Authentic Authority and Innovation Diffusion: A Study on the Breakthrough Mechanism of Peking Opera Short Videos

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the intrinsic mechanisms behind Peking Opera's cross-demographic dissemination on short video platforms. Drawing upon the theories of innovation diffusion and uses and gratifications, we propose "authentic authority" as the cultural foundation for content dissemination. Through an analysis of case studies—including those categorized as paradigm anchor, visual spectacle, and Peking Opera adaptations/covers—we reveal three core pathways for breaking through demographic boundaries: First, "authentic authority" content establishes cultural trust through professional endorsement and emotional refinement. Second, derivative innovative content generates attractiveness through contrast, achieved via unfamiliar expressions and cultural juxtaposition. Third, innovative forms that integrate modern audiovisual language lower the barrier to audience reception. The findings clarify the dynamic balance between upholding tradition and fostering innovation in the digital age, outlining a comprehensive communication ecosystem characterized by "foundational core authority—diversified innovative breakthroughs—user co-creation."
Keywords: **Peking Opera Short Videos; Breaking the Circle of Dissemination; Essential Authenticity Authority; Innovation Diffusion; Uses and Gratifications**

1. Introduction
It was pointed out at the 11th National Congress of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the 10th National Congress of China Writers Association that we should make proper use of new technologies and means to stimulate creative inspiration, enrich cultural connotations, express ideological emotions, and elevate literary and artistic creation to a new realm with richer connotations and greater potential. In the era of deep integration of digitalization and mediatization, there exists a contradiction between the in-depth expression of traditional culture and the entertaining and superficial communication tendency of various platforms. However, classic Peking Opera content such as the "Announcing Flower Names" excerpt from *Selling Water* has successfully broken through cultural circles. This paper explores the core characteristics and communication paths of Peking Opera's cross-circle communication in the fragmented short video environment. It first defines the core concept and subcategories of "authenticity authority", and then adopts the comparative case method to analyze three types of cross-circle communication paths of Peking Opera content: the cultural trust construction path of classic normative content, the communication diffusion path of derivative innovative content such as visual spectacles based on the cultural foundation, and the path of expanding communication dimensions through the integration of cross-cultural elements such as adaptation and cover versions. Finally, it outlines a dynamic communication landscape of traditional Peking Opera from adhering to its cultural core to expanding the boundary of innovation.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
Current scholarship on the dissemination of Chinese opera through new media, the cultural practices of short video platforms, and related theoretical applications can be categorized into three core areas. Research on new media

dissemination of Chinese opera confirms that digital platforms can transcend spatio-temporal limitations and lower barriers to access. Lightweight adaptations within the "Guochao" (national trend) context are conducive to attracting younger audiences; however, the optimal path for balancing the profound expression of traditional culture with the platform's inclination towards entertainment remains underexplored.

At the theoretical application level, the diffusion of innovations theory and the uses and gratifications theory are currently treated in isolation, failing to integrate an analysis of the intrinsic connections between "content innovation attributes—dissemination nodes—audience needs." Notably, the crucial role of "authentic authority" as the bedrock of cultural innovation is overlooked, thus obscuring the micro-chain of cross-circle dissemination from "authority construction—innovation derivation—audience resonance." This represents the central focus of the present study.

This research integrates the diffusion of innovations theory and the uses and gratifications theory, constructing an analytical framework centered on "authentic authority." "Authentic authority" refers to a curated collection of content that prioritizes the presentation of the genuine and professional standards of Peking Opera artistry, aiming to establish aesthetic benchmarks and cultural references. It serves as the cornerstone of the Peking Opera short video dissemination ecosystem[1] and can be further categorized into three types:

Paradigm Anchor Type: Encompasses exemplary ritualistic models and technique-focused content. Its core characteristic is de-emphasis on entertainment and a strong focus on professionalism.

Visual Spectacle Type: Centers on transformations and scene reconstructions, generating visual impact through the unconventional treatment of Peking Opera motifs.

Peking Opera Adaptation and Cover Type: Integrates the melodic modules of classic Peking Opera arias into contemporary popular music frameworks, creating novel texts through the collage of heterogeneous cultural symbols.

3. Authority Construction and Cross-Circle Communication Path of Paradigm Anchor Type Videos

This study defines the "paradigm anchor type" as a collection of content on short video platforms that focuses on presenting the authenticity, professionalism and normativeness of Peking Opera art, aiming to establish authoritative standards and provide cultural references. It is the source and evaluation benchmark of all innovative forms of Peking Opera short videos. Paradigm anchor type videos include classic ritual model and skill-focused type: the former refers to video clips that can fully present the classic norms and authoritative features of Peking Opera as a comprehensive stage art; the latter refers to professional displays that strip away stage forms and focus solely on individual essential skills such as singing, recitation, acting and acrobatics. The two share the core characteristics of "de-entertainment and emphasis on professionalism", with the difference that the former emphasizes the complete ritual sense of Peking Opera culture, and the latter highlights the pure core of its artistic skills.

How can the paradigm anchor establish authority and achieve cross-circle communication in the fragmented and entertaining short video platforms? This chapter argues that the key lies in accurately meeting the differentiated psychological needs of the audience through two distinct "trust construction" strategies. The following will demonstrate this with *Selling Water* and *Ballad of Acacia* as typical examples respectively.

3.1 A Case of Classic Ritual Model – The Classic Stage Version of Selling Water

This case focuses on the "Presenting Flowers (Announcing Flower Names)" excerpt from the Peking Opera *Selling Water*, an aria sung by the maid Mei ying to amuse her mistress Gui ying, and also the most classic segment of the whole opera. The excerpt starts with the South Banzi tune, followed by the Liushui Ban (running water tune) and spoken clapper. With witty lyrics, and a combination of singing and dancing, it is lively and vivid, and is a foundational aria for the Xun School Huadan (young female role) in Peking Opera.

The communication of the *Selling Water* excerpt on short video platforms is essentially

an adaptive embedding of the classic stage art paradigm in the fragmented media environment. Its core driving force lies in the aesthetic authority of authenticity: it establishes a comparative advantage by providing a definitive and high-standard aesthetic paradigm, satisfying users' demand for the cognition of cultural origin and in-depth aesthetic experience.

The communication of the video starts with high-credibility sources, including official releases by professional Peking Opera troupes and artists, as well as professional interpretation and recommendation by senior fans and creators in the Peking Opera vertical field, which makes the audience regard it as an artistic model with a serious aesthetic attitude. In the diffusion stage, cultural taste nodes transform artistic trust into universal taste trust, and through the discourse reconstruction such as "the advanced sense of Chinese aesthetics", push the content from a textbook for Peking Opera fans to a cultural symbol of urban youth. In the mass communication stage, ordinary users express their recognition through forwarding and secondary creation; feedback such as "I don't understand Peking Opera but find it extremely beautiful" in the comment section marks the completion of the transfer of aesthetic trust to mass taste consensus, and ultimately consolidates its status as a classic ritual model.

The key nodes in the classic ritual model case refer to creative users who inject new meanings into the content and trigger the communication of specific circles through representative secondary creation and comments. Taking *Selling Water* as an example, costume transformation, children performing in Peking Opera costumes, and parodic expressions such as "Getting up early and ready for an afternoon nap" have become important carriers of cross-circle communication. Costume transformation bloggers bind themselves to classic Peking Opera images through professional or interesting imitations, realizing the visual transformation of cultural capital; those who share children's performances show the achievements of intergenerational cultural inheritance through their children's interpretation. Both promote the concrete communication of Peking Opera symbols by satisfying the needs of individual integration[2].

The benevolent deconstructive parody of classic arias strengthens users' social connections and sense of belonging with interesting expressions, condenses social consensus in viral relay, makes Peking Opera symbols break through the professional circle, spread widely through social networks, and form a positive cycle of "individual expression empowering cultural communication". Platforms like Douyin provide media affordances that lower the threshold for traditional art communication[3].

This relaxed and pleasant form of participation provides a burden-free aesthetic experience and a gamified way to relieve stress. It strips away the cognitive pressure that may accompany the appreciation of traditional art, making contact with Peking Opera a pure leisure and entertainment activity, and satisfying users' demand for light emotional comfort in fragmented time.

3.2 A Case of Skill-Focused Type – Ballad of Acacia

Ballad of Acacia, sung by professional Peking Opera actors and presented with a minimalist background and pure vocal performance, is a typical model of "skill-focused type" content. The video abandons visual symbols such as Peking Opera costumes and stages, and takes the professional vocal cavity of Peking Opera Laodan (elder female role) and Kunqu Opera recitation as the core, making the opera skills themselves the only aesthetic focus. This is highly consistent with the Peking Opera innovation principle of "keeping the traditional without being rigid, pursuing innovation without following the trend".[4]

This adherence to the artistic ontology makes it highlight scarce authenticity and professional height in entertaining content, constituting a core communication advantage. Externally, the work adopts the form of popular *Guochao* music, conforming to the consumption habits of mass music; internally, it takes professional opera skills as the foundation, accurately meeting the young group's demand for the recognition of traditional cultural values under the background of *Guochao*, and realizing the compatibility of popular form and traditional core.

Its cross-circle diffusion can be divided into three stages: the first stage is the initial release of the content by professional opera actors,

which accumulates initial traffic by virtue of professional recognition; the second stage, users spontaneously take the work as the background music of videos such as *Guochao* costume transformation, embedding it into the mainstream popular expression scene, and the platform algorithm further amplifies the communication effect; the third stage, a large number of secondary creations focusing on Peking Opera vocal cavity and Kunqu Opera recitation emerge, forming a pattern of national co-creation. This process is not a deconstruction of the original work, but a creative reproduction with the paradigm anchor as the core.

From the perspective of audience motivation, early users who carried out secondary creation of *Ballad of Acacia* mostly completed identity recognition and taste declaration through cultural content, satisfying the demand for shaping a compound online personality with "traditional heritage + modern expression". The intervention of authoritative media such as China Central Television has completed value confirmation and mainstream guidance, incorporating the spontaneous cultural popularity of the people into the cultural development framework, and realizing value guidance and social consensus construction.

Therefore, the motivations of different nodes in the communication chain of *Ballad of Acacia* jointly construct a social psychological landscape of "how traditional culture can achieve effective innovation". This makes *Ballad of Acacia* transcend the song itself and become a "symbolic symbol" for all parties to express their own cultural demands.

4. Authority Construction and Cross-Circle Communication Path of Visual Spectacle Type Videos

The core innovation of Peking Opera costume transformation short videos lies in the "defamiliarization" expression with visual impact and cross-border contrast, which advocates breaking the audience's conventional expectations and aesthetic habits through the innovation of artistic techniques and linguistic forms. [5] In the digital intelligence era, short videos have reconstructed the survival and expression modes of traditional art[6]. There is a complex spectrum from "basic costume transformation" to "composite scene spectacle" within such videos, and the innovation attribute is upgraded with the superposition of scene dimensions. This study selects three typical costume transformation video cases for analysis.

4.1 Cases of Basic Peking Opera Costume Transformation Videos

A series of costume transformation videos represented by "Exploring the Top Ten National Treasures of China - Peking Opera" by Diandi Lahai and "Drunken Concubine" costume transformation and beat-matching video by Qiongnniang focus on the contrasting images of characters, matched with adapted Peking Opera excerpts with a strong sense of rhythm. Their innovative advantage is reflected in low-threshold visual interest and low complexity, making it easy for ordinary users to imitate. Benefiting from the traffic foundation of the two bloggers themselves, such Peking Opera-themed costume transformation videos have achieved remarkable communication effects, with millions of likes each. The interactions in the comment section are mainly the appreciation and resonance of Peking Opera communication and the recognition of the exquisite makeup, which shows that users have a high acceptance of national treasure communication videos, and the form of Peking Opera costume transformation has effectively enhanced the public's continuous attention to Peking Opera.

Based on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, in the diffusion path, the early adopters are Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in the *Guochao* and beauty fields, such as Liu Yu, Diandi Lahai and Qiongnniang, who have great influence in the *Guochao* and beauty fields and possess their own vertical circle influence. The diffusion process can be divided into three stages: the first stage is the independent communication by the creators. After the video is released by ordinary creators, it is first spread and recommended within their fan circles; the second stage is mass user communication. After the content gains popularity in the vertical circle, it attracts the likes and forwards of ordinary users, and then diffuses to a wider mass circle. The driving force of diffusion at this stage comes from users' recognition of *Guochao* aesthetics; the third stage is mass follow-up communication. Creators in similar fields choose to follow and imitate after observing the communication

popularity of such videos, with the diffusion driving force coming from the low-threshold imitability of the content.

Tracing the communication motivations of each stage, the topic selection motivation of early KOLs is to promote Peking Opera to the public vision through innovative forms, consolidate their own online persona and obtain communication traffic. The follow-up motivation of mass users is mainly to meet the needs of entertainment, aesthetics and identity exploration. At the same time, by participating in the communication of Peking Opera costume transformation, users can express their recognition of traditional culture and realize the identity construction of "cultural lovers". The imitation motivation of mass creators comes from the satisfaction of aesthetic recognition and content fit: their online personas are highly bound to *Guochao* and appearance-related content, and the aesthetic value of Peking Opera costume transformation videos is highly consistent with their content positioning. Imitating such content can not only provide high-quality aesthetic materials for their fans, but also strengthen their own online personas as "Guochao experts" and "beauty experts", achieving a win-win situation for persona and content.

4.2 Cases of Composite Scene Spectacle

Content represented by the underwater Peking Opera short video *Warrior Actress* by "Underwater Director Xiaowuge" belongs to the form of composite scene spectacle. The core innovation of such videos lies in the superposition of the double spectacle of "Peking Opera excerpt + underwater environment", which is a reconstructive innovation of Peking Opera performance scenes. This type of innovation has high complexity but extremely strong observability; the highly visually striking images are easy to trigger users' active communication. The video has also achieved millions of likes, and the audience comments show a dual tendency of "admiration for technology" and "cultural recognition", with high-frequency words including "exquisite skills" and "support the inheritance of national treasures", reflecting the dual attraction of "technology empowerment + cultural core" in the communication of traditional culture short videos.

Analyzing the diffusion process of such videos, it can be summarized into three stages: the first stage is the independent communication by the creators, which is first spread in professional circles such as film and television production and underwater shooting; the second stage is the forwarding empowerment by cross-border KOLs. The blogger of the case made the shooting behind-the-scenes into a video and uploaded it to the platform the day after the release of the underwater *Warrior Actress* video, transforming the visual spectacle into a dual topic of "modern dancer technology + paying tribute to traditional culture", attracting the attention of audiences outside the vertical circle; the third stage is the fission communication in the mass circle. After the content enters the public vision, it forms a communication upsurge in the mass circle due to its extremely strong observability. In the process of communication, mass users not only share visual interest, but also convey the value concept of "rejuvenation of traditional culture", making the content realize cross-circle fission communication.

Investigating its motivation, the topic selection motivation of early KOLs is to innovate the expression of underwater dance themes, attract fans who love *Guochao* based on their own underwater technical advantages, and obtain communication traffic. The communication motivation of mass users focuses on the experience of novelty seeking, aesthetic admiration and the accumulation of social capital: the highly striking visual presentation brings a strong experience of novelty seeking and aesthetic shock, and sharing such content can gain attention and recognition in social circles and accumulate social capital.

4.3 Summary of Model Innovation

This judgment echoes the subtraction logic of opera rejuvenation proposed by Luo Li in *Doing a Good Job in the "Addition and Subtraction" of Opera Rejuvenation* — the visual innovation of opera must take "simplifying the complex and returning to the ontology" as the premise, avoiding distorting artistic forms due to the excessive pursuit of traffic.[7] As she said, the entertainment of opera should be based on the artistic ontology, not at the cost of diluting cultural connotations; only by adhering to the essence can the audience truly understand the value of traditional art. The visual contrast and scene

reconstruction of short videos are only means to attract users' attention. What truly evokes users' resonance are the core cultural symbols contained in the videos, such as Peking Opera makeup, costumes and the spirit of characters. This means that the cross-circle communication of Peking Opera short videos must be based on the core of traditional culture, avoiding the misunderstanding of "form over content" due to the excessive pursuit of visual spectacle.

5. Authority Construction and Cross-Circle Communication Path of Peking Opera Adaptation and Cover Type Videos

The phenomenal case selected in this study is a music video made by editing and mixing the song *If You Feel My Love* by the Romanian rock band Blaxy Girls with the excerpt from the classic Peking Opera *The Case of Executing Chen Shimei*. Instead of a simple parallel play, the work makes the Peking Opera banhu drum, vocal cavity and rock guitar, drum beat rhythm perfectly integrated through exquisite audio processing, forming a dialogue-like interaction of "you sing and I respond", and creating an unprecedented auditory experience.[8]

In terms of innovation type positioning, this integration is a typical music fusion and cover innovation, classified as compatibility innovation at the content level. Analyzing the core innovation attributes from the perspective of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, compared with the original rock music or traditional Peking Opera, this mixed version provides a strong auditory novelty and rhythmic experience, retaining the rhythm of rock and injecting the lingering charm of Peking Opera. At the same time, it is compatible with the content consumption habits of short video platform users who pursue rhythm beat-matching and reverse contrast. Users can fully experience its core highlights through a short video of dozens of seconds, and it is easy to describe and recommend with expressions such as "highly infectious" and "amazing fusion effect", facilitating word-of-mouth communication.

From the perspective of communication path, the first stage is the incubation period: the work was spread on a small scale on music platforms, and a small number of innovators completed the song release through the mixing of Peking Opera and electronic music, forming the initial communication foundation. The second stage is the activation period: the content produced by early innovators was recognized by early adopters, who, as KOLs in various vertical fields covering *Guochao*, music, beauty and other segments, carried out early promotion through content reuse. Specifically, music sharing accounts with 100,000 fans on Douyin discovered and used the work, realizing the first coverage of the work from the subcultural circle to a wider mass entertainment user group, with a single video receiving more than 100,000 likes. The third stage is the detonation period: the song continues to be used as background music on Douyin, and some creators combine it with various content forms such as costume transformation, *Guochao* and film and television editing to expand the communication scene.

In April 2021, the official Douyin account of *People's Daily* forwarded the relevant mixed video, triggering an online communication upsurge of opera innovation and cover, and promoting the content to achieve national-level communication. The content presents a strong emotional experience; the sharing behavior is the transmission of this cultural shock, aiming to seek mass resonance. At the same time, it is associated with broader social and cultural issues, enhancing the sense of belonging in step with the pulse of the times, and conforming to the communication orientation of mainstream media. At the fan interaction level, users' needs are met in a diversified way: comments such as "I've been looping it all morning, begging for a lossless audio source! Peking Opera can be so trendy" reflect the satisfaction of the needs of entertainment experience and emotional catharsis. Fans obtain extreme sensory entertainment and emotional release, express and interact through exaggerated comments, strengthening the communication effect of cultural shock[9]; by appreciating the work, they express their recognition of high-level cultural innovation and gain a sense of pride in cultural taste and identity recognition of cultural confidence.

To sum up, the cross-circle communication path of *If You Feel My Love (Mixed Version with The Case of Executing Chen Shimei)* presents a three-stage model of "innovation attributes - diffusion nodes - user satisfaction".

With Peking Opera forms and cultural core as the foundation of upholding the essence, and rock cross-border as the carrier of innovation, this case confirms the development path of Peking Opera adhering to the essence and pursuing innovation advocated by Mr. Zhang Jianguo: Peking Opera cannot be separated from the drainage and communication of new media, but always takes stage art and artistic ontology as its essence. Only by adhering to the core and pursuing moderate innovation can it break through from the subcultural circle to the mass market, and truly promote the living inheritance and communication power improvement of Peking Opera art[10]. The core logic of the dynamic balance between the two not only avoids cultural distortion caused by excessive entertainment, but also gets rid of the communication dilemma brought by clinging to tradition. Through the two-way empowerment of upholding the essence and pursuing innovation, it realizes the organic unity of cultural core and communication form, providing a replicable communication logic for the living inheritance of traditional culture such as Peking Opera.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the above discussion, the conclusions can be drawn as follows: First, authenticity authority constitutes the cornerstone of cultural trust. Classic ritual models activate the inherent authority of classics, and skill-focused type purifies professional skills; the two jointly construct a reliable standard for aesthetic judgment, laying a cultural foundation for innovative communication. Second, cross-circle communication follows the dual-track logic of "trust establishment - innovation diffusion": the authenticity of the core builds a stable audience base by virtue of professional endorsement and emotional purification, while the innovation of the extension realizes scope expansion through defamiliarization expression, cultural collage and the integration of modern audio-visual language. Third, user participation drives meaning co-creation: the audience completes the modern translation of culture through usage behaviors such as parody and secondary creation, promoting Peking Opera to spread from niche circles to the whole people.

The main contribution of this study is to propose an analytical framework with "authenticity authority" as the core, which systematically integrates the dimensions of content, communication and audience, fills the micro research gap in the balance mechanism between authenticity and innovation of traditional culture short videos, and deepens the theoretical cognition of the mediatized inheritance of traditional art. At the practical level, cultural institutions and creators must adhere to "upholding the essence and pursuing innovation" — continuously produce high-level authenticity authority content to consolidate the cultural core, and at the same time encourage diversified innovations such as visual spectacle and cross-border integration to adapt to diverse communication scenarios, so as to realize the living inheritance and extensive communication of Peking Opera art.

At the same time, this study focuses on head cases and platform mechanisms, and has certain limitations. The study is mainly based on qualitative analysis, lacking the support of quantitative data, making it difficult to accurately measure the actual effect of different contents on the change of audience attitudes. Future research can combine quantitative methods such as questionnaire surveys and data mining to construct a correlation model of "content characteristics - communication effect - audience attitude", reveal the key influencing factors of cross-circle communication more accurately, and provide more targeted strategic references for the digital communication of traditional culture.

Acknowledgments

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