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RESEARCH ON INFORMATION VISUALIZATION DESIGN OF XIJU OPERA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VISUAL NARRATIVE

Master's Thesis submitted for the degree of Master

Specialty B2 Design

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The qualification work contains the results of independent research.

The use of ideas, results, and texts of other authors is properly referenced.

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ABSTRACT

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This study is based on the theory of image narrative and explores specific design approaches for the information visualization of Xiju Opera. Xiju carries the historical essence of Jiangnan culture and is one of the three major opera genres in East China. It is also a national intangible cultural heritage and is praised as the "Plum Blossom of Taihu." However, with the diversification of modern entertainment and changes in aesthetic habits, Xiju, like many traditional operas, faces development challenges such as audience loss, difficulties in inheritance, and weak dissemination. Although the government has introduced policy measures such as the "Three-Year Action Plan for the Revival of Xiju" its influence in mass communication, especially among younger groups, remains limited. As an intuitive and efficient way of conveying information, information visualization design can transform and spread the cultural connotations, artistic features, and aesthetic value of Xiju through modern design language, thereby creating new paths for the inheritance and innovation of Xiju.

First, through literature review, the study delves into the theory of image narrative and information visualization design to clarify relevant concepts and design strategies. Combined with field investigations, it summarizes and organizes information on Xiju's historical background, costume features, repertoire themes, and accompanying instruments, laying the theoretical foundation for subsequent design practice. Second, based on the collected information, three aspects – Xiju's stylistic development, costumes and instruments, and representative repertoire – are chosen as a series of themes. From the singing style, plot, and makeup of the

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corresponding repertoire, representative visual elements are extracted and then transformed into contemporary design language using image narrative theory by constructing themes, arranging plots, and creating scenes. This approach also extends to related cultural and creative products that reflect Xiju's distinctive charm, achieving the modern reinterpretation of Xiju culture. Finally, it provides new forms of expression for the promotion and dissemination of Xiju and integrates with local cultural and tourism publicity, achieving dual benefits in cultural and socio-economic value.

By combining information visualization design with the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, an innovative communication model for Xiju culture in modern society is established. This approach helps improve public awareness and influence of Xiju, stimulates cultural identity and inheritance awareness among audiences, and allows people to understand the charm of Xiju more intuitively. It can also provide a reference model for the modernization of other traditional operas, promoting the inheritance and development of drama, and serve as a foundation for better promotion of local urban cultural construction.

Keywords: Xiju opera, development schools, costumes and musical instruments, representative repertoire, information visualization design, visual narrative theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the research: With the rapid development of digital media and the impact of diverse entertainment cultures, the living inheritance of traditional opera has become a focal point of social concern. As a national intangible cultural heritage and one of the three major opera genres in East China, Xiju has over 200 years of historical heritage and rich resources in terms of schools, repertoires, and makeup, hair, and costume styles. However, it also faces issues such as audience loss, difficulties in inheritance, weak dissemination, and insufficient recognition among younger generations. Traditional stage performances and static promotional methods are difficult to adapt to contemporary audiences consumption habits. Information visualization design, as an interdisciplinary modern communication approach combined with image narrative theory, can effectively transform abstract and specialized Xiju cultural information into intuitive, legible, and perceptible visual language. This provides innovative solutions for the protection and revitalization of Xiju ' s development schools, makeup, hair and costumes, and representative repertoires, while also holding multiple values in the cultural, social, educational, and cultural tourism economy sectors.

Purpose of the research: From the perspective of image narrative theory, combined with information visualization design methods, visually translate and practice the design of the development schools of Xiju, makeup, costumes, and representative repertoires, in order to lower the public ' s, especially young audiences', cognitive threshold for Xiju, enhance the dissemination effectiveness and emotional identification of Xiju culture, and promote Xiju from "museum-style preservation" to "everyday life inheritance".

To achieve this purpose, the **following objectives** are set:

1. Sort out the cultural resources of Xi opera, including its development schools, makeup, costumes, and representative repertoire, extracting core image narrative symbols and visual translation elements.

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2. Analyze the shortcomings of existing communication forms of Xi opera (performance posters, programs, static display boards, WeChat articles, short videos, etc.), clarify the core needs of information visualization design, audience cognitive pathways, and adaptation directions for communication scenarios.

3. Introduce image narrative theory to establish information visualization design principles and methods suitable for the cultural characteristics of Xi opera, including single-image narrative and composite-image narrative, forming a design process of "theme construction—plot arrangement—scene creation."

4. Complete multidimensional visualization design practices, including genealogy charts of Xi opera development schools, makeup and costume atlases, narrative infographics of representative works such as *Pearl Tower*,*Double Push Mill*, and *Meng Lijun*, as well as Xi opera character posters, and apply them to public spaces like bus stops and subways, as well as digital media.

5. Verify the communication effect of the design results through questionnaires and audience feedback, evaluate its role in cognitive efficiency, memory retention, and emotional identification, and propose sustainable optimization strategies, providing methodological reference for the living inheritance of Xi opera and similar intangible cultural heritage information visualization design.

Object of the research – Information on Xiju opera culture and its visual communication forms mainly includes the development of schools, makeup, hairstyles and costumes, as well as representative repertoires such as *Pearl Pagoda*, *Double Grinding Mill*,and *Meng Lijun*,which are core cultural resources.

Subject of the research –

Visualization Design Strategies, Methods, and Practical Applications of Xiju Opera Information from the Perspective of Image Narrative.

Chronological framework of the research – The historical development of Xiju (from the 'Dongxiang Tune' during the Qianlong to Jiaqing years of the Qing Dynasty to contemporary Xiju) as well as the current design practice period (from October 2025 to December 2026)

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Territorial framework of the research – Centered on Yanjiaqiao, the birthplace of Xiju, in Wuxi and Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, while also taking into account the main areas of Xiju dissemination in Jiangsu, Shanghai, and other regions.

Research methods:

Literature Analysis Method

Systematically review academic monographs, journal articles, and other literature related to this study to establish a solid theoretical foundation and historical basis, ensuring rigor when selecting Xiju opera repertoires and conducting cultural interpretation. At the same time, organize previous analyses of information visualization design and image narrative theory to identify entry points suitable for this study.

Field Investigation Method

Go deep into the birthplace of Xiju opera – mainly Wuxi and Changzhou – by conducting on-site visits to Xiju opera troupes, inheritors, related exhibition halls, and audiences; conduct in-depth interviews and surveys to obtain first-hand information and real needs, ensuring that the design practice is rooted in the authentic cultural context and communication scenarios.

Case Analysis Method

Interpret information visualization design works of similar types of drama or other thematic information visualization works; analyze the visual elements such as style characteristics, graphic layout, and color combinations, and combine them with the objectives of this study. In accordance with the needs of different audiences, better present the information visualization design practice of Xiju opera.

Data Analysis Method

Use questionnaires targeted at young audiences to clearly analyze their aesthetic preferences, information acquisition channels, and cognitive barriers regarding Xiju opera. Analyze the online and offline viewing data of Xiju opera to ensure that the research results can effectively reach the target audience.

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Practical significance of the research:

1. Expanding theoretical perspectives: Introduce image narrative theory into the information visualization design of Xiju opera, allowing Xiju cultural information to move from static diagrams to narrative visual translations, thereby expanding the theoretical analysis pathways of Xiju information design.

2. Supplementing design perspectives: Existing Xiju studies mostly focus on musicology, drama studies, and folklore. This study approaches it from the perspective of design, supplementing the shortcomings in visual communication and information design within the research on Xiju protection and inheritance.

3. Providing practical strategies: Centered on the development schools of Xiju, makeup, costumes, and representative repertoire, formulate actionable principles and methods for information visualization design, providing directly usable visual materials for Xiju troupes and cultural venues' popularization efforts.

4. Promoting dynamic dissemination: Enhance the visibility and shareability of Xiju in public spaces and digital media, attract younger audiences, and provide a reference paradigm for the information visualization design of similar intangible cultural heritage.

Structure and scope of the thesis. The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a list of references (24 items), and an illustration album (23 items). The main body of the research comprises 33 pages, the total volume with appendices is 45 pages.

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE ISSUE. RESEARCH METHODS

1.1. Review of the Literature

Current Status of Domestic Research in China

Domestic research on information visualization design and image narrative theory provides important theoretical references for the information visualization design of Xiju Opera. In terms of information visualization, Chen Wei's *Data Visualization (2nd Edition)* systematically introduces the definition, methods, usefulness, and tools of data visualization from a researcher's perspective, serving both as an introductory manual and a reference for research and tools. Regarding image narrative theory, Yu Deshan's *Chinese Image Narratology: Logical Starting Points and Their Methodology* uses Western narratology as a reference to explore the logical starting points and research methods of Chinese image narrative. Overall, relevant domestic theoretical achievements are relatively abundant, but the systematic application of these theories to Xiju Opera information visualization design, especially research focusing on visual narrative transformation around the development schools, makeup, costumes, and representative works of Xiju Opera, is still insufficient.

Current State of Research Abroad

Research abroad in the field of information visualization and image narrative started relatively early, and the theoretical system is relatively mature. In terms of information visualization, American scholar Edward Tufte systematically expounded the core design theories and methods of data visualization in *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, and introduced the concept of the “data-ink ratio”, which requires maximizing the proportion of information-expressing elements and reducing unnecessary decoration [4]. In terms of image narrative, American scholar W.J.T. Mitchell, in *Picture Theory*, centered on the concept of the “pictorial turn,” systematically exploring the complex relationship between images and language/text, and argued that image narrative is a symbolic system with self-

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theorizing ability, emphasizing that images are not merely supplements to language but independent narrative subjects [9]. Research abroad provides a theoretical reference for this topic, but there are relatively few results directly targeting the information visualization design of Xiju .

Research on Xiju Opera

Domestic research on Xiju Opera is more targeted and detailed. In the book *A Study of Traditional Xiju Opera Repertoires* edited by Jin Yi, a total of 276 traditional Xiju repertoires were collected, and the plot, historical evolution, and performance situations of 162 of them were recorded and examined; *Introduction to Xiju Opera Melodies* by Zhu Zongxin organizes and summarizes Xiju melodies, exploring the general patterns of Xiju lyrics, and is the first systematic monograph introducing Xiju melodies in China; *Stories on the History of Xiju Opera* edited by Qian Huirong systematically reviews the development process of Xiju Opera, tracing its evolution from “paired plays” to “same-stage plays' and literary plays' in three important periods [6]. These achievements provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding the cultural background and artistic connotations of Xiju Opera. However, current research mainly focuses on the vocal characteristics, repertoire changes, and historical origins of Xiju Opera, while studies on the visual innovation application of Xiju Opera – particularly how to combine the dry knowledge of opera with information visualization design and transform it into visual narrative forms that meet the needs of young audiences in the digital media environment – are still insufficient.

Case Analysis

Domestic and international cases of information visualization design provide effective references for the information visualization design of Xiju opera. In the practice of visual design for traditional opera, foreign approaches tend to emphasize technological means and innovation in visual language. Tobias Gremmler from Germany drew inspiration from the shapes, colors, and movements of Chinese opera costumes, precisely shaping the human body through clothing and movements. In *Virtual Characters of Chinese Opera*, he presented the performances of seven

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Peking Opera role types through virtual characters, focusing on aspects such as the movement of colors and sound forms [12]. Japanese artist Ikko Tanaka, in the *Maiyo Series*, used geometric lines and bold color blocks to transform aesthetic features of Kabuki and Noh theater into a highly modern visual language. Ding Weihao, in *Digital Reproduction of Xiju Opera Costumes Based on Generative Artificial Intelligence*, used virtual displays combined with social media dissemination, enabling digital Xiju opera costumes to attract audience interaction, especially among young groups, thereby stimulating their attention to traditional opera.（APPENDIX A.1）

1.2. Research Methods

Literature Research Method: This paper mainly refers to specialized works such as *The History of Xiju* edited by Qian Huirong and *A Study of Traditional Repertoires of Xiju* edited by Jin Yi, providing theoretical support for researching the development history, schools, representative repertoires, and cultural connotations of Xiju. Regarding journal articles, Ma Quanfu's *The Development and Evolution of Visual Narratives and Design Strategies* systematically reviews the basic characteristics and design strategies of visual narratives, offering methodological reference for the narrative combination of visual elements and visual encoding in this paper; Gu Yuling's *Research on the Application Design of Opera Information Visualization: A Case Study of Shandong Liuzixi Opera* explores, from the perspective of digital media art design and information visualization, the extraction, organization, and visual transformation of local opera cultural information, providing a practical case reference for Xiju information visualization design, which is also a form of local opera.

Field Investigation Method: From May 2026 to September 2026, the author conducted multiple field visits to the Wuxi Xiju Art Center, Wuxi Grand Theatre, Changzhou Modern Media Center, and other locations. Combined with online performance videos of Xiju from the past two years, a large amount of images and related textual materials related to Xiju were collected, with a focus on the stage

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visual presentation, costumes and makeup, musical instruments, and the scene arrangements of representative plays. At the same time, the author observed and recorded existing visual communication media of Xiju. These field investigations and research provided first-hand materials for the study, as well as intuitive references and practical basis for the extraction of regional cultural elements, the construction of image narrative logic, and the visual translation design in Xiju information visualization design.

Questionnaire Analysis Method: To gain an in-depth understanding of the public's awareness of Xiju opera and their acceptance of information visualization design for Xiju, the author conducted a questionnaire survey among local residents, visitors, and audiences around Xiju performance venues in the regions where Xiju originated and is mainly performed. This data provides a clear direction for Xiju information visualization design in aspects such as visual style positioning and information hierarchy organization, ensuring that the final design effectively meets the audience's cognitive needs and serves the promotion and dissemination of Xiju culture.

Conclusions to Chapter 1

This chapter systematically reviews domestic and international theoretical research, studies on the ontology of Xiju (Wuxi opera), the current development status of Xiju, practical cases, and research methods. In terms of theory, the work of Chen Wei, Long Diyong, and Michel provides support for information visualization and image narrative, but direct research on information visualization design specifically for Xiju remains limited. Studies on the ontology of Xiju mostly focus on operas and melodies, with insufficient application of visual innovation. Public dissemination still mainly relies on posters, program booklets, and static exhibition boards, with a gap existing between digital resources and public dissemination. Practical cases involve digital resource libraries, virtual characters, interactive picture books, and digital reproduction of costumes, but there is a lack of systematic information visualization design concerning the development branches of Xiju, makeup and

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costumes, and representative pieces. Regarding research methods, this paper combines literature research, field investigation, and questionnaire analysis, using literature review and on-site research at locations such as the Wuxi Xiju Art Center, Wuxi Grand Theatre, Changzhou Modern Media Center, and Yanjiaqiao, providing a basis for design positioning.

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CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF XIJU OPERA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VISUAL NARRATIVE AND INFORMATION VISUALIZATION

2.1. Info Classification and Communication Characteristics of Information in Xiju Opera

Xiju originated from the small mountain songs along the shores of Lake Tai. It went through stages such as Dongxiang tune, Tanhuang, and Changxi Wenxi, and by 1954 it was collectively referred to as Xiju. Its performance forms evolved from paired plays to small ensemble plays and large ensemble plays, with vocal systems, role classifications, and repertoire accumulation becoming increasingly mature. From the perspective of visual translation, Xiju cultural information is a complex system composed of multiple interrelated yet relatively independent information domains. In line with the objectives of this study, its core information can be summarized into three main dimensions: development schools, makeup and costumes, and representative repertoire.

In terms of development schools, during the formation and development process of Xiju, the older generation of artists created highly distinctive singing style schools, such as the Yao school, Shen school, Wang school, and Mei school. These schools each have unique characteristics in terms of vocal features and performance styles, constituting the lineage of Xiju artistic inheritance. Information on development schools exhibits clear temporality and genealogical traits, making it suitable for visualization using timelines, relationship diagrams, and vocal branch diagrams [10].

As for costumes and instruments, the Xiju costume system is based on the regulations of the Sheng-Dan-Jing-Mo-Chou (male, female, painted-face, civil, and comic roles) in Peking Opera, but it is not as rigid as in Peking Opera, allowing for

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more creative space and presenting more artistic and thematic characteristics. Xiju costumes are based on historical dynasty attire, and in the process of character portrayal, they reference a large amount of historical artifacts, paintings, and sculptures, while continuously absorbing artistic elements from Peking Opera, Kunqu, and other genres, gradually forming a stylized system. For example, in *Meng Lijun*, when the female protagonist first appears as a Guimen Dan, her costume highlights feminine beauty; when she disguises herself as a man to escape, transitioning to a female Xiaosheng, she wears a square scarf on her head and holds a folding fan; when she changes her name to take the imperial examination, her clothing becomes official attire; when she attains high office, she dons a dragon robe; and finally, she restores her female attire, wearing a phoenix coronet and a ceremonial robe [16]. Makeup and costume information is symbolic, hierarchical, and visually recognizable, making it suitable for visualization through diagrams, decomposition charts, and color coding.

In terms of representative works, this article selects three of the most representative traditional plays: *The Pearl Pagoda*, *The Double Millstones*, and *Meng Lijun*. *The Pearl Pagoda* originates from the Qing Dynasty Tanci, and the story follows a main thread of “Gift of the Pagoda – Pagoda Falls – Recognize the Pagoda – Reunion”. It is the most iconic traditional play in Xiju, having been performed for over a hundred years. *The Double Millstones* is characterized by depictions of labor life and folk comedic elements, with the imagery of the 'millstone' being particularly prominent. These three plays correspond to different thematic types: talented scholars and beautiful women, labor life, and love and marriage, respectively. Their visual imagery is clear, making them suitable for translation into visual narratives.

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2.2 Visual Narrative Theory and Its Application to Information Visualization Design of Xiju Opera

Information visualization design organizes and translates complex information into visual forms such as graphics, charts, and symbols, transforming abstract and dull text and data into aesthetically pleasing, orderly, and engaging visual content. Its core concept is to use graphical methods to convert difficult-to-interpret or complex materials into easily analyzable forms, not only presenting the visual form of data but also exploring the relationships and structures between information, revealing internal connections, development patterns, and potential characteristics. For Xiju Opera, information visualization design can organize cultural information such as development trajectories, vocal systems, and repertoire topics within a visualized logic, transforming it from scattered textual records and specialized discourse into knowledge that can be visually perceived and systematically understood.

Information visualization design has three main advantages: first, enhancing the readability and intuitiveness of thematic information, converting a timeline into a visible timeline and the vocal system into color and graphic codes; second, facilitating rapid audience comprehension of the information framework, using relationship maps, classification charts, hierarchical diagrams, and other methods to directly present inclusion, parallel, and evolutionary relationships between informational units; third, enhancing the expressiveness and appeal of visual design, extracting expressive elements from Xiju's cultural symbols, creating a visual style compatible with Xiju culture, enabling the audience to develop a sense of cultural closeness and aesthetic enjoyment even before delving into the specific content [14].

Image narrative theory injects narrative logic and emotional tension into information visualization. Long Diyong points out in *Spatial Narratology* that the essence of image narrative is the *temporalization of space*, which is to use the organization and presentation of visual elements to transform static spatial images into narrative sequences with a temporal process, allowing viewers to reconstruct

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the sequence and internal logic of events during visual reading. In the narrative system of visual communication design, image narratives can be divided into single-image narratives and composite-image narratives. Single-image narratives mainly use four techniques: symbolism, metaphor, the decisive moment, and juxtaposed plots. Symbolism links concrete objects to abstract meanings; for example, *Panjin Ecological Charm* reflects regional cultural memory through unique patterns and colors. Metaphor establishes a correspondence between two things; for instance, IKEA's *Tomorrow Starts Tonight* poster **(**APPENDIX A.2**)** series conveys key ideas through visual paradigms of products.In the Xi opera *Pearl Tower*, one might select the moment when Chen Cui'e "gifts the tower", implying differences in social status, the emergence of emotion, and subsequent separation and reunion. Juxtaposed plots place different narrative fragments on the same two-dimensional plane under a unified theme; for example, in depicting the theme of historical development, key points such as the origin of the tan-huang style, its entry into Shanghai, integration into civil plays, and formal naming are juxtaposed, enabling viewers to grasp the century-long development of Xi opera.

Composite-image narratives are formed by multiple consecutive visual fragments, hinting at the flow of time through spatial juxtaposition. These can be divided into sequence combinations of plot fragments and series combinations of thematic practices. Sequence combinations of plot fragments break down a complete narrative into several key segments arranged chronologically or according to causal logic; for example, in *Visual Design of Sui and Tang Bronze Mirrors*, the author uses flat character designs and main visual illustrations with scene narratives, bold color schemes, and 2D-style main visual illustrations to reflect the process of bronze mirror production [2]. In *Information Visualization Analysis of Chinese Traditional Fish Lanterns*, the relevant information of fish lanterns is displayed through scenes of three stages: understanding, making, and playing. The color tone is consistent, and the visual focus of the images is always on the fish lanterns (APPENDIX A.3).

The combination of image narrative theory and information visualization design can simultaneously meet the dual demands of clarity and emotional impact.

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On one hand, information such as the historical evolution of Xi opera, its vocal system, and performance conventions needs to be explained with an orderly narrative logic. On the other hand, the Jiangnan aesthetics, local sentiment, and humanistic spirit inherent in Xi opera need to evoke deep audience resonance through narrative-guided emotions. The organic combination of the two allows information visualization to go beyond mere knowledge illustration, becoming a visual narrative practice that combines cognitive efficiency with cultural expressiveness, providing systematic theoretical and methodological support for the living heritage of Xi opera culture.

2.3 Analysis of the Cultural and Visual Characteristics of Xiju Opera for Information Visualization

Based on the above analysis of information classification and theoretical applicability, this section proposes visual translation pathways for three types of core cultural information in Xiju: development schools, costumes and musical instruments, and representative repertoire.

Visual translation pathway for the development of opera schools information: Using the timeline as the main line to present the evolution of Xiju from Dongxiang tune, Tanhuang, duet plays, small troupe scenes, large troupe scenes to Changxi literary drama and Xiju; using genealogical branches to present the singing styles of schools such as Yao Cheng, Shen Peihua, Wang Binbin, Mei Lanzhen, Wang Lanying, Ni Tongfang, Wu Yatong, supplemented with silhouettes of representative figures, vocal symbols, and regional cultural elements, organically combining time, events, and characters to make the information hierarchy clearly visible [7]. Visual translation pathway for costume and musical instrument information: Categorized by role type, displaying makeup and costume characteristics; using roles from works such as *Meng Lijun* as examples, breaking down the structural changes of Guimen Dan, female young sheng, official attire, etc.; using color coding to differentiate identity and scene, forming a readable visual symbol system. Visual translation pathway for representative repertoire information: Centered around the three dramas

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Pearl Tower, *Twin Millstones* and *Meng Lijun*, with tower and millstone as core symbols, employing instant selection and juxtaposition with plot to present story progression and emotional shifts. *Pearl Tower* can select the moment of gifting the tower, hinting at cause and effect; *Twin Millstones* uses the millstone as the core image, depicting labor scenes, character relationships, and the rhythm of folk comedy. By combining sequences of plot fragments in image narration, key plot points of each drama are linked into a clear visual timeline [13].

Based on the analysis above, four design principles are proposed-Intuitiveness, to lower cognitive barriers; Readability, to establish a clear information hierarchy; Memorability, to strengthen visual symbols and plot points; and Innovation, to blend traditional opera aesthetics with contemporary visual language. The overall narrative framework is “Origins-Formation-Repertoire”: Origins correspond to the development of schools, Formation to makeup, hair, and costumes, and Repertoire to representative works. This can effectively improve young audiences' understanding, memory retention, and emotional connection to Xiju culture, while also enhancing its reach in public spaces and digital media.

Conclusions to Chapter 2

This chapter completes the classification of information and analysis of the current state of dissemination regarding the development schools of Xiju Opera, makeup, costumes, and representative repertoire. It demonstrates the suitability of image narrative theory and information visualization design, and proposes visual translation pathways and research hypotheses. Xiju Opera cultural information is multidimensional and specialized, making it difficult for traditional dissemination methods to effectively reach young audiences; information visualization design centered on image narrative can provide Xiju Opera culture with a visually translated pathway that is clearly structured, emotionally perceptible, and easily disseminated. The development schools can use timelines and genealogy charts to present evolutionary logic, makeup and costumes can establish visual correspondences through charts and color coding, and representative repertoire can achieve story

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narrative through instant selection and juxtaposition of plots. The principles of intuitiveness, readability, memorability, and innovation distilled from this provide a theoretical basis and formal reference for the design plan presented in chapter three.

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CHAPTER 3

DESIGN PROPOSAL FOR INFORMATION VISUALIZATION OF XIJU OPERA

This chapter, from the perspective of image narration, argues for the overall scheme of Wuxi opera information visualization design, with “image narration-driven hierarchical decoding of Wuxi opera culture” at its core. It revolves around three themes: development schools, costumes and musical instruments, and representative repertoire, and achieves the transformation of Wuxi opera culture from a mere listing of information to narrative visualization through the construction of themes, plot arrangement, and scene creation as three image narration strategies.

3.1. Concept of the Design Proposal

3.1.1 Design Origin and Problem Awareness

As a representative local opera genre in the Jiangnan region, Xiju has undergone a long development process from Tanshuang and Changxi literary plays to modern Xiju, forming a rich lineage system, role costumes, instrumental arrangements, and classic repertoires. However, in its current dissemination and display, Xiju culture is often presented through textual introductions, stage photographs, physical exhibits, or single charts, with a lack of narrative connections between pieces of information. This makes it difficult for audiences to establish an overall understanding of Xiju's development context, artistic characteristics, and representative works in a short time. Based on this, this design proposes a plan for “Xiju Information Visualization Design from the Perspective of Image Narrative,” attempting to use image narrative as a method and information visualization as a medium to transform the scattered, abstract, and specialized content of Xiju culture into a visual narrative system with themes, storylines, and a sense of scene, turning

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Xiju culture from static knowledge into a narrative experience that can be read, seen, felt, and interacted with (APPENDIX B.1).

3.1.2 Core Concepts: Information Visualization of Xiju from the Perspective of Image Narratives

Using image narratives to drive the stratified decoding of Xiju culture, and using information visualization to construct a knowledge graph of Xiju. "Image narrative" refers to using images as a narrative medium, organizing information through visual symbols, compositional relationships, color atmospheres, temporal sequences, and spatial scenes, allowing the audience to understand and memorize Xiju culture during the viewing process. "Information visualization" refers to structurally presenting Xiju's developmental schools, costumes and musical instruments, and representative works through charts, graphs, timelines, and other methods. Therefore, the basic logic of this design is: image narratives are responsible for telling the story, while information visualization is responsible for explaining clearly. The former addresses the appeal and emotional resonance of Xiju's cultural dissemination, while the latter addresses the systematization and readability of Xiju knowledge (APPENDIX B.2).

3.1.3 Design Positioning: From "Data Compilation" to "Narrative Map"

Traditional Xi Opera data is often organized according to categories such as history, schools, costumes, instruments, and repertoire, which has informational value but poses a high reading barrier. This design transforms Xi Opera culture from a data compilation into a narrative map, meaning that through visualized information structures, Xi Opera knowledge is organized into an exploratory, comparable, and expandable narrative system. Specifically, the design positioning includes three levels:

- Cultural Level: Focusing on the history of Xi Opera development, inheritance of schools, role-type costumes, instrument evolution, and classic repertoire, to construct a visual knowledge system of Xi Opera culture.

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- Narrative Level: Using theme construction, plot arrangement, and scene creation as visual narrative strategies, transforming Xi Opera culture from 'knowledge points' into 'storylines.'
- Communication Level: Using static infographics combined with narrative illustrations as output formats, serving exhibitions, digital dissemination, cultural tourism guidance, and cultural and creative development. (APPENDIX B.3).

3.1.4 The Triple Translation Mechanism of Image Narratives

This design summarizes image narratives as a triple translation mechanism of constructing themes, arranging plots, and creating scenes, which runs through the three design themes. Constructing themes is the starting point of image narratives. The design no longer classifies content solely based on development genres, costumes and instruments, or representative pieces, but instead extracts narrative motifs for each theme.

Develop the theme of schools of performance to show the evolution of Xiju from Dongxiang tune, Wuxi Tanhuang, Changzhou Tanhuang to Changxi Wenxi, the naming of Xiju, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage; collect the three major Sheng role schools of Wang Binbin, Wang Hanqing, and Wu Yatong, as well as the four major Dan role schools, to reflect the main schools of Xiju. The theme of costumes and instruments can regard the role costumes and literary and martial stage instruments as the visual and auditory carriers of Xiju performance. For example, in *Meng Lijun*, the heroine Meng Lijun's costumes change from the young lady costume at the beginning of the play, to male attire when she escapes, to official attire upon achieving the top scholar status, to a dragon robe when holding a ministerial position, and finally returning to female attire with a splendid phoenix crown, with the character's costumes continuously changing along with the plot. The theme of representative repertoire can be refined as “one play, one main theme” By extracting themes, Xiju knowledge is no longer a series of parallel entries, but a cultural whole with a core narrative thread.

Plot arrangement is the organization of information into a chronological

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sequence, a causal sequence, or an emotional sequence. For Xiju information visualization, plot arrangement can be reflected in the following ways: arranging the development of schools along the timeline of Xiju's five major development periods (Budding Period: Qianlong to Daoguang eras; Formative Period: during the Xinhai Revolution; Prosperity Period: 1914 to 1949; Golden Period: 1950 to 1965; to the present); in costumes and musical instruments, it can be reflected through changes in character costumes. Representative works are arranged according to the plot structure of the repertoire (APPENDIX B.4).

Scene creation is the emotional and spatial dimension of visual storytelling. Design uses color, composition, illustration, materials, and interaction to create typical scenes of Xiju culture. For example, in the development of schools theme, representative regional symbolic elements can be selected to reflect the cultural characteristics of Xiju; in the costumes and musical instruments theme, the three main Xiju instruments can be combined with a timeline to show changes in instruments over time. These not only enhance visual appeal but also help the audience understand the artistic characteristics of Xiju culture within a specific context.

3.1.5 Design Objective Breakdown

Cultural Inheritance Goals

Systematically sort out the development trajectory of Xiju Opera from Tanhhuang, Changxi literary plays, to modern Xiju, present the artistic contributions of master artists such as Wang Binbin, Wang Hanqing, and Wu Yatong, showcase the costumes of Sheng, Dan, and Chou roles and the three major instruments system of drum, erhu, and pipa, and protect and disseminate the cultural connotations of Xiju.

Public Awareness Goals

Provide tiered information access for different audiences. Young viewers can focus on storyboard and scene illustrations of representative repertoires; opera fans and researchers can pay attention to the developmental lineages, vocal

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characteristics, and instrument evolution; tourists and cultural product audiences can focus on costume symbols, stage scenes, and Xiju IP images. Through differentiated storytelling, enhance public awareness and communication efficiency of Xiju culture (APPENDIX B.5).

Industry Empowerment Goals

Create a unified visual identity and information narrative system for Xiju, promoting its transformation from a traditional opera resource into a cultural IP that can be communicated, experienced, and developed. The design results can be applied to cultural tourism guidance, digital exhibitions, cultural products, online communication, and immersive experiences, providing visual content support for the contemporary transformation of Xiju culture.

3.2. Structural, Plastic, and Graphic Solution of the Design Concept

3.2.1 Overall Structural Design

Narrative Framework with Three Parallel Themes

This design constructs the overall narrative framework for the visualization of Xiju information through the parallel arrangement of three themes: development of schools, costumes and musical instruments, and representative works. The three themes do not exist in isolation; rather, they form an intertextual relationship through the logic of history-form-works: the development of schools answers Where does Xiju come from and how has it evolved, costumes and musical instruments answer What does Xiju look and sound like, and representative works answer What stories does Xiju tell and what cultural motifs does it shape. Together, they form a complete narrative chain of Xiju culture.

In terms of overall structure, a general-specific-general' narrative framework is adopted. The opening establishes an overall understanding with a panoramic view of Xiju culture, the middle section presents in-depth visualizations of the three themes separately, and the conclusion integrates schools, costumes, instruments, and works through a Xiju Cultural Ecosystem Map, forming a cognitive loop from whole to parts and back to whole. Timelines are represented by horizontal extension,

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genealogical trees by vertical unfolding, relational networks by central radiating structures, and scene sequences by sequential arrangement. Visual attention is guided through contrasts in color, size, and focus to ensure clear information hierarchy and smooth reading path (APPENDIX B.6).

3.2.2 Visual and Graphic Scheme

The overall color scheme primarily uses blue-pink and pink-green, supplemented with white, cyan, and red to reflect the tones of Jiangnan water towns. Portraits are treated in retro black-and-white or light color, while historical scenes use a combination of line-drawn illustrations and light color rendering. The layout follows the format of main image-supporting image-text annotation, with the main image occupying the visual center, supporting images arranged in circular or card forms, and text annotations connected with leader lines to keep the layout clean. For clothing, styles such as mang, pai, kao, zhe, and official robes are layered and labeled; for musical instruments, the focus is on the three major instruments of Xiju, using image translation and showing the addition of new instruments over time. Across the three themes, the visual language remains consistent, based on the colors of Jiangnan water towns and the Xiju stage, uniformly using graphic languages such as timelines, genealogy trees, and breakdown diagrams, extracting Xiju regional cultural symbols. By unifying colors, graphics, symbols, and layout, viewers can maintain an overall understanding of Xiju culture when switching between different themes(APPENDIX B.7).

3.2.3 Strategies and Principles for Xiju Information Visualization Design

The implementation of a triple translation mechanism-comprising theme construction, plot arrangement, and scene creation-within the overall structure is as follows: Theme construction determines the narrative motif and visual tone of each section; plot arrangement organizes information into temporal, causal, or emotional sequences; scene creation uses illustrations, colors, materials, and interactions to create specific contexts. The triple translation runs through all three themes, forming a unified narrative approach. Combining the characteristics of information visualization design-intuitiveness, simplicity, efficiency, and memorability-with the

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principles of accuracy, clarity, consistency, and adaptability, this design, from the perspective of image narrative, establishes the following design principles around three themes: the development schools of Xiju, costumes and musical instruments, and representative repertoire. These principles not only follow the general rules of information visualization but also reflect the regional, theatrical, and narrative characteristics of Xiju culture.

- **Principle of Unity of Accuracy and Narrative Authenticity**

The primary principle of information visualization design is accuracy, which requires rigorous verification and validation of the data, facts, and viewpoints presented. In the information visualization of Xiju Opera, accuracy refers not only to knowledge-based content such as historical time, schools and figures, and costume forms, but also to the authenticity of visual narratives. Building a theme can distill narrative motifs, arranging plots can artistically organize sequences, and scene creation can evoke atmosphere, but none should contradict historical facts of Xiju Opera or the fundamental knowledge of the opera itself. The unity of accuracy and narrative authenticity is the bottom line of information visualization design for Xiju Opera.

- **Principle of Intuitiveness and Image Narrative Translation**

Information visualization design embodies intuitiveness, presenting information in a concise graphical language to reduce comprehension difficulty. From the perspective of image narrative, intuitiveness requires translating the abstract knowledge of Xiju opera into readable and viewable visual narratives. Developmental schools are intuitively presented along a timeline, genealogical tree, and school network to show historical context; costumes and musical instruments are presented through performance role costume charts, instrument classification charts, and timbre waveform charts to directly convey artistic forms; representative repertoires are presented via plot timelines, character relationship diagrams, and scene storyboard cards to intuitively show story content. Intuitiveness is not mere illustration, but a systematic translation of Xiju knowledge through image narrative.

- **Principle of Conciseness and Plot Arrangement Refinement**

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Information visualization design pursues clarity and conciseness, filtering and refining original information to retain only the most crucial and representativecontent. In Xiju information visualization, conciseness requires narrative refinement of Xiju historical materials, school genealogies, costume details, instrument evolution, and repertoire plots. Developmental schools do not need to list all figures but should focus on representative founders like Wang Binbin, Wang Hanqing, and Wu Yatong; costumes and instruments do not need to cover every style but should select core symbols such as the three major items: "drum master, main hu, pipa." Plot arrangement should eliminate complexity to allow the audience to grasp the key content in the shortest time.

- **Principle of Clarity and Information Hierarchy**

Clarity is the fundamental requirement of infographics design, making both overall layout and detailed elements simple, clear, and easy to understand. In Xiju information visualization, clarity requires establishing a clear information hierarchy and visual flow. Each theme is organized in three levels: "core information — supporting information — extended information": core information serves as the primary visual focus, such as the timeline of developmental schools, the classification chart of costume instruments, and the main plot line of representative repertoires. Clarity allows audiences of different knowledge levels and backgrounds to quickly understand Xiju culture (APPENDIX B.8).

3.3. Technical Support and Testing

3.3.1 Technical Support Routes and Tool Selection

The implementation of Xiju information visualization design from the perspective of visual narrative requires relying on a complete technical route from data collection, information processing, to visual design. Based on the thematic content and narrative requirements, this design selects the following software tools to work collaboratively: Photoshop is used for texture processing of Xiju costume details and scene illustrations; Illustrator is used for drawing vector graphics such as the timeline of schools of development, costume breakdown charts, and musical

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instrument classification diagrams.

3.3.2 Presentation Form and Media Adaptation Expert Evaluation. Invite Xiju (a form of Chinese opera) researchers and information visualization design experts to form an evaluation team to assess the three themes in terms of information accuracy, visual rationality, narrative coherence, and cultural communication.

Assessment Criteria. The evaluation tests use the following criteria: information accuracy – whether historical materials, data, classifications, and plots are accurate; clarity of information hierarchy, legend labels, and color contrast; logical coherence in constructing themes, arranging plots, and creating scenes, etc.

Feasibility Analysis. The author is proficient in using tools such as Photoshop and Illustrator, able to meet the needs of design practice; the author has conducted multiple field visits to performances of Xiju and related museums and exhibition halls, collecting a lot of information about Xiju; the design results can be transformed into a visual system for Xiju cultural IP, applied to cultural tourism guides, cultural and creative products, digital exhibitions, and immersive experiences, with potential to empower the industry.

Conclusions to Chapter 3

The Xi Opera information visualization design scheme constructed in this chapter from the perspective of image narrative not only follows the basic principles of information visualization design-accuracy clarity cconsistency adaptability-but also reflects the methodological characteristics of image narrative-thematic, plot-oriented, and scenographic-achieving a three-dimensional narrative of Xi Opera culture across the dimensions of 'history, form, and works.' Future research can further expand interactive functions, enrich data sources, deepen user testing, and explore the application of Xi Opera information visualization in digital museums, guide apps, and cultural and creative products, allowing the design results to continue to exert value in a broader range of cultural dissemination scenarios.

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CONCLUSIONS

This paper systematically studies the visual translation and communication of Xiju culture in the digital media environment. Through literature review, field investigation, questionnaire analysis, and design practice, it addresses how to transform the development schools, costumes, instruments, and representative repertoires of Xiju into a readable, viewable, and interactive information visualization system from the perspective of image narrative, thereby promoting the transition of Xiju culture from static preservation to dynamic dissemination.

In terms of value and significance, this paper introduces the theory of image narrative into the information visualization design of Xiju, expanding the research path of visual communication in local opera culture. The practical value lies in forming a set of operable and scalable Xiju information visualization design solutions, which can be applied to cultural and tourism guides, digital exhibitions, and cultural creative development, providing visual content support for the contemporary transformation of Xiju cultural IP.

In terms of innovations, first, the innovation in research perspective combines image narrative with information visualization, breaking through the traditional text-centered limitation of Xiju research; second, the innovation in design methodology proposes a threefold translation mechanism of "constructing themes, arranging plots, and creating scenes," allowing Xiju knowledge to become narrative; third, the innovation in practical approach uses a narrative framework with three juxtaposed themes to achieve the transformation of Xiju culture from scattered materials to a systematic map, and from static introduction to narrative experience.

In summary, this article takes image storytelling as the perspective and information visualization as the carrier, conducting systematic visual translation and design practice of Xiju culture. The research not only provides new paths and methods for the contemporary dissemination of Xiju culture, but also offers a reference model for the digital preservation and innovative dissemination of local opera intangible cultural heritage.

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APPENDIX A



A.1 Germany · Gremler — *Virtual Character from Chinese Opera*



A.2 Japan · Ikko Tanaka — Japanese Dance Series Poster



A.3 IKEA *Tomorrow starts tonight*

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A.4 Visual Design of Sui and Tang Bronze Mirrors



A.5 Information Visualization Analysis of Chinese Traditional Fish Lanterns

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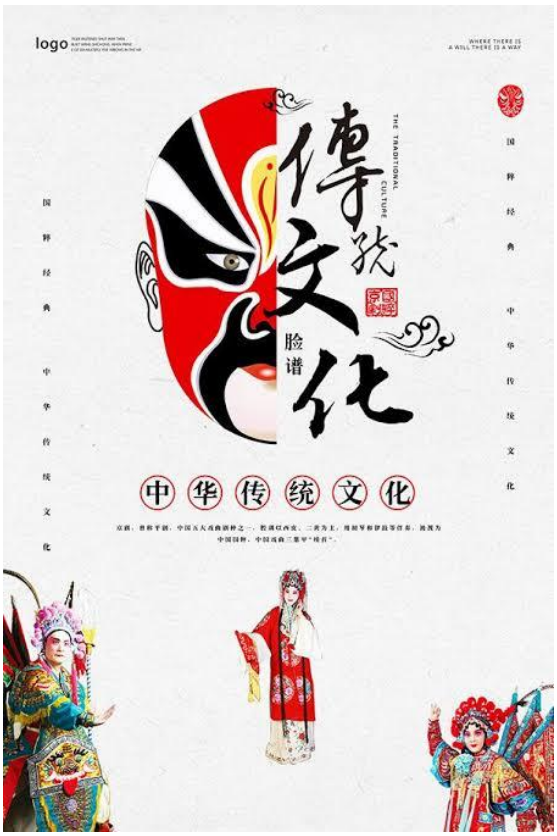

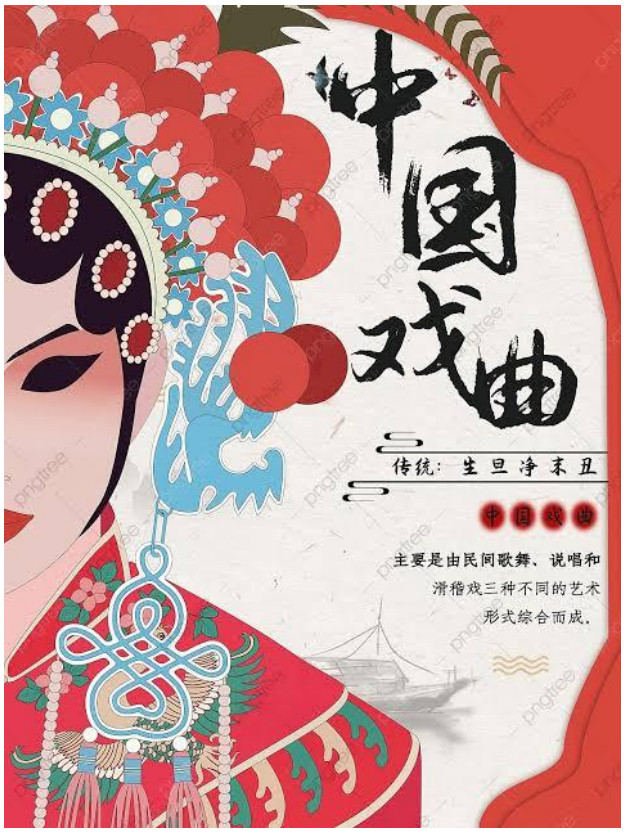



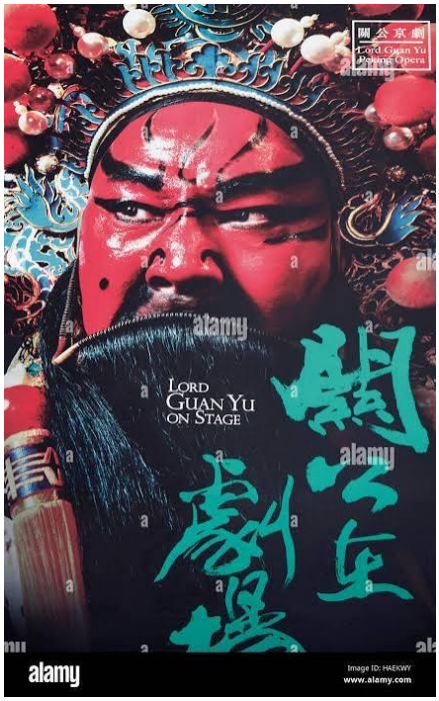

A.6 Information Visualization Analysis of Chinese Opera Posters

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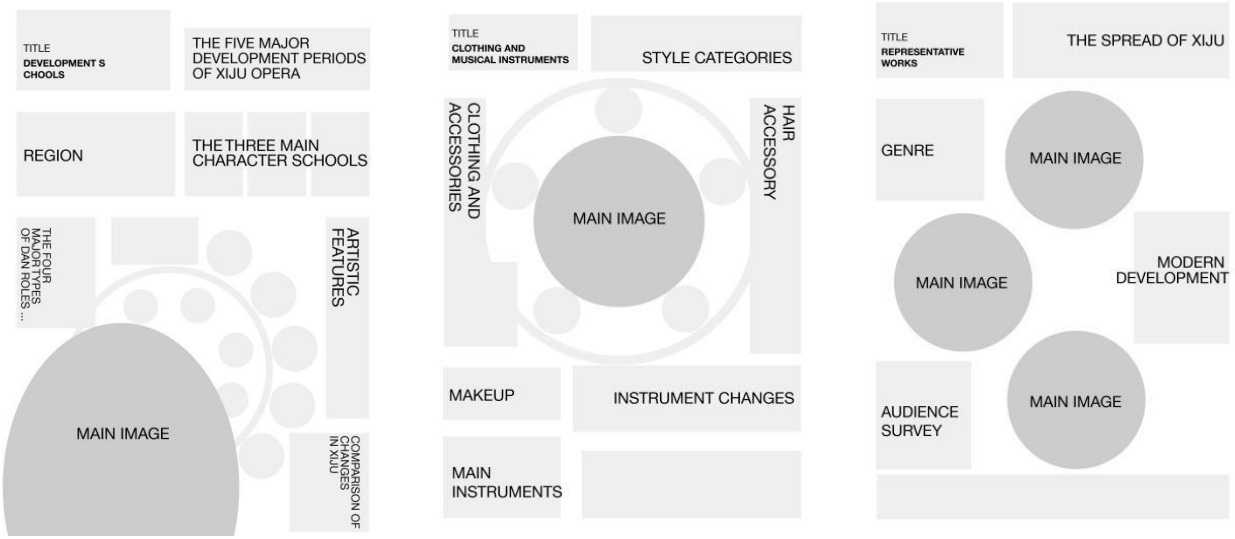
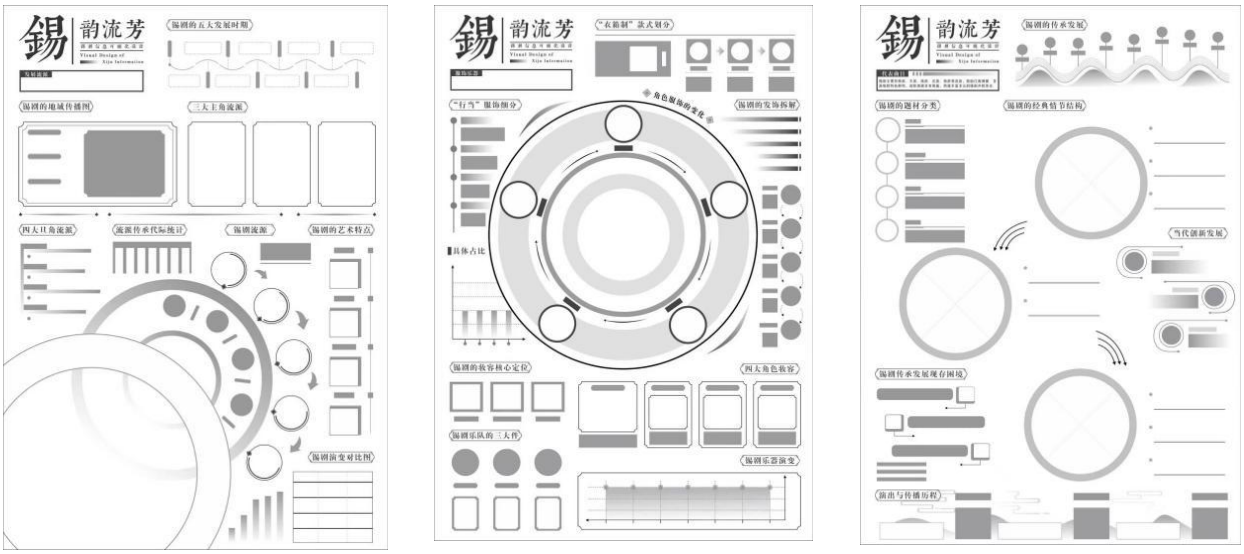
APPENDIX B



B.1 Three topic divisions



B.2 Refine information structure division

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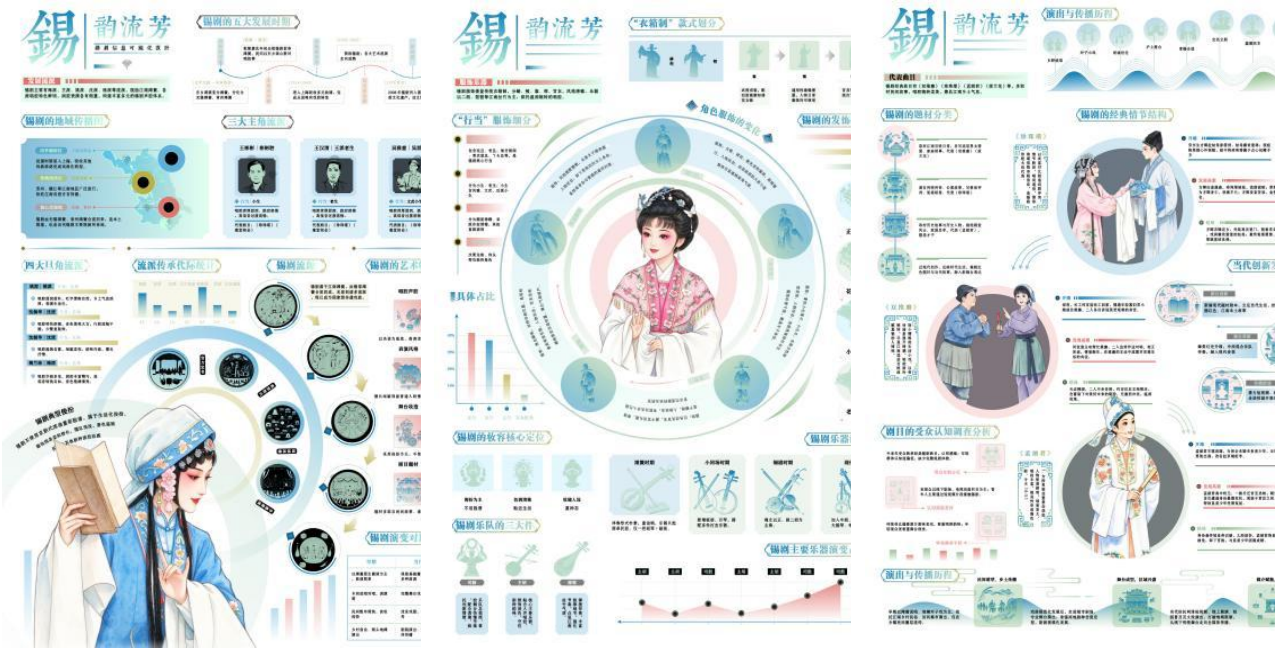

B.3 Color Scheme 1



B.4 Posters Sketch

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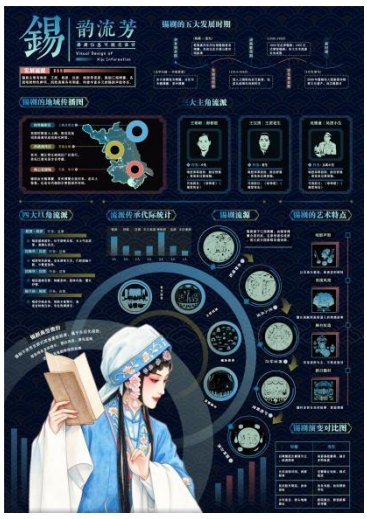
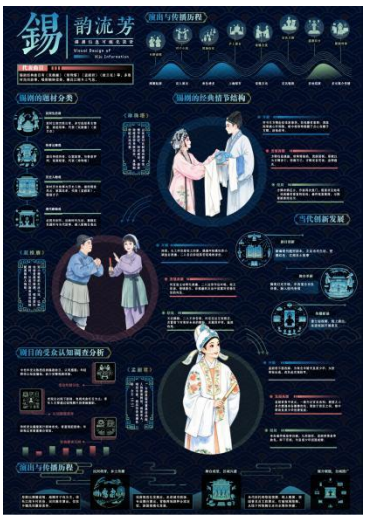
B.5 Posters Sketch







B.6 Color Scheme 2(Final adaption)

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B.7 Promotional poster effect



B.8 Phone case design

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