

# Peking Opera Cinema: Storytelling And Audiovisual Interpreting From 2014 To 2023

<sup>1</sup>Da Guo Ph.D Candidate

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, [da.g@kkumail.com](mailto:da.g@kkumail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Bhomhuan Buarabha

Asst. Prof. Ph.D. Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, [bhomhu@kku.ac.th](mailto:bhomhu@kku.ac.th)

<sup>3</sup>Wanwisa Wannapipat

Ph.D. International College, Khon Kaen University, [wanwwa@kku.ac.th](mailto:wanwwa@kku.ac.th)

---

## Abstract

*This study examines the audiovisual language and narrative structure of Peking Opera films from 2014 to 2023, contextualized within the broader historical evolution of the genre from 1905 to 2023. Three primary groups of informants underpin this research: key informants (established directors, playwrights, and academics), casual informants (industry practitioners), and general informants (mainly film students representing new audience perspectives). Insights from these groups illuminate both the theoretical and practical dimensions of Peking Opera cinema. The study reveals how Peking Opera films have successfully adapted to contemporary audiences while retaining their cultural essence and emphasizes the dynamic interplay between traditional stage techniques and modern cinematic storytelling. This research thus contributes substantial evidence to academic discourse and industry development regarding the creative and technical advancement of Peking Opera films.*

**Keywords:** Peking Opera Cinema, Casual Informants, Film Reception, Film Industry, Audiovisual Language, Audience Perspectives, Cinematic Storytelling.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese opera (戏曲) is a traditional performing art form that tells stories based in Chinese history, folklore, and culture by combining dance, mime, acrobatics, music, and vocal performance. The division of this art form into regional styles sets it apart; among these are Yue Opera, Kunqu Opera, and Cantonese Opera, with Peking Opera being the most well-known worldwide (Liang, 2011). Since its distribution is concentrated in Peking and spreads throughout the nation, Peking opera is the most influential opera genre in China. Peking opera is now known as the "national opera" due to its widespread influence and nationalisation. UNESCO added it to its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010 (UNESCO, 2010).

In Peking Opera performances, four vital artistic elements converge:

- Singing: Artists communicate characters' emotions and advance the storyline through specific melodies, with cantatas like Xipi and Erhuang at the core.
- Speaking: Rhyme and prose articulate the characters' inner thoughts and situational nuances.
- Acting: Physical movements and stylized gestures convey character and plot developments.
- Fighting: Choreographed martial arts sequences animate battle scenes and confrontations.

Chinese opera film is a cinematic adaptation that incorporates elements of traditional Chinese opera into film form. It combines performance styles like singing, recitation, acting, and martial arts, commonly associated with Chinese operatic traditions, with cinematic techniques such as close-ups, editing, and sound design (Teo, 2013). Peking opera films serve both as a medium of cultural preservation and as a platform for innovation, offering new interpretations of classic operatic narratives (Hu, 2017; Li, 2015). The history of Peking opera films traces the evolution of a traditional Chinese performing art into a cinematic genre that bridges stage and screen. The origins of Peking opera films can be dated back to the early 20th century, with silent film adaptations that captured the artistry of live performances. The genre gained momentum during the mid-20th century, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, when advancements in sound and color technology allowed for more faithful renditions of operatic

performances. Iconic productions such as *Farewell My Concubine* (1955) set benchmarks for the genre by combining traditional aesthetics with cinematic techniques. Film narrative structure refers to the framework through which a film's story is organized and presented to audiences. It encompasses the sequence of events, character development, thematic progression, and cinematic techniques used to convey meaning and emotion. Common narrative structures include the three-act structure (setup, confrontation, resolution) and non-linear storytelling, which disrupts chronological order for dramatic or thematic effect. Film visual language refers to the system of visual elements and techniques used in cinema to convey meaning, emotion, and narrative. It encompasses a range of components, including camera movement, angle, shot size, composition, color, and lighting, each contributing to the overall storytelling and audience experience.

- **Camera Movement and Angle:** Camera motion, such as panning, tilting, tracking, or zooming, guides the viewer's attention and creates dynamic engagement, while angles—low, high, or eye level—convey power dynamics and emotional tone (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

- **Shot Size:** The use of different shot sizes, such as close-ups, medium shots, and long shots, frames the subject within the context of its surroundings and highlights emotional or narrative details (Monaco, 2009).

- **Composition:** The arrangement of elements within the frame, guided by principles like balance, symmetry, and the rule of thirds, directs visual focus and underscores thematic significance (Arijon, 1991).

- **Color:** Color palettes and grading evoke mood and symbolism, guiding emotional responses or reinforcing narrative themes. For example, warm tones often convey intimacy, while cool tones suggest detachment or tension (Bellantoni, 2005).

- **Lighting:** Lighting design shapes mood and depth, with techniques such as high-key lighting for a bright, optimistic atmosphere or low-key lighting to emphasize shadows and mystery (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

Film auditory language uses sound to complement and enhance the visual narrative. Key components include:

- **Dialogue:** Speech conveys character, advances the plot, and provides exposition while reflecting cultural and linguistic nuances (Altman, 1992).

- **Sound Effects:** Diegetic and non-diegetic sounds add realism, underscore action, and create atmosphere, such as the roaring of engines in an action sequence or ambient background noise (Chion, 1994).

- **Music:** The score reinforces emotional tone, signifies cultural context, and highlights narrative developments. Leitmotifs, recurring musical themes, often represent specific characters or ideas.

Peking Opera films have accomplished the innovation of the traditional art through narrative structure and audio-visual language, blending the performative aspects of opera with the expressive tools of cinema. This cross-media integration enhances the audience's experience by expanding the aesthetic possibilities of storytelling. For example, close-up shots highlight the subtle facial expressions and intricate makeup details that might be less perceptible in a live theatre setting (Wang, 2018). However, from 2014 to 2023, the development of Peking Opera cinema has taken on unprecedented new dimensions. During this period, along with the support of national cultural policies and changes in audience aesthetic demands, Peking Opera films entered a new golden age.

### Objectives

- To study the history of Peking Opera Film (1905-2023).
- To study the narrative structure of Peking opera film (2014-2023).
- To study the audiovisual language of Peking Opera Film (2014-2023).

### Scope of Study

The objective of this study is to explore the transformative developments in Peking Opera films, focusing on aspects of narrative structure and audiovisual language. The research will then focus on the 7 Peking Opera films from 2014 to 2023 that filtered based on movie box office, movie ratings and international awards, investigating the reason of their success. By analyzing these films, the research seeks successful

experiences through focusing narrative structure and audiovisual language from the perspective of film formalism theory. Based on the three criteria of film box office (top three), film ratings (top three), and winning international film awards, 7 films were selected for this study in a comprehensive manner: Farewell My Concubine (2014), Mu Guiying Assuming Command (2017), Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity (2015), Havoc in Heaven (2019), In Pursuit of The General (2015), The Gious Zhen-Guan period (2021), Zhuo Fang Cao (2021).



Fig. 1 Posters for representative 7 Peking Opera films (Baidu.com, n.d.).

### Research Concept and Framework

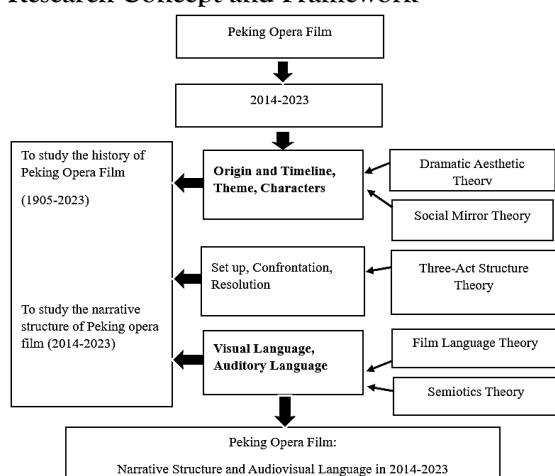


Fig. 2 Research Framework.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Society and Culture of the People's Republic of China

The term “society”, derived from the Latin word socius, meaning “companion” or “ally,” emphasizes the role of human cooperation in the development and functioning of society (Wahyudi, 2020). “Society” is one of the foundational concepts in sociology, representing the collective lives and interactions of individuals living within a shared system.



Fig. 3 National flag of the People's Republic of China (China Government Network, n.d.)

China's administrative structure is hierarchical and comprehensive, comprising provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the central government, and special administrative regions (SARs). China's achievements in poverty alleviation and rural development are among the most significant globally. The country's focus on lifting over 850 million people out of extreme poverty (World Bank, 2019) is a testament to its economic planning and social welfare policies. China is a multi-ethnic country officially recognizing 56 ethnic groups, with the Han Chinese constituting approximately 91% of the population. The remaining 55 minority groups include the Zhuang, Hui, Manchu, Uyghur, Miao, and Tibetan peoples, each contributing unique cultural, linguistic, and historical traditions. Mandarin

Chinese, or Putonghua, serves as the official national language and is widely spoken across the country. Rooted in the Beijing dialect, it acts as a unifying linguistic medium in a nation characterized by extensive linguistic diversity, including numerous regional dialects and languages such as Cantonese, Shanghainese, and Hakka. “Culture” was first defined by the ancient Roman philosopher Cicero using the Latin word “cultura animi”, which originally meant “cultivation of the soul”. It is derived from the knowledge or experience related to the life of organisms accumulated in the process of their development, enabling them to adapt to the natural or surrounding environment.

**Table 1** Chinese Historical Dynasties.

Dynasties	Start and end time
Xia	2070 B.C.E. - 1600 B.C.E.
Shang	1600 BC-1046 BC
Western Zhou	1046 BC - 771 BC
Eastern Spring and Autumn Period	770 BC - 476 BC
Zhou Warring States	475 BC - 221 BC
Qin	221 B.C.E. - 207 B.C.E.
Western Han	206 B.C.-24 A.D.
Eastern Han	25 BC-220 AD
Three Kingdoms (Wei, Shu, Wu)	220-265 B.C.
Western Jin	265-316 A.D.
Eastern Jin Dynasty	317-420 A.D.
Northern and Southern Dynasties	420 - 589 A.D.
Sui (Sui)	581-618 A.D.
Tang Dynasty	618-907 A.D.
Five Dynasties	907-960 A.D.
Northern Song Dynasty	960 - 1127 A.D.
Southern Song	1127-1279 A.D.
Yuan	1271-1368 A.D.
Ming	1368-1644 A.D.
Qing Dynasty	1644 - 1911 A.D.
Republic of China	1912—1949 A.D.
People’s Republic of China	1949—A.D.

Chinese regional folk customs are an intricate tapestry woven from thousands of years of history, geographical diversity, and cultural interactions. They embody the daily lives, beliefs, and values of the Chinese people and provide insight into the profound cultural richness of China. Chinese theatre arts, encompassing traditional opera and modern drama, are a testament to the nation’s artistic ingenuity and cultural richness. Among the most renowned forms is Peking Opera (Jingju), which combines music, vocal performance, mime, dance, and acrobatics.



Chinese folklore embodies the collective wisdom, values, and imagination of the people, passed down through generations via oral traditions, songs, and stories.



**Fig. 5** Folklore the Legend of the White Snake (S.shuge.org, n.d.)

Folktales often reflect themes of morality, resilience, and reverence for nature. Stories such as “The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl” (a tale of love and separation symbolized by the Qixi Festival) and “The Legend of the White Snake” illustrate the interplay between human emotions and supernatural forces (Allan, 2020).

#### **General Knowledge about Peking Opera Film, Film Narrative Structure, Audiovisual Language**

Film, as an art form, has evolved significantly since its inception in the late 19th century, blending technological innovation, artistic expression, and cultural representation. Rooted in both visual storytelling and sociopolitical contexts, cinema serves as a medium for entertainment, education, and ideological dissemination. The history of Chinese opera films can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, when traditional Chinese theatre performance forms, such as Peking Opera, Kunqu Opera and Yu Opera, were introduced into films. These forms of opera were not only popular with Chinese audiences, but also formed an important part of traditional Chinese culture. Opera films have been a way to introduce traditional Chinese performing arts to new generations and to international audiences who may not have access to live performances (Pang, 2005). Peking opera films are an important part of Chinese opera films. Peking Opera originated in the Qing Dynasty and incorporates many forms of theatre from southern China.



**Fig. 6** Peking Opera Film Poster (Image.baidu.com, n.d.)

During the 1950s and 1960s, Cantonese opera films reached their golden age in Hong Kong. Studios such as Shaw Brothers and MP&GI produced numerous Cantonese opera films, leveraging advancements in filmmaking techniques to enhance the visual and auditory appeal of opera.



**Fig. 7** A Still from the 3D Yue Opera movie Romance of the West Chamber (Shanghai Opera Art Center, n.d.)

Huangmei Opera films are unique among opera films because of their light and clear singing and fresh and simple style. Huangmei Opera originated in Anhui Province and was originally based on folk tunes.



**Fig. 8** Poster for the Huangmei Opera film *The Match of Heavenly Fairy* (Finance. sina.com., n.d.)

In 1905, the first Chinese film ever made, *The Battle of Dingjunshan*, featured a recording of a Peking Opera show with the same title performed by the celebrated master Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) (Chen, 2022), which marked the first combination of Peking Opera and film and became an important milestone in the history of Chinese cinema. The narrative structure of film is a narrative-based art, and although its narrative methods are strange and varied, its structural patterns can be summarised into several types: linear narrative structure, non-linear narrative structure, and anti-linear narrative structure. The earliest conceptualisation of linear narrative structure can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, whose definition of narrative integrity and tragedy has influenced the West for nearly two millennia (Richardson, 2007). The most classic and common structural pattern of linear narrative is the three-act structure (McKee, 2014). The main features of non-linear narrative are 'non-realistic mental structure' instead of 'realistic factual structure', 'chance' instead of 'causality', 'open ending' instead of 'closed ending', 'temporal chaos' instead of 'closed ending', 'spatial and temporal chaos' instead of 'spatial and temporal chaos'. Anti-linear narrative is mostly adopted by art films such as loose culture films, poetic films and experimental films. These films share a common feature, that is, they don't respect the narrative, and intentionally downplay the narrative, the plot, and the relationship between the characters. More often than not, they express an emotion (Screenplayology, 2023). Film audiovisual language encompasses the interplay of visual and auditory elements to create a cohesive and immersive narrative experience. This synthesis of visual and sound components is essential in shaping how stories are perceived, understood, and emotionally resonated with by audiences.

### **Plan and policy**

The Chinese government has implemented a variety of plans and policies to preserve and promote Peking opera films. By integrating Peking opera into the nation's broader cultural and economic strategies, the government ensures that the art form not only survives but also evolves to meet modern cultural and technological trends. Several important government policies have supported the development and promotion of Peking opera films, with the goal of preserving cultural heritage while enhancing its market appeal. The Film Industry Promotion Law (2017) is one such policy that directly impacts the production of Peking opera films. This law offers incentives such as tax breaks and subsidies for filmmakers who produce films based on traditional Chinese culture, including Peking opera. Social policies and educational reforms have also contributed to the preservation and promotion of Peking opera through films. The National Education Reform Plan (2020) has introduced traditional Chinese culture into school curricula, encouraging the younger generation to engage with art forms such as Peking opera from an early age.

### **Study area**

This paper aims to examine the Peking Opera films produced between 1905 and 2023, focusing on three critical aspects: history, narrative structure, and audiovisual language. The corpus of this study consists of 154 films. When it comes to narrative structure and audiovisual language, 7 representative Peking Opera films were selected and studied. The selection criteria for the 7 films are film box office, movie ratings and international awards.

**Table 2** List of representative 7 Peking Opera films.

No.	Film Title	Director	Premiere Time
1	<i>Farewell My Concubine</i>	Teng Junjie	2014.05.30 2015.12.05
2	<i>Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity</i>	Bao Erfu	2015.04.23
3	<i>In Pursuit of The General</i>	Teng Junjie	2015.05.05
4	<i>Mu Guiying Assuming Command</i>	Xia Gang	2017.04.21
5	<i>Havoc in Heaven</i>	Cheng Lu	2019.10.20
6	<i>The Gious Zhen-Guan period</i>	Teng Junjie	2021.05.18
7	<i>Zhuo Fang Cao</i>	Teng Junjie	2021.05.19

### Theory and Concept

This study mainly focuses on the characteristics and success of Peking Opera films in terms of narrative structure and audio-visual language, such as three-act structure, camera movement, composition, lighting, color, sound effects, music, dialogue, etc. The following are the theories I chose based on the research content and purpose. This theory is widely associated with screenwriting guru Syd Field, whose seminal book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979) became a foundational text for filmmakers. Metz was a French film theorist who applied semiotics to cinema, analyzing how films function as a language. His seminal work, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (1974), explores the syntactic and semantic systems underlying audiovisual communication. His seminal work, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (1974), explores the syntactic and semantic systems underlying audiovisual communication. Semiotics, introduced by Saussure, is the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior. In film studies, semiotics has been widely applied by theorists such as Roland Barthes and Christian Metz, who argued that films communicate through a complex language of signs (Metz, 1974). Social Mirror Theory is widely applied in disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies, and media studies to explore how cultural artifacts both reflect and shape societal realities. Stuart Hall (1932–2014) is the most representative theorist.

### Relevant Research

There are no studies on Peking Opera films in Thailand, but there are studies on Chinese films, Chinese culture, film narrative structure and audiovisual language in film. This review explores the aesthetics of Peking Opera as represented in cinematic narratives, analyzing contributions from key scholars. The studies provide insights into how Peking Opera's traditional forms are reinterpreted in films, integrating performance arts, symbolic gestures, and cultural narratives with modern cinematic techniques.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research on Peking Opera Film: Narrative Structure and Audiovisual Language From 2014 To 2023 has 3 objectives, 1) To study the history of Peking Opera Film (1905-2023). 2) To study the narrative structure of Peking opera film (2014-2023). 3) To study the audiovisual language of Peking Opera Film (2014-2023). In this study Qualitative research tools will be applied, and the details are as follow.

### Target Group

The analysis of target group is very important for the study, for it is related to the useful information which would construct the research. According to the different sources of information, there are key informant, casual informant and general informant in the study. In this study, we aim to investigate three target groups, which are as follows: 1) academic experts, renowned directors and actors specializing in the work of Peking Opera films research and creation, 2) filmmakers and workers engaged in the creation of Peking Opera and Peking Opera films, 3) film students. The examination of these diverse groups will provide a comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives and experiences that contribute to the discourse surrounding Peking Opera films.

### Research Duration and Procedures



Before embarking on this research, a substantial amount of preparation work is required. One of the most crucial aspects is to have a comprehensive understanding of the field and the questions to be investigated, which can be achieved through extensive literature review and consultation with relevant experts and scholars. Reviewing related literature helps us grasp the current research progress, identify established consensus, determine valuable research methods, recognize issues to avoid, and pinpoint the most worthwhile questions to explore. Consulting with pertinent experts and scholars allows us to learn from their research experiences and methodologies, ensuring that our investigation is more robust and well-founded. Once we have a solid understanding of the research field and questions, we can begin to devise a research plan and steps. The entire research process is expected to span one year. The overall plan and steps for this study are as follows:

**Table 3** Research Duration and Procedures.

No.	Research Programmed	Period
1	Preparation: gather general information for the research	2 months
2	Data collection: plan for field research, field research and data collection	1 month 5 months
3	Data processing, analysis, and synthesis	2 months
4	Conducting report and publish	2 months

#### Research Tools

In this research, a multi-faceted interview strategy will be implemented to comprehensively understand the reception and assimilation of Peking Opera Film across different segments of informants. In this study, a focus group discussion format will be adopted to collect data basing on Peking Opera Films from General informants. This method enables the researcher to gain insights into the collective experiences and opinions of the participants, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of Peking Opera Films. The researcher observes the subject without becoming involved in the setting. This minimizes the influence of the researcher's presence on the observed behavior.

#### Data Collection

The data collection of this study consists of two parts, primary data and secondary data.

##### Primary data

In this study, primary data will be collected through following research tools.

**Table 4** Data collection implementation details.

Objective	Research tools	Contents	Informant
History of Peking Opera Film (1905-2023)	1. Survey form 2. Participant observation 3. Non-participant observation	<b>The Origin and Timeline, Theme, Characters</b>	1. key informants 2. casual informants
Narrative Structure of Peking Opera Film (2014-2023).	1. Participant observation form 2. Unstructured in-depth interview form 3. Focus group discussion form	Views and feelings on narrative structure of Peking Opera film	1. key informants 2. casual informants 3. general informants
Audiovisual Language of Peking Opera Film (2014-2023).	1. Observation 2. Unstructured in-depth interview form 3. 3. Focus group discussion form	Views and feelings on audiovisual language of Peking Opera film	1. key informants 2. casual informants 3. general informants

##### Secondary Data

This part of the data will come from films, books, textbooks, research, documents, internet, and academic websites.



### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a critical step utilized for the in-depth excavation and interpretation of the rich data collected through various research tools such as observation grids, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions.

### **Presentation of Results**

Upon completing the aggregation and analysis of the data, this research will formulate a series of findings and conclusions based on the research. These results will be presented in the form of an academic research paper, exposing the innovation and development in the narrative structure and audiovisual language of Peking Opera Films. This research paper will focus on presenting novel and insightful perspectives derived from the analysis of Peking Opera Films. Furthermore, it will serve as a potent resource for scholars and researchers in relevant fields to refer to and cite, fostering further research and discussion in the field of Peking Opera Films, and also provides creative references for Peking Opera film practitioners.\

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The findings of the study, which are directly influenced by the insights provided by three categories of informants: key informants (KI), casual informants (CI), and general informants (GI). Key informants, including experts and scholars, provided historical and theoretical perspectives on Peking Opera films, ensuring the academic rigor of the study. Their opinions shaped the core narrative and audiovisual evolution of the films. Casual informants, consisting of industry professionals, provided practical knowledge on filmmaking techniques and artistic approaches, helping to connect traditional Peking Opera elements with modern film approaches. General informants, primarily film students, provided new perspectives on audience acceptance and emerging trends, focusing on how the younger generation engages with the genre.

### **The History of Peking Opera Film (1905-2023)**

The study of the origins of film has a core position in the history of cinema. This viewpoint is often attributed to film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. In their influential book *Film Art: An Introduction*, Bordwell and Thompson (2008) argue that examining the origins of cinema is essential for understanding the medium's evolution from a technical experiment to a complex narrative art form. Theme and Character are foundational elements in the study of the history of Chinese opera films. The viewpoint has been explored by several scholars, though the most prominent discussions arise in works by scholars like Tan Ye and Kun Qian. Their research focuses on how themes and characters in Chinese opera films reflect socio-cultural values and individual archetypes, serving as a bridge between traditional opera and cinematic expression. Based on historical documents, published Peking Opera film productions (1905-2023) and field research data, this study compiles and analyses in detail the history of Peking Opera films in 3 aspects: origins and timeline, themes, characters. In this study, after a literature review and multiple examinations, Peking Opera films produced from 1905 to 2023 are sorted out and summarised according to four main pieces of information: year of production, title, producer, and director.

In conclusion, Peking Opera films have gone through seven stages of development roughly:

1. Stage of recording Peking opera performances by means of film (1905-1931);
2. Stage of preliminary cinematographic sound black-and-white documentaries (1931-1937);
3. Stage of the birth and maturity of Peking Opera films (1940-1948);
4. Stage of Prosperous Development of Peking Opera Films (1950-1966);
5. Stage of Model Opera Films (1970-1976);
6. Stage of Free Development of Peking Opera Films in a market economy (1977-2013);
7. Stage of exploring Peking Opera films in the context of market economy and government support (2014-2023).

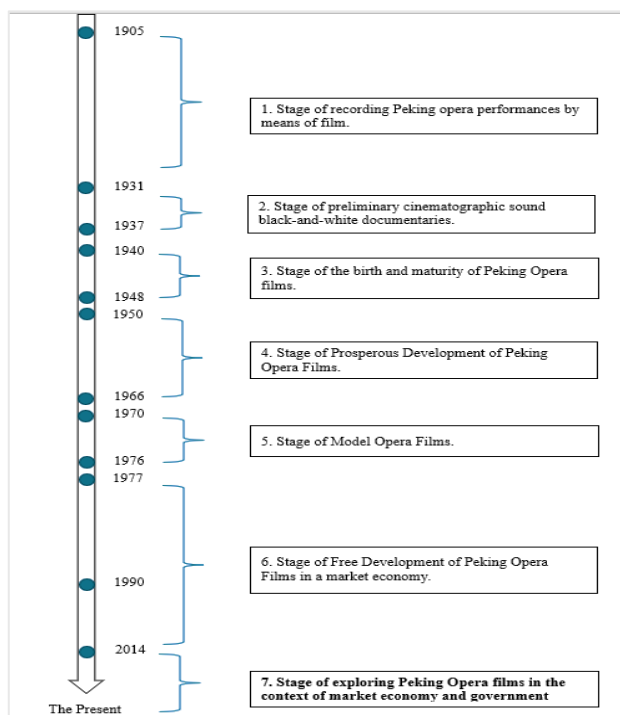


Fig. 9 7 Stages in the Historical Development of Peking Opera Films.

### The narrative structure of Peking Opera film (2014-2023)

The study of narrative structures in Peking Opera films requires a comprehensive and systematic. The investigation begins by selecting and engaging three distinct target groups—key informants, casual informants, and general informants—to gather diverse perspectives on narrative structures. The Act One of a Peking Opera film is not only the starting point of the narrative, but also an important carrier of cultural expression, showing a unique emotional depth and cultural connotation through a variety of artistic means and narrative techniques. This in-depth analysis of the first act helps to better understand the innovation and development of Peking Opera films (2014-2023) in terms of narrative structure.

**Three-act structure diagram (Act One) of the Film *Farewell My Concubine*** (All three-act structure diagrams appearing in this research were created by the author)

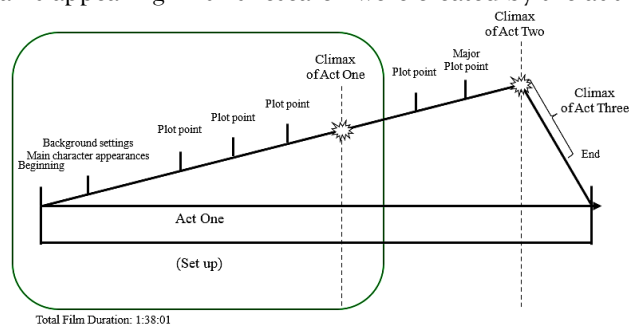


Fig. 10 Three-act structure diagram (Act One) of *Farewell My Concubine*.



Fig. 11 Xiang Yu (Character Appearance Time: 2:45)

**Xiang Yu:** Xiang Yu is the hero of the play, the hegemonic king of Western Chu, who is headstrong and courageous, but also lacks strategy. His ego and lack of advice lead to his ultimate failure. Xiang Yu's character drives the main plot of the story, from raising an army to attack Han, to being trapped in Gaixia, to finally killing himself.



Fig. 12 Xiang Bo (Character Appearance Time: 4:32)

**Xiang Bo:** Xiang Bo is Xiang Yu's uncle, he advises Xiang Yu not to go out to war many times in the film, but fails to do so. Xiang Bo's role mainly serves as an aid and foil to Xiang Yu, and his advice highlights Xiang Yu's stubbornness and conceit.



Fig. 13 Li Zuoche (Character Appearance Time: 5:40)

**Li Zuoche:** Li Zuoche is Han Xin's strategist, who disguises his surrender to Xiang Yu and lures Xiang Yu to march in personally, thus leading Xiang Yu to be ambushed on all sides. Li Zuoche's character is one of the key characters that drive the plot, and his schemes directly lead to Xiang Yu's defeat.



Fig. 14 Yu Ziqi and Zhou Lan (Character Appearance Time: 8:47)

**Yu Ziqi:** Yu Ziqi is Xiang Yu's general and he is also involved in advising Xiang Yu in the drama, but again fails to change Xiang Yu's decision. The role of Yu Ziqi further highlights Xiang Yu's isolation and stubbornness.



Fig. 15 Yu Ji (Character Appearance Time: 13:27)

**Yu Ji:** Yu Ji is Xiang Yu's love interest, who is always by his side and never leaves him. After Xiang Yu's defeat, Yu Ji cut her own throat after dancing with her sword in order to relieve Xiang Yu's worries. Yu Ji's character not only promotes the development of the plot, but also expresses the theme of loyal love through her sacrifice.



Fig. 16 Han Xin (Character Appearance Time: 24:16)

**Han Xin:** Han Xin was a general of Liu Bang who set up a ten-sided ambush formation and successfully trapped Xiang Yu. Han Xin's character is the central figure of Liu Bang's side, and his wisdom and strategy directly lead to Xiang Yu's defeat.



Fig. 17 Liu Bang (Character Appearance Time: 27:55)

**Liu Bang:** Liu Bang is the villainous character in the play, who worships Han Xin as his general, attacks and raids the Chu land, and eventually defeats Xiang Yu. Liu Bang's character represents the victor and the writer of history, and his presence makes the plot more complete and richer. Xiang Yu is a valiant but headstrong overlord, while Yu Ji is his beloved beauty, and their deep friendship in the midst of war becomes the core of the film. Xiang Yu listens to Li Zuo Che's advice and insists on conquering Liu Bang in person despite the opposition of his generals, a decision that sets the stage for the subsequent episodes.

#### The audiovisual language of Peking Opera film (2014-2023)

The theory of audiovisual language in film clearly states that language in film can be divided into visual and auditory language, which together constitute the narrative and expressive power of the film. For example, V. Rodríguez's study mentions that audiovisual language includes visual elements (e.g., camera movement, composition, etc.) as well as auditory elements, which work together to convey emotions and messages (Rodríguez, 2000). Ruirui Zhang and Xuan Luo further analysed the character's expression through visuals and sounds, showing that visual and auditory elements interact with each other to enhance the viewer's emotional experience in the film (Zhang & Luo, 2008). Audio-visual language of film is a special form of language that conveys information, communication and exchange through visual and auditory means. It includes visual elements such as camera movement and camera angle, scenery, composition, colour, lighting, and auditory elements such as music, sound and language (dialogue).

Non-participant observation is a key tool for analyzing the cinematic elements of Peking Opera films. Researchers observe selected films without interacting with their creators, focusing on;

1. **Camera Movement:** Tracking how dynamic camera movements enhance the opera's traditionally static stage performance. For example, observing how close-ups emphasize facial expressions painted with symbolic makeup.
2. **Composition:** Noting the arrangement of characters and props within the frame, especially the interplay of traditional Peking Opera spatial aesthetics with cinematic techniques.
3. **Lighting:** Analyzing how lighting is used to evoke mood, highlight symbolic moments, and enhance visual depth, especially in dramatic scenes like battle sequences or emotional monologues.
4. **Sound Design:** Observing the synchronization of traditional Peking Opera music, vocal techniques, and sound effects with on-screen visuals to analyze how they create emotional resonance.

Film students in focus groups analyze selected Peking Opera films, discussing:

1. The emotional impact of sound design and visual techniques on their viewing experience.
2. The effectiveness of integrating traditional Peking Opera aesthetics into the cinematic medium.

Next, we will elaborate the importance of audio-visual language in Peking Opera films from the perspectives of Visual Language and Auditory Language, according to specific elements.

### **Visual Language**

#### **Visual Language of the Film Farewell My Concubine**



**Fig. 18** Yu Ji's tearful eyes under the push camera.

#### **Visual Language of the Film Mu Guiying Assuming Command**

The Peking Opera film *Mu Guiying Assuming Command*, directed by Xia Gang and written by Song Feng, offers a fascinating blend of traditional Chinese opera aesthetics with cinematic techniques. Through its sophisticated use of camera movement and angles, shot sizes, composition, and lighting, the film transforms the stage-bound art of Peking Opera into a dynamic and visually compelling cinematic experience. By integrating the stylized conventions of Peking Opera with the immersive potential of film, *Mu Guiying Assuming Command* becomes a unique cultural artifact, balancing tradition and innovation.



**Fig. 19** Tracking Shots and Pans in *Mu Guiying Assuming Command*.

One notable example is the scene in which Yang Wenguang competes in the martial arts tournament to secure the role of commander. Here, the camera follows the swift and precise movements of the actors with tracking shots and pans, capturing the fluidity of their martial arts choreography.

#### **Visual Language of the Film Havoc in Heaven**

The Peking Opera film *Havoc in Heaven* (大闹天宫), co-produced by the Fujian Peking Opera Theatre and Fujian Film Studio, is a masterful adaptation of one of China's most beloved mythological tales. Based on the story of the Monkey King, Sun Wukong, defying the Jade Emperor and wreaking havoc in the celestial court, the film blends traditional operatic aesthetics with cinematic techniques to create a visually captivating experience. By employing innovative approaches to camera movement, angles, shot size, composition, and lighting, the film elevates the theatricality of Peking Opera into a dynamic cinematic spectacle while preserving its cultural essence. This analysis explores how these visual elements contribute to the storytelling and artistic impact of *Havoc in Heaven*.

#### **Visual Language of the Film Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity**

In the choice of camera angles, *Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity* is equally meaningful. The director is good at using tilt angle to show the psychological state and status difference of the characters. For example, when showing war scenes, the director mostly uses distant and panoramic views to show the grand war scenes and the fierce battle atmosphere; while when showing the inner activities of the characters or emotional exchanges, the director mostly uses close-ups and close-ups to capture the characters' subtle expressions and changes in their eyes.





**Fig. 20** Sun Shangxiang Burst into Tears.

#### **Visual Language of the Film in Pursuit of the General**

The Peking Opera Film in Pursuit of the General, starring Chen Shaoyun and Fu Xiru, exemplifies the fusion of traditional theatrical aesthetics and cinematic techniques to create a visually compelling experience. Directed with a keen understanding of both Peking Opera and modern filmmaking, the film employs a sophisticated visual language that enhances its narrative, emotional depth, and cultural authenticity.



**Fig. 21** Xiao He's Monologue.

Medium shots bridge the gap between the theatrical and cinematic, focusing on the interplay of movement and dialogue. These shots allow viewers to appreciate the performers' gestures and body language, which are integral to the storytelling. During Xiao He's monologue, a medium shot captures his deliberate movements, symbolic of his unwavering resolve to bring Han Xin back to serve the kingdom.

#### **Visual Language of the Film the Gious Zhen-Guan period**



**Fig. 22** The Gious Zhen-Guan period Stills.

Directed by Teng Junjie and starring iconic Peking Opera performers Shang Changrong and Guan Dongtian, the 3D immersive film The Gious Zhen-Guan period represents a groundbreaking fusion of traditional Chinese opera and modern cinematic techniques. Through innovative use of camera movement, angles, shot sizes, composition, and lighting, the film transforms the operatic stage into a dynamic and visually compelling cinematic experience.

#### **Visual Language of the Film Zhuo Fang Cao**



**Fig. 23** Zhuo Fang Cao Stills.

The Peking Opera film *Zhuo Fang Cao*, directed by Teng Junjie and starring Wang Peiyu and Wang Yue, stands as a masterful blend of traditional Chinese opera aesthetics and cutting-edge cinematic techniques. The film showcases Teng's ability to adapt the timeless art of Peking Opera to the cinematic medium, employing camera movements, shot sizes, composition, and lighting to create a visually stunning and emotionally resonant narrative.

#### **Auditory Language**

Auditory language also plays a crucial role in Peking Opera films. Music, sound effects and language work together to create a complete audio-visual experience through their combination with visual elements.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film Farewell My Concubine**

The singing voice in the Peking Opera film *Farewell My Concubine* is the core of its musical elements. Shi Yihong's Yu Ji, played by Shi Yihong, demonstrates the depth of her character's emotions with her melodious and melodious singing.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film Mu Guiying Assuming Command**

In the Peking Opera *Mu Guiying Takes Command*, starring Li Shengsu, auditory elements such as music, sound, and dialogue (language) play a pivotal role in narrating the story and enhancing the emotional depth of the performance.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film Havoc in Heaven**

The Peking Opera film *Havoc in Heaven* (大闹天宫), jointly produced by the Fujian Peking Opera Theatre and Fujian Film Studio, represents a unique intersection of traditional operatic artistry and modern cinematic techniques. This production, which reimagines the classical Chinese tale of Sun Wukong's rebellion in the Heavenly Palace, integrates diverse musical and linguistic elements to create a rich auditory and narrative experience.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity**

The Peking opera film *Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity*, directed by Bao Erfu and featuring esteemed Peking opera masters Li Weikang, Geng Qichang, Ye Shaolan, Feng Zhixiao, Zhao Baoxiu, and Wang Ping, represents a unique fusion of traditional operatic aesthetics with modern cinematic techniques. This adaptation of a classic Peking opera exemplifies how the art form's vocal styles, musical accompaniment, sound effects, and language are preserved and innovatively reinterpreted in the medium of film. The production demonstrates a profound respect for Peking opera traditions while leveraging cinematic tools to enhance its storytelling and emotional impact.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film in Pursuit of the General**

In *Pursuit of The General*, a Peking Opera film featuring celebrated performers such as Chen Shaoyun and Fu Xiru, stands as a modern cinematic adaptation of a classic opera. This production exemplifies the successful integration of traditional operatic aesthetics with the cinematic medium, highlighting the artistry of Peking Opera while leveraging the possibilities of film to reach a broader audience.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film the Gious Zhen-Guan period**

Directed by Teng Junjie and starring renowned Peking Opera artists Shang Changrong and Guan Dongtian, *The Gious Zhen-Guan period* is a landmark production in the realm of Chinese opera films. As a 3D immersive film with panoramic sound design, it represents a significant evolution in bringing traditional art forms to the modern cinematic medium.

#### **Auditory Language of the Film Zhuo Fang Cao**



The Peking Opera film *Zhuo Fang Cao*, directed by Teng Junjie and starring Wang Peiyu and Wang Yue, serves as a remarkable adaptation of one of China's most beloved operatic works. The film combines the traditional artistry of Peking Opera with the cinematic medium, offering an experience that is both visually and aurally captivating.

## CONCLUSION

Peking Opera films represent a unique amalgamation of traditional Chinese performance art and modern cinematic techniques, symbolizing a journey of over a century that mirrors China's socio-cultural evolution.

### Conclusion of the history of Peking Opera Film (1905-2023)

The history of these films can be summarized through three main dimensions: their origins and timeline, thematic evolution, and the characterization within this cinematic genre.

### Conclusion of the narrative structure of Peking opera film (2014-2023)

In this study, the authors summarise a model of narrative structure for Peking opera films, as shown in Figure 165. This model is different from the three-act narrative structure of traditional theatre, firstly, the first act of Peking opera films is much longer, focusing on creating the story background and designing the characters' appearances; secondly, the climax of Peking opera films is often the "drama point" (the famous singing section) that is widely known in China; thirdly, Peking opera films adopt a small number of flashbacks and interludes to break the limitations of time and space.

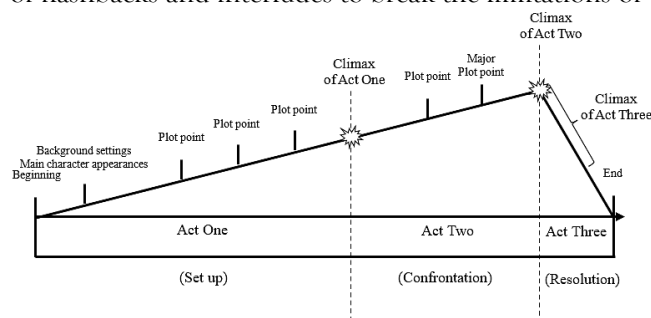


Fig. 24 A Model of Three-Act Narrative Structure for Peking Opera Films.

### Conclusion of the audiovisual language of Peking Opera Film (2014-2023)

The audiovisual language of Peking Opera films (2014–2023) demonstrates a seamless integration of traditional Peking Opera aesthetics with cinematic techniques, creating a distinctive narrative and sensory experience.

## DISCUSSION

### Discussion of the history of Peking Opera Film (1905-2023)

The emergence and evolution of Peking Opera films can be analyzed effectively through Dramatic Aesthetics Theory, which explores the interplay of theatrical elements, symbolism, and audience engagement in narrative art forms. Peking Opera films represent a fusion of traditional Chinese theatrical aesthetics with cinematic storytelling, preserving operatic traditions while embracing modern media's expressive potential.

### Discussion of the narrative structure of Peking opera film (2014-2023)

The Three-Act Structure (a branch of film narrative theory), a classic narrative framework, divides a story into three parts: Set-up, Confrontation, and Resolution. While Peking Opera films often draw from traditional Chinese storytelling with episodic and symbolic elements, this structure can effectively analyze their narrative flow when adapted for cinematic storytelling. Below is a detailed examination of how this theory applies to Peking Opera films.

### Discussion of the audiovisual language of Peking Opera Film (2014-2023)

The theory of audiovisual language provides a framework to analyze how visual and auditory elements collaborate to create meaning, evoke emotions, and enhance storytelling in Peking Opera films.

## **SUGGESTION**

### **General suggestion**

Maintain the symbolic and stylized elements of Peking Opera, such as intricate face makeup, elaborate costumes, and stylized movements, ensuring the authenticity and cultural significance of the art form. Incorporate traditional music and vocal techniques while enhancing their cinematic appeal with modern orchestration and sound design.

### **Suggestion for further research**

Conduct comparative analyses between Peking Opera films and other traditional art forms adapted for cinema, such as Japanese Noh or Indian Kathakali, to explore cross-cultural approaches to preserving tradition in modern media. For Peking Opera films to thrive as both an artistic and cinematic medium, creators must balance tradition and innovation, catering to modern audiences while preserving cultural heritage. Further research should focus on understanding audience dynamics, leveraging technology, and exploring new creative possibilities to ensure the continued evolution and global relevance of Peking Opera films. Through these efforts, the art form can continue to flourish in the modern cinematic landscape.

## **REFERENCES**

- Ahn, B. (1972). The politics of Peking Opera, 1962–1965. *The China Quarterly*, 49(3), 123–145.
- Allan, S. (2020). *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China*. New York: State University of New York.
- Arijon, D. (1991). Grammar of the film language. Retrieved January 15, 2025, from <https://www.silmanjamespress.com>
- Atkinson, P. (2014). Embodied Movement in the Perception of Shot Duration. *Journal of Cinematic Arts*, 7(1), 104–119.
- Bao, W. (2010). The politics of remediation: Mise-en-scène and the subjunctive body in Chinese opera film. *Oxford Quarterly*, 26(2-3), 256–273.
- Bellantoni, P. (2005). If it's purple, someone's gonna die: The power of color in visual storytelling. Retrieved January 15, 2025, from <https://www.routledge.com>
- Brown, K., & MacKinnon, M. (2021). *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Castanheira, J.C. (2015). O som implicado: ruídos como experiência material do filme. *Contracampo: Brazilian Journal of Communication*, 33(2), 737.
- Chou, K.H. (1997). Staging revolution: Actresses, realism, and the New Woman movement in Chinese spoken drama and film, 1919–1949. *China*: [n.p.].
- Clark, P. (1987). *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Cook, D.A. (2004). *A History of Narrative Film*. [n.p.]: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Da Guo, H.B., & Wannapipat, W. (2024). Cross-border integration and cultural inheritance: The historical evolution and artistic innovation of Chinese Peking Opera films. *BPAS Journals*, 44(3), 6426–6433.
- Dai, J. (2024). Aesthetics and Values in Animated Opera Characters: The Fusion and Innovation of Tradition and Modernity. doi:10.70767/jsscd.v1i1.179
- Dong, L. (2015). Study on Sound Design in Films Based on Visual Image. In *Proceedings of the 2015 International Conference on Material Science and Engineering Technology*. Retrieved January 15, 2025, from <https://www.dx.doi.org/10.2991/MSETASSE-15.2015.32>
- Eisenstein, S. (1949). *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. Harcourt, Brace: [n.p.].
- Fan, N. (2021). Ne Zha's image transformation in Chinese animation cinema (1961–2019). *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 10(1), 1–16.
- Fan, X. (2018). *Staging revolution: Artistry and aesthetics in model Beijing opera during the Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Farquhar, M. (2000). Shadow Opera: Towards a New Archaeology of the Chinese Cinema. In *Chinese-Language Film*. (pp.27–51). China: [n.p.].
- Field, S. (1979). *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. [n.p.]: Dell Publishing.
- Gagné, J., Rochette, A., & Charest, M. (2002). Auditory, visual and audiovisual clear speech. *Speech Communication*, 35(1), 169–186.
- Gladney, D.C. (1996). *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic nationalism in the People's Republic*. [n.p.]: Harvard University.
- Haiping, Y. (2015). *Theater and society: An introduction to contemporary Chinese drama*. [n.p.]: Taylor & Francis.
- Harrell, S. (2018). *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China*. Washington: University of Washington.
- He, D. [n.d.]. Comparative Study of Chinese Peking Opera and Italian Melodrama from the Perspective of Artistic Production Models. [n.p.].

- Iovene, P. (2010). Chinese operas on stage and screen: A short introduction. *Oxford Quarterly*, 26(2-3), 181-192.
- Jia, Y. (2024). Affective Authenticity: The Opera Film in Early Chinese Cinema. [n.p.]: University of Pittsburgh ETD.
- Jia, Y. (2024). Affective Authenticity: The Opera Film in Early Chinese Cinema. China: [n.p.].
- Kaplan, R.B. (1986). The Pre-Leftist One-Act Dramas of Tian Han (1898-1968). Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University.
- Lam, L.H. (2010). Reading Off the Screen: Toward Cinematic Illiteracy in Late 1950s Chinese Opera Film. *Opera Quarterly*, 26, 2-3.
- Machado, I. (2018). Plasticidade das imagens audiovisuais no espaço acústico-ressonante do cinema. *E-Compos Journal*, 21(2), 1443.
- McGrath, J. (2010). Cultural revolution model opera films and the realist tradition in Chinese cinema. *Oxford Quarterly*, 26(2-3), 343-361.
- Niantong, L., & Yu, D. (1985). A study of the theories of Chinese cinema in their relationship to classical aesthetics. *Journal of Chinese Studies*, 15(4), 45-67.
- Pang, C.J. (2005). (Re)cycling culture: Chinese opera in the United States. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 22(2), 229-253.
- Qian, K. (2014). The Politics of Affect in Chinese Opera. Hawaii: University of Hawai'i.
- Reidy, D.A. (2014). Basic structure of society. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Screenplayology. (2023). Classical screenplay structure. Retrieved January 15, 2025, from <https://www.screenplayology.com>
- Shangyi, H. (2010). The design and style of opera films. *Oxford Quarterly*, 26(2-3), 446-457.
- Tan, Y. (2008). Historical Dictionary of Chinese Theater. [n.p.]: Scarecrow Press.
- Tecucianu, D. (2014). The "Language" of cinema: Film "Grammar" and visual literacy. *Journal of Media Studies*, 10(2), 45-58.
- UNESCO. (2010). Inscription of Peking Opera on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. [n.p.]: UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.
- Vernon, K.M. (2016). El sonido cinematográfico. *Hispanic Film Sound Studies*, 2(6), 25-38.
- Wahyudi, A. (2020). Tipe tipe masyarakat modern dan tradisional. [n.p.]: OSF Preprints.
- Xie, Q., & Luo, M. (2018). Intertextuality of "Triple Present": On the creation of contemporary Chinese art film taking the film "Mr. No Problem" as an example. *Proceedings of ICASSEE-18*.
- Xiong, X., & Li, J. (2021). The Context of Presenting "Others": The Construction of Meaning and the Potential of Communication in Ethnographic Film.
- Yao, H.H. (1990). The relationship between percussive music and the movement of actors in Peking Opera. *Journal of Chinese Theatre Studies*, 4(1), 45-60.
- Yuvanash. (2019). The role of social and cultural institutions. *Think India Quarterly*, 22(14), 212-220.
- Zhang, L. (2017). Sound Images, Acoustic Culture, and Transmediality in 1920s-1940s Chinese Cinema. China: [n.p.].
- Zhang, L. (2020). The cinematic adaptation of traditional Chinese opera: A case study of Peking opera films. *Asian Cinema*, 31(4), 56-72.