

### Beijing opera masks and costumes

At the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics you will surely be intrigued by Chinese operas, Beijing opera in particular, and by the characters in the operas, their stage costumes, and their eccentric patterns of masks (facial makeup), which are certainly exaggerations of the true lineaments. First of all, you will want to know what the implications are of the various colorful patterns of masks (facial makeup). In this regard, I would like to tell you that these patterns of different colors represent the plastic art of moulding faces specific to the operas of China. This way of making up the faces of actors and actresses for theatrical effect is patternized and is in accordance with the requirement of presenting a visible image of the personality of the character concerned. The countless combinations of colored lines add intensity to the expression of the inner world of each character and produce at the same time a strong aesthetic effect.

Every color in the facial patterns, no matter whether it is red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, or purple, lends itself effectively to the expression of a definite trait in the character's personality.



The purple color Beijing opera mask symbolizes loyalty, candor and uprightness.



The red color Beijing opera mask, when used as the chief color,



symbolizes loyalty, faithfulness, and courage. General Guan Yu, who lived during the period of Three Kingdoms in China, may be taken as the best example. General Guan never wavered in his allegiance and was always faithful to the fulfillment of his own words. So his counterpart on the stage has a red face.



The black color Beijing opera mask symbolizes firmness and honesty, or temerity. The famous honest and upright official Bao Zheng of the Soong Dynasty in popular stories may serve as a typical example. For temerity, a suitable example may be General Zhang Fei, who also lived in the period of Three Kingdoms in China and was General Guan Yu's sworn brother. His counterpart on the stage has a black face.



The blue color Beijing opera mask symbolizes valor, stubbornness and



intractability. An ideal example of a man having such a personality in the history of China would be Shan Xiongxin, who fought against the establishment of the Tang Dynasty literally single-handed after all his former allies had deserted him and gone over to the other side.



A green face Beijing opera mask symbolizes bravery, brutality and despotism, and vehemence and irascibility. The best example is the bandit leader who was nicknamed “the green-faced tiger”. A popular Beijing opera about the “tiger” has the following short scenario: The valiant farmhand fought, by mistake, on the side of the “green-faced tiger” and helped him escape capture by a group of government officers in civilian clothes.

The “green-faced tiger”, out of gratitude, led his followers to storm the execution ground and saved the farmhand, who had been sentenced to death because of a false accusation made by the landlord.



A yellow face Beijing opera mask symbolizes brutality and insidiousness characteristic of such people as brigand chiefs.



A white face Beijing opera mask has several implications. It may simply signify an old, white-haired hero or army officer without reference to their personality. It may denote, however, a knight who is crafty and cruel, or headstrong at the same time. Eunuchs in Beijing opera always have their faces painted white to show that they were feminine and treacherous. Some Buddhist monks, who are skilled in fighting, also have white facial makeup.