

Analysis on the Inheritance and Innovation of Cantonese Opera Films

Jiawei Li

Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Xi'an, China
13422336850@163.com

Abstract: Through the compilation and analysis of research literature on Yue Opera and Yue Opera art since the 21st century, it can be seen that current academic research in this field covers many aspects, including performance groups, performance techniques, artistic characteristics, famous artists, inheritance and innovation, and Yue Opera films. This article selects and analyzes relevant literature on Yue Opera films that have been controversial in recent years. Some old artists believe that Yue Opera art should maintain tradition, while some new Yue Opera inheritors believe that Yue Opera art needs to be innovative to integrate into modern society. In this regard, the 2021 Yue Opera film *The Legend of the White Snake* provides a successful example. It not only achieves the harmonious coexistence of traditional and modern elements, but also enhances the popularity of the work. Therefore, it has attracted widespread attention from society and academia. In recent years, the rise of Yue Opera films has opened up a new channel for the dissemination and development of traditional arts. However, through the analysis of relevant literature, it is found that achieving truly innovative transformation of Yue Opera is still a long way to go, mainly reflected in the balance between tradition and modernity and the current situation of talent-deficient Yue Opera inheritance. This review further focuses on the cross-disciplinary perspective between film and Yue Opera and Yue Opera, and discusses the phenomena and problems in the field of their intersection.

Keywords: Cantonese Opera, Cantonese Opera Music, Cantonese Opera Film

1. Introduction

The full text is based on the interest in the Cantonese Opera film *Legend of the White Snake: Love*, and analyzes the important literature related to it from the perspective of Cantonese Opera and Yue Opera. As the most widely spread genre of drama in Lingnan, the status of Cantonese Opera in the hearts of the older generation of Guangdong people is of great significance. However, with the advent of the 21st century information age, people's pace of life has accelerated, and their lifestyles have become more convenient. Most of the attention of the new generation of young people to Cantonese Opera art is limited to the situation of "knowing but not understanding". This article will start with the examination of the Cantonese Opera itself, and in the third part, it will carry out in-depth research on the recently widely concerned Cantonese Opera film *Legend of the White Snake: Love*. It is hoped that through the analysis of literature, it will provide more solutions to the problem of how to achieve balance between tradition and modernity, and provide some constructive suggestions for the development of Cantonese Opera in the future.

2. A review of Cantonese Opera films based on Cantonese Opera

A total of 10 documents related to Cantonese opera films were retrieved, including documents on the innovation and development of Cantonese opera films *The Development Dilemma and Innovation of Cantonese Opera Films* by Zou Jiashan [1], Cao Dongdong, "Historical Memory and Cultural Identity—Research on Lingnan Cultural Characteristics of Cantonese opera Films in the Past 15 Years" [2]. These two articles mainly focus on the artistic innovation, cultural inheritance of Cantonese opera films, and how to combine traditional Cantonese opera with modern film art, exploring its innovative path. Among them, Zou Jiashan's article provides a more complete review of the history and background of Cantonese opera films. The dilemma lies in the limited audience group, the difficulty of integrating traditional art and modern film, and the challenge of production cost and commercialization. The way to innovate is to add more artistic forms to Cantonese opera and strengthen its modernization adaptation. In addition, most of the topics on the innovative development of Cantonese opera also mention an important issue, that is, how to grasp the integration of opera art and film art, retain the traditional flavor, and at the same time break through the limitations of tradition to bring freshness to the audience.

There are two studies on the history and cultural background of Cantonese opera films. These articles focus on the development of Cantonese opera films, especially the role of Cantonese opera films in historical and cultural identity. Among them, Tu Yuzheng's research focuses on the music design in Cantonese opera films, providing reference for the relationship between traditional Chinese music elements and film and television music design.

Tu Yuzheng's *Analysis of the Role of Film Art in the Inheritance of Yue Opera Culture* [3], mainly introduces the role of film art in Cantonese opera and Cantonese opera education in modern society. It discusses four problems in the inheritance situation: insufficient attention from the government, insufficient innovation, lack of talent, and an aging audience group. It also emphasizes that film art is conducive to storing classic content, enhancing the dissemination effect of Cantonese opera, and enhancing the innovative development of Cantonese opera.

Liu Xiaoxi's *A Tentative Discussion on the Artistic Legacy and Development of Red-haired Women's Films and Cantonese Opera* [4]. Through the analysis of the contributions of Red Line Woman to Cantonese opera films, the article inspires thinking about the development and inheritance of Cantonese opera. The article mainly uses the screen images left by Red Line Woman as research materials. The purpose is to fill the gap in the research of Red Line Woman's Cantonese opera films and inspire scholars to pay more attention to the innovative development of Cantonese opera.

There are three articles on the creation, aesthetics, and music design of Cantonese opera films. Zheng Rui's *Audiovisual Exploration in "Fragrance of Wild Flowers": A Study of the Sound in Early Cantonese Opera Films* [5]; Zhang Yan's *Music Design in Classic Cantonese Opera Films in Hong Kong from the 1950s to the 1970s* [6]; Wu Guokun's *Sustainable "White Dragon": Xue Gexian and the Vernacular and Voice Politics of Early Cantonese Films* [7].

Among them, Zhang Yan's article comprehensively records the music design of the peak period of the development of Cantonese opera films in Hong Kong from the 1950s to the 1970s. Starting with the film adaptation of stage Cantonese opera, it studies its music structure and creation methods, then focuses on the combination of Cantonese opera music and film images, and finally summarizes the previous experience and puts forward constructive suggestions for further exploration of the film adaptation of stage Cantonese opera music. This article is one of the few comprehensive and representative articles on the music design of Cantonese opera films.

3. Modern transformation of Cantonese Opera films: taking "*The Story of the White Snake*" as an example

After 2021, the literature on Yue Opera films focused on the film *Legend of the White Snake: Love*, and the literature analyzed its characteristics in terms of innovation, fusion of opera and film, emotional expression, and role reconstruction from different perspectives. A total of 17 articles were found to study the *Legend of the White Snake: Love*, which can be roughly divided into three categories: innovation and inheritance of opera art, fusion of traditional opera and film language, and emotional expression and atmosphere shaping of the *Legend of the White Snake: Love*.

3.1. Innovation and inheritance of opera music

A total of 4 articles on the innovation of opera music and the inheritance of traditional elements were retrieved.

Among them, Liu Xing and Haiyang's *How to "Break the Circle" in Chinese Yue Opera Films—Taking Yue Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake as an Example* [8]. Through the Cantonese opera *The Legend of the White Snake: Love*, he found the tension between traditional culture and modern media, and also proposed that there should be a balance between the two, so as to avoid excessive entertainment and damage to the traditional value of Cantonese opera. Similar views include Chen Jinmei and Leung Ka-sheng's *The Destruction and Establishment of Folklore in the New Cantonese opera film The Legend of the White Snake* [9]. Its value lies in its analysis of the form and visual narrative of the Cantonese opera film *The Legend of the White Snake* from the perspective of Chinese classical aesthetics and folk legends, while also highlighting that today's opera films can boldly break the shackles of traditional drama films, highlighting the characteristics of drama while also utilizing the characteristics of digital films.

Tang Ying's *Analysis of the Innovative Development of Traditional Chinese Opera—Taking the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake as an Example* [10]. This article mainly discusses the balance between inheritance and innovation in Cantonese opera films, especially the treatment of musical elements. The full text analyzes how traditional Cantonese opera music is combined with the sound effects of film. The author, by comparing other forms of innovation, proposes that under the support of modern film technology, the music of traditional opera can break through its formal limitations, thus reaching a new aesthetic height.

Dong Pu's *The Development and Innovation of Contemporary Operatic Films—Taking the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake as an Example* [11]. From the perspective of the development of opera films, this paper mainly studies how *The Legend of the White Snake: Love* innovates while maintaining the core characteristics of Cantonese opera music. Dong Pu focuses on the music arrangement, sound effect design, and the integration of traditional opera music in the film, and discusses how to create an artistic effect that is both traditional and modern through the combination of modern music elements and opera music.

Liu Jiuling and Zhen Zhuoyi's *Traditional Cantonese Opera and Contemporary Film Interspersed—A Brief Analysis of the Innovativeness of the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake* [12]. The article analyzes how the *Legend of the White Snake: Love* innovates on the basis of Cantonese opera music, especially by combining traditional elements of Cantonese opera with the audio-visual language of contemporary films. It emphasizes the fusion of traditional Cantonese opera and modern music styles in film music, demonstrating how film can enhance the expressiveness of Cantonese opera art through music innovation.

3.2. The fusion of traditional opera and film language

A total of 6 documents were retrieved that studied the cross-border fusion of traditional drama and modern film and aesthetic changes in the Yue Opera film *The Legend of the White Snake*.

Among them, Lin Minghao's *The Fusion of Drama and Film: The Innovation and Development of Drama Films—A Discussion on the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake* [13]. The article analyzes the innovation of drama films, especially the modernization adaptation of the Cantonese opera film *The Legend of the White Snake* on the basis of traditional drama art. Lin Minghao discusses the combination and change of opera and film in terms of expression, narrative methods, and visual style.

Zhou Jun's *Integrating Drama into Film: Tragic Tradition and Audiovisual Innovation—Taking the Adaptation of the Story of The Legend of the White Snake as an Example* [14]. Starting from the traditional tragic story of *The Legend of the White Snake*, this article explores its audiovisual innovation in film. The article analyzes how the tragic plot of traditional opera can be displayed through film techniques, and compares the differences in artistic expression between traditional opera and modern film.

Peng Jiayi's *Exploration of the Success Path of Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake: Love from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics* [15]. Using the theoretical framework of reception aesthetics, this article analyzes the path to success of the Cantonese opera film *The Legend of the White Snake*. His research explores the audience's acceptance, emotional resonance, and aesthetic changes, pointing out how the film can attract young audiences through modern artistic forms while preserving tradition.

Wang Shaoxiong and Han Yutao's *Cross-media Narrative Strategy of the Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake* [16]. The article discusses how *The Legend of the White Snake: Love* integrates opera and film through cross-media narrative strategies. The author analyzes the narrative characteristics of different media and how to innovate and express the unique artistic charm of opera through film language.

Duan Jiayi's *Stability and Innovation—Revelation of the Opera Film (The Legend of the White Snake)* [17]. The paper analyzes the balance between safeguarding tradition and pursuing innovation in *The Legend of the White Snake: Love*. The study explores how to respect the traditional elements of Cantonese Opera and integrate new technologies and forms of expression in a modern film context, forming an artistic expression with a sense of the times.

Huang Changning and Xie Xiaofen's *Decoding the Image of Traditional Culture and the Transformation of Modernity—Talk about the Creation of the 4K Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake* [18]. Explain the collision between traditional structure and modern concepts from the text level, and analyze how *The Legend of the White Snake: Love* uses film to tell the traditional story. Understand the fusion of traditional aesthetics and modern elements from the production level, and analyze how to do addition and subtraction when dealing with the relationship between the two to better highlight the special characteristics of opera film. Finally, through the analysis of the creative concept, it leads to the reflection on the traditional culture and its modern identity.

3.3. Emotional expression and atmosphere creation of *The Legend of the White Snake: Love*

A total of 5 articles were retrieved for research on the emotional conveyance, atmosphere creation, and aesthetic characteristics of the music in *The Legend of the White Snake: Love*.

Tian Longguo and Wang Jiashheng's *Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake: Construction of Artistic Conception and Character Innovation* [19]. Focusing on the construction of artistic conception and the innovation of characters, it discusses how the Cantonese Opera film *The Legend of the White Snake: Love* innovates traditional opera characters and their emotional expression

through music and stage performance. They believe that music is not only a carrier of emotional transmission, but also builds a deeper cultural artistic conception through the combination with visual elements. The expression method of music combines traditional Cantonese Opera tunes with modern film performance techniques, making the emotional tension more obvious and the atmosphere more vivid.

Zhao Qian's *The Legend of the White Snake: The Temporalization of Yue Opera Aesthetics* [20]. A study of the "expressive beauty" in the Cantonese opera film *The Legend of the White Snake: Love* was conducted. By analyzing its emotional resonance, the modern aesthetic adaptation of the subject matter, and innovative performance techniques, the reasons why the film *The Legend of the White Snake: Love* so closely matches contemporary artistic aesthetic experiences were explained. Similar studies by Tian Longguo and Wang Jiasheng also began with the construction of the artistic conception, but added analysis of characters and modeling.

Gong Ranran's *Emotional Expression · Artistic Presentation · Ink and Watercolor National Style—Review of the Successful Breakthrough of the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake: Love* [21]. From the perspective of poetry and national style, she analyzed how the film can deepen the emotional communication through the poetic expression of music. She emphasized that the music in the film adopts the traditional Chinese ink wash painting style, with soft and ethereal characteristics in the melody and rhythm of the music. The music and the picture work together to create a poetic atmosphere that transcends time and space. The creation of this atmosphere not only helps to convey the depth of emotions, but also gives the film a sense of history and culture, bringing the audience closer to traditional culture.

Wang Hong's *Love for a Thousand Years, Melancholy and Enchanting—From the Poetic Talk of the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake* [22]. From the perspective of the poetic nature of film, the article discusses the role of music in emotional and poetic expression. He believes that the music in Cantonese opera films plays a role in strengthening emotional contrast and intensifying contradictions in the transmission of emotions. The author, especially in dealing with the emotional entanglement between Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian, vividly expresses the emotional fluctuations of each character. Starting from the emotional rendering effect of drama music in film, the article analyzes why audiences can feel the joys and sorrows of the film more deeply in films with opera music.

4. Conclusion

Learning and understanding traditional Cantonese opera art is the basis for studying Cantonese opera films. After the release of the first 4K panoramic sound Cantonese opera film *The Legend of the White Snake*, articles using "Cantonese opera film" as a keyword accounted for nearly one-third of the research on Cantonese opera in recent years. In the existing articles, there are more and more detailed studies on the cultural characteristics, historical review and innovative development of Cantonese opera films. In contrast, there are fewer and more casual studies on the creation process, aesthetic expression and music design. Although some scholars have mentioned the music and sound design in Cantonese opera films, they tend to focus on its combination with traditional Cantonese opera, ignoring the functions of music in promoting emotions, creating atmosphere and connecting plots in films, so the research on this part is relatively superficial.

The balance between tradition and modernity in Cantonese opera is an important issue that still needs to be resolved today. Although the innovation of Cantonese opera films in recent years has brought new opportunities for its dissemination, how to ensure that the artistic style of Cantonese opera does not lose its essence still requires more in-depth discussion. In future research, scholars are advised to pay more attention to the dissemination and adaptation of Cantonese opera in different cultural contexts, such as how to promote the cross-cultural communication and globalization of

Cantonese opera with modern technology in the context of globalization. In addition to paying attention to the research of the essence of Cantonese opera, scholars need to strengthen the interdisciplinary research of Cantonese opera education and non-heritage protection, actively explore the integration path of Cantonese opera art and contemporary society, and let the research results help Cantonese opera achieve sustainable development in reality.

References

- [1] Jiashan Zou. (2024) *The Development Dilemma and Innovation of Cantonese Opera Films*. *Home Drama*, (17):151-154.
- [2] Dongdong Cao. (2023) *Historical Memory and Cultural Identity: Research on Lingnan Cultural Characteristics of Cantonese Opera Films in the Past Fifteen Years*. *Film Literature*, (13): 135-138.
- [3] Yuzheng Tu. (2020) *Analysis of the Role of Film Art in the Inheritance of Yue Opera Culture*. *Home Drama*, (35): 30-31.
- [4] Xiaoxi Liu. (2020) *Discussion on the Red Line Women's Film Art and the Inheritance and Development of Cantonese Opera*. *Sichuan Drama*, (02):26-32.
- [5] Rui Zheng. (2024) *Audiovisual Exploration in "Fragrance of Wild Flowers": A Study on the Sound of Early Cantonese Opera Films*. *Film Literature*, (20):127-131.
- [6] Yan Zhang. (2022) *Music Design in Classic Cantonese Opera Films in Hong Kong from the 1950s to 1970s*. *Contemporary Film*, (03):166-171.
- [7] Guokun Wu. (2019) *Sustainable "White Dragon": Xue Gexian and the Dialect and Voice Politics of Early Cantonese Films*. *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, (07): 24-32.
- [8] Xing Liu, Yang Hai. (2022) *How to "break the circle" of Chinese Cantonese Opera Films— Taking the Cantonese Opera Film "Legend of the White Snake: Love" as an Example*. *Film New Works*, (03): 110-118.
- [9] Jinmei Chen, Jiasheng Liang. (2023) *New Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake: Love Breaks and Establishes Folklore*. *Sichuan Drama*, (06): 106-109.
- [10] Ying Tang. (2022) *Analysis of the Innovative Development of Traditional Chinese Opera - Taking the Cantonese Opera Film "Legend of the White Snake" as an Example*. *Journal of Shaanxi Open University*, 24 (02): 60-63 + 67.
- [11] Pu Dong. (2022) *The Development and Innovation of Contemporary Opera Films—Taking the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake: Love as an Example*. *Great Stage*, (01): 43-47.
- [12] Jieling Liu, Zhuoyi Zhen. (2021) *Traditional Cantonese Opera and Contemporary Film: A Brief Analysis of the Innovativeness of the Cantonese Opera Film "Legend of the White Snake"*. *Audio-Visual*, (08):79-81.
- [13] Minghao Lin. (2020) *The Fusion of Theatrical Shadows: Innovation and Development of Theatrical Films - A Discussion on the Cantonese Opera Film "Legend of the White Snake"*. *Great Stage*, (06): 23-29.
- [14] Jun Zhou. (2022) *Merging the play into the shadow: the tragic tradition and audiovisual innovation—Taking the adaptation of the "Legend of the White Snake" story as an example*. *Contemporary Film*, (03): 159-165.
- [15] Jiayi Peng. (2022) *Exploration of the Success Path of the Cantonese Opera Film "Legend of the White Snake" from the Perspective of Aesthetic Acceptance*. *Journal of Kaifeng Cultural and Art Vocational College*, 42 (11): 122-124.
- [16] Shaoxiong Wang, Yutao Han. (2022) *Cross-media narrative strategy of the opera film "The Story of the White Snake"*. *Sichuan Drama*, (04): 102-104.
- [17] Jiayi Duan. (2021) *Stability and Innovation—Revelation of the Opera Film "Legend of the White Snake"*. *Audio-Visual*, (11): 102-103.
- [18] Changning Huang, Xiaofen xie. (2021) *Decoding the Image of Traditional Culture and the Transformation of Modernity: A Discussion on the Creation of the 4K Cantonese Opera Film "The Legend of the White Snake"*. *Guangdong Sea Breeze*, (05): 117-120.
- [19] Longguo Tian, Jiasheng Wang. (2022) *Opera film "The Legend of the White Snake: Love"*. *Sichuan Drama*, (03):103-105.
- [20] Xi Zhao. (2021) *The Legend of the White Snake: Love*. *Film Literature*, (24): 117-120.
- [21] Raman Gong. (2022) *Based on emotions and artistic presentation of ink and water painting style—a review of the successful breakthrough of the Cantonese opera film the Legend of the White Snake: Love*. *Sichuan Drama*, (04): 105-107.
- [22] Hong Wang. (2023) *A Thousand Years of Love, Melancholy and Longing—Exploring the Poetic Narrative of the Cantonese Opera Film the Legend of the White Snake*. *Home Drama*, 2023 (16): 148-150.