



KharkivState Academy of Design and Arts
Graphic design department
Visual Communication Design

Contemporary Graphic Interpretation of Tibetan Opera Imagery within the System of Visual Culture

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ISSUES AND RELEVANCE



01 Why is this topic important?

Tibetan opera is national intangible heritage with rich Tibetan culture. This study addresses its weak visual communication, helps young audiences learn about it, and provides references for revitalizing ethnic heritage through design.

02 What do you want to research or create?

This research explores the visual translation of Tibetan opera under contemporary aesthetics. It analyzes Tibetan opera visual symbols and creates three flat illustrations: The Soul of Masks, Light of the Stage, The Road of Inheritance, combining Thangka aesthetics with modern illustration.

03 How is it connected to culture, design, people, or history?

It connects Tibetan traditional culture and graphic design. The works shorten the cultural distance between young audiences and Tibetan opera, while recording the living inheritance stories of opera inheritors.

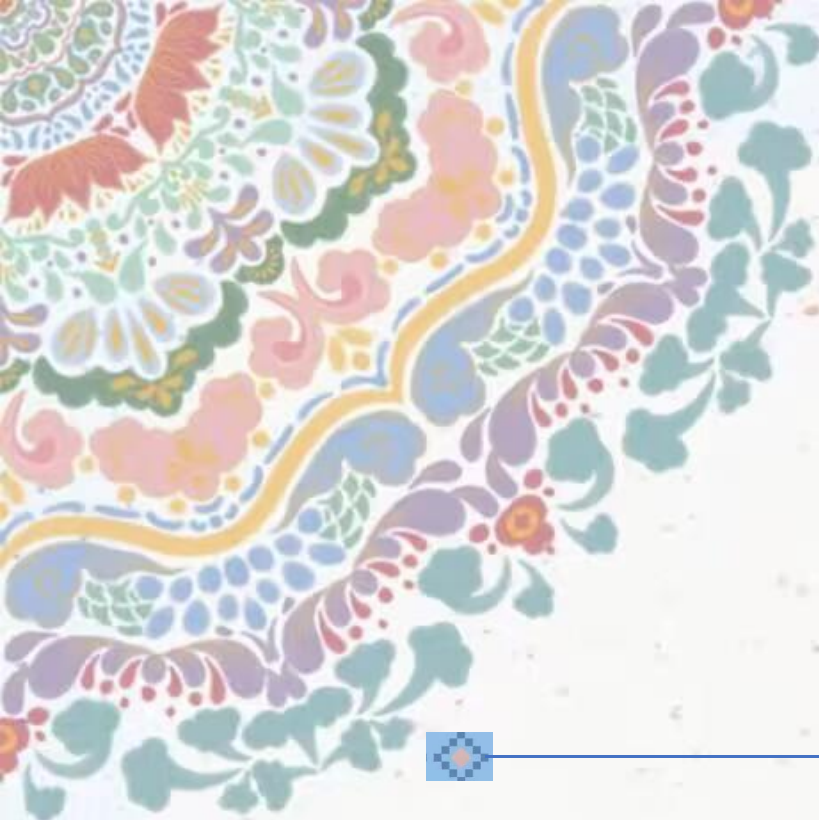
04 What is the cultural, historical, or social background of this theme?

Culturally, Tibetan opera integrates myths, folk dances and rituals. Historically, it has two main genres: white- mask and blue- mask Tibetan opera. Socially, China advocates creative transformation of intangible heritage, requiring lightweight visual works for ethnic culture.

Thesis Information

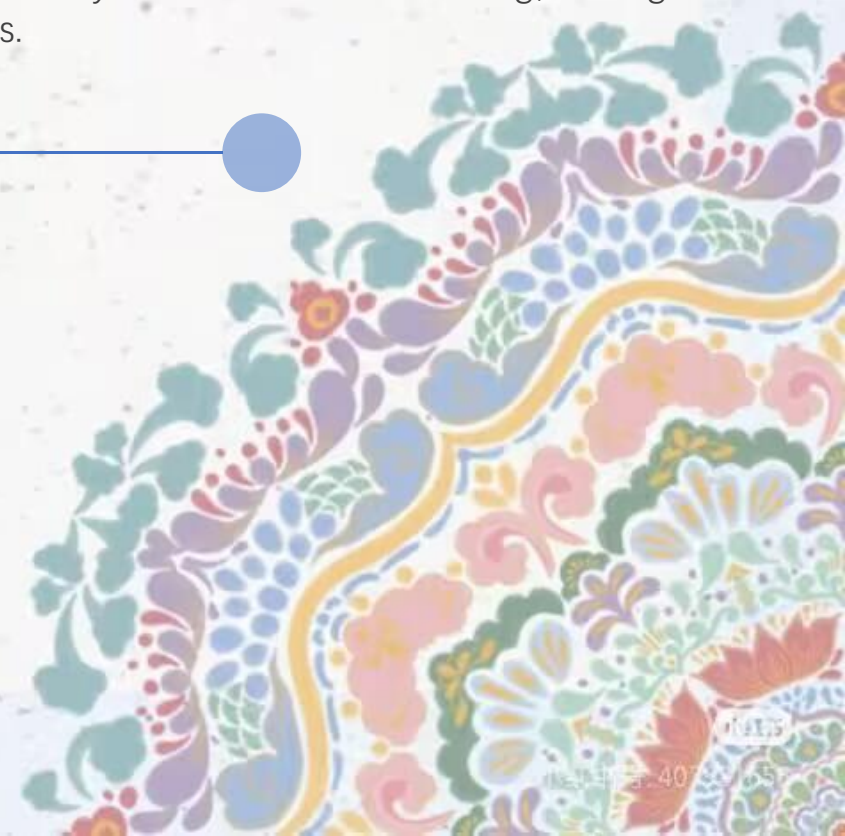
- **Master's Thesis Topic:**
Visual Design Research of Tibetan Opera
Series Graphic Works under Contemporary
Aesthetics
- **Object of Research:**
Tibetan Opera (national intangible cultural
heritage)
- **Subject of Research:**
Visual translation and illustration creation of
ethnic intangible cultural heritage based on
semiotic and visual narrative theories
- **Territorial and Chronological Scope:**
China, Tibetan areas, Tibetan opera culture
(ancient to modern)





Project Background

Against the backdrop of creative transformation of intangible cultural heritage in the post-World Heritage era, Tibetan Opera, a national-level intangible cultural heritage, embodies Tibetan beliefs, stage art and inherited cultural context. It is a vital carrier of Tibetan collective memory and a typical microcosm of China's ethnic minority intangible heritage. Celebrated for masks, costumes and folk tales, Tibetan Opera has unique cultural genes with great folk, artistic and educational value. Yet it faces geographic limits and monotonous communication forms. Current digital preservation mainly focuses on data archiving, lacking lightweight visual interpretation of its cultural stories.



Research Objectives

This design carries out comprehensive academic exploration from "cultural excavation" to "theoretical construction", "design practice" and finally "value promotion". It addresses the communication challenges of Tibetan Opera heritage. Through case studies, it explores design's role in heritage conservation, and seeks innovative approaches for ethnic traditional art to "come alive" and "be passed down" in modern society.

Research Content and Methods

Research content includes four parts: cultural excavation, theoretical construction, design practice, and value promotion.

1. Collect literature, academic papers, oral histories, and field materials related to Tibetan Opera.

2. Analyze its masks, costumes, performance scenes, and regional landscapes as core visual resources.

3. Diagnose contemporary communication problems and establish design principles.

4. Complete three series illustrations: Soul of the Mask, Light of the Stage, and Path of Inheritance.

Methods: literature review, field investigation, semiotic analysis, case study, and design practice.

Data: 10 interviews, 4 performance observations, about 100 first-hand images, and about 100 documented images.



Research Source

1.Liu Z Q. A History of Chinese Tibetan Opera [M]. Lhasa: Tibet People's Publishing House, 2009.

2.Hware S T. A brief discussion on mask art of Tibetan Opera [J]. Tibetan Art Research, 2013

3.Cao Y L. Conservation and inheritance of Tibetan Opera as intangible cultural heritage [J]. Qinghai Ethnic Studies, 2010

4.Zhuang C H. Living inheritance and innovative development of Tibetan Opera [J]. Tibetan Art Research, 2020

5.Hu H W. Contemporary-aesthetic transformation of traditional elements within Chinese-style illustrations [J]. Shanghai Packaging, 2024

6.Shu X Y, Zuo H. Visual characteristics and contemporary translation of Thangka decorative patterns [J]. Decoration, 2022(07)

7.Chen N. A methodology for visual-design-driven revitalization of intangible cultural heritage [J]. Decoration, 2019

8.Lin J F, Wang Q. Creative transformation and innovative development of intangible cultural heritage [J]. China Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2023



Key Reference Projects

■ Ethnic Intangible Cultural Heritage Triptych Illustration



Visual: Flat decorative style, framed composition, pattern filling

Color: High-saturation traditional ethnic colors

Symbols: Visual transformation of folk utensils and totems

Narrative: Continuous storytelling in triptych form

Inspiration: Learn from serialization; Optimization: Simplify decorations, highlight the core symbols of Tibetan opera

Key Reference Projects

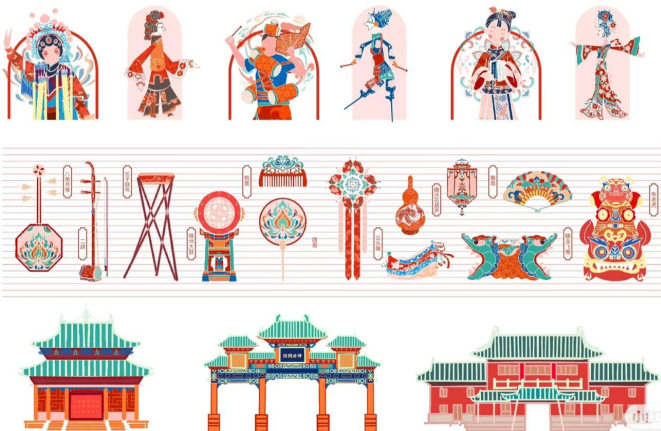
Physical display



插画展示
Illustration showcase



元素提取
element extraction

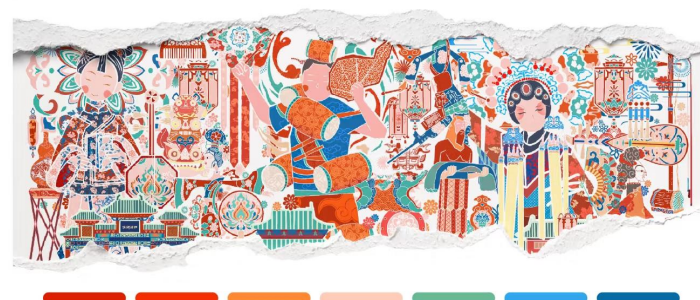


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Derivative product design



整合展示
Integrated design



招贴展示
Poster display



文创应用
Cultural and creative applications



邮票与门票展示
Stamps & Ticket Displays



小红书号: youniyouni8888

Design Concept

Core concept: Translation of Traditional Aesthetics, Dialogue Between Ancient and Modern Cultures.

The design avoids superficial stacking of Tibetan cultural symbols.

Layer one: masks embody national spiritual beliefs.

Layer two: the stage demonstrates the artistic charm of Tibetan Opera.

Layer three: inheritance sustains the vitality of intangible cultural heritage.

Visually, the works combine Thangka composition, auspicious patterns, and traditional colors with modern flat illustration.

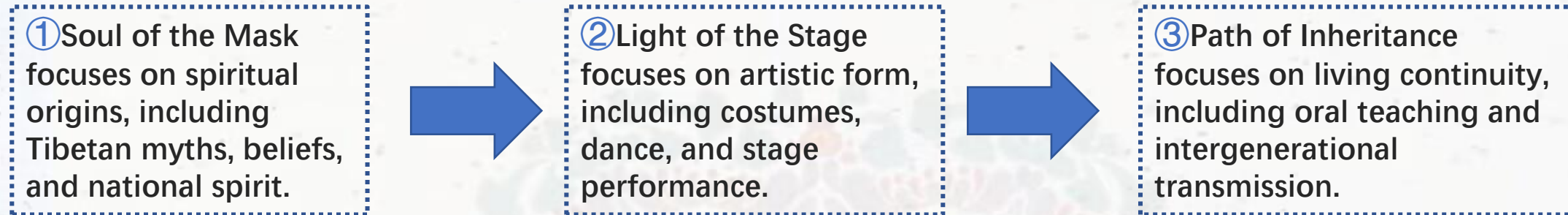
The aim is to transform Tibetan Opera from a distant heritage record into perceptible visual stories.



Narrative Framework:

Soul – Form – Inheritance

Three works form a progressive narrative logic: **Soul, Form, and Inheritance.**



Together they guide viewers to understand the complete value system of Tibetan Opera culture.

Soul of the Mask—visual elements



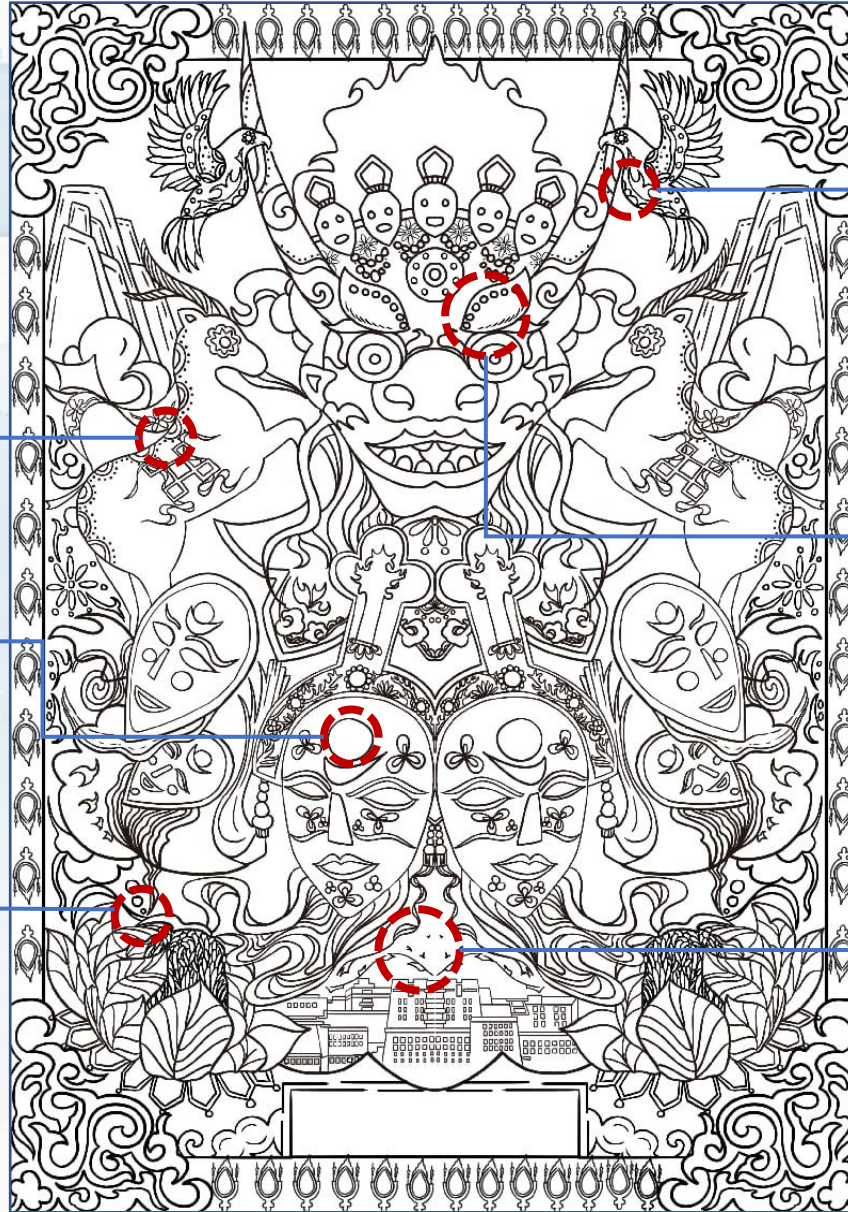
Tibetan antelope



Blue Mask of Tibetan Opera



Snow Lotus



Upland Buzzard



Mask of Yamantaka for Cham Dance



Potala Palace

Light of the Stage—visual elements



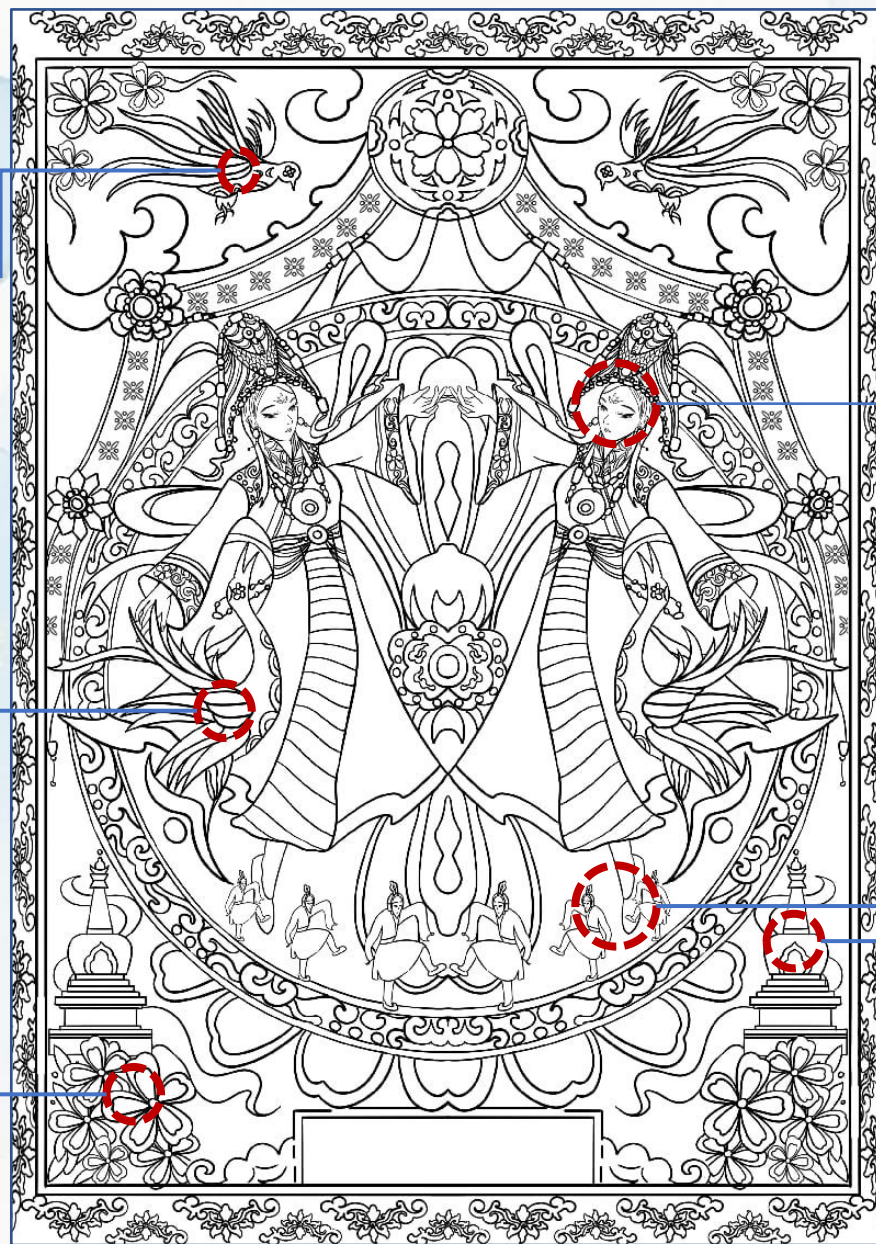
Common Pheasant



Black-necked Crane



Galsang Flower



Princess Wencheng



Tibetan opera actors



White Stupa

Path of Inheritance-visual elements



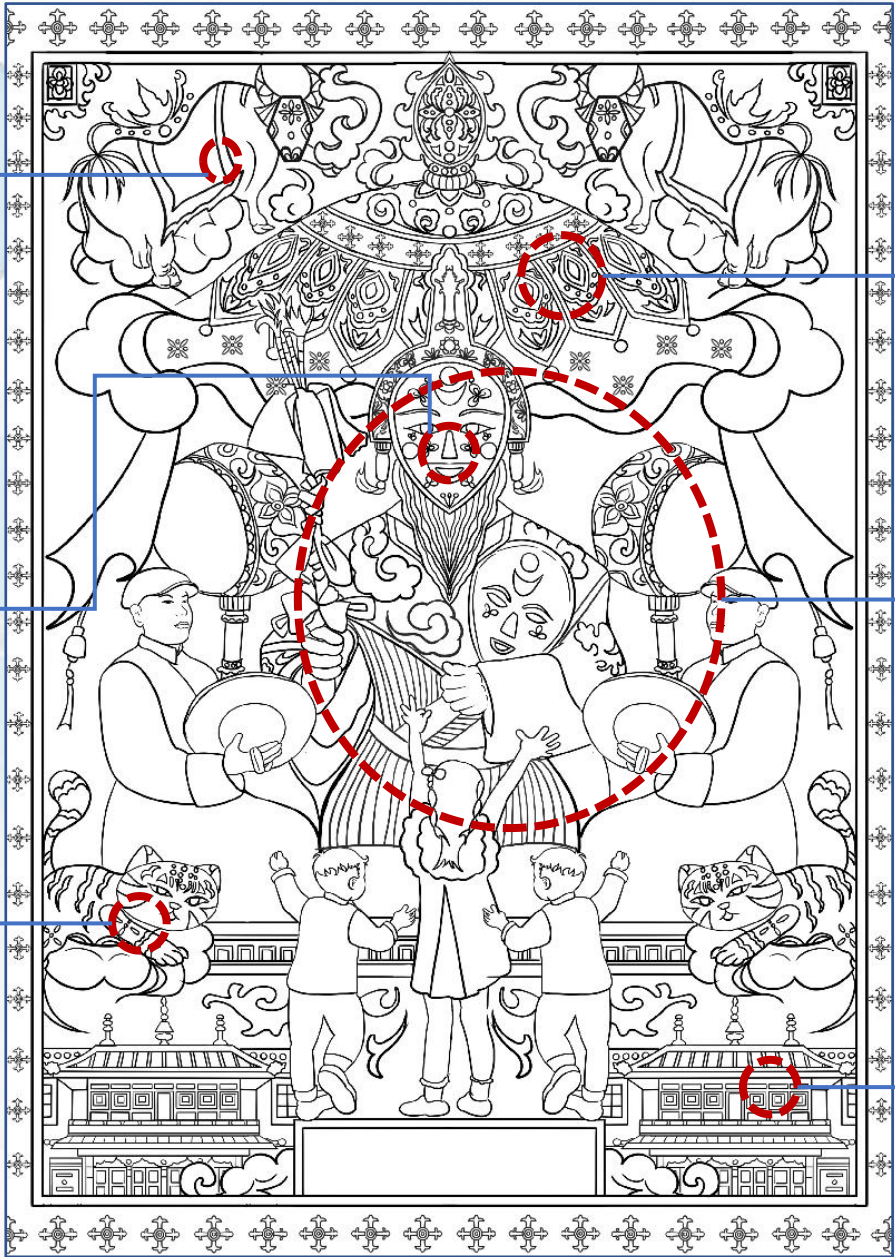
Yak



Blue Mask of Tibetan Opera



Pallas's Cat



Precious Parasol



Performance



Jokhang Temple



Description of The Soul of Masks

This illustration 'The Soul of Masks' draws on the symmetrical composition of Thangka paintings and centers on Tibetan mask culture, integrating Tibetan opera masks and Cham guardian masks. At the top sits the solemn mask of Yamantaka, while two classic blue Tibetan opera masks are symmetrically arranged in the middle, with small decorative masks on both sides. Plateau elements such as Tibetan antelopes, sacred birds and snow lotuses surround the scene, and the Potala Palace together with auspicious cloud and scroll patterns is painted at the bottom. With dark Tibetan blue as the background and the traditional Thangka colour scheme, the work uses modern flat illustration techniques. It combines religious guardian masks, Tibetan opera masks, plateau creatures and local landmarks to interpret the spiritual connotation of Tibetan masks and explore Tibetan faith and cultural memory, enabling young audiences to perceive ancient mask culture via contemporary visual language.





Description of Light of the Stage

This illustration 'Light of the Stage' adopts the symmetrical composition of Thangka paintings and focuses on Tibetan opera stage performances. In the centre are two gracefully dancing Tibetan opera actresses wearing gorgeous costumes and delicate headdresses. Sacred bird patterns decorate both sides of the figures, while a group of performers below recreates the lively scene of ensemble performance. Stupas stand on both sides, and Tibetan auspicious patterns such as flowers, scroll grass and auspicious clouds adorn the frame. With dark Tibetan blue as the base colour and a traditional Thangka palette including warm yellow, bright red, emerald green and lake blue, this work adopts modern flat illustration techniques. It captures the singing and dancing moments of Tibetan opera, highlights its vivid vitality and shows the unique stage charm of Tibetan opera to young audiences through contemporary visual language.





Description of The Road of Inheritance

This illustration The Road of Inheritance follows the symmetrical composition of Thangka paintings and focuses on the living inheritance of Tibetan opera. It depicts the scene where senior Tibetan opera artists pass on skills to young successors, accompanied by Tibetan opera musical instruments, traditional patterns and plateau natural elements, symbolizing the continuation of cultural heritage. Following the traditional Thangka colour palette with dark Tibetan blue as the background and matched with red, yellow, green and other colours, the work adopts modern flat illustration. It portrays the cultural transmission between generations, records the perseverance of Tibetan opera inheritors, and allows young people to feel the power of intangible cultural heritage inheritance through modern visual narration.





Jigsaw Puzzle

This jigsaw puzzle adopts the illustration elements of Tibetan opera masks. It integrates Tibetan opera culture into educational cultural and creative products to spread the intangible cultural heritage of Tibetan opera in an interesting way.

AI生成



T-shirt

T-shirt is fully printed with illustrations of Tibetan opera masks. It combines gorgeous Tibetan patterns and Tibetan opera facial masks, integrating the intangible cultural heritage of Tibetan opera into daily clothing and promoting traditional culture in everyday life.

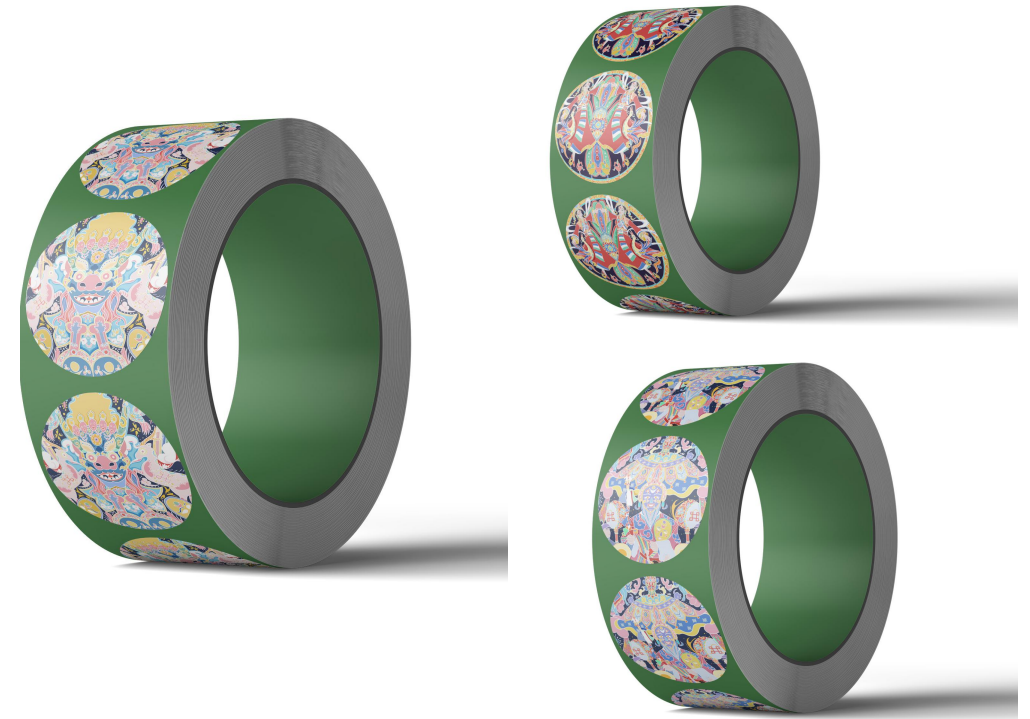
Mug

The mug is selected because mugs are widely used daily necessities. As a lightweight cultural carrier, it integrates Tibetan opera illustrations into ordinary life and promotes the intangible heritage of Tibetan opera.



Washi Tape

This washi tape is printed with Tibetan opera illustrations. As a lightweight small cultural creation, it brings Tibetan opera visual elements into daily handcraft and decoration.





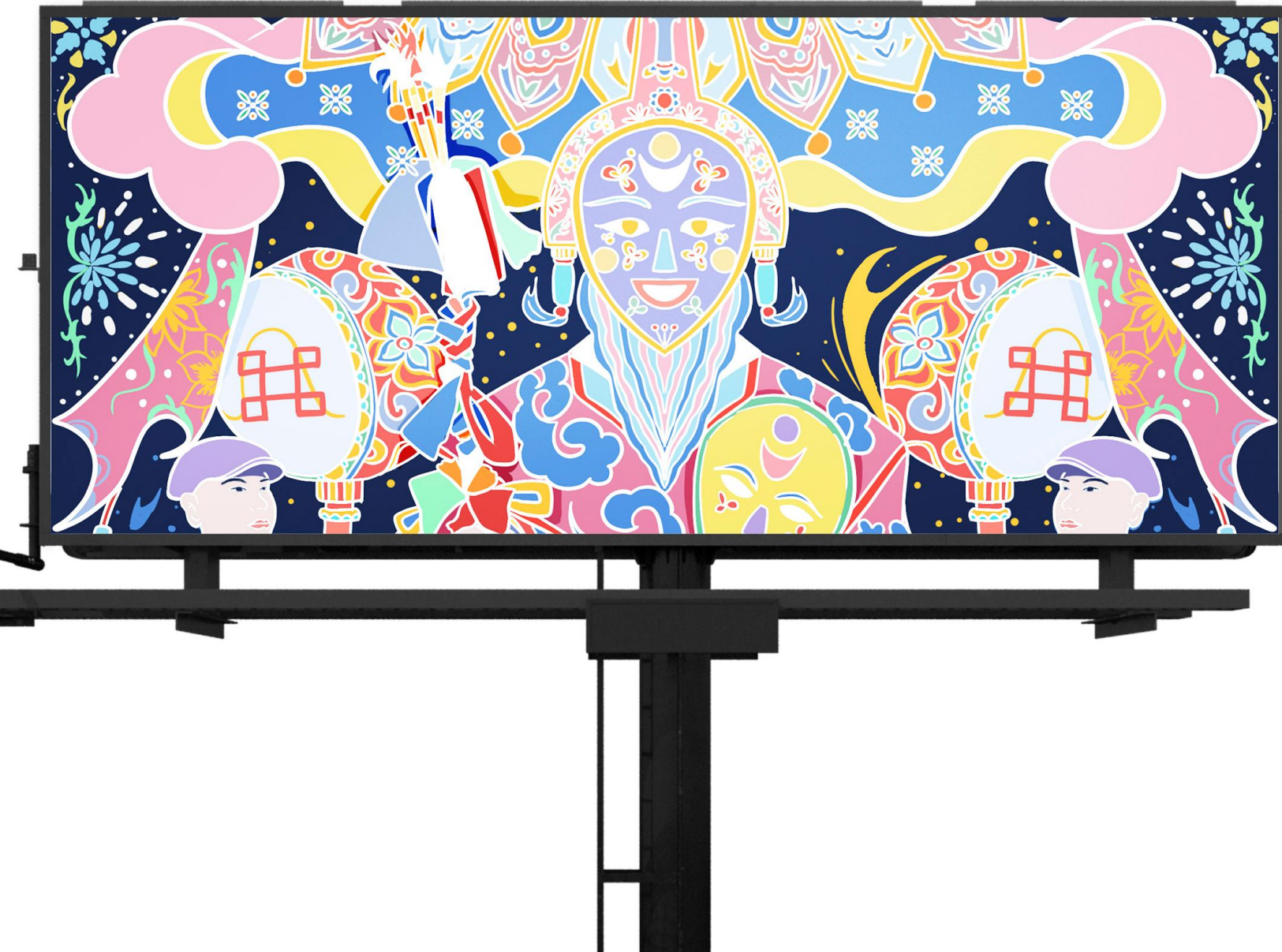
Canvas Tote Bag

This canvas tote bag is printed with Tibetan opera illustrations. Serving as a portable cultural carrier, it spreads the intangible cultural heritage of Tibetan opera in daily life.



Billboard

This billboard takes the Tibetan opera series illustrations as the main visual. It displays Tibetan opera art in the form of an outdoor publicity carrier to expand the influence of the intangible cultural heritage of Tibetan opera.



Application Extension



This group of cultural and creative products includes a canvas tote bag, washi tape and illustration cards. Visual elements such as Tibetan opera masks, stage performers and traditional Tibetan patterns are printed on the products. With bright and rich colors consistent with the illustration series, it integrates the intangible cultural heritage of Tibetan opera into daily carrying and decorative supplies, spreading Tibetan opera art in daily scenes through lightweight carriers.

Application Extension



This gift box set includes a picture album, envelope and matching cards. With the theme of Tibetan Charm · The Dream of the Play, it prints illustration elements such as Tibetan opera masks, performers, raks and Tibetan buildings on paper products. With unified style and gorgeous colors, as a packaged cultural and creative gift box of the illustration series, it fully shows the visual charm of Tibetan opera culture and conveys the unique artistic charm of this intangible heritage to the public.

Application Extension



This picture shows the application extension of this series of Tibetan opera illustrations. The patterns of The Soul of Masks, Light of the Stage and Path of Inheritance are applied to cultural and creative derivatives such as folding fans, clipboards, card lanyards and stickers, realizing the physical application of illustration visuals.

Application Extension

This set of cultural and creative products applies Tibetan opera illustrations to desk calendars, paper cups, tote bags and glasses. Combining Tibetan opera masks and ethnic patterns, it spreads the intangible heritage of Tibetan opera through daily goods.



Conclusion

Focusing on the visual communication of Tibetan Opera as a national-level intangible cultural heritage, this study adopts literature research, field investigation, semiotic analysis, case studies, and design practice to construct a “Soul–Form–Inheritance” narrative framework, propose principles of authenticity, systematicness, readability, and distinctiveness, and complete three flat illustrations: Soul of the Mask, Light of the Stage, and Path of Inheritance. The results contribute to heritage preservation, academic methodology, and youth-oriented communication, while future technological optimization will further enhance the Tibetan Opera cultural IP.



Thank you!