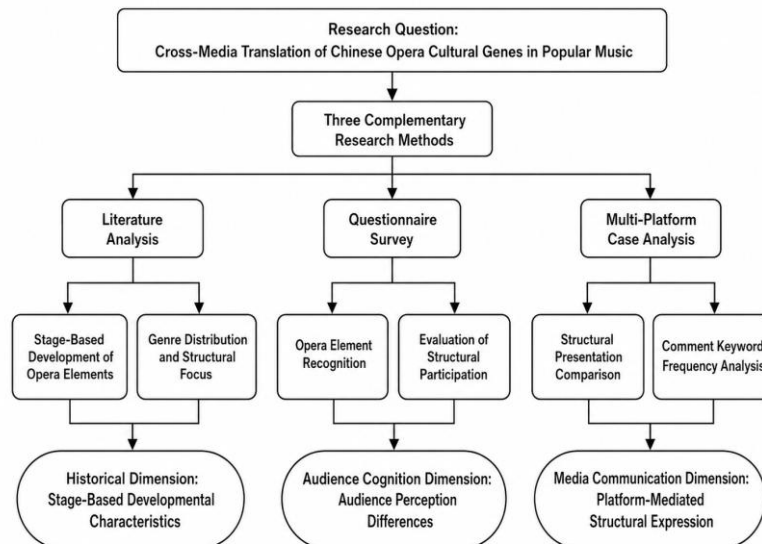


Figure 2. Research Process Design Framework

(Source: Authors)

At the historical level, a large-scale literature analysis was conducted to trace the developmental trajectory of Chinese opera elements in cross-media contexts. The search was carried out across CNKI, Wanfang, Chaoxing, and Web of Science, using the keywords “Chinese opera,” “cross-media translation,” and “opera music,” covering the period from 1990 to 2025. The initial retrieval yielded 586 publications, of which 417 valid sources were retained after screening for thematic relevance and removing duplicates. These sources were used as the analytical corpus rather than as direct references. Content analysis was employed to classify research themes, methodological approaches, and structural focuses, while time-series analysis was applied to identify stage-based evolution patterns.

Building upon the identification of historical stages, a questionnaire survey was conducted to examine audience cognition regarding the integration of Chinese opera elements in popular music. A total of 200 valid responses ($n = 200$) were collected. Participants were drawn from Southeast Asian and Western cultural groups, covering individuals aged 18–45 with diverse educational backgrounds. The questionnaire was distributed online between March and April 2025 through academic mailing lists, social media platforms, and university networks, with voluntary and anonymous participation. The survey instrument consisted of three dimensions: recognition of Chinese opera elements, evaluation criteria of structural participation of Chinese opera elements, and perception of structural participation. A five-point Likert scale was used for structured items, complemented by optional open-ended responses. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and intergroup comparison methods to identify differences in recognition, evaluation criteria, and

cognitive thresholds of structural integration.

At the level of practice, the study further conducted multi-platform case analysis to observe how Chinese opera cultural genes are structurally presented across different media environments. Case selection followed four criteria: representativeness of Chinese opera integration, platform diversity (music streaming, television audiovisual, and short-video platforms), availability of publicly accessible data, and temporal relevance within the period 2015–2025. Data were collected from publicly available sources up to May 15, 2025, including view counts, comment volumes, interaction frequency, and release information, without accessing any private or backend data. In addition, comment datasets were manually compiled from platform comment sections. Analytical methods included keyword frequency analysis and comparative structural analysis, with manual verification of keyword context to reduce semantic bias. Structural analysis focused on the degree of preservation or fragmentation of operatic elements, their participation in melodic and rhythmic organization, the presence of technological processing, and their level of integration within overall musical structures.

Overall, the three methodological approaches are integrated within a unified research design. Literature analysis establishes the historical and structural foundation, the questionnaire survey verifies audience-level cognitive responses, and case studies reveal how technological and platform conditions shape structural expression in practice. This combination constitutes a form of methodological triangulation, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the findings, as conceptually summarized in Figure 2. Importantly, this study adopts a non-evaluative analytical stance, treating structural change as an observable phenomenon rather than a value-based judgment.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Literature Analysis: Data-Based Identification of Developmental Stages

Building on the dataset of 417 valid publications (1990–2023), the content analysis reveals not only an increase in research volume over time, but more importantly, a shift in how operatic elements are conceptualized within popular music. Early studies predominantly focused on terms such as “borrowing,” “fusion,” and “localization,” whereas later research increasingly emphasizes “structure” and “systematic integration.”

This shift suggests that operatic elements are no longer understood merely as stylistic resources, but as components that can participate in the internal organization of musical systems. From the perspective of Linda Hutcheon, such a transition reflects a movement from adaptation as surface-level recontextualization toward adaptation as

structural reconfiguration. In this sense, cross-media translation involves not only the transfer of cultural symbols but also the reorganization of structural relationships. As summarized in Table 1, the evolution of Chinese opera elements in popular music can be empirically divided into four stages, each characterized by a distinct degree of structural participation.

Table 1: Evolution of the Integration of Opera Elements in opular Music (1980s–Present)
(Source: Authors)

Stage	Period	Dominant Features	Structural Characteristics	Representative Examples
Symbolic Usage Stage	1980s–1990s	Emphasis on stylistic borrowing and cultural localization	Chinese opera elements appear as sampled fragments or timbral imitation; function mainly as stylistic markers without structural integration	<i>Farewell My Concubine</i> soundtrack (1993); Xie Jin, <i>Talking-Singing of Painted Faces</i> (1996)
Surface Integration Stage	2000–Early 2010s	Increased attention to integration methods and hybrid styles	Juxtaposition of operatic vocals and pop melodies; emphasis on stylistic identity while pop structure remains dominant	<i>Wang Leehom, Heroes of Earth</i> (2005); Jay Chou, <i>Fearless</i> (2006)
Deep Structural Integration Stage	Mid 2010s–2019s	Stronger emphasis on structural integration and system design	Systematic incorporation of operatic singing style, narrative elements, and instrumentation into overall musical structure	<i>Thousand Threads Opera</i> (2015); Luo Tianyi, <i>Power Over the World</i> (2015); TV program <i>Chinese Opera Conference</i> (2018)
Technological Reconfiguration Stage	2020s–Present	Expansion into digital media and platform-based dissemination	Chinese opera elements reconfigured across games, virtual idols, AI music, and digital media; restructuring beyond stylistic boundaries	TikTok online concert <i>National Rhyme Tides</i> (2020); <i>Goddess Splits the View from Genshin Impact</i> (2022, 100M+ global views)
Symbolic Usage Stage	1980s–1990s	Emphasis on stylistic borrowing and cultural localization	Chinese opera elements appear as sampled fragments or timbral imitation; function mainly as stylistic markers without structural integration	<i>Farewell My Concubine</i> soundtrack (1993); Xie Jin, <i>Talking-Singing of Painted Faces</i> (1996)

From the Symbolic Usage Stage (1980s–1990s), operatic elements primarily functioned as symbolic markers. Representative works such as *Talking-Singing of Painted Faces* (1996) demonstrate that these elements were incorporated mainly as melodic fragments or timbral imitations, without participating in the overall musical structure. This indicates that cross-media translation at this stage operated at the level of representation rather than transformation, corresponding to a limited form of adaptation in which structural relations remained largely unchanged.

From the early 2000s to the early 2010s, operatic elements began to appear more frequently within popular music compositions. Works such as Jay Chou's *Fearless* (2006) and Wang Leehom's *Heroes of Earth* (2005) illustrate a growing tendency toward integration. However, structural analysis shows that these elements remained subordinate to dominant pop frameworks. This suggests that cross-media translation at this stage represents a transitional condition, where integration occurs but does not yet result in systemic structural reorganization.

After 2015, both academic discourse and creative practice show a marked increase in attention to structural integration. In works such as *Thousand Threads Opera* (2015) and Luo Tianyi's *Power Over the World* (2015), operatic melodic and rhythmic systems begin to participate more actively in the overall musical organization. This indicates a shift toward deeper structural integration, where operatic elements are no longer supplementary but contribute to the compositional logic of the work. From an adaptation perspective, this reflects a more advanced stage in which the structural principles of the source material are rearticulated within a new media context.

Since the 2020s, the expansion of digital media and platform-based dissemination has introduced new forms of structural transformation. Cases such as *Genshin Impact* (2022) demonstrate that operatic elements are increasingly fragmented and recombined across different media environments. Rather than reinforcing structural continuity, technological mediation often redistributes these elements across platforms and formats. This suggests that cross-media translation in digital contexts is characterized not by linear enhancement, but by adaptive restructuring shaped by media conditions.

Taken together, the patterns identified in the literature analysis indicate that the structural role of operatic elements evolves from symbolic usage to partial integration, and ultimately to complex forms of structural reconfiguration. This progression provides empirical support for understanding cross-media translation as a dynamic and stage-based process.

4.2 Questionnaire Survey: Empirical Evidence of Audience Cognitive Differences

The questionnaire survey results (n = 200) provide quantitative insight into how audiences from different cultural backgrounds perceive Chinese opera elements in popular music. As shown in Figure 3, significant differences emerge between Southeast Asian and Western respondents across three dimensions: identification, acceptance, and cultural engagement.

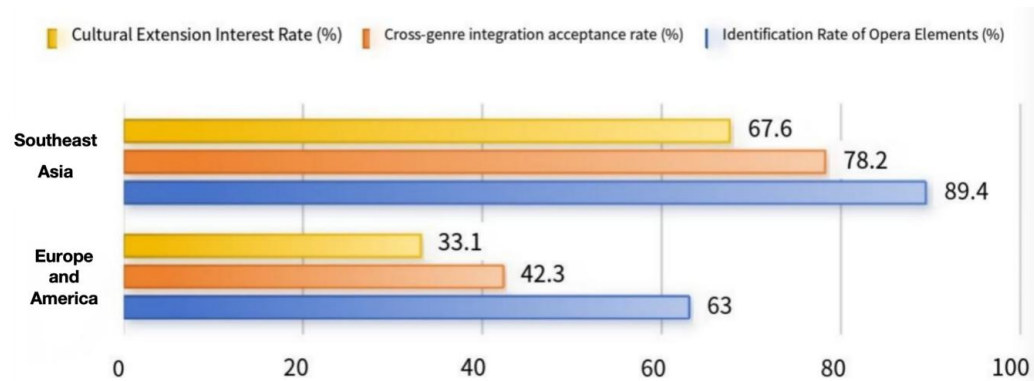


Figure 3. Comparison of Cross-Cultural Audiences' Understanding and Acceptance of Elements of Chinese Opera (n = 200)

(Source: Authors)

In terms, Southeast Asian respondents demonstrate a higher recognition rate (89.4%) compared to 63% among respondents from Europe and America. This difference suggests that cultural familiarity enhances the ability to identify structural features of operatic elements within musical works. In contrast, lower recognition rates among Western audiences indicate a reliance on more perceptual or surface-level cues.

A similar pattern is observed in the evaluation of cross-genre integration. The acceptance rate reaches 78.2% among Southeast Asian respondents, compared to 42.3% among Western respondents. This suggests that audiences with greater cultural proximity are more receptive to hybrid musical forms, while those with less exposure may find such integration less accessible. Furthermore, cultural extension interest follows the same trend, with 67.6% of Southeast Asian respondents expressing willingness to further engage with Chinese opera, compared to 33.1% among Western respondents.

These differences indicate that structural integration is not interpreted uniformly but is mediated by audience cognition. From an analytical perspective, this implies that the effectiveness of cross-media translation depends not only on compositional strategies, but also on how audiences interpret and evaluate structural elements.

This finding is consistent with Hutcheon's view that adaptation is not only a process of production but also one of reception, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction between text and audience. Therefore, cross-media translation should be understood as a culturally mediated process, in which audience cognition plays a crucial role in shaping both perception and reception.

4.3 Case Analysis: Structural Modulation Across Media Environments

To further examine how structural participation varies across media environments, this study compares three platform types: music streaming platforms, television platforms, and short-video platforms.

On music streaming platforms, case data show that operatic elements are more likely to be preserved in their structural form. For example, in *Haishenmiao Canon* (2023), user comments frequently reference terms such as "structure," "counterpoint," and "operatic voice," indicating a high level of audience attention to musical organization. Structural analysis confirms that operatic elements actively participate in the overall composition. This suggests that complete listening environments facilitate a higher degree of structural integrity.

In contrast, television platforms introduce audiovisual elements that redistribute audience attention. While programs such as *Chinese Opera Conference* achieve high viewership, user comments tend to focus more on performance and visual presentation than on musical structure. This indicates that the integration of visual elements alters the perceptual focus, reducing emphasis on structural aspects of music.

On short-video platforms such as TikTok, structural compression becomes more evident. Due to time constraints, content is often limited to climactic segments, resulting in fragmented structural presentation. User responses are predominantly emotional rather than analytical, suggesting that structural complexity is reduced in favor of immediacy and impact.

Across these platforms, a consistent pattern emerges: different media environments impose distinct structural constraints on operatic elements. This can be understood as a process of "platform-conditioned structural modulation," in which the degree and form of structural participation are shaped by media affordances. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with the view that adaptation is context-dependent, with structural transformation occurring in response to specific production and reception conditions.

4.4 Synthesis: Evidence-Based Reconstruction of the Developmental Model

By integrating findings from literature analysis, questionnaire survey data, and case studies, a coherent developmental pattern can be identified. The progression from symbolic usage to structural integration and ultimately to technological reconfiguration is consistently supported across multiple data sources.

Importantly, this model is not imposed a priori but emerges inductively from empirical observation. Literature analysis reveals long-term trends, survey data highlight audience-level differences, and case studies demonstrate how structural forms are shaped by media environments. The convergence of these independent sources provides a robust empirical basis for the stage-based framework.

Further analysis indicates that this process is not strictly linear. Instead, it reflects an adaptive system in which structural relationships are continuously reshaped through the interaction of artistic form, audience cognition, and media conditions. From the perspective of adaptation theory, this suggests that cross-media translation is best understood as an ongoing process of structural negotiation rather than a fixed transformation.

Therefore, the stage-based model should be regarded not as a prescriptive developmental sequence, but as an analytical construct grounded in observable data. It provides a framework for understanding how Chinese opera cultural genes are reconfigured within contemporary media ecosystems, and how their structural roles evolve across different contexts.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Building on the empirical findings, this section further interprets the cross-media translation of Chinese opera cultural genes from the interrelated perspectives of structural distribution, audience cognition, and media conditions. Rather than reiterating descriptive results, the discussion aims to clarify the underlying mechanisms through which structural transformation occurs, thereby directly addressing the study's central research question: how operatic elements are reconfigured within popular music across different media contexts.

5.1 Structural Distribution of Operatic Resources

The literature analysis (n = 417) reveals that operatic resources are unevenly distributed across genres, with a concentration on widely recognized forms such as Peking Opera. This pattern is not merely a reflection of research preference, but indicates that certain operatic traditions possess structural characteristics that are more compatible with contemporary music production systems.

Specifically, genres with relatively standardized melodic systems, clearer rhythmic organization, and higher cultural visibility are more readily adapted into popular music. From an analytical perspective, this suggests that cross-media translation is conditioned by the structural adaptability of cultural materials, rather than being determined solely by aesthetic selection.

In this sense, the uneven distribution of operatic resources reflects differences in their capacity for structural reconfiguration. This finding contributes to the broader argument that cross-media translation operates as a selective process, in which certain structural forms are more likely to be retained, transformed, or amplified within new media environments.

5.2 Audience Cognition and the Interpretation of Structural Integration

The questionnaire survey (n = 200) demonstrates that audience cognition plays a central role in shaping how cross-media integration is perceived and evaluated. As shown in the empirical results, respondents from Southeast Asia exhibit higher recognition, acceptance, and engagement levels compared to respondents from Europe and America.

More importantly, the findings indicate that different audiences apply distinct interpretive frameworks. Participants with greater cultural familiarity tend to evaluate integration in terms of structural participation, such as melodic organization and rhythmic systems whereas those with less exposure rely more on perceptual cues such as timbre or stylistic markers. This distinction suggests that “structural integration” is not an inherent property of the musical work itself, but a cognitively mediated construct. In other words, the perception of integration emerges through the interaction between musical structure and audience knowledge.

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with Linda Hutcheon’s view that adaptation involves both production and reception processes, in which meaning is co-constructed rather than fixed. Therefore, cross-media translation should be understood not only as a compositional strategy, but also as a process shaped by culturally conditioned modes of interpretation.

5.3 Media Conditions and Structural Modulation

The case analysis demonstrates that media environments exert a significant influence on how operatic structures are presented and perceived. Different platforms impose distinct temporal, perceptual, and technological constraints, which in turn shape the degree of structural participation of operatic elements.

Music streaming platforms, which support complete listening experiences, tend to preserve structural continuity, allowing operatic elements to function within the overall compositional framework. In contrast, television platforms redistribute attention across visual and performative dimensions, while short-video platforms impose strict temporal limitations that compress structural development into fragmented segments.

These patterns indicate that cross-media translation is not a uniform process, but one that is conditioned by platform-specific affordances. Structural transformation, therefore, can be understood as a form of “media-conditioned modulation,” in which the organization of musical elements is reshaped according to the logic of different media systems. This finding reinforces the view that adaptation is context-dependent, with structural outcomes emerging from the interaction between artistic form and media environment.

5.4 Integrated Interpretation of the Developmental Model

By synthesizing findings from literature analysis, survey data, and case studies, this study identifies a stage-based pattern in the cross-media transformation of Chinese opera elements. The progression from symbolic usage to structural integration and ultimately to technological reconfiguration is consistently supported across multiple datasets.

Importantly, this model is not derived from theoretical assumption, but from the convergence of empirical evidence. Literature data reveal long-term structural trends, survey results reflect audience-level differences, and case studies demonstrate how media conditions shape structural expression in practice.

At the same time, the findings indicate that this process is not strictly linear. Instead, it reflects a dynamic system in which structural relationships are continuously adjusted in response to changing artistic, cultural, and technological conditions.

From the perspective of adaptation theory, this suggests that cross-media translation should be understood as an ongoing process of structural negotiation rather than a fixed transformation. The stage-based framework, therefore, functions as an analytical tool for interpreting variation, rather than as a prescriptive developmental model.

5.5 Conclusion

This study has examined the cross-media translation of Chinese opera cultural genes in popular music through a combination of literature analysis, questionnaire survey, and multi-platform case observation. The findings demonstrate that the structural

participation of operatic elements evolves across different stages and is shaped by the interaction of cultural, cognitive, and technological factors.

Rather than representing a simple process of preservation or loss, cross-media translation emerges as a dynamic process of structural reconfiguration. Operatic elements are selectively retained, transformed, or recombined depending on their structural compatibility, audience interpretation, and media conditions.

By grounding the analysis in empirical data, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how traditional Chinese opera continues to adapt within contemporary media ecosystems. It also suggests that future research should pay closer attention to the interaction between structure, perception, and media logic when examining the transformation of traditional arts in digital contexts.

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THE ONTOLOGY OF WATERCOLOUR PAINTING FROM A HEIDEGGERIAN PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY OF NANTONG CLOCK TOWER SQUARE

Yan Changhang

Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Mohd Fuad Bin Md Arif

Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Corresponding Author
Fuad5649@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: This paper approaches watercolour painting through a focused Heideggerian ontological framework, concentrating on the interrelated moments of material concealment, the establishment of the work, and the unconcealment of truth as articulated in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. These moments are treated not as an exhaustive metaphysical system, but as a structural logic through which an artwork comes into presence. Positioned at the level of medium rather than philosophy per se, the study examines how the interaction of paper, water, and pigment renders this ontological sequence experientially and medially legible within watercolour practice. Ontology is thus approached neither as a theoretical abstraction nor as a method to be applied, but as a visible and reconstructable order of pictorial events through which a work establishes itself as a site of truth.

Keywords: Watercolour painting; Heidegger; Ontology; Phenomenology; Mediality

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of the origin of art has long occupied a central position in aesthetics. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger argues that an artwork is not merely a thing, but a site in which truth sets itself into work (Heidegger, 2018, p. 64). Compared with discourse-centered oil painting, watercolour, due to its transparency, fluidity, and contingency, has often been reduced to a matter of technique or treated as a “light” medium (Shi & Liu, 2025; Zhao, 2010). Consequently, systematic accounts of its ontological weight and modes of appearance remain insufficient (Duan, 2004).

While existing scholarship has accumulated substantial insights into watercolour techniques, stylistic tendencies, and cultural contexts, it remains comparatively under-articulated at the ontological level, specifically regarding the question of how watercolour can function as a site of truth’s disclosure. Two limitations are particularly evident: first, the lack of a systematic interpretation of watercolour grounded in Heidegger’s framework of “thing, work, and truth” and the tension between world and earth (Young, 2001); second, insufficient attention to the hierarchical distinction between “perceptual reality” and “ontological truth,” often leading to the conflation of visual verisimilitude or sensory intensity with appearance itself (Crowther, 2009). In response, this paper returns to the site of the work and, through a case analysis of my watercolour Nantong Clock Tower Square, examines how material “concealment,” the “establishment” of the work, and the “flash” of truth form a progressive structure within watercolour. By exploring the dialogical space between *aletheia* (unconcealment) and artistic *yijing* (situational resonance, a term from Chinese aesthetic theory), the study aims to provide a more coherent and focused theoretical account of the origin of watercolour painting. Here, *yijing* does not function as a parallel ontology to Heidegger’s *aletheia*, but rather as an experiential vocabulary through which situational resonance becomes perceptible within artistic practice. The purpose is not to reinterpret Heidegger’s philosophy *per se*, but to demonstrate how its ontological structure may be rendered experiential and made legible at the medial level, without treating ontology as a method to be applied or verified through concrete watercolour practice.

2. MATERIAL CONCEALMENT AND THE CALLING FORTH OF WORLD

Heidegger understands the occurrence of art as a tension-event between world and earth (Heidegger, 2018): the world unfolds meaning and orientation, while the earth

withdraws through sheltering, opacity, and inexhaustibility. In the context of watercolour, “thingness” does not consist in a catalog of material properties such as water, paper, and pigment, but in the structure of refusal and allowance manifested through their temporal interaction and resistance. Paper fibers simultaneously absorb and repel; water disperses and recoils; pigment particles sediment, wash away, and crack, continuously rewriting boundaries. This resistance, experienced as “not fully penetrable” and “not arbitrarily controllable,” transforms material from a passive carrier into earth with ontological weight, laying the ground upon which a world can be established (Harries, 2009). Thus, watercolour’s apparent “lightness” and transparency do not diminish its ontological gravity; rather, low coverage and high sensitivity render material resistance more readily perceptible, making concealment accessible at the sensory threshold. Here, material concealment is not an aesthetic effect but an ontological condition for the work’s emergence.

In Nantong Clock Tower Square, this concealment first appears in the wet-laid skies, tree masses, and rooftops, where cycles of moisture return and evaporation leave subtle feathering and backflow traces, forming water rings and pigment aggregations. Roofs dissolve at wet edges instead of closing linearly; negative spaces at the junctions of tree canopies and the clock tower directly reveal the paper’s resistance to seepage; broad cool blue shadows in the square acquire texture and banding due to dry and wet disjunctions, transforming “shadow” from flat infill into an air-like volume borne by paper grain. These are not technical flaws but medial events, visible attestations of paper, water, and pigment letting themselves be felt at the pictorial scale (Elkins, 2000). Here, the “thing” is no longer a bearer of form but actively imposes limits through concealment, compelling the image to find its mode of emergence within constraint (Yao, 2006).

As material refusal and pictorial intention press against one another, an order at the level of world begins to take shape. Sparse orange warmth in the clock tower’s doorway and upper windows contrasts with the dominant cool tonality, appearing as thresholds lit from within concealment (Gage, 1999). Directionality emerges through diagonal shadows and slender lamplight lines, not through perspectival construction but through the linkage of shadow, blankness, and hard/soft edges. Tree-trunk reserves are not voids but points where the paper’s resistance props brightness from within. Architecture thus ceases to be a depicted object and is instead installed at its proper place through the contest of paper, water, and pigment. Viewing shifts from verifying contour completeness to sensing how resistance constitutes presence, recognizing that clarity always exacts a cost from material silence.

Accordingly, the origin of watercolour painting lies not in representational abundance but in the manner by which material concealment calls forth a world. In Nantong Clock Tower Square, this call may be recognized through a constellation of medial events, including wet edge diffusion, backflow traces, pigment sedimentation, negative space reservation, alignment between hard and soft edges, dry brushed paper grain, and differences in warm and cool chromatic energy. These phenomena orient perceptual reality toward the threshold of ontological truth, where presence is experienced through impenetrability. Aletheia does not arise because a threshold is reached; rather, the threshold becomes recognizable only after unconcealment has already occurred; thereafter, material traces are recast as grounds of meaning, becoming visible testimony to how Dasein coexists with the world. In this recursive movement from concealment to establishment and from flash to recasting, watercolour, by the lightest means, bears the heaviest ground, transforming truth from abstraction into a visible, tangible, and traceable chain of material events.



Figure 1. Nantong Clock Tower Square (Watercolour on paper, July 2025)

3. THE WORK AS SITE OF TRUTH: WORLD ESTABLISHMENT

For Heidegger, an artwork does not report external facts but brings truth (*aletheia*) into presence (Heidegger, 2018). The work, as a site (*Stätte*), installs meaning for the first time through the strife of world and earth. This section therefore does not evaluate aesthetic effects but examines how the work functions as a site in which truth enters presence. Unlike propositional truth, artistic truth is an occurrence: appearance erupts as an event, later recognizable through the tension between material resistance and pictorial intention, compelling viewing to reconstruct its pathway, this is the moment when the work becomes a work (Thomson, 2011).

In *Nantong Clock Tower Square*, the establishment of world begins with directional orders: diagonal cool blue shadows intersect with vertical lamplight lines. Tree trunk reserves open near, middle, and far spatial layers in a single gesture. This is not geometrical proof but a habitable order twisted out of hard and soft edge alignment, shadow and blank linkage, and chromatic energy differentials. The clock tower and adjacent rooftops do not preexist as depicted objects; their stability and referentiality are set into place through the contest of paper, water, and pigment. Establishment here does not mean adding detail but allowing relations to self-disclose along material traces, distance through diffusion, climate through sedimentation, and time through wet and dry rhythm.

Truth's letting-appear may be retrospectively recognized through identifiable thresholds. Most critical are the small warm planes of orange in the doorway and upper windows: against expansive cool tonality and atmospheric diffusion, these are not color accents but threshold illuminations at the site of world and earth confrontation. They do not signify "there is light" but pierce thick concealment with minimal means, transforming architecture from image into place. The same mechanism operates at the interface of canopy and tower, where negative space tears branches free while preserving the paper's active resistance; at eaves, exposed paper grain and softened wet edges juxtapose clarity and obscurity as mutual conditions. Viewing thus relinquishes contour verification and endures opacity; in this endurance, unconcealment occurs as event (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). What is experienced is not merely an urban corner at dusk but "habitable openness" itself, an assemblage of human, thing, light, air, and time.

Through this distinction, perceptual reality and ontological truth are articulated rather than conflated. At the perceptual level, the work organizes light and air through volumetric cool shadows, soft transitions of roofs and canopies, and atmospheric

background compression. At the ontological level, warm apertures, trunk reserves, and threshold edge juxtapositions establish a world, not through additive information but through an opening of “how one dwells here.” The former answers how the scene is seen; the latter, how one coexists with it. Artistic truth is not “likeness” but the manner in which beings come to be what they are: the clock tower is experienced not as an image but as a place of gathering and shelter; shadows are not color blocks but cool rhythms guiding bodily movement; blank reserves are not technical omissions but existential supports propping light from within color.

In Heideggerian terms, the work’s “work-being” is the moment when truth is set into the world. In *Clock Tower Square*, this is not a single instant but a traceable constellation of thresholds, understood not as a causal sequence, but as a set of perceptible marks: wet-edge diffusion, shifts between hard and soft alignment, the holding open of negative space, warm and cool energy differentials, and the surfacing of paper texture. Appearance thus avoids empty epiphany, remaining hermeneutically confirmable through material events. Once named in the wake of unconcealment, these events shift status: water rings, pigment clusters, and exposed paper are read as testimonies of how *Dasein* coexists here. Appearance retroactively recasts material meaning, anticipating the next section in which material becomes ground after truth’s arrival.

4. TRUTH RECASTING MATERIAL AND GROUNDING

Extending the discussion of unconcealment, this section argues that appearance does not end with the momentary event but retroactively restructures the grounding role of material. The analysis proceeds not from authorial intention but from the work’s standing presence, treating the painting as an autonomous site of disclosure. In *Nantong Clock Tower Square*, this recasting first manifests as a change in viewing trajectory: instead of verifying representational completeness, viewers confirm how the world is sustained through identifiable material traces. Warm apertures persist as threshold lights; diagonal shadows gain volume through paper grain; wet-edge diffusion, negative space, and uncovered paper continuously present impenetrable resistance at the visual plane. Once unconcealment occurs, these traces, formerly dismissible as technical byproducts, are recognized as grounds and testimonies of how the world is installed (Dreyfus, 1991).

Temporally, material traces are reinterpreted as generative trajectories. Atmospheric diffusion, soft wet edges, backflow rings, and pigment sedimentation infuse the present with layered pasts; color is no longer static coverage but residue of repeated evaporation, return, and deposition (Si, 2019). The urban corner thus appears not as

a captured instant but as a place temporalized through material rhythm, with air density, light delay, and shadow pace negotiated slowly by paper, water, and pigment. Time, though not thematic, lingers materially; concealment becomes the medium through which temporality is seen.

Grounding shifts as overlooked zones assume argumentative weight. Tree-trunk and eave reserves, once “unpainted,” become supports propping light; exposed paper grain within shadow converts it from color block to habitable coolness; warm apertures open thick concealment with minimal means, turning image into place. In each case, earth’s concealment transforms from obstacle into ground. Because paper’s resistance cannot be smoothed away, appearance gains foothold; because edges are rewritten by material, order emerges not geometrically but along material traces. Recasting thus does not attach meaning to material but recognizes material as meaning-bearing.

Co-presence further clarifies this repositioning. The work gathers sky, earth, human, and the clearing light of unconcealment into one site: atmospheric gradients introduce climate; grain and blankness anchor earth’s depth; lamplight lines, branch gestures, and shadow organization register human movement; warm apertures release a presence that may be termed “sacral,” not as transcendent symbolism but as immediate habitability. These elements do not accumulate sequentially; they mutually define one another. When viewers recognize habitability at a lit aperture, paper grain and wet edges are simultaneously acknowledged as conditions; when viewers step into shadow volume, climate and time co-presence materialize. Recasting thus affirms that world establishment and truth’s flash arise not after material but with it, grounded in concealment.

In sum, repositioning is not an added interpretive layer but the inevitable trajectory of viewing after unconcealment. Through resistance and shelter, material installs a habitable openness; once truth occurs, every trace becomes irreplaceable testimony. *Nantong Clock Tower Square* succeeds not through representational sufficiency but by revealing that without these constraints and traces left by paper, water, and pigment, the world could not be installed. Through a recursive movement in which concealment gives way to establishment, flashes forth as truth, and is subsequently recast, the work translates abstract ontology into visible and revisitable pictorial facts: truth is not outside the image, but set firmly in place within each wet edge, blank reserve, paper grain, and threshold illumination.

5. CONCLUSION

Using the paper-based watercolour *Nantong Clock Tower Square* as a case study, this paper situates “thing, work, and truth” within Heidegger’s world and earth horizon as a hermeneutically reconstructable chain of medial traces. The analysis demonstrates that material concealment in watercolour is not an impediment to appearance but a prerequisite for world establishment and truth’s unconcealment. Truth enters presence as an event, retrospectively recognizable through the tension between materiality and pictoriality; subsequently, appearance retroactively recasts material from background into the ground of the work’s standing.

At the pictorial level, medial events such as wet edge diffusion, negative space reservation, paper texture emergence, and differences in warm and cool chromatic energy differentials form a visible and revisitable chain of thresholds, rendering abstract ontological propositions perceptible as concrete pictorial facts. By articulating perceptual reality and ontological truth, the study argues that watercolour’s transparency, contingency, and partial uncontrollability are precisely the conditions that enable it to bear ontological weight.

The contribution of this paper lies in transforming specific watercolour operations into discussable ontological traces (Nelson, 2013), offering a clarificatory pathway for practice-based reflection rather than an operational method or practice-based art research (Borgdorff, 2012). Limited by scope, the study focuses on presence and medial evidence; the influence of socio-historical context and representational conditions remains to be addressed in future research. That watercolour can bear ontological weight does not mean that it always does; unconcealment remains an event that can neither be compelled nor secured.

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EXPLORING HOW BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCE DRIVE BRAND LOYALTY THROUGH WORD-OF- MOUTH INTENTION

Baoyin Hu

*Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti
Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Malaysia*

*and Journalism and Communication School, Qilu
Institute of Technology, 250200, China*

Qistina Donna Lee Abdullah

*Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti
Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Malaysia*

Corresponding Author
21010190@siswa.unimas.my

Abstract: Festival branding has become increasingly important in enhancing visitors' loyalty and sustaining the competitiveness of cultural events. However, limited studies have examined the combined effects of brand engagement and brand experience on brand loyalty in festival contexts, particularly through the mediating role of word-of-mouth (WOM) intention. This study aims to examine the effects of brand engagement and brand experience on brand loyalty at the Jinan Spring Water Festival, as well as the mediating role of WOM intention in these relationships. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected from 197 respondents who participated in the Jinan Spring Water Festival. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS to evaluate the proposed relationships and mediation effects. The findings reveal that both brand engagement and brand experience significantly and positively influence brand loyalty. In addition, WOM intention partially mediates the relationships between brand engagement, brand experience, and brand loyalty. The study highlights the importance of developing engaging and experiential festival activities while encouraging positive WOM communication to strengthen audience loyalty. The findings contribute to the literature on festival branding and provide practical guidance for festival organizers seeking to enhance brand value and long-term visitor loyalty.

Keywords: Festival; Brand Engagement; Brand Experience; Word-of-Mouth Intention; Brand Loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cultural and creative festivals have become important platforms for promoting local culture, tourism development, and destination branding. Among these events, the Jinan Spring Water Festival has attracted increasing public attention due to its unique cultural identity and experiential activities. As competition among festivals continues to intensify, enhancing visitors' brand loyalty has become essential for sustaining long-term participation and strengthening the festival's brand value. Brand loyalty refers to consumers' favorable attitudes and continued commitment toward a brand, which are often reflected through revisit intentions, positive recommendations, and emotional attachment (Yadav et al., 2023). In festival settings, loyal participants not only contribute to repeat attendance but also help promote the event through positive word-of-mouth (WOM) communication.

Brand engagement reflects consumers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connection with a brand, while brand experience represents consumers' overall sensory, emotional, and interactive experiences during brand-related activities (Elalfy et al., 2025; Goyal & Verma, 2024). These two constructs have been widely recognized as important predictors of consumer behavioral outcomes in marketing and tourism research. However, limited research has simultaneously examined brand engagement and brand experience within cultural festival contexts, particularly in explaining how these constructs influence brand loyalty through word-of-mouth intention. In addition, the mediating role of WOM remains inconsistent across different contexts, suggesting that further empirical investigation is needed in experiential festival settings.

To address these gaps, this study examines the relationships among brand engagement, brand experience, WOM intention, and brand loyalty in the context of the Jinan Spring Water Festival. The study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, which provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining consumer behavioral processes (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). According to the SOR model, external environmental factors act as stimuli that influence individuals' internal psychological states, which subsequently generate behavioral responses (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). In this study, brand engagement and brand experience are conceptualized as the stimulus components, WOM intention represents the organism component reflecting consumers' internal evaluations and communication intentions, and brand loyalty is regarded as the behavioral response outcome. By applying the SOR model, this study provides a clearer theoretical explanation of how festival-related experiences and engagement influence consumers' loyalty formation through WOM intention.

2. BACKGROUND

The Jinan Spring Water Festival is an annual cultural event held in Jinan, China, celebrating the city's unique natural springs and local traditions. The festival features a variety of performances, exhibitions, and interactive activities that attract both local residents and tourists, making it a significant platform for cultural promotion and community engagement (Wu et al., 2022). The growth of cultural and creative festivals like this has highlighted the importance of building strong festival brands to attract and retain audiences. Festivals rely not only on their cultural appeal but also on the experiential and interactive engagement of participants to sustain long-term loyalty (Ho et al., 2022). Understanding the factors that drive attendees' commitment is essential for both practical management and the theoretical development of event marketing strategies.

Brand engagement and brand experience have emerged as central constructs in explaining audience behavior in festival contexts. Brand engagement reflects the emotional and behavioral connection participants develop with the festival, while brand experience captures the holistic perception of interactions, activities, and sensory stimuli (Zha, et al., 2022). Together, these constructs influence how attendees evaluate the festival and decide whether to participate again or recommend it to others.



Source: https://pics7.baidu.com/feed/cf1b9d16fdfaaf51eddf13441a33a1fef11f7a80.jpeg@L_autotoken=592f48cc9c23afb3fddc2e_413131e8b8

Figure 1. Jinan International Springs Festival

The SOR model provides a theoretical lens to explain these relationships. In this framework, brand engagement and brand experience serve as external stimuli, shaping internal psychological and emotional states of participants, which then drive behavioral responses such as word-of-mouth intention and brand loyalty. This model underscores the importance of both cognitive and affective processes in shaping festival-goers' decisions. WOM intention plays a critical mediating role in linking participants' experiences and engagement to loyalty outcomes. Positive recommendations and social sharing amplify the festival's reach and reinforce attendees' commitment, making it an essential mechanism for sustaining brand loyalty (Errajaa et al., 2022). By integrating these constructs, this study provides a comprehensive view of how creative and experiential elements influence audience behavior in festival settings.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty

Numerous studies have demonstrated that brand engagement is a key predictor of brand loyalty, with a generally positive relationship between the two (Goyal & Verma, 2024; Samarah et al., 2022). Research further indicates that the cognitive dimension of consumer brand engagement plays a significant role in shaping loyalty (Aljuhmani et al., 2022). However, some scholars suggest that this relationship may be influenced by mediating factors (Chou et al., 2023), and existing studies have largely focused on commercial brands rather than cultural or event-based contexts.

Similarly, brand experience has been widely recognized as an important driver of brand loyalty, with evidence showing that positive experiences enhance loyal behavior (Rahmat & Kurniawati, 2022). Yet, findings remain mixed, as some studies report insignificant or conditional effects depending on the type of experience and context (Akoglu & Özbek, 2021; Philip & Pradiani, 2024). These mixed results highlight the need for further investigation into how brand engagement and brand experience jointly influence brand loyalty, particularly within cultural and festival settings.

H1: There is a positive relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty.

3.2 Brand Experience and Brand Loyalty

Previous studies have widely acknowledged the positive relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. Research has shown that positive brand experiences enhance customer satisfaction, emotional attachment, and long-term commitment, thereby strengthening brand loyalty (Rahmat & Kurniawati, 2022). Meaningful interactions with a brand, through product usage, service encounters, or marketing communications, can foster trust and deepen emotional bonds, leading to sustained

loyalty (Bing et al., 2024; Siregar et al., 2023). Empirical evidence also suggests that engaging brand experiences encourage continued participation and reinforce consumers' psychological connection to the brand (Bae & Kim, 2023).

However, some studies have reported inconsistent findings. Philip and Pradiani (2024) found that brand experience does not necessarily translate into brand loyalty, while Chung and Welty Peachey (2022) observed that different types of brand experiences may exert varying effects on loyalty outcomes. Similarly, Ong et al. (2018) argued that the influence of brand experience on loyalty is conditional and context-dependent. These mixed results suggest that the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty may be more complex than previously assumed and warrants further investigation. Therefore, this study examines the role of brand experience in shaping brand loyalty within the context of the Jinan Spring Water Festival, aiming to clarify its impact in a cultural and experiential setting.

H2: There is a positive relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

3.3 Brand Engagement and Word-of-Mouth Intention

Previous studies have indicated that brand engagement positively influences consumers' WOM intention. Consumers with higher levels of engagement are more likely to actively share brand-related experiences and recommendations with others. For instance, Giuseppe Mainolfi and Daniela Teresa Vergura (2022) found that stronger engagement with fashion blogs significantly increased consumers' intention to spread positive WOM regarding sponsored products and bloggers. Similarly, Sheng Gao and Bo Shao (2024) confirmed that consumer brand engagement is closely associated with consumers' electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) intention. Although Anjali Goyal and Pankaj (2024) suggested that brand engagement primarily enhances attitudinal loyalty rather than directly influencing WOM, loyal and engaged consumers are generally more willing to recommend brands to others. In addition, Masarroh et al. (2025) noted that highly engaged consumers are more likely to express their evaluations through eWOM, particularly when their expectations are unmet. Overall, prior findings largely support a positive relationship between brand engagement and WOM intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand engagement positively influences word-of-mouth intention.

3.4 Brand Experience and Word-of-Mouth Intention

Previous studies have consistently shown that brand experience positively influences consumers' WOM intention. Positive and memorable brand experiences encourage consumers to share their opinions, recommendations, and consumption experiences with others. For example, Manzoor et al. (2022) found that brand experience

significantly affects WOM behavior among consumers. Similarly, Elalfy et al. (2025) reported that brand experience has a significant direct positive effect on eWOM. In the digital banking context, Bapat and Kannadhasan (2022) further demonstrated that different dimensions of brand experience are positively related to customers' WOM intention. Overall, prior studies suggest that consumers who have favorable brand experiences are more likely to engage in positive WOM communication. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand experience positively influences word-of-mouth intention.

3.5 Word-of-Mouth Intention and Brand Loyalty

Previous studies have consistently confirmed a close relationship between WOM intention and brand loyalty. Consumers who are more willing to share brand-related information tend to develop stronger loyalty toward the brand. For instance, Manyanga et al. (2022) found that WOM intention has a direct positive effect on customer loyalty. Similarly, Rafikul Alam Karim and Md Kamruzzaman Rabiul (2024) reported a positive association between customer loyalty and WOM behavior. In the context of eWOM, Aldulaimi et al. (2025) further confirmed that eWOM positively influences customer loyalty. However, Sun et al. (2024) noted that loyal customers may also be more likely to share negative eWOM when their expectations are not met, indicating that loyalty can amplify both positive and negative WOM behaviors. Overall, existing evidence suggests a strong link between WOM intention and brand loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Word-of-mouth intention positively influences brand loyalty.

3.6 The mediating role of Word-of-Mouth Intention

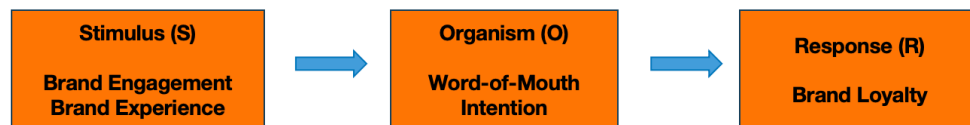
Previous studies have extensively examined the relationships among brand engagement, brand experience, WOM, and brand loyalty, highlighting the important mediating role of WOM. Research has shown that brand engagement positively influences WOM and subsequently enhances brand loyalty by encouraging consumers to share positive experiences and strengthen emotional attachment to the brand (Danyal et al., 2024; Akter et al., 2024). Similarly, positive and memorable brand experiences have been found to stimulate WOM and foster long-term loyalty through emotional and experiential connections with consumers (Liu & Yan, 2022; Manzoor et al., 2022; Yadav et al., 2023; Manyanga et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the mediating effect of WOM, suggesting that its role may vary across different contexts and consumer experiences (Haryono et al., 2023). Therefore, this study proposes that WOM intention serves as a key mediator between brand engagement, brand experience, and brand loyalty. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: WOM intention mediates the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty.

H7: WOM intention mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

3.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the SOR model, which explains how external stimuli influence individuals' internal evaluations and subsequent behavioral responses. In this study, brand engagement and brand experience are conceptualized as the stimulus variables that shape consumers' psychological and emotional reactions. WOM intention represents the organism component, reflecting consumers' internal responses and intentions to share positive information about the brand. Brand loyalty is regarded as the response outcome, representing consumers' favorable behavioral intentions and continued commitment toward the brand. Based on the SOR model, the framework proposes that higher levels of brand engagement and positive brand experiences enhance WOM intention, which subsequently strengthens brand loyalty.



Source: Adapted from Mehrabian and Russell (1974)

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

4. METHODOLOGY, VARIABLES AND DATA

This study adopted a quantitative, survey-based research design to examine the relationships among brand engagement, brand experience, word-of-mouth intention, and brand loyalty. A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was employed to select individuals who had attended the Jinan Spring Water Festival. This sampling strategy was considered appropriate given the need to target respondents with relevant firsthand experience of the event. In addition, purposive sampling enables researchers to select respondents with relevant experience, thereby improving the relevance and validity of the data collected while increasing research efficiency. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the data collection process. Participants were informed of the study purpose, confidentiality, and voluntariness, and provided written informed consent prior to participation.

All constructs were measured using established and validated scales adapted from prior studies to ensure reliability and validity. Brand engagement was measured

through cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement items; brand experience captured sensory, emotional, and experiential perceptions; word-of-mouth intention assessed respondents' willingness to recommend and share their festival experiences; and brand loyalty reflected revisit intention, preference, and long-term commitment. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered both online and on-site. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, and 197 valid responses were obtained after data screening and cleaning, resulting in an effective response rate of 78.8%. The minimum required sample size was determined a priori using G*Power 3.1 based on a multiple regression model with three predictors, an effect size of 0.15, a significance level of 0.05, and a statistical power of 0.80. The results indicated a minimum sample size of 77, confirming that the study achieved adequate statistical power. Accordingly, the final valid sample of 197 responses exceeds the recommended threshold. Respondents were drawn from diverse demographic backgrounds, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

For data analysis, SPSS and SmartPLS were employed to conduct descriptive statistics, as well as reliability and validity assessments. Hypothesis testing and mediation analysis were performed using SmartPLS through the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to examine the mediating effect of word-of-mouth intention between brand engagement, brand experience, and brand loyalty. This approach allows for the assessment of both direct and indirect effects without assuming normality, thereby providing robust empirical evidence for testing the proposed research model.

5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The pilot test results based on 50 respondents demonstrate strong measurement reliability and validity. Table 1 showed that Cronbach's *Stimulate* alpha values ranged from 0.880 to 0.937, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. Composite reliability values (ρ_c) ranged from 0.909 to 0.946, further confirming construct reliability. In addition, all constructs achieved satisfactory convergent validity, with AVE values ranging from 0.574 to 0.715, exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.50. Overall, the results suggest that the measurement model is reliable and valid for subsequent large-scale data collection.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha of Variables

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Engagement	0.892	0.899	0.914	0.574
Brand Experience	0.937	0.941	0.946	0.594
Word-of-Mouth Intention	0.900	0.905	0.926	0.715
Brand Loyalty	0.880	0.885	0.909	0.626

The correlation results among the four constructs in Table 2 indicate that all variables are positively and significantly related. Brand engagement shows strong correlations with brand experience ($r = 0.73$), word-of-mouth intention ($r = 0.64$), and brand loyalty ($r = 0.68$). Similarly, brand experience is highly associated with word-of-mouth intention ($r = 0.71$) and brand loyalty ($r = 0.77$), while word-of-mouth intention is also positively correlated with brand loyalty ($r = 0.67$). Overall, the results suggest meaningful and consistent positive relationships among all study variables.

Table 2: Correlations among the Four Factors of Perception

Variables	Brand Engagement	Brand Experience	Word-of-Mouth Intention	Brand Loyalty
Brand Engagement	1			
Brand Experience	0.73	1		
Word-of-Mouth Intention	0.64	0.71	1	
Brand Loyalty	0.68	0.77	0.67	1

The inner VIF values were examined to assess potential multicollinearity issues in the structural model. The results in Table 3 showed that all VIF values ranged from 1.396 to 1.766, which are well below the recommended threshold of 3.3. This indicates that no multicollinearity problems exist among the predictor constructs, confirming the stability and robustness of the structural model estimates.

Table 3: Inner Model Collinearity Assessment

Variables	Brand Engagement	Brand Experience	Word-of-Mouth Intention	Brand Loyalty
Brand Engagement			1.552	1.766
Brand Experience			1.552	1.607
Word-of-Mouth Intention				1.396
Brand Loyalty				

The results presented in Table 4 show that both brand engagement and brand experience have significant positive effects on brand loyalty and word-of-mouth intention. Specifically, BE ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.001$) and BEX ($\beta = 0.580$, $p < 0.001$)

significantly enhance BL, while BE ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.001$) and BEX ($\beta = 0.519$, $p < 0.001$) also significantly increase WOMI. In addition, WOMI has a significant positive impact on BL ($\beta = 0.188$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that consumers with stronger word-of-mouth intentions are more likely to develop brand loyalty.

Table 4: Mediation Effects of WOM Intention

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Result
H1 BE -> BL	0.257	0.255	0.067	3.858	0.000	Supported
H2 BEX -> BL	0.58	0.587	0.061	9.498	0.000	Supported
H3 BE -> WOMI	0.273	0.274	0.066	4.112	0.000	Supported
H4 BEX -> WOMI	0.519	0.523	0.063	8.169	0.000	Supported
H5 WOMI -> BL	0.188	0.186	0.064	2.929	0.003	Supported
H6 BE -> WOMI -> BL	0.051	0.051	0.021	2.426	0.015	Supported
H7 BEX -> WOMI -> BL	0.097	0.098	0.037	2.62	0.009	Supported

Note. Brand Engagement=BE, Brand Experience=BEX, Word-of-Mouth Intention=WOMI, Brand Loyalty=BL

Regarding the mediating effects, WOMI significantly mediates the relationship between BE and BL ($\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.015$) as well as between BEX and BL ($\beta = 0.097$, $p = 0.009$). Although both indirect effects are significant, their relatively small magnitudes suggest partial mediation. Notably, the mediating effect is stronger in the BEX pathway, implying that brand experience is more effectively translated into brand loyalty through word-of-mouth intention compared to brand engagement. Overall, WOMI plays a meaningful but partial mediating role in the relationship between brand-related factors and brand loyalty.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence supporting all proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that brand engagement and brand experience significantly enhance brand loyalty. Specifically, brand engagement not only exerts a direct positive effect on brand loyalty but also an indirect effect through WOM intention. This finding suggests that when participants are more actively involved in festival-related activities, they are more likely to develop stronger loyalty and engage in positive communication behaviors, which further reinforces their attachment to the festival (Rahmat & Kurniawati, 2022; Goyal & Verma, 2024).

Similarly, brand experience shows a strong and significant impact on brand loyalty, both directly and indirectly via WOM intention. The results indicate that memorable and meaningful festival experiences play a crucial role in shaping emotional attachment and behavioral loyalty. In addition, both brand engagement and brand experience

significantly influence WOM intention, while WOM intention itself positively affects brand loyalty. This confirms the central role of WOM as a key behavioral mechanism that transforms experiential and engagement-based perceptions into sustained loyalty (Liu & Yan, 2022). The significant mediating effects of WOM intention further support H6 and H7, indicating partial mediation in both pathways.

Overall, these findings align with the SOR model, where brand engagement and brand experience influence internal states that lead to WOM intention and brand loyalty, with WOM intention acting as a key mechanism that strengthens their effects on loyalty.

7. Limitation

This study is subject to several limitations. The use of a cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to infer causal relationships among brand engagement, brand experience, word-of-mouth intention, and brand loyalty. In addition, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may introduce common method bias and social desirability bias, as respondents' answers are based on subjective perceptions rather than actual behaviors. Furthermore, the adoption of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, since the selected respondents may not fully represent the broader consumer population. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal research designs, integrate multiple sources of data, and apply probability sampling techniques to improve the robustness and external validity of the findings.

8. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both brand engagement and brand experience significantly contribute to brand loyalty in the context of the Jinan Spring Water Festival. Brand experience exhibits a stronger direct effect on loyalty, highlighting its central role in shaping participants' long-term attachment. In addition, word-of-mouth intention plays a significant partial mediating role in the relationships between brand engagement, brand experience, and brand loyalty, indicating that experiential and engagement-based effects are strengthened when participants are willing to share positive festival-related information. The findings also confirm that engagement and experience jointly form a coherent mechanism that drives advocacy behavior and loyalty formation.

This suggests that enhancing interactive participation and delivering high-quality experiential value are both essential for strengthening festival branding outcomes. From a practical perspective, festival organizers should prioritize the integration of immersive experiences with communication platforms that encourage social sharing, thereby amplifying loyalty effects. Theoretically, the study extends the SOR model by demonstrating how engagement and experience influence behavioral responses through WOM intention in a cultural festival setting. Future research may incorporate additional mediating variables such as emotional attachment or satisfaction and test the model in other cultural or creative tourism contexts to improve generalizability.

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INTERACTIVE ANIMATION FOR KIDNEY DONATION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN MALAYSIA

Muhammad Iskandar Mustafa Md Noor

*Centre for Diploma Studies,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia*

Mohd Firdaus Mohd Herrow

*Faculty of Art and Design, Universiti Teknologi
MARA Selangor Branch, Puncak Alam Campus*

Ahmad Afeef Basil Ahmad Khuzairi

*Centre for Diploma Studies,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia*

Khairil Fa'iq Dzakwan Khairol Umam

*Centre for Diploma Studies,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia*

Corresponding Author
firdausherrow@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: This study investigates the use of interactive animation as an awareness campaign tool to address low participation in kidney donation in Malaysia, particularly among the Malay community. It aims to (1) examine public perceptions and understanding of kidney donation, (2) develop an interactive animation based on audience preferences and expert insights, and (3) evaluate its effectiveness in communicating health-related information. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a semi-structured interview with a transplant expert and a questionnaire survey involving 50 participants. The animation adopts a “choose-your-own-adventure” narrative structure, allowing users to engage in simulated decision-making scenarios related to organ donation. The findings indicate that while general awareness exists, communication gaps and misconceptions continue to remain major barriers. The interactive animation received positive responses in terms of visual appeal, engagement, and effectiveness of information delivery, suggesting its potential to enhance audience involvement and comprehension. Overall, the study demonstrates that integrating interactive storytelling with visual communication offers a promising approach for culturally sensitive health awareness campaigns, although further research with broader samples and extended platforms is recommended.

Keywords: organ donation, kidney donation, interactive animation, health awareness campaign, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the International Registry on Organ Donation and Transplantation (IRODaT), Malaysia records one of the lowest organ donation rates in the world, with only 0.9 donors for every million people. The country follows an “opt-in” system, whereby individuals must voluntarily pledge themselves to the national registry. The shortage is particularly evident in kidney transplantation. In 2023, the National Transplant Resource Centre (NTRC) reported 9,542 people on the waiting list out of 9,941 total transplant patients. Public communication has become central in tackling this challenge. Advertising is one approach that has shown promise, and interactive media—such as the “choose-your-own-adventure” style popularized on platforms like Netflix—offers a platform for audiences to engage directly in decision-making processes. For organ donation campaigns, this format can make the issue feel more immediate and relatable. Research further shows striking differences across ethnic groups: 72.7% of Indians and 61.8% of Chinese have shown willingness to donate, compared to only 10.6% of Malays (Islahudin, 2020). These figures reflect strong cultural hesitation, particularly among the Malay community.

Although general awareness of organ donation exists, this awareness has not translated into higher registration rates. Many potential donors remain uncertain about the organ donor registration process, while misinformation continues to influence decision-making. Limited education, lack of accurate knowledge, and uncertainty regarding religious permissibility are persistent barriers. Although Islam permits organ donation, misconceptions continue to remain widespread among Muslim communities. Previous studies in Malaysia have shown that a substantial proportion of Malays believe organ donation is prohibited in Islam, reflecting ongoing confusion surrounding religious guidance (Noordin et al., 2012). Similarly, Tumin et al. (2016) found that uncertainty about Islamic rulings and limited understanding of medical concepts such as brain death contribute to hesitation toward organ donation. These findings suggest that clearer and more consistent guidance from religious authorities could play a crucial role in improving public confidence and willingness to register as organ donors.

In response to these challenges, there is a growing need for more effective communication strategies that go beyond conventional awareness approaches. While existing campaigns have increased general awareness, they often rely on passive information delivery, which may not effectively engage audiences or address deeper cultural and emotional barriers associated with organ donation. In particular, limited attention has been given to the use of interactive animation as a medium that combines visual storytelling with user participation to enhance engagement and understanding. Therefore, this study explores the development and evaluation of an interactive animation approach for kidney donation awareness in Malaysia, with a focus on

improving audience engagement, communication effectiveness, and culturally sensitive message delivery.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Organ Donation

Organ donation refers to the medical act of transferring an organ or tissue from one individual to another through surgical procedures. This procedure is usually carried out when a patient suffers from severe illness or injury that leaves an organ damaged or unable to function properly. The practice is considered one of the crucial advances in modern medicine as it enables the possibility of saving lives by replacing failing organs with healthy ones. Approaches to organ donation vary across countries, but they are generally divided into two main systems: opt-in and opt-out. In an opt-in arrangement, a person must give explicit consent by registering as a donor. In contrast, the opt-out system assumes everyone to be a donor at the time of death unless they have officially declined. Although many donations occur after death, certain organs may be donated by living donors. Importantly, age is not a barrier, as people of different age groups can take part voluntarily. However, certain barriers like lack of proper knowledge, fear of surgery, myths, and limited access to clear guidance discourage many from participating in this life-saving act (Ismail et al., 2020).

The need for donated organs remains extremely high worldwide. Each year, thousands of patients die before receiving a transplant, showing how demand consistently exceeds supply. While several countries have taken initiatives to increase donation rates, the shortage remains critical as the number of patients continues to increase faster than the availability of donors. Organ transplantation is nevertheless a milestone of contemporary healthcare, offering people of all ages suffering from organ failure or severe injury a second chance at life. Beyond major organs, donated tissues such as corneas, tendons, and bones are equally valuable in helping to restore vision, movement, and other essential bodily functions. Despite these contributions, the gap between organ demand and supply continues to be wide, highlighting the urgency of stronger efforts to address this imbalance.

2.2 Kidney Donation

Kidney donation refers to the process of transplanting a healthy kidney from a donor to a patient with end-stage kidney disease (ESKD) or chronic kidney disease (CKD), where kidney function is severely impaired (Wan et al., 2022). Compared to long-term dialysis, kidney transplantation offers significantly better outcomes in terms of survival rate and quality of life, making it the preferred treatment option for many patients.

Kidney donation can be carried out through two main approaches: living donation and deceased donation. Living donors, who may be family members, friends, or unrelated volunteers, generally provide better transplant outcomes due to pre-planned procedures and controlled medical conditions.

Despite its medical effectiveness, kidney donation rates remain low in Malaysia, particularly among the Malay community. This is largely influenced by factors such as limited awareness, misconceptions about health risks, and uncertainty surrounding cultural and religious beliefs. Many individuals are concerned about the long-term health effects of kidney donation, despite medical evidence indicating that living donors can continue to lead normal lives with one functioning kidney. In addition, lack of clear communication regarding the donation process and eligibility further contributes to hesitation. These challenges highlight the importance of effective awareness strategies that can present accurate information in a clear, accessible, and culturally sensitive manner.

2.3 Animation in Advertising

Animation has emerged as a powerful communication medium widely used in advertising more academically to deliver messages in a clear, engaging, and visually compelling manner. In contemporary digital media, animation is frequently applied in promotional content, explainer videos, and awareness campaigns due to its ability to simplify complex information and present it in an accessible format (Cook & Thompson, 2019; Nazley et al., 2024). Unlike static visuals or text-based communication, animation integrates movement, narrative, and visual elements, allowing messages to be communicated in a more dynamic and memorable manner.

In the context of advertising, animation functions not only as a visual attraction but also as a persuasive communication tool that can influence audience perception and behaviour. It enables the use of storytelling, symbolism, and emotional cues to communicate ideas that may otherwise be difficult to express, particularly in sensitive topics such as health and medical awareness. Previous studies have demonstrated that animation, when combined with interactive technologies such as augmented reality, can significantly enhance user engagement, comprehension, and interest, especially among younger audiences (Jamaludin et al., 2025; Mohd Noor et al., 2024).

Furthermore, animation provides flexibility in representing abstract or complex processes, making it suitable for explaining issues like organ donation in a more relatable and less confrontational manner. The use of 2D animation in this study is grounded in its effectiveness in maintaining visual clarity while supporting emotional accessibility. Compared to live-action or highly realistic visuals, 2D animation allows

greater control over visual composition, colour, and symbolic representation, which helps reduce psychological resistance when addressing sensitive issues. From an advertising perspective, the integration of interactive elements further enhances this approach by encouraging user participation, thereby increasing engagement, motivation, and message retention (Zainurin et al., 2024). As such, 2D interactive animation is particularly suitable for awareness campaigns that aim to inform, engage, and influence audiences within culturally sensitive contexts.

2.4 Interactive Elements in Animation

Interactive elements in animation have become increasingly important in contemporary digital media, as they transform audiences from passive viewers into active participants. Unlike traditional linear media, interactive animation enables users to influence the narrative through decision-making processes, creating a more engaging and personalized experience. In digital communication and media platforms, interactivity is widely recognised as a key factor in enhancing user engagement and participation (Lin et al., 2020; Lumen Learning, n.d.).

The concept of interactive storytelling, often referred to as “choose-your-own-adventure,” allows users to navigate different narrative paths based on their choices. This approach supports experiential learning by enabling users to explore the consequences of their decisions within a simulated environment. Previous studies have highlighted that interactive and simulation-based media can improve user motivation, comprehension, and retention by encouraging active involvement rather than passive consumption (Humayun, 2021; Matt, 2021).

In the context of awareness campaigns, interactive elements provide an opportunity to address complex and sensitive issues more effectively by guiding users through structured decision-making processes. This is particularly relevant for topics such as organ donation, where personal, cultural, and emotional factors influence individual choices. By incorporating interactive features, the communication approach becomes more immersive and reflective, allowing users to better understand the implications of their actions. Therefore, the integration of a branching narrative structure in this study is intended to enhance user engagement and facilitate a deeper understanding of kidney donation decisions.

2.5 Past Related Research

Table 1: Selected Examples of Digital Media and Interactive Approaches in Awareness Campaigns

Product	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
The Development of Mobile Application of Organ Donation Using Flutter (Ong & Suparjoh, 2023)	Mobile Application for organ donation Mobile Application incorporated with 2D animation	Assisting people in registering to become organ donors. Exploring information about organ donation through better visualization via 2D animation.	Does not have good quality 2D animation.
Organ Donation Application for Top Glove and Global Doctor (TGGD) Medical Centre (Sasitharan & Hamzah, 2022)	Organ Donation Application	Serving the neighboring society in preventive medical care. Reducing time to find suitable organ donor.	Does not have good visualization for people to understand information about organ donation.
NSPCC, "Real Children Don't Bounce Back" (NSPCC, 2002)	Animation in advertising video about child abuse.	Using animation to raise awareness and disseminate facts about child abuse.	Does not have interactive elements for people to choose their storyline.

Cat Burglar- an Interactive trivia cartoon. (Brooker et al., 2022)	Classic family-friendly cartoon with interactive choices.	Many choices are available in the story.	The animation does not have information.
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Table 1 presents selected examples of digital media and interactive approaches used in awareness and communication campaigns. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of animation and digital media in enhancing audience engagement and delivering information in a more accessible manner. For instance, animated campaigns have been shown to simplify complex issues and attract audience attention, while interactive platforms provide opportunities for user participation and personalized experiences. However, most existing studies tend to focus on either visual presentation or information delivery, with limited integration of interactive narrative structures that allow users to actively engage in decision-making processes. In addition, there is a lack of research that addresses culturally sensitive topics, such as organ donation, using interactive animation within a localized context. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by combining visual communication, interactive storytelling, and culturally relevant content to enhance awareness and engagement in kidney donation campaigns.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to support both the development and evaluation of the interactive animation. A semi-structured interview was conducted with a transplant expert from a relevant medical institution to obtain insights into the medical, cultural, and communication aspects of kidney donation. The interview utilised open-ended questions to explore issues such as public misconceptions, awareness challenges, and factors influencing donation decisions. The findings from this qualitative phase informed the development of the animation narrative and ensured that the content was accurate, relevant, and culturally sensitive.

Following the qualitative phase, a questionnaire survey was administered in two stages to support both the design and evaluation processes. The first questionnaire focused on identifying audience preferences related to visual style, interactive elements, and overall design direction, which guided the development of the animation. The second questionnaire involved 50 participants and was conducted after the animation was developed to evaluate audience perception, engagement, and the effectiveness of the animation in delivering information. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to

summarise the responses, enabling a systematic assessment of user experience and communication impact.

3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

An online interview was conducted on 30 January 2024 with Dr. Hasdy Haron, Deputy Director of the National Transplant Resource Centre (NTRC), to obtain expert insights into organ transplantation and donation practices in Malaysia. It aimed to support the development of an interactive animation for a kidney donation awareness campaign, subsequently addressing the pressing issue of long waiting lists, particularly for kidney transplants, which remain the most in-demand organ in the country. The interview functioned as a primary data collection method aligned with the research objective of creating an informative and socially impactful media product.

The interview was structured into three main sections: (1) factors and impacts related to kidney and organ health, (2) procedures and processes involved in organ donation, and (3) public perceptions among Malaysia's major ethnic groups. Content analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data. Specific topics discussed included the appropriate donor age range, organ-recipient compatibility, associated medical costs, donor registration procedures, and the notably low donation rates among the Malay community. All data were systematically documented and analyzed to inform the creative and educational direction of the animation project.

3.2 Questionnaire

The data collection process was achieved by administering a two-phase questionnaire to individuals aged 18 to 40 across various locations via Google Forms, targeting approximately 50 participants. The primary aim was to support the design of an interactive animation as a medium for a kidney donation awareness advertising campaign, while also assessing the effectiveness of such animation in delivering targeted health information. The first phase of the questionnaire focused on user preferences regarding animation design elements, including character type, background art style, and genre. This phase was intended to inform the creative direction of the animation. Google Analytics was used to evaluate the percentage-based responses gathered from the participants. The sample size of 50 participants was selected based on accessibility and relevance to the target audience, focusing on Malay respondents as the primary demographic group for this study.

The second phase aimed to validate the animation's effectiveness in conveying information to the intended audience. Both phases employed descriptive statistical analysis to examine the collected data. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to

summarize response frequencies and percentages, supported by visual presentation through charts and figures for clearer interpretation. This approach helps to highlight public knowledge gaps and supports the potential of interactive media as a tool for health communication and advocacy.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of structured items designed to capture participants' perceptions of kidney donation awareness, animation preferences, and user experience. Visual references, including sample animation styles and design options, were provided to assist respondents in making informed selections. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the full questionnaire and accompanying visual materials are included as supplementary material for review.

3.3 Interactive Narrative Structure

The interactive animation in this study adopts a branching narrative structure that enables users to engage with the storyline through a series of decision points. As illustrated in Figure 1, the narrative begins with an introductory scene that presents the context of kidney donation, followed by sequential choices designed to simulate real-life decision-making situations. At each stage, users select between alternative actions, such as seeking additional information, engaging in discussion with family members, or proceeding with donor registration. Each decision leads to a different narrative outcome, reflecting the implications of informed or uninformed choices. This structure is designed to mirror the opt-in system of organ donation, allowing users to experience the decision-making process in an interactive and reflective manner. By incorporating user-driven pathways, the animation transforms passive viewing into active participation, thereby enhancing engagement and reinforcing the intended awareness message to the target audience.

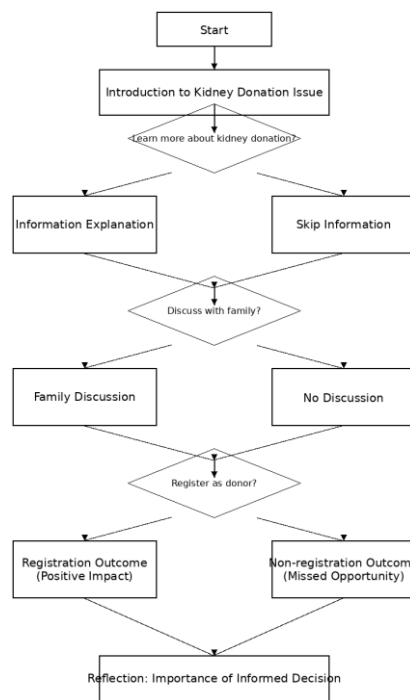


Figure 1. Interactive Narrative Flowchart of the “Choose-Your-Own-Adventure” Animation Structure.

The animated video used as the primary stimulus in this study was presented to participants prior to the evaluation phase. For the purpose of peer review, an anonymized version of the animation has been provided as supplementary material. The content has been prepared without identifying information to ensure compliance with the double-blind review process. It should be noted that the use of a single expert interview and a relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the study aims to provide exploratory insights into the potential of interactive animation as an awareness tool.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Results of Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview was held with Dr. Hasdy Haron from the National Transplant Resource Centre (NTRC). The goal was to explore the perception of the Malays regarding organ donation and the procedure of kidney donation in Malaysia.

Table 2: Interview Data with Dr Hasdy Haron

QUESTIONS	ANSWER
Procedure to register as a donor?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals who want to be an organ donor after death must register and express their desire to be a donor.• Donors must make a pledge during their lifetime when registering.• Donors must notify their family members about their decision.
What are the main factors causing the low percentage of organ donors among Malays?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Malay community is reluctant to donate organs because there is still a feeling of fear.• Some consider donating organs a sin; others fear the public's stigma and negative perceptions.• Muftis have issued a fatwa that donating organs is allowed and permitted by Islamic laws.
How do we identify the right organ for the right organ recipient?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The recipient and donor must have the same blood type in terms of tissue suitability from the donor.• Medical assessments will be conducted for both parties before the transplant.• Medical assessment is required for both living and deceased donors to ensure compatibility and safety in the transplantation process.
What are the immediate and long-term implications for organ donors and recipients?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For living donors, there are usually no negative effects because humans can live even with one kidney.• Usually, the donor will experience minor side effects after surgery.• The percentage of deaths for donors is low at 0.01%.

Are expenses for medical checkups and surgery borne by the hospital?

- No charge will be imposed on the next of kin.
 - Government and private hospitals cannot charge because it is written in government policy.
-

As shown in Table 2, the Human Tissue Act 1974 stipulates that individual wishing to become organ donors after death must register and explicitly express their intent. Malaysia's organ donation system operates on a pledge basis, meaning potential donors must formally declare their decisions while alive and inform their family members, as such consent is necessary under the Act. The Malay community remains hesitant about organ donation due to fears and misunderstandings about the importance of transplant, Islamic legal rulings, concerns about mutilating corpses, illiteracy, and inadequate dissemination of information. There is a prevalent stigma, with some viewing organ donation as sinful or suspecting that organs might be sold, causing family members' fear to societal judgement. However, Islamic religious leaders have issued fatwas confirming that organ donation is permissible, although public awareness remains low.

For organ transplants, both donors and recipients must have matching blood types and tissue compatibility to minimize rejection. Medical assessments, including blood tests and scans, are conducted for both parties before the transplant. However, the evaluation process differs between living and deceased donations, although compatibility and medical suitability remain essential considerations in both cases. Living donors typically do not suffer adverse long-term effects, as humans can live with one kidney. They may experience temporary post-surgery side effects like dizziness, vomiting, and nausea. According to Dr. Hasdy Haron, the mortality rate for donors is extremely low at 0.01%, as only healthy and suitable organs are considered for donation. Additionally, the costs associated with organ donation after death are not borne by the donor's family. Both government and private hospitals in Malaysia are prohibited from charging these expenses, as stipulated by government policy.

4.2 Results of Questionnaire on User Experience in Interactive Animation

The results indicate that informational and communication gaps are the dominant factors influencing the low participation of Malays in kidney donation, with over 70% of respondents highlighting limited exposure and ineffective media communication. Social influence also plays a role, particularly in family hesitation, while personal concerns such as fear of physical harm contribute to a lesser extent. Cultural and posthumous

body-related beliefs appear present but are comparatively less influential. Overall, the findings suggest that the issue is driven more by ineffective information delivery than by strong cultural or ideological resistance.

Pada pendapat anda, apakah faktor pendermaan buah pinggang kurang terdedah dalam kalangan orang Melayu? (Malays were observed to have a signi... 10.6% contribution. - Dr. Farida Islahudin, 2020)
52 responses

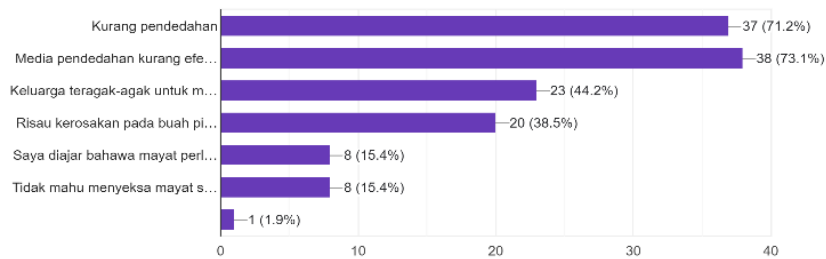


Figure 2. Factors Contributing to Low Kidney Donation Awareness Among Malays

The findings indicate that while most respondents (69.2%) have been exposed to kidney donation information, a significant portion remains unreached. This suggests that awareness efforts have achieved a certain level of visibility, but their reach is not yet comprehensive. More importantly, when considered alongside earlier findings, exposure alone does not guarantee effective understanding, indicating that existing communication strategies may lack depth, clarity, or engagement. As such, the issue appears to lie not only in access to information but in the effectiveness of how the information is delivered.

Adakah anda pernah didedahkan tentang isu pendermaan buah pinggang?
52 responses

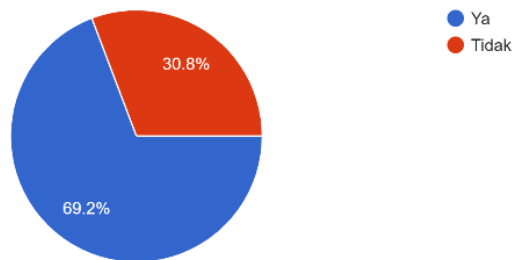


Figure 3. Public Exposure to Kidney Donation Issue

The findings demonstrate an overwhelming consensus on the effectiveness of 2D animation as an advertising medium, with 96.2% of respondents expressing positive agreement. This strong endorsement suggests that 2D animation is widely perceived as an accessible and engaging form of communication, making it a suitable medium for delivering awareness messages. More importantly, this supports its selection in this study, as the medium aligns with audience expectations and increases the likelihood of message acceptance.

Pada pendapat anda, adakah medium animasi 2D berkesan sebagai media pengiklanan?
52 responses



Figure 4. Effectiveness of 2D Animation as an Advertising Medium

The findings indicate a high level of familiarity with the “choose-your-own-adventure” concept, with 82.7% of respondents demonstrating prior awareness. This suggests that interactive narrative formats are already well recognised among the target audience, reducing the need for adaptation or learning barriers. Consequently, the use of this approach in the study is well-aligned with existing user experience expectations, increasing its potential effectiveness as an engaging communication strategy.

Adakah anda tahu mengenai animasi yang berkonsep "choose-your-own-adventure"?
52 responses

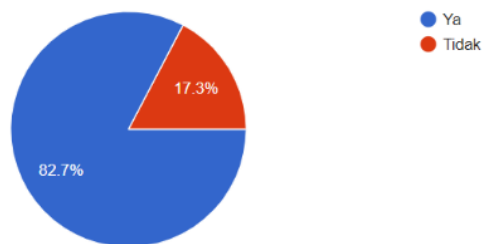


Figure 5. Public Awareness of the “Choose-Your-Own-Adventure” Animation Concept

4.3 Results of Questionnaire on User Learning Experience in Interactive Animation Video

The findings show a very high level of audience satisfaction with the animation’s visual style, with 98% of respondents indicating positive reception. This suggests that the visual design effectively aligns with audience preferences, supporting both aesthetic appeal and accessibility. Such strong acceptance implies that the chosen visual approach successfully enhances viewer engagement and provides a suitable foundation for delivering the intended message.

Adakah grafik visual video animasi ini kena dengan citarasa anda?

51 responses

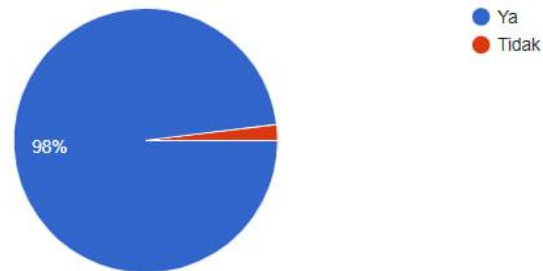


Figure 6. Audience's Satisfaction with Animation Visual Style

The findings reveal a strong positive response toward the interactive “choose-your-own-adventure” element, with 96.1% of respondents indicating that it successfully captured their attention. This suggests that interactivity plays a crucial role in enhancing user engagement, moving beyond passive viewing toward active participation. The high level of attraction further supports the effectiveness of interactive storytelling as a strategy for increasing audience involvement and reinforcing message delivery.

Adakah element interaktif "choose-your-own-adventure" dalam animasi ini menarik perhatian anda?

51 responses

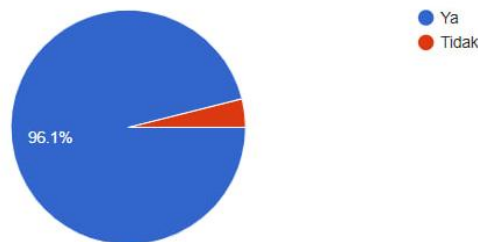


Figure 7. Audience Engagement with Interactive "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" Element

The findings indicate strong confidence in the animation's potential for large-scale dissemination, with 94.1% of respondents perceiving it as suitable for mass advertising. This suggests that the animation not only engages audiences but is also considered viable for broader public communication. The high level of acceptance reinforces its potential as a scalable awareness tool capable of reaching wider audiences beyond the initial study context.

Adakah video animasi ini mempunyai potensi untuk ditayangkan secara besar-besaran sebagai pengiklanan?

51 responses

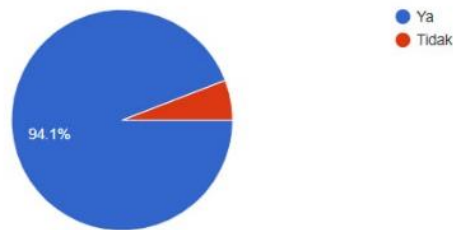


Figure 8. Audience Perception of the Animation's Potential for Mass Advertising

The findings demonstrate a very high level of effectiveness in information delivery, with 98% of respondents indicating that the animated video successfully conveyed its message. This suggests that the integration of visual design and interactive elements enhances not only engagement but also comprehension. The strong response indicates that the animation functions effectively as both an informative and persuasive communication tool, supporting its role in awareness campaigns.

Adakah penyampaian maklumat dalam video animasi ini berkesan?

51 responses

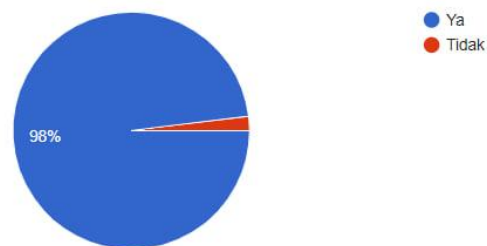


Figure 9. Audience Feedback on the Effectiveness of Information Delivery

The final visual outcome demonstrates a coherent integration of background and character design, developed in response to audience preferences identified through the questionnaire. The use of a controlled colour palette and balanced composition supports visual clarity, while lighting and shading enhance depth and emotional expression. These elements work together to establish a consistent visual hierarchy, guiding viewer attention without overwhelming the narrative. The selected scenes illustrate how visual decisions were intentionally structured to support both aesthetic appeal and message delivery. Overall, the design reflects an iterative process in which audience feedback informed refinements, resulting in a visual style that strengthens engagement and reinforces the emotional tone of the animation.

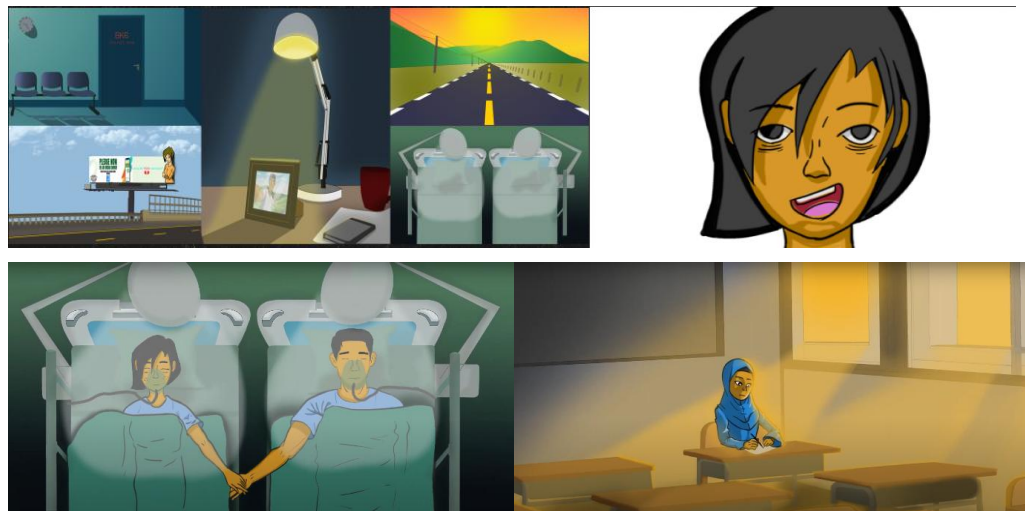


Figure 10. Selected Scenes Showcasing Final Background and Character Design in the Animation

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the effectiveness of the interactive animation lies in its integration of visual design, narrative structure, and user participation. While high levels of audience engagement were observed, the results indicate that engagement alone is insufficient without clear and meaningful communication. The combination of visual storytelling and interactive decision-making enables users to better understand complex information, particularly in the context of kidney donation where cultural, emotional, and informational factors influence public perception.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that highlight the role of interactive and simulation-based media in enhancing user engagement and learning outcomes. Interactive digital environments allow users to actively participate in the communication process, which improves comprehension and retention compared to passive media consumption (Zainurin et al., 2024). In addition, visual-based approaches have been shown to simplify complex information and make it more accessible, particularly for awareness campaigns involving sensitive topics (Nazley et al., 2024).

In the Malaysian context, the results further suggest that awareness challenges are not solely due to lack of information, but are also influenced by cultural perceptions, misconceptions, and uncertainty regarding religious acceptance. This is consistent with previous findings indicating that social and cultural beliefs significantly affect public willingness to participate in organ donation (Ismail et al., 2020). The use of interactive

narrative allows users to explore these concerns in a simulated environment, making the communication process more reflective and personally relevant.

This study contributes to the field of visual communication and digital media by demonstrating how interactive animation can be applied as an awareness tool that combines engagement with meaningful learning. By integrating a “choose-your-own-adventure” structure, the study moves beyond traditional animation by incorporating user-driven pathways that simulate real-life decision-making processes. This approach aligns with current trends in digital communication, where interactive and user-centred media are increasingly used to enhance message effectiveness.

Despite these findings, the study is limited by the use of a single expert interview and a relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future research could expand the sample to include more diverse demographic groups and explore the use of different interactive platforms to enhance accessibility and scalability. Further investigation into long-term behavioural impact would also provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of interactive animation in influencing real-world decision-making.

5.2 Conclusion

This study suggests that interactive animation has strong potential as an awareness communication tool for kidney donation in Malaysia. The integration of visual storytelling and interactive elements enhances user engagement and supports clearer understanding of complex and sensitive information. By simulating real-life decision-making scenarios, the approach encourages more reflective audience responses and improves communication effectiveness.

The study contributes to the field of visual communication and digital media by demonstrating how interactive storytelling can be applied to address culturally sensitive health issues. The findings highlight the importance of combining visual design, narrative structure, and user participation in developing more effective awareness strategies. This approach provides practical value for future health communication campaigns seeking to engage audiences in a more meaningful and participatory manner.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by the use of a relatively small sample size and a focused demographic group. Future research could expand the scope by involving more diverse participants and exploring different interactive platforms to enhance accessibility and scalability. Further investigation into long-term behavioural impact would provide deeper insight into the effectiveness of interactive animation in influencing real-world decision-making.

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STAGING YUAN ZAJU: ADAPTATION OF AUTUMN IN THE HAN PALACE (汉宫秋) IN XINCHANG DIAOQIANG OPERA

Ng Yu Qin

*Department of Chinese Studies, Faculty of Arts
and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya 50603,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

Teoh Hooi See

*Department of Chinese Studies, Faculty of Arts
and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya 50603,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

Corresponding Author

ngyuqin1016@gmail.com
teohhooisee@um.edu.my

Abstract: Drawing on Susan Bennett's reception theory (Bennett, 2003), this paper adopts a spectator-oriented qualitative approach to explore *Diaoqiang's* adaptation of *Autumn in the Han Palace* (汉宫秋). As one of the oldest surviving theatrical forms, dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD), *Diaoqiang* is often described as a living fossil of Chinese opera and is especially renowned for its capacity to stage classical repertoires such as *Autumn in the Han Palace*. Focusing on stage arrangements, extra-daily bodily movements, and the soundscape of this adaptation, this paper argues that the *Diaoqiang* troupe seeks to balance the pursuit of archaeological reconstruction, as theorised by Pavis (2013) with contemporary audience reception. Rather than treating *Diaoqiang* merely as a means of preserving the classical canon, this paper draws attention to the troupe's efforts to engage modern audiences, a perspective frequently overlooked in existing scholarship. This study concludes that the *Diaoqiang* troupe is committed to negotiating the tension between traditional conventions and contemporary audience reception by introducing their own interpretative elements into gaps in the original text, thereby making the classic more accessible to contemporary spectators.

Keywords: *Diaoqiang*; Yuan zaju; classics; reception; adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Grammy-nominated composer Du Yun brought a regional opera form that is in decline to international attention at the Los Angeles Philharmonic on 6 February 2019, as part of the *Future Tradition, Revamping Disappearing Folk Arts and Regional Operas Project in China*. Her work was inspired by Xinchang Diaoqiang Opera (新昌调腔), one of the oldest surviving theatrical forms, dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD). In Zhang Dai's *The Dream Recollections of Tao An*, there is an early reference to *Diaoqiang* (调腔), noting that “Zhu Chusheng, a female opera singer, is renowned for her *Diaoqiang* performance.” This reference implies that *Diaoqiang* had already been established in Xinchang and had a burgeoning influence across eastern Zhejiang, encompassing Shaoxing, Xiaoshan, Shangyu, Yuyao, Shengxian, and Ninghai by that time.

The *Diaoqiang* troupe preserves a corpus of 159 late Qing-period libretto manuscripts in local archives. In 2006, *Diaoqiang* was listed in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List for preservation. The *Diaoqiang* repertoire is generally classified into three main categories: the traditional, including adaptations of Yuan *zaju*, *Nanxi* (南戏, Southern Theatre), and Ming-Qing *chuanqi* operas, the topical, and the *Monk Mulian Series*. *Diaoqiang* is especially renowned for its capacity to stage classical texts, most notably *Autumn in the Han Palace* and *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. This study focuses on *Diaoqiang*'s adaptation of *Autumn in the Han Palace* through a close reading of staged movement, vocal transformation, and musical accompaniment, based on a recorded performance.

Autumn in the Han Palace (破幽梦孤雁汉宫秋) is a Yuan *zaju* written by Ma Zhiyuan, one of the most influential playwrights of the Yuan Dynasty. The play recounts the love story between the Han Emperor and Wang Zhaojun, whose lute performance wins the emperor's affection. However, they are forcibly separated when the Mongol khan demands to marry Wang Zhaojun as the price of political peace. After bidding farewell to the emperor, Wang Zhaojun drowns herself in despair instead of heading north with the Mongol soldiers. The emperor, on the other hand, repents the loss of her in the Han Palace, and later encounters her soul as a wild goose in his dream. The *Diaoqiang* troupe chooses to stage the episode “Bidding Farewell” which carries the emotional and dramatic core of the narrative.

In recent years, a growing number of Yuan *zaju* have been adapted for contemporary performances. For instance, *Autumn in the Han Palace* has been adapted into a variety

of performing arts such as Cantonese opera, Peking opera and Kunqu opera, demonstrating its strong adaptability. Among these forms, *Diaoqiang* is the oldest performing form, and it evokes a particular interest in this paper for its pursuit of what the French semiologist Patrice Pavis calls “archaeological reconstruction”. This concept refers to the representational ideal of a classical work (Pavis, 2013, p. 207), that seeks to *echo* the original text while largely disregarding the actual circumstances of contemporary reception.

In spite of this, the troupe leader Ding Lihong notices that *Diaoqiang* struggles to compete with more established forms such as Peking opera or Jingju, Kunqu opera and even Western theatre. This raises key questions about how *Diaoqiang* negotiates the tension between historical fidelity and contemporary performance. Accordingly, this study explores: What are the specific ways in which *Diaoqiang*'s adaptation of *Autumn in the Han Palace* transforms the original Yuan *zaju* text? To what extent does this adaptation remain traditional, and where does it depart in order to reach its contemporary audience? Drawing on a recorded performance, this paper offers a qualitative analysis of a regional opera that is in decline, distinguishing the performing conventions the troupe uses in staging the classic itself and uncovering how staged performance, vocal techniques, and musical arrangements narrate the text. Finally, this paper aims to explore why the *Diaoqiang* troupe insists on engaging in “archaeological reconstruction” despite the difficulties encountered in contemporary performance contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *The Adaptation of Autumn in the Han Palace*

Autumn in the Han Palace, written by Ma Zhiyuan in the late 13th century, is based on the well-known story of Princess Zhaojun's journey going beyond the frontier. Although the play is believed to have circulated widely during the Yuan dynasty, the irretrievability of its original performance details and related historical materials prevents a full reconstruction of its early reception. (Wang, 2018, p. 178). Despite this limitation, this *zaju* continued to have an impact on later generations. It is mentioned that in 1682, Yu Jinquan arranged for the renowned Yu troupe to perform at a literati gathering, presenting *The Beauty and Peach Blossoms*, *The Story of Washing Gauze*, and *Autumn in the Han Palace*, among others. (Wang, Ding, & Gu, 2004, p. 232).

Over time, the play has been widely adapted across various regional operas, including *Diaoqiang*, *Yuyao qiang*, *Taizhou luntan*, Sichuan opera, Kunqu opera, Henan opera,

and Huangmei opera. In the modern era, it has also been adapted for *Huaju* (话剧, Spoken Drama), most notably in Gu Haiqing's three-act play of 1934 and Hong Shen's one-act play of 1937.

The play further extended its reach beyond China in the early 20th century. As shown in **Figure 1**, it was translated by the French musicologist and sinologist Louis Laloy (1874–1944), whose adaptation, *Le Chagrin dans le palais de Han*, was performed at the Théâtre des Arts on 2 June 1911. (Lo, 2017, p. 33). Shortly thereafter, from 19 March to April 1912, *The Flower of the Palace of Han* was staged at the Broadway Little Theatre by Charles Rann Kennedy (1871-1950) as illustrated in **Figure 2**. According to *The New York Times* (17 March 1912), the play consisted of five scenes, with Miss Matthison appearing as Wang Zhaojun and Frank Reicher as the Emperor (see **Figure 3**; Times, 1912).

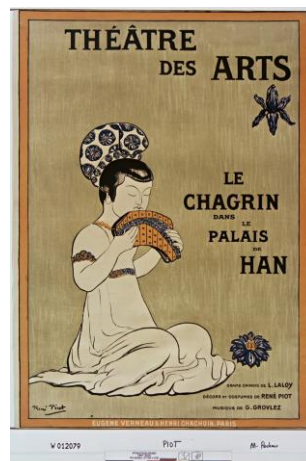


Figure 1: Theatre poster of *Le Chagrin dans le palais de Han* by René Piot (1911).

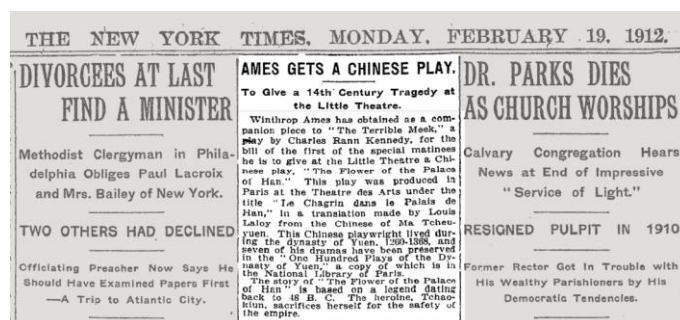


Figure 2: A news article of *The Flower of the Palace of Han* published in The New York Times (19 February 1912).



Figure 3: Photograph of Frank Reicher in *The Flower of the Palace of Han* at the Little Theatre, published in *The New York Times* (17 March 1912).

Focusing on the Xinchang *Diaoqiang* tradition, a significant milestone occurred in 1963 when the *Diaoqiang* artist Zhu Caixing performed and recorded *Autumn in the Han Palace*, after which Fang Rongzhang transcribed the score. The recording, the transcribed score, and a handwritten libretto dated 1892 are all preserved in the archives of the Xinchang *Diaoqiang* Opera Troupe (Shi, 2008, p. 124). The play was later included in the *Selected Traditional Operas of Zhejiang*, alongside works such as *The Story of the Lute*, *The Romance of the Western Chamber*, and *The Story of the White Rabbit*, which further expanded its circulation and visibility. These materials provide a concrete foundation for examining how *Diaoqiang* opera is realised on stage today.

Existing studies have concentrated largely on tracing the adaptation lineage of *Autumn in the Han Palace* across different regions, genres, and cultural contexts. However, relatively little attention has been paid to how the play is faithfully represented or reconstructed within contemporary theatrical contexts. In particular, there is a scholarly gap concerning the performance techniques and conventions of the play, as well as its engagement with present-day spectatorship.

2.2 Ways to Play Old Texts

The question of how to restore and stage older plays has been widely discussed within theatre studies. From a comparative perspective, William Shakespeare's works have generated extensive discussion in Western theatre, as the number of traditional

productions is nearly matched by those that boldly rewrite the scripts. (Schoch, 2021; Bennett, 1996). Studies of Shakespearean performance demonstrate that attempts at pure restoration are often dismissed as “the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever was seen,” as troupes are inevitably influenced by contemporary theatrical practices and audience expectations. These types of adaptations have persisted for a significant period (Schoch, 2021). A theatre actress and scriptwriter Emily Smith (2024), shared insightful thoughts on performing Shakespeare today, noting, “the heart of these works are stories about love, power, betrayal, and ambition – themes as relevant now as they were in the 16th century – they just need to be presented in different or more modern ways to be accessible”. Without a doubt, the accessibility of older plays to contemporary audiences is a key rationale for rewriting old scripts.

Such debates provide a useful comparative lens for examining similar issues in Chinese opera traditions. While Chinese opera has likewise preserved a rich repertoire of classical texts, it faces challenges in restoring the distinct aesthetic and performative constraints. In the case of reproductions of classic texts, Pavis (2013, pp. 212-213) proposes six methods, namely archaeological reconstruction, historicization, *récupération*, *mise-en-scène* of possible meanings, vocalising the text, and the return to myth. Pavis emphasises that several methods are normally used within a single production. Clearly, the *Diaoqiang* troupe adheres to the principle of archaeological reconstruction, an approach that seeks to stage plays exactly as they were first performed based on available historical knowledge as the troupe is especially renowned for staging some of the most faithful classical *zaju* in China. Such *mise-en-scène* prioritises archival accuracy over the gap between reconstruction and the contemporary spectator’s horizon of expectations.

By way of comparison, the recent production of *Autumn in the Han Palace* by the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre, starring Yuan Guoliang and Zhang Yuanyuan, was staged in January 2024. This version adopts a *récupération* approach. The original text is treated as raw material awaiting the processes of actualisation, modernisation, adaptation, and rewriting necessary to bring the classical play into contemporary relevance. In addition to adapting the singing to the Kunqu style, adding vocal parts for supporting characters, and shifting the narrative focus from the emperor to Zhaojun, this version incorporates modern backdrops and stage props to enhance the staging.

The contrasting instances above show the tension in staging classical texts. In practice, these reproduction methods are usually used in combination, and most productions

attempt to negotiate a middle ground between them. In the case of *Diaoqiang*, its strong emphasis on archaeological reconstruction raises a vital question: How can a performance focused solely on historical authenticity remain intelligible and meaningful to contemporary audiences? To answer this, it must be examined through the lens of the spectator. While Pavis categorises strategies for staging the past, his framework overlooks how these reconstructions are perceived and interpreted by present-day audiences. To bridge this gap, it is necessary to turn to Susan Bennett's reception theory, which emphasises the active role of the spectator in constructing meaning based on their cultural and historical context.

Bennett's theory helps address the aforementioned question, arguing that the meaning of a classical play is not fixed within the performance itself. Rather, it emerges through the interaction between the performance and each generation of spectators, shaped by their own cultural, historical and experiential horizons.

2.3 The Research Gap

Despite extensive scholarship on the adaptation history of *Autumn in the Han Palace* and broader debates on staging classical texts, existing studies have tended to focus on textual dissemination or on production strategies that demonstrate distinct adaptation methods. There is a significant lack of attention to how archaeological reconstruction-oriented performance practices are experienced and interpreted by contemporary spectators. This gap is especially evident in the case of *Diaoqiang*, where its emphasis on preserving the most faithful traditional forms raises questions about contemporary accessibility and relevance. By bringing Pavis's concept of archaeological reconstruction into dialogue with Bennett's reception theory, this paper examines how the *Diaoqiang* troupe maintains its commitment to archaeological reconstruction while fostering the engagement of modern audiences.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since *Diaoqiang* was listed in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List nearly 20 years ago, it has gained a far-reaching reputation for preserving the "purest" form of zaju performance and is often celebrated as a living fossil of Chinese opera (ezhejiang.gov.cn, 2020). However, as Eric Hobsbawm argues in *The Invention of Tradition*, older forms of community and authority structures, and consequently the traditions associated with them, were unadaptable and became rapidly unviable (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000, p. 5).

In this light, the Xinchang Diaoliang Opera Troupe's pursuit of what Patrice Pavis terms "archaeological reconstruction", refers to an effort to bring past *zaju* performances to life as faithfully as possible. However, the troupe must contend with a lack of documentation and historical materials, as well as the pressure to remain relevant in the contemporary market. The distance between the classical text and contemporary audiences creates a fundamental tension, suggesting that any attempt at reconstruction inevitably involves the invention of 'new' traditions to adapt old ones. Such reconstruction largely relies on spectators shaped by present-day aesthetic tendencies and performance contexts to interpret the performance within contemporary relevance.

Bringing these perspectives together, this paper examines how *Diaoliang's* adaptation of *Autumn in the Han Palace* negotiates the delicate balance between the ideal of archaeological reconstruction and the practical demands of contemporary reception. It is guided by the following research questions:

- i. How does the troupe negotiate between historical authenticity and modern spectatorship?
- ii. Through what performative strategies, specifically, stage arrangement, bodily movement, as well as vocal and musical performance, are these tensions articulated or resolved?

By exploring these questions, the paper aims to analyse the process of performance reinterpretation, through which tradition is reshaped for contemporary relevance.

4. METHODOLOGY

Positioning the researcher as a contemporary spectator, this paper draws on Susan Bennett's reception theory, which emphasises the spectator's active role in constructing theatrical meaning (Bennett, 2003, p. 1). Before proceeding, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of the spectator and the audience. Unlike audience reception, which primarily relies on empirical data such as interviews, surveys, or archival records, the spectator, according to Gaylord (1983, p. 136) and Balme (2015, p. 47), refers to an individualised and ideal recipient equipped with psychological, cognitive, and emotional competencies, as well as knowledge of aesthetics and reception theory. By approaching the performance from a micro-perspective, the spectator uncovers the underlying meanings and significance of the stage performance. Rather than collecting empirical data through interviews or surveys, this paper approaches reception as an interpretive and reflexive process, in which meaning is generated through informed viewing shaped by prior knowledge and experience of Chinese opera. In other words, this approach allows the spectator to create their own

text of the classical canon. The responses nonetheless require examination against structural elements found in the play or text.

As such, this paper utilises a model of the spectator's theatrical experience that relies on two frames, initially proposed by Gaylord (1983, p. 136) and later extended by Bennett (2003, pp. 1-2). In *Theatre Audiences*, Bennett divides the theatrical frame into two and describes the outer frame, which encompasses both audience and performers, as a cultural construct. Within this frame, the spectator is influenced by factors external to the performance, specifically the social and cultural context, and the expectations they bring to the event. Meanwhile, the inner frame refers to the playing space where the actual theatrical performance occurs; it is here that the spectator experiences the 'fictional stage world' (Bennett, 2003, p. 139). Grounded in this framework, this paper transforms these theoretical concepts into an analytical tool to examine the performance of *Autumn in the Han Palace* presented by the Xinchang Diaoqiang Opera Troupe.

Specifically, the framework in **Figure 4** presents the adapted model of the spectator's theatrical experience, showing how the source text, *Autumn in the Han Palace*, undergoes a process of archaeological reconstruction (Pavis, 2013) and is transformed into an actual performance through three specific elements: stage arrangement, bodily movements, and vocal and musical performance. However, as shown in the integrated framework below, significant challenges arise in the process of archaeological reconstruction when the inner frame interacts with the outer frame. In particular, the troupe must negotiate the tension between preserving the original play and maintaining its appeal for contemporary audiences. Spectators may encounter difficulties in decoding the symbolic conventions of traditional *Diaoqiang* performance, and ethical dissonances may arise between ancient moral ethics and the emotional values of twenty-first century audiences. Accordingly, this paper adopts a qualitative approach grounded in performance analysis and interpretive reading to examine how the Xinchang Diaoqiang Opera Troupe responds to overcome these challenges.

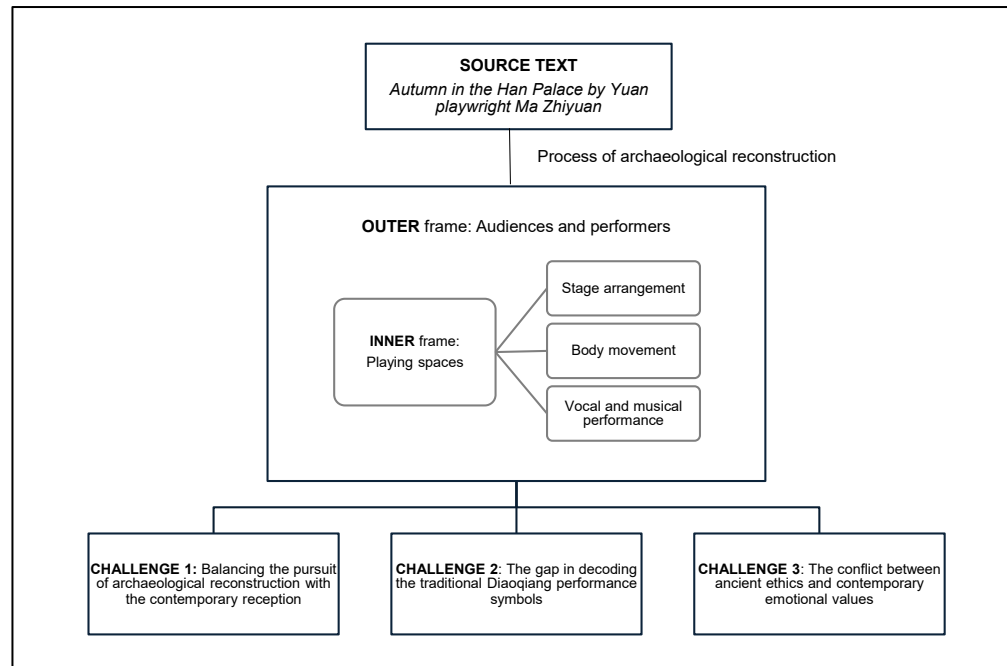


Figure 4. The adapted model of the spectator's theatrical experience.

The primary data for analysis consist of two recorded performances of *Autumn in the Han Palace* by the Xinchang Diaoliang Opera Troupe, both retrieved from the online video-sharing platform Bilibili. The first recording, recorded at the Nanjing Museum Old Teahouse on 30 December 2018, features a smaller stage that allows for close observation of the actors' bodily movements and facial expressions (Ma, 2021). The second recording, recorded on a larger stage, offers a panoramic view that clearly reveals formations and spatial arrangements, which are essential for analysing their staged formations (Ma, 2020). Both recordings are productions by the Xinchang Diaoliang Opera Troupe. They were selected based on several criteria: the completeness of the performance documentation, the clarity of audio-visual quality, and the contrast in stage scale, which facilitates comparative analysis across different performance conditions.

Methodologically, both recordings were analysed through close viewing and comparative performance analysis. Each recording was viewed multiple times, with initial viewings aimed at familiarising the spectator with the overall structure of the performances, followed by detailed observations focusing on specific performance elements. These include stage blocking (performer positioning and formation movement), bodily movement (gesture, posture, and choreographed techniques), as well as vocal and musical performance (singing techniques, rhythmic delivery, and interaction with instrumental accompaniment). Through comparative analysis, the paper identifies recurring patterns and variations across different stage conditions. Attention was given to how stage scale influences the articulation of movement and

stage blocking. In addition, to ensure transparency and reproducibility, the video sources are documented with full bibliographic references and their access links are in the References section.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. The Stage Arrangement or *Mise-En-Scène*

Traditional Chinese opera stages use minimal physical stage props, instead, relying on the actors' movements to animate the scenic environment. In fact, the empty space on stage reflects what Pavis terms an "archaeological reconstruction" of staging practices, through which traditional Chinese opera pursues an art of omission. As Ye observes, this stage constitutes a virtual space-time, a realm of free possibility. (Ye, 1997, p. 46). Contemporary *Diaoqiang* performances, as evidenced by video recordings, largely preserve this convention when staging traditional plays (see **Figure 5**).

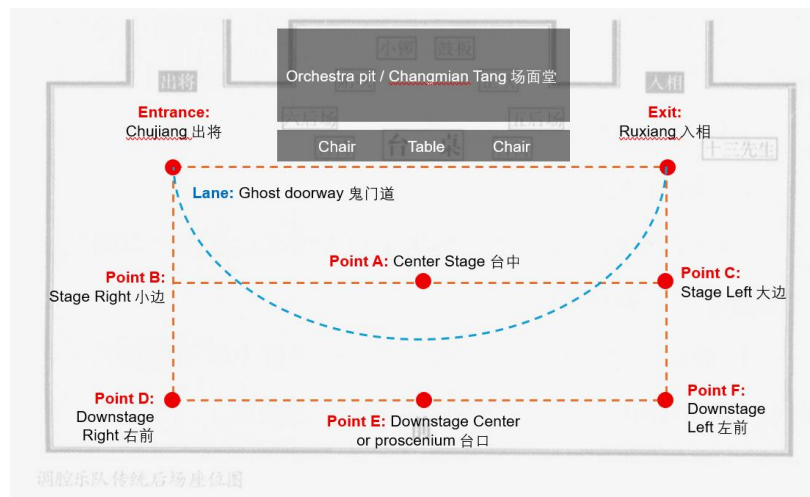


Figure 5. *Diaoqiang* stage

In *Diaoqiang*, the stage is organised into two primary zones. The first is the acting area extending to the apron, where actors perform most of their action. This area is traditionally equipped with a table and two chairs, and the principal stage props placed upstage. Behind these, at upstage centre, is the orchestra pit, known in *Diaoqiang* terminology as the *Changmian Tang* (场面堂), often visible to the audience, which provides live musical accompaniment throughout the performance.

Despite the minimal physical setting on stage, *Diaoqiang* actors make full use of the table and chairs to create a virtual scenography, such as simulating city walls or strolling along streets and alleys. At the rear of the stage, doorways are located on the

left and right, known respectively as Chujiang (出将) and Ruxiang (入相), which serve as conventional entrances and exits and help signal shifts of scene. Although the *Diaoqiang* stage utilises few stage elements, the absence of realistic scenography, or what Chiang defines as “blankness in aesthetics”, encourages the spectator to actively transform the bare space into an imagined environment.

Despite this, stage arrangement, positional shifts and actor formations are also essential components in structuring stage space. This dynamic is particularly evident in the “Seven Brothers” aria, at which point Zhaojun has already departed for the frontier while the emperor prepares to return to the Han palace. The emperor moves from the downstage area (point E) to stage left (point C), then ascends onto the table at the upstage centre. In this context, the table signifies an elevated position, allowing the emperor to stand tall and see farther. Meanwhile, the procession of soldiers and Zhaojun through the Ghost Doorway creates a layered spatial relationship. Three soldiers enter first, followed by Zhaojun and a final soldier who uses two flags to simulate a chariot, with Hatun bringing up the rear. As shown in **Figure 6**, although the leading characters appear physically close on stage, vertical differentiation produces a perceived emotional and geographical distance.



Figure 6. Video footage, timestamp 00:25:46

A comparison between the two recorded performances further reveals how reconstruction is adapted to accommodate different stage scales. On a larger stage, as seen in the second recording, the troupe utilises the expansive space to create a more dynamic visual composition. For instance, during Hatun’s entrance, he first walks around the stage in a few circles to perform his *lingzi* skills, a basic technique in traditional opera involving the wielding, shaking, and rotating of long pheasant feathers. Following this, he moves to the centre stage for his formal appearance. These introductory movements effectively embody Hatun’s character and his dominant power in the narrative, expressing his ambition and confidence through purely physical means.

The additional 15-second *lingzi* performance is a subtle adaptation for the larger stage, designed to capture the spectator's attention. Rather than simply preserving form, the troupe enhances both visual narrative and audience engagement by adjusting the duration and scale of movement.

Group blocking (*qunti diaodu*, 群体调度), one of the notable features of this performance, refers to coordinated movement involving three or more performers, often employed for walk-on roles (*longtao*, 龙套) such as soldiers, eunuchs, and palace maids. (Yan, 2008, p. 57) Although the original text of *Autumn in the Han Palace* provides no specific movement instructions for these walk-on actors, the troupe arranges their choreography based on the conventions of Chinese opera. The procession demonstrates considerable flexibility in both blocking and static positioning. Nevertheless, the movements are not improvised but closely adhere to conventional formations, resulting in an aesthetically ordered stage composition. The following table (Table 1) outlines the core stage formations of the walk-on roles:

Table 1: Stage formations of walk-on performers.

Timestamp	Walk-ons	Formations	Description
00:00:35	4	Small procession (<i>xiao baidui</i> , 小摆队)	The small procession is used in more intimate scenes, such as meetings in the commander's tent. Soldiers enter the stage and stand in orderly formation on both sides.
00:02:04	4	Oblique line and exit (<i>tuimo xiehutong yu woxia</i> , 推磨斜胡同与窝下)	The soldiers walk around the stage and stand in an oblique line near the exit, with Hatun leading the departure. This formation signifies that they are following Hatun to the next destination.
00:04:45	10	Grand procession (<i>da baidui</i> , 大摆队)	The grand procession is a solemn and majestic formation in which eunuchs and palace maids enter the stage in pairs, preceding the emperor.
00:06:57	10	Standing in a horizontal line	The eunuchs and palace maids stand in a horizontal line near the

		(<i>guihou zhengyizi</i> , 归后正一字)	upstage area, facing the audience, while the emperor and Zhaojun perform at centre stage.
00:18:24	10	Rushing off the stage (<i>yiwu xia</i> , 一窝下)	The eunuchs and palace maids rush off the stage in disorder, signifying an emergency evacuation.
	4	Entrance with apprehension formation (<i>qinzhu shang</i> , 擒住上)	The soldiers seize Zhaojun using an apprehension formation. After circling her several times, they stop while two soldiers strike a “bow-and-arrow” pose.
00:19:00	4	Apprehension formation and paired exit (<i>qinxia yu chougupai duixia zuhe</i> , 擒下与抽骨牌队下组合)	The soldiers squat into a horse stance, simulating the act of riding. They then escort Zhaojun slowly from centre stage towards the exit.
00:25:40	4	Running across the stage (<i>paoguo shang, paoguo xia</i> , 跑过上, 跑过下)	The soldiers move along the Ghost Doorway (also known as the Running Lantern Path, <i>zouma deng guidao xian</i> 走马灯轨道线). Three soldiers lead the formation, followed by Zhaojun and another soldier who uses two flags to simulate a chariot.
00:30:32	8	Entrance and standing in a horizontal line (<i>zhengyizi shang</i> 正一字上)	The eunuchs and palace maids enter the stage in a line and stand near the upstage area as the emperor prepares to return to the Han palace.

Two contrasting formations are particularly significant in articulating underlying narrative relations. The troupe uses the “Small Procession” and “Grand Procession” to stage a host-guest relationship between the Han dynasty and the northern forces. Four northern soldiers enter the stage in a small procession, evoking a nomadic atmosphere of a long march. In contrast, the ten-person grand procession, moving in a solemn and hierarchical line, serves as a majestic symbol of the Han dynasty. For much of the play, the walk-on performers stand in a horizontal line near the upstage area. Their static

and orderly formation allows the audience to focus on the protagonists. By varying the density and rhythm of the walk-on formations, the troupe transforms textual details into physical stage language, allowing the spectator to perceive differences through the formation.

Throughout the play, the troupe choreographs group blocking in strict adherence to established conventions. On the one hand, this reinforces the principle of archaeological reconstruction by preserving traditional formation systems. On the other hand, the use of these traditional formations allows the troupe to maintain a dynamic visual rhythm and achieve narrative efficiency, compensating for the absence of static scenery. From the perspective of spectator reception, such stylised formations provide cues for the spectator to read and decode the performance, as Chinese opera conventions have long developed into a mature, historically shared framework for both performance and appreciation. A knowledgeable spectator does not merely watch the shapes form on shape; they decode them instantly as signs of military tension or spatial transition.

Ultimately, the *Diaoqiang* troupe's stage arrangements demonstrate how minimal props and conventional formations are mobilized to construct symbolic meaning rather than literal scenery. Their strategies reveal that archaeological reconstruction is not just about preserving form; it actively engages the spectator's interpretation through shared cultural symbols of classical performance, recalibrating historical authenticity to remain intelligible and resonant for modern spectators.

5.2. The Extra-Daily Bodily Movements

The bodily techniques employed in *Diaoqiang* performance can be understood through Eugenio Barba's concept of the "extra-daily", which refers to scenic behavior found predominantly in codified Eastern performance forms. This technique requires actors to move on stage in ways that are contrary to daily habits, while remaining controlled, in order to create a heightened theatrical situation on stage. In Chinese opera, the extra-daily movement is achieved through exaggerated and stylised gestures to attract the audience's attention and emphasise the message of the movement (Chiang, 1993). These bodily movements are specifically designed to intensify expression and enhance perceptibility. The "four skills and five methods" (sigong wufa 四功五法), foundational techniques of *xiqu* performance, constitute a codified system of bodily signs, akin to what Roland Barthes describes as a system of codes awaiting interpretation.

This is evident again in the contrasting entrances of Hatun, the Northern envoy, and the Han emperor, where their emotion is externalised through bodily movement. Hatun wears a *lingzi* (翎子) (**Figure 7**), particularly in larger stage productions, performing *lingzi* techniques in front of soldiers standing at the sides of the stage. He circles the stage while manipulating the pheasant feathers in rhythmic gestures, then stops at centre stage to make an appearance and recite his lines. His expansive bodily movements and technical skills amplify his presence and suggest his dominant status in the narrative. In contrast, the emperor enters with his head bowed and in measured pace, appearing preoccupied. Upon seeing Zhaojun, he approaches her in a few quick steps, then takes a few steps back; the hesitation reveals his conflicted feelings about Zhaojun's departure. His movements embody the tension between political focus and intimate attachment. Rather than being directly expressed through dialogue, the actors convey the subtle emotions directly to the audience through "extra-daily bodily movement", while the movements themselves remain aesthetically stylised.

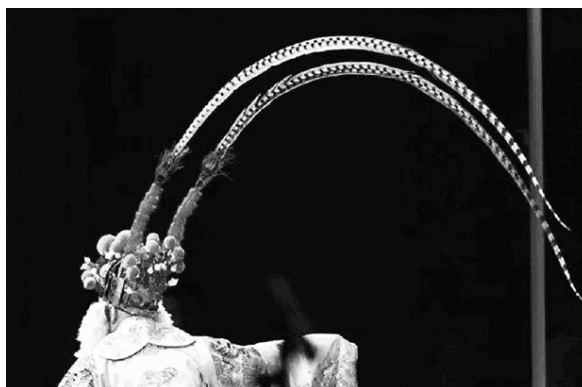


Figure 7: *Lingzi* is often worn by male martial roles, also known as *wusheng* (武生).

The strategic calibration of the "inner frame" is further evident in the *Diaoqiang* troupe's introduction of an additional two-minute farewell scene, which is absent from the original text but serves as a proactive negotiation with modern spectatorship. This scene heightens the dramatic conflict through intense physical confrontation and symbolic action. When the emperor embraces Zhaojun before their parting, Hatun interrupts with a sudden, booming, and rough voice from the *Ruxiang* door. The stage composition is disrupted. Hatun and the soldiers separate the couple and seize Zhaojun using an apprehension formation. As the emperor rushes to her aid, Hatun seizes his dragon robe amid the chaos and casts it aside, throwing the emperor towards stage right. The dragon robe here, representing Han authority and dignity, is stripped of its power through the act of physical desecration. By externalising power relations through embodied action, this additional scene can be seen as the boldest stroke of the entire performance, layered with expressive emotion and political

implications. It demonstrates that archaeological reconstruction is not merely a faithful reproduction but involves selective augmentation to appeal to modern audiences.

The emperor's response to Zhaojun's abduction once again exposes his powerlessness, shifting the focus from apparent chaos to his inner turmoil. Remaining in a fallen stance at stage right, he trembles towards the exit. His despair is codified through the single-leg kneeling step (*dantui guicuobu*, 单腿跪蹉步), a strained ground movement across the stage, as he attempts to chase after them but fails. He then stands up and returns to stage right in quick steps. Upon seeing the discarded dragon robe on stage, symbolising his humiliation, he is overwhelmed by emotion. He takes a few steps back, flutters his sleeves, and shakes his headwear. Accompanied by the rhythm of the *guban*, gongs, and cymbals, he takes a rightward backstep (*you cuobu*, 右蹉步) towards the proscenium and stomps. Twice, he touches his forehead, murmuring, "I can no longer be the Emperor of the Han dynasty. I can no longer be the Emperor of the Han dynasty!", the modern spectator does not require naturalistic exposition. Instead, from the perspective of reception, its meaning is derived directly from the tightly controlled variations in movement, tempo, and vocal intensity.

At the same time, the boundary between classical convention and the actor interpretation is clearly visible during the performance of the aria "Wild Geese Falling" (雁儿落). When the imperial secretary and minister return onstage, the emperor accuses them of being useless. He then staggers back several steps due to his overwhelming emotion following his emotional outburst, mimicking a sudden onset of dizziness due to excessive grief and anger that can increase heart rate and blood pressure. This subtle movement is a realistic imitation of dizziness and, as Yu Zhenfei (1979, p. 64) notes, is a kind of *free action* within *established conventions*.

In the fictional world on stage, actors use extra-daily scenic behavior, but they must maintain consistent bodily language to effectively engage the spectator. As Okuş (2020, p. 25) suggests, consistency is necessary to make the fictional meaningful. From a reception perspective, this consistency enables spectators to recognise and interpret the symbolic system of extra-daily movement. Within the framework of archaeological reconstruction, performative flexibility, such as slight variations in timing, emphasis, and performance, is still allowed. Actors can incorporate their own interpretations into their roles through bodily movements, and this unpredictability sustains the vitality of live performance; to some extent, improvisation is what makes the live performance charming.

Taken together, the troupe's stylized gestures and choreographed postures transform physical movement into narrative symbolism, conveying emotional states without relying on realistic action or props. Techniques such as circling, bow-and-arrow poses, and horse stance embody conflict, capture and resistance, allowing spectators to decode meaning through convention. In this way, bodily movement becomes a key site where archaeological reconstruction intersects with modern reception.

5.3. The Soundscape of *Diaoqiang* Performance

Sound is one of the major elements of *Diaoqiang* performance, and is structured through three interconnected elements, namely vocal singing, musical accompaniment, and offstage sound. These elements together construct the narrative and emotional atmosphere of the scene. This section examines each of these sound elements in turn.

Solo singing is a defining feature of *zaju*, traditionally assigned to a single protagonist according to the conventions of *moben* (末本, a play where the male lead performs all arias) or *danben* (旦本, a play where the female lead performs all arias). *Autumn in the Han Palace* was originally a *moben* play, in which the emperor is responsible for solo singing. Although many later adaptations, such as Huangmei opera, Cantonese opera, and even recent Kunqu opera, rarely adhere to this convention, they often redistribute the singing roles among multiple actors or shift vocal focus to Zhaojun. Consequently, the emperor is frequently reduced to a foil for Zhaojun rather than remaining the sole vocal figure. Nevertheless, the *Diaoqiang* troupe adheres to the principle of archaeological reconstruction, faithfully preserving the convention of a single soloist. By maintaining the emperor as the sole singer throughout the performance, the troupe preserves the original dramaturgical structure and intent of the *zaju* form.

Although the *Diaoqiang* performance retains the *zaju* convention of solo singing and most of the lyrics from the original text, it introduces strategically placed spoken lines within sung passages, to make the classical lyrics less obscure and more comprehensible to contemporary audiences. For instance, during the aria "Triumph Song", the troupe inserts a line between the emperor's singing lines.

"TRIUMPH SONG" (*De Sheng Ling* 得胜令)

EMPEROR [*sings*]:

Can none of you be a pillar of the nation?
Years spent feeding iron-clad men on the frontier.
You attend me day and night,
yet my wife, who shared my hardships, has been cast away!

MINISTER: Let us draw our swords and fight!

EMPEROR [*sings*]:

Speak not to me of swords and spears,
my heart trembles like a startled deer.
Today the empress goes north,
how can a man still hold himself upright?

This insertion does not interrupt the musical flow and original lyrics; rather, it speaks to the spectator by proposing another means of declaring war against the Northern force. The emperor's hesitation exposes a paralysing fear born of ongoing military conflict, a vulnerability that might otherwise remain subtextual within the play. By adding this single line, the troupe provides a contemporary perspective that helps the spectator grasp the tension quickly.

On top of singing solo, the troupe is also renowned for its ability to stop the audience in their tracks, with the performance being always intense and captivating due to the masterful control of rhythm by the *guban* player. The musical characteristics of *Diaoqiang* are often summarised as “not relying on string and wind instruments, using gongs and drums to mark the rhythm, one person initiating the singing and others responding” (Shi, 2008, p. 28). In other words, *Diaoqiang* music relies less on harmonic development and more on rhythmic articulation, with the actor initiating the vocal line and the musicians providing responsive accompaniment. Typically, *Diaoqiang* performance consists of a band of six musicians:

Table 2: Musical instruments used in *Diaoqiang* performance.

Instrument player	Function
Guban (鼓板)	The guban player, who performs both the <i>bangu</i> and <i>paiban</i> clappers, functions in a role similar to a concertmaster in a Western orchestra. This musician is responsible for leading the tuning, cueing musicians for tempo and dynamics, and remaining in sync with the actors on stage.
Small gong (小锣)	The xiaoluo player can be understood as an associate concertmaster, stepping in for the <i>guban</i> player when necessary and assisting in leading the ensemble. The <i>xiaoluo</i> also serves to mark the rhythmic phrasing and divisions of the aria.

Zhengchui (正吹)	“Zhengchui” refers to the lead player in the string and wind section, who is responsible for playing <i>dizi</i> (笛子), <i>dalu</i> (大锣), and providing vocal accompaniment (<i>bangqiang</i> , 帮腔).
Fuchui (副吹)	“Fuchui” acts as the associate to this lead player and is responsible for playing <i>banhu</i> (板胡), <i>zhangu</i> (战鼓), <i>dabo</i> (大钹), and providing vocal accompaniment.
The Fifth (五后场)	The fifth person in the ensemble plays large cymbals or <i>dabo</i> (大钹), <i>erhu</i> , and provides vocal accompaniment.
The Sixth (六后场)	The sixth person plays small cymbals or <i>xiaobo</i> (小钹), <i>pubo</i> (普钹), <i>yueqin</i> (月琴), and provides vocal accompaniment.

Relying on only six musicians, the ensemble provides a strong rhythmic backbone for the performance, emphasising body movement, dialogue, and combat scenes. Through their rendering of *qupai* (曲牌, tune matrices), they could build the emotional atmosphere, whether to emphasise the feelings of sorrow, tension, or hesitation, and ensure that the music remains closely attuned to the characters and context of the scene.

Within the musical accompaniment system, repetition through backing vocals (*bāngqiāng*, 帮腔) plays a crucial role in building dramatic and emotional momentum. The *bāngqiāng* style can be traced back to *Nanxi* (南戏), the earliest form of Chinese opera that emerged in southern China, and later to Yiyang opera. Today, this technique is used in various regional operas (*difangxi*, 地方戏), including Sichuan, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Chaozhou opera. *Bāngqiāng* is not only performed as vocal accompaniment but can also function as a “voice-over” or as a character’s monologue. However, the *Diaoqiang* troupe uses this technique specifically for lyrical and emotive purposes. In the aria “Plum Blossom Wine”, repeated phrases (bolded below) are echoed by the ensemble.

“Plum Blossom Wine” (*Mei Hua Jiu*)

EMPEROR [*sings*]:

.....

She followed the northern men to the desolate wilderness,

I, with my imperial carriage, **return to Xianyang;**

Return to Xianyang, I

pass the palace walls;

Pass the palace walls and
circle around the cloister;
Circle around the cloister under
the faint moonlight;
The faint moonlight as
the night grows cold;
The night grows cold and
the cicadas cry;
The cicadas cry
behind the green gauze window;
Behind the green gauze window,
I try hard not to think of her.

When the emperor returns to the Han palace and is moved by the familiar sights, the ensemble's repetition of his final lyrics amplifies his expression of grief and sorrow. The call-and-response technique enables the spectator to experience the emperor's deepening sorrow.

Furthermore, offstage sound is another commonly used device in Chinese opera performance, most often employed for narration or voice-over. What distinguishes *Diaoqiang* is its use of the cries of wild geese as offstage sound, introducing a more evocative and symbolic auditory element. The cries of wild geese are a metaphor that has not yet appeared in this episode. In the scene where the emperor prepares to return to the Han palace, the distant cries of wild geese disrupt the silence. The emperor is startled. He pauses, listens, and walks around the stage in search of the source. His responses direct the spectator's attention towards something beyond the stage. Rather than relying on a visual representation of the wild geese, the troupe prompts spectator to engage in interpreting the scene through sound. The auditory cue functions as a trigger that draws on the spectator's familiarity with the classical wild-geese metaphor, evoking associations of loneliness and melancholy.

The emperor then sings the original lyrics: "Suddenly I seemed to hear the wild geese flying south, their cries loud and clear. Yet all I saw were cattle and sheep, it was only the sound of the carriage wheels bearing Zhaojun away." The troupe ingeniously introduces the vital metaphor from the source text without disrupting the performance flow. By creating the offstage cries of wild geese, the troupe sparks the audience's imagination, providing an immersive and engaging theatrical experience in which the spectator can hear the invisible and construct the missing visual landscape, thus becoming an active participant in the creation of its theatrical meaning. As Bernard Dort

(1982, p. 64) notes, theatre performance is a meaningful polyphony open to the spectator.

This analysis demonstrates that *Diaoqiang's* vocal delivery, instrumental accompaniment and offstage sound foreground the expressive power of soundscape in shaping audience interpretation. These strategies show how reconstruction is recalibrated for accessibility, balancing historical fidelity with the affective demands of contemporary spectatorship.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that *Diaoqiang's* adaptation of *Autumn in the Han Palace* achieves a dynamic balance between the pursuit of archaeological reconstruction and the demands of contemporary reception. Moving beyond the dominant scholarly view of *Diaoqiang* as a “living fossil”, it demonstrates that the preservation of *Autumn in the Han Palace* or of *Yuan zaju*, is not necessarily a passive act of archaeological reconstruction, but a proactive negotiation between faithful representation and contemporary spectator expectations.

By placing Patrice Pavis's concept of archaeological reconstruction in dialogue with Susan Bennett's reception theory, this paper offers a spectator-oriented perspective on how Chinese classical performance navigates the tensions of adaptation. As Daniel Mesguich (2011, p. 115) explains, staging a classic involves not only the visible script but also an “invisible” layer shaped by its history, interpretations, and performance traditions (composé de la mémoire du texte visible, de son histoire, de sa poussière [gloses, commentaires, exégèses, mises en scène, voire effets des intimidations successives par lui apportées, etc.]). Thus, this paper argues that archaeological reconstruction-oriented performance cannot be understood solely at the level of staging strategies (the visible “inner frame”); it must also be examined through the interpretive processes by which meaning is produced in reception. (the invisible “outer frame”).

Methodologically, this paper adopts a spectator-oriented qualitative approach based on close analysis of recorded performances. By treating the researcher as a situated spectator, it proposes an alternative way of accessing reception without relying on interviews or survey data, instead foregrounding the perceptual and interpretive mechanisms embedded in performance itself.

In fact, the original text of *Autumn in the Han Palace* is not written down to the smallest detail, thereby allowing the troupe some flexibility to make minor adjustments in adapting the stage performance. Empirically, this paper focuses on three major

components of *Diaoqiang* performance. First, stage arrangement, or *mise-en-scène*, largely adheres to traditional stage conventions, using minimal props and structured stage blocking to sustain an aesthetically ordered composition on stage. Second, extra-daily bodily movements transform codified gestures into expressive signs, allowing actors to communicate emotional and narrative meaning within a shared cultural symbolic system of classical performance. Third, the *Diaoqiang* troupe constructs a multi-layered soundscape through solo singing, musical accompaniment, and offstage sound that guides the spectator's attention and enhances the accessibility of the classic for contemporary audiences. Taken together, these elements show that accessibility does not necessarily rely on radical rewriting, but on the calibration of performance codes that bridge the gap between faithful reconstruction and modern perception.

In the context of Chinese opera performance, including *Diaoqiang*, the narrative is no longer the primary focus of performance. Instead, the spectators attend closely to the actors' singing, acting, body movements, and other performative techniques. Over the centuries, the Xinchang Diaoqiang Opera Troupe has remained committed to the "archaeological reconstruction" of Yuan *zaju*. At the same time, the troupe seeks to engage modern audiences to maintain contemporary relevance. By shifting the analytical focus from textual dissemination or production strategies to the lived experience of contemporary spectators, this paper provides a new perspective to understanding how classics continue to generate meaning through their interaction with evolving spectatorship.

Future research may extend this approach by comparing *Diaoqiang* with other operatic forms, such as Ming-Qing *chuanqi* operas, or with more commercially oriented repertoires such as its *Monk Mulian* Series, to examine how different performance traditions negotiate similar tensions between convention and reception. Moreover, it would also be valuable to investigate how *Autumn in the Han Palace* is adapted in other forms of opera, exploring how different regional aesthetics, and staging conventions influence their interpretation. Further engagement with practitioners, including actors, musicians, and directors, would deepen the understanding of how interpretive decisions are made within contemporary performance practice. In this sense, the afterlife of Yuan *zaju* is found not in its preservation as a cultural artifact, but in its continual reconstruction through performance and spectatorship.

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