

**Creativity**  
and the  
**Art**  
of  
**Cantonese Opera**

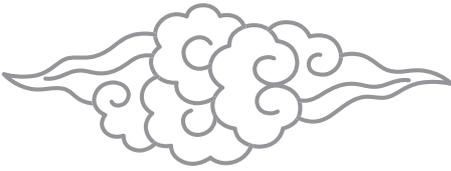


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of Education





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## **Creativity and the Art of Cantonese Opera**

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The UNESCO Arts in Education Observatory on Research in Local Cultures and Creativity in Education is delighted that the first-ever International Symposium on Creativity in Cantonese Opera has brought together academics, artists, practitioners, and connoisseurs of Cantonese opera from Hong Kong and overseas to share and discuss their perspectives about the genre from a range of domains. The rich mix of perspectives provided valuable insights into vital aspects of creativity in Cantonese opera, including the nature of creativity in Chinese arts, creativity in the performance of Cantonese opera, creativity in scripts of Cantonese opera, creativity in the music of Cantonese opera, and the transmission of creativity in Cantonese opera. The views of keynote speakers and respondents are enriched by responses from the audience.

This Symposium demonstrates the emphasis placed by the Hong Kong Institute of Education on the development and transmission of Cantonese Opera through education and research. It also celebrates the recognition by UNESCO of Cantonese opera, adding it on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.

This book is very special in nature, containing the full transcripts of speeches by speakers, respondents and audience. It is a useful resource for researchers and valuable reading material for the dedicated and passionate experts, practitioners, advocates and lovers of Cantonese Opera.

**Professor Samuel Leong *PhD***

Director, UNESOC Observatory for Research in Local Cultures & Creativity in Education

Associate Dean (Quality Assurance & Enhancement), Faculty of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences  
Head, Department of Cultural & Creative Arts  
The Hong Kong Institute of Education



# Foreword

Cantonese Opera as an invaluable art form was officially recognised by its inscription onto UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in September 2009. The successful inscription greatly encouraged Cantonese Opera personnels, scholars, and related public or private agency, and more attention was devoted to the art form with regards to its research and development, promotion and transmission, and education of younger generation. These diversified events were well received in Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Foshan, Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, and in overseas such as the United States, Canada, Singapore and Malaysia, etc.

In 2009 and 2012, the Department of Cultural and Creative Arts, The Hong Kong Institute of Education has conducted the ‘Collaborative Project on Teaching Cantonese Opera in Primary and Secondary Schools’. Supported by the Quality Education Fund (QEF), the project targets on recruiting 60 schools in three years and introducing Cantonese Opera to more teachers and students. Providing the above schools with collaborative teaching instruction and curriculum plan, as well as Cantonese opera music training to school teachers, it is expected that the project can help to nurture Cantonese Opera performance-goers in future. These measures are fairly practical and effective as the basic knowledge delivered is essential to appreciating the art form. In 2011, the project received the ‘Musical Rights Award’ – one of the three major awards offered by the International Music Council. This honorary recognition is not merely as encouraging as the high figure of 1,600 Cantonese Opera performances in Hong Kong last year, it also largely benefits the future development of Cantonese Opera education and the cultural inheritance of the art form.

Besides, the Department of Cultural and Creative Arts held the ‘International Symposium on the Creativity in Cantonese Opera’ on 5th and 6th May 2011. The five main themes of the symposium were ‘creativity in Cantonese Opera performance’, ‘creativity in Chinese Arts’, ‘creativity in Cantonese Opera scripts’, ‘creativity in Cantonese Opera music’, and ‘creativity in transmission of Cantonese Opera’. Local and oversea scholars and representatives of Cantonese Opera performers, together with several other enthusiasts, all shared their precious experience and opinion in the symposium. Their contributions remained influential and deserved an official record for the transmission of the art of Cantonese Opera. The Hong Kong Institute of Education thus determined to publish the transcription of the symposium content for its invaluable academic values. I truly appreciate the effort made and am more than pleased to write this foreword with my deepest wishes to promote Cantonese Opera.

## Professor Leung Pui Kam

Former Professor of Chinese Language and Literature,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Senior Researcher in Cantonese Opera



# Foreword

The Cantonese opera is a representative traditional art form from Guangdong Province. Since the late Qing Dynasty, Cantonese opera has been widely performed in the Pearl River Delta. Many artists appeared with different and unique personal artistic styles. For instance, eminent actors and actresses such as Xue Jue Xian and Ma Shi Ceng have developed their own “Xue Qiang” and “Beggar Qiang”, He Feifan developed his “Doggie Qiang”, and Fang Yan Fen developed her “Fang Qiang”, where “qiang” refers to a personal singing style. However, today we are facing a situation that creativity is avoided but imitation is encouraged. Many artists try to imitate the artistry of great masters since the audience appears to appreciate their vivid imitation due to their memory of those predecessors. In addition, audience tends to prefer those romance repertoires to others, such as historical and dramatic repertoires. The Cantonese opera tends to follow the beaten track without innovation and personal style.

The Department of Cultural and Creative Arts at the Hong Kong Institute of Education strives for supporting the development of Cantonese opera. Facing such situation, we organized an “International Symposium on Creativity in Cantonese Opera” from 4th to 5th of May, 2011. We hope to arouse the attention and reflection of the Cantonese opera practitioners, audiences and academics so that the genre can be further developed through the discussion by the stakeholders. This book is an outcome of the Symposium in which discussions of all Keynote Speakers, Responding Speakers and other participants are included. We aim to document the insights and updated knowledge of various stakeholders and to provide a new piece of literature focusing on creativity in Cantonese opera.

The publication of this book is attributed to the contributions of all the Keynote Speakers and Responding Speakers. They are: Professor Bell Yung from the University of Pittsburgh, USA; Professor Samuel Leong from the Hong Kong Institute of Education; Professor Chan Sau Yan, Dr Sam Chan, and Dr Tai Shuk Yan from the Chinese University of Hong Kong; Dr Xu Yanlin from the South China Agricultural University, China; Mr Ip Sai Hung, Head of the Radio 5, Radio and Television of Hong Kong; Cantonese artists Mr Yuen Siu Fai, Mr Danny Li, Ms Hung Hung, Ms Lau Wai Ming, Ms Tang Mei Ling, Mr Lui Hung Gwong; eminent accompanist Mr Mak Wai Man, Cantonese tutors Ms Wong Yee Man, Ms Lo Wan Yin, and Mr Wong Sing Kwan; Dr Estella Cham, former Principal Curriculum Officer (Arts Education), Education Bureau; and Cantonese opera researchers Dr Lam Wing Cheong, Mr Pak Tak Wan, Mr Choi Kai Kwong, and Mr Wong Chi Fai. We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to their contributions. Last but not least, we are thankful to the kind support from the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and the Radio 5 of the Radio and Television of Hong Kong, as well as the UNESCO Observatory for Research in Local Culture and Creativity in Education which publishes this book.

**Dr. Leung Bo Wah, Editor**

Associate Professor (Music)  
Department of Cultural and Creative Arts  
The Hong Kong Institute of Education



## Session 1



# *The Performance Creativity of Cantonese Opera*

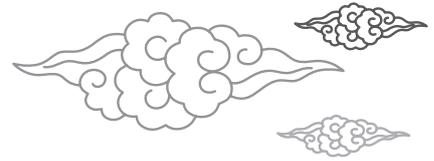


**Speakers :**

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai, Dr. Chan Chak Lui, Prof. Chan Sau Yan ( video recording )

**Respondents :**

Mr. Danny Li, Ms. Hung Hung, Ms. Lau Wai Ming





## The Performance Creativity of Cantonese Opera



Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Without any further ado, let us begin today's first symposium session. The topic of this session is "The Performance Creativity of Cantonese Opera". "The performance of Cantonese opera" means the singing, acting, speech delivery, and acrobatics that are performed by *actor-singers* on stage. Today's audiences are often attracted by the set design, lighting effects, and other stage effects, but I personally think that the most fascinating part of Cantonese opera performance is the singing (唱), acting (做), speech delivery (唸), and acrobatics (打) of its *actor-singers*. Whenever different *actor-singers*, or even when the same *actor-singers* perform the same opera, there would be a different interpretation for each performance. What are the differences among the various performances? Where does creativity come into the performance? This is a question that we have to think deeply about in the first session of the symposium. Today, we are very glad to have invited the renowned Cantonese opera veteran Mr. Yuen Siu Fai (阮兆輝) and Dr. Chan Chak Lui (陳澤蕾), a lecturer of the Department of Cultural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong as well as a Cantonese opera *actor-singer*. They are going to investigate this question from different perspectives. The third speaker is Professor Chan Sau Yan (陳守仁). He is currently in England and cannot attend this symposium in person. On April 8th this year, he delivered a lecture at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. He agreed to let us share an edited excerpt of a video recording of the lecture at this symposium. We shall watch this video recording of Professor Chan's speech soon. After the speeches made by the three speakers, there will be responses from the three invited guests. They are all experienced Cantonese opera *actor-singers* Mr. Li Qigeng (李奇峰), Ms. Hung Hung (紅虹), and Ms. Lau Wai Ming (劉惠鳴). I hope that there will be a sharing of opinions on the performance creativity of Cantonese opera based on the perspective of experienced and professional Cantonese opera *actor-singers*. Let me first introduce Mr. Yuen Siu Fai.

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:

First, speaking of the performance creativity of Cantonese opera, I think that all of us have witnessed the ongoing changes of the genre. In comparison, the physical outlook of the stage of Cantonese opera has had greater changes. If we were to choose among a list of Chinese regional operas, Cantonese opera would have to be considered one of the most radical genres because of its abundant variations over the years. Yet, such variations are not necessarily those related to performance. Since I began my career, I have witnessed many changes, including those of stage design, set design, lighting, costumes, and music. In terms of bodily form (身段) and hand gestures (做手), there were also difference between some seniors that I personally knew when I was a child and some of the popular *actor-singers* of that time. In terms of costumes, it is widely known that Cantonese opera absorbed the costumes styles of *Peking*

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
(continue)

opera and *Kun* opera. This is why we may not be able to distinguish the performance genre by the costumes nowadays. In the past, the costumes of each genre had their own characteristics, and such characteristics were apparent. In addition to Cantonese opera, other regional operas have also had changes. In *Peking* opera, for example, an old photo of one of the earliest *actor-singers* Chen Delin (陳德林) performing a *qingyi* role (青衣) (a type of *huadan* role 花旦) shows that there was only a small red dot on his lips, which led us once to think that he was acting a *chou* role when he was actually playing a *huadan* role. In Cantonese opera, Ma Si Tsang (馬師曾) and Xue Juebian (薛覺先) introduced musical and theatrical elements of other regional operas to their performance since they were active on stage. They also invented some original elements. For changes such as bodily form changes that took place in earlier periods, they might be influenced by the changes in costume. It is widely known that the costumes of today's *xiaosheng* (小生) are called "*haiqing*" (海青). "*Haiqing*" has an inclined collar, a pair of wide sleeves, and a white "water sleeve". The earlier "*haiqing*", however, does not include the white "water sleeve" (水袖). Ever since I began my career in 1953, I have not seen someone wear the old costumes. Yet, the seniors often showed us the earlier "*haiqing*". The first earlier "*haiqing*" that I saw was the one used by senior Mr. *Jing* Shaofeng (or Ching Siu Fung 靚少鳳). His "*haiqing*" has a pair of small and tight sleeves, and it does not have a "water sleeve". At the beginning, I found the earlier "*haiqing*" to be quite strange. The absence of sleeves makes the earlier "*haiqing*" similar to a woman's *cheongsam*. Some cuttings of the "*haiqing*" are tightly fitted to the body and are strange in shape. I've never seen someone wear this kind of "*haiqing*" during performance. On the other hand, I have noticed the change of the *xiaosheng*'s bodily forms in the performances of Bai Yutang (白玉棠). Mr. Bai Yutang mostly performed the *xiaosheng* role. In *Yutang Chun* (《玉堂春》), for example, his bodily forms are different from what I have learned. Some seniors pointed out that the *xiaosheng* of the past walk more uprightly, unlike those of today who would make big steps in two diverging directions. I have not found some concrete evidence for that yet. It is because I was not born to this world when there was such a practice. I only know about earlier bodily forms from different seniors.

In terms of creativity, the individual styles of the seniors of the early period are already an innovation of Cantonese opera. Since there were not too many new and original operas, early Cantonese opera mainly adopted traditions of other regional operas, such as imitating Hubei *Han* opera and following its conventions. Therefore, early Cantonese opera was not (漢劇) performed in Cantonese dialect. At that time, even though many operas were performed by different *actor-singers*, the performances were quite similar. Since there are no video recordings of these performances and written records of these performances do not necessarily exist, there is no way to validate whether these performances have involved creativity. We only know that a famous *actor-singer* performed a specific opera from existing sources, there might be other *actor-singers* who had performed the same opera. For example, there was a *xiaowu* (小武) called *Jingxian* (靚仙). His performances of *West River Meeting* (《西河會》) always had a sold-out crowd. There was also a claim that "(the audiences) must get three great features, otherwise there would be a ticket refund!" Thus, we assert that every *actor-singer* has his or her own "principal

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
(continue)

operas” (or sell-out shows). The so-called “principal operas” refers to the core operas that an *actor-singer* would perform in the first few days or nights. This is how the term “principal operas” was invented. *Actor-singers* made significant accomplishments in the performance of these “principal operas”, which helped establish their fame and consolidate their status as *actor-singers*. No matter what, we think that new creations do emerge continuously in performance. When different seniors performed the same opera, each of them would make changes to shape the role. For example, *Shen Siguan* (or *Final Jurisdiction*) (《審死官》) is the “principal opera” (sell-out show) of “Uncle Ma” (or Ma Si Tsang) the father of Ms. Hung Hung. originally known as *Si Jinshi* (or *Four Scholars*) (《四進士》), *Shen Shiguan* is performed in ancient Cantonese opera and *Peking* opera troupes. “Uncle Ma” played a *chou* role to act as a loyal, upright, and rightful fake-lawyer, which successfully changed the impression of the overall performance. I think that quite a number of seniors demonstrated this kind of creativity. However, it’s a pity that the concept of inheriting traditions or performance practice of different schools in Cantonese opera never ripe. The more recent schools of performance practice which were established respectively by Mr. Ma Si Tsang, Mr. Xue Juexian, and the later Mr. Sun Ma Si Tsang (新馬師曾) and Mr. Ho Fei Fan (何非凡), have not been inherited. The concept of inheriting traditions in Cantonese opera is not as well-conceived as in *Peking* opera, of which protégés of different schools would have formed to inherit the conventions of their specific school of practice. Actually, we admire the famous Cantonese opera *actor-singers* very much. We imitate their performances. The failing of passing down the Cantonese opera performance traditions and practice by schools or the unification of Cantonese opera performance style is perplexing to me. I hope that we can investigate this issue in-depth.

The five schools of Cantonese opera we admired the most in the early period, namely Xue, Ma, Gui, Bai, and Liu, which are the schools of Mr. Xue Juexian, Mr. Ma Si Tsang, Mr. Bai Yutang, Mr. Gui Mingyang (桂名揚), and Mr. Liu Hap Wai (廖俠懷). These schools are the most commonly mentioned among Cantonese opera insiders. Nevertheless, even if the inheritance of conventions from these schools existed, few performers proclaim such an inheritance. For example, the Xue school was much proclaimed by people in the early period, but it is now fading. I always wonder why. The fading of some schools can be traced. The fading of the Liu school and the Ma school were due to the over-dominance of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School: meaning all the operas feature the love episode of *sheng* and *dan*, or the so-called “Mandarin duck” and “butterfly”. This resulted in the reduced performance frequency of many good operas of the early period, such as *Shen Siguan*, on today’s Cantonese opera stage. Cantonese opera professionals are of course responsible for the existence of this situation. They should teach the audience how to appreciate Cantonese opera as an art form and should not emphasize only the beautiful set and costumes design or the love episode of *sheng* and *dan*.

Furthermore, as I perform in various opera troupes, I have noticed a *dangerous* phenomenon. Even if the singing of the male and female protagonists is out of tune or off-beat, audiences still applaud their performance as the two protagonists would

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
(continue)

embrace each other after singing. I really do not understand the reason behind this. In the era when I was learning Cantonese opera, *sheng* and *dan* would seldom have body contact. They would only rely on body positioning when the plot required them to hug each other. Today's performance includes more intimate scenes. This may be due to the fact that some of the schools of tradition have died away. Nevertheless, some other schools of tradition such as the Xue school and the Gui school still exist although they are not actively promoted. Nobody would intentionally distinguish the singing styles of the Xue school and the Gui school, but there are actually many Gui school protégés, for examples Ms. Yam Kim Fai (任劍輝) and Mr. Law Kar Po (羅家寶). Nowadays, many people imitate the performing style of Ms. Yam Kim Fai and Ms. Lung Kim Sang (龍劍笙), but none of them claims that they are the *actor-singers* of the Gui school. These people do not even know about their musical lineage. This is a far-reaching problem. I hope that everyone can treasure the artistic creations of the predecessors and the characteristics of different schools of tradition.

Dr. Chan Chak Lui:

My topic today is "Cantonese opera *actor-singers*' craft of drama roles and the active learning and use of official pronunciation in Chinese opera". I will use Mr. Leung Sing Bo's (梁醒波) performance of two roles in *The Purple Hairpin* (《紫釵記》) as an example. In Cantonese opera, the commonly-used stage languages include Cantonese dialect and Mandarin Chinese, in which Cantonese dialect can be delivered in two styles, meaning the one closer to written Chinese, and the one closer to daily use. The use of Cantonese dialect is the foundation of Cantonese opera as a localized artistic creation. Experienced Cantonese opera *actor-singer* Luo Pinchao (羅品超) even thought that the use of Cantonese dialect is the basis of Cantonese opera's adherence to the Southern school. His thinking matches with the idea that the differences among regional operas are related to the development of "musical vocalization" and other characteristics from different dialects. For the use of official pronunciation, Yun Weili's *Word Tones in the Cantonese Operatic Singing with Ancient Vocalization* (云惟利著《古腔粵曲的音韻》) carefully illustrates the word tones employed in Cantonese operatic singing with ancient vocalization compiled by Mr. Li Ruizu (李銳祖). Yun also suggests that the use of official pronunciation in Cantonese opera is mainly based on the *Zhongzhou* tone (中州韻) but with the adaptation of pronunciation conventions from Cantonese dialect. This kind of creativity can actually be found in other regional operas. For example, renowned *Peking* opera *actor-singer* Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳) studied *kunqu* vocalization and integrated it with the *Peking* dialect to present his self-established Mei school of *kunqu*. The absorption and integration of stage languages constitute a layer of practice, and how *actor-singers* make use of the artistic methods accumulated by the predecessors to interpret a role constitute yet another layer of practice. Both layers are dependent on each other. In the following part, I will use the design of theatrical language in Leung Sing Bo's performance of two roles in *The Purple Hairpin* as an example. Through his stage interpretation, we will try to further understand the use of official dialect in today's theatrical stage and briefly discuss how Cantonese opera *actor-singers* learn to localize the use of foreign dialects and later demonstrate such localization during performance.

Dr. Chan Chak Lui:  
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In “The adaptation process of Tang Xianzu’s *The Purple Hairpin*” (《改篇湯顯祖紫釵記的經過》) published in the commemorative performance programme of *The Fifth Season of Sin Fung Ming Opera Troupe*, Mr. Tang Disheng (唐滌生) mentions the reason for having Leung Sing Bo play two characters. Tang Disheng points out that in Tang Xianzu’s *The Purple Hairpin*, there is Wei Xiaqing (韋夏卿) and the “yellow shirt guest” in addition to Li Yi and Huo Xiaoyu. In Tang Disheng’s adaptation, the character Cui Yunming (崔允明) replaces the original “yellow shirt guest”. Tang Disheng considers the two roles Wei Xiaqing and Cui Yunming to be very important. He states, “In order to demonstrate the importance of the two characters, I asked Leung Sing Bo to perform both of them and I made some minor changes to the original plot. This is a decision made in the absence of a choice. I hope that connoisseurs would forgive me.” Leung Sing Bo performed two characters in four hours. In addition to relying on the costumes and makeup to perform two wholehearted but contrasting roles in terms of wealth and social status, Leung had to make use of the formulaic performance for specific characters to strengthen the differences between the two characters. The predecessors generated a rich set of knowledge of formulaic art for constructing various roles, and Tang Disheng applied this knowledge according to his composed vocal text and based on the suitability of his created theatrical characters and the special characteristics of *actor-singers*.

In terms of singing and acting, the adapted character Cui Yunming is a better fit for the *laosheng* role and the character “yellow shirt guest” is a better fit for the *jing* role (淨). I say “better fit” instead of “perfect fit” because Leung Sing Bo made economical use of the flexibility of the “six pillars” system (六柱制) to perform characters of different role types in the same performance. For the vocalization, the singing for both characters should be basically sung in *ping hao* (「平喉」). When Leung Sing Bo acted as Cui Yunming starting from the episode *Xiaochuang Yuanmeng* (〈曉窗圓夢〉), he added a lot of “coughing sound”. The *laosheng* of other regional operas also use this method. There is even a form for entering the stage called “coughing entering”. Yet, Leung Sing Bo did not use the “coughing sound” to represent the character’s old age. He instead used the sound to represent the poor health and financial conditions of Cui Yunming. Moreover, he did not wear the man-made whiskers, and thus we cannot say that he acted as a *laosheng* for the character Cui Yunming. We cannot say that Leung acted as a *chou* either. His nose was not colored with any cosmetics during the performance and he did not illustrate the acting skills characterized by “minor movement and small movement”, but he made embellishments that are commonly found in the *chou* role. He employed various performance techniques according to the instructions of singing and speech delivery for the character. When he had to demonstrate the spirit and charm of a scholar, his singing and speech delivery was more like a *laosheng*. He used the official pronunciation to show the bookishness and etiquette of an old scholar. When he had to act as someone who was optimistic about whatever that had happened to him, he would present the humor of a *chou* role. He would also make embellishments in Cantonese dialect that was mostly comprehensible to Hong Kong audiences. Even though the character Cui Yunming is a scholar, he had never succeeded in any examinations and thus did not receive any



Dr. Chan Chak Lui:  
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official assignment. Therefore, Leung Sing Bo seldom employed official pronunciation to strengthen the tone even when Cui Yunming was in a struggle against the character “Chief General Lo” performed by Lan Chi Pat (靚次伯). In the episode *Swallowing the Hairpin to Refuse the Marriage* (吞釵拒婚), Leung Sing Bo, however, used official pronunciation for his speech delivery because of the demand of the plot. The use of official pronunciation to strengthen the tone and regulate the rhythm of singing or speech is common in Cantonese opera performance, and Leung Sing Bo made use of this for the design of his speech delivery in order to create greater tension. The use of Cantonese dialect for speech delivery was forceful in that it helped to introduce the gongs and drums into a scene that requires sufficient “flavour”. This is the technique. The design of the use of various emotional tones through familiarizing the personality of Cui Yunming and the plot that Cui refuses to be a matchmaker of the daughter of “Chief General Lo” constitutes the acting. Cui Yunming is a character who stresses the bond of friendship. He thinks that “the debt has to be paid even if the debt is just one cent”, but he is without choice and has to rely on borrowing to survive. By combining technique with acting, Leung Sing Bo created a concrete shape and outlook as well as an effectual voice for this character. “Yellow shirt guest” is a role that fits into the typical *jing*. Leung Sing Bo’s interpretation of this role resembles *jing* in the outlook and *siu mou* (小武) in the voice. According to Yuen Siu Fai’s memory, “When ‘Uncle Bo’ first performed *The Purple Hairpin*, he once attempted to interpret his role as a *jing* in *Peking* opera. He found such an interpretation dissatisfactory and thus decided to disregard it.” He used a high and forceful voice to represent the martial strength and charisma as well as the manly sentiment of the role. He also employed a “falsetto” to regulate the rhythm of singing or speech and selectively borrowed the features of various role types to interpret the “yellow shirt guest”. From the front and back covers of a special volume of *The Purple Hairpin* published in 1957 that shows the featured pictures of the roles Huo Xiaoyu and Li Yi in the episode *Falling the Hairpin Under the Shadow of a Light* (〈墜釵燈影〉) as well as Huo Xiaoyu and “yellow shirt guest” in the episode *Meeting the Hero Under the Flowers* (〈花前遇俠〉), we can notice the significance of “yellow shirt guest” in *The Purple Hairpin*. Tang Disheng intended not only to make “yellow shirt guest” the number one playboy in the world, but also as “the most powerful figure of the time”, referring to the description of his “extensive personal connections with the mistresses in the court” in Tang Xianzu’s version of *The Purple Hairpin*. As the instruction in Tang Disheng’s script illustrates, “yellow shirt guest” – a nameless but wholehearted man – should be dressed with “a yellow large-size *haiqing* with a sword offered by the emperor” in order to present the role as both a playboy and a powerful figure.

At the premiere in 1957, Leung Sing Po coloured his face while Lan Chi Pat used a mask. However, Lan Chi Pat spoke less frequently in official pronunciation than Leung Sing Bo. Under the circumstance that Cantonese dialect is the main language employed on the Cantonese opera theatrical stage, Leung Sing Bo used official pronunciation to make speech deliveries for the role “yellow shirt guest”. More importantly, Leung’s acting for the role Cui Yunming and the performance of other *actor-singers* also included the use of official pronunciation to strengthen the tone and regulate the rhythm

Dr. Chan Chak Lui:  
(continue)

of singing or speech. The use of official pronunciation for “yellow shirt guest” was not just for enunciating a number of Chinese characters. It was employed in speech deliveries that required special care towards the accuracy of pronunciation. Through demonstrating different dialects and with the audiences’ impression towards the use of official pronunciation, the performance expressed the identity and spiritual character of a hero and a prince respectively. At the same time, in order to maintain the significance of Cantonese dialect in Cantonese opera, Leung Sing Po used the dialect to deliver the rhymed ancient phrases and important dialogues. Official pronunciation was usually employed on stage to strengthen verbal expression and create an atmosphere, as well as to consolidate the expressiveness of speech delivery that has been emphasized in *zhongzhou* pronunciation. This is so that the attractiveness of the art can be enhanced by the fitting use of pronunciation in relation to the design of the theatrical characters. Audiences can thus experience the persona of theatrical characters through the *actor-singers’* use of official pronunciation and immerse in the plot development through the *actor-singers’* speech delivery in Cantonese dialect. This is especially apparent in the dialogue between “yellow shirt guest” and “Chief General Lo” in the episode *Jiezhen Xuanen* (〈節鎮宣恩〉) in *The Purple Hairpin*. In this dialogue, Leung Sing Bo made use of both his real voice and falsetto to express the manhood of “yellow shirt guest”. He also employed official pronunciation to establish the royal status of the character as well as to demonstrate vocal variations in both speech delivery and rhythm regulation, so that the differences between “yellow shirt guest” and “chief General Lo” became more obvious. When Cantonese opera *actor-singers* learn about the pronunciation and vocalization of official pronunciation from other regional operas for their application in performance, they have to take care in the design of speech delivery: considering when to employ Cantonese dialect and official pronunciation respectively. They also have to study the enunciation of official pronunciation, paying attention to the rolling-tongue word tones and the word tones with sharp pitches that are absent in Cantonese dialect in particular. By considering Leung Sing Bo as an *actor-singer* performing *chou* under the “six-pillar system” in *The Purple Hairpin*, we can notice that the “six-pillar system” results in an unclear categorization of role types. Furthermore, based on the concern regarding such unclear categorization and performance practicality, *actor-singers* should have the room to match an assigned character from the script with appropriate role(s) and to employ a cross-role-type method to shape a theatrical character according to the characteristics of different role types. Sometimes a playwright has no choice and he or she has to let an *actor-singer* perform two distinctive theatrical characters within a performance that takes several hours. Leung Sing Bo did not employ the *zhongzhou* pronunciation in the style for delivering Cantonese dialect. He instead used the *zhongzhou* pronunciation in his speech delivery to enhance the performance and successfully established an example that demonstrated the choice of pronunciation method based on how a theatrical character is shaped. His achievement in this aspect clearly shows his successors how an *actor-singer* can flexibly employ suitable techniques according to the personal characteristics of a theatrical character when there are limited resources.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

What follows is a screening of Prof. Chan Sau Yan's lecture. His lecture topic is related to Mr. Ma Si Tsang. This is a topic that is filled with creativity. Last month, he held a lecture at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The content of the lecture was about how Mr. Ma Si Tsang had been inspired by the drama of one of his contemporaries, the film actor, Charlie Chaplin from the West. Ma even imitated Chaplin's performance to a certain degree, and that influenced his personal development in Cantonese opera. This is really an interesting topic. Usually, when we watch a Cantonese opera performance, we would not think of how it had searched for new elements from the West. During Ma's time, Western theater was yet to be popular in Hong Kong. Mr. Ma Si Tsang was a pioneer. He looked for new inspirations through various mediums and directions for the creativity of Cantonese opera.

( The original length of the lecture is an hour and a half, and now the selected excerpt is played as follows )

Prof. Chan Sau Yan:

I notice an absence in the history of Cantonese opera: the record of Mr. Ma Si Tsang as a great theatrical writer. Nevertheless, Hong Kong people of my age, for example, have a shallow knowledge of Mr. Ma Si Tsang, let alone the generations of the post-eighties and the post-nineties. Some people even have no idea about who Ma Si Tsang is. Some later-generation *actor-singers* learned the art of Ma, such as Sun Ma Si Tsang. Mr. Sun Ma Si Tsang treated Mr. Ma Si Tsang as his idol and learned to perform Cantonese opera from him. In the preserved Cantonese-dialect movies of Mr. Sun Ma Si Tsang, we can therefore see many artistic traces of Mr. Ma Si Tsang and even the artistic traces of Charlie Chaplin.

I believe that everyone here understands the *chou* role ( 丑 ) to a certain extent. This role exists across the world. It exists in Shakespearean dramas. It has also appeared in Chinese opera for a long period of time. From looking through the scripts, we can discover that the *chou* role was already well developed in the Southern theater of the Song dynasty in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Nevertheless, *chou sheng* was a role developed during the 1930s. *Chou sheng* ( 丑生 ) means a male acting in a *chou* role. It is different from the *chou dan* ( 丑旦 ) performed by a woman. *Chou sheng* is a young man who acts as a clown. This was a very new idea during the 1930s. In the past, there was only the idea of *chou*. The ten essential role types in Cantonese opera were influenced by Western movies, especially Hollywood, during the 1930s. During that period, Charlie Chaplin was one of the best actors who were widely known around the world. In fact, Chaplin started his career and established his fame between 1914 and 1915. According to Chaplin's biography, Chaplin was known by every American in 1915, and he was famous worldwide between 1916 and 1917. Later, in the 1930s, he was regarded as "the master of comedy" appreciated by people around the world. It was really not easy to achieve popularity among audiences worldwide.

Going back to the topic, Cantonese opera experienced a significant change during the 1930s. This was particularly apparent in Hong Kong as an important place of Cantonese opera. Hong Kong people are more receptive to the fusion of Western art into Cantonese

Prof. Chan Sau Yan:  
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opera. Musically, the use of Western tunes and Western instruments such as the violin and the saxophone are examples. In terms of role design, Cantonese opera was also influenced by Hollywood comedies. Charlie Chaplin was one of the comedians of that period, and indeed there were many similar types of actors during the early twentieth century. Hollywood comedies were spread to Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and some other places, which led to a significant change in Cantonese opera. Audiences appreciated this type of movies, and they also favored the comedic element of each Cantonese opera performance. The young male *actor-singers* who acted as *chou sheng* were particularly popular. This was the time when the two Cantonese opera maestros Mr. Xue Juexian and Mr. Ma Si Tsang emerged. They first acted as *chou sheng*, and many opera troupes invited them to perform. They were regarded as “the only *chou sheng*” or “the civil and martial *chou sheng*”. They were able to perform all the civil, martial, and comic scenes and were known as “the all-rounded great masters”. Some of the role types were created at that time as a consequence, such as *wu chou sheng* (武丑生), *chou* (丑), and *wenwusheng* (文武生). They were all created during the 1930s. There was a significant change in the opera troupes. Traditionally, *chou sheng* is a subordinate role, but it became more important from the 1930s onwards. Each opera troupe would promote the fact that it had invited the best *chou sheng* to perform. These *chou sheng* not only performed in the comedic scenes, they also acted in the serious and solemn civil scenes as well as the martial scenes. This is the reason why these *chou sheng* were known as *wenwu chousheng* (文武丑生). A *wenwu chou sheng* was equivalent to the male protagonist in Western movies. This was a kind of influence from Hollywood. The creation of this new role type led to the emergence of other new role types, including the principal *dan* which is analogous to the female protagonist, *xiaosheng* as the supporting actor, and the subordinate *dan* as the supporting actress. The creation of these role types that constituted the “six pillars” was influenced by Western movies.

Let me first introduce the simple life of Charlie Chaplin. He was born in the United Kingdom. He appeared on the cinematic screen as a wanderer. In his real life, he also wandered from the streets of the United Kingdom to the United States. Although he achieved fame and was financially successful when he was in America, many American critics and politicians did not like him, despite the fact that he was beloved by many American audiences. He later went to Switzerland and continued his vagrant life. He was politically a vagrant as well. After he left from America to Europe, he delivered a famous speech in front of reporters on September 22nd, 1952 in response to accusations from American government officials and to state that he was not a communist. He claimed, “I am only a human. I only believe in freedom! This is all of my politics. I am not a manic patriot! Super-patriotism would only generate thoughts that are as *dangerous* as those of Hitler’s. I am only a film producer, a director, and an actor. I only want to make good movies, not revolution.” This statement precisely represents Charlie Chaplin’s political views during that time. This is the premise of what I am going to talk about in relation to Mr. Ma Si Tsang.

Prof. Chan Sau Yan:  
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I always stress that Mr. Ma Si Tsang is a great Cantonese opera artist. Yet, Hong Kong people know very little about him. It is because he let himself wander Mainland China in 1955 after Charlie Chaplin fled to Switzerland in 1952. Now, let us look briefly at the complex life of Mr. Ma Si Tsang. There has been controversy about the year of his birth. Most biography writers indicated that he was born in 1900, but his daughter, Ms. Hung Hung, stated that he was born in 1901. I am not sure whether this is related to the difference between the Chinese lunar calendar and the solar calendar, so there are still doubts about his birth year which needs future investigation. Ma appreciated Cantonese opera very much, but it is said that his parents opposed his plan of being an *actor-singer*. After he finished secondary education, he moved from Guangzhou to Hong Kong to learn how to run a business. Some people said that he had a poor relationship with his colleagues and bosses. His colleagues often made fun of him, and his bosses distrusted him. In the end, he quitted his job and returned to Guangzhou. Yet, he dared not go home but instead committed a life-contract with the *Taipingchun Theatre House* (太平春戲館) and started to learn to perform Cantonese opera. By chance, he joined a renowned big opera troupe in Guangzhou in 1923. The opera troupe was called *Renshounian Ban* (人壽年班). He first performed some subordinate roles. Despite the types of roles, he already had the opportunity to improvise at that time that helped him to establish his fame quickly. In 1924, the playwright Mr. Luo Jinxing (駱錦興) was planning a new script titled *Pity the Poor Girl* (《苦鳳鶯憐》). This script was very influential to Mr. Ma Si Tsang. He played the role of a wandering beggar. Mr. Luo Jinxing's inspiration for this script was precisely from Charlie Chaplin. The protagonists of *Pity the Poor Girl* were "phoenix" and "warbler", and Luo added the role "Yu Xiayun", which was the beggar role performed by Mr. Ma Si Tsang. This added role appears in many parts of the script and was important. Before the performance, Mr. Ma Si Tsang intensively explored different ways to expand his role by following the designed characteristics of the role. He created the "beggar aria" (「乞兒喉」), a coarse and expressive vocalization, and he became well known since then. In 1925, he was invited by some opera troupe owners to establish a large opera troupe across Hong Kong and Guangdong province, *Daluotian Ban* (大羅天班). He performed with this troupe in different towns in Guangdong provinces as well as in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macao. He performed in cities and no longer needed to travel to the countryside to perform. The career path of Mr. Ma Si Tsang was smooth and he became a famous *actor-singer* in many places. 1930 was the turning point in Mr. Ma Si Tsang's career. In that year, *Peking Opera* master Mei Lanfang was invited to hold a performance tour in the United States. This performance tour was planned for a long period of time and was very costly. The tour was supported by bankers and indirect assistance from the government. It inspired Mr. Ma Si Tsang to consider organizing his own overseas performance tours. He wanted to learn from Mei and become critically and commercially successful like he did.

In 1931, Mr. Ma Si Tsang went to San Francisco to perform. The original plan was to perform for a year, but he was cheated by the opera troupe owner who demanded him to hold 365 days of performance before the contract was over. Since it was impossible to have an audience for a daily performance, Ma was forced to stay in San

Prof. Chan Sau Yan:  
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Francisco and performed once every two days for two full years. Moreover, he had hoped to meet Charlie Chaplin but failed. He was tempted to open a film company in Hollywood, hoping that this would increase the opportunity of meeting his idol, but he was defrauded at the end. As a result, he stayed in the United States and could not make any progress or return. In 1933, a Hong Kong opera troupe bought Ma's freedom back and brought him back to Hong Kong. Mr. Ma Si Tsang was active in politics. Even though he was not a member of the Communist Party and he did not love the Party, he was very patriotic. During the Second World War, he learned more about Kuomintang and witnessed its corrupted bureaucracy. Thus, he hated Kuomintang very much and returned to Hong Kong. He refused to stay in Mainland China until its liberation in 1949. Although he was skeptical about the Communist Party, he still very much supported the development of China.

The Korean War began in 1950, and the PRC became involved in this war in 1951. At the time of the PRC's involvement in this war, Mr. Ma Si Tsang returned to Guangzhou from Hong Kong to raise fund through performances to support North Korea in opposing the United States. This act was very embarrassing for the British government because of its alliance with the United States. The British government sent Mr. Ma Si Tsang the first serious warning, but Ma did not take heed of it. In 1955, Ma performed a controversial opera, *Monster MacArthur meets Hideki Tōjō in a Dream* (《麥魔夢會東條》). Everybody knew that Hideki Tōjō was a war criminal who was sentenced to death in the Tokyo Trials. Monster MacArthur is actually General Douglas MacArthur who was the highest commander of the United States Military Forces in the Far East during the Second World War. He was also the highest commander in Japan during the Occupation of Japan. At the early stages of the Korean War, he was also the highest commander. Yet, his army had been at a disadvantage and thus his post was replaced by General Matthew Bunker Ridgway. Mr. Ma Si Tsang hated General MacArthur and this led to the composition of this opera, satirizing General MacArthur as a puppet of Hideki Tōjō. Ma even added the role of the British prime minister in the opera. This embarrassed the Hong Kong government and they therefore sent him a second serious warning, claiming that he would be deported out of Hong Kong if he continued to act this way.

In 1957, an anti-rightist movement emerged in the society. Mr. Ma Si Tsang was implicitly categorized as a rightist. If we look through files on the Internet about the anti-rightist movement, we would notice that nearly no intellectuals were able to avoid the movement. Mr. Ma Si Tsang was literate to a certain degree, and his opera troupe was reorganized as a part of the Kuomintang army by Kuomintang during the Second Sino-Japanese War. He therefore was requested to return to the theater to clarify his past involvements during the movement. He was unyielding, and said, "I have no aggressive ambition! My belief is liberty!" These are exactly the words borrowed from Charlie Chaplin. Mr. Ma Si Tsang once quoted these words to respond to the people who requested his clarification. After some years of turmoil, he died in April 1964. He stayed alive for just about ten more days than Douglas McArthur. A short while before Ma died, he was pleased to see his enemy die before he did.

Prof. Chan Sau Yan:  
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Returning to the artistic perspective, let us take a look at the information about the premiere of *Pity the Poor Girl* before watching an excerpt of this Cantonese opera. As I had mentioned, the scriptwriter of this opera is Mr. Luo Jinxing. This opera was premiered in 1924 by the Renshounian opera troupe. It originally had twenty scenes. At that time, most Cantonese operas had around twenty scenes. Every scene was short. During the intermissions, *actor-singers* would go backstage to take a rest or change their costumes while audiences would eat and chat as they waited for the performance to resume. Mr. Ma Si Tsang had been making modifications to *Pity the Poor Girl* up to the final version in 1957 that is still in performance nowadays. This Cantonese opera is still popular in Mainland China, and it is the oldest Cantonese opera in the current Cantonese opera repertoire. Another surviving Cantonese opera of the same period is *Time to Go Home* (胡不歸). Other Cantonese opera of that period are no longer performed. Let us first watch an excerpt of Charlie Chaplin's performance. Please pay attention to his bodily forms. Even though "bodily forms" is a Chinese operatic term, we can notice that Charlie Chaplin's trademark movements. (playing a film excerpt of Charlie Chaplin)

Next, let us listen to the theme song in the episode *Meet in a Temple of Pity the Poor Girl* sung by Mr. Ma Si Tsang. The song illustrates the renowned "beggar aria", and the episode is about the characters "Yu Xiayun" and "phoenix" who meet in a temple and introduce their personal lives to each other (playing the performance excerpt of Ma Si Tsang).

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

To conclude what I have talked today, there were such interesting actors in the East and the West— Charlie Chaplin and Ma Si Tsang. If we did not know them, or if we do not clearly understand the relationship between them, we would miss an interesting episode in the history of Cantonese opera.

Okay. The selected excerpts of Prof Chan Sau Yan's video recording end here. The speeches of the three speakers are over. Next, I would like to invite the respondents to comment on the speeches or on today's topic, "The Performance Creativity of Cantonese Opera". Let me first introduce Mr. Danny Li (李奇峰).

Mr. Danny Li:

The speeches are very exciting! It is valuable for the field of Cantonese opera to collaborate with the academics to organize and preserve the details of Cantonese opera. Colleagues in the field of Cantonese opera only talk about the details, but they seldom document such details. If there were people who had made such an effort some decades earlier, today's scene would be different.

I would like to respond to the speech by Mr. Yuen Siu Fai. The development of Cantonese opera and its types of roles have a lot to catch up really. I am very lucky because I started my career in Vietnam when I was a teenager. During that time, the development of Cantonese opera in Vietnam was very prosperous. I was around fifteen or sixteen then and was fortunate enough to perform on stage with the four masters: Xue, Ma, Gui, and Liu. For example, when "Big Brother Ma" performed as a *wenwusheng* in *Pity*

Mr. Danny Li:  
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*the Poor Girl*, I took on a subordinate role in the same performance. “Big Brother Ma” and Hung Sin Nu (紅線女) visited Vietnam twice in 1950 and 1955. Speaking of the conditions of Cantonese opera in the past, Xue, Ma, Gui, and Bai each had their own creativity. The whole-male and whole-female troupes of the past are now changed to troupes of mixed genders. After the “heroic battle between Xue and Ma”, Cantonese opera has absorbed elements from other regional operas. Later, Sun Ma Si Tsang and Ho Fei Fan emerged as Cantonese opera stars. They were both very creative, and they had their own distinctive characteristics. During the same period, there were Chan Kam Tong (陳錦棠), Wong Chin Sui (黃千歲), and Mak Bing Wing (麥炳榮); and Law Kar Po (羅家寶) and Chan Siu Fung (陳笑風), even later. They all had their personal characteristics.

Today, regardless of whether we are in Mainland China or in Hong Kong, few creative characteristics in Cantonese opera have been discovered. The *huadan* of the early period such as Sheung Hoi Mui (上海妹) and Tam Lan Hing (譚蘭卿), and the later ones such as Hung Sin Nu, Fong Yim Fen (芳艷芬), and Pak Suet Sin (白雪仙), were all very creative. These *huadan* still have a far-reaching influence on today’s Cantonese opera. Nevertheless, a big crisis has appeared in today’s Cantonese opera. There are only around ten “uncles” (or masters) in the field of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. Even though there exists a systematic pedagogical method of Cantonese opera performance in Guangdong province, the method is not recommended because it trains all *actor-singers* to develop an identical singing style that follows a specific musical design. As a consequence, the uniqueness or personal characteristics of each *actor-singer* would be discouraged. I think that the field of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong should work harder to improve Cantonese opera pedagogy. Cantonese opera in Hong Kong has been fortunate for not having been impaired in the recent century or not been affected by the disastrous aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. The traditions of Cantonese opera have been preserved. In terms of role types, it is with no doubt that the later career of Mr. Leung Sing Po achieved the greatest excellence. But actually, there were some other *actor-singers*, such as Boon Yat On (半日安), Liu Hap Wai (廖俠懷), and Au Yeung Gim (歐陽儉), who were renowned for their personal characteristics. Why has such phenomenon disappeared nowadays? Indeed, this is because the method of pedagogy and transmission is problematic. In the past, Cantonese opera veterans fully learned and practiced the basic skills and thus they could perform different roles easily. For example, Mr. Leung Sing Po’s performance in *The Purple Hairpin* as the “yellow shirt guest” also relied on his mastery of these skills. Yet, today’s young *actor-singers* do not know about these basic skills. They have developed through watching video recordings. The advance of technology hampers the inheritance of Cantonese opera to a certain degree. Young *actor-singers* do not want to be trained hard, and their skills are not comparable to their predecessors as a result, and so they cannot manage performance roles comfortably. They only watch video recordings over and over again as they prepare to perform. They imitate the skills illustrated in the recordings, or they urgently ask their teachers about the required skills for the performance. When they have to handle various aspects of performance, such as lyrics and hand gestures, they would appear to be incapable of performance. As Mr. Yuen Siu Fai said, they may even sing out of tune sometimes and audiences

would still clap their hands for these bad performance. This is certainly not a favorable phenomenon. I think that the seniors or enthusiasts of the development of Cantonese opera should work together to fight for support and assistance from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the government, so as to contribute to the training and inheritance of Cantonese opera.

Ms. Hung Hung:

Actually, I came to this symposium today with the intention of learning. I am very glad to see many of the precious materials that were just presented. The speeches of Mr. Yuen Siu Fai and Mr. Danny Li resemble the words from my heart. As many people know, I am a *huadan* trained in Mainland China. I absolutely agree with the issue of tradition inheritance that we had just mentioned. I think that the transmission of Cantonese opera lacks coherence. Yet, to make this transmission continuous again, I believe that it does not solely rely on the effort of those who have attended this symposium.

I would like to talk about the changes of the “six-pillar system”. The changes are related to my personal growth. Many years ago, I was a member of the Cantonese opera conservatory. I was sent to *Beijing* for further study. We had to receive five years of training in order to be a member of the youth Cantonese opera troupe that belonged to the Cantonese opera conservatory. At that time, due to the lack of *actor-singers* for certain role types in the troupe, four members of the conservatory were sent to *Beijing* to learn about four rare role types, including *laodan* (老旦), *jing* (淨), *xiaosheng* (小生), and *daoma dan* (刀馬旦). From the excerpt that we have just watched, we can see the performance of a *jing*. Nevertheless, that performance by Mr. Leung Sing Bo indeed involves a crossover of role types. Mr. Leung basically did not perform as a *jing*. In *Peking* opera, there is a clear distinction between the *jing* for singing and the same role type for acting, as its *actor-singers* are really better trained than those performing in Cantonese opera. There was *xiaosheng* as well. *Xiaosheng* is different from *wenwusheng*. My father (Mr. Ma Si Tsang) first acted as a *chou* and later became a *wenwusheng*. As Dr. Chan just mentioned, my father invented the *wenwu chousheng* role type. To me, my father is different from Mr. Xue Juexian. Mr. Xue Juexian is more like an intellectual, whereas my father had a pair of big eyes and thick eyebrows who would look like a colored face when he would sweat. My father made good use of his advantages. He created a new role type with his foundation in literature, and his school of tradition still survives and continues. When I was in *Beijing*, I learned to perform as a *daoma dan*. This role type requires familiarity with the techniques for acting as a warrior, and I was sent to The National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts and *Beijing* Opera Art’s School to learn this role type and prepare for my mission to establish the youth Cantonese opera troupe in Guangzhou. I was mainly involved in the performances of four works. The first work was *Searching the Institute* (《搜書院》) that was well-known in Mainland China. The second work was *The Lotus Lamp* (《寶蓮燈》) that involved many role types, including *huadan*, *laosheng*, and *xiao wusheng*. The third work was *Jinjiling* (《金雞嶺》), a story of Hong Xuanjiao (洪宣嬌). The fourth work was *The Women Generals of the Yang Family* that featured twelve *wu dan* dressed in regimentals, in which the work itself was a showcase of the excellence of an opera troupe. I practiced very hard when I studied at these schools.

Ms. Hung Hung:  
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I woke up at 4 a.m. everyday. I put on the regimentals to train with other *wu dan*. Everyone hoped to switch back to how it was before the “six-pillar system” emerged. Unfortunately, it was the moment right before the Cultural Revolution. In the end, the mission of setting up a youth Cantonese opera troupe fell through. Looking back at the past, as Mr. Yuen Siu Fai just said, the development of Cantonese opera has to follow social development.

As Prof. Chan also mentioned, *wenwusheng* is equivalent to the male protagonist while *zhengyin huadan* (正印花旦) would be the female protagonist. If we have to apply the conventions of Cantonese opera to the cinema that is popular in the West, I believe that this would demonstrate its relationship with the development of a society. I think we should not criticize the predecessors who transformed the “Ten Important Roles” (十大行當) to the “six-pillar system”. It is because some of the roles became unimportant in Cantonese opera performance. In order to meet the demands of the audiences, *hoihei siye* (開戲師爺) (or the scriptwriter) had to add many “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Scenes” (or love episodes) in the new operas. The male and the female protagonists have to embrace each other sometimes. This also reflects the development of costumes. In the past, the costumes of *huadan* were more bulky and had more accessories. As a result, *huadan* had to keep a certain distance from the male protagonist. Today’s costumes are much simpler. Therefore, if we see the development of Cantonese opera through the perspective of cultural transmission, I think that we should emphasize more on artistic nurturing. I heard that many students of today from Cantonese opera schools transfer to *dance* schools half-way through their education. This is a reflection of reality. There are too many opera troupes. Students do not really know where they should go after they graduate. The size of audience is not as large as we imagine. The supply is greater than the demand. Today, Cantonese opera is not really popular even in the area of the Pearl River Delta. We should work hard to solve the problems of developing Cantonese opera through the perspective of social development. The solutions to these problems really rely on the cooperation among the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, and other personnel and organizations in the areas of Guangdong province, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Ms. Lau Wai Ming:

After listening to the speeches of several seniors, I am still organizing my thoughts. I do not know what idea I should respond to. Being a young *actor-singer*, there are really too many to respond. The ideas of the seniors are completely different from those of my generation. I think the discussion on performance creativity has conflicting ideas. It is because Cantonese opera is a traditional art form. If we have to add creativity to it, it means that we have to add new attempts to it. We would see the existing conflicts as we find the point of balance between tradition and creativity. Today’s young *actor-singers* are facing these conflicts. The issue of performance creativity really requires us to deeply explore together. We cannot just rely on the effort of any single person, *actor-singer*, or organization. The direction of creativity should be based on audience preference. Actually, the meaning of “creativity” is that every *actor-singer* has to come up with something thoughtful before they create. Therefore, every *actor-singer* should



Ms. Lau Wai Ming:  
(continue)

have his or her own creativity. The *actor-singers* that we have just mentioned, such as Ma Si Tsang, Hung Sin Nu, and Pak Suet Sin, are all veteran *actor-singers* of the previous generation. It is really not easy to develop a new school of tradition from their performances.

In fact, many *actor-singers* of today strive to develop their own school of tradition. The difference between the past and today is that in the past, *actor-singers* kept on performing their own set of repertoires while today's *actor-singers* incessantly perform the Cantonese operas of their predecessors. Actually, current *actor-singers* have attempted to be creative in their performance of these early Cantonese operas. They perform traditional operas such as *The Story of Princess Changping* (《帝女花》) and *Goddess of the Luo River* (《洛神》) in their own way. Their shaping of the character of the role, the method of interpretation, bodily forms, and the use of "water sleeves" are all different from one another. This results in the phenomenon of the formation of various fan groups. Speaking of the use of "water sleeves", since there is no relevant video documentation, I really do not know about the use of "water sleeves" as mentioned by Mr. Yuen Siu Fai earlier. We can only know from the Cantonese-dialect full-length movies and the conversations of Cantonese opera seniors that such usage was unpopular in the past. The predecessors placed more emphasis on singing, and they seldom made use of the "water sleeves". I remember a performance by Ms. Fong Yim Fen; her use of "water sleeves" and bodily forms included very few movements. It was the emergence of the later *actor-singers* that introduced many new elements to Cantonese opera performance. These *actor-singers* added more usage of "water sleeves" and bodily forms as well as elements from *Peking* opera, *Kun* opera, Shanghai opera, and Shaoxing opera. They had hoped to create something new. Later, they noticed that such additions were outside of the paradigm of Cantonese opera, and they decided to return to the traditional performance approach. They followed the practice of the era that did not use "water sleeves". I think this is something to do with trends.

According to my observation, today's Cantonese opera is more relevant to daily life in terms of performance forms, the gestures of *actor-singers*, as well as other aspects. As Mr. Yuen Siu Fai has mentioned about the embrace of male and female *actor-singers*, this is also a manifestation of daily life. Since today's audiences are more open-minded, they would not act as conservatively as audiences would have in the past, and they are able to accept this kind of plot. I think that this is creativity. This is a new element in today's Cantonese opera. In order to establish a new school of tradition, it must have its repertoire. Therefore, the first task would be to write more new operas. I believe that the meaning of a school of tradition is derived from being able to see the uniqueness and innovative characteristics of an *actor-singer* in each of his/her opera performances. This is what really counts as a school of tradition.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

The previous speakers have just mentioned the creativity of singing, acting, speech delivery, and acrobatics. I have been researching on creativity. It does not refer to the creativity of Cantonese opera, but rather creativity in education and music. At the same

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:  
(continue)

time, I love Cantonese opera. Therefore, today's topic which links the issue of creativity and Cantonese opera is very meaningful to me. This can be my new research direction. In the west, ideas about creativity include two important processes. The first process is "from nothing to something", which means developing something from square one. At the beginning of this process, what is developed may not be the best. The developed thing may be something exploratory, prototypical, or abstract. This leads to the second process: "from something to anything", which means an existing object can be developed further without any limitations. This process involves the continuous improvement of the existing object and evolving it into a real innovation. It is a long-term process. After hearing the speech of Mr. Danny Li, I have been thinking about how *actor-singers* have developed their personal styles and characteristics during the era of Xue Juexian and Ma Si Tsang, whereas today's *actor-singers* are facing a crisis. I do not think that this is because current *actor-singers* are less proficient than those of earlier generations.

I have an idea that would like to share with all of you. In my research on education, I have witnessed an interesting phenomenon. As all of you know, there are usually many photographs of musicians in the music rooms of local primary or secondary school, such as that of "the musical saint" Beethoven and "the musical genius" Mozart. In a research study on music-making, I interviewed a group of students, asking them whether they can compose music on their own. Their responses surprised me. They said that they have listened to the stories of many renowned musicians and composers, and they thought that they could not be a composer because the composers in the stories are magnificent like saints. Indeed, adults have been unintentionally sending the next generation a message, that a great musician is not an ordinary person but someone distinctive and saintly. I thus requested the music teachers not to post similar materials in the music rooms after receiving the research result because such content would only kill students' self-confidence. Through this research, I now understand the students' thoughts and I am attempting to apply the research results to the case of Cantonese opera. During the era of Xue and Ma, i.e., the fifties and the sixties, it was a period of "creating something from nothing". Xue and Ma seldom imitated others. They could only rely on their own understanding and interpretation of a performance. Any attempts that they made were exciting. The *actor-singers* of the new generation then have to further develop what already exists. The "creativity without limit" mode suggests more difficulties for people today. Predecessors have already made various excellent performances, and it is difficult for people of today to achieve a level that is even higher than their predecessors. They might have in mind a similar idea that I have just mentioned about the primary and secondary school students that they think their achievement would not go beyond that of Mr. Xue Juexian. Therefore, I think we need to be humble but at the same time, be confident. We do not necessarily need to be more excellent than the predecessors, but we can make attempts at various matters. This is also how I often encourage students of the next generation. I hope that the *actor-singers* of the next generation can further develop in this way.

Mr Danni Li

I absolutely agree that the new generation can be creative. For example, Ms. Pak Suet

Mr Danni Li  
(continue)

Sin emerged on the Cantonese opera scene after the era of Xue Juexian and Ma Si Tsang. When she first performed Cantonese opera, she was like a blank slate, but she continuously studied with the seniors and accumulated experiences from performances. For example, the episode *Save Pui* (〈脱阱救裴〉) in *The Reincarnation of Lady Plum Blossom* (《再世紅梅記》) is adapted from *Peking* opera materials. Pak Suet Sin adapted the performance mode of *Peking* opera, integrating this mode with some elements of Cantonese opera that included various body movements. Actually, today's young *actor-singers* can absolutely make greater progress and achievement than their predecessors. Yet, they have to first familiarize themselves with the basic skills. They cannot just rely on their passion for the genre. Cantonese opera is a vocal genre, therefore singing is of foremost importance among the four major aspects of performance. Singing skills are essential for *actor-singers*. If an *actor-singer* lacks such skills, they cannot perform well. If one is born musically deficient, then it is probably better for them to not "abuse" the audience. In today's world, many people perform on the Cantonese opera stage just because they are wealthy enough to support such a desire as a part of their personal interests. This becomes a big problem in the field of Cantonese opera. An *actor-singer* should at least make an adequate effort on the four major aspects of performance. If one can manage the acting aspect, they can practice the acrobatic scenes with or without weapons. Cantonese opera's four aspects of performance are intricate, and one must first develop good basic singing skills and broaden their vocal range, so that they would have the opportunity to achieve a higher level than the predecessors.

Dr. Chan Chak Lui:

I remember that Wang Zhiquan (王芝泉) once mentioned that she learned creating "from nothing to something" from her teacher while her generation strive to improve "from something to excellence". At first glance, we think that creating excellence is achieving the best, but she pointed out that the process of creating "from nothing to something" is in fact the most difficult. The improvement "from something to excellence" is not the effort of a single person. It requires cooperation from *actor-singers* and instrumentalists, as well as incorporating the advantages of other regional operas into the performance. Therefore, I think that we do not need another Xue Juexian or another 'someone' to further establish Cantonese opera. Rather, we need each *actor-singer* to perform as themselves. They should learn from other regional operas, make use of the foundations of the predecessors, and expand their performance possibilities. We are happy to be able to follow the steps paved by the predecessors. Nevertheless, we have to accept that Cantonese opera is no longer a popular art. If it has to be established as a classical art, there is still a long way to go. This is not necessarily the developmental direction of Cantonese opera. Contrarily, Cantonese opera professionals, including the on-stage and off-stage *actor-singers* and scriptwriters have to be responsible for every detail of a vocal text. It is not about how much they can do, but their reason for doing something. We should be concerned with how much the new generation or the next generation *actor-singers* are able to watch and listen to. For example, thanks to the documentation made by the predecessors, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to watch a previous performance of Mr. Leung Sing Po. Yet, some other schools of transmission are discontinued because their performance documentations

Dr. Chan Chak Lui:  
(continue)

are not accessible to the general public and to students. We should be aware of this. In this time when Cantonese opera is no longer popular entertainment, we should pay attention to two layers. The first layer is about identifying the status of Cantonese opera in the fields of literature and art. Cantonese opera cannot be isolated from the audience and their preferences. Nevertheless, its development cannot rely on indications from audiences who are unfamiliar with Cantonese opera either. Cantonese opera professionals should illustrate the various possibilities in the further development of the art form. Thus, we need to rely on the assistance from the government and other public sectors. Take setting a theater in a museum as an example. It makes staging Cantonese opera performance a living way to preserve the genre. Such assistance renders the profit or deficit from the box-office negligible. Preservation of Cantonese opera should not solely rely on written documentation but using live performance to demonstrate its value. This kind of performance can start from performing excerpts, then further develop to staging a full-length opera, and lead to commercially profitable performances in the end. This may be a path of development for Cantonese opera.

Audience:

I would like to ask Mr. Danny Li the following question. You just mentioned that some young *actor-singer* should not “abuse” audiences if they were musically deficient. If you were a member of the audience who met such a young *actor-singer*, would you persuade him or her to quit performing Cantonese opera?

Mr. Danny Li:

Honestly speaking, if he were an amateur *actor-singer*, I would not comment further. Yet, if he hopes to be a professional *actor-singer*, I would persuade him to give up or to study hard. A professional *actor-singer* really cannot sing out of tune. Contrarily, the most important thing for an amateur *actor-singer* should be the enjoyment of performing. We should not be too strict on other aspects. If this young person really hopes to pursue a life-long career as a Cantonese opera *actor-singer*, I would sincerely remind him to work hard on singing techniques and see if there would be room for any improvement. I would suggest that they should give up if there seems no improvement. Singing out of tune is really a serious fault in Cantonese opera performance. Some people are born musically deficient and cannot improve their musical abilities through learning. They can consider being involved in Cantonese opera through other ways.

Prof. Bell Yung:

First, I would like to thank the speakers and respondents for all the speeches. For what Mr. Danny Li had just mentioned about persuading a musically deficient person to give up performing Cantonese opera, I think that it is more important to openly evaluate whether the *actor-singer* concerned is musically deficient or not. I hope that all of you would understand the significance of criticism. Without good audiences, there would be no good dramas. If audiences are ignorant, they would tend to accommodate those deficient *actor-singers*. In order to enhance the standard of appreciation of the audience, criticism is very important. I understand that under the umbrella of Chinese traditional culture, this might be a big challenge to overcome. Nevertheless, c, this is an inevitable step to enhance further development of Cantonese opera.

Audience:

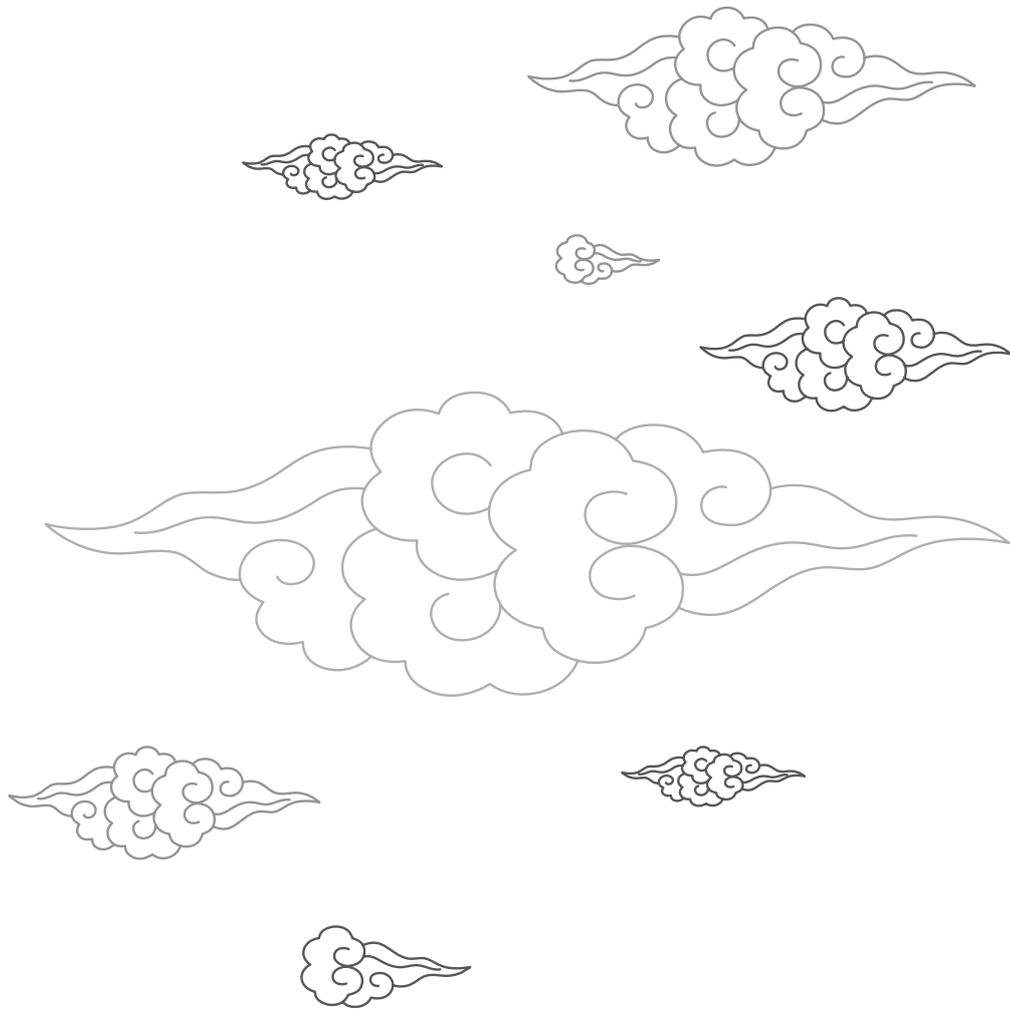
I just heard from many experts about the performance creativity of Cantonese opera.



Audience:  
(continue)

As Mr. Yuen Siu Fai said, creativity exists in Cantonese opera, especially in terms of language and performance space. In the past, the technology for lighting and sound was not advanced, but such technology has improved nowadays. Also, I am glad to see Ms. Hung Hung today. Actually when I was formally working in a Cantonese opera troupe in 1980, my salary was about 26 dollars a month. This salary was based on the scale of “the sixteen classes for art and literature” proposed by Hung Hung’s mother (Ms. Hung Sin Nu). I came to Hong Kong after experiencing the ups and downs of Cantonese opera.

I also want to talk about the problem of musical deficiency. I am currently a part-time music teacher. Over the years of my teaching, I have not yet encountered any students of musical deficiency. If my students love to perform Cantonese opera, they must be able to correct the problem of pitch accuracy. The key is really to do with how much the students enjoy performing and singing Cantonese opera. I once taught a student who had been criticized for his musical deficiency by several of his previous teachers. He could not study anywhere, and so he studied with me. After several years of training, his performance greatly improved. Since he loves Cantonese opera and he studies hard, practices hard and so he succeeded. I came to this symposium today because the principal of my school is passionate for Chinese traditional culture. I have been asked to seek opportunities to organize a Cantonese opera interest class in our school by attending this symposium.





## Session 2



# *The Creativity of Chinese Art*

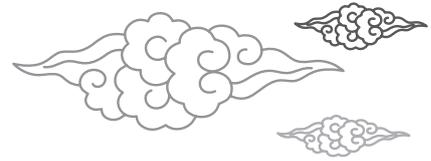


**Speakers :**

Prof. Samuel Leong, Prof. Bell Yung

**Respondents:**

Ms. Hung Hung, Dr. Lam Wing Cheong, Mr. Christopher Pak





## *The Performance Creativity of Cantonese Opera*



Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

This is today's second session of the symposium. The topic of this session is Chinese traditional creativity. This topic may take us away from the issues of Cantonese opera. We shall focus on rethinking the relationship among Chinese traditional culture, creativity and the ability to create. Certainly, we believe that Cantonese opera has a close relationship with Chinese traditional culture. During lunch, I was able to talk to some guests about the possible relationship between Chinese traditional culture and the ideologies and habits involved in the transmission and pedagogy of Cantonese opera. We therefore arranged this session for discussion. Since the emergence of psychological research in the 1950s, issues of creativity have been discussed in the West for more than half a century. Yet, the study of creative thinking is still in its early stages in the east. Through investigating the transmission, pedagogy, and development of Cantonese opera in this symposium, we shall re-examine the Eastern concepts and thoughts about creativity. This process of re-examination is significantly meaningful and valuable to us. We will have two speakers today: Professor Samuel Leong, the Head of the Department of Cultural and Creative Arts at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. He will be the first guest to deliver a speech. His topic is "The Creativity and Art of Chinese Society". Professor Leong will deliver his speech in English. I will try to do a brief translation for him.

Prof. Samuel Leong:

(Professor Leong delivered his speech in English with Dr. Bo Wah Leung's interpretation into Cantonese)

I have seen many Cantonese operas in Singapore when I was young, and these were usually performed on street corners. Therefore I have a special feeling towards Cantonese opera. I want to share today about a long-term research interest of mine. It is mainly concerned with how Chinese creativity is different from that the concept of creativity held by Westerners. I have worked in the West for about 30 years and I recognize that there is misunderstanding about Chinese creativity from the viewpoint of the West. As we don't have too much time today, I would only share briefly.

The role played by culture in creativity has become increasingly recognized around the world. However, traditional Confucian thinking continues to exert a strong influence on the culture, ethics, politics, religion, philosophy of many East and South-East Asia countries including their businesses and organizations. These countries have scored low on the Individualism Index: Hong Kong (25); Singapore, China and Vietnam (20); Korea (18); and Taiwan (17). This session examines some of the misconceptions about Chinese creativity against the backdrop of Confucian thinking and related cultural traditions.



Prof. Samuel Leong:  
(continue)

In Chinese societies, social harmony and stability are central to how people interact and communicate amongst themselves and with others because traditional Confucian-based socialization practices emphasize obedience, duty, cooperation, compromise and sacrifice. It is generally accepted that people in Chinese societies tend to be less expressive of their personal opinions, feelings, and desires, being more concerned about social harmony and conforming to in-group mores. The education systems in Chinese societies have been criticized for being didactic, controlling and paternalistic, emphasizing conformity and rote learning at the expense of creative and critical thinking. Criticisms related to the lack of creativity have been attributed to the values underlying Confucian thinking. Some studies have challenged earlier conclusions about the ineffective learning styles of Chinese students, shedding light on the ‘paradox’ of Chinese learners.

For years, the repetitive learning style of Chinese students has been misinterpreted as mindless rote learning. In reality, they prefer deep learning strategies and consider it so. For them, repetition facilitates the accurate recall of important factual information, enables them to attach meaning to the material they were learning, and helps them to be better prepared for examinations by having the key facts and points memorized. The two terms for ‘practice’ – *xue xi* (‘learning practice’ 學習) and *lian xi* (‘training practice’ 練習) – indicate that repetition is necessary in the training and learning process until the desired habits (*xi guan* 習慣) are formed.

For years too, people in Western countries are believed to possess creative intelligence superior to people in Asian countries. In reality, Western students did not perform as well as their East Asian peers in standardized achievements tests especially in mathematics and science. Asians have been found to possess slightly higher mean IQs than Europeans, with their visualization IQ much higher than verbal IQ. Many criticisms raised against the so-called Confucian educational practices are based on incomplete understanding of Chinese traditions and their underlying beliefs. The two most common Chinese terms for ‘knowledge’ – *xue wen* (literally ‘learn and ask’ 學問) and *zhi shi* (‘know and understand’ 知識) – indicate that questioning and understanding are integral to the learning process. Confucius’ pedagogical approach was said to involve posing questions, citing passages from the classics, using apt analogies, and waiting for his students to arrive at the correct answers: “I only instruct the eager and enlighten the fervent. If I hold up one corner and a student cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not go on with the lesson” (Analects, 7.8). His students were expected to undertake long and careful study with some reflective learning: “He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great *danger*” (Analects, 2.15); “Knowing through silent reflection, learning without satiety, and teaching others without becoming weary – these are merits which I can claim” (Analects, 7.2). “There are those who act without knowing why. But I am not like that. To hear much and then to select the good and follow it; to see much and then to ponder it – this comes next to true knowledge” (Analects, 7.27). Confucius also believed that prior knowledge is intrinsically connected to new knowledge, which cannot be derived without the mastery of prior knowledge. Moreover, critical reflection

Prof. Samuel Leong:  
(continue)

is possible when learning is repeated, and a learner is able to instruct others only after acquiring the new knowledge based on prior knowledge. Repetition does not hinder reflection but enhances it – “To be able to acquire new knowledge while reviewing the old qualifies one as an instructor of men” (Confucius).

The significance of the self within Chinese education has also been misunderstood. Lifelong learning is central to the Confucian concept of *ren* (仁), which encourages individuals to become the most moral person (i.e., genuine, sincere, and humane) one can attain. This process of self-perfection includes both academic pursuit and individual moral development. It is noteworthy that every person has a right to seek self-perfection and each individual has control of this process.

Culture and the arts are intricately integrated in Chinese societies. A record from the Tang Dynasty period provides a glimpse of how the arts played an integral role in the lives of the emperor and his scholar-officials: “Whenever the emperor was moved by something, he would write a poem, and all the Scholars would follow suit using the same rhyme. This indeed was what men of that age took delight in and yearned after” (from ‘*The Records of Occasions in ‘Tang Poetry’*, cited in Owen, 1977: 256). The rigorously trained scholar-artists were skilled in the arts and held official positions as powerful politicians. This elevated the level of artistic accomplishment in court life and the arts played a central functional role in all official ceremonies and banquets.

An artist belonging to this elite breed was called *wen ren* or ‘the person with the ultimate knowledge of the arts’. He was “simultaneously a scholar or scientist, a statesman, as well as an artist accomplished in a variety of artistic media” (Chou, 2002:19). The *wen ren* (文人) was also described as “men of culture” (Shin, 2006) who were typically accomplished artists in the four literary arts of music, poetry, calligraphy, and painting. The *wen ren* spirit was both Chinese and universal: Chinese in that it was responsible for the cultural and social life of the Chinese civilization for more than 2,000 years; universal in its “commitment to true quality and deep sincerity, to independence, honesty and courage” (Chou, 2002: 24). The former director of research for the Shanghai Art Museum, Li Xu (李旭), provides insight into the *wen ren* from a 21st century perspective: ...the ‘*wen ren*’, the polymathic scholar artist, is at the root of Chinese visual culture... “Throughout history, Western society has laid emphasis on the specialized division of labor, so no social system for cultivating broad and comprehensive talent was ever fostered,” he says. “Differing from the Western concept of an intellectual, Chinese *wen ren* were not only erudite scholars; many were also talented artists and designers.” Li gives as an example the highly sophisticated tradition of teapot design by *wen ren* scholars. Sometimes exuberantly formal, they were also often inscribed with poetry written by the *wen ren*. Creating a teapot was one of the best ways to disseminate a poem among other members of the cultural elite; an alternative form of publication. Li says: “The creation of a teapot saw the convergence of a variety of disciplines, including modeling, mud coloring, inscription, poetry, calligraphy, painting, sculpture and seal cutting” (Long, 2006: 1). Heritage forms the foundation of creativity by which the *wen ren* was nurtured within the scholastic



Prof. Samuel Leong:  
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traditions of the Imperial Examinations. Over time, such a legacy is revitalized through a process that involves ‘assimilation and introspection’ and a person’s own responses to “stimuli from beyond as well as within the heritage...” (Chou, 2002: 19).

Chinese ideals of creativity are rooted in respect for the past and the search for harmony with the forces of nature. Creativity was seen as ‘an inspired imitation of the forces of nature’ within the Taoist and Buddhist traditions. Both Eastern and Western conceptions of individual creativity have developed from a theistic or cosmic tradition of either divine inspired or natural creativity. Western divine creativity and Chinese natural creativity (*dao*) (道) share three common characteristics of representing the ultimate origin of everything, in which there are ‘endless producing and renovating changes’ and the creating of ‘all goodness’. The significant difference between the two conceptions lies in definition of the production (Western) and non-production (Eastern) of something ‘new’. Continual transformation is inherent in Chinese natural creativity, which is perceived to be ‘ever-renovating’ and ‘producing’ or ‘as unexpectedly developing into various genuine entities’. This is in tune with Eastern ‘polychronic’ conceptions of time, human action and progress, viewing creative acts as reiterative and rediscovery processes or ‘successive reconfigurations’. This requires adaptability (*hua*) (化) in order to find a balance between continual change (*bian*) (變) through time and space and the social goal of harmony. As water flows and adapts to avoid obstacles in its way, Chinese creativity demands a unique type of creative flexibility to adapt to specific situations and conditions. Whereas the East sees creativity as a re-interpretation of ideas, the West sees creativity as a break from tradition. Western creativity ideals that include the “elements of invention and novelty, a willingness to reject tradition, orientation on self-actualization, celebration of individual accomplishment, and concentration on the future” are foreign to Chinese traditional ideals (Lau et al., 2004: 59). The West tends to be more deductive and values novelty more than the East, which tends to be more inductive and values the authentic expression of an art work, i.e., effective in representing the creator’s personal values and beliefs. The emphasis on products is an idiosyncratic trait of the West, which adopts novelty and appropriateness as criteria and indicators of creativity. The Western view of creativity is progressive in outlook, emphasizing method and the most appropriate way to solve problems, leans towards the logical and demands that everything fits together in *accordance* with existing laws. In contrast, the East puts more attention on ‘mastering and perfecting skills’, the inner ‘experience of personal fulfillment’ and the creative process. The arts are found to feature more prominently in Western perceptions of creativity than in the East, with Westerners believing that exploration should precede skill development whereas Chinese educators believe skills should be developed first (requiring repetitive learning), so as to provide a foundation for creative expression. Several recent studies have found overlaps between Eastern and Western implicit concepts regarding creativity and the characteristics of a creative person.

This session has examined the way that Chinese cultural traditions have influenced the development of creativity in Chinese societies. Strongly influenced by Confucian thinking, key aspects of Chinese culture have been misinterpreted as uncreative by

Prof. Samuel Leong:  
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those who have applied Western criteria in their judgment. Comparisons of differences between East and West are becoming increasingly challenging in a globalized world, where there are more intercultural exchanges taking place, more multicultural communities living together, and where nationality may not constitute cultural membership. China and other Chinese societies today are living with the confluences of Eastern and Western cultures, where the more conformist traditional values intersect with those of capitalism and internationalization. This might result in more people from these societies becoming 'bi-cultural'; better able to cross between differing social constraints and social interests in relating to each other.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

The second speaker of this section is Professor Bell Yung. I think everyone is familiar with him. Professor Yung is a pioneering Cantonese opera researcher in Hong Kong. He has lived in the United States for many years. I am glad that we can invite him to return to Hong Kong and share with us his thoughts on the creativity of Cantonese opera. Professor Bell Yung please.

Prof. Bell Yung:

I would like to first thank Professor Leung Bo Wah and the Hong Kong Institute of Education for offering me this opportunity to return to Hong Kong to meet and share my thoughts with all of you. The first topic of this symposium that Professor Leung has given to me is actually quite a difficult topic. It is because the scope of "the creativity of Chinese art" is too broad. Prof. Samuel Leong has also mentioned various kinds of art such as painting, sculpture, poetry, and calligraphy. These are all art. The more relevant subjects of this symposium, meaning Chinese opera and music, are also a kind of art as well. I hope Prof. Leung would allow me to narrow down the topic of my speech to Chinese music instead of Chinese art.

In fact, the scope of Chinese music is still very broad. Today, when we are walking down the street, we can hear popular music everywhere. There are performances of Western music and classical music put up at City Hall or other performing venues. Of course, we are going to talk about the music of Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing today. I guess regular people would categorize the music in Cantonese operatic singing and Cantonese opera as traditional music as opposed to avant-garde music that we can hear at City Hall or other performing venues. As such, I am narrowing down the scope of my speech to the creativity of traditional music. The earliest representative of Chinese traditional music should be *guqin* music. We all know that *guqin* music might be the most ancient music. There are numerous sources about *guqin* music that remains today. *Qin* players are more conservative and obedient. Does it imply that there is no creativity in *guqin* music? Of course not. *Guqin* music also has its creativity. The great speech that Prof. Samuel Leong had just delivered paves the path for my speech. I will use a *qin* piece to discuss the creativity of *qin* music. The points of view that I am about to present actually correspond with the content of Prof. Leong's speech. I want to say that Western people often misunderstand Chinese music. They think that Chinese music is traditional, ancient, and unchangeable. They would think that the *guqin* music that we currently listen to is the same as the *guqin* music which was performed by ancient people a thousand years ago. The creativity



Prof. Bell Yung:  
(continue)

of Chinese literati is really difficult for Western people to understand. Sometimes, even Chinese people cannot understand it. In particular, in Hong Kong, a dual-culture region, many people are influenced by ideas from Western culture. These people think that traditional music such as Cantonese operatic singing is not creative at all. They would think that Cantonese operatic singing is in fact the singing of old songs. This of course is not true.

Now, I would use *Guangling San* (《廣陵散》) as an example that illustrates the creativity of Chinese traditional music. While there are numerous renowned *qin* pieces, *Guangling San* is unique in its musical meaning and thus it is a popular piece. Among many *qin* pieces, *Guangling San* is the most lengthy of them all. A complete performance of this piece takes more than twenty minutes. Moreover, this piece is based on certain historical documents. We can learn about the history of this piece from those documents. Most *qin* pieces have unclear historical records. Some *qin* pieces appeared in the musical notations of the eighteenth century but were claimed to have existed from a thousand years ago. Are such records reliable? Nevertheless, *Guangling San* has concrete historical support. Some historical documents indicate that the musical notation of this piece appeared as early as the early Tang period. In addition to this, one of the special things about this piece is the story behind the music. This piece is also titled “Nie Zheng assassinates the King of Han State” (《聶政刺韓王》).

I believe that everyone has watched the recent assassin films, and *Guangling San* can be considered as the oldest assassin story. The story of *Guangling San* has several versions. The earliest version is from *Records of the Grand Historian* (《史記》), which is the story “Nie Zheng stabs the king of the Han state”. The whole story is very violent and bloody. I think that everyone knows it. Nevertheless, I am going to speak briefly on this story. The content of this story is quite exciting. It is like one of today’s Hollywood kung fu films.

The story takes place during the Warring period. Nie Zheng's father was harassed to death by the king of the Han state. Nie Zheng felt that he must take revenge for his father. Speaking of revenge, we would naturally think of methods such as learning kung fu or buying guns. Yet, Nie Zheng went into a deeply mountainous area to learn to play *guqin*. Since Nie Zheng knew that the king of Han state had a particular love of *guqin* music, Nie Zheng intended to become a renowned *guqin* player so that the king of Han state would invite him to the palace to perform *guqin* music. Nie Zhen learned to play the *guqin* for seven years and he excelled of the performance technique of *guqin*. Some versions of this story claim that Nie Zheng studied the *guqin* for ten years, but this is not important. After he developed excellent *guqin* performance skills, he changed his physical appearance. He also swallowed dust in order to make his voice hoarse. He did all these things in order to avoid being recognized by the king of Han state. After he changed his physical appearance, he left the mountains and met with his wife. He asked his wife whether she was able to recognize him. His wife recognized him easily due to his teeth. After that, Nie Zheng went back to the mountains to further enhance

Prof. Bell Yung:  
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his *guqin* performance skills and continued to change his physical appearance. He used stones to grind his teeth and he changed the shape of his face. Later, he left the mountains again. This time, nobody could recognize him. Since his *guqin* performance was excellent, the king of Han state finally invited Nie Zheng to visit the palace to perform for him.

The special thing about this story is that the instrument used by the protagonist had to be the *guqin*. It cannot be replaced with *yangqin*, *erhu*, or *pipa*. It is because, as everyone knows, the sound produced by the *guqin* is especially weak, and therefore one has to sit near the *guqin* when listening to a performance. As a result, when Nie Zheng was performing at the palace, the king of Han state had to sit very close to Nie Zheng. This is the first point. The second point is about the shape of *guqin*. The interior of a *guqin* can hide a knife or a sword, and thus a *guqin* can be the shell of a weapon. Nie Zheng hid a sword inside his *qin*. When he was playing *guqin* in front of the king of Han state, he suddenly pulled out his sword from the *guqin* and killed the king with a single stab. Nie Zheng learned to perform *guqin* solely because he would be able to get close to the king of Han state so that he could take revenge for his father. After Nie Zheng assassinated the king of Han state, he clearly understood that it would not be possible for him to leave the palace and that he would be killed in the palace. He also did not want to be a burden to his mother. Finally, he used his sword to destroy his face and then committed suicide. He destroyed his face so that his identity would become mysterious and hence he could save his mother's life. Otherwise, his mother would be killed because of his assassination. Since the assassination was a serious incident, Nie Zheng's corpse was disclosed to the public in order to allow the court officials to identify Nie Zheng. Nevertheless, as Nie Zheng had changed his physical appearance, nobody was able to recognize him. Only Nie Zheng's mother knew that the corpse was her son's body because she could predict that her son would eventually die at the palace after taking revenge for her husband. In the end, she went to court and claimed that the corpse was the body of her son. I do not want to keep the bravery of Nie Zheng's mother hidden, so I will tell her story here. This incident was recorded in historical documentation. Nie Zheng's mother committed suicide at the court as well. This story involves many deaths and this is the reason why I said that it is violent.

This story is very uncommon in the tradition of *guqin* performance. *Guqin* performance was influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, but this story goes against the philosophy of these two schools. The story is anti-Confucianism because the assassination is a traitorous act and it is a serious crime. On the other hand, Taoism encourages humans to get rid of the complex relationships and conditions of society and nurture their mental health in the natural environment of the mountains. Nie Zheng could not forget his parents and his hatred, and he planned the assassination. As a consequence, *Guangling San* was not performed for several centuries. People worried that audiences would misunderstand their own performance as an intention to assassinate the emperor if they performed that piece. I believe that everyone has heard of the term "the last sounds of *Guangling*" (「廣陵絕響」). This term means that something would disappear from the world and become unknown to people forever like *Guangling San*.

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It illustrates that something precious would disappear forever. It uses a *guqin* piece to illustrate a more general concept. Yet, are the so-called “last sounds” of *Guangling San* really the “last sounds”? Not really. A musical notation of this *guqin* piece was inherited by our predecessors.

The earliest Chinese music notation is the *Shenqi Mipu* (《神奇秘譜》) that emerged in 1425. According to the narration in *Shenqi Mipu*, *Guangling San* was composed by Xi Kang (嵇康), one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (竹林七賢). Xi Kang is a very famous third-century writer, thinker, philosopher, and *qin* player. According to the stories that have been passed down through the centuries, *Guangling San* was composed by Xi Kang. Why is this *qin* piece believed to be composed by Xi Kang? There is a story to be told. Xi Kang is a *qin* player. According to a story, a mysterious person came to the home of Xi Kang one night and played a piece of music for him. Xi Kang listened to it and thought, “I have never listened to such a special kind of music before.” Xi Kang then learned to play that piece from the mysterious person. Xi Kang spent a whole night learning the piece. After that, the mysterious person told him, “I do not allow you to teach any others to perform this piece. I have taught you to play this piece solely for your own performance.” The mysterious person then left the place. I believe that all of you know that Xi Kang later became a political criminal and was prosecuted in a public place. Some people said that Xi Kang carried his *guqin* on his back and went to the market. He played a *qin* piece before his execution, which is *Guangling San*, and nobody has ever been able to hear the same piece since. This story became another source for *The Last Sound of Guangling* as well. There is also another story which says that the nephew of Xi Kang learned the piece secretly when he was listening to Xi Kang’s performance, and as such, the piece was able to be passed down through the generations.

So, how would this be related to the creativity that we are talking about? I will explain this very soon. First, I will talk about the structure of *Guangling San*. This *qin* piece has a very complex structure. It has the lengthiest as well as the most complex structure among all *qin* pieces. It has six sections, which is structurally comparable to the four-movement European symphonic music. Each section consists of different musical passages and has its own title. The first section is “open the finger” (「開指」), which is the shortest section with one musical passage. The second section is “small introduction” (「小序」) of three passages. The third section is “large introduction” (「大序」) of five passages. The fourth section is “the musical main body” (正聲) with eighteen passages. The fifth section is the “chaotic sound” (「亂聲」) of ten passages. The sixth section is the “postlude” (「後序」) of eight passages. The six sections constitute the whole piece with a total of forty-five passages.

According to the original version of *Shenqi Mipu*, *Guangling San* includes six sections of forty-five passages. *Shenqi Mipu* is the earliest existing Chinese musical notation. Today’s *qin* performers refer to the version in this notation when performing *Guangling San*. Some people studied the origins of the *Shenqi Mipu* and challenged the validity of Xi Kang’s authorship of *Guangling San*, amongst these I think Wang Shixiang’s (

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王世襄) study is the most extensive. In 1957, *Yinyue Chubanshe* (音樂出版社) published a score of *Guangling San*, in which the score includes an introduction titled “Illustration of *Guangling San*”. Wang Shixiang’s research appeared there. He conducted a great deal of research and explained the origin of *Guangling San*. I think that this introduction provides us with many creative inspirations. According to Wang Shixiang’s study, the column at the bottom of this picture illustrates the original version of *Shenqi Mipu* (show picture slide). The piece consists of forty-five musical passages, including the six sections I have just mentioned, such as “open the finger”, “small introduction”, and “large introduction”. Mr. Wang Shixiang conducted a lot of research on ancient texts, and he discovered from history that people have mentioned *Guangling San* in various eras. The number of passages in *Guangling San* was mentioned as well. The earliest record of *Guangling San* appeared during the Tang dynasty. During that time, this *qin* piece consisted of twenty-three musical passages. The total number of musical passages from “large introduction” and “the musical main body” is exactly twenty-three. Therefore, Wang Shixiang reckoned that the earliest score of *Guangling San* existed during the Tang dynasty. This is of course a guess. Another source shows that *Guangling San* had thirty-six musical passages during the late Tang, and Wang Shixiang postulated that the sections “small introduction” and “chaotic sound” were added to the *qin* piece during that time. The score of *Guangling San* from Northern Song shows that the *qin* piece had forty-one musical passages. The “postlude” was supposedly added to this version while the “small introduction” was eliminated. *Guangling San* was then passed down through the Song and Yuan dynasties and so on.

The several hundred years of history from the early Tang dynasty to the Ming dynasty that was previously mentioned reveals to us that the *qin* piece *Guangling San* has been changing. As time passed, the *qin* piece became more lengthy and larger in scale. It developed from the initial twenty-three passages to the later forty-five passages. How is it possible for us to believe that the twenty-three passages in the “large introduction” and the “musical main body” of the current version is the early-Tang version? This is in fact a well-grounded statement because the descriptions of the twenty-three-passage *Guangling San* in some early Tang documents already mention the titles of some of the *qin* piece’s sections. Every section of the *qin* piece has its own title. It is like the different names of the musical movements in Western music. The titles mentioned in the descriptions of the early Tang documents correspond with those illustrated in *Shenqi Mipu*. Therefore, we firmly believe that the musical passages in the “large introduction” and the “musical main body” of the current version were already in existence during the early Tang period, even though the notation of early-Tang version is lost. The earliest surviving notation of *Guangling San* dates back to the Ming dynasty.

Here, what I would like to explain is that we normally consider innovation to be something that happens in an instant. As we suddenly have a new idea, a new thing is created. Yet, as Professor Samuel Leong said, innovation can be a slow process that begins with the familiarization of knowledge and then the addition of variations to the knowledge through development that comes as time passes. The interpretation *Guangling San*

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is one of the interesting examples. This *qin* piece appeared to have a life that kept on growing throughout a thousand years and it developed into a forty-five passage version in the Ming dynasty. Today's interpretation of *Guangling San* is in accordance to the forty-five passage musical notation. The idea that I would like to suggest is that innovation exists in *guqin* music, but the progress of innovation is different to what we normally expect. Before innovation, we must have a deep understanding of tradition, so that we can make innovations slowly. This is a very good example.

Within a thousand years after *Guangling San* was composed, this *qin* piece lengthened and became large-scale through its development. Yet, in the twentieth century, it became shorter. This is because of the great changes in China in the twentieth century, especially after 1949. Of course, there are several causes for the changes. First, there were only a few of the literati who would play *qin* music. Nobody intended to popularize *qin* music. In new China, however, there existed a desire to popularize *qin* music. Why is it that only the literati can understand this kind of music? The music should be able to be appreciated by the general public. Therefore (with this line of thinking), there was a trend of promoting *qin* music. In particular, since the Chinese Economic Reform in the 1980s, the technological development, the production of long-playing records, and the use of computer helped to promote *qin* music. Nevertheless, the widespread promotion of *qin* music created another problem. Since the general public has no knowledge of *qin* music, *qin* pieces have to be adapted to become more exciting and they have to be made shorter in order to attract this group of audiences. If a *qin* piece has to be performed for twenty minutes or even longer, there would be no audience. This is why there are several five-to-seven-minute versions of *Guangling San*, and these versions only include the parts with a fast-tempo and the tense middle section but exclude all other sections.

Actually, this is related to the following discussion on Cantonese opera. Do we want to specifically nurture a group of audiences who are familiar with Cantonese opera? Or do we want to popularize Cantonese opera so that many people can appreciate it? The direction that *guqin* music has taken is to popularize it for more audiences. Therefore the development of *qin* pieces have changed from lengthy and large-scale to short and small-scale. This is influenced by society. *Guqin* cannot be performed for too long so that the music can attract an audience. This can also be called innovation.

(Powerpoint slide)

This is the *qin* notation of *Guangling San*. I think all of you may know that the writing that came before the notation is an introduction written in Chinese, so we are able to read it. The *qin* notation starts from here. From the *qin* notation, we can see something that looks similar to but yet to be completely like Chinese characters. This is the inherited simplified ideogram notation. Here is the beginning of the music, the shortest first section. Due to the time constraint, we are not able to listen to this excerpt, which is a pity. I can only tell all of you about the following figures. Guan Pinghu (管平湖) is the most renowned *qin* player during the mid twentieth century. Yao Bingyan (姚丙炎) was my teacher, and he was active in *qin* performance in the previous

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century. He died in 1983. Dai Xiaolian (戴曉蓮) and Liu Li (劉利) are more modern. They were born during the 1960s, and they are now in their forties or fifties. Originally, I prepared the four *qin* players' recordings of *Guangling San*. By listening to the four performances, we can hear how the four *qin* players have interpreted the same *qin* piece in their own particular way. Even though the *qin* notation is the same, each performance has its own flavor. This personal flavor is especially strong in the performances of Dai Xiaolian and Liu Li. They established their career as *qin* players after the Chinese Economic Reform, and they had to consider the demands of the market. Therefore, their performances are more attractive. The variations of strength and tempo in their performances are more obvious. The performances of literati such as those by Guan Pinghu and Yao Bingyan are more tranquil. Most modern people are not able to appreciate their performances. Musical changes due to the changes of era and society demonstrate another kind of creativity. Indeed, the question that I just raised is directly related to Cantonese opera. After sharing my thoughts with all of you, I hope that all of you can rethink this and express your opinions on the issues discussed.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, Prof. Yung. This is a very inspiring study. Next, I would like to introduce the respondents. I also understand that the topic of this session is very broad. In fact, every topic of this symposium is very broad, and this may be challenging for the responses. Yet, it does not really matter. I hope all of you can express your own opinions in your response. As I have said this morning, I hope that we can talk in a relaxing environment and atmosphere. Mr. Christopher Pak from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts please.

Mr. Christopher Pak:

The essay by Prof. Samuel Leong has allowed us to clearly see the different understandings of creativity in China and in the west. I think that the misunderstanding of creativity is from our interpretation of the word "creativity" seen only through the Western perspective without consideration of Eastern culture that is especially influenced by Confucianism. This is not only in the case of China. Other East Asian regions also have similar problems. The other regions that are influenced by Confucianism, such as Japan and Korea, also interpret the same term through only Western perspectives. Actually, an earlier understanding of creativity in the west is not the same as that of today. We know that this understanding began after the Renaissance period. Before the Renaissance, the mainstream culture in the west was Christian culture. In this culture, human behavior, including artistic creations, was only to demonstrate the existence of God in the world. These creations did not aim to demonstrate the creativity of an individual. After the Renaissance, the west began to emphasize the concept of individuality. This is a rethinking of Christianity: humans should not treat individual behavior as the manifestation of the existence of God on Earth. After humans were liberated from the earlier thinking, they began to emphasize the point that creativity should be based on an individual. Therefore, we have the idea of creativity as an individualistic quality— the creation of a genius. Since then, we understand Western art to be about how geniuses create new things out of traditions. Of course, there are still artistic creations influenced by Christian culture. Nevertheless,



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the central point of this kind of creation is how to innovate something new.

The essay that was just presented by Prof. Leong as well as the literati culture and *guqin* music that was mentioned by Prof. Yung are both influenced by Confucianism. To a certain extent, the *pipa* is also the same kind of music as *guqin* music. If we look back at Chinese music history, we would notice that the music of *guqin* and *pipa* were the most notated among the instruments that have been passed down through history. The number of *guqin* music notations is particularly large. It is because *guqin* belongs to the music of the literati. What we have just talked about was mainly literati culture. Chinese opera is also related to the literati in certain circumstances. Yet, usually, Chinese opera is more related to the popular culture of Chinese traditional society. Many studies show that popular culture is in fact influenced by literati culture.

Chinese opera has three important characteristics: formulaic, integrative, and simulative. Why does Chinese opera have these three characteristics? First, the formulaic characteristic means that we have to be familiar with many techniques, including various kinds of artistic techniques and knowledge, in order to perform Chinese opera. Why is this characteristic so important? It is because Chinese opera is an integrative art. Being integrative means that we have to familiarize many kinds of formulas for singing, speech delivery, acting, and acrobatics. Whenever an *actor-singer* is on stage, his or her act involves certain formulas. This is different from Western opera. In Western opera, the performers may have to follow certain formulas for singing, but their movement involves no formula. Looking back at Chinese opera, all *actor-singers* on stage have to be familiar with the basic skills for every gesture, speech delivery, movement, as well as the music and content of speech delivery, in order to perform on stage. The importance of the simulative characteristic is related to the effectiveness of an *actor-singer* in representing the whole staged world by managing all of his or her actions. All the actions, such as opening a door, involve the existence of the simulative characteristic. Why must the singing, acting, speech delivery, and acrobatics involve formulas for *actor-singers* to follow? It is because the whole stage represents everything. *Actor-singers* can represent the staged world even without any assistance from the use of props. Why does Chinese opera stress the importance of its formulaic character then? Indeed, in addition to Chinese operatic music, traditional arts in the regions influenced by Confucianism, such as Korea and Japan, also have their respective formulaic characteristics. Performers have to be familiar with all the contents of performance in order to demonstrate their creativity. As what Prof. Leong had just said, we must first be familiar with the formulas. Where does the so-called creativity come from? Creativity is a gradual process. We are now analyzing the creativity of Chinese art through a macroscopic perspective. If we apply this perspective to Chinese opera, we would understand how the characteristics of Chinese opera are related to our understanding of creativity.

Dr. Lam Wing Cheong:

Thanks very much to the two professors. They have explained a very important matter and demonstrated it to all of us. I would like to express my opinion by following their line of thinking to see if it would be easier to understand how creativity is applied by looking at it from another perspective. Actually, what Prof. Leong had mentioned as

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cultural concepts are the comparisons between the west and China based on the concepts of educational background and the ideas behind this background. Honestly speaking, the limitation of Western musical culture is greater than that of our culture. On the other hand, Prof. Bell Yung demonstrated a very good example of a notation system, a system illustrated in the *Shenqi Mipu* compiled by Zhu Quan (朱權).

Why is it possible for the creativity of Chinese music to be so broad? It is because it does not have a big frame. The notation system of Western music, instead, limits the pitch and duration of every musical tone. If one performs a song, one must follow the notational symbols to deliver its musical expression. *Shenqi Mipu* was not compiled for this kind of practice. It uses the simplified ideogram notation that resembles other notational systems such as the full ideogram notation and *gongche* notation (工尺譜) in terms of not notating fixed rhythms for performers to follow. Performers have to interpret the notation by using their own method to (re-)create the music. This is very important. This makes it possible to establish “schools”. I bet everyone here knows Guan Pinghu because he is particularly remarkable in this aspect. By comparing his performance with those of others such as Chen Leishi (陳蕾士), the interpretation of each *guqin* player has its own distinctive character. Why? They use the same musical notation with the same method but approached it with an open attitude. They added their creativity into the interpretation of the musical notation to create music that contains their own ideas in order to convince their audience that their interpretation is how the music should be performed. This process can be violent, vengeful, or spontaneous. This relaxation of institutional context enhances the creativity of Chinese music. Of course, talking about creativity, I agree with what Dr. Leung Bo Wah regarded as “from nothing to something; from something to anything”. Creativity can be “infinite”, which means that it is large in quantity, but it cannot be “without boundary”. It is *dangerous* to be “without boundary”. I think that any kind of creativity should take place within a particular area. For example, I heard from Ms. Lau Wai Ming (劉惠鳴) that Pak Suet Sin (白雪仙) once performed *Peking* opera and applied what she had learned from that to Cantonese opera. I also heard Mr. Yuen Siu Fai mention that he would have been unable to distinguish the genre that was on television if he had turned off the sound. Assuming that we are now in the era of Pak Suet Sin, we would consider what she performed to be Cantonese opera without seeing it on television. Why? It is because she absorbed the elements of *Peking* opera and transformed the elements into something that is idiomatic to Cantonese opera. This is a change made within a frame that can be further developed in Cantonese opera. The absorbed elements are not forcefully applied to Cantonese opera. This results in a high degree of creativity. If we apply many new elements to Cantonese opera by force, I, as a relatively traditional advocate, would consider the outcome to be unidiomatic. The simulative formulas that are the essence and special characteristics of Cantonese opera would disappear as a result, and I would ask whether the outcome would still be considered Cantonese opera. I am not the only one who raises this question. Many others would ask the same question. We need creativity, and we need the “infinite” creativity. Yet, there should still be boundaries for such creativity, so that this creativity can be inherited by the next generation. Our inheritance concerns theatrical or musical genres, which

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are not widely recognized by everyone, such as the idea of opera being a combination of singing and acting. Losing the essence of the genre at hand would transform it into something strange. Seeing from the essays by the two speakers today that have discussed Cantonese opera and music, or in other words all the performance formulas of Cantonese opera, I think that “infinite” creativity is something beneficial, but we should pay attention to the issue of “no boundary”.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, Dr. Lam! Does “Sister Hung Hung” have any comments?

Ms. Hung Hung:

Actually, I am a junior member of Cantonese opera. Moreover, as I mentioned in the previous section, I am a Cantonese opera *actor-singer* that was born in Mainland China. Today, my classmate is here, and (s)he knows how much I know about the tradition. Nevertheless, since I have had the opportunity to travel around the world and learn about the knowledge of other cultures, I have developed a foundation in Chinese culture. As mentioned by Mr. Lam and Mr. Pak, a good knowledge of Chinese opera is necessary before one absorbs something from other subjects and cultures. This is very important.

I performed a Cantonese opera excerpt when I was working with Prof. Bell Yung and Mr. Danny Yung in Taipei. The performance of that excerpt came upon me instantly, and I was offered a very short period of time to come up with a solo performance that included both traditional and innovative elements. I tried to think about a solo performance that was available in Cantonese opera, and I first asked my mother Ms. Hong Xian Nu (紅線女) for suggestions. She said, “You should quickly ask Law Kar Ying (羅家英) to adapt the two-person act *The Sassy Princess and Her Blunt Husband* (《刁蠻公主戇駙馬》) into a solo act. You perform as both the princess and her husband.” “Brother Hong” (Mr. Law Kar Ying) kindly helped me to condense the original script to a half-hour version. In fact, I had no information about such kinds of performances. The final outcome was completely a combination of the ideas of artists from the earlier generation and the talent and helpfulness of “Brother Hong”. It was “Brother Hong” who helped me to rehearse this artistic work. If possible, I hope I can keep a copy of the script for future inheritance. I think that my mother is very creative. She can immediately think of a Cantonese opera colleague who is able to create such a work.

There is a relationship between that performance and *Guangling San*, which is the non-rigid nature of the artistic form. If you like performing Cantonese opera and you are well-trained, you can contribute to society in return by demonstrating what you have learned upon an appropriate occasion or condition. This is a good opportunity provided by heaven. I think that no one here has ever watched a wedding night scene (which is normally performed by two *actor-singers*) being performed by only one *actor-singer*. The most amazing thing is that such a performance can really be achieved. I am very grateful to the artists of both the older generation and my generation. They have such talent to be able to help me express myself theatrically. Why is it that I am making such a response? It is because the topic mentioned by Prof. Samuel Leong,

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which is particularly concerned with the significant impact of globalization, has led to the theatrical expression that I have just mentioned. If the conditions reflected in Prof. Leong's topic did not exist, I would not be able to express such creativity through the Yung brothers.

I think that the basic skills are very important. Without the basic skills, a successful performance cannot be achieved. *Actor-singers* of every generation have to practice the skills of the waist and legs and many other skills. They have to practice all the skills of singing, acting, speech delivery, and acrobatics. They do not learn all these things just by laying on their beds. They have to work hard.

If you have learned a lot but you do not further develop what you have achieved, then how could the vitality of Cantonese opera be so strong? I think that Hong Kong is a very good base that is open to many things. Popular songs, for example, can be borrowed for Cantonese opera. The appropriation of *Lonely Days* as a *siukuk* (小曲) is an example of this. Nobody would ask, "Isn't it a Cantonese opera?" Such appropriation is also a part of Cantonese opera. I think that recognition from the audience is very important. The performers are on stage, and the scriptwriter is behind the stage. The scriptwriter provides us with the materials for our theatrical interpretation. It is like someone who gives us the ingredients to cook a nice dish. I think that this is what we are looking for today.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, "Sister Hung Hung". I am interested in many of the points that I have just heard. I would like to question "Sister Hung Hung" further. About the creativity in the opera *The Sassy Princess and Her Blunt Husband* that you have just mentioned, it can be encapsulated by four easily memorable words that begin with letter "p" in the Western concept: person (the one who creates), process (the process of creation), product (the product of creation), and place (the environment of creation). As I have just heard, it is possible to change a traditional opera that is ordinarily performed by two persons in half-an-hour to a one-person performance of the same length within half an hour. For this, first, I would like to know whether "Brother Kar Ying" (Law Kar Ying 羅家英) made such a change within half an hour. Second, under what circumstances did he make this change? Was he forced to do so? Was the adapted version performed right after he finished making the adaptation?

Ms. Hung Hung:

The half an hour was for the performance on stage. The rehearsal session that he offered help with came from Hong Xian Nu's (紅線女) idea. Since she promised the two Mr. Yungs that she would hold such a performance in Taipei, the costumes, props, and makeup for this half-hour performance were all unplanned. Nevertheless, the result was satisfactory. Since "Brother Kar Ying" provided the space for the performance, we were able to create this product. This also included the cooperation amongst creative people.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Therefore, the time, location, people, process, and environment constituted the performance.



Ms. Hung Hung: Actually this opportunity was by chance. Originally I was sitting below the stage as an audience watching someone else's performance. I did not expect to be brought up on stage to perform.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah: Very interesting! Are there any other guests who would like to give their opinions or responses? Mr. Pak?

Mr. Christopher Pak: I would like to supplement what Lam Wing Cheong has just spoken on. Western art actually has its formulas. It has some basic languages for people to follow, but its creativity emphasizes the existence of the final product. For a musical work by a composer, it would be something very significant to Western people if the basic formulas of the work are changed. We would regard that as a paradigm shift. The musical change from church mode to the functional harmonies of major and minor scales is a large paradigm shift. Another change from the functional harmonies of major and minor scales to atonalism, as well as the changes of basic musical elements, constitutes another paradigm shift that took place in the music of the twentieth century. Chinese opera, or the artistic forms influenced by Confucianism, are mostly changed in a way that Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳) regarded as "changing the moves without changing the shape". Among these artistic forms, creativity is originally a formula (based on basic knowledge) that leads to changes within the artistic forms. Huang Xiangpeng's (黃翔鵬) discussion on traditional Chinese instrumental music that concludes with the continuity of creativity and liveliness of Chinese opera is also similar to the characteristics of "changing the moves without changing the shape" as termed by Mei Lanfang, and the "creativity of the East" that was just mentioned by Prof. Samuel Leong is actually the same thing.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah: I would like to make a small summary of the opinions made by the previous speakers. The creativity of Chinese art seems to be related to collaborative production. The same work can be performed and then recreated by different people, so that the work would be continuously filled with new life. Yet, I want to raise a question here. In the twenty-first century, Chinese art such as Cantonese opera seems to be developing in a Western way, which means a return to a focus on the individual. In Cantonese opera, for example, we greatly appreciate the scripts composed by Tang Disheng (唐滌生). Tang's scripts are different from the traditional repertoire that were not composed by a single writer but were collaborations of different opera troupes and *actor-singers*. Although this difference may be related to the general conditions of globalization, would this difference imply the change of practice from the wonderful tradition of collaborative creation to a gradual move towards a Western direction? Would this be a crisis? Do any of you have a response?

Prof. Bell Yung: Yes, this would be a crisis. To supplement your point, there is another factor which is the issue of copyright. After marketization, everyone has felt the importance of monetary benefits. Therefore, it has become important to know about the composer and the performer of the music, because the music may be marketable and could sell for a large amount of money. Creators should get their return. It is because of

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marketization and the emphasis on copyright. What you have said is right. It has gone into that direction. Regardless of whether it is right or wrong, we have to confront it; but it is true that there is such a trend nowadays.

Dr. Chan Chak Lui:

Indeed, in addition to the repertoire that we are familiar with, I can see many possibilities from ritual Cantonese opera performances. The interesting thing about this is that we usually have no idea about the origins of these possibilities.

For the scripts written by Tang Disheng, those performed on today's stage are actually just some amongst his large number of works. More importantly, there is a question of the resemblance between today's renditions of Tang's past works and the original content of these works during the 1950s. The audio recordings of Tang's works that we are the most familiar with were distributed by Crown Records Limited. They include *The Story of Princess Changping*, *The Purple Hairpin*, and *The Reincarnation of Lady Plum Blossom*. While we think that they are the originals, are we sure that they were composed by Tang Disheng himself? Were the performances of the 1950s the same as today's performances? This is really worthy of our consideration.

May I ask the speakers a question? In the past, a performance of Cantonese opera could take four to five hours. I have heard from some seniors that they could watch a performance until midnight. Can we make a performance shorter nowadays? People may still find a performance lengthy even if a performance was truncated to two to three hours with an intermission. A performance begins at seven thirty, and it has to end at nine thirty. I would like to ask Prof. Yung: What should we consider when Cantonese opera has to deal with the pace of life in Hong Kong? What should we do and what should we pay attention to? Thanks.

Prof. Bell Yung:

I remember that when I came to Hong Kong to study Cantonese opera in the early 1970s, the Cantonese opera performances of that time took four hours and lasted till midnight. I heard from some old mentors that the performance before the 1970s could last until dawn of the next day. Some people expressed that the performances were too long. A performance of four hours would make audiences fall asleep. Some others have said that the performances until midnight would disturb other people's rest. They thought that these performances should end at ten so that other people could go to sleep. Nevertheless, people of the past paid respect to ritual performances. They felt that Cantonese opera should be performed for many hours. Even though they might dislike such a practice, they would nevertheless endure it. Today, everyone thinks that they should have their individual rights, and they would oppose these performances if they were to disturb their sleep. Therefore, the change of Cantonese opera is related to the change of society as well as the changes of our views toward individual rights and democracy. As a result, many Cantonese operas have been shortened nowadays.

You also mentioned Crown Records Limited just before. Some of my friends know that I translated *The Story of Princess Changping* into English. During that time, a remarkable effort was made on the issue of copyright. It is because it could not be published until



Prof. Bell Yung:  
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that issue was settled. Later, I got to know the son of Liu Dong (劉東) and we became friends, and thus, I had the opportunity to publish my translation. Otherwise, the publication would have been impossible. I know that many friends have made the same attempt but failed. The main problem is that the Chinese version could not be published. Instead, the English translation can be published because the copyright owners thought that nobody would read English in Hong Kong. In the end, they also allowed me to publish the original Chinese text. At that time, “Sister Sin” (Pak Suet Sin 白雪仙) was also shocked by the fact that I was able to get the copyright of *The Story of Princess Changping* for both the Chinese and English versions. This is the issue of copyright that we have just talked about. This issue is more serious nowadays.

Audience:

I want to respond to the issue of the length of a Cantonese opera performance. I think that the function of Cantonese opera in the past was solid and past audiences were mobile. But now, we have to put Cantonese opera into a concert hall to be appreciated by the audience. Because of the difference between the past and present audiences, it is necessary to adjust the length of Cantonese opera to fit in with today’s society.

Prof. Bell Yung:

Yes, when I returned to Hong Kong during the 1970s, there were many ritual Cantonese opera performances. Many friends from the field of Cantonese opera were worried about the future of Cantonese opera because of the lack of available theaters for rehearsals. There were no performances in regular theaters either, and it was difficult to schedule a performance at City Hall. Many people worried about what they could do with Cantonese opera in the future. But, in fact, if ritual performances can be performed everywhere, I feel that the prospects for Cantonese opera are not that pessimistic. For example, we can build a temporary theatrical stage within twenty-four hours and then hold an ongoing performance for seven days. Today’s technology is really amazing. Since I have been living in the United States for several decades, I would like to ask everyone here whether there have been big changes in ritual Cantonese opera performance since the 1970s. My impression is that there have not been any big changes, and there are still many ritual performances. It is because the spiritual beliefs of Hong Kong people are not instantly changed.

Audience:

I think that I am more familiar with ritual Cantonese opera performance because I have just finished one very recently and I will perform another two days later. During the two months around the birthday of *Mazu* (or Tin Hau 天后), there are four to five ritual performances. I have been living in Hong Kong for more than twenty years. Let me briefly talk about the changes of ritual performance in Hong Kong. Amongst these changes, the first is the change in the length of performance. In the past, eighty percent of the presenters the ritual performances would request a performance to be continued until after 12 a.m. and sometimes until 1 a.m. In recent times, such requests no longer exist, but a performance cannot be finished too early. There would be no interference if a performance were to end at 11 p.m. Nowadays, there is an increasing number of tall buildings, and those temporary stages are very often next to housing areas. A late performance would affect people, and therefore the length of performance has to be changed. The second change is in transportation. I remember that when I performed in

Audience:  
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Tung Chung in the past, I had to first get on a bus to Tuen Mun and then travel to Tung Chung by ferry. I was not able to return home at night after performance because of the traffic. Now, it takes less than an hour to travel to Tung Chung. Also, we used to only be able to reach Po Toi O by water transport, but now we can go there by land. The third change is the reduced use of costumes with plastic sequins. In the past, *actor-singers* were often requested to wear costumes with plastic sequins in ritual performances, but now, *actor-singers* can wear embroidered costumes except for the performance of *Prime Ministers of Six States* (六國大封相). I feel that ritual performance has had a greater change in the recent twenty years.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Are there any other responses or questions?

Audience:

I want to talk about the concept of ritual Cantonese opera performance in relation to the perspective of cultural anthropology. When I was small, I liked to watch ritual performances. It is because a ritual performance at that time included other things, such as the people who sold swords or medicine. The performance was like a large entertainment gathering. Since the living conditions at that time were not so complicated, people could get whatever they wanted during the several hours of the ritual performance.

Dr. Cham Lai Suk Ching:

For the issue of performance length that we have just discussed, I think that it is related to Hong Kong people's pace of living in addition to the copyright issue which was mentioned by Prof. Yung. I remember that the recent performance of *The Purple Hairpin* by Ms. Lau Wai Ming took only a little over two hours. The scene change for this performance was completed in under a minute, and the performance omitted many plots and musical parts from the original. An elderly woman who sat next to me asked, "What is *The Purple Hairpin*?" I have watched *The Purple Hairpin* before, and I could not perceive any beauty from the version that I recently watched. It is because the pace of the performance was just too fast. Therefore, creativity is also about people's lives, their different ages, and whether they have watched a performance before.

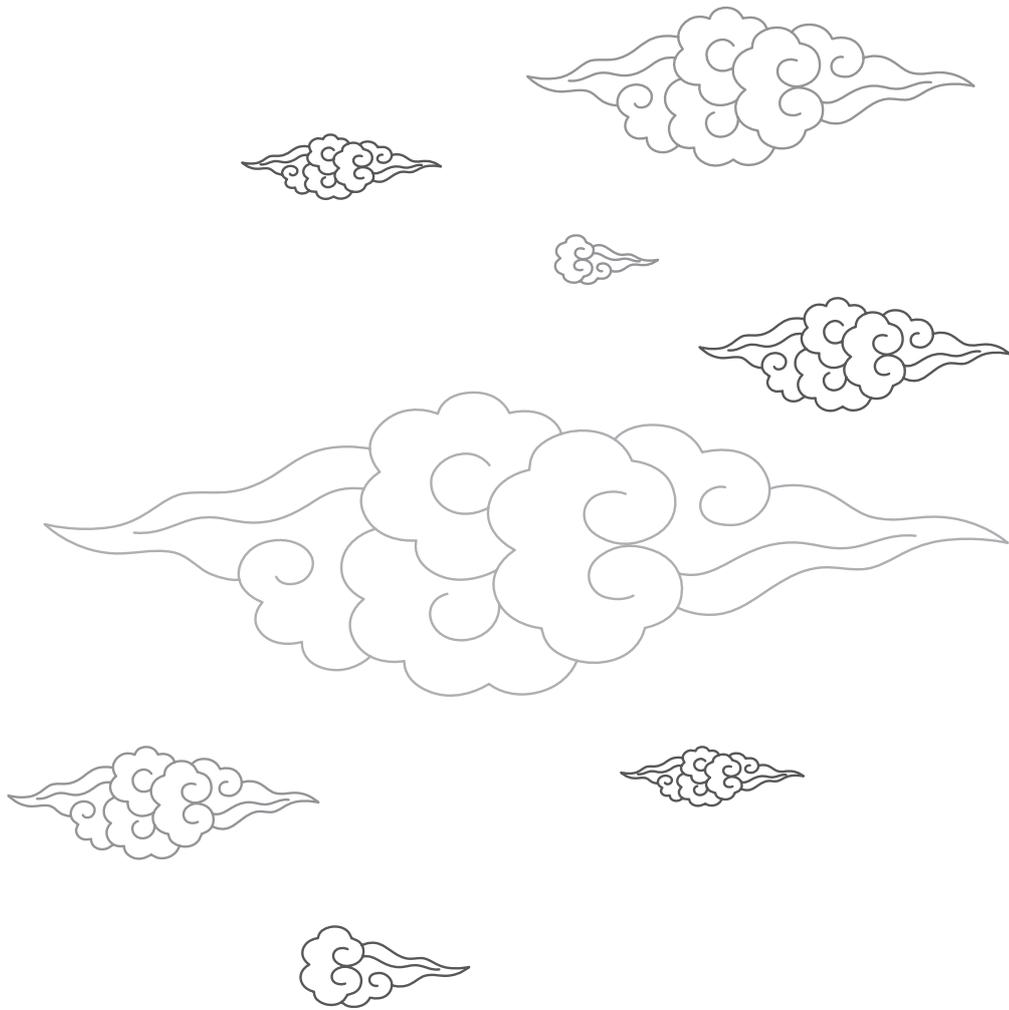
Prof. Bell Yung:

I believe that innovation is really related to the surrounding environment. My experience of this is strong: the students on the left had good feelings about the performance, as they treated it as a Western musical and they have no idea what Cantonese opera is; the two seniors with a traditional background criticized the performance throughout, saying that the performance was not a real Cantonese opera because there were hardly any gongs and drums. This is really a special experience. In this performance, the *actor-singers* sang as an audio recording was played. There were very few *banghuang* (梆黃) but a lot of *siukuk* (小曲). The music was more modernized, and I would say that it was a daring innovation. Of course, we are unable to judge the success or failure of this innovation in such a short period of time. This is about time. As we have just said about *Guangling San*, this *qin* piece took a thousand years for us to see its collaborative innovation. The innovation in the Cantonese opera performance that I just mentioned may just be a small part in the process of its future development. If we look further down the road, Cantonese opera may really change. We just do not know how it will change.



Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

This section should come to a close now. Personally speaking, I am a bit worried about the phenomenon of globalization that may lead to the failure of preserving Chinese traditional culture. Indeed, Cantonese opera has a good base in Hong Kong. Yet, I would be a bit worried if the education, performances, and other matters are inclined to privilege Western values. It is because it would be unhealthy if this wonderful traditional culture, which includes collaborative creation or an expression of high levels of freedom, would be considered to be bad.





## Session 3



# *The Creativity of Cantonese Opera Scripts*

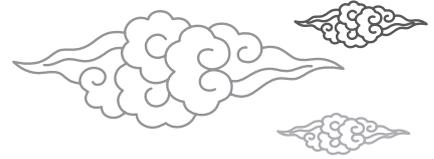


**Speakers :**

Dr. Xu Yanlin, Dr. Tai Suk Yan

**Respondents:**

Ms. Lo Wan Yin, Ms. Tang Mei Ling, Mr. Wong Chi Fai





## The Creativity of Cantonese Opera Scripts



Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Good afternoon. Welcome back to this venue. We will go into the third session of the symposium. The topic of the third session is “the creativity of Cantonese opera scripts”. We are pleased to have our two speakers. The first is Dr. Xu Yanlin (徐燕琳). Dr. Xu is from the Guangzhou Agricultural University. Welcome Dr. Xu. The second is Dr. Tai Suk Yan (戴淑茵). She is from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Also, we have three respondents. The first is Ms. Lo Wan Yin (勞韻妍), President of Wan Man Cantonese Opera Academy. The second is Ms. Tang Mei Ling (鄧美玲), an experienced Hong Kong actress. The third is Mr. Wong Chi Fai (黃志輝) from Chu Hai College. After the speeches made by the speakers, may the three respondents please respond and give your opinions on the issue of scriptwriting.

As far as I know, the early form of Cantonese opera, which is the *Jianghu Shibaben* (江湖十八本), did not have any formal documentation. Cantonese opera is a process that began with nothing. Later, the development of Cantonese opera became more rigorous. Cantonese opera began to develop complete scripts like that of Western theater. This seems to be a positive development. For now and for the future, how should Cantonese opera scriptwriting in Hong Kong be developed? This is what I am interested in and I consider this to be a meaningful question. May I now pass the session to Dr. Xu. Thanks.

Dr. Xu Yanlin:

Thank you, chairman. Thank you, everyone. I feel very nervous about this lecture because I usually speak in mandarin and this is the first time that I have delivered a speech in Cantonese. Moreover, there are many experts here. That makes me a bit scared. I therefore prepared a lot of reports for this lecture. If anyone here is unable to understand any parts of my presentation, I can switch back to mandarin.

Firstly, Dr. Leung has just mentioned the situation of Cantonese opera scriptwriting in Guangdong province. As far as I know, the condition of Cantonese opera preservation in Guangdong province, in areas such as script development and scriptwriting, is doing less well than it is in Hong Kong. This makes me worried somehow. Some years ago, the Cantonese Opera Development Fund set up a Cantonese opera research study at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I was working at the Chinese University then. The study class intentionally gathered Cantonese opera scriptwriters to study together. Yet, this course was held only once and discontinued upon completion. About the situation of Cantonese opera scriptwriting today, I feel that there is a disconnection between the generations. Let me now speak about this. There are a lot of issues that I am unclear on and I have to seek the opinions of the seniors. I am also not very clear about the situation in Hong Kong. Thus, I will first talk about what I know.



Dr. Xu Yanlin:  
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As everyone understands, a script is very important in Cantonese opera. In today's society, there is no drama or song that has no written text. Scriptwriting determines the development of Cantonese opera. It determines the current condition as well as the future development. In addition to Cantonese opera, some other regional operas also face the same situation. Here, I want everyone to know that literati and folk artists compose Chinese operas as well. I have previously studied the Chinese opera history. I think that the government has been influential towards the development of Chinese opera as well as other dramas since the Song dynasty. During the Song dynasty, the literati composed *ci* (詞) as well as other literary and musical genres. The state established an office to specifically manage the music and *ci* composition of that period. It developed a system to control the music, rituals, and rites, and to integrate music into education and the propagation of the state. Since that time, poetry was also adapted as musical text. In the Yuan dynasty, the prototype of a script emerged. Actually, this prototype should be considered to have originated from Song dynasty which later developed into a more complete and concrete form in the Yuan dynasty. Some scholars think that Yuan *qu* (曲) should be of the same status as Tang poetry and Song *ci*, which are considered the most excellent of literary genres. The development of Yuan *qu* involved a process in which the participation of the literati was a key determining factor. During the Yuan dynasty, the condition was that literati were those who knew about music and played an essential role in the development of *qu*. The literati were considered to be different from *actor-singers*. The literati had their most direct influence on Chinese opera during the Ming dynasty, and this influence still existed until the Qing dynasty in Guangdong province. There were some excellent Qing writers from Guangdong province, and they published some magazines. The creativity demonstrated in these magazines was the same as that in the literary works of the Ming dynasty in terms of its emphasis on stylistic expression. Yet, we have still to study about how folk artists have played their role throughout the process of literary creation and how they interacted with the literati. This question just came to mind right now, and I have yet to think further about it. At this stage, we are still exploring the relationship between scriptwriting and the literati.

In Cantonese opera, a script is equivalent to the work itself to a certain degree. Its categories are formed according to its contextual information. In addition to the basic categories, there are some scripts that belong to certain complicated types. Today, the categorization of scripts is generally based on the genres of folk stories. The categories basically include various types of love dramas that follow certain conventions, i.e., mistress versus poor scholar, princess versus her spouse, scholar versus renowned prostitute, and mistress versus young master, as well as numerous types of family ethics dramas including those about the filial piety of sons and grandsons, and those about a servant saving or mistreating his or her master. The creation of scripts involves many conventions. In Guangdong province, there are some regional operas that have apparent local characteristics. Works about hunters saving a ruler for example, is particular to Guangdong province. There are also some other themes which involve heroes and heroines that emphasize the role of womankind. Furthermore, works about the snake king is particular to the regional opera of the Lingnan region. People of

Dr. Xu Yanlin:  
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different regions have their specific ways of thinking that result in various regional characters. I think that the local characteristics of Cantonese opera are remarkable. How would these conventions relate to reality today? Why do we have to talk about this issue? Within Chinese opera circles in Mainland China, everyone has been discussing about how Cantonese operatic singing can survive on different occasions, such as at Cantonese operatic singing symposiums. Since moving to Hong Kong, I can see the remarkable effort that has been made to ensure this survival. I am very happy to see this. In Mainland China, people have been worrying about the issue of education. Our critical observation has caused us to become more detached from what people have been doing. Our idea of looking at the development of Cantonese operatic singing from a historical perspective is not new. This idea actually emerged sometime between the 1920s and the 1930s. When I was studying the context of Guangzhou during the early 1930s, which later involved the investigation of forty organizations in Guangzhou, I noticed that the people of that period were facing the problem of the dominance of cinema. Both cinema and Cantonese operatic singing appeared in theaters, but they could not coexist. There were a few of theaters that featured both. Yet, this halved the audience levels for Chinese opera, as this group of audience would watch cinema instead. Under these conditions, some people conducted a reformation of Cantonese opera. They added a lot of content into Cantonese opera. This resulted in the tendency to seek change and innovation in Cantonese opera, and people have sustained this tendency and it has since evolved into a characteristic of Cantonese opera. Looking at the development history of Cantonese opera in its entirety, we can observe that the genre has been absorbing elements from other cultures. For the development of Cantonese opera in Mainland China, I think that we should preserve some of its outstanding repertoire by treating it as if it were a museum artifact. We should not make changes to it, and we have to preserve its original features, such as its performance conventions and singing methods. On the other hand, we have to promote the characteristic of seeking change and innovation in Cantonese opera. This characteristic is an essence of the genre. If we overlook this characteristic, we would lose our audience. I have conducted many surveys which touch on this issue. The results of these surveys show that young people would perhaps say that they are unfamiliar with Cantonese opera, and the development of Cantonese opera may result in some sacrifices because it has to follow concurrent social and cultural trends. We may have found it strange in the past to have to make such a change. Nevertheless, it may become something desirable if we are able to preserve certain inalterable essences of Cantonese opera while we experiment with the adaptable elements of the genre. These experiments can be related to the use of theatrical materials or certain ideas. After this experimentation, the good elements can be preserved while the undesirable elements can be eliminated. New insights into the development of Cantonese opera are desirable. Yet, we have to stand firm in our culture and establish a solid local foundation. If we lose sight of the genre's main framework, then the whole thing would be obliterated. This would be a return to the former thinking.

Let me now talk about the general conditions of the preservation of traditional art and its development in Mainland China. This is a question that we are discussing today,

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and we have made it a topic to be explored in this academic symposium. We, including the academia and the Chinese opera professionals, are thinking about how to ensure the survival and further development of traditional art. This process includes criticism. We have been studying Cantonese opera in terms of its genres. Yet, this study has to be further expanded. I find that Hong Kong is very experienced, having groups such as the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and local Cantonese opera troupes that are worthy of reference. Equal exchange that is unbegrudgingly made among professionals is good.

There exists a problem in today's regional opera troupes in Mainland China. The problem is similar to the one mentioned before about political influence. Political influence is disadvantageous to the development of art. Sometime ago, Liao Bin (廖奔), the current vice-chairperson of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles who is a scholar specializing on the history of the development of Chinese art, wrote an article about the writings of Cao Yu (曹禺). In the article, he questioned why Cao Yu did not create any works after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Cao Yu continuously asked his daughter, "What do you think about *Thunderstorm*?" Why did Cao Yu have such doubts? It is because he had already lost himself. When he was writing *Thunderstorm*, he narrated his personal experiences and some other matters about his past family life. After the establishment of the PRC, his writing had become restricted by some external factors. He had to think about what others would say about his writing and whether his subjects would match the concurrent political ideology. He completely lost the life of an artist. His artistic life had ended. Political influence can have a great impact on the development of art.

There is also a problem to do with the structure of a troupe. For example, the development of a troupe in the past was purely based on its survival under marketization. Yet, our today's troupes have become an official unit, an administrative, career, and cultural unit of the country. The art produced by our troupes totally rely on the effort of its members. There was a big problem with its infra-structure which has been resolved to a certain extent by now. Within the troupe, its members are all currently thinking about this problem. Some of the members think that it can be completely resolved. Some say that it is not solvable and they can only do what they can do. From my observation of the current situation, I find that we often work hard at rehearsing for performances with great seriousness, but there is no liveliness in such a performance. Sometimes people rehearse simply because they are paid. Some Cantonese operas even become what I call "opera in Cantonese". The singing for this kind of performance is excellent, but the Cantonese dialect is not used in the singing. Even if the performance is sung in Cantonese, the song-lyrics is usually an adaptation of a Putonghua version. As a principle of artistic development, the use of the sonority of the Cantonese dialect to perform such an opera is a complete failure. It is really pitiful. It is because these performances waste time and money within such a short period of time. Also, it creates a bad effect on *actor-singers*, the market, and all other people involved in the long term.

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Currently, people are conducting investigations on artistic ideas. There are some newly-introduced elements in Cantonese opera that excite people, such as animation. Hong Xian Nu's (紅線女) *The Sassy Princess and Her Blunt Husband* provides a good case for illustration. This Cantonese opera is very successful. I showed a video excerpt of this opera to my students, and they later told me that they had searched for it themselves and watched the complete video recording on their own. I did not force them to do so. After this, I discovered that some students and teachers of the Hanshan Normal University (韓山師範學院) created an animated version of *Meet in the Woodshed* (《柴房會》), and it was in fact the students who were motivated by their own interest to create it. This shows that many people favor new forms of representation, and these new forms are excellent changes and explorations.

Let me introduce another activity about the Peking opera *Hua Yue Ying* (《花月影》) which involved Ni Huiying (倪惠英) and her university students. For this performance, each student had to pay a dollar to attend it. I brought a dollar with me to the performance, and I had no idea as to what to expect. After watching it, I found that the performance was very sophisticated as it demonstrated many complicated matters including social problems and questions about life. I attended this performance with my father and mother. They cannot understand the Cantonese dialect, but they were able to finish watching the whole performance by relying solely on the subtitles (surtitles for opera performance usually?). This was very successful. There was another performance of *Guangfu Huacai* (《廣府華彩》) which was led by Ni Huiying last year. Ni Huiying borrowed several hundred thousand dollars to stage this performance. They had invited Tian Xiayin (田沁鑫), a famous modern theater director to direct the opera; a fact that disappointed me when I first found out about this arrangement. During the performance, I wondered whether it would be a successful collaboration, since modern theater directors often add modern theater elements into the performance and there are no limits in modern theater. At the end of the performance, I thought that it was a very good performance because there was a Cantonese opera director who had collaborated with Tian Xiayin. The Cantonese opera director had been working on the areas to do with his field, while Tian Xiayin was familiar with the elements of modern theater and had experience in other aspects such as theater design, choreography and art design, as well as some other matters. They both excelled in their respective areas of expertise.

On the other hand, there are also some examples from traditional Cantonese opera. For example, *Prime Ministers of Six States* (六國大封相) is a traditional *kaichangxi* (or opening scene開場戲), as it involves many *actor-singers*. There are many characters, including the leaders of the six states as well as other male and female characters.

What was the purpose of performing this piece in the past? It is a piece that was used to showcase the *actor-singers*. According to the information at hand, this work was performed to convince the audience that the performance was worth their money. These audiences paid particular attention to the skill of the *actor-singers*. Actually, this

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work has been put aside for a long period of time.

There are other works, such as *Wusong Danao Shizilou* (《武松大鬧獅子樓》) that received the golden prize in *Quanguo Xiju Zhejixi* (全國戲劇折子戲). It has some great scenes such as *Wurenzhuang* (木人樁). *Shiqian Dujia* (《時遷盜甲》) is a renowned work of the famous *mou sang* Mr. Lu Qiguang (盧啟光) that he showed off his many exciting and unique skills. According to what I have read, Mr. Chen Xiaodao (程小刀) suffered a fall when he was performing this work two years ago. *Yu Xiayun Suqing* (《余俠魂訴情》), *Ruigong Yeyan* (《璿宮夜宴》), *Zhaojun Chusai* (or *Lady Zhaojun Traveling to the Frontier* 《昭君出塞》), *Youyuan Jingmeng* (or *Peony Pavilion* 《遊園驚夢》), and *The Fairy's Baby* (《仙姬送子》) are other excellent Cantonese operas that have been frequently performed in the recent decade.

The next problem is worth the consideration of those of us living in Mainland China. Firstly, how would Cantonese opera become acceptable to people? Secondly, how do we maintain the sustainability of the transmission of Cantonese opera in order to prolong its liveliness? For those who like to study, they should think about how Cantonese opera can be developed into a format that is accepted by the public. Not just for now, but also for its future continuation. As a result, I accepted a task to conduct a study of *Tanka* culture (蜑民文化) last year. In this study, I discovered a very meaningful person, Xian Xinghai (冼星海). He is an inspirational figure in my study of Cantonese opera, and in the context of Cantonese culture, the appearance of his name really surprised me. Let me first introduce him. I knew that Xian Xinghai is *Tanka*, and so I thought that his musical works must be related to Cantonese culture. Yet, as I learned more about him and heard the following statement, I was shocked. He said, "What I wrote has nothing to do with the Cantonese." He made his response very clear. Nevertheless, my study shows that his work actually has a significant relationship with Cantonese culture as well as with the wider context of general Chinese culture. Xian Xinghai existed as a product of Guangdong province and as a product of China as a whole. The process of development for Xian Xinghai's relationship with Cantonese culture is long, and it includes many problems. I am not going to talk about that in detail today. I will only bring out some materials that are relevant to today's discussion. I think that an artistic work must have its timeliness and profitability. This means if a work is acceptable to people, the composer must be immersed in the current context. He must be able to reflect the context by composing with the *zeitgeist* of the era. The composer has to be full of love. He has to love what he writes and creates so that he can influence and move other people. This is my first revelation from Xian Xinghai. The second revelation from him is that the existence of a classic artist is not incidental. The existence of Xian Xinghai is not incidental either. He integrated various discoveries from his life, ethnicity, and age. His art also achieved a state of elevation. This elevation involves fundamental matters or certain objective conditions. A classic can be in whatever format. It can be a Cantonese opera or a work by Xian Xinghai, but it can only become a classic work if it is widely accepted. This is a necessary condition for a classic work. If people do not accept it, then that work would not be a classic.

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Therefore, a classic must be produced within the context of the creator's life, ethnic group, and era. The elevation of the work after an integration of these elements would result in a classic artwork.

Now, I would like to introduce something about Xian Xinghai. I think that Xian Xinghai's works are portrayals of the living culture of Lingnan region. His Song of *Tanka* People (《蠔民歌》) provides us with an example, as Xian Xinghai clearly stated that he had used a farm competition in the south to represent a battle scene. Another example is *Yellow River Cantata* (《黄河大合唱》). This work was composed for not only one person but for many people. As revealed in the lyrics, the piece depicts a boat rowing scene, which is in fact the narration of a dragon boat competition in the south. Xian Xinghai was born in Macao. When he was a baby, there were dragon boat races in Macao. Today's development of dragon boat races is prosperous in Macao. There are also phoenix boats in Panyu (番禺), Xian Xinghai's homeland. In the Guangdong region, there are plenty of materials of this nature. Such materials were influential to Xian Xianhai's composition. This is why it is said that Xian Xinghai's works are portrayals of the living culture of Lingnan region.

Moreover, Xian Xinghai's music is an expression of Lingnan culture. Now, I would like to introduce everyone to a song. The song is called *Ding Ngang Soeng* (《頂硬上》). I wonder if any of you have listened to it before. It is quite difficult to understand this song if you do not know the Cantonese dialect. Yet, after Xian Xinghai popularized this song, people learned to sing it and enjoy it. This is quite strange. This is why we have to look into the historical context of the song. I think that this song represents the sound of an era. It represents a common spirit of people in that era and their unwillingness to submit to fate. Of course, Xian Xinghai accepted his fate, but he was unwilling to do so. This is a kind of struggle. The song was popular in the area around the Pearl River Delta. Some people say that the song is about laborers working at the pier, but it does not really matter. Anyway, the people depicted are *Tanka* people. When Xian Xinghai was at Lingnan University, he was in frequent contact with *Tanka* people. He knew that the *Tanka* people sang this specific kind of song. After he composed *Ding Ngang Soeng*, he popularized it. The rhythm of this song expresses a common spirit or even an ethnic image. *Ding Ngang Soeng* is a folk song from a small region that belongs to a people who have been looked down by others. It can be considered as a cry of the people. Yet, why is this related to the ethnic image? It is because the research shows that the song is related to Xian Xinghai's era. Xian Xinghai returned to China in 1935, and Guangzhou fell into enemy hands in 1938. Wuhan, the place where Xian Xinghai stayed during that time, also was taken over. After these incidences, Xian Xinghai began to participate in some activities. *Ding Ngang Soeng* was completed in 1936, and Xian Xinghai spread the spirit that was embodied in the song title to others, especially to those who were oppressed or in *danger*. These people could only go forwards, otherwise they would die. The term "*ding ngang soeng*" was employed to recruit soldiers. The embedded spirit is indeed the common spirit of the people in the whole Lingnan area. Throughout the development of Lingnan until the Ming and Qing dynasties, the region experienced a loss of culture as well as other losses. This

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resulted in a repressed resistance. Xian Xinghai could only use such a way to make a resistance. In the process of resistance in this context, Xian Xinghai reflected and created the image of unity and resistance. Even though his song belongs to a particular era and the spirit of a specific group of people, it actually reflects the common fate of humanity as humans have to face many problems in order to survive. This song was very popular. Some people who did not know the Cantonese dialect could even sing it. It was considered a representation of ethnicity.

*Yellow River Cantata* was even more popular. Xian Xinghai was regarded as “the trumpeter of Yellow River”, “the spirit of Yellow River”, and “the soul of Yellow River”. This brings up other questions. How does *Yellow River Cantata* reflect the spirit of a particular era? How does it reflect the spirit of Chinese people? How does our culture influence other people and even reflect the inherent characteristics of our ethnicity? These questions do not simply affect Guangdong locals, but they also affect the world. This leads to many problems. I think that *Yellow River Cantata* does not only present a musical sound. It also presents the ‘sound’ of the Yellow River, and this is the sound of a people and an era. *Yellow River Cantata* is the same as *Ding Ngang Soeng* in that they both reflect the interactions and endurance of people. Even though we do not belong to the era of *Ding Ngang Soeng*, we can still share in its sentiments when we listen to it today as it has transcended its historical context and all other things. It reflects the common fate and struggle of humans. *Yellow River Cantata* does not only represent an era, it is also a manifestation of Chinese culture. In my studies, I have discovered that Xian Xinghai’s music actually has a close relationship with the symbolism of water. This symbolism is a lofty and grand concept for Chinese people. People have said that “the wise love water and the benevolent love mountains”, and Confucius also said that “water has five inherent characters”, which include benevolence, righteousness, and courage. This spirit is the manifestation of water. The Yellow River represents the spirit and the power of water. Throughout the process of composition, Xian Xinghai interpreted such spirit and power. He is a humble man, and he presents a great deal of endurance in *Yellow River Cantata*. In fact, an artist is always linked with their artistic works.

The impression of Cantonese opera is another issue. Currently, there are many difficulties in theater. If Cantonese opera only belongs to an art that requires declaration to the government in mainland China, then it is over. This would be the equivalent of the government giving us only money to remedy a severe illness. This is very awful. It would be awful if we were just satisfied with making sure that Cantonese opera does not die but were not willing to make further developments for the genre. We should endeavor to develop Cantonese opera and lead it towards a better direction so that the genre can maintain its value and not deteriorate.

The first issue regarding development is how a script should be composed. The second issue is how to locate Cantonese opera in today’s world. My opinion is that we should raise the artistic status of Cantonese opera to a higher level; treating it as high art. Anyone can disagree with this idea. I am only voicing my thoughts at this moment.

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Urban Cantonese opera (城市粵劇) has already become the mainstream. While Cantonese opera has its own status and market, urban Cantonese opera has become an increasingly recognized art form. Moreover, even though Cantonese opera is a folk tradition, this does not mean that it cannot be something elegant. We may contrast folk art with elegant art, but such contrast is indeed based on an unfair division. For example, I consider ritual Cantonese opera performance to be elegant because the performance involves many esoteric religious questions that are not understood by ordinary people. This is about ideas. On the other hand, the texts and musical vocalization of Cantonese opera are very delicate. When we study these elements, we have already entered into the academic arena. It would be a disgrace if we treat Cantonese opera as an inelegant art. In addition, just as our museums have to maintain an elegant image, and we have to transform Cantonese opera into an elegant art form when we are seeking for innovation and change during its development. In the current situation, we can notice that many art forms are treated as high art. *Kabuki* (歌舞伎), originally an art for common people, is one of the examples. If we are discussing various art forms, it would seem incongruous to say that *Kunqu* is elegant but Cantonese opera is not. Why would *Kunqu* be elegant but not Cantonese opera? *Kabuki* is originally for common people, and yet it is a national treasure. Why can't Cantonese opera? If we are confident about our culture, we can also make Cantonese opera elegant. If we define it as an elegant art, the whole representation of the genre would change. If we just define it as an art for the grassroots, then we have already discredited ourselves.

The combination of modern art and the museum mode of preservation is also an issue. For example, the performance of *Guangfu Huacai* (《廣府華彩》) makes use of modern performance formats that includes incorporation methods. It is a lively and funny performance. The dialogue is interesting and hilarious. I find this style of performance to be quite nice. If we can treat happiness as a culture or a phenomenon, then our society can treat its culture as a treasure. That would be our real spring. Thank you!

Dr. Tai Suk Yan:

Hello everyone! My topic today is the creativity of new Cantonese opera scripts during the 1950s. This topic was my area of research for my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation. My research was mainly about Cantonese opera scripts, such as the creativity of Cantonese opera scripts in Hong Kong. Today's topic will focus on studying several Cantonese operas, including the classics composed by Tang Disheng (唐滌生) during the 1950s and the scripts of some Cantonese operas that are now frequently performed. Actually, Mr. Tang Disheng composed and adapted more than 440 scripts. For today's presentation, I have only chosen the classic pieces that he composed during the 1950s and I will analyze the creativity related to the use of materials and the music that has been demonstrated in the content. The following are the Cantonese operas that I have chosen: some are from the early 1950s performed by Chan Kam Tong (陳錦棠) and Fong Yim Fen (芳艷芬), some are from the mid-1950s, some are performed by the Sin Fung Ming Opera Troupe (仙鳳鳴劇團), and some are from the program of the Lai Sing Opera Troupe (麗聲劇團). Now I would like to quickly show everyone the selected materials. Why have I only focused

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on these twenty-five operas? It is because the Chinese University of Hong Kong has a collection of more than a thousand Cantonese opera scripts, but their access is limited. Therefore, I have only chosen some of the available scripts from that collection for my study. As for the area of study, it will mainly be to do with the content of the scripts. The reason why I have chosen these twenty-five scripts is because they are frequently performed. We can still see the effects of its theatrical representation on location as we study these scripts.

From these twenty-five operas, we can derive several key creative intentions. Why are the creative intentions categorized in such a way? It is because Tang Disheng had published some of his own analyses in the newspapers. Tang Disheng explained the reasons for composing operas such as *Goddess from Ninth Heaven* (《九天玄女》) and *The Purple Hairpin* (《紫釵記》). His explanations also appear in the pamphlets of the Sin Fung Ming Cantonese Opera Troupe. Therefore, I studied these materials and categorized Tang Disheng's intentions for composing the twenty-five operas that I selected. These intentions include Tang Disheng's personal interest in certain topics, suggestions from "Sister Sin" (Pak Suet Sin 白雪仙) and "Sister Fong" (Fong Yim Fen 芳艷芬), as well as suggestions from Cantonese opera lovers, audiences, good friends, and other people. They are all illustrated in the pamphlets. Among the twenty-five operas, eleven of them belong to the classical category and two of them are interpretations of historical stories. *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢), *Mistake at the Flower Festival* (《花田八喜》), and *The Legend of the White Snake* (《白蛇傳》) are his early works. Tang Disheng adapted contemporary novels, such as Lu Xun's 魯迅 *Cheng Dasao* (《程大嫂》), as well as works from other theatrical genres. He even adapted Hollywood movies, but he had also composed some original works. When I was studying for my master's and doctoral degrees, my research focused on the analysis of the music in Tang Disheng's works. My analysis includes the analysis of some of his theme songs. The theme song was a trendy feature in Cantonese opera during the 1950s. My study of the twenty-five operas shows that more than ninety percent of these works feature a theme song in the final episode. Most of them are musical dialogues between the *sang* and *dan* that involve more than two kinds of musical structures, such as *banqiang* (板腔), *qupai* (曲牌), and *shuochang* (or narrative songs 說唱). Singing is emphasized in these songs. Strictly speaking, the definition of a theme song is: a song that focuses on singing, in which it includes musical dialogues between *sang* and *dan* for the expression of emotions.

On the other hand, Tang Disheng's creativity is reflected in the *banqiang* (板腔) musical expressions. Here, I have chosen a ten-character phrase in *fanxian zhongban* (反線中板) as an example (Powerpoint slide), to demonstrate how the lyrics are coordinated according to the musical rhythms and how the poetic lyrics are interpreted. The illustrated lyrics show a even-character-phrase-plus-five-character-phrase structure, which is actually a ten-character phrase in *faansin jungbaan*. This creativity is manifested in the scripts of the later period of Sin Fung Ming. It is also found in the scripts of the earlier period, but less frequently so. The following example is from *The Reincarnation of Lady Plum Blossom*, which also has a seven-character-phrase-

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plus-five-character-phrase structure. I initially planned to play an audio recording of this excerpt, but I have to skip it this time because of today's time constraint. I will share this with everyone later if there is a chance. For *The Reincarnation of Lady Plum Blossom*, a CD recording is currently available.

Next is the analysis of *qupai* (or tune曲牌). *Qupai* includes Cantonese music, ancient tunes, *xiaodiao*, folk songs, and popular songs. In Tang Disheng's Cantonese operas, there are various types of *qupai*. For example, *A Pedestal of Rouge Fragrance* (《一枝紅艷露凝香》), *The Story of the Lute* (《琵琶記》), and *Sigui Xiangsi* (《四季相思》) all employ Mandarin popular songs. This usage is due to the fact that Cantopop was yet to exist during the 1950s. Cantopop emerged as television dramas appeared. Most of the audiences of the 1950s found Mandarin popular songs to be acceptable, and such popular songs were widespread. Therefore, Mandarin popular songs were adapted as a part of Cantonese opera. Let us now listen to the popular song in *Sigui Xiangsi*. (play the audio recording)

Now, everyone can feel that the Mandarin popular song had been completely transformed into Cantonese style music. By studying the lyrics, we can notice that the lyrics are composed in a way that the musical tones follow the linguistic tones. This demonstrates how Tang Disheng had composed the lyrics in a way so that the music was in a Cantonese style and thus it became suitable for interpretation in Cantonese opera.

Another creative aspect of Tang Disheng's scripts is its completeness and its musical independence. The first song that I would like to introduce is *Sisi Lei* (or *Trace of Tears*絲絲淚). It is a *siukuk* written by Tang Disheng for *Cheng Dasao*. The lyrics of *Sisi Lei* was written before the music was composed. As clearly indicated in many scripts, this song was a new composition. There is also a remark for this song, i.e., "please ask the old masters (such as Wang Yuet Sang 王粵生)". This proves that the lyrics were composed before the music; Wang Yuet Sang composed the music after the lyrics was completed. There may be some other songs for which the music had been composed before the lyrics were written. It is possible that Tang Disheng collaborated with some musicians to write the lyrics of these songs. *Sisi Lei* belongs to the first type that I just mentioned. It was composed in 1954 for *Cheng Dasao* and the leading characters were performed by Man Chin Sui (文千歲) and Fong Yim Fen (芳艷芬). The singing passage in the last episode of this Cantonese opera narrates how *Cheng Dasao* misses her dead son. *Sisi Lei* was originally a part of the theme song sung in the ritual scene. This song became popular, and it was reused in other scripts. The title *Sisi Lei* was given to the song ever since it was first reused. Through analysis, we can observe that the song is basically in the *yifan* mode (乙反). This matches with the theme of the song, as this song is sung to express how *Cheng Dasao* misses her son. I am not going to illustrate the structure of this song in detail. There are other famous songs in Tang Disheng's scripts, but I am going to skip the discussion of these songs because of today's time limit.

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The following is a *siukuk* from *The Reincarnation of Lady Plum Blossom*. This *siukuk* was a newly-composed piece by Zhu Yi (朱毅) that was featured in the forth episode of the opera. It was sung by Pak Suet Sin (白雪仙). The music of this song was composed in accordance to the lyrics. The song is comparatively short and simple, but it is still very creative. It is because the composition process was similar to that of the Western mode of composition. Within the song, there are some leading instruments. We can also sense the use of tonal harmonies which was a common feature of newly-composed *siukuk* at that time. This distinguishes the song from traditional Cantonese operatic singing, as we can notice a change in the musical concepts of *qupai* and “aria types” from what we have heard.

To conclude, I would like to focus on the change of ideas on creativity during the 1950s. Gone back to the changes during the 1950s, Tang Disheng made many reformations in terms of themes and music. We also notice that the reduction of the number of scripts that he produced corresponded with the maturity of his scripts. He composed forty-one scripts in 1951, and he wrote only seven scripts in 1957. For his creative ideas, he gave up on using the traditional mode of Cantonese opera scriptwriting, and instead borrowed elements from some fresh classical works. For his performance practice, he employed Chinese ancient tunes and *paizi* tunes as well as composed some new *qupai*. This brought innovation to the musical structure of Cantonese opera. Why did he change his idea of creativity in his performance practice? Actually, this was due to the influence of many seniors and important figures. Within the political culture of Hong Kong at that time, there was creative freedom, and thus Tang Disheng composed many new and innovative scripts that are still in circulation today.

Lastly, we can experience the exchange of Chinese and Western cultures in the Cantonese opera scripts composed by Tang Disheng. There are the traditional features of Cantonese opera as well as the modern and newly-composed *siukuk*. Thank you.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

In the following session, we would like to invite each respondent to express their opinions on this afternoon’s topic. First, Ms. Lo Wan Yin.

Ms. Lo Wan Yin:

After listening to the speeches made by the two speakers, I believe that everyone has learned a lot. My involvement in Cantonese opera is mainly to do with the teaching of Cantonese operatic singing and not performance. Even so, I still insist on teaching in Yau Ma Tei. I had discussed with a group of younger students about the topic that was discussed this afternoon. They have a lot of opinions on today’s Cantonese opera scripts. Let me now talk about that. I am not sure how everyone feels about this.

First, I asked this group of students about their motivations to buy a ticket for a Cantonese opera performance. Actually, from their point of view, there are many possibilities. Some would say: “I would first read the script. If I like watching a martial scene, then I would pay attention to the headings of the script and see whether there would be many martial scenes in the plot.” To him (or her), an opera that is composed of purely civil scenes would make him fall asleep. It is because he likes to watch martial

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scenes. This does not mean that he does not like that script or the script of a particular writer. Some newer students who have just begun studying Cantonese operatic singing with me do not know how to appreciate a Cantonese opera. They would consider today's Cantonese operas to be too lengthy. They prefer the performances of shorter scripts.

My response is that this is his personal preference. I think that the source of income in the past was ritual performance. I do not know if Ms. Tang would agree with that. I am sorry that I am not a professional *actor-singer*. Actually, there is a principle in ritual opera performance is that a performance would not be paid if it performs for less than four hours. Therefore, the scriptwriter has to satisfy the demands of village audiences. The script has to be long enough. This is what I have heard from the responses of a Cantonese opera veteran when I was attending a ritual opera performance. Since that performance was held on the outlying islands, I would normally get on a ferry once the performance was over. I watched that performance for four hours, and finally there was no ferry available after the performance. The veteran said, "I have no other choice, Ms. Lo. If the troupe did not perform for four hours, we would not get paid." I shared his response with my students. A ritual performance would take at least four hours, but it would not be possible for it to be performed in a theater because of its length. Since the scriptwriters lack money, they have to shorten their compositions. Many audiences would become followers of performances of shortened scripts. A Cantonese opera performance supposedly takes at least four hours, but it has now been shortened to three hours as it is performed at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. A ticket for such a performance would cost several hundred dollars nowadays, and some people would also be dissatisfied with the shortened performance. They would think that they are being cheated. Such a situation exists. These matters correspond with the difficulties encountered by today's scriptwriters, and many people may not know these difficulties. I got a lot of information from my students before I came here. These students belong to a younger generation, and from them I have learned about their demands, how they choose a performance to watch, and whether all these things are related to creativity.

In fact, scriptwriting has always maintained a changeable relationship with its concurrent context. For example, people of the past liked to read poetry; therefore, when a writer such as Tang Disheng composed a script, he would make delicate use of the language so as to entertain his audiences' taste. As scriptwriting enters another era, people no longer learn about poetry, and they are not able to appreciate Cantonese operas that involve the use of poetry. The new scripts have to be written in modern standard Chinese so that they would be more acceptable to the audience and the audience can become more quickly involved in the performances of these new scripts. Moreover, beginners in Cantonese operatic singing, such as some of my students, are yet to be able to appreciate Cantonese opera. These people would not know how to appreciate and what singing on stage is about because there are no subtitles. They can only appreciate the acrobatics because there is a display of martial arts and the *actor-singers* on stage are deeply involved in the fighting scene. This also causes some problems for the creativity of a script. The audience has to be understanding when

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it comes to the change of an era. In the past, like during the era of Sin Fung Ming, it was easier for a playwright to write a script because the whole crew was fixed. The roles were written for Yam Kim Fai (任劍輝), Pak Suet Sin (白雪仙), “Uncle Bo” (Leung Sing Bo 梁醒波), and Lan Chi Pat (靚次伯). The playwright could write a script based on the strength of these Cantonese opera veterans. This is different now. Today, it is possible that a script may be composed before a crew is formed, and the scriptwriter may have no idea as to who would perform his script and when his or her script would be scheduled to perform. This brings an extra element of difficulty for the scriptwriter’s composition. It is more challenging to compose a script today than it was during the time of Tang Disheng. The change of an era involves structural changes and the change of *actor-singers*. Today many students have provided me with a lot of information so that I can express their opinions here. Since there are many guests here, I better not waste everyone’s time. Let me now finish on this point.

Ms. Tang Mei Ling:

I have heard plenty of information on Cantonese opera. Actually, based on my experience of Cantonese opera, I am a bit nervous to talk about the creativity of new Cantonese opera scripts. I am a Cantonese opera *actor-singer*, and the organizer has invited me here to speak because I have been performing new Cantonese operas in the last two years. Let us first go into the issue of the length of a Cantonese opera that was previously mentioned. Recently, I have been performing in some special performances for students that have been organized by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Education Bureau. This year, I am responsible for performing *The Summer Snow* (《六月雪》). The script of *The Summer Snow* was composed by Tang Disheng, and a regular performance of this script takes around three and a half to four hours. Therefore, for the special performance, we condensed the performance to an hour and forty-five minutes and the episodes were performed without any breaks in between. For me, this special performance was more tiring than the regular performances because there were no breaks. There is no time to sit because you need to change costumes and hurry for the next act. This performance still has to present important plots such as the reason for drinking the sheep stomach soup for one of the characters. For the singing parts, we had to shorten it. For example, the performance included the ten essential musical excerpts but eliminated some *banghuang* and other “aria types”. An original twenty-minute musical excerpt was shortened to twelve minutes, but it still included the complete content. Initially, the performance included some important musical excerpts sung by huadan, but it was eliminated in the end after considering the main objective of demonstrating the plot. Based on my observation, students were very engaged as they watched this performance. *The Summer Snow* belongs to the category of “worn-out-costumes dramas” that are seldom performed in theaters. Its script is good, but it does not perform well at the box office. When regular audiences watch such these “worn-out-costumes drama” (「爛衫戲」), there are no beautiful costumes for them to admire. Yet, if they are willing to buy a ticket for such a performance, then it means that the script is good. From the perspective of *actor-singers*, *The Summer Snow* is an opera that offers each role special characteristics and includes many songs. Nevertheless, it is not commercially successful despite how good it is. This then responds to the issue that I had just mentioned about the

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length of a performance: condensing a performance. New audiences cannot withstand long Cantonese operas. Yet, if *The Summer Snow* is performed in a theater, it cannot perform for only an hour and forty-five minutes with just some tuneful music, a part of the plots, and some percussion excerpts. Therefore, I hope that it can be performed for three hours and fifteen minutes in order to present a more complete version of the script.

I have already performed three to four new scripts this year. I do not deliberately seek to perform new scripts. In the past, some friends from the media would often ask, “You have already performed other people’s Cantonese operas for many years. Why don’t you perform new scripts?” I answered, “How can I perform the new ones if I have not mastered the old ones?” On the other hand, writing a Cantonese opera script is already difficult enough, let alone finding a writer to compose a Cantonese opera script. “Uncle Tak” (Mr. Yip Shiu Tak 葉紹德) promised to write one for me when he was alive, but unfortunately his health condition did not allow him to do so. The new scripts that I have performed in the last two years were introduced to me by chance. The writer is originally from Hong Kong, but he had migrated to Singapore. He has some background in literature, and he has knowledge of Cantonese operatic singing. He is Mr. Cheung Chak-ming (張澤明). In the coming two weeks in May, I am going to perform his new opera *Li Qingzhao* (《李清照》). I got to know Mr. Cheung in person by chance. Sometime ago, he had sent me his scripts to read, but I did not have time to perform them. Two years after that, I sang his songs by chance, and I found the songs to be very smooth. He then sent me his scripts again. Since I lack the knowledge to judge the quality of the scripts, I sent these scripts to some senior *actor-singers* and musicians. They thought that these scripts were acceptable and that these scripts were no worse than those composed by the new writers in Hong Kong. They found the text to be relatively fluent, and they said that the composition of *banghuang* and *siukuk* was quite good. Nevertheless, Mr. Zhang is an amateur writer and he had migrated to Singapore for many years. He is not familiar with the performance practices of Cantonese opera troupes in Hong Kong, such as the instructions for an *actor-singer* to enter and leave the stage and that for drinking tea. His writing style is highly cinematic. It is like controlling a camera moving to the left or to the right. This had to be further modified.

Last year, when I first performed his script, he mentioned that he liked the story of *The Three Kingdoms* very much. Therefore, he wrote the story *The Legend of Xiaoqiao* (《小喬傳》) for me. He thinks that I am like a heroine. He said, “I wrote *The Legend of Xiaoqiao* for you.” And I tried my best to take a look at it, since I did not know when it might be performed. When it was finally performed, he changed the title to *Jiandan Qinxin Jinguoqing* (《劍膽琴心中國情》). The story is about *The Three Kingdoms*. The idea of this story is to present the incidences and experiences of Xiaoqiao. Since Mr. Cheung is too familiar with the story of *The Three Kingdoms*, and he is thus bound by this familiarity. When audiences were watching the performance, they expected to see something they could find in usual performance. Yet, they did not see what they expected. On the other hand, Mr. Cheung felt despondent during the

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scriptwriting process as well as after the first performance. The performance was not what he had imagined it to be. This was a process of adjustment. As the seniors say, “refining a drama takes ten years”. The scripts written by Mr. Tang Disheng that have survived to this day are not the original versions either. The first version might have taken six hours, and it was later condensed to four hours, and then later to three and a half hours. There have been adaptations or condensed versions of various Cantonese operas. Nevertheless, this process has become uncommon in Hong Kong because of the small number of new Cantonese operas. On the night after the first performance of *Jiandan Qinxin Jinguoqing*, there was a meeting to immediately remedy the problems of the whole performance. The performance became a lot smoother on the second day. When would there be an opportunity for the third performance? Maybe some years later.

I know this new playwright, and I hope that I can bring him to Hong Kong and introduce him to colleagues and audiences in Hong Kong. Not only do I need this playwright, I feel that many audiences desire new works. I have this passion, but I find that performing new works is tough after my experiences from last year. My performance experience is limited. I am only able to detect if my singing and speech delivery needs work, but I do not know how to improve it. Fortunately, there are many Cantonese opera instrumentalists and renowned *actor-singers* around me. They think that this playwright is humble and willing to accept their opinions. These people have helped a lot. The new work is thus a collaborative piece. This year, we are going to perform *Li Qingzhao* on May 15. This script was actually written by the playwright more than a decade ago. He has a very strong impression of the historical figure Li Qingzhao. Writing is a leisure activity for this playwright. Now, there is an opportunity as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has provided assistance to stage a performance of this work. As the piece had been completed more than ten years prior, there have been ten versions of the script in total since the script was sent to us half a year ago. Whenever an *actor-singer* receives a script, we hope to do our best at every rehearsal. Of course, in Cantonese opera we never know what problems we might encounter until we are due to perform. There is always something unexpected and we have to keep making modifications. Today’s version is a collaborative piece. The playwright composed the first version, and then there were newer versions that included additions from the musical designer and the director. We invited Ng Chin Fung (吳仟峰) to be the director and he helped us to form the working group. Also, we invited some senior *actor-singers*, including Yau Sing Po (尤聲普), Yuen Siu Fai (阮兆輝), and Yam Bing Yi (任冰兒) to join the performance. I felt that we needed such a working group, especially with the inclusion of these senior *actor-singers*. The director can illuminate the incomplete or unvarnished parts of the script and thus enhance the script. So, after working on the new script last year, I find that performing a new work is actually not that tough as before. I discuss with other people about the performance because I am responsible for introducing this new playwright to the *actor-singers*. I hoped that I could reduce their burden, if any. We tried to improve the singing excerpts that were not fluent enough, but my ability is limited. I once thought of giving up because I found the whole thing to be too much hard work that did not necessarily

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produce good results. Yet, as I had a chance to do the same thing again this year, I found that I had learned a lot from performing this new work even though it was tough. We had started from ground zero, but I now know how to manage different parts of the script by repositioning, simplifying, expanding, or truncating the plot. I learned a lot from that. Thanks to the working group that has been established, things will go more smoothly for my performance of another new work this year. Everyone in the group knows that they are willing to accept opinions from the other members of the group, and everyone is willing to provide their opinions. This makes things go more smoothly. I am not sure about the results of the performance. I just hope that it would be a good continuation of the previous effort.

Mr. Wong Chi Fai:

Hello everyone! Before I talk about Cantonese opera, I have to say that I study literature and I am not very familiar with musical issues. Yet, I do watch Cantonese opera. I will try to analyze the creativity of Cantonese opera scripts from a literary perspective.

The topic of this session is the creativity of Cantonese opera scripts. The emphasis is the aspect of creativity, and I would look into the situation of the frequently performed Cantonese operas in Hong Kong today. I do not watch all the Cantonese opera performances that are available. I live in Sai Kung. Whenever it is the birthday of, I would go to the *Mazu* Temple at Hebe Haven to watch a ritual Cantonese opera performance. I just stay for a while for those performances. Yet, strangely, as I have been attending these performances for more than ten years, I notice that the ritual performances have been performing the same repertoires, which are usually the popular operas. I understand that this trend has been led by the market. As Ms. Tang said, *The Summer Snow* is actually very famous, but it is not necessarily popular when it is performed on stage because audiences may not find it to be acceptable. I believe this is a problem to do with market demand. Yet, if we want to talk about creativity and hope to continue the transmission of Cantonese opera, we must make certain modifications. I think that this requires the determination to go against the market. We often talk about Tang Disheng when we look back at history. His scripts are still promoted today. Except for the celebrity effect that was created by his choice of *actor-singers*, regular audiences are mostly uninterested in watching his scripts that were not written for Pak Suet Sin and Yam Kim Fai. I am a fan of Siu Ming Sing (also known as Tang Man Mei, 小明星), but I seldom hear people talk about her in Hong Kong. Therefore, when I noticed *The Biography of Siu Ming Sing* composed by Mr. To Kwok Wai (杜國威) it caused me to think: if we have been developing Cantonese opera based on audience tastes or market demand only, then the past *Jianghu Shibaben* (「江湖十八本」) would later just become “*Jianghu Sanshiben*” (「江湖三十本」) which would include most of the works by Tang Disheng. We can say that these popular Cantonese operas can help with the inheritance of Cantonese opera, but it also limits the development of the genre. I think this is an issue that is worth reconsidering for those who are involved in Cantonese opera.

What is the tradition of Cantonese opera? I am fortunate to have been born at the time when long Cantonese opera films still existed. I remember that I read *Zheng Bo Conquered Gong Shu Duan at Yan* (〈鄭伯克段於鄆〉) from *Zuo Zhuan* (《左傳》) when I was a college student. This excerpt told of how Zheng Bo treated his relationship with his brother and his mother's bad behavior. I was not yet ten years old when I had first read the dialogue of the theatrical version of this excerpt and I remembered the saying “never meet in the hell”. I only remember two people who

Mr. Wong Chi Fai:  
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were performing in that theatrical version, Tang Pik Wan (鄧碧雲) who travestied as Zheng Bo and Tam Lan Hing (譚蘭卿) who acted as the acrimonious mother. I still remember the scene that depicted the final plot and led to the occasion of “never meet in the hell” where the mother meets the son again. I did not know that this theatrical version is originally from *Zuo Zhuan* until I was studying at college. If Cantonese opera is a traditional Chinese regional opera, it should have a strong relationship with history. If it is isolated from history, what would be its value? The genre would only be able to maintain its value and gain the recognition of the audience by relying on innovation if it was isolated from history. Otherwise, audiences would neglect the genre and the effort made to create new scripts would be wasted. After all, does the market value of Cantonese opera relate to its literary and historical nature? If so, should we develop the genre in such a direction?

I also notice that the episode *Leaving the State and Surrender* (〈去國歸降〉) in *The Last Emperor of Southern Tang* (《李後主》) includes a quotation from Li Yu's (李煜) *Po Zhen Zi. Po Zhen Zi* (破陣子) is a famous *ci* (詞). When I was doing a dictation in school, I had already memorized that *ci* by heart. I knew how to sing it out loud at a very early age. If we analyze the educational value of Cantonese opera on a sophisticated level, I think that the literary and historical nature of Cantonese opera can help the young generations with learning about Chinese culture. After today's educational reform on the subject of Chinese culture, Chinese literature is no longer a core subject. We can demand for the demonstration of a familiarity with Chinese poetry in the development of Cantonese opera, including the ability to compose music which follows the vocal text. It is just as what Dr. Tai had just mentioned and Ms. Tang's familiarity with *Li Qingzhao* is an example. Similar to Li Yu, *Li Qingzhao* has composed more than forty *ci*. Why do we not make use of the intricate literature which exists in Cantonese opera? Actually, every *ci* has a story behind it. If the quality of a playwright is good, he or she can develop a good story from a *ci*. I think that compositional creativity should have a strong relationship with culture and tradition, so that the quality of script can be enhanced.

The surviving works of Tang Disheng have been known for the quality of its writing. They have survived for several decades, and they will possibly survive for hundreds of years. This implies that audiences are in demand of high quality scripts. Can we achieve such these standards in today's environment? If not, maybe we can learn from ancient literature as we write new scripts. I think that this is a possible direction.

In addition, from a book written by Prof. Chan Sau Yan (陳守仁) that I had just read, he mentioned that according to the statistics, two-thirds of Cantonese opera performances during the 1980s were ritual performances. It is really a pity that there are no ritual performance operas that carry a festive theme even when the performances are held during the birthdays of *Mazu* and *Che Kung*. Very recently, I read from the newspaper about *Guanshiyin* (《觀世音》), a Cantonese opera performed by Ms. Chan Ho Kau (陳好逴). I think that it is based on a new script. Buddhism and Taoism are amongst the major traditional religions in Hong Kong that constitute the general religious atmosphere of the society. Why shouldn't we make more of an effort to develop Cantonese opera in this area? We can perform this kind of Cantonese opera during the related festivals and build a strong relationship between Cantonese opera and the festivals. I think we can strengthen these traditional aspects in the development of Cantonese opera.

Mr. Wong Chi Fai:  
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On the other hand, this could either be an innovation or a kind of destruction. Some years ago, I noticed that Mr. To Kwok Wai composed some theatrical productions about Cantonese opera. I think that Cantonese opera can learn from this kind of production. I do not know if these are Cantonese opera-like modern theaters or theatricalized Cantonese operas. I observed that *A Sentimental Journey* (《劍雪浮生》), *The Mad Phoenix* (《南海十三郎》), and *Hu Du Men* (《虎道門》) all include a strong Cantonese opera element. Why can't we strengthen this aspect of Cantonese opera so as to make Cantonese opera acceptable to this new generation that has yet to accept it? We can first expand the audience group and then add more performances of Cantonese operas. I do not know if this is destruction or innovation, but I think that this attempt is worthy.

Finally, what we regard as Cantonese opera is in fact a regional opera. The ci poetry of the Chu state (楚) was written and read in the Chu language. It would not be the poetry of the Chu state if it did not contain elements of the Chu language. For Cantonese opera, if it does not contain Cantonese elements, then I think it would not be Cantonese opera anymore. I often watch the Chinese opera television programs that are broadcasted by the Southern Television Guangdong, and I notice that their performances of Cantonese opera have diluted the Cantonese dialect element. For example, these performances include some speech styles that have been borrowed from Northern dialects. These speech styles do not exist in the Cantonese dialect. I believe that such language use has been used to create a more elegant representation. This does not mean that the idiomatic Cantonese dialect is not elegant enough. In ancient texts, the Cantonese dialect occupied a lofty and elegant position. But now, the Northern dialects are of mainstream, and the Cantonese dialect has become a regional dialect. In terms of scriptwriting, we must firmly maintain the Cantonese elements in addition to relating the practice to literature and learning from modern theater.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, Mr. Wong. There were a lot of exciting viewpoints that were raised. Does anyone want to make a response or pose a question?

Ms. Tang Mei Ling:

I would like to respond to several questions. This first one is to do with the market. Very often, ritual Cantonese opera performances (神功戲) involve the same set of repertoire. It is because the main concept of the ritual performance is to do with its cheerfulness and excitement. On the other hand, with performing new Cantonese operas, my experience from performing *Li Qingzhao* is that this opera can be scheduled to perform for three days but I only scheduled for two because we, both the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and myself, were not confident enough to schedule a performance for the third day as we worried about the lack of audiences.

Why have many excellent Cantonese operas from the past been preserved? In addition to the renowned works of Mr. Tang Disheng, some Cantonese operas of Tai Lung Fung opera troupe (大龍鳳劇團) and Chung Sun Sing opera troupe (頌新聲劇團) have been preserved. For the reasons behind this, "Brother Sing" (Lam Kar Sing 林家聲) once stated, "I have to fully familiarize myself with a new work after performing it at least eight or ten times. As I keep performing the same work, I also modify the work. With or without audiences, I have to perform my best." This tells of how "Brother Sing" produced excellent work and why his successors still perform his works to this day. Currently, we do not have the opportunity, market, and gut. Taking my case as an example, it is organized by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, but it lacks publicity and promotion. The performance of *Li Qingzhao* seeks to attract the elderly

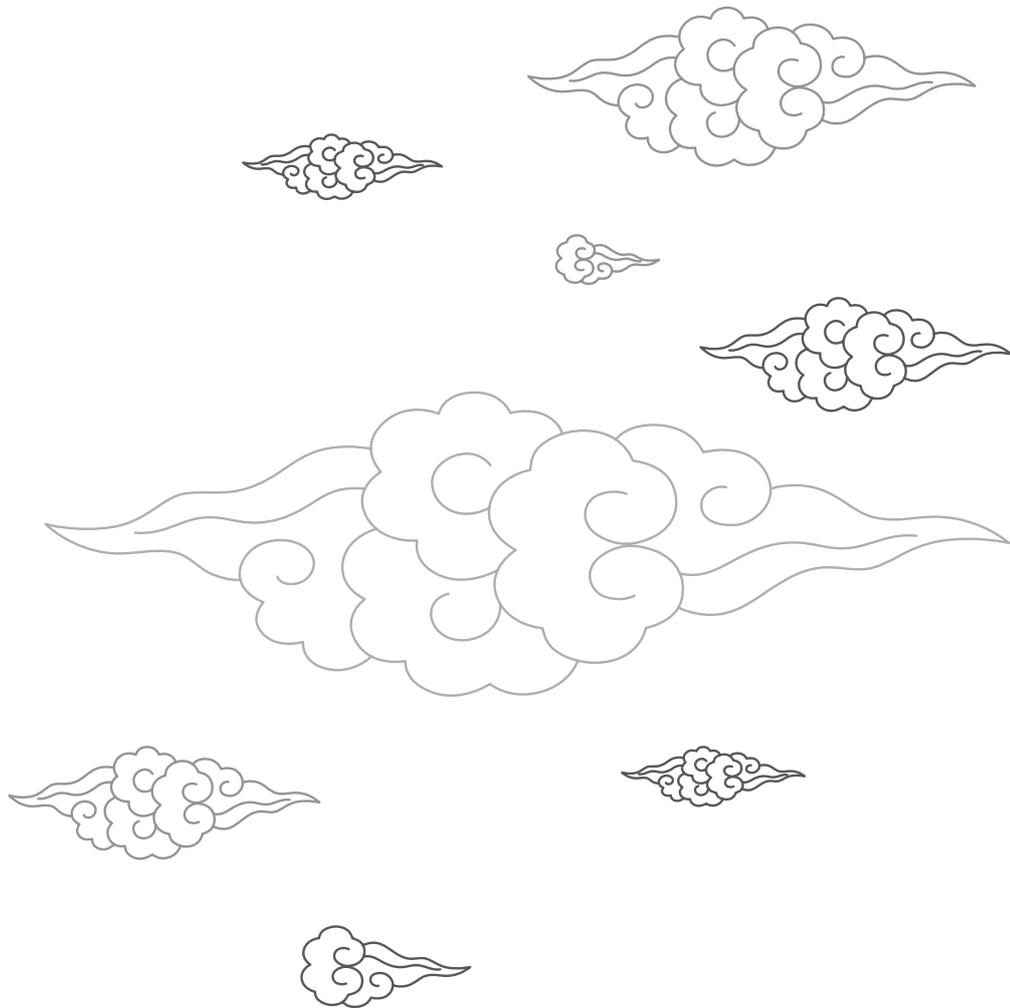
Ms. Tang Mei Ling:  
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and regular audiences as well as professionals in the cultural field. Can we focus on the latter when we promote the performance? The promotion began five weeks before the performance, but there were no more leaflets available in the final two weeks. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department overlooked the issue of distributing leaflets. It just offered me some money to handle this without any follow-up. This is a waste of resources.

This script was given a special grant for new scripts by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council as well. Yet, once the council noticed that we had already received other funding, the Council reduced their sponsorship. Even if I wanted to improve the conditions of the performance, I was not able to do so. We invited master Ng Chin Fung to direct the opera for us. Why have such few people written about *Li Qingzhao*? I heard that “Sister Sin” ( Pak Suet Sin 白雪仙 ) wanted to perform as *Li Qingzhao*, but there have been no others who have mentioned this desire to portray *Li Qingzhao* since. It is difficult to both write about and act as *Li Qingzhao*; therefore, the plan to write about *Li Qingzhao* was postponed. There are very few writings on *Li Qingzhao* in other genres, and successful examples are uncommon. In this opera production, Ng Chin Fung provided many opinions throughout the production process and during the rehearsals. He felt that the script was well written, and he intended to transplant this script to Peking opera. If this script is brought back to Mainland China to perform, the effect of the production there should be much better because the stage setting and the overall musical design would be more coordinated. There is a problem with Hong Kong’s access to resources. I think that there should be further improvement so that these Cantonese opera performances would be as organized as modern theatrical dramas. This would help to attract new audiences. New audiences would pay attention to the story as well as the stage design. Unfortunately, common Cantonese opera troupes cannot accomplish this. This is an obstacle in the promotion of new productions.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you! Maybe I should make a small conclusion here. The symposium is almost finished for today. I have listened to speeches made by many speakers. Actually, Cantonese opera scripts should have more room for development. It seems that the lack of new playwrights and new plays being written may be caused by the performance creativity of *actor-singers* or perhaps by the overwhelming influence of Tang Disheng on contemporary scriptwriting. If there are more new scripts written for *actor-singers*, they might be liberated from the many restrictions in performing styles of these scripts from early years. As such, I think tomorrow’s topic on inheritance or transmission is very important: how to educate and foster a new *actor-singer* and also playwright? We especially have more concern on playwright. There are many organizations which are doing the work of fostering new blood, but that seems a lesser effort spent on playwrighting. It’d be better for the whole industry if more so would be done.





## Session 4



# *The Creativity of Cantonese Operatic Music*

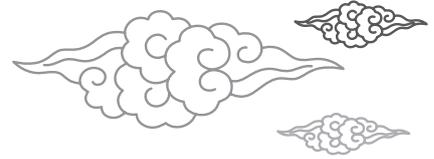


**Speakers :**

Prof. Bell Yung, Mr. Yuen Siu Fai

**Respondents:**

Mr. Mak Wai Man, Mr. Wong Sing Kwan, Dr. Lam Wing Cheong





## The Creativity of Cantonese Operatic Music



Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Good morning everyone. Welcome to the International Symposium on the Creativity in Cantonese Opera. Today is the second day and also the last day of the symposium. There will be a section in the morning and another one in the afternoon, followed by a conclusion section at the end of today's program. Some of the participants may have just arrived today, so let me first briefly introduce the format of this symposium. In this symposium, each section includes at least two presenters. Each of the presenters will deliver a presentation for around twenty minutes. There are also three to four respondents who would be responsible for the responses of the presentations. Of course, other participants can freely express their opinions on the presentations. After the respondents have finished their speeches, everyone can ask questions, give comments and responses. I hope this symposium can be held in a relaxing atmosphere, and everyone would feel as if they were attending a gathering for a friendly chat.

The theme of this symposium is "the creativity of Cantonese opera." Yesterday, we discussed the performance creativity of Cantonese opera, the creativity of Cantonese opera scriptwriting, and the fundamental concepts of creativity in Chinese arts. The title of today's first section is "the creativity of Cantonese operatic music".

Music is of course important in Cantonese opera, as singing is the most prioritized aspect in performance. Different *actor-singers* and veterans have their own unique style of "musical vocalization". Nevertheless, there are some very complicated questions: What can be considered as an individual style? How can one claim to have developed an individual style? These questions are worthy of further reconsideration. On the other hand, in addition to the *actor-singers*, the accompanying musicians play an important role in performance. How can musicians cooperate with *actor-singers*? Can a musician make his or her own musical decisions in order to render the music more creative or special? These issues also interest me in terms of Cantonese opera research studies. In today's discussion, we are not going to incline towards an academic direction. Instead, we would like to hear a variety of comments from Cantonese opera professionals, *actor-singers*, and scholars, so as to generate viewpoints of different perspectives. This is the objective of this symposium.

Prof. Bell Yung:

It is precious to see many professional and avocational experts attending this symposium. Please allow me to first say a few words outside of the topic of today's discussion. I came back to Hong Kong in 1972 to study Cantonese opera and collect research materials for my dissertation. I got to know many experienced *actor-singers* in Cantonese opera and great veteran *actor-singers*, but there were three of them who influenced me the most. The first one is Mr. Kwok Lun (郭麟), "Uncle Lun." I studied



Prof. Bell Yung:  
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*yangqin* with him. Unfortunately, he is no longer alive. The other two are my teachers as well as my friends, because we all are around the same age. The second one is Mr. Mak Wai Man (麥惠文). I am very glad that he is here today. I still remember that I often followed him everywhere. He did not find it troublesome and allowed me to follow him. No matter if he went to the countryside or to the opera theater to perform, I would sit behind him and watch him. I really learned a lot about Cantonese opera, especially about the music, and more specifically about the “musical vocalization” at that time. The third one is Mr. Yuen Siu Fai (阮兆輝), “Brother Fai.” When I first came back to Hong Kong, “Brother Fai” was a very young *actor-singer*. It was around 1972 and 1973. I followed him as well. I observed him and I made recordings of his performances. Later, he performed a Cantonese opera titled *Hongqiao Zengzhu* (《虹橋贈珠》), which became a very important subject in my dissertation and book publication. In the later decades, especially the recent twenty years, we contacted each other more frequently. I once invited “Brother Fai” to teach Cantonese operatic singing when I was teaching at the University of Hong Kong. And later, whenever I returned to Hong Kong, “Brother Fai” would make time in his tight schedule to have lunch with me. I am very grateful for that. This allows me to be in touch with Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. I am very happy to see Mr. Mak Wai Man and Mr. Yuen Siu Fai here today, and therefore I feel that I should mention this to everyone here.

On the other hand, I would like to stress that I am completely an “outsider” when it comes to the research studies of Cantonese opera. This so-called “outsider” has three layers of meaning. First, I am Shanghainese. This already makes me an “outsider”. I bet all of you can notice my Shanghainese accent when I speak. Today, I only pretend to be an authority of Cantonese opera research studies. Second, my major of study was first in the field of science. I spent many years studying physics, and so I observed Cantonese opera with a completely distinctive perspective. When I later began to study music seriously, I studied Western music. That is another aspect of me being an “outsider.” I started playing piano when I was a child, and I studied Western music history and theory when I minored in music during my university education. Nevertheless, I finally found the way that I should devote myself towards — the study of Cantonese opera. Since my viewpoints are originated from the perspective of an “outsider”, I hope all of you could be patient when I share my thoughts on Cantonese opera later. This is the first time that I have shared these thoughts in front of Cantonese opera experts. My previous papers were all presented in English which contributes to the third layer of myself as an “outsider.” I first delivered a lecture on the “musical vocalization” of Cantonese opera in a conference about language studies (or linguistic tones) when I returned to Hong Kong two and a half years ago. As most of the Cantonese opera experts were not at the lecture last time, I would say that today’s presentation should be considered as the real first that I have done on Cantonese opera. I hope I can bring out some ideas that can contribute to some more sophisticated thoughts during the presentation. Please feel free to express your opinions.

The topic of this presentation is the creativity of Cantonese operatic music. This is a very large topic and we actually have been discussing this topic yesterday and today.

Prof. Bell Yung:  
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We need to narrow the topic, otherwise, it would be difficult for us to continue the discussion. Now, I will focus on something in greater detail. Among many “aria types,” *qiziqing* (「七字清」) is the first one that I learned when I started to listen to Cantonese operatic singing, and I find it to be a very special one. Today, I will explain to you my analysis of and viewpoints towards the “rhythmic structure” of *qiziqing*. I will not touch on other musical measures such as *zhengxian* (正線), *fanxian* (反線), *qizi* (七字), *shizi* (十字), or the ending notes (結束音). I will only talk about the “rhythmic structure” of “aria type.” (Powerpoint slide)

This is an example of *zhongban* (「中板」) in *qizi* (七字). I must first point out that the word “liveliness” is very important one to me ever since I started to learn about Cantonese opera. It is necessary to illustrate “liveliness” during the composition of Cantonese opera. In my book, I mentioned the three levels of meaning of “liveliness”: the first is the “liveliness” in historical transformation, the second is the “liveliness” in social functions, and the third is the “liveliness” in theatrical performance. Now, I am going to illustrate the issue of “aria type” in *qiziqingzhongban* (「七字清中板」) in order to prove the first and the third levels of meaning. Since all of you know what *qiziqing* is, I am not going to explain it. (Powerpoint slide)

This is my study of the arrangement of *qiziqing*'s song-lyrics. Here, we can see the distribution of strong beats and weak beats. When I first learned about *qiziqing*, I already found it to be a very special “aria type.” The song-lyrics of *qiziqing* are mostly attached to weak beats rather than strong beats. As we can see, five out of seven words in the upper line are attached to weak beats, whereas the remaining two are attached to strong beats. I find this to be strange enough. The heavy reliance on weak beats in this “aria type” creates a particular rhythmic style. This can be described as “an inversion between the weak and the strong.” In the usual singing of song-texts, rhythms are emphasized. We can hear the words being sung one by one and thus feel the strong beats accordingly. Yet, in *qiziqing*, words are mostly attached to weak beats. That is how this “aria type” is characterized by its “inversion between the strong and the weak,” and this is a particular characteristic of *qiziqing*. Many actor-singers pay attention to musical variation when singing *qiziqing*: by embezzling an extra half beat for the second word on the weak beat so that the word is sung in-between a strong beat and a weak beat. This singing method is common for singing the second and the sixth word of both the upper and lower lines. Therefore, the basic “rhythmic structure” of *qiziqing* would become an “aria type” of rhythmic variation. I notice that many actor-singers would embezzle one and a half beat for singing such an “aria type.” Nevertheless, in most of the books on the composition and singing of Cantonese opera, such as the book about writing Cantonese opera, *Yue Qu Xie Chang Chang Shi* (《粵曲寫唱常識》) written by Chen Zhuoying (陳卓瑩), they only show the basic “rhythmic structure” of *qiziqing*. Until now, I have not seen any books that illustrate the rhythmic variation of this “aria type.” Audiences can still recognize *qiziqing* even after rhythmic variations are being made in this “aria type.” They would not be disturbed by the variation. (Powerpoint slide)

Prof. Bell Yung:  
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Next, I would like to introduce some terms that I have invented. The first one is the “single layer” inversion of the strong and the weak. Another would be the inversion layer of the strong and the weak in addition to the “single layer.” For the second term, the weak beat becomes even weaker, and the second word is sung in a weaker beat that places between the strong beat and the weak beat. This is the same for the few words after the second one, and thus there would be four possibilities. I once notated the *qiziqing* of some famous Cantonese opera *actor-singers* when I began to study Cantonese opera as a student. There were a lot of audio recordings of Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing. I think I did that sometime before and after 1970.

Let me first explain before going into the following example. Here are nine passages of *qiziqing*. Each of the passage has an upper line and a lower line. The first three passages are the excerpts of Lü Yulang (呂玉郎) recorded in *China Record Corporation* (《中國唱片》). The fourth passage is sung by Lam Kar Sing (林家聲). The fifth and sixth passages are sung by Jiang Ping (江平). The eighth and ninth passages are sung in the form of call-and-response by Lam Kar Sing and Lee Bo Ying (李寶瑩). Sorry that I use staff notation for illustration. Although many of you are not very familiar with this notation system, it is actually quite easy to read. This is the music notated in staff notation, and what appears below is the song-lyrics. In addition to the song-lyrics, there is a line of peculiar symbols that represent the Cantonese word tones. These symbols are irrelevant to the topic that we are now discussing, because I am not talking about the issue of word tones. I will only talk about the issue of “aria type.” Let us listen to the example once. I believe you are familiar with these passages.

The music is presented in staff notation, and you may not be able to see it clearly. But I want to indicate that, as I just mentioned before, these are respectively the basic “rhythmic structure” of *qiziqing* and its variation. While the first passage is not clear enough, the fourth excerpt sung by Lam Kar Sing clearly demonstrates the “rhythmic structure”. From the song-lyrics of this excerpt, we can notice that he performed *qiziqing* with variation. There are four occasions in which Lam vocalizes a word between a strong beat and a weak beat. The passage of Lee Bo Ying is instead a typical *qiziqing* of no variation. Lee only uses the basic “rhythmic structure” of *qiziqing*, whereas Lam often employs variation.

From the audio recordings, we can hear the basic structure and the structure of variation. I just used Lee’s passage as an example that resembles the illustrations found in common Cantonese opera publications. I also used Lam’s fourth passage to illustrate the structure of a variation of *qiziqing*. You can notice how he utilizes all the possible “rhythmic embezzlements.” Now, we can see two different approaches to interpreting *qiziqing*. Here, I would like to raise some questions. How does Lam decide when to employ the basic structure and the structure of variation respectively? Would the speech tone of a word lead to his “embezzlement” of a half beat? Or does the tonal inclination or meaning of a word influence his decision of “embezzlement”? Or does his “embezzlement” relate to the interpretation of the theatrical narrative?

Prof. Bell Yung:  
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This can be explained through the perspective of musical cognition. This may be related to the inheritance of schools of tradition as well. Does Lam Kar Sing use this singing method more frequently because his teacher had been using the same method? From the nine passages illustrated above, there are eighteen appearances of basic “rhythmic structure” and variations respectively. The chance of employing one of the two types is the same. This is not my deliberate manipulation. When I first learned Cantonese opera, I would make a *qiziqing* excerpt whenever I heard someone singing it. These nine passages are the excerpts from the Cantonese opera audio recordings, in which these recordings are the ones I first listened to. It is interesting to see that the share of the two types of *qiziqing* is the same in the nine passages. Assuming that these passages are from the recordings made in 1970, it seems that the use of the terms “basic rhythmic structure” and “variation” are not appropriate for describing the rendition of *qiziqing* at that time. It is because the two types have the same share in rendition. Soon after, I would like to ask the experts here about their own rendition of *qiziqing*. Is there a specific school of tradition that shapes the rendition *qiziqing*?

What is cognition? This I also intend to discuss in my topic today. What is musical cognition? We know that music is the sound produced through the airflow. Some physicists consider this to be a natural phenomenon. Moreover, when people listen to music, they would have different feelings towards what they are listening to. Everyone has his or her own preference for both visual and audio experiences. No matter whether the music is simple or complicated, people may conceive different kinds of messages and beauty from the music that they listen to. Objectively speaking, we conceive the same kinds of oscillations transmitted through air, but we would generate different feelings after the oscillations enter our ears and brain. There must be a difference in experience because we are different from each other. Then, how would we feel when we listen to music? This is the cognition I am talking about. Real music is produced by our feelings and not by oscillations transmitted through the air. This cognition may involve consciousness, but it may take place in an unconscious state or without any sense of consciousness. Listeners need the sense of cognition, but it is more important to the performers. They have to listen to their own singing during the performance. This is also a kind of musical cognition. Music theory is a large category, in which one of the topics is the investigation of cognition that studies how different people develop their own methods and generate their own particular feelings when they are listening to the same piece of music. This helps to understand the various possibilities created by music. What are the possibilities? The oscillations transmitted through air are fixed, but we can have different methods of listening, in which these methods provoke various possibilities of appreciation. This can really be considered as creativity. Sometimes, when we listen to a song, we may have a different feeling when we listen to it a year later. Since we have changed, our feelings have changed as well. Therefore, studying the possibilities created by music is very important. By doing this study, we can enhance the way audiences and performers appreciate the enjoyment and beauty of music. This study is also a kind of creativity.



Prof. Bell Yung:  
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When we listen to *qiziqing*, we never think about how it is sung. We usually stop our thinking at the stage of recognizing its presence. This is common in listening to traditional Chinese music. Yet, if we think further about the possibilities of rendition, we would notice the variations of *qiziqing* made during performance. I think this can be considered the creativity of the music of Cantonese opera.

Here is my daring assumption. For example, in the “single layer” inversion of the strong and the weak in the 2/4 meter *qiziqing* passage of Lee Bo Ying, four of the seven Chinese characters *gui* (「閏」), *zhong* (「中」), *hui* (「徽」), and *wen* (「文」) are sung on a weak beat respectively. My explanation of the inversion is that our cognition tells us that each Chinese character is usually sung on a strong beat, while the empty beat carries no Chinese character and thus results in a weak beat. This is a theory. In fact, as early as forty years ago when I first listened to *qiziqing*, based on this theory, I already wondered about the result of altering the weak beats that attach to Chinese characters with the strong beats. (Illustration: using triple meter to perform *qiziqing*)

Did you have the following thoughts when you were listening to someone singing *qiziqing*? Triple meter is very uncommon in Chinese music, be it Chinese opera, instrumental music, or ritual music. It is rarely found in Japanese music as well. Korean music, as the music in between Chinese and Japanese however, exclusively features triple meter. This difference is yet to be understood. While triple meter almost does not exist in Chinese music, I wonder whether some *actor-singers* unconsciously recognized triple meter music throughout the history of the development of *qiziqing*. That is why I say that *qiziqing* sounds like music with triple meter. Of course, I know that the accuracy of rhythmic rendition is very important to singing *qiziqing*. Does one’s mind carry two types of feelings when he or she is singing *qiziqing*?

(1st illustration: *qiziqing* sung in 2/4 meter, lyrics attached to weak beats)

(2nd illustration: *qiziqing* sung in triple meter, lyrics attached to strong beats)

From the illustration, we can notice that these versions with two different meters cannot be clearly distinguished from each other. This allows us to feel the music in a more complicated, meaningful, and satisfying manner. This is my point of view. I don’t know what you think about this.

For the “double layer” inversion of the strong and the weak, the fourth passage sung by Lam Kar Sing would be one of the examples. We can temporarily neglect the decorative characters from this excerpt that we have just listened to. As I stated previously, I apply my own ideas to bring out a new perspective for understanding the “double layer” inversion of the strong and the weak in *qiziqing*.

Lam Kar Sing sang *qiziqing* with “rhythmic embezzlement”, so that the beat attached to the character “*yuk*” (玉) in the excerpt changed from one single beat to one

Prof. Bell Yung:  
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and a half beats. The character “*dai*” (帝) was also sung in one and a half beats, while the two characters “*mo ching*” (無情) are sung in the original triple meter. This excerpt is a combination of a triplet of small rhythmic value and a triplet of larger rhythmic value (illustration). Such a perspective brings us a different understanding of *qiziqing*. I do not know whether Lam Kar Sing felt the same when he was singing. The rhythmic type that I just mentioned has been popular since the Baroque period in European music. In Europe, there is a specific term that describes this rhythmic type. It is “Hemiola”. I once asked my colleagues whether there is a Chinese translation of this term, and one of them just provided the Chinese translation as the Cantonese homophone of the term. Therefore, I would just use the Cantonese homophone of “Hemiola” to describe this rhythmic type. In this rhythmic type, the second beat of a triplet divides into two halves and hence results in two triplets of smaller rhythmic value. “Hemiola” is a rhythmic type that combines a triplet of small rhythmic value and a triplet of larger rhythmic value. It is an interesting rhythmic arrangement. After all, do the interpretations of *qiziqing* in the nine passages involve consciousness? Or do the renditions take place in an unconscious state or without any sense of consciousness? Whatever you may think, this is one of the possible methods to analyze *qiziqing*. All that I have just said is based on what I feel, which I also consider to be a form of creativity in Cantonese operatic singing. I have already spoken for a very long while. Let me stop here!

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, Prof. Yung. I think the purpose of this fifteen-to-twenty minute presentation is to deliver a focused, brilliant, and special concept, to show us a very clear thought. Now, I would like to introduce “Brother Fai,” Mr. Yuen Siu Fai.

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:

Thanks to Prof. Yung for his sharing. He brings us a new topic for further consideration. On the aspect of singing practice, I believe that nobody has ever thought about this. It is because we sing casually. *Qiziqing* is composed of sentences of four or six words, and beginners must first learn about this “aria type.” In the profession, we first learn about *qiziqing* instead of three-strong beat sentences. This is a must. The old masters of the past always taught about *qiziqing*, which is what we call “four-or-six-word sentence” at the beginning. When we sing *qiziqing*, we sing in a casual way. As a result, the outcome of “three beats” is something unexpected to *actor-singers*. Prof. Yung’s analysis has shown us this characteristic.

First, I want to discuss the word “creativity.” Actually, in the profession, the knowledge and techniques of Cantonese opera are transmitted from a master to a protégé under the master-apprentice relationship. When we start learning at a young age, we dare not even ask “why,” because all masters would say, “You just have to follow the way I sing, and it will be fine. This way is right, and that way is wrong.” We never know why some ways are considered wrong. Later on, we try to figure out the causes based on our musical understanding and experience.

In addition, we often hear the seniors creating new “aria types” on their own. They created many new “aria types.” For example, in early times, there was no *fanxianzhongban* (反線中板) or *yifan zhongban* (乙反中板). We thought that they were from Hubei



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*Han* opera (漢劇). Even though now we can trace the origins and know when “Master Cheung” arrived in Foshan in Guangdong province, we still consider our “big opera” as Hubei *Han* opera.

Actually, *daxi* (「大戲」) generally refers to all the Chinese regional operas. *Daxi* does not specifically address Cantonese opera. Thus, in the Guangdong area, people usually call a performance a *xi* (「戲」). They would call the performance of “breaking a boulder at one’s chest” a *dali xi* (「大力戲」) and a magic show a *baxi* (「把戲」). We can often read in novels the saying “playing what *baxi*.” We call all of these *xi*. Cantonese opera is constituted of narrative, singing, and acting. Therefore, it is called a *daxi*, a term which is also applicable to other Chinese regional operas. We know that Cantonese opera is originated from Hubei. Recently, some people argued whether the Eight *Kuk* Masterpieces (「八大曲」) or the theatrical performance came first in Cantonese opera. According to the existing information, we believe that theatrical performance was developed before the existence of the masterpieces in Cantonese opera.

The creativity that we are talking about is actually the inheritance of *Han* opera from Hubei people. We know that numerous Cantonese opera predecessors doubted the rendition of Cantonese opera with non-Cantonese dialect during the 1920s. After the establishment of the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (八和會館), the anti-Qing movement and the open access of censored operas, many predecessors such as Jin Shanbing (金山炳), Pak Kui Wing (白駒榮), and Taizi Zhuo (太子卓) were devoted to studying the use of the Cantonese dialect to perform Cantonese opera. They made many attempts, and I believed that they faced many failures. Nevertheless, they were not exhausted by the failures. They maintained their high spirits and finally created the Cantonese opera that we now see today. This is what we regard as “change”. Did the element of creativity exist throughout this process of change? Can renditions made in Cantonese dialect by Cantonese people be considered creativity? This kind of questions sound strange. Yet, considering the conditions at that time, their efforts are really creative. They made a reformation that is extremely new. Therefore, we should first put the word “creativity” aside at this moment. Even though today’s topic is on creativity, there are many things that are too problematic to be regarded as creative.

Later on, the Cantonese opera ensemble added numerous Western instruments. In the era when I was born (in 1953), the wind and string instruments in Cantonese opera ensembles were known as the Western instruments, whilst percussion instruments were regarded as Chinese. Why would that be? It is because there were no Chinese instruments included except the percussion instruments. There was a young protégé playing *qinqin* (秦琴) or *yehu* (椰胡), but he could only play it with a low volume so that he would not disturb others. Mr. Mak Wai Man should be very familiar with what I have just said. On stage, there were Western instruments such as the violin and saxophone but there were no Chinese instruments. Nevertheless, I wanted to quote what Yu Siu Wah (余少華) had said some years ago about the

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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Cantonese opera ensemble, “Even though Cantonese operatic singing of the past was accompanied by Western instruments, the music sounded authentic. Nowadays, Cantonese operatic singing is accompanied by Chinese instruments. Yet, the music does not sound idiomatic.” I absolutely agree with Yu’s statement. In the past, it was Western instruments playing music for Cantonese operatic singing. Today, it is Chinese instruments playing Western music.

Throughout the previously mentioned reformations, I have continued to perform Cantonese opera. The reformation came to be due to the fact that many people perceived certain deficiencies in Cantonese opera music after learning about Western music, such as the insufficient variety of musical expressions and the lack of a lower-pitch instrumental section. Yet, I have to point out that the improvisatory nature and the economical effectiveness of Chinese music are unique musical characteristics of Chinese music. Chinese opera troupes are mobile, and the owners of the troupes cannot afford a large orchestra that consists of thirty instrumentalists. Troupe owners would then fail to maintain the troupe’s operation. Why do these opera troupes unify the costumes used in performance? Do you think that our predecessors would know what historical period it was that they were talking about? Did they know what history is? They might not know about that. Why did they unify some conventions? “Chinese opera is like that.” This is precisely one of the smartest ideas of the predecessors, but this is also the cause of many criticisms against them.

In the past decades, many people have supplemented the two “emptied” beats in *Xiao Tao Hong* (《小桃紅》). The two “emptied” beats are substituted by something else. Mr. Loo Kah Chi (盧家熾) often discussed with me about that when he was alive. At Mr. Loo’s funeral, a recording of Mr. Loo’s version of *Xiao Tao Hong* was played. This version follows the original which includes the two “emptied” beats. For someone who is able to write such a long piece of music, would it be difficult for him or her to fill in the two “emptied” beats? I absolutely disagree with the idea that he or she cannot do so. The “emptied” beats are actually a characteristic, “What I want is exactly the two ‘emptied’ beats.” Yet, many people today consider themselves to be so smart, and they think, “Why do the ‘emptied’ beats exist? What is this? Let me fill in the ‘emptied’ beats!” Yes, this idea is not wrong, but why would the predecessor intentionally leave two “emptied” beats in the music when he was composing the piece? We can notice that the two “emptied” beats can be found in many “rhythmic structures”. In these “rhythmic structures”, there are “*ju*” (the mnemonic for striking the large woodblock) (「局」), “*de*” (the mnemonic for striking the medium woodblock) (「的」) in the emptied beats. In *xipi* (「西皮」), we can hear many “*ju*”, “*de*” in the emptied beats. There is nothing added to these emptied beats.

This is similar to how we sing *qiziqing*. Why is the singing of *qiziqing* so flexible? The strong beat would only be placed at the last word of a phrase. This does not mean that there is no strong beat in other parts of the same phrase. Since there are more weak beats in other parts, we do not count the strong beats from these parts. What is the reason? It is related to how an *actor-singer* expresses himself or herself on stage.



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Therefore, I totally disagree with the “rigid notation” of *banghuang* (梆黃). This is to do with the feelings that are generated on stage by an *actor-singer*. Their feelings are not like frozen goods. It is something fresh. For example, when Lin Chong sees the White Tiger Hall, he would not know that it is the White Tiger Hall upon entering it. The *actor-singer* would generate different feelings when he sees the Hall on different nights. His feelings should come suddenly. If we restrict him to seeing it from a particular position of the stage or when he listens to a specific percussion pattern, the performance would become cinematic instead of theatrical. Thus, as Prof. Bell Yung said, we are “living”. I agree with this saying very much. On many occasions, our “musical vocalization” has its “liveliness”.

So much for that! For “liveliness”, we can talk about why our performance has this quality. This should be clear to “Brother Man” (Mak Wai Man). Thanks to *yingtou* (「影頭」). When we were learning Cantonese opera, we were told to indicate the way that we were going to sing to the instrumentalists on stage. We called the “music” “*pengmian*” (「棚面」). This is because our stage did not have a screen, and all the instrumentalists had to be seated on stage. When audiences entered the theater, they would see these instrumentalists before they see the *actor-singers*. This is the reason for referring to the “music” as “*pengmian*”. We would let the instrumentalists know how we would sing by singing the *yingtou*. They would know how you would sing the whole passage after they hear the *yingtou*. Since our “rhythmic harmonization” appears in the latter half beat or the three-fourth beat, we would be able to notice the way that you are going to sing. This is valid unless there is deliberate trickery involved! When we were learning Cantonese opera, our masters were absolutely opposed to the undirected rendition. They commanded us, saying that one must tell the instrumentalists how one is going to sing.

There is another strange thing that I think those who are desperate for innovation would not understand. When we listen to the Cantonese operatic singing of today, we would notice that *actor-singers* do not sing *erhuang* (二黃) as *erhuang* and *zhongban* (中板) in the way that *zhongban* should sound. In fact, I am not the only one who opposes to this kind of singing. Audiences oppose it too. Why is that so? When audiences listen to the singing, their minds follow the music that they listen to. If they cannot get the idea of how an *actor-singer* intends to sing or what he or she is actually singing, they would raise a question, “What is this?” This thought would affect the audience’s thoughts and feelings towards the performance and thus their appreciation of the performance. For most of the time, we do not want *actor-singers* to be pretentious. In fact, we do not oppose to their pretentions but the consequence of these pretentions. *Actor-singers* are supposed to be in sync with the audience, but these pretentions would affect the musical expression. As a result, the audience cannot understand what the *actor-singers* intend to achieve. I believe that the intentions of these *actor-singers* are good. Nevertheless, when they sing in such a way, are they considering whether it would bring a sense of resonance between them and the audience?

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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The other thing is that our predecessors never performed many of the pieces that we are currently singing. Why? These pieces, including *The Wailing of the River* (《江河水》), are sung with musical notation. They belong to the so-called “medley form” (「曲牌體」). “Medley form” has existed in Chinese opera throughout its history. The earlier *Yiyang Qiang* (「弋陽腔」), is one of the examples. We also perform the repertoire from the “medley form”. Nevertheless, in “tempo-variant form” (「板腔體」), the two major types *bangzi* (梆子) and *erhuang* (二黃) have their own path for musical expression. Personal styles such as Xue’s vocalization, Ma’s vocalization, and Liao’s vocalization, are distinctive, as they have developed their own path whilst following what is offered in Cantonese opera. They never thought of departing from the path that is offered by Cantonese opera. This is the difference between creativity and development. I believe that this kind of development has been recognized by the seniors. I do not believe that anyone objected the more radical singing methods, such as Mr. Ho Fei Fan’s (何非凡) partition of an “aria” into several sections, and the similar “beggar aria” of “Uncle Ma”. I believe this because they have still followed the path; the “tempo-variant form” is still apparent. Although I said that we have created *fanxian* and *yifan*, these musical modes are created through the effort of many predecessors. It should still be considered a development that follows the conventional path. This can also be regarded as a kind of creativity. Yet, how innovative is this idea? The change from *shigong* mode (「士工」) to *yifan* mode (「乙反」) is not really conceptually innovative. Clearly, the definition of innovation depends on what each of us thinks about it.

I think that there exists a crisis in the current development of Cantonese opera. When we were young, we often received criticism on our inaccurate vocalization of the notes in so-fa names “ti” and “fa”. But Chinese music is not well tempered. This is the first thing that we have to know. We should not be criticized because of that. Every ethnic group has its own musical language. Our music has its own specific character. Cantonese dialect has many words pronounced in checked tone, and this is our language. Similarly, only the *suona* (嗩吶) can produce clear notes with the tonguing technique. We cannot find another musical instrument that can produce the same kind of sound in all of China. When wind instruments are played together, the musical notes produced are combined together, right? This is our musical language. Why should we change our own musical language to fit with your well-tempered scale? Do you think there is the use of well temperament in Japanese Kabuki and Noh theater? No. Indian music does not employ well temperament either. We do not mean to attack the use of well temperament, but we should be clear about the character of Chinese music. Chinese music does not use a well-tempered scale.

Chinese music is an expression that follows a performer’s feeling. Some would criticize that our performance is disorderly. Disorderliness, however, is exactly a characteristic of our performance. In the past, when we were performing *bangzi*, the tuning of our leading instrument *erxian* is *shigong* (「士工」), and the tuning of the violin is *heche* (「合尺」). Different instruments have their own tunings and their distinctive effectiveness. If a performer thinks that he or she can fully utilize his or her instrument,

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then everything would be fine. Therefore, when we listen to an ensemble performance of renowned performers, we would notice that the performance is disorderly. If it were a tidy performance, then it would not be a performance by renowned performers. From its score to its rhythm, and to its harmonization, performances by renowned performers are distinct. Later on, there was a trend of tidy performances. In a certain period of time, the performance repertoire of Sin Fung Ming opera troupe was notated. There were even musical notations written for performing *banghuang*. This is what I am totally against. If musical notation is used for documenting some sections that involve music of “medley form” or for the composition of *siu kuk* (aria) that includes the addition of counterpoints or harmonics, then I would not go against it. When we perform some unpopular or innovative “arias”, I would not disagree with the notation of *banghuang* to provide clear instruction for the *actor-singers*. But still, I absolutely oppose to notating all the existing *banghuang*. Nowadays, I dare not visit any musical societies. When you enter a musical society, you would discover that musical notation have been provided to the title of each excerpt or the pitches. The song-lyrics is instead documented elsewhere. Thus, I tell the people in musical societies that I cannot sing. In my point of view, the existence of this phenomenon harms the development of Chinese opera. It is because *actor-singers* should be central in Chinese opera. All the other matters in Chinese opera should be subordinate. Notating *banghuang* would imply that *actor-singers* have to go in the opposite direction and follow the notation during performance. Where would my personal sentiments be? After you notate the music, the notation would be your interpretation, and I would be following your interpretation if I sing with your notation. This is ridiculous! I am not saying this on behalf of the *actor-singers* because I am one of them. I am also involved in instrumental accompaniment, scriptwriting, and stage design. I only think that we should allow *actor-singers* to express their feelings through music. How much one is able to express is another issue! This is what we call “measuring the weight”.

I still remember that when Mr. Loo Kah Chi (盧家熾) returned to Hong Kong towards the end of his life, I once asked him, “Will you still go to Canada?” He said, “I will never go there again.” In the end, he did never return to Canada. I asked him, “Why?” We know that he had high standards for making music. He said, “I cannot get used to it. The musical societies in Canada do not have a fixed instrumental ensemble. There are often new members that join these societies, and the members play music for leisure and entertainment. Since they play music for fun, you cannot expect too much of them. Therefore, I cannot get used to it.” After he returned to Hong Kong, he told me, “Fai, do you think you can find an instrumental ensemble that can play music without scores?” I felt ashamed, as I could not find a group of instrumentalists to form such an ensemble before he died. There were capable instrumentalists, but they were not able to find time to play music together. As a result, I could not finish the task before Mr. Loo died. I have been asking myself why it is so difficult to find instrumentalists who can play music without scores nowadays. Instrumentalists of the past were never only able to play music when a score was available. In the Cantonese opera troupes of the past, there would only be a score for the whole instrumental ensemble and another one for the *zhangban* (「掌板」) who managed the flow of the music. Mr. Mak Wai Man

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knows this very well. Throughout several decades, he played music for Cantonese opera, starting first as a subordinate instrumentalist to later becoming the leader of the instrumental ensemble. Indeed, the leader has to follow the *actor-singers*, and those subordinate instrumentalists have to follow the leader. This is that simple. I hope that we can carefully consider our inherited musical practice and its advantages when we study Cantonese opera. Of course, there are some disadvantages in the inherited practice. I dare not claim that all the past practices are good. We can improve the parts that are yet to be refined, but we should not eliminate the advantages instantly. We should further demonstrate the advantages. These are my ideas for stimulating further development. I hope that everyone can provide more opinions for our discussion on the topic this morning. Thank you everyone.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, “Brother Fai”! Your viewpoints are also very insightful. Now, I would like to invite Mr. Mak Wai Man for comments. Mr. Mak Wai Man, please.

Mr. Mak Wai Man:

We just listened to the sharing of Prof. Bell Yung and Mr. Yuen Siu Fai. Let me speak a little on Prof. Yung before I begin my own sharing. In the past, I called Prof. Yung “Ah Yung,” and I still cannot change my habit. I consider Prof. Yung a half Cantonese opera troupe member, and what he has written truly takes place in reality. It is not hearsay or something solely based on the study of books in a closed room. He followed me to the countryside, to uncultivated places such as Stanley and Po Toi. When I was sleeping on a canvas cot, he used his desk to build a canvas cot for his own use. He learned about Cantonese opera in such an environment. What he has written is based on his personal experience. His sharp insights are powerful and well-grounded. I once told Prof. Yung that I wished that more intellectuals like him could be involved in the musical activities of Cantonese opera. I knew that he had talent for composing Cantonese opera scripts, and I once encouraged him to do so. I think that it is rare for a professor to be interested in Cantonese opera. Although there was no follow-up about the scriptwriting, I still remember that I told him about the great significance of *yifan* mode in Cantonese opera. I reminded him that everything in Cantonese opera could change except the *yifan* mode. I later heard from him that he mentioned this in his dissertation and this made me feel very happy.

I started to play violin when I was eight. My nephew introduced to me Chen Jing Cheng (陳竟澄) who is the brother of Chen Fei Nong (陳非儂), and I borrowed my nephew’s violin to learn to play music. When I was thirteen, my father died in New York, and the family’s financial condition worsened. I had to make money to support my family. It was between 1951 and 1952. I could earn about a dollar and fifty cents a day by “setting a game.” During that time, a bowl of congee cost only one cent. A Chinese cruller cost the same, and lunch at a Chinese restaurant cost only fifty-five cents. I could spend my daily salary for more than just one day, and I could spend it over a period of several days. I started to participate in Cantonese opera accompaniment when I was thirteen. I experienced several horrible “clearance of a scene.” It was similar to the situation during the 1960s riots. Musicians could not perform Cantonese opera under such an environment, and quite a number of them changed their jobs.



Mr. Mak Wai Man:  
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I also experienced the ups and downs of Cantonese operatic singing. The genre began to decline when I started my performance career. There were only the Lin Heung Cabaret (蓮香歌壇) and Go Sing Cabaret (高陞歌壇) and Lin Heung was closed soon after. “Ah Lau” was in charge of the remaining Go Sing Cabaret with the support of Mr. Loo Kah Chi and my mentor Chan Hau (陳厚), but it was closed sometime in the 1960s after a period of struggle. In around 1968, the first cabaret, Ho Choi Cabaret (好彩歌壇) returned to business in Kowloon City. I was a teenager at that time, and I performed at that cabaret. Soon after the return of Ho Choi, the Lung Chu Cabaret (龍珠歌壇) on Shanghai Street was reopened, and there were also the new Kam Hong (金漢歌壇) and Guangzhou Jinlin cabarets. (廣州金陵歌壇) Cabarets became popular again. There were dozens of cabarets in Hong Kong at that time. I performed on a cabaret in Mongkok during daytime, and I worked at Lung To (龍圖) in Wan Chai at night. I had two performances a day, earning ten dollars for each performance. I could get six hundred dollars a month while those experienced musicians could only earn around four hundred to five hundred dollars a month. My salary was sufficient to support my living expenses. Nevertheless, the “cabarets” of Cantonese operatic singing was superseded by the popularity of mandarin songs, and “cabarets” disappeared again.

After the decline of Cantonese operatic singing for some twenty years, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong organized the College of Cantonese Opera in around 1980. I employed Wang Yuet Sang (王粵生) and Lau Siu Wing (劉兆榮) as the singing coaches. I was responsible for the administrative work and the organization of the daily routine of the college. Lau left and taught lessons on his own at the Hong Kong Arts Center after working at the College for half a year. Lau employed assistants to copy music for his students’ use. That is when the “housewife group” first appeared. From the 1980s onwards, professional musicians would help the “housewife group” to practice singing weekly. Later, Wang also left to formulate his own singing class at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Thanks to Lau, the fate of Cantonese operatic singing changed, and he can be credited for its continuing popularity to this day.

In 1996, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), and the Jade channel of Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) co-organized an event titled “Cantonese Operatic Singing Championship” (「粵曲爭霸戰」). I was the chief judge of the first stage of the event, and I evaluated seven hundred recordings on my own. I already migrated to Canada when the formal competition began. I could not be a judge for that, and the position had to be substituted by others. Nevertheless, I collected some statistics with RTHK during the first stage of evaluation. The statistics showed that there were around two thousand two hundred registered musical societies in Hong Kong but there were none in Shenzhen. Later, as Shenzhen counterparts noticed the popularity of Cantonese operatic singing in Hong Kong, especially after the efforts of Luo Qinger (駱慶兒), musical societies began to be established there. I have a close relationship with Luo Qinger. I am a very good friend of his father’s. As Luo Qinger had phoned me after he arrived in Hong Kong, I introduced him to Mr. Liu to set up his own musical society. He stayed there for slightly

Mr. Mak Wai Man:  
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more than a year but he did not feel satisfied with the environment, so in the end, he went back to Shenzhen to set up his own business. That was the time when musical societies first emerged in Shenzhen. Luo Qinger changed the fortune of Cantonese opera in Shenzhen. In the past, the musical practitioners in Shenzhen could not read the *gongche* notation for Cantonese operatic singing. Nevertheless, the “housewife group” in Hong Kong followed the *gongche* notation compiled by Lau Siu Wing. When the members of this group went Shenzhen to sing, they made the musicians in Shenzhen learn to read *gongche* notation. I hear that most of the musicians in the musical societies of Shenzhen can read *gongche* notation nowadays. I still remember that there was a musical society in Shenzhen that invited me to be its advisor when it was established in 1980. I do not have much of an idea about its current development. From my standpoint, I do not care much about this either. I am more concerned about the development of Cantonese opera on the whole.

I have stated several times in front of our members that the development of Cantonese opera will face another decline, even though its current development is remarkable and I hope for further development. Whenever the Cantonese opera industry is in a good shape, we would face the lack of professional musicians and we would then have to invite amateur musicians to help. In the early days, amateur performers would not suggest payment for performing. Yet, we insisted on paying them because their attendance rate would be unstable if they were not paid for the performance. We could not conduct rehearsals when there were insufficient participants and so we requested them to accept salaries. They were satisfied with being paid an hourly rate of thirty dollars. Today, those amateur performers consider themselves technically proficient, and they are not very willing to attend rehearsals even if they can get a hundred dollars per hour. As a result, amateur performers are nearly extinct in Hong Kong.

Currently, I hear complaints from performers of Cantonese operatic singing about the behavior of the accompanists. These performers would say that some of the accompanists would laugh at them or show displeasure if they do not sing well. There were times when I give them the music scores of new pieces, the accompanists would say, “What is that? I don’t know how to play it!” So, how do the performers react? They would tell the accompanists, “What can you play? We will sing what you can play then!” At this stage, I feel ashamed to be a leader in the field of Cantonese opera, and I have no idea about how to react to this behaviour. Despite the saying that there are rotten apples in every barrel, there are, however, many performers who maintain professional conduct in Cantonese opera. There are a few intellectuals that participate in acting or perform music in Cantonese opera. Most of the predecessors that I know did not receive formal education. Later, I know two brothers Wong Sing Kwan (王勝焜) and Wong Sing Chuen (王勝泉) who told me that they liked performing music and that they have been doing that since they were students. That is something happened a long time ago. At that time, of course I hoped that they could stay in the field of Cantonese opera. After some detours, they finally entered this field and provided us with much help.



Prof. Bell Yung:

Wai Man, let me make a short response to your comments. Since you have such a good memory, you should put your stories on paper. The same applies to “Brother Fai.” If we do not record the history of Cantonese opera from the last half century, our successors would never know about it. These stories are very precious, so I tell friends of younger generations and my colleagues to put some effort into that as soon as possible. It seems as if you can spend more than a month to tell your story. After all, they are your experiences from half a century’s worth of time.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

I also know that the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong is currently conducting some work on oral history and related book publications. This is something very meaningful. Thank you, Mr. Mak. Now, please welcome Mr. Wong Sing Kuan.

Mr. Wong Sing Kwan:

Hello, guests and friends. I am going to talk about my points of view. Please offer your feedback. Let me first respond to the topic of *qiziqing* raised by Prof. Bell Yung. Many thanks to Prof. Yung for his detailed analysis and his creation of terms for *qiziqing*. What Prof. Yung had just mentioned as “single layer” and “double layer” inversions of the strong and weak beats are just two cases in the rendition of *qiziqing*. I hope that Prof. Yung can also study and academically define the third possibility that I am going to suggest. The basic “rhythmic structure” and the variation of *qiziqing* that you had previously mentioned is known among Cantonese opera insiders as “seizing the beat” (「搶板」). In the past, my teacher Wang Yuet Sang taught his students to sing *qiziqing* in this way only. If one should ask whether the rendition of *qiziqing* is related to specific schools of tradition, then the answer is certainly yes. If a Cantonese opera teacher says that it is necessary to apply a specific singing method, then we would follow this instruction for most of the time. We seldom disobey. For some renowned *actor-singers* such as “Brother Fai”, I have noticed that many of them also like “seizing the beat” when singing *qiziqing*. The rendition by Mr. Lam Kar Sing that we just discussed is even more obvious in this respect. By studying Lam’s renditions of *qiziqing*, we would find that 99% of his renditions involve “seizing the beat”. Contrarily, in the case of Ms. Lee Bo Ying, 99% of her renditions do not involve the same method. This does not mean that Lee does not know how to “seize the beat”. She may just prefer using the basic “rhythmic structure” to create the musical effect. In this regard, we may need Prof. Yung and other scholars to make further study of the overall variations of *qiziqing*.

Actually, *qiziqing* involves many possible variations. This demonstrates the flexibility of the “tempo-variant form” in Cantonese opera. The “tempo-variant form” allows for a range of variations in performing Cantonese opera. Since we are discussing creativity today, I think that the “tempo-variant form” still has more room for further development. As “Brother Fai” has stated, the basic *zhengxian* (正線) mode in this form leads to the development of *yifan* (乙反) and *fanxian* (反線) modes, while the *erhuang* (二黃) mode develops from its original ten-character structure to eight-character and long-phrase structure. Throughout its history, the development of Cantonese opera has been consistent and innovative. In the recent twenty years however, not too many new ideas and new “rhythmic structures” have been created. Not sure if this is related to people being more interested in creating new “rhythmic

Mr. Wong Sing Kwan:  
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structures” in the past than they are today. The current generation, as “Brother Fai” had said, emphasizes on and is more interested in studying harmonies and orchestration. Therefore, there are much fewer people studying the *banghuang* and the “tempo-variant form” to develop new “rhythmic structures.” This generation should devote more energy to the innovation of “rhythmic structure” instead of changing the outlook of *banghuang* through orchestration. This condition directly corresponds with the phenomenon of using Chinese instruments to play Western music that we had just mentioned.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

I would like to ask for opinions from the seniors. Do you think that it would be more acceptable if the creative reformation was led by the great veterans? Would it be the case that the younger generations dare not be creative and have thus not developed a creative approach to Cantonese opera? Or perhaps they are willing to be creative but they have not expressed their creative thoughts because they are afraid of criticism? Does traditional Chinese ethics in general or the relationship between people of different generations in particular affect the effectiveness of developing the creativity of Cantonese opera?

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:

I would like to make a response as well. There is nothing that today’s young people dare not do. To them, there is only something that they “do not know”, but nothing they “dare not do”. This is true. Only people of my generation dare not be innovative, and it is still the same nowadays.

Dr. Lam Wing Cheong:

Today, I am most pleased to hear Mr. Yuen Siu Fai, a cultural insider, share his views on creativity. There are many similarities between what I said yesterday and what you regarded as creativity. As an observer, I think that creativity means the process of first bringing a completely new thing to existence, and then developing it without limit except for certain constraints. If there are no constraints, then it is possible to completely separate something from its original form. This would be very dangerous. This is what I said yesterday, and this is how I find my view to be similar to that of Mr. Yuen. I would also like to share with you on several aspects of change in Cantonese opera. First, as Prof. Yu Siu Wah asked, why is it that he finds today’s accompaniment of Cantonese operatic singing with Chinese instruments to be unidiomatic? How come the accompaniment with Western instruments is more authentic? Actually, throughout this process, we are able to discover one thing. The linguistic localization of Cantonese opera at the early stages, i.e., using Cantonese for performance, proves that Cantonese opera is an adaptable genre that allows for a high degree of freedom for elaboration. Yet, the elaboration has to be framed by the constraints of the genre. When we propose reformation of Cantonese opera, we can only do that within this larger framework, so that the audience would still find the reformed version appropriate and acceptable.

There were both successful and abortive uses of Western instruments in the past. The use of the bass saxophone is an example of success. Actually, in Cantonese opera, this instrument is played in a way that departs from its performance conventions. The musicians would use metal mouthpieces as in jazz performance for Cantonese operatic



Dr. Lam Wing Cheong:  
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music playing. The blowing technique is also different: the lips has to be tightened when playing the bass saxophone for Cantonese opera, but in the traditional playing method it is relaxed as if you are playing the *houguan* (喉管). With the concepts of Cantonese opera applied, the addition of the bass saxophone in accompaniment can still generate the flavor of the genre. As Prof. Yung said, if this instrument can play sounds that are acceptable to us after it has been added to the Cantonese opera ensemble, then it should be considered as part of the genre.

For the violin, its tuning for Western music is completely different from its tuning for Chinese music. In Cantonese opera, its tuning has to be specifically modified for the performance of Cantonese opera, or else it would not work. The five-string lute is another example of successful integration. In the Western world of music, this instrument is played according to certain musical scales. How could Cantonese opera possibly use these scales? Of course, it is destined to be a failure if we just force circles into squares. The Hawaiian guitar was used in “Cantonese operatic singing cabarets” for quite a period of time, but performers no longer use it nowadays, because it was borrowed without serious consideration towards how it could be adapted. The Jazz drum is no longer used in Cantonese operatic singing for dancing because the sounds produced do not match the style of music.

So, why would a performance played by Chinese instruments not sound like the music of Cantonese opera? This is another issue. Actually, during the twenties when *Datongyuehui* (大同樂會) was established, its members have already westernized Chinese instruments. Ever since Chinese orchestras were established, all instruments have had to be tuned according to the standard A=440Hz. The frets of the *pipa* had to be redesigned. How could the music sound as if it were authentic Cantonese opera if the music is played in equal temperament? Of course, the context of a specific period should be considered. The *pipa* was not considered as a Chinese instrument when it was first imported to China, but people no longer regard it as a foreign instrument after many years of development and modification for localized use. If there is a Chinese person using a Chinese instrument to perform Chinese music, how is it that we end up hearing something that does not sound Chinese? The reason is precisely that Chinese instruments have been westernized. In such connection, I think we should first make a thorough understanding of the characteristics of a musical genre before demonstrating our creativity. Further developments should be based on original characteristics. It should never be out of the original framework; then creativity as such would be acceptable.

While there is creativity, we must be aware of the feelings and impressions of the audience. If there were no audience, there would not be any theatrical genres or performing arts. There would be nothing. What can an audience accept? Dr. Leung provided an example yesterday. Two groups of audience watched *The Purple Hairpin* together. When the first group of older audiences watching the performance, they noticed that differences from the original version, so they claimed, “Why would it be like that? That is not like *The Purple Hairpin*!” However, the other group of young

Dr. Lam Wing Cheong:  
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audiences felt differently, “That’s enjoyable to watch!” Here is the problem: those who are familiar with Cantonese opera would not attend the same kind of performance after that, whereas the young audiences would find Cantonese opera interesting but consider that one performance to be sufficient exposure to the genre. This is unhelpful to the development of Cantonese opera, as either group would not return to watch such performances and there would be no financial contribution made to the development of the genre either. Which audience group should we target when we attempt to improve Cantonese opera? This is an important question for cultural insiders to consider.

Furthermore, I would like to respond to the issue about the disorderliness of the music of Cantonese opera. I absolutely agree with the saying that “the music of Cantonese opera is disorderly.” Such disorderliness is also present in the singing of Cantonese opera. By using western notation to document *banghuang* so that the fixed pitches are indicated in the notated score, the notated musical excerpt would be presented in an orderly manner. Yet would it be favorable? This is absolutely a bad idea. If you go to watch Mak Bing Wing (麥炳榮) perform *The Princess in Distress* (《鳳閣恩仇未了情》), you would notice the spontaneous variations presented in the group singing section. It is clearly disorderly, but we call that group singing. This is what Mak considered to be group singing. This is my point of view.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

The session this morning has been very productive. Different speakers have spoken about the musical creativity of Cantonese opera from various perspectives. After lunch, there will be the last session of the symposium. That session will investigate the issue of inheritance in Cantonese opera. “Inheritance” is not only about providing guidance for the next generation, but also about how Cantonese opera can be developed with greater creativity. This is an issue that should be understood by performers and audiences. I believe that the audience themselves need to be creative in order to accept the changes in Cantonese opera. This is an important topic.





## Session 5



# *The Inheritance of Cantonese Opera's Creativity*

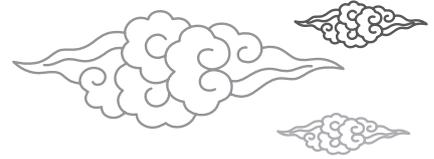


**Speakers :**

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai, Mr. Ip Sai Hung, Dr. Tai Suk Yan, Dr. Xu Yanlin

**Respondents:**

Dr. Cham Lai Suk Ching, Mr. Lui Hung Kwong, Ms. Wong Yee Man,  
Mr. Christopher Pak, Mr. Choi Kai Kwong





## *The Creativity of Cantonese Operatic Music*

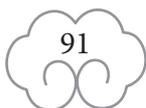


Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to the last session of this symposium titled “The Inheritance of Cantonese Opera’s Creativity”. Speaking of “inheritance”, I believe that people of each generation are concerned about this. This is because it is about the development of Cantonese opera in the future as well as the retrospection of the tradition for further progress. In my teaching, I often ask students a question, “What direction should we take if we want to change Cantonese opera? On the other hand, what would happen if no change is made?” Of course, we do not expect a universal conclusion at the end of today’s discussion. We rather hope that the speakers and guests will provide us with various directions in their sharing and thoughts. There are four speakers in this session: Dr. Tai Suk Yan (戴淑茵), Mr. Yuen Siu Fai (阮兆輝), the Head of RTHK Radio 5 Mr. Ip Sai Hung (葉世雄), and Dr. Xu Yanlin (徐燕琳). There are five eminent respondents as well, including Ms. Wong Yee Man (黃綺雯), Mr. Christopher Pak (白得雲), Dr. Cham Lai Suk Ching (湛黎淑貞), Mr. Lui Hung Kwong (呂洪廣), and Mr. Choi Kai Kwong (蔡啟光). Mr. Lui is well known to each of us. Ms. Wong is an experienced instructor of Cantonese operatic singing. We also know Mr. Pak and Mrs. Cham very well. Mr. Choi is from the University of Hong Kong, specializing in the design of Cantonese opera teaching curriculum for primary and secondary school students. Let me first introduce Dr. Tai to this session.

Dr. Tai Suk Yan:

Today’s question for investigation is the issue of inheritance in Cantonese opera education in modern-day Hong Kong. This current development of education will be evaluated from a historical perspective. I suggest three directions of research, i.e. the exploration of the materials providing the historical background of the development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong; the discussion on the suitable direction for developing the education of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong; and the study of today’s transmission of the genre. A retrospection of the history of Cantonese opera education in Hong Kong should be prioritized. In 1979, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong established the College of Cantonese Opera. Following the surrounding changes and developments, the curriculum offered by the Association today is different from that of the past. There were two two-year programs focusing on the basic skills of singing and acting respectively. Currently, it organizes some Cantonese opera courses as well as modules for enhancing performance skills, targeting Cantonese opera artists of different ages who seek enhancement. There are also advanced courses on accompaniment, percussion performance, and scriptwriting for professionals. In general, the Association organizes numerous classes with many (282) students. This information is from last year’s report, and the details can be found on the Association’s website. Following the College of Cantonese Opera, the Chinese University of Hong Kong began to organize Cantonese opera courses from 1985 onwards. At that time,



Dr. Tai Suk Yan:  
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Prof. Chan Sau Yan came back to Hong Kong to organize courses such as “Chinese Opera Appreciation”, “Chinese Opera and Culture”, “Research of the Special topics of Chinese Music”, and “The Music of Chinese Opera”. There were on average around a hundred students taking Chinese opera courses every year, including more than ninety students from the general studies courses, and some students at master’s and doctoral levels.

Actually, there were Cantonese operatic singing classes at the Chinese University during the late 1970s, such as those taught by Mr. Wang Yuet Sang (王粤生). The singing class, taught by Ms. Wong Yee Man (黃綺雯) who is in attendance at the symposium today still exists. The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), and the Chinese University of Hong Kong once collaborated and organized an off-campus extended learning Cantonese opera training certificate course in 1996, but it no longer exists. The HKAPA started to run a Cantonese operatic singing curriculum from 2004, and the current curriculum includes courses for a diploma, an advanced diploma, a certificate, and an advanced certificate. The difference among the four qualifications offered by the HKAPA is the requirement of educational qualification. Form 5 graduates have to first study the certificate courses, while Form 7 graduates and those who have higher educational qualifications can take the diploma courses. The structure of the curriculum places emphasis on acting and musical accompaniment. There are research courses and scriptwriting courses, but fewer students enroll for these.

As we have talked about the involvements of tertiary institutions and the Association in training contemporary Cantonese opera professionals and artists, let me now move to a discussion on the role of the Hong Kong Education Bureau. The Bureau has intended to include Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing in the curriculums of primary and secondary schools. In 2009, these courses were included in the new high school curriculum. At the same time, an elective section of Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing were included in the textbooks and the course contents of primary and secondary schools. Teachers can select appropriate materials for teaching. In addition, based on statistics, there are around fifty primary and secondary schools that organize Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing courses as extra-curricular activities. The student involvement in these courses is satisfactory. There are many performances. In 1999, the School Music Festival established a category for Cantonese operatic singing. Up to 2006, there have been 736 participants. To my knowledge, the events for Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing are separated from other conventional events in the Festival. Since every participant can only choose to partake in either a Cantonese opera event or a Cantonese operatic singing event, the numbers of participants were changed.

On the other hand, several tertiary institutions have been devoted to popularizing Cantonese opera courses in primary and secondary schools. They organize experimental teaching and promote course plans in order to help students and teachers from primary and secondary schools to understand Cantonese opera. The “Integrating

Dr. Tai Suk Yan:  
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Cantonese opera in Education: Seed Project” (「粵劇小豆苗」) organized by the University of Hong Kong and supported with funding from the HKU Cultural Fund and Cantonese Opera Development Fund, for example, is a proposal that attempts to incorporate Cantonese opera into the Chinese language subject within the new high school curriculum. This proposal has been in an experimental stage since 2007, and there are many secondary schools participating in this experiment. These schools hope to spread the ideas of Cantonese opera to their students, so that the students would understand Cantonese opera better while fulfilling the task of conducting school-based evaluation. Supported by the Quality Education Fund, the Hong Kong Institute of Education also carried out a Cantonese opera collaborative teaching plan for primary and secondary schools between 2009 and 2012. There is an estimate of about sixty schools that have participated in this plan. This plan aims to enhance the understanding Cantonese opera culture among the teachers and students in primary and secondary schools and provide assistance in teaching. What I have just mentioned is the situation of Cantonese opera education in primary and secondary schools. There are other non-school-based Cantonese opera courses as well, but I only chose the above cases to provide as examples. Other than these, in 2010, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong started a collaborative Cantonese Opera teaching program with Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Lui Yun Choy Memorial College (東華三院呂潤財紀念中學). In this collaborative teaching program, some classes in the secondary school curriculum have been used to teach Cantonese opera. Students can take these classes as substitutions for “Other Learning Experience”. There are various artistic and administrative considerations involved in the selection of students for these classes, and we anticipate that this project can be carried out in more schools.

I have just analyzed the contemporary history of Cantonese opera education. Let me now talk about the direction of its development. In general, Cantonese opera education includes four types of curriculum:

1. Conservatory curriculum including courses on acting, accompaniment, percussion performance, and scriptwriting;
2. Research curriculum that nurtures master’s and doctoral graduates to conduct research study of Cantonese opera;
3. Promotional teaching projects for primary and secondary school students;
4. Courses for personal interest.

I would like to investigate whether these four types of curriculums would be adequate for the development of Cantonese opera in primary and secondary schools, as well as whether they would be sufficient for nurturing Cantonese opera performers, as it pertains to the issue of inheritance. According to a market investigation report about the development of Cantonese opera in Guangzhou published on September 23, 2010 in *Wen Wei Po*, there are less than three thousand Cantonese opera enthusiasts in Guangzhou. These enthusiasts are mostly more than fifty-one years-old, and their education level are junior secondary school or below. They earn less than a thousand dollars a month. The report also indicates that younger people (below the age of thirty)



Dr. Tai Suk Yan:  
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who have higher education level and salary (between two thousand and four thousand dollars a month) have “completely no interest” in Cantonese opera. The situation in Guangzhou is worthy of our further consideration. What result would we get if we conducted the same investigation in Hong Kong? Originally, there were thirteen large theaters in Guangzhou. Today, there are only two or three that are still in operation. In Hong Kong, there were also many large theaters showing Cantonese opera in the past, but now we don't even have an idea about the fate of Sunbeam Theater after this coming September. We should think seriously about the way to improve the attendance rate of Cantonese opera performances and attract young audiences. How can we resolve the disconnection between the different generations of Cantonese opera professionals? Should we first nurture more young audiences? Should we expand the current promotional projects and organize more free Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing programs in different school cultural festivals and other cultural activities so that the primary and secondary school students can gain more exposure to these performing arts? Or should we organize some programs for both children and their parents? Should we encourage or enforce students to become involved in these activities? I hope that the attending guests and seniors can discuss further on the questions that I have just raised.

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:

First I would like to respond to what Dr. Tai had just mentioned about the collaborative teaching programme of Cantonese opera in Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Lui Yun Choy Memorial College. We have to admit that the project was solely experimental at its early stages, and there were some wrong estimates. It is currently still at a stage of improvement, and is yet to be considered successful. The problem encountered stems from the enrolment system: as a participant of the “through-train” policy, the students of a particular primary school would occupy a remarkable number of seats within this secondary school. This comes into conflict with the original objective of the project, which is to enroll students from all of Hong Kong who would be interested in Cantonese opera. The procedures and regulations led to its departure from expectations. Dr. Tai just mentioned about the interest in Cantonese opera amongst this group of students. In fact, some students are really interested in Cantonese opera, but there are also some others who do not have such an interest. That is why this project still requires refinement and it is yet to be a successful example. We shall discuss about this further with the school and with the Education Bureau to seek a better format to carry out this project and enroll more students who are interested in Cantonese opera. In general, we are facing a problem: students who hope to learn Cantonese opera fail to enroll in this school, while others who are studying in this school feel as if their exposure to Cantonese opera has been forced upon them.

On the other hand, for the curriculum, there is room for improvement. It is a new attempt to teach Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing in formal classrooms. This is under experiment in Hong Kong. At the same time, if the Hong Kong government approves to change this secondary school into a school of Cantonese opera, there will be other problems. First, if there were a large group of Cantonese opera graduates, this may create an employment problem. We cannot only focus on the aspect of training. We also have to consider the issue of employment. According to a survey

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, there are about 1,600 Cantonese opera performances each year. This is surprising. In view of audiences, Cantonese opera is a genre for a small group of audiences rather than for mass audiences since not everyone can appreciate this ancient art form. Yet, this small group of audiences is able to provide sufficient support to sustain its development. We must produce excellent performances to maintain their support. This is an inescapable responsibility for Cantonese opera professionals.

I have been in this profession for several decades, witnessing how this circumstance has been formed. I did not understand it at the beginning, but I have better idea about it after certain introspections. The impact of the Cultural Revolution is significant. During that time, there was a big riot in Hong Kong. People could often hear the curfew announcements. The daily newspapers also focused on reporting related information. As an art or a form of entertainment in the eyes of ordinary people, Cantonese opera was not something that was necessary to living. Nobody would be willing to risk his or her own life for a Cantonese opera performance. As a result, the ticket sales got worse, and performances had to be temporarily stopped. Some of the ritual performances also had to be cancelled. Under this situation, the Cantonese opera professionals could not make a living. As a result, many of them changed their jobs, and some older ones chose to retire. After the Cultural Revolution, these people did not return to performing Cantonese opera. This accounted for a great loss of support in this field. These people were not necessarily famous, but they were admired and well-respected by their colleagues. Later, Cantonese opera regained its popularity, but there was a lack of professionals. Some mentors had to train a large group of protégés for the opera troupe performances. Since everything was done in a rush, these mentors dared not criticize the wrongdoings of their protégés as they had in the past, worrying that such criticism would result in a loss of *actor-singers*. This resulted in a trend of “muddling along”. There was first the loss of professionals and then the rush to train *actor-singers*, and later many people witnessed the lack of professionals in Cantonese opera and thus started learning to perform it. In the past, those masters of Cantonese opera would not ask for fees. Even if some of them collected fees, it would just be a small sum of money. Some others would exclude such fees when their protégés did not have performances. I myself have benefited from this environment. Later, all the masters asked for money. Unlike those of the past who were very strict towards their protégés, they would not criticize or punish their protégés, worrying that this practice would affect their income. This is understandable, but this resulted in a very unfavorable trend: many people thought that they could teach Cantonese operatic singing even if they just knew a little about music and singing; the accompanists could then teach singing, and the acrobatic masters could teach acting. In fact, many famous masters have never performed on stage.

Time flew, and such conditions continued for several decades and resulted in today’s situation. For example, in today’s performances of *Prime Minister of Six States* (《六國大封相》), there exists some unacceptable mistakes. The responsibility of this should not be wholly borne by the seniors. The students should be responsible

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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for this. On the other hand, many people stress that they are “volunteers” who have offered help to the field of Cantonese opera and therefore should not be blamed. There are also some others who are learning Cantonese opera seriously and humbly. Yet, the seniors cannot instantly point out their mistakes because of the students’ use of the microphone. In the past, for a long period of time, we received criticisms when we were on stage. This was helpful for us to remember the mistakes. Contrarily, today’s actors and actresses are busy with changing their make-up and costumes as well as preparing for the next scene of a play when they are offstage. They would forget about the mistakes that they have just committed. There is even no interaction among *actor-singers*; they do not know one another well. In addition, because of the convenience of transportation, they can easily return home for rest after a performance. Some of them would leave the performance venue as soon as they have finished their part, and thus we cannot immediately correct their mistakes that they have made on stage. The seniors often ask me to discipline the performers who have made mistakes, but I just cannot help with this because I do not know them and they would leave soon after performance. I believe that this phenomenon began to form during the Cultural Revolution, and we still have yet to present any solutions.

Talking about today’s students, we are devoted to searching for and training a group of new performers. Many parents, however, do not want their children to learn Cantonese opera as they worry about their career path. The salary of a Cantonese opera professional is quite decent. It is higher than the minimum pay enforced by the government. We hope that this can attract more people to develop a career in Cantonese opera performance. Our lowest salary can reach more than sixty dollars per hour. This is something true. For example, a performance of a play in a large theatre takes around six hours, which includes the time for transportation and the time spent in the theater. As the lowest pay in an opera troupe is no less than four hundred dollars a day, this means that the hourly pay is more than sixty dollars. People are not paid lowly in the area of Cantonese opera, and the hesitation to get into this area is only due to a misunderstanding. First, one may worry about the lack of performance opportunities, but there are actually plenty of opportunities if he or she can perform well enough. Secondly, there is a completely wrong assumption that there has to be at least ten years of training before one can perform on stage. Indeed, it is not the case. I often use myself as an example: I started to perform Cantonese opera when I was seven. Do you think that I started to learn it when I was in my mum’s body? In practice, all the performers have to learn and perform at the same time. All these misunderstandings have led to the lack of professionals in the area of Cantonese opera.

There are more people who treat Cantonese opera as an interest, but only a few who would pursue a career as a Cantonese opera professional. We were full of hope when the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) first organized Cantonese opera courses. Unfortunately, there have been very few graduates from the HKAPA who have joined opera troupes after finishing their studies. The HKAPA always approaches me about the issue of inadequate enrolment. I joked that the enrolment figure would increase significantly if they can bring up an *actor-singer* like Loong Kim Sang (龍劍)

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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笙) . This is exactly the problem. It is not about whether the HKAPA wants to do that or not. It is rather to do with how. Moreover, I just cannot understand the reason for not sending its students on internships. I started mentioning this since Lo King-man (盧景文) was the Director of HKAPA, but there is still no progress. This may be related to certain regulations, but I still cannot understand that. The overall atmosphere of the development of Cantonese opera is unsatisfactory. The objective of organizing these courses is to bring up new professional Cantonese opera performers, but graduates do not do so in the end. I feel bad about this. Going back to the basics, there are some questions related to this situation. First, can the students apply what they have learned? Since I have not made further investigation about this, I dare not make any statement about it. Furthermore, many course instructors of the Academy are from Mainland China. As a result, the students lack contact with *actor-singers* from Hong Kong. In the past, students can learn about performance from different opera troupes through their teachers' contacts. This is lacking in today's environment. This problem can actually be easily solved. We only have to let these students train early on in different opera troupes, with a senior assigned as an instructor for each student in each troupe, so that the seniors can guide the students whenever they encounter problems with performance. I suggested this more than a decade ago, but it has yet to come into practice.

Dr. Tai just mentioned that there were once many large theaters in Guangzhou but now only two or three are still running. She also said that there are almost no theaters in Hong Kong. In fact, the situation in Hong Kong is very different from that in Guangzhou. There was a loss of audience in Guangzhou due to the Cultural Revolution, and some renowned performers suffered severely during that period. These performers decided to leave for foreign countries. The three great *xiaoxheng* Luo Pinchao (羅品超), Law Kar Po (羅家寶), and Chan Siu Fung (陳笑風) migrated to other countries, while the father of "Brother Guang" (Lü Hongguang 呂洪廣), Lu Yulang (呂玉郎), passed away. These performers were the most popular *man mou seng* (文武生) of that period. As these performers were no longer on stage and the new performers were barely known, the Cantonese opera fans no longer continued to visit the theater. After the Cultural Revolution, there were many types of entertainment which fought against each other for audiences in Mainland China. A similar struggle took place in Hong Kong. We nearly had to stop our performances due to visits from Taiwanese song and dance troupes. The theater would be empty whenever there was a finale episode of a television drama series. The Cantonese opera professionals in Hong Kong experienced this struggle and managed to overcome. It is because such a struggle is common in the history of Chinese opera.

Generally speaking, we need a well-developed education system for training Cantonese opera professionals. We also have to think seriously about the way to improve the common practice. This is the most difficult. I think that Hong Kong society does not pay attention to arts and culture. We lost theaters not because we lacked audiences but because of high land price policies. I have reflected this to the government many times. Some of my good friends organized a set of information which included details about

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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ancient theaters that exist all over the world. Why are other cities able to keep their own theaters? There are many ancient theaters in New York, London, and Melbourne. Aren't the land prices of these cities high as well? Don't these cities take the matter of moneymaking into consideration? These cities have their way of preserving these theaters. They have ways to let those who want to make money fulfill their goal. When we raise the question of keeping theaters, some people would challenge us by saying that there is no audience and hence no use of these theaters. Despite this, I dare to claim that we have the support of the audiences. Those theaters were demolished even when there were audiences. Who would say that there was no audience at the Lee Theater? Isn't the Lee family rich enough? The main problem is the lack of attention towards cultural arts and history. Demolishing the Lee Theater is no different from destroying history. Many Chinese opera maestros such as Xue Juexian (薛覺先) and Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳) performed at this theater, and now we can only know about this history from the mouths of the older generations. This shows that the transmission of and attention to the culture and history of Hong Kong people is extremely weak. This is very sad. We do not have a cultural bureau or a ministry of culture, and "culture" belongs to "leisure". As we can see, we have the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. This is absolutely ridiculous. Looking everywhere in the world, there is nowhere like Hong Kong that treats culture in such a way. Even though Macao is smaller than Hong Kong, its government has established a Cultural Affairs Bureau. There is no such thing in Hong Kong, and the Home Affairs Bureau has to process these cultural issues. I really feel a sense of unfairness for the Secretary of the Home Affairs Bureau. *Min* (民) and *wen* (文) are of the same Cantonese pronunciation, but each word means something very different from one another. It must be incredibly tough for the Home Affairs Bureau officials to handle cultural matters. We are yet to successfully obtain recognition from the government, and I believe that this would not change during my lifetime. We have to fight for everything on our own. I am very glad that today's academics have begun to emphasize artistic education, and I hope that people who are not good at studying, like us, can also visit their reputable academic institutions to share ideas with them. I think that this brings us hope. It is important that parents would feel the significance of Cantonese opera gaining recognition. Lastly, I would like to bring out an issue about the music of Cantonese opera that was raised by a guest this morning for further discussion. He mentioned that the music of Cantonese opera is similar to jazz music as opposed to classical music.

Mr. Ip Sai Hung:

Actually, I am not a Cantonese opera professional. I am only a producer or a creative artist whose works are in other art forms such as film and theater. Yet, I have been in touch with Cantonese opera, and thus I often talk about it. I always tell others that discussions about Cantonese opera are for the insiders. Such discussions include details that are difficult for outsiders to understand. Therefore, whenever I was interviewed by a magazine journalist, I would claim that I "know" about Cantonese opera, but I do not necessarily "understand" this genre. I feel a bit embarrassed with my involvement in today's discussion on the inheritance of Cantonese opera's creativity. It is because I have seldom talked about the inheritance of creativity since I became

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the convener of the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee in 2004. My engagements in this post have been more about the traditional art of Cantonese opera rather than the issue of transmission. Since 2000, I have noticed the problem of aging amongst the active Cantonese opera professionals. Some of our well-respected seniors such as “Brother Fai” are already in their seventies. Many of my friends in this circle are also in their sixties. Therefore, I suggest that we should carry out the preservation of the current local tradition of Cantonese opera as soon as possible. Chinese opera relies on human effort in terms of transmission. If any of the great veterans has passed away or becomes unable to perform due to their old age, the artistry of Cantonese opera would die consequently. This is what a Cantonese opera enthusiast like me would worry about. During the 1960s and the 1970s, there was the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China which caused a huge loss of the art of Cantonese opera. This was a tragic experience.

Looking back at the Fifties, Cantonese opera was very popular in Mainland China, and this was very influential to the development of the genre in Hong Kong. Yet, the Cultural Revolution led to the loss of performers in the field of Cantonese opera. As indicated by the Cantonese opera cultural worker Wang Jianxun (王建勳), we have to “save” and “rescue” but not “preserve” Cantonese opera in Mainland China. This is really true. I know Mr. Chan Siu Fung (陳笑風) and Mr. Law Kar Po (羅家寶) very well, and they told me that there are no audiences and no good performers (there are performers, but none of them are good enough). Audiences are not willing to watch a Cantonese opera in a theater.

I think that the act of preserving the tradition of Cantonese opera is not for conservative but developmental reasons. The tradition encourages throwing out the outdated and promoting the new, and we currently propose “re-creation”: creation that is based on old materials. It would be a painful experience to create something from nothing, and the time that such creation would take would be very long. Furthermore, to put it into trendy language, we hope to build a database to support young people who are interested in creative work. At our age, we are powerless to be creative, but we hope to be able to preserve what currently exists. The technology of audio and video recordings is more advanced than that in the past. During the 1930s and the 1940s, people can only record sounds but not images. The improvement of today’s technology is remarkable. In this respect, we should make our best effort to contribute.

By reviewing the development of Cantonese opera in ancient China, we can notice that the artistry of this genre involves a lot of creative elements. Among these elements, the foremost would be the basic movements illustrated in a performance. In Chinese opera, these movements aim to transform human actions into choreographed actions, bodily forms, and gestures with beauty in terms of shape, design, and pattern. This is a kind of creativity that has been accumulated by the practitioners of Cantonese opera and other regional operas. It is not something that exists naturally. For the theatrical stage, I think that it is a precious place as it transcends the limits of time and space. The time-space setting of Cantonese opera is determined by human involvement, in



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which its changes are carried out through the movements of the performers. This is rarely found in western theatrical forms. From what we know so far, there are similar settings in Indian and Indonesian theaters. Nevertheless, the Chinese theatrical stage is systematically the best and the most comprehensive. This was created by the Cantonese opera practitioners of ancient China, and this is creativity.

In the recent decades, I must refer to the Thirties when I have to talk about creativity in Cantonese opera. The Thirties of the last century is the most prosperous period of creativity. This may be due to the influence of the New Culture Movement or from urbanization. In the case of the former influence, people thought that Cantonese opera would be something outdated if it were not reformed. Therefore, there were many kinds of reform during that period. With regards to urbanization, people argued that Cantonese opera professionals should use lighting and other devices of the new theatrical stage to enhance the performance. These influences could have existed simultaneously. There were many lighting devices and other kinds of devices borrowed from western theatre that were employed in the performances of Cantonese opera, including the silver-vapor light, projection of reversal film, visual images from film (this is yet to be verified from my research, but there was a saying that an excerpt of a kung fu film was played in a performance), “wire-hanging”, the use of real horse, and the change of scene with stage-lights closed etc. I did not witness these uses, and I only learned about them from books. While people today claim that there has been a lack of creativity in stage design, such creativity already existed as early as the Thirties. In addition to innovations in terms of the devices, there was also a reformation of the genres. Cantonese opera performed in Western historical and modern costume emerged. Such performances were only characterized by the costumes, and they did not obtain the characteristics of Cantonese opera. The performances in contemporary Chinese costumes were products of the influence of the New Culture Movement. There were also many performances of absurd plays, for examples *The White Dragon* (《白金龍》), *Thunderstorm* (《雷雨》), *Family* (《家》) are products of the new cultural movement. There are also absurd drama, such as *When Gandhi meets Xishi* and *When Aliens Lands*, there are many new ideas for drama.

For the accompanying instruments, there were the gongs and drums used in Peking opera, as well as violin and jazz drums. There were a large variety of musical influences, including contemporary popular songs, Western songs, and vocal music from Peking and other provinces. These musical influences were integrated into Cantonese opera. During the 1930s and the 1940s, Cantonese opera was in the same situation as Chinese politics. Both of them sought changes for renewal and self-strengthening. Such changes aimed not only to contend against western civilization, but even against some greater ideals. If we look carefully at the early reformation proposed by the Cantonese opera maestros Xue Juexian and Ma Si Tsang, we can notice that their contributions were greater than today's artists who have inherited the work of Xue and Ma. In an article titled *Nanyou Zhiqu* written in 1936, Xue indicates that Cantonese opera has to integrate the refined elements of regional operas from the south and the north as well as Chinese and Western compositional methods. This is what we are

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witnessing in today's development.

Ideologically speaking, the repertoire of Xue Juexian includes a reflection on the truths of revolution in *Love is not a Sin* 《愛情非罪》 that corresponded with its contemporaneous news stories, reforming the idea of needing to have noisy gongs and drums in *Returning the Flower Debt* (《還花債》), warning against suicide and carrying a strong sense of modern social consciousness in *The Pityful Qiuxiang* (《可憐的秋香》), and the narration of the foreign invasion of China in *May Third Shangdong Tragedy* (《五三魯難記》) that depicts the pain and humiliation of the Chinese people. We can see that many Cantonese operas of Xue's time reflect the spirit of its people at that time.

The reformation by Ma Si Tsang is even more radical. As he pointed out in *A Tough Journey of a Thousand Miles* 《千里壯遊集》, "We still staunchly preserve the old performance conventions and use figures purely as core symbolic representations. Under this condition, we can never come out and claim that Cantonese opera is an art. How can we possibly avoid total failure if we have to compete against cinema and other theatrical forms?" This suggested that everything that was on the theatrical stage of Cantonese opera had to be developed all over again. I was fortunate enough to interview a Cantonese opera senior "Father Bo" sometime ago. He told me that the performance of Ma Si Tsang was really like an art film. Based on the influence from Ma Si Tsang and Xue Juexian, I personally think that the development of Cantonese opera since 1950 has been generally following the path proposed by Xue, which is the fusion of Northern and Southern theatrical characteristics and the combination of Chinese and Western elements. As a result, some of the traditional elements of Cantonese opera have been preserved while some others have become extinct. There have been some Mainland and a few of Hong Kong Cantonese opera professionals that have followed in the path of Ma Si Tsang's reformation. They brought a fresh rendition of Cantonese opera to audiences by producing "operas of Cantonese operatic singing" and "musicals of Cantonese operatic singing".

I do not plan to talk about the changes of Cantonese opera during the 1950s in detail. It is because the changes involve many controversies. Many of the Cantonese operas of this era are creative. This reflects an extreme condition, and I regard it as the "Sin Fung Ming mode" (「仙鳳鳴模式」). In Mainland China, "purification" and "aestheticization" came as the result of political influences.

For the creativity found on today's Cantonese opera theatrical stage, I would like to illustrate several examples. The first one is the "musicals of Cantonese operatic singing" such as the local production *Pearl Shirt* that is currently popular in Hong Kong. This type of performance uses pre-recorded music, and performers sing by following the music. There are two common methods for this kind of musical production. The first one involves discussion of the use of bodily forms and gestures prior to musical composition, so that the composer's music would follow the performers' interpretation. The second one is a reversal of this process. Performers have to make bodily forms

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and gestures to serve the music. This method completely departs from the traditional “rhythmic harmonization”. “Rhythmic harmonization” is not “accompaniment”. There are two distinctive ideas.

The second example is the “electric rendition of Chinese opera” from Mainland China. It makes use of cassettes and good LP recordings of predecessors, and involves new and good-looking performers who have to follow the recorded music to perform. This is similar to dubbing. This type of performance is known as “muted dog-like Chinese opera ” or “dubbed Chinese opera” that is popular in Chaozhou and Shantou areas. It is less common in Hong Kong, but it can be found in some singing and dancing venues due to the constraints of the facilities. In fact, some newly-formed amateur theatrical groups follow the direction of this type of performance. Yet, its existence in the future is uncertain.

The third example is the replacement of canopies with electronic screens. Ms. Connie Chan (陳寶珠) made use of an electronic screen when she was performing at the Hong Kong Coliseum. With the use of a huge screen, audiences can see the performance clearly. However, this results in the lack of differentiation on the stage.

By recalling the modern innovations of Cantonese opera since 1930, I have demonstrated that there have been reformations in Cantonese opera as well as in other regional operas that have sought to present a new image for this art form. I support these reformations and consider them essential.

Despite certain “successes” that have been caused by political interferences, there are not many successful examples of Cantonese opera reform. The outcome of the reformations by the two Cantonese opera maestros Ma Si Tsang and Xue Juexian are seldom presented on today’s theatrical stage. This is especially true in the case of Ma Si Tsang. We should rethink the causes of this circumstance. I am not a scholar, and I cannot analyze the causes in detail. Yet, from the responses of the audience, we can tell that audiences cannot accept innovations when innovations become too far removed from tradition. Therefore, I think that the basis of creativity should be drawn from the core values of the art form. As we can see, the promotion of ballet and Western music has not received public recognition in Hong Kong. It is because every country and place has its own cultural and artistic characteristics. If an innovation involves the exclusion of the local cultural and artistic characteristics, then it would destroy these excluded characteristics. There are more than three hundred regional operas in China. Their main differences can be found in their music in general and “musical vocalization” in particular, which is due to the differences between various regional dialects. The bodily forms and gestures of these regional operas, however, are very similar. For these features, there exists only different degrees of complexity. If we claim that Chinese opera is an accumulation of aesthetic values, then its formative beauty that originated from the bodily forms and gestures would be the core value of Chinese opera. If Cantonese opera professionals intend to make innovations, then they have to have deep knowledge of Chinese opera in general and Cantonese opera

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in particular. They have to firmly uphold the artistic value of the genre, and they cannot be tempted by the attractions of other art forms. They cannot make any simplistic and direct transplantation from other art forms to Cantonese opera. I once watched a performance using modern ballet to perform Sichuan opera, in which the essence of Sichuan opera was completely lost. I instead support innovation that is based on the absorption of artistic elements from other art forms that are then integrated into the original art form.

Speaking of my creativity, I actually have not made many contributions. My practical attempts began with assisting the project “Viewing Windows of Cantonese Opera” which was initiated by the Education Bureau. I regard this project as “a new bottle with old wine”, using new technology to hold old materials, i.e. the traditional art. The most important purpose of this project is to attract students to learn about Cantonese opera through the use of the compact disc. Moreover, the content in these compact discs can now be downloaded from the Radio Television Hong Kong website. This is also a breakthrough. On the other hand, I have also helped the Education Bureau to invite the Cantonese opera experts Mr. Yuen Siu Fai and Mr. Leung Hon Wai (梁漢威) for collaboration. While “Brother Fai” has been assigned to promote Cantonese opera in primary and secondary schools, “Brother Wai” has become responsible for promotion within the community network. The particular nature of this collaboration is the disintegration of the elements of Cantonese opera to reorganize events that facilitate an understanding of the genre amongst target audiences. There are some other creative ideas in progress as well. I made a suggestion to Ms. Selina Chow (周梁淑怡) about building a Chinese opera venue cluster in the West Kowloon Cultural District that would provide various kinds of entertainment and consumption activities for adults and youngsters. I proposed the use of Cantonese operatic singing as the main theme that could then be integrated into the general mode of consumption that is characteristic of modern people. I think that the most attractive aspect of this idea is that the new venue would allow family members of different ages to spend time together to shop, sightsee, and be entertained. Since children would follow their parents and visit the new venue, this can solve the problem of their lack of exposure to Cantonese opera. When we were young, we did not necessarily like to watch Cantonese opera, but we enjoyed watching something dramatic. We could also listen to Cantonese opera whenever we turned radio on. Currently, there exists a difficulty, which is the lack of exposure to Cantonese opera among students. Thus, we hope to promote Cantonese opera through daily life.

In addition, I suggest that the modern Cantonese opera theatrical stage should be created based on the concepts of symbolism and minimalism. Symbolism means the use of different forms to create an infinite sense of space. This corresponds with the spirit of the traditional theatrical stage. The design of theatrical stage and costumes should be simple in order to express certain general impressions. Proscenium stage should also be replaced with combinational stage, since the traditional theatrical stage was not square but three-dimensional in shape. I still have no practical strategies for these suggestions.

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I also recommend the introduction of an examination system to evaluate the standard of Cantonese operatic singing performance. The apparent reason of this recommendation is the consolidation of social recognition for Cantonese operatic singing and Cantonese opera. Since there are public examinations for western art music, ballet, Chinese dance, and Chinese instrumental music, I think that a similar kind of examination can be introduced to Cantonese operatic singing. As for the way to carry out this examination, however, we will leave it for seniors such as “Brother Fai” to develop ideas. In reality, parents emphasize not only on what their children have learned but also on the certificate that the children can obtain. It is because a certificate would be helpful for pursuing further study in foreign countries. If children can obtain certificates of different levels, their parents would find it a worthy investment to pay the cost for Cantonese operatic singing courses. In a utilitarian society like Hong Kong, I think that this is quite a strong reason.

On another issue, I propose the use of computer simulation for stage settings that would replace slide projection and electronic screens for the equipment set-up at the West Kowloon Cultural District. I think this can result in greater dynamic variety and greater depth in theatrical performance. This can also remove certain obstacles for the performance of *actor-singers*. Yet, the cost of these devices would be too high, and I suppose my proposal would be far from being realized. I also suggest dual usage of the theater in the West Kowloon by building hanging rails in front of a proscenium stage. It is not difficult to build a theatrical stage. The most complicated procedure would be to set up the hanging rail and hanging lights. It is because this setup has to be done early in order to fulfill the requirements of the Fire Safety Ordinance. If we want the newly-built theatrical stage to be used as traditional stage for Chinese opera, we can build an extension in front of the stage by reducing the audience seats.

Finally, I recommend the design of a set of fitness exercises based on a selection of movements from among the many within Chinese opera, which would be accompanied by the music of Cantonese opera. This fitness exercise can be promoted in different schools and voluntary organizations so that the public can be exposed to certain elements of Cantonese opera through a new medium. What has been mentioned is only to do with promotion methods, but in fact it is more important to “follow up” on this kind of promotion. As a professional of the field of mass media, I always think about what can be done to enhance public exposure. What I have just mentioned is copyright free. For those who are interested in the ideas, please feel free to make use of them.

Dr. Xu Yanlin:

I think the examination system to evaluate Cantonese opera performance that has been mentioned by Mr. Ip is a very good idea. In the Guangzhou International Cantonese Opera Festival in 2008, I also proposed this idea during the meeting. Before that, I also talked to Mr. Chen Youfeng 陳友峰, the director of the Department of Theatre in the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts and the Chief Editor of *Xiqu Yishu* (《戲曲藝術》). He supported this idea as well. This examination is important to students, teachers, and the process of transmission. It can solve many of the problems encountered in Cantonese opera today. This is a beneficial proposal that is

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advantageous to us. In reality, we can see how unfair it is as there is an examination system for violin and piano performances, whereas Chinese opera is discriminated. For Chinese music, there is also an examination system for *guzheng* performance. How come an integrated and excellent art that is also an intangible heritage validated by UNESCO does not have an examination system? This is inappropriate. As for teachers and students, we should provide them with certificates. In the Guangzhou International Cantonese Opera Festival, Dr. Chua Soo Pong (蔡曙鵬) from the Chinese Opera Institute in Singapore (新加坡戲曲學院) also expressed the same thoughts after the meeting. This is the reason why I would like to realize this idea. This is our wish, and I do not want to let this become only an idea. We have to figure out a way to realize it. From my investigation, I have discovered that it is pragmatic to have this examination system. If there were no such system, there would not be a nationally recognized system of qualification. Of course, this examination system would have many drawbacks, and we may encounter some problems. It would not be easy to carry out this system. Nevertheless, if we develop this system, it would be very good even if there were drawbacks. I therefore hope that we can realize this together. This is not for some special purpose, but it is simply for the transmission of Cantonese opera. This is truly good.

Moreover, I would like to talk about some ideas that have been raised over these two days during the symposium. Some teachers have mentioned that there are some young people who hope to preserve the tradition while there are others who would like to make innovations. We should make use of some new research methods such as those used in marketing studies. While cultural workers work on this matter, we can also introduce marketing professionals to commercially package and promote Cantonese opera with the plans and procedures that are in accordance to the common marketing strategies of modern society. For example, the Southern Theater in Guangzhou will be built as a theater for tourists. The development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong is prosperous and there are good audiences. I think that we can make a connection between Cantonese opera and tourism in Hong Kong, making Cantonese opera a tourist attraction or a tourist spot.

For the content and method of the inheritance of Cantonese opera, I think that this involves two aspects. The first one is the transmission of art within the field of Cantonese opera as pointed out by Mr. Yuen Siu Fai. The second one is the nurturing of the audiences' level of appreciation for Cantonese opera. I think the first one has to do with the refinement of Cantonese opera. Folk art can also be elegant. It is just about the changing of forms. The second one is to do with what I am emphasizing today: the popularization of Cantonese opera amongst the younger age groups, i.e., nurturing children as audiences. Popularization of Cantonese opera in general is also an issue, many scholars and seniors have already mentioned.

Let me first introduce the situation of transmission among Cantonese opera insiders in Guangzhou. Dr. Tai just mentioned some problems related to changing the structure of traditional opera troupes as well as the training of performers. I do not have any related

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personal experiences, and I hope that the seniors and colleagues can tell me more about that. Currently, there is a big problem with the transmission of Cantonese opera in Guangzhou. There is decreasing number of Cantonese opera professionals. For example, the directors of Cantonese opera lack professional knowledge. The training of performers has also been affected by many complicated issues. I first studied literary theory, and I later researched the theories of Chinese opera. I believe that we should conduct some theoretical thinking during the process of transmission. The relationship between Cantonese opera and contemporary culture would be one of the issues for further consideration. We have to admit that Cantonese opera is a product of agricultural society, which is now distant from modern society. How can we judge Cantonese opera in this day and age? Actually, Cantonese opera has many cultural characteristics. It is unique but it also includes some universal qualities. Its cultural uniqueness is a mark for both its very existence and its recognition by the public. It is also a mark of its recognition of itself. For example, Cantonese opera is different from *Han* opera, *Peking* opera, and *Kunqu*. It is because it has its unique character. As it was just mentioned by some teachers, it is possible for Cantonese opera to maintain its uniqueness and special characteristics.

Cantonese opera is also a history. It is an integrated art with plenty of accumulated history. It was formed through a long history of development. It has widespread meanings. It belongs to the local people and it also belongs to a category of art. It transcends the basic essence of life amongst different ethnicities, localities, and races. Judging from the perspective of art, it carries an ideal of a high level - a pursuit of truth, kindness and beauty, as well as realizing, demonstrating, and surpassing the yearning of an individual. At this level of understanding, the values of every culture, be it Chinese opera, Cantonese opera, our traditional culture, or any other culture such as western culture and the culture of other countries, should be treasured, protected, and studied.

Meanwhile, we have to consider that Cantonese opera is a regional art. I study the history of Chinese opera, and I have found that historical writings generally do not mention anything about the Chinese opera of Guangdong province. Even if there was some mention of it, it is only from a few writers such as You Jun 丘浚 from Hainan. As a regional culture or a sub-culture that has existed for a long period of time, how does Cantonese opera relate to mainstream culture? We have to first admit that Cantonese opera is a regional culture, a culture that cannot be separated from its ethnic and regional qualities. That is why a regional culture is usually considered to be best suited for its specific region and it has specific regional connections. This “regionality” also has its value, as it makes part of the whole cultural structure. The whole culture would no longer exist if there were no “regionality” within it. The acceptance of the “regionality” of Cantonese opera would not limit the development of the genre. This “regionality” is an objective existence, and we do not have to deny it. Every art has its own “regionality”. Peking opera also has its “regionality”. Moreover, we can understand the problems of Cantonese opera by taking a look at its “regionality”. Cantonese opera is a manifestation of traditional culture with “regionality”, and one of my current research directions is to prove this. The culture of Cantonese opera is not something

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isolated. It is because it is impossible for mainstream culture to not belong to a specific region. Each mainstream culture necessarily exists in a specific region. Although I am from Guangxi, I have stayed in Guangzhou for twenty years. My research as well as much of my thinking has become a part of the culture that I am living in. This regional culture is in fact a constituent of the traditional culture. In terms of meaning, every study of a regional culture is a study of a specific aspect of the traditional culture.

At the same time, Cantonese opera is an integrative culture. It is a concrete and vivid form of both local cultural education and the education of traditional culture. I have raised this point of view at the national conference and the conference organized by the literature society of Guangdong province. Many people think that they should look down on the research of regional culture, as they consider mainstream culture to be nobler. In fact, the problem of nobility does not exist. Rather, it is to do with different research perspectives. Furthermore, regional art and culture is closely related to people's lives. For example, Cantonese opera is sung in Cantonese, and much of the content of traditional theatre has been drawn from regional living experiences. This is the main reason that local people like to watch Cantonese opera. Those who have migrated from other places may even like it more than the locals. They may be more familiar with it as well. This is the result of the assimilation of regional culture and the processes of acceptance, experience, and recognition. In this situation, we have to consider the question of expanding the meaning of "regionality" into something with a broader scope. Cantonese opera is not only for the research of regional culture. It can also be put into a larger cultural context for further study. It is a discovery of life and beauty. It is because Cantonese opera is a way of life, and watching Cantonese opera is a lifestyle. Experiencing the historical dimension of Cantonese opera is a way of life in Cantonese opera as well, while the large amount of time devoted to the study and promotion of Cantonese opera is yet another lifestyle. By immersing in its enjoyment, we would find such lifestyles to be beautiful. And, in this situation, we would realize the importance of the discovery and transmission of Cantonese opera. I think that this reflects the respect towards tradition, as well as the treasuring of culture, the appreciation of beauty, and the need to spread ideals.

The responsibility of the educators is yet another question. Since I teach courses on literature, Chinese opera, and culture, I am familiar with the different aspects of regional culture. University students are unlikely to talk about poetry after their graduation. They may work in the fields of administration, culture, or in corporations. They may not maintain a relationship with Chinese opera. If I force them to learn something, they may not find such knowledge applicable. Yet, I hope that they would not deny us funding when they are doing administrative work in the future. If they work for corporations, I hope they can apply their literary knowledge and other kinds of knowledge to their writing. It would also be nice to see if they can invite their clients to watch a Chinese opera performance. This would be enough. I do not want to see them becoming the ones who would end this culture. In addition, during the process of education, we have to consider the fact that they would be a father or mother someday. I will talk about that in detail later. For the present, regional culture would be their living environment

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and the cultural environment surrounding them, and the nurturing of understanding and familiarity towards the regional culture should take place in the last stages of education. I feel that this is my responsibility.

Another problem is about what is commonly referred to as “patriotism” in the Mainland. I tell my students and also in many different occasions that patriotism is not something that is empty. If you love something, then you have to know what it is that you love. Maybe one does not love their family. Maybe one does not love their culture. Maybe they are from a peasant village in the Hakka region but they would never tell anybody about it. I am from an agricultural institution, and I first thought that many of the students would be from peasant villages. In fact, many of them are from cities. I notice that some of the students from peasant villages have low self-esteem because of their different living environment. This is beyond our imagination. I told them that even if they are from peasant villages, they have to bravely tell people that their homeland has the best culture in the world; that it is the home of a world intangible cultural heritage. Shadow puppetry, for example, is a subject of investigation when foreigners visit their land. I encourage them to be proud of their homeland. If they do not love their homeland, how can they love their own country? I do not expect them to have a high level of understanding of patriotism. I only request them to love their home and their parents. We say that a culture includes the mountains, streams, houses, and rocks. If you do not love these natural features of your homeland, how can you love your homeland? You have to love something concrete, such as your parents and relatives. Our culture relies on its history and its future. I once let my students conduct an investigation to find out about the stories, renowned figures, and something about the future development of their homeland. By knowing about these things, the students form ideas about the past and the future. When they then return to their peasant village, even if it is just that they become the village chief, they would be a cultured chief. If one understands his or her homeland, then he or she would know about the significance of a temple and decide not to demolish it. That would be enough. The responsibility of an educator therefore is to help his or her students understand and become familiar with all these things. If one is not familiar with it or does not understand it, one would not be able to love it. Only this way would lead one to respect tradition and culture. If one understands that one's homeland has such a history and such remarkable things, one would naturally be proud of it. One would not have low self-esteem no matter where one goes. If one has low self-esteem because one is from a village or from China, then it would be terrible. If one cannot be self-confident, how can one live out life without fear? It is not a problem if you are from China as long as you are from Earth, but it is clear that you should know where you come from. I am clear about where I am from. I think that it is troublesome for one to not have confidence.

Next, I would like to introduce two surveys. The first one targeted the university students living or studying in the region of Cantonese culture, and the second one is an investigation of the education of ethnic tradition, art, and culture in the high schools of Guangdong province. Both surveys took a very long period of time to finish. Despite the hard work that it took, the findings of the two surveys have been found to be very

Dr. Xu Yanlin:  
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important. Let me first talk about the first survey. The result of this survey can be found on the Internet, and it was published in two volumes of *Nanguo Hongdou* (《南國紅豆》) as a twenty-thousand-word-long report. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed for this survey, and one hundred and seventy-eight of them were returned. According to the results, there are very few students who like Chinese opera. The questionnaires were distributed by students. This arrangement has an advantage. Students can learn about the actual situation. It is not possible to ask a company or other people to distribute the questionnaires. We do not have any funding from other sources. In order to conduct the survey, we had to use our own funding and ask for students to help. These students are interested in the topic, and have a sense of responsibility towards their task. They can learn from their involvement in the survey, and they can develop an interest in Chinese opera through their task. They are believed to be more trustworthy and reliable. According to this survey, people think that Chinese opera is something important because Cantonese opera is a large part of Cantonese culture. While a few of the respondents indicated their dislike of Cantonese opera, a large number of respondents, i.e., 146 out of 178 respondents, agreed with the need to study and preserve Cantonese opera. This result gave us great deal of confidence.

Let me talk about the reasons for why we like Chinese opera. Some of us think that the singing is beautiful, the theatrical content is good, and that it has educational meaning. Some others like its content (that is relevant to daily life), the communal effect of Chinese opera, and the cheerful atmosphere. Contrarily, there are many people who dislike Chinese opera and do not like its forms and content. Some of them say that they do not understand or cannot appreciate it. Students were also asked whether they think that Chinese opera will be abandoned. Some say that it would not be abandoned because of the values that it retains and that it is in the process of development and improvement. Some others say the opposite. They think that Chinese opera is becoming farther removed from the modern world and it will become a relic in the future. Some also consider it noisy or time consuming, and said that they only watch television. People all have their own take on this.

I conducted another survey in Guangdong province for five months. I assigned students from Guangdong province to different schools in order to look for differences among the schools. I collected a lot of information, and the whole process of organizing this information took several months. According to the findings, there were thirty-three courses on Chinese opera that were operating in the schools included in the survey. These schools also organized other courses, such as the more common theoretical courses. Some people reacted positively to the idea of the necessity of establishing Chinese opera courses. The students had some thoughts about the curriculum design, the promotion of the courses, the qualification of teachers, the collaboration with other organizations, and the scheduling of the courses. This survey demonstrated a dilemma in Chinese opera education: students are interested in learning about Chinese opera, but they do not get the chance to do so or they are not in an environment that allows them to do so which brings us to what we have mentioned today: what is the key to Chinese opera education? The survey showed that children are most sensitive to and

Dr. Xu Yanlin:  
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most easily influenced by Chinese opera when they are between five and eight years old. All the interviewees were first exposed to Chinese opera when they were sixteen years old or younger. Family members are the most influential to a child's exposure to Chinese opera. The grandparent and parents' generation would encourage a greater level of curiosity towards Chinese opera amongst the children. The education of Cantonese opera is active in the primary and secondary schools in Guangzhou, but there is still a great deal of room for improvement. Similar educational work has emerged in universities as well. In my school, the research of Cantonese opera, as both a traditional Chinese operatic genre and a regional opera, are to do with exploring and utilizing the educational resources of traditional culture.

I am currently doing research on the cultural recognition and regional construction of Chinese opera in the Lingnan region. It is a collaborative project with the Guangzhou Research Institute of Creative Arts and Literature (廣州市文藝創作研究所) that is to do with maintaining the quality of Chinese opera scripts. There are lectures as well as student internships that involve teaching and other practices. The research also involves exchanges and collaborations with other institutes, including the symposium co-organized by Zhongshan University, South China Normal University, Guangzhou Research Institute of Creative Arts and Literature, Guangzhong Cantonese Opera Troupe, and Hong Xiannü Art Center. Because of the issue of funding, it is more economical to employ the students of my school to assist my research. I employed a student who is the successor of the Guangzhou storytelling maestro Yan Zhitu (顏志圖) to teach storytelling. I also employed another student who is the successor of the tradition of Foshan Lantern to teach on this area of expertise. These are courses taught by students and sponsored by a town government office. I am more or less responsible for all other parts of the research.

In general, Cantonese opera is a very distinctive genre that is worth treasuring and further development. It is a pool of good cultural and educational resources.

Dr. Cham Lai Suk Ching:

Due to the tight schedule, I will discuss the opinions on two aspects of today's discussions. Today, we have mainly spoken about the popularization of Cantonese opera, be it related to the education system or another system. The other aspect of today's discussion is the issue of inheritance of the art of Cantonese opera. I am optimistic about the popularization of the art. When Prof. Yung returned to Hong Kong in 1995, we started to cooperate with Mr. Yuen Siu Fai and some other professionals to conduct a study of pedagogical method and curriculum design for the Education Bureau. This study was officially launched in the 2004-2005 school year. It offered the methods and content for teaching Cantonese opera in primary and secondary schools. This is very important. Moreover, in terms of support, various tertiary institutions and the Quality Education Fund have provided funding to support the promotion of Cantonese opera in these schools. A short while ago, Dr. Tai Suk Yan also mentioned that Cantonese opera is more than something for extra-curricular activities. Most importantly, Cantonese opera courses are already rooted in the formal curriculum. In other words, primary and secondary school students would have the opportunity to

Dr. Cham Lai Suk Ching:  
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become exposed to Cantonese opera during their music classes. Even though this is not an exposure that is constantly present, students would have a chance to learn Cantonese opera in certain years or time-periods. The Quality Education Fund also provides funding to support visits from professional performers at these schools. These performers would assist the teachers' instruction or conduct demonstrations. For what I have seen so far, the influence of these activities is significant, so I am absolutely enthusiastic about this aspect of development. Meanwhile, by looking back at the past, we would find that many things were not accomplished in an instant. If we follow the steps with patience, then success will surely come.

Nevertheless, I worry very much about the inheritance of the profession. "Brother Fai" just mentioned the learning attitude of today's professional performers as well as the courses and direction taken by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in training future performers. These issues really make me worried. To quote a well-spoken line from Dr. Xu Yanlin, "Culture cannot exist if it is separated from its ethnicity and "regionality"." In other words, Cantonese opera is a local culture that belongs to Cantonese and Hong Kong people. It is also a culture that is rooted in Hong Kong, therefore, we should listen to what we should listen to and learn about what we should learn about in our daily lives. Currently, what students are exposed to in regular schools is something comparatively traditional. In terms of professional training, as "Brother Fai" just said, its development goes into other directions because of problems such as the quality of teachers. What will future audiences accept as Cantonese opera? Will it be something foreign or something locally-rooted and familiar to the audience? This question is worthy of our serious consideration.

Mr. Christopher Pak:

Actually, I am not responsible for the curriculum design of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, but, surely, I know about this to a certain extent. The issue that "Brother Fai" just mentioned really does involve the question of the inheritance of art. In modern society, the insertion of the transmission of traditional art into a modern education system would involve issues related to the overall objective of social education and the distribution and use of resources. The biggest issue would be the way to transform the traditional mode of transmission for Cantonese opera into modern modes of education. In fact, in different countries around the world, there are many approaches used to place various types of traditional arts into modern modes of education. Some of the countries, such as Japan, have done a better job of this. Some others do a less favorable job. But still, the methods of transformation adopted by different countries are really different. For the issue of "internship" that we have just mentioned, I would like to use Western opera training as an example. Even if one had graduated from the Juilliard School, it would be impossible for him or her to perform at venues like the Metropolitan Opera right after their graduation. The School must first assign internship training for students with potential. Throughout history, there have never been any opera singers who were able to perform on stage right after his or her graduation. This is the same for Pavarotti. Looking back at Hong Kong, should we adopt training modes from the Mainland? We should borrow methods from successful examples and learn from the failed examples to make improvements.



Mr. Christopher Pak:  
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Speaking of education resources and the distribution of educational goals, this leads to another issue, which is what Dr. Xu had mentioned yesterday and today about the “transformation into something noble”. This issue can be understood as the portion of cultural capital in today’s society occupied by traditional art. This is very important, because the concept of cultural capital will affect the distribution of resources for the entire society. Nevertheless, there exists some sort of inequality. A universal acknowledgement of the importance of Cantonese opera does not immediately imply that we have to invest resources into this field. The economic power of cultural capital does not have a balanced relationship with power distribution. Inequality is about how people of different social classes control their respective resources. For example, in viewing Cantonese opera from the perspective of business operation, we would only think about the need to make money; if there were no solutions for the problems encountered, then the theater would be closed. Indeed, there are many factors that affect the distribution of cultural capital, such as gender, age, economy, and education etc. “The contest of culture” is often about race as well, even though this is more rare in Hong Kong. Politics, religion, and community are also factors. All these factors would result in a variety of concepts about cultural capital held by different people in the society, and these variant concepts would lead to the creation of some other problems.

A survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong shows that there are a large number of Cantonese opera performances on average every year. On the other hand, some people think that Hong Kong is a “cultural desert”. The main characteristics of Hong Kong culture are Hong Kong people’s unawareness of culture and their tendency to place Hong Kong culture into the dichotomy between Chinese culture and western culture which leads to the loss of local culture. Local culture exists, but we do not care about it. Although there are more than a thousand performances, we still think that Cantonese opera is facing the problem of inheritance and it will be extinct. Indeed, the government should further explore the characteristics of Hong Kong local culture. It should not emphasize the development of Chinese or western artistic culture and yet overlook local culture. It should not regard Hong Kong as a “cultural desert” either. Whenever there is a discussion of “cultural policy”, Hong Kong people would firmly agree with that Hong Kong lacks culture and art. They also have no idea as to how to use capital for development. This phenomenon precisely explains the limitations of funding obtained within the field of Cantonese opera.

Mr. Lui Hung Kwong:

Today’s topic is “The Inheritance of Cantonese Opera’s Creativity”. For inheritance, I think that many of us here, including myself, carry the great responsibility for it. I hope we can correct our direction of thought. As early as the time of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, someone pointed out in the Zhongnan Display (中南匯演) that “The surname of Cantonese opera is *yue*.” In the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, I am the leader of the unit responsible for the issue of inheritance. I conduct promotional work, including that which is conducted in primary and secondary schools. I also offer professional training and organize courses for the College of Cantonese Opera. Let me first talk about the courses for the College. After the reform two years ago, the College organized the first training class for youngsters. At that time, I laid down a teaching

Mr. Lui Hung Kwong:  
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principle, i.e., “Consolidation of the foundation, teaching in accordance to talent, rehearsals with corresponding professionals”. “Consolidation of the foundation” and “teaching in accordance to talent” do not require further explanation. “Rehearsals with corresponding professionals” is an idea drawn from my own experience of learning Cantonese opera, which means that *fadan* would teach the *fadan*, *chou* would teach the *chou*. I only play *chou* and I would not teach others who play *wenwusheng*. The so-called “correspondence” refers to employing excellent performers to “inherit the opera through personal teaching”. For example, Lin Xiaoqun (林小群) teaches *Qiang San* (搶傘), Wen Juefei (文覺非) teaches *Qiang Di* (搶笛), and Luo Pinchao teaches *Bie Yao* (別窯). When I was learning how to play a *chou*, it was Wen Juefei who taught me to play *Qiang Di* (搶笛). This happened fifty years ago. If someone woke me during the middle of the night, I can still perform that excerpt fluently with good memory. This was the moment when I became “enlightened” in my artistic career. This is “rehearsals with corresponding professionals”. The effectiveness of the principle that I set can be seen to a certain extent in last year’s performances. Mr. Yuen Siu Fai is one of the instructors as well. Many performers and audiences expressed their satisfaction after the performances.

Returning to the point why leaders have to correct their directions of thought? There was once a performance unit that organized a graduation performance. The performance included famous Peking operas such as *San Cha Kou* (三岔口), *Lü Bu Shi Ma* (呂布試馬), and *Hu Jia Zhuang* (扈家莊), and I joked that the title of the performance should have been changed to “Graduation Performance of Peking Opera in Cantonese dialect”. I think that a chef should cook dishes that he is familiar with. I am a Cantonese chef and I should cook Cantonese dishes. The same goes for a Beijing chef. As “artistic chefs”, we should be alert and not divert our direction. I do not oppose foreign art and culture, but I think we should strengthen our own foundation before making any further development. We should pay attention and be alert to this.

Ms. Wong Yee Man:

Whenever I attend this kind of lecture, I become very emotional because there are many things for which my actions are unable follow my will. I just cannot do many things. I share some of the same opinions and direction, but my ability is limited. Therefore, I think that there should be more lectures of this kind. We should encourage more professionals of the same field to participate and discuss Cantonese opera’s direction of development. Let me talk about what Mr. Ip has just spoken about. Actually we have known each other for quite a long time, but we have seldom spoken to each other. Nevertheless, every time I submit a proposal in a conference or a meeting, my ideas would be very similar to those of Mr. Ip. For example, Mr. Ip just mentioned that he officially proposed the examination system for Cantonese operatic singing in 2008. I first drafted some ideas about that in 2005, and I submitted the first proposal to the Hong Kong Arts Development Council in 2008. It was not accepted. I submitted another one in 2009, and was rejected also. After that, I have given up this idea. This makes me feel very sorry. I think we are not proposing a kind of distinction of levels or division of art. We instead intend to provide a way for primary and secondary school students as well as students from tertiary institutions to progress and learn to understand the

Ms. Wong Yee Man:  
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art of Cantonese operatic singing. Using the same idea, like a bearer of a grade eight piano performance certificate, a person with a grade eight Cantonese operatic singing certificate (I hope that I can witness this in my lifetime) does not necessarily mean that they are a professional in the field of Cantonese opera, but this would reflect the effort that we have made to train performers. Is a holder of a grade eight piano performance certificate necessarily a performance artist? No! Is a holder of a grade eight Cantonese operatic singing certificate necessarily a good Cantonese opera performer? Not necessarily either! Yet, I still hope that this will come true in the future. This relies on the support of people from different fields. To borrow what Mr. Ip had just said, I would like to make the copyright of this idea available to everyone. I hope that I can try my best to help in realizing this idea. This is really a good way to promote the development of Cantonese operatic singing.

Moreover, some of you just mentioned the professional and the unprofessional aspects of artistic inheritance. As Mrs. Cham had just said, there should be no worry about the promotional work outside schools and the profession. It has received favorable responses. I was an amateur singer and later became a professional singer and performed on stage. After being a professional singer, I then made myself a teacher. I have been exposed to different levels of participation. Talking about the importance of the emphasis on transmission, this is a principle that I developed when I established a performance group for young people in 1998. I had hoped to teach professional skills to students of a non-professional group. Actually, not all of my students were able to reach the professional standard, but I am still glad that I was able to bring in more performers into the field and train up performers with potential. I feel really encouraged about that. Last year, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong organized a class for youngsters. I also recommended my students to attend it. I never isolate my performance tradition from the outside world. I once had a student who just finished his (or her) secondary school education. He (or she) did not study well, but he (or she) was a big fan of Cantonese opera who had aimed to develop a career in Cantonese opera performance. I encouraged him (or her) to apply for the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. In Hong Kong, there are several institutions that provide Cantonese opera education. Students are free to choose amongst them and parents can decide on their own as to which one of them is more suitable for their children. The students of these institutions are fortunate to receive praise from many teachers. My ongoing work has always been aimed towards bringing potential performers to the field of Cantonese opera. Therefore, as a non-professional group, we are excited to have achieved this.

My work also connects me with some institutions including the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the Music Department of Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts for the teaching of Cantonese operatic singing. As an educator, especially a Chinese opera educator, I think that regardless of my position in developing a non-professional performance group or as an employee of an institution, I have to enhance my skills and techniques as well as maintain a proper mentality and ambition. I should not work in the field of Cantonese opera just to make a living. If I lose this mentality, the existence of a Chinese opera educator would be

Ms. Wong Yee Man:  
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meaningless. If we hope to nurture a certain type of person, we should develop the kind of thoughts and viewpoints that correspond with what we intend to nurture. A while ago, Radio Guangdong conducted an interview with me, asking me how to attract people who dislike Cantonese opera and cause them to accept this musical art. I responded by saying that we have to bring excellent performances to the stage so as to gain the audiences' acceptance. We cannot talk about the standard of the performance without the acceptance of the audience. The best method of attraction would be to show performances of a high standard on stage.

Mr. Choi Kai Kwong:

Hello all! I am a representative of the Cantonese Opera Education Research and Promotion Project from the University of Hong Kong. Since the director Dr. Ng Fung Ping (吳鳳平) is conducting exchange activities abroad, she is not able to attend today's symposium. Initially I had only planned to come here for observation, but the organizer invited me to be a respondent. I hope that I can enrich today's discussion.

I believe that all of you have this document in your hands. I will illustrate the curriculum development that has been proposed by the Project in recent years. I will briefly talk to you about this. Today's education system is complicated. One cannot be entirely familiar with all of its details even if one were an educator. I have learned about the system through studying it and working on my research at the same time. Therefore, I will try to simplify the complexities of what I am going to say. In the past, we would talk about performance education whenever we discussed Cantonese opera education. This means that we seek to train students in singing and acting, regardless of whether they were amateur or professional performers. This is the method that we have been using for more than ten years. As Ms. Cham had said in terms of school education, Cantonese opera has long been categorized under the music curriculum. Four years ago, we began a project titled "Integration of Cantonese Opera in Education Seed Project" by chance. This was a big progress in innovation. We attempted to remove the teaching of Cantonese opera from the music curriculum and develop it in other subjects. For example, we put together two specific books for the Chinese language curriculum. The first one *The Classroom of The Princess Changping* is particularly for the Chinese language curriculum. The second one *The Classroom of The Purple Hairpin* includes content that is related to other subjects such as literature and general studies. This project also includes activities for other educational experiences. These arrangements are listed in the document.

We think that this would be the most effective way to root Cantonese opera into the very foundation of education. Since each student is interested in different subjects, we disseminate the contents of Cantonese opera education into various subjects, so that Cantonese opera education can be a concrete part of the school curriculum whilst students can gain more exposure to Cantonese opera. For example, in Chinese language class, Cantonese opera can be a medium for teaching Chinese language. In the general studies class, the investigation of the culture of Cantonese opera can be a part of it. This would be the most effective entry point for students to gain more exposure to Cantonese opera and develop positive feelings towards it. By continuously learning

Mr. Choi Kai Kwong:  
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about Cantonese opera during the growing process, they would become audiences of the genre when they grow up. Some of them who have a greater interest in the genre can study it further and become *actor-singers* in the future. This is our goal.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

About the theme of these two days, i.e. “creativity”, I want to ask “Brother Fai” a question. As a senior *actor-singer*, you must have certain impressions of your own familiar repertoire as well as the foremost repertoire of your mentor in your mind. I would like to ask whether you would deliberately develop an interpretation that is different from Mr. Mak Bing Wing’s when you are encounter this situation (of performing a piece that is part of the foremost repertoire of one’s mentor), like performing *The Princess in Distress*.

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:

I was just about to discuss the issue of “phases”. We always hear about “creativity”. Actually, what we “create” is not necessarily something new. Sometimes we borrow from the long-time practices of others and we regard that as innovation. This is very dangerous. Working in the field of Chinese opera, we have to pass through three phases. The first is “inheritance”. If someone cannot firmly “inherit” the conventional practice, I would consider them to be someone who does not even know the basics. It would be meaningless for him or her to be creative. The second is “development”. This is not creativity. I may imitate my mentors, but I am not their replica. My mentor once said, “If you want someone to be you, there may as well be two of you.” He indicated that I did not need to learn all his gestures, but that I should learn to develop a personal point of view towards art. He told me to observe and learn how he would interpret a new play, but not to learn the details of his hand gestures. Therefore, “development” is originated from “inheritance”. When the “inheritance” is fruitful, “development” would emerge.

Moreover, people of today promote the ideas of “innovation” and “personal style”. I do not oppose the development of a “personal style” based on one’s personal character. Nevertheless, I have heard many seniors indicating that such “personal style” mostly comes from one’s “weaknesses”. Mr. Sun Ma Si Tsang once told me in person that his voice was actually thin and soft. He trained very hard to develop his “kung fu vocalization” (「功夫噪」) so that he could force himself to sing loudly. If he sang in his real voice, people would notice how thin and soft it is. I did not believe him when I was young, but I have become certain about it after growing up and exploring this. There are two famous *actor-singers* who told me something similar. One of them is Bai Yutang. People thought that Bai’s voice is strong and loud, but it is actually thin and soft. Bai told me that he used various methods, such as using the sounds of gongs and drums to cover his voice, and conceal it. Another example would be Mr. Law Kar Po’s “prawn vocalization” (「蝦腔」). Law also pointed out that he sang with such a method because of his weak sound and airflow. Here, we can see that many distinctive characteristics have originated from weaknesses. My mentor Mr. Mak Bing Wing provided an example as well. It is popularly known that my mentor has a “hoarse throat”, but he transformed this weakness to become his personal characteristic. I also adopted his “hoarse throat”. These people have worked very hard because of their own weakness. Their innovations may not be new, but it can be regarded as “creative”.

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
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In addition, I have witnessed another crisis which is the appropriation of Peking opera and Shaoxing opera in other Chinese regional operas. I once listened to a radio broadcast when I was on a car. I could not figure out what regional opera that was being broadcasted. I was shocked to find out that it was a Chaozhou opera performance at the end of it. I nearly forgot to turn off the engine before getting out of my car. In the past, I could distinguish the genre from listening to the first musical phrase of a performance. Today, I cannot distinguish the genre even if I were to listen to the music for quite a while. I think that this is very dangerous. As “Brother Kwong” said, the development of Cantonese opera cannot go down such a path; it cannot adopt too many characteristics from the regional operas of Northern China. The seniors introduced various theatrical and musical elements from the North, and they learned Peking opera. I also learned Peking opera, but what we perform is indeed Cantonese opera. We can only borrow some of the elements from other regional operas. We can learn from their advantages. *Kun* opera has been widely regarded as the most elegant and classical form of Chinese regional opera. We can learn about various theatrical and musical elements from *Kun* opera, but this does not mean that we have to perform Cantonese opera as if we were performing *Kun* opera.

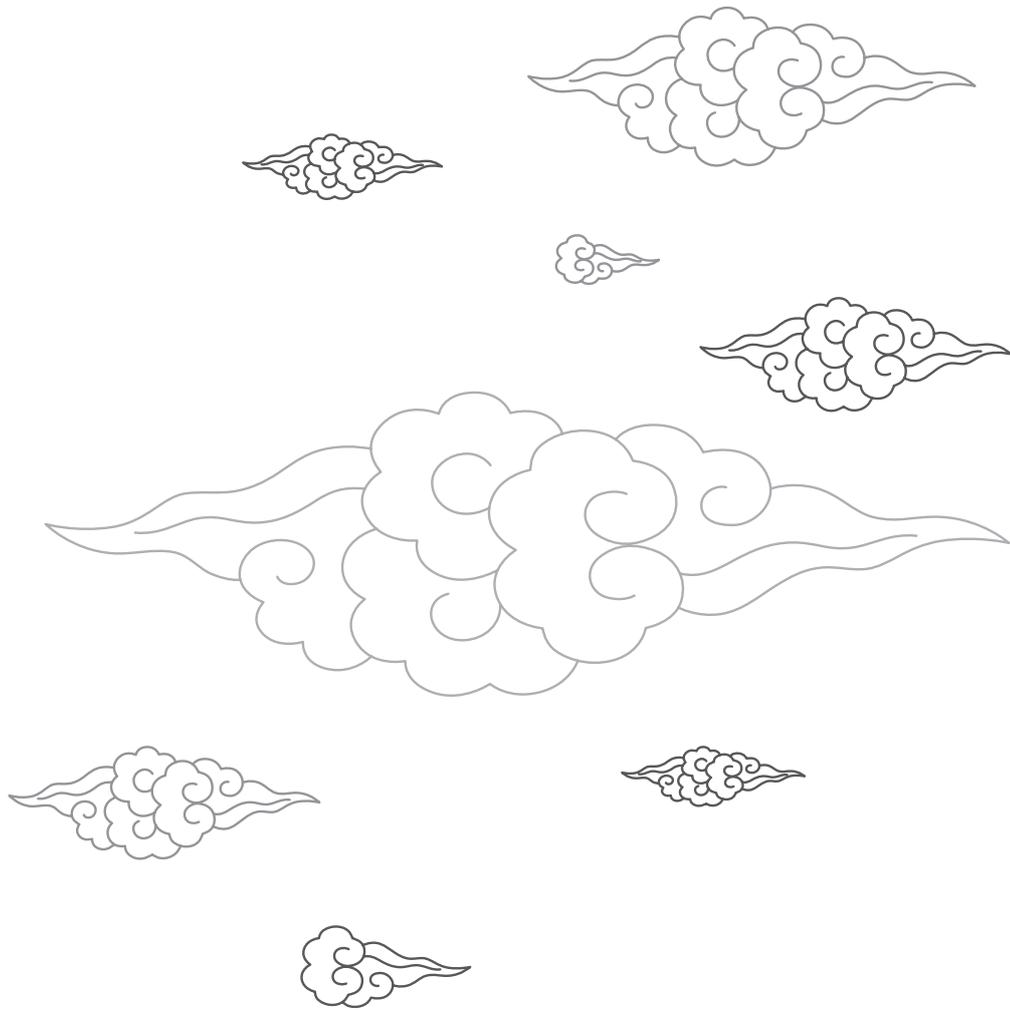
Talking about the changes of Cantonese opera, I am surprised that I am regarded as a “conservative”. This is just ironic. When I was devoted to the development of experimental Cantonese opera in 1970, I collaborated with the “frog king” Mr. Kwok Mang Ho (郭孟浩) to build the set. He was once arrested because he had hung a plastic bag at Tiananmen Square and at the Great Wall. This enthusiast of installation art and performance art helped me with set design. We can see that Cantonese opera is not conservative at all. Mr. Ip Sai Hung just mentioned some of the creative elements in Cantonese opera, and there are actually a lot more. Let me bring out a new example that you may not have previously known. In *Five Mice Making Troubles in Tokyo*, the final scene of Fanjiang mouse (翻江鼠) and Jinmao mouse (錦毛鼠) is a real fight between two dressed performers in a tank filled with water. This is an innovative creation, and it shows that past Cantonese opera performances have involved many creative elements. There were attempts of neglecting the *banghuang* as well as gongs and drums as well. When I became an established performer, I saw some performances that employed no Chinese instruments except those of the percussion section. Jazz drums were used instead.

Whether Cantonese opera becomes ‘northernized’ or westernized, there are still some professionals who are devoted to performing Cantonese opera and there still are people who know about the art and culture of the Guangdong region. I am glad about this. The flying performance in *Legend of the White Snake* by Yu So Chow (于素秋), the wife of my mentor, is originated from cinema. In that performance, the whole theater suddenly became dark, and then the audience saw a screen projection showing Yu flying in the sky. There were many similar performances, and the technological support at the time was excellent. On the other hand, there is an incident that befuddles me. Some years ago, someone invited me to re-create the mechanical setting of a set that was used in the past in the Hong Kong Arts Festival. I spent two months asking all the set decorators in the field, and nobody dared to guarantee that it could be done. The technology of the past should be less advanced than that of today, but the people of today cannot make use of the more advanced technology to re-create an earlier mechanical setting. I just cannot understand that.

Mr. Yuen Siu Fai:  
(continue)

There are two ideas that I wish to share with all of you. The first is the “inheritance”, “development”, and “creativity” that I had just mentioned. Our inheritance must be fruitful, and we should clearly understand the advantages of our art, so that we can begin the innovation. My radical statements may offend many people. I think that many of those who propose innovation at the present time are lacking in the basics. That leads to their negligence of the basics, their dislike of the basics, or their ignorance of the basics. This is very dangerous. It is because they do not follow the pre-existing creative path. Second, I notice that today’s *actor-singers*, no matter if they are newbies or those of my generation, are often inattentive when they are performing on stage. This is also very dangerous. I have watched many performances of the old seniors. They concentrate on their performance throughout the entire performance. Many of my colleagues of today, however, often become inattentive once they have finished their part even when they remain on stage. It is like if they are standing on the stage to watch the performance. Therefore, I always suggest organizing study classes and inviting colleagues to join the classes, with the hope of improving this big problem. Many *actor-singers* do not notice their significance in the audiences’ eyes. Sometimes, the main *actor-singer* in the middle of the stage may perform very well, while the remaining four subordinate roles scatter unevenly on the stage and this results in a visual effect problem. Our Cantonese opera performances are always being criticized, but the cause of the criticism may be due to those who stand on the sides of the stage. Thus, the insiders should seriously do their work in the field of Cantonese opera. We should boldly eliminate the unqualified *actor-singers* and conduct a reassessment.

About the reassessment, many people in the field of Cantonese opera have already approved of this. Many owners of Cantonese opera troupes also support the reassessment. They are willing to boldly eliminate unqualified professionals in order to secure the future of Cantonese opera. The disorganization of Cantonese opera is not caused by the renowned *actor-singers* but by other professionals. We feel ashamed about this. I currently perform for various Cantonese opera troupes. I can tell you that I dare not face the audience whenever I make my curtain call at the end of a performance. I feel guilty to receive the applause of the audience. I know that the performance was underperformed, but the audience still clap with great excitement. We now propose educating Cantonese opera audiences, which I think is practically implausible. I think that only an *actor-singer* who is an idol to the audience would be qualified to promote such education. A chain of train cars can only be pulled along by the force of a huge train engine. Therefore, we worry very much about producing an engine that would always make turns and bring us to a wrong place. This phenomenon is common today. On the other hand, I disagree with Mr Pak Tak Wan’s claim about the insufficient funding provided by the government. Actually, the government has already provided 69 million Hong Kong dollars to support the development of Cantonese opera. This cannot be denied by the field of Cantonese opera. Even though the field of Cantonese opera is uncertain about its future development, we still have to be supportive of it. I think that the inheritance of the culture of Chinese opera or the exploration of creating the phenomenon of a heavy cultural atmosphere relies on the belief of “going ahead even if it is a mission impossible”. I hope that the colleagues who agree with what I had just said can use their efforts to contribute towards future developments, so that there would be a real inheritance of Cantonese opera.

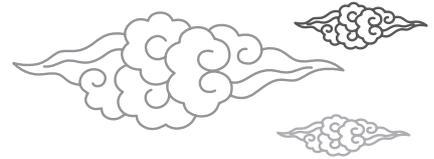




**Creativity in Cantonese Opera: An international symposium**



*Summary*  
*and the*  
*Closing Ceremony*





## Summary and the Closing Ceremony



Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

The following section is the conclusion of this symposium. I hope that other participants will voice out their opinions in addition to listening to what our guests have delivered both yesterday and today. I will conclude on the content discussed during this symposium and share my thoughts and feelings with all of you.

First, let me explain the ideas behind this symposium and the reason for using “creativity” as its topic. In recent years, I have witnessed the some satisfactory development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, but I have also noticed a direction of development that might not considered proper. Many audiences only favor one or two performance styles. This would universalize the scene of Cantonese opera performance and hence result in the loss of personal style. From an artistic standpoint, this is a phenomenon that causes worry. It is because art should be diversified. Different actor-singers and playwrights should have different personal styles. As for audiences, there should be different groups of audiences that favor different types of performance so that the development of Cantonese opera would be prosperous. What is happening nowadays departs from this principle. As such, I daringly suggested “the creativity of Cantonese opera” for the topic of this symposium. I intended to investigate whether it would be necessary to make changes and variations through the lens of creativity. Of course, making changes requires daring and risky attempts. Such attempts may not come to success at the end. There may be failure. The acceptable form of creativity may come after frequent failure. This is a sensitive topic. As Mr. Yuen Siu Fai had just said, discussion of this topic may result in some people being offended. Nevertheless, I think it is worthy to raise this issue before academia and the field of Cantonese opera to stimulate further thought. Even though there may not be an inspiring conclusion or direction derived from today, the discussion is still a good start. Personally, I hope that the academia, the field of Cantonese opera, as well as the public, would be awakened to the phenomenon which is whether we should only favor one style. The performance of *The Orphan of Zhao* last night is particularly meaningful to this symposium. The leading accompanists dismissed the use of the violin and only played *gaohu* and *erxian*. This is a comparatively traditional treatment. Moreover, the performance is not a love story between the *sheng* and *dan*, but instead a historical drama of Chinese ethnic characters. It absolutely can represent China. The “musical vocalization” and “aria type” of the performance are all in accordance to tradition. There were no stage settings in yesterday’s performance except for the use of a fabric screen. The performance’s main attraction for the audience relied only on the singing, acting, speech delivery, and acrobatics of the actor-singers. This is the attractiveness of Cantonese opera itself.



Mr. Boaz Chow:

My name is Boaz Chow. I am a Cantonese opera researcher currently teaching at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Many of you here are my teachers, colleagues, or those who I am always in contact with. I should say that I am expressing my opinion. I watched the Cantonese opera performance last night and attended today's symposium. I have heard about the viewpoints on the inheritance of Cantonese opera's creativity from professionals in the field of Cantonese opera and academia. This is very helpful to my teaching and this facilitates the discussion on relevant issues with my students, such as the perspectives and methods of appreciating Cantonese opera. This is about recognition. In fact, there is a difference between our understanding of Cantonese opera and that of youngsters and other common audiences. Some traditional actor-singers or those who have received traditional education have a particular set of understanding of Cantonese opera. In the current society, youngsters are influenced by popular culture and western music. They would think that Cantonese opera is a type of music or performance, and they would not intentionally learn about its cultural meanings. If we talk to them about that, they would think that it is none of their business. Instead, if we teach them how to appreciate it, or if we introduce them to some of its characteristics that are worthy of appreciation, then they may be inspired to understand Cantonese opera. Thus, in terms of recognition, we should study further on this and make some more concrete inductions in order to familiarize ourselves with how youngsters understand Cantonese opera. This is so that we can connect our understanding with their understanding of Cantonese opera.

Moreover, I find myself closely related to today's topic of inheritance. There are many difficulties and complicated problems that we are working hard to tackle. I help to adapt some operas sometimes, and I would think deeply about whether I would be considered a "sinner of Cantonese opera" by changing some traditional elements by adding some new elements. This is like the many modifications that Mr. Xue Juexian (薛覺先) and Mr. Ma Si Tsang (馬師曾) have made the past which has been regarded as "the most recent Cantonese opera". Yet, the accumulation of experience over a long period of time will result in innovation, so the current situation will also require time to accumulate experience. I hope that there will be various opinions and approaches generated throughout the process, so that there will be a continuous development of Cantonese opera. This really requires a long period of learning. I think that the biggest problem with this symposium is that it is too short and so the goals of the participants are yet to be satisfied. If there is another opportunity, I hope there will be further discussion on these issues.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

We will surely take this into consideration, but this also depends on the future development of the project. The Hong Kong Institute of Education will surely endeavor to conduct further research on Cantonese opera in the future, especially in the area of education. We will also broaden our vision of Cantonese opera to include non-educational aspects, such as Cantonese opera's inheritance, as well as research about the perception of Cantonese opera among Cantonese opera professionals and the general public.

Mr. Ting Yu:

Hello, seniors. I am an administrative officer from the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong. I should not dare to talk about Cantonese opera in front of all the experts here. Yet, as Dr. Leung encouraged us to discuss it in a relaxed manner, I would like to share my opinions here. I am an art administrator. Before working for the Association, I was working in the field of theatre. Since I started to work in the field of Cantonese opera, I have had opportunities to attend various kinds of lectures about Cantonese opera. Based on my observation and what I have learned so far, I think that the “creativity” that many people have been talking about in recent years has actually existed for many years. In terms of education, some parents spend a large amount of money to have their children study at international schools, where they encourage freedom of thought with open-mindedness and do not have a fixed and compulsory mode of study. This was pointed out by Prof. Samuel Leong in his papers. Contrarily, the local education system in Hong Kong limits the development of children. Going back to Cantonese opera, as Mr. Lui Hung Kwong (呂洪廣) said this morning, our development of Cantonese opera does not mean that we are highlighting the protectionism of this place. I absolutely agree with that Cantonese opera carries the surname of *yue* (粵), but there should be something more than that. We should stress on “the Cantonese opera in Hong Kong”. It is because the Cantonese opera in Hong Kong has its distinctive character that distinguishes it from the Cantonese opera of Guangdong province. Such distinctive characteristics are not only to do with artistic representation such as “musical vocalization”, costumes, and props, but also related to a specific kind of theatrical improvisation. To borrow a term from western theatre that would be “improvisation”. In western theater, there is a strong tradition which is Italian improvisatory comedy. For Cantonese opera, I think that there is more than just the difference between civil scenes and martial scenes. There is also strong interaction between actor-singers and audiences. An actor-singer has to deal with eye contact, hand gestures, the delivery of theatrical content, and certain improvisatory expressions, i.e., the so-called “exploding the belly” (爆肚), or to use a more positive term, “improvisatory performance” in theatrical vocabulary. In western theater, improvisatory performance requires training for a long period of time. As many seniors have indicated, an actor-singer should have a strong foundation and basic skills in order to excel at improvisation and thus reach the goal of interacting with the audience and creating theatrical resonance. In western theater, this would mean creating a sense of resonance among the audience and the performers within the same time-space. To me, the improvisatory nature and interaction with the audience are very strong features of Cantonese opera performance in Hong Kong. This is built on the foundation of strong basic skills and the accumulated theatrical experience of actor-singers who have been performing for many years. This is an important characteristic of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. In addition to seeing actor-singers “exploding the belly” or making jokes, we can appreciate the relationship established between actor-singers and the audience within Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, in which such a relationship is less common in Cantonese opera in the Guangdong region. This may be due to the difference of training directions. Such relationships contribute to the popularity of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. Thus, in terms of systematic training and promotional arrangements, this characteristic should be emphasized in the future development of the genre.

Mr. Ting Yu:  
(continue)

Also, speaking of the issue of scriptwriting which was discussed yesterday, the difficulty and constraints of writing a script does not only exist in the field of Cantonese opera. Similar kinds of difficulty exist in other forms of performance and entertainment in Hong Kong as well as in Hong Kong cinema. I was working in Hong Kong's film industry some twenty years ago, and I know about the poor development of Hong Kong cinema during the 1980s and 1990s. One of the reasons for this is the problem with the script because filmmaking resources have not been spent on scriptwriting. I think that the funders and the government should realize that a double amount of the resources and support is required to develop a good script. In addition to supporting the development of a script, the nurturing of professionals such as scriptwriters should involve more resources. This is an investment. Same as education, this is not a one-off investment. I hope that the funders can understand that and put more resources towards the development of scripts and the nurturing of scriptwriters. This can support the development of Cantonese opera in terms of scriptwriting.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

I absolutely agree with the importance of scriptwriting. May I ask the colleagues from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts about whether training in scriptwriting is included in the Chinese opera curriculum in addition to the training for actor-singers and instrumentalists?

Mr. Boaz Chow:

Our Cantonese opera curriculum includes the performance major, the musical accompaniment major, and the composition and research major. Even though the curriculum is formally divided into three major study areas, the class for composition and research often has a low admission rate and thus fails to operate. One of the reasons for this is that not many people are interested in fully devoting themselves to Cantonese opera scriptwriting. Moreover, scriptwriting requires a better foundation and a higher admission requirement for the subjects of literature, performance, and music. Therefore, up to now, the Academy has not yet admitted enough students to open a class. I hope that in the future there will be a class at a higher standard that will teach the relevant content.

Mr. Choi Kai Kwong:

I would like to add that the College of Cantonese Opera of the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (八和粵劇學院) has held scriptwriting courses since the very beginning. Since the previous class, the College has started to collaborate with the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Through reinvestigating the design of the scriptwriting curriculum and systematically modifying the teaching schedule and course arrangement with professional teaching knowledge, the collaboration intends to teach laymen Cantonese opera the basics through a systematic program. There have already been two classes of this scriptwriting course, in which several students have already composed some new operas for public performance. We also plan to arrange the course materials and edit a volume titled *The Basic Teaching Scheme of Cantonese Opera Scriptwriting* (《粵劇編劇基礎教程》). Please stay tuned.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Will this “Basic Teaching Scheme” be published by the University of Hong Kong or by the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong?

Mr. Choi Kai Kwong: Both the course and the book are collaborations between the two organizations.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah: Who would be the target reader of this book?

Mr. Choi Kai Kwong: We hope that any common reader can develop a basic knowledge of Cantonese opera scriptwriting by reading this book. We also hope that the course can help those who intend to learn about scriptwriting or the design of a scriptwriting course. This course is originally organized by the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, in which the Association has been using a one-to-one master-protégé teaching mode. And now, the teaching professionals hope to develop a systematic and complete course that can provide training that begins with something easy and ends with something difficult.

Mr. Christopher Pak: I just discussed with Boaz Chow about the issue of training. This is an issue that requires further thought. In today's education system, be it for university education and other tertiary institutions, or for the upcoming Cantonese opera degree program offered by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 2013, we must think seriously about whether it is vocational training or not, for the content of a Bachelor of Fine Arts program should not only include vocational training. It should also include other courses that fulfill educational objectives. Some of the courses such as those offered by the School of Theater and Entertainment Arts (of HKAPA) emphasize vocational training. These courses can ensure that students are familiar with the working environment of career-related off-stage productions after their graduation. For example, those who major in theatre lighting design can devote themselves to their work right after graduation because they are familiar with the lighting control programs used in control rooms. Contrarily, some other programs have a different kind of training. For example, the training of western opera offers students many vocational training programs after their graduation. These programs are not about collecting degree certificates or diplomas. They instead provide a platform for professionally-trained performers to conduct exchange within the vocational environment. Foreign conservatories that offer western opera training would invite some executives of opera troupes to watch the rehearsals of their students. These students have mostly graduated from music schools, and they solely emphasize on rehearsals every day. By establishing such a platform, professionals can discover young performers with potential.

Also, in today's education system, it is not a must for graduates of the arts to enter a relevant profession. Music conservatories, for example, have very few graduates who can join a professional symphony orchestra. Although the curriculum design of a conservatory seeks to allow its students to pursue their subject of study as their career after graduation (as a professional soloist, or a conductor or a player of a professional orchestra), not every student is able to achieve this because of the intense competition. Nevertheless, those who cannot enter the profession also have an important impact on the relevant field. The case of the development of Cantonese opera is similar. This development does not solely rely on its professionals. It also has to correspond with the development of different social strata within the society.

Mr. Christopher Pak:  
(continue)

In addition, our emphasis on the promotional education of Cantonese opera in primary and secondary schools results in the disregard for promotion in other social strata. I have always regarded Cantonese opera to be an entertainment that is suitable for retired people. Hence, I thought that the promotion should emphasize developing Cantonese opera as a manageable form of entertainment for these people. We should spread to them the idea that cultivated people must perform Cantonese opera when they are retired. We should encourage them to learn Cantonese opera even though they have no knowledge of it. Currently, there is an aging problem in Hong Kong. Around 20 percent of the population are at the age of fifty-five or above. Ten years later, there may be more than one-third of the population that will belong to this age group. These people have time and money, and there is absolutely no problem for them to spend four hours on watching a Cantonese opera performance. Contrarily, youngsters may feel bored after watching such a performance for two hours. Retired people may even hope that the opera will last five hours or longer. They have plenty of free time. This is why promotional initiatives should consider the specific demands of different social strata. We need different kinds of personnel to reach deeply into different levels of society to promote Cantonese opera. These people require professional knowledge as well. There are many graduates from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts who have not joined any professional orchestras or troupes. These graduates are probably more professional than music teachers who have only attended training courses organized by the Education Bureau. They have received professional training for four or five years, and they should be the best candidates to promote Cantonese opera within primary and secondary school music curriculums. Each Cantonese opera training course organized by the Education Bureau only includes nine hours of classes, and its participants would obtain qualification to introduce and promote Cantonese opera after taking thirty hours of these classes. But, if we think carefully, we would find that thirty hours of classes would not be sufficient for that. These graduates from the Academy undoubtedly have better professional knowledge than the music teachers. If they are assigned to primary and secondary schools to introduce and promote Cantonese opera, then the overall effect should be better.

Prof. Bell Yung:

I would like to talk about the topic of this symposium, i.e., “creativity”. After I listening to the opinions from the discussion, I am reminded of two distinctive directions of “creativity”. The first direction is the question of whether creativity exists in Cantonese opera. There are many articles that mention the efforts of Mr. Leung Sing Bo and Mr. Ma Si Tsang, and we can learn a lot from their histories. This is the reason for asking whether creativity exists in Cantonese opera or what kind of creativity exists in Cantonese opera. On the other hand, we can ask whether we should be creative. As Mr. Yuen Siu Fai and some other speakers have mentioned, the creativity of the predecessors was not something that was deliberately generated. Prof. Samuel Leong also stated that creativity in Chinese culture is different from that of western culture. Creativity in Western culture is something deliberate. I think that when we were discussing whether there should be creativity in Cantonese opera in the future during this symposium, the discussion had already brought out an element of deliberation that destroys natural and intuitive creativity. This demonstrates a move towards the

Prof. Bell Yung:  
(continue)

direction of a Western form of creativity. Mr. Yuen pointed out that some people today place emphasis on their creativity in order to hide their deficiencies. Indeed, this kind of deliberate creativity would result in some more undesirable effects instead. Therefore, I have doubts about the issue of whether Cantonese opera should be creative in the future. This doubt is even stronger after hearing Mr. Yuen's opinion. I understand that he does not pay much attention to creativity, and instead thinks that inheritance should be the most important issue. This is the same as my learning of *guqin*. I never think about creativity. I just hope to reach my teacher's level. Of course, what I play would produce a different effect from that of my teacher's because it is my performance. Nevertheless, I have never deliberately created a tradition under my name. I think that this is an issue that we should think more about.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah:

Thank you, Prof. Yung. This is a very good point. Actually, from what I have observed from these two days, I have identified eight aspects of creativity in Cantonese opera. One of the aspects is the arbitrary nature of Cantonese opera. This nature is exactly in opposition to what Prof. Yung stated as deliberate. The creativity in Cantonese opera depends on its arbitrary nature instead of the deliberate nature of the west. I totally agree with this idea. As Prof. Yung has said about *qiziqing*, the practice of this technique should absolutely depend on the understanding of each actor-singer. It should be executed in an enjoyable and arbitrary manner without any pressure, so that new creations can emerge from the music itself.

Prof. Samuel Leong:

I would like to share here about something happened during the morning session. When I said that a Cantonese opera symposium is being held here, some of the attendants told me, "You have to tell them that the problem is to do with Cantonese opera, and not creativity." They thought that Cantonese opera is outdated and that it is not worth making any innovations to it. They also stated that the creativity of Chinese people is not like this. They claim that there should be more inspiration from the analysis and assessment from China. This makes me feel very worried. It is because most Cantonese opera outsiders think that Cantonese opera professionals are people who are in their fifties or sixties and that there is no involvement from people of younger generations. This is not our fault but rather, outsiders have problematic preconceptions of us. We have to deal with this problem. What they told me helped me to understand their standpoint. While insiders are clear about the needs and directions of development, they fail to stimulate the participation of the outsiders. Therefore, we should try to tackle this misunderstanding and initiate more conversations between insiders and outsiders. Education is different from art or technology. This is actually an issue to do with education. We have to resolve this misunderstanding when we talk about education. Cantonese opera insiders talk about the genre on a technical level, while educators facilitate the understanding of this genre so as to make it more popular. Without the effort of these educators, how can we fight for support from other people in the field or appreciation from outsiders? As a result, the Hong Kong Institute of Education hopes to facilitate the cooperation between the field of art and the field of education. It intends to help outsiders to appreciate the development of this arduously maintained art form. I really hope that this cooperation will be achieved.

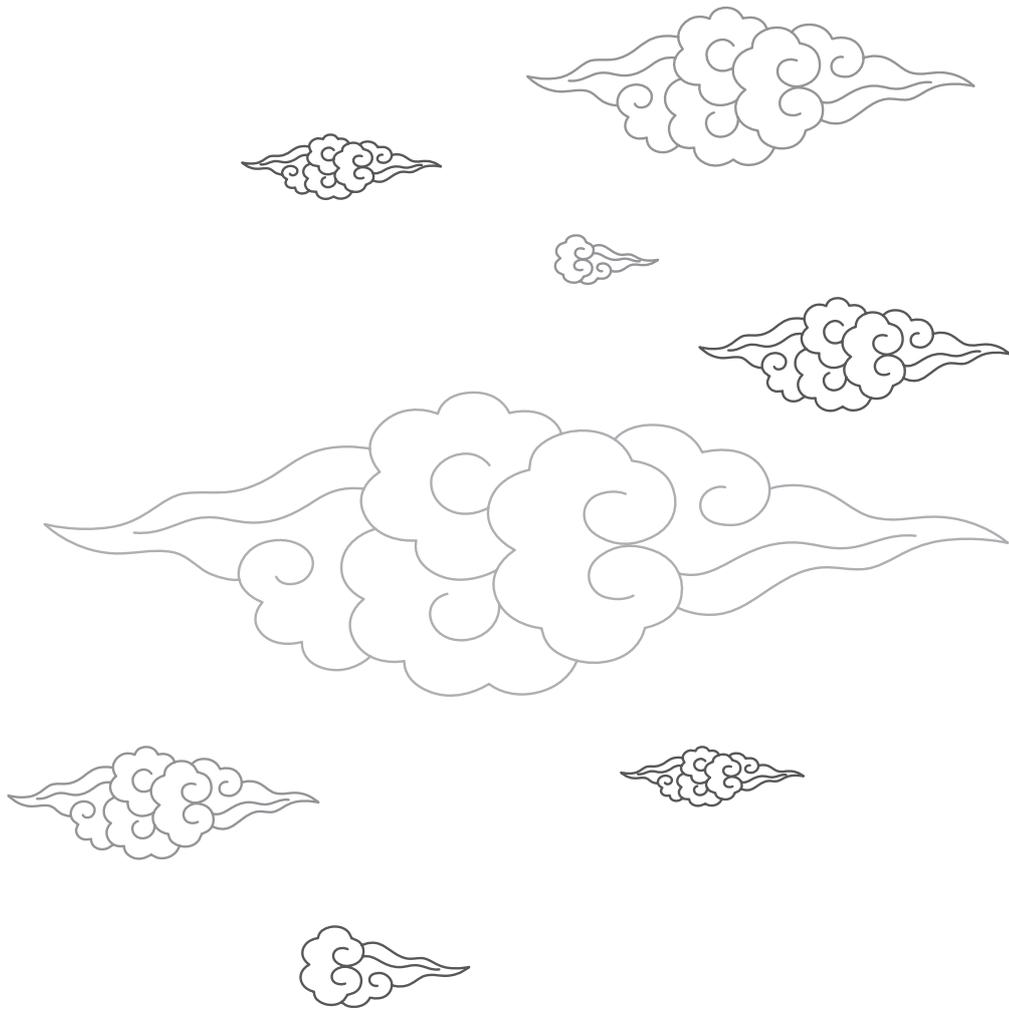
Prof. Bell Yung: Since we know that these people are ignorant, why should we have to withstand pressure from them? Since we are confident about our efforts, why do we have to care about this pressure and do something unsophisticated to cater to these people?

Dr. Leung Bo Wah: This is exactly the main purpose of organizing this symposium.

Prof. Samuel Leong: Correct! “Creativity” is not the central issue, but the misunderstanding of it is very serious.

Prof. Bell Yung: The topic of this symposium should not be “creativity” but “education”. Education is the core value of Cantonese opera. If one looks down on us, then it is not worthy to “educate” him or her. I think that the Hong Kong Institute of Education really bears a great responsibility towards the mission of “education”.

Dr. Leung Bo Wah: In conclusion of the discussions, I find that we have benefited a lot from the symposium. The most important thing is that many guests have mentioned the creativity of Cantonese opera. I have generalized eight aspects of creativity in Cantonese opera. The first is the arbitrary nature of the genre, just as I had mentioned before. The second is a practical need. The creativity of Cantonese opera depends on the practical needs of the genre. For example, Mr. Yuen Siu Fai pointed out that some of the *actor-singers* would make new attempts in order to mask their performance weaknesses. This kind of creativity reflects the practical need. The third aspect is the inter-disciplinary nature of the genre. As Prof. Chan Sau Yan (陳守仁) pointed out, the performance of Mr. Ma Si Tsang was inspired by films from the west, such as the films by Charlie Chaplin. The fourth aspect is the adventurous nature of the genre. The innovations by Xue Juexian and Mr. Ma were not accepted during their time. They had to possess foresight and an adventurous spirit to not become daunted by criticism from others; which finally led to their success. The fifth aspect is the tradition of the genre. Cantonese opera is a traditional genre that contains Chinese ethnic characteristics. It is not a western material. Thus, we should stress on the traditional framework of the genre. The sixth aspect is the mass ownership of the genre. We cannot change the genre in whatever way we like. As Dr. Lam Wing Cheong (林詠璋) said, there is no limit to creativity, but it is impossible for such creativity to be without any constraints. The seventh aspect is time consumption. The creativity of the genre requires many years of development to reach today’s status. Therefore, we have to be determined and patient with the progress. Finally, the genre is something re-creative. The completion of a work is not the effort of a single person. It involves the effort of a large group people and the transmission of knowledge amongst them. All these things are the key things that I have learned over these two days. I hope that all of you can share in the outcome of this symposium as well.





# Acknowledgements



**Speakers :**

- Dr. CHAN Chak Lui
- Prof. CHAN Sau Yan
- Mr. IP Sai Hung
- Prof. Samuel LEONG
- Dr. TAI Suk Yan
- Dr. XU Yanlin
- Mr. YUEN Siu Fai
- Prof. Bell YUNG

**Respondents :**

- Dr. CHAM LAI Suk Ching
- Mr. CHOI Kai Kwong
- Ms. HUNG Hung
- Dr. LAM Wing Cheong
- Ms. LAU Wai Ming
- Mr. Danny LI
- Ms. LO Wan Yin
- Mr. LUI Hung Kwong
- Mr. MAK Wai Man
- Mr. Christopher PAK
- Ms. TANG Mei Ling
- Mr. WONG Chi Fai
- Mr. WONG Sing Kwan
- Ms. WONG Yee Man

( Name listing with alphabetical order )

**Co-organiser**





**Creativity and the Art of Cantonese Opera:  
Performance, Script, Music, and Transmission**



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