

Unit

11

Peking Opera





Lead-in

Match the programs of Peking Opera with the English translations.

Programs

- 1 《贵妃醉酒》
- 2 《拾玉镯》
- 3 《霸王别姬》
- 4 《穆桂英挂帅》

Translations

- a *Farewell My Concubine*
- b *The Drunken Concubine*
- c *Picking up the Jade Bracelet*
- d *Mu Guiying Takes Command*

1

PART

Appreciating and Interpreting

The Art of Listening: Old-style Theaters

be wont to (do) 习惯于 (做)

1 In the past, people visiting Beijing would invariably go to a theater to see a Peking Opera performance. When we see a show today, we say “watch an opera.” But old Beijingers say “listen to an opera” instead. What counts in Peking Opera is singing, whereas performance is highly stylized. Audiences **are wont to** listen to singing with eyes shut and hands beating time. When they like a particular line, they would shout “bravo!” These are typical fans.

incidental *n.* 附带事件

2 Old-style theaters where Peking Opera was performed before the 1950s were called *xiyuanzi*, which literally means “opera courtyard.” Facilities in *xiyuanzi* were rather simple. The stage was square, with three sides extending right into rows of seats for the audience. At an early date in the Qing period, *xiyuanzi* was called “tea courtyard.” At the time, audiences paid for the tea but not the opera they watched. For customers, their main purpose in coming to the “tea courtyard” was to drink tea, whereas watching an opera was sort of “**incidental**.” In the Qing period, a show in *xiyuanzi* could last as long as 10-12 hours, all in the daytime. Customers also paid for snacks such as sunflower seeds and roast peanuts. Tea charge was not charged until before the start of the last but one item on the day’s theatrical program. A striking feature of *xiyuanzi* in old Beijing was “hot towel throw.” Waiters, shouting “here comes the towel,” would throw steaming towels to audiences, with



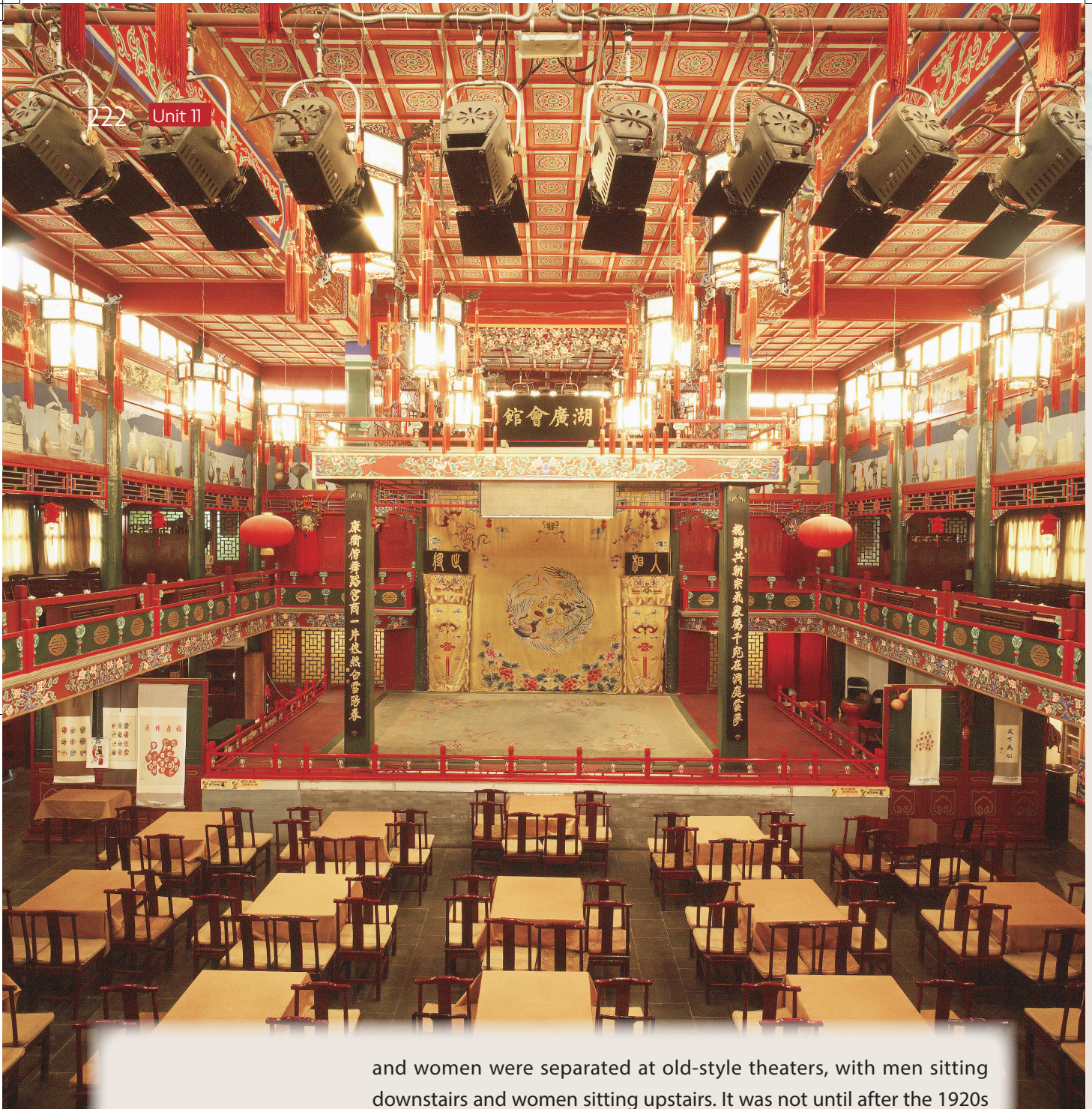
great accuracy. Waiters accepted tips and never **haggled** over their size.

haggle v. 讨价还价

- 3 “Tea courtyards” were later called *xiyuanzi*, or old-style theaters. In the 1920s, they became known as theaters, and the stage was patterned after stages in the West. *Xiyuanzi*, which was of a traditional architectural style, was smaller than a typical Western theater in capacity, but what audiences heard in *xiyuanzi* was original singing of actors and actresses, free of a loudspeaker.
- 4 In the middle and late periods of the 19th century, as Peking Opera gained popularity, the number of *xiyuanzi* in Beijing increased, and most of them were located in a flourishing commercial district south of the Qianmen Gate Tower. Viewed from the above, the district is situated on the city’s north-south axis.
- 5 The stage in an old-style theater was not big. Stages were first paved with wooden planks and later covered with carpets. This was to make sure that actors making **summersaults** would not hurt themselves. At the stage front were usually erected two columns on which were written words in praise of the troupe performing at the time.
- 6 In the rear of the stage hung an embroidered curtain, which was the private property of the leading actor of the day. The curtain bore patterns of flowers and birds, in a style compatible with the leading actor. Seeing the curtain, audiences knew who was going to play the lead.
- 7 Below the stage was dirt ground. Later, ground was paved with bricks and still later with cement. In an early period, audiences sat on benches facing one another across oblong wooden tables. This sitting posture facilitated chatting and eating snacks but was not suitable for watching a theatrical performance. It was not until after 1914 that long benches with back support were placed parallel to the stage, enabling audiences to face the stage. On the back of the benches were nailed long-framed planks, on which were placed teacups. At the time, men

summersault n. 翻筋斗





and women were separated at old-style theaters, with men sitting downstairs and women sitting upstairs. It was not until after the 1920s that men and women sat together. At the back of the rows of seats was usually placed an oblong table with the sign "The Suppression Seat" on it. When a play started, fully-armed soldiers came to sit behind the table to deal with any possible **commotion**. On a holiday the theater owner would hand them envelopes stuffed with money to seek their protection.

commotion *n.* 骚乱



- 8 During the early stage of *xiyuanzi*, there were no newspapers, nor were there ads or posters. The method of promotion was to place at the *xiyuanzi* gate stage **properties** for the evening's show. For people who loved Peking Opera, a look at the stage properties was enough for a guess at what the show was for the evening. For example, a block of stone pointed to *The Yanyang Building* (《艳阳楼》) and a big spear *Battling Down-sliding Chariots* (《挑滑车》). A heap of weapons of different kinds indicated that the evening's last play would be *Havoc in Heaven* (《闹天宫》). The weapons were used to **subdue** the Monkey King, hero of the play. A day's program was printed on a piece of yellow paper with a wood block and sold for a penny or two. It was not until after the 1920s that programs were printed with lead types.
- 9 Peking Opera had a close relationship with the Qianmen Gate Tower area in Beijing, which was a **cradle** of folk culture in the city. In the early years of Peking Opera, the Qianmen Gate Tower area was where the city's entertainment, catering industry, commerce and people's cultural activities were concentrated. It was right in this area that Peking Opera grew and thrived. Not only were Peking Opera's old theaters and the homes of actors and actresses concentrated here, but many Peking Opera fans and people connected with theatrical shows lived in the area. In the more than 50 years from the early 20th century to 1957, the Qianmen Gate Tower area was home to some 600 famous artists of Peking Opera, *pingju* Opera, acrobatics and *quyi* (folk art forms including ballad singing, storytelling, comic dialogs, **clapper talks** and **cross talks**). These performing artists had learned their art from different masters and each had his unique skill. At the time, Tianqiao, south of the Qianmen Gate Tower, was a thriving, densely populated downtown area of Beijing. And Tianqiao's soul was Beijing's traditional folk culture.

property *n.* (戏剧、电影等中用的) 道具

subdue *v.* 征服; 制服

cradle *n.* 摇篮; 发源地

clapper talk *n.* 快板儿

cross talk *n.* 相声

Source: Xu Chengbei (2003). *Peking Opera* (Chen Gengtao Trans.). Beijing: China Intercontinental Press.



Reading Comprehension

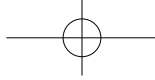
1 Decide whether the statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the passage.

- 1 When seeing a show, old Beijingers say “watch an opera.”
- 2 Facilities in *xiyuanzi* were rather simple. The stage was square, with four sides extending right into rows of seats for the audience.
- 3 At an early date in the Qing period, audiences paid for the tea but not the opera they watched in the “tea courtyard.”
- 4 In the Qing period, tea charge was not charged until before the start of the last but one item on the day’s theatrical program.
- 5 In the middle and late periods of the 19th century, most of *xiyuanzi* were located in a flourishing commercial district south of the Qianmen Gate Tower.

2 Answer the following questions according to the passage.

- 1 Why do old Beijingers say “listen to an opera” instead of “watch an opera”?
- 2 What is “hot towel throw”?
- 3 What is the difference between *xiyuanzi* and a typical Western theater in the 1920s?
 - 4 How did audiences know who was going to play the lead?
 - 5 What was the method of promotion during the early stage of *xiyuanzi*?





Language Focus

3 Complete the sentences with the information from the passage.

- 1 At an early date in the Qing period, the main purpose of customers in coming to the “tea courtyard” was to _____, whereas _____ was sort of “incidental.”
- 2 At the stage front were usually erected _____ on which were written words in praise of _____ performing at the time.
- 3 It was not until after 1914 that long benches with back support were placed _____ the stage, enabling audiences to _____.
- 4 At the time, men and women were separated at old-style theaters, with _____ sitting downstairs and _____ sitting upstairs. It was not until after the 1920s that men and women _____.
- 5 In the early years of Peking Opera, it was in _____ area that Peking Opera grew and thrived.

4 Translate the paragraph into English by using the expressions given in brackets.

京剧是中国的国粹。京剧的服装和脸谱（facial makeup）受到人们的喜爱。不同类型的服装反映人物不同的社会地位。脸谱是京剧中塑造人物形象的重要手段，它是用不同的颜色在脸上勾画出来的。脸谱的颜色让人一看便知角色的善恶。比如白色代表阴险狡诈（treachery），黑色代表直率鲁莽（forthrightness and recklessness），蓝色代表刚强骁勇。

Development

5 Every country or region has its own type of opera. Italian Opera was born around the year 1600 and has continued to play an important role in the history of opera. What do you know about Italian Opera? Work in groups and compare it with Peking Opera.



Reading and Understanding



The History of Peking Opera

discern v. 觉察出

1 As you know, many foreigners first learn about Chinese culture through numerous Chinese restaurants found all over the world and soon **discern** that China is a country with delicious cuisine.

2 The second impression of Chinese culture is often Peking Opera whose facial makeup is now almost a symbol of China. Many countries design posters using Peking Opera makeup to symbolize Year of Chinese Culture. Therefore, to understand Chinese culture, some knowledge of Peking Opera is very important.

3 Peking Opera came into existence in the not too distant past, but it is full of mysteries for Westerners. Peking Opera, rooted in Chinese culture, is very different from Western dramas.

Sanskrit n. 梵文; 梵语

4 Chinese operas, ancient Greek drama, and **Sanskrit** drama are considered three ancient dramas in the world. Ancient Greek drama is a form of theater from ancient Greece. It reached its most significant form in the 5th century BC and heavily influenced the theater of ancient Rome and of the Renaissance. Ancient Greek drama and Sanskrit drama were the great pieces Greece and India had given to the world. Unfortunately, Chinese operas are the only survivor of these three ancient dramas in the world. The other two have become history. So, Chinese operas are the cream of Chinese culture and even of the world culture.



- 5 Chinese operas were derived from the songs and dances of the primitive society. During the reign of Emperor Jiajing in the Ming Dynasty, *Kunqu* Opera came into being. As one of China's representative classic operas, *Kunqu* Opera nourished and nurtured many other operas, so it is called the mother of Chinese operas.
- 6 It was during the reign of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty that Peking Opera emerged. [A] In 1790, an Anhui troupe led by Gao Langting came to Beijing to participate in the performances in celebration of the 80th birthday of Emperor Qianlong. [B] It was soon followed by three other theatrical troupes from Anhui. [C] During their practice, these Anhui troupes assimilated the performing characteristics of other operas such as *Kunqu* Opera and *Shaanxi* Opera and were affected by Beijing dialect and customs. [D] What these Anhui troupes were offering was Peking Opera and a unique theatrical variety came into being.
- 7 Peking Opera, which had developed from rural shows, had a wide range of 1) _____. They included not only members of the 2) _____ family, high-ranking 3) _____ and scholars, but also merchants, townspeople and handicraftsmen. So gradually, Peking Opera became a townspeople-4) _____ performing art.
- 8 After 1860, Peking Opera further developed. In 1867, Peking Opera spread to Shanghai. Peking Opera in Shanghai gradually developed some unique characteristics and later the division of Shanghai School came into being.
- 9 In 1919, Mei Lanfang, a very famous Peking Opera actor, went to Japan to stage performances. Since then, Peking Opera troupes have frequently staged performances in foreign countries. And the rest of the world regarded Peking Opera as the 5) _____ of traditional Chinese operas. Now, Peking Opera is the most popular and influential opera in China with a history of over 160 years. Full of Chinese culture, Peking Opera presents to audiences a(n) 6) _____ full of attractive stories, beautiful paintings and costumes, graceful gestures and martial arts.

1 Decide whether the statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the passage.

- 1 Chinese operas, ancient Greek drama and Sanskrit drama are considered three ancient dramas in the world.
- 2 The birth of *Kunqu* Opera in the Yuan Dynasty marked the maturity of traditional Chinese operas.
- 3 As one of China's representative classic operas, *Kunqu* Opera nourished and nurtured many other operas, so it is called the mother of Chinese operas.
- 4 In 1860, Peking Opera spread to Shanghai.
- 5 Peking Opera is the most popular and influential opera in China with a history of over 160 years.

2 Look at the four square brackets marked [A], [B], [C] and [D], which indicate where the following sentence could be added in Paragraph 6. Where would the sentence fit best?

These Anhui troupes stayed in Beijing and offered performances to the local people.

3 Complete the sentences in paragraphs 7 and 9 with suitable words from the box.

A oriented	B representative	C royal
D encyclopedia	E audiences	F officials

4 Complete the sentences with the information from the passage.

- 1 _____ is a form of theater from Ancient Greece. It reached its most significant form in the _____ and heavily influenced the theater of _____ and of the _____.
- 2 Unfortunately, _____ are the only survivor of these three ancient dramas in the world.
- 3 Chinese operas were derived from the songs and dances of the _____.
- 4 Peking Opera in Shanghai gradually developed some unique features and later the division of _____ came into being.
- 5 In 1919, _____, a very famous Peking Opera actor, went to _____ to stage performances.



Peking Opera: Roles and Facial Makeup



- 1 Peking Opera features character categorization. The characters of Peking Opera are classified according to gender, age, disposition, profession, and social status. Nowadays there are four major roles in Peking Opera. They are *sheng*, *dan*, *jing*, and *chou*.
- 2 *Sheng* represents a grown-up male who is generally positive. It can be further divided into *laosheng*, *wusheng*, and *xiaosheng*. *Laosheng*, representing decisive and honest middle-aged or old men, usually specializes in singing or martial arts. It is the most common male character in Peking Opera and, with artificial beards, it is also called *xusheng*. *Wusheng* represents young generals skilled in martial arts. Sometimes they hold long-handle weapons, wear armor, look dignified and have a moderate skill of singing and recitation. Sometimes they hold short-handle weapons, wear short clothes and their action is swift. *Xiaosheng* represents clean-shaven and handsome young men, frequently portrayed in love stories. Usually they are scholars. As a feature of Peking Opera, *laosheng* is given priority in many programs and *xiaosheng* is relatively obscure. In the history of Peking Opera, famous actors playing the role of *xiaosheng* were very few in number. It is quite different from Western dramas where the young hero is very important and is played by highly acclaimed actors. In performance, the striking feature of *xiaosheng* is speaking and singing with a combination of real and false voices. Usually the false voice is very sharp, thin, and high-pitched which makes *xiaosheng* different from *laosheng*. The false voice of *xiaosheng* is also different from that of *dan*. It should be strong but not rough. It should not be as gentle as a woman's voice. So the singing of *xiaosheng* is very difficult.
- 3 *Dan* represents various female characters, including *huadan*, *laodan*, *qingyi*, and *wudan*. *Huadan* plays young women with a frank and open-minded personality. They are maidservants from humble families or young ladies in rich families. *Laodan* stands for elderly women. They usually use their natural voices which are rich, loud, high-pitched and **melodious**. *Qingyi* generally stands for young or middle-aged women

melodious *adj.* 音调优美的

of strong character and refined disposition. Most of them are faithful wives, loving mothers, and pure women from the feudal society. *Wudan* represents, women skilled in martial arts, including generals, heroic outlaws and fairies.

subtlety *n.* 机敏

- 4 In the history of Peking Opera, there are a lot of famous actors with great accomplishments. The famous “Four Great *Dan* Actors,” Mei Lanfang, Cheng Yanqiu, Shang Xiaoyun, and Xun Huisheng, have made great contributions to the performance of the *dan* role and the development of Peking Opera. Historically *dan* used to be performed by male actors. The four famous *dan* actors have created various images of ancient Chinese women and expressed their tenderness, elegance, and **subtlety**. Mei Lanfang had beautiful voice and stage appearance with elegant dancing and movements. He crafted a noble and natural image reaching the peak of female-role performance. He had made innovations to the art of Peking Opera in different aspects. He composed many new melodies, and introduced facial expressions, movements and techniques of dancing to the accompaniment of singing from *Kunqu* Opera to Peking Opera. He created various dances, such as the silk dance, sword dance, sleeve dance, and **duster** dance. He was the first to use *erhu* to support *jinghu* to accompany singing by the female role. He also made innovations to facial designs, hairstyles and costumes in Peking Opera. Mei Lanfang’s performances fully demonstrated Chinese classical beauty. And he had headed several performance tours to the United States, Japan and European countries, winning an international reputation for Peking Opera. He is worthy of the title “Master Artist of Peking Opera.”

duster *n.* 尘拂

provocation *n.* 挑衅

- 5 *Jing* is the most romantic and exaggerated role in Peking Opera. Actors playing *jing* usually put on facial makeup. Most of them have a rough and bold character. They speak loudly and may shout at the slightest **provocation** and may use force if they are angry. *Jing* can be divided into the singing-oriented type, or *wenjing*, and the martial type, or *wujing*. They usually wear colorful paint on faces and are also known as *hualian*.

foil *n.* 陪衬者

- 6 *Chou* serves as a **foil** to the leading character and usually is the first to go on the stage during a performance. “No *chou*, no play” has long been a popular saying in China. The *chou* actors usually wear a patch of white around their eyes, and their nose is sometimes outlined in black. *Chou*



represents far more characters than *sheng*, *dan* and *jing*. They can be all kinds of people from high-ranking officials to servants and soldiers, from scholars to farmers and traders. They can be old or young, male or female. They can be deaf, blind or lame. And they can be kind-hearted or evil. *Chou* can also be divided into *wenchou*, which is the gentle clown, and *wuchou*, or martial clowns.

- 7 Seeing a Peking Opera performance for the first time, a foreigner would usually wonder: Why are the faces of the actors painted red, black, white, yellow or green? Are they masks? But masks could be separated from the face while facial makeup cannot. So, facial makeup in Peking Opera is different from masks.
- 8 The facial makeup in Peking Opera is a unique way to tell stories. There are about thousands of facial makeup patterns in Peking Opera and different patterns have different meanings. At an early date faces were painted mostly in red, white and black. As plays increase in number,

opera artists use more colors and lines to paint on the faces of characters. The color patterns are called *lianpu*, or facial makeup. When the face of a character needs to be exaggerated, the facial makeup is used. Facial makeup can tell the personality of a particular character. Different colors in the facial makeup have different meanings. For example, red means uprightness and loyalty. A black face represents a rough and forthright character. Blue means bravery and pride. White means treachery and cunning. So facial makeup in Peking Opera can arouse the interest of the audience and make Peking Opera performance much more interesting.

- 9 *Jing* usually wears complicated facial makeup patterns and different *jing* characters wear different facial makeup patterns. Compared with *jing*, *chou* usually wears very simple facial makeup patterns with a white patch on the face. But *chou* usually can make a greater impression on the audience than the *jing* character. And all the audience like their humor and jokes very much. With the development of Peking Opera, there have been established rules on how to paint a facial makeup pattern and what a pattern represents. The facial makeup reveals Chinese people's evaluation on historical figures. For example, Cao Cao, a Han Dynasty prime minister, has a white face. It tells us that he was treacherous and cunning. Guan Yu, a general of the Three Kingdoms period, has a red face. From this, we know he was a loyal person. And Zhang Fei, also a general of the Three Kingdoms period, has a facial makeup pattern of a butterfly. The pattern of butterfly is a masterpiece perfectly combining personality and artistic design. Judge Bao has a black face. From this, we know he was impartial and **incorruptible** as a judge. And a distorted face, drawn with asymmetrical lines, means a villain or someone whose face was wounded.

incorruptible *adj.*
廉洁的; 正直的



1 Decide whether the statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the passage.

- 1 *Xusheng*, with artificial beards, presents the most common male character in Peking Opera.
- 2 *Xiaosheng* presents young generals skilled in martial arts.
- 3 *Qingyi* mostly stands for faithful wives, loving mothers, and pure women from the feudal society.
- 4 *Jing* is the most romantic and exaggerated role in Peking Opera and its actors usually have facial makeup.
- 5 *Chou* is the least important role in Peking Opera and often leaves little impression on the audience.

2 Complete the following tables about roles and the colors of facial makeup in Peking Opera.

Table 1

Roles	General Introduction
<i>Sheng</i>	Representing a grown-up male who is 1) _____
<i>Dan</i>	a. Representing various 2) _____ characters b. Including <i>huadan</i> , <i>laodan</i> , <i>qingyi</i> , and <i>wudan</i>
<i>Jing</i>	a. The most romantic and exaggerated role in Peking Opera b. Usually having 3) _____
<i>Chou</i>	a. Serving as 4) _____ to the leading character b. Usually the first to go on the stage during a performance

Table 2

Colors of facial makeup	Meanings
Red	5) _____
6) _____	A rough and forthright character
Blue	7) _____
8) _____	Treachery and cunning

3 Complete the sentences with the information from the passage.

- 1 Peking Opera features _____. The characters of Peking Opera are classified according to gender, _____, disposition, _____, and _____.
- 2 *Laosheng*, representing decisive and honest _____ men, usually specializes in _____.
- 3 *Xiaosheng* represents _____ and handsome young men, frequently portrayed in _____.
- 4 Actors of *laodan* usually use their _____ which are rich, loud, _____ and melodious.
- 5 Actors of *chou* usually wear _____ around their eyes, and their nose is sometimes _____ in black.

4 Match the characters in Peking Opera with their facial makeup.

1 Cao Cao

a



2 Guan Yu

b



3 Zhang Fei

c



4 Judge Bao

d



5 A villain

e





3 PART

Watching and Doing



Watch the MOOC “Peking Opera” and complete the tasks.
For non-MOOC learners, you can scan the QR code to watch the video clips and complete the tasks.

1 Watch the part of “Introduction” and fill in the blanks.

Peking Opera is an intriguing and mellow form of 1) _____ Chinese theater. With elaborate and colorful costumes and 2) _____ makeup, performers produce vivid portrayals of characters by utilizing the skills of 3) _____, singing, dancing and combination of 4) _____ that are symbolic and suggestive, rather than realistic, creating a theatrical effect far beyond the 5) _____ of the stage in terms of both time and 6) _____. The warring scenes, for example, are rendered with pretended 7) _____ and acrobatic movements rather than brutal violence. The formulated and hyperbolic mask 8) _____ are to reveal the individuality of different characters, allowing the 9) _____ to read their 10) _____ through their painted faces. Therefore, to understand Chinese culture, some knowledge of Peking Opera is very important.





2 Watch the part of “The Four Major Roles of Peking Opera” and translate the following expressions into English.

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| 1 剑舞 _____ | 2 绸舞 _____ |
| 3 袖舞 _____ | 4 拂尘舞 _____ |
| 5 武术 _____ | |

3 Write an essay on the topic “How to Appreciate Peking Opera.” The beginning of the essay has been written for you.

Peking Opera is an art which pays equal attention to singing, speaking, acting and fighting. These four basic skills are combined together to tell a story. Each action by the performer is highly symbolic. Feelings and ideas are often expressed through these symbolic motions. So, we should know how to appreciate the beauty of a virtual world.

...





Difficult Sentences

1 In the rear of the stage hung an embroidered curtain, which was the private property of the leading actor of the day. The curtain bore patterns of flowers and birds, in a style compatible with the leading actor.

在舞台后边会悬挂一个绣花的帘子，这个帘子是当天主角儿的私人物品。帘子上点缀着不同的花鸟图案，与主角儿的风格一致。

2 At the back of the rows of seats was usually placed an oblong table with the sign "The Suppression Seat" on it. When a play started, fully-armed soldiers came to sit behind the table to deal with any possible commotion. On a holiday the theater owner would hand them envelopes stuffed with money to seek their protection.

靠后的座位处常常设一张长方桌，桌上立一个写着“弹压席”字样的牌子。开戏后，军警全副武装入座，维持治安。逢年过节戏园主人还给军警送红包以求得保护。



Useful Expressions

Qianmen Gate Tower 前门城楼

north-south axis 南北中轴线

leading actor 主角

facial makeup 脸谱

ancient Greek drama 古希腊戏剧

Sanskrit drama 梵剧

Shaanxi Opera 秦腔

Kunqu Opera 昆剧



Mini-Pedia

Music of Peking Opera: *Xipi* and *Erhuang*

Unlike Western operas, the music of Peking Opera is not really created by a composer, but based on sets of traditional codified tunes. The singing mainly follows two sets of tunes, *xipi* (西皮) which is used to express happiness, anger or agitation, and *erhuang* (二黄) which is used to express a subdued mood such as loss in deep thought, sorrow and melancholy.