

DOCTORAL THESIS

Tradition and innovation: adaptation in Cantonese opera

Chow, Sze Sum

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ABSTRACT

Cantonese opera, a Chinese regional operatic genre sung in the Cantonese dialect popular in the Pearl River Delta area and overseas Cantonese communities, has shown its vitality through absorbing various elements of theatrical art and culture, thus often moving between tradition and innovation. It is to be argued that adaptation has always been the most essential means of introducing changes to the genre, and it is precisely because of this need for change from the practitioners or the audience that innovation emerges.

The current thesis investigates how adaptation contributes to changes in Cantonese opera in different developmental stages of the genre by mediating the conflict between tradition and innovation. Focuses include the establishment of Cantonese opera by adapting other regional operas into *paichangxi* [episodic repertoire] and its re-adaptation to different media; the role adaptation and re-adaptation played in Cantonese opera reform in the 1930s in introducing new elements and establishing aesthetic traditions of contemporary Cantonese opera; how adaptation and re-adaptation promoted the canonization of Tong Tik-sang's works since the 1950s; and the role adaptation played in recently produced works for the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts aiming at training performers as well as searching for a possible path for the continuation of Cantonese opera. It presents a never-ending cycle of tradition

formation and innovation absorption, catalyzed by adaptation, that shapes the constantly changing face of Cantonese opera.

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