

# *Chinese Folk Art* Facial Design

中国民俗——脸谱



Attached  
附

3张 明信片和  
1张 画片

three postcards  
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a sheet of picture

Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House

上海人民美術出版社

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## 图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

脸谱：英文 / 李新主编；段梅编文；白岸杨译. — 上海：上海人民美术出版社，2010.5

(中国民俗)

ISBN 978-7-5322-6580-0

I. ①脸... II. ①李... ②段... ③白... III. ①脸谱—中国—画册 IV. ①J528.3-64

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2010) 第027497号

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## 中国民俗——脸谱

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图片供稿：北京民族文化宫博物馆

上海京剧院

装帧设计：顾晓春

特约编辑：丁 晨

责任编辑：雨 鹰 余小倩

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出版发行：上海人民美术出版社

(上海长乐路 672 弄 33 号)

印 刷：上海中华商务联合印刷有限公司

开 本：889×1194 1 / 16 印张：2

版 次：2010 年 5 月第 1 版

印 次：2010 年 5 月第 1 次

印 数：0001-4250

书 号：ISBN978-7-5322-6580-0

定 价：48.00 元

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Chinese Folk Art

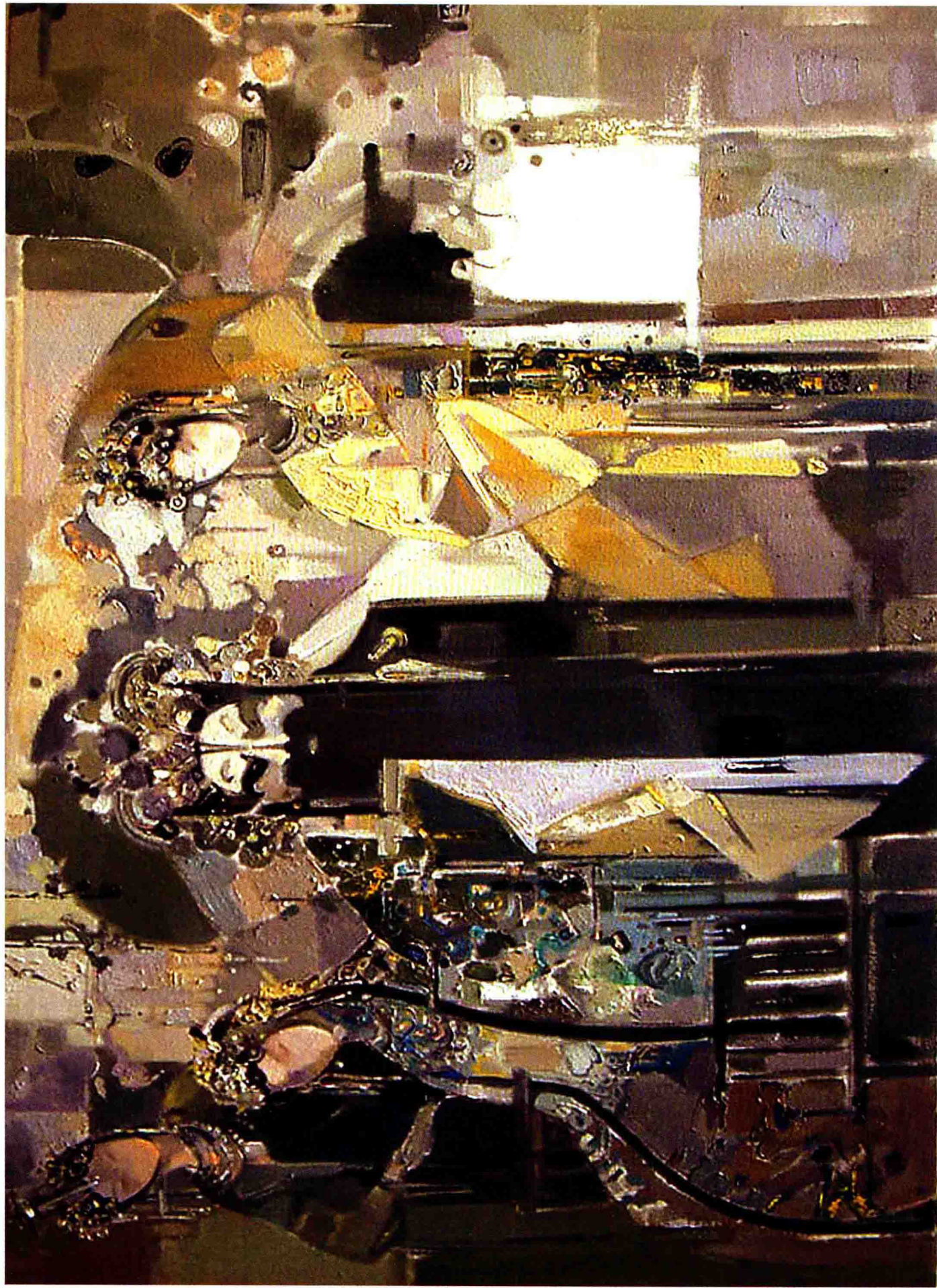
# Facial Design



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Facial design of Peking Opera (oil painting by Ye Shengqin)



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## Chinese Facial Design

Facial design, or "*Lianpu*", is the art of facial make-up used by the performers of traditional Chinese folk activities or theatre. With lines and colours painted on some important areas of the face, the purpose of facial design is to show the distinguishing features of the characters. While observing some traditional guidelines pertaining to the art of applying make-up, facial design enjoys freedom from real-life constraints and is characterized by being suggestive and symbolic of good and evil roles or negative and positive implications.

Facial design, historically called "*Damian*" or "*Daimian*", originated from the make-up used in the song-dance dramas that flourished during the North Qi of the South-North Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty, and is closely related to the development of Chinese theatre and the culture of masks. The *Nuo* rituals celebrated in the courts had become more and more grand after the Han Dynasty, and their dances more and more splendid. The music-dances popular in ancient China were the rudiments of Chinese theatre, and the "masked dances" in the music-dances were the beginning of facial design. Along with the development of folk theatre, masked performances have shown disadvantages, especially in displaying the varied facial expressions of the performers. At the end of the Song Dynasty and the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, there appeared in the variety plays "white face" clowns, who had the central area of their faces painted white, which was considered the earliest facial design. In order to highlight dramatic effect, performers then began to use ink, powder and oil on their faces, a technique which gradually developed into the art of facial design.

Tools, materials and facial designs





An actor paints his face before the performance Photography by Liu Haifa  
(Reprinted with permission of Section of Art Archives, Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe)



Facial design progressed during the long history of its development. Characterized by aspects of primitive culture, early facial design was simple and rough, with mere contradictory colours such as black, red and white intensifying skin colour, facial contour and features—bushy eyebrows, big eyes, snub noses and big mouths, to name a few. Later, the application of more colours and use of better skills made it possible to show more subtle features of the characters. Thanks to the abundance of folk activities and the enrichment of theatre stories, the artistic creation of facial design was freed from the shackles of doctrines and formality; therefore, a complete set of make-up patterns are fixed at last.

Facial design can be roughly classified into two categories: one for artistic appreciation, and the other for stage performance. The former uses art products of various patterns and colours, made by means of painting, knitting, embroidery, etc. on plaster casts of a man's face. The latter is facial representation with rich cultural connotations, which is painted, in accordance with theatre stories, in various colours and designs on a man's face, for the purpose of strengthening stage effects and thus enriching traditional culture, particularly, theatre culture.

Performers make up before a performance

Photography by Liu Haifa (Reprinted with permission of Section of Art Archives, Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe)





Facial design by Li Jiyou



## Folk Facial Design

The development of Chinese folk facial design goes side by side with that of folk ritual and "Shehuo". Ritual, or "jili", is a traditional ceremony celebrated to worship gods and ancestors, and to pray for their blessings. *Shehuo*, or "*shehu*", is an ancient form of folk art. The ancient Chinese people believed that "*she*" was the Earth God of harvest, health and peace; while "*huo*" stood for prosperity and revelry. In as early as the Shang and the Zhou Dynasties, there appeared some rituals celebrated in the courts to exorcise demons, which, in the Zhou Dynasty, was called "*Danuo*" or "*Qunuo*", in which witchcraft was believed to be exercised. That kind of ritual was then brought to the common people, and, combined with performances of variety plays, it evolved into two forms; one is the grand customary festivity to reward the good, punish the evil and pray for the blessings, the other is *shehuo* to welcome, please and worship gods. Nowadays, various interesting *shehuo* performances are still held, from the first day to the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar, in such places as Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu Provinces.

Blank wood pieces ready for use

Li Jiyou, one of the masters of Chinese arts and crafts, draws facial paintings









*Shehuo* is sometimes referred as "*yaxi (pantomime)*" by the common people, for there are no music, vocal performances, mime or acrobatics in it. The characters have conspicuous make-up and outfit that corresponds to their social standings and personalities. In order to intensify the visual effect, abstract colour blocks, in most cases, are painted on the performers' faces, which becomes the facial design of *shehuo*. This design has undergone a long history of development, changing from "design-in-lines", "design-with-masks" to "design-in-painting". Some archeological study shows that, on the facial designs of *Shehuo*, we can find out the traces of the patterns on the coloured potteries in ancient China of five or six thousand years ago.

There are regular ways of drawing—the lining, colouring as well as composing—the facial design of *shehuo*, which helps to demonstrate remarkable artistic features and fresh bucolic charm. Apart from various images, the facial design of *shehuo* has diverse and symbolic colours, which differentiate varied qualities of the characters. Red, for example, means loyalty; white treacherousness; black justice; yellow brutality; blue boldness; green chivalry; and gold and silver both mean the supernatural power. By means of artistic exaggeration and transfiguration, the folk artists have created such patterns as the sun and the moon, fire, whirlpools and frogs, which represent people's personalities and social standings, in the depiction of the characters' eyes, brows, mouths, and beard. These patterns are classified into two categories: one is called "*jinglian*", which is used to represent roles of young men and ladies; the other is called "*hualian*", which is used to represent roles of fairies and monsters. Compared with "*jinglian*", "*hualian*" has more complex variations of the patterns, such as the "*duilian*" of the symmetrical patterns and the "*xuanlian*" of the whirl patterns.

Facial design of *Shehuo* by Li Jiyou  
Patterns of facial designs in the traditional *Shehuo* performance in Baoji, Shannxi Province on 15<sup>th</sup> day of 1<sup>st</sup> Month of Lunar Calendar







The facial design of *shehuo* demonstrates different characteristic features in different places, among which those of Long and Baoji Counties, Shaanxi Province are the best-known. With numerous patterns, elaborate designs, and bright colours, the facial designs of these two places represent the highest standard in Baoji Area. Folk artists always triturate the mineral pigments of scarlet, brownish yellow, or brownish green and then smoke them, with the soot of burning colza oil, into black; while the colour of white is produced by the mixture of lead powder, honey, crystal sugar, caster sugar and egg white.

"*Mumashao*", or "*shuipiao*", is a kind of gourd ladle used in everyday life. People engraved the patterns of facial design also on those ladles, both as a symbol of blessing for health and wealth and as a typical local handicraft for decoration. The facial design on the *mashao* is well-known for its wild patterns, striking colours, and varied rough lining. As representation of folk fairy tales, the design is imaginative and impressive, reflecting local culture and customs. The patterns which once appeared on the colored potteries and bronze wares that flourished five thousand years ago are well maintained in these facial designs, which, therefore, are considered "living fossils" of the designing patterns of the Shang and the Zhou Dynasties.



Facial design on ladles  
By Li Jiyou