

CONCEPTION OF CREATIVITY AS PERSONAL STYLE OF CANTONESE OPERA ARTISTS IN HONG KONG: A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

As a popular Chinese opera genre in Hong Kong, Cantonese opera has experienced its rise in twentieth century, during which various personal styles were developed and well recognised. In the 1960s to the 1990s, however, the art form has been declined due to various reasons. Although the Hong Kong government has infused her support since the 2000s, the present artists tend not to develop their personal style. This study aimed to investigate the attributions leading to the development of artistic creativity by surveying the opinion of 13 eminent and experienced practitioners through a series of semi-structured interviews. Findings suggest that the transforming socio-cultural and economic contexts in Hong Kong have been significantly influenced the personal decisions of artists in determining the pursuance of personal style. The modern culture of impatience and instant gratification might be one of the attributions leading to the absence of tough practices for artistry and creativity.

KEYWORDS

Cantonese opera; artists; learning; creativity; Hong Kong.

INTRODUCTION

Cantonese opera, or yueju, is a genre of Chinese opera that has been popular in Hong Kong and Guangdong Province since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The period from the 1920-1950s is generally regarded as the golden age of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, during which many eminent and innovative artists, such as Sit Kok-Sin (薛覺先 1904-1956), Ma Si-Tsang (馬師曾 1900-1964), and Fong Yim-Fun (芳艷芬 b. 1926) (see Ng, 2015), contributed to the modern development of the genre by creating their own singing style. However, Cantonese opera experienced a recession in the 1960s after the Cultural Revolution in mainland China (1966-76) and the Hong Kong Leftist Riots in 1967 (Lai, 2010; Cheung, 2009). Specifically, increasing competition with Western movies, which were cheaper and trendy, meant that the numbers of practitioners and audiences dropped, leading it to become a minor entertainment form. Since the 1970s, the development of a personal style has not been as vigorous as before; practitioners tend to prefer to imitate other artists' styles without developing their own personal "brand" (Leung, 2018a).

This study aimed to investigate those attributions leading to the development of artistic creativity by surveying the opinion of 13 eminent and experienced practitioners. Together with a review of the historical and socio-cultural phenomena that underpin Hong Kong Cantonese opera, the issue of sustainability of a traditional genre in modern society will further be discussed in the hope that the conclusions drawn may provide implications for global practices.

Creativity is a popular issue that has been studied by academics in different fields, including psychology, sociology and education. Amabile (2012) has proposed a Componential Theory of Creativity, in which four components – domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, intrinsic task motivation and social

environment – are all seen as critical in its development and nurture. Domain-relevant skills refer to the knowledge and skills specific to the particular domain in which the creator is working. Creativity-relevant processes encompass the personality and cognitive style of the creator as it relates to independence, risk-taking, and the skills required for generating new ideas. Intrinsic task motivation is the passion of the creator for undertaking creative tasks. While these three components are located within the creators themselves, the social environment is concerned with external factors, such as collaborative and supportive teamwork (positive), harsh criticism as the norm, and an emphasis on maintaining the status quo (negative).

Furthermore, the cultural psychologist, Glaveanu (2010), argued that the development of creativity does not exist solely at the personal level, but is closely connected with the creator's environment, other peoples and their culture. He proposed five principles that should guide any investigation of creativity, including contextual understanding, generative understanding, meaning-oriented understanding, genetic understanding, and ecological creativity research.

RISE OF HONG KONG CANTONESE OPERA

Hong Kong became a British colony in 1841 after the First Opium War. Since the 1920s, it has not only transformed itself from a fishing village to an economic business centre in southern China (Lai, 2010); the demand for Cantonese opera as the primary source of entertainment has also increased, albeit gradually. Numerous performances took place almost every day as the context of Cantonese opera transferred from rural areas to the city, its function likewise shedding the vestiges of its ritual performance origins (Ng, 2015). Due to high demand and competitive revenues, many Cantonese opera artists moved from Guangzhou, which despite being a hub of the art form, was politically and economically unstable during this time, to Hong Kong (Lai, 2010). The resulting influx of capital and manpower provided perfect conditions for Cantonese opera to thrive, with Hong Kong becoming the core city of its development.

Performance practices of Cantonese opera also changed significantly during the 1920-30s. There was no native opera in Guangdong province during the eighteenth century, with outside troupes representing different Chinese opera genres, such as Kun opera, travelling there to perform (Ng, 2015; Lai, 2010). A certain kind of stage language, rather than Cantonese, was used (Frankel, 2011), the resulting transmission by certain artists leading to the formation of local troupes. During the late nineteenth century, local artists started to use Cantonese opera in their performances, which impacted on the musical system since the melodies were largely derived from the linguistic tones (Yung, 1989; Chan, 1999). In addition, the traditional use of falsetto voice by male characters was changed to natural voice (Ching, 2018), while local folk songs and the narrative music of Guangdong province were added to the genre. Modern Cantonese opera was thus formulated.

Eminent Cantonese opera artist Sin Kok-Sin initiated various reforms in Cantonese opera. Having initially adopted many of the transformation trends popular during the 1920s, he discovered many malpractices in the performances, including improvisation on stage without respect to the original libretto, leading him to request his troupe members to strictly follow the scripts. At the same time, however, he adopted the consummate musical and performance practices of Peking and Kun operas, importing their musical systems, musical instruments and movements into Cantonese opera (Sit, 2009). Based on existing practices, he created new Aria Types (see Yung, 1983) of Cantonese opera music, including the changju erhuang (長句二黃) and changju gunhua (長句滾花), both of which enriched the diversity of the Aria Types system (Sit, 2009). In sum, while the early twentieth century was essentially a period of conformation within modern Cantonese opera, Sit was one of the leaders who initiated different and important ideas for its improvement.

NEW TECHNOLOGICAL INVENTIONS

The development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong is related to technology. Radio broadcasts were the main media form in the 1950s, providing the general public with both news and entertainment. Cantonese opera was a typically popular genre; according to Ip (1995), in 1957 a third of Radio Television Hong Kong's (RTHK) daily slots consisted of Cantonese opera programmes, while Commercial Radio Hong Kong (CRHK) provided Cantonese opera programmes every afternoon. Indeed, radio broadcast companies and cinemas signed a joint agreement committing them to broadcast Cantonese opera three times a week. RTHK organised their own Cantonese opera programmes in 1956, a move which was particularly popular among youngsters. The vigorous popularity of Cantonese opera as a result of these programmes led to a great demand for performance artists, such social contexts providing excellent conditions for them to develop their skills.

Before the invention of the gramophone in the late nineteenth century, audiences had to go to performing venues for live performances. The expansion in popularity of Cantonese opera that followed the gramophone's commercial success meant that audiences could now replicate the live experience in the comfort of their own homes. This point was brought home in 1925; with the explosion of the Canton-Hong Kong Strike and Boycott, Cantonese opera troupes in Guangzhou were unable to perform in Hong Kong (Yung, 2006). Along with the rise in sales of (portable) gramophones and records, Cantonese opera became a part of the daily life of middle- and high-class families. The popularity of the art form, allied to the increase in the numbers and types of audience, led to even more favourable conditions for the development of a variety of personal styles.

METHODOLOGY

To identify the factors affecting the formation of different Cantonese opera artists' personal styles, the author interviewed 13 practitioners of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong in a series of semi-structured interviews. Non-verbal communication was utilised in order to improve the quality of interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), while the overall study design adopted the seven stages of interview inquiry developed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as follows:

Thematising: the focus was on how the artists perceive the development of their personal style in singing, accompanying and acting during performances, together with the reasons for such perceptions.

Designing: as part of designing the study, especially with regard to the protection of their identities, the transcripts were shown to the interviewees before analysis.

Interviewing: the interviews were conducted with sound recording equipment and a pre-determined set of questions. Questions with a reflective approach were used to follow up on some of the issues which needed to be further investigated.

Transcribing: all the interviews – from oral speech to written text – were transcribed.

Analysing: based on the research themes, keywords, which could be developed into different themes and categories for coding and decoding, were identified.

Verifying: comparison of themes from different interviewees, in order to seek consistency and validity, was attempted.

Reporting: the article was written up for the purposes of publication and presentation.

SUBJECTS

The 13 interviewees comprised five experienced singers, four professional actors and actresses, and four professional accompanists. The author came to know the interviewees upon joining a Cantonese operatic singing club in 2014; as part of researching the practices of Cantonese opera transmission, friendships with the artists were forged and a high level of rapport subsequently established. While all interviewees are currently engaged in performing Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing, they each possess different opinions about the issue. Table 1 shows the demographics of the interviewees.

Table 1. Demographics of interviewees

	Gender	Approximate Age	Approximate Experience	Years of	Current situation
Actress 1	F	>80	50		Retired, singing as entertainment
Actor 2	M	~40	25		Active in professional performances
Actress 3	F	~50	30		Active in professional performances
Actor 4	M	~60	40		Active in professional performances
Accompanist 1	M	~70	50		Active in accompanying in private singing clubs
Accompanist 2	M	>70	50		Active in accompanying in private singing clubs
Accompanist 3	M	~50	30		Active in professional performances
Accompanist 4	M	>40	30		Active in professional performances

Singer 1	M	>85	60	Active singing in clubs
Singer 2	F	>70	50	Teaching
Singer 3	F	>80	60	Occasional singing in singing clubs and teaching
Singer 4	F	~55	40	Active singing in singing clubs
Singer 5	M	>70	50	Active singing in singing clubs

The interview questions aimed to investigate their experiences of creativity during the learning process, their understanding regarding Cantonese opera artists' imitation, and their opinions about improving the status of Cantonese opera. The interviews started with a general question concerning the interviewees' personal description about how they became engaged in learning and performing Cantonese opera. After that, they were asked to express their views on three main areas: (1) their perceptions concerning the development of personal style and creativity in Cantonese opera; (2) their thoughts on the creative practices of current performers and previous masters; and (3) their explanations for those artists who had the ability (or not) to develop their personal styles. Different themes emerged as the stories were related and subsequently analysed.

RESULTS

Three internal and external attributions related to the development of personal styles were identified and categorised, based on the interviewees' responses. These were: personal factors, transformed socio-cultural contexts, and changing economic contexts.

PERSONAL FACTORS

In order to create a new style, the first condition that must be met is the learning motivation of the artist concerned. Indeed, developing an individual style is a personal choice rather than a request from the audience: "Apart from our own persuasion, we have to rely on ourselves. Nobody can force you [to create your style]. Only you dare to and are willing to" (Accompanist 2). Some artists strive for excellence in acting rather than generating a new style. According to Actress 1: "In fact, as a professional actor, I think learning is most important ... I keep on learning [up to this moment even I am a professional actress]."

A common issue for modern artists is a lack of concentration. Practicing is a daily routine for all artists, regardless of their fame. In the past, however, perhaps they put in more effort: "In the past, artists were so hardworking ... even they have become famous, they still practiced very hard and studied a lots of thing ... Nowadays, they [the artist] do not want to practice, just want to have a quick success" (Accompanist 1). However, nowadays there are a lot of distractions: "The world is just too tempting. In the past there were not so many [attractive] things. How can you concentrate on your practice with so many tempting things?" (Accompanist 1).

Many modern-day Cantonese opera artists lack professional skills. To develop creativity, domain-relevant skills are a critical component (Amabile, 2012). Without a solid foundation, nothing can be built up:

If you have nothing [knowledge], how can you create a personal style? Please work hard in imitation and learning. Who does not start with imitation? Who can be a star at the very first step? Impossible! Whatever you learn, you have to learn from a model. After thoroughly learnt, you may get it through. (Accompanist 3)

If you want to create something, you have to get to know it. How can you create anything if you don't know it? (Accompanist 1)

The resulting lack of professional skills hinders artists' creative development. Accompanist 3 thought that the new generation of artists refused to practice or learn from the classic repertoires: "They [young artists] are unwilling to practice. They do not want to perform the old [classic] repertoires, which required artists to practice seriously." The attitude of artists towards their accomplishments is critical in developing a personal style. Some of them have given up striving for excellence in their career and are instead waiting for the senior artists to retire:

They [the young artists] are waiting for those ancestors to retire, or until they have been staying in the field for several decades, then they can claim that they are the representative artists of the field. They just wait for this day to come. (Accompanist 3)

COLLABORATION WITH, AND LEARNING FROM, ACCOMPANISTS

In the Aria Type music of Cantonese opera, melodies are derived from the linguistic tones of the lyrics. Within this context, artists are, to a certain extent, free to develop the melodies, known as qiang (腔, literally oral cavity) (Leung, 2018a). When singing the same aria type, different artists can sing based on their own interpretation or articulation (Chan, 1999). However, deriving qiang requires a high level of knowledge about Cantonese opera, which artists may not possess. This being the case, if artists want to create a new qiang, they usually seek help from their accompanists:

Apart from the artists themselves, there are a lot of musicians (accompanists) ... For example, Ho Fei-fan invented his qiang during mid-night. He had an accompanist helping him to derive different qiangs, and he just chose from them. Now we don't have that... First, we don't have such [financial] condition, and we don't have that context. Those accompanists are not so free to collaborate with you. They have to earn their living by playing with many different artists. (Actor 2)

Actually, there are many eminent artists seeking the assistance from musicians. Especially when they have to deal with modulation [the artists have to rely on the musicians]. (Accompanist 2)

Any collaboration between an artist and an accompanist is a long-term commitment. According to one of the artists, his troupe worked with the same group of accompanists for at least a year. However, nowadays, the collaboration period is extremely short:

Nowadays, [the troupe cooperation] will only last eight to ten days or even one week. Ritual performance is only five days ... They better to have a longer period of collaboration. They don't even have enough communication. They [artists and accompanists] don't get used to each other, but the troupe has to disband. (Actor 4)

As a result of this situation, the traditional style of collaboration between artists and accompanists cannot be established. Without help from accompanists, artists need to create their own personal style by themselves, a task which has become increasingly difficult for them.

TRANSFORMING SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

TEACHING AND PEDAGOGY

Senior artists can be good mentors for young artists. However, some senior artists possess negative concepts about teaching the new generation. According to Chan (1982) "... [Most artists] are not willing to teach. Some of the famous artists might think negatively that "successfully nurturing disciples may starve the master to death [due to keen competition]". Very few artists would nurture the descendants unconditionally" (p. 64). Some mentors might worry that students will become their competitor if they impart all their knowledge: "There was an artist who worked with me in teaching, but she didn't know much about how to teach ... If she could teach well, she may go to develop her own troupe?" (Accompanist 4)

Today's learning environment and pedagogy have undergone many transformations. Traditionally, channels for learning and entering the Cantonese opera profession were limited (Leung, 2015). Seeking a master and entering into an apprenticeship was almost the only way, especially for those families who were too poor to raise their children by themselves (Chan, 1982). Nowadays, interested learners can enrol into community troupes and then enter relevant institutions (Leung, 2018b). Nevertheless, despite the wider choice of institutions available, personal styles are still very difficult to develop since learning is discrete and divided into different skills. Teachers focus on teaching specific skills; the responsibility of the students is to learn and follow the instructions. Consequently, it is easy for pupils to become passive learners:

Current artists were born in a cradle [they were spoiled]. Many teachers are employed to teach them. Moreover, the teachers are brilliant and experienced. They teach step by step. They [the student] would rely on teachers, seems that learning is the responsibility of the teachers [rather than the learner]. If I [the student] don't know anything, teacher must teach me. They [the student] only repeat what the teachers said. It means that they [the students] lose their responsibility [of learning]. (Actor 2)

Indeed, while teaching is undoubtedly the teacher's responsibility, learners nowadays may become too reliant on the system. Apart from doing what is required by the curriculum, there is a tendency for students not to pursue in-depth knowledge, relying instead on the syllabus and tutors' instructions. According to an interviewee, Actor 4's own learning process was much harder during the old days, when learners valued every opportunity:

It was very hard to get answers from the senior. You need to treat them so well ... Then they could write few words on a piece of cigarette paper to answer your question ... Only very nice seniors could teach the others. It was a treasure. (Actor 4)

CONCERT ETIQUETTE

Modern audiences are much more kindly disposed towards performers than in the past. Indeed, influenced by Western culture, Hong Kong audiences tend to over-encourage artists. According to Actor 2: "Hong Kong audiences are exceptionally tolerant ... They would encourage the junior performers [even if they perform not so well]" (Actor 2). Traditionally, interaction between audiences and artists was relatively direct and instant when ritual performances were staged at the bamboo-tinsheet theatres (Chan, 2005): members would hoot if

they were not satisfied. However, as the performance context has changed to the theatre and concert hall, concert etiquette has improved. They will give a big round of applause, no matter how well or badly the artists perform. Accompanist 4 mentioned the problem of over-indulgence from audiences:

[Over-encouragement from audiences] made them [the artists] to be arrogant. You [the artists] fall down on the stage, making mistakes, they [the audiences] still applaud. Then I [the artists] won't mind making mistakes. In the past, audiences will hoot if artists make mistakes. (Accompanist 3)

While encouragement is good for artists, the downside is that this may not be a real reflection of their performance. As a result, performers may be unwilling to make more effort, not to mention creating and developing their personal style.

TRANSFORMING CAREER PATH

Traditionally, Cantonese opera artists started their careers by taking minor roles on stage for a lengthy period of time in order to establish their artistry and gain experience. This process might last for many years:

At the very beginning, I played the "muted mui-heong" [a minor role without any dialogues nor singing]. After a period of time, I play Caguk [another minor role] with one dialogue. It was awesome. Then the third Daan [female role] left, I was promoted to Ceon-tou [another minor role], having baaklaam [paddler speeches]. (Actor 4)

Nowadays, career paths have been shortened, since those artists who graduate from Cantonese opera institutions are trained to take on main roles only: "They become Jingyan [the leading female role] at the very beginning ... Because the youngsters [the new artists] can get what they want easily, therefore, they failed to succeed ... They miss the process [learning to play the minor roles]" (Actor 4). . However, although goals are quickly fulfilled, the fact that they have skipped the process of experiencing the minor roles means that modern artists lack experience, which in turn may limit their artistic development and hinder the creation of their own personal style. Due to increased government financial support, it is also relatively easy to put on a public Cantonese opera performance nowadays.

CHANGING ECONOMIC CONTEXTS

LACK OF REPEAT PERFORMANCES

In the past, watching Cantonese opera was a major part of people's daily entertainment. At that time, repertoires were repeatedly performed over a long period, while famous repertoires could be staged continuously for almost a month:

For example, Wu Bu Gui (a famous play), it will perform for a month." [Did the audience watch it again and again?] Yes. They watched a lot of times, because there was little entertainment. (Accompanist 1)

In the past, Yam Bak (Yam Kim Fai and Baak Suet Sin, two famous artists) could perform ten nights or even twenty nights for a new piece. However, under the current market situation, you can only perform maximum for two nights. (Actress 1)

Due to keen competition among different kinds of modern entertainment, Cantonese opera troupes need to frequently produce new repertoires in order to satisfy audience demand. According to Actress 1, “Normally, these [new] repertoires only perform once in a year. They may perform again after a few years.” However, repeat performances are important for the development and advancement of a performer’s artistry:

To bring out the taste of the performance, you [artist] need to keep repeating performing, improving and exploring in the same play. If you [artist] can only repeat performing the repertoire every other year or even two years, it seems like starting over of everything. (Actress 1)

After you have sung a new piece at least thirty times, then [the artist] could express it to a certain extent. (Actor 4)

INTENSIVE PERFORMING SCHEDULE

For artistry to develop, performers need to devote lots of time and energy to their craft. However, for today’s artists, time is limited:

According to my grand master, such as Romance of West Chamber [a traditional play], it took three months for rehearsal. It is just a simple piece, not a great production... But nowadays, it is impossible to spend so much time for rehearsal; it is difficult to spend even two or three days to rehearse. It is the reality of the current market. After all, all of us are too busy. (Actress 1)

Limited opportunities to rehearse with the whole team, coupled with a rapid and intensive performance schedule, means that modern-day Cantonese opera artists are unable to review and improve. As a result, opportunities for a comprehensive understanding of the repertoire are relatively few and far between.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT

The Hong Kong Government supports the development of Cantonese opera through the Cantonese Opera Development Fund and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. Young artists are particularly keen to apply for funding to support their public performances, a situation totally different from the past when audiences were the only source of financial support:

I think they [the artists] have spent more effort on “politics” rather than their artistry. What is “politics”? For example, the funding agency, or some large-scale foundations. They pay more effort to fawn on those people of West Kowloon Cultural District. (Accompanist 3)

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

This study aims to investigate the possible attributions leading to the development of personal creativity within Cantonese opera in Hong Kong. Findings revealed that various personal styles, which were developed and recognised in the 1950s, were similarly reflective of a form of musical creativity. However, gradual changing socio-cultural contexts and the economic environment in Hong Kong have since influenced artists’ personal decision making. Findings of the study are discussed with reference to the cultural psychological approach and related principles of Glaveanu (2010), specifically by focusing on the contextual understanding of creativity.

Similar to other regions, Hong Kong has experienced many different and gradual socio-cultural changes, the most representative of which has been the rise of instantaneity brought about by technology and social media

(Herzogenrath-Amelung, 2016). Younger generations tend to be influenced by a “culture of impatience and instant gratification” (Taubenfeld, 2017), inasmuch as they expect immediate feedback and satisfaction. Presently, email is regarded as slow, its place being taken by many kinds of short messaging applications. Even worse, the commercial community aims to satisfy individuals by providing instant services such as online shopping and delivery, news and other items (Patel, 2014). People prefer to search for information and knowledge on the internet rather than by reading books. We are losing our ability to focus, while multi-tasking is the “norm”. However, research has suggested that delayed gratification and self-control may imply human success (Dollinger, 2012) and cognitive control (Eigsti et al, 2006). The famous marshmallow experiment conducted by Mischel (1973) indicated that the way children perceive rewards may influence their ability to delay, i.e. if instructed to transform the notion of a reward into an abstract concept, they tend to be able to wait longer; if, however, the focus is on the utility of the reward, waiting time is shortened. In such circumstances, education may serve to make critical changes: “through instructions ... about what to imagine during the delay period, it is possible to completely alter (indeed, to reverse) the effects of the physically present reward stimuli in the situation and to cognitively control delay behaviour with consideration precision” (Mischel, 1973, p. 260). As shown in the findings of this study, present day Cantonese opera artists tend to be impatient when it comes to practise and to prefer performing repeat repertoires as a means of sharpening their skills and developing their personal style. Graduates from conservatoires often expect to take on major roles immediately instead of accumulating performing experience by accepting minor on-stage roles as a form of “apprenticeship” (Leung, 2015). Artists’ personal skills and creativity may thus be subsumed by a culture of instant gratification and the popularisation of multi-tasking.

Following a decline in the popularity of the genre from the 1960s to the 1990s due to keen competition among different forms of modern entertainment, Cantonese opera’s stars have since gradually risen, especially after it was listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009 (Lai, 2010). At present, the preservation of Cantonese opera has been included in the Hong Kong government’s policy, both in terms of its educational and cultural exchange value. In the case of the former, it is part of the formal music curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2003; Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority, 2018). In that of the latter an undertaking has been made to preserve, promote and develop Cantonese opera through: 1) developing performance venues; 2) nurturing professionals and preserving creative works; 3) promoting Cantonese opera education, audience building and community participation; 4) fostering cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao; and 5) preserving and showcasing treasures of cultural heritage (Legislative Council, 2009). Consequently, in recent years, numbers of performances have significantly increased. The improving economic and political environment is, in turn, influencing the current crop of artists, whose main focus is not on practice and learning, and of a review and refinement of their artistry through repeat performances, but instead on catering to the vagaries of the market by aiming to satisfy audience demand for new plays.

The attitudes of artists is the essential factor leading to the development of a personal style. Conversely, however, while they are the drivers in the sense that no one else can urge them onwards to create a unique “voice”, their attitude also seems to be strongly influenced by the overall environment. The present-day culture of instant gratification has led to artists losing the focus on sharpening their skills and creativity in place of generating more performances without rigorous practices and rehearsals, while government support indulges them via the financing of many performances, thereby indirectly discouraging them from a life-long pursuance of artistry and creativity. If artists are determined to develop their own style, they need to endure a tough path, being humble enough to listen to opinions and critiques from musicians or the audience, while simultaneously learning from different eminent artists and other stakeholders. This ability to review and integrate all the different opinions and knowledge may also put them at risk of losing existing fans unhappy with the new direction their performing style has taken.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the reasons for the stagnation of creativity in Cantonese opera have been investigated by interviewing different stakeholders. One of the main issues to arise from the investigation is that of the preservation of traditional culture. It is undoubtedly the case that nowadays, as a result of fierce competition and the rapid change in lifestyles, traditional culture has become marginalised by society. This is true not only for Cantonese opera, but also for other arts. Although many traditional cultures have been recognised as examples of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the reality is that the successful preservation of such art forms is still in doubt. Ensuring the vitality of a traditional culture, as well as how to enhance its creativity while simultaneously broadening the cognition of the wider public, are hard but vitally necessary tasks for the stakeholders concerned to address.

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