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**Modernising Cantonese Opera through
contemporary sound production design**

LIN Lung Ghi Roger

Faculty of Professional and Social Sciences

Middlesex University

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Student number: M00474616

Director of Studies: Dr Agi Ryder

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The views expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners or Middlesex University.

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GLOSSARY

CODF	The Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee & Cantonese Opera Development Fund was set up by the Home Affairs Bureau to effectively develop Cantonese opera as a unique local art form.
COIC	Established in 2000 by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and the Music Department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Chinese Opera Information Centre is devoted to the collection and preservation of archival materials regarding Chinese operas.
CreateHK	Create Hong Kong is an agency set up under the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau in 2009 to develop the creative economy in Hong Kong.
DI	Direct In
HAB	Home Affairs Bureau is a governmental agency that focuses on the policy areas of civic education, youth policy, district and community relations, sports and recreation, and culture and arts.
HKAC	Hong Kong Arts Centre is a multi-arts centre that facilitates artistic exchanges both internationally and locally.
HKADC	Hong Kong Arts Development Council was established in 1995 as a statutory body set up by the Hong Kong Government to support the development of arts in all fields in Hong Kong.
HKAPA	The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts is a leading tertiary institution in performing arts in Asia that was established in 1984.
HKCO	The Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra was founded in 1977 and is currently the only professional, full-sized Chinese orchestra in Hong Kong.
LCSD	The Leisure and Cultural Services Department is a government department in Hong Kong that reports to the Home Affairs Bureau.
MIDI	Musical Instrument Digital Interface is a system designed for recording and playing back music on digital synthesizers.
PA system	Public Address system
PCCW	Pacific Century Cyber Works Limited is an information and communications technology company based in Hong Kong.

RSM	Resident Stage Manager
RTM	Resident Technical Manager
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is an agency of the United Nations that was established in 1946.
TM	Technical Manager
SM	Stage Manager
SM Team	Stage Management Team
Xiqu	Xiqu refers to traditional Chinese opera as a whole and has multiple genres, Cantonese opera being one of them.

ABSTRACT

Xiqu (Chinese opera) is a very old art form in China that has had a significant influence on the development of world theatre at large. Cantonese opera is one of the *Xiqu* genres in Southern China. It shares a strong inseparable historical and cultural background with Hong Kong. In 2009, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization classified Cantonese opera as a form of *Intangible Cultural Heritage* manifesting Cantonese opera's importance.

For the past four decades, Cantonese opera has faced many challenges in adapting to the contemporary environment in Hong Kong. For example, there was the changing of performance venue from outdoor temporary-built bamboo canopies to indoor technically well-equipped theatres, and the income shifted from commercially box office dependent to government funding oriented. As a result of this struggle, Cantonese opera is declining in terms of audience numbers and performance quality. Modernisation of the art form can support Cantonese opera to adapt to a contemporary environment and enhance its appeal to younger audiences, thus moving the art form forward.

Having been born and raised in Hong Kong, with over twenty years of experience as a professional sound designer, I was motivated by my love of Cantonese opera and my contemporary experience of its potential decline to undertake research into whether and how Cantonese opera in terms of production and management aspects could benefit from such technological advances.

This research set about investigating other forms of *Xiqu*, many of which have been registered on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The intention of this particular piece of research was, in line with the HK government's goal of reviving Cantonese opera, to contribute to stabilizing the quality of Cantonese opera sound performance, as well as making it more palatable to the younger generation, with the vision of bringing this national cultural treasure to the world. It explores the contemporary and historical context of Cantonese opera and its relation to other *Xiqu*.

The research was undertaken over a 36 month period using a Mixed Method Research approach with performers and other industry stakeholders. In addition, the research were made comparisons between three theatre case studies which identified the obstacles, outcomes and challenges to modernising Cantonese Opera's sound production management. Key issues revealed

included : the sacredness of tradition; the current operation system, the concerns and agenda of stakeholders, and the government's funding policy.

The findings identify the need to re-evaluate (i) the traditional production system practice, (ii) the industry's general consensus about modernisation, and (iii) the ineffective funding strategy as these are the main factors holding back any modernisation process.

The research recommends a funding strategy that will contribute to the development of Cantonese opera and emphasises the need for the consensus and collaboration of all the stakeholders to implement a modernised sound management system for the development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, not only to enhance the art form itself but also its appeal against competition from other art forms with more sophisticated and effective enhancement strategies – film, theatre, ballet, opera which are generally western.

This research is the first of its kind in Hong Kong and as such is a breakthrough for Cantonese opera as well as *Xiqu* at large. It also opens the doors for more academic research and study on technical aspects of Cantonese Opera and *Xiqu*.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTEXT AND FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

Hong Kong upholds a reputation as one of the most economically successful and modernised cities in the world. The city embraces the contrasting cultures of the East and the West, ties together the traditional and the contemporary, all of which build it to become the metropolis it is today.

Although colonised by the British for over one and a half century, traditional Chinese culture is still very prevalent in Hong Kong. The most popular art form of traditional Chinese culture in Hong Kong is Cantonese opera, one of the more well-known genres of *Xiqu* (Chinese opera as a whole). While other genres of *Xiqu* such as Peking opera and *Kunqu* opera have already gained international recognition, awareness for Cantonese opera has been growing in the past decades as it remains to be one of Hong Kong's strongest ties to traditional Chinese culture.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s classification of Cantonese opera as a form of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009 resulted in a number of dedicated performance venues being built, and more funding provided by the local government. The Hong Kong government and people have always realized its importance in Hong Kong's cultural history.

However, once a fundamental traditional art form and a widely-recognized symbol of Hong Kong's culture, Cantonese opera has found itself growing stagnant due to challenges posed by Hong Kong's rapid modernisation. It has seen many developments over the years from both its rise in popularity to its gradual decline.

Additionally, there are the crossroads that Cantonese opera is currently facing. The traditional Cantonese opera audience is an ageing one and there are hardly any young and educated people who are as interested in watching the art as the original audience. It is also difficult for young performers and professionals to survive given the structure of a typical Cantonese opera company, as well as its dwindling interest.

Since the 1960s, Cantonese opera has lost its mass appeal in Hong Kong as it became slowly replaced by Western theatre and media. Although the government has recognized Cantonese opera as a cherished part of Hong Kong, they also need to put more effort into stopping the decline.

There is still a great number of Cantonese opera performances happening throughout Hong Kong. However, the quality often fluctuates, mainly leaning towards a lower quality than a higher one despite the constantly improving standard of relevant technology and equipment. Ideally, the government's funding to promote the art form should focus on quality over quantity, but as of now, it remains the opposite.

As far as theatre production is concerned, Cantonese Opera has yet to adapt and benefit from the past decade's theatre technology advancements. The gap between the contemporary audience's expectation and the production quality of Cantonese opera continues to grow as time progresses. This ultimately led to the decline in its popularity.

Cantonese opera has entered a new phase of both challenges and opportunities. The use of current opportunities to move forward into the twenty-first century is important to avoid declining any further. Cantonese opera's survival is dependent on its willingness to adapt and change with time.

To ensure and enhance the future development of Cantonese Opera, and the empowerment of its stakeholders, this research not only aims to modernise sound management production and add value to the production quality of Cantonese Opera, it also examines the policy of funding bodies and how to enhance the subsequent results. This research opens the door for further study on the production aspect of Cantonese Opera as one of the first investigations on sound production in the art. It is hoped that the findings can contribute to the study and research of technical aspect of *Xiqu* at large.

HONG KONG

Cantonese opera is still active in Southern China's Guangdong province area including Hong Kong. Due to civil wars and other political situations, the development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong and mainland China has diverged into two different journeys.

This research is situated in Hong Kong, not only because I was born and brought up in the city, but because Hong Kong has been acting as a safe haven to nurture Cantonese opera during the last century. Given that Hong Kong was a colony of Britain during the previous century, many Cantonese opera artists sought out refuge in Hong Kong while Mainland China's political situation grew tense. This is where Cantonese opera would survive and continue to flourish.

Hong Kong was known to be a harbour that produced incense sticks for worship gods or ancestors, resulting in its literal translation to Incense Harbour. In 1842, China's Qing Dynasty's government was forced to cede Hong Kong Island to Britain following their defeat in the First Opium War. Within the next 60 years, Kowloon, New Territories and 235 outlying islands were also let to Britain up until 1997. These regions that were ruled by the British Government became what we now know as Hong Kong.

On the 1st of July 1997, the sovereignty over Hong Kong was handed over to China by the British. Hong Kong then became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China.

Hong Kong served as an important port for international trade since its early colonial years. In the 1950s, because of the skills and capital brought in by refugees from Mainland China, Hong Kong gradually built its economic success that became a solid foundation for what the city has now. With a population of 7.39 million, *The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong Limited* is the fourth single largest stock market in the world. Hong Kong also ranks 7th in the most competitive nations in the world out of 140 countries based on the 2018 edition of the Global Competitiveness Report published by the World Economic Forum.

Yet, despite having been colonized by the British for 155 years, traditional Chinese culture is still very prevalent in Hong Kong. A notable example of traditional Chinese culture and the focus of this study is Cantonese opera. Hong Kong's culture of duality—the British influence on

traditional Chinese values practiced in modern everyday life—has played an important factor in Cantonese opera being put to the test of modernisation.

XIQU (戲曲)

Xiqu (Chinese opera) may be divided into many genres. Each of them is tied with the area where it developed. The origins of *Xiqu* can be traced back to as early as the third century BC in Ancient China. Since then, the art form has developed considerably due to influences from other international cultures as well as influences from within China's many regions. *Xiqu* as a whole gained immense popularity for incorporating not only music and drama, but acrobatics, martial arts, and make-up arts, all onto one stage. Its widespread popularity in the country led to many regions incorporating their own regional style into the art, creating numerous unique *Xiqu* styles.

With Xi (戲) meaning drama and Qu (曲) meaning song or music, it is often translated as Chinese 'music-drama' nowadays, which is considerably not conveying the whole picture of *Xiqu*. Different from musical, *Xiqu* is a theatre form that does not only focus on music, but also physical and vocal techniques (Evans, 2016, p. 8).

This characteristic marks the difference between *Xiqu* and *Huaju* (話劇), which is also known as spoken drama. Performers of *Xiqu* have to portray their characters of a specific role trope with their costumes, voices, and body language, thus they have to be well trained before being able to perform on stage.

Concerning the fact that it was first created in a work-oriented life as a form of entertainment for the public, there are now more than 350 genres with different regional styles in the field of *Xiqu*. Three well-recognized examples would be *Kunqu* (one of the oldest extant forms of *Xiqu*), Peking opera (or Beijing opera) and Cantonese opera. The dialect used in *Xiqu* varies on the region where the production was created. As *Xiqu* is a form of art born among the people, *Xiqu*'s contents and themes mostly focus on war, love, religion, politics, or even superstitions.

As an art form that has existed for thousands of years, *Xiqu* has become one of China's popular and more notable cultural practices. It is through the development of both *Xiqu* and the region it was birthed in that led to the genesis of Cantonese opera.

CANTONESE OPERA (粵劇)

The names of Cantonese opera include daai hei (great theatre), loh gu hei (theatre with percussion), Gwongdong hei (Gwongdong theatre), Gwongfu daai hei (great theatre of Guangzhou), or Gwongdong daai hei (great theatre of Guangdong). These mainly emphasize on Cantonese (location), grand spectacle (visual) and percussion music (sound). Cantonese opera is one of the 14 existing *Xiqu* genres in Southern China's Guangdong Province (Yung, 2015).

The origin of Cantonese opera can be dated back to the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1522-1566) of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It is in fact a blend of different operatic styles, such as the Yiyang and Kun tunes of the Ming Dynasty, the Xiqin and Han Opera of the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), the regional operas from the provinces of Jiangsu, Henan, Anhui, Hunan, Hebei and Guangxi as well as the local Guangdong music and its tradition of telling stories through song (Ching, 2005).

Ching confirmed that during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795), Foshan was the home for most of the Cantonese opera troupes and where an association called "Qionghua Guild" was set up. Nearby, there was a water area reserved for the anchorage of "red boats", which were wooden yachts painted in red that were used to transport the staff and chests containing the costumes and ornaments for the performances. Given that most of the operas were performed in the delta region of the Pearl River at the time, boat was the main mode of transportation and, sometimes, troupes would live on the boats as well.

Life on a Red Boat was very demanding, with unyielding rules for bed allocation and division of labour among members of the troupe. Regardless, the rules enforced on a Red Boat laid the solid foundation for the organization of the Cantonese opera troupe in the future. However, as major performing venues moved to the big city in the 1930s, the existence of Red Boats began to dwindle.

The two notable performing contexts of Cantonese opera that existed in the 19th century were ritual performance and theatre performance. The former was organized by villagers to celebrate gods, festivals and other rituals. The performances took place in a bamboo canopy, a temporary

theatre made of bamboo and iron sheets. These performances have a long and important history in Hong Kong's rural and urban areas, and are regarded as important folk rites. Meanwhile, theatre performances only appeared when buildings were established in urban areas. These performances were relatively stable events in terms of popularity, as they often attracted a consistently high number of audience. Theatre performances tend to be much more commercial and entertaining in order to sell tickets, which is what funding mainly relies on. Yung brings up the fact that this could possibly highlight "the contemporary development of Hong Kong as a business-driven city" (Yung, 2015).

The 1920s to 40s is what The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong calls the "golden age" of Cantonese opera. Because of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), many Cantonese opera artists migrated to Hong Kong from China and contributed to the development of the art as well as broaden the list of plays and singing style. It also incorporated Peking opera's music instruments and performing style. Artists such as Sit Kok Sin introduced film's makeup style, costumes and lighting to the stage production of Cantonese opera stage production, along with Western instruments for music composition.

The 1950s was highlighted by The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong as a critical era for Cantonese opera due to the change of political systems in China, resulting in the development of styles unique to Hong Kong and the Mainland. While the development of Cantonese opera in the Mainland suffered a devastating blow during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Hong Kong's productions were focused on commercial value, often about the hero and love stories of the past. At that time, Hong Kong started many of its own creations such as Cantonese opera movies and records that were widely circulated during this period. These developments have greatly influenced the constantly evolving history of Cantonese opera, which soon became representative of Hong Kong's culture.

PERFORMANCE VENUES IN HONG KONG

The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong confirmed that ‘Cantonese Opera started to be popular in Hong Kong in 1880s. At that time, the stage was temporarily built with bamboo and aluminium sheet. The first theatre built for Cantonese Opera was in 1890.’

Hong Kong City Hall was established in 1962, followed by many government-run theatre venues established in the following decades. However, the hiring cost for government venues were much higher, only famous actors or theatre groups were able to perform in those venues at that time.

Another important performance venue is the temporarily-built bamboo canopy, used for ritual performances that date back to over a century ago. But as more and more theatre venues were built, the main venue for Cantonese opera became the theatre rather than the bamboo canopy.

In 2009, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization classified Cantonese opera as a form of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Because of this, the international public had recognized its cultural and historical status. Since then, the Hong Kong government has initiated several policies to assist the development of Cantonese opera, most notably the construction of the *Xiqu* Centre in West Kowloon Cultural District. The West Kowloon Cultural District is one of the world’s most ambitious cultural infrastructures in the recent years. The *Xiqu* Centre opened to the public in January 2019 and it is a world class arts venue specifically built for *Xiqu* performance, alongside acting as a centre for production, education and research of this unique art form.

Another government action to preserve Cantonese opera may be traced back to 2012, when the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) revitalized a territory-wide performing arts venue in Kowloon, making the Yau Ma Tei Theatre dedicated to Cantonese opera. The New Wing Auditorium was constructed in the Ko Shan Theatre to facilitate Cantonese opera performances as well.

The development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong is closely linked to the performance environment: i.e. development of venues. From bamboo canopies to privately owned theatres, government-run multi-purpose venues (City Hall, Civic Centre) to the dedicated theatre built for

it (Yau Ma Tei Theatre), Cantonese opera has developed together along with Hong Kong. Consequently, as the performances in bamboo canopies decrease and more theatres dedicated to it are built, Cantonese opera has entered a new phase: from a folk art form like ritual performances and arts for the mass to a high art form which is performed in dedicated elite venues such as the *Xiqu* Centre.

MY ROLE IN THE CONTEXT

I was born and raised in Hong Kong. Growing up in Hong Kong in the 70s, despite my family being somewhat westernised, it was hard to ignore the day to day influence of the popular culture (radio, television, etc.) where Cantonese opera was one major form of entertainment. Subsequently, Cantonese opera has ingrained its influence to my generation.

During my teenage years, I was sent to the United Kingdom to pursue my higher education studies. When I returned to Hong Kong in 1994, Hong Kong was about to be handed back to China. As a Chinese person brought up under British colonization, like many artists and creative minds of my generation, seeking my own identity became the main subject of my creative concern. It is worth mentioning that this is the exact period that Hong Kong cinema became popular worldwide, because Hong Kong cinema at that time also shared the same subject of searching for our its identity.

I became heavily involved in contemporary professional theatre upon my return from the UK. Contemporary theatre in Hong Kong at that time was exposed to and experimented with elements from *Xiqu* into its creative practice. As a theatre professional, Cantonese opera and *Xiqu* have played an important role in my creative and professional practice.

Educational Experience

After attaining a three-year-diploma in Fine Arts from Byam Shaw School of Art in London (now part of University of the Arts London), I felt that my work had gone beyond the visuals and grown towards the subconscious sound field. I then entered Postgraduate Diploma in Electro-Acoustic Music for Film and Television at Bournemouth University—the only course related to sound and visuals available in UK in 1992—and it offered a practical approach toward music composition for film and television.

The Electro-Acoustic Music for Film and Television course allowed me to study film history and theory. I gained knowledge about cinema in depth, which became useful for my future work. Understanding that film art is a mixture of visuals and sounds, I realized the importance of sound in this visually dominated art form and therefore, it increased my awareness of sound design and production throughout the process of film production. Although sound art was not taught during

the course, I was personally learning and developing techniques in musical composition to perfect my sound production skills, by embedding sounds and music together.

In addition, I was introduced to the ‘new’ computer technology at the time—MIDI programming and sampling in Bournemouth University. It opened up another creative outlet for me. Through sampling technology, I could use sound as a part of music composition with ease.

Professional Experience

Upon my return from the UK in 1994, I eagerly looked for opportunities to collaborate with local productions in Hong Kong. Following two small theatre productions, apart from the television and film commissions, I was commissioned to be the sound designer and music composer for many major theatre productions in Hong Kong and abroad, amongst them: *Back to the Wall* at the Edinburgh Fringe, *Moon Light* by French director Claire Heggen and *Of Heaven and Earth* by The Academy Award (Oscar) winner Tim Yip. I was nominated *Best Original Music* and *Best Sound Design* by Hong Kong Theatre Award twelve years consecutively and awarded *Outstanding Designer Award* by Hong Kong Theatre Award in 2001.

The idea of combining a contemporary theatre production with a traditional Cantonese opera has long been rooted in my mind.

In 2007, I was set on developing a project of my own. With an academic background in sound design and work experience in contemporary multi-media productions, I decided to adapt one of the four classical novels in China, *The Dream of Red Chamber*. This was a ground-breaking experiment, in terms of both content and technology. During the preparation period, I widely researched both Western and Eastern literature theories and criticisms, and looked into how various traditional and contemporary theatre forms in China approached the theme; Cantonese opera’s version of the adaptation had to be considered. Another significant aspect of this work is the development of synchronization system to synchronize all the live elements (actors and musicians) with video projection and technical support (lighting and stage change) within medium-sized scale production. Hence, the success of this production represents a major milestone in my career as a sound designer and director.

In 2007, I was fortunate enough to work in a Cantonese opera production ‘Pearl Shirt’ (珍珠衫) as the sound designer. The main actor, the highly respected Cantonese opera star Leung Hon Wai (1944-2011), who was in charge of music production of the show introduced me to Cantonese opera music. Attending music rehearsals in his studio and music recording sessions in Guangzhou, Mr. Leung has shown me his vision to develop Cantonese opera by innovation and experimentation. I was instantly fond of Mr. Leung’s enthusiasm and deeply admired his hard working attitude and vision. In the dress rehearsal of the performance, Mr. Leung was surprised about the sound quality I produced and asked me: ‘How did you make the music sounds so much better?’ It is this question that encouraged and inspired me to develop the idea of improving Cantonese opera sound quality, planting the seed for this research.

Cantonese Opera as my focus

Cantonese opera has always been a highly ranked art form representative of Hong Kong’s cultural heritage which is why the government and theatre professionals have been consistently enthusiastic in promoting it to flourish in a contemporary and international world. Working in Hong Kong theatre for the past twenty-four years, inevitably, Cantonese opera has played a huge role in my creative and professional practice.

From the experiences of participating in opera and musicals production in the past, I clearly recognize the significance of a sound and how a direct link to the audience is essentially built when singers make use of their voice effectively. In Western opera and musicals, elaborate sound design management systems are well-developed, allowing theatre productions to be produced, set up, and performed efficiently and effectively even in different theatrical environments. However, there is an absence of academic studies or archived knowledge about sound production management for *Xiqu* and Cantonese opera. With hundreds of years of history, Cantonese opera has developed its own practical preference on production management, modernizing its system may encounter resistance as well as facing its cultural sensitivities. It is also fair to judge that sound design in production management has often been overlooked by managers in the times I have been involved practically with Cantonese opera productions.

This research has allowed me to review my studies and past experiences. Looking in detail at everything I had undertaken, academically and professionally, gave me a chance to reflect on my

past. I could connect my time as a composer and a sound designer for theatre with the Doctorate of Professional Studies in Middlesex University. My career path and education as a sound designer were relatively straightforward. I developed skill in sound design for theatres of varying environments: those with exquisite equipment, as well as those with limited resources. In these less privileged environments, I came to realize the importance of sound production management. With appropriate management and organization, sound of high quality could be delivered despite the lack of high-tech equipment and the long hours needed to move in and set up. For instance, the stage manager could plan the sound production ahead of time so that production management was able to allocate longer time for speakers' set up and placement, while other departments worked.

Having had over twenty-four years of experience as a theatrical sound designer, in charge of over two hundred productions in Hong Kong as well as internationally. I have connected with other professionals in the industry, I believe in my capability to conduct research on the subject of sound production management in Cantonese opera. In short, I seek ways to modernise it and to combine my perspectives as an academic researcher with that of a practitioner and industry insider.

Receiving professional training on the Postgraduate Diploma course in the United Kingdom and being involved as a composer for theatre, dance, films and television, I have gained cross-cultural exposure and solid experience in sound art. I believe that my expertise allows me to tackle this project in considerable depth to make a significant contribution to the dynamics of music production in our contemporary society.

On the other hand, I felt a need to explore my own cultural identity as a Hong Kong Chinese citizen. 'Cantonese opera is one of the local art forms in Hong Kong. It would be a loss of historical and cultural art treasures in Hong Kong without Cantonese opera' (Pao, 2007). The significance of classical Chinese cultural forms is the primary motive behind my adaptations of Chinese literary works for the theatre, as well as working with Cantonese opera productions.

Therefore, I eagerly wanted to assimilate my prior knowledge in contemporary theatre sound production management in modern art forms into Cantonese opera production. However, I could only measure my achievement from the approval of senior opera singers, because until now, there has been no official study of the role of sound production management in Cantonese opera and *Xiqu*. I wanted to investigate the voices of people involved in Cantonese opera and create an

approach that is built on inclusion of all stakeholders, to relate my own values and not make assumptions based only on my own experience through listening to and combining all the wisdom from the various stakeholders in the industry. I looked for additional ways to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of sound production which could potentially revolutionize the Hong Kong art world and lift Cantonese opera into a broader, international context.

In my past involvement with contemporary theatre, I recognized the need to collaborate with other theatre personnel such as the production manager, stage manager, director, actors, singers and musicians. My research would have to convince them of the necessity for modernisation to keep up with technological and social developments.

Taking a closer look at my educational background, I have proven that from a professional training in the United Kingdom alongside rich involvement as a composer for theatre companies, dance companies, film and television productions, I have sufficient cross-cultural exposure and solid experiences in sound art. I believe that my expertise allows me to address the project with considerable depth and contribute significantly to the dynamics of music production in contemporary society.

This research is intended to further my study of sound production management in Cantonese opera in-depth academically and to make a significant contribution to the future of Cantonese opera production in Hong Kong. On a wider scale, this research can assist other *Xiqu* forms in China to flourish, as they too face lack of research in technical production management. This study will take the first step needed in modernising the sound production in all of *Xiqu*.

Having identified what I believe is an important problem to address in this chapter, I started to explore the knowledge already available that would help both validate my focus and enable me to choose the most effective way of carrying out the research. In the following chapter, I will address the knowledge landscape of the research, which will create a clear and objective picture of Cantonese opera's current situation as well as the problems it faces.

CHAPTER 2. KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

In order to highlight the focus of the research and confirm its validity as a unique project, in this chapter, I will explore the literature that covers the four areas of my research: the importance of *Xiqu*'s influence, the history and current crisis faced by Cantonese opera, the challenge of change for Cantonese opera and sound design in contemporary theatre productions.

With more than five hundred years' of history, Cantonese opera has gone through many phases and adjustments due to societal and technological changes. From performing in temporary bamboo canopies to state-of-the-art theatres, being classified as regional folk art to a UN Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cantonese opera has undergone several stages of 'modernisation'. Yet, many experts may challenge this and research figures may suggest that Cantonese opera is declining from its glory days. To secure Cantonese opera's future development, it is very important for Cantonese opera to be able to present itself with the high quality of contemporary theatre production.

Cantonese opera continues to use centuries-old traditional production management structures that arguably inhibit its potential to survive in the current century. To ensure Cantonese opera can face and withstand the challenge of a contemporary environment and enhance its performances to cater towards the contemporary audience's expectation, modernising the production management system is essential.

Through learning about Cantonese opera's history and its ties to Hong Kong, I gained an in-depth appreciation of its cultural and historical significance. Hong Kong itself is one of the most modernised cities in the world and Cantonese opera is an important aspect of Hong Kong's cultural heritage. In order to preserve Hong Kong's own identity and carry its history and culture forward, modernising Cantonese opera's production management and presenting the art form to the world in an admirable quality is critical and necessary.

In order to develop my view of the topic prior to carrying out my case studies, I explored the existing knowledge landscape for Cantonese opera and *Xiqu*. Exploring the knowledge landscape has validated the project with a strong theoretical foundation and has provided me the ability to review and refine my approach.

The knowledge landscape is divided into 4 main areas:

- The importance of *Xiqu* and its differences with Western theatre.
- The crisis faced by Cantonese opera today.
- The challenge of changing for Cantonese opera.
- Sound design in contemporary theatre productions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF XIQU'S INFLUENCE

Xiqu has a history that spans back to over two millennia. *Xiqu* genres such as Peking Opera (京劇) and *Kunqu* Opera (昆劇) have long gained great recognition and appreciation internationally. Followed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s classification of Cantonese opera as a form of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009, Cantonese opera has gained exposure and the potential to reach out towards a larger audience worldwide.

Through Chinese opera, the audience is given the opportunity to learn about the life of people in ancient times and thus, understands their way of thinking as the content is largely influenced by people's wishes and displays rituals of celebration. With the same reason, *Xiqu* places emphasis on the audience's mind and feelings. In order to stimulate the audience's emotions, *Xiqu* has to have a clear stance and a distinguished attitude. Politics is also a popular theme in *Xiqu* where the performances were used as a way to mock the politicians in ancient times in a sarcastic way. The actors would not be punished, despite challenging authorities through *Xiqu*, so long as it is deemed a performance. This shows that *Xiqu* does not only provide enjoyment, but also serves as a relatively safe outlet of self-expression that can educate the audience. Therefore, themes and messages in *Xiqu* usually incorporate common social concepts and in turn, have a large influence on society.

***Xiqu's* influence on Western Theatre**

Xiqu's influence on Western theatre is easily overlooked, this may be caused by the lack of report and writing of *Xiqu* in Western media unlike 'Japonism' which was used to describe Japanese printing influence to French Impressionism art in mid-19th century, and was widely publicized and reported. On the other hand, Chinese *Xiqu's* influences to Western theatre were rarely mentioned and documented. However, this does not mean Chinese *Xiqu* has not made an important impact to the West. On the contrary, Chinese *Xiqu* has changed the fundamental perception of Western theatre and helped pave the way for modern theatre that we enjoy and appreciate so much.

During 1920s and 30s, followed by a series of performances in Europe, America and Russia by Peking Opera master Mei Langfang (梅蘭芳), *Xiqu* made a strong impact and left its influence in Western theatre.

While the Soviet theatre artists were engaged in their open debate on Mei Lanfang's performances, Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright and theatre director in exile and traveling in Moscow, was jotting down—from his fresh experience of the Chinese actor's performances—inspirations and ideas in several short pieces on the Chinese theatre, which would form the basis of his critical essay and one of the most important theoretical documents of the twentieth-century international theatre, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (Brecht 1964b). Indeed, Brecht's essay has been highly regarded not only as the first articulation of Brecht's seminal concept of the "Alienation effect" (A-effect) in the development of his system, which has had a profound and lasting influence on the twentieth-century international stage, but also for its insights into Mei Lanfang's art and the Chinese theatre (Min, 2012, p. 175).

The term "Alienation effect" was first introduced by Bertolt Brecht. He explains in the quote above as the phenomenon when the Chinese artist in a *Xiqu* performance dismisses the fourth wall most European actors pay careful attention to. Instead, the Chinese artist is aware of the audience watching him. In turn, the audience is no longer able to view the performance as the unseen, creating an entirely different effect compared to the European theatrical technique of building the fourth wall between the stage and the audience (Silberman et al., 1964, p. 91).

Documented in Taipei National University of the Arts Library official webpage, Chinese *Xiqu* and Eastern Public Theatre's Performing Culture Study, playwright Huang Zoulin classified *Xiqu* as one of the world's three performing systems along with Stanislavsky and Brecht (2007). It marked the importance of *Xiqu* in the international context.

The differences between *Xiqu* and Western theatre

For foreigners, the word 'Chinese opera' (*Xiqu*'s former English name) tends to mislead people to look at the art form as Chinese version of Western opera. However, the truth is far from

it. Siu Wang-NGai confirmed that *Xiqu* is an overwhelming experience of colour, sound, and movement for first visit. ‘The dramatic tradition of China is a blend of song, speech, mime, dance, and acrobatics, held together by theatrical conventions resting on a concept of drama quite different from the realism and naturalism that have had such influence in the West’ (Siu and Lovrick, 1997, p. 3).

Xiqu is a combined art form on stage. Its characteristic is to let different art forms express their characteristics by putting them together in one standard. These forms are mainly poems (si), music (yue) and dance (wu). Poem refers to literature; music refers to accompaniment in music; dance refers to performance. They also include scenic art, costume design, make-up, etc. These elements exist in *Xiqu* only for one purpose, that is to tell stories; and they all follow one principle, which is beauty. In a nutshell, the characteristic of *Xiqu* is to perform a story by singing and dancing (Wang, 1912, p. 2).

By contrast, ‘Western opera is an expensive art form, which is comprised of music, poems, drama, dance, etc. Music is the most important dramatic element among all’ (Liu 2014, p. 9).

Although both art forms encourage a mixture of different art forms, remaining as interdisciplinary areas, beauty and aesthetics are especially emphasized in *Xiqu*.

Chinese opera is a broad term that needs some defining. The term ‘opera’ is misleading for Westerners to whom opera means full orchestration and characters that sing throughout. In China, opera is more akin to a Western operetta or musical. It is a mixture of singing and speaking, prose and poetry, and even dance and acrobatics (Wang, 2014, p. 2).

Additionally, *Xiqu* and Western opera have a very different historical circumstances for their development:

Director system originated in 18th century Europe...After The Renaissance, as technology advanced, theatre’s architecture, stage arts became more complicated. Until Modern era, Western theatre naturally need a professional director whose knowledge is beyond the realm of acting to supervise, integrate

the different relationship between ‘flat’(two dimensional) literature script and three dimensional theatrical arts. However, traditional *Xiqu* never had the need and propulsion for the specific duty of director. Although theatre groups occasionally rehearse for new play, but the rehearsals are led by the responsible leading actor or experienced actor from the group most of the time (Sun, 2014, p. 38).

Visually, the difference between Western opera and *Xiqu* is the most noticeable. On the other hand, the bigger difference lies in the music. Both have a different approach in terms of production and actual practice.

However, the more significant difference between Western theatre and *Xiqu* lies in the approach towards acting. For Western theatre, ‘Many of us have seen, or at least know what a traditional Shakespearean performance entails. An immense script, where actors are required to memorize the lines and then fit interaction with props and other characters. These performances are very text based, and require an actor to perfect the art of lying to the audience’ (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2001, p. 105). Training for Western actors, before the 19th century, was centered on the ideas of naturalism and realism, attempting to give the audience a slice of real life. (Intercultural Influence on Acting and Actor Training, 2016).

On the other hand, Chinese *Xiqu* has a completely different approach:

Xiqu performance is ‘static within the movement, movement within stillness’; the virtual body movement has an indicative meaning, presenting an implicit, subtle, stylized, visualized body. This kind of rigorously expressed body is actually a ‘classical’ body with a cultural concept. Because state management, social norms, and cultural practices restrict people's forms, postures, and movements, they pay attention to "the combination of life experience and stage" (Xiong and Jia, 2005, p. 45).

Xiqu actors need to go through a long, tough and repetitive training: ‘Everyday practice is to reverse the basic physical movements (of the actor), making it a habit to raise their hands and feet (to the style of *Xiqu*)’ (Wei, 1995, p. 59).

Like Western classical musicians playing the same pieces of music for hundreds of years, through formulaic restrictions of *Xiqu*, actors are able to achieve a ‘perceived mind is a physical soul’ (Yang, 2008: 48) status. In other words, they transcend their performance beyond merely trying to duplicate reality.

The music of Cantonese Opera

Music is an essential aspect of Cantonese opera. Technically, Western opera music is always newly composed for each opera. During the performance, music is typically played by symphony orchestras (over 50 musicians,) or chamber orchestras (under 50 musicians). The orchestra will be located in the Orchestra Pit in front of the stage. Within the orchestra, the number of musicians on each instrument are carefully set in order to create a balanced symphony for audience; the sound level of different instruments will be naturally right for the music without any third party adjustment.

In terms of singing and music composition, the difference becomes more clear:

Though solo is the major part of singing in Western opera, there is also a tradition of chorus. In the singing part of Western opera, multiple vocals and ensembles also take up a great part. Music of *Xiqu* (singing and instrumental music) usually follows the principle of ‘follow the singer’s tone’, ‘songs follow words’. Music in *Xiqu* does not match with the chorus but puts an emphasis on the synchronization of the band. Thus, the singing part of *Xiqu* is usually soloing with melody only, and/or duet/supporting singer behind screen (Liu, 2014, p. 6).

To understand the differences of Cantonese opera music versus Western opera music, we must understand its style. As Cantonese opera was sometime called: loh gu hei, theatre with gongs and drums (percussion), it is implied that percussion music plays a major role in Cantonese opera.

The Education University of Hong Kong’s website explained that music in Cantonese opera is rich. The playwright often selects and employs different kinds of existing music to the opera according to the plots. Music in Cantonese opera can be categorized as: aria type, fixed tune, narrative music, and percussion music.

Aria Type emphasizes the close relationship between musical tones and the linguistic tones of Cantonese. Collaborating together, the melody and the rhythmic system generate different kinds of aria types in Cantonese opera.

Fixed tunes in Cantonese opera can be categorized into:

- i. melodies from other Chinese *Xiqu* genres.
- ii. specific new melodies created from aria types by specific artists who modified previous aria types and included their personal interpretation.
- iii. adoption of Cantonese tunes and other melodies from China and overseas.
- iv. specifically composed melodies.

Narrative music in Cantonese opera includes naamjam, mukjyu, lungzau, baanngaan, and jyuau. These kinds of music were largely spread over the Cantonese communities in Guangdong province. These genres possess their own musical structure. Playwrights usually adopt parts of these genres in order to contrast with other types of music in Cantonese opera.

Percussion music in Cantonese opera is known by the filed as lohgu (literally gong and drum). During the performance, percussion music not only functions as providing basic pulse, rhythm and tempo, but also guides, heightens and supplements the whole performance, especially in those fighting scenes in which percussion music is in a leading role (Young, 2015).

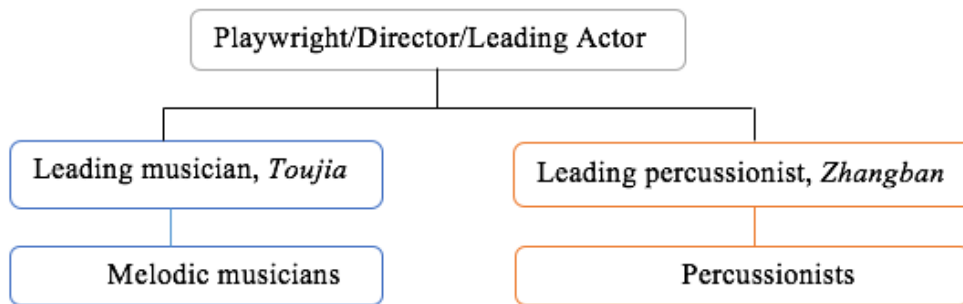


Figure 1: Cantonese opera music structure

Western opera music is typically composed by the composer and the musicians are supervised by a conductor. However, Cantonese opera music is often composed of pre-existing music, meaning original composed pieces are not common, and the music is performed under the collaboration of the leading musician (who is in charge of the melodic part of the music) and the leading percussionist: as illustrated by my diagram above (Figure 1). This is a fundamental difference that leads to the second major difference between Western opera and Cantonese opera: theatre structure and operation.

Aesthetics of Cantonese Opera

Traditional Cantonese Opera focuses on abstraction. The art often only uses a default ‘one table and two chairs’ as the stage setting. Instead of using a believable stage set to properly sell the story to the audience, traditional Cantonese opera uses a minimalistic approach. They rely on the actors’ performance to tell the story in an abstract fashion. ‘For example, the performer walks a circle on stage to represent the character walking for hours’ (Yuen, 2014).

In terms of the location of musicians, unlike Western opera, Cantonese opera does not try to hide the musicians from audience by putting them in Orchestra Pit or behind the set. The musicians are often located on stage right, right next to the actors and are totally exposed to the audience’s view. Modern theatre stage direction as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 2).

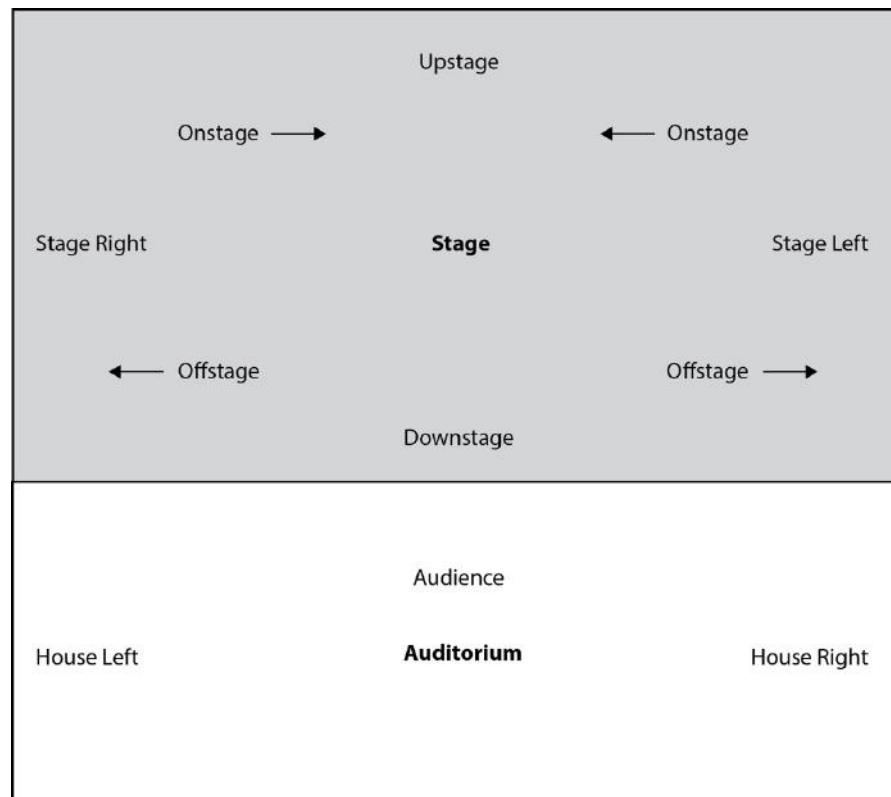


Figure 2: Stage direction for modern theatre

The unrealistic stage setting and musicians’ location consciously tell audience that what they are seeing is a performance and not reality, together with the self-consciousness of actors’

performance that contributes to what the Western theatre would call ‘Alienation effect’ coined by Brecht, which delivered a huge impact to the development of modern theatre.

Cantonese Opera Theatre Group’s Operation

In an interview, Ms. Ho (pseudonym), who has many years of professional Cantonese Opera administration experience in Hong Kong, explained each Cantonese theatre group has one Banzhu (班主); who is the investor of the group. Every troupe has one main actor and one main actress, Wenwusheng and Zhengyin Huadan respectively, as regulars. Different actors are chosen by the Banzhu for each performance, making judgments based not only on the skill of the performers, but the circumstances as well. The same logic applies to musicians and stage workers.

Technically speaking, there are no full-time actors for Cantonese opera groups. Typically, only a few administrators are employed. Before each performance, freelance Performance Managers and Prompters (Tichang) are employed by the group. The Performance Manager is in charge of contacting main actors, handling the music and promotion, ticketing, as well as overseeing the financial arrangements.

Cantonese opera actors were either traditionally trained by The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong or underwent apprenticeship training from a famous actor as a master. Since the establishment of The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) in 1984, Cantonese opera actors can be trained in an academic approach. They naturally adopt a modernised approach towards theatre production. Therefore, they have a Stage Manager in the production team instead of a Prompter. However, the ‘mainstream’ Cantonese opera actors and personnel are trained traditionally. A large majority of the Cantonese opera groups in Hong Kong are using the traditional Production Manager and Prompter combination (Lin, 2010, p. 2).

Modern theatre production structure

As illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 3), every role in the modern theatre production is very specific.

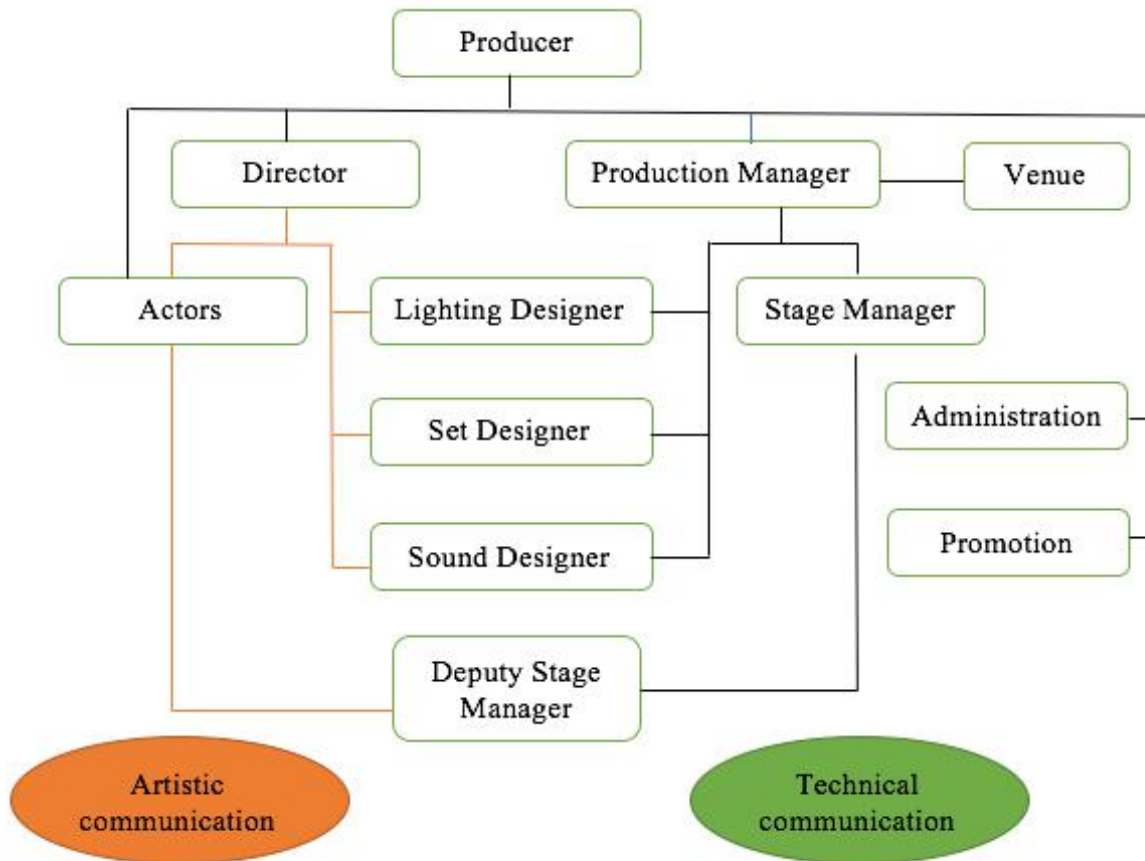


Figure 3: The complexities of who is who

The roles of modern theatre production are:

Producer:

The Producer is responsible for managing every aspect of the production prior to the final performance, as well as overseeing it during the production run and making any necessary closure arrangements (Baggaley, 2008).

Production Manager:

The Production Manager employs and supervises the staff. Their other responsibilities include budget handling, managing deadlines, creating a master schedule, overseeing stage work, initiating meetings with the production members, and note-taking during technical rehearsals (The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, 2014).

Stage Manager:

The Stage Manager is in charge of everything related to the stage, such as marking out the stage, furnishing the stage based on the designer's set plan, and overseeing rehearsals. Additionally, they are to compile a breakdown chart for each scene and ensure a smooth flow of information among all departments. They work together with the Production Manager in outlining the budget for the stage as well as overseeing technical rehearsals. Finally, they are the person who is sought out for troubleshooting (The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, 2014).

Deputy Manager:

An assistant to the Stage Manager, the Deputy Manager is often tasked with compiling a list of props, technical cues, and a scene availability chart. They run rehearsals alongside the Stage Manager and are responsible for managing blocking, prompting and distributing rehearsal notes. The Deputy Manager also cues the show and writes up a report after every performance so to maintain the quality and technical standards each time (The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, 2014).

Lighting Designer:

The Lighting Designer's duties revolve around the design, installation and operation of lighting and special effects to be used in the production. They make use of a light plot that details the placement of the instruments used in the production. The Lighting Designer also has to finish any relevant paperwork (Gillete, 2000).

Sound Designer:

Similar to the Lighting Designer, the Sound Production is responsible for the sound effects and how they are acquired (e.g. recorded or live). They are also responsible for setting up the related equipment and ensuring the operator is properly trained (University of Oregon Eugene, n.d.).

Set Designer:

The Set Designer is tasked with designing the setting for productions, ranging from single scenes for simpler and lower budget productions to complex scenery and setup required by major productions (Stage Designer, Creative & Cultural Skills, n.d.).

The Performance Manager's roles in Cantonese Opera are similar to the Producer's job in modern production, which is mainly focused on the administration and financial side of the production. The Prompter's job is similar to the Production Manager's job but needs to cover the role of Stage Manager, Deputy Stage Manager, Lighting Designer, Sound Designer and Set Designer, if necessary. The Prompter needs to handle areas that require their own expert knowledge and technical know-how. Light and sound elements strongly depend on the designers own artistic vision and are executed with an expert technical understanding, in which the Prompter was never trained and prepared to do.

The Prompter – the all-in-one Cantonese opera production position

Unlike the modern theatre system, Cantonese opera continues to utilise the hundreds-years-old production system led by the Prompter (Tichang). From assisting actors and help organising production in the old time, the Prompter’s job has expanded to cover all technical aspects and certain production management roles today; as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 4).

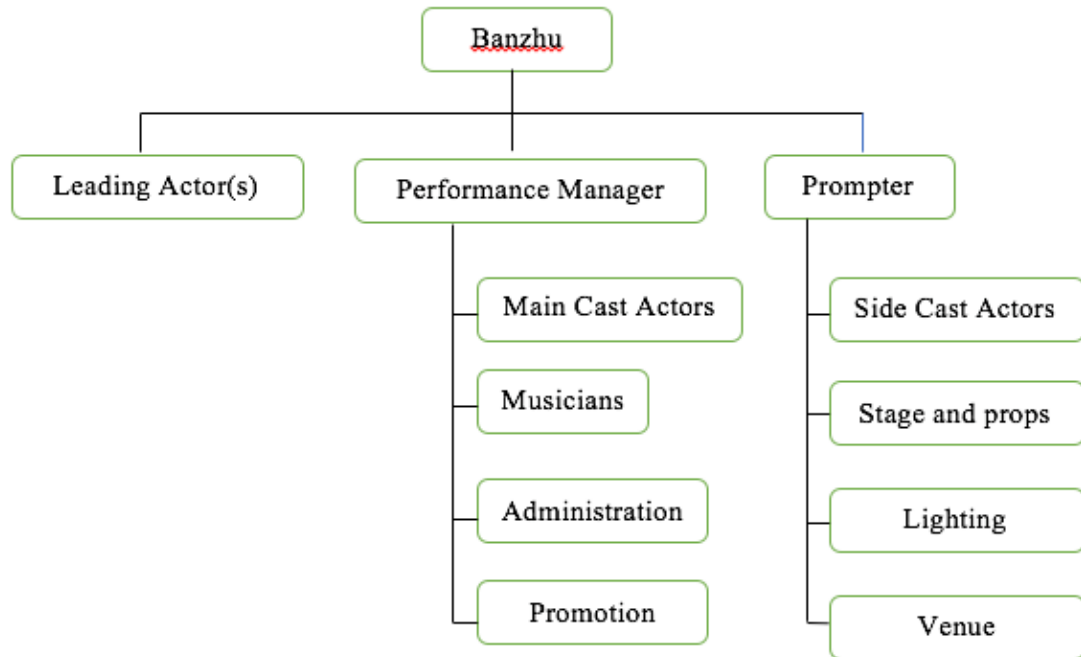


Figure 4: Cantonese Opera production structure

Ms. Ho reaffirmed that the Prompter’s role is to contact companies for the set and props, employ Xialanren (performers with minor roles), oversee the acrobatics, and handle the props transportation. The Prompter is also in charge of script distribution to the performers, the Toujia—the leading musician—and Zhangban—the leading percussionist. They have to prepare a Tigang, an outline of the script, that details every scene including backdrop, props, characters, order of performers and the percussion pattern. Finally, the Prompter also has to remind performers to put on their costumes and cue them to go on stage (Lin, 2010, p.3).

Web media Arts-news interviewed Prompter Su Zhichang. Su confirmed that the Prompter is almost responsible for all matters: work as a communication bridge between the actors and the backstage, to read the script, and then arrange the work. Before the show, find the appropriate amount and suitable for the content of the repertoire, assign roles for side cast, and inform the clothing department what kind of clothing and quantity. The preparation of props and sets of canvas is even more inevitable work but the work of the field is far more than this. After moving in, he also tests the sound coordination and design lighting effects (Nanhai, 2014).

During the performance, the Prompter needs to wear headphones, look at the progress on the stage, and pay attention to the scene changes. The prompter should also contact the venue technicians. If there are any temporary changes, it is necessary to inform the shed master immediately, and the work is not easy.

‘A lot of Prompters switched from originally being an actor’ (Yip, 2015). A majority of Prompters begin as Cantonese opera actor trainees. They change their paths after being offered to train under a senior Prompter once they displayed an adept capability in helping the technical areas of the production.

In contrast to the structure of modern performing groups in the field of drama, dance and opera, Cantonese opera productions adopt a relatively traditional and simpler set up consisting of the Performance Manager and the Prompter essentially managing the entire production. As the production environment progresses with time, both positions are tasked with adapting to multiple roles that were not intended for them in the beginning, adding more weight to their roles.

In terms of music and production management system, this section of the knowledge landscape has demonstrated some of the differences between Western opera and Cantonese opera. It is true that Cantonese opera has maintained the hundreds-years-old production system and has a very different approach towards music. Yet in the contemporary environment, where venues are mainly designed with Western productions in mind and the audience are expecting to see a technically-advanced performance, Cantonese opera is facing a crisis that urgently needs to be addressed.

‘Modernisation’ of Cantonese Opera

In the past decades, the general approach of the theatre professionals in Hong Kong towards Cantonese opera is referencing to the Western theatre production. However, there are numerous differences between Cantonese opera and Western opera. For example: *Xiqu* is an art form equally mixed between traditional stories, and the interpretation of actors and musicians, as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 5), while ‘Western opera is an expensive art form, which is comprised of music, poems, drama, dance, etc. where music is the most important dramatic element among all’ (Liu, 2014), as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 6). To make a direct reference to Western opera (or theatre production) and copy its production style to Cantonese opera is unrealistic and goes against the traditional aesthetic of Cantonese opera.

As Ruru Li quotes legendary Beijing Opera singer Kuo Hsiao-chuang: she tries to achieve her goal of establishing a jingju that would “belong to tradition, modernity and to you and me” (Li, 2010, p. 215), and whether Kuo’s approach of ‘collage’ with Western issue is a subversion or innovation in itself. Li believed in the latter.

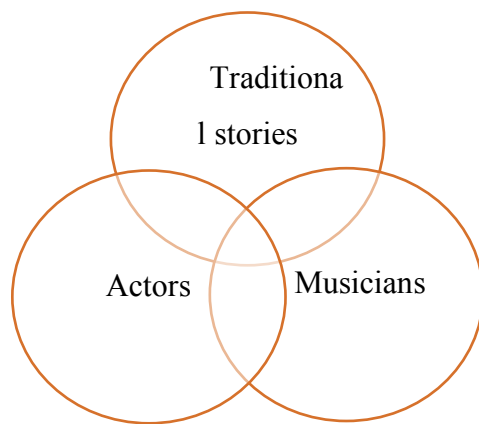


Figure 5: Elements of traditional Xiqu theatre

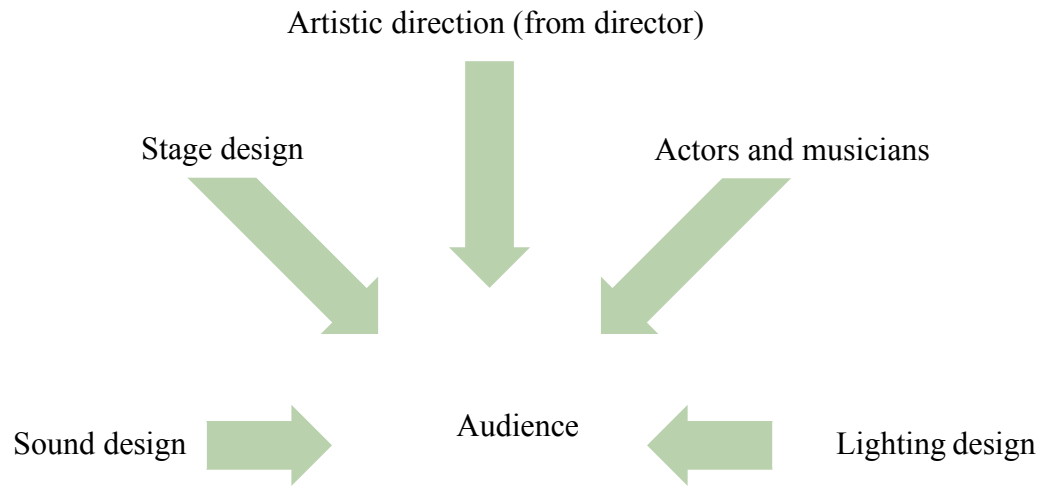


Figure 6: Elements of modern theatre

The difference between Modernisation and Westernisation

In order to come up with an accurate resolution to modernise Cantonese Opera without changing its nature or essence in any way, it is important to explore for myself and to explain to participants and readers the fundamental differences between two key terms: ‘modernisation’ and ‘westernisation’.

Modernisation refers to ‘a model of an evolutionary transition from a “pre-modern” or “traditional” to a “modern” society. The teleology of modernisation is described in social evolutionism theories, existing as a template that has been generally followed by societies that have achieved modernity’ (Maheshwari, 2016).

As Fei Hsiao-t'ung has further explained the concept of modernisation:

This world society, however, was built on the basis of economic and cultural discrepancies. Since the base for development and rate of development between each region, nationality and country differed, serious gaps between them emerged, especially after industrialisation. World history over the last several centuries has been marked by the efforts of various peoples of relatively underdeveloped regions to close this gap and achieve real equality. Modernisation is a new phase of this historical process (1982, p. 119).

From this perspective, like many major developments in world history, modernisation is a necessary historical evolution. Huntington described modernisation as a process that ‘involves industrialisation, urbanisation, increasing levels of literacy, education, wealth, and social mobilisation, and more complex and diversified occupational structures. These common elements may be present, even though the institutions that created them are not. Modernisation can be borrowed or bought’ (1996, p. 68).

Contrary to this idea, Westernisation can be seen as ‘the adaptation or influence of western (European) culture among societies across the globe in areas such as life-style priorities, education, values, economics, architecture, clothing, politics, entertainment, etc.’ (Irwin, 2016, p. 13). It is a ‘process of imitation of western countries by non-western countries, whereby societies come under or adopt the western culture. In short, westernisation is about the adoption of “Western” values’ (Shah, 2015). Huntington went as far as saying that westernisation ‘created the tremendous expansion of scientific and engineering knowledge beginning in the eighteen century that made it

possible for humans and shapes their environment in totally unprecedented ways' (1996, p. 68). But 'the non-Western world did not experience the Renaissance, the Reformation or the Enlightenment in a similar fashion; thus, development and modernity cannot possibly mean the same thing. Nor can we measure institutional development in non-Western countries with a linear Western yardstick' (Tazmini, 2018, p. 201).

These two concepts can be confusing for Cantonese opera professionals as they are concepts often conflated not just by non-Westerners but by Westerners themselves. Attempts at modernisation can be interpreted as westernisation, that is, misapplying the western aesthetic and styles to westernise Cantonese opera instead of modernising our own production quality is common within the industry.

On the surface, Hong Kong appears to fit into Gilman's criteria of a modern society model: 'modern societies are cosmopolitan, mobile, controlling of the environment, secular, welcoming of change, and characterised by a complex division of labor' (2018, p. 133). Our way of living and preferences can at first glance appear 'westernized' that is copying the West as according to Woo et al (1999) 'westernised' generally seem to be associated with Western culture and values ... [and the] adoption of Western lifestyles'. However, 'we need to note here that not all Western values are ideal' (Zain, Kassim and Ayub, 2016, p. 584).

Living in a modern society does not mean that we have to totally accept 'westernization' a term which carries the notions of colonial domination, that things would not have improved or modernized without western influences and that westernization is a destructive force on traditions and cultural identity. Modernisation has wider connotations and can be seen as 'a change or modification which offers the promise of the preservation of the past.' (Shah, 2015).

Fourie (2012, p. 55) has in my opinion rightly suggested that 'all modernisation should be seen in the light of its historical context. Because the impact of modernity around the world is and always has been highly contingent on the cultural backgrounds of individual societies, its ideological and institutional manifestations are bound to vary greatly' Cantonese opera has a very rich historical and cultural background with unique traditions that we need to preserve for the future, instead of simply westernising it. Adopting modern sound production practices can offer a way of modernising Cantonese Opera and ensuring its continued survival without the need to transpose Western culture or values onto it.

Moreover, Mignolo (2020) argues that ‘the westernisation of the world is no longer possible because more and more people are resisting being subsumed in it... Decoloniality (or de-westernisation) operates on pluriversality and truth and not in universality and truth... There cannot be only one model of re-existence.’ (p. 40-41) This is important to remember because there is no single way to achieve modernisation, especially in the area of arts and music. As Blaukopf rightly pointed out:

As far as non-Western musics are concerned, the present transformation is usually described as either westernisation or modernisation. Westernisation is defined as a process whereby non-Western musics become part of the Western system by adopting central features of Western music, whilst modernisation is said to consist of modifying traditions by the adoption of non-central Western features (NETTL, 1989, p. 366). We believe that this terminology, useful as it may be, should be supplemented by yet another category since neither of these expressions cover the social mutation due to the impact of the electronic media. (1989, p. 186)

Modern arts and music have not only been affected by westernisation. Social mutation also plays a great role. Cantonese opera has evolved through hundreds of years of social mutation. The unique quality of Cantonese opera cannot be replaced by westernisation only.

Westernisation in this research refers to the adoption of a western theatre production style while Cantonese opera is losing its ‘traditional’ culture and values. ‘Societies can modernize without westernising...far from being universal, remain the culture-specific, proselytizing, and egalitarian ethic ...’ (Lal, 2000, p. 22). To prevent Cantonese opera from losing its own identity and tradition during its way to modernisation, the professional must be aware that they should not westernise the culture of Cantonese opera and instead modernise the technology and production management.

This research builds on these concepts and in this research, the modernisation of Cantonese opera is referred to as making an evolutionary transition from a ‘traditional’ to a ‘modern’ production management and technology which can fulfil the contemporary audience’s expectations as well as maintain a sustainably high production quality which can reflect the technology of the time.

Modernisation of Cantonese opera can improve the production quality and therefore become relevant to contemporary environment. Therefore, my stance on the term ‘modernisation’ does not

indicate westernisation of Cantonese opera. This research will focus only on modernization, incorporating modern production management theories and technologies insofar as they align with Cantonese opera's artistic goals. Westernisation of Cantonese opera, on the other hand, is not the focus of this research.

THE CURRENT CRISIS FACED BY CANTONESE OPERA

In Hong Kong, the number of Cantonese opera performances and the audience count are still considered to be high. Yet, many critics consider that Cantonese opera is facing a challenging period. It poses the question of whether they should modernise and adapt to the contemporary environment, or merely not make any changes and face decline. Although there is a handful of critics and practitioners that disregard the theory of the decline of Cantonese opera. The evidence below illustrates that Cantonese opera is not only declining, but facing a crisis that may threaten not only its development, but its existence.

The decline of Cantonese Opera

All figures (for example: the reduction of audience and box office income) suggest it is undeniable that Cantonese opera has been declining since the 1960s. However, the inability to modernise and keep up with times are not the only reasons for this decline. Reforming the industry is vital for its survival and future development. As a research conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2009) titled *Cantonese opera in Hong Kong* reported:

The subjective reasons for the decline of Cantonese opera are:

- A temporary scarcity of professionals: less young artists enter the business; the learning process is shortened resulting a lack of practice for basic skills. Actor trainees often focus on training the easier skill of 'singing' technique, instead of much difficult skill of 'acting' technique, causing many uniquely outstanding traditional performing technique of Cantonese opera to be lost, and the quality of performance is gradually declining.

- Contradictions between artists: Mainly in competition of rankings, competing for more important role, bullying, not performing seriously on stage, not uniting.

The objective reason is the rise of diversified entertainment: a variety of modern cultural entertainment media (film, tv, internet, computer games, etc.) have emerged, they have won over a large number of Cantonese opera audiences in a new, fast and rich subject matter (2009).

However, the research also concluded:

The reason for development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong is in a dull state since 1960s are:

- Due to the advancement of technology, the entertainment of Hong Kong people has become diversified.
- At present, the number of Cantonese opera audience and artists in Hong Kong is far less than before, and there is a crisis of lack of talent.
- Cantonese opera needs more support from the government, and it also needs reform. (2009).

To understand the conclusion of the decline of Cantonese opera, we can look further into the other figures.

The amount of performances and audience attendance of Cantonese opera

According to Hong Kong Association of Cantonese Opera Scholars' 3/2017-2/2018 Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Performance Stage Study, Hong Kong has a total of 921 Cantonese Opera performances during the period with an average of 76-77 performances per month and 2.5 performances per day; as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 7).

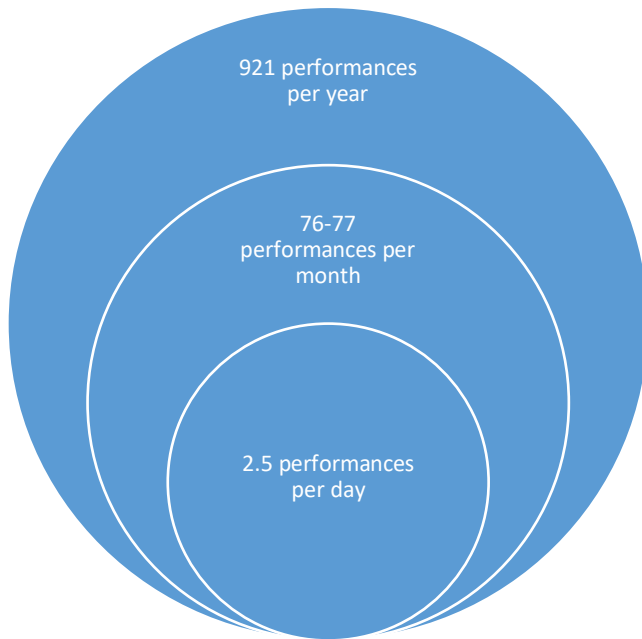


Figure 7: Cantonese Opera performances in Hong Kong

HKADC's Hong Kong Annual Arts Survey Report 2015/2016 stated *Xiqu* has the highest audience attendance amount in all of the Performing Arts Programme, as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 8).

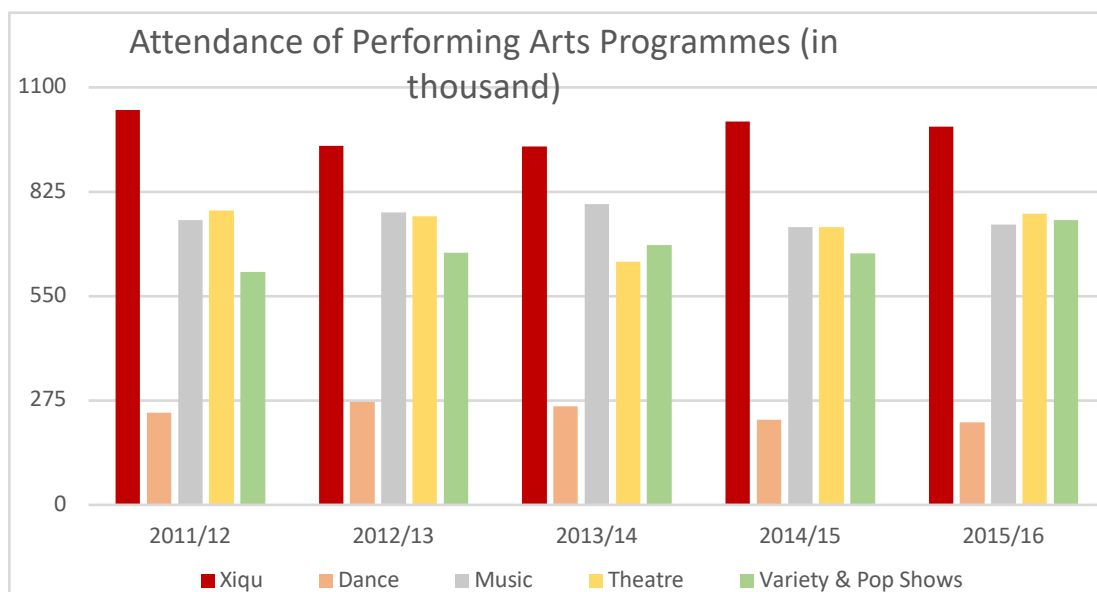


Figure 8: Performing Arts Programmes' Attendance

Audience

In the 08-09 Cantonese Opera's Audience Research Report published by Hong Kong Opera Preview magazine, Hong Kong has a Cantonese opera audience made up of approximately 300,000 people. However, according to the research, 81.5% of Cantonese Opera audience are aged over 50, 77.4% audience's monthly family income are under 30,000 Hong Kong dollars (3,000 pounds), 86.9% audience have less than University education, and 52.3% are housewives or retired. (All Figures in Appendix 1: 08-09 Cantonese Opera's Audience Research Report)

As the research figure indicates, Cantonese Opera's audiences are comparably older in age, and lower in income and education. Undoubtedly, this figure is alarming and it is a great obstacle for the future development of the art form. Cantonese Opera has the largest number of audience compared to other performing art forms in Hong Kong; thus, the funding bodies contribute their support to increase the number of performances every year (from 2011 to 2016, the number of performances has increased by 38.8%). Given that the number of audience members remains largely unchanged, local Cantonese opera theatre groups are facing the threat of a diminishing audience due to its audience's characteristics.

The decrease in audiences

Despite the growth in performances being held, the amount of audience numbers has decreased, indicating its decline. This trend will be discussed in the following section.

Regarding box office income, Hong Kong Arts Development Council's Hong Kong Annual Arts Survey Report 2015/2016's figure shows that from 2011 to 2016, although the total number of Cantonese Opera performances has increased by 38.8%, the total number of paid performances only increased by 9%, while the total number of free performances increased by 43%. Total attendance of free performances increased slightly (5.7%), but the total attendance of paid performances has decreased by 10%, and the total box office has also reduced by 28% (see Appendix 2 for detail figures in Hong Kong Arts Development Council's Hong Kong Annual Arts Survey Report 2015/2016).

Box office income reflects the popularity of the performance. Thus, the production budget of Cantonese Opera's box office is decreasing regularly, unlike the Theatre Performances whose box office income has increased by 36% from 2011 to 2016. Acknowledging the importance of adapting modern theatre production structures to provide a like high-quality performance as Theatre Performances category, employing a Production Manager, a Stage Manager, a Deputy Stage Manager, Lighting and Sound Designers, and replacing the Prompter may be a challenge for Cantonese Opera to embrace.

The need for Modernisation

Modernising Cantonese opera production is not a personal nor an artistic preference, it is necessary for the art form to survive and develop. In the *08-09 Cantonese Opera's Audience Research Report*, as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 9), the venues that audience are most unsatisfied with regarding the 'lighting and sound system' are Hong Kong Cultural Centre's (HKCC) Concert Hall and Grand Theatre, Sunbeam Theatre*, Shatin Town Hall's Auditorium and Hong Kong City Hall's Concert Hall. It is surprising that the mentioned venues are the best equipped venues in Hong Kong (especially Hong Kong Cultural Centre which has been the most prestigious performing venue in Hong Kong), yet the Cantonese Opera's audience are most unsatisfied about their 'lighting and sound system'.

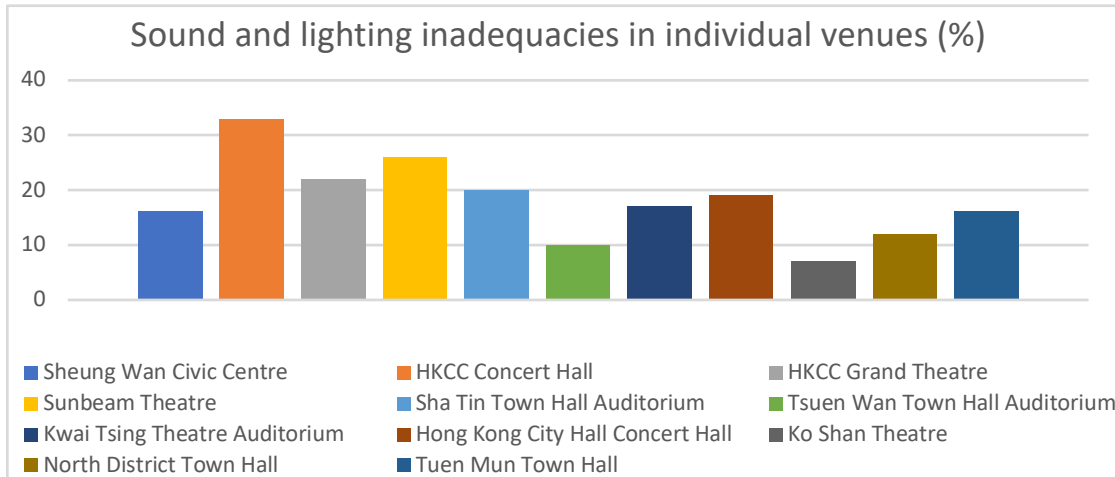


Figure 9: Sound and lighting inadequacies in individual venue

When we look at Figure 10, the research result becomes more reflective: the most unsatisfying ‘lighting and sound system’ venues have the largest seating capacity in Hong Kong. Those venues house from 1,033 seats (Sunbeam Theatre¹ Hall 1) to 2,019 seats (Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall). HK venues’ seating capacities are as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 18). For such a large performing venue, performers must totally rely on sound system’s enhancement for their voice to reach audience. On the other hand, in a small venue, which has around 300 seats, has a much smaller stage, back stage and auditorium area, performers’ own voices often can reach over half of audience without sound enhancement.

¹ Sunbeam is a privately owned theatre. Its equipment and technical support is expected to be less well covered than LCSD venues.

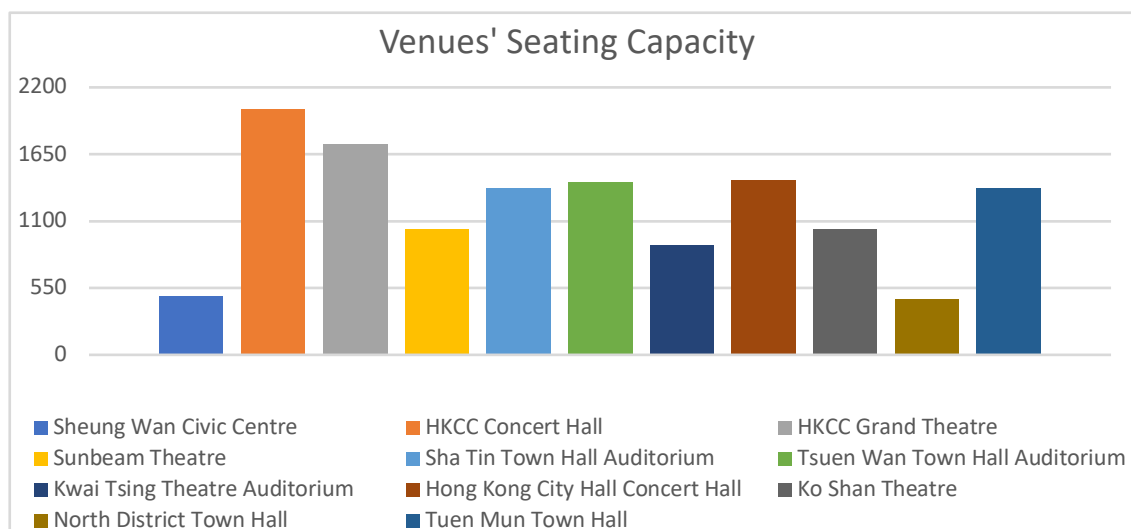


Figure 10: Individual venues' seating capacities

The case above explains that Cantonese opera production has already experienced technical difficulties while adapting to the contemporary performance environment.

The lack of study and research on technical aspect of Cantonese opera

Although there are many academic research studies on Cantonese opera and Xiqu in Hong Kong, there has not been any studies exploring its technical or production aspects. Existing research on Cantonese opera mainly focuses on the following five areas:

- Performing technique. For example, *Creative process in Cantonese opera I: The role of linguistic tones. Ethnomusicology* (B. Yung, 1983).
- Creative processes. For example, *Creativity in Cantonese operatic singing: Analysis of excerpts from Hu Bu Gui by three artists as examples* (Leung Bo-Wah, 2018).
- Theory and aesthetics. For example, *Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Narrative* (香港粵劇敘論) (K. Lai, 2010).

- Social context. For example, *Ceremony, Faith, Acting-Shengong Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong* (儀式、信仰、演劇 - 神功粵劇在香港) (S. Chan, 2008).
- Inheritance of the art form. For example, *Hong Kong Cantonese Opera's Inheritance Model Initiative: From Apprenticeship and Community Training to College System* (香港粵劇的傳承模式倡議：從師徒制和社區訓練到學院制) (Leung Bo-Wah, 2014).

Research on tradition, history and aesthetic of Cantonese opera are invaluable to the study of the art form; however, there are no studies published about the other aspects of this art form, such as the technical and production management aspects or ways of modernising this ancient art form. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature.

The shift of income focus

Since the 60s and the 70s, one of the biggest change in Cantonese opera industry is the shift of funding from private investors to government. In the old days, private investors were focused on the commercial aspect of the art, namely how to bring in more paid audience. Now that the government's goal is to ensure preservation of the art form. Maintaining the amount of audience (paid or unpaid) has become the theatre groups' primary concern. This change demonstrates a change of focus within the Cantonese opera industry. The change of funding bodies and their focus has affected the fundamental mind-set of Cantonese opera groups, which may have contributed to the current period of the decline of Cantonese opera.

Cantonese Opera groups' income revenue

Funding for performances comes from theatre groups' own accumulated surplus, Banzhu's capital injection, supporters' patronage and programme presenters' funding (mostly from various government funding bodies), as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 11) (Lin, 2010, p. 5).

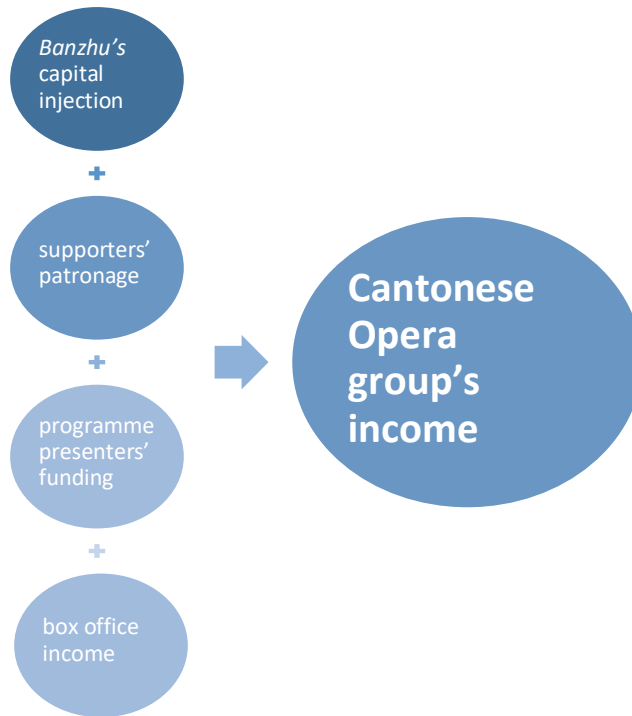


Figure 11: Contribution to a Cantonese Opera group's income revenues

In terms of expenditure, Cantonese Opera performances only have limited box office income, but expenditure is very high; the actors' fee alone already covers 2/3 of the entire production cost (Lam, 2010, p. 5).

Hong Kong Funding Bodies

Government and Cultural Funding Bodies play a very important role in the Hong Kong performance arts. Currently, there are nine performance art groups attained the long term financial support by the government. They are: Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Dance Company, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Chung Ying Theatre Company, Zuni Icosahedron, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Hong Kong Ballet, and City Contemporary Dance Company.

In terms of other funding revenue, there are two main government-funding bodies for Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong. They are the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) and the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee & Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF).

Every year, there are millions of dollars of funding dedicated to support Cantonese Opera. In 2016-17, CODF has granted 9 million dollars (900 thousand Pounds) funding. In 2017-18, HKADC has granted over 5.8 million dollars (580 thousand pounds) for *Xiqu* related funding.

HKADC was established in 1995 as a statutory body set up by the Hong Kong Government to support the broad development of the arts in Hong Kong. Its major roles include grant allocation, policy and planning, advocacy, promotion and development, and programme planning.

CODF is a charitable fund set up by the Secretary for Home Affairs Incorporated of Hong Kong Government in 2005. The Home Affairs Bureau is responsible for overseeing the operation of the CODF.

According to their website, CODF was established for the following purposes:

- a) to support and fund research and studies on the development of Cantonese opera;
- b) to support and fund programmes and events aimed to promote and sustain the development of Cantonese opera;
- c) to support and fund such other charitable works and projects that are ancillary to, and conducive to, the purposes specified at (a) and (b) above; and
- d) to raise funds for projects as are conducive to the purposes specified at (a) and (b) above.

There are many other government bodies and organizations who would fund activities for Cantonese Opera such as: The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), various Arts Festivals, Home Affairs Bureau, The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, Create Hong Kong, and District Councils, etc., as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 12). However, it is important to highlight that these funding bodies mainly support performances (ritual performances and theatre performances) and promotional activities (introductory workshops) rather than investing in the future development of Cantonese Opera as an art form.

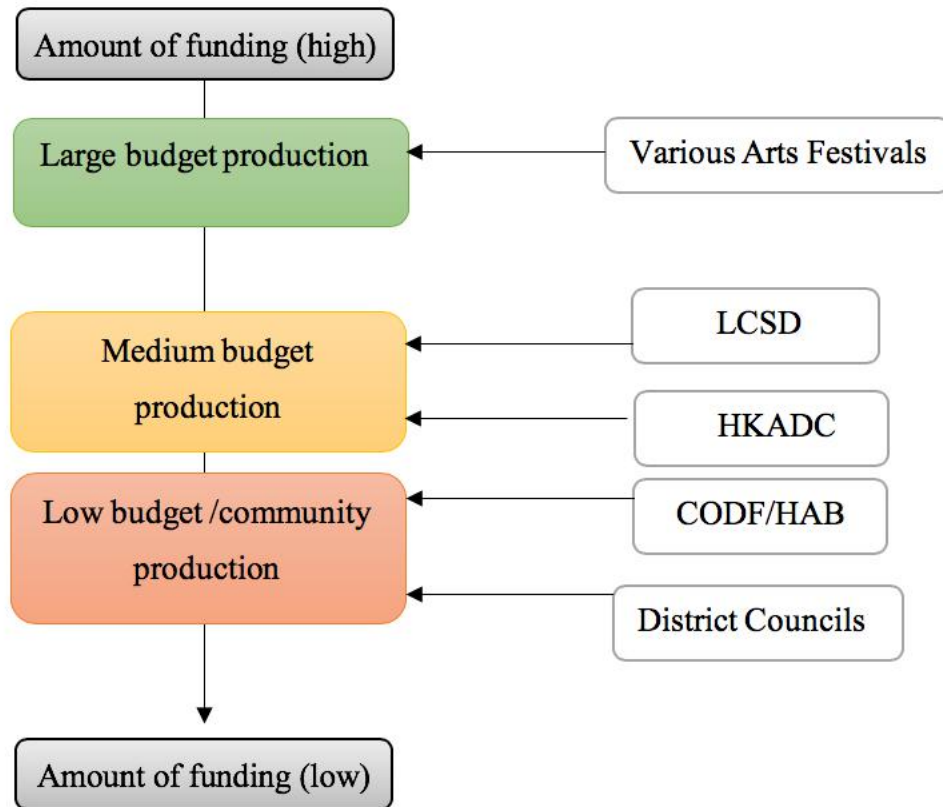


Figure 12: Major Funding Bodies' Funding Budget

Compiling different viewpoints and research regarding Cantonese opera into a study will provide the Government and Cultural Funding Bodies with a more complete and comprehensive perspective towards funding Cantonese opera and its development; thereby, affecting future funding policies and their execution.

West Kowloon Cultural District and *Xiqu* Centre

Apart from the conventional funding bodies, the Hong Kong Government established the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority in 11th July 2008, which is in charge of one of the largest cultural projects in the world: West Kowloon Cultural District.

With the original budget of HK\$21.6 billion (2.16 billion pounds) (Yau, 2018), West Kowloon Cultural District is planned to have many world class performance venues and exhibition spaces. Among them are M+ Museum and *Xiqu* Centre, which are the two major infrastructures in Phase 1 due to open in 2019.

Xiqu Centre is the state of the art theatre that is technically dedicated to *Xiqu* performances. As other performance venues in Hong Kong have been design for multi-purpose use, for example drama, dance, music and opera performances. *Xiqu* Centre, the first of its kind, is architecturally purpose-built for *Xiqu*, which already created great interest in China's cultural community.

The change of performance venues

From performances held in privately-built theatres to temporarily-built bamboo canopies to government-run state-of-the-art performance venues, it is evident that Cantonese opera's performance venues have gone through many changes over the past hundred years.

A Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Performance Stage Study conducted in 3/2017-2/2018 stated that during the period, 69.7% of the performances were performed inside theatre venues and 30% were performed outdoors in temporarily-built bamboo canopies.

HKADC's List of Performing Arts Venues in 2015/16 listed 49 performance venues in Hong Kong. Among them, 19 venues are non-government run (seating capacity of different venues are illustrated by my diagram below, Figure 13). With the exception of Lyric Theatre in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and Hall 1 in Sunbeam Theatre (both of which have more than 1,000 seats), most of the non-government run venues have a small to medium audience capacity (40 to 600 seats, average 206 seats per venue).

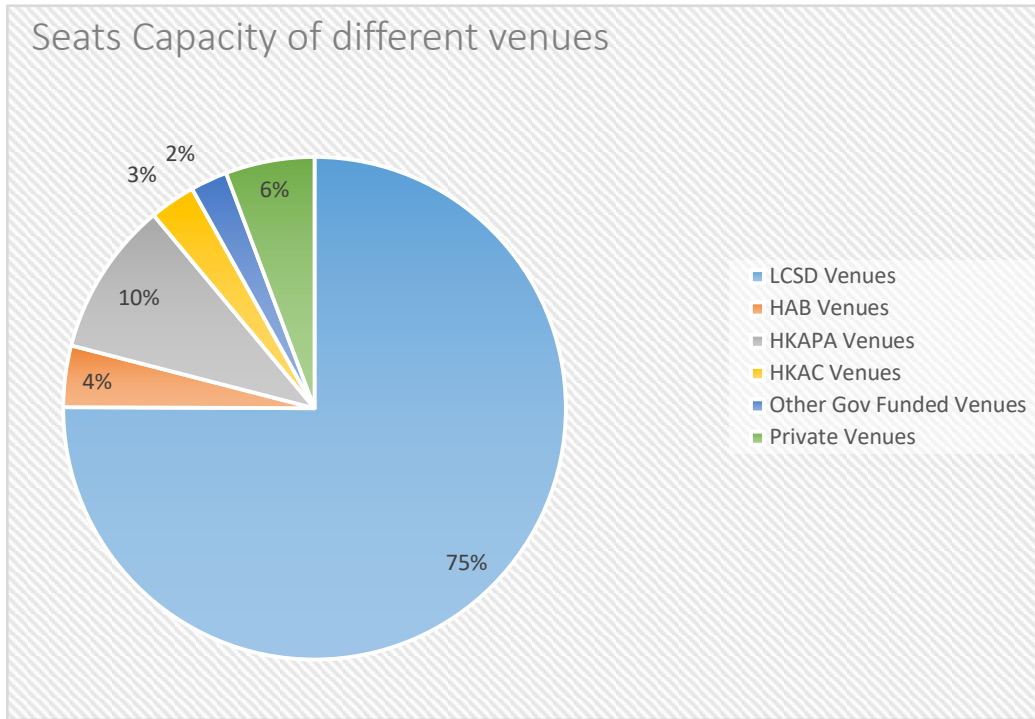


Figure 13 Seating capacity of different venues

The government-run performance venues are mostly under The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). Concerning production, LCSD venues provide their own Resident Technical Manager and technicians to support all performances within the venues. Different performance groups will bring their own Production Manager and/or Stage manager to work along with the venues' Resident Technical Manager and technicians.

To complicate the matter even further, LCSD also outsources their venues' lighting and sound equipment support to Pacific Century Cyber Works Limited (PCCW, the largest information and communications technology company in Hong Kong). Consequently, major technical decisions often need to be approved by PCCW's personnel instead of the venue's own technical manager. While the venues' own Resident Technical Manager and technicians are required to be well-trained in the performance arts' field, PCCW's personnel may not have the same amount of training and relevant knowledge, as illustrated by my diagram below (Figure 14).

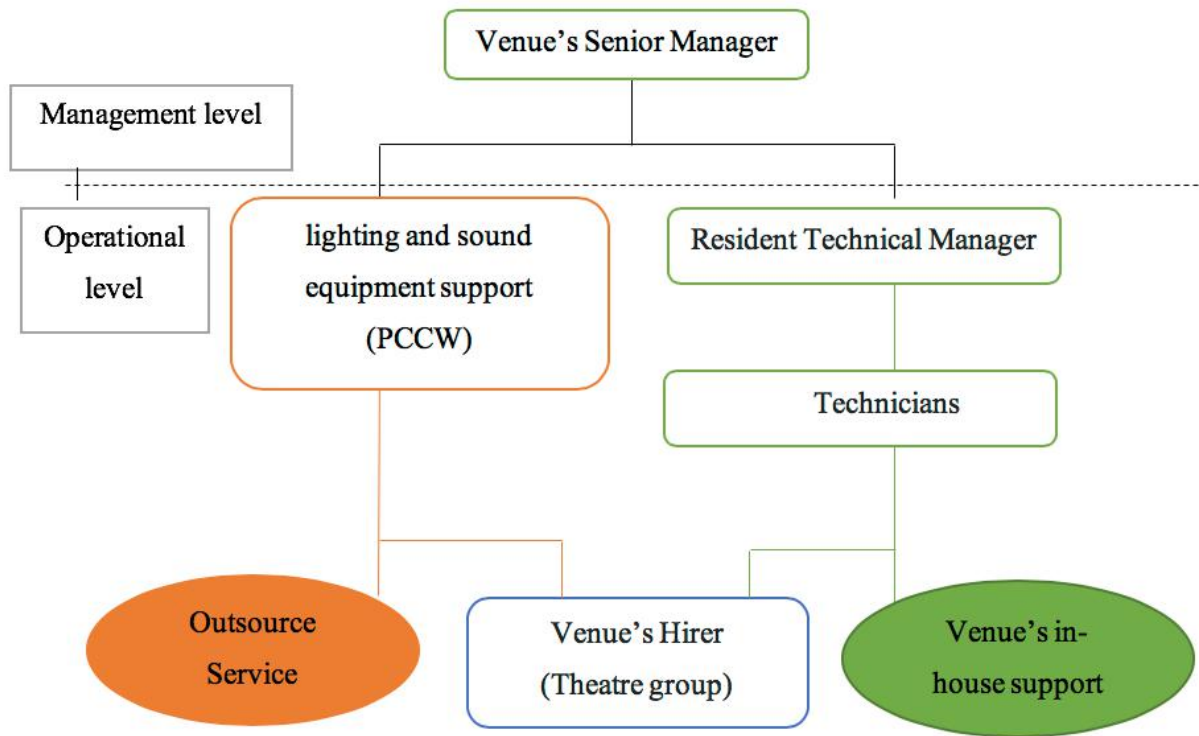


Figure 14: Service levels of LCSD venues

The technical management system is run by LCSD and PCCW in LCSD venues, which make up for a majority of the larger sized venues in Hong Kong. This complicates decision-making for the productions. Theatre groups may encounter confusion regarding technical support when performing in these venues due to the inefficient flow of information.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE FOR CANTONESE OPERA

For the past hundreds of years, Cantonese opera has been changing and adapting to its period of time, surviving World Wars, the Civil War and the Cultural Revolution in China, overcoming such obstacles and striving to succeed as an important art form representative of Southern Chinese culture. However, it had been holding onto its 'tradition' on an arguably strict production structure for the past few decades. It may be no coincidence that this is exactly the period many critics consider as 'the decline of Cantonese opera'.

Changing to survive in the past

The Golden Ages of Cantonese opera (1920s to 1940s) was not without problems of their time. Facing the challenge posed by new media such as film, Cantonese opera had introduced extravagant settings and costumes, film-style make up and lighting into productions, as well as adding Western musical instruments like the violin, the saxophone, and the double bass to music productions. The changes were seen as bold and revolutionary at the time. In the 1950s, Cantonese opera troupes would build their bamboo canopy in fairs and public parks as their main performance platform to attract a larger audience (*The development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, n. d.*).

To survive time and the subsequent change in performance environments, Cantonese opera has been full of innovation, experimentation, and adaptation (as illustrated by my diagram below, Figure 15). Along with other performance arts in Hong Kong for the past decades, Cantonese opera entered a new era and is now faced with new challenges. Such as the professionals before us, Cantonese opera needs to embrace these challenges and adapt to the environment in order to ensure its survival and continued development as an art form.

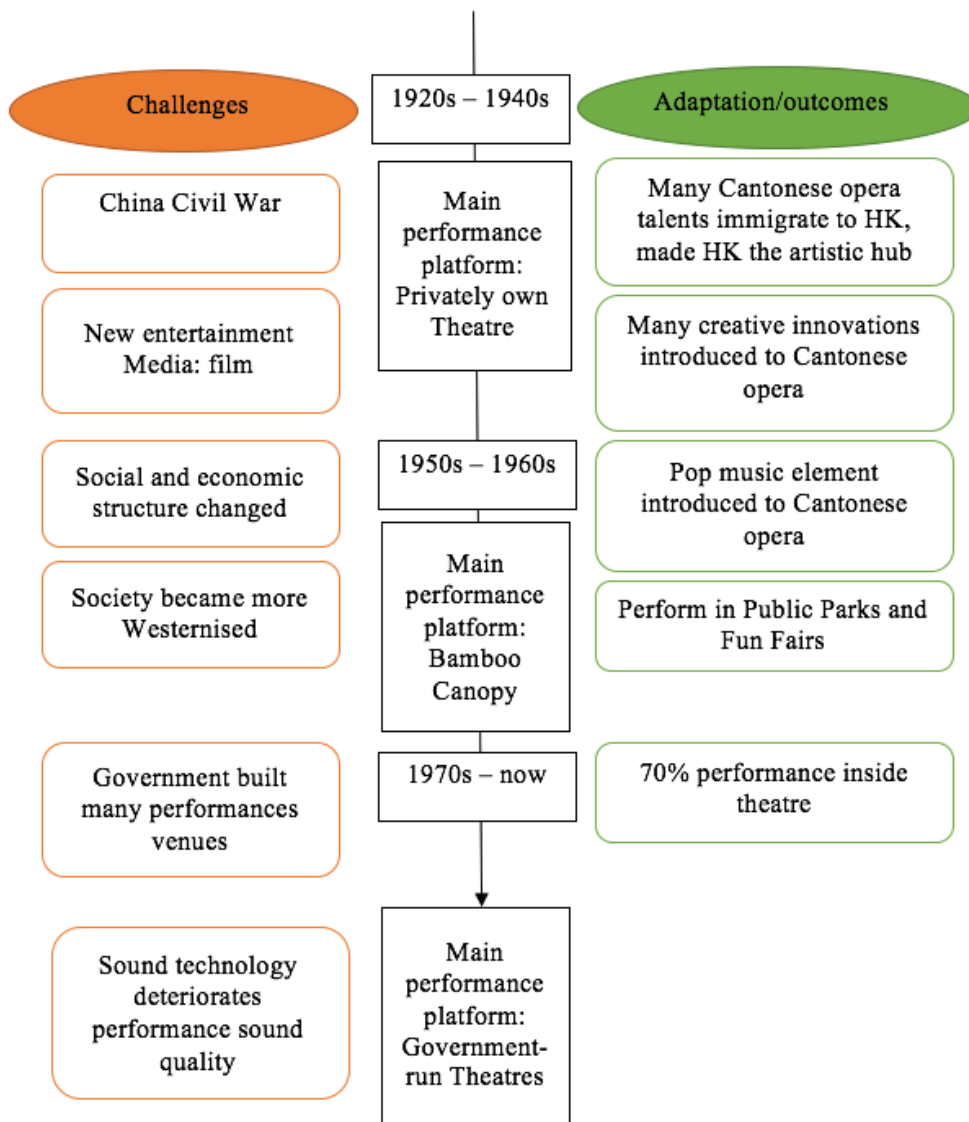


Figure 15: Timeline of the development of Cantonese Opera

The Challenge

Culturally and historically, Cantonese opera is one of the most important art forms in Hong Kong. It follows a very strong tradition formula throughout thousand years of *Xiqu* history. However, some traditions in terms of production management may limit its potential to engage the contemporary audience.

In terms of production, Cantonese opera has yet to adapt and benefit from the past decade's theatre technology advancements. This is a possible explanation for its unstable production quality and ultimately, a decline in its popularity.

The idea of a modernised Chinese Opera has encountered traditional obstacles for some time. Lin's (2003) essay discusses the relationship between the Chinese opera theatrical form and concept with performance citing critics' views of *Xiqu* throughout history. 'Chinese dramas always do not care about stage installation' (Zhou, 1977, p. 23), pointing out that *Xiqu* has little aesthetic concern for the fields of art and design.

However, in contemporary theatre, production often showcases a visual extravaganza and a technological feast to attract audience. *Xiqu* lagging behind other theatre genres may be due to the lack of concern about 'contemporary value'.

The failure of modernising *Xiqu* in the 1940s-1950s

The concept of modernising *Xiqu* was conceived very early in 1930-1948. 'For the hardware of production in this period, theatres of new styles or new stages inside huge department stores have already been completely in use. These 2 types of venues are mainly of the style of western stage and thus the organisations which perform there must change their old performing habits to suit the theatres of new styles' (Shu, 2011, p. 5).

Also, "after public ownership, *Xiqu* became a part of Chinese communist's cultural undertaking. Since then, 'professional division of labor' style production has been fully introduced into the *Xiqu*'s world" (Sun, 2011, p. 38).

Many professionals have realised the importance of sound in Chinese opera. 'One of the most important sound factor in *Xiqu* performance, is the effectiveness between singing and music, whether they can be effective or under control realistically. The equipment helping actors and other

singers to send their voices, on the other hand, show the emergence of its outcome when contemporary sound equipment became electronic and scientific. Although theatre design was already concerned about the problem of sound, using plafond, water stage or and physical sound blocking while designing the theatre to help actors' sound delivery; but really achieving actual result, or even helping to embellish actors' defects in their voice, should become possible after applying contemporary sound engineering to theatre' (Lin, 2013, p. 4).

SOUND DESIGN IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

Leonard (2001) rightly pointed out: ‘Almost all theatre products involve sound; in its most basic form, it is the sound of the actor’s voice, and even the ancient Greeks used a form of processing via masks to distort and project the voice of the performer.’ As the venues to perform Cantonese Opera have been modernised, sound and sound management systems need to keep up with the times and take the next step forward.

The term ‘Sound Designer’ is defined by *Student Technical Theatre Handbook*, published by Harvard University (2007), as ‘in charge of anything that is heard during the production. This includes any live or recorded music and sound effects as well as the vocal projection of the actors, both speaking and singing.’

Jean-Marc Larrue further explains the function of sound design inside the theatre production:

Given that theatre is the place where spectators watch, it has also always been the place where they hear – and what they hear varies and comes from different sources: the physical space where the performance leaves its sound imprint, the theatre’s own sounds and those of the audience. And then there are also the sounds from the stage – the actors’ voices, all the noises they make when performing and the sound of the music and sound effects (rain, wind thuds, singing birds and so on). All these elements make up the performance’s sound universe and, until the advent of sound reproduction technology in the late nineteenth-century, they were creative live. This juxtaposition of multiple sounds produced in real time in the same space was about to be disturbed by the intrusion of mediatised sound (recorded and played by an apparatus) – and this intrusion triggered a huge debate on the concepts of sound fidelity, authenticity and reproducibility (as illustrated by my diagram below, Figure 16) (Larrue, 2011, p. 14).

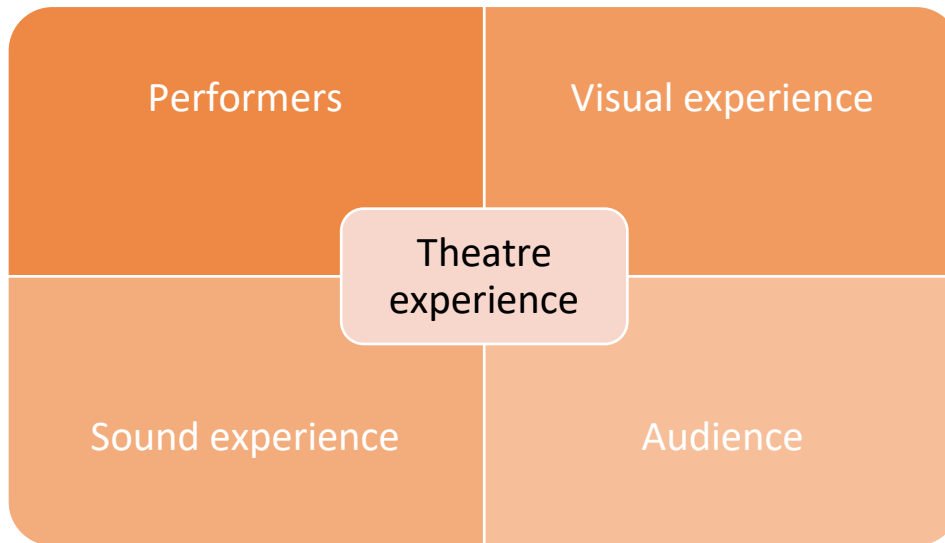


Figure 16: What makes the theatre experience

Prior to the 1930s, the manner in which sound in the theatre was produced had not changed for more than 2,000 years. Music was played by musicians present in the theatre... In the early 1950s, there were several simultaneous developments in the audio industry that ushered in the modern era of sound in the theatre. Advances in electronic engineering greatly enhanced the fidelity of recording and playback equipment (Gillette, 2000, p. 8).

The importance of sound design in theatre

Until 15 or 20 years ago, sound design was still very much viewed as a technical skill. It was not until 2004 that sound design was recognised as a category in the Laurence Olivier awards. Audiences still have to endure plays in which music is randomly poured over scenes like so much aural lube, but a generation of theatre practitioners are busy leading sound design deeper into the realms of art (Szalwinska, 2008).

Sound often is a very underestimated element in production, especially in the past. But as technology advancement allows creativity to take a foothold, sound is no longer just a tool to solve the technical problem:

A plurality of expressive means is not only inherent to theatre, it is its very *raison d'être*, a purpose enacted from its primary genetic code (Kulezic-Wilson, 2011, p. 33).

Musical Imagery

For live performance, 'musical imagery' plays an important role to give audience the right scene. It is important to understand that sound is projected directionally, and people perceive sound not only by its volume and characteristic but also direction. For example, when audience see a drum located in the right hand side of the stage, they expect to hear the drum sound from right side, not from the left. In other words, audience are expected to hear the same image as they see.

...we defined musical imagery in the call for papers prior to an international conference on musical imagery in 1999 as 'our mental capacity for imagining musical sound in the absence of a directly audible sound source, meaning that we can recall and re-experience or even invent new musical sound through our 'inner ear' (Godøy and Jørgensen, 2001, ix). This may be a useful initial definition, but there is of course much more to musical imagery, both with regards to the content or nature of images and with regards to the workings or phenomenal underpinnings (Godøy, 2010, p. 55).

To explain the concept of musical imagery in a more technical terms, Kendrick and Roesner confirmed:

In the undertaking the psychoacoustic process known as 'scene analysis', the brain decides which parts of the complex 'plenum' of acoustic activity in the air within the ear canal belong to which causal events in the local acoustic environment. It bases these decisions on stereophonic differentials in timing and phase, and on tonal and amplitude variations, but it also draws intelligence from the other senses, particularly vision. It then offers to the consciously perceiving

brain a processed map of the acoustic environment that consists of a number of event-objects, or *sounds* (Kendrick and Roesner, 2011, p. 5).

Indeed, while the eye can never literally achieve peripheral vision, the ear simultaneously perceives all the surrounding sounds (Kendrick and Roesner, 2011, p. 208).

To convince the audience that they are engaging in the ‘environment of the performance’, creating an accurate, believable and realistic musical imagery to what the audience are seeing is essential. This is also what the recording artists are trying to achieve in CD or recording as High Fidelity (HIFI). Surround Sound System in movie-making also attempts to recreate the musical imagery of the visual for audience.

The use of sound design in contemporary Cantonese Opera

The use of music in straight plays is as old as theatre itself. We know that the Ancient Greeks used musical accompaniment for their drama productions, as well as sung chorus for dramatic effects (Leonard, 2001, p. 119).

Cantonese opera is a very old art form, the scholars and professionals have been largely focusing on preserving the art form rather than further advancing it. For the past decades, large percentage of Cantonese operas have been performed in theatres, in which the technology has been progressing greatly. Sound design in production has become an essential element. As more and more dedicated theatres are built exclusively for Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, and Cantonese opera productions are invited to perform internationally more often, more Cantonese opera will have performed in theatre spaces than the traditional temporary bamboo canopy.

The Cantonese opera singers also adapted to using microphones for voice projection rather than their own natural voice. It is important to understand that sound design is an essential part of the modern Cantonese opera production.

On the other hand, a typical Cantonese opera production is mainly managed and produced by opera singers. Their main concerns have nothing to do with the technical aspect of the production, but rather the performance of the singers.

However, there has been no academic research on the sound design and the sound production management of Cantonese opera. In fact, the theory in Sound design in Western theatre was only taken seriously not too long ago.

Although mechanical sound effects and sound reinforcement have been a part of Western theatre from the earliest Greek plays, little has been written on the importance of sound in the development of Western theatre. Even if we exclude playwriting, acting and directing and limit the discussion to only the history of theatrical design and construction, most volumes, even those written in the past fifty years, treat sound design and operation as lesser endeavor when compared to the big three of scenic, costume, and lighting design' (Scheil, 2011).

The idea of modernised Chinese opera has encountered many 'traditional' obstacles. For example, Chi Chia Lin mentioned that 'the early Chinese *Xiqu* history's critic, like Zhou Yi-Bai mentioned that Chinese drama always do not care about stage installation' (1977, p. 12). She pointed out 'the aesthetic of *Xiqu* does include the field of art and design'(2013, p. 4). This clearly describes that Cantonese opera singers also do not often link their production to sound design. On the other hand, they are growing concerned about the visual effects (setting and lighting) as part of the aesthetic of the Cantonese opera.

The relationship between sound and performance are not truly reflected in the Cantonese opera production. Thus, the production concern of sound design is low and production managers rarely spend their resources in sound designing. Looking solely at the visual aspect of Cantonese opera fails to provide us with a full understanding of the art. The relationship of how sound is presented and how the audience receives the performance is vital to the opera as an art form.

A sound designer and his working schedule

Sound and its effect on the audience has been a technical and artistic consideration since Greek drama in Western theatre. Yet, due to the lack of technological support, sound production was not able to fulfil the needs of the directors and actors. Until the middle of the last century, sound technology has advanced so much that the element of sound production can be used creatively. Most of all, the advancements may help actors and singers enhance their vocal quality so that audience can ‘hear’ their voice clearly and accurately as intended. Sound design then became a very important part of contemporary theatre productions (as illustrated by my diagram below, Figure 17).

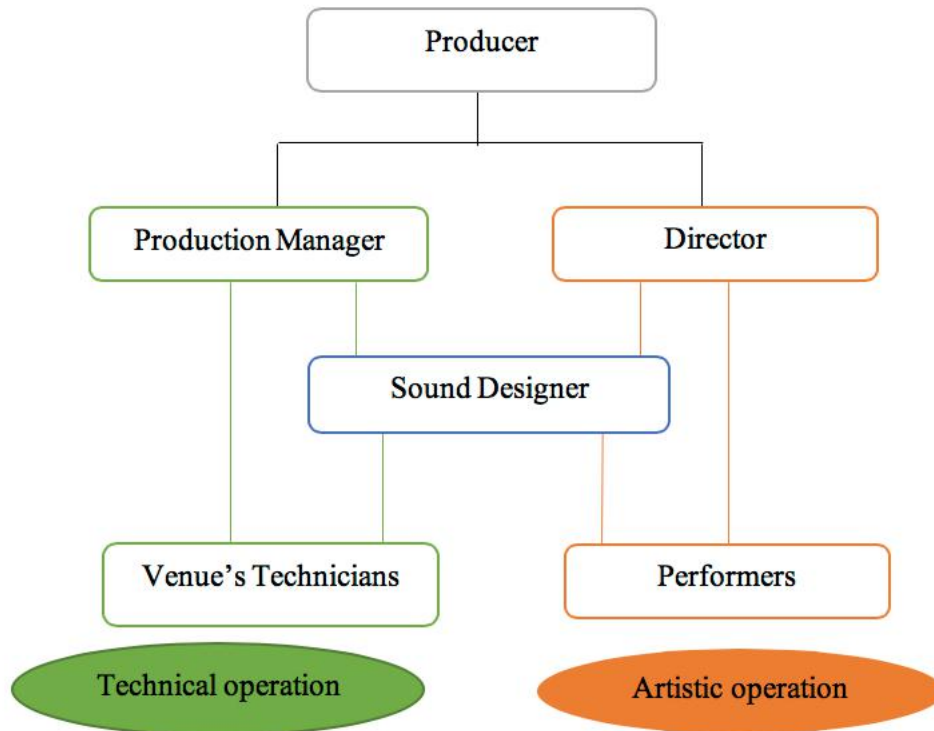


Figure 17: Operation breakdown of a contemporary theatre production

Illustrated by my diagrams below are the different move-in working schedules for contemporary theatre (Figure 18) and Cantonese opera production (Figure 19):

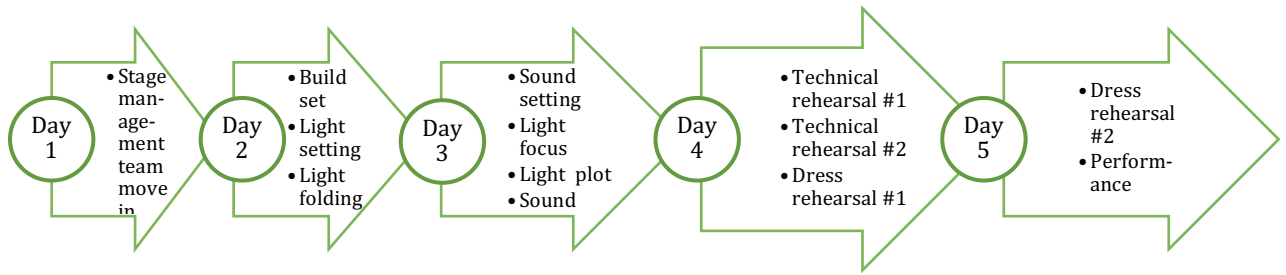


Figure 18: General moving-in schedule for a contemporary theatre production

Day 1



Figure 19: General moving in schedule for a Cantonese opera theatre production

The job of a sound designer

Novak and Novak (1996, p. 207) outlines the responsibilities of the sound designer in a musical theatre production (as illustrated by my diagram below, Figure 20):

- Amplifying performers' voices and musical instruments;
- Mixing sounds;
- Creating or obtaining recorded music and sound effects (such as distant church bells or an airplane flying overhead);
- Supervising the operation of the control console, which is often placed in the house so that the operator can ascertain easily how the spectators are perceiving the sound.

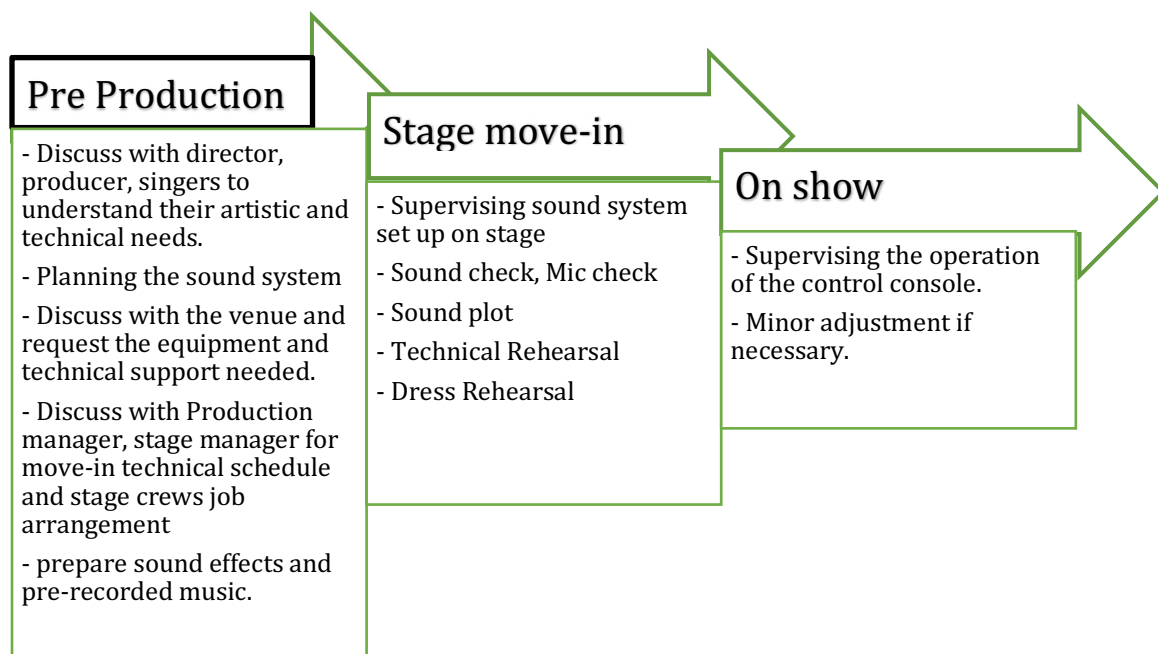


Figure 20: Responsibilities of a sound designer in a conventional theatre production environment

However, as a professional sound designer with over 20 years of experience, I would say that apart from the technical and supervisory role Novak and Novak pointed out, there is another side of creative and artistic input that sound designer needs to be responsible for. The role of sound

design has gone from purely being a technological personnel to an active member of creativity for the production. Theatre technology has now allowed sound designer to be more innovative. Their artistic and creative input would not only ‘enhance’ the sound of the performance, but also alter the audience’s perception of the entire theatre experience.

Why does Cantonese Opera need sound design?

It would be untrue to answer the question simply by saying that sound has been a long neglected aspect. In fact, many professionals have realized the importance of sound in Chinese opera.

In the past decades, the incorporation of realistic scenery, lighting, and special effects into traditional Chinese stage techniques has grown increasingly more prevalent in many regional operas. It is also clearly stated that some of the most important elements and uniqueness of Cantonese opera are its sound, song, and speech. It is important that the audience are able to receive these sounds, songs, and speech well. Thus, sound design plays a vital role in presenting Cantonese opera in its best form to the audience.

The collaboration between sound designers and the modern theatre’s production team

The role of stage management is ‘the management of the rehearsal process and performance which requires a close working relationship with the director and performers, as well as with makers and technicians. For the majority of the production team, the stage management is the main point of contact with the rehearsal room and as much is responsible for recording and communicating developments to all relevant parties as this information becomes available’ (Maccoy, 2004, p. 45).

Novak and Novak define the role of stage director as to:

...analyze the spectacle, which includes all of the visual elements of the production, the performers’ movements and dances as well as the scenery, properties, lighting, costumes, make-up and special effects, and the sound,

which refers to the aural aspects of the production (performers' voices, music and around effects) (Novak and Novak, 1996, p. 5).

Maccoy, and Novak and Novak both confirmed that within contemporary theatre production, all production personnel should be communicating with each other to result in a higher quality production. Cantonese opera, in this case, has lacked a contemporary approach towards the understanding between all theatre production personnel, which has likely contributed to its decline. The recognition of Cantonese opera as a contemporary art form by professionals and the adoption of the management style of contemporary theatres is crucial to ensure the modernisation of Cantonese opera (as illustrated by my diagram below, Figure 21).

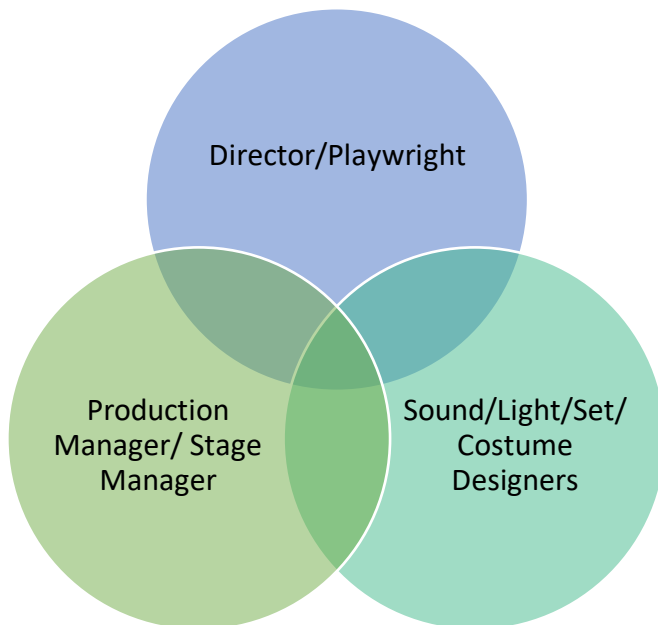


Figure 21: Collaboration between modern theatre production management roles

SUMMARY

In this chapter, in order to enhance my own existing practitioner knowledge and to confirm the focus of my enquiry, I have explored the four areas in the knowledge landscape: *Xiqu*'s influence, the background of Cantonese opera, the current problem Cantonese opera is facing and sound production in theatre environment. This helped me to find my approach to this research - practitioner enquiry that is informed by practice theory. From the reading done so far, I identified my interest in learning about people's different perspectives, experiences as well as opinions; this fits with the social constructivist view of the world. In the following chapters, I will explain how I set up my project in greater detail.

The knowledge landscape above has mapped out 4 main areas of the current situation of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. Through understanding the importance of *Xiqu* and its difference to Western theatre, we can see the important position of *Xiqu* in contemporary world theatre. However, due to the changes of society and technology, Cantonese opera is facing a crisis now. There are many challenges for Cantonese opera to overcome. Changing and adapting are one of the biggest issues that Cantonese opera needs to deal with.

Thanks to the recent technological advancement of sound design in contemporary theatre productions, theatre sound technology can be the springboard for Cantonese opera to become 'modernised' and take the current crisis and challenges as an opportunity.

'We are placed in between these two cultures, which creates a triangle between art, science and humanities that points to a potential emergence of a Third Culture. Being "in between" is a privileged and dangerous position, at least in this transitional stage' (Ascott, 2000, p. 7). Cantonese opera is currently in an awkward 'in between' stage, therefore my research aims to fill the gap between the traditional and modern approaches in the production management of Cantonese opera.

'Opera, so they say, has the power to transport the listener on wings of sound to places beyond the imagination – on a good night, at any rate' (Bredin, 2009, p. 1). From this quote, published in *The Spectator*, we see that sound design remains a necessity in any type of opera, and this does not preclude Cantonese opera. With the need to explore the issue mentioned in the sections above, it is fair to demand that administrative and management sectors need to take sound design into

account as they create productions, and the design of theatres should consider aesthetic support that adopts the use of sound design in Cantonese opera.

On the other hand, as Werr and Greiner said in *Collaboration and Management Knowledge*: ‘The question of what is and is not knowledge often provokes debate among the different producers; they each have different criteria for what passes as “real” knowledge’ (Werr and Greiner, 2014, p. 95). It is important to take the feedback from different stakeholders of the industry very seriously in the research, as their responses will determine the future of Cantonese opera.

CHAPTER 3. INFLUENCES ON CHOOSING A RESEARCH DESIGN

Following the knowledge landscape explored in the previous chapter, this chapter will look into the methodological approaches to be taken when conducting the research. With the assistance of the literature studied that set the foundation for this part of the research, the overall rationale, purpose, aims and objectives will be identified. Data collection methods will be evaluated in this chapter such as interviewing, survey collection, and practical case studies. This chapter will also introduce the three theatre groups that will serve as the case studies of the research, along with the stakeholders and professionals who are to be interviewed. Finally, ethical considerations will be explained according to the guidelines set by the British Educational Research Association.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge landscape explained the environment Cantonese opera is in and the challenges it faces, such as the hesitance towards the modernisation. As the knowledge landscape discussed, change in Cantonese opera is inevitable, ‘like an elephant in the living room, the evidence-based model is an intruder whose presence can no longer be ignored. Within the global audit culture proposals concerning the use of Cochrane and Campbell criteria, two experimental methodologies, randomized control trials, quantitative metrics, citation analyses, shared data bases, journal impact factors, rigid notions of accountability, data transparency, warrantability, rigorous peer-review evaluation scales, and fixed formats for scientific articles now compete, fighting to gain ascendancy in the evidence-quality-standards discourse’ (Thomas, 2004, p. 47).

It would be untrue to simply say that sound has been a long neglected aspect. In fact, many professionals have realized the importance of sound in *Xiqu*. The traditional aspects restrict the professionals in openly supporting changes to the system. Resistance to change and fear of change are often the major factors that advance the current circumstances.

On the other hand, as Malhotra rightly suggested: ‘Organizations should configure their internal resources and capabilities to address competitive opportunities and treats’ (2001, p. 16).

Cantonese opera professionals need to adjust and adopt to the modernised mindset for their productions.

The knowledge landscape - main findings

Chapter 2 knowledge landscape confirmed the following main findings:

- The importance of *Xiqu* and its influence to the world theatre. Cantonese opera is an important art form that represents Hong Kong's heritage and history, yet it is facing decline.
- One of the biggest challenge Cantonese opera is facing is the change of performance venue; from outdoor temporary venue to indoor modern theatre.
- The centuries-old production system may not be able to adequately adapt to the modern environment.
- The shift of income from commercial box office to funding-based changed the fundamental mind-set of Cantonese opera groups.
- Despite facing many challenges in the past, 'modernisation' remains a challenge yet to be overcome.
- Sound design is largely ignored in Cantonese opera productions. There are many elements for the production to look into to increase their quality.

The above findings are used to establish the validity of my enquiry on modernisation of Cantonese opera.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

Cantonese opera is one of the major categories in *Xiqu*, originating in southern China's Cantonese culture. Its cultural importance as a Southern Chinese — especially Hong Kong's — traditional art form is certain and without doubt. Cantonese opera's cultural significance and the cultural identity it represents play a very important role in Hong Kong's history. As the history of

Hong Kong is continuing, it is important to not only preserve the art form but to advance it to the future. The modernisation of Cantonese opera is an inevitable step that needs to be studied.

Meanwhile, serious academic research about the aesthetic of Chinese *Xiqu* has been going on for more than half a century. Both Chinese and international scholars have been studying about different traditions and history of various forms of *Xiqu*. The academic research on sound design or technical production of *Xiqu* is not nearly as substantial or strong.

In order to give Cantonese opera all-rounded academic support as well as the resources to map out the future development, it is important to start studying and researching the technical side of the art form, also taking a transdisciplinary perspective to bring together the voices of everyone involved in Cantonese opera.

Purpose

There are various motivations behind my choice of research study. First, I am concerned about the preservation and promotion of this highly significant art form, as I am culturally and nationally inclined to Cantonese Opera. I am encouraged that its cultural importance is increasingly recognized, most notably by its UNESCO classification as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. On the other hand, Cantonese opera continues to face many challenges in recent decades. I wish to assist in improving the art form by enhancing its presentation and ultimately contribute to the survival of Cantonese opera in a contemporary world.

Secondly, as I have mentioned, the lack of research into sound is a concern. As the international status of Chinese *Xiqu* is currently on the rise, serious academic investigations into its aesthetics have been undertaken for more than half a century by both Chinese and international scholars studying its traditions and history, yet no research has been carried out specifically on sound design production. This leads to an inability to present the art in its ideal form: ‘a topic which does not have a traditional locus and therefore avoids the discipline- and culture-bound paradigms which can suffer from replication syndrome’ (Maguire, 2018, p. 106).

Lastly, personal experience has also encouraged me to conduct this research. As a Chinese, I have spent many years exploring traditional art forms, particularly Cantonese Opera, because it is firmly based in Hong Kong and intertwines with the city’s history. I was irresistibly drawn to adopt

Chinese literature into modern musical theatre when I began to see the depth and uniqueness of our cultural heritage. Now, after working with several prominent Cantonese opera singers on different productions, I can see that they also support my desire to improve the quality of production.

To summarize the above motivating factors discussed, the ultimate purpose of my research is to contribute to the modernisation of the Cantonese Opera art world, hopefully influencing the development of *Xiqu* at large, through the introduction and active research of better ways in managing sound production.

Aims

Having been a theatre professional for years, I am interested in finding a way to modernise and promote one of our culture's most delicate art forms, and I feel as though my connections could assist me in discovering a way to successfully develop solutions to the lack of standardisation in sound design in Cantonese opera management. In terms of the government's funding policy, I would like to explore its relation to the development of Cantonese opera. To review if the current funding policy can be adjusted to further help the art form. Socially, I also hope that my sound study of the issue may encourage acceptance and generate practice for practitioners. Hopefully the unification of standards will be useful in future Cantonese opera theatre productions. This would enhance audience appreciation and enjoyment. I will consistently refine the quality of my research to ensure other scholars could use it as reference, as I am keen to develop a concern for sound design in the production of other *Xiqu* genre to accelerate the modernisation of *Xiqu* as a whole. My aims in the research are:

- To explore people's current experiences, to find out the views of the stakeholders in Cantonese opera regarding its future development/modernisation;
- To find out what could enhance Cantonese opera that would help it survive;
- To identify the factors that contribute to the development/modernisation of Cantonese opera;
- To explore the importance of technological sounds systems to enhance the experience of Cantonese opera and to contribute to knowledge in the sector;

- To provide a convincing argument regarding the modernisation of Cantonese opera;
- To explore Cantonese opera production implementation (management and technical) in order to produce high quality productions;
- To investigate how current funding policy contributes to the development of Cantonese opera.

Objectives

Sound design has long been a neglected element of Cantonese opera. The field has lacked academic studies, causing the art form to decline. For this research, I should like to devise a method to improve the sound production system to contribute to the modernisation of Cantonese Opera. The objectives desired in my research are linked to my motivation to conduct it. My objectives in the research are:

- To explore the context, the historical and contemporary state of Cantonese opera, and the political, cultural, funding context;
- To design an approach that will give voice to stakeholders: actors, group manager, venue's technical personnel, funding/organisation manager and scholar, and to collect data from stakeholders as part of the research consideration;
- To analyse and interpret results for the following audiences: actors, group manager, technical personnel, funding bodies - the main stakeholders who would find this useful.
- To present the benefit of modernising sound production to stakeholders;
- To suggest how funding bodies can adjust their strategy to help the modernisation process;
- To evaluate the current sound production management and make suggestion for a more effective and modern approach; and
- To seek plausible arrangement for venues to help improve productions' sound quality.

Feasibility

The feasibility for me to conduct the research became an important factor to consider as I was designing my study.

According to Hong Kong Association of Cantonese Opera Scholars, there are around 2.5 Cantonese Opera performances per day in the city. My personal ties with the theatre industry also gave me access to professionals and theatre groups. As I am a sound designer myself, there is no cost needed to be secured for the research. As this research is very much dependent on the interaction and feedback from participants. The ‘audiences’ that this research is intended for are very important as I need to take into account their consideration to ensure the feasibility of the research.

Audiences

The audiences of the research are those who this research is intended for and the stakeholders who may find this research interesting and useful. The audiences of this research are:

- Cantonese Opera Funding bodies: Funding bodies are responsible for the support, development and mapping the future plans for Cantonese opera. Understanding the current need and the challenges the industry is facing will help funding bodies to better distribute their resources.
- Cantonese Opera groups: Cantonese Opera groups are the foundation of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong. Research figures suggested that Cantonese Opera groups are facing larger competition, fewer audience and lower box office.
- Cantonese Opera group’s manager and administrator: Manager and administrator are not performers or artist, but they are involved in the decision making of programmes and productions. Understanding the production side of the project will help them to schedule and manage project. Also, some decisions on purchasing equipment for the group require technical understanding.

- Cantonese Opera's stage production personnel: For Stage manager (SM) or Prompter, having knowledge on sound production is essential. Otherwise, they will encounter communication problem during the move-in and set-up period. Although having a Sound Designer is the key element, SM and Prompter also need to communicate with Sound Designer on scheduling and work arrangement. However, when the budget does not allow a Sound Designer in the production, SM and Prompter need to work on the Sound Designer's behalf and instruct technicians to carry out appropriate work.
- Venues and Sound technicians: Theatre venues and their technicians have an important role in supporting different theatre groups to ensure each production is successfully performed. On the other hand, as majority of venues hosted a variety of programmes (drama, dance, music concert, conference, magic show, award ceremony, etc.), venues and technicians tend to use a more universal sound setting toward Cantonese Opera. A standardised guideline on handling Cantonese Opera's sound production can not only give technicians a reference to work with, it can also ensure the production quality will not fluctuate greatly.
- Cantonese Opera's performers (Actors and Musicians): One of the most important way to communicate to audience from performers is through sound. Actors, singers and musicians use their voice to deliver their line and music to audience. In a large venue, using audio amplification is the only way to reach out to a large audience. A sustainable good sound quality for Cantonese Opera performers is essential to boost their confidence and for them to deliver a high-quality performance.
- Audience: Different researches show that Cantonese Opera audience are aging, low in education and income. Also, the box office has reduced drastically for the past years. This is a challenging situation to be in for Cantonese Opera. To satisfy audience's expectation and bring in more audience, a better quality of production is essential. A better sound production will let the audience enjoy the performance much more and therefore able to truly 'communicate' with the performers.

Own position (ontology)

In the aims and objectives sections above, I have established what I wanted to explore as part of this research. It is important to also reflect on my own position in this research as I am a practitioner exploring the perceptions and practices around of stakeholders involved in Cantonese opera.

Cantonese opera is part of my childhood and cultural identity. I am motivated to share it. I have always since childhood been curious. I have a balance between the traditional and where curiosity can lead us especially into the future but it should be with eyes wide open. I believe everyone has stories in them and that is how they construct meaning by the stories told to them and the stories they tell to each other not least about the world and their place in it. That I why it was important for me to talk to people and hear what they have to share. I enjoy detective fiction because the novels are about someone solving puzzles. Speaking with people and doing research is like being a detective, finding clues, piecing things together to make a comprehensive picture . Artists /performers, producers and directors are in the business of telling stories and disseminating them; it would seem important in that environment to have such conversations about their own work and practices to better see how these ‘stories’ could be respected and modified at the same time. Doing what I can to sustain and expand interest in Cantonese opera matters to me, just as I believe that one’s identity is linked to our roots and our need to feel rooted in the past that gives us identity and makes some kind of sense of life.

In order to implement an in-depth and authentic piece of research, I have taken a pragmatic and organic approach toward this research but also putting myself at the center of the research process as an agent for change informed by my experience and practice. As someone involved in Cantonese opera production, I was in a position though my existing knowledge and open to increasing that to explore this topic of modernising the art form tentatively and respectfully like cleaning a precious object that one might be in danger of breaking if one is too eager and too full of one’s own ideas about what the object should look like, for example a vigorous clean that may end up removing the thing that makes it beautiful in the eyes of others. For example, during my involvement in a Cantonese opera production in 2007, by working as sound designer for the production, I could show the professionals involved an improved sound quality. Working together with the industry professionals, I was able to construct a new understanding of Cantonese opera

production experience. Through this authentic experience and working with and alongside practitioners, I was able to construct a new way of approaching and understanding Cantonese opera in order to preserve this unique art form for the future. This research would provide evidence for my ideas based on my experience and for my intention not to westernize but to modernize. I would be an insider/outsider researcher. I am from Hong Kong, I was brought up to the sounds of Cantonese opera, I have worked in it but I am an outsider in the sense of not being a performer or a producer, director or manager.

Cantonese opera gives people a very traditional impression and it is generally related to non-technological craftsmanship and an ancient storytelling presentation. Yet, that does not mean the actual production of the performance is required to follow the system set hundreds of years ago. The role of the contemporary stage director is to ‘analyse the spectacle, which includes all of the visual elements of the production, the performers’ movements and dances as well as the scenery, properties, lighting, costumes, makeup and special effects, and the sound, which refers to the aural aspects of the production (performers’ voices, music and around effects)’ (Novak, 1996, p. 5). Contemporary theatre in Hong Kong has already adopted this modern approach, yet Cantonese opera is still clinging onto its ‘traditional’ practices resulting in the sector to face more difficulties. The industry practices of Cantonese opera remain largely unchanged and not necessarily for the better. These thoughts influenced how I approached the research which was in fact tentatively; immersing, observing and listening.

Epistemology

Cantonese opera is a complex industry, its practice is influenced by historical traditions, different stakeholders’ preferences, commercial value as well as the funding institutes’ policies... etc. In order to have a deep understanding about the industry, I applied an interpretivist paradigm (Bryman, 2001, p. 28) to my research and immersed myself into the Cantonese opera community via case studies, a survey and interviews to be able to ‘gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context instead of trying to generalise the base of understanding for the whole population’ (Creswell, 2007). ‘In the same way, Hammersley (2013) emphasises that since multiple interpretation is developed among humans’ relationship, interpretivist researchers should try to understand “the

diverse ways of seeing and experiencing the world through different contexts and cultures” and try to avoid the bias in studying the events and people with their own interpretations’ (Pham, 2018, p. 3).

As Bryman pointed out, “taking an interpretative stance can mean that the researcher may come up with surprising findings, or at least findings that appear surprising if a largely external stance is taken” (2001, p. 31). As the modernisation of Cantonese opera can be a subjective issue, I decided to explore the views of various stakeholders and ask what modernisation of Cantonese opera means to them and how to modernise Cantonese opera from their perspective. Qualitative data like interviews are very important for this research as they reflect different stakeholders’ personal experience and their views of the industry. Quantitative data, on the other hand, was useful to gather the views of audiences and thus allowed me to incorporate their views into my research, too. As highlighted in the case studies, by participating as a temporary member to the participating groups, I gained a better understanding of the professional field as an insider and was able to see the issue through their perspective.

Research Design and Research Details

In order to select the most appropriate research methods, it was essential to design it in consideration of the influences from the audience and stakeholders as well as the ethical considerations and my own beliefs about what evidence and needed and who from.. I chose the Mixed Methods as it allows for the inclusion of a range of methods, such as theatre cases, a survey of audiences, and interviews with stakeholders and professionals involved with Cantonese opera. This reflected the variety and types of knowledge each kind of stakeholder has and the different ways of sharing information and knowledge. What the opera director would want to share and how would be different from the performer which would be different from the production manager, the funder and the audience. Mixed Methods allows for a multiperspective view.

My research design was based on a pragmatic and holistic approach that recognises the cultural complexities of researching Cantonese opera but was also practical to undertake in this context. I drew on my own professional background and experience of working in the industry and this was my starting point. I did not set out with a fixed methodology rather followed naturally from one stage to the next. I started by conducting interviews with professionals who I already knew from the Cantonese opera industry. They introduced me into the insider's world of Cantonese opera and were able to refer me to other professionals who would be able to help me with my research. I started with few people and based on these discussions I realised that I wanted to learn more about the opinions of other stakeholders, too. So, I decided to design a survey that can collect the views of a larger number of people in a more efficient way. To be able to understand the issues better, I also decided to work with theatre groups. My background and experience in sound design and production allowed me to work on specific performances in three different theatre companies. Here I began to adopt an insider role both as a theatre professional and a practitioner in my research. This helped me capture a lot of detailed information and understood the position of different stakeholders and built on the information I was gaining as I moved along. After this, I had gained more insights but also led to more questions and so, I contacted additional major stakeholders to fill in the missing puzzle pieces as well as asking for their insights on how to modernise Cantonese opera. The information gathered from all these sources over time allowed me to gain a better understanding of the views of stakeholders and explore various aspects of modernising Cantonese opera.

Case Study and Mixed Methods Research

Cantonese opera has over a hundred years of history, therefore to research its relationship between its tradition, practice and contemporary society required a complex research method, and ‘...the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, a case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-world perspective’ (Yin, 2009, p. 4). The methodology I chose accordingly for this research is essentially a case study of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong utilising the mixed methods research design.

Mixed Methods Research (MMR), established around 2000 (Lund, 2012) and also referred to as the "third methodological movement" (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013, p. 22), has become increasingly accepted by researchers. MMR, defined as a method of both quantitative and qualitative designs in the same research study, evolved in response to the observed limitations of both quantitative and qualitative designs (Caruth, 2013, p. 113).

This research approach played an important role in my research as the data collection process involved both qualitative and quantitative means: qualitative in regards to unstructured interviews and case studies, while also quantitative concerning the surveys distributed to a fixed number of members from different participant groups.

I used the mixed methods for my research methodology, because the seven purposes of Mixed Methods Research: Complementarity, Completeness, Developmental, Expansion, Corroboration/Confirmation, Compensation and Diversity (Venkatesh et al., 2013) are well elucidated and comprised of the subject matter of the modernisation of Cantonese opera. The seven purposes of Mixed Methods Research are illustrated in the Table 1 follows:

Complementarity	to obtain mutual viewpoints about similar experiences or associations
Completeness	to ensure total representation of experiences or associations is attained

Developmental	to build questions from one method that materialize from the implications of a prior method or one method presents hypotheses to be tested in a subsequent method
Expansion	to clarify or elaborate on the knowledge gained from a prior method
Corroboration/ Confirmation	to evaluate the trustworthiness of inferences gained from one method
Compensation	to counter the weaknesses of one method by employing the other
Diversity	to obtain opposing viewpoints of the same experiences or associations

Table 1: Seven purposes of Mixed Methods Research

The design of this study allowed me to access diverse stakeholders' within the industry's viewpoint (performers, administrators, venues' professionals, funding bodies, etc.). Their viewpoints can oppose each other as they have different agendas and concerns. Gaining the data from their perspective make the research relevant to the target population.

Through this, I was able to observe and learn the reasoning behind the working structure of each case study. I also had an active intervention role and contributed to their work and thus my role went beyond the observer. I was able to contribute to the subject and make changes in the practice of the sector and ensure the completeness of the research experience.

My research design allowed me to explore my research interest through a combination of case studies, qualitative as well as quantitative data collection. The outcome of the different stages of the study clarified and elaborated the knowledge gained at each step of the process and therefore ensured expansion from each method. New problems and questions can arise through different stages of the research and contribute to the next stage of research. For example, the data outcome from survey can affect how I handle the participant groups in each case study, how to persuade the participant groups to let me 'experiment' with the sound design in their production. This design allowed me to stay flexible in my approach and adopt my enquiry as I progressed from stage to stage, taking the leaning from each stage to guide my next approach. For example, the quantitative survey can achieve a larger sampling size to reflect the general industry's measure as well as being able to build a landscape of the industry's general view point, in which qualitative interview is lacking.

As the performances' producing groups and the audience, their response to the outcome of each case study can act as a guide for the corroboration and confirmation of the research's finding.

Data collection design

I divided the data collection methods of my research into four stages, I have illustrated the progression of the four stages in the diagram below (Figure 23):

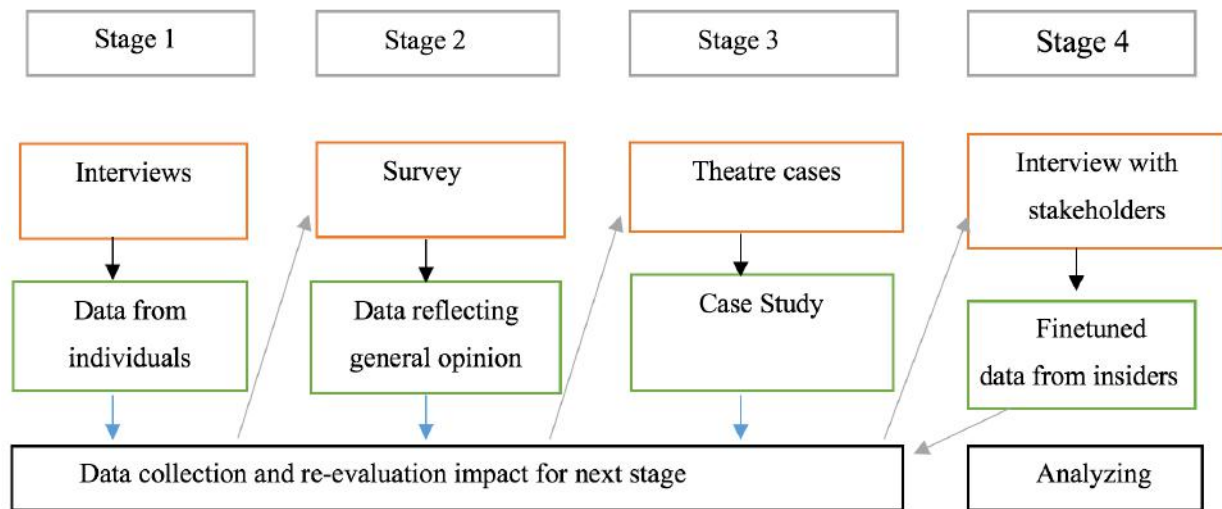


Figure 22: Four stages data collection

- Stage 1 – interviews: Through unstructured interviews with professionals, I was introduced into the insider's world of Cantonese opera. They have also provided me with suggestions on how to start my research, as well as refer me to other professionals they know who could be of potential help to the research.
- Stage 2 - surveys: After talking to professionals, I wanted to know if their opinions are representative of the industry. Therefore, I gave out surveys to the industry's stakeholders to confirm the views.

- Stage 3 - theatre cases: With enough information and understanding of the general view of the industry, I worked with three professional theatre groups and with different natures and agenda, I can adopt an insider practitioner researcher role. I further gathered data by becoming the insider of the industry.
- Stage 4 - semi-structured interview with stakeholders: At this stage, I have gathered enough data to ask questions constructed with gained insight. I arranged semi-structured interviews for major stakeholders to fill in the missing puzzle pieces as well as asking for their insights on how to modernise Cantonese opera.

After each stage is finished, I re-evaluated the data and adjusted the next stage's strategies.

INTERVIEWS

Although I have been heavily involved in Hong Kong theatre production as well as participating in Cantonese opera production, I am an outsider to the Cantonese opera industry. In the beginning of the research, in order to gain information of the industry as an outsider, I reached out to 6 professionals of different areas. Engaging in interviews with them provided me with the data required to construct the rest of the research. It was important to determine what kind of interview approach I would take when conducting them. Because the verbal and nonverbal exchanges are the heart of an interview session, the interviewer gathers information on the applicant's qualifications. A highly structured approach severely restrains these exchanges by requiring interviewers to ask exactly the same questions, in the same order, with no spontaneous comments or side conversations allowed (Campion et al., 1988). The intent is to remove the influence of the interviewer's behavior, so that what is obtained in the session is a genuine reflection of who the applicant is rather than how the interviewer conducted the session (Dipboye, 1994, p. 83).

In a research interview, structured interview is commonly used. 'The goal of the structured interview is for the interviewing of respondents to be standardized so that differences between interviews in any project are minimized' (Bryman, 2012, p. 209).

However, as I wanted to collect data from the professionals' personal experience and their view of the industry, I needed to prepare for spontaneous subjects that may be brought up and that open-ended answer will be covered during the interview. As structured interviews have the disadvantage of 'not as ideal for collecting sensitive or personal information' and 'more difficult to code open-ended responses' (Kumar, 1999, p. 16), I chose to use unstructured interviews in the form of an informal conversation as my data collection method. For unstructured interviews, 'the interviewer typically has only a list of topics or issues, often called an interview guild or aide-memoire, that are to be covered. The style of questioning is usually informal. The phrasing and sequencing of questions varies from interview to interview' (Bryman, 2012, p. 213).

The informal conversational interview is outlined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) for the purpose of relying "...entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in a natural interaction, typically one that occurs as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork" (Turner III, 2010, p. 755).

The timeline for carrying out data collection was from 11/2015 to 5/2016. The interviews were informal and either took place outside in a restaurant having a conversation over an afternoon tea, and also inside performance venues during move in period, before or after performance. Oftentimes, the participants did not require much prompting to dive into a topic. As the interviews happened, I kept track of them through note-taking². The purpose of interviewing the professionals is to obtain insight on the present-day operation behind the art, as well as to understand different opinions on the sound production of *Xiqu* and the possibility of change with the help of their analogies and experience. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, my note were taken in Chinese and English (whichever was faster to write), the data was translated into English for this research.

Participants

The participants of the interviews (illustrated in Table 2 below) included young and senior actors, prompter, a person who works in a senior managerial role and one who has been focused

² See Appendix 3 for the Sample note of Interviews

working on the technical support for *Xiqu*. I received permission from Ting Yu and Frank Yeung to use their names in my research. As I have not received the actor's consent about using their real name, I therefore call the participants Actor A, B, C and Prompter A in the research respectfully:

Participant	Who they are
Ting Yu	Former Cantonese opera advisor of West Kowloon Cultural District
Frank Yeung	West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's Senior Manager, Technical and Productions (Performing Arts)
Actor A	A young up-and-coming actor; he participated in many professional productions and has a theatre group himself.
Actor B	Young, up-and-coming actor with his own group.
Prompter A	A very prominent prompter and actor in Hong Kong.
Actor C	A senior actor in the Cantonese opera industry and has already achieved star status.

Table 2: Interview participants

I selected them for interviews because they cover different areas from the industry: young versus senior; artistic, administration and technical. These people were chosen because of their professional experience, their insider status and their status as stakeholders.

The first two participants (Ting Yu and Frank Yeung) were my friends and ex-colleagues, they have been working in the *Xiqu* field for some time and achieved senior positions. I called them to explain my research and asked them to have an interview. They were very supportive and immediately agreed to meet me. The two young actors (Actor A and Actor B) and prompter A were referred by Ting Yu. Ting introduced them to me via WhatsApp and we then continued our interview arrangement through WhatsApp. I contacted Actor C at that stage of research, I reached out to most of the professional personnel and organisations to introduce my research as well as looking for a professional who is willing to participate the research. Actor C appeared interested in my research, therefore I arranged an interview with her.

SURVEYS

The first stage of interviews has collected data from six industry's professionals. As the concept of Modernising Cantonese opera through sound design was never studied, in order to achieve a larger sampling size to reflect the general industry's measure, a quantitative survey was used as the second stage of the research.

The important of concepts in quantitative research and the ways in which measures may be devised for concepts; this discussion includes a discussion of the important idea of an indicator, which is devised as a way of measuring a concept for which there is no direct measure (Bryman, 2012, p. 160).

Two sets of surveys (illustrated in Figure 24 below) were constructed to begin the data collection process. One for Cantonese opera professionals, the other for Cantonese opera's audience. It is important that the survey is structured clearly and coherently so that participants will not lose motivation to answer.

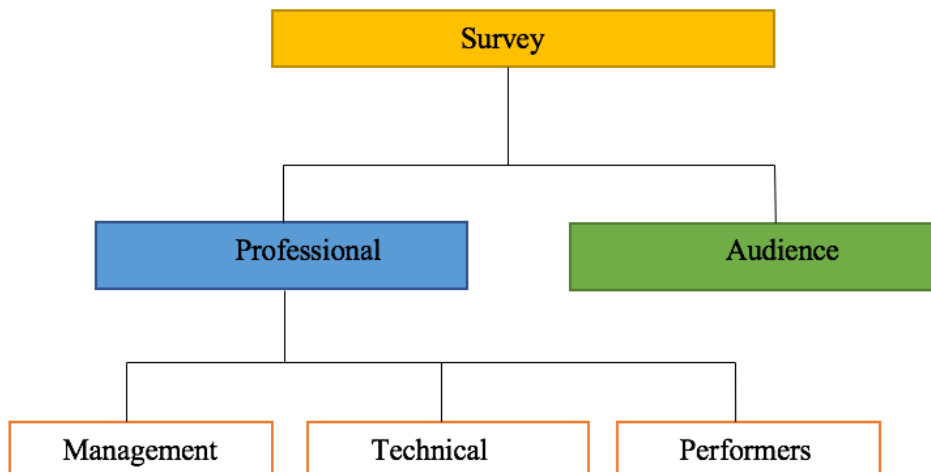


Figure 23: Division of surveys

If one is going to have a self-administered survey, one must reconcile oneself to closed question, that is, questions that can be answered by simply checking a box or circling the proper response from a set provided by the researcher (Fowler Jr., 2009, p. 72).

It became apparent to me that using open-ended questions in the surveys would undoubtedly cause a decrease in responses. Clear instructions were included in the questions to indicate how participants should answer them to avoid confusion. These steps were taken to increase the response rate.

Some researchers prefer intensity scales that are in one direction, rather than the ‘disagree to agree’ range, which allows three directions of positive, negative and neutral feeling to be reported. Instead, they might ask respondents to evaluate a statement on a 7- or 10-point scale where 1=low and 7 or 10 =high. The intensity scale goes in one direction without allowing negative or neutral responses (Nardi, 2018, p. 81).

The scales used for the participants to answer did not use a numbering scale, but an adaption of the Likert scale. For example, participants could choose to answer from a scale of ‘Not at all important’ to ‘Very important’. Although each professional group is to be asked to answer only their section of the survey, each is welcome to read the questions for other professional groups. Doing so may change their view toward sound production of Cantonese opera, and this could have an impact in the opera world even before the publication of my results. This stage should help collect data representative of the general opinion around Cantonese opera.

Professional Survey

The questions were derived from my own professional knowledge, the literature and from the insight gained in the first stage of the process. The professional survey intended to map the professionals’ general view on sound production in Cantonese opera, along with their attitude toward sound production, in contrast to other technical work in the pre-production and production. The professional survey targeted 3 groups of professionals: Management, Technical Personnel and Performers. Each groups would have their own set of questions related to their respective field of work.

The timeline for carrying out data collection is from February 2016 to August 2016. During this period, I sent out the survey to my professional friends via email and WhatsApp. They would

distribute the survey to the professionals who were interested to participate and sent me back the results. At the same time, I would go visit the theatre during the move-in period when all 3 targeted professional groups would present. I gave the professionals a survey of nine questions; only three are to be answered by each professional groups. Although each professional group is to be asked to answer only their section of the survey, each is welcome to read the questions for other professional groups. Doing so may change their view toward sound production of Cantonese opera.

With the help of two volunteer assistants, we asked the professionals to complete the questions on the survey and mark down on the survey. All surveys were also initially written in Chinese to increase the participants' awareness, then translated into English for this research. The survey can be found in the Appendix 4 and 5³.

³ Appendix 4 for Survey questions for professionals and Appendix 5 for Survey questions for audience

Participants

The sample frame will focus on efficiency characteristic: ‘the rate at which members of the target population can be found amount those in frame’ (Fowler Jr., 2009, p. 21).

In 2011, HKADC⁴'s *Survey on the Working Status of the Theatre Practitioners* (illustrated in Figure 25 below) shows that there are 61 full-time backstage workers and 60 who fell under art administration. For part-time staff, there were 121 backstage workers and 79 staff under art administration in the theatre industry.

However, backstage workers include stage managers and stage crews. Based on my experience, about 30 of the full-time backstage workers and 25 of the part-time working as stage managers are included in the survey. For art administration, all part-time workers should be considered as supporting roles such as office clerks and assistants. An estimated 34 of the full-time art administration staff would take on the management roles (HKADC, 2012).

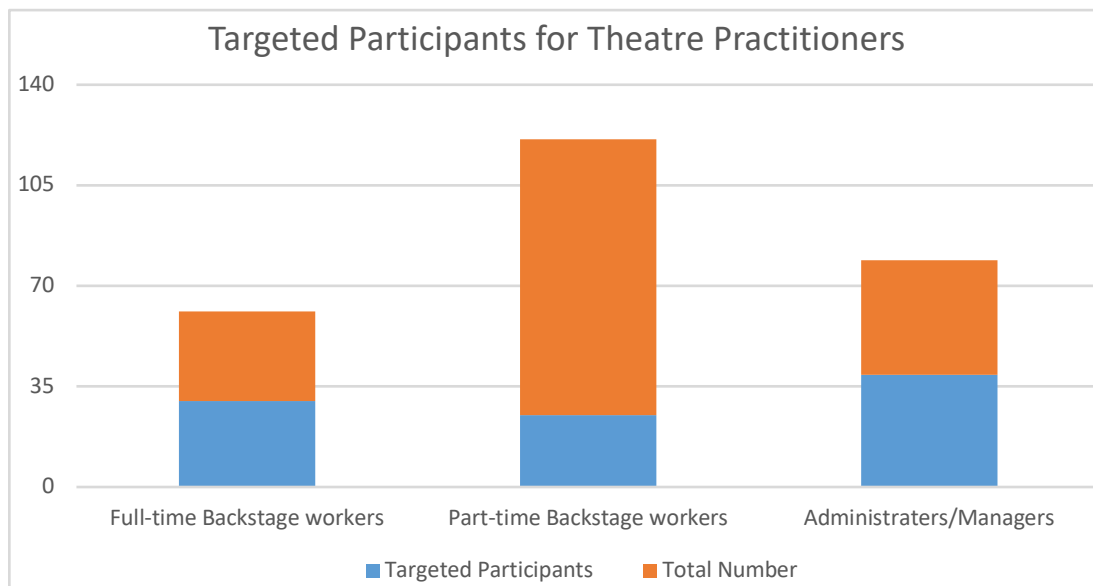


Figure 24: Targeted participants for theatre practitioners

In terms of venues' technical personnel, HKADC's List of Performing Arts Venues in 2015/16 listed 49 performance venues in Hong Kong. Assuming each venue has 1 full-time stage manager,

⁴ HKADC is supported by the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies

1.5 sound technicians (lighting technicians were excluded in this research), which made total of 122.5 venues’ technical personnel. The breakdown of participants is illustrated below in Table 3.

	Backstage worker(FT+PT)	Art Administration	Venues’ technical personnel
Total Number	182	79	122.5
Excluded Participants	127	40	--
Estimated target survey participants	55	39	122.5

Table 3: Breakdown of participants

For performers, unlike technical personnel and management work, as there is no survey or information about how many professional performers are in the industry. Also, the area musicians work is very wide, it is difficult to have an accurate number of active professional in the industry. I would estimate there are no more than 100 active professional performers currently working in Hong Kong.

As there is a small population for professionals working in the industry, I decided 60 (20 per professional groups) would be a representative sample.

Audience Survey

As Peter Brook stated: ‘the only thing that all forms of theatre have in common is the need for an audience’ (Brook, 1968, p. 142).

According to the 2008-09 Cantonese Opera’s Audience Research Report published by Hong Kong Opera Preview magazine that was used above, Cantonese Opera audience are aging, low in education and income, also the box office has reduced drastically for the past years. This is a challenging situation to be in for Cantonese Opera.

Theatre, in a way, is the ultimate example of consumerism. In the time of Shakespeare and even the ancient Greece, there was a certain element of responsiveness in theatre-- if the audience did not like it enough to show up, the performance could not go on (Tustin, *The Role of the Audience in Theatre*).

Modernisation of Cantonese opera needs to understand the current audience's preference on production quality, the audience survey is to understand their expectation on sound quality of performances. Again, the questions were derived from my own professional knowledge, the literature and from the insight gained in the first stage of the process. The questions focused on audience behaviour and their expectation about sound quality in Cantonese opera performance.

The timeline for carrying out data collection is during August 2016. These surveys were also written in Chinese and questioned in Chinese by the assistants. They were then translated into English for the University.⁵

Participants

In the audience survey, I focused on the average Cantonese opera audience, although the knowledge landscape show that Cantonese Opera audience are aging, low in education and income. It is essential to include their data into my sample frame.

As Cantonese opera audiences tend to be over 50 of age who may not have access to the Internet to answer the survey, I sent 2 research assistants to randomly interview 100 audience members in person in the venue's foyer before the performances began.

In order to question the audience inside the venue's area, permission had to be given by the theatre group followed by the venue. For the time allowed by the venue and theatre group, I could interview 50 audience members, which would be a detailed sample. Upon receiving permission, two assistants interviewed 50 audience members. The surveys were designed with a clear presentation in mind to ensure the participants would find ease in answering them.

⁵ See Appendix 6 for Survey Data

THEATRE CASES

Based on data analysis from the knowledge landscape, my personal experience and the first two stage of my research, I developed an active research plan of three case studies about the production management of sound design in Cantonese opera. ‘When individual teachers make a personal commitment to systematically collect data on their work, they are embarking on a process that will foster continuous growth and development. When each lesson is looked on as an empirical investigation into factors affecting teaching and learning and when reflections on the findings from each day's work inform the next day's instruction, teachers cannot help but develop greater mastery of the art and science of teaching. In this way, the individual teachers conducting action research are making continuous progress in developing their strengths as reflective practitioners. The role of reflective practitioner through action research for building professional cultures, so that “all the work ultimately will be shared and will consequently contribute to organizational learning’ (Sagor, 2000, p. 8).

I incorporated the views of the participating groups, theatre professionals and opera audience, and reflected on them at every step of the research.

The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but then the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian's repertoire: direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events (Yin, 2009, p. 11).

Adopting an insider researcher role, I was able to observe and learn the reasoning behind the working structure of each case study. During the case study, I also had active intervention role and contributed to their work, my role went beyond the observer. After working as an insider researcher, I gained a lot of data and in turn, came up with more questions, allowing me to further collect data through the next stage: interviews.

Case study does have their limitation, namely the small sample size: ‘because a case study focuses on a single unit, a single instance, the issue of generalisability looms larger here than with other types of qualitative research’ (Reis, 2009).

However, the industry of Cantonese opera is relatively small and I collected data from three different cases. Therefore, I believe my research would be a detailed sample about the industry.

The timeline for carrying out data collection for this stage is from 2/2017 to 6/2018. Data was recorded in both Chinese and English, based on whichever was more convenient, via taking observation notes on my phone and on paper. After this, I would update an observation diary. Notes were focused on keeping track of the key differences and moments I witnessed. Additionally, I also captured in-the-moment photos of the groups and included notes on the location.

Following the open coding process, thematic analysis was carried out on the themes drawn out in the coding process to examine any patterns and interpret them.

Robert K. Yin distinguishes sources of evidence in his book, *Case Study Research* (2009, p. 101), which are illustrated in Table 4 below:

Source of evidence	Action taken
Documentation	I found studies relevant to my case that were used in the literature review, however, such studies were difficult to find due to the limited amount of studies available concerning Cantonese opera and sound design.
Archival records	Statistics from government organizations concerning Cantonese opera — specifically its location, box office income, competition with other industries, and audience — were used.
Interviews	Targeted interviews were conducted with members of the case studies' groups as well as unstructured interviews with professionals in the industry. While there is undoubtedly a bias in the process, the responses were insightful and helpful to the research.
Direct observations	During the case study stage, I was able to observe the theatre group directly as well as watch their performances, providing me with context to what was discussed about the troubles Cantonese opera faces.
Participant-observation	Assuming the role of a sound engineer on set for the three case study groups, I gained a better understanding and deeper insight of the process behind a Cantonese opera performance to add on to my previous knowledge.

Table 4: Sources of evidence

Explanation Building: the goal is to analyse the case study data by building an explanation about the case (Yin, 2009, p. 141, 143).

- Making an initial theoretical statement or an initial proposition about policy or social behaviour;
- Comparing the findings of an initial case against such a statement or proposition;
- Revising the statement or proposition;
- Comparing other details of the case against the revision;

- Comparing the revision to the facts of a second, third or more cases; and
- Repeating this process as many times as is needed.

Theatre 1: Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd.

According to Burns (1997, p. 365), ‘In a case study, the focus of attention is the case in its idiosyncratic complexity, not on the whole population of cases.’ In selecting a case therefore, you usually use purposive judgmental or information-oriented sampling techniques (Kumar, 1999, p. 126).

I choose Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. to be the first case study group. I received permission from them to use their name in my research. They are young and a small professional group that performs regularly, constantly seeking for ways to improve their performances. Also, they are a small group which receives little funding, so their income very much depends on the audience’s support. Additionally, a lot of their performances take place in Yau Ma Tei Theatre, which I have never worked in before. Experiencing a venue that is solely dedicated to Chinese opera is something I must include in my research.

After contacting them through email, I visited the group on 13/2/2017. Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. is a non-profit organization that conducts traditional and also newly arranged Chinese opera performances. The newly arranged performances conducted by Tin Ma Music and Opera Association combine traditional and modern elements of stage effects, aiming to reach for a higher standard of art values. Local landmarks such as the Lion Rock Mountain are used as the background setting as to inject local elements into the traditional performance and bring the audience closer. ⁶

⁶ See Appendix 7 for Sample note and photographs from Theatre 1

Theatre 2: Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. with Xinyi Cantonese Opera Art Promotion Agency

The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd., founded in 2008, is a non-profit organization that aims to promote Cantonese Opera to the public. The association aims to protect the culture of Cantonese opera with the support of the government and to promote it to the public. On 4/5/2018, I had my first meeting with Ms. Yiu (Chief Executive of the association) and Ms. Chan in Ms. Yiu's office.

Unlike Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd., The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. cooperates with other theatre groups to present their performances in their residential venue (Shatin Town Hall). As one of the resident art group in Shatin Town Hall, The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. is well-funded compared to Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. The structure of The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. is illustrated in Figure 26 below.

The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. constantly presents programme with their associate groups. Since the Chief Executive of the association, Connie Yiu, was not classically trained as an actor, she welcomes to introduce new technology to improve their production quality.

Yiu suggested that I can work with their upcoming brand new production by Xinyi Cantonese Opera Art Promotion Agency. Since I have worked in this venue for many times and familiar with the environment, and they will use an Orchestra Pit for musicians. I then gathered data from two different venues both using Orchestra Pit. Also, the group will move in on the same day of performance as general Cantonese opera practice, therefore I was able to gather data from a more commonly practice performance.⁷

⁷ See Appendix 8 for Sample note and photographs from Theatre 2

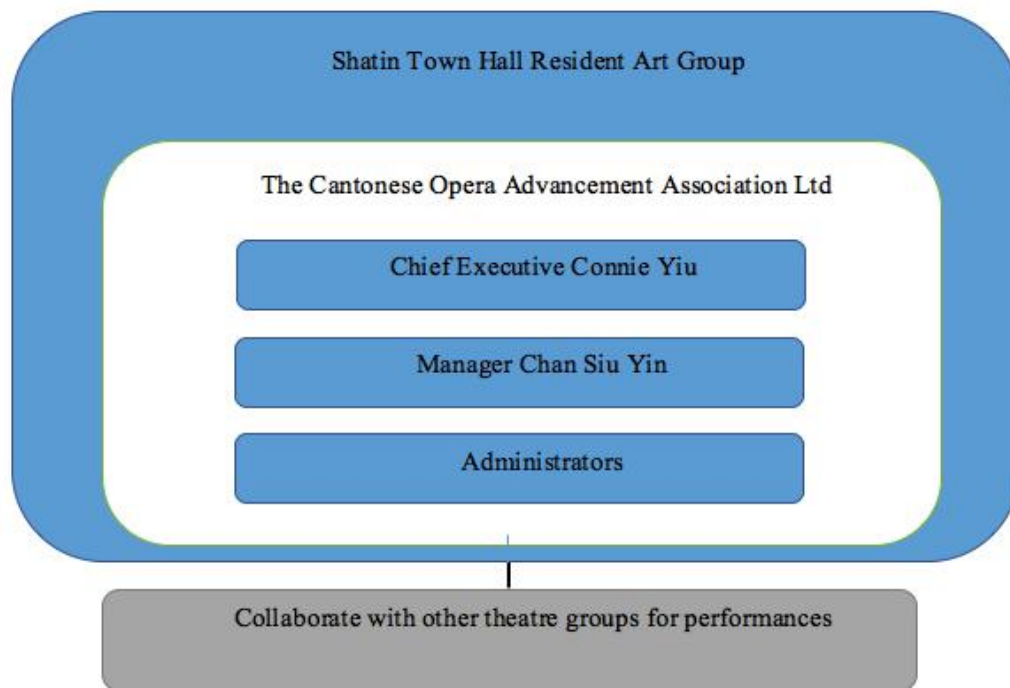


Figure 25: The structure of The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd.

Theatre 3: Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. with Linglong Cantonese Opera Troupe

Linglong Cantonese Opera Troupe is a more traditional group; they were performing three different classic performances in three days. Performing in the same venue in Shatin Town Hall, the band was located on stage right of the stage as the traditional style. The moving-in period was from the morning of the performance day. This is a very common practice for Cantonese opera performance, with no newly written performance, they also used the Prompter production system. This production is the most typical Cantonese opera production in my research.

I talked to the programme presenter of Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. on 23/5/2018 about the detail of the production.⁸

⁸ See Appendix 9 for Sample note and photographs from Theatre 3

INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

From the last three stages, I gathered a lot of data that built the backbone for the interviews, which should provide me with more in-depth insight. I then interviewed the stakeholders to find out their points regarding change and the possibility of modernising Cantonese opera. The stakeholders for the interview include: actor, group manager, venue professional, *Xiqu* Centre manager and scholar who contribute to the development of modern Chinese musical instrument.

Since different views have gone by the name “relativism,” epistemic relativism is not a single view, but a family of views. What unites these various views is that, in one way or another, the fact that some item of evidence justifies a given belief is said to be relative to the value of some further parameter (Boghossian, as cited in Bernecker & Pritchard, 2011).

The interviews were semi-structured in nature as to allow for more opinions and evidence to be gathered.

A semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important (Longhurst, as cited in Clifford et al, 2016, p. 143).

The benefit of a semi-structured interview is that it invites unexpected answers, which leads to new findings. They also allow the interviewer to clarify questions should the interviewees feel confused. The interviewees are also able to provide more well-rounded answers as they are not restricted by a wholly structured interview that tends to limit responses. In this stage of research, I was looking for the data further than I gathered during the last three methods. Therefore, semi-structured interview allowed me to set the basic questions at the same time, open up possibility for unforeseeable information as they occurred. However, this method is not without its disadvantages. Semi-structured interviews can make analysing and comparing open-ended answers difficult, I

must be careful when conducting interview so that the data collected during the interviews can be analysed effectively.

The questions of the interviews were the result from the last three stages of my research. They are focused in their view of the industry's practice and how can they improve the production quality as an insider of different fields in the industry.

Five people were chosen for the interview: the theatre manager from the last two case studies, the venue's resident technical manager who happened to be an old friend, *Xiqu* Centre's senior manager, an up-and-coming actor who runs her own theatre group as well as freelances, and a research fellow for HK Chinese Orchestra who has been taking up the task of modernising traditional Chinese instruments with great success.

I particularly had a lot of questions concerning Chinese instruments and modern technology. The questions were designed based on the previous data collected, as well as considerations to each interviewees' background and expertise in the field.

The interviews were conducted from May 2018 to July 2018. The data was recorded in Chinese and transcribed into English while listening to the audio file. Once again, I practiced open coding and thematic analysis when analysing the gathered data to draw out patterns and any notable reoccurring themes.

Participants

For the selection of participants in the interviews, I carefully chose them according to the need of the research and to include a wide aspect to represent different stakeholders in the industry. The interview participants and the reason to choose them in the research are illustrated in Table 5 below. I have their informed consent to make their names public and that I am acting with due ethical considerations:

Participants	Reasons for choosing them
Andy Tsui	<p>The venue's resident technical. The venue has been holding great amount of Cantonese opera performances each year, therefore he has many insider data to share as a venue manager.</p> <p>Andy is a long-time friend and we participated in projects together. While carrying out the case study in Shatin Town Hall, I asked him if he would have an interview with me given his role as the stage manager of the venue. We met during his lunch hour on 23/05/2018, after the second case study. We talked during lunch and he brought me back to Shatin Town Hall to have an interview inside the theatre, where we can look at all of the equipment and setting during the interview.⁹</p>
Francis Wong	<p>Up-and-coming actor: She runs her own theatre group as well as freelances for other groups. I intended to collect the data about the reason behind many of the industry practices, also to see what I can do to help them technically which is within their acceptable environment.</p> <p>Tsui connected me with Francis Wong, who has performed in Shatin Town Hall before. Tsui passed Wong's contact details to me through WhatsApp and I contacted Wong for the interview. She responded positively during our text exchange and we arranged to meet. On 15/06/2018, I met Wong in a coffee shop for the interview.¹⁰</p>

⁹ See Appendix 12 for Interview: Andy Tsui

¹⁰ See Appendix 13 for Interview: Francis Wong

Frank Yeung	<p><i>Xiqu</i> Centre’s senior manager. As <i>Xiqu</i> Centre is ready to open at this stage of research, all the technical infrastructure of the Centre is completed. I intended to get updated on his point of view technically as well as his plan to work with the industry.</p> <p>Frank Yeung is another long-time friend who I contacted through Facebook for the interview. He immediately agreed to meet. On 10/07/2018, I interviewed him in a coffee shop.¹¹</p>
Connie Yiu	<p>Manager of the last two case studies. I wanted to understand Cantonese opera group’s vision about the future of the art form: their concern, their plan and what they wanted to achieve.</p> <p>Connie Yiu is the Chief Executive of the Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. I contacted her through WhatsApp for the interview and she agreed. I interviewed on 11/07/2018 in a restaurant during lunchtime with the manager, Chan Siu Yiu, and her two assistants.¹²</p>
Yuen Shi Chun	<p>Research fellow for HK Chinese Orchestra: He has been taking up the task of modernising traditional Chinese instruments with great success. I particularly had a lot of questions concerning Chinese instruments and modern technology. Together with <i>Xiqu</i> Centre’s data, it would help to map out the technical path of Cantonese opera’s sound for the future.</p> <p>As my DProf advisor at the time, Dr. Carlye Tsui, was the board member of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, I asked Dr. Tsui if she could connect me to HKCO for an interview about the development of Chinese musical instruments. After contacting the staff of HKCO over WhatsApp, I was able to interview Yuen Shi Chun in his studio on 18/07/2018.¹³</p>

Table 5 Participants for the stakeholder interviews

¹¹ See Appendix 14 for Interview: Frank Yeung

¹² See Appendix 15 for Interview: Connie Yiu

¹³ See Appendix 16 for Interview: Yuen Shi Chun

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

As the interviews were unstructured and semi-structured, the case study data included information that I did not plan to arise. Therefore, I decided to use the open coding method to analyse the data.

Open coding: ‘the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data’ (1990, p. 61); this process of coding yields concepts which are later to be grouped and turned into categories (Bryman, 2001, p. 569).

Thematic analysis was employed to analyzing the data collected from the four stages of the research.

The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).

After examining the coding from the data, I classified the data into six categories:

- Technical-related: the sound problem of productions the industry are facing, and technology the industry aspires; e.g. sound feedback, unstable performance sound quality, what the professional wish to improve, etc.;
- Management issue: all issues concerning the management of the production; e.g. production team structure, communication between all production parties, production planning, etc.;
- Theatre practice: issues related to the execution of performance; e.g. moving in schedule, venue’s support, technical set up, where to locate musicians, etc.;
- Resources: the group’s resources for the production; e.g. technical support the group can mobilize, manpower, money, time, etc.;

- Modernisation method: what the professional is employing to achieve their concept of modernisation; e.g. what production management system they use, what technical change they are willing to apply, the balance between traditional aesthetic and modern style, etc.; and
- Other issues: issues outside the four categories mentioned above.

Ethical considerations

In research where human responses are considered as the most crucial source of data, ethical boundaries have to be treated carefully (Orb et al., 2000, p. 1). As an insider researcher, although I have more access to participants and data, there is also the probable situation where information can still be withheld and assumptions can be made by both parties. Informing participants of the nature of the research and of their role was intended to counteract this possibility. The guidelines set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) have been read thoroughly before conducting this research and were taken seriously when setting the ethics foundation for the research. Ethical approval was given by the University.

For instance, there is the issue of privacy and confidentiality. I have been made aware that ‘every researcher has the responsibility to protect participants in a research study including obtaining consent, ensuring protection from harm, and protecting privacy’ (Drew et al., 2014, p. 25). I ensured that all interviews are conducted in a safe environment indoors, confidentially and free from any interruption or judgment. On participants’ request, I exercised various confidentiality and privacy protocols to meet their needs. Examples of such protocols may include concealing the participant’s identity and any personal information they wish not to be exposed to the public. Such instances have occurred and instead of using their names, I substituted them for aliases such as Actor A and Prompter A.

It is normally expected that participants’ voluntary informed consent to be involved in a study will be obtained at the start of the study, and that researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish, for any reason and at any time, to withdraw their consent (BERA, 2018, p. 9).

I also ensured that informed consent was obtained from each participant before they were accepted as part of the experiment, with the purpose, method, potential risks and demands of the study described. They were free to raise any questions concerning the frame of the research. Any instances when participant wished to withdraw was respected, either to leave or terminate the process. Their ability to exercise the free choice without any intervention of force, fraud, duress deceit and coercion was honored. I understand that informed consent can only operate when three crucial elements are ensured: information, capacity and voluntariness.

They should be told why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to do, what will happen to the information they provide, how that information will be used and how and to whom it will be reported (BERA, 2018, p. 9).

Participants were told of the purpose of the research, what the research would amount to in the end, and why I required their participation prior to any interview, survey, or case study, as part of gaining their consent.

Particularly, I dealt with legal authority issues with care, since many of my intended interviewees are prominent opera singers and their speech may be restricted if they were under contract. I intended to ensure the truthfulness of responses by devising non-biased questions and by using raw data at all stages of analysis, without any manipulated selection or intervention.

Switching role between insiders and outsiders

Working in different fields of Hong Kong's cultural industry for more than twenty-five years, I definitely identify myself as a business insider. On the other hand, my research made me realise that, in a very enclosed and traditional Cantonese opera environment, I am an outsider to them.

We agree with Bridges (2001) that the insider/outsider polarity should be challenged, since people are insiders in some respects but outsiders in others... There is a need for a more nuanced conceptualisation of insider-outsiderness to reflect the multiple positionings researchers may represent in a research project and the potential and pitfalls of such fluidity in interpretation and analysis of data (Dhillon, 2018, p. 5).

Coming from a professional modern theatrical background, I could not understand the practices of the Cantonese opera professionals. Modern theatre practices are concerned about the goal and the result, with a professional connection with the venue's technicians in order to make our work easier. However, Cantonese opera is concerned with upholding tradition and inner connections the most. For example, many actors or prompters are the students of famous professionals or even the star's younger relatives themselves. It is the family values that carry the industry along. It is also the preservation of tradition and family values that restrict the industry to accept new technology and contemporary working methods — in other words, to be modernised.

However, when we got into the theatre, the Cantonese opera professionals suddenly became the outsider. They cannot communicate with theatre professionals on a deeper level, in many cases, they do not know what they can ask for and are entitled to have. I, on the other hand, became the insider. I am able to know what to ask, who to ask and when to ask in order to deliver the outcome that I wanted. Working inside theatre has been one of the major jobs that I have done for the past twenty-five years. When the performance starts, both Cantonese opera professional and I became insiders of the show.

There are many outsiders like myself and the personnel in *Xiqu* Centre who want Cantonese opera to modernise its production quality. After all, we perceive Cantonese opera as an essential component of Hong Kong's history and cultural heritage. We are all Hong Kong's cultural industry's insiders. Although throughout this research, my role has been constantly switching between insider and outsider. Yet, concerning Hong Kong's history and heritage culture, I am sure that I am an insider. My insider and outsider situation is illustrated in the picture below (Figure 22).

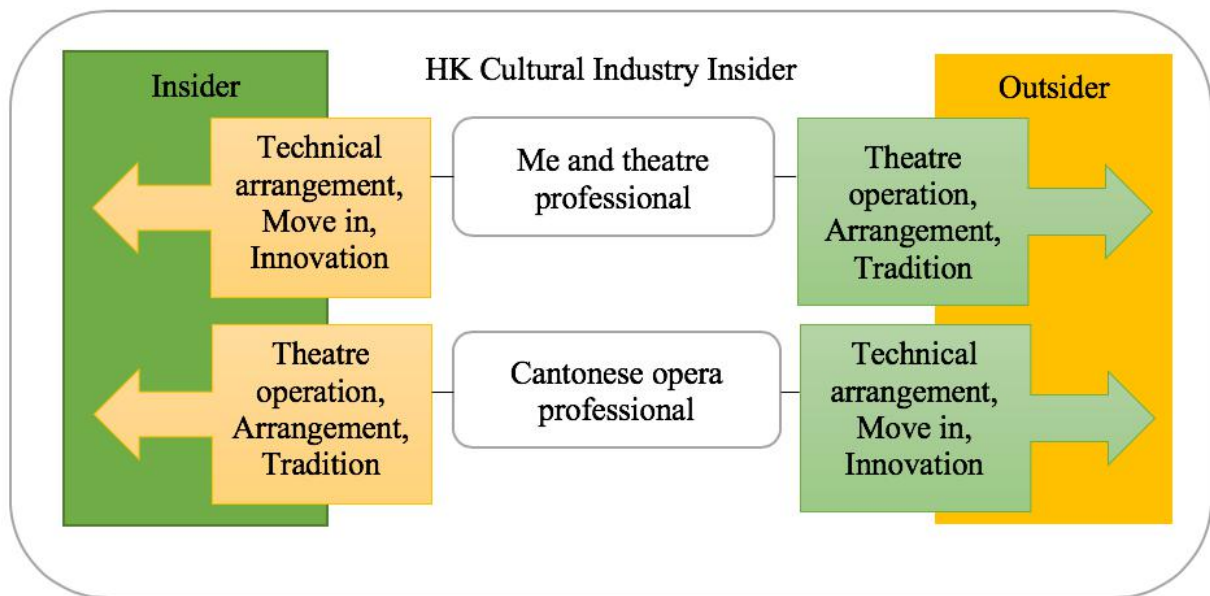


Figure 26: HK Cultural Industry insiders

In the research, I carefully read the guidelines set by BERA to ensure my insider-outsider status will not affect the ethics of engagement in the research.

SUMMARY

After consideration of the research rationale, ethical issues, and audiences' opinions, due to the complexity of its historical practice and the contemporary environment of Cantonese opera, I chose the mixed methods within a case study approach as my research methodology. My research is divided into four stages: interviews with professionals, surveys for professionals, three theatre case studies, and interviews with stakeholders.

- Stage 1 - interviews with professionals: six unstructured interviews with Cantonese opera professionals including both young and experienced actors, a Prompter, a Cantonese opera advisor from West Kowloon Cultural District, and the *Xiqu* Centre manager provide a specific impression of the industry.

- Stage 2 - surveys for professionals: a wider survey from professional management and technical personnel, performers and audiences reflect the general opinion of how sound production is received in the industry.
- Stage 3 - three theatre case studies: by working as an insider along with three groups, I gained the knowledge of how the production is operated and obstacles the groups are facing during production.
- Stage 4 - interviews with stakeholders: five semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from different area to collect data focused on the specific subjects that arise from the findings of the previous three stages.

With the affirmation of research methodology, I then began the research activities to collect data, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

After deciding on the research approach I would apply to this stage, I implemented the plan in four stages: Stage 1-interviews with professional, Stage 2-surveys with professionals, Stage 3-three theatre case studies, and Stage 4-interview with stakeholders. This chapter, Project Activities, equips the knowledge and plan designed in the previous chapter, Methodology. I will go into detail about how the stages were carried out and their findings using the techniques and approaches from the previous chapter.

STAGE 1: INTERVIEWS

In this stage of research, I interviewed six participants. For two participants: Ting Yu and Frank Yeung, I was able to conduct proper unstructured interviews as they have enough knowledge to fully understand my questions.

However, for Actor A, Actor B, Prompter C and Actor C, as they are mainly trained as actors (Prompter A included), they have little technical knowledge. It became clear to me that questioning their technical opinion or their expectation of production quality would not give me data that truly reflects their views and preferences. Rather, their reaction and behavior were able to reflect their true views to my questions. Therefore, I believed it is necessary to explain the interview process of each participants.

Interview 1: Cantonese opera advisor of West Kowloon Cultural District

Ting Yu was working as Cantonese opera advisor of West Kowloon Cultural District, at the time of interview, he has already been deeply involved in the industry for many years and gained respect within the industry.

After I explained to him my research's intentions, his main concern about my research is: 'how do you intend to modernise Cantonese opera?' In the past, he has witnessed many people who wanted to modernise Cantonese opera. However, what they have done is impose Western opera/musical aesthetics and style to Cantonese opera. It often destroys the characteristics that make *Xiqu* or Cantonese opera unique, sometimes they turned the performances into nondescript

performances. Therefore, many professionals are very cautious when someone mentions something about modernising Cantonese opera.

I assured him that what I intend to do in my research is to modernise Cantonese opera by keeping the traditional quality, instead of mimic Western productions. I fully understand and appreciate the traditional characteristic of Cantonese opera, and I also do not wish to lose any of its unique qualities that defined our culture. My research is to try to find a way to modernise Cantonese opera without sacrificing our cultural identity.

After I repeatedly explained and confirmed my intentions, Ting was then willing to share his experience with me. First, he told me the difference between modern theatre and Cantonese opera production, i.e. Prompter system. Ting said the Cantonese opera industry is still operating under a very traditional practice. Young actors undergo apprenticeship training from a famous actor as a master and therefore, they formed a very tight-knitted community.

Actors trained from The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts' Chinese opera department received many modern theatre training and practice that way. However, the mainstream personnel in the industry are still trained traditionally, which means the actors trained in modern production practice need to adopt the traditional way of working once they enter the industry.

During our discussion, he has stressed to me many times that the industry is very strict with its traditions and it will be a challenge to apply changes on their productions because of it.

Ting Yu also stressed that the industry has a firm stance on traditional practice, therefore making it very difficult to introduce a new perspective on their production. Asking them to adopt the modern theatre production method would be even more difficult.

At the end of our conversation, Ting referred me to three young professionals, they will spend time to talk to me due to senior member of the industry's (Ting) referral, a traditional hierarchy practice which is common in the industry.

Interview 2: West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's Senior Manager, Technical and Productions

Frank Yeung shared their experience of *Xiqu* Centre with me during the interview. At the time of interview, the *Xiqu* Centre was under construction. As the theatre professionals in Hong Kong, Yeung and *Xiqu* Centre understood that there is a great difference between *Xiqu*'s sound production and Modern theatre production, West Kowloon Cultural District Authority has done their own research concerning the sound production in *Xiqu* while building the Centre. However, they are focused on the technical side of sound production, hence why the design of the theatre relates to sound response and the location of technical personnel.

Since there are no studies and research on the subject of *Xiqu*'s sound, to build a theatre dedicated to *Xiqu* is very challenging to international designers, Yeung said. The music in *Xiqu* is very unique in comparison with Western music. For example, the *Xiqu* singers often sing in a very high pitch that can risk creating a feedback issue with the mics and speakers, which can make building a theatre for this challenging, especially because there is little research to go off of. As *Xiqu* Centre is the first of its kind in the world, they are constantly learning as they further develop the project.

Interview 3: Actor A

Upon Ting Yu's referral, I connected with Actor A in early 2016. Actor A is a young up-and-coming actor; he participated in many professional productions and has a theatre group himself. His main income, from what I observed, is from working freelance for other productions as actor.

I tried to make an appointment to meet him on many occasions; however, he is always rushing to somewhere else. Despite meeting him multiple times, we never got to sit down and talk properly at all. For example, in one occasion we agreed to meet in one of his performances. I went to watch the show and when the show was finished, I went to see him in changing room. Actor A was not happy as he expected me to go to the changing room during the performance. He had two scenes that he did not need to be on stage, he expected me to discuss with him while his show is on. And since the show was then finished, he must leave and had no time to talk at all. However, on my

part, I think it is extremely rude and disrespectful to walk in other production's dressing room during performance. I did not feel that it is appropriate for me to conduct my research in such manner.

The same situation happened a few times more, Actor A gave me a cold response also he seemed uninterested in my research. He has a resistant attitude talking to me.

Interview 4: Actor B

Actor B is another young, up-and-coming actor with his own group. Actor B runs his own business outside the Cantonese opera industry, he is also very busy and therefore difficult to get hold of. Actor B does not have financial burden; his main focus is to revolutionise Cantonese opera. His theatre group is focused to 'modernise' Cantonese opera with many cross-over projects with other media. While it was a struggle to get a hold of him, he was very keen to talk with me.

Actor B invited me to attend one of his performances. To my surprise, his performance is a complete adaptation of Broadway musical style. With modern stage, video projection and costume design, musicians are separated around the stage. The only element in the performance that can be related to Cantonese opera is the song they sing. The traditional costume, make up, stage set up and the communication between actors and musicians are abandoned for the sake of 'modernisation'. For me, this is a musical with Chinese element rather than a modernised version of Cantonese opera. It not only loses all of the cultural significance of Cantonese opera, it also gives up the transcendent quality approach of *Xiqu*'s formulistic acting by replacing it with highly rehearsed scene changes to enrich the visual element of the performance.

I attended his group's production and noticed that his approach to Cantonese opera is completely Westernised; they were performing the opera like a Western musical in terms of costumes, stage set-up, lighting and sound. While I respect his artistic decision, my research will not be reflective of the industry if I were to pursue this case further.

Interview 5: Prompter A

Prompter A grew up in a family with generations of performers. With the ‘family’ connection, Prompter A became a very prominent prompter in Hong Kong. Many productions use him as a prompter as well as an actor. Much like SM team with designers, Prompter A handles lightning, sound, set, and everything else with his own team of assistants.

He agreed to meet me because of the referral from Ting Yu, but his response to me was very cold. He asked me to attend one of his moving-in section in Hong Kong Cultural Centre in March 2016. When I arrived at the theatre, he just told me to ‘look around yourself’. However, while observing him work with the lights and the plotting session, it came to my attention that Prompter A was not technically trained and is not aware of the protocol and general practice of that profession. He was wearing a pair of sunglasses on stage while handling the light focusing and plotting inside the theatre. Any professional will understand wearing sunglasses while focusing the plotting of the light will distort the vision of the designer and therefore cannot reflect the real light set up to the designer.

For the sound design aspect, Prompter A just left it untouched, I assumed to let the venue’s technicians to sort out for him.

Interview 6: Actor C

Actor C is a senior actor in the Cantonese opera industry and has already achieved star status. She has her own big budget production coming up. She was very interested to meet me and understand more about my work, as well as how to improve the quality of her performance.

Actor C has her own big production being three months away, she is eager to learn about what she can improve. Her production has 7 performances, the venue can house 1,700 audience members, although they are three months away from the performance, all tickets were sold out within 3 days.

Clearly, Actor C was willing to talk to me out of her own interests; she wants to make her production more commercially successful. She realised that current production quality for Cantonese opera has its own limitation. During our conversation, Actor C expressed great interest

in trying out ‘new technology’. I suggested that she could try out ear monitors in her smaller performance and she was happy to do so. Ear monitors are used frequently in musicals and concerts. Instead of hearing the music through stage fold-back monitors (which is the main reason behind sound feedback), the actors used earphones to listen to the sound.

For the small production prior to her big budget one, she expressed interest in trying ear monitors during performance. I quoted the price of hiring the ear monitors for her to try out the technology. When I called the equipment rental company for quotation, the company was surprised that I was using it for Cantonese opera. They expressed that no Cantonese opera production has hired ear monitors from them.

After I gave Actor C the hiring quotation, Actor C’s welcoming attitude to my contribution had quickly taken a 180 degree turn. She refused to contact me after I sent her the quotation. For her big production three months later, she simply gave me a free ticket to watch the show and reluctant to meet me afterwards.

Actor C’s change in attitude was most likely due to the quotation I provided her that exceeded her expectations. However, Prompter A was the prompter of her show, which may have something to do with why she did not contact me afterwards.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews took place between 11/2015 to 5/2016. All interviews were recorded through note-taking. They were conducted in Chinese, my notes were taken in Chinese and English, but the data was translated into English for this research¹⁴.

After coding each interviewee during the qualitative data collection, I utilised open coding to draw out the main themes brought up in the interviews as a whole in the second cycle of coding. However, it was more difficult to code open-ended responses, which was unavoidable considering the interviews were open-ended in nature. Sample size was also limited to a smaller size, and there was room for bias in respondents’ answers (Yin, 2009, p. 16).

¹⁴ See Appendix 3 for Sample note of Interviews

THEMES FROM STAGE 1

After using the open coding method to analyse the interview data, there were five main common themes that strongly emerged:

- No common definition of what is Modernisation;
- Lack of knowledge about technology;
- Do not have time;
- Resistance to change; and
- Unwilling to further invest into the production.

No common definition of Modernisation

During my interviews, Frank Yeung, Actor B and Actor C shared a common opinion that Cantonese opera needs to modernise. The three of them are finding ways to modernise the art form. However, they all have a different approach:

- Frank Yeung believes that the modernisation of Cantonese opera is achievable from a technical point of view. For example, hiring a world-class designer to design a world-class venue would be able to introduce the high quality sound production to the industry, which is currently lacking.

However, as mentioned earlier, there are no studies and research about the sound production of the art form that are currently available. The *Xiqu* Centre had to play the role of the researcher in the earlier stage when designing the venue.

- Actor B also feels the need to modernise for the art form. As he is a practicing young performer with his own group that is able to get funding, Actor B is able to experiment with Cantonese opera in a real performance environment.

However, since he is interested in introducing Western (he would think of it as ‘modern’) elements to Cantonese opera, he went as far as abandoning the traditional costumes, set and form, and adopted the Western Broadway musical approach. I personally respect Actor B’s decision, because art needs freedom to diversify and evolve, as Western arts has influenced cultures all over the world on many accounts. But this approach may create a certain paranoia for many professionals, as Ting Yu pointed out again and again in his interview: industry traditionalists fear this approach will completely change the characteristics of Cantonese opera for the sake of modernisation (Westernisation).

Actor B is a revolutionist who is willing to commit to modernise Cantonese opera. However, as I mentioned in knowledge landscape, there are some misunderstandings between modernisation and Westernisation. Actor B’s work merely became an attempt to commercialise Cantonese opera by reducing its unique artistic characteristics and mimicking a Broadway show, for which I think leans more towards Westernisation than modernisation.

- Actor C has been working in the industry for many years. She is very well-established inside the industry and can be considered a traditionalist. As her productions get bigger and bigger, she can see there is a gap between Cantonese opera’s production quality compared to modern productions. She is willing to improve the sound production of her performance by adjusting her production’s way of working.

However, her attitude changed afterwards. It could be because she considered my quotation to hire equipment was well over her budget, or it may be due to the production personnel around her convincing her there is no need to get an outsider (such as me) to help. For either reasons, she decided to keep her original way of working and did not continue the quest of better sound production.

The above three interview participants shared the same idea of the need to modernise Cantonese opera. They all have their own methods to achieve their goal. However, they all have

their own views of what is considered to be modernisation: changing the artistic style, improving hardware support or introducing new ideas to the production workflow.

This misinterpreted concept of modernisation plants fear into traditionalists' minds. In order to modernise Cantonese opera, do we have to change the artistic tradition of Cantonese opera all together, hire more state of the art venues or abandon traditional practice such as Prompter system? And if we modernise, will people like Prompter A lose their job to sound designers, lighting designers and stage managers? As Ting Yu mentioned, these kind of uncertainties result in their reluctance to embrace technology as well as re-evaluate their hundred-years-old theatre practices.

Lack of technological knowledge

Ting Yu pointed out the industry primarily consists of actors. Actors received very little to none technical training, even professional Prompters are actors trained under experienced Prompter who was an actor with backstage experience to begin with. The industry's lack of understanding in the relevant technology poses as an obstacle to determine what constitutes as a high-quality performance and a low-quality one.

Actor A and Actor C clearly have no technical knowledge; they rely on technical personnel to sort out their problems. As I observed, Prompter A just knows enough to ask venue technicians to hang and focus lights. He has neither in-depth technical knowledge nor the artistic vision to be a designer.

On the other hand, without knowledge and understanding of sound technology, actors have become dependent on amplification.

In the early part of the twentieth century, when amplification in theatre was unknown, musicals tended to star a certain type of performer who could sing well enough to fill a theatre without the need of a microphone.... Musical were, in effect, self-balancing, without the need for sound designers to help out.

With amplification systems becoming more commonplace in theatres, microphones and loudspeaker were used simply to enhance the voices of the

singers, so that they did not have to sing quite so hard for every number. The major changes in the use of sound in musicals started in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Leonard, 2001, p. 111).

Yeung confirmed the *Xiqu* Centre's own study: Cantonese opera singers have changed their singing technique along with the technology advancement for the past decades. In the 50s and 60s, where audio amplification is very limited in performances, actors need to train their voice to reach out to a large audience. However, contemporary actors in Hong Kong now overly rely on technology to enhance their voice. Without training to sing with loud or penetrating voice, singing quietly in performance create more technical problem (quiet voice need to increase amplification level, therefore increases the risk of feedback from mics).

This reminded me of my own experience, I was working with a Cantonese opera production which invited a Cantonese opera actress from mainland China. As China has different training system, the actress is able to sing with a very loud and penetrating voice. However, her Hong Kong counterpart actress sang with a very quiet and weak voice. This created problem with the sound design, I faced two choices: to increase the Hong Kong actress's voice risking feedback and keep the China actress voice as powerful as it should be, or weakening China actress's voice to lower the sound quality of the entire production. At the end, the producer asked me to weaken the China actress's voice and lower all the music instruments sound level to match the Hong Kong actress' voice. It was not a good experience for me as I had to lower the sound quality of the entire production.

Lack of time

When arranging the interviews with Actor A, Actor B, Actor C, and Prompter A, the common issue I found was that they were constantly busy. It was hard to believe that all of them could not spare one or two hours for an interview, even when some of them seemed genuinely willing to contribute to the research.

Actor C mentioned that Cantonese opera actors do need to practice their routines daily. Young actors such as Actor A often have another job or a different production to commit to in order to

make a decent living, especially since actors are only paid for the performance days, excluding rehearsal time. Actor B has his own business and a theatre group to run simultaneously. Prompter A is occupied with many productions since he is one of the most well-regarded prompters in the industry. With all these different responsibilities and priorities to uphold, I am grateful that in the end, I managed to interview them all.

Although an actor needs to spend a lot of time daily for practice routines, young actors need to work side job to survive. There are a few number of professional Prompters in the industry, and there is an average of 2.5 performances per day in Hong Kong. The capable Prompters will be very busy with many productions. Not having enough time to focus and reflect on their work is the common problem within the industry.

Resistance to change

Based on the reactions of Prompter A and Actor C, along with Ting Yu's comments about the reluctance to change within the industry, this became a common code that I noticed in the interviews.

Resistance to change may be of two types: individual and organizational. Individuals resist changing due to the fear of losing jobs, obsolescence of skills, change in the equations in the social relationships, etc. The organizations may also resist to change due to the resource crunch, difficulty to bring in the change in the set operational methods and sometimes simply due to the fear of the unknown (Sengupta, 2006, p. 3).

There are numerous fears surrounding the modernisation of Cantonese opera. Going off Sengupta's observation, Prompters such as Prompter A may risk losing their job to specialized and more qualified individuals could be linked to individual resistance. His role may become obsolete with the rise of new talents. Meanwhile, in terms of organisational resistance, Actor C risks upsetting co-workers who are set on exclusivity by allowing outsiders to interfere with the sound design. These fears are once again something that Ting Yu has pointed out in our interview.

Unwilling to further invest in the production

Actor C's productions have a relatively higher budget due to her fame. Yet, she was not willing to invest money and time into improving the sound quality of her productions. When talking to the equipment-hiring company, they confirmed that Cantonese opera productions seldom invest money on higher-end sound systems.

Initially, upon hearing that I would improve their sound quality for free, the theatre groups were all very interested. It is likely that they expected me to bring in some special equipment that would solve their sound problems immediately. However, when they came to realise that they needed to invest their time, thought, and even money (to hire equipment), they became strongly reluctant to participate. It came to my realisation that the most important factor for the group that would let me work with them is to not burden them with their already overloaded work and to solve the problem myself.

Investing in overlooked aspects of productions is essential towards improving the production quality as a whole, however this is a sentiment that is arguably ignored by the part of the industry who can afford to do so. There are groups who are interested in investing more money into productions, but their finances do not allow them to do so. Oftentimes, these are groups who rely on government funding and therefore, have less money to spend on extra resources.

STAGE 2: SURVEYS

By the end of the unstructured interviewing process in Stage 1, I gained a lot of data from individuals and thereby wanted to see whether their opinions were representative of the industry. This led me to move on to the next stage concerning the quantitative data gathering aspect: the survey.

The survey took place between 2/2016 to 8/2016. Two sets of surveys were sent: Professional¹⁵ and Audience¹⁶ survey. The professional survey was divided into three categories: for management, for technical professional and for performers. The data was collected either via email and WhatsApp distribution or through face to face interview. All surveys were initially written in Chinese then translated into English for this research.

Comparing to Stage 1, the survey has collected a larger amount of information. As ‘descriptive statistics helps to simplify large amounts of data in a sensible way, each descriptive statistics reduces lots of data into a simpler summary’ (Jaggi, n.d., p. 1). Hence, I used descriptive statistics analysis to process the data and I put the analysed data in the research findings.

For Professional surveys, I received surveys from 60 professionals: 20 members of management, 20 technical personnel and 20 performers. With permission from venues and theatre groups, audience members were provided with surveys. For audience survey, a total of 60 members answered the survey. The full survey data was analysed and listed in Appendix 6 Survey Data.

¹⁵ See Appendix 4 for Survey questions for professionals

¹⁶ See Appendix 5 for Survey questions for audience

THEMES from STAGE 2

After using descriptive statistic to illustrate and analyse the survey data, there were three main common themes that strongly emerged:

- In professional survey, managers and performer groups are not willing to invest further to improve the sound quality of the production, even though they agreed sound is an important component of the production.
- In professional survey, technical personnel are willing to invest further to deliver a better sound quality production.
- The audience are generally satisfied about the current performances' sound quality, and have not paid much attention to the sound production of the performance.

Looking at both professional and audience surveys, the data indicated both of the manager and audience agreed that sound is a fairly important factor in a production. Performers believed that although the sound quality on stage does affect their performance, having a good sound quality is not a very important factor to enhance or decrease their performance quality. However, most of the performers would agree it is very important that the audience receives a good sound quality of their performance, which arguably contradicts their own argument. The three groups look at sound as an element that a production cannot be lacking, but they all expressed not being concerned with its quality.

It is clear that both managers and performers wish to produce good quality performances. But although most of the managers agreed that sound quality is important to a production and having a unique theatre experience is fairly important to attract audience members, both managers and performers are not in favour for investing more resources (time or money or both) to sound production.

On the other hand, all technical personnel agreed sound production is very important and they are willing to invest more (spend more time and work more) in sound production.

There is a large gap between technical personnel and performers about spending time for sound test. All technical personnel agreed that more than one hour of time is needed to be spent. However, 75% of the performers only agreed to spend less than 15 minutes for sound testing, and

all of the performers will not spend more than 30 minutes for it. This translates that the technical personnel are willing to invest more time and effort to achieve a better sound quality production, whereas performers are the opposite.

If we include the audience survey in the data analysis, we would find out managers, performers and audience members share similar values toward the importance of sound production in a performance. They generally agreed that sound is important for a performance.

The audience are generally pleased about the current sound quality. Improving sound quality of the production only will mildly increase their interest. It would also not affect their decision to whether or not watch more performances.

However, most of the audiences who participated in the survey are largely non-frequent theatre goers. Sixty-one (61) per cent of the participants go to theatre once a year or it was their first time going to Cantonese opera performance. The data only reflect their theatre going habit.

On the other hand, 20% of the audience do pay attention to the sound quality of the performance, they like performances with good sound quality and they expressed interest in improved performances.

The response of the interviewees in stage one made me aware that even professionals fall back to their traditional mentality when in practice, despite the surveys in stage two showing a positive response. This clearly clashes against the results of the survey. These professionals know that the sound quality in Cantonese opera is not ideal and they did agree that they need to put in some effort to improve the quality. However, not many professionals are willing to face the problems when in practice.

STAGE 3: THEATRE CASE STUDIES

Based on the results of interviews (stage 1) and data statistics from the survey (stage 2), a landscape of my qualitative and quantitative analysis will form the background to the next stage of research: theatre case studies.

Through the surveys, I learnt the general opinions held by members of theatre groups, primarily the performers and the management staff. They gave me something to expect from the theatre groups that I would experience first-hand. Now able to utilize the information and knowledge gathered from the previous two stages, I began to tackle the third stage of the chapter, which was immersing myself in case studies revolving around selected theatre groups. For all case studies, I gained explicit permission to show everyone's name in the research.

Theatre 1: Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd.

Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. is founded in 2000, the organization first started by a group of Chinese Opera lovers, including Wen Hua (文華), the scriptwriter. Wen Hua was born in a family of opera artists and thus, is deeply influenced by the art of Chinese opera. A graduate from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Wen Hua engaged in the studies of Chinese opera in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

The father of Wen Hua, Li Shi An (李石庵), is a famous music arranger and a former musician of Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and is now working as the music director in Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. He composes the music for all performances in the association, including the music used in the transitions.

Zhang Cai Zhen (張才珍), the administration and art director who supervises and directs every performance, is the mother of Wen Hua. The structure of Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. is illustrated in Figure 27 below.

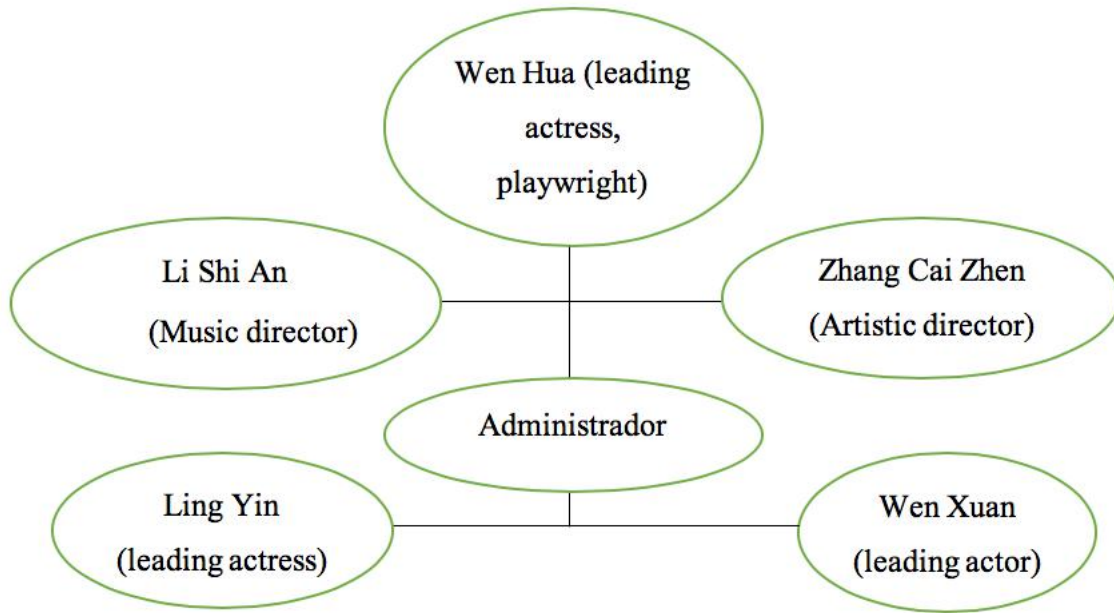


Figure 27: Group structure of Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd.

Preparation

Prior to the performance, I attended a rehearsal and met with the SM team to discuss the production process. Due to the availability of the supporting cast, which is comprised of students from the group, and a limited budget, there were very few rehearsals. The artistic Director and the show’s director, Zhang Cai Zhen, was very busy instructing all the supporting actors to dance and coordinating scene changes.

I noticed that there will be video projections and sound effects to be used in the performance. Many Hong Kong Cantonese opera performances involving younger cast members are trying to add modern technology like video and sound effects to add new, contemporary element to the show.

Moving-in to the theatre

Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. highly values their productions. Unlike many other Cantonese opera productions, the group booked an extra day in the theatre for moving in. There is a Dress Rehearsal session with the full cast and musicians, which is an extremely rare luxury for the relatively small sized the production.

On 24/3, I arrived at the theatre at 2:30PM. As it is a small production and members of the SM team have their own full-time job elsewhere, there were only a handful of personnel working in the theatre until 6:00PM. I took the opportunity to check and balance the house speakers, discussed what the production needs with the venue technician and requested a headset and a communication system for the sound control room set in the auditorium.

The venue

Built in 1930, Yau Ma Tei Theatre is the only surviving pre-World War II theatre in Kowloon District... Yau Ma Tei Theatre ceased operation in July 1998. It was accorded as a Grade 2 historic building by the Antiquities Advisory Board in the same year.

Yau Ma Tei Theatre was officially opened on 17 July 2012, designated for promoting Chinese opera activities, in particular Cantonese opera. (Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2014.)¹⁷

Performance and technical setup

The musicians were lined up across the Orchestra Pit. From the stage right, there are 4 percussionists (gongs, percussions, timpani, and the lead percussionist), Electric Yuan¹⁸, Gaohu¹⁹, Guzheng²⁰, Yangqin²¹, Pipa²², Flutes, Erhu²³ and Zhonghu²⁴.

For a performance involving live musicians, it is impossible for a sound technician to hear the sound accurately inside control room, because the sound the audience hears includes the sound from speakers as well as the sounds from the live instruments. When the technician is seated in the control room, they can only hear the speakers' mix, not the sound the audience is hearing. This

¹⁷ Appendix 10 for Theatre Ground Plan of Yau Ma Tei Theatre

¹⁸ Chinese plucked string instrument

¹⁹ Chinese bowed high-pitched string instrument

²⁰ Chinese zither

²¹ Chinese hammered dulcimer

²² four-stringed Chinese plucked musical instrument

²³ Chinese bowed high-pitched string instrument

²⁴ Chinese bowed medium-pitched string instrument

system of putting the technician in the control room typically works just fine if most of the sound elements are played through a PA system²⁵, but the technician will receive false feedback if the performance depends on live instruments. This is why a majority of rock concerts' control panels are located in the middle of the auditorium.

Given that I will not be attending the actual performances (not an essential practice for a professional, I was also not invited), I decided to plot out the sound during the dress rehearsal. Sound plotting means to confirm and mark all the sound levels and details of all sound cues in the performance with the technician. I found the optimal music balance for the show and made sure the sound can be heard well in all locations in the auditorium.

Outcome and initial reaction

By adjusting the sound level during the dress rehearsal, I was able to create a relatively balanced sound level. Due to the venue's inherent sound problem, it is nearly impossible to balance the sound without installing noise barrier devices ('a room') to block the sound from percussion musicians. However, installing a 'room' could create other problems such as cost issues and blocking the sight of the audience.

The Artistic Director was very pleased with the outcome. Unfortunately, despite the success of the dress rehearsal, the two performances that followed suffered. I was not invited to attend the two performances; according to the Artistic Director, the sound quality had dropped again.

There are a number of reasons that could be causing the problems in sound quality. In this case, the position of the musicians in relation to the mics is one of the main reasons. A lot of traditional Chinese instruments have a quieter or a higher pitched sound (especially the Pipa), so mics often need to be placed very close to the instrument to pick up the sound. Musicians may not have been sitting at the exact spot as they were during the rehearsal, or they moved the mic's location, in which even the slightest change can affect the sound quality a lot. Another reason is that musicians may play harder or lighter in different performances. During a particular performance, if the percussionists play much harder in comparison to the melodic instruments' musicians, the outcome of the sound quality would be affected greatly.

²⁵ A Public Address system is an electronic system comprised of microphones, amplifiers, loudspeakers, and related equipment.

Interview with artistic director and music director

After asking Wen Hua (the head of the group) for her opinion of my input, she answered: 'Based on the reaction of the audience, your sound work must have worked well.' She was not able to give me any further feedback. She suggested and arranged for me to talk to the Artistic Director and Music Director of the group. On 29/3/2017, I had a meeting with the group's Artistic Director and Music Director in their office. The Artistic Director was very happy with my input and wished that I would be able to help them every time, except they do not have the budget to employ me. Despite ensuring her that I would not charge for the next two performances, she was not convinced.

On the other hand, the Music Director was confused about what I did to achieve the better outcome. Nevertheless, he expressed that it was important for him to 'hear' all the musicians he employed. However, due to the unpredictable production qualities, certain instruments' sounds were often lost in the mix and the audience could not hear some of the instruments at all in most of his performances.

Initial learning

The research so far has lead me to realise the gap between professional modern theatre production and traditional Cantonese opera production. Theatre technology and production (from light, sound, stage to the SM team) is often overlooked in Cantonese opera productions. There is little detail planning ahead, along with the tendency to wait to sort out technical problems during the moving in period. Said moving in period is so short (a few hours), so many technical problems are left unsolved and instead, they simply hope that the performance will go well by faith.

They cannot employ more professional theatre personnel largely due to the tight budget of each production. It is important to note that the entire Cantonese opera industry is actor-oriented. Theatre groups are run by the actors, Prompters are trained as actors to begin with, and administrators often start as the group's students or fans. There is a great emphasis on actors. There are little to no dedicated directors, designers, Stage Managers, and technical personnel who are professionally trained in their own respective field. No one is able to take a step back and evaluate

every part of the production as a whole. Instead, they consider the performance of the actors to determine the outcome of the performance.

Also, Yau Ma Tei Theatre has been open as a Chinese opera theatre for only 5 years, making it both modern and relatively inexperienced. It came to my attention that despite its congenital problems with the sound system, the software of the venue is also in need of adapting to suit the Cantonese opera environment. I noticed this when I expressed the necessity of having the speakers checked as well as the sound balance. The venue technician then told me that their venue does not practice this, so I insisted that they let me do the sound check and balance check instead. The house speakers were not balanced and tuned, and I did my best in the given time to set up the system properly. This goes to show that the venue can improve its sonic environment and internal production schedule by optimising the sound system to cater to the venue's Cantonese opera needs.

The SM team were not very collaborative. For example, the SM was unwilling to spare a headset for me to communicate with those in the control room. I was told there are no headsets available for me, yet, when I asked the venue technician, he had no qualms with setting up a headset with an intercom for me to use.

Without the support of technology in a contemporary environment, the actors' performance will not have the best outcome. For instance, the actors' voices cannot reach every corner of the large venue, or the actors' voices can be muffled by the other instruments in a venue with a sonic environment that is not ideal. These issues can be solved by integrating the use of up-to-date technology. To improve the sound production is not an artistic or personal preference, it is crucial in order for Cantonese opera to survive to the future.

After working with this group, I realised that everyone in the group (including the music composer) does not view sound element as an important issue. Their only requirement is that the audience can hear the singers and the percussion. Cantonese opera professionals do not understand that sound in theatre not merely means the sound project out from house speakers, 'sound-vocal, non-vocal, musical and non-musical-along with sound's absence-the ticking, anticipatory buzz of stage silence-are elemental to the phenomenal fabric of theatre'. (Brown, 2011: 1)

It is because they do not understand what they can do and what a good sound system can do to enhance the audience's experience. On the other hand, everyone in the group was very pleased

about the outcome of my input. The artistic Director asked if she can hire me to work with them every time. It proved that the group wanted to perform in a better sound environment.

The survey feedback from the group is similar to the survey I attained before. Everyone was pleased with the outcome, everyone acknowledged the sound problem in productions and all of them are willing to do more to improve.

Although the Artistic Director and Music Director were happy about the outcome of my input, I received a very cold respond from the rest of the group. After all, a theatre production operation depends strongly on group collaboration; if the rest of the group are not seeing the importance of sound issues and are not willing to collaborate, the sound production issue will be very difficult to resolve.

Upon reflecting the experience with the group as well as evaluating their future performances (mostly in Yau Ma Tei Theatre), I decided that I have collected all the information I could from this group and venue. To gain a better study of the entire industry in Hong Kong, I need to look for another participating group to obtain information from another professional's perspective—a more professionally established group and a much more professionally-aware venue.

Theatre 2: Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. with Xinyi Cantonese Opera Art Promotion Agency

The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd., is founded in 2008. In cooperation with other theatre groups and the government, the association puts up 70 performances annually in Sha Tin Town Hall in order to arouse the public's interest in Cantonese opera and achieve the aim of gaining recognition. The association also organizes workshops with contents about costumes and basic techniques of Cantonese opera to public in order to achieve the second objectives, promoting Cantonese opera to different classes in the society.

The venue

Recognised as one of the Hong Kong's finest performing arts Centres, Sha Tin Town Hall is also the heart of culture in the east of the New Territories. Since its opening in January 1987, it has come to symbolize the department's commitment in the arts, its support for local arts and culture, and its regard to the cultural enrichment of the community (Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2014).²⁶

Technical preparation

During 21-22/5 in Shatin Town Hall's Auditorium, the group will perform a brand new production, 'The Siege of Bi City'. This production featured a few stars. The director Franco Yuen is a very famous opera star, while the production and the music are clearly much more professional. However, the group is using the traditional Prompter system. The production will use an Orchestra Pit for musicians; the group's production has rarely used the Orchestra Pit as it increases the production cost. The group needs to book the venue the night prior to performance day for setting up the Orchestra Pit. Also, the group will move in on the same day of performance (a general Cantonese opera practice), and actors and musicians will turn up after 5PM. As there is no time to do any sound adjustment and based on the experience from Theatre 1, I asked the group to reserve

²⁶ See Appendix 11 for Theatre Ground Plan of Shatin Town Hall Auditorium

me a seat during performance and give me an intercom to the control room; I will have to adjust the sound level during the actual performance.

Performance setup and technical support

This production is using the Orchestra Pit to house the musicians, and the number of musicians are the same as the first case study. The musical instruments used were largely same, with the exception of using Cello and Saxophone instead of Pipa and Erwu. Western instruments are generally louder due to their design; thus, it is easier to pick up the sound by the mics. With the Orchestra Pit in a lower level, the sound setting was a lot less problematic.

Shatin Town Hall Auditorium has a very large stage and backstage; it could cause problems on locating the fold back speakers. In order to cover the stage with sound, it is easy to create sound feedback with the mics. For this, the venue's Technical Manager, Andy Tsui has assured me that they are very experienced with Cantonese opera performances, all speakers and mics set up and the location has been measured to make sure the sound quality is good throughout the entire theatre area. As I only have two hours to prepare the sound system, I have to take the house setting to work with.

Because this is a new production, the leading musician and percussionist arrived at 5PM to discuss the last minute changes to the music arrangement to the director. Other musicians started coming in after 6PM, but from 6PM to 7PM is venue's dinner break, so there was nothing that could be done until 7PM, which is 15 minutes before the house opens.

At 7PM, everyone was in position, musicians were still adjusting the music according to the leading musician and percussionist. The technician had to adjust the mics position according to how they are seated. About 7 minutes before the house opens, finally, the full band played music for a few minutes. Then, everyone had to be quiet as the house opened for audience to come in.

Performance

During the first performance, I sat inside the auditorium surrounded by audience, and talked to the technician inside the control room through my intercom. The nature of a Cantonese opera audience is normally more casual; they sometimes talk to each other or walk around the auditorium

as they see fit. Therefore, they did not notice that I was talking quietly into my intercom. The technician and I used the first two scenes (about 45 minutes) of the performance to adjust the sound balance. After the basic balance is set, we used the rest of the performance to fine-tune the sound balance (normally a Cantonese opera performance lasted over four hours).

I also attended the second performance on the next day, with the intercom set in my seat, so that I can communicate with the control room if necessary. Unless some rather large problems occur, I normally would not do any adjustment after the show is publicly open, I would leave it to the technician to improvise. Therefore, I was mainly observing the second performance's sound quality and only made some very minor adjustment.

In the first performance, the percussionists played very hard, resulting the percussion sounding too loud and disrupting the sound balance. The percussion sounds covered most of the other instruments and vocals level. The group manager immediately expressed her concern to me. However, we did not turn on any mics for percussion instruments at all. The sound came purely from the instruments; so we cannot reduce the sound level technically. There is also no way to contact musicians during the actual performance. Technicians suggested that if I wish, they can put a 'cover' on the top of percussionists to reduce sound for the next day performance, but the technician did warn that musicians are not in favour of this decision.

During the second performance, for whatever reason, the percussionists did not play hard at all, the sound balance immediate improved. The manager was much more pleased with this outcome.

Initial learning

Without technical rehearsal and music balance, sound technicians can only use the first two scenes of the performance as a 'technical rehearsal'. This is not only unfair to audience, but it also severely affects the quality of the performance.

The two studies above suggest that due to the different levels of percussion and melodic instruments, to set up the music band in the Orchestra Pit requires the installation of a sound barrier on the percussionists. Otherwise, it is very difficult to provide a stable, balanced sound quality in

every performance. The problem is that it costs extra time and money to set up, which due to factors such as the actors' salary and the box office income, most Cantonese opera productions do not have. This leads to the dilemma of whether Cantonese opera production 'needs' the Orchestra Pit to locate their musicians in the first place. What is the problem of the traditional stage right position? If the Orchestra Pit is important, with the given working environment, what can we do to provide a good sounding production with the use of the Orchestra Pit?

Theatre 3: Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. with Linglong Cantonese Opera Troupe

Technical preparation and moving-in to the theatre

During the last case study in Shatin Town Hall, I met the venue's Technical Manager, Andy Tsui. I discussed how the venue operates on Cantonese opera production and I told him what I would like to do in the next production. He promised the venue will give me full support (as they always do to all productions). Upon discussing the sound image problem that comes from setting up the band on stage right and my plan to add additional speakers in front of the band to enhance the sound image, Tsui was supportive and was willing to collaborate with me.

This production moved in the same day of performance as usual. I turned up around 3PM to carry out the usual speakers' balance work.

Performance setup and technical changes

The band was set up in traditional style with three roles, the back role involves percussion instruments, the middle role for the Electric Yuan, two Suona²⁷, and the front role for the Violin, the Yangqin, the Sanxian²⁸ and Flutes.

Since all instruments were placed on stage and all sound will go through the PA system, almost all of the sound the audience are hearing will be from the house speakers. Although the sound level

²⁷ Chinese Reeds

²⁸ Chinese lute

and balance will be much easier to handle, the sound quality will be more artificial than using the Orchestra Pit.

My focus for this production is to establish a proper musical imagery for the audience. When asking the technician to set up a speaker in front of the band to enhance the sound coming from the stage right, he refused since he was not given an order from his superiors, despite talking about this setting with Andy Tsui previously. I then immediately called for a meeting with Tsui and one of the Senior Managers of the venue.

I explained what I needed and the reason behind my idea. However, the Senior Manager said all levels of the venue has been measured and marked and any added speaker will ruin the optimised sound quality they set up. I told them I have been working in all venues in Hong Kong and have been changing speakers' locations all the time, including in this venue. Then the Senior Manager said there was no technical rehearsal, if some audience complain the sound quality, who will take the responsibility? I assured him that I would be the one to take responsibility should there be any complaints.

Eventually, Senior Manager agreed to give me a speaker, but a much smaller one than I requested. As there was no more time left, I settled with a smaller speaker and moved on with other work.

Performance and initial reaction

Like the previous production, I sat through the first performance, communicating with the technician inside control room to balance the music. As the band were on stage, it is much more controllable in terms of sound. However, I did not attend the second performance because that performance was sold out, so the group could not give me a ticket.

I found that the sound quality was holding up well upon attending the third performance. However, I realised the band has changed, the musician playing the Electric Yuan has been replaced by a Cello player. I asked the technician if he knows about the change of instrument and he said no. We then spent more time readjusting the music balance during the performance.

Although with a much smaller speaker, I was able to build a more realistic musical imagery to reflect the performance, at the same time not to sacrifice the sound quality of the front. A much better outcome can be achieved with a proper technical rehearsal. Unfortunately, for the audience and group, the improvement is too subtle for them to tell the difference. Generally, the group is happy about the sound quality.

Initial learning

While I was working on this production, I talked to the venue's technical Manager Andy Tsui. Tsui worked in this venue for over 15 years as technical manager and has worked in hundreds of Cantonese opera production in this venue. As we have known each other for more than 20 years, we were just having a casual chat. However, he shared some rather interesting observations in regards to the industry. Tsui suggests that since actors need to practice for a long period of time to become a star (often over 30 years), the high ranking personnel in the industry and Cantonese opera audience are also generally older. The sound frequency range older people can hear is much narrower than younger people. That explains why Cantonese opera productions do not look at sound production as an important issue in many cases.

Although Tsui's insight is very interesting from a purely technical and scientific point of view and helps add some balance to the previous commentaries from other professionals, I have to take into account that Shatin is largely a residential area where the target Cantonese opera audience in the area are senior citizens. For Cantonese opera to progress as an art form, modernisation and the ability to deliver the quality of contemporary professionals is essential.

Shatin Town Hall has long history of performing Cantonese opera, they have Cantonese opera performances almost every week. The hardware and software of the venue are very well-adjusted and adapted to Cantonese opera. Though their sound quality is satisfying to generally older audience, the venue has not provided an outstanding sound quality which they are capable and equipped for. The outcome of the sound quality is entirely dependent on the technicians' musical taste and their working attitude—there is no fixed standard for the sound quality. No one is there to provide any artistic preference and a supervised workflow. At the moment, there is no one to act as a bridge between actors, musicians, theatre groups and venue.

Data analysis

The theatre cases studies were conducted between 2/2017 to 6/2018. Data was mainly collected by direct and participant observation and recorded in both Chinese and English, via taking observation notes on my phone and on paper. I also captured photos for documentation²⁹. The data collected in the theatre case studies were analysed with open coding. By comparing the findings against initial proposition about theatre production, as well as the findings between different cases and revised the proposition. Thematic analysis was carried out on the themes drawn out in the coding process to examine similar patterns.

THEMES from STAGE 3

Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. is a small up-and-coming group. They receive small funding and work hard to build their audience. Actors of the group were trained in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and are used to the modern production style. Their production structure follows the modern production style, i.e. using stage manager instead of Prompter.

The group uses many amateur performers as side actors and dancers, there is a need for rehearsal prior to performance. Also, due to the group's training, they booked one extra day for technical and dress rehearsal, which is not common in other Cantonese opera productions. I collected many data that is otherwise difficult to obtain in a 'normal' production environment. It presented me a wider area of data on the entire production.

For the second and third case, the performances are very professional and the division of work was very clear and strictly followed. For those two cases, I was focused on collecting data on sound production. The following main themes emerged:

Different attitudes between commercial and funding-oriented groups

As mentioned, the first theatre case, Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd., received limited funding for this production. They are an up-and-coming theatre group lacking a regular audience. They need to produce high quality performances to attract more audience. To reflect that, they are very concerned about the outcome of the performance. The group spends their own

²⁹ See Appendix 7, 8 and 9 for Sample note and photographs for the three theatre cases.

money to add an extra day for technical setup and rehearsal. The Artistic Director is also very concerned about my contribution to the production.

Concerning the second and third theatre cases, The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. is a resident group for Shatin Town Hall for many years and they are well-funded, whereas the Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. and Linglong Cantonese Opera Troupe each have their own resident star(s). All of them have regular audience members to support them and all of their performance are sold out full house. Contrary to Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd., Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. and Linglong Cantonese Opera Troupe did not pay much attention to sound production.

This could be the reflection of the more established groups with more funding, the groups would focus more on employing bigger stars to attract audience. The less established groups with less funding cannot afford to employ stars to attract audience, therefore they improve the quality of their production hoping audience will appreciate their good quality production.

Different venue design and the use of the Orchestra Pit

One way of using the theatre architecture is to find and emphasize what is special about the space. This approach may not be easy, and the theatre's strengths may not be readily apparent; in many cases, the designer or director may first be stuck by the theatre's problem (Condee, 1995, p. 20).

With 300 seats, Yau Ma Tei Theatre is a small-medium sized theatre. It was built almost 90 years ago and it was designed and operated as a movie theatre. The sonic environment for live performances was not considered at the time when it was built because of its original purpose. This limited the sonic environment when it was refurbished to become a dedicated Cantonese opera theatre. Upon visiting the theatre, it became clear to me that there are two major problems sonically inside the theatre hindering it from reaching its full potential.

The Orchestra Pit is located directly in front of the first row of seats. This is unlike other venues, where the Orchestra Pit is below the audience level. The Orchestra Pit in Yau Ma Tei Theatre is on the same level of audience, which is located between the stage and auditorium.³⁰

A vital element in the creative use of theatre space is the vertical relationship of audience and performance, affecting design, directing and audience perception of the theatrical event... Two factors determine the vertical relationship of audience and performance: the rake of auditorium and the height of the stage... (Condee, 1995, p. 127).

The problem of this design is that there is no way to control the loud sound emitted by the drums and other percussion instruments. As the Orchestra Pit is located just one foot away from the first row of seats, it is very difficult to balance the sound between different instruments. The percussion sound will play directly to the audience while other instruments need to go through the house speaker, rendering it impossible to create the correct and realistic musical imagery of the performance.

A theatre with good acoustics will allow every member of the audience to hear, and understand the words being spoken by an actor standing anywhere on the stage (Gillette, 2000, p. 529).

As mentioned, the theatre was not originally designed for live performance use. Once it reopened as a Cantonese opera theatre, the venue had inherent problems as a result of its initial structure designed for a movie theatre, especially regarding the sonic environment. The speakers are located in the middle, the far left and right of the auditorium, well above audience level. There are also five mini speakers in front of the Orchestra Pit that fill the middle front seats with sound. This setting has created many 'blind spots' for sound in the auditorium.

Shatin Town Hall's Auditorium on the other hand, is a very well-designed theatre venue³¹, especially in comparison to Yau Ma Tei Theatre. The Orchestra Pit is located in where it should be (below audience level), the speakers' locations were well designed and distributed (on the

³⁰ See Appendix 10 for Theatre Ground Plan of Yau Ma Tei Theatre

³¹ see Appendix 11 for Theatre Ground Plan of Shatin Town Hall Auditorium

celling, balcony and floor level). There is little to criticize regarding the sonic environment of the venue. The technicians are well-trained and knowledgeable. I have also personally worked in the venue in many occasions as a sound designer. The challenge I am facing is that the stage is a large one, the backstage and the auditorium itself is very large as well. Thus, the performance has to be totally reliant on the PA system to reach out to the audience.

However, with the nature of currently Cantonese opera musicians setting and short move-in period, even the well-designed venue like Shatin Town Hall Auditorium have problems balancing between percussion and melodic instruments.

In both theatre cases, I found it difficult to achieve good musical balance by utilising the Orchestra Pit. Yau Ma Tei Theatre is inferior in every aspect, putting musicians in Orchestra Pit only worsens the sound quality in the theatre. Shatin Town Hall Auditorium's Orchestra Pit is well-designed, however with such limited time to set up the sound, it is also very difficult to achieve high sound quality.

On the other hand, as my third theatre case indicated, putting musicians on stage has solve the music balance problem. Although this is only applicable to larger theatre, Yau Ma Tei Theatre or other medium to small size venues have other problems such as their stage area is too small to accompany all musicians, also the backstage area is too small for sound to escape, i.e. difficult to control music balance.

Prompter taking on sound designer roles

In the first case, the group only employed a stage manager, who let me to contact the sound department as a sound designer. In the second and third cases, the production only employed a Prompter to handle all technical matters. During the move-in and set-up period, the Prompter was just too busy to handle other stage work. The Prompter opted to let the venue's technicians handle the sound production all by themselves. There was no communication between Prompter and me, and I was free to make any sound adjustment.

The three cases indicated that a single position, whether a stage manager or a Prompter, cannot handle all the technical work by themselves. When the production only has a few hours to set everything up, the sound elements are simply ignored and left to the venue's technicians to sort

out. Paired together with the late arrival of performers and musicians, the venue's technicians can only resolve the problem by using the first two scenes of the performance as a makeshift technical and dress rehearsal.

Lack of communication

In the three cases, one common issue is that there is very little communication between the group's management, the performers and the venues. The management has little understanding about the production. Technical meeting with the venue prior to performance is meant for the group to express their technical requirements for the performance to the venue's management and technicians. But in some case, the person responsible for the group does not attend the meeting, or simply informs the venue about how many wireless mics they need.

The performers also did not communicate with the management and the venue well. In the third case, it was brought to my attention that a musician changed his instrument in the third performance, but nobody was aware of it.

As a sound designer, I understand that the group, as the hirer of the venue, are entitled to ask for technical assistance, such as extra speakers, headsets, and mics. However, in all three cases, the groups were hesitant to ask for assistance. For example, in the first case, we had four headsets provided by the venue. The stage manager refused to let me use one of the headsets, as she assumed the venue will not provide one extra headset for the production. However, all I did was just ask the technician to give me one more headset. The technician set up an extra headset for me and we carried on with the production.

Lack of technical knowledge and expectation for quality

For the groups that I worked with for the three case studies, it is very clear that everyone in the production has no technical knowledge about sound production. They cannot tell what is good sound quality nor do they know what kind of sound quality they are looking for. They have no expectations for sound quality.

Because of the lack of basic technical knowledge and the inability to differentiate between good and bad sound quality, it is difficult to convince the group to invest resources into improving sound production. It is not always necessary to invest money into these resources, but to invest

time and effort. For instance, they could give the venue more time to set up as well as inform the venue of what is needed to improve sound quality in a proper technical meeting. However, the technical personnel of the three groups did not consider this option.

STAGE 4: INTERVIEW WITH STAKEHOLDERS

After my three theatre case studies, I will now move on to the next stage of the qualitative research interview. I will construct a series of semi-structured interviews, where some predetermined questions I collected and developed during my research will be asked. As this research has been rather challenging and reflected the reality of the industry that cannot be presumed by *outsider*, I did not have any preconceived theories when I started each interview; the predetermined questions were questions I have learnt during the research and a starting point to the interviews. I expected I can obtain many ideas from different stakeholders' point of view.

For the interviews, I invited stakeholders from different areas: an actor, a theatre group manager, a venue's manager, the *Xiqu* Centre Senior manager (who acts the role of programme presenter/fund provider) and a scholar who is a Chinese instruments developer.

Interview 1: Andy Tsui

As Shatin Town Hall's Resident Technical Manager, Andy Tsui confirmed that the venue is very well-prepared and capable for housing any kind of performance including Cantonese opera. The full interview is documented in Appendix 12.

Tsui explained that the biggest obstacle they face when supporting the production is the lack of technical knowledge. As there are many different styles of mic in the venue for the hirer to use, the groups do not know how to differentiate. In Tsui's words, 'they've never even thought about these'.

Tsui recalled in one of his cases that a group needed 14 wireless mics. The venue could provide the group 10 mics, so the group brought along four more before the performance. The problem is, the mics the venue use are of high standards and quality, so when the group used the mics they brought, they complained that the sound quality is not good enough. At the end, Tsui

was able to provide extra four mics for the group. If the group have asked during the production meeting, the venue could have provided it. The problem is that the groups never asked, so the venue did not know what they really needed. Tsui said that the venue has good equipment to cater the hirer's needs, but the hirers also have to learn how to use them. The venue encounters these problems sometimes.

Concerning the expectation of sound from the venue, Tsui commented that the Cantonese opera personnel's generation has always been listening to radios. So they are after the sound quality that they listen at home, and hope to have the same effects on stage, which is impossible to achieve.

At the end of the interview, Tsui summarised his experience as the venue's technical manager: 'We can support the theatre group whatever they need. We can buy new equipment, try out new mics, even new settings. But what they have to learn is to get out there and listen. This is what they lack.'

Initial learning

In my case study, I learnt that one of the biggest problems Cantonese opera groups appear to have is they do not know they are entitled to ask the venue to support them, although the venues are willing to do so. Most of the Cantonese opera professionals I talked to did not know they can ask, what to ask, and some of them are even afraid to ask. I have heard many times that the groups worry if they ask 'too much' from the venue, they will be treated badly the next time they use the venue again. Of course this is completely untrue, the mind-set of Cantonese opera professionals I talked to continues to stick to a traditional way of thinking. Our venue's technicians are very professional and willing to help, whether or not the group can get the best out of the venue for their performance is entirely up to the group's production team.

I have personally worked in most of the Hong Kong's venues including Shatin Town Hall. I also have many friends working in different venues as Resident Technical Manager. My experience is that the venues do have very high quality equipment and they are constantly updating their equipment. But the venues' personnel often would not suggest to the hirers what they have and what to use if the hirer did not tell them what they want. The technicians often just use the most general setting for different types of performances. Someone on the group behalf has to tell the technicians what equipment to use. That is why a sound designer is very much needed for

Cantonese opera group, not only to liaise between the group and venue, but to find out what the production need and suggest the best equipment setting which the venue can provide.

In the following page is an illustration of the process of sound production (Figure 28). Modern production practice is what most of the venues are expected to provide services for production. Cantonese opera production practice missed many steps that they are entitled to produce better production quality:

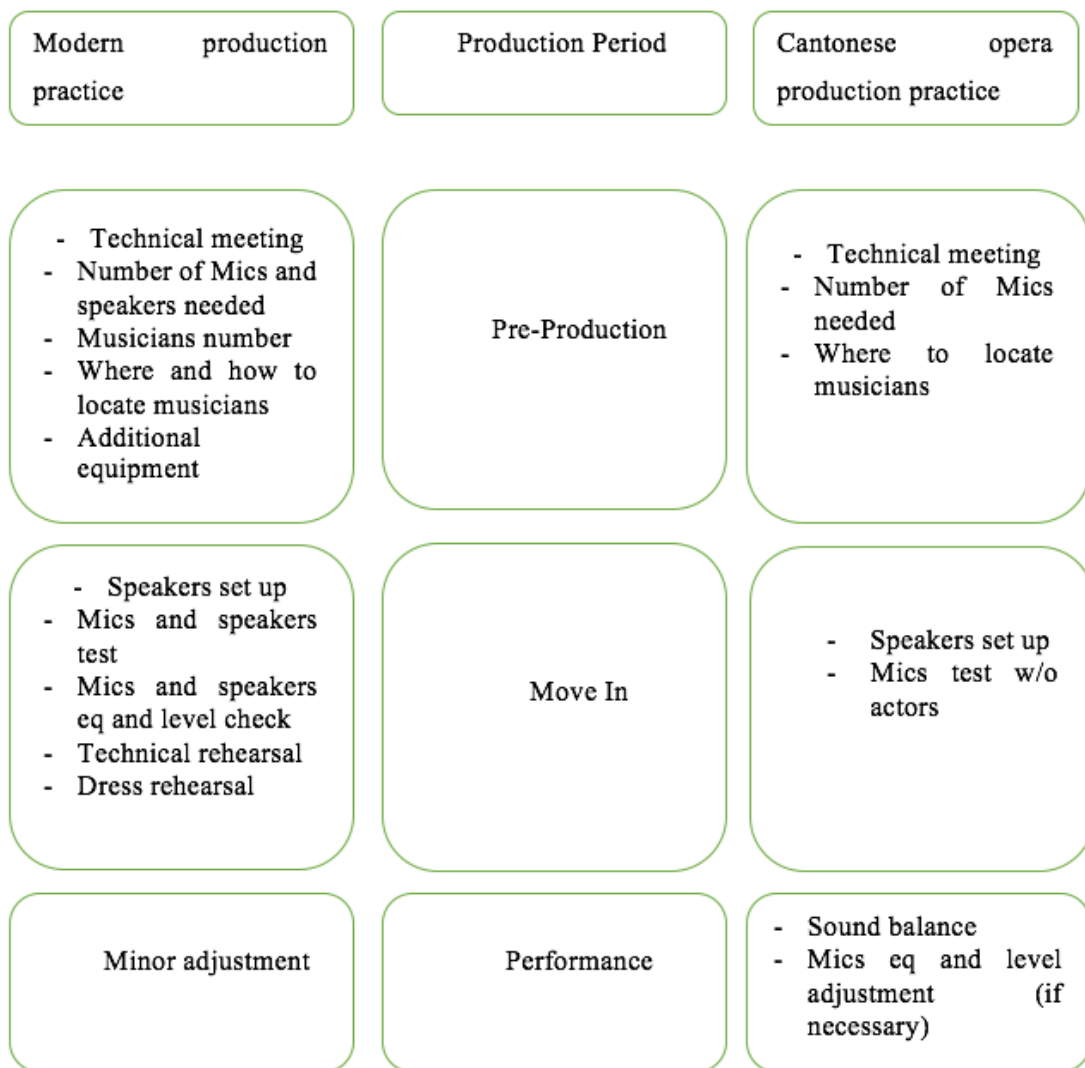


Figure 28: Sound production process

However, one has to bear in mind that venue technicians do not contribute artistic ideas. Despite their deep technological knowledge on the field, their job role does not entitle them to give artistic input. Someone has to tell them what they want and the technicians will provide the service. This leads to the second problem: there is no one who knows what the theatre group wants for sound in a production.

In actual practice (or at least in the information gathered in my study), no one is willing to take the responsibility. In most cases, the group cannot differentiate between good sound and bad sound. For the three case studies I did, no one cared what I was doing, as long as I did not get in the way of their work or mess up the performance. Even when the result of my input is proven positive, they are not bothered to continue my practice to maintain the better sound quality production. The bottom line is that someone in each production must be able to differentiate between good and bad sound quality and take the role to communicate with the venue's technicians.

Interview 2: Francis Wong

For my research so far, a lot of questions are accounting on how actors' approach technical issues. In order to have a better and honest answer, I arranged to meet a young actress, Francis Wong. With a younger mind-set and the eagerness to develop Cantonese opera, I was interested in hearing her opinion on technology from the eyes of actors.

Francis Wong began to study the evening part-time Cantonese opera certificate course and the full-time Cantonese drama diploma course at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 2001. During her time in the school, she starred in "Fengyuan Wall" and "Qin Xianglian" and was awarded the "04/05 Jackie Chan Charitable Foundation Scholarship" and the "05/06 HSBC Charitable Foundation Cantonese Opera Scholarship". In 2004, she participated in the "Yue Art Jubilee Competition" sponsored by the "Sword Heart Cantonese Opera Troupe" and won the runner-up of the "Cantonese Performing Arts Competition". The full interview with Francis Wong is documented in Appendix 13.

About why performers turn up so late for performance, Wong explained that a Cantonese opera production is not like modern drama production, which has a moving-in period. The performers do not have rehearsals prior to the performance and they will see each other only on stage, or on the day of the performance.

It is because Cantonese opera has little funding from government, so everyone needs to save money on production, therefore shortening the move-in period from five days to one day only.

In this industry, performers only get paid when they work. Unlike in drama productions, where actors may work from, say, January to June with rehearsals and meetings, and actors receive a large amount of salary for the whole period. But Cantonese opera performers only get paid on the day of performance, if the performer performs for three days, they will only be paid for those three days. Therefore, performers need to go make money elsewhere, resulting to the performance becoming a secondary priority to them. As Francis Wong explains: ‘Young actors for example, I don’t know what do they do to make money outside, the result is they turn up for performance 30 minutes before the show starts’.

Regarding the lack of technical rehearsal before the production, she explained that even if she does a lot of preparation work, she would only get paid on the performance only. It results in a mentality where everyone only cares about today’s work. No one will do preparation work for a performance that happens two months later.

Wong thinks that sound checks are a good thing for groups to carry out. The function of the sound check is to maintain that her first line to sing on stage does not go wrong. She said she experienced once that her mic was not turned on at all when she sang. According to Wong, sound is not part of the production in Cantonese opera people’s mind, or it is not within the top five priorities. The performers just expected to have sound from PA system, as long as the sound from the mic does not get interrupted during the performance, or two actors moving closer will not create sound feedback.

Wong suggested the changes of practice must be made from the venues. Since most of the groups just employ freelancers in each production. The freelancers will not be the same each time, and they will not focus on technical matters at all. She believed the groups will use the ‘new’

service if it is free of charge. The groups will use the service if it is attached to the venue, but they would not let an outsider to join the groups to provide service.

In terms of the location of the band, Wong prefers the Orchestra Pit over the traditional stage right. She believed that musicians can see actors' movement more clearly inside the Orchestra Pit. She has encountered when musicians were situated in stage right and their view was blocked by other actors, so the musicians were not able to respond to her action.

The advantage of putting the band on stage right is the musicians can answer to actors' needs. For example, she can directly talk to the musicians before she gets on stage if she needs more percussion. If the musicians are in the pit, once the music starts there is no chance to talk to the musicians at all.

Another practical reason for her preference that musicians are located inside the Orchestra Pit is: 'if you put the band in stage right, audience will try to avoid buying the seat near stage right, because it is too noisy'.

Initial learning

Francis Wong explained very clearly the reality where actors need to balance their art and their livelihood, which can lead to lack of preparation or even showing up minutes before the performance starts. This attitude can only result in the deterioration of quality, which leads to less audience members, then less income. This chain of events will only get worse if something is not done.

The move in schedule of Cantonese opera below (Figure 29) shows that even if actors and musicians arrive at 6:30PM, the venue is on dinner break and there will not be any technicians to help until 7PM—15 minutes before house open.

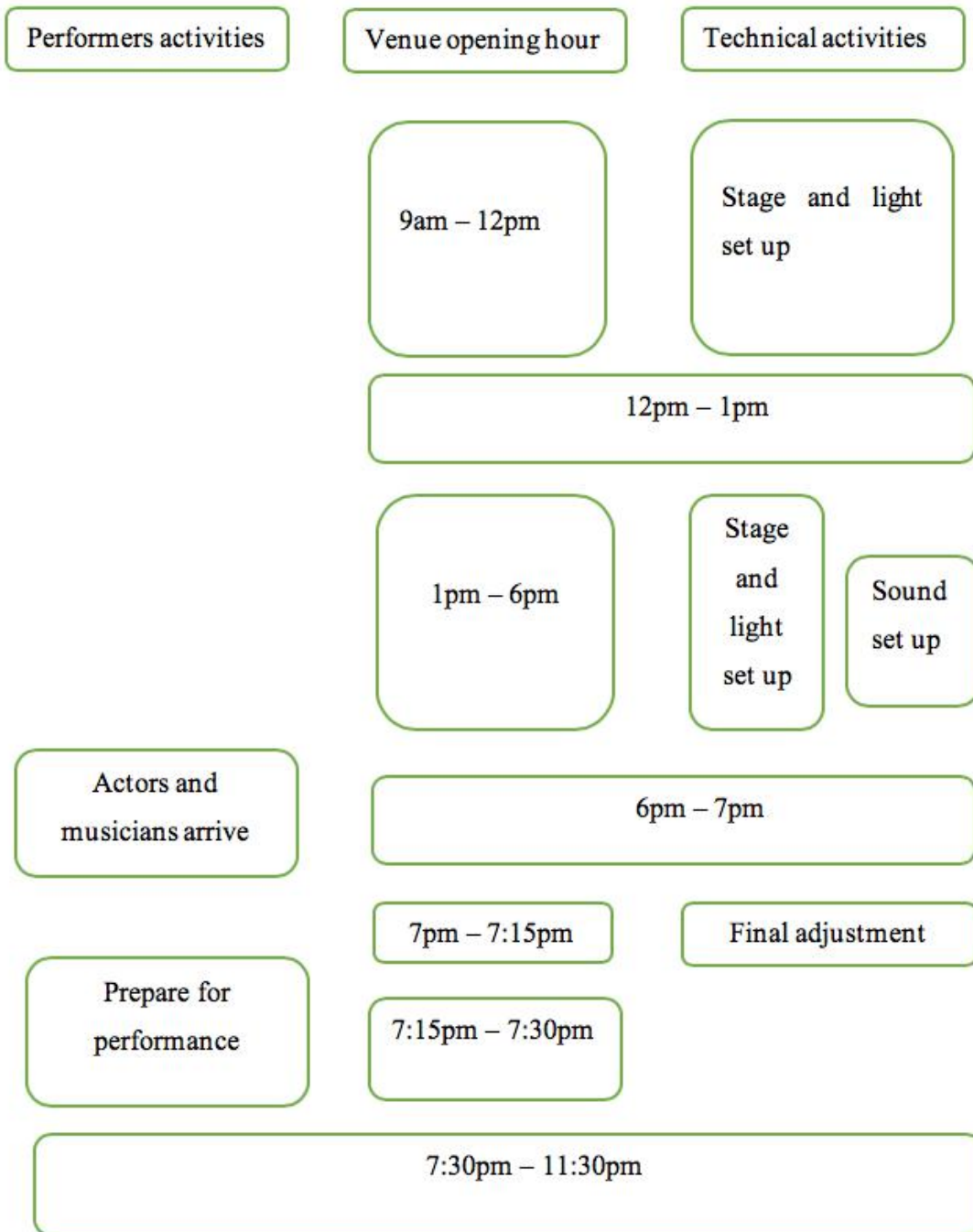


Figure 29: Typical Cantonese opera schedule

The second problem is the key members of Cantonese opera are actors only while other theatre forms have professionals from different areas. It is difficult for the industry to understand the need to modernise the art form. Although actors mastered the craft of acting and singing, they do not

possess the technological knowledge and the know-hows of theatre production. A performance in the contemporary world is no longer only limited to performances by actors.

To be able to appreciate the positive outcome of better sound production, theatre groups need to gain relevant knowledge. At the moment, theatre groups do not have enough knowledge to differentiate between good and bad sound quality. To develop their own production technologically, groups need to allow help from professionals of other fields.

To modernise, to develop or merely continue to survive as an art form or an industry, Cantonese opera groups have to understand and accept that they cannot do it alone. Help from technical professionals (sound, lighting, set, etc...) is urgently needed. Otherwise, Cantonese opera may be facing elimination through time and competition by other art forms.

Interview 3: Frank Yeung

Since the last time I talked to Frank Yeung, the Senior Manager, Technical and Productions (performing arts) of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority before I began this research almost three years ago, the *Xiqu* Centre has gone through many phases. As the *Xiqu* Centre is getting ready to open to public at the beginning of 2019, Yeung must have many new insights towards Cantonese opera productions. Additionally, after my case study and interview with different professionals, I have many questions that needed his opinion. The full interview is documented in Appendix 14.

We started talking about the Orchestra Pit dilemma. Yeung agreed the sound balancing problem of using Orchestra Pit and it will be a lot easier to control the sound if the musicians are located elsewhere. However, he stressed that contemporary theatre groups like to use the Orchestra Pit. Therefore, as a supportive venue, the *Xiqu* Centre 'will provide some solutions to deal with the unbalanced sound problem. For example, we ordered some acoustic banner to block percussion'. *Xiqu* Centre will also set up a permanent open sound booth at the back of auditorium. With a physical location, it will enhance the importance of sound function.

When collaborating with musicians, Yeung confirmed that the *Xiqu* Centre will take an aggressive and active role. They will be acting the role of production coordinator, or even as

production manager and technical director. Along with his own team to bring the theatrical function into full play, they will enhance or co-operate the production.

When it comes to the traditional practices of theatre groups, specifically not having rehearsals, the *Xiqu* Centre intends to incentivise them to practice ‘professionally’. Yeung states that, ‘we can request them to rehearse with musicians. Meaning we use money to buy their “service” throughout the production’. The *Xiqu* Centre’s proposed solutions for Cantonese opera production problem is illustrated in Table 6 below.

We then talked about the problems I encountered in my third case study, where I was not able to set up my intended design. At the end of interview, Yeung added: ‘in a sense, sound is measured on level and balance, other matters are relatively subjective. A subtle failure will not cause big change; this is the biggest problem. For the SM coordination like light or sound, people only will question if light or sound have gone missing. If it is only timing or quality problem, in fact not many people will notice.’

The problems currently faced by productions	<i>Xiqu</i> Centre’s solution
Productions do not have rehearsal	Contractually request the production to have rehearsal with full cast and all musicians
No pre-production planning	Contractually request the production to have technical meeting prior performance
No time to move in	Provide enough move-in period for each production; Contractually request the production to have technical and dress rehearsal
Not enough support for sound production	Build a state of the art theatre with great sound system; Provide good technicians and a production manager to support the production
Percussion is too loud	Install acoustic banner to block percussion; Suggest using smaller size drums

Table 6: *Xiqu* Centre’s proposed solutions

Initial learning

Clearly, Frank Yeung and West Kowloon Cultural District Authority are well aware of the lack of the technical concerns and traditional practices of the Cantonese opera industry. Coming from a technical and modern practice background, Yeung shared similar opinions with me about the need to modernise Cantonese opera as well as the technical issues of its production. It is admirable that the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority are doing everything within their power to propel the changes in the industry. It can be a very important step forward for Cantonese opera.

However, whether the outcome of this unorthodox way of ‘paying them to change’ can truly change the industry or not has yet to be seen as the *Xiqu* Centre can only produce a fraction of Cantonese opera productions in Hong Kong each year. The productions that can be presented by the *Xiqu* Centre could be for the well-established and well-funded ‘super’ theatre group, those who already have sufficient resources to evolve technically themselves (as some of them already have). The gap between the elite 1% of the high-end well-funded groups and the common groups may remain huge.

Interview 4: Connie Yiu

After I interviewed the actor and the venue manager, I have collected the opinion of the industry on a personal level. I also interviewed *Xiqu* Centre’s manager to gain a managerial opinion. Referring the response and policy from *Xiqu* Centre, I decided to interview the Chief Executive of The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. to get their opinion. The full interview is documented in Appendix 15.

For actors and musicians’ behaviour during moving in, Yiu explained that in a normal case, actors will turn up around 6PM on the day of performance, but they will not do any sound check. Unlike amateur groups that often request to carry out a sound check, professionals do not find it necessary, but the presenter can request them to do so. If West Kowloon thinks the *Xiqu* Centre needs to carry out a sound check, they can request the group to spend 15 minutes for sound check when the group hires the venue.

For Yiu, one big task for *Xiqu* Centre is getting the people to follow orders. She pointed out that the industry has no one who can control the personnel. They would not even wear the same clothing she asked them to wear in one occasion. Also, there is no one within the group who knows how to carry out the sound-check and tell the technician what they want. If the *Xiqu* Centre reminds the musicians to do sound check in the beginning, they will do it automatically once they get used to it for 15 minutes.

When I asked Yiu if the industry needs someone who has the knowledge on sound quality to handle the job, Yiu's answer is 'for so many years, there was no such a role and we can get by, therefore we do not need it now.' She suggested the venue to force the performers to do sound-check. But even if the performers are willing to do sound-check, there must be someone to listen to the sound or it will not work. Most of the musicians will turn up at 6:30PM, and it is impossible to have a sound-check for one hour. For sound-check and adjustments, Yiu confirmed that performers are only willing to give maximum 15 minutes to do it all.

Based on Yiu's observation, to today's audience, music is merely a supporting role. Their main focus is to see the stars singing. Other production elements such as acrobatics does not even concern the audience that much. Better sound quality, therefore, will not impress the audience.

At the end, Yiu summed up her opinion on the future development of Cantonese opera: 'I think Cantonese opera is going through a settling period. Some people will not innovate any further, but there are always resolute persons who want to try out technology...'

Initial learning

Connie Yiu is one of the Cantonese opera professionals who has a very open mind about technology. She has experimented with different technology herself and asked if I could help to design a sound barrier for their percussionists when they are doing promotions outside a theatre environment.

On the other hand, she has the same concept about technology as many professionals: new technology must introduce something 'new' to the production that previous productions do not have, like video projection or surround sound. They have recognised that technology advancement is often used to improve the current quality, a good sound quality production can improve and

enhance the performance of actors and musicians; technology is advancing along with the quality of performance.

Regardless of misunderstanding the major use of technology, Yiu acknowledged bad sound quality is one of the biggest factors contributing to the lack of a young audience. She also thinks that there is no one to handle sound production issue, which is needed to be taken care of. But the professionals have yet to understand that their practice of not supporting sound check and turning up late are acting as a major obstacle for designers/technicians to improve the quality of the production technically.

Yiu is interested in technology, but due to her lack of knowledge, it is difficult for her to improve the production quality alone. The resistance to change within the industry is strong and in order to carry out the changes, they have to accept the help of skilled outsiders.

Interview 5: Yuen Shi Chun

Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra website described Yuen Shi Chun as ‘a pioneer in the revival and remodelling of Chinese traditional musical instruments. He joined the newly formed Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra in 1974 and was appointed Liuqin Principal. He has performed and given talks in many parts of the world, covering Asia, Europe, America and Australia. In his spare time, Yuen has been conducting a self-financed project dedicated to the revival, design, research and making of ancient Chinese instruments. The families of *liuqin* with double resonators and *ruanxian* that he modified won the Class Two Technology Advancement Award (in 1992 and 1996) and a National Class Three Technology Advancement Award (in 1998) from the Ministry of Culture of China respectively. The two families of modified instruments are now being used by many Chinese orchestras all over the world.

Yuen was presented the Award for Arts Achievement (Music) by the HKADC in 2003, and was appointed Research and Development Officer (Musical Instrument) by the HKCO in the same year. The Eco-Huqin Series that he first developed in 2005 has since included the *gaohu*, *erhu*, *zhonghu*, *gehu* and *bass gehu*. On the recommendation of the Home Affairs Bureau of Hong Kong,

the Series won the ‘4th Ministry of Culture Innovation Award’ of the People’s Republic of China in 2012. It was followed by several other awards between 2012 and 2016.

Considered to be a greatly influential figure in the music circles of China and beyond, as well as in the academic sector, Yuen has opened up new horizons in academic research and in the performing arts with his contribution to the revival of ancient instruments and improvements on the modern versions’ (hkco.org). The full interview is documented in Appendix 16 and evidence of newly designed Chinese string instruments can be found in Appendix 17.

Yuen said that in the old days, there were no microphones or PA systems installed in the venues, that even in a large theatre, the natural sound level was large enough for audience. As a result, musicians would have to practice a strong fundamental skill, to train themselves to perform with penetration powers. He insisted that every instruments’ sound gone through microphones has already lost its original sound quality, therefore there is a lack of live ambience feeling in the performance. ‘The most beautiful sound is of course the original sound.’

In terms of venues, within Yuen’s 40 years’ experience with HKCO, he has worked inside Shatin Town Hall countless number of times. Shatin Town Hall has changed through many generation of technicians. But Yuen thinks that Shatin Town Hall only have one formula for all production, the lack of live sound ambience is something the venue does not care about.

On the other hand, Yuen considers the people of *Xiqu* Centre as outsiders. They do not understand the style of Cantonese opera. It is true that *Xiqu* Centre personnel have better technical skills, though they need to know how to arrange and have traditional guidance. Only in this case, they can exert their skills very well. Yuen strongly stressed that ‘Hong Kong government should listen to the opinion of insiders.’

Yuen pointed out the difference between newly designed instruments and old ones. First of all, due to the environmental concern, the newly designed *Gaohu* does not need pythons’ skin. Due to the redesign of the cane tube and the inside contour, the sound of new instruments is better than the traditional one. It is difficult for audience to notice the different as visually the new instruments look similar to the old ones. The new instrument is also physically much stronger than the original. The pressure and vibration of the fibre skin are more than 35 times stronger than that of the python’s skin. Currently, the reason for the loud volume is that the bearing pressure and penetration

are much stronger, so there is no need to add a microphone. But the tone is the same and the volume is louder.

Originally, large pythons' skin materials were used to make Chinese instruments, but as the Chinese government is restricting the use of python's skin for musical instruments, it will be banned completely in a few years' time. The musicians will have to switch to new instruments sooner or later. Yuen confirmed that HKCO is not trying to subvert our culture; they are trying to preserve it instead, preserving the technique and tone of Chinese music.

When discussing about putting musicians in the Orchestra Pit, Yuen confirmed that he did not use the Orchestra Pit in his time. It is because they did not have so many musicians. Also, there is a big disadvantage of using Orchestra Pit, musicians only can see the hair of actors from the pit. If musicians are on the stage, they can see everything clearly and easily to respond to actors. Yuen stressed that 'Cantonese opera music is relying on musicians' hearing, not the conductor'. Yuen suggested the group can put the lead percussionist and the lead musician on a higher ground inside the Orchestra Pit, instead of having a conductor.

At the end of interview, Yuen has pointed out Western Music has more than 400 years' worth of history, and the true Chinese folk music ensemble has only appeared since more than 60 years ago. There is still a large gap between Western Music and Chinese folk music that we need to learn from.

Initial learning

As a very experienced musician, Yuen Shi Chun gave a very different view to the mechanics behind a Cantonese opera production. At the moment, professionals preferring to use the Orchestra Pit is mainly based on the practical preference of actors.

The pros for locating music band inside the Orchestra Pit and on stage right is illustrated in Figure 30 below:

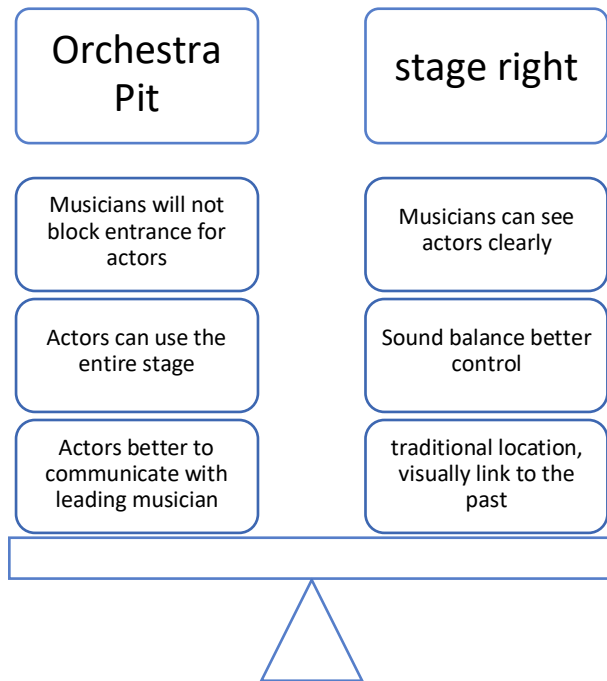


Figure 30: Advantages of the two locations for the musicians

Cantonese opera’s operating decision solely relying on the actors’ opinion has the potential to be biased and one-sided. To have a well-rounded production both artistically and technically, opinions from professionals of different areas are vital and necessary.

Yuen stated that ‘the world’s technology is improving, the culture is shrinking, but the arts is growing’. Nowadays, many people rely on using microphones to increase the volume. The technique of the new generation of young people is not as good as the older generation.

For the past decades, actors and musicians have grown to depend on the technology of sound amplification, resulting in lip-syncing and playing in a higher volume and stronger penetration as before. This is an undeniable fact that we need to face. In the old days, the bamboo canopy stage was hollow under the stage area and bars were set up to resonate the sound on stage—that was the technology of their time to enhance sound quality.

Now that we are in the twenty-first century, old technology has become obsolete as most of the performances take place inside a proper theatre environment that uses relatively new

technology. Cantonese opera needs to adopt modern technology to be able to survive, as well as to further develop the art form.

The over reliance on technology has weakened the fundamental skill of performers. Yet with the right approach, newly-designed instruments can help to improve the sound quality, and can also rely less on PA system. Technology can help to preserve the sound quality yet when used in the wrong way, it can be harmful to the art form.

Data analysis

The interviews took place between 5/2018 to 7/2018. They were conducted and recorded in Chinese, then transcribed into English for the research purpose. Detailed notes were also taken during the interview. I practiced open coding and thematic analysis when analysing the gathered data. I used different colour highlight on keywords with notes to draw out patterns and any notable reoccurring themes from each transcriptions. The coding system as follow: blue highlight represented the subjects relating to sound technology related to venue support; green highlight represented the sound technology related to music and sound quality and performance issue; yellow highlight represented the working attitude of participants; pink highlight represented the budget and funding issue; and underline represented problems outside the above categories. An example of how I coded the transcriptions is demonstrated in Appendix 18.

THEMES from STAGE 4

Throughout the interviews, there were six recurring themes:

Insiders do not see the importance of improving sound production

Insiders such as managers and performers place more importance on other areas of Cantonese opera. They do not consider sound production to be a primary concern of theirs. This was confirmed by Wong, who discussed why Cantonese opera insiders do not carry out proper technical sound checks. The overreliance on microphones and the misunderstanding of its use become apparent, along with the constantly arising issue where insiders do not know enough about sound production.

No one to take up the role of the sound designer

No insider is available to handle the job of a sound designer because insiders of the industry tend to not be equipped with the knowledge needed for the job. On top of that, technicians provided by the venue do not have the artistic knowledge and tend to just follow the orders they are given. Those orders given by insiders are not made with the technical and artistic knowledge in mind.

This is something Yeung understands and therefore, looks to develop the role of venue technicians to cover the job of sound designers. However, this is limited to the *Xiqu* Centre and has not been proven to actually work.

Outsiders determining technical and hardware support

As Tsui brought up in his interview, the venue does have high quality mics at their disposal, however the problem arises when theatre groups do not know how to use them. Wong has also mentioned that utilising outsider support, especially from people who are not affiliated with the venue, is something hard for most theatre groups to accept.

Yuen, an insider, is sceptical of the judgements made by the *Xiqu* Centre and LCSD venues as he considers them as outsiders. However, there is a lack of insiders who possess the knowledge to contribute to technological and hardware support.

Outsiders, such as myself, have realised the problem of the production quality. They are equipped with the technical knowledge and skills to assist this problem. Yet due to the lack of

communication and understanding between insiders and outsiders, outsiders are only able to carry out their jobs by providing instruments and setting up hardware based on their own judgement that may conflict with the judgement of the insiders.

Limits of currently available technology

Technically, it is difficult to balance the sound when using Orchestra Pit, which is preferred by actors. From a managerial point of view, the percussion's loud noise deters potential young audience members and has a negative effect during promoting Cantonese opera in public. Countermeasures for this are available in the form of acoustic banners, but that is not enough. However, technology for this can only be developed if there is a demand for it.

Additionally, Yuen, who is renowned in the industry for modifying traditional Chinese instruments, has said he has plans to develop the percussion instruments which could solve the issue of the percussion instruments overpowering the other instruments, yet has not been able to do anything so far as he is occupied with other instruments such as string and wind.

The gap between technical and practical preferences: The Orchestra Pit

Wong, a Cantonese opera actress, has practical reasons for utilising the Orchestra Pit. She made interesting points where if the musicians were located on-stage, the seats near stage-right would not sell as many tickets due to how loud it gets. There is also the view of the musicians to consider. Wong explained that in the Orchestra Pit, musicians can see the actors more clearly and thereby, comprehend more cues and body language signals.

On the other hand, Yuen, who is a musician, states that working in the Orchestra Pit is hard for musicians as they are only able to see the top of the actor's head. According to him, if musicians are on stage, they would have a clearer view of the actors and can easily respond to them.

From a managerial point of view, Yeung points out a technical limitation set by the Orchestra Pit in which a sound balance problem arises. He goes on to say that it would be easier to maintain an adequate sound balance if the musicians are located elsewhere. However, it is acknowledged by the *Xiqu* Centre that they would respect the theatre group's preferences should they choose to use the Orchestra Pit and they have measures set up to tackle the sound balance problem, such as acoustic banners.

High Quantity-Low Quality Funding Policy

In 07/08 and 08/09, the annual Hong Kong government's Policy Address stressed that the government will be 'dedicated to the preservation and development of the local traditional art of Cantonese opera'.

My research indicated that HKADC and CODF mainly granted funding on performances and promotion activities. However, the budget for performances are very low (especially CODF) that theatre groups can only maintain a basic production quality. The funding may just be enough to keep the industry afloat, which is doing the job of preserving the art form, but certainly not enough for it to develop.

This lack of research ultimately prevents any focused investigation and awareness to modernise the art form, hindering its interaction with a younger, international audience.

The amount of funding HKADC and CODF granted for the past years have been minimal on researches and studies. A majority of academic studies on Cantonese opera I encountered in my research are about its history. While the past is extremely important to how our culture has been shaped, the future cannot be ignored in order to move forward.

The funding bodies must acknowledge the importance of research and studies concerning the future of Cantonese opera. For Cantonese opera to have a bright future and develop, more studies on all aspects of Cantonese opera is urgently needed for the industry.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Based on the findings learnt in project activities, I will summarise the key points discussed in the chapter.

- Industry lacks consensus of modernisation:

Industry acceptance remains an obstacle for the development of Cantonese opera. Every stakeholder has different definitions of modernisation and this uncertainty instils fear in the industry when they consider changing. The industry must also realise the need for modernisation regardless of what they prefer. The fact still remains that performance venues are changing and so is technology. It is essential for them to catch up to these developments before they fall too far behind. The uncertainty paired with the fear of losing their jobs is a factor behind their reluctance to change.

- Traditional practice cannot catch up with the contemporary environment:

Current practices in Cantonese opera pose many limitations. Currently, the industry is using the prompter system that is some-hundred years old, therefore it cannot adapt to the contemporary environment properly. For example, in sound production, no one knows exactly what to do nor do they know what they should be aiming for.

- Different concern between insiders and outsiders:

The industry is built by the work of insiders and outsiders. Without one, it cannot progress. However, they both possess very different sets of knowledge and do not interact with each other's fields. They have their own interests and more importantly, the communication between the two is lacking. The research indicates the outsiders established the hardware of the industry and the insiders are the users of said hardware. If the communication continues to remain quiet, Cantonese opera cannot modernise.

- Insider lacks commitment for modernisation:

For insiders, they believe modernisation is important to ensure the survival of Cantonese opera, yet they are not willing to invest either time or money (or both) into the improvement of the sector. To catch up with contemporary theatre and the contemporary world, they must accept that

they have to possess a certain degree of understanding and knowledge behind the technology so they can communicate with the technicians.

- Funding policy affects the development of Cantonese opera:

My research shows that funding policies have changed the nature of Cantonese opera from something that can go commercial to something that relies on funding. Funding bodies are only focused on quantity over quality, performance over research. This creates a strong limitation to the development of Cantonese opera. Additionally, the current funding policies encourage Cantonese opera groups to give away tickets for free. The current audience quality reflects this. In order to truly develop Cantonese opera, developing the audience is essential as the audience is part of the core of the art. Therefore, funding policies should be considering this.

CHAPTER 5. KEY FINDINGS

In this key findings chapter, I will go into a deeper discussion on the three strongest themes that emerged from the data collection process. These themes are devised from my perspective, which is that of a professional insider in the theatre industry.

MAIN THEMES from the overall findings of the project

The previous chapter discussed the findings drawn from the project activities. Now divided into three main themes, this chapter will look into:

- The disjointed perception of modernization.
- Traditional practices in a contemporary environment.
- The future of the industry in the hands of funding policies.

THE DISJOINTED PERCEPTION OF MODERNISATION

In this research, a common theme that came to light is the disjointed perception of modernisation and how it could be achieved from different stakeholders. As different stakeholders have their own different perceptions of modernisation: some are willing to change, some want to remain traditional, some want to revive the old style. The concept of modernisation among them became disordered with no single definition. When talking about modernisation, the industry insiders often wonder about what new ideas will be introduced to the already confusing subject. It is the unknown that strikes fear into some professionals' hearts and leads to reluctance towards changes. For the industry to embrace the concept of modernisation and move forward, the industry has to set a general consensus on it.

Different stakeholder's interpretation towards Modernisation

All stakeholders in my research have developed their own idea about the modernisation of Cantonese opera. Venue professional, Andy Tsui, wanted to foster better communication among

groups—the groups should be able to explain to the venue what they want to achieve in terms of sound production. So that the venue can extend help to the production the best they can.

Frank Yeung of *Xiqu* Centre is interested in enhancing the production quality of Cantonese opera, so it will become a brand that represents one of the most important aspects of Hong Kong's culture. They have invited international designers and engineers to construct the best theatre for *Xiqu*, and are keen on paying generous funding to encourage the groups to follow their practice to create a professional performance. Yeung believes modernisation can be achieved by injecting capital to a minority of productions (the productions presented by the *Xiqu* Centre) in Hong Kong.

Yuen Shi Chun on the other hand, aims to develop Chinese music in terms of redesigning musical instruments and reconstruct the music by adding the missing tonal range to the Chinese orchestra.

Actors have used their own methods to modernise their performance. Artistically, Actor B has tried to imitate Western musicals, whereas Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. introduces 'modern' theatre treatment such as video projection into their performances.

Managers like Connie Yiu believe that producing more contemporary performances is the only way to increase audience. Technical problems like sound are something they need to face sooner or later. Yet, they consider that modernisation needs to be done by venues or funding bodies.

As the industry has so many different opinions and concerns, who should the industry follow in terms of modernisation? Or whose idea of modernisation should Cantonese opera adopt? Currently, everyone follows their own ideas and seems to neglect other stakeholders' opinions.

Two different approaches for Modernisation

My research indicated that since the 1920s, professionals have attempted to modernise Cantonese opera in various ways. After analysing the data, I found that there are two main approaches used for modernisation: imitating Western productions and introducing new technology.

Imitating Western productions

As the Knowledge Landscape chapter explained, during the Golden Age of Cantonese opera (1920s to 1940s), a lot of changes were introduced to Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. Western theatre productions liked extravagant settings and costumes, film-style makeup, modern theatrical lighting. They were also adding Western musical instruments to music productions like the violin, the saxophone, and the double bass. It was the industry's attempt to modernise and commercialise Cantonese opera. Cantonese opera music at that time had a very limited tonal range; introducing Western instruments allowed Cantonese opera music to have a much wider range. This brought their production closer to the Western entertainment we receive in Hong Kong like films and pop music.

The early changes in music brought new elements into improving Cantonese opera. As traditional Cantonese opera music often focuses on mid-high range musical instruments such as the *Zhongwu*, the *Yangqin*, and the flute, introducing Western musical instruments like the double bass in 1920s can improve the once restricted tonal range of Cantonese opera music to a much wider range. As Yuen Shi Chun pointed out in his interview, his mission in developing new Chinese instruments is 'to cover the music tonal range that was never there'. This development allowed Cantonese opera music to be more versatile and able to perform a wider variety of musical styles. As a result, the changes inspired composers to write more popular song styles (notably *Fragrant Sacrifice* from the opera *Di Nü Hua*), which were largely successful and therefore further enhanced the popularity of Cantonese opera at the time.

The modernisation of Cantonese opera music at that time had successfully combined Eastern traditions and Western hardware. They were merged together and developed into a unique modern Cantonese opera music style that kept the traditional aesthetic yet expanded its musical tonal range to become suitable for its contemporary style.

My research also suggested that, currently, many professionals prefer using the Orchestra Pit over the traditional stage right position to locate musicians. Using the Orchestra Pit is a common practice for Western opera. The Orchestra Pit became popular in Cantonese opera productions for the past decades due to most of the modern indoor theatres being already equipped with this designated area. Frank Yeung even suggested introducing music conductors into productions.

These approaches are the adaptation of the Western opera style that brought Cantonese opera further towards Westernisation.

On the other hand, some professionals are trying to modernise Cantonese opera by changing their performance style. For example, Actor B in my research has abandoned the traditional Cantonese opera aesthetic when adapting Western musical styles in his performance. Actor C is interested to develop a new style of ‘*Xiqu* musical’, which is a combination of Cantonese opera and Western musical.

Introducing new technology

It is a common perception that modern technology helps the production and improves its quality. Since 1920s, Cantonese opera has introduced many different up-to-date technologies to productions to create special stage effects in order to attract audiences: special lighting effects, water fountains, and even actors ‘flying’ are not uncommon on stage during the Golden Age period.

Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. in my first theatre case tried to embrace technology by using video projection and sound effects in their performance. Connie Yiu also mentioned to me that if I can provide ‘surround sound’, she will be very interested, as it can be a selling point of the performance. This reflects the professional’s tendency to bring in new technology for modernising Cantonese opera for commercial purposes. But this approach often fails to attract audiences as the new technology is often poorly executed due to the lack of time, knowledge and resources.

Surely when the technology is properly utilised, it is capable of hugely contributing to improving the production and inviting the audience for a superior experience. However, if it is not used well, technology comes with limitation and constrains, so it can create an unexpected negative impact.

Different communities within the industry

The Cantonese Opera industry is unique in that it needs the collaboration between both insiders and outsiders when creating a production. According to my research data, insiders are divided into three main communities: traditionally-trained professionals, academy-trained professional performers, and technical professionals. Outsiders are composed of the other stakeholders such as art management, funding bodies, art policy makers, and art experts.

Traditionally-trained professional

According to Ting Yu, due to the historical reason, this community dominates the industry. They are mostly trained by The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (or causes that are organised by this community) or following a traditional master-and-apprentice system.

The traditionally-trained community has its own hierarchy system and regulations that were developed throughout its history. They form a union-like bond that protects the interests of the community. For example, to illustrate the relatively unbiased nature of the community, the opera master is not likely to train his/her own child themselves. Instead, he/she would send his/her child to train under another master.

This community consists of actors, musicians and prompters. In my research, Prompter A, Actor C, Xinyi Cantonese Opera Art Promotion Agency, and Linglong Cantonese Opera Troupe belong to this community.

Academy-trained professional performers

The establishment of HKAPA (Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts) in 1984 offers an alternative option to train Cantonese opera professionals academically. In terms of musicians, there are also other Universities providing courses that train musicians for Chinese music. However, HKAPA was initially not well-received by the traditionally-trained community as it may sabotage the hierarchy system that has been strongly established and operated with for hundreds of years.

The academy-trained community are trained with modern thinking, so a lot of them can see the importance for Cantonese opera to move forward. In fact, all members of the academy-trained community in my research have put efforts into moving Cantonese opera forward. For example:

Actor A has produced a Cantonese opera performance collaborated with a *Kunqu* director. Actor B's group constantly tries to 'modernise' Cantonese opera.

According to Ting Yu, the academy-trained community currently does not have the same opportunity to work as traditionally-trained community. They need to establish their connection and network with the traditionally-trained community in order to be recognised, which may take decades to achieve.

The academy-trained professional performers have been training under a modern production system. They are used to working with stage managers, designers, and a technical set-up team. But they need to adapt to the traditional prompter-and-production system in order to work with the mainstream traditionally-trained community.

This community consists of actors and musicians. In my research, Actor A, Actor B, Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd, and Francis Wong belong to this community.

Technical professionals

HKAPA trains a lot of theatre technical professionals every year. In the Hong Kong performance arts industry, a majority of the technical professionals graduated from HKAPA.

It is fair to say that the venues' technical personnel do not have a high interest in having a career in the traditionally-trained professional community, as Cantonese opera is not the only genre of performing arts that they work with. In the case of freelance technical personnel, Cantonese opera productions generally pay much lower than other performance arts productions due to their low production budget to begin with. There are other genres like drama, music, and dance that are performed in their venue. Their goal is to produce a good production regardless of what performance type comes to their venue or request their service.

This community consists of stage managers, designers, venue technicians, and venue/organisation management. In my research, Andy Tsui and Frank Yeung belong to this community.

Different solutions, different agendas, and their potential problems

The issue of modernisation for Cantonese opera has been raised on countless occasions in the past. Every stakeholder's proposed solution has its own strengths and weaknesses, along with its own agenda:

Traditionally-trained community

Performers are trained and have lived inside Cantonese opera environment, managers also handle the industry's issues day-in, day-out. They are surely the insiders of the industry, but they lack an objective view and technical knowledge to come up with a solution to modernise Cantonese opera. The current system works well for the traditionally-trained community like established senior actors and groups (such as Actor C), and they do not need to make efforts to adopt the changes.

Prompters are clearly unable to cover the job of every technical personnel because their knowledge is not sufficient enough to properly execute everything. Their knowledge is often based on trial and error within the theatre, so getting to the bottom of what goes wrong is difficult—let alone to possess an artistic vision of developing the art form.

Academy-trained community

Young actors and groups from academy-trained community understand the need to change. Actor B is making drastic moves to change, Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd is trying to incorporate new technology with a longer move-in period to improve production quality. However, their action is not encouraged by the traditional community. Francis Wong confirmed: 'No one dares to move, no one dares to change. Sometimes you have this invisible pressure, others don't do it but you do it... Essentially, we often have disagreements with the older actors because of the hierarchy system.'

Technical professional community and outsiders

Venue professionals, art organisations (like the *Xiqu* Centre) and experts (like Yuen Shi Chun) possess a lot of knowledge, but lack the insiders' traditions, network, and they do not belong to the hierarchy system that would allow them to truly convince the industry to follow their ideas.

The survey outcome indicated that generally, those involved in the industry are willing to make an effort to improve the sound quality of Cantonese opera. But during my case studies, I encountered otherwise where actors and musicians are reluctant to put in more effort to arrive earlier to carry out technical work. But when I look at the figures in detail, the reality is actually reflected in the survey:

The management

The majority of them think sound is important and they are generally fine with directing more resources to sound production. The interview with Connie Yiu confirmed that the group managers' major concern is to have more audiences. If spending more resources can generate more marketing value (e.g. surround sound), they will have no problem with doing it. For example, in my first case study, Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. invested in video projection and sound effects to add to the performance. Managers are looking to increase the production's value so that they can promote the production more efficiently, as well as make their production stand out among other productions.

However, managers also prefer to follow the traditional prompter practice over modern SM system. Introducing new concepts or changes may lead to disapproval from the industry.

Technical personnel

The figures are rather surprising. All of the technical personnel who answered the survey agreed they should spend more time to improve the production sound quality and they do not mind to work more, which indicates that they consider the sound quality of Cantonese opera has room for improvement. Andy Tsui suggested that they know how and what to do to improve the current sound quality, but they are restricted by the limitation posed by groups that do not communicate with them and let them do their job.

Performers

Majority of them think that good sound quality is important and they consider good sound quality can help their performance. However, when I asked how long they are willing to spend on sound test and balance, 75% of them were willing to spend just 15 minutes or less, and none of them were willing to spend more than 30 minutes. This suggests that performers either are not concerned about how the audience receives their performance or they do not understand the important role that technology plays in order for the audience to appreciate their performance in a contemporary environment. Essentially, they either do not care or they do not know. In Francis Wong's opinion, it is a bit of both. According to Wong, the industry's expectation of sound is: 'they (the industry) just expected to have sound from PA system, as long as the sound from the mic do not get interrupted during the performance, or two actors moving closer will not create sound feedback, then it is okay for them'.

Because of all conflicting priorities and agenda of different stakeholders, the production itself is very fragile. Unsolved problems will hopefully be dealt with next time, that is the reason as Yeung pointed out the industry has not yet 'processed' the problems faced by Cantonese opera.

Industry's lack of technical knowledge

My research indicated that both traditionally-trained and academy-trained communities have misunderstood the production process. Some of them have no knowledge about theatre technology whatsoever and some do not know that they are entitled to ask for more technical support from the venue.

After working with Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd., I noticed that everyone in the group (including the music composer) does not view the sound element as an important issue. Their only requirement is that the audience can hear the singers and the percussion.

It is because they do not understand what they can do and what a good sound system can do to enhance the audience's experience. On the other hand, everyone in the group was very pleased about the outcome of my input. The Artistic Director asked if she could hire me to work with them every time. It proved that the group wanted to perform in a better sound environment.

The survey feedback from the group is similar to the survey I attained before: everyone was pleased with the outcome, everyone acknowledged the sound problem in productions but all of them are not willing to do more to improve.

Although the Artistic Director and Music Director were happy about the outcome of my input, I received a very cold response from the rest of the group. After all, a theatre production operation depends strongly on group collaboration. If the rest of the group does not recognise the importance of sound issues and is not willing to collaborate, the sound production issue will be very difficult to resolve.

Francis Wong confirmed even for younger generation of actors' perception: 'sound is not part of the production'. The professionals believe the venue will automatically set up everything and it will all be ready for them when they arrive. Connie Yiu expressed disappointment when she realised even in the state-of-the-art *Xiqu* Centre, everything is not 'ready to go' by the time the musicians walk in to the venue.

Yiu also pointed out the more the actor is 'professional' (famous), the more reluctant they are to carry out sound check. It is because they believe they are 'professionals' and 'good enough' to perform, therefore sound checks are obsolete. But in the case of amateur groups, Yiu confirmed they are willing to spend time on technical issues such as sound checks.

On the other hand, the venues have been doing a lot for the groups. As I experienced interacting with the venues' technicians during my three theatre cases, the technicians would observe the production, and decide what to set up based on their own experience. As the groups do not tell them what and how they want, technicians are left to make their own technical and artistic judgement.

However, due to the lack of set-up and preparation sessions, venue technicians can only fix the sound quality during the performance. That is what Francis Wong always experiences: 'the mic sticks on the clothes and disrupts the sound. The first few lines (I sang) may be quiet or do not have any sound at all so I have to speak a few more lines to adjust it.' It is the result of not having sound check and technical rehearsal, not bad luck.

What emerges from these experiences is the fact that the industry's lack of understanding about the need to properly cooperate with technical personnel is due to them (the industry)

believing it would render their image to be seen as unprofessional. This attitude is further emphasised by the lack of basic knowledge regarding theatre technology and the industry itself that performs in the theatre day in and day out.

For Cantonese opera to move forward and provide a more stable and higher quality of performances, having basic knowledge in production technology is essential for the professionals.

Resistance to change

My research indicated that Cantonese opera theatre groups maintain most of the traditional job positions of the industry and resist the introduction of new job positions into the industry, namely those that can be found in modern theatre productions such as stage managers, designers, and technicians.

Their hesitance to adopt these new positions can be pinned on the fear that those with the replaceable jobs may lose their jobs or lose their influence in the industry. For example, if we introduce the role of a conductor to Cantonese opera productions, how about the role of the Lead Percussionist and Lead Musician? Would they become normal musicians? Who will be in charge of music? Where does the extra budget for the conductor come from?

At the moment, the leading musician recruits his own melodic musicians and the leading percussionist recruits percussionists. It is as if the leading musician and the leading percussionist have their own bands, they will bring their bands to the performance and sort out the melodic and percussion part of music respectively before working together. The introduction of the conductor to the system means they need to change the industry practice that is over a hundred years old.

Another example is the Prompter. As explained in the Knowledge Landscape chapter, the Prompter's role involves management as well as technical duties. The managerial role includes employing side cast actors, overseeing the acrobatics, script distribution, contacting companies for the set and props, and preparing outline of the script. The technical role includes lighting design, handling the props transportation, overseeing the set building, and reminding performers to put on their costumes and cue them to go on stage. As Cantonese opera normally does not have a director, a stage manager or a production manager, the Prompter handles many important issue of a production. This means the Prompter's role is very influential. But once some job positions are

introduced to the production, say lighting designer, sound designer or stage manager, the role for the Prompter inevitably reduces, and so will the importance and influence of the Prompter for the production.

By looking at the provided examples, it is understandable that some professionals do not want change and are afraid of modernisation. Modernisation is not only an issue of updating the technical aspect of the industry, but it may threaten the entire system of the industry.

Bringing changes to the industry undoubtedly introduces uncertainty and disturbs the traditional hierarchy of the industry. Uncertainty also changes the current status quo. That may be the reason behind some insiders' unwillingness to change.

Coming up with innovative ideas, especially on how to run a production, attracts a lot of criticism, which is difficult for young actors to overcome.

Cooperation between different communities

My research data indicated one of the themes behind the industry's inability to modernise and produce good quality performances consistently is the lack of communication between the insider groups and the outsider groups involved.

All communities wanted the production to be good without a doubt, but their approaches go in opposite directions. Performers are focused on preparation: their own training and make sure they remember all the music and lines when they are on stage performing. Hundreds of years' worth of industry practice has developed a tacit understanding within the traditional community that they can confidently perform on stage without any rehearsal. However, they have not adopted or processed the introduction of technical professional community and outsider involvement in the production.

Outsiders such as a modern theatre professionals focus on how to present the performance well to the audience. Therefore, sound-checks and technical rehearsals are important to them so that everyone is on the same page as they clarify everyone's role while performing. But since the traditional community has already developed a practice, to open up and discuss their practice to an outsider every time is tiresome and does not necessarily guarantee that the outsider can empathise with them.

For the third theatre case, I was surprised by the lack of communication among musicians, SM team and the technicians. The musicians or SM team/backstage crews did not inform the technician that an instrument has been changed and the technician did not find out himself either. This ‘mind my own business’ mind-set causes the quality of production to suffer. Unless all parties in the production realise the importance of other people’s work, it will take a huge effort for anyone to raise the production quality of Cantonese opera.

At the end, no matter the differences between insider groups and outsider groups’ beliefs and practices, a successful performance must require the collaboration between the two groups. The insiders must open up and communicate with the outsiders, and ask for help if they encounter problems. The outsiders should also more actively express their concern about the production. Currently, the industry is lacking this communication and collaboration, which make the modernisation of Cantonese opera much more difficult to achieve.

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES IN A CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENT

In the Knowledge Landscape chapter, I explained the details about the traditional roles in Cantonese opera production, and I also explained how the modern theatre production structure functions in a different way. My findings made it very clear that there is a gap between the current Cantonese opera practice and the expectation from contemporary theatre production.

When I was carrying out the survey stage of my research, I went to Kwai Tsing theatre on one occasion. While my assistants were gathering data from the performers, I got to talk to the RSM³² and technicians of the venue. The RSM is also a long-time friend. She pointed out the difference between groups from mainland China and Hong Kong, since all group members from China are state employed full-time actors and musicians. The musicians will stay inside the theatre for the entire afternoon to rehearse, and in this case the venue can then adjust the sound level and all technical matters accordingly. But Hong Kong groups employ mainly freelance actors and musicians; they need to work in the afternoon elsewhere so they can only arrive after 6:00PM on the day of performance.

Moving-in schedule

The largest theme of my research data in terms of production is the lack of time for Cantonese opera groups to move-in. Where a typical modern theatre move-in period is four to five days, Cantonese opera has less than one day. The group would move-in at 9:00AM to begin setting up and the performance would be at 7:30PM that night. During the 8-hour-15-minutes' period (there are two hours for venue lunch and dinner break, the house opens 15 minutes prior to show starts), the group has to set up all the lighting and stage, practice all the scene changes, and handle other matters that need to be sorted out.

The order of setting up the production is to first set up lighting: hanging and rigging lights, light focus and plotting. The reason of setting lights first is because the stage needs to provide an empty space in order to lower the light bars or adjust the lights with mobile elevator. After the lights are set, the crews will start installing the stage, different scenes need to be set up and it has

³² Resident Stage Manager

to be made sure that the scene changes are possible. Once the main stage is set up and the location of musicians is confirmed (if located on-stage), the sound technician is then able to set up the sound system. The reason for setting up sound after the stage is that sound equipment can only confirm their location (fold-back speakers, wiring) after all the set location are confirmed.

In my case studies, the stage was not ready for sound technicians to start setting up mics and wires until 4:30PM. It will take the technician at least one hour to set up the basic sound system and by then, it is already 5:30PM. The technician only has 30 minutes before dinner break and 15 minutes after to carry out all of the sound check and get the sound balance correct.

With such a tight schedule, even if the performers arrive early, there is simply not enough time to carry out a proper sound set-up and check.

Due to the lack of time to prepare the sound system, although the technician mentioned adding sound barriers for percussion during setting up in my first and second cases, there was never enough time to do it properly. The flawed sound quality outcome of the first performance is to be expected. However, other problems surfaced. As the lead percussionist and the lead musician will also play during the performance themselves, there is no one to monitor the music playing and adjust accordingly. In Western music, this is the job of conductor, but a typical Cantonese opera production does not have extra budget to employ a conductor and it is also not in their tradition to have a conductor in their production. The problem of monitoring the music and sound outcome remains unsolved.

It is very clear that the current move-in schedule cannot allow sound production to do their job properly. The result is the technician has to use the actual performance as technical rehearsal, and to adjust the sound while the performance is on.

Operations management

From my observation of the three theatre cases, there is no one in the production to inform the venue technicians when and how to install the sound equipment. As the technicians know when the performers will arrive (they could ask the prompter or SM, or they would have assumed the performers will arrive after 6PM), they would wait until the stage is clear to set up the sound equipment.

However, if the Prompter or stage manager can communicate with the technician, technicians can start to install sound equipment earlier. Also, if there is communication between both parties about the style of music in the performance, the technician can adjust the sound equipment accordingly.

For example, in the second theatre case, the performance has more actions; therefore, there would be much stronger percussion music. If the technician and myself have been informed about this, we would have installed more sound barriers or acoustic panels around the percussionists. In our case during the performance, the audience complained the percussion sound was too loud and there was nothing we can do to improve the sound quality. The technician suggested to add sound barriers before the next performance. But since it would create more problem as percussionists will not participate in sound checks before the second performance, the result could be catastrophic. Therefore, I expressed my concerns about the technician's suggestion. And as it turned out, the percussionists were less energized on the second and third performance, therefore the sound problem was solved.

This example confirmed how important communication between the insiders and the outsiders is. As Andy Tsui pointed out, during the technical meeting prior to the performance, groups often just tell the venue how many wireless mics they need. In order to utilise the venue's facilities and support, the group must first present their problem. Otherwise, it is difficult for the venue to help last minute.

Technical obstacles

Cantonese opera music style strongly contributes to the uniqueness of its production today. However, the music style has also created challenges towards modern production:

- A large amount of Cantonese opera music is using pre-existing music, the playwright changes the lyrics, 'mixes and matches' different aria type, fixes tune, narrative music and percussion music to form a new show. In many cases, there is no new music composed for the entire show. Since all of the main Cantonese opera actors are trained to know all pre-existing music by heart, unless it is a relatively big budget production, main actors will practice their part privately in their own time. Rehearsals are mainly for the side cast to practice their dance, movement and scene changes.

- As all the music is familiar to them, the musicians normally will study the music themselves and turn up to theatre around one hour before performance. Leading musician, Toujia, and leading percussionist, Zhangban, will then explain the last minute changes to the musicians for adjustment. A full band normally will not be assembled until 15 minutes before the house opens.
- In Cantonese opera music, percussion music plays a very important role. The percussion is often played loudly to add energy to the performance. This results in the soft melodic instruments being muffled by the louder percussion instruments. Sound balance is one of the biggest challenges in the sound production of Cantonese opera.

Table 7 below highlights the production challenges that Cantonese opera music’s practices create:

Cantonese opera music’s practices	Production challenges
Lack of Full Rehearsal	Production team/Sound Designer cannot foresee the 'real' performance environment and plan technical requirement accordingly.
Musicians turn up late	No proper sound balance/plot before performance
	No Technical/Dress Rehearsal
	No time for sound technician to adjust changes
Loud Percussion	Difficult to balance with sound balance and overpowers the soft melodic instruments.

Table 7: Production challenges

The current problem concerning sound production

As for sound production for Cantonese opera, there are some issues that are causing problems of the production quality. Most noticeable issues are who will be the sound designer, how to incorporate sound designer into the current production system, where to locate musicians, and how to sustain performance quality:

- Who will be the sound designer?

My findings suggest that there is a greater need for dedicated sound production personnel to participate in the performances on a permanent or regular basis. But who will take this role? Yiu agreed that it is a very good idea to establish a kind of sound designer in the production, but she has her doubt about the current available candidates.

There must be someone knows how (and what) to listen (for), otherwise it's useless... this industry has no one who can control the (sound) panel... I don't know if (venues') sound engineers are good enough, but I think stage managers aren't competent enough either.

Some amateur groups' leading musician will ask someone to play the instrument on his behalf, he then goes to listen for the sound. But this is pointless because he will be the one who plays the music at the end, the sound-check needs to be him playing the instrument.

- How to incorporate sound designer into the current production system?

Currently, the traditional community does not welcome 'outsiders' like sound designer in the production. They might consider it will cost them more in production cost as well as they need to work more to deal with the sound production related issue. Prompters do not also welcome sound designers, although in my theatre cases, Prompters were not involved in sound production. However, my interview has shown that Prompter A does not want someone else to get involved in the production system.

- Where to locate musicians?

My research suggests that there is a big divided opinion about where to locate musicians between the groups and technical professional community. Groups often prefer to use the

Orchestra Pit when possible, but the Orchestra Pit was not designed for Cantonese opera music and it would easily result unbalance sound quality.

- How to sustain performance quality?

One common theme in my research is the groups' inability to ensure the sustainability of performance quality. Francis Wong went as far as to consider no sound from the mic when performing as unlucky. It reflects the lack of control toward the quality of the production from the group. The clash between communities made the collaboration much more challenging.

THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY IN THE HANDS OF FUNDING POLICIES

One of the main finding as the result of analysing all of my collected data is related to funding strategy and how it promotes the quantity over quality attitude toward developing Cantonese opera. It is no doubt that like many art forms in Hong Kong, Cantonese opera industry relies on funding to survive. The funding policy has changed the entire industry's behaviour, for average of 2.5 performances per day, producing high quality productions does not amount to the industry's top priorities. This attitude reflects in the fact that the industry does not look at modernisation as an urgent matter despite the fact that it is already 30 years behind the hardware development. To change this attitude of reluctant of change, funding policy has to change in order for the industry to adjust.

The implications behind the funding strategy

As the Knowledge Landscape chapter explained, there is one aspect of Cantonese opera that has changed dramatically: the income source. Cantonese opera are heavily reliant on commercial income like box office and supporters' patronage, but since the establishment of HKADC in 1995 and CODF in 2004, Cantonese opera has gradually adapted to an operation strategy that meets the government funding policy. Currently, only Sunbeam Theatre provides commercial Cantonese opera performances, which accounts for 6% of the venue market share in Hong Kong. To explain the difference between commercially-based and funding-based production strategy, we can look at the three theatre cases.

For the first case, Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. is a young up-and-coming group. They do not receive constant funding from government. In order to generate income, they apply funding from different areas such as performance, education and community projects. As they are not well established, the funding they get from funding bodies would be very low, which means the funding they get is not enough to cover their production cost. Box office income is crucial for their survival.

Yet, in order to produce better quality performances, they hire the venue for one extra day for technical rehearsal and technical adjustment. Through good quality performance, they want to generate a word-of-mouth marketing and therefore increase their audience base.

For the second and third cases, as the Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. is Shatin Town Hall's resident partner for many years, they are much well-funded than Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. invites their member groups to perform in Shatin Town Hall every month. Their member groups normally have at least one star performing and they also have budget for the performances.

Since the performances features star actors, it is easy to sell out all of their performances, although it is not clear if they would give away free tickets just to boost up the attending number as Francis Wong described. Either way, it is fair to say the Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. does not stress about box office as much as Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd.

For the second and third cases, despite having a much bigger production—bigger set, much more actors and musicians—they only have one day for moving in. In the second case, the manager was complaining that they need to book an extra session (four hours) for the theatre to set up the Orchestra Pit. The two much larger scale productions use lesser time to move-in than the first theatre case.

The reason for that is funding bodies are often mainly concerned about the audience attendance rate because that is how the funding bodies calculate the funding they base on. For example, a funding body may set a subsidy rate to 120 HK Dollars per head for Cantonese opera. Which means if they provide funding of 120,000 HK Dollars to a group for a performance project, they expect the performance to have at least 1,000 audience members turning up. All government

venues (94% of all Hong Kong venues) have a system to record the number of audience entering their venues' auditorium. If the performance is underperforming, next time when the group applies for funding, the funding body may consider reducing or not approving the funding at all. This is why Francis Wong said she often has to give away tickets for free, it is to meet the funding bodies' request.

This suggests that more reliance on funding may only result to groups not paying attention to the production quality. Their main concern is the number of audience regardless if they pay or not. This is reflected in the Hong Kong Arts Development Council's Hong Kong Annual Arts Survey Report shown in Knowledge Landscape chapter. Between 2011 and 2016, despite the total number of Cantonese Opera performances increasing by 38.8%, the total number of paid performances only increased by 9% while the total number of free performances increased by 43%. Total attendance of free performances increased 5.7%, but the total attendance of paid performances has decreased by 10%, and the total box office has also reduced by 28%.

If this type of funding policy continues, we might suffer from further decline of production quality. As a result, it may further reduce audience as well as the inability to develop the art form.

Quantity over quality

As we discussed earlier in the Key Findings chapter, funding in Hong Kong is concerned with quantity of the performance over quality. For example: between 7/2017 – 1/2018, the funding of *Xiqu* performances granted by HKADC was between 94,300 to 159,600 HK Dollars (8,573 to 14,509 pounds) per programme, an average of 132,240 HK Dollars (12,022 pounds) per programme. In the first round of 2018 funding from CODF (total 3 rounds per year), each programme was given between 37,000 to 50,000 HK Dollars (3,364 to 4,545 pounds), an average of 40,909 HK Dollars (3,719 pounds) per programme. Noted that each programme usually contains multiple performances with different classical repertoire and/or new play, the funding that theatre groups get for each performance is between 13,000 to 44,000 HK Dollars (1,200 to 4,000 pounds).

The amount of funding for Cantonese opera (*Xiqu*) makes it difficult for the theatre group to provide a high quality production. For example, the cost for hiring Yau Ma Tei Theatre already costs 3,650 HK Dollars (332pounds) per day in concessionary rate.

Comparing to HKADC funding for Drama for the same period, drama groups were given between 90,000 to 266,600 HK Dollars (8,182 to 24,236 pounds), an average of 166,650 HK Dollars (15,150 pounds) per programme, which is about 12.6% higher than funding for *Xiqu*. Also, for drama funding, each programme contains one play (production) only. Therefore, the programme budget can be focused on one production instead of three in some cases of Cantonese opera.

Below (Figure 31) are the drama and Cantonese opera productions that HKADC have been funding between 7/2017 – 1/2018. In that period, coincidentally Drama and *Xiqu* categories both have four performance programmes funded.

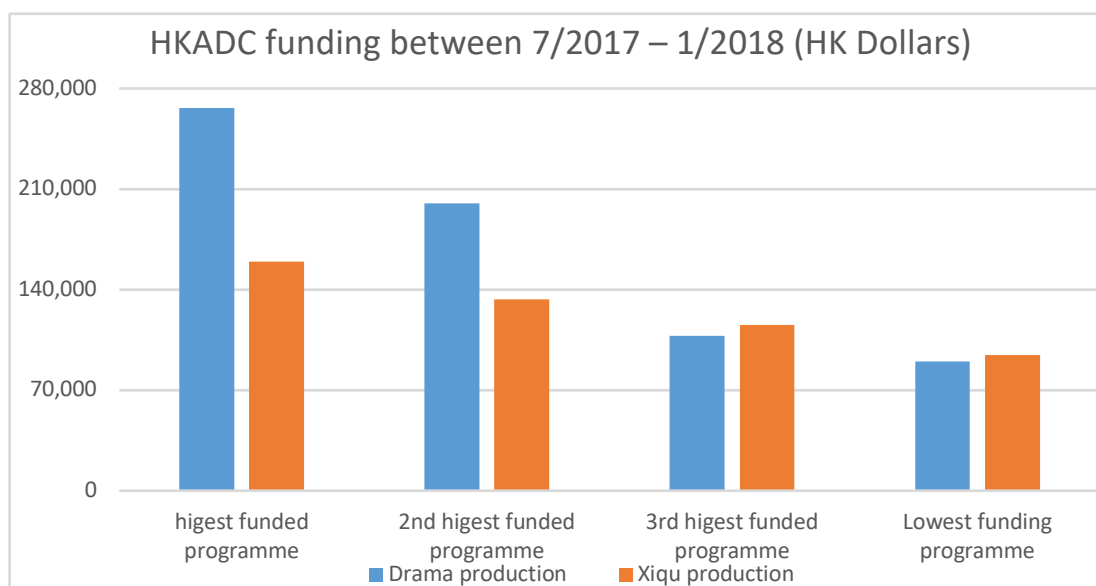


Figure 31: HKADC funding between 7/2017-1/2018

CODF on the other hand, had funded 13 performance programmes in the first round of 2018 funding.

If we look at other funding bodies in Hong Kong, LCSD, various Arts Festivals (Hong Kong Arts Festival, New Vision Festival...) and the *Xiqu* Centre are constantly funding/presenting much

higher budget productions, which allows the groups to have a sufficient budget to create high quality productions.

For the low end programmes, 18 regional District Councils in Hong Kong also fund a large amount of performance projects. Along with many other governments, private and non-profit organisations' funding, currently Hong Kong already has 921 performances from 3/2017 to 2/2018, an average of 2.5 Cantonese opera performances each day (Hong Kong Association of Cantonese Opera Scholars, 2018).

So, questions that arise with such high quantity of performances are: can the audience digest all the performances? Is the continual decrease of paid attendance of audience in the past years signalling that we have too many performances and not enough good quality performances? Should the funding bodies improve the quality rather than just worry about increasing the quantity? (From 2011 to 2016, HKADC has increased 38.8% Cantonese opera performances.) Additionally, should all funding bodies only focus on funding performances especially when everyone is talking about the 'development' of Cantonese opera?

In the current funding environment, actors and musicians have a lot of working opportunities, but they do not get paid enough to focus on any project at all. Francis Wong confirmed that the lack of seriousness coming from those in charge of the production is not their fault. They have to work every day and do not have time to dedicate to preparations.

For example, since there is no rehearsal or move-in period, performers only get paid the day that they perform, which forces many professionals to work for multiple productions and take up side jobs at the same time. Low-budget funding also means that the group cannot afford a longer move-in period, cutting down to move-in the same day as the performance is the minimum time to make the production possible.

This is the main reason that performers turn up so late before performances and spare no time to prepare technical aspects for the production. Inadequate sound quality is the direct result of the 'high in quantity, low in quality' policy of funding bodies.

Funding bodies using the audience attendance rate to determine the amount of funding of each group is indicative that it prioritises quantity of audience over quality of the group. This will only

increase the number of audience who want free tickets, but reduce the number of quality audience that are willing to pay for good production.

It is clear that the funding policy favours quantity over quality. Specifically, it favours more performances and more audiences over a higher quality performance and a higher standard of audience. In a highly competitive world where all kinds of entertainment are available to public easily, in order to keep the audience interested and gain their support, a production that meets high standards is the only way forward. Otherwise, the younger audience will not attend Cantonese opera performance if their expectations are not met. If this becomes the case, the future of Cantonese opera is truly limited.

Performances over studies

HKADC and CODF's 2008-2018 funding record clearly illustrated that they prefer funding performances over research or studies around Cantonese opera. Looking at HKADC and CODF's 2008 to 2018 funding record, while both organizations have both funded hundreds of performance and promotional programmes, HKADC has funded only one academic research programme and three 'research/preservation' programmes. CODF has funded one cultural study forum and three research programmes.

Like Chinese Opera Information Centre, the Hong Kong Government's (HKADC, CODF) funding approach toward Cantonese Opera appears to be focused only on preserving the art form by supporting performances, rather than developing or modernising it by accumulating knowledge through research and studies.

For this research, I applied for funding from HKADC's *Xiqu* session in 2016 and Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee & Cantonese Opera Development Fund (CODF) in 2017. For HKADC, I applied for funding for research, Chinese translation and publishing. For CODF, I applied for funding for Chinese translation and publishing.

Both of my applications were rejected. The reason for HKADC's rejection was '(HKADC) panels agree that your research is able to benefit Cantonese opera...but due to too many applications, we regret we cannot grant this application.' And the reason for CODF's rejection was simply 'due to too many applications, we regret we cannot grant this application'.

To develop an art form, theory and research are needed as a solid foundation. Only focusing on performing with little reflection makes it difficult to bring Cantonese opera forward, especially when the industry is so busy producing so many performances each year. Currently, the groups barely have enough time to produce their performance, not to mention to improve the quality. To have an objective study to modernise Cantonese opera is something lacking in the industry.

Although both funding bodies have put development of the art form as one of their main goal, they have done little to accomplish this goal. Currently, professional institutes have studies on the history and aesthetics of *Xiqu* and Cantonese opera. But there are no studies dedicated to the technology and the modernisation aspect of the art form. In order to further develop Cantonese opera, it is important to realise the importance of the theoretical support as well as practical support.

Audience development

The quantification approach of evaluating arts strategy also applies to audience. As most of the productions need to keep up the audience attendance number due to the funding bodies, groups often need to give away tickets for free. To quote Francis Wong: ‘We need to give away tickets at the theatre entrance, sometimes I feel very insulted, very unhappy.’

This is reflected in the figures listed in Knowledge Landscape chapter: despite the number of audiences for a Cantonese opera being high in comparison to other performance arts, the Cantonese opera audience is also older in age (over 80% are over 50), low in education (13.9% have University or higher education), low income (76.4% has monthly family income of under 29,999 HK Dollars) and 52% are either retired or housewives.

It is difficult to expect the target audience group who received the tickets for free would have high expectation of the quality from the performance, which is confirmed by the audience survey in my research. The audience members who took the survey were generally pleased about the current sound quality, which implies it will not change their habit of going to theatre event if the sound quality is improved.

If audiences have no expectations for the performances, it is difficult to come up with reason for the groups to invest in resources to improve their quality. In my theatre cases, Tin Ma Music

and Opera Association Ltd. are concerned about audience's response to their performance, therefore they booked extra day of the venue to move-in and prepare for their production, which is relatively more thorough than the other theatre groups I worked with.

Alternatively, The Cantonese Opera Advancement Association Ltd. appeared to understand their audience's expectations. Their manager, Connie Yiu confirmed that 'the audience is not at the level to tell the difference yet. They only really complain if the percussion is too loud... All they want to hear is the stars singing'. They spent one day to move-in for both of my cases.

Is understanding the expectations of the audience and merely providing the audience what they want a good way to carry out productions? Yiu admitted that poor sound quality defers young audiences from Cantonese opera performances. It is possible that keeping the current production quality can satisfy the current target audience group, but this target audience is an ageing one. The current poor sound production quality is unable to introduce the art form to the younger generation. With the ageing audience and the lack of a younger audience in mind, the future of Cantonese opera is not a bright one.

In order to avoid this, the *Xiqu* Centre has a plan to broaden their audience group. Frank Yeung confirmed that the *Xiqu* Centre believes that younger and higher-educated audience is important and very much needed for the survival of Cantonese opera. Their plan is to reduce the audience's age by ten years and have developed many programmes (for example, the establishment of the Tea House theatre inside the *Xiqu* Centre) to attract a younger audience.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

This research looks at the difference between industry consensus, different perspectives between the insider and the outsider, limitations in the current practice, and the impact of the funding policies on the industry's future. In the previous chapter, I presented the analysis of my findings. A significant topic that has arisen multiple times across my findings is the confusion between Modernisation and Westernisation. There is a common misconception among the industry that in order to modernise, one must westernise, which is far from the truth. The misconception is an important factor contributing to the hesitance to change within the industry. In this chapter, I will discuss this topic, along with other findings, in further detail with the support of relevant literature.

MODERNISATION AND THE AVERSION TO CHANGE

The world is changing, regardless of how many professionals in the industry are willing to accept that fact or otherwise. Currently, 70% of Cantonese opera performances are performed inside theatre venues. With the establishment of the *Xiqu* Centre, the percentage will only get higher every year as the need for outdoor bamboo canopy theatres decreases.

There is the external force of 'outsiders' propelling the modernisation of Cantonese opera—the establishment of the *Xiqu* Centre is a key example, having been designed by international architects who are considered as outsiders in the eyes of certain Cantonese opera professionals. There are many professionals inside Hong Kong's cultural industry that recognise the urgent need for Cantonese opera to modernise itself. The audience also needs better quality productions for them to grow in number. But what is modernisation? According to my findings, different stakeholders may give varying answers, but in the end, they accept the fact that Cantonese opera needs to be modernised.

As the contemporary environment makes innovative technology more available, Cantonese opera will modernise one way or another. The changes may happen during a long period of time, and it may not modernise in a way that fits certain stakeholders' expectations. But if we do not lay

down the direction, the future of Cantonese opera may be as Franco Yuen described: ‘on the road to perishing’ (Yuen, 2014).

Did we Westernise Cantonese opera instead of Modernise it?

Hong Kong was a British colony for 155 years, which has brought around many developments to the city that has shaped it into what it is today. At the same time, mainland China has gone through a troublesome 100-year period. Civil wars and political turmoil held back China’s Modernisation process during that period. Because of Hong Kong’s historical development, until the early 1990s, we have been looking at mainland China as backwards and not ‘modern’. We are susceptible to the belief that Westernisation is the only way for Modernisation. However, as I pointed out in the Knowledge Landscape, Modernisation and Westernisation are separate entities (Shah, 2015), though the lines are often blurred given different cultural contexts. Throughout my research, it became apparent to me that people who claimed to have attempted modernising Cantonese Opera were in fact westernising it instead.

As the industry was blooming during the Golden Ages, theatre groups also faced very tough competition among each other. As their income was mainly dependent on box office, in order to attract more audience, Cantonese opera groups became reliant on stage gimmicks.

‘In the 1950s, these naive, quirky stage design gradually disappeared on the stage. Some stage technical personnel who are good at stage setting agencies have eventually changed careers’ (Zhong, 2014).

Cantonese opera’s modernisation or commercialisation attempt was criticised by Peking Opera master, Mei Langfang: ‘in order to please audience, Cantonese opera easily introduce different mechanical stage setting, it is in fact laughable’ (Zhong, 2014). Although the Modernisation of Cantonese opera between 1920s to 1940s has not been completely successful, it nevertheless opened the door for the industry to modernise Cantonese opera in a Westernised fashion.

On the other hand, Mei Langfang himself has introduced modern elements into his performances. In a 1924 performance, Mei has improved the lighting, costume, makeup and stage design. He invited Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore to watch his performance and Tagore was so

deeply moved by the performance that he wrote a poem dedicated to Mei afterwards. Mei's success demonstrates the right approach towards Modernisation and provides an example that *Xiqu* can appeal to a wider audience when developed correctly.

This approach of using gimmicky stage designs in the 1920s reappeared in my first case study, where Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. used video projection and special sound effects to 'enhance' the production. While the artistic and commercial result of this 'enhancement' is questionable, it is appreciable that the group tried hard to improve their production in the way they could understand, even if I would have suggested them to spend the resources on a more solid production quality such as sound design, enhanced lighting and a SM crew³³.

Actor B in my research has totally adopted the Western musical style, abandoning traditional costumes, makeup and instead, introducing modern stage design, lighting and production management. This was Actor B's attempt to convert Cantonese opera to musical as part of a Modernisation process. In comparison to Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd., Actor B's approach is surely much bolder but both groups share a similar ideology: to modernise Cantonese opera, we need to westernise it.

Sacrificing unique aesthetic characteristics

The actors and managers in my research have shown that they prefer using the Orchestra Pit over stage right for locating musicians, as relocating the musicians to the Orchestra Pit creates more space on stage for them to utilise when acting. Frank Yeung of the *Xiqu* Centre also suggested to introduce a conductor to the production for contributing to decision-making for sound and music.

Using the Orchestra Pit and a conductor may seem to be a logical step forward in terms of Modernisation. After all, most of the venues in Hong Kong are designed for multipurpose uses, which means they are able to support all kind of performances: from a classical orchestra concert to modern theatre productions to *Xiqu*. With the hardware installed that makes the Orchestra Pit available, it is convenient and logical for Cantonese opera groups to use it to free up theatre space on stage.

³³ Stage Management crew

However, once musicians are in the Orchestra Pit, it becomes difficult for the leading musician and the leading percussionist to communicate with actors, let alone allowing musicians to observe actors' performance and adjust accordingly. Additionally, for these theatres, someone is needed to tell the venues' technicians how and what they want in terms of sound quality, so that the technicians can make technical adjustments to suit those needs. Since the leading musician and the leading percussionist are both musicians who have to perform on stage, they are unable to provide feedback on the sound quality. There is no one in the production who can inform the venue of the optimum sound quality for the performance.

In this case, a Western approach is suggested: introducing conductor to the musicians. While in the Orchestra Pit, the conductor will stand on a platform (just like Western Orchestra), they can then observe the actors' performance and instruct the musicians accordingly. Also, the conductor can sit in the auditorium to listen to the musicians and determine if the sound quality is satisfying or not.

However, adopting the Western approach of using the Orchestra Pit and conductor will take away some aesthetic characteristic which is unique to *Xiqu* and Cantonese opera.

First of all, traditionally, Cantonese opera productions place their musicians on stage right, making them visible to audience. The visible musicians and actors, along with the minimal stage setting (one table and two chairs) makes it clear to the audience that this is a theatre performance. This helps create the 'Alienation effect' that is unique to *Xiqu*. The conventional Western approach of theatre is trying to conceal the production elements, such putting the musicians away from the stage and creating a realistic stage design for realism. It therefore convinces audiences what happens on stage is real.

Unlike the internationally-praised Peking opera and *Kunqu*, which have well-preserved the alienation effect and abstract quality of *Xiqu*, Cantonese opera's decline today may be due to losing its cultural identity.

Secondly, the suggestion of introducing a conductor to the music production also shatters the unique performance style of Cantonese opera. As mentioned in the Knowledge Landscape, Cantonese opera music is not focused on composing new music for new productions (Young, 2015). It takes a similar approach to classical music where the same music is played in different

occasions. It is the performers' interpretation or improvisation of the moment that brings the performance to life.

Having musicians located on stage right resembles a jazz ensemble, where musicians and actors can interact with each other all the time to adjust with the audience's response, with the leading musician and the leading percussionist guiding the musicians to perform. In the interview, Yuen Shi Chun confirmed that in some occasions, musician will attune their playing style to the actors' performance without necessarily following the leading musician. It is the spontaneous reaction between actors, musicians and audience, as well as the improvisation that makes Cantonese opera music alive and different in every performance.

Introducing a conductor surely can solve the problem of adopting the use of the Orchestra Pit and takes on the role of communicating with the venue. However, it also sacrifices the unique free style of music. Cantonese opera's music will shift into the music style of Western opera and musicals, where singers follow the music to sing and deliver the same, clean-cut way of performing.

Frank Yeung explained very well in his interview that although Cantonese opera has moved from outdoor to indoor for more than 30 years now, the industry has not yet processed the change. In my opinion, this 'unprocessed' attitude is slowly turning Cantonese opera to a Western style production. Actor B's approach of Modernisation may be an extreme case, but it can also be a forecast of the future of Cantonese opera, if the issue is left unacknowledged.

Thinking and Doing: the difference between survey and practice

My research surveys' results and case studies show a huge gap between the thinking and doing of a Cantonese opera professional. Majority of professionals think sound quality needs to improve and they think they are willing to invest some time and resources for the change. But the reality is that due to many reasons, they are not willing to put what they think into action. According to *The Psychology of Thinking Vs. Doing*, Thomas Oppong discusses the difference between thinking and doing as 'Thinking is reflecting on what tasks should be carried out' and 'Doing is carrying out a series of tasks... But unfortunately they easily begin pushing them further back on their to-do lists, if not completely disregarding them as being unfeasible or unrealistic' (Oppong, 2018). The concept of Thinking Vs. Doing is illustrated below in Figure 32.



Figure 32: Thinking vs. Doing

As discussed, professionals hold the opinion that sound cannot be viewed by the audience. Therefore, it is not a priority for them to direct their resources to. However, actors and musicians do rely on the use of sound technology to assist and enhance their performance.

During my interview with Frank Yeung and Yuen Shi Chun, both of them mentioned that the contemporary Cantonese opera actors and musicians have relied on the help of sound technology (microphones and PA system) to enhance their voice/sound during performance, and neglect the basic techniques and skills training. This resulted in their voice projection becoming much shorter and lacking penetration power.

Yeung confirmed that during the 1950s and 60s, sound technology was not well-developed and little could be done technically to enhance the sound quality of performers. Actors and musicians trained themselves to deliver a powerful performance. Today, actors and musicians assume venues will increase their volume and therefore, there is no need to sing or play very hard. In my first case study, I have to continuously ask the leading musician to order some musicians to play louder or the mics could not pick up their instrument's sound clearly. In all three case studies, the different sound level between percussion and melodic instruments can be partially solved if the musicians play louder and percussionists play quieter. Yet, there is no such position in the

production where someone can be in charge of the technical quality of music and sound, therefore, no one can make the decision and no one will follow even when someone pointed out the problem.

The fact that performers rely too much on the help of technology has contributed to the sound balance's problem during performance. With the production personnel, theatre management and performers all disregarding the sound element's importance in productions, the outcome is reflected on the production terms—a deterioration of sound quality compared with the performances in 1950s and 60s.

Honouring tradition or following blind tradition?

One of the most common business phenomena is also one of the most perplexing: when successful companies face big changes in their environment, they often fail to respond effectively. Unable to defend themselves against competitors armed with new products, technologies, or strategies, they watch their sales and profits erode, their best people leave, and their stock valuations tumble... (Sull, 1999, p. 12).

In the past decade, Cantonese opera did little while facing competitors equipped with new products (modern theatre, musicals, film, TV, internet, computer games), technologies (light, sound and stage), and strategies (innovative promotions, artistic and/or commercial marketing positions). The aging of their target audience contributes to the low box office income and number of audience turnout. Fewer young people want to get into the industry and produce lower quality productions. Sull continues to explain:

The problem ... is a condition that I call active inertia. Inertia is usually associated with inaction—picture a billiard ball at rest on a table—but physicists also use the term to describe a moving object's tendency to persist in its current trajectory. Active inertia is an organization's tendency to follow established patterns of behaviour—even in response to dramatic environmental shifts. Stuck in the modes of thinking and working that brought success in the past, market

leaders simply accelerate all their tried-and-true activities. In trying to dig themselves out of a hole, they just deepen it (Sull, 1999, p. 13).

Active inertia may be one way to explain the unwillingness to modernise the Cantonese opera industry. But the essay *Is Blind Tradition Hurting Your Independent Advisor Business?* also suggested the idea of ‘Blind Tradition’:

Blind tradition can be defined as a habit that is performed simply because ‘it’s always been done that way’ and that you never really examine to find out why (Krishnamurti, 2018).

For a production, one can push the boundaries and present the best quality the group can provide to audience. This involves a lot of innovation and experimenting, as well as the risk of failure. But often, though trial and error, a new direction will raise the standard of the art. On the other hand, one can stick to the old ways of working and only provide the bare minimum of elements to the audience, hoping the audience will keep coming back and maybe some new audience will come along with them. Unfortunately, Cantonese opera belongs to the latter. This could explain why the audience of Cantonese opera are much older, and why a young audience is generally not interested in the art form.

With individual concerns and independent work, my survey and case study results indicated that the industry operates and performs based on group behaviour:

A group is an assemblage of persons who work, interact and cooperate with one another in achieving a common goal in a specified time. The identity of the group members is taken individually. The members share information and resources with other group members (Surbhi, 2015).

The essay further explains the difference between a group and a team, illustrated in the Table 8 below:

BASIS FOR COMPARISON	GROUP	TEAM
Meaning	A collection of individuals who work together in completing a task.	A group of persons having collective identity joined together to accomplish a goal.
Leadership	Only one leader	More than one
Members	Independent	Interdependent
Process	Discuss, Decide and Delegate	Discuss, Decide and Do
Work Products	Individual	Collective
Focus on	Accomplishing individual goals	Accomplishing team goals
Accountability	Individually	Either individually or mutually

Table 8: Group vs. Team

Theatre productions are based on teamwork; however, the Cantonese opera industry's group operation appears to cause the inability to see the bigger picture of the need to modernise.

A deeply-rooted hesitance

The survey data in my research has shown that almost every professional knows there is much to improve in the sound production of Cantonese opera. However, when it comes to action, very few of them are willing to invest time and money for change. This demonstrates resistance to change the industry from within.

Commenting on changes introduced by outsiders, 'the major impetus for change in organisations is from outside' (Miles, 1964, p. 431). Suspicion and hostility arises when outsiders

propose a change of norms, and Wood has suggested that, in various cultures, there is both a sentiment of curiosity and antagonism toward foreigners (1934, cited in Watson, 1971). This could suggest why Cantonese Opera is reluctant to adopt Western traditions when faced with proposals for modernisation. It is imperative not to allow an enterprise to feel vulnerable to foreign domination, but to underline the significance of cultural preservation in the process of modernisation.

The hierarchy of Cantonese Opera as a high art form also hinders it from making way for change. 'The more stratified the power structure in an organization, the easier it can be changed from the top down, but the harder it is for grass-roots change to occur' (Watson, 1971, p. 442).

However, the nature of innovation has long been an opponent to reluctance to change. Watson observes the features of innovation that make change palatable:

Proposed innovations can be more easily adopted if they are simple to understand and to operate. They will be resisted increasingly as they are complex, hard to grasp, and require new skills. Changes which can be introduced piecemeal are more easily accepted than are those which require sudden, large-scale alterations. Changes which, if introduced, cannot easily be retracted or reversed must overcome more resistance than those easily withdrawn if unsatisfactory. Changes which are based on concepts, theories, or values incompatible with those of the organization or the individuals involved are likely to meet insuperable resistance. (Watson, 1971: 28).

What is the reason that stops the professionals doing what they already think should be doing?
Robert Tanner's assumptions matched the situation of Cantonese opera very well:

Loss of status or job security in the organization

It is not our nature to make changes that we view as harmful to our current situation. In an organizational setting, this means employees, peers, and managers will resist administrative and technological changes that result in their role being eliminated or reduced. From their perspective, your change is harmful to their place in the organization! (Tanner, 2018, para. 7)

Currently in the industry, the Prompter's job includes all technical elements. From light, sound, stage, props, cueing the show, to logistics and employing side case actors. If the Prompter's role ends up being solely the technical 'handy man', they might fear that they will lose their value and their job.

This could be the reason why when I contacted Prompter A in my research's preparation period, I got very a cold and unfriendly response from Prompter A. Also, Actor C may have received negative comments about me from her production's personnel (the Prompter for Actor C's production was also Prompter A, there are very few professional Prompters inside the industry), which may have caused Actor C's sudden change of attitude towards working with me.

Poorly aligned (non-reinforcing) reward systems

Currently, Cantonese opera performances mainly depend on government funding. However, the priority of a funding body, like HKADC and CODF, is to preserve the industry. They mainly consider the group's audience attendance record to evaluate whether to grant funding and the amount of funding they will receive if granted. The quality of the productions is not the funding bodies' main concern.

There is a common business saying that managers get what they reward. Organizational stakeholders will resist change when they do not see any rewards. (Tanner, 2018, para. 9)

This funding policy affected all stakeholders in the industry. For the group to get funding, understanding their target audience are low educated, low income, older and may get free tickets, makes them more likely to have low expectations on production quality. As production quality is not within the group's priority, no one is willing to spend their limited budget on sound (which they cannot 'see') to improve the production quality. Knowing there will be no sound-check and balance, and more importantly, no one cares about it, performers, therefore, are not bothered to turn up early before the performance. Performers showing up around one hour before the performance became a conventional rule in the industry.

Surprise and fear of the unknown

As my research indicated, very few professionals in the industry understand what qualifies as good sound quality and why do we need it; even fewer understands how to create good sound. ‘The less your team members know about the change and its impact on them, the more fearful they will become. Leading change also requires not springing surprises on the organization! Your organization needs to be prepared for the change’ (Tanner, 2018, para. 11).

The complete lack of knowledge on sound production, along with the need of sound production, causes the unsatisfying sound quality in the industry.

Peer pressure

When we talked about bringing some changes to their production in the interview, Francis Wong said: ‘No one dares to move, no one dares to change. Sometimes you have this invisible pressure, others don't do it but you do it.’

Whether we are introverted or extroverted, we are still social creatures. Organizational stakeholders will resist change to protect the interests of a group (Tanner, 2018, para. 13).

There are certainly a lot of ‘traditionalists’ inside the industry who vow to work according to the ‘old ways’. Being creative, especially on how to run a production, attracts a lot of criticism, which makes it difficult for young actors to overcome.

Climate of mistrust

Frank Yeung recalled his experience with the Cantonese opera industry: ‘During the years when I started up at the HKAPA, the entire team of Cantonese opera performers did not believe us. Costume is also the case, they are very skeptical, very reserved...’ ‘Meaningful organizational change does not occur in a climate of mistrust. Trust, involves faith in the intentions and behavior

of others. Mutual mistrust will doom an otherwise well-conceived change initiative to failure’ (Tanner, 2018, para. 16).

Organizational politics

Some resist change as a political strategy to “prove” that the decision is wrong. They may also resist to show that the person leading the change is not up to the task. Others may resist because they will lose some power in the organization. In these instances, these individuals are committed to seeing the change effort fail (Tanner, 2018, para. 19).

Successfully modernised Cantonese opera may result in some professionals lacking the modern production knowledge to lose power and influence inside the industry. This is also a reason as to why professionals respond very differently with the answers they gave me in the survey.

Fear of failure

Sweeping changes on the job can cause your team members to doubt their capabilities to perform their duties. What is known is comfortable! Your team members may be resisting these changes because they are worried that they cannot adapt to new work requirements (Tanner, 2018, para. 21).

As Frank Yeung pointed out in his interview, the government venues’ manager is afraid to receive complaint letters, it can also apply to funding bodies. Sticking to what has been working and not making any unnecessary change is the unofficial motto of many government-related personnel. Theatre groups are hesitating to adopt a new method of sound production, especially experimentation on sound setting, they concern it may raise complaints from the audience. During my research, I have received many doubts about ‘changing’ the way of sound production and ‘improving’ sound quality like musical image and live ambience.

Faulty Implementation Approach (Lack of tact or poor timing)

Sometimes it is not what a leader does, but it is how s/he does it that creates resistance to change! Undue resistance can occur because changes are introduced in an insensitive manner or at an awkward time (Tanner, 2018, para. 22).

There is never a good timing to introduce change, especially to the Cantonese opera industry that is known for its unconventional and cramped schedules. As Francis Wong explained in her interview, Cantonese opera professionals cannot spare time to plan ahead for their next project. Sound is the element that they have no knowledge about; it is more difficult for the professionals to agree and commit to the change of sound production.

On the other hand, Florian Kunze, Stephan Boehm, and Heike Bruch quoted individual differences of Resistance to Change (RTC) coined by Oreg (2003), who established a second-order four-dimensional structure, as well as reflected the industry's concern about changing to a modern production system (illustrated in Figure 33 below):

- (1) routine seeking, which involves the extent to which an employee aims for routine and stable environments;
- (2) emotional reaction to imposed change, which reflects the degree to which employees experience changes as uncomfortable and stressful;
- (3) short-term focus, which represents the degree to which employees are preoccupied with short-term challenges compared to long-term benefits of the change; and
- (4) cognitive rigidity, which represents reluctance to consider and test new perspectives and concepts (Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2015, p. 743).

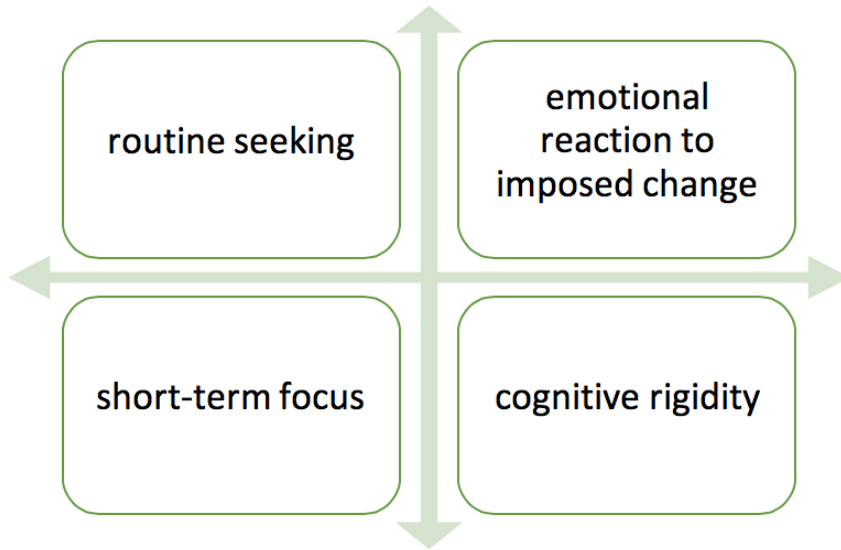


Figure 33: Resistance to change

With the industry lacking the knowledge about sound production, the Prompter or SM can only comfortably rely on the ‘not-perfect-but-no-one-complains’ production mentality they established. Their lack of knowledge also contributes to the emotional reaction that they may show their weakness towards sound production. Additionally, the Prompter or SM may just want to finish the performance and move on to next. The problem with sound can be solved in the ‘next’ production. But most of all, no one in the production cares about the sound quality to begin with, so what is the point in changing?

James M. Kerr’s essay *Business blind spots* mentioned "Theory of Incongruency", which can explain the current situation in Cantonese opera:

"Theory of Incongruency" which suggests that our expectations cloud our perception. If we don't expect to see a bike on the road, we simply will not see it - even if that Harley-Davidson is right in front of us.

Due to the Theory of Incongruency, many breakthrough ideas are ignored or dismissed because business leaders are unable to see the value of a new idea that doesn't fit within their current expectations of what will work within their firm or industry. (2014).

Kerr's method of avoiding "Theory of Incongruency" is firstly 'taking steps to get out of our personal comfort zones' and 'people at different levels of status, with different skills, styles, and backgrounds, can all earn the right to participate, influence, decide, lead, and succeed.'

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE AND SOUND PRODUCTION

'Technology by itself has no single objective value. The economic value of a technology remains latent until it is commercialized in some way via a business model' (Chesbrough, 2009, p. 354). What element of production practice does the group wish to explore in order to improve production quality and thus increase audience figures? Aesthetically, what is their concern about changes in sound?

Everyone in my research acknowledged the importance of sound production in Cantonese opera. On the other hand, the industry is reluctant to change the production practice or invest in more resources to improve the current situation. Currently, due to the lack of knowledge about sound production inside the industry, the sound quality fluctuates in different performances. Actors consider they are 'lucky' if the sound of the performance went well that night and 'unlucky' if it did not. The inevitable question for the research is: does the industry need to improve sound quality?

Comparison to modern theatre practice

In the Knowledge Landscape chapter, I have explained in detail the different production systems being used in modern theatre versus Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. The modern theatre production has a very strong work division with clear roles and trained professionals. People do not cross each other's paths and multiple rehearsals are scheduled as part of move-in procedure (often two technical rehearsals and one to two dress rehearsals).

Cantonese opera's work division is heavily convoluted in comparison, with many jobs overlapping. For example: Prompter handling many technical and managerial work, the actor may take on the role of the director when some decisions need to be made, leading to the musician

taking on the role of the conductor if venue technicians have questions. In the Cantonese opera, people take on too many roles and the role can be far too diverse for them to focus on. The result is an ineffective production practice with an unstable production quality.

Apart from the production system, the attitudes of performers between modern theatre and Cantonese Opera are also very different. Modern theatre actors are very concerned about the technical support to them. They are very willing to do sound check and spend as much time possible on sound production to ensure their performance will not be affected by technical problems. It is because they consider themselves as professionals and one main role of a professional is to ensure their performance is well executed to the audience.

On the other hand, Cantonese Opera actors are only willing to spend 15 minutes for a sound-check (basically just to make sure their wireless mic is working), with no option for rehearsal. Professionalism for them is to train well and master their craft.

In my second and third theatre cases, musicians only play the music together for 5 minutes before the house open. This is too late for the technician to work on the sound balance, not to mention to improve it. For performances with such unprepared production, it is difficult to maintain a stable quality constantly.

My research showed that the production system is not the only difference between modern theatre and Cantonese Opera productions. The performers also have great different attitudes toward cooperating with venue technicians. This is a critical problem if the system is not able to improve and the productions are not allowed to have a much longer move-in period, and if the performers do not collaborate nor arrive early to aid sound set up and check, it will not help to improve the production quality.

‘If it works, why fix it?’ attitude of the industry

The industry professionals (managers, musicians and actors) in my research agreed that sound is an important element in a performance. Frances Wong confirmed the audience often avoids buying tickets near the location of percussion musicians, and Connie Yiu considered bad sound balance as the main reason why young people do not watch Cantonese opera.

On the other hand, they are not willing to invest more time, money or both into improving sound quality in a production. It is a difficult task just to introduce the position of sound designer into their production. Connie Yiu confirmed the industry's view: 'for so many years, there was no such a role and we could get by, therefore we do not need it now.'

After all, theatre is a spontaneous art form, unlike a film or music recording, a minor mistake is not a sure guarantee that every performance will have the same mistake. If the sound quality is problematic in one performance, the group can hope for better results in the next performance. If the sound quality is problematic throughout the whole production, then the next production in another venue with a different technician may improve. However, for the next production, there will be too many things to look after for the group, so sound problems are not prioritised.

Another reason for the groups' indifference towards sound design is that the sound element cannot be 'seen', therefore it is not as urgent. Unlike lighting, costumes, and set design, mistakes in sound are not easily spotted beforehand, especially when there is no sound-check. This makes sound an easily overlooked element of the production.

On top of that, when you are stressed and busy in the theatre-making process, sound seems like something you can leave until the last moment. As Patch Middleton wrote in his blog: 'Sound in theatre is fifty percent of the tools you can use to tell a story... And yet still, despite all this, some theatre makers leave it to the last minute. Downloading a few sounds from the internet and throwing them into a scene.'

This case is more apparent in Cantonese opera productions, where they only have a handful hours to set up everything. Setting up speakers and mics often have to wait for the stage installation to be completed first. With such a short set-up time, the stage barely has enough time to complete its installation. Many Cantonese opera productions do not have the luxury of sound set-up sessions at all.

In the smaller productions that I have experienced for the last two decades, sound is forced to take a backseat, with little care or thought put into it. But, if you bring a sound designer in as early as you can in the rehearsal process, they can be part of the creative mixing pot.

If one has never put a moment's thought into these matters, then it is hard to see how one is under any epistemic obligation to go against one's strong natural propensity to follow one's own inclinations. The problem of disagreement doesn't arise unless one is both significantly reflective and respectful of the epistemic abilities and performances of others (Frances, 2010, p. 74).

Everyone including the audience knows the current sound quality is not ideal, but it also not bad enough to cause disaster. Why would you fix something that is not considered broken?

The gap between actors' expectations and technological support

Theatre technology has improved the production quality greatly for the past few decades. However, it also provides challenges. For example, the professional need to adapt to new technology and adjust their acting style accordingly. J.A. Leonard identified theatre sound technology changes and its effect on actors and singers.

In the early part of twentieth century, when amplification in theatre was unknown, musicals tended to star a certain type of performer who could sing well enough to fill a theatre without the need of a microphone.... Musical were, in effect, self-balancing, without the need for sound designers to help out.

With amplification systems becoming more commonplace in theatres, microphones and loudspeaker were used simply to enhance the voices of the singers, so that they did not have to sing quite so hard for every number. The major changes in the use of sound in musicals started in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (2001: 111)

At the moment, Cantonese opera industry is overlooking the technological change in relation to the production quality. This reflects on the quality of their performances, as well as the decline of their audience. The technical aspect of theatre production is an essential factor that theatre groups have to consider seriously in a contemporary environment.

The importance of sound and its deterioration in Cantonese opera

After working with the three theatre cases, I realised that everyone in the groups do not view sound element as an important issue. Their only requirement is that the audience can hear the singers and the percussion. Cantonese opera professionals do not understand that sound in theatre does not merely mean the sound projected from house speakers:

Sound-vocal, non-vocal, musical and non-musical-along with sound's absence-the ticking, anticipatory buzz of stage silence-are elemental to the phenomenal fabric of theatre (Brown, 2011, p. 1).

However, it is also true that sound technology has only been taken seriously in recent decades:

Until 15 or 20 years ago, sound design was still very much viewed as a technical skill. It wasn't until 2004 that sound design was recognised as a category in the Laurence Olivier awards. Audiences still have to endure plays in which music is randomly poured over scenes like so much aural lube, but a generation of theatre practitioners are busy leading sound design deeper into the realms of art (Szalwinska, 2008).

Sound is often a very underestimated element in production, especially in the past. But as technology advancements allow creativity to take a foothold, sound is no longer just a tool to solve the technical problem. 'A plurality of expressive means is not only inherent to theatre, it is its very *raison d'être*, a purpose enacted from its primary genetic code' (Kulezic-Wilson, 2011, p. 33).

Although modern theatre productions in Hong Kong now recognise sound as an important element in production, my research indicated that it is still being overlooked by Cantonese opera professionals. However, as a sound designer, I would very much disagree with this attitude. A non-professional 'lighting designer' may not enhance the performance with lighting effects, but they will not necessarily make theatrical elements disappear. But for sound, as my research showed, a non-professional 'sound designer' can make certain musical instruments 'disappear' from audience. A band of 12 musicians playing, only 6 of them can be heard from audience (as in the first case) which can be humiliating for the musicians.

As mentioned in Knowledge Landscape, the audience survey showed that the most unsatisfactory venues on ‘lighting and sound system’ are the best equipped venues in Hong Kong. This suggests that the unsatisfied element of the production is not due to the lack of equipment itself, but rather the execution of the production that the audience are unsatisfied with.

Contemporary Cantonese opera’s sound quality has become worse than it was before, especially in large venues where they need the help of sound amplification most. This is fine as long as audience have no expectation on the performance quality. But this deterioration of sound quality can lead to the further decline of Cantonese opera.

Technical improvement and its constraints

Sound technology has partially improved the performance’s quality since its introduction to Cantonese opera. Yuen confirmed in the early age of Cantonese opera, there were no amplification system installed in the theatres. The audience were hearing the actual sound produced by singers and musicians. The theatre or bamboo canopy built at that time were designed to enhance the sound acoustic. When the stage mic and wireless mic became portable and high-quality, sound technology started to change the production of Cantonese opera.

Yuen Shi Chun and Frank Yeung both pointed out that in the past decades, actors have developed an overreliance on microphones and sound amplification technology. In turn, that takes away the traditional vocal training that enables performers to sing with a strong vocal penetration quality. The same goes with musicians; they do not need to play ‘hard’ in order for their music to reach the audience. This development shifts the focus away from skill and talent. With a quiet singing voice and the instruments being played lighter, performers need technicians to amplify their voice artificially using mic and speakers, which poses risk for technical problems such as sound feedback and bad sound quality.

My theatre cases indicated that neither the group nor the audience have expectations of good sound quality and cannot differentiate between good and adequate sound quality. It is not easy to convince the group to invest their resources for better sound quality in the long term.

In terms of the location of musicians, Frank Yeung agreed that due to the unique Cantonese opera musicians setting: a combination of very loud percussion instruments next to small amount of quiet melodic instruments, using the Orchestra Pit will make sound balancing much more difficult. It is a fact that without adequate sound set up time and detail adjustment, the production will definitely suffer from unbalanced sound when using the Orchestra Pit.

Rather than looking at modern sound technology as a tool to improve their production quality, the industry is overly reliant on technology for solely convenience purposes: using mic in order to sing less, using the Orchestra Pit so that they can have a bigger stage to perform. Technology has been used for another purpose other than improving sound quality. Looking at it from a different angle, technology has made the sound quality of contemporary Cantonese opera performance worse compared to the absence of it. Technical improvement and its constraints is illustrated in Table 9 below:

Technology	Improvements	Constraints
Theatre amplification system	Louder and better sound for performers to reach audience	Performers rely on amplification system, put less effort on practicing their skill, resulting to drop of skill in performance.
Orchestra Pit available for performance	Moving the musicians to Orchestra Pit provides bigger space for actors on stage.	The current musicians setting for Cantonese opera is not suitable to use Orchestra Pit. Unbalance sound is almost inevitable with little setting up time.

Table 9: Technology in Cantonese opera

The problem of locating musicians in the Orchestra Pit

One of the biggest problems about sound production of Cantonese opera music is sound balancing. In Western Orchestral music, the number of violins, viola, and cellos are based on the balance between the softer string instruments and the louder percussion instruments or the piano. For example, a typical modern orchestra normally has 30 violins, 12 violas, 10 cellos and 8 double basses to accompany the percussion instruments.

However, for Cantonese opera music, there is only one musician per instrument. Traditionally, the band will be placed on stage right and the formation of the band will help to balance the music naturally; the percussion at the back and the string instruments in the front. In the case of using Orchestra Pit, all musicians would line up and play next to each other. Very often (and it was the case of two of my theatre cases) a large timpani would be placed right to *Ruan* (a plucked string instrument). During the performance, because they were all lined up next to each other in a small enclosed space as the Orchestra Pit, the sound of timpani would be picked up by the mics of *Ruan* and other instruments nearby. As the sound of timpani is naturally much louder than *Ruan*, when technician increase the volume of *Ruan*, he also increases the timpani's volume at the same time. As the result, the timpani's sound would be always much louder than other melodic instruments and therefore, the audience could not hear 'all instruments' playing. In my first two theatre cases, the band is located in the Orchestra Pit next to each other without a significant noise barrier. Therefore, it is almost guaranteed that the noise of the percussions will overpower the softer, melodic instruments.

In the first theatre case, I was given enough time to adjust the sound balancing. The artistic director and music director of the group were so please about the result of my work; they could hear all of the musicians playing after I worked with the sound.

In the case of the industry practice, performers would only arrive to the theatre one hour before the performance starts, and the moving-in period only has eight hours. This results in the technicians not having sufficient time to work, so the audience then suffered from loud percussion and unbalanced music, especially since the audience sit near percussionists' area.

Also, Western music uses harmonic elements in their composition; many instruments are playing different notes or chords to support the main melody, which gives the music more layers

and depth. Cantonese opera music, on the other hand, is very different. Every melodic instrument will play the same notes with what the singer sings. It will take more time and rehearsal than Western music to balance Cantonese opera music with layers and depth. However, in actual practice, we only can balance the music during the actual performance. As many programs only perform once in a production, it is a great shame that the theatre group cannot provide a good sound quality production to audience.

In addition to the problem of the venue's Orchestra Pit, I found that the practice of Cantonese opera musicians tends to have a major sound problem: confusing sound output. In the performance, there are percussion instruments from the Orchestra Pit and because they are already very loud, the mics for the percussions have to be all switched off. The melodic instruments, which are also in the Orchestra Pit, have their sounds aided by the PA system. However, there is one instrument that is completely reliant on the PA system to project sound—the *Yuan* (similar to the Western guitar) which is an important instrument for Cantonese opera music. During most performances, musicians will use the Electric Yuan and they will plug it directly into the PA system. This is called Direct In (DI).

This resulted in a three-way sound output: 1) fully-natural sound with no PA (percussions), 2) half PA, half-natural sound (melodic instruments) and 3) fully PA (Electric Yuan). Since the speakers are located near the ceiling of the venue, the audience receives a very confusing sound image and it does not allow the audience to be completely immersed in the performance.

Without technical rehearsal and music balance, sound technicians can only use the first two scenes of the performance as a 'technical rehearsal'. This is not only unfair to the audience, but it also severely affects the quality of the performance.

The first two theatre cases suggest that due to the different levels of percussion and melodic instruments, setting up the music band in the Orchestra Pit requires the installation of a sound barrier on the percussionists. Otherwise it is very difficult to provide a stable, balanced sound quality in every performance. The problem is that it costs extra time and money to set up, which due to factors such as the actors' salary and the box office income, most Cantonese opera productions do not have. This leads to the dilemma of whether Cantonese opera production 'needs' the Orchestra Pit to locate their musicians in the first place.

Inviting more audiences through better sound quality

What Makes the Theatre Audience Return? The Role of Engagement in Predicting Future Behaviors (Pap et al., 2017) suggested that the customer (audience) engagement is built on Core Service Quality and Perceived Value, which will reflect on their behavioral intentions (to visit the theatre again).

The “service encounter” or “service experience” is the entire transaction received by the customer (Dwyer et al. 1987; Tseng et al. 1999). When measuring the performance of actual service versus perceived service, Zeithaml et al. (1988) suggests measuring service quality. Service quality receives attention in research as more firms realize that maintaining customers and maximizing customer satisfaction is key to long-term relationships (Jiang and Wang 2006; Palmer and O’Neill 2003). Hoskins and McFadyen (1991) suggest that more focus is required in understanding the roles of service quality and also overall perceived value in the cultural industry. (2017: 425)

To provide a good Core Service Quality, the actors’ performance is as important to the technical production quality. Sound is one of the main elements amounting to technical productions.

Theatre productions have also transformed into an audio and visual extravaganza over the last two decades and crowds are lapping it up. A National Theatre report in 2014 found almost twice as many people visited the theatre every year in London – 22 million – as those who attend England’s Premier League football. Meanwhile, the Society of London Theatre found gross sales of £633 million in 2015 for West End theatre shows, up 1.6 per cent on the previous year.

With high audience expectations, the rise of outdoor theatre, heritage considerations and touring performances, audio has never been more important on the stage (Sharples, 2016).

In Hong Kong Government's 09/10 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong demonstrates the strong will to further the development of culture and creative industries. In order for the industry to be successful, one must take the clients (audience) seriously. For the success of British culture and creative industries, Arts Council England's Arts audiences: insight (2011) may give us some hints.

According to the insight, the most engaged audience members fall into two categories; 'Urban arts eclectic' and 'Traditional culture vultures'. 'Urban arts eclectic' are young (under 24) and highly educated, 'Traditional culture vultures' are older (45-74) and are also highly educated. To safeguard their future and development, Cantonese opera needs to aim for a younger and higher educated audience demographic.

Why People Go to the Theatre: A Qualitative Study of Audience Motivation (Walmsley, 2011) has shown that there are five audience drivers and engagements for them to go to theatre: Spiritual, Sensual, Emotional, Intellectual and Social. All of these factors require the performance to be able to reach and touch the audience, where sound is undoubtedly a very important factor.

Needs, motivations and drivers' matrix for theatre audiences (Walmsley, 2011, p. 14) is illustrated in Table 10 below.

Audiences' Needs & Motivations	Driver & Type of engagement
Feeling part of a special community of interest, Ritual Escapism & immersion, Being ethically challenged, Reflection Access to creative people & process, Aesthetic pleasure & development, Passing on a legacy to children/grandchildren, Quality me-time	Spiritual
Tingle-down-the-spine moments, Having a visceral response, Feeling the chemistry and buzz	Sensual

Empathy, Getting an emotional hit, Being moved, Being drawn in and engaged, Mimesis & personal relevance, Exploring human relationships, Nostalgia Exploring or celebrating cultural identity, Storytelling	Emotional
Developing world view, Being intellectually challenged, Self-improvement Learning about history or current issues, Stimulating others	Intellectual
Enhanced socialisation, Quality time with family and friends, Partaking in a live experience, Entertainment; a “good night out” Dinner with a show, Comfortable seating & good sight lines, Good customer service & venue facilities	Social

Table 10: Table adapted from Walmsley (2011)

The improvement of sound in Cantonese opera may bring in new, younger audiences who will begin to appreciate their own culture. As Sharples (2016) concluded:

The increasing importance of sound in the theatre is, in part, down to new and improved technologies as well as going hand in hand with the trend towards more immersive theatre, and cross-fertilisation between theatre, film and radio. Hopefully the audience is standing to applaud.

FUNDING POLICY NEGLECTS CANTONESE OPERA

My research indicated that Cantonese opera currently has the most amount of audience among all performance arts. Yet funding bodies appear to neglect the art form. Surely, Hong Kong government has established dedicated venues for Cantonese opera such as the *Xiqu* Centre, Ko San Theatre and Yau Ma Tei Theatre. There are little government actions taken to nurture the software of the art form (such as theatre group). With the funding policy tilted toward other art forms, it is difficult for Cantonese opera to have sufficient resources for modernisation.

Targeted low quality audience

As my research indicated, Cantonese opera audiences are generally older, low in education and income.³⁴ As the funding bodies continue to fund low budget (thus low quality) production, they appeared to be satisfied with the low quality audience group. Currently, there is only the *Xiqu* Centre that is concerned about develop higher quality audience: younger in age, higher in education and income.

Low production funding

Looking at the figures in Knowledge Landscape chapter, it is fair to say that despite Cantonese opera having the largest amount of audience among all performance arts in Hong Kong, Cantonese opera productions receive the lowest funding for individual projects. For example, a drama production that has same audience capacity can receive much more funding from the government than a Cantonese opera production.

No funding on dedicated professional groups

As mentioned in Knowledge Landscape chapter, the Hong Kong Government fully funds nine performance groups, their genre includes classical and Chinese music, contemporary and traditional dance, ballet, traditional and contemporary drama, as well as experiential theatre. All

³⁴ See Appendix 1 for 08-09 Cantonese Opera's Audience Research Report

nine groups receive funding from the government so that they can afford full time management and performers, as well as technical personnel. It is to ensure that the groups have enough support to focus on their arts. All nine groups have constantly performed in Hong Kong and internationally to promote the arts from Hong Kong.

However, despite Cantonese opera being the art form strongly linked to Hong Kong, there is no funding for a full-time Cantonese opera group from the government. In recent years, there are talks about forming such theatre group. But until now, there is no sign of the government setting up such Cantonese opera group, and it may take years or decades for such group to be realised.

CHAPTER 7. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND HOW IT CHANGED MY PRACTICE AND THINKING

This chapter is the reflection of my entire professional and personal journey of the research. This also documents my research and learning processes in the doctoral project.

In different stages of my research, the information I gathered have led me to make assumptions about the industry's expectations and their attitude towards solving the problems they face. Some of those assumptions have proven to be incorrect and therefore, have changed and revived many times as the research progressed. Fig. 8.1 below illustrates the key assumptions I made during the different stages of the entire research journey:

Before the research

- My experience with Cantonese opera production exhibited a lot of improvements that can be done to sound management and quality.
- My discussion with professionals suggested that they are concerned about the unstable sound quality and wish to improve.
- Discussion with professionals in the preparation stage led me to believe different locations for musicians is being used for professionals to find better ways for better sound quality. Nevertheless, professionals prefer traditional stage right position.
- There is much concern about too much westernising Cantonese opera within the industry.

Beginning of the research

- My discussion with research partners and survey results suggested professionals acknowledge the sound problem and are very much willing to take action to improve sound quality.
- Venues' personnel and group's SM or Prompter are very willing to support the production.
- My survey suggested that the audience welcome improved sound quality in a performance.
- Because of the limited move-in time, professionals have no time to do technical work even if they wanted to. The fact that Tin Ma Music and Opera Association Ltd. spend their own money to book one more day for dress rehearsal confirmed my assumption.

During the research

- The problem between *thinking* and *doing* arise, professionals are ‘too busy’ to take care of sound-technical matters.
- SM or Prompter do not consider sound issue as their responsibility.
- Some venues have bureaucracy issue. They are not willing to take risks resulting to difficulty to execute new ideas.
- Actors and musicians will not turn up until less than one hour before the performance. Extending move-in period will not improve production quality. Audiences are too old or not entitled (free entrance) to expect better quality production.

End of research (with data from interviews)

- Government funding discourages professionals to work seriously.
- Venues’ management can improve their support (e.g. *Xiqu* Centre).
- Actors and musicians have very different opinions on performance set up.
- Changes need to apply within the industry as well as externally.

Figure 34: Key assumptions

KNOWLEDGE GAINED

For the entire research journey, I reflected the knowledge I gained through various ways and sources. All of them are extremely valuable for me professionally and affect my view moving forward personally. My knowledge towards Cantonese opera as an industry and as an art form have expanded greatly. Below lists out the key knowledge gained from this research:

Literature Review

Through literature review, I have gained the following knowledge for my research:

- Understanding of the evolution between *Xiqu* and Cantonese opera, also how *Xiqu* influences world performance art.
- The difference between Modernisation and Westernisation, and what Cantonese opera needs is Modernisation.
- The psychology of Fear of Change and how to overcome it.
- Learnt the cause of Reluctance to Change and ways to overcome it.
- The importance of sound in modern theatre production.
- The psychology between thinking and doing, and ways to overcome it.
- Group and team working style, and what Cantonese opera needs is team work.
- Audience behaviour.
- How Following Tradition and Blind Tradition can hurt the industry.

Data Gathering

For data gathering, I have gone through many research data, both based in Hong Kong and internationally. The main focus was on audience, funding and performance figure.

For collecting the survey data, I learnt that there is restriction on activities inside venues. I need to get the venue hirer's agreement in order to give survey to audience, backstage personnel or performers.

Through quantitative research and data gathering, I was able to map out the current situation of Cantonese opera. At the same time, I gained the skill of data gathering for quantitative and qualitative research.

Data Analysis

Of all different stages of the research, data analysis is without a doubt the most enlightening and encouraging. My research is a subject that no one has researched. In order to accurately reflect and analyse all data from different fields, I needed to analyse with the help of literature reviews from different subjects, and combine the quantitative and qualitative data I gathered.

Cross-referencing data from different subjects such as theatre production, audience behaviour, arts funding, business management, and management psychology allowed me to gain knowledge on all these subjects. I developed a new way of approaching problem-solving with and outside my profession.

Learning about Cantonese opera

Xiqu is one of China's greatest cultural heritage, and some of its genres have already been highly praised and are influential internationally. Brought up in Hong Kong, Cantonese opera and its influence have been always around me. However, I did not have any in-depth understanding about Cantonese opera and its history. The literature review and interview with professionals and stakeholders of this research allowed me to gain a lot of knowledge about Cantonese opera, which

helped me understand where Cantonese opera stands in the *Xiqu* context, as well as its relationship with the history of Modern China.

Through the literature review, other research figures and data gathering from my research allowed me to gain knowledge about the history of Cantonese opera, its relationship with *Xiqu*, its influence and cultural importance to Hong Kong. Most importantly, it highlights Cantonese opera's current situation and problems it faces in Hong Kong now. I completely respect the traditional values of Cantonese opera, and it is indeed my intention to preserve these values as it is the priority of my research. With this knowledge, I could come up with recommendations and suggestions to modernise Cantonese opera. Based on the information I collected, I am convinced that the only way to move forward for Cantonese opera is to go through Modernisation.

Technical Issues

From the research, I found out Chinese traditional music have very different characteristics when compared to Western music. Furthermore, Cantonese opera music has its own distinguished style compared to other *Xiqu* genres. For example, Cantonese opera music is more dynamic and louder while other *Xiqu* genre's music can be more poetic and mellow. To produce good sound design for Cantonese opera, we need to understand all these aspects as well as the actual production schedule in order to execute the design properly and in a timely manner.

Through applying my experience, improvisation and experimentation in my case studies, I was able to develop a way to work around the limitations of the short moving-in time schedule and achieved positive outcomes.

I learnt in the research that with the current production system and environment, it is difficult to produce good standardised sound quality productions across the industry. Each production needs a responsible sound designer to supervise and ensure the work is done accordingly.

We are well into the twenty-first century and in this journey, I learnt that the Cantonese opera industry has a lot to catch up on with the current contemporary environment. My research about modernising sound production management is the first step of modernisation that will undoubtedly make this feasible in the short future.

Industry practice

Before I began the research, like many other people in Hong Kong, I had some misunderstandings revolving around the industry. For example, I first thought that the actors were paid generously for each performance. Although some of them are true, this research allowed me to gain a deeper understanding about the industry and how it functions, as well as the reasons behind why and how the industry has grown to become what it is now.

I was shocked about the professional's practices that are not typically considered to be professional. However, during my research, I learnt that they have their own ways of problem solving. It is very different than modern theatre practice in Hong Kong, but they have been practicing this way for many years and it has proven to be working. That is why they continue to have a traditionalist mind-set.

In my research, I talked to and interviewed many professionals that showed understanding that the industry needs to modernise, but a majority of them do not know how to get to that point. I hope this research, when made accessible, can assist them and contribute to the change of the industry practice to a more efficient and productive way of working.

Underlying problems

As mentioned, I was very caught off guard by the professional's practices that are not considered to be very professional conventionally. However, when I came to understand more about the industry through this research, I realised that the reason behind their unprofessional attitude is largely due to being insufficiently paid for their services. Living in one of the most expensive cities in the world³⁵, the salary these young professionals receive reflects the time they spend on each project. Surely, a Cantonese opera star can get paid very high for each performance, but they often need to work without receiving the appropriate salary for around three decades in order to reach this position.

³⁵ According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual Worldwide Cost of Living report, Hong Kong share the first place with Paris and Singapore in 2019.

This research gave me the opportunity to understand the Cantonese opera professionals in-depth on a personal level. Understanding their passion towards the art form and the problems they are facing, I admire them for their commitment and determination. Some of them will become my friends and we may have the opportunity to venture further together to improve sound production in the future.

At the same time, this research also gave me the opportunity to study the art form that was part of my childhood and adolescent memories. Born and raised as Hong Konger, I sincerely hope that Cantonese opera will be an art form that can develop into the future and receive great admiration internationally.

CHALLENGES AND ADJUSTMENTS

During the research, I have encountered challenges in every step of the way. Some of the challenges were foreseeable, however, a lot of them were unexpected. In order to move my research forward, I had to handle and solve all the challenges, resulting to the changes and adjustments made for my research. Below are the keys challenges I met and the adjustments I made to overcome those challenges:

<u>Challenges</u>	<u>Adjustments</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential participants of project drop out without notice.• Production has no rehearsal.• No technical meeting with the venue.• SM is not supportive.• SM team members are not professional. • No time to adjust sound balance. • Technician may be unenthusiastic with helping.• Difficult to balance sound due to the nature of instruments.• Participating groups were unable to give credible feedback as they do not have knowledge to differentiate the difference.• Audiences were too old to appreciate better sound quality.• Participating group was not showing any interest to continue collaborating.• Professionals were not interested to improve sound quality.• Professionals have no knowledge about sound production.• Actors and musicians have different opinions on the location of the music band.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spent longer time to look for suitable participants.• Studied the location, prepared the sound set up plan and improvised during move-in period.• Worked independently during move-in; contacted sound department and arranged everything myself.• Set up headset in auditorium and balanced the sound during performance.• Exercised authority and pushed ahead my plan; did adjustments on design when necessary.• Communicated with Leading Musician and Leading Percussionist to adjust musicians' volume.• Researcher had to rely on experience, feedback from <i>Outsider</i> (venue's professional), research data and literature review to determine the success of case study.• Searched for another participating group.• <i>Outsider</i> (venues, presenters) may have to push professionals to change.• <i>Outsider</i> (venues) can provide technical help and advice.• Considered all aspects of opinions when analysing the data.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Although I have covered as much as I could in this research, there are still some limitations to my research:

- Cantonese opera professionals generally do not have a lot of knowledge on production technicalities. Sound production is something that they never think about. In this case, the feedback from professionals only can be limited to a more surface level of comparable answers such as ‘I like it better than without’ and ‘audience seems happier’. Until professionals gain some knowledge about sound production, they cannot provide more in-depth and constructive feedback.
- Audiences are mostly senior citizens with low education whose feedback are not able to truly reflect what they experienced. One of the goals of this research is to raise the production quality of Cantonese opera in order to bring in younger and higher educated audience. Only then will the audience’s feedback will be more valuable and reflective to the production quality.
- The research mainly focuses on government venues and its operational system, although 79% of Hong Kong’s venue are run by the government and only 6% of venues in Hong Kong are totally private-run.
- The research is focused on Cantonese opera performances inside theatre venues, although 30% of annual performances take place in traditional bamboo canopies. However, as more venues are built and safety concerns for bamboo canopy stages may arise, the percentage of performances inside theatres will increase rapidly.
- Another focus of the research looks at funding bodies such as HKADC and CODF. Although there are many other funding bodies in Hong Kong, the higher-end funding bodies have a much larger budget to ensure the production quality. The lower-end funding bodies’ funding policies are not consistent and dependable on the committee of the time. Therefore, they are not included in this research.

This chapter listed out the changes of key assumptions, knowledge gained, challenges and adjustment, and limitations of the research journey. With all this learning in mind, my

recommendations for modernising Cantonese opera through contemporary sound production design are in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS

As the result of the findings that were analysed and discussed in the two chapters prior to this one, together with the literature support and my own professional perspective, here are some of my recommendations for directing Cantonese opera to the path of modernisation. My recommendations will focus on three areas: the future direction of the industry, funding strategy, and sound production management.

THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE INDUSTRY

Currently, the concept of modernisation is very confusing for the industry. It is important for the industry to agree on what is and how to modernise Cantonese opera. Relying on outsiders (like the *Xiqu* Centre, funding bodies, venues and experts) to apply and enforce the changes only further complicates matters for the industry. The industry needs to have an agreed concept on the future of Cantonese opera. Having a short-term, mid-term and long-term visions will guide all insiders and outsiders on how to approach the development of the art form.

Modernisation without Westernisation

To preserve the art form with its unique aesthetic characteristic, the industry needs to identify what is the essential element for Cantonese opera; the alienation effects, the abstract element or the realism that Cantonese opera adopted in the past few decades.

In the past, the industry has taken a Western realism approach towards indoor production, mimicking Western musical for the stage design, lighting and costume in some cases. But currently, Cantonese opera has yet to accept the modernisation process. Consequently, Cantonese opera has driven away from traditional aesthetic characteristics but is unable to adapt to modern technology and production system. The loss of identity may be the cause behind the failure to attract young audiences and people willing to pay for the performances. The industry will need to differentiate between modernisation and westernisation in order to move forward.

In order to make progress on modernisation, the industry should identify and discuss what makes Cantonese opera unique. We can look into two major aspects: aesthetics and technical.

Aesthetically, the industry needs to discuss if they should abandon abstract and alienation elements. As I have quoted Franco Yuen's concerns about losing the important abstract element in Cantonese opera, the realistic set design and location of musicians in Orchestra Pit also contribute to the loss of these aesthetic characteristics.

Technically, the question of how to adapt to the modern environment has become a major concern for the industry. Technology has become inseparable to any theatre production as well-designed and equipped venues begin to grow in number. Utilising these venues' facilities to create a high-quality performance should be in every group's agenda. The hardware is already installed and ready for use. The only problem is the lack of insider professionals who are capable of using them properly.

The industry also views technology as a way to make their life easier; performers do not need to train to have penetrating voice/sound, musicians can be moved to the Orchestra Pit to make room for performers on stage. The industry needs to understand that technology is there to improve their production quality, not for them to grow dependent on.

Using sound production technology can help Cantonese opera to achieve modernisation without sacrificing unique characteristics of Cantonese opera. Sound production can help and enhance the production to raise the quality to fulfil contemporary audience expectation. The way for modernisation does not mean giving up tradition, rather using technology to enhance tradition.

Introducing the concept of changes to the Industry

My research led me to believe that the industry understood its need to change or to modernise. But many of them do not know where and how to start. Asking professionals to adopt the system they have been practicing for hundreds of years and dive into the modern production system they were alienated from is very risky for them. That is partly why the industry would rather put all the different work roles on the Prompter (a position that they understand and trust), instead of employing SM and designers.

As the Cantonese opera industry has been operating in a traditional production system and receives minimal complains, the risk of adopting a modern production system may receive complaints from the audience which is viewed as a threat by the traditionalist professionals. The

industry's attitude is best described in the book *Managing Group Risk Attitude's* one of four basic risk attitudes:

Risk averse: Uncomfortable with uncertainly, desire to avoid or reduce threats and exploit opportunities to remove uncertainty. Would be unhappy with an uncertain outcome (Murray-Webster & Hillson, 1988, p. 7).

The industry can form group risk attitudes: ‘...in group situations is their influence on collective risk attitude in a particular situation, which in turn drives a group’s performance in making decisions’ (Murray-Webster & Hillson, 1988, p. 44). To convince the industry to take a different approach toward changes, we can introduce the practical ‘Six A’s’ approach toward managing group risk attitude through educating them about the advantages of adopting this approach. Additionally, if this research gains traction among the Cantonese opera community as hoped, these suggestions will become more accessible.

The Six A's Model is described by Murray-Webster and Hillson (2008, pp. 79-87) and can be summarised as (illustrated in Table 11 below):

Awareness of the current behavior of the group
Appreciation of the underlying drivers (both external and internal)
Assessment to determine whether the current group behavior is likely to lead to an acceptable outcome
Accepting the existing group is unlikely to cause major difficulties
Assertion requires a clear statement of the implications of the current approach, and why it needs to be modified
Action is then taken to create a changed environment

Table 11: Six A’s Model

The manager of each group can use the Six A's Model internally to improve efficiency. It is important that the Prompter or SM can encourage their team to begin taking approaches like Six A's Model to modernise the production system.

The industry professionals need to be aware of the need of modernisation or they will be outdated. Embracing the technology can enhance the performance, they can have assessments on how to modernise the production system step by step, agree on an assertion about the need and timetable for change, carry out the action needed to bring the change (introduce the modern production system to their programme) and finally accept the modernisation process.

Turn Group into Team

Cantonese opera industry is mainly operated by actors; therefore, many decisions are made from an actors' perspective. As my study has shown, technical personnel and musicians are there just to serve the requests from actors. The opinion of other stakeholders (audience, musicians, technicians...etc.) are not thoroughly considered and reflected upon.

The industry must realise they need to integrate into the contemporary environment of performance arts: a team working environment where everyone is there to accomplish team goals – a good production.

Tycoon Story (2017) suggested how to convert group into team:

- Establish Team Goals
- Define Roles
- Hire with Team Culture in Mind
- Encourage Good Communication
- Encourage Collaboration
- Be Fair and Consistent
- Celebrate Team Successes

By adopting the seven steps mentioned above, Cantonese opera production can turn their groups into teams. The manager can hire personnel knowing that they are adaptable to team working. Also, trying to hire the same freelance personnel by booking them in advance enhances the connection between freelance personnel (SM, Prompter, musicians, side cast, designers...etc.) (*hire with team culture in mind*). The team should also have a clear goal of what to achieve in this production (*establish team goals*), for example, to produce a big budget spectacle or a small budget creative performance. Once the goal is determined, a good team would be able to define each other's role (*define roles*). The attitude of the theatre group affects the team greatly. A good team should be able to communicate within themselves (*encourage collaboration*) in terms of their work. The manager can encourage the team by treating everyone like a family (*be fair and consistent*). The Manager can also allocate some time for 'team building', host meetings together instead of just talking to each person individually. In this way, the team members can understand each other's needs and connect them together as a team (*encourage good communication*). The manager should constantly supervise the team, spot the tensions building up between members and try to resolve the situation.

Also, managers should be able to share the success of the production and celebrate the success with the team (*celebrate team successes*). This can be achieved by having a nice meal together and a promise to employ them in their future productions.

From my personal experience, I have participated in both groups and team working environment productions. In group environment productions, everyone in the production took care of their own business and no suggestions were made outside their role of work. The corresponding person in charge can make the decision for adjustment only if there is any problem arising for their department. It is a very straight forward command system from top to bottom. The group is a much less effective and a less friendly working environment.

In a team working environment productions, everyone takes a step forward to communicate to each other. We would go to eat midnight snacks after rehearsal and talk about the problems we encountered that day. For example, the sound designer would learn the problem of the costume, props or set department. Very often, the problem of one department can easily be solved by minor adjustments of the other department in this environment. For example, if there is not enough space for actors on set (set and stage management department), it can be easily adjusted by relocating

the on-stage speakers (sound department). By supporting each other as a team, many production problems can be solved without escalating to a PM, venue or producer level, which is far more effective. Additionally, as the team members become friends or recognise each other as working partners, we could contact each other and discuss the upcoming production well before any production meeting is set up.

My experience in modern theatre proved that a team working environment would increase the productivity and effectiveness of the production. Cantonese opera will only benefit if they also apply the seven steps to turn their group into team inside the production.

Overcome reluctance to change

To overcome resistance to change, we can consider using the following three methods for short-term, mid-term and long-term solutions:

Short-term: Imposed by External Force

Although Derya Yılmaz and Gökhan Kılıçoğlu (2013) discussed educational organizations, the concept can be applied to the modernisation of Cantonese opera:

Changing nature of technology and economy force educational organizations to change as regards structural and functional aspects. Indeed, some major external triggers originated outside the school organizations can be ranked as law and regulations of the government, society's standards and values, changing technology, demographic characteristics, improvements in technology, administrative processes and school members' needs (Dawson, 2003; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010) (Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2013, p. 19).

The *Xiqu* Centre is going to impose a professional standard for every production they present. Venues and funding bodies can also adopt a similar approach to ensure the productions funded under them or perform in their venues comply with a modern professional standard. This method is most effective and brings about results quickly, but may create tensions between groups and

venues/funding bodies. Therefore, the change needs to take time and they should also offer many support for the change. However, in order to ensure that the change is taking place, supervision over theatre groups is necessary.

By applying the methods above to the industry progressively, professionals will finally understand that modernisation is not only a preference of the technical professionals and the audience, but it is also a need to integrate into contemporary performing environment. There are only benefits for them to modernise the art form.

Mid-term: Educate the resistance

The essay *Definition of change definition of resistance why people resist who resists* suggested:

1. Over Communicate

Give all relevant information about the change

2. Seek Buy-In

The most effective way to gain buy-in from a group going through change is ...design a simple, yet effective discussion that facilitates not only an understanding of the transition, but also their agreement to participate.

3. Provide Training & Tools

In order for an organization to make a significant change to their business, considerable time must be spent on training and preparation.

4. Reinforce & Follow-Up

To keep momentum moving forward during the change initiative.

This is a mid-term ‘investment’. The resisting professionals take time and result (reward) to accept modernisation. Seeing other groups’ success will hopefully change their mind eventually. Organizations like The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong or the *Xiqu* Centre can organize talks or workshop to motivate and educate the professionals (actors, musicians, prompters and administrators, etc.) to modernise.

Long-term: Target younger age group professionals

Age, resistance to change, and job performance talk about the effect of introducing change to different age groups:

Theoretical arguments underlying these stereotypes can be drawn from developmental and career stages models. For example, Pogson et al. (2003) defined three stages of managerial careers:

- trial stage (under 31 years old);
- stabilization stage (31-44 years old);
- maintenance stage (45 years and older).

Older workers, being in the maintenance career stage, are assumed to be more cognitively rigid, more short-term focused, and hence more resistant to change. In line with these arguments, Finkelstein et al. (1995) showed in a meta-analytical study that older employees are typically associated with lower potential for development (including learning new skills and tackling new challenges) (Kunze et al, 2015, p. 744).

Introducing the modernisation of Cantonese opera production system (illustrated in the picture Figure 35 below) to young professionals and young groups is a long term goal that will lead to the young actors becoming prominent professionals in the industry. The industry will successfully adopt the modern production system.



Figure 35: Introduction of modernising Cantonese opera

SOUND PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

There are numerous roles in Cantonese opera productions and people such as the Prompter are responsible for multiple of them. Since sound production has been an overlooked element of productions, there is no one in Cantonese opera groups who specialises in that department. The Prompter, who is meant to be well-versed in multiple aspects of the production, has limited knowledge on sound production. Venue technicians have the knowledge, but do not have the artistic freedom nor do they have expectations from the group to base their skills on. Therefore, Cantonese opera groups should consider hiring a sound designer to assist them in sound production management.

The Contemporary Role of Prompter

In an interview with Cantonese Opera Prompter Su Zhichang, Su mentioned: ‘There are only 3 or 4 active Prompters in the industry, however there are more than one (Cantonese opera) performance every day (in Hong Kong).’ (Cheung, 2014)

The fact is that there is lack of prominent Prompters in the industry now. Even if they adopt the modern theatre production system of using stage managers and designers which will eventually replace Prompters, it will not affect the industry on a big scale. However, I am not suggesting the industry to abandon the role of the Prompter. On the contrary, I suggest the industry should re-evaluate the role of Prompter by making it more specific and specialised.

As Frank Yeung stated in the interview: ‘Prompters understand very clearly how Cantonese opera operate, but they do not understand the non-Cantonese opera operations, like theatre and technical operation, or they do not care about it.’

Although the Prompter has a deep understanding about the industry, they do not have enough technical knowledge to handle all production elements well. This is the main reason that Cantonese opera productions generally have a lower technical quality than modern theatre productions in Hong Kong.

The industry has to understand that the role of the Prompter has to adapt to the contemporary environment. In a world where most of the Cantonese opera performance will be inside a theatre, technical communication within the venues is essential to provide high quality productions.

As an expert on the operation of Cantonese opera, the Prompter can work as a bridge between actors and SM team, they can take part of the role of the Production Manager and supervise/advise the Stage Manager regarding technical work. Prompters can express opinions and needs on behalf of the theatre group, while Stage Managers can handle all technical aspects with the venue.

In the past, the industry has put too many roles on the Prompter and each role requires their own professional knowledge. This is also the major reason why no one is handling sound element in most of the productions; there is no time and no knowledge.

Banzhu, Performance Managers, actors and programme presenters (funding bodies) have to understand that when they work on the budget of each production, they must reserve a certain percentage of the budget for sound production. The amount does not necessarily matter, even a small amount would suffice, but there must be a budget allocated to sound production nonetheless. The Prompter is not and cannot be the one-stop-solution for all technical problems. The Prompter is a valuable and unique asset in Cantonese opera, however, they are overwhelmed with roles that they are unable to properly handle and therefore, cannot focus on the job(s) they are meant to do.

Sound Designer as an important role in Cantonese opera production

My research indicated that the industry does not have the knowledge required about sound production to begin with. No one can differentiate good or bad sound quality. No one can explain to the venues' technicians what they want and how they want it. As there is no instruction for the technician, the technician can only follow the setting of the previous performance that received no complaints.

The sound designer is there to instruct the technician to deliver the sound quality that the designer wants and to make sure the technician delivers. The sound designer's artistic and technical contribution is vital for a high quality production.

On the other hand:

Theatre must observe a strict hierarchy in order to function smoothly. The collaboration between artists and the group creation of a single art form is both complicated and stressful. It is best to know who to ask questions and who to report to when engaging in a group collaborative (Brugh, 2018).

The importance of having a sound designer in the production is not only because of the designer's artistic and technical contribution, although their artistic and technical input are valuable to the production. Kaye and Lebrecht (2009, p. 343) asked sound engineer Angela Don about her relationship with the sound designer: 'I see myself partly as an instrument that makes the sound designer's vision happen'.

Since the theatre hierarchy is very strict, a sound designer in a production not only takes on the responsibility of any sound related decision, but more importantly, has the authority to ask actors, musicians and technicians to follow instructions. For example, technicians have no authority to ask actors and musicians to do sound test, they can only suggest and wait for the actors and musicians to be ready. Normally, technicians will not advise musicians to play in a certain way (louder or quieter...), because it is not their position to make such suggestions.

The sound designer on the other hand, has the authority to ask personnel to follow the production decisions and schedules concerning sound. If the technician does not follow the instruction, the sound designer can directly complain to RTM or the venue manager. If performers do not follow the instruction, the sound designer can directly complain to the producer or TM. The sound designer is there to ensure the work is carried out accordingly and professionally to the time frame.

Re-evaluate the structure of production workflow and personnel

To modernise Cantonese opera production management, the structure of production workflow and personnel must be re-evaluated. The main difference between the different sized productions are production budget and preparation time. In the following, I propose three different scenarios

and suggest how the production workflow and personnel can be operated, as well as how the Sound Designer can be integrated into the production.

Small budget production

Due to the lack of production budget, I suggest the programme to employ a SM and a sound designer instead of a Prompter. The person in charge of the performance (main actor, director...etc.) will be taking the role of the Prompter. SM will be in charge of all production aspects and the sound designer will only turn up on the performance day to set up sound system and balance the sound during performance (such as what I did during my case studies). The sound designer will also communicate with SM prior to the performance about the technical needs and the SM will arrange any extra equipment hiring if necessary and attend production meetings on the sound designer's behalf. In this case, the sound designer only needs to show up on the performance day, thus charges much less for their service (illustrated in Figure 36 below).

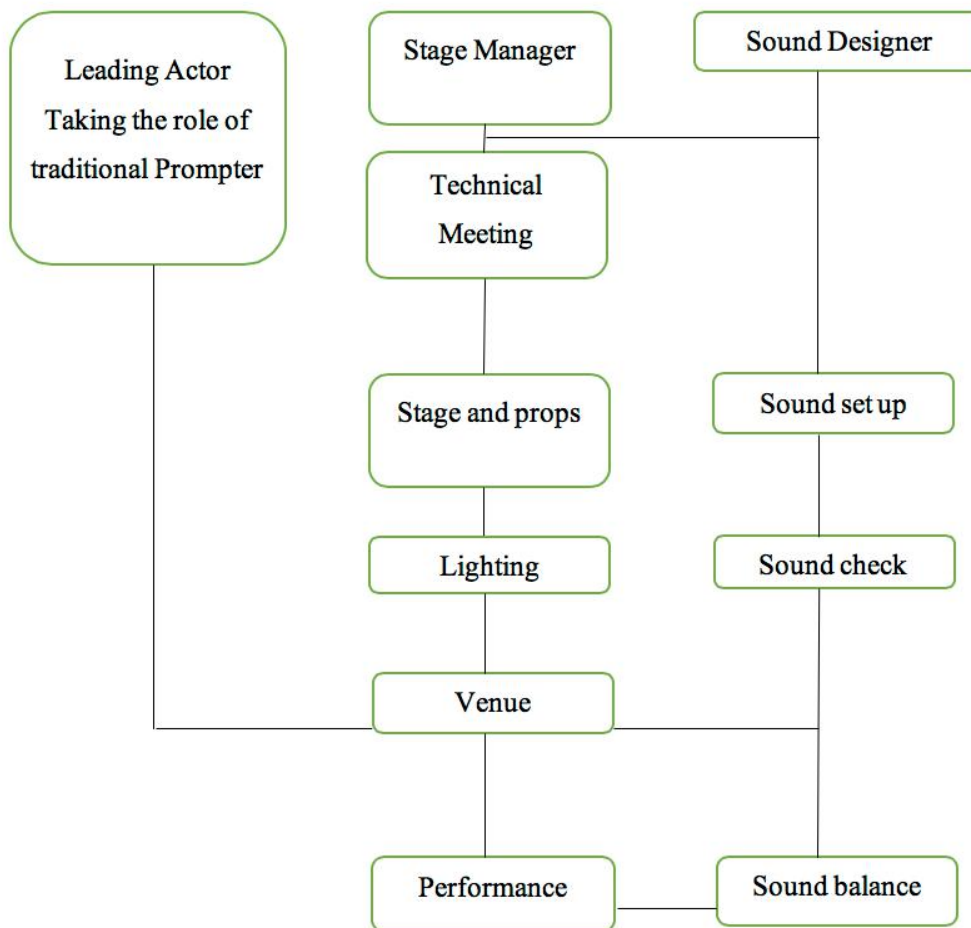


Figure 36: Small budget production

Medium budget production

Medium production's budget can vary largely; so, I would suggest to employ a Prompter if the group can afford it. Otherwise, the Leading Actor or the person in charge can take the role of the Prompter. On the production side, same as small budget production, I suggest a combination of a SM and sound designer. In this case, the sound designer will be in control of all sound-related issues, equipment hiring, technical meetings, move-in and set-up, and sound balancing during the performance. The SM can then focus on the matters other than sound. In this case, the sound designer needs to work around 4 days for the project, and they can charge accordingly (illustrated in Figure 37 below).

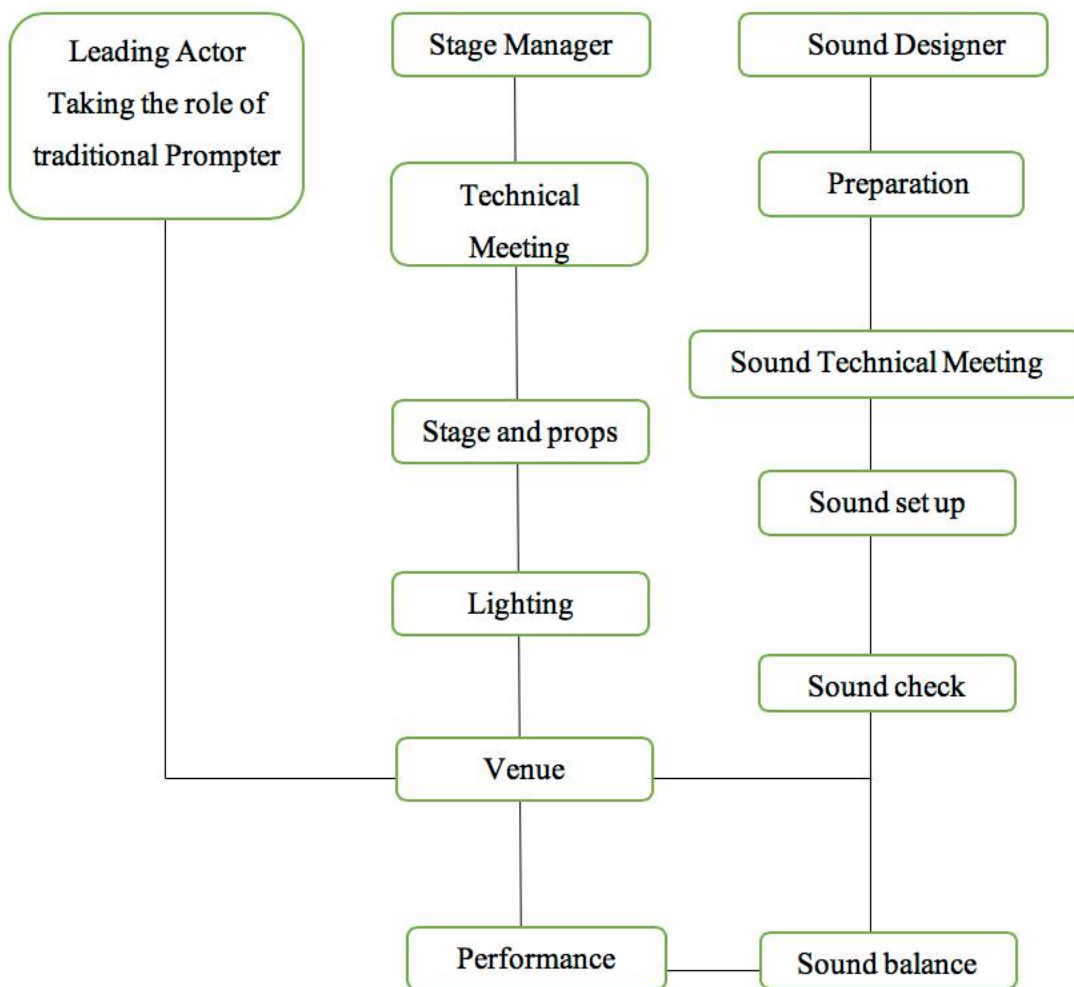


Figure 37: Medium budget production

Large budget production

Large budget productions have many support from all sides; their standard will be same as other modern productions, but with the extra position for a Prompter. There will be many rehearsals and designer meetings with the Director and the PM prior to performance. All designers will attend the production meetings and there will be four to five days of move-in period. With two Technical Rehearsals and one to two Dress Rehearsal(s). Since the sound balance and levels will be set during Technical/Dress Rehearsals, there will only be minor adjustments made by the technician according to situation.

For a large budget production, we must follow the industry standard to maintain the top quality of the art form, as a lot of the high budget Cantonese opera productions are already doing.

Where to locate the musicians?

My research indicated there are two popular locations to locate musicians: stage right and inside the Orchestra Pit. From the actors' point of view, they would prefer the Orchestra Pit, because they can utilise the entire stage for acting and they can see the musicians clearly.

However, from a sound technician's point of view, I would not recommend the Orchestra Pit unless the production has enough technical support, i.e. enough move-in time for sound balance and installation of sufficient sound barrier for percussionists. The problem of balancing loud percussion sound is difficult to solve at this moment. Technical and dress rehearsals are needed under the supervision of a sound designer with the collaboration of the leading musician, leading percussionist and all musicians. However, I am afraid this ideal production environment is only achievable for large budget productions. For a majority of medium and small programmes, it is difficult to achieve within the short future.

For stage right position, despite actors not preferring this option, it is easier to achieve a better sound balance quality with the current production environment, looking at it from a sound technician's point of view. Musicians are able to see the actors more easily and the stage set up would look more traditional to Cantonese opera's standards.

With the current production conditions unchanged, putting musicians inside the Orchestra Pit has more benefit for the actors and stage right is better for the sound quality and the audience.

Deciding between locations depends on the production condition of different programmes, which the Performance Manager, Prompter or Production Manager have to carefully consider.

The Musical Imagery

In my case studies, I found musicians like to use Electric Yuan instead of the acoustic Yuan, which creates a problem of different sound sources with other acoustic instruments. This results in the outcome of sound output being heard in a non-realistic manner; all instruments' sounds are heard through the speakers and the sound produced by the instruments themselves, apart from the Electric Yuan. Since the Electric Yuan is directly plugged into the PA system, its sound can only be heard through speakers but audience cannot hear the sound from the actual instrument. This creates a sound imagery problem for audience.

Apart from the musical imagery problem, like the electric guitar, the Electric Yuan's sound quality will be too flat if it is directly inputted to PA system and played straight out of the speakers without adjusting the sound at all.

To solve this problem, I strongly suggest either the musicians or the venue to provide a small guitar amplifier for Electric Yuan to plug into, and then use the microphone to receive the sound from amplifier; it is a common practice for electrical instruments in pop/rock concerts or official recordings. The sound source of Yuan can bring back its musical image to the band's location. This will ensure the musical image is accurate, and the sound of Yuan can be in tune and improved.

In case the band is set up in the stage right position, I suggest to put extra speakers in front of the band like I did on my third case study. With good sound balance and adjustment, this set up can reflect the true performance environment and the musical image, and thus create a live ambience for audience that cannot be recreated in other media.

Modernisation of musical instruments

Facing the same problem as Cantonese opera, modernising traditional Chinese instruments is not a simple task. Fortunately, Yuen Shi Chun of HKCO has already been doing it for many years and is recognised internationally for his work. Although there is still work in progress to develop instruments to replace all traditional Chinese instruments, the instruments HKCO have developed are more stable with better sound quality by comparison with the traditional instruments. However, the technology now still has its limitations, to further develop computerised instruments, as M.M. Wanderley and M. Battier pointed out:

We are faced with a dilemma – computer sound synthesis gives us an enormous range of parametrized control. Sensor devices give us a freedom from mechanical and acoustical constraints. Despite this, an acoustic instrument is capable of responding to a player’s expressive subtlety in a way we can only hope to approach with new instruments. And as much as the computer allows an unlimited sonic palette, an acoustical instrument is extremely rich in the range of related and articulated timbres it can produce (Wanderley & Battier, 2000, p. 404).

Although there are limitations on computerized instruments, I suggest the industry to start getting used to the idea of using them. While talking to Connie Yiu in my second and third case study and interview, one of the issues most troubling to her is that during promoting their touring performances, the percussion sound were way too loud, the group got complaints from neighbours (school, library...etc.) frequently. I designed a sound barrier device to block off the sound from the percussionists for her. But the sound barriers are very big to carry around, and it will be very hot for musicians to stay inside during summer. It is also difficult to adjust the sound level in different environments.

On the other hand, MIDI instruments technology have been developed for decades and although it still cannot totally recreate and replace real instruments to a hundred per cent, the technology is constantly improving and developing. I believe it is a very good option to use MIDI percussion during the groups’ promotion and touring performances.

The optimal Sound Design for Cantonese opera

Currently, the good sound quality of a Cantonese opera is expected to be television-like with a clear stereo sound from house speakers with reasonable balancing between musicians and singers.

And thus one might look at theatre's current fashion for interactive immersivity and wonder of what it is redolent. A mode of perspective (which necessarily assumes a detached perceptual position and implies non-participation or involvement) whereby one watches television, films or plays, looks at art or listens to music, seems, in a way that is reminiscent of mid-nineteenth century fashions for exhibitions, stereoscopes and peep shows, to be giving way to modes of wraparound immersivity in which one wears 3D glasses, headphones or virtual reality visors, submits one's entire field of vision to a huge IMAX screen or participates in events. Immersive theatre becomes more the perusal of an environment than show; its audience no longer subjected, from a predetermined viewpoint, to a predetermined story. Rather a multifarious dramaturgy follows and 'subjectifies' them on their personalised promenades of participatory encounter (Kendrick & Roesner, 2011, p. 9).

The audience has evolved through time, and now they are 'trained' or have gotten used to a complex production experience. Good sound quality needs to be three dimensionally reflected in the performance environment to the audience. Apart from the audience being able to hear all of the musical instruments' layers along with the different vocals' unique qualities, musical image and live ambience needs to be included in the whole audience experience.

Suggestions for future research

This research is the first of its kind concerning the production aspect of Cantonese opera or *Xiqu*. As technology and theatre arts are becoming inseparable, to continue developing the Chinese performance arts, technical and production studies are essential.

I suggest to have more studies based on the sound elements: the musical imagery, how to pick up sound from Chinese instruments, sound mixing and balancing for Chinese music or even developing the surround sound system for *Xiqu* venues.

Production management is also very important, the production management of *Xiqu* production, TM and SM work role adaptation to *Xiqu*, the Prompter's new role in engaging modern production, and more. Other technical aspects like lighting and set design are a no-man's land in terms of study. Therefore, more attention should be paid to these technical aspects alongside sound design.

FUNDING STRATEGY

The funding bodies' strategies has to be assessed in order to propel Cantonese opera forward. Currently, these strategies are responsible for holding Cantonese opera in one place, stagnant and reliant on the funding that is not even considered to be generous. The current funding policies favour quantity over quality. A lacklustre performance that attracts the same audience group is prioritised over creating a spectacular performance that can appeal to the masses. These funding policies arguably do not create much difference in box office income, nor do they provide groups with modern technology. It is essential for funding bodies to carefully examine and reconsider their priorities to enable Cantonese opera groups to flourish.

I suggest to the funding bodies that, instead of duplicating each other's work and only focusing on funding performance programmes, they should re-evaluate each of their roles to focus on funding programmes specifically to improve performances' quality, enlarge audience base and 'develop' Cantonese opera.

More research funding on all aspects of Cantonese opera

The amount of funding HKADC and CODF granted for the past years have been minimal on research and studies. Both funding bodies refused to grant funding on translation and publishing for my research with the reason: 'due to too many applications, we regret we cannot grant this application'. Instead, they continue to fund low budget performances.

A majority of academic studies on Cantonese opera I encountered in my research are about its history. While the past is extremely important to how our culture has been shaped, the future cannot be ignored in order to move forward.

In the case of CODF, the funding budget for each performance programme is around 40,000 HK Dollars, which is extremely low for a performance but enough to carry out research and studies.

The funding bodies must acknowledge the importance of research and studies in the future of Cantonese opera. For Cantonese opera to have a future and develop, more studies on all aspects of Cantonese opera is urgently needed for the industry.

Sound designer support

In Frank Yeung's interview, we learnt that the *Xiqu* Centre has taken a giant step to support the production of Cantonese opera from a venue perspective. The *Xiqu* Centre's vision is admirable and their method can be adopted partly by other funding bodies and venues.

- Funding bodies only provide funding for production e.g. HKADC, CODF

Yeung expressed when negotiating with theatre groups for presentation programme, the *Xiqu* Centre can request the group to follow a certain production protocol (having full rehearsal, everyone shows up for moving-in period...etc). The same idea can apply to the funding bodies; they can request theatre groups to reserve part of the budget for hiring a sound designer in their programme when granting the funding. The budget can be anywhere from 2,000 to 8,000 HK dollars (182 to 727 pounds) according to the production size and requirement, which will not affect the overall production budget very much (the average budget for HKADC *Xiqu* programme is 132,240 HK Dollars). The sound designer will be responsible for technical meetings and moving-in to set up sound equipment and to balance sound. It will be about two days of work per production for the sound designer and they can assure that the sound quality is at a professional level.

- Funding bodies who are involved in the production they present e.g. different arts Festivals, LCSD

To ensure their presented programmes is up to professional standards, various arts festivals can provide their own sound designer(s) (project-based or freelance) for their *Xiqu* programmes. Alternatively, they can also request the theatre groups to reserve a small budget for hiring sound designer.

- Venues

The 07/08 and 08/09 yearly Hong Kong government's Policy Address also promised to 'improve the operation and management of cultural services and venues in Hong Kong'. Almost ten years have gone by and the services that LCSD venues provide has not changed much since.

On the other hand, the *Xiqu* Centre is hoping the technician would take the role as the ‘third person to give some balancing advice’. Frank said in our interview: ‘When I went to Europe, the sound control and light control booth were located inside the auditorium. The light operator is going to study those dances to adjust. So these examples show that the technician has different levels of input.’

LCSD venues can emulate the *Xiqu* Centre’s beliefs and go further; if a production has no sound designer, the venues can assign a sound technician to carry out the sound designer’s job. In a technical meeting prior to performance date, the venue representative can ask if the production has their own sound designer. If the group says no, the venue’s Resident Stage Manager (RSM) or Resident Technical Manager (RTM) responsible for this particular production can assign a sound technician to be the production’s sound designer.

In order for the venue to provide an extra sound designer, venues may need to arrange the working schedule for the technician. Since most of the LCSD venues have enough manpower for multiple facilities, extra technicians can arrange to aid the performance’s sound set up for two to three hours. This is an administrative effort, but it will undoubtedly help improve the sound quality of the performance. It also allows theatre groups to get used to having a sound designer as the industry’s standard, and encourages venues’ technicians to further engage in the production.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION - A JOURNEY OF APPRECIATION ON CANTONESE OPERA

After been educated in UK for art and music, I have been working as a theatre sound designer in Hong Kong from 1994. My professional accomplishment includes over 100 productions I participated in Hong Kong and abroad, I have been nominated for and won numerous awards, and have been given many opportunities involving working with top international professionals and participated in many international festivals.

Having gone through the handover of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the British to China in 1997, my generation of cultural workers in Hong Kong recognize the importance to find our own cultural identity. As Cantonese opera has a significant influence—culturally and historically—over Hong Kong, Cantonese opera is often the answer to our quest.

As a modern metropolitan city, the hardware and production system used in modern theatre in Hong Kong is of very high international standards. However, with hundreds of years of traditional practice and preferences, Cantonese opera has not been able to adopt and reap the benefits from these advantages that are right in front of them. Worse yet, facing the challenges of contemporary environment, Cantonese opera is facing decline.

In 2007, I was fortunate enough to work with the highly respected Cantonese opera star Leung Hon Wai (1944-2011), whose vision to modernise Cantonese opera as well as his professional attitude inspired me to plant the seed toward research on the modernisation of Cantonese opera. My encounters with Cantonese opera production also convinced me that there are many technical improvements to be made to improve the sound quality of the performances. Eventually, I settled on this project to open the doors to an investigation of Cantonese opera and the modernisation of the art in order to facilitate growth in its popularity, cultural significance, and its future development.

Since 2015, I set out to research on Modernising Cantonese Opera through contemporary sound production design. I started the research believing Cantonese opera needs modernisation to survive in the future. During the 36-month data collection period, the project was reliant on a mixed method that contained interviews with different industries' professionals and important stakeholders, survey to the industry, as well as participating in different case studies.

When I began the project, I understood that this was a research that had never been done before and I was aware that industry's professionals tend to be more conservative and traditional.

I was well-prepared to receive any unforeseeable obstacles along the way. To my surprise, I met challenges in almost every single step. I have met professionals who reacted enthusiastically about my project at first, but gave me extremely cold response in the end. On the other hand, I also met many professionals who genuinely welcomed my research and were willing to help and participate.

During the journey, my professional and personal beliefs and assumptions of the industry have constantly changed from one end to another. My questions about the industry's professionalism in the beginning of my research was later understood and empathized with due to collecting more in-depth information about the industry. In order to move forward in my research, it required me to extend all of my professional skills, knowledge and personal contacts to find solutions. Although there were times when I experienced confusion and frustration during the journey, I felt encouraged every time I reached a breakthrough to move on to the next stage. I am very glad that I went through with the research and truly made personal and professional gains at the end of it.

On the other hand, as I investigated deeper and deeper into the core of the art form, I discovered about the industry's practice and the reasons behind these practices. I simultaneously started to appreciate Cantonese opera's traditions. The project enabled me to appreciate Cantonese opera more and how it works, and I gained a deeper understanding through the eyes of the people I have spoken to. I would not have learnt all that if I have not done this project. Despite the obstacles posed by the contemporary environment Cantonese opera is now in, their practice withstood the test of time, always able to adapt to the environment presented to them to a survivable degree, yet they produce art that has been inspiring generations of people.

My research has shown that Cantonese opera needs to keep up with the times like all other elements in life. It confirmed that modernisation is the way forward for the future development of Cantonese opera. The research findings underpinned the three major factors that hold back Cantonese opera from modernisation: the need to re-evaluate the traditional production system, the united industry's consensus about modernisation, and the deficiency of the current funding strategy. From the three major factors, I have made suggestions for future development of the art form: the industry to embrace the modern production system, adjust their view for modernisation, and for the funding bodies to board their strategy and not only prioritize quantity over quality.

In this journey, I made many new friends, learnt to respect Cantonese opera and the people of the industry. Cantonese opera is the guardian of Hong Kong's heritage and a beacon of our culture and history. I sincerely hope that Cantonese opera can fully adapt to the contemporary environment

and present itself to a new generation of local and international audience with the highest production quality.

Going forward, this is the first breakthrough study and research on sound production and management on Cantonese opera and *Xiqu* at large. It opened the door for more academic research and studies on the technical aspects of Cantonese opera and *Xiqu*. I will continue to seek funding and ways for this research to reach further lengths and be read by non-English reading scholars internationally.

Doctor of Professional Studies
(Arts management and technology)

A research project submitted to Middlesex University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Modernising Cantonese Opera through
contemporary sound production design**

Bibliography and Appendix

LIN Lung Ghi Roger

Faculty of Professional and Social Sciences

Middlesex University

January 2020

Student number: M00474616

Director of Studies: Dr. Agi Ryder

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners or Middlesex University.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 08-09 Cantonese Opera's Audience Research Report

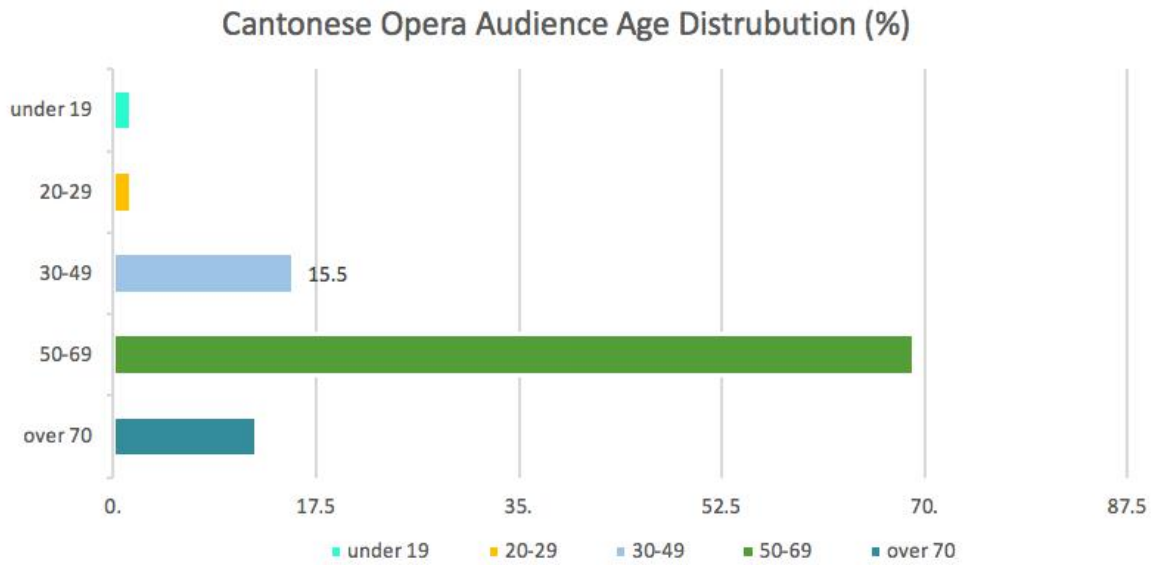


Figure 1: Age distribution of the Cantonese Opera audiences

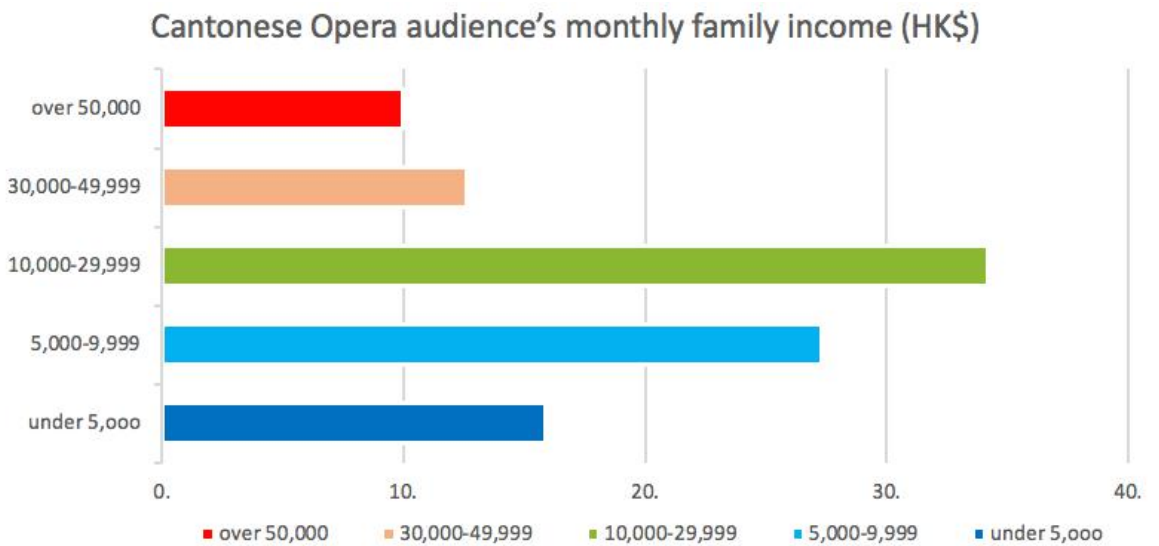


Figure 2: Cantonese Opera audiences' monthly family income

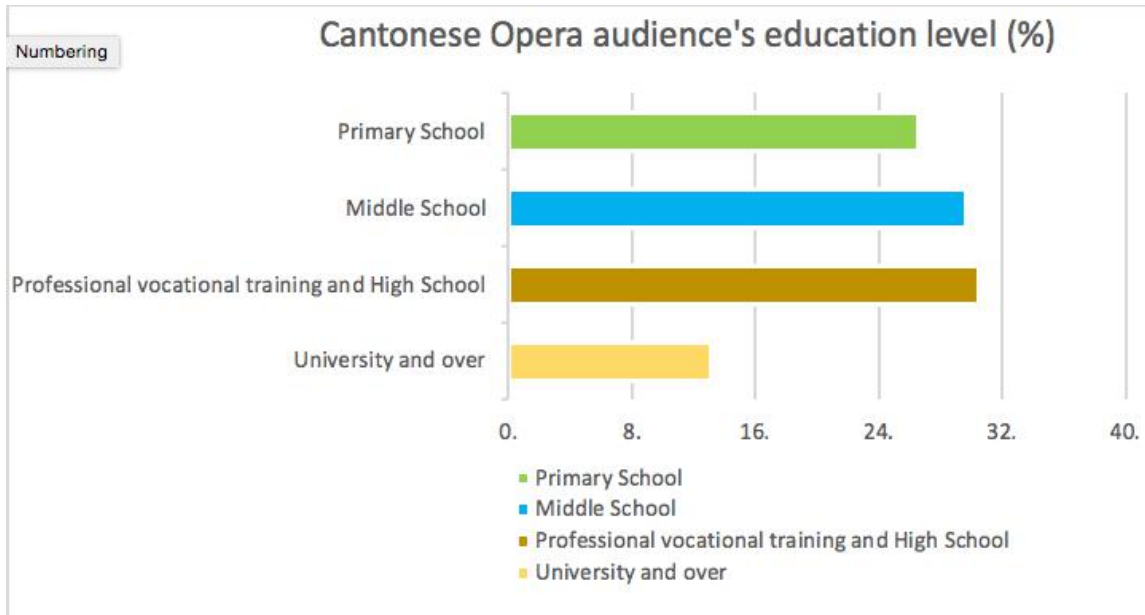


Figure 3: Education level of the Cantonese Opera audiences

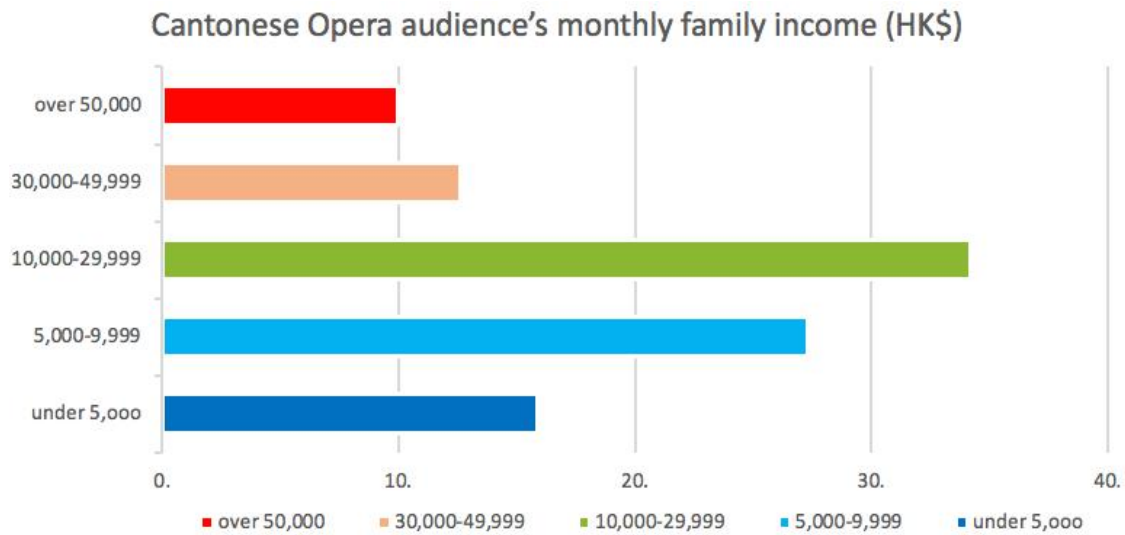


Figure 4: Occupations of the Cantonese Opera audiences

**Appendix 2 Hong Kong Arts Development Council's Hong Kong Annual Arts Survey
Report 2015/2016**

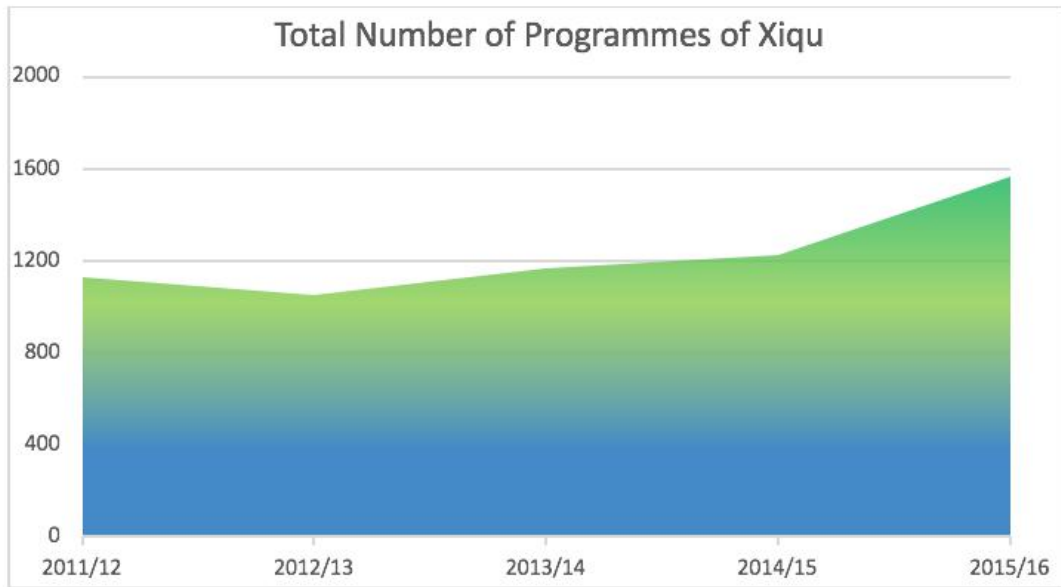


Figure 5: Number of Xiqu programmes

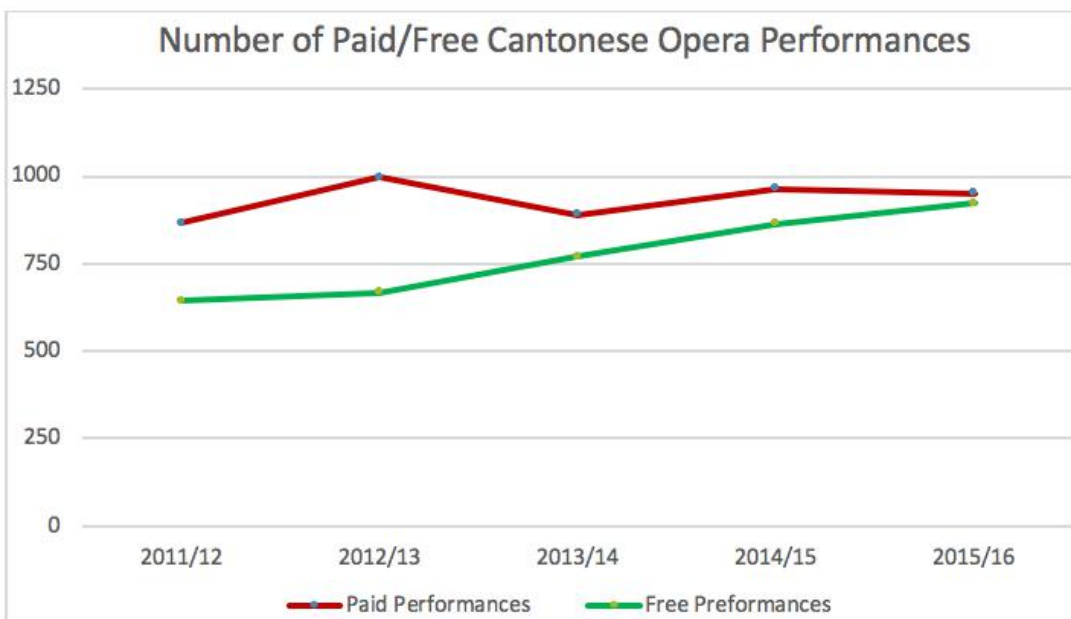


Figure 6: Number of paid and free performances

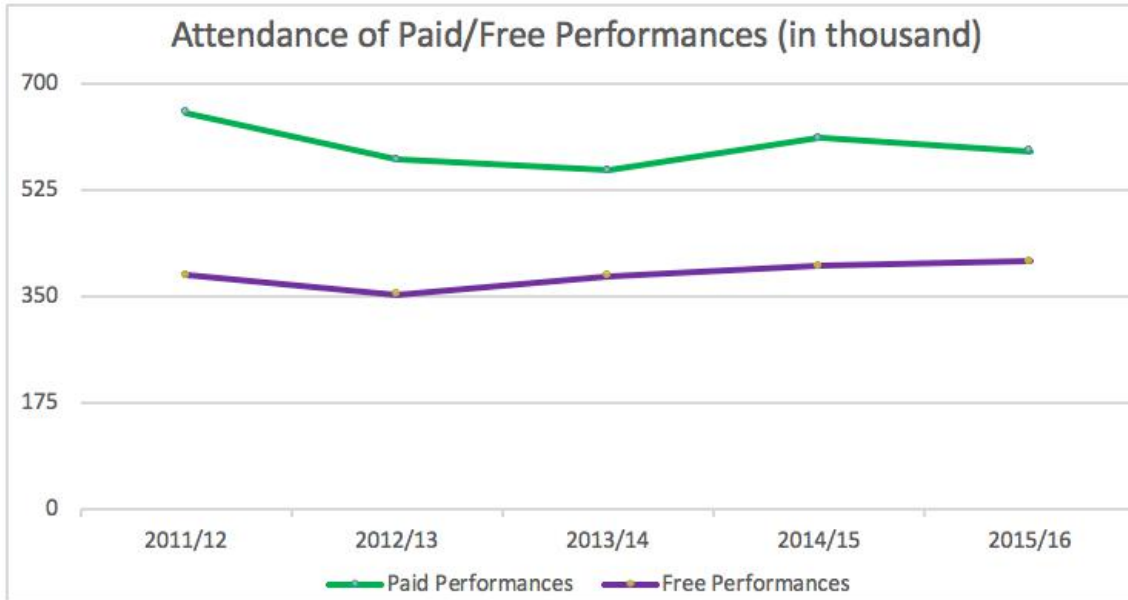


Figure 7: Attendance of paid and free performances

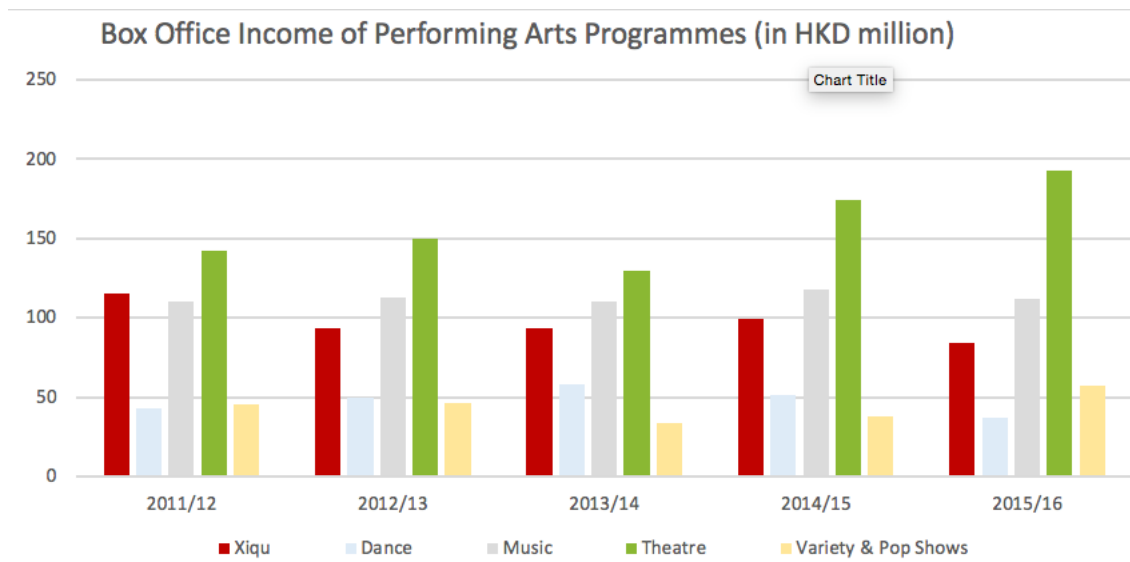


Figure 8: Box office income of performing arts programmes

Appendix 3 Sample note of Interviews

戲曲中心 設計問題
 聲 pitch. feedback.
 → bowing. their own research.
 old time: NO PA. 像官的
 聲音由觀衆入來.
 不用 mic. 每晚對人練聲
 Now, 倚靠 mic. 缺少練聲
 鑼鼓聲的 balance
 如何解決?
 技術的問題, 外國設計
 師才 PA 台.
 Hard ware.

傳統! 家庭式父子.
 給其他人教, 自己不教
 例如師傅不教自己兒子
 而給其他師傅.
 一個份緊密的群体.
 紅褲仔 VS APA. 紅褲仔
 交流, 傳統訓練.
 一般要做三、四年以上才
 可以叫師傅, 份難求.

為何要現代化? 似西
 方做法? 將半部放到
 四周, 行內人份抗拒!
 以往太多人要現代化, 會
 戲, 結果不倫不類.
 要變清楚, 學界不希望
 亂來. Morris? 現代化
 年輕一輩會加入戲曲之
 類. 發展方向各有不同.
 要保持傳統!!

他是份完整拍動響劇, 這字
 可以試不同技術.
 ear man? OK! 訂? ✓
 others? personal mic?
 找錢! sound check?
 OK ✓
 戲曲音樂? 粵音?
 化木匠, 舞台設計, 不同.
 wave in? 'Dang!!!
 need more + small notes!!
 try ear man on earlier
 performance. contact
 SM. for that production
 9月初我認識! 李寧?
 音向設計? tune EQ.
 only!

Appendix 4 Survey questions for Professional

1. Management	
How do you rate the importance of sound quality in a production?	
Not important	Very important
How important would you rate a unique theatre experience (which is non-replicable in CDs, TV or DVDs) in attracting audiences?	
Not important	Very important
Are you willing to distribute more resources (time and/or budget) to sound production?	
Not at all	Very much
2. Technical personnel	
Is it acceptable to spend more time on sound production during move in?	
No	Very much
Will sound production increase workload a lot?	
Not at all	Very much

Appendix 6 Survey Data

*The responses are presented in both table form with percentages as well as pie charts for visual summary.

Professional surveys

Survey for members of management:

For the question: 'How do you rate the importance of sound quality in a production?'

Very Important	0%
Fairly Important	15%
Important	75%
Slightly Important	10%
Not At All Important	0%

Table 1: Importance of sound quality in a production

How do you rate the importance of sound quality in a production?

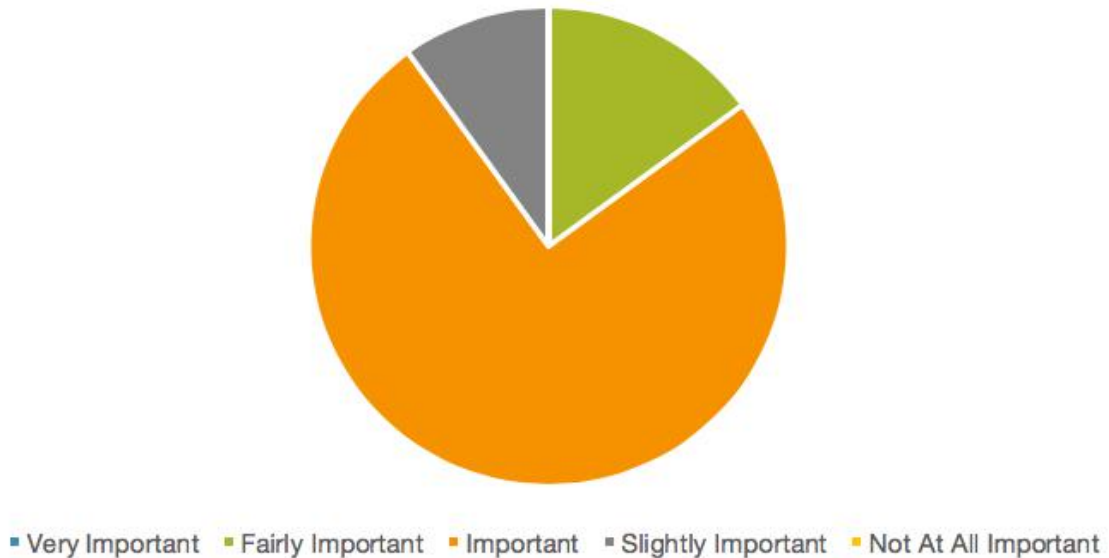


Figure 9: Importance of sound quality in a production

The question ‘*How important would you rate a unique theatre experience (which is non-replicable in CDs, TV or DVDs) in attracting audiences?*’

Very Important	0%
Fairly Important	50%
Important	25%
Slightly Important	25%
Not At All Important	0%

Table 2: How important would audience rate a unique theatre experience

How important would you rate a unique theatre experience (which is non-replicable in CDs, TV or DVDs) in attracting audiences?

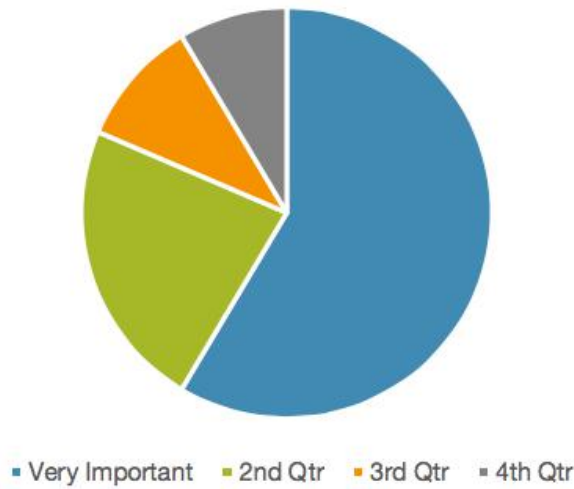


Figure 10: How important would audience rate a unique theatre experience

The question ‘Are you willing to distribute more resources (time and/or budget) to sound production?’

Very Much	0%
Fairly Much	10%
Yes	40%
Not So Much	50%
Not At All	0%

Table 3: Distribution of resources

Are you willing to distribute more resources (time and/or budget) to sound production?

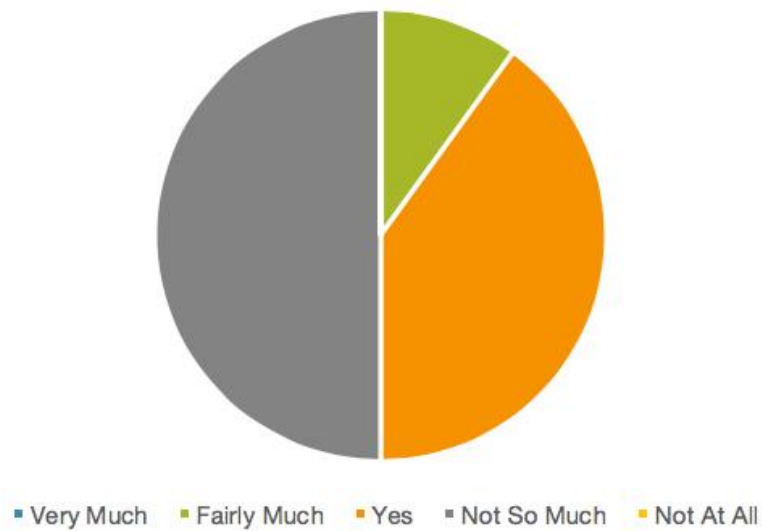


Figure 11: Distribution of resources

Survey for technical personnel:

The question 'Is it acceptable to spend more time on sound production during move in?'

Very Much Acceptable	100%
Fairly Acceptable	0%
Acceptable	0%
Not So Much Acceptable	0%
Not At All Acceptable	0%

Table 4: Spending time on sound production

Is it acceptable to spend more time on sound production during move in?

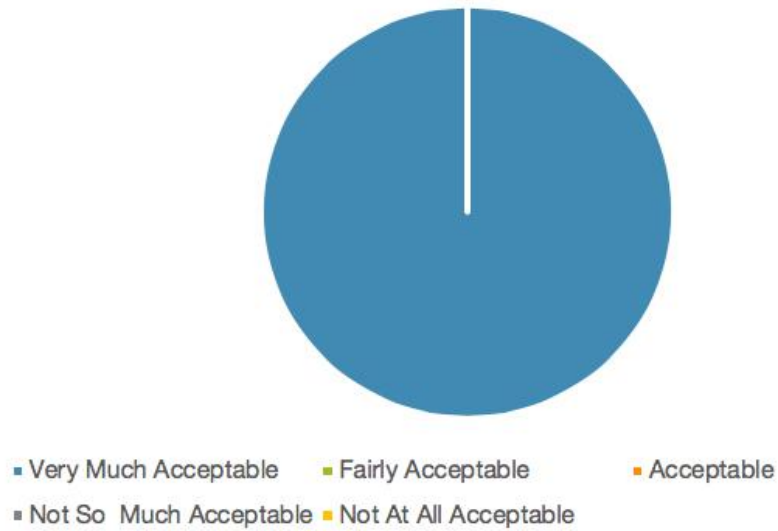


Figure 12: Spending time on sound production

The question ‘Will sound production increase workload a lot?’

Very Much	0%
Some	0%
Fairly	0%
Little Bit	20%
Not At All	80%

Table 5: Sound production and workload

Will sound production increase workload a lot?

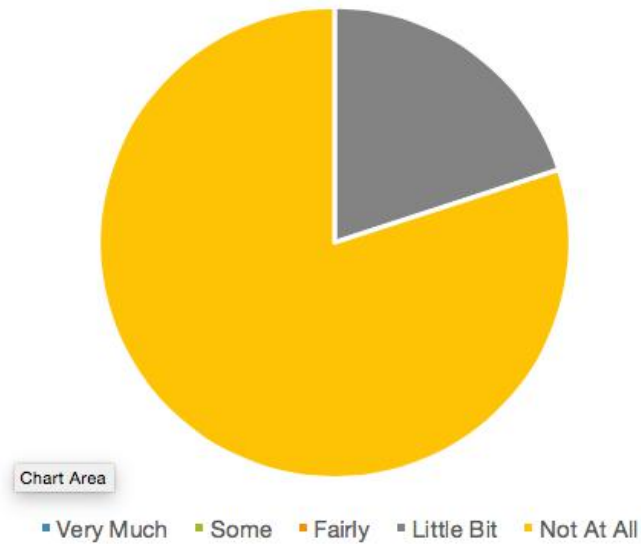


Figure 13: Sound production and workload

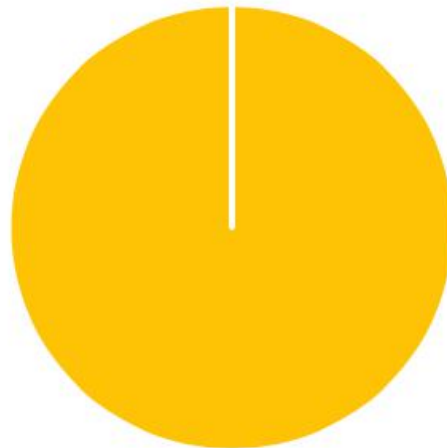
The question ‘How much time can be used on sound check, sound plot and sound balance during moving-in?’

15 Minutes	0%
30 Minutes	0%
45 Minutes	0%
One Hour	0%
More Than One Hour	100%

Table 6: Allocation of time

How much time can be used on sound check, sound plot and sound balance during moving-in?

Chart Area



■ 15 Minutes ■ 30 Minutes ■ 45 Minutes ■ One Hour ■ More Than One Hour

Figure 14: Allocation of time

Survey for performers:

The question ‘Does the quality of on-stage sound system affect your performance?’

Very Important	5%
Fairly Important	30%
Important	55%
Slightly Important	10%
Not At All Important	0%

Table 7: On-stage sound system’s effect

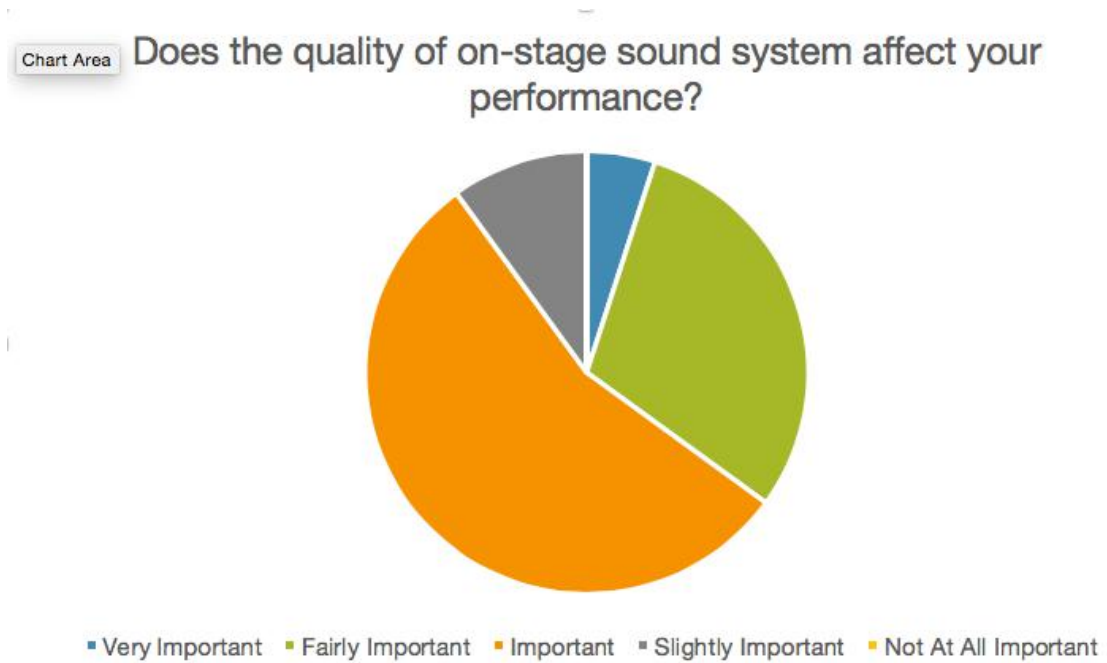


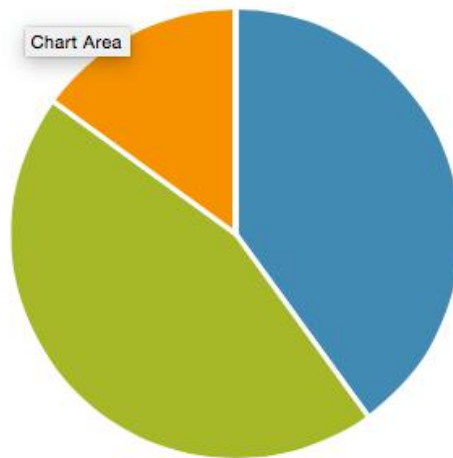
Figure 15: On-stage sound system’s effect

The question ‘How important is it for the voice/music to reach the audience well?’

Very Important	40%
Fairly Important	45%
Important	15%
Slightly Important	0%
Not At All Important	0%

Table 8: Importance of sound reaching the audience

How important is it for the voice/music to reach the audience well?



■ Very Important ■ Fairly Important ■ Important ■ Slightly Important ■ Not At All Important

Figure 16: Importance of sound reaching the audience

The question ‘How much time can be used on sound check, sound plot and sound balance during moving-in?’

15 Minutes	75%
30 Minutes	25%
45 Minutes	0%
One Hour	0%
More Than One Hour	0%

Table 9: Time for sound check

How much time can be used on sound check, sound plot and sound balance during moving-in?

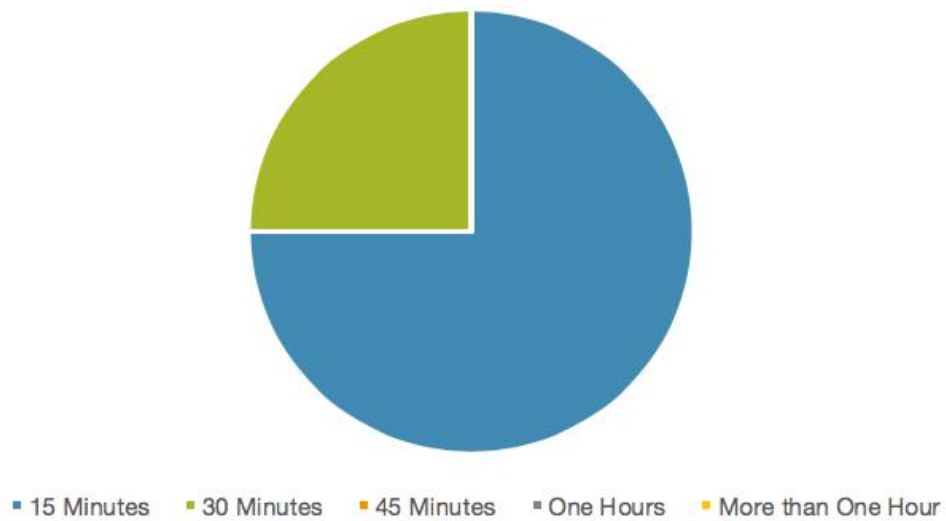


Figure 17: Time for sound check

Audience survey

The question ‘How often do you watch Cantonese opera performances?’

Once A Week	1%
Once A Month	10%
Once A Quarter	28%
Once A Year	39%
First Time	22%

Table 10: Frequency of watching Cantonese opera performances

How often do you watch Cantonese opera performances?

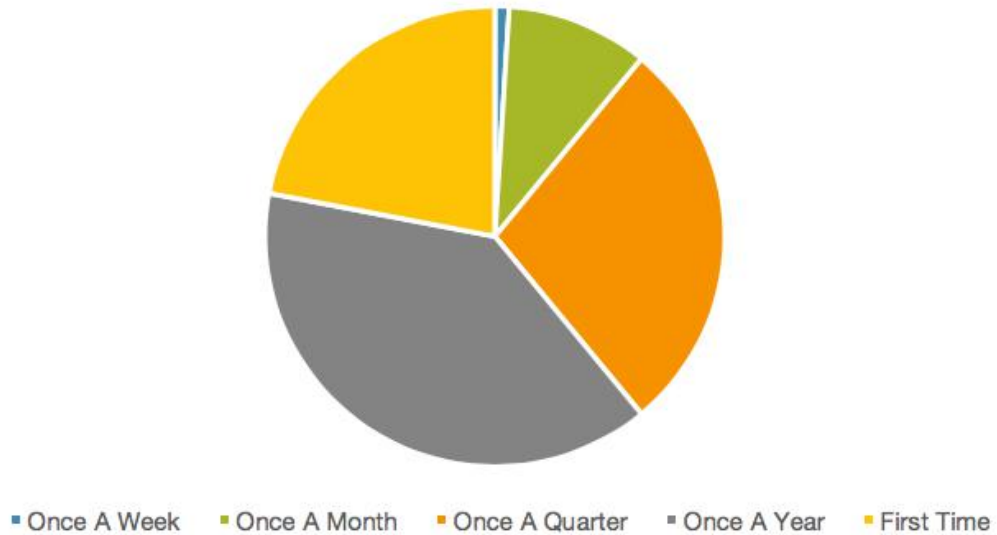


Figure 18: Frequency of watching Cantonese opera performances

The question ‘Are you happy with the sound quality of the performance?’

Very Happy	2%
Fairly Happy	20%
Happy	62%
Slightly Happy	16%
Not Happy	0%

Table 11: Satisfaction with sound quality

Are you happy with the sound quality of the performance?

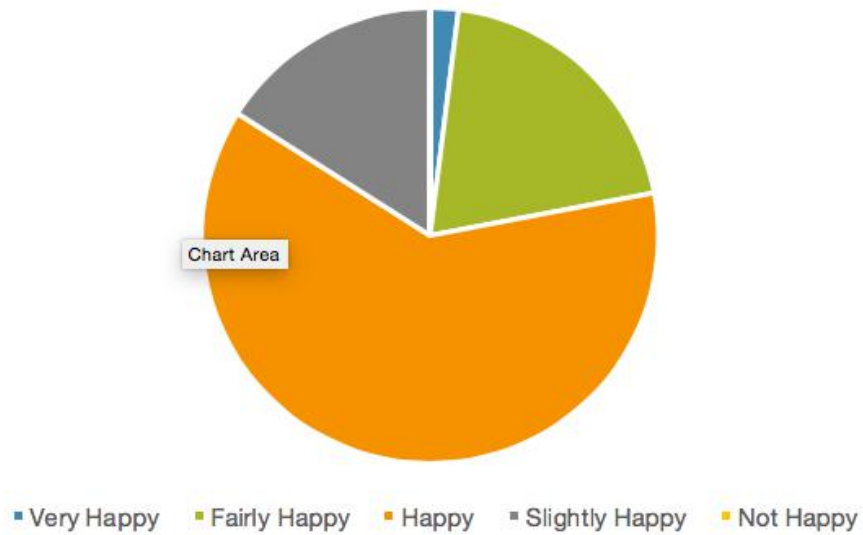


Figure 19: Satisfaction with sound quality

The question *'Is the sound quality what you expected to hear before you watch the performance?'*

Very Much	5%
Fairly Much	5%
Yes	80%
Not So Much	10%
Not At All	0%

Table 12: Sound quality expectations

Is the sound quality what you expected to hear before you watch the performance?

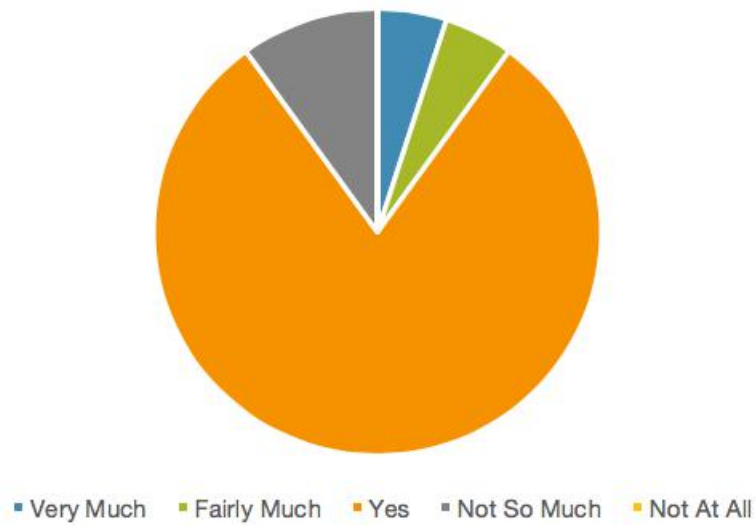


Figure 20: Sound quality expectations

The question ‘*Will you watch more performances if the sound quality is always good?*’

Very Much	3%
Fairly Much	16%
Yes	30%
Not So Much	43%
Not At All	8%

Table 13: Watch more performances with good sound quality

Will you watch more performances if the sound quality is always good?

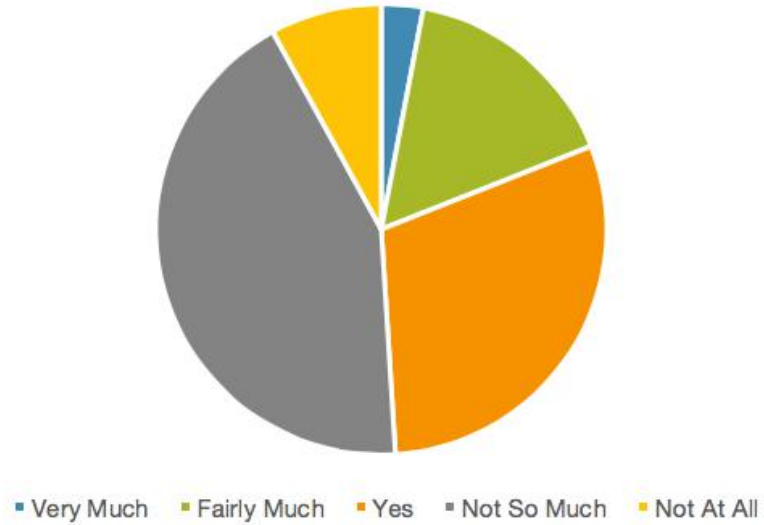


Figure 21: Watch more performances with good sound quality

The question ‘Will you watch more opera performance if it offers a unique theatre experience that cannot be reproduced in other media (CDs, TV or DVDs...etc)?’

Very Much	6%
Fairly Much	14%
Yes	36%
Not So Much	34%
Not Relevant	10%

Table 14: Unique theatre experience and Cantonese opera

Will you watch more opera performance if it offers a unique theatre experience that cannot be reproduced in other media (CDs, TV or DVDs...etc)?

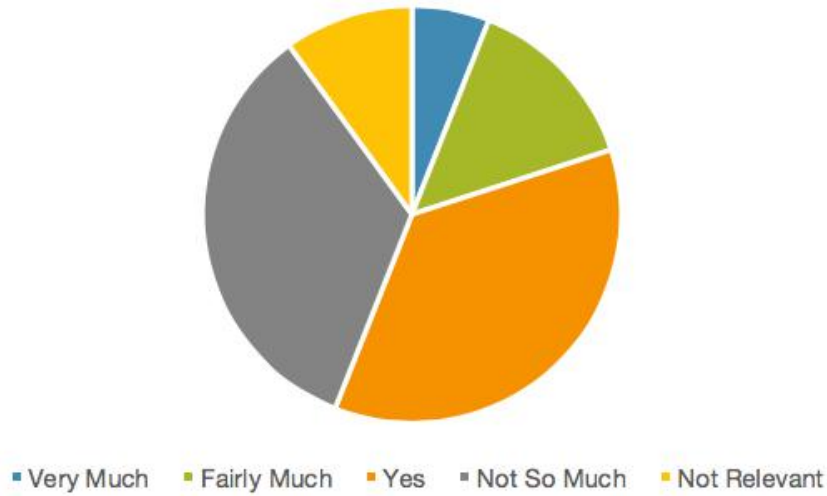
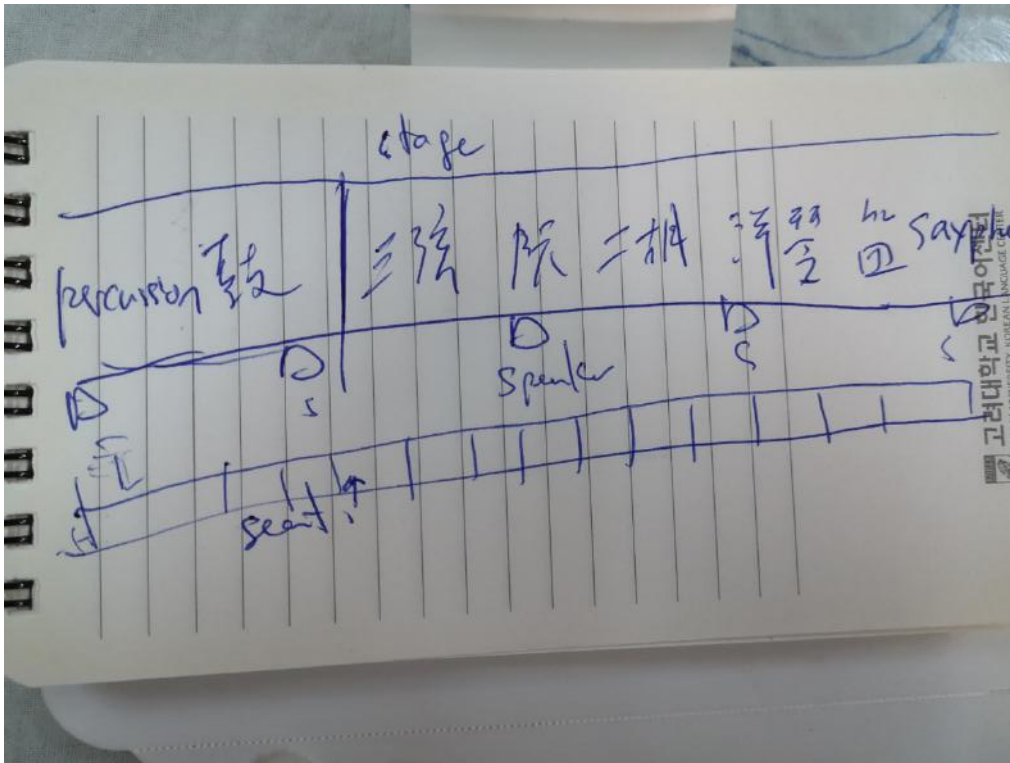


Figure 22: Unique theatre experience and Cantonese opera

Appendix 7 Sample note and photographs from Theatre 1





9:00 AM
2:30 check sound.
setup
6:00 sound check.
7:00 Tech Run.
?
problem with sim.
no headphone.
solve by asking
Technician to give
me a wired head
phone.
11:00 finish.

Appendix 8 Sample note and photographs from Theatre 2





Appendix 9 Sample note and photographs from Theatre 3





玲瓏粵劇團

鄧美玲 龍貫天

2018年6月13-15日 晚上7時30分

沙田大會堂演奏廳 (粵語演出 In Cantonese)

陳鴻運	六月十三日(星期三)	再世重溫金鳳緣
阮兆輝	六月十四日(星期四)	十年一覺揚州夢
洪海	六月十五日(星期五)	蝶影紅梨記

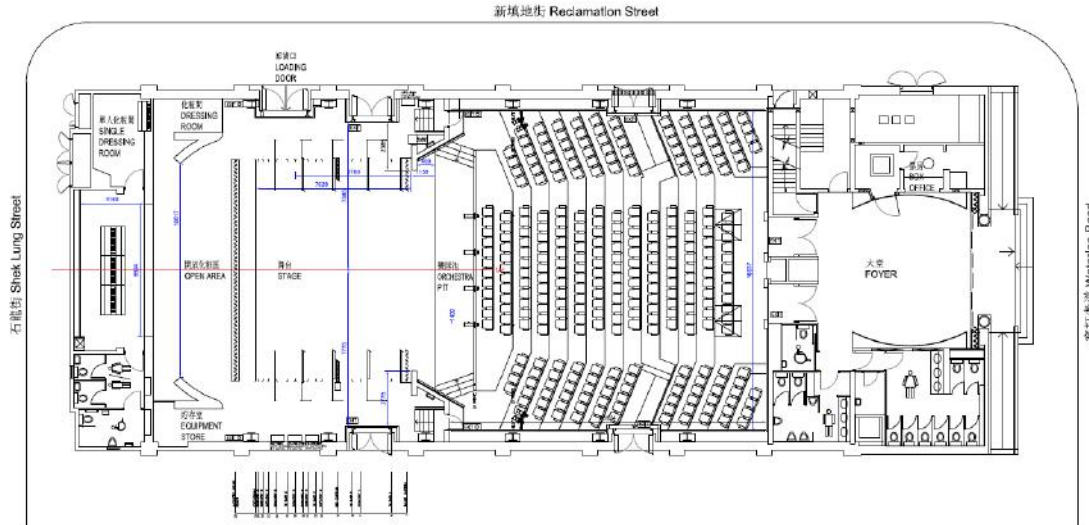
門票現正在城市售票網公开发售

票價: \$380, \$280, \$200, \$140, \$100

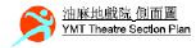
六十歲或以上長者、殘疾人士及長者護人、全日制學生及綜合社會保障輔助
 受惠人士半價優惠 (部份 \$380 門票不設半價優惠)
 信用卡電話購票: 2131 5999 戲院查詢: 6683 8163 (劇團)
 網上購票: www.urbtix.hk 熱線查詢: 3761 6661 (每日上午 10 時至晚上 5 時)
 流動應用程式 My URBIX (Android 及 iPhone/iPad 版) 推廣

粵劇發展基金會
 粵劇發展基金會
 粵劇發展基金會

Appendix 10 Theatre Ground Plan of Yau Ma Tei Theatre

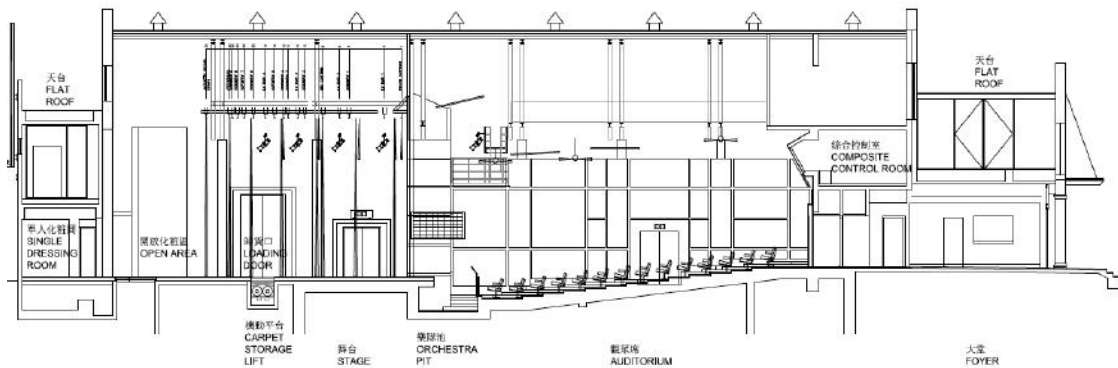


LCSO-PATSS-V.20180821

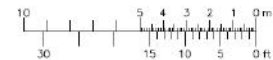


座位 Seats: 296
舞台畫框 Proscenium Opening: 9m x 5m

卸貨口 LOADING DOOR: 2.1m x 3.5m
機動平台 CARPET STORAGE LIFT: 10m x 1m

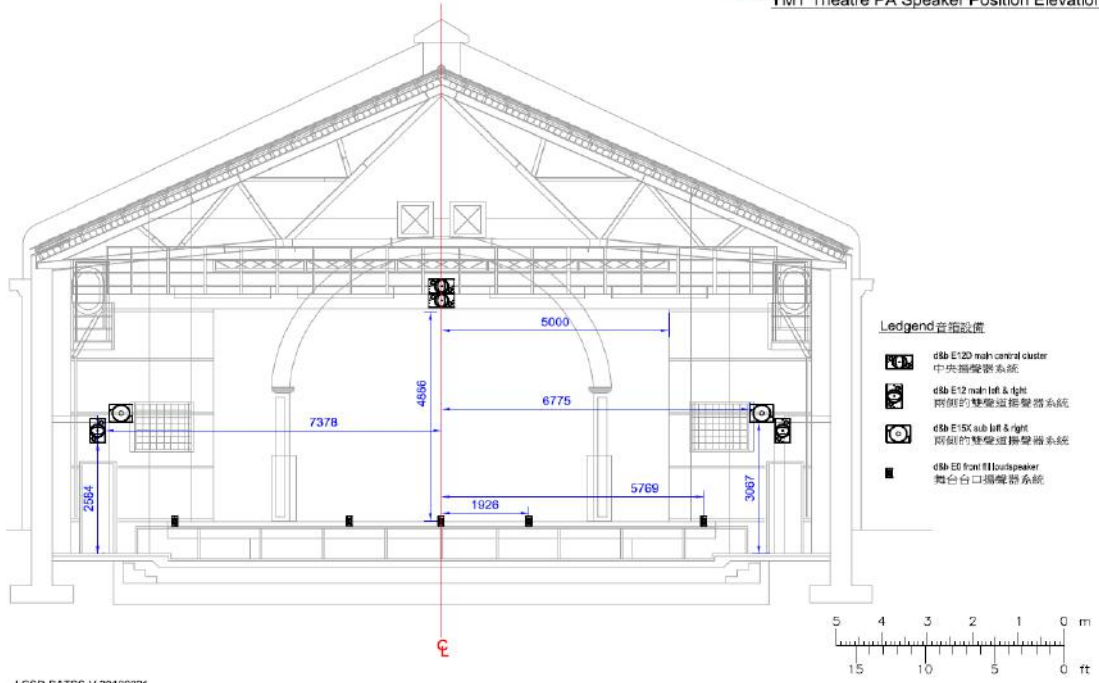


LCSO-PATSS-V.20180821



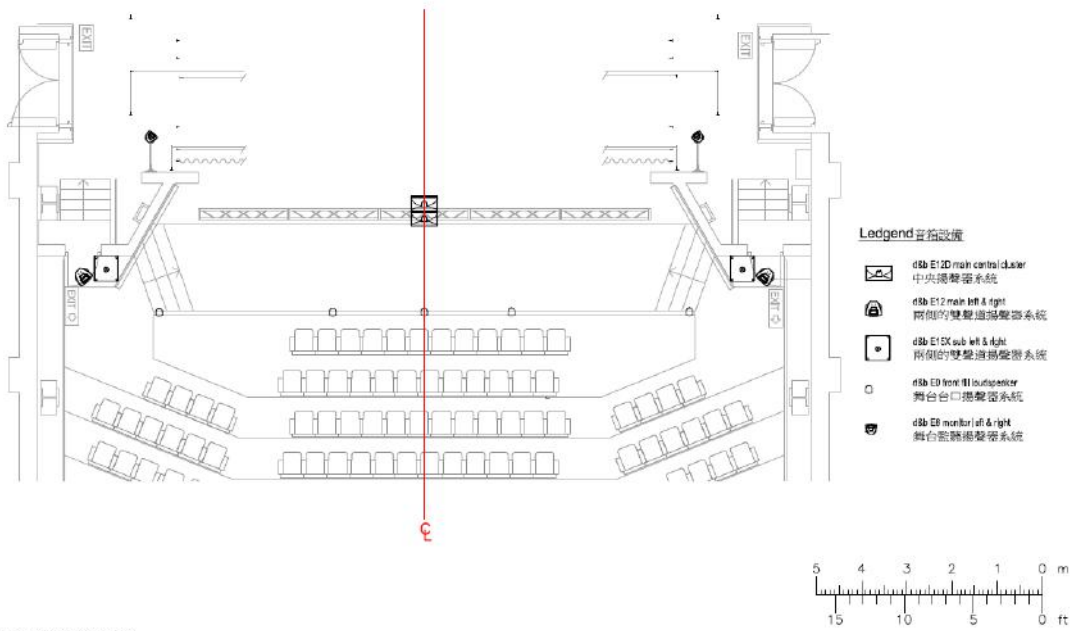
Speakers Plan of Yau Ma Tei Theatre

油麻地戲院-音箱點位 正面圖
YMT Theatre PA Speaker Position Elevation

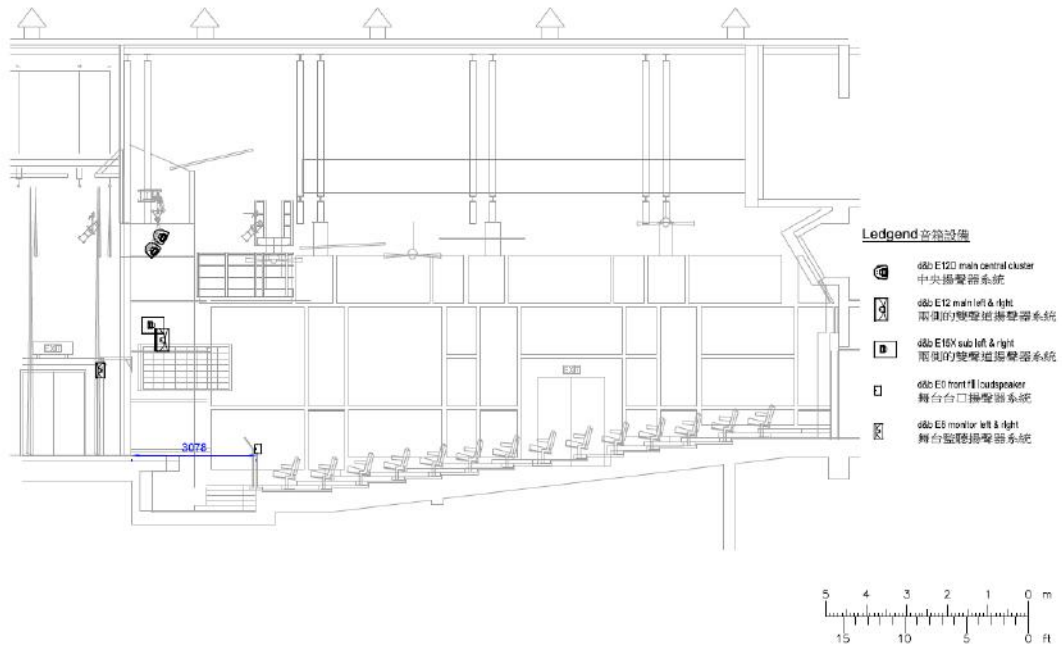


LCSD-PATSS-V.20180821

油麻地戲院-音箱點位 平面圖
YMT Theatre PA Speaker Position Ground Plan



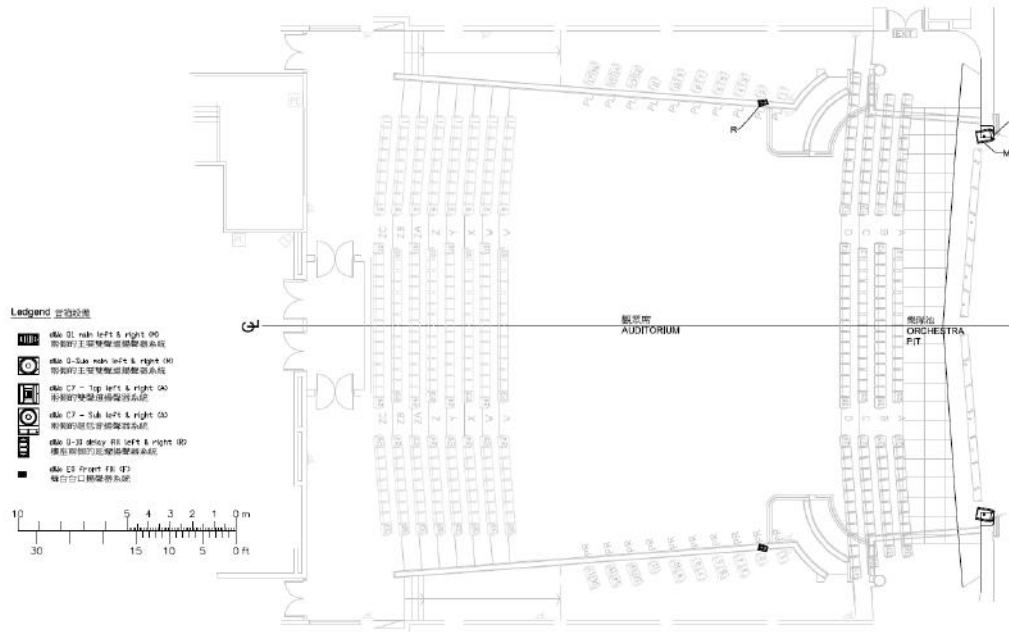
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LCSD-PATSS-V 20180821

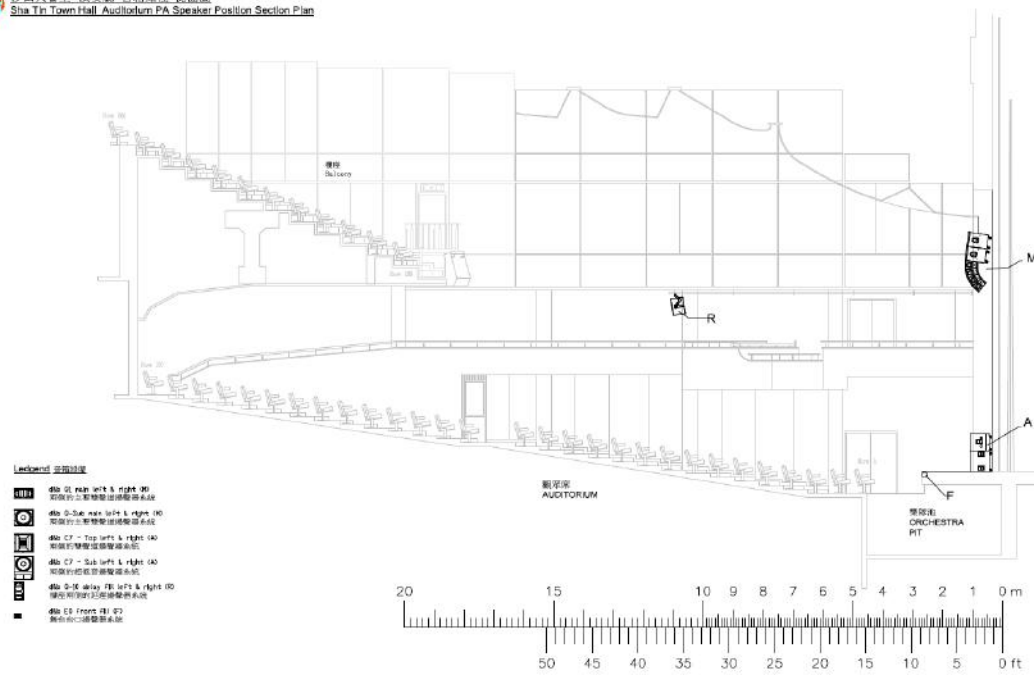
Speakers Plan of Shatin Town Hall Auditorium

沙田大會堂 演奏廳 音箱點位 平面圖
Sha Tin Town Hall Auditorium PA Speaker Position Ground Plan



LCSD-PATSS-SEP V.2013.2

沙田大會堂 演奏廳 音箱點位 側面圖
Sha Tin Town Hall Auditorium PA Speaker Position Section Plan



LCSD-PATSS-SEP V.2013.2

Appendix 12 Interview: Andy Tsui

Interview date: 23/5/2018

I — Interviewee Andy Tsui: Shatin Town Hall Resident Technical Manager

R — Roger Lin

R: You have 4 fold back(speakers). 3 on-stage microphones. These are basically for the stage...

I: All the PA systems are fixed in all LCSD venues. All the PA is on left and right, and also in the middle. We have some speakers to fill the space that differs from other venues. Every venue has a standard coverage. This is for the 'normal' venue, but obviously I can't say the same for all. Every LCSD venue has a standard. Every seat should be able to receive the sound properly in the auditorium. When we purchase speakers, we test all kinds of music, like Chinese and Western, so we call it an all-round system. It is not tailored towards a particular style like Cantonese opera. The specific feel of the genre is the job of the operator to create. For fold-back speakers, they are standardized. Normal Cantonese opera stages are about 11 to 13 meters wide. We have 14 meters. It is difficult for the actors because of such a large stage so each step has to be wider. We normally put fold-back speakers on the side, hardly the front. My opinion is that by putting the fold-back in the front, it disturbs the visuals of the performance.

R: How about the three microphone system?

I: The reason we have the pick-up mics in the front is because it is impossible to allocate a wireless mic for each actor. For the productions with up to 10 actors, we'll give them one wireless mic each, even if they don't have much dialogue. For the downstage, the gun mics are there to pick up the dramatic noise made by the actors. So I would not put mics within the set because they change the set really quickly and I do not know where they stand since they don't rehearse. Putting it in the downstage is the safer option. Another reason is that the main actors change clothes too quickly, so the wireless mics might get stuck in their costumes. Naturally, that affects the sound quality so in this situation, we use the gun mic to pick up sound until they have time to fix their mic backstage. Because sometimes, the scenes are 15 to 30 minutes long so without the gun mics,

we cannot help the actor if this situation ever comes up. We don't use PCC mics because the PCC mic isn't directional. It's okay for regular dramas, but not for the Cantonese opera. The actors are essentially in the same area so the gun mics are used to get better quality sounds. From our experience, 3 mics are the best because if we use 5 mics, we begin to pick up something else that we don't want to, like musicians.

R: So this theatre has done quite a lot of Cantonese operas.

I: This is practiced across all LCSD venues from Tsim Sha Tsui to Tuen Mun depending on how long the venue has been established. Cantonese opera has always been a very important part of any LCSD venue.

We are testing new things such as putting foldback mics on different locations so when actors walk too far downstage, they're covered. This is a new practice we've applied to the last couple of years; putting mics in front of the curtain on the floor just to cover a bit more.

There's a big performance tonight. They normally put the musicians on stage, but tonight they put them down in the orchestra pit.

R: They put a lot of musicians there.

I: We have talked to the groups whether they want to practice like Yau Ma Tei, where they constantly put the musicians in the orchestra pit, or whether they want to put them up on stage. When Yau Ma Tei just opened, they were really eager to put them in the orchestra pit, but I don't really agree with that. Once the musicians are in the pit, they will produce a barrier between the audience and the performers. So on the percussion side, the audience in front cannot hear anything but the percussion because it's so loud. I think it is better if the musicians are on stage so there'll be some distance between the audience.

It is still their choice. For Yau Ma Tei, it became really difficult to produce sound because of the use of the orchestra pit.

R: So Yau Ma Tei is really troublesome.

I: No matter what you do with the PA in the front, it will never work out. So this problem has not been solved until now, no one could give me a definite answer. Every actor in each group has different ideas. Some likes to do it on the sides, some like the front. Maybe the front looks better?

R: But it's ok to set them up here with such big stage? With a small stage like Sheung Wan, they told me the venue will tell you to book an extra day.

I: If nine actors, it's okay. But not for thirteen actors.

R: But the theatre said it's troublesome, because the venue asked them to book one extra day to set up the orchestra pit, and then another extra day to reset (the auditorium).

I: Even for the one in Tsim Sha Tsui or Kwai Ching, you can do it with the switches to get the orchestra pit to rise automatically. You will still need to spend hours to set the things up. It's a pretty normal practice. Like in Yau Ma Tei, they are constantly setting up the orchestra pit. If they're constantly down there and the sound quality is good, that's good.

R: So you think it should be on the stage as well? I feel it should have always been on the stage.

I: The problem I encountered is that there's always an imbalance with the musicians. To balance it out, it's very difficult. It is uncomfortable for the audience.

R: Is this exactly the situation now? For the upcoming performance in the 11th of June, I think since they already put the musicians on stage, why don't we just add a speaker here, enhance the smaller sounds, direction (of the sound) will be stronger as well. Sounds will be produced here, and a clearer image will be produced. You will not have to pretend that you have a stereo system.

I: Well you will have to see whether they can get used to it. For people like us who studied sound production, we know the sound should be there. But some audience members want to hear a CD quality sound. Nowadays, some of the bands have half of their people in the curtain, more into the backstage. The melodic musicians are not directly facing the audience. There's a curtain to block the sound but it's not too bad.

R: I think the biggest problem is that there are only 2 kinds of music in Cantonese Orchestras. One is loud, one is very quiet, there's no in between. Both are next to each other. Even if you wanted to balance it out, for example having a Timpani next to a double bass, having it next to each other, it's impossible to balance it.

So there's a huge issue here, you should add an acoustic board here to block the sound of the percussion.

I: Definitely, we always cover it up. Even now.

R: But it's still really loud. Last time despite such a big theatre, they were complaining that it was too loud.

I: If the musicians are excited, it's quite a difficult situation. I've tried sitting here near the percussion side and there two sounds for each percussion to hit — the sound the percussionists make and the sound of it bouncing off the walls because it's so loud. It was really uncomfortable for the listeners; they've really made it too loud. But there won't be these technical issues if they went up the stage, since you can control the volume of the sounds. It's always been done on stage, even back when they did ritual performances.

R: Another thing is, the new generation actors, they like to adapt to the western orchestra style, separate all the things. Drums on one side, rest on the other side. What do you think? Do we need to do that?

I: From a venue's point of view, it doesn't matter where you put the orchestra because the quality of the mics is very good and we have the budget to buy mics that fit the range, focus, and control area of specific needs.

R: So if you do so, you need the time for sound plotting.

I: It's just a guessing game since they don't rehearse. Might as well see what they got when the performance opens and adjust to it then.

R: Because this system has been done a lot, so it's easy. But if they spread the instruments all over the place, is it more difficult?

I: PA remains the same. On the other hand, fold back is difficult. But their operation is not good enough. I've done it once in the North district, they have a very small stage, so we spread out the musicians in the auditorium. So the audience are looking at the stage but the sides are where the musicians are. Then I added a board here, so it wouldn't be too loud for the audience. Another problem that arises is that the audience is blocking the view between musicians so it's difficult to start together. The biggest problem is basically communication between musicians that are spread everywhere.

If we spread them like what Mo Sir did, we can really take control visually, and the problem cannot be solved. Western music depends on the conductor, but for Chinese musician, there is the leading musician and leading percussionist. They only have mutual understanding of each other. So I think that's the biggest problem when you separate them.

R: Yes, I know

I: I've tried to figure it out with them before, they said there's a problem with the orchestra pit. If the stage is really deep, the musicians cannot see the actors coming out. If you're on the stage, you can play the music according to how long the scene is, but if you're in the orchestra pit, you don't really know what is going on on-stage and it becomes guessing in technical terms.

R: I have another question. I'm wondering about the people running the show. I've asked the theatre group and they don't know what they can ask the venue for, such as the equipment you can provide to them. They don't know that the venue can. Secondly, during the move-in period, how can you make that experience better? Or have you already gotten used to their way of working that it doesn't really help if they come for production meetings?

I: Have you heard of the man called Lee Ling?

R: Yes.

I: He is the sound designer for a bigger theatre group. When he comes to production meetings, all he requests is how many wireless mics are there? 8 or 10. Then they'll count how many actors they have and how many wireless mics do they need? Then how many musicians they have, how many melodic musicians, how many percussionists. The meeting pretty much ends after that. Their knowledge about the mic positioning, technical skills, and which model to use is really insufficient.

Every venue might have mildly different equipment due to different systems, therefore we will arrange different mics. I don't think they can tell the difference, let alone whether they even know we have a different set of mics or not.

R: My concern is that even though the theatres are used to dealing with their problems, but let's say what if they went to US for a tour. How are they going to communicate?

I: They don't even know about the mic's models that they use every day. We've done it so many times, none of them know the models and its numbers. They simply do not know how to differentiate; they've never even thought about these. There was once where we had 10 wireless mics, but they needed 14. So they said they will bring 4 more on their own, which were relatively amateur branded mics. But the problem is, the mic we use here are pretty high quality, so when they used the cheap ones they brought, they complain that the sound quality is not good enough. We've encountered these problems sometimes. The manager has already ordered really nice mics to cater to their needs, but they also have to learn how to use them.

R: Would it help if Lee Ling was there to liaise?

I: He does help; he was one of us back then. Now he left and works especially for helping these Cantonese operas. But he just listens to his own EQ (equalization). Every engineer and sound designers have their own standards of good EQ. So now, these Cantonese opera groups, what they want is the EQ quality of that particular person's mind, which is based on experience. They trust the sound quality that person provides. Usually, the Cantonese opera people are seeking out a quality that reminds them of a recreational type of quality. They essentially want to recreate the hi-fi sound in their home, which does not exist.

I've experienced having customers complain to us that the sound quality didn't sound very good, but all we did was change the operator. With a different staff, we have a different EQ. So then we had to find the old staff to work with the new staff. Then, the new staff had to adjust the sounds according to how the old staff did. They are still stuck in the FM era. A mono sonic type of feel. They mostly just do the acting; they rarely get out there listen to how others do it. So they won't have a chance to develop the kind of objective view of seeing what kind of sound effects can be created nowadays. This is the problem.

We can support the theatre group however they need to know what they want. We can buy new equipment, try out new mics, even new settings. But they have to learn to get out there and listen so they can tell us what they want. This is what they lack.

R: Basically, when I talked to a lot of venue managers, they were really willing to help.

I: Well, we're just doing our job. We don't want to make the production bad.

R: For example, if you're requested for extra speakers, you won't pretend to not have any to give them?

I: If I had it, I will let them use it as long as there is enough time to set it up, and if it won't cause too much trouble. But sometimes they ask me to set it up just five minutes before the show starts, and we don't have enough time, even if we plugged it in, there won't be sound coming out from the speakers.

Appendix 13 Interview: Francis Wong

Interview Date: 15/6/2018

I — Interviewee Francis Wong 黃葆輝 Professional Actor

R — Roger Lin

I: You know we are very old professionals. Our structure is not fully formed apart from actors, we now have directors too, which we did not have before. You ask a teacher to teach you the basic skills then you need to come to work. Everyone has a role in the production. The most is that we have a stage manager. The SM is only in charge of what happens on that day, such as scene changes and searching for cast members, as well as costume changes. This has now improved. After moving-in, they will arrange technical matters such as snow, rain, etc. For these instances, they need soundtracks to play the sound effects of those matters.

R: I noticed recently that Cantonese opera is catching up a bit. Sometimes they'll play videos and sometimes they'll use sound effects.

I: Yes, I think that this is a personal preference. Some older actors don't understand and secondly, they don't think there's a need. If there's some younger SM, they'll bring their knowledge from other productions on the stage to make the production richer. For the theatre group, this helps. We won't say no, or think that they're in our way so long as we think they'll improve it and that there won't be that much loss, then we'll do it.

R: I want to know how to help your group.

I: I had previously worked with a Hong Kong Repertoire Theatre. It was drama about Cantonese opera. They performed certain short pieces and we did preparation work for that. At that time, we played recorded music because we could not have live musicians. I also sang over it a bit. I tried all these sort of things. They have done many things that I don't understand, but its technical such as how to receive better sound and so on.

R: In Hong Kong, many musicians come very late and even by 7 o'clock, they have not all arrived.

I: Yes, we are not like Drama, which has a moving in period. We see each other only on stage, or the day of performance. Therefore, everyone will only be there at the moment of the performance. At most we do rehearsals, but it doesn't need music. If they are needed, only one or two will come, such as percussion and violin. The leader will then talk to the musician about what to do.

R: As a performer on stage, regarding the fold back, can you feel the connection with the audience?

I: We are not at that stage yet but at least we will know what kind of effect and setting. For example, for ghost scenes, you need to give the actor some ghostly sounds to enhance the feeling. From my understanding, this is a ghost scene, so I hope you give me some echoes. Then there'll be a stronger haunting feeling. These kind of simple things, we know.

R: I gave out many surveys to professionals and they all agreed to spend more time on technical help such as mic tests and sound tests.

I: Having Mic test is a good thing.

R: However, no one is actually doing it.

I: Your kind of backstage people who do sound will test the mics one by one at around 6:30. We don't know how serious or how detailed the mic tests are. Some will see if it's just clear, but you don't know if that means it's working or not. It's kind of unclear for us. I'm sure some are just testing that sound comes out or not.

R: Our sound people knows that everyone has a different voice so if you use a mic to test, we will help you to EQ your voice.

I: The first line to sing on stage is always the worse one (for technical reason), sometime the mic did not turn on at all.

R: Without turning on the mic, it is their problem, not your mistake.

I: Well, if my condition is not well today, such as a lack of voice or the bad positioning of the mic. Sometimes the mic sticks on the clothes and disrupts the sound. The first few lines may be quiet or not have any sound at all so I have to speak a few more lines to adjust it. Things like this happen.

R: In my research, basically, people use the first scene to adjust the technical matters.

I: Yes, so you can hear the difference when you appear again in the second scene, the sound is a lot different.

R: What can I help with?

I: If next time, if you have an understanding with the group, you can join them during rehearsal.

R: I've done that already and seen them rehearse.

I: Maybe you can look at the script and see what effects they need. Like what I said concerning the ghost effects, or wind effects. For example, someone has done dog barking effects.

R: This is all no problem, but for me is to adjust with the working schedule, such as your actual practices. For example, if you ask the musicians to play a bit of the music at 7 o'clock, at least give me time to adjust. Actually, it is still difficult because there are times when they aren't all present. So for me, the biggest challenge is not how to ask you to do better, it's how to do our job in an environment you are comfortable in and also doesn't affect your work.

R: Cantonese opera receives little funding from government, so everyone needs to save money. They need to go out make money, resulting in the performance becoming secondary. Because they need to free the time to make money and do other things. Young actors for example, I don't know what they do to make money outside, the result is that they turn up for performance 30 minutes before the show starts.

I: In this industry, you only get paid when you work. Unlike Drama, a Drama may work from say January to June, with rehearsals and meetings, actors will receive a large amount of salary. But we get paid only on the day of performance, if you perform for three days, you got paid for three

days only. Therefore, it's very difficult to gather people together. We have tried to do rehearsals, but people will say they have to be in other places to act. Of course, they will come according to their role, so if it's important and they need to work with the musicians, they will come. But if it's not important, they won't come. It's time consuming to rehearse. This is the preference of the industry.

R: Do you have any concerns on how to attract a younger audience?

I: Yes, definitely. We understand very well that the young generation of actors feel the same. Without audience, there is no point for us to do this. It's a connected cycle. Doing this with the audience and being able to make money, it is meaningful. If you cannot make money and support yourself, that is not meaningful. That's a whole different issue.

I: Now we have some government support and funding, but I think only relying on government support is not workable. You can see those international musicals coming to Hong Kong. 1 thousand dollars per ticket and people still fight for it. Ours are 300 dollars and we need to give away (tickets) at the theatre entrance, sometimes I feel very insulted, very unhappy. On the other hand, we also understand that ourselves, as a (theatre) worker, actors, maybe those who in charge of production are not serious. But their lack of seriousness is not their fault. As I just said, for example, we need to work every day. For example, I finished Shatin Town Hall last night and tonight I have to come to the Ko Shan Theatre. Where do I have time to do these preparations with you?

I: If I work with you for preparation work, I only get paid for 1 day. So I might as well just work in other places to earn money and sacrifice time working with you. Everyone just does what is in front of them. Tonight I am doing tonight's work. I will help you for tomorrow's performance, tomorrow. I will not do anything to prepare a performance that is two months away. If you are the only one who does this, you will be isolated and no one will talk to you because the whole industry does not practice this. That's why I always say this is the industry's problem. If we produce a serious production compared to a meet-you-on-stage production, there is an obvious difference that the audience can pick up. However, the latter production is more prevalent in the industry. If every production isn't serious, then it'll be very difficult to attract young people when there are many choices now for entertainment. They don't have to watch Cantonese Opera.

R: I think that the Cantonese opera audience is larger than any other art form in Hong Kong. You can have thousands of audience members easily.

I: But a lot of people just give away tickets for free. This leads to many issues. Rich housewives who like singing or acting are rather vain. If I'm their teacher, I can ask them to perform and charge them a huge appearance fee. If they perform and their friends say they sing very well, they get vainer. But are they really singing well? In this sense, it all becomes too much. No one will buy tickets for a housewife's performance, so she'll give them away to her friends. Ends up that you invited your friends to watch your performance for free. For a normal audience, you got a professional performance that charges and a semi-professional one that's free, they'll obviously go for the free one. The quality isn't that great either if you do choose to go see the professional one. This is our industry's problem. As I said, if we are not serious in our work, how can we ask people to buy our tickets? Even if they're willing to buy your ticket, they'll feel cheated and won't come again. People don't really want to buy tickets in the end. One day, we'll swarm the box office.

R: For some matters, can they be fixed by tradition?

I: I think surely, there is some structural problems within that we aren't used to or are able to adapt to. I think the changes has to start from the venues, because most of the group just employ freelancers in each production. The freelancers will not be the same each time, they will not focus on technical matter at all. Generally thinking is that if it is free of charge, surely we will use it. Of course, it is good that you are willing to work for free. The problem is that you are not attached to the production itself. However, if you attached to the venue, and the venue is giving us sound support, it is ok for us to use, because you are given by the venue. But if it is within our own group, we do not have this post (sound designer) today, then we will not let you attached to us.

R: this is within Hong Kong, but if you perform abroad, how would it be?

I: It's more simple because many things we can just do by ourselves or find people to do it. Because if you go abroad, the people won't care as much about it. As I said, for Cantonese opera people, sound is not part of the production, at least it is not within the top five priorities. I think they just expected to have sound from PA system, as long as the sound from the mic do not get

interrupted during the performance, or two actors move closer will not create sound feedback, then it is ok for them. Maybe at some point, they'll want some echo effects, as long as you give me, then it's alright. We only think about it at the time.

R: If someone tells you that they can improve your production quality like sound or light, would you be interested?

I: I think so. We like to do small theatre productions that are minimal but powerful (in a more modern fashion.)

R: This is an artistic choice. If you look at Kuan Qu and Noh theatre, they are very minimalistic in their setting. But they deliver very powerful performances. At one point, you're very focused. And you also save a lot of money because of the minimal set. The money you save can go towards improving lighting and sound.

I: For the boss' point of view, we hire the set, for example trees, candles, buildings, these kind of standard things, it's all inclusive and we don't need extra effects.

I: No one dares to move, no one dares to change. Sometimes you have this invisible pressure, others don't do it but you do it. Because you sometimes have to make something sense. Us younger actors sometimes just want to do something without much reason. Essentially, we often have disagreements with the older actors because of the hierarchy system. They're always right in that sense. We need to break those rules and make them accept new ideas. I think we have to start with the venues. The venues can provide the services we need that would make it easier for them to accept. Tell them that this is all included and that they are entitled to it.

R: One more question. Where should we put the musicians?

I: When I was in APA studying, there was someone with a high position who didn't like the noise produced by the percussion instruments, so in the year end performance, he put the percussion underneath the stage. So we could only see the musicians through the monitor.

I: With the delay of the monitor as well as the lighting difference, it is very uncomfortable to work in an environment like that.

R: I just want to help you to upgrade the performance, not to change the traditions.

I: Oh, you're not here to mess things up.

R: Yes, because a lot of them are worried I will mess it up but I have no intentions of that at all.

I: That's because they're very close minded people.

R: Do you think putting the musicians on stage or the orchestra pit is better?

I: I think in the front is better, they can look at our movement to do music, in front will be more clear to them. If on stage right, their view may be block by other actors. Sometime I noticed they don't know how to play the music when their view is blocked.

R: So you don't think that there are advantages to being on the same stage?

I: The only good thing to put the band on stage right is they can answer to your need. For example, if I need more percussion, I can take to them in backstage. If they are in the pit, once you on stage you have no chance to talk to the musicians. Although I can give them signals or body language, but I could not talk to them directly. If you ask me to choose, I think of the musicians are in the pit, they can see clearly what is happening on stage. They can often give me some hints. In case some actor forgets their line, musicians can remind them in the pit. Or musicians can skip that secession all together. We can talk to the musicians about our immediate needs just right before walking on, rather than having to ask someone to relay the message to the orchestra pit.

R: But if the orchestra pit is really deep, can you see clearly?

I: As long as they can see the top of my head, it's okay. If they're in the orchestra pit, we cannot ask them to adjust right away. We need to ask the SM to ask through headphones. There are both pros and cons for the orchestra pit. If you put the band in stage right, audience will try to avoid to buy the seat near stage right, because it is too noisy. I feel that it's better to be in the orchestra pit. It also depends on the size of the stage, some are too big and some are too tight with musicians on the stage.

R: Artistically, if you work like this, what do you look forward to?

I: I just want to perform more. I'm simple. I think this art form is good but in this business, the mentality is not too great. There are some people who are selfish and anxious as well as lazy. I want to pass on this industry to let more people see, because when I was a child, I found it so beautiful. Therefore, I entered the industry. Of course, I don't wish for there to be no more performers after my generation. There is a worry that this art will disappear. It's not attractive to audiences anymore, which is a big issue. If you are not able to attract people, you have a big responsibility. Actors and people in charge are not serious. Maybe your seriousness is not on the artistic side and is only on the promotional, surface level side. So for me, you have to improve yourself in order for people to change their mind to think that you're good, otherwise, why waste 4 hours to watch a performance and not to mention, you also need to pay for it. Now the cost of production is so high that sometimes, we lose money. So we have to improve ourselves. Why do those international musicals get a lot of people to buy their expensive tickets? Because after watching it, you feel nice and that the ticket was worth it. But for Cantonese opera, you are lucky to have a good performance. To have a bad performance is the norm.

Appendix 14 Interview: Frank Yeung

Interview date: 10/7/2018

I — Interviewee Frank Yeung: West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's Senior Manager in Technical and Productions

R — Roger Lin

R: The first question is where do you locate the musicians? Traditionally, it's on stage right. Are you concerned about the tradition, aesthetics, functionality, or do you decide to be flexible and follow the needs of the theatre group? Or do you have a location for them already?

I: In the Xiqu Centre, it depends on what program is playing inside. On this platform, we have to be flexible. We will not fix a form to make other theatre groups inconvenienced. In the beginning, our goal is flexibility. Normally, Cantonese opera is in the stage right, but stage left is for Beijing opera or Kunqu. There's more possibilities in the orchestra pit. It is more possible that productions use the Orchestra Pit, for the last two decades, theatre groups move into the proper theatre venue. If they have a larger band, they will locate the band in the Orchestra Pit. Shatin Town Hall and Cultural Centre have been like this. We understand the complexity of sound design in Orchestra Pit, because it needs to balance the sound. If the band not located in the Orchestra Pit, it will be a lot easier to control. However, the contemporary theatre groups like to use Orchestra Pit. We will provide some solution to deal with the unbalancing sound problem, I hope we are able to achieve that. We also installed many temporary devices to solve the acoustic problems, such as the acoustic panels. We've done many things to better control the percussion sounds.

So we use the PA system to enhance the other instruments and repress the percussion sounds. There's also a sound designer or operator there with a live balance. In terms of the venue to provide the best sound quality, we also set up a permanent open sound booth at the back of auditorium. With a physical location that will enhance the importance of sound function, I think this is a golden time to let them understand the importance of theatre technology, which I've seen in the past few years to grow stronger in terms of technical awareness. They understand they cannot go turn back.

R: I have been working with two performances in Sha Tin town hall, one in the orchestra pit and one in stage right.

I: To be honest, we all know how to make the sound better, but the problem is how to arrange the testing because they come so late.

R: Is this a software problem or an operating/management issue?

I: I want to be clear about what West Kowloon is doing. You know we have different programs. West Kowloon Xiqu Centre has a very clear role, we don't look at specific productions, only West Kowloon's productions. As long as develop on the platform of West Kowloon, then it became our productions. Therefore, we will do our best to enhance the productions. For West Kowloon productions, we'll pay a bit more attention. We wanted a different operation, which means we are not on the receiving end. Our role is not only receiving, we want to change our role in the production.

Our role is more aggressive and proactive. We are not waiting for you to come to us, we will even reach out. In theory, we can provide a lot more information to other parties. For example, if you hire the venue, we will request for more information and study it. After providing a solution or suggestion, you can then make a decision what to do. This involves investing our resources. Our idea is more like presenting the production.

If it is West Kowloon's production, our technical team will no longer be taking the role as venue management, we can take the role of branding. Branding means mixing production and technical together, we may even be involved in the process of the production in some case. To put it in LSCD context, for example if Andy Tsui (of Shatin Town Hall) is handling this production, he will be acting as the role of production coordinator, or even production manager and technical director, along with his own team to bring the theatrical function into full play. To enhance or to co-operate the production. That is what we wanted to do.

About the so-called unprofessional practice of theatre groups, for example not having proper rehearsals. At this moment, we cannot tell them what to do. I always say that they are a bunch of survivors, they have their own mindset. The way we can influence them is through paying them. We can request them to rehearse with musicians. Meaning we use money to buy their 'service' throughout the production. From the receiving end, we will use the first and second points to force

them to provide us with more information and resources. In fact, I know some groups that have more resources are doing it already. We need to separate different focus groups: Some are equipped with resources; they are willing to do what we asked. Next are also professional groups, but they have not enough resources. Maybe they'll hire the venue on the day of performance. The third type of groups are amateurs.

This is West Kowloon's approach and I believe they can tell the difference. Some APA graduates understand the importance of rehearsals and dress rehearsals. It's just that they don't have the resources to do so. I do believe the seed is planted already.

R: There's no stage manager position in Cantonese opera, there's only prompters. The prompters themselves aren't very technical. They don't really understand how the theatre runs.

I: Prompters understand very clearly how Cantonese opera operate, but they do not understand the non-Cantonese opera operation; like theatre and technical. Or maybe they don't care about it.

R: The biggest problem is how to communicate with the prompter. I find it quite difficult.

I: SM also has their own prompter. If this is a West Kowloon production in the future, there will be a stage manager assigned alongside the prompter. In this case, we will have one SM and one prompter. Slowly, we want to pull together the two roles, because they aren't resistant to this. In fact, this is happening right now. In LCSD venue, RSM is actually doing this. They don't look at your production, but concerning what time it starts, what time is lunch. For us, this role should be more rounded to help look at the production for them. It can become a whole production team that can see the big picture and in one sense, make things much more focused.

The second thing to be concerned about is the conductor. Who is responsible for the sound balance? No one is currently responsible. There's no director and even if there is, it is not something they are concerned about. So we hope that our sound operator or sound engineer can play this role. Because they are sitting in the auditorium, to some extent they can become a third person to give some balancing advice.

R: What you're saying is that you have a group of capable technicians, they can even have artistic input. But the problem is, as soon as you have artistic input in a production, the group won't be so happy.

I: I understand what you're talking about. We aren't giving artistic input, but artistic advice. As I work in the Xiqu Centre, I'm fully aware of this sensitive issue. So I think we have to achieve some kind of strong approach that isn't too overbearing, but at the same time not passive so that people will listen to you. The most important point is to make them understand that this isn't for any gain but for the production. If you show them you're just interested in the production, they'll begin to trust you. But in the end, the industry is concerned with profit. If you can help them, they'll take it. If they're worried their position is threatened, they'll reject.

For example, Lee Ling has a very respected position in the industry because he helps the production but doesn't take credit away from the actors. That shows that this idea can work. So we just need to build a trusted relationship between the group and ourselves. From my own experience, when I worked in APA during the Chinese opera session. We were setting up and all the personnel didn't trust us. They were very sceptical and hostile towards us. So they were worried that if they taught us, then we would take their job. How I did it is that when I was a production manager, I was very fair. Even when I counted money with them, I was very fair and in the beginning, they asked me to pay them daily because they didn't trust me. They also only took cash. Eventually, they took cash in the end of the production. Later, they took cheques. I can see that you can change them, but not in one production. It's a long term relationship and you have to handle them very carefully. There has to be fair rules then things will go smoothly.

R: If we practice the way you were talking about, will the technician cross the line by giving artistic advice?

I: In the case of Shatin Town Hall, this is a congenital problem. Andy Tsui is LCSD's Shatin Town Hall's technical manager (TM), he has no direct supervision. However, he has a contractual relationship with PCCW, but PCCW does not directly report to TM, they only report to venue's senior manager. Which means Andy can only make sure provide the service for how many days. Although they say he can control the quality of service, but I do not found that is the case. In West Kowloon, regarding sound and stage all are reported to our management. You can carry out the

work as long as the management agrees. Therefore, the sound will not contradict with technician-in-charge in Xiqu Centre.

They won't cross the line if they're given the power to do that. If there's no sound designer and there's only a prompter, the engineer has to do the job of a sound designer. I always think that every technician has different degrees of artistic input. You cannot rule out their artistic input, so if European theatres don't have any deputy stage manager position, the sound and light operators work themselves. I once brought some students to Paris and in the theatre, there was only light and sound operators. The operators had to study the whole dance without needing to be cued to operate. This showed me that operators have different degree of input but in West Kowloon, I believe that they have more input, purely because nobody is taking the position as a designer. This is the mentality of the West Kowloon productions that I think will change. I cannot deny the preferences of different technicians. Some technicians may dislike Cantonese opera, some may have different preferences of sound balance, but the most important thing is that we cannot let them hide in the control room and that they have to come to the front to confront the sound of the performance. What they hear is exactly what the audience hears, so as long as they accept what they produce, this system puts everyone in the forefront, including sound operators.

R: My concern is how to create a more standardised sound quality throughout the industry, apart from West Kowloon.

I: You have to ask them this question. Only thing I come across is that they respond more last-minute and they are very sensitive to complain letters, like a government organisation. In some sense, sound is measured with level and balance, other matters are relatively subjective. A subtle failure will not cause big change; this is the biggest problem. As we all know, the SM coordination like light or sound. People will ask questions only if you do not have light or sound. If it is only a timing or quality problem, in fact not many people will notice.

R: What is your target audience? Nowadays, the main audience is quite old.

I: The current audience we definitely take care of, and they're mostly over 50 years old. According to our research, they're over 55. We want to bring down the target audience to 10 years, I think this is a measurable target. For younger audience, it's important but we don't know how to

do this. Apart from our Grand Theatre, we're concerned about our Tea House theatre. Simply saying, it's a shorter performance with more impact.

R: How many seats are in the Tea House theatre?

I: Almost 200 seats. We wish to introduce Cantonese opera to a newer audience with a different educational experience for them to motivate them to continue seeing performances in the Grand Theatre.

I think that in order for Xiqu to evolve, its quality has to change, including sound quality. From an outdoor venue to an indoor venue, the industry has never processed the change. We will have a small theatre with 200 seats like Yau Ma Tei but it has never been processed, such that you cannot use the same sound system as Sha Tin Town Hall Auditorium or the Cultural Centre Auditorium. You cannot put that energy into a small theatre.

I remember I had a music centre stakeholder meeting. There was a band and they did some Cantonese opera related music. They said that if they go to a theatre that needs to be quiet, they use smaller instruments. This is a real life experience. We have done several mock up tests with Tea House theatre, fortunately, we were using APA students to carry it out, not the professional musicians. I deliberately asked them to control their volume, because even if we block them the sound would still attack the audience, so we needed a more balanced sound. Because they're students, they would listen to me and would use the smaller instruments. You cannot use the same energy and same instruments in a hall of a different scale. In the West, the conductor already deals with this problem by reducing the number of violins from 6 to 2. They've been easily dealing with these issues for a long time but there has been no consideration in Cantonese opera, because no one even thinks of doing it. So I hope that Xiqu Centre can take that role, but there is also a need for a very experienced production practitioner to carry it out.

Appendix 15 Interview: Connie Yiu

Interview date: 11/7/2018

I — Interviewee Connie Yiu: Theatre group manager

A — Connie Yiu's assistant

R — Roger Lin

I: From a theatre group's point of view, they would prefer to put the band in the orchestra pit. Because if you have modern things on stage, it's a bit strange since the plays are often period-dramas. Once you place the band on stage, the entrance is a lot smaller too. It's not convenient. So big productions insist on using the orchestra pit.

However, when using the orchestra pit, there's a problem with the percussionists. But it can be resolved, for example, in APA they have a cover that covers up the percussion section. I think this is a good solution.

R: There's nothing unsolvable. There's just two matters to consider: money and time. Yesterday, I talked to the Xiqu Centre and their solution for the production presentation is that they throw in a lot of money to ensure that the technical parts can be carried out.

I: Does that mean the Xiqu Centre is not well-designed that they need to sort out things with money?

R: For example, when you ask the musicians to come over for a sound check, you need to pay them. These kind of things cost money.

I: In this case, that means Xiqu Centre has sorted out all the technical problems. So, percussionists won't be an issue. Is that true?

R: It will. You simply need to set up everything properly to avoid the problem.

I: Isn't it that now that we fixed the locations of the musicians so that by the time they walk in, everything is ready to go?

R: No, they still need to set up.

I: That's disappointing.

R: Essentially, the Xiqu Centre has the flexibility to support all kinds of inquiries, but they still need time to carry out that support. If the musicians arrive 30 minutes before the performance, there's nothing much they can do.

I: That's true. Normally, actors will turn up around 6pm on the day of performance, but they will not do any sound check. Many amateur groups request to do sound checks, but professional do not feel the need because they think they're good enough. If the stage manager asks them, they won't answer. However, the boss (presenter) can request them to do so. If West Kowloon think Xiqu Centre need to do sound check, they can request the group to spend 15 minutes for sound check when the group hires the venue.

The bad habit of this industry is that no one can control the personnel. They will not even wear the same clothing. I found it very difficult to get the personnel to wear the uniforms I provided. I think that it's ugly for people to wear different colours on stage when working, I really wanted them to simply wear black. One time, I brought uniforms and asked the leading musician to distribute them. After I came back from lunch, no one was wearing the uniform and said that the clothes disappeared. For bad habits like this, it's not impossible to change but you have to make sure they do it personally. Next time, I'll be there to make sure they change into the uniform rather than asking somebody else to do it. You need to be patient for them to change.

So if the Xiqu Centre wants them to carry out sound checks, they still need supervision. After they get used to it then they will do it automatically without the need of someone reminding them. I think this is a very good idea but even if the musicians willing to do sound check, there must be someone knows how to listen, otherwise it's useless.

I don't know if sound engineers are good enough, but I think stage managers aren't competent enough either. If they could provide someone who is qualified for this, then it'll be good.

R: Within the industry, are they interested in this type of role?

I: For so many years, there was no such a role and we could get by, therefore we do not need it now. If you want them to do sound check now, you need to force them to. If Xiqu Centre force them to do sound check, Xiqu Centre need to have someone to listen the sound or it will not work. Some amateur groups' leading musician will ask someone to play the instrument on his behalf, he then goes to listen for the sound. But this is pointless because he will be the one who plays the music at the end, the sound checks need to be him playing the instrument. But this is better than not doing it at all. However, this is only done by amateurs, professionals think they are very good already. Most of the musicians will turn up at 6:30PM, it is impossible to have sound check for one hour. For sound check and adjustment, we can only have maximum 15 minutes to do it all.

R: From my experience, 15 minutes is not enough. It often takes an hour to do it properly.

I: That's impossible. It's too long. Normally, musicians will have another performance in the afternoon in another venue so they can only arrive at 6:30. One hour is impossible, it has to be done within 15 minutes.

R: From the Sha Tin town hall, they told me that they basically just used the first scene as a sound check. I don't think that's very good, since the opening scene should be very important but the sound is not balanced. For the quieter scenes, they'll have to wait for two more scenes or so to get balanced.

I: Yes, this is not ideal.

R: From another point of view, does the industry and audience need an improvement in the quality at all?

I: The audience is not at the level to tell the difference yet. So, they only really complain if the percussion is too loud. People like me will care about the sound quality. Occasionally, in some performances, I will personally ask them to adjust the volume of certain things.

R: So if we improve the technical side, do you think we could attract a younger audience group to watch the performances?

I: No.

R: No wonder the industry doesn't care then.

I: That's right. I tried so hard, I want to solve the percussionist's problem.

R : After talking to the Xiqu Centre yesterday, they provided me with a solution: ask the musicians to bring a smaller drum for smaller venues. What do you think about that?

I : It's not the volume, it's the sound quality. Different sizes produce different sound quality. Unless you design new instruments that makes a lower volume but same quality. I don't know if that's possible. I'd rather work like APA where they use covers to cover up the percussion instruments.

R: Covering up is okay, but it also creates its own problems. For me, using electronic instruments may be a solution. What do you think?

I: Will it sound the same?

R: For percussion, it's very realistic.

I: No.

R: For example, the Chinese orchestra has designed their own instruments.

I: I'm also interested in how they modernise the Chinese instruments.

R: From my experience with Cantonese opera music, there's only either extremely loud or extremely quiet instruments. If you put them together, it creates problems. When you put them on stage, you can arrange them so that it helps.

I: How about Western opera?

R: Western instruments are more flexible in terms of volume. But Chinese instruments are designed to be very loud.

R : I think you guys want to lower the audience's general age. How are you trying to achieve this?

I : Young people don't watch Cantonese opera, maybe because the percussion is too loud, they do not understand. That's why I'm very concerned about the volume of the percussionists. (towards her assistant) You are young, why don't you listen to Cantonese opera?

A: It's not the music, it's the content that we have a problem with. The way of presentation is a problem. The music also doesn't suit the taste of young people. The performances that are popular with young people, they adjust the music to fit towards what we like.

R: So this is just a presentation problem then, right?

A: Yeah, you can say that.

R: At the moment, you lack audience immersion and the quality seems like just watching something on TV. This is a current problem I have with Cantonese opera.

I: What do you mean by immersion?

R: You feel like you are part of the opera.

I: Do you mean not using any speakers?

R: Of course, not using speakers helps, but in such a big venue, it's impossible not to use them. What I'm suggesting is to use the speakers to recreate this real environment instead of producing a television-like sound.

I: So is it the hardware that they provide for the venue? It has nothing to do with us? Does that mean the venue has to buy more equipment?

R: They already have the equipment, it's just that no one asks them to do it, that's why they don't do anything.

I: So that means there's some kind of sound controller from our side that has to ask them to do it then? We can't ask our boss to do that.

R : Is there anyone who can be a sort of liaison between technical and venue management?

I : For me, up to now, the audience think the music is some kind of support. All they want to hear is the stars singing. They want to appreciate the voice of the performers, everything else isn't

as important to them. So if you can make surround sound in the theatre, they might be interested.
Can we have surround sound?

R: Technically, it is possible. There just needs to be cooperation. That's the most problematic.

A: The problem with sound isn't so much. But with the lighting, we do have a light designer (Prompter A mentioned in informal conversation). He always changes the original rigging of the light so the venue needs to spend a few hours set the light before the show and reset the lights after the show.

I: So is the lighting better then?

A: I don't know, I can't tell.

I: I don't think there's any difference.

We need pioneers for Cantonese opera. Traditional people will not invest further in the industry. So the people who have hearts have to try out the new technology and if its successful, introduce the technology to the industry with a low cost. That's what I've been doing. I did a performance last year to try to explore the City Hall's technical side but failed at the end.

Appendix 16 Interview: Yuen Shi Chun

Interview date: 18/7/2018

I — Interviewee Yuen Shi Chun, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra Ltd.'s Research Fellow

R — Roger

R: About the sound design of Cantonese opera, do you think there is a difference between Cantonese opera and Chinese orchestra in terms of Cantonese opera's music and arrangement.

I: There's a big difference. I grew up by a Cantonese opera theatre in Guangzhou, my school was right next to it.

R: At that time, was the band on stage right or the orchestra pit?

I: In my time, we do not use Orchestra Pit, because we did not have so many musicians. Also there is a big disadvantage of using Orchestra Pit in that the musicians only can see the hair of actors from the pit. If musicians are on the stage, we can see everything clearly and easily to respond to actors. That's the difference. It's easier and more comfortable to follow up. We don't really follow the leading musician in Cantonese opera. It's nothing like that at all.

I've been through the era where nobody used microphones. I'm so much older than you guys. At that time, the singing skill was earned through hard practice. Now, people just rely on microphones. The level has been lowered. Even the musicians, now you guys don't do it. At that time, people even practiced kung fu. You've never heard of that, right? The percussion drummers had to practice squatting to help with focus. But this is the old style.

R: How would you compare Guangzhou to Hong Kong?

I: Of course, Guangzhou is better than Hong Kong. The sound quality is much better. The only thing Guangzhou is lacking in is that Hong Kong has the Chinese Artist Association of Hong Kong providing courses on this.

R: So the Chinese orchestra has designed new instruments for Chinese music. Which areas did you improve on?

I: Chinese orchestra is essentially full-range, which means there are traditional music instruments and Western music instruments. We follow our musical instrument compilations. We wrote out all four voices. We also do Cantonese opera, including traditional ones. In 1978 and 1979, they already worked with Chinese opera stars. We used the whole orchestra to support their vocals. It's very different compared to how they do it now with Cantonese opera. Also, some other people have changed the style of music, getting rid of the musical scores altogether. The general practice now is that musicians don't read the score since it doesn't make much difference.

Generally, everyone remembers two hundred to three hundred songs to be considered as professionals. Normally, they also provide you a book without any musical score, only providing the setting and atmosphere. So in practice, when the drumroll starts, the leading musician will follow, then the other musicians follow suit.

Chinese orchestra sound is very different from others since the band is so big and the voices range from high tones to mid tones. For example, a piano has 88 keys but 6 octaves. It's all there for the Chinese orchestra, but it's impossible to achieve in Cantonese opera because the range is too different. But in fact, when the Chinese orchestra does it, it's much more grand. It's easy for us to adapt to Cantonese opera style.

R: From my understanding, to redesign instruments, do you have to separate the range of the sound to make it more detailed?

I: Not only that, but to cover the music range that was never there, such as bass. For traditional Chinese music, music cannot reach a certain range. But the Chinese orchestra can do chorus, everything new.

R: For the same music range, is there anything different with the new design?

I: To recreate the sound quality of the original instrument is very simple. I can achieve it 100%. The most difficult part is to make it better than the traditional one.

R: What does 'better' mean?

I: From my experience, for the Cantonese opera now, since they want to save production cost, they'll omit some instruments. They employ musicians but they just want them to perform from

start to finish, which is very different to Chinese orchestra. We have a three dimensional style that you cannot compare.

R: Does that mean the new design is to fit into the style or arrangement?

I: Yes.

R: How about wind instruments?

I: In Cantonese opera, there's only one position who plays wind instruments, so he has to do it all himself. He can't do it all at one go, unlike us.

R: For the new instrument design, apart from better sound quality, are there any other advantages?

I: Of course it's modernised. There used to be certain sound scales that have never appeared in Chinese music. Now we have over 80 musicians in the orchestra, but normally in Cantonese opera, there's a maximum of seven or eight people. So there's ten times more people. The sound quality differs vastly.

We can reduce the amount of musicians to have a smaller sound but we can make it very big if needed. If there's only a few musicians from beginning to end, it's all the same. There's very little change you can do with a small amount of musicians, but in the Chinese orchestra, we can do more than ten times of the feeling. We can be grand, but original Cantonese music cannot do that. We can be grand and we can be minimal.

That said, music can support the atmosphere of the performance. The audience can feel the story directly.

R: I have two questions. For the new instruments, do they need microphones to pick up the sound? Or is the sound able to be picked up just like that?

I: We don't even need microphones, even for a big venue, the sound produced is enough. The concept of using microphones is wrong. We didn't have microphones before. In the old times, musicians had strong basic skills so their music had penetration power. Old school musicians practice this through hard practice.

R: Is there a problem now concerning sound balance? For example, the percussion is so loud but other instruments are quieter. It's very difficult to balance the sound when they're in the orchestra pit.

I: Oh, that's no problem for us because we have a conductor. Musicians have to listen to the conductor's judgement.

R: For the same instruments covering the same musical range, what is the advantage of the new instrument?

I: Very simple, the newly designed Gaohu does not need python skin. Python skin can only be used for two or three years. The sound is also better than traditional one. The new one is not made of plastic but fibre skin that's biodegradable. It is made in the United States and is a substance that can be decomposed by nature. There is a difference in the cane chamber too. it is difficult to be noticed but the contours inside are different. There are two distinct levels in the head. The position of the head is obviously inlaid with a thin layer of steel to ensure that it will not move. It remains stable no matter what kind of weather throughout the day, whether it is cold or hot, this is the key. If it is python skin, the humidity will soften it, soften the sound and therefore become numb. After the improvement, firstly, the tone is the same. The audience cannot tell whether it is improved or not improved instrument. Physically, it is much stronger than the original. The pressure and vibration of the fibre skin are more than 35 times stronger than that of the python's skin. For example, the new fibre can endure three hundred pounds of force. If one applies 30 pounds to python's skin, it will be broken. Now, the reason for the loud volume is that the bearing pressure and penetration are much stronger, there is no need to add a microphone. But the tone is the same yet louder too.

R: Do you think more musicians will buy the new instruments?

I: We do not mass-produce the newly designed instruments. The Chinese orchestra does not do this to make active income, however, if there's another group or orchestra interested, we'll sell to them.

R: I believe that Cantonese opera currently has a problem of not providing enough live ambience. Do you have any input on this?

I: Every instruments' sound that goes through microphones have already lost their original sound quality, therefore creating that lack of live ambience feeling. Like singing Karaoke, you can even pretend to sing on the stage. The sound played is the mixture of all the instruments, so along with the lack of live ambience, the use of the microphone broadcasting will also drop three scales, leading to poor results. The most beautiful sound is of course the original sound. There was a period when the Beijing Concert Hall refused to add microphone in the late 1980s. They said that this is art, and there is no need to add pop elements. To sing pop songs, you must use a microphone or you can't sing. They said there is no microphone here. HKCO went to the festival to hear that there was no microphone. We were glad that they are reviving this tradition of omitting the microphone. The feeling of having microphone and not having microphone is different. This is an economic problem, and the sound will degrade.

R: I have spoken to the Xiqu centre and they've done a lot of research. One of their proposed solutions is to use smaller instruments for smaller venues. Does this create a different outcome?

I: Of course, it'll be different. Even the pitch will be different. Nowadays, designing the venue is done by outsiders. They don't know how it works. This is a big problem. Larger drum or smaller drum, it's not a volume problem but a pitching one. With the small theatre in Xiqu Centre uses microphones, it'll be ridiculous. Because you use microphones, you become like karaoke. What's the difference to playing a CD then?

I have a lot of experience with recording records and working in television. Just do lip-syncing and no one will notice. The audience will feel like it's fine because the musician just imitates his own playing. Real-life sound is completely different, with or without microphones. It just sounds like street musicians. When they design the venue, they have to think it all through. Now, the problem is that the outsiders are managing the industry of which they don't even understand the workings of. But nowadays, during Cantonese opera, it's also all about money. Only the opera groups in China don't care about money. For example, in Guangdong opera house, they have full-time musicians all the time. No need for mics too.

For us, we have no problem to adapt. If you send twenty of our musicians to work for Cantonese opera, we'll do it as good as freelance musicians. If you want to improve, you have to change. We don't use Western instruments anymore, but we have our own designs to cover all the ranges.

Now, the younger generation are born able to listen to international standards, such as Western orchestra's musical range, so they can compare it with Chinese music. So we also have to step up to meet their standards. We can only survive in the world with comparisons. We have to be different to Western music but also have the function of Western Music. There's a bottom line of designing instruments: we don't want to change the sound quality and the appearance of the instrument, we are changing the structure and the material.

R: How do you promote the new instruments to average musicians?

I: China and Hong Kong both have bans on snake skin, so in the near future, musicians will have to use alternatives since snake skin won't be on the market. In terms of price, it's similar to the snake skin instruments. But if we can mass-produce the instruments, it'd be 20% lower.

R: How about in mainland China? Is there an idea of improving instruments?

I: A few academies in China have bought instruments from us. Sooner or later, it'll happen. In China, how they handle the changes will be another issue. We've been developing this for ten years already. We started in 2005. This is the second generation of improved instruments (2014).

R: What's the difference between the first and second generation?

I: Through performances and testing, we can determine how to improve and we can spot the problems through different styles of performances. We can solve the problems that way. If there's no expectations like Cantonese opera, there'll be no improvements because there'll be nothing to change. The new work demands for more from the instruments, so in order to push the instruments forward, improvements have to be made. At the same time, the skill of the musicians has to match the demand, so the work behind the music is most important. We've gone through many generations of musicians. The younger generation are born in the 80s-90s, and their skill is much better than the older one. They've gone through a lot of academic training and they started young too. It will be like this from now on.

R: The young generation has the advantage of doing it since they were young, but there's also the problem of getting used to microphones.

I: Yes. In my opinion, now the world's technology is improving, the culture is shrinking, but the art is growing. Before, not everyone can be a professional musician. Nowadays, many people rely on technology using microphones, then everyone can do it. Today, the Chinese Orchestra also recorded the 40-year theme song of Hong Kong's open reforms on Radio Television Hong Kong. The technique of a new generation of young people is not as good as the older generation. Now there's no successors. To be a musician is very easy, you just have to remember a few hundred songs. Nobody is there to move forward. In fact, the interest is fuelling many musicians in the industry, but they're working for amateurs most of the time. Many of them do it recreationally, not passionately.

R: The idea of improved instrument is really good, but only if the average musicians are willing to use it, right?

I: Yes, only if they're willing to change to use the new instruments because every musician.

R: Because they're all used to their old instruments.

I: It is fine if they are willing to use it. When the original materials, such as python skin, used to make Chinese instruments are totally banned, they will have to switch to new instruments anyway. We are not trying to subvert our culture, we are trying to preserve it — preserve the technique and tone of Chinese music.

The people in Xiqu Centre are outsiders, they said we do not know the style of Cantonese opera. In fact, it is them that do not know the style of Cantonese opera. They have better technical skill, if they simply know how to arrange and have traditional guidance, they can execute it very well. The Hong Kong government should listen to the opinion of insiders.

I worked in HKCO for 40 years already, Shatin Town Hall has gone through many generations of technicians. But they only have one formula, lacking live ambience is something they do not care about.

Of course, they don't understand what is the essential to the scene. For example, concerning the person who sings, their microphone will only adjust the volume of the microphone. The person

who sings is controlled. The person who sings does not feel good or not. When everything is not clear, the bottom of the stage is used for sharing. The people who performed as the gods in the past did not have the microphones. They only passed the sound of the bottom of the platform to the further ends of the house, but they must practice with the wind before they can use Dantian to sing. The current portrait is like Karaoke and it gets worse. There is no such thing now, and although, masters have taught the same thing, it is shrinking. The former professionals practiced their martial arts to practice their qi, and they practiced penetrating power. They clamoured in the wilderness to practice the sound.

R: Will Guangzhou now use traditional methods to practice? I think that Chinese opera seems to be better than Hong Kong Cantonese opera.

I: Xiqu Centre is a hardware without software. I understand the way the Hong Kong Government used to do everything in one way. But those foreigners simply don't understand what Cantonese opera is. I am convinced that there will be many jokes in the future. If it is different for Western opera, but it is difficult to bear the current situation in Hong Kong, where does the huge band come from? Today, Cantonese opera becomes like this, and the expenditure is difficult to pay. This is how one musician got to play three instruments in a performance. It can be brilliant when there is regular hardware, but there are people who can do it. We also had a concert hall, but in the end, it became a museum. Now we only have the Cultural Centre, Sha Tin Town Hall, Tsuen Wan, and Tuen Mun. Now it seems that the West Kowloon Xiqu Centre is useless. It is important to develop the software behind it.

Take Taiwan as an example. It has experienced the colonisation of the Netherlands and Japan and lost its own culture. If you don't have literary character, you don't have the world. If you don't have the literary character, you can't save it. The second one must be optimized before you can occupy the music in the world. We are not new people. I am the person responsible for making changes. I have been in the Chinese Orchestra for forty years. I know how Chinese music has changed. Now I have given Chinese music to foreigners and they don't know what happened.

We think that the music of the ethnic group can be up to several steps, because the development of the Western Music has been more than 400 years, and the truly Chinese folk music ensemble has only appeared for more than 60 years ago, and there is still a long gap. These things

are needed when China's national strength is raised. There is a Chinese folk orchestra in China, whether it is for politics or something else. This is something that belongs to China.

We have been doing this since 100 years ago, and it is now the fourth generation, and it has been passed down. We will learn how the history of Western music appears and develops. We must advance to understand how others do it. The first step in creation is not whimsical. First, we must imitate, imitate success and optimize it. After the first move, we can't throw away the things in front. Young people today get information too easily because of the emergence of smartphones. The biggest enemy of man is the age.

Now since they have Orchestra Pit, they do not need a conductor. By putting the lead percussionist and the lead musician on a higher ground, they can replace conductor. In this case, actors will have more space to act on stage. Putting musicians in Orchestra Pit with microphones than stage right with microphones, because their sound quality is same.

R: For the improvement of sound, some people have said that in schools and malls, the percussion is too loud. Is there any way to reduce this sound?

I: The normal way is to use the boards to block the sound, because the people near the musicians will be very overwhelmed. This can be sorted out in its design but we haven't developed improved percussion instruments.

As an extension, it can be promoted with an electronic drum, because the electronic drum can match the tone of the sound, as long as the beat is on. This can be done, but it has changed, but there is no way to survive.

Appendix 17 Newly designed Chinese string instruments



Appendix 18 Open coding for stakeholders' interviews example

The coding system as follow: blue highlight represented the subject relate to sound technology related to venue support, green highlight represented the sound technology related to music and sound quality and performance issue, yellow highlight represented the working attitude of participants, pink highlight represented the budget and funding issue, underline represented problem outside the above categories.

R: I think the biggest problem is that there are only 2 kinds of music in Cantonese Orchestras. One is loud, one is very quiet, there's no in between. Both are next to each other. Even if you wanted to balance it out, for example having a Timpani next to a double bass, having it next to each other, it's impossible to balance it.

So there's a huge issue here, you should add an **acoustic board** here to block the sound of the **percussion**. *SD tech venue support. percussion prob.*

I: Definitely, **we always cover it up**. Even now.

R: But it's still really loud. Last time despite such a big theatre, they were complaining that it was too loud. *SD tech performance inconsistency.*

I: **If the musicians are excited, it's quite a difficult situation**. I've tried sitting here near the percussion side and there two sounds for each percussion to hit — the sound the percussionists make and the sound of it bouncing off the walls because its so loud. It was really uncomfortable for the listeners; they've really made it too loud. But there won't be these technical issues if they went up the stage, since you can control the volume of the sounds. It's always been done on stage, even back when they did ritual performances.

R: Another thing is, the new generation actors, they like to adapt to the western orchestra style, separate all the things. Drums on one side, rest on the other side. What do you think? Do we need to do that?

I: From a venue's point of view, it doesn't matter where you put the orchestra because the quality of the mics is very good and **we have the budget to buy mics that fit the range**, focus, and control area of specific needs. *SD tech, venue support.*

R: So if you do so, you need the time for sound plotting.

I: **It's just a guessing game since they don't rehearse**. Might as well see what they got when the **performance opens and adjust to it then**. *performer do not support tech factor*

R: Because this system has been done a lot, so it's easy. But if they spread the instruments all over the place, is it more difficult?

performers arrive late, not support tech setup?

R: In Hong Kong, many musicians come very late and even by 7 o'clock, they have not all arrived.

I: Yes, we are not like Drama, which has moving in period. We see each other only on stage, or the day of performance. Therefore, everyone will only be there at the moment of performance. Maximum we do rehearsals, but it doesn't need music. If they're needed, only one or two will come, such as percussion and violin. The leader will then talk to the musician about what to do.

R: As a performer on stage, regarding the fold back, can you feel the connection with the audience?

lack of knowledge and expectation

I: We are not at that stage yet but at least we will know what kind of effect and setting. For example, for ghost scenes, you need to give the actor some ghostly sounds to enhance the feeling. From my understanding, this is a ghost scene, so I hope you give me some echoes. Then there'll be a stronger haunting feeling. These kind of simple things, we know.

R: I gave out many questionnaires to professionals and they all agreed to spend more time on technical help such as mic tests and sound tests.

I: Having Mic test is a good thing. tech: wanting to have tech support.

R: However, no one is actually doing it.

I: Your kind of backstage people who do sound will test the mics one by one around 6:30. We don't know how serious or how detailed they test the mics. Some will see if its just clear, but you don't know if that means its working or not. It's kind of unclear for us. I'm sure some are just testing that sound comes out or not.

R: Our sound people knows that everyone has a different voice so if you use a mic to test, we will help you to EQ your voice.

I: The first line to sing on stage is always the worse one (for technical reason), sometime the mic did not turn on at all. tech: not understand how tech help and what they can do.

R: Without turning on the mic, it is their problem, not your mistake.

I: Isn't it that now that we fixed the locations of the musicians so that by the time they walk in, everything is ready to go?

R: No, they still need to set up.

tech not understand technical support.

I: That's disappointing.

*different expectations
wanting to have tech support.*

R: Essentially, the Xiqu Centre has the flexibility to support all kinds of inquiries, but they still need time to carry out that support. If the musicians arrive 30 minutes before the performance, there's nothing much they can do.

I: That's true. Normally, actors will turn up around 6pm on the day of performance, but they will not do any sound check. Many amateur groups request to do sound checks, but professional do not feel the need because they think they're good enough. If the stage manager asks them, they won't answer. However, the boss (presenter) can request them to do so. If West Kowloon think Xiqu Centre need to do sound check, they can request the group to spend 15 minutes for sound check when the group hires the venue.

*performer attitude
not support tech*

not willing to support tech

The bad habit of this industry is that no one can control the personnel. They will not even wear the same clothing. I found it very difficult to get the personnel to wear the uniforms I provided. I think that it's ugly for people to wear different colours on stage when working, I really wanted them to simply wear black. One time, I brought uniforms and asked the leading musician to distribute them. After I came back from lunch, no one was wearing the uniform and said that the clothes disappeared. For bad habits like this, it's not impossible to change but you have to make sure they do it personally. Next time, I'll be there to make sure they change into the uniform rather than asking somebody else to do it. You need to be patient for them to change.

So if the Xiqu Centre wants them to carry out sound checks, they still need supervision. After they get used to it then they will do it automatically without the need of someone reminding them. I think this is a very good idea but even if the musicians willing to do sound check, there must be someone knows how to listen, otherwise it's useless.

Funding body impose rule.

SD tech ~~many~~ do not have knowledge.

I don't know if sound engineers are good enough, but I think stage managers aren't competent enough either. If they could provide someone who is qualified for this, then it'll be good.

R: I believe that Cantonese opera currently has a problem of not providing enough live ambience. Do you have any input on this?

I: ^{SD tech musical imagery, SD quality.} Every instruments' sound that goes through microphones have already lost their original sound quality, therefore creating that lack of live ambience feeling. Like singing Karaoke, you can even pretend to sing on the stage. The sound played is the mixture of all the instruments, so along with the ^{musical imagery} lack of live ambience, the use of the microphone broadcasting will also drop three scales, leading to poor results. The most beautiful sound is of course the original sound. There was a period when the Beijing Concert Hall refused to add microphone ^{mic. problem} in the late 1980s. They said that this is art, and there is no need to add pop elements. To sing pop songs, you must use a microphone or you can't sing. They said there is no microphone here. HKCO went to the festival to hear that there was no microphone. We were glad that they are reviving this tradition of omitting the microphone. The feeling of having microphone and not having microphone is different. This is an ^{production budget.} economic problem, and the sound will degrade.

R: I have spoken to the Xiqu centre and they've done a lot of research. One of their proposed solutions is to use smaller instruments for smaller venues. Does this create a different outcome?

I: ^{SD tech instrument} Of course, it'll be different. Even the pitch will be different. ^{venue design.} Nowadays, designing the venue is done by outsiders. They don't know how it works. This is a big problem. Larger drum or smaller drum, it's not a volume problem but a pitching one. With the small theatre in Xiqu Centre uses microphones, it'll be ridiculous. Because you use microphones, you become like karaoke. What's the difference to playing a CD then?

I have a lot of experience with recording records and working in television. Just do lip-syncing ^{SD tech musical imagery.} and no one will notice. The audience will feel like it's fine because the musician just imitates his own playing. ^{Funding also?} Real-life sound is completely different, with or without microphones. It just sounds like street musicians. When they design the venue, they have to think it all through. Now, the problem is that the outsiders are managing the industry of which they don't even understand the workings of. But nowadays, during Cantonese opera, it's also all about money. Only the opera groups in China don't care about money. For example, in Guangdong opera house, they have full-time musicians all the time. No need for mics too.

Funding ~ production quality.