

# On the Road of Innovative Blueprint Design of Chinese Traditional Opera——Take the Newly Edited Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography and Love" as an Example

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**ABSTRACT.** *In the 16th century AD, two important figures appeared in the history of world literature and art—Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu. Shakespeare is the most famous dramatist in Europe. He created a unique dramatic art and is a master of European drama. The other is Tang Xianzu of China, who pioneered Chinese opera. Chinese opera and European drama are important artistic crystallizations in human history. Dramatic art has been enduring for a hundred years, and it is still profound in people's memory. At the same time, it also faces challenges and opportunities: with the rich production of visual art and sensory art in modern society, Chinese traditional opera with stage as the carrier is slightly less competitive in content and style. In the past ten years, Chinese opera people have also paid attention to the crisis that opera needs innovation and inheritance, and it needs to be in line with the times and put into action. In the 21st century, looking back on the innovative journey of Chinese traditional opera in recent ten years, we also deeply feel the hardships and challenges, and can't help thinking: Does traditional opera not innovate mean moving into a museum? Is traditional opera rich in value as long as it is innovated? What is the future of Chinese traditional opera? This paper will take the exploration of the newly edited Cantonese opera "White Snake Biography and Love" in the innovation and inheritance of Chinese traditional opera as a case, and discuss in depth how the "blueprint designer" on the road of innovation of Chinese traditional opera should adhere to the balance between "id" and "superego" in innovation and inheritance.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Chinese traditional opera, Innovation, Inheritance, Cantonese opera, Art culture*

## **1. Introduction**

Chinese traditional opera is a part of Chinese culture, and it is the practical achievement of Chinese people's art and life in the past century. Opera stories originate from life; Traditional Chinese opera communication has its unique connotation value. Watching opera is not difficult to find, and all the stories tell people the truth of life: "Yangmen Female General" tells the pursuit of loyalty to serve the country and defend the homeland; Bao Qingtian should punish evil and promote good, and stick to the right path. Pan Jinlian expresses people's rejection and criticism of evil...

The reason why Chinese opera has been enduring for a hundred years is that it adheres to the "id" of Chinese opera art: through the artistic means of Chinese opera performance and freehand pictures, it expresses the demands and praises of social classes, which retains the purest humanistic essence—the values of "loyalty, filial piety and benevolence" and the highest pursuit of "truth, goodness and beauty". "id" refers to the "initial heart" left in the development of things. As the times change rapidly, its "initial heart" is still sung in every drama story.

With the progress of modern science and technology and the enrichment of life, new things are emerging and the ways of transmission are being updated. People's acceptance and tolerance of traditional art seems to be gradually decreasing. In recent years, many opera people are thinking about innovation to achieve the effect of "superego". "Superego" refers to the absorption, integration and re-creation of the outside world during the development of things, so as to achieve the ideal level beyond the essence of things. However, is the innovation of Chinese traditional opera a total denial of "id"? Output "superego" heartily? In artistic creation, "blueprint designers" on the road of traditional opera innovation should also think about how to maintain the balance between "id" and "superego" in innovation and inheritance.

The Story of the White Snake is a story that has been sung for hundreds of years in Chinese opera and film circles. There are no fewer than 100 works on this subject, which can be said to be a well-known story. However, the newly edited Cantonese opera "White Snake Biography and Love" has been loved by many audiences in recent years, and it has become the first 4K drama film in China, which will soon be put into the market for dissemination. The reason is also to think about the best balance between traditional Chinese opera inheritance and innovation.

## **2. Balance Between the Integration of Choreography and Director**

### ***2.1 Innovation and inheritance in text creation***

Writer is the best core to endow artistic works with soul, and is the blueprint creator of texts. Text determines the perspective of the story and the height of the work. Traditional opera has unique value in text creation, which requires not only

selecting characters matching the language, style and style of the opera, but also its unique singing language and qupai language...

The story of "White Snake Biography" is familiar. If it is different from the traditional plot, it is necessary to seek a breakthrough on the basis of the original. Did the screenwriter of "White Snake Biography and Emotion" skillfully catch the word "emotion" as the image seed? "Emotion" includes affection, friendship, love, romance, evil feelings and so on, all of which are the ultimate direction pursued by human beings. In the story refinement of "White Snake Biography", the innovation with the word "emotion" as the core not only inherits the love pursuit of the traditional version of "White Snake Biography", but also enriches the emotional yearning, which also breaks the character frame limited by the works of this theme and endows each character with unique and moving personality.

Comparing the traditional Cantonese opera "White Snake Biography" (Ni Huiying and Liang Yaoan editions) with the newly edited Cantonese opera "White Snake Biography and Emotion" (Zeng Xiaomin and Wen Ruqing editions), it is found that in the traditional edition, the story is set to be caused by the fact that the two heavenly green and white snakes went down to meet Xu Xian because they were lonely and greedy for the mortal world. Fahai, the God who was ordered by Emperor Fengtian to go down to the earth to catch the two demons, was the role setting of the "big villain" in the drama. His dramatic motive was "being ordered to capture the snake demon, killing and letting it go". He incarnated the Zen master to give Xu Xian realgar to harm the white snake, and even induced Xu Xian to enter Jinshan Temple, causing the white snake to be injured and give birth. It can be said that the sea is the biggest obstacle to destroying the love between lady white snake and Xu Xian. In Chinese opera, the prominent thoughts and demands of characters are the existence of "id". As one of the four great love legends in China, "The Legend of White Snake" is also the counter-demands of the ancient people for the tragic ending of lady white snake and Xu Xian, and also conveys the closed life values that need to abide by the rules and not go astray because of love when educating the people in ancient times.

Prelude	"Fairy Rebellion", the Jade Emperor ordered Fahai to arrest the white snake and the green snake to return to heaven	Prelude	"Memories of love" in front of Buddha and lotus, thousands of years of human encounter, Buddha flowers like the sea, interpretation of aesthetic love
Scene 1	"Traveling to the Lake to Marry", the snake fairy went down to the world, met Xu Xian, the boatman was the medium, and the snake was married	Scene 1	"Love", lady white snake West Lake drizzle met Xu Xian, fell in love at first sight, and talked about each other's feelings
Scene 2	"Wine Change", the white snake is pregnant, mistakenly drinks realgar wine, changes back to the snake body, and Xu Xian is shocked	Scene 2	"unusual love", Xu Xian's three cups of realgar wine thanked the white snake, and the white snake was scared to death by Xu Xian
Scene 3	"Stealing grass, dispelling doubts", the white snake rushes to Kunlun, steals Ganoderma lucidum, saves the husband, and the Xianweng probation gives Ganoderma lucidum	Scene 3	"Begging for Love", the white snake Kunlun asks for fairy grass, and the Taoist child gives Ganoderma lucidum
Scene 4	In "Conviction", Fahai induced Xu Xian to enter Jinshan Temple, and the white snake struggled for nothing	Scene 4	In "Injury", Xu Xian misunderstood that the white snake entered Jinshan, and the white snake was injured in Jinshan
Scene 5	"Water Fight", the green and white snakes call the water army to fight the sea, and the water overflows Jinshan	Scene 5	In "Continued Love", the white snake was injured and left the world, and Xu Xian pleaded for renewal
Scene 6	"Broken bridge, giving birth, and getting married", the white snake was injured and blood-stained to break the bridge, and suddenly gave birth to hate Xu Xian, and Xu Xian admitted his mistake and made up	The end	"Unfinished Love", the White Snake Tower has been cultivated for thousands of years, and Xu Xian has never left or right
The end	"Sacrificing the Tower", eighteen years later, the top scholar Xu Shilin asked for his biological mother in front of Leifeng Tower		

Character Relationship Diagram of Traditional Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography" (Ni Huiying and Liang Yaoran Edition)

New Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography and Love" (Zeng Xiaomin, Wen Ruqing Edition)

Comparison of Text Structure between Traditional Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography" and New Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography and Love"

*Figure. 1 Comparison of Text Structure between Traditional Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography" and New Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography and Love"*

It is undeniable that the transmission of traditional ideas is applicable to ancient society, and will modern people still be bound by such values? Obviously it won't. In the text creation of the new edition of "White Snake Biography and Love", it is also precisely positioned that contemporary young people generally advocate the pursuit of "free love" and "crazy love", not only telling with the word "love" as a clue: White Snake and Xu Xian used to be the former Buddha and Tilian. After reincarnation, they became human beings and snakes. White Snake cultivated for thousands of years, never forgot Xu Xian, came to the world to find Xu Xian, and continued the beautiful love for thousands of years. It also increases the update and guidance of modern correct values: only hope that the true feelings of the world will last forever. In contrast, the new version of the works has abandoned and persisted in the conception and inheritance of the text.

Compared with the character design, the traditional version of "White Snake Biography" adheres to the "id" of "good and evil": lady white snake, Xu Xian and Qing Snake pursue "love"; Fahai, the Jade Emperor, and soldiers in heaven will be persistent in the "right way"; Lu Tong, He Tong, and Antarctic Xianweng maintain "goodness", and the characters have clear blood and do not change their positions, which is also the conflict and debate of characters needed by opera.

The Story of the White Snake inherits the main ideas, but refines and cuts down the main characters, retaining only seven main characters and giving each character a unique position and emotion. Lady white snake pursues the love concept of "only wishing for the true feelings of the world to last forever", and still sticks to his initial heart when he is tortured by the world; Xu Xian represents the highest definition of love that "if a person is ruthless, it is better than a demon, as long as there is a demon and a person", his heart is like a rock, and he is lost; The green snake represents the family and girlfriends of "the love of husband and wife is difficult to give up, and the love of sisters is difficult to break". Friendship is also a solid reliance when it is dangerous; In the traditional version, the Fahai symbolized by "evil" is endowed with the inclusive feelings of Buddhism's great love that "the mountains are silent and the water is unintentional, the heavens and the earth are boundless and the laws are regular, and each goes its own way, and the Buddha crossing all beings is great love"; Lu Tong and He Tong are the symbols of Taoism, and the Taoist idea of "Two in one, three in two, three in all" pursued by them conveys the pedestrian criterion of "if you cultivate immortals without feeling heartless, it is not the right way, and save people first". The setting of characters is a concise exposition of the traditional Chinese ideas of "Heaven" and "Human Relations" and the ideological essence of modern "Freedom" and "Only Love".

When the story framework is conceived, the screenwriter pursues a clear main line, cuts and optimizes the plots of the traditional version of "Traveling the Lake" and "Stealing Grass", and shows the audience's beautiful love between White Snake and Xu Xian to the fullest, which is also the charm of opera: Find the shadow of life in the play, and believe that every audience can find their own emotional belonging in The Story of the White Snake.

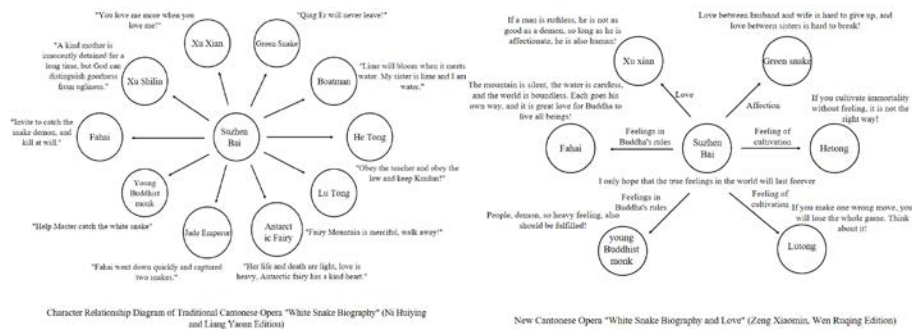


Figure. 2 Character Relationship Diagram of Traditional Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography"(Ni Huiying and Liang Yaoan Edition) and New Cantonese Opera "White Snake Biography and Love"(Zeng Xiaomin and Wen Ruqing Edition)

### 2.2 High coordination between director's conception and text creation

In the long-term practice of drama creation, there are some differences in ideas and concepts between the writer's first creation and the director-centered second

creation, which are inevitable and mutually promoting. After all, every art creator has his own unique style and ideas but serves the drama works together, which promotes the richness of the drama, but also causes some uncontrollable disputes. Nowadays, the integration trend of screenwriter and director is gradually developing in drama creation, which is conducive to the overall and unified completion of script arrangement and conception, and makes the director's conception highly compatible with text creation. However, in terms of skills, it is necessary to have the dual abilities of writing and directing, otherwise it will get twice the result with half the effort. At the same time, in the drama, it is necessary to have the ability of writing lyrics and cards for drama writers and the ability of freehand performance for drama directors, which further tests the overall ability of writers and directors.

The writer and director of "White Snake Biography and Emotion" are all the same person, so there is a high degree of unity between the control of the text and the presentation of the director's conception. In other words, when the screenwriter integrates the director's idea as early as possible in the text creation, he can polish the opera language and text content in advance from the perspective of performance presentation, and can adjust the text and structure adaptively in the director's rehearsal, which is an act that complements each other.

Compared with the traditional text creation of "White Snake Biography", "Love of White Snake Biography" combines the director's thinking in images, and thinks that modern and contemporary viewers have the habit of watching movies with fast rhythm and high efficiency of seeking knowledge, and combines modern style to treat the stage pictures of opera through film and television and scenes. This is also the famous feature of the traditional opera "curtain", which inherits the clues of the whole drama through the performance of one scene at a time, such as the ugly inner monologue.

The drama combines the director's conception with the film and television expression in the text, and has added some elements in the text creation. For example, in the prologue "Reminiscence", lady white snake's modern dance performance, which faces Xu Xian behind the umbrella, shows a sad love stretch in the eyes of the audience, which is also a comprehensive embodiment of words and vision. For another example, after the traditional version of lady white snake and Xu Xian met, they would marry and have children under the matchmaking of boatman and green snake, while the newly edited "White Snake Biography and Love" directly showed Xu Xian and white snake looking at each other with umbrellas on the broken bridge, and highly broadened their love with the popular "two of a kind" and "love at first sight" of modern people. As a result, the drama "lens" of "taking an umbrella home" simply explained "love". Such innovation reflects the advantages of integration of editing and directing, and the high cooperation between the scriptwriter's text and the director's lens makes the text have ups and downs.

The existence of Chinese opera, which has spread in the present era, is often invited to perform in the countryside for the New Year, which is an important existence of festivals. However, in the New Year, Chinese people generally share a common wish-that everything is prosperous and prosperous, and they all yearn for

beauty. Imagine performing works such as Pan Jinlian, Dou E's Grief and Zhao's Orphan during the Spring Festival, which will bring negative views to the audience. Therefore, there are hidden connotations in traditional opera: the happy ending of "spend a full moon" and "second time around". Writers and directors also take care of this "id". In the process of text creation, they tell the story of lady white snake and Xu Xian's life and life with the help of musical performances with an open ending, and express infinite meanings in moving stories.

### **3. Balance Between Stage Re-creation**

#### ***3.1 Dance beauty design —— seeking the extreme freehand opera***

In the early stage of the development of Chinese opera, many local operas were spread and promoted with the help of "ships", that is, "ships come to play, and ships go to play". "Boat" is usually the "hodgepodge" of opera people's living and living. Because of the limited stage space on board, the beautiful dance props are usually simple: a few freehand background curtains hanging the scenery, low steps, "one table and two chairs", "door and desk window account" ... Simple beautiful dance props and partial details description have gradually formed the "freehand" beautiful dance style in the traditional opera stage.

Thinking in modern and contemporary aesthetic style, excessive freehand brushwork will make the stage appear too thin. With the maturity of stage technology, more beautiful dancing devices have been applied to the stage, and the beautiful dancing style of opera gradually learns the stage art of musical and drama, hoping to exist with tension and expressive visual effects. On the one hand, the integration with today's popular dance style is conducive to enriching the performance style of opera dance beauty. However, if the proportion is improper or over-reliance on dance beauty is used to render, it will run counter to the "freehand brushwork" style, which is the core connotation of opera performance. In the innovation of traditional opera, we should also think about the aesthetic inheritance of "id", and increase the innovation of "superego", so that the artistic works of dance have the flavor of opera and times.

"White Snake Spreads Love" takes "bridge" as a unique beauty image in the beauty design of opera dance. This bridge can be rotated and transformed by 360 degrees. At the same time, the beauty design gives it graceful classical beauty in the style of the bridge. The broken bridge stretches and the undulating platform also provides more spatial dimensions for the stage. It can be said that the only core dance beauty of this drama is a bridge, which inherits the main continuity of the whole drama, which is the ultimate freehand opera sought in the innovative style of dance beauty of the times.

At the same time, the simple styles of "one table, two chairs" and "doors and windows" of traditional opera have not been discarded in other props decorated with beautiful dance, but the practice after thinking about the text has been added: For example, in the scene of "unusual love", Xu Xianjia's door and curtain account are

boldly replaced by thin ropes, which not only expands the space presentation but also echoes the West Lake water phase, reflecting the harmonious poetry in the play; Another example is in the scene of "Love", when lady white snake and Xu Xian meet the West Lake, the beauty of dance is dotted with the lines of lotus leaves and branches and the three pools of the West Lake, creating an extremely clean atmosphere of rational beauty of dance, which echoes the emotional plot in the director's conception, integrating the stage discourse and giving people beautiful time and space. At the same time, in the injured scene of lady white snake flooding Jinshan in "Continued Love", the stage is still the West Lake scene, but the lotus also hangs down with the hero's injury. What is left on the stage is the lotus branches with strong line sense, which are intertwined and lingering, but they wear a sad look.

The highest realm of oriental aesthetics is "freehand brushwork", which is also the inclusive and implicit idea of aesthetics such as drama and traditional Chinese painting. The design of contemporary opera dance beauty is also the reflection and refinement in the inheritance. With the classical and poetic three-dimensional background, it builds a parallel time and space with Zen and poetry. And this design is also the aesthetic style of modern and contemporary young people-minimalist, elegant and connotative.

### ***3.2 Lighting design-seeking pure drama color***

Light is a particularly important existence in the framework of drama stage. Light is the source of all things. People often put light into drama and render it with light. Good lighting design works must be formed by appropriate conception and balance of text. On the stage, any displacement deviation of any beam of light may misrepresent emotional color. In the dramatic lighting design in China's industry, people have been impressed in recent years, such as: in the dance drama "Never Disappearing Radio Wave", Teacher Ren Dongsheng showed the speed and passion of dramatic dance with the beam of black and white elements through the high cooperation with the beautiful LED screen; For example, Zhou Zhengping's Su Ju "Guo Ding Soul" uses the combination of lighting and fog to create the love and hate blend of the protagonist in three time and space; Another example is that Mr. Xing Xin delineates the stage outline and expresses the color level through large areas of strong light and weak light in the multi-level dance beauty framework of wang gui and li xiangxiang in Qin Opera. The best opera lights have temperature and stories.

The core of dance beauty in opera pays attention to "freehand" dance beauty. If the scene is rendered with light color in a large area, it will definitely be inconsistent with the performance of drama and dance beauty. Then, on the basis of the original flavor of opera, we should look for the purest drama color that really belongs to the drama.

For a long time, the lighting of Chinese traditional opera is the least prominent and valued link in the second creation. Because the stage of traditional opera was restricted in many ways before, the lighting of traditional opera was mainly "big white light" and "world light" for a period of time, so it is the most progressive link



compared with the same kind of traditional opera lighting in the current industry. Because of its costume drama and divine drama, the text expression of *White Snake Biography and Emotion* must have classical Zen meaning. Under the design of pursuing the ultimate freehand style, lighting design also needs to find the simplest colors to match the most poetic stage style, and create elegant and pure visual effects with the best optics. For example, "Love" tells that when two snakes came to the West Lake to travel in the world, they used light blue color, which made people imagine the color of a young girl, and it was elegant and pure. In the flooded Jinshan Bridge section of "Injury", the opera lights were matched with the actors' blue and white classical dresses, and the warm orange-red light was boldly used to contrast, which reflected the sadness and sympathy for Xu Xian and lady white snake's love behind the struggle. In the prologue "Remembrance of Love" and the ending "Unfinished Love", pale cyan and warm white light are matched with the screen of beauty dance to create an ethereal space-time atmosphere, an optical art with distance and love in painting.

It is not the light with strong visual impact that is the best light, but the proper light that serves the repertoire is the best light story. In the process of seeking pure drama color, *Love of White Snake* did not forget the connotation of traditional drama lighting-serving the drama with simple and pure colors. What is the purest color? It should be the image definition after the script is understood, representing the color of actors and the stand of stories.

### ***3.3 Music composition-seeking romantic opera notes***

Opera art is an all-encompassing cultural "hodgepodge". In different times, because of different social values and aesthetics, it is extremely social in the times. However, the only constant and essential difference is the way of playing opera music and the singing of lyrics and songs. Opera music has its own unique orchestration, which is a comprehensive orchestra integrating folk music such as gaohu and dulcimer, strings such as violin and wind music such as clarinet. At the same time, with a fixed singing brand, the opera has been passed down to this day. The tune of the opera tunes is basically unchanged, but the words and instruments are changed. For example, the death of the goddess flower, as one of the most classic aria of Cantonese opera, can modify the lyrics in different plays to serve the content presentation of the new drama.

In fact, thinking about why young people are "not interested" in traditional Chinese opera has something to do with the slow rhythm of traditional Chinese opera music, slow singing and noisy performance. Opera needs innovation. In fact, the most serious thing is the innovation of opera music, which brings people auditory thinking. Therefore, music composition needs to find a balance between ancient and modern times, purify the existing Cantonese opera music cards, and add fresh elements into it.

When the director conceived the Cantonese opera "*White Snake Biography and Emotion*", he hoped to develop into Cantonese opera situational musicals. At the

same time, the director also grasped the essential characteristics of "getting rich" by music, and integrated opera music into the popular singing and music elements of musicals. This drama changed the way of traditional opera live orchestra accompaniment, and added orchestral elements of musicals to the orchestration. At the same time, the composition style was based on retaining the singing language and singing style of Cantonese opera, and created a piece integrated work that was more inclined to popular singing and musical singing. Outstanding actor's beautiful singing style and Cantonese opera's "exquisite" performance style, let the audience feel younger in audio-visual and more appropriate to the music of the times. Among them, "Preface" and "End" of the whole drama are presented in the form of musical performance, and in the theme song and ending music, the source and end of the story are told in "silent" forms such as dance and performance, which is more coherent and gives the audience more reverie and enjoyment. This is also an innovative transformation of opera music towards pop music and drama music. However, it also retains the original taste of opera, without diluting the elements of opera, but it is full of aesthetics of the times. The communication advantage of "White Snake Biography and Love" also aims to endow the romantic love of White Snake and Xu Xian with musical note charm.

#### **4. Summary**

Traditional Chinese opera has existed for hundreds of years because of its unique spiritual value and connotation support. Opera was once the highest realm of people's spiritual pursuit. How many people are keen on and believe in "loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness", "truth, goodness and beauty" in opera works. However, when we put it into the modern and contemporary society, it is difficult for us to pursue it. Loyalty, filial piety, righteousness, truth, kindness and beauty...

"Demons are human beings if they have feelings". The newly edited Cantonese opera "White Snake Biography of Love" shows us the thinking and practice of traditional Chinese opera workers on the road of opera innovation. It is still a traditional comprehensive performing art, but it integrates modern stage communication style, and creates the theme of the times of "loving only love" through innovative artistic expression techniques and artistic balance means. This practice is also worthy of deep thinking: how to "purify" on the basis of the "id" of the opera itself, absorb the excellent innovative "superego" elements different from the traditional ones, properly preserve the beauty, properly try new ones, and finally realize the traditional opera aesthetics which is original and full of vitality and creativity under the times.

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