



Research on the transmutation of Ancient AnHui Opera Costumes in China under the Perspective of Social Memory

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ABSTRACT

In China, AnHui Opera, as an integral part of the nation's rich cultural heritage, has maintained a visual narrative of social structures, moral values, and historical continuity through its distinct costumes. The transmutation of these costumes over centuries provides a window into the dynamics of social memory and identity. This paper critically explores the metamorphosis of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes, considering their symbolic significance and how this has evolved in response to socio-political changes. Drawing on a diverse range of historical records, regulations from various dynasties, and the concept of object biography, the research elucidates how social memory, encoded in the fabrics and designs of these costumes, has preserved and reshaped cultural identity.

We dissect the implications of color prohibitions, with particular attention to hierarchy and honor, and scrutinize the permitted alterations through time. Moreover, this study investigates the nuanced interaction between society's collective memory and individual agency within the context of opera costume transmutations. Findings from this research not only illuminate the intricate relationship between societal norms and cultural expressions but also contribute to the broader discourse on intangible cultural heritage preservation amidst modern transformations. The paper advocates for the consideration of social memory as a pivotal framework in the analysis and conservation of cultural artifacts and practices, such as the treasured costumes of Ancient AnHui Opera.

Keywords: AnHui Opera Costumes, Social Memory, Ancient AnHui Opera, Intangible Cultural Heritage

1. Introduction

The AnHui Opera, a traditional theatrical form with its origins tracing back to the Ming Dynasty, stands as a monumental symbol of China's profound cultural history. It embodies a rich tapestry of artistic talent, historical narratives, and ethical discourses that have been shared across generations. With its distinctive costumes, AnHui Opera not only entertains but also communicates the intricate interplay of social structures and moral values, portraying characters and stories that resonate with societal memory and Chinese identity.

Costumes in AnHui Opera are not mere accessories; they are powerful cultural emblems laden with meaning. They serve as a canvas reflecting the societal hierarchy, ethical beliefs, and historical events of the times. These garments carry with them colors and designs that denote status, character, and even philosophical insight, playing a critical role in the visual storytelling process of the operatic tradition. As such, the evolution of these costumes over centuries offers a unique vantage point into understanding the shifts and continuities within Chinese social memory and cultural identity.

The primary goal of this study is to dissect and interpret the transformation of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes through the lens of social memory. This research endeavors to elucidate how these artistic expressions have been shaped by, and in turn, have contributed to the social and political vicissitudes of China's timeline. By examining the encoding of collective memory into the fabrics and designs of the costumes, this paper aims to

unravel the threads of cultural evolution that have woven the heritage of AnHui Opera into the fabric of Chinese society.

To conduct this research, an interdisciplinary methodology will be employed, combining historical analysis, sociological theory, and the study of material culture. The framework will include a comprehensive review of historical records and regulations pertaining to opera costumes, an exploration of the concept of object biography as it relates to heritage value, and a critical analysis of how these artifacts of performance have been perceived and repurposed over time. By focusing on the symbolism of color prohibitions, changes in aesthetic standards, and the impact of societal norms on artistic innovation, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamic relationship between social memory and cultural expression.

In conclusion, this pursuit of knowledge on the transmutation of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes will not only shine a light on a pivotal aspect of China's intangible cultural heritage but will also contribute to the broader scholarly conversations on the preservation of such heritage in the face of relentless modernity. It is the deep interconnection between social memory and cultural identity, encoded within these historical costumes, that this paper endeavors to decipher and preserve for posterity.

2. Historical Overview of AnHui Opera Costumes

AnHui Opera, historically known as Huiju, Anhui opera is a type of singing style that evolved from a previous style, originally known as Anhui tune. It is one of the primary roots of Chinese opera and traces its origins to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), originating from the southern part of AnHui province. Through the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) and into the modern era, AnHui Opera has undergone a significant transformation, not only in its performance techniques but also in its visual representation, especially in terms of costume design and usage. The genesis of AnHui Opera coincides with the improvisational singing of local ballads, which gradually formalized into a structured performance art. Early AnHui troupes mainly performed for local communities and, during the late Ming and early Qing periods, they were pivotal in shaping the form and content of what later was known as Peking Opera. The cross-regional mobility of troupes and the exchange with other regional forms have led to the introduction of varied musical elements and storytelling techniques, influencing the opera's evolution.

The costumes of the AnHui Opera were initially defined by their functional approach, utilizing the intrinsic fabric colors and simple patterns to depict the social status and moral aspect of characters. These costumes emerged not only as a means of bold visual impact but also as containers of social and cultural significations. In the beginning, colors like purple, sparingly used due to its association with nobility and power, were heavily emblematic of the traditional ethos upheld within the artform.

During the Qing Dynasty, there was a prohibition on the wearing of clothing by both commoners and officials. Conversely, there were no excessive restrictions imposed on costumes, allowing them to retain the shape and form of Han Dynasty attire while continuing the fashionable trends of that era. A myriad of historical milestones accentuated shifts in AnHui Opera costumes. The culmination of complex power dynamics during the Qing Dynasty, including the imperial edicts on color prohibition, had influenced the use of specific hues and ornamentation in costume design. The onset of the Republic of China (1912–1949) led to more liberal sartorial expressions as cultural revolutions sought to detach from rigid feudalistic systems. In more contemporary times, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) introduced a paradox, demanding cultural purity but also critically impacting traditional art forms, forcing a degree of uniformity and simplicity in Opera costumes. The reform and opening-up policy starting in the late 1970s paved the way for a renaissance of the traditional costumes, yet with a modern understanding of cultural heritage and aesthetics.

Each epoch brought with it its social norms and political ideologies, shaping the visual aesthetics of AnHui Opera Costumes, thus charting a historical narrative true to the ever-evolving social memory of China's rich operatic tradition.

2.1 Origin and evolution of AnHui Opera

As a crystallization of regional folk performance arts in the AnHui Province, it played a pivotal role in the development of many forms of Chinese opera, including the renowned Beijing Opera. AnHui Opera emerged from a soil rich in cultural traditions, thriving with local plays known as 'Anhui tune'.

The evolution of AnHui Opera can be traced through the migration of AnHui troupes during the Qing Dynasty. These troupes, known as the 'Four Great AnHui Troupes', migrated to the royal center of Beijing in 1790, due to mounting cultural interest and the patronage of the Qing court. The integration of AnHui Opera into the cultural framework of Beijing not only created a confluence of styles but also streamlined the narrative and aesthetic elements that were to characterize the Beijing Opera. The integration of AnHui Opera into the cultural framework of Beijing not only created a confluence of styles but also streamlined the narrative and aesthetic elements that were to characterize the Beijing Opera.

The ancestors of AnHui Opera were peripatetic by nature, with artists often moving from one village to the next, weaving a network of influences that shaped the operatic landscape. It is because of the cultivation of Hui merchants that Hui opera can be carried forward because Hui merchants raise the troupe at home, and all expenses are provided by Hui merchants from costumes (dress modeling). Therefore, the actors and troupe of

Hui opera followed the merchants of Hui Opera. This nomadic trait resulted in the assimilation of various regional theatrical practices, ranging from the martially inflected 'Pihuang' style to the melodically nuanced 'Erhuang' style.

The transformation of AnHui Opera illustrates the adaptability of the genre to sociocultural vicissitudes. Its storied past is reflected in the ongoing evolution of its costumes, which symbolize the cultural zeitgeist and serve as markers of historical development. From the becoming ceremonial garb aligned with Confucian mandates to symbolic representations of power and virtue, these costumes encapsulate the complexities of China's social stratification and ideological shifts.

2.2 The initial design and symbolism of costumes

The initial design of AnHui Opera costumes embodied the rich tapestry of Chinese cultural and societal values, capturing both the ethos of the times and the intrinsic nature of the characters being portrayed on the stage. Consisting of elaborate garments, these costumes were not mere pieces of clothing but potent symbols that conveyed status, virtue, or vice within the narratives enacted through opera.

In their embryonic stages, the costumes were marked by simplicity and practicality, serving primarily to facilitate the actors' movements while hinting subtly at the nature of their roles. However, over time, these simplistic designs evolved to incorporate intricate patterns, luxurious fabrics, and vivid colors all reflective of complex social hierarchies and moral codes.

Symbolically, colors played a formidable role in communicating character and status within AnHui Opera. Inspired by the broader Chinese color symbology, reds represented loyalty and courage, yellows and golds indicated imperial associations, and greens were synonymous with rebellious or peripheral characters. These colors were strictly regulated across dynasties, where laws crafted by the ruling classes dictated the permissible shades for different social ranks—a motif that can be found echoed within the broader history of Chinese textiles.

The use of the 'shou' (寿) character, symbolizing longevity, was typical in opulent garments designed for celebratory scenes or worn by characters of high esteem. The floral patterns exhibited connections to nature and femininity, frequently adorning the garments of female characters.

Embroidery, another critical element, served to highlight the important traits of the characters on stage. Skilled artisans stitched narratives into the fabric with threads of silk and gold, crafting visual stories that lifted the AnHui Opera experience beyond verbal storytelling. For instance, an intricate depiction of a tiger could signify bravery or strength, while a crane could suggest a lofty sanctity. The tiger represents the generals; The crane represents civil officials.

Military characters donned Peking knots, armor pieces, and fastenings that resembled actual wartime attire, communicating the authentic gravity and valor associated with martial roles. The meticulous designs lent credence to the operatic portrayal, ensuring that societal memory and historic occurrences were rendered vividly on the stage. Military characters don authentic wartime attire, including Peking knots, armor, and fasteners, which authentically convey the profound gravity and unwavering courage associated with these individuals. The meticulous design of their costumes ensures a credible depiction of the opera, effectively bringing social memories and historical events to life on stage.

Through these ensembles, AnHui Opera costumes acted as codices of social order and collective memory, with each thread and hue contributing to the vibrant historical canvas on which sociopolitical dynamics played out. They were not only attires but also visual scriptures that informed and instructed society on immutable ethical codes, personal virtues, and the perennial struggle of good against evil.

Ultimately, the initial designs of AnHui Opera costumes were more than mere sartorial choices—they were threads woven into the larger fabric of Chinese history and social memory, each costume a living biography contributing to the cultural narrative and identity.

2.3 Key historical milestones influencing costume transformation

The transmutation of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes is profoundly intertwined with China's historical landscape. Significant periods of socio-political upheaval, imperial edicts, and cultural interchange have served as pivotal milestones that instigated profound changes in the sartorial narrative of AnHui Opera. Starting from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the lavishness of opera costumes began to reflect the opulent tastes and grandeur associated with imperial courts. Surpassing mere aesthetics, these costumes incorporated intricate symbolism and were used as a means to exhibit social hierarchies and power structures within the performances.

During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), the Manchu rulers imposed a strict dress code across the society which influenced the opera costumes as well. The 'Queue Order' and the adoption of Manchu clothing elements signified the political subordination, which was subtly reflected in the costumes of AnHui Opera of the period. The hierarchical nature of the society, stratified by class and ethnicity, was conspicuously presented through the colors, embroidery, and design of the costumes.

The turn of the 20th century heralded the fall of the Qing dynasty, leading to the Republic of China era (1912–1949), where Western influences began to permeate Chinese culture. This cultural synthesis brought about a hybridization in costume design which incorporated Western cutting techniques and motifs, allowing AnHui Opera garments to evolve stylistically while maintaining their traditional roots.

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), marked a drastic transformation as it sought to eliminate the 'Four Olds' - old customs, culture, habits, and ideas. AnHui Opera costumes, as an embodiment of 'old culture,' underwent simplification and were stripped of imperial connotations—reflecting the ideologically charged atmosphere of the era. Utilitarian themes and proletarian lifestyles became the artistic fulcrum, aligning the costumes with the prevailing political ethos.

With the economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 20th century and the opening up of China, the revival and global exposure of AnHui Opera brought about another significant change. There was a resurgence in the appreciation of traditional aesthetics and craftsmanship, leading to the restoration of historical costume designs, though often with modern sensibilities to cater to contemporary audiences.

These historical milestones paint a vivid tapestry of fluctuating influences, each leaving an indelible imprint on the morphology of AnHui Opera costumes. This transmutation encapsulates an array of factors, extending from imperial mandates to cultural revolutions, and from cross-cultural interactions to modern-day revivals, all of which are pivotal in understanding the evolution of cultural expressions and social memory in China's operatic tradition.

3. Social Memory as a Force in Costume Alterations

Social memory, construed from the collective experiences and shared by a group, holds significant sway over the cultural artifacts of a society. It embodies the collective consciousness and the lived realities of a community, it goes beyond individual remembrance to encompass shared traditions, values, and social norms. As per the framework provided by scholars like Hoskins (2006), cultural artifacts, such as opera costumes, are thus not mere inanimate objects but silent narrators of a historical journey, witnessing fluctuations in social hierarchies, and embodying the shifting values of a civilization. The connection between social memory and cultural artifacts is synergetic; as memory is transmitted, it leaves enduring imprints on tangible forms, just as those tangible forms in turn become vessels that carry and communicate these memories through time.

AnHui Opera costumes are repositories of societal structures, where every thread can be seen as a meticulous notation of historical and social importance. The design of these costumes mirrored the prevailing social hierarchies and values, with certain colors and patterns being reserved for specific ranks and classes, akin to the regulations observed and documented regarding the symbolic use of purple in traditional attire (Study on the Prohibition of the Purple Costumes in Ancient China). The design intricacies of these costumes, therefore, attested to a visual hierarchy, demarcating societal status and honor that was candidly interpreted and accepted social norms.

Through the continuous practice of AnHui Opera, with each performance, the opera costumes underwent a passage of transmutation, influenced by the evolving societal contexts. The transmission of social memory across generations encapsulates both fidelity and fluidity – a phenomenon perceptible in the maintenance as well as the creative alteration of costume designs. Successive generations engaged with their cultural heritage, manifesting respect for tradition along with subtle commentaries on contemporary ethos, reflective of the capacity to infuse the present into the weave of the past. This delicate balance between perseverance and innovation stands as an intricate dance between individual agency and collective memory, defining the journey of AnHui Opera costumes across the temporal tapestry of Chinese history.

3.1 Defining social memory and its connection to cultural artifacts

Social memory is an ensemble of recollections shared by a social group that emerges and persists through the dynamics of collective remembrance. It is intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life and is an essential medium through which cultural groups preserve their history, identity, and values. In the context of cultural artifacts, especially opera costumes, social memory operates as a living archive that not only records but also infuses objects with meaning, enabling them to serve as conduits for cultural transmission.

AnHui Opera costumes, as quintessential cultural artifacts, are imbued with the accumulated experiences and ideologies of their times. They are material manifestations of social memory that encapsulate the values, social hierarchies, and contextual significance associated with their origins. These costumes are not merely inanimate representations; they are vibrant testimonies to the ways in which cultural practices are remembered, revered, and adapted over time. They act as repositories of social narratives and as symbols of continuity that bind the past to the present and future generations.

The significance of these costumes as agents of social memory lies in their ability to encapsulate and evoke the collective experiences of the society from which they emerge. They crystallize moments in history, reflecting societal shifts and transformations in a tangible form. The elaborate embroidery, color schemes, and design elements of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes are not random or merely aesthetic; they are deliberate choices that embody cultural codes and social memories.

Through detailed analysis and understanding of the object biographies of these costumes, we can discern the evolving societal norms that have been layered onto them over time. From every stitch and dye to every refurbished brocade, the transmutations of these costumes narrate a story of their existence within a socio-historical milieu. This diachronic perspective reveals the potent role that cultural artifacts, specifically AnHui Opera costumes, play in stabilizing and transmitting social memory, ensuring that the essence of a collective past is not lost but perpetuated and adapted within the unfolding tapestry of time. Thus, the study of social

memory as it interweaves with the evolution of cultural artifacts is imperative for the preservation of heritage and for understanding the nuanced interplay between memory, identity, and the material manifestations of culture.

3.2 The reflection of social hierarchies and values in costume designs

The intricate designs and color palettes of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes function as a canvas for the stratified social system and the moral ethos deeply ingrained in the Chinese cultural fabric. The dress codes for characters in the AnHui Opera were never arbitrary but reflected a meticulously encoded system of social hierarchies and values that governed feudal China. Each costume served as a visual lexicon delineating the character's societal rank, profession, and moral standing.

Costumes rich with symbols, patterns, and specific hues were exclusive to the echelons of nobility and valor, often embroidered with motifs that signified good fortune, integrity, and heroism. Dragons and phoenixes adorned only those garments meant for characters portraying emperors, generals, or characters of noble birth, as they were imperative emblems of imperium and grandeur. Meanwhile, the precision of pleats and the opulence of fabrics such as silk, brocade, and velvet were indicative of wealth and status. Consequently, a hierarchical delineation was evident in the gradation from the lavishly ornate to the simplistic, paralleling the social spectrum from nobility to peasantry.

Moreover, these costumes mirrored the values espoused by the society such as loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness. For instance, characters exemplifying virtue were resplendent in bright, auspicious colors, whereas those depicting treachery or villainy were often cloaked in darker, muddled tones, signifying their corrupt nature and social condemnation.

The rigid costume norms were also a reflection of the color prohibitions present in historical regulations. Such regulatory principles dictated the permissible colors for various social ranks, reinforcing the visible indicators of one's place in the societal hierarchy. For instance, the exclusive use of bright yellow by royalty, as it was considered the most revered hue, emblematic of the center of the universe and the emperors who claimed the mandate of heaven.

In essence, Ancient AnHui Opera costumes were not mere accouterments; they were both manifestations and conservators of social hierarchies and values. They conveyed complex narratives of honor, lineage, and social order, translating intangible social memory into tangible cultural semiotics. Through time, as these vestments have transformed, the social tapestry they embody remains a resilient narrative of the bygone eras, underscored by the immutable social dogma that governed their creation and use.

3.3 Transmission and transformation of social memory across generations

The continuum of social memory through the ages serves as an underpinning for cultural evolution and identity, expressed vividly in the domain of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes. This section examines how the material manifestations of opera costumes carry forward the legacies and societal narratives from one generation to the next, acting as conduits for both the preservation and the adaptation of shared memories. Through the lens of object biography, each successive era bequeaths its own interpretation, symbolism, and innovation to the costumes, thus perpetuating an evolving dialogue between present and past sensibilities.

The intergenerational transmission of social memory within the context of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes can be observed through an analytical dissection of the continuation and deviation of stylistic elements and iconography. It encompasses the intentional conservation of certain features that underscore time-honored values and norms, while simultaneously adapting to the ever-shifting landscape of cultural, political, and technological changes. Collective knowledge, stories, and practices are encoded in the detailed embroidery, fabric choices, and color palettes, painting a storied canvas of societal progression and historical context for subsequent generations.

Moreover, the transformation of these memories is not merely a linear passage from past to present but encompasses a dynamic and reciprocal exchange. As new generations interpret the significance of these costumes against contemporary backdrops, they both draw upon and enrich the collective repository of cultural memory. This is exemplified in the restorative efforts aimed at reviving lost techniques or reintegrating historical motifs that have borne silent witness to eras bygone. The preservation efforts and educational initiatives undertaken to invigorate the relevance of these costumes in modern times serve as testimonies to the resilient nature of social memory and its role in cultural resurgence.

Within this transformation, there is also a tension between fidelity to tradition and the inevitable evolution of cultural expressions. The dialogue between preserving authenticity and embracing change is rendered on the stage of AnHui Opera, where costumes serve as emblematic markers of the past yet evolve to resonate with contemporary audiences. This phenomenon reveals an undercurrent of negotiation that exists within social memory as a living process — one that must, at times, reconcile with the selective remembering and forgetting inherent in cultural transmutations.

In understanding this intergenerational transference, the study highlights the role of various mediators, including costume designers, opera performers, and cultural historians, who each contribute to the conservation and reinterpretation of these sartorial legacies. They act as custodians of history, charged with the delicate task of maintaining the integrity of social memory while engaging with emergent conventions and practices that reflect the ethos of their times.

This intricate network of transmission and transformation of social memory, as encapsulated by Ancient AnHui Opera costumes, is not an isolated phenomenon but serves as an archetype for examining the broader dynamics of cultural continuity and change. It emphasizes the importance of costumes as more than mere garments; they are an integral thread in the fabric of collective human experience, embodying a living narrative that is continually re-sewn by the hands of each generation.

4. Individual Agency and Collective Memory Interplay

The interplay between individual agency and collective memory plays a crucial role in the evolutionary narrative of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes. The artistic expressions embedded within the intricate designs and vibrant colors of the opera costumes are not solely products of inherited tradition but are also influenced by the creative interventions of individual artists and craftsmen. This section delves into the dynamic process wherein the personal creativity of artisans intersects with the established social narratives preserved in the collective memory.

In the realm of Ancient AnHui Opera, the role of individual artists and craftsmen is formidable. Their hands are the conduits through which cultural values and social memories are woven into the fabric of the costumes. These creators serve as interpreters of tradition, drawing from a deep well of historical knowledge while also instilling their own artistic visions into their work. They carry the weight of heritage on their shoulders, balancing the expectations of fidelity to traditional aesthetics with the agency to inject innovation.

Historically, certain figures have emerged as pivotal in the evolution of AnHui Opera costumes. For instance, individuals who had the foresight to incorporate symbolic motifs signifying societal shifts or those who challenged color prohibitions subtly within their designs. Case examples include artisans who, during political upheavals, reaffirmed or redefined cultural motifs by altering elements of the costume to reflect changes in the social order—thereby preserving a narrative continuity while demonstrating their personal agency in the face of collective cultural transformations.

The endeavor to balance traditional fidelity with creative innovation is a nuanced aspect of costume transmutation. On one hand, there is the necessity to maintain the integrity of the operatic form, safeguarding the recognizability and thus the collective memory of the art. On the other hand, there is the equally important need to allow space for individual innovation, which prevents cultural stagnation and invites fresh interpretations. This delicate balance sustains the evolutionary trajectory of AnHui Opera costumes, ensuring they remain vibrant embodiments of socio-cultural complexities, rather than rigid, unchanging relics. The life trajectory of these costumes, as informed by the philosophies of object biographies, continually recontextualizes their meanings and underscores the importance of individual contributions in concert with collective cultural sensibility.

4.1 The role of individual artists and craftsmen in costume creation

The transformative journey of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes over time is inextricably linked to the individual artists and craftsmen whose expertise in fabrication, embroidery, and aesthetic design shaped the visual spectacle of this traditional art form. These artisans were not mere executors of pre-established patterns but were instrumental in the perpetual evolution of the costume's style, symbolism, and functionality, profoundly impacting the preservation and adaptation of cultural identity within the opera tradition.

Costume creation for Ancient AnHui Opera has long been an art that necessitates meticulous craftsmanship and deep understanding of cultural symbolism. Artisans, steeped in historic tailoring techniques and folkloric motifs, dedicated significant portions of their lives to perfecting the art of costume fabrication. They were the silent narrators of social memory, embedding within the weave of threads and fabrics the tales of their society, the mythology of their heritage, and the edicts of their rulers. The depiction of dragons, phoenixes, and other mythological creatures on regal opera costumes was more than mere decoration; it was a dialogue between the artisan and the viewer, a code through which cultural values and hierarchies were reinforced and transmitted. With the knowledge of fabrics and dyes, these artisans confronted the practical realities and constraints of their times. Innovations in dyeing techniques, the incorporation of available materials, and the adaptation of artistic methods all formed part of the alchemy that allowed Ancient AnHui Opera costumes to flourish and transition through dynasties and cultural shifts. The color palettes chosen by the artisans conveyed status, emotion, and narrative weight, thus, the decision-making of these individuals had profound implications for the performance and its reception by the audience.

4.2 Balancing traditional fidelity and creative innovation

The dynamic interplay between preserving tradition and fostering creative innovation in the evolution of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes is a critical reflection of the cultural dialogue within the art world. The fidelity to traditional elements of AnHui Opera costumes is paramount to maintain continuity and respect for cultural heritage. This has typically manifested in steadfast adherence to recognized color schemes, embroidery patterns, and emblematic and symbolic motifs that convey the stories and characters of opera narratives with a high degree of authenticity. The immutability of certain costume elements serves as a cultural marker, preserving the aesthetic and historical values that are associated with Ancient AnHui Opera.

Yet, artistic innovation is equally important in revivifying the tradition and keeping it relevant to contemporary society. This process demands a nuanced approach to integrating modern artistic methods, materials, and philosophical concepts to re-contextualize or reinterpret traditional costumes. Creative innovators in the field of costume design and production confront the challenge of infusing new life into the opera's visual representation while operating within the constraints of cultural authenticity. This delicate balance necessitates a profound understanding of AnHui Opera's social memory, as this provides the creative platform from which innovation springs.

Creative innovation often flourishes in the form of nuanced adaptations, such as blending new textile technologies that enhance the durability and wearability of costumes while preserving the visual integrity of ancient designs. Additionally, the introduction of contemporary thematic elements that resonate with modern social values and perspectives can broaden the appeal of AnHui Opera to a wider audience. It is through such interventions that the modern creators, curators, and performers of AnHui Opera navigate the space between tradition and innovation, ensuring both the conservation and the continual evolution of this artistic heritage. This balance is not merely an artistic choice, but a socio-cultural imperative that responds to an ever-changing landscape of cultural consumption and demographic shifts. The evolving appreciation of AnHui Opera, both domestically and internationally, calls for a dynamic approach where the opera's visual representation can serve as a living dialogue between the past and present, ultimately contributing to the vibrant and sustainable future of this cultural form. Thus, the balancing of traditional fidelity with creative innovation is a strategic and responsive act that aligns with the discourse on intangible cultural heritage preservation in a modern and global context.

5. Preserving Cultural Heritage amidst Modern Changes

The conservation of AnHui Opera costumes encounters numerous challenges in the face of contemporary societal transformations. As objects of intangible cultural heritage, these costumes are not immune to the forces of modernization and globalization. The fading transmission of traditional knowledge, diminishing number of skilled artisans, and the lure of commercialization pose significant risks to the integrity of these cultural artifacts. Additionally, the costumes' vulnerability to environmental factors and the inadequate archival practices threaten their physical and symbolic survival. Dwindling public interest and support compound these issues, leading to concerns about the long-term viability of this heritage domain.

Modern interventions, while sometimes controversial, play a pivotal role in the reconstruction and revitalization of historical AnHui Opera costumes. Technological advancements have allowed for innovative methods of restoration and reproduction, empowering curators and conservationists to halt or reverse decay and damage. Contemporary designers and scholars collaborate, employing digital technology and archival research to accurately depict original designs and materials. Furthermore, modern performances and exhibitions embrace these reconstructed costumes, promoting the opera's visual history and its narrative content to a broader audience.

Strategically preserving the social memory embedded in AnHui Opera costumes necessitates a multifaceted approach. Primarily, such an effort begins with rigorous documentation of object biographies, which illuminates the rich tapestry of their origins, symbolism, and historical journey. Embracing participatory models of cultural heritage management can engage local communities and encourage the younger generation to take ownership of their legacy. Structuring educational programs aimed at interpreting and disseminating the socio-cultural narratives of these costumes can enhance public appreciation and awareness. Additionally, integrating the costumes into multimedia resources and virtual platforms ensures their accessibility and relevance in the digital age. Lastly, fostering collaboration between cultural institutions, policymakers, and academic circles is instrumental in formulating conservation policies that reflect the significance of these cultural treasures and the social memories they preserve.

In conclusion, safeguarding the AnHui Opera costumes demands attentiveness to their material and immaterial aspects, reflecting a commitment to nurturing the identity and memory they encapsulate. Only through concerted and informed actions can the cultural heritage of AnHui Opera costumes continue to flourish amidst the inevitable changes of modern society.

5.1 Challenges to the preservation of AnHui Opera costumes in contemporary society

The endeavor to sustain and protect the intrinsic value of AnHui Opera costumes encounters several challenges within contemporary society. The first obstacle is the diminution of traditional skills and expertise required for the authentic reproduction of these historic garments. Given the intricate craftsmanship involved in the making of opera costumes, the preservation of these skills is essential. However, the aging population of master tailors and the lack of interest among the younger generation in learning these traditional techniques threaten the transmission of this cultural knowledge.

Another challenge lies in the material conservation of the costumes. Susceptibility to environmental factors such as humidity, light, and temperature makes these textiles particularly vulnerable to deterioration over time. With a scarcity of facilities equipped with the proper climate-controlled environments and a deficit of professionals specialized in textile conservation, there is an increased risk of irreparable damage to these cultural relics.

Additionally, AnHui Opera costumes face the issue of commercialization and commodification, akin to the phenomena discussed by Kopytoff (1988) and Pardo-Guerra (2011). As the costumes' aesthetic value is recognized by a wider market, there exists a pressure to cater to contemporary tastes while generating profit, often leading to modifications that stray from historical accuracy. This commercial approach can dilute the costumes' cultural significance and distort the social memory associated with them, detaching the costumes from their original context and transforming them into mere commodities.

Moreover, the rapid pace of modernization and urbanization in China has resulted in societal shifts that challenge the traditional roles and expressions preserved in opera costumes, as city life offers little space for traditional customs. This, coupled with a shift in public interest towards modern forms of entertainment, has led to a decline in the popularity and visibility of AnHui Opera, further marginalizing its costumes and their significance.

Finally, there is a profound challenge in striking a balance between preserving the authenticity of the costumes while making them accessible for educational purposes and public viewing. Museums and cultural institutions often seek to display these garments to support cultural awareness and education, yet without proper methods in place for their preservation during exhibition, the costumes can suffer further damage.

To surmount these challenges, deliberate and well-coordinated strategies are essential to safeguarding the precious social memory carved into the fabric of AnHui Opera costumes and ensuring their longevity for future generations.

5.2 Modern interventions and reconstructions of historical costumes

In recent decades, the reconstruction of historical opera costumes has risen as a crucial dimension in preserving and revitalizing the tangible aspect of AnHui Opera's intangible cultural heritage. This intentional act of modern intervention instigates a bridge between the antique vestiges of cultural attire and the contemporary aesthetic and performative practices. These reconstructions are not merely replicative but serve as an interpretative regeneration of tradition, wherein each costume encapsulates layers of social memory, complementing its visual representation with narrative depth.

Modern interventions in the reconstruction of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes are informed by methodological research that echoes the principles observed in object biographies. As demonstrated in the case of Catherine Martin's carefully documented designs, the biographies of reconstructed opera costumes engage with a historical context that is substantiated by empirical evidence, such as trade records, visual archives, and documented regulations dictating colors and patterns. Attention to such details ensures that the constructed garments do not become devoid of the historical and social significance that the originals possessed.

These reconstructions are further influenced by contemporary dynamics, including advancements in materials, methods of production, and evolving perceptions of historicity and authenticity. As the social narratives embedded within the costumes are revisited, modern designers and historians alike face the challenge of filtering through layers of historical alterations, aiming to present a coherent visual narrative that resonates with both the past and present audiences.

The impact of modern technology also plays a significant role, allowing for intricate patterns and dyes, which were once exclusive to high societal ranks due to their cost and rarity, to be replicated with accuracy and within reasonable costs. This democratization of costume production can lead to a newfound accessibility and appreciation of AnHui Opera, although it also raises questions regarding the dilution of traditionally sanctioned hierarchies and exclusivity that these costumes represented.

Despite these challenges, the reconstruction endeavours often take a collaborative path to ensure fidelity to tradition. Engagement with custodians of opera costume tradition—such as the skilled tailors, historians familiar with AnHui Opera's spectrum, and community elders—fosters an environment where practical knowledge is holistically combined with theoretical understanding. Digitalization and 3D modeling of costumes heighten the precision of reconstructions, facilitating virtual exhibitions and educational resources to disseminate knowledge and foster an appreciative understanding of opera costumes' significance.

Furthermore, these modern reconstructions and interventions serve as a platform for dialogues on the dynamic nature of cultural heritage and the importance of balance between preservation and relevant expression. As operatic performances thrive on the vitality of its costume legacy, the nuanced appreciation of past aesthetics, their socio-cultural underpinnings, and their evolution over time act as a testament to the vibrant, living tradition that is Ancient AnHui Opera. Through these modern recreations, a patchwork quilt of historical authenticity and innovative craftsmanship emerges—stitching together memory, culture, and the ever-evolving tapestry of human artistry.

5.3 Strategies for retaining the social memory embedded in opera costumes

Retaining the social memory in opera costumes necessitates meticulous strategies that bridge the past and present, ensuring the transmission of cultural values and maintaining the integrity of these historical artifacts. Utilizing the concept of object biographies as described by Mytum (2003) and Hoskins (2006), the strategies proposed in this section are aimed at making these mute objects speak their historical context and cultural significance. These recommendations synthesize the perspectives of heritage preservationists, costume designers, and social historians.

Firstly, the creation of detailed object biographies for each costume becomes paramount. This documentation should go beyond physical descriptions and incorporate the historical, artistic, and social significance of each costume piece. By linking the costumes to archival materials such as performance scripts, period photographs, and actor diaries, we create a rich tapestry of information that can enhance understanding and appreciation of the memory embedded in these artifacts.

Secondly, the institution of digital archiving methods to comprehensively catalogue AnHui opera costumes could provide broader access and interactivity, allowing for a virtual exploration of the costumes' details and their evolution over time. By digitizing these materials, we create a durable repository that can withstand time and resist the physical decay of textiles.

Thirdly, engaging with modern designers and tailors to replicate the craftsmanship of historical costumes could serve both educational and practical purposes. Workshops and apprenticeship programs could be designed to transfer the knowledge of traditional AnHui Opera costume making, thus preserving the skills and techniques that are as much a part of social memory as the costumes themselves.

Fourthly, adopting a participatory approach to costume exhibition could be explored, allowing audiences to engage directly with the costumes. Interactive exhibitions could be set up, where the public can not only view but also touch reproductions of the costumes, experiencing the texture and craftsmanship firsthand.

Fifthly, collaboration with performance troupes to incorporate authentic costume recreations in contemporary performances may reinforce social memory. Audiences would have the opportunity to see the costumes in their intended context, fostering a greater link between past and present cultural expressions.

Lastly, Currently, the Hui Theatre is collaborating with Anhui University to safeguard cultural heritage and implement initiatives in primary schools aimed at instilling and training future generations of Hui opera performers. However, little attention has been given to the costumes. educational initiatives, such as integrative school programs and public seminars, might be used to instill awareness and interest in the cultural significance of AnHui Opera costumes. Educational materials developed in conjunction with historians and costume experts would ensure accurate and engaging presentations of the social histories associated with these garments.

Collectively, these strategies could forge a multifaceted approach for preserving the social memories embroidered within the fibers of AnHui Opera costumes. By valuing the information and narratives these costumes carry, it becomes possible to maintain their relevance and significance in the contemporary cultural landscape, encouraging a living continuity of ancient social memories.

6. Conclusion

The investigation into the transmutation of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes in China has unveiled the multifaceted nature of social memory and its powerful influence on cultural heritage. Through meticulous analysis, this research has identified key findings that substantiate the costumes' evolution as not merely an aesthetic adaptation but as a reflection of the changing socio-political milieu. As identified in the study, the color regulations and permitted alterations of opera costumes signify the pronounced role that social hierarchy and honor played in dictating cultural expression. Furthermore, the findings underscore the dialectic nature of how collective memory shapes, and is shaped by, individual agency, particularly in the preservation of material culture.

This paper has illuminated the dynamic interplay between social memory and the sartorial narrative of AnHui Opera costumes. The evolution of these costumes underscores the resilience of cultural identity during periods of fluctuating societal norms. The implications for cultural heritage are substantial, as this research evidences the necessity for sensitivity to socio-cultural contexts in the preservation and interpretation of historical artifacts.

Drawing on the concept of object biography and historical costume examination, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of social memory effects. It provides empirical evidence that social memory encapsulates more than cognitive recall; it is a manifestation of cultural values inherent within the fabric of AnHui Opera costumes. This research also reinforces the importance of material culture in sustaining and communicating intangible heritage through generations.

In light of the findings, there is a pressing need for comprehensive documentation and conservation frameworks that respect the balance between safeguarding the physical integrity of opera costumes and maintaining their social and cultural values. Future research should prioritize interdisciplinary approaches to explore broader social influences on material culture, extending beyond the opera stage. Heritage conservation can be enriched through the integration of social memory studies, ensuring that the narrative and significance of artifacts like AnHui Opera costumes are preserved for future reflection and learning. It is recommended that digital archiving methods be explored to enhance access to these cultural treasures and promote their enduring legacy.

6.1 Summary of key findings and their implications for cultural heritage.

The investigation into the transmutation of Ancient AnHui Opera costumes has uncovered several key findings that hold significant implications for the cultural heritage of China. First, it has been established that the evolution of these costumes is not merely a reflection of aesthetic trends, but rather a vivid tapestry threads by

social structures, moral values, and power hierarchies. The intricate designs, color schemes, and material choices are encoded with layers of social memory that chronicle the vicissitudes of Chinese history and society. The embodiment of social norms and codes within the fabric of the costumes suggests a deliberate process of cultural preservation through which intangible heritage is manifest. The study uncovered how color prohibitions and the rigidity or fluidity in costume designs were closely intertwined with societal values, particularly those pertaining to hierarchy and honor. This finding is crucial for understanding the complexity of social memory as a living phenomenon; it evolves yet retains elements of the past.

The transformations of costume constituents like fabrics, embellishments, and hues were marked by regulatory decisions imposed by various dynasties, reflecting the political landscape's influence on the cultural domain. These historical regulations shaped the contours of AnHui Opera's visual portrayal and, as a result, the collective memory surrounding it. As such, these costumes are more than just objects; they are dynamic narrators of past socio-political environments.

Furthermore, the interplay between collective memory and individual agency, examined in the context of costume alterations, presents a unique intersection where personal artistry comes into dialogue with the wider social narrative. This has significant repercussions for the discourse on intangible cultural heritage, as it underscores the need for a nuanced approach that appreciates both the societal and the individual determinants of cultural evolution.

Synthesizing these findings, it becomes evident that cultural heritage is dynamically entwined with social memory. It highlights the necessity for innovative conservation strategies that are adaptive to the evolving nature of traditions while being rooted in an understanding of the past. The documented history of AnHui Opera costumes, as articulated through the concept of object biography, serves as a potent illustration of the need to preserve the richly layered cultural memory to maintain the integrity of intangible heritage. This research elevates the perception of traditional opera costumes from mere artifacts to emblematic constructs of cultural heritage, bearing within them the imprints of time and society.

6.2 The contribution of this research to the understanding of social memory effects

This research extends the understanding of social memory effects by providing empirical evidence on the impact of socio-political dynamics on the evolution of cultural artefacts, specifically Ancient AnHui Opera costumes. Through the use of object biographies, this study has traced the diachronic changes of the costumes, revealing the layers of social, political, and cultural significances imbued within them. The research showcases how these garments serve as repositories of collective memory, reflecting the societal values and historical context of their time.

6.3 Recommendations for future research and heritage conservation efforts for AnHui Opera costumes

In the wake of the critical findings of this study, several recommendations for future research and heritage conservation efforts for AnHui Opera costumes can be advanced. Future research should prioritize an interdisciplinary approach, melding historical, sociological, and design methodologies to further unpack the complexities of opera costume transmutation. Extensive archival work combined with anthropological fieldwork will deepen the understanding of the social, political, and cultural impacts of costume changes. Additionally, technology such as 3D scanning and virtual reality could be employed to digitally preserve and recreate ancient costumes, allowing for broader access and interactive engagement.

Heritage conservation strategies should account for both the tangible and intangible aspects of AnHui Opera costumes. Implementing detailed object biographies for each costume is essential. These biographies would adhere to the paradigm outlined by Hoskins (2006) and should endeavor to detail the life course of costumes, including their creation, usage, alterations, representations in media, and influence on both public perceptions and opera practices. There is also a need to collaborate with opera professionals and communities, recognising the dynamic and living tradition they embody.

Moreover, the conservation efforts would benefit from the development of specialized workshops aimed at training the next generation of artisans in the traditional craft of costume making. These workshops could serve as an intersection of cultural transmission, scholarly research, and public education. To this end, institutions dedicated to the research and conservation of AnHui Opera could partner with academic entities, leveraging shared resources and expertise to cultivate a more profound respect for and understanding of this cultural heritage. Collaboration with auction houses and museums may also reveal novel ways to assess the value and ensure the sustainable management of the opera costumes as collectibles.

Finally, thematic exhibitions and public seminars could be designed to showcase the transformation and significance of AnHui Opera costumes, enlightening a wider audience and encouraging community involvement in heritage preservation. These efforts should be underpinned by rigorous scholarly research, leveraging findings such as those presented in this paper, to articulate a compelling narrative of the social memories and historical insights preserved within these costumes. Through these recommendations, a holistic approach to the preservation and celebration of AnHui Opera costumes can be realized, ensuring that these treasured elements of cultural heritage continue to inspire and educate, reflecting the diverse tapestry of Chinese history and society.

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