Protection and Inheritance of Cantonese Opera*

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Abstract—The development history and characteristics and current protection status of Cantonese opera were understood over a looking through relevant literature and materials. The necessity to protect Cantonese opera was analyzed from perspectives of its distribution regions and characteristics and development history and so on based on its current development status. Further, it is found that the inheritance of Cantonese opera has problems such as the aging of Cantonese opera audiences, people's lack of protection consciousness, not that highly attention of the government and insufficient capital investment on such opera. Through in-depth research, it is proposed to strengthen the protection and inheritance of Cantonese opera in the aspects of establishing laws for protection of Cantonese opera culture and enhancing regional Guangdong's cultural protection legislation, strengthening the awareness of regional people's relevant protection and inheritance consciousness.

Keywords—Cantonese opera; culture; protection; inheritance

I. INTRODUCTION

Cantonese opera is a local opera mainly popular in Guangdong. It is also spread to the vernacular area of Guangxi Province as well as overseas such as Southeast Asia and San Francisco, USA and other ports where most overseas Chinese inhabited. It is one of the local opera dramas in Guangdong Province and is also poses large influence to southern China. Due to its origin in Guangdong, it was called a Cantonese opera. Cantonese opera was originally emerged in Guangzhou and Foshan regions and now is mainly popular in Guangdong, Guangxi, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. Since many overseas Chinese are descendants of Cantonese, there are often Cantonese opera performances in overseas Chinese communities. Cantonese opera is a fusion of a variety of vocal musics, mainly singing pang-tzu and Erhuang.

Cantonese opera is an important culture in Guangdong Province, derived from southern opera, also known as the "full-scale dram" or "Cantonese full-scale dram" and originated from Foshan. As early as in Han Dynasty, the performance art of Foshan had become very popular. Since Jiajing period in Ming Dynasty, Cantonese opera had begun appearing in Guangdong. Cantonese opera is a performance art that combines singing and playing, incidental music, stage costumes and abstract body and so on. It is a large-scale drama of southern China that is mainly composed of pang-tzu and Erhuang and formed by a fusion Haiyan tone, Yiyang tone, pang-tzu and other tones flown into Guangdong in Ming and Qing Dynasties and absorbs the folk musics of Pearl River Delta. Whereas, the five major folk operas

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recognized in China are Peking opera, pingju (a local opera of north and northeast China), Henan Opera, yue opera, and Huangmei opera, excluding Cantonese opera. It can be even said that Cantonese opera is not well known by many people. However, Cantonese opera is an important element in Cantonese culture. Almost all Cantonese people have heard Cantonese operas somewhat, such as Tang Diheng's "Princess Chang Ping" and "Legends of Purple Hairpin". There is even a saying that the later Cantonese dramas and Cantonese songs were both developed from Cantonese opera.

It can be seen that Cantonese opera is a very representative traditional culture of highly native characteristics in Cantonese culture. It is even included in the national intangible cultural heritage list. But why is it not lofty in Chinese dramas? It is because of language restriction. To understand Cantonese opera and feel the charm of Cantonese opera, it is necessary to be proficient in Cantonese. It is right because of such a threshold that Cantonese opera cannot be spread all over China but only be confined to Guangdong. Therefore, the position of Cantonese opera in the China is certainly not as good as that of the northern opera. It can only take a position in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao and overseas Chinese communities.

II. DEVELOPMENT HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF CANTONSESE OPERA

At the beginning of the 17th century (in the early of Qing Dynasty), nonlocal theatrical troupe introduced Yiyang tone and Kunsuan tone into Guangdong. Up to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom period, local theatrical troupe gradually appeared, but the tones were still dominated by pang-tzu. Later, with the fading of kunqu opera and the influence of the hui combo, it was converted a tone based on Huangpi tone and Erhuang. From AD 1911 to the beginning of 1912 (the period of revolution of 1911), the improvement of Zhishi theatrical troupe get the singing language changed from Mandarin to the Guangzhou dialect, also known as the new tone. During the Anti-Japanese War, famous old men emerged unceasingly to individually dig into Cantonese opera and develop their own singing tones. For example: Xue Juexian's "Xue tone" is elegant, with pure and strong lingering charm. Ma Shizeng's "Ma tone" is vulgar and in form of half singing and half saying. Starlet's "star tone" gives an impression of exquisite emotion, mild and indirect fluctuation in voice and is very touching. Luo Jiabao's "Xia tone" is a combination of true voice and falsetto, fresh and sweet. There are also Hung Sin-nui's "Hong tone", Ma Shizeng's "New Ma tone", He Feifan's "Fan tone", Fang Yanfen's "Fang tone" and Chen Xiaofeng's "Feng tone" and other tones featured by their sweet, clear-cut, smooth, gentle and delicate characteristics.

At the beginning of post war, Hong Kong's Cantonese opera was developed in aspect of performance of traditional operas although it inherited the tradition of fickle Cantonese opera in 1930s. In the form of repertoire, there are fewer and fewer fashionable Cantonese operas, the script writing tends to be literary but emphasizes words and expressions, the lyrics tend to be in seven-word form and the theme is mostly extracted from classical dramas. In performance, it becomes close and close to the Peking opera and pay attention to figure performance. The costumes were also gradually separated from the traditional southern sequins and rabbit hair styles due to the increasingly lessened inheritances in workmanship and the changes in aesthetic standards and become in line with the Peking Opera costumes.

In 1950s, Xianfengming troupe emerged so that Hong Kong Cantonese opera was changed fundamentally. Although Bai Xuexian was taught by Xue Juexian, she inherited the advantages of both Xue tone and Ma tone. In the drama literature, she is like Ma Shizeng, focusing on improving the expressed content; in performance, she inherits her teacher's skills, learns from Peking opera and pays attention to the figure of northern style. However in Cantonese opera music, she does not take the type of metre of Cantonese opera as the basis but select ancient notation and major key or innovative song as the main body.

In 1970s, the sudden appearance of Lin Jiasheng (Xue Juexian's last follower) right reflected Cantonese opera's closing trend to traditional opera and represented the stage performance oriented art style. While, the Chufengming troupe trained by Ren Jianhui and Bai Xuexian still focused on playing the famous dramas of Tang style and represented art style of script innovation; however, after more than 30 years of performance, the innovated scripts were no longer innovative any more. Although Chufengming troupe is popular with thousands of fans in the form of idols, its artistic achievements are far less than those of Lin Jiasheng. In 1990s, with Lin Jiasheng's retirement and dissolution of the Chufengming troupe, Cantonese opera began entering into a new era.

The accompaniment band of Cantonese opera has been developing rapidly. The band scale is developed from initial 5 or 6 persons (five instruments) to 10–20 persons. The band adopts the combination of Chinese and Western musical instruments and uses many Western musical instruments such as violin and saxophone. This is unique even in many local operas in China. In addition, lyrics of Cantonese opera are relatively popular and adopt many vivid and lively dialects, especially in the "spoken parts".

III. ARTISTIC FEATURES OF CANTONSESE OPERA

The artistic feature of early Cantonese opera was similar to that of Han opera, Peking opera, and Qi opera. Later, it gradually forms into a unique artistic style in the process of development. The Cantonese opera's lyrics are easy to understand and the basic tone is "pang-tzu and Erhuang" and reserves some tune names of Yiyang tone and Kunqu tone as well as southern musics, Cantonese folk songs, temple blocks, dragon boat, beat in music and other tunes of Cantonese folk raps and folk ditties such as folk songs, musical composition, popular songs and popular tunes. As "pang-tzu and Erhuang" in Cantonese opera is played in dialect, absorbs and integrates the local folk ditties and has, it has become different from general Pihuang drama and has a strong local style. In singing method, "falsetto" is changed into "flat throat" (true voice), and after repeated practices, all of them are changed to be played in Cantonese dialect.
Cantonese opera tone of music is dominated by type of metre, associated with tune names style. The type of metre includes pang-tzu and Erhuang. Pang-tzu have the first clapper, slow clapper, middle clapper, Furong, Tanban clapper and Shaban clapper; Erhuang includes first clapper, slow clapper, Erliu, rolling clapper and the like. In addition, there are also Huangpi (equivalent to Peking Opera's "Siping Tune"), Liantan, chord, beat in music, temple blocks, Cantonese folk songs and other tones. Although chord, beat in music and temple blocks are different from pang-tzu and Erhuang but they are the same in melody singing method; Huangpi and Liantan are filled with lyrics according to the tunes, but their lyrics patterns are similar to those of pang-tzu and Erhuang. There are two types of tune names such as make and ditty. Most of the makes are absorbed from Kunqu and Fuyang tunes and a few of them are Cantonese folk ritual makes of musical composition; ditty includes interlude music in drama, south yangzi string and pipe ensemble, Cantonese musics such as, such as "Madam Liu Qing", "Dressing Table", "Selling of Groceries", "Jade Beauty" as well as created new ditties such as "Looking for a Needle", "Urging for Return", "Full of Hate", "Play with Daji" and so on. The two types of tunes except newly created musics are almost instrumental musics having fixed melody.

Cantonese opera's accompaniment instrument is divided into two parts such as orchestral music and percussion music. The former part mainly adopts Kao-hu, two-stringed fiddles, dulcimer and houguan as the major leading instruments for playing. It is also divided into two different combinations such as "hard bow" and "soft bow". The instruments used in "hard bow" include two-stringed fiddles, houguan, long houguan, bamboo violin, small three-stringed fiddles, yueqin (a four-stringed plucked instrument with a full-moon-shaped sound box), yehu (two-stringed fiddle with coconut body), horizontal bamboo flute and the like and are used to cooperate with gaobian gong in the part of percussion music. The sound and tone are both loud and rigid and are mostly used in the accompaniment for spectacle in traditional dramas and more intense scenes. While, the instruments used in "soft bow" include erhu (nanhu, a two-stringed bowed instrument with a lower register than jinghu), zhonghu, Kao-hu, yehu, dahu, dulcimer, Chinese lute, small three-stringed fiddles, middle three-stringed fiddles, zhongruan, daruan, long houguan and Chinese bamboo flute and so on. In addition to national musical instruments, Cantonese opera music also boldly adopts Western musical instruments such as violins, cellos and saxophones and other instruments. In conjunction with the Wen gong and drum (or Su gong and drum or middle and low-pitched Beijing-style drums), the sound and tone created are relatively soft. They are used to the accompaniment of lyrics and meticulous portrayal of the inner feelings of the characters. Percussion instruments include Boyu (board), side plate, sand drum, double-leather drum, top cymbal, Wen gong, Gaobian gong, Su cymbal, Su gong, singles (high-pitched small gong), battle drum, bass drum and so on. And there is a complete set of gong and drum points of various types of rhythm.

The “Guoshan troupe” active in rural area retains the rough and simple characteristics of the early period. Many famous actors in it have tricks such as standing on one foot, somersaults, hair dance and artificial whiskers (worn by actors in Peking opera). The martial arts is based on the "Southern martial arts", including the powerful target, the hand bridge, Shaolin boxing and the highly difficult chair performance and performance on high platform. After the characters appear on the stage, it is also quite rare for man to often perform a "small jump" and female to give a "back bending" performance. The stage art style is almost enjoyable. The scenery arrangement is simple and the situation defined in drama is mainly displayed by a virtual performance program. If the program cannot be displayed, "riverside" and "mountain" and other words description will be written on the plate.

The “Cantonese and Hong Kong grand troupe” acted out in urban area absorbs partial artistic nutrition of modern drama, opera and movies, and is improved in reflecting contemporary life and making the performance more lively. Most repertoires are sheng and dan dramas. Among them, those acted by singing and acting are more than martial arts. But they also refine and create some new performance programs from the life and draw on and absorb the performance skills from the movies and dramas to form into a free, flexible and popular and delicate and particularly true-life performance style. The stage art is over-represented in true life. The scenery arrangement uses painting-oriented soft scene. It also uses lighting and firm base real scenes as well as gorgeous and exquisite costumes and make-up. Later, it was developed to machine-operated stage scenery, film costumes, helmets and props and installing electric lamps.

The martial performing art of Cantonese opera maintains the rough and simple characteristics of the early “Guoshan troupe”. Many famous actors have tricks such as standing on one foot, somersaults, slip rope, stamping, eye movement, hair dance and artificial whiskers (worn by actors in Peking opera). The martial arts is based on the "Southern martial arts", including the powerful target, the hand bridge, Shaolin boxing and the highly difficult chair performance and performance on high platform. After the appearance of the roles, the male often play "small jump" and the female often "bend back". This is also quite rare. Most repertoires of Cantonese opera are sheng and dan dramas, paying more attention to singing than acting. Among them, those acted by singing and acting are more than martial arts. But they also refine and create some new performance programs from the life and draw on and absorb the performance skills from the movies and dramas to form into a free, flexible and popular and delicate and particularly true-life performance style.

IV. PROBLEMS IN AND SOLUTIONS FOR PROTECTION OF CANTONES OPERA

A. The Necessity and Current Status Quo of Cantonese Opera Protection

In 2009, Cantonese opera was listed in the representative directories of intangible cultural heritage of human beings. This represents that Cantonese culture was recognized in the
colorful cultural arena of the whole world. It is a matter that the Lingnan compatriots and even the entire Chinese may be proud of. At the same time, the success of declaring the world cultural heritage also represents that Cantonese opera has its profound connotations and uniqueness. As a Cantonese, it is necessary to cherish the excellent traditional culture and pass it on so that the Cantonese opera can be carried forward continuously and become a more outstanding and unique cultural brand.

Cantonese opera is the jewel of Lingnan culture. From the Manyin Tutai in late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty to the various genres of Qionghua Bahe, a hundred years of Nanguo Hongdou, a generation and generation of famous players of dramas had early get those Cantonese rhymes fed into the blood vessel of Lingnan. Moreover, because it has never been just a drama only played on stage, the Cantonese Opera Tea House for people to watch dramas while drinking a cup of tea has always been implanted into the memory of Lingnan people from generation to generation. Cantonese opera has early penetrated into the lives of countless people and become a living habit that we cannot live without it.

In present era, internet culture has become a dominant trend. And Cantonese opera in the general background of this rapid development seems to have had a slight weakening trend. However, it is right because Cantonese opera still retains its unique ancient charm and traditional beauty no matter how the times change so that this "invariability" becomes more valuable in the rapidly changed modern metropolis. It is not smart to reject excellent traditional culture for reason that large number of new cultures are emerging unceasingly. After all, this culture is the soul of a country and nation and the confidence to culture is a more fundamental, deeper and more everlasting power in the development of a country and nation. Hence, it is necessary to practically protect Cantonese opera culture.

With the influence of various factors in development of nowadays society, Cantonese opera is gradually in the dry tree in today's cultural pattern. Under the impact of today's popular music, Cantonese opera as an art category of national music has gradually been ignored by contemporary young people. With the aging of Cantonese opera and flourishing of various other media performing arts, those keen on watching Cantonese opera become less and less and and are all aging. The Cantonese opera having more than 400 years of history and once posed wide regional influence have now faced a severe crisis of survival. In confronting with this social status quo, the government and relevant departments, educators, etc. have issued appeals for protecting of Cantonese opera culture in order to ensure the preservation and development of Cantonese opera.

In 2010, the NPC member from Guangdong proposed to protect Cantonese opera culture by legislation and proposed various legislative standards; in 2012, on the academic seminar hold on Guangzhou International Cantonese Opera Festival, Cantonese opera experts and scholars from all over the world gathered together to discuss how to protect Cantonese opera in a legislative manner; in 2014, Guangdong further promoted to establish legislation for protection of Cantonese opera legislation and the local government announced that it will establish a Cantonese opera teaching system, at the same time complete the construction of the Cantonese opera database and vigorously support the protection and development of Cantonese opera; in 2016, Guangdong Provincial Department of Culture carried out an investigation and research on legislation of Cantonese opera so as to perfect and complete the Guangdong Provincial Provisions for Protection Management on Cantonese Opera (hereinafter referred to as "Provisions"); in 2017, Guangdong Provincial Provisions for Protection Management on Cantonese Opera was approved by deliberation on the executive meeting of the People's Government of Guangdong Province, provided legal guarantee for protection and inheritance of Cantonese opera.

As can be seen from the above course from legislation exploration to the final establishment of relevant provisions, Guangdong Provincial Government indeed made a lot of efforts to protect the continuation and development of Cantonese opera. Local draft law can be established only after going through a series of procedures such as information collection, communication and negotiation, legislation cost evaluation and benefit analysis and so on. And the law can be finally executed only after being checked and voted for approval of local people's congress. It can be said that this Provisions is hard-won. In addition, the protection stated in the Provisions involves a wide range of aspects. What the Provisions protects is not only the artistic behavior of Cantonese opera itself, but also the art of making of Cantonese opera props as well as historical archives, literature and instruments in kind in close relation to Cantonese opera as well as all traditional customs unique to Cantonese opera. It shows that Guangdong Provincial Government pays highly attention to the authenticity, integrity and inheritance of Cantonese opera and insists in the principle of paying equal attention to protection, inheritance and development in guaranteeing the protection and inheritance of Cantonese opera. A local system has been gradually formed into making exploration on legislation for protection of Cantonese opera culture and is perfected in continuous practice.

C. Measures for the Protection of Old Cantonese Opera Artists

In recent years, relevant measures have taken to strengthen protecting old Cantonese opera artists. Because many outstanding older generations of Cantonese opera performers have passed away successively, many ancient tune names and some classic forms of performance may also
lost. This would be a huge loss for Chinese traditional art. So, it is necessary to seize the opportunity to organize the older generations of Cantonese opera artists to perform personally or get some of the classic tune names that they have taught their disciples to perform recorded as DVD and other digital audio and video materials, in addition to do a careful job in protecting the old artists of Cantonese opera, establish the art archives of the existing Cantonese opera artists, strengthen the protection for Cantonese opera materials they have mastered and record them in written form so as to preserve valuable image and text materials for the development and research of Cantonese opera in the future. Moreover, relevant actions are also taken in many schools to protect Cantonese opera. It is suggested to strengthen school's educational function and introduce the contents of the Cantonese opera into classroom. Some schools should offer some courses such as traditional culture and drama appreciation and the like. Teachers should guide students to understand and explore traditional culture and create on the basis of traditional culture. Wherein, the Cantonese opera called “Nanguo Hongdou” has been introduced into current teaching textbooks in Guangdong Province so as to get local students understood the native tradition and enhance their understanding of such culture to facilitate the propagation and protection of Cantonese opera.

V. PROBLEMS IN AND SOLUTIONS FOR THE INHERITANCE OF CANTONENSE OPERA

A. Problems in the Inheritance of Cantonese Opera

The government does not pay enough attention and the investment is insufficient. Firstly, the government does not give capital support to the development of Cantonese opera. It is understood that the salary of Cantonese opera performer is generally around 3,000 Yuan and being such performer requires a large amount of Cantonese opera skills and experience. However today, the internship salary of an ordinary migrant worker is also almost 3,000 Yuan so that more people give up the opportunity to engage in Cantonese opera. Secondly, the government fails to provide a good external environment for the development of Cantonese opera so that Cantonese Opera troupe cannot develop some activities and research work. Practitioners of Cantonese opera are not provided with that high salary so that it is not available to retain Cantonese opera talents, resulting in the loss of Cantonese opera talents.

Cantonese opera faces the problems of too old script and lack of new vitality. "Princess Chang Ping", "Flirting Scholar" and "Parted Lovers" are surely not stranger to the generation of grandmothers and this kind of script caters to their aesthetics so that it has indeed attracted the attention of the older generation. However, it is impossible to win the favor of the younger generation, because the script of Cantonese opera cannot catch up with the trend of the times. Additionally, Cantonese opera practitioners are content with the status quo and have no innovative Cantonese opera concept so that their artistic thinking is lagged. The antiquated unproductive scripts are not only unable to attract the attention of young people, but also have the trend of losing some doglike old audiences gradually. Most repertoire played by various Cantonese Opera troupes on the stage are dramas that have been classic for decades. Newly created local works are rarely seen. The shortage of resources in the new repertoire and the low enthusiasm for creation has led to the lack of charm in the development of Cantonese opera.

Cantonese opera talents gradually disappear in new generation so that today's Cantonese opera appears temporary shortage of talents and relevant skills are on the verge of being lost and has even been in a situation of no successor. The young generations after 80s and 90s are more likely to be attracted by the fast-food culture popular in the new era. They rarely have a strong interest in Cantonese opera culture and are rarely willing to participate in learning Cantonese opera performances. Meanwhile, with the successive death of many outstanding older generations of Cantonese opera artists, this phenomenon has become more and more serious. At the same time, with the development of social economy, people's wonderful cultural life has become more and more abundant. Especially, the birth of new media has made the younger generation feel alienated from Cantonese opera and gradually ignored the Cantonese opera. This is the most leading reason for the phenomenon of faults in Cantonese opera today.

B. Enhancing Regional People's Protection and Inheritance Consciousness

The inheritance of culture should firstly begin with school education. Schools can educate students based on innovative teaching thoughts and realistic teaching attitude. In addition, schools may create a set of body figure exercises suitable for students to exercise Cantonese opera in combination with the physical and mental development characteristics of students. Materials for creating Cantonese opera in campus should be selected based on innovative thinking and to the extent that the programs created and rehearsed are suitable for students to understand and learn.

The Cantonese opera “Nanguo Hongdou” have been absorbed in the current music textbooks in Guangdong Province, which has enabled local students to enhance their understanding of local traditional culture. In addition, school should also organizes relevant knowledge contests, arrange activities for students to watch Cantonese opera so as to enhance students' interest in Cantonese opera and directly introduce Cantonese opera music into campus. Moreover, it is also available to open a second classroom, inviting Cantonese opera masters to give lectures in order to sow Cantonese opera seeds on campus.

Cantonese opera is produced in Guangdong and the people in Guangdong should be obliged to protect Cantonese opera. In Guangdong, the government is suggested to carry out many activities about Cantonese opera and call people for protecting and understanding Cantonese opera and enhancing their awareness of protecting Cantonese opera.

VI. CONCLUSION

At present, although the protection of Cantonese opera culture has been guaranteed by legislation, it is still needed
to continuously explore the legal protection for Cantonese opera. After all, the Provisions have been implemented not before long. In the future, there may be many problems appeared in practice. So, it is necessary to get ready for solving the problem and absorb the experience and lessons at all times. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to ensure a smooth communication in information channels, unceasingly receive feedback from Cantonese opera art troupes and fans and more fully demonstrate local characteristics and put into practice a legislative mode based on communication procedure system. That is to say, the legislative exploration of Cantonese opera still continues and the existing regulations are not perfect. Only the perfection after formulating the Provisions is the most crucial step in legislative exploration.

On the other hand, only by strengthening the education of Cantonese opera culture at all levels of schools and long-term continuous edification can this national traditional culture be rooted in the mind of young people as early as possible.

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