

# Literatures and Research on Cantonese Nursery Rhymes in China

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## Abstract

Chinese local Cantonese nursery rhymes are an important part of the Chinese traditional music education system. Cantonese children contain Chinese culture's genes and life passwords, carry unique and rich imagination, cultural awareness, collective memory and by studying Guangdong's Cantonese nursery rhymes, students can accumulate the vocabulary of local national folk music in Guangdong, master the artistic characteristics and style characteristics of Chinese folk music. This will give the student folk music theory knowledge, the cultivation of national folk professional skills, the development of national folk music art and the development of national folk music music play an indispensable role. It is also a deep understanding of traditional Chinese art and cultural connotation. This article presents the literature of Cantonese nursery rhymes in China.

**Keywords:** Literatures; Research; Cantonese; Nursery Rhyme; China.

## Introduction

By using "Cantonese nursery rhymes" as the main title to search for the overall trend of the number of publications in Chinese literature (2008-2023) that can be recorded in CNKI database. There are 77 literatures, including 7 master's theses, and the trend is obviously rising, which shows that the research on "Cantonese nursery rhymes" has been paid more and more attention. 2020 is by far the year with the highest number of articles, at 17. Before 2008, the academic attention on the study of "Cantonese nursery rhymes" did not attract much attention from experts and scholars. From 2008 to 2016, the number of published Chinese Cantonese nursery rhymes and the sequential growth rate of Chinese nursery rhymes showed a slow trend. In 2017, 2019 and 2020, the number of published Chinese Cantonese nursery rhymes and the sequential growth rate of Chinese nursery rhymes significantly increased three times. By 2020, there were 17 published in the same year, and the research on Cantonese nursery rhymes has been paid more and more attention by scholars. An upward trend in growth is foreseen in 2023.

Through the quantitative visualization analysis of the keywords "Cantonese nursery rhymes" in CNKI database, it is found that the research on "Cantonese nursery rhymes" takes Cantonese nursery rhymes as the main keywords, and forms a keyword co-occurrence network with music education, national vocal music, music classroom, etc. It can be seen that "Cantonese nursery rhymes" is an important part of music education in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and it is also one of the ways of traditional music culture in school education. The teaching of Cantonese nursery rhymes contains the dual connotation of art ontology and education, which has research value and significance.

Through the search of English literature in CNKI database with Cantonese nursery rhymes as keywords (1923-2023), it can be found that there has been a total of 1 study on Cantonese nursery rhymes and their teaching since 1923. Foreign studies on Cantonese nursery rhymes have not paid much attention.

#### **Analysis of the research field of Cantonese nursery rhymes**

The research field of "Cantonese nursery rhymes" involves a wide range. There are primary education, music and dance, preschool education, Chinese literature, higher education, secondary education, Chinese language and literature, journalism and media, drama, film and television arts, vocational education, library information and library science, educational theory and educational management, cultural economy, publishing, literature and art theory, adult education and special education, and so on. Among them, there were 20 literatures on primary education, accounting for 22.99%; There were 16 literatures on music and dance, accounting for 18.39%; There were 8 higher education literatures, accounting for 9.2% of the total; There were 9 literatures on preschool education, accounting for 10.34%.

#### **Analysis of research institutions and personnel of Cantonese nursery rhymes**

Related research institutions on Cantonese nursery rhymes mainly include universities, government departments, municipal district education bureaus, primary and secondary schools, specifically: Guangdong Vocational College of Literature and Art, Guangdong Second Normal College, Guangdong University of Technology, Guangzhou Tianhe District Huarong Primary School, Guangzhou University, Xinghai Conservatory of Music, Foshan University of Science and Technology, Guangzhou Yuexiu District Education Development Research Center, South China Normal University, Guangdong Technical Teachers College, Shaoguan College, etc. The main researchers are: Wan Shanshan published 5 papers, Chen Huali published 3 papers, Chen Jinying published 2 papers, and so on.

#### **Overview of research on the teaching of Cantonese nursery rhymes.**

Through major libraries, cultural centers, literature and history libraries in China, the books of "Cantonese Nursery rhymes" collected are lyrics and music scores. Using "Cantonese nursery rhymes" and "Guangfu nursery rhymes" as search terms through CNKI, Tongfang, Wip.com and Google Scholar, 77 literatures were retrieved from 1959 to December 2023, including 7 postgraduate theses and 44 journal papers analyzed and researched from the perspective of music and education. Another 26 papers are studied from other disciplines such as Chinese, fine arts, and design.

Through the literature analysis on CNKI, it is found that there is no core literature on the teaching of Cantonese nursery rhymes at present, and most of them focus on the analysis of lyrics, melody and rhythm of the music ontology. There are also studies on music appreciation, vocal music teaching and the use of Cantonese nursery rhymes in early childhood education, and the correlation between the research contents is not great. Through the search of literature and the analysis of the data obtained by field investigation, there are no significant research results on Guangfu nursery rhymes in foreign literature.

#### **Literatures of Cantonese nursery rhymes**

Qu Dajun's "Guangdong New Language" through 28 volumes of the Guangfu area's mountains and rivers, scenic spots, poetry works and other detailed records and classification, such as "Lizhi good food, no children, nimbaki no sweet fall broken branches." Although the description of Guangfu nursery rhymes is not much, it is also promoted as the earliest Guangdong encyclopaedia that records Guangfu nursery rhymes.

Zhu Ziqing's "Chinese Nursery rhymes" can take the way of nursery rhymes and compare the differences between different local nursery rhymes, such as the difference between the Guangzhou nursery rhyme "Moonlight Light" and the southern Fujian nursery rhyme "Moonlight Light". People show the characteristics and value of Guangfu nursery rhymes.

Liang Da's "Guangzhou Xiguan Ancient Child (4) Xiguan Children's Play" combines the background of Guangfu nursery rhymes, local legends, and the combination of nursery rhymes and games with vivid and concise pictures, which is well received by the world.

Xiao Zhuoguang's "Guangzhou Folk Ballads" is a book with the most complete contents of Guangfu nursery rhymes. It is called "professional dictionary" of Guangfu nursery rhymes. The ballads are classified according to the number of first characters and strokes.

Guangzhou Yuexiu District Literary Federation. "Old and New tour of Guangfu Nursery rhymes" collected 64 nursery rhymes combined with pictures, divided into "the most classic", "the most ghost horse", "the most fun", "the most common", "the most characteristic", "the most brief" six parts, and the difficult to understand the words and words to interpret, forming a fun and childlike "small picture book".

In addition, the works on Guangfu nursery rhymes published in modern times include Chen Zidian's Lingnan Traditional nursery rhymes: Guangfu Nursery rhymes Hakka Nursery rhymes Chaoshan Nursery rhymes, Chen Zidian's New Life New Nursery rhymes and Wang Junkang's Ageless Nursery rhymes: Comments on Children's Poetry by Chen Zidian, Notes on Foshan Traditional Nursery rhymes by Peng Yongmei, Research on Teaching Design of Rhythm in Xiguan Nursery rhymes in Guangzhou by Li Qingyue and Chen Yaxian, etc. To sum up, the works of Cantonese nursery rhymes are divided in various ways (Song, 2008).

To sum up, the existing books published on "Cantonese Nursery rhymes" are all lists of musical scores and tracks of "Cantonese nursery rhymes", as well as lists of lyrics of "Cantonese nursery rhymes". There is no in-depth discussion on teaching objectives and teaching effects from the perspective of teaching. At present, the research at home and abroad is still vacant.

## **Research on the music ontology of Cantonese nursery rhymes**

Wan Shanshan (2019), in an essay on the Creation and Development of Cantonese nursery rhymes chorus, takes the creation and arrangement of Cantonese nursery rhymes chorus as the starting point to make suggestions on the way out of traditional Cantonese nursery rhymes chorus.

In the article "The Classroom Inheritance of Local Nursery rhymes Culture -- Taking the Classroom Inheritance of Cantonese nursery rhymes and Songs as an example", Zhang Wei (2019) expounds the great role of classroom in the inheritance of Cantonese nursery rhymes and puts forward several suggestions for optimizing classroom inheritance, such as: We should pay attention to the development of Cantonese nursery rhymes curriculum, strengthen the construction of teaching materials of Cantonese nursery rhymes, pay attention to the fun of Cantonese nursery rhymes and build a rich and colorful display platform.

In his article Folk Chanting in the Cultural Memory of Guangfu -- On the Inheritance and Development of Cantonese nursery rhymes, Zeng Yingfeng (2018) discusses the content, lyrics format and language of Cantonese nursery rhymes in a specific period, starting from the Opium War in 1840.

The characteristics and multiple versions of one song are expounded, and suggestions are put forward for the inheritance and development of contemporary Cantonese nursery rhymes.

Zhang Ying's (2016) Research on the singing Style of Guangdong Traditional nursery rhyme "Moonlight Light" aims at the analysis and elaboration of the history and artistic characteristics of different versions of "Moonlight Light" in Guangzhou and Hakka areas, and explores their internal emotional expression and other issues.

In "On the Regional Cultural Characteristics of Guangzhou Nursery rhymes", written by Liu Yezhen (2015), the carrier characteristics of the lyrics of Guangzhou nursery rhymes, the way of emotional expression and the sense of picture carried in the works are introduced in detail.

Wu Yumei (2017), in the article "A Study on the Phonetic Characteristics of Cantonese nursery rhymes", analyzes and studies the phonetic features of Cantonese nursery rhymes lyrics, and provides suggestions for the development of Cantonese nursery rhymes in the new era.

Liu Yezhen (2015) pointed out that Guangfu nursery rhymes have the free rhythmic form of "number of Bai LAN", and the regional characteristics of the dialect with a rhyme and a sigh.

Guangfu children's rhymes can make use of nine tones and six keys of Cantonese, flexibly use melody changes to set the person, grasp the speed and strength of singing, and form a diversified lyric style.

Cantonese new nursery rhymes are full of strong children's taste, innocent imagination and happy game color, the language is simple and popular.

Cantonese nursery rhymes have a strong vitality. The rhythm of the level and oblique tones shows the rhythmic beauty of the nursery rhymes. The lyrics with nine tones and six keys show the beauty of the nursery rhymes.

Zhang Ying (2021) uses text analysis and comparative research to explain the traditional nursery rhyme "Moonlight Light" in Guangzhou and Hakka areas, analyzes the aesthetic characteristics of "Moonlight Light" in terms of music ontology structure, lyrics content and emotional transmission, and summarizes the singing style and characteristics of Guangdong nursery rhymes.

He Tao (2021) uses the text analysis method to analyze the source and cultural connotation of Guangzhou traditional nursery rhymes from the past, present and future three dimensions, and probes into the artistic characteristics of Guangzhou traditional nursery rhymes in terms of language, melody and structure.

From the perspective of data analysis methods, existing studies have paid more attention to the song creation and singing skills of Cantonese nursery rhymes, but paid less attention to the specific implementation of music education in different regions.

#### **Analysis of the cultural connotation of Cantonese nursery rhymes**

Chen Huali-Chu and Zhu Zai-ching (2023) pointed out that Cantonese nursery rhymes are part of the traditional culture of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in China. It has certain significance for promoting the inheritance and protection of Guangfu culture in the Greater Bay Area; It can improve the cultural cohesion and centripetal force of Guangfu; Enhance the sense of identity and belonging to the local culture of Guangfu; To inspire children to love their hometown and motherland, and to provide a good language

environment for the inheritance and development of Cantonese in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. This paper discusses the ethnic characteristics of Cantonese nursery rhymes in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area from the perspective of musical anthropology and its interconnecting national emotional and cultural heritage.

By collecting data through field investigation, Fu Chunming explained the aesthetic characteristics, spiritual and cultural connotation of Guangzhou nursery rhymes and the "gray nursery rhymes" under the contemporary evolution, and analyzed the four aspects of Guangzhou nursery rhymes with local characteristics of Lingnan scenery, interesting festival customs, positive and optimistic people's spirit and pragmatic and enterprising commercial consciousness. It shows Guangzhou people's plain, honest, open-minded, positive attitude towards life and interpersonal communication standards, and shows the Guangfu culture's aesthetic value pursuit of truth, kindness and beauty.

The feelings of local and hometown contained in Guangfu nursery rhymes are expressed in the form of lyrics to reproduce the beauty of rural situation and water village ethics, and the picture of the integration of Xiguan old houses and urban culture deepens the aesthetic taste of Guangfu culture.

#### **Establishment and research of Cantonese nursery rhyme teaching**

Transmission of Cantonese nursery rhymes in school education

"Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards (2011 edition)" pointed out: "The excellent traditional music of all ethnic groups in China as an important content of music teaching." Therefore, in order to spread local culture, primary and secondary education in Guangdong Province has also done a lot of work, such as the development of local art textbooks "Guangzhou Music" and "local art". Although the textbooks are available, what about the actual application in teaching? According to the survey on the use of the textbook "Guangzhou Music", 40 teachers from 35 primary and secondary schools in Panyu District, Guangzhou, found that almost none of the teachers often use the textbook "Guangzhou Music". When asked about the reasons, the teachers generally said that the Education Bureau did not clearly stipulate that the textbook must be included in the textbook, so it can be used or not. Originally there is a music textbook "Music" (Huacheng Publishing House), this must be on the textbook is not enough time to finish, naturally will not teach "Guangzhou Music", moreover, "Guangzhou Music" teaching reference is very little, there is no CD and other materials to learn, many provincial teachers can not speak Cantonese, nature can not teach. Nowadays, a large number of college graduates from other provinces of Guangdong come to Guangdong to teach, so Putonghua teaching is the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools. These teachers are not proficient in Cantonese, so they generally do not teach Cantonese nursery rhymes. Even though some teachers consciously teach children to sing Cantonese nursery rhymes, there are not many nursery rhymes works, and the materials for reference and learning are limited. It affects the teaching of Cantonese nursery rhymes, so we should solve this problem from the richness of works and the richness of learning images, audio and video materials. The author believes that it is imperative to train children and primary and secondary school teachers who have the knowledge system of Lingnan music culture.

Many education units in the old urban areas of Guangzhou, such as Yuexiu District and Liwan District, still attach importance to the inheritance and development of Cantonese nursery rhymes. For example, the performance video of Yuexiu District's old Buqian Primary school shows a group of "student brothers" on the playground.

Line up the formation of "2017· Yue Sing", and sing Cantonese rhyme Tang children's song "Pool" together with Cantonese shock. It was composed by Chen Huiquan, a famous musician in Guangdong Province, and adapted from a poem of the same name by Bai Juyi, a Tang Dynasty poet. Cantonese nursery rhyme, the song is sung by Chen Yunrong, the daughter of teacher Chen Huiquan. Yuexiu District "Cantonese nursery rhymes, Cantonese Popular singing" singing activities, each school year will select five selected songs for primary school students in Yuexiu District to learn singing, has been held for four years, many key primary schools in Yuexiu District have organized students to sing Cantonese nursery rhymes. The development of art education activities in these schools is worth learning from other schools.

Guangzhou Yuexiu District Education Bureau holds a Cantonese nursery rhyme competition every year, see the picture below:

Ling Yao's "Case Study of Primary school students' Learning attitude towards Cantonese nursery rhymes" is a memorial to MAO Sheng in Panyu District, Guangzhou.

Taking "school" as an example, this paper analyzes pupils' learning attitude towards Cantonese nursery rhymes.

In the article "Cantonese nursery rhymes, Lighting up Your childhood - On the application of Cantonese nursery rhymes in my kindergarten teaching", Wu Minyan and Chen Xiaoming believe that choosing suitable nursery rhymes can stimulate children's interest in learning. In the teaching process, if the use of rich teaching forms can promote the all-round development of children.

Tang Wen believes that an important way for Cantonese nursery rhymes to enter the classroom education of kindergartens is to design courses and activities that conform to children's cognitive rules and psychological development characteristics, set the teaching objectives of Cantonese nursery rhymes, and choose appropriate methods such as situation method, question method and prop practice method for teaching. For example, the goal of small classes is for children to learn to sing while performing simple movements; The goal of the middle class is to learn to sing and perform Cantonese nursery rhymes with expression, and to imitate and compose Cantonese nursery rhymes; The goal of Tai class is to be able to express and sing Cantonese nursery rhymes in the created situation, and to be willing to participate in the collective creation of Cantonese nursery rhymes.

Guangzhou nursery rhymes, as one of the quintessence of Guangfu culture, fit into Guangzhou nursery rhymes in combination with the localization emphasized by the Orff music teaching method in rhythm, scale, tone and other aspects, and can be integrated into music classes through the combination of the two.

Shen Mei proposed that the application of Guangfu nursery rhymes in the music teaching practice of the lower grades of primary schools not only accords with the actual physical and mental development of students, but also helps students understand the history and culture of the city where they live, providing possibilities for cultivating love for their hometown and realizing the pursuit of truth, kindness and beauty from an early age.

He Fang proposed to take "Guangzhou nursery rhymes" as the carrier, under the framework of the new curriculum standard, and relying on Tao Xingzhi's art education thoughts, to design effective teaching strategies such as "Guangzhou nursery rhymes + culture", "Guangzhou nursery rhymes + technology", and "Guangzhou nursery rhymes + opening", to enter the mother tongue ballads, base on the local origin, dig deep into the

teaching materials and humanities, integrate the teaching methods, and enrich the music teaching content. Inheriting excellent traditional culture.

Pan Yingbin proposed that Cantonese nursery rhymes have such characteristics as beauty of children's interest, beauty of music and beauty of games. In the teaching process, teachers can introduce various characteristics and classification of nursery rhymes, display corresponding Cantonese nursery rhymes, and then analyze them.

In the context of diversified cultural background, through integration education into various forms such as the contextualization, creation and performance of Guangfu nursery rhymes, foreign students are promoted to quickly adapt to the life of Guangfu and enhance the sense of cultural identity of Guangfu.

As the origin and characteristics of Cantonese culture, Cantonese nursery rhymes should be selected to integrate the content and form of appropriate Cantonese nursery rhymes into children's daily life, so that Cantonese nursery rhymes can become a learning method that children enjoy (He, 2023).

Zhou Minxian and Shen Feifei believe that according to the problems of passive waiting, complaint incidents, and safety hazards that may occur in drinking water and gathering of middle class in kindergartens, teachers can guide Guangfu nursery rhyme into several categories of "good taste" and "good viewing" to optimize the effect of middle class children in the transition process.

Nursery rhymes are of profound significance to the development of children. To optimize the application of Cantonese nursery rhymes in kindergarten curriculum, it is possible to integrate Guangfu nursery rhymes into children's daily life by adopting such methods as children's cultivation, education through entertainment and subtle influence .

By analyzing the significance of games and combining with a large number of group cooperative game words involved in Guangfu children's rhymes, this paper puts forward operable game types to enable children to develop their physical and humanistic qualities in the process of playing games.

### **Social education inheritance of Cantonese nursery rhymes**

In the 1980s, Mr. Wei Ran, the father of Hong Kong nursery rhymes, carried out the activities of Guangdong nursery rhymes, adapted and created more than 300 nursery rhymes in three months, and recorded some songs into six sets of Guangdong nursery rhymes song tapes. At that time, no record company was willing to publish them, and he invited Hong Kong university students and several children to record CDS, which sold more than 10,000 copies. With China's reform and opening up, these songs spread to Guangzhou and even the whole South China. In the 1990s, Mr. Lai Kwong-yi adapted the song into a chorus and won awards in various music competitions, which has since spread and has been sung until now. It is not difficult to find that "Moonlight" and "Rain" are the two nursery rhymes that music creators are most enthusiastic about adapting. Because of their catchy melodies, these two nursery rhymes are also the most widely spread and have become well-known songs and become the most famous classic nursery rhymes in Cantonese. However, the degree of social attention is still not enough, and the whole society should pay attention to it together in order to better inherit traditional culture. Radio and TV stations still consider economic benefits more, and advertisements occupy most of the time. If traditional songs are played in these times, it will certainly have great social impact. With the development of The Times, new nursery rhymes and nursery rhymes are constantly developing and innovating, and the creation of children's songs is getting more and more attention from everyone. With the

development of The Times, new nursery rhymes and nursery rhymes are constantly developing and innovating, and the creation of children's songs is getting more and more attention from everyone. She spent decades to create a large number of children's songs, these children's songs are based on the traditional Chinese poetry adaptation and creation, and held Gu Jianfen ancient poetry children's poetry concert, through the promotion of the concert, a lot of ancient poetry children's songs spread rapidly in the north and south of the Yangtze River, which is also helpful for children to remember ancient poetry. The social environment is the best way to inherit and develop traditional culture, such as subway, bus billboards and TV videos, can be well used, but in fact, these screens and videos are occupied by a large number of advertisements, failed to play a good propaganda effect on traditional culture. The Lingnan Nursery Rhyme Festival organized by the Guangdong Provincial Civilization Office is a good way to promote the festival. Guangzhou Education Bureau and Guangzhou Committee of the Communist Youth League held the collection of Guangzhou nursery rhymes in 2022, see the left figure below. Guangdong-hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cantonese nursery rhyme choir performance see below right (He, 2021).

From the first session to the second session, whether in the quality of works or the scope of participation and groups, there is a qualitative leap. The organizers also aim to inherit the minor tunes that have carried folk culture for thousands of years, and also hope to collect works belonging to the current era. The Xinghai Children's Palace in Panyu District plays Cantonese nursery rhymes on the screen in the hall, which also has a good enlightening effect on people.

At the same time, the spread of Cantonese nursery rhymes in public places also plays a certain role. For example, when the New Year is coming, the restaurant of Guangzhou Library plays "Selling Laziness", which is really grounded. It not only has the atmosphere of the New Year, but also plays a good effect of promoting traditional culture.

For the inheritance of Cantonese nursery rhymes, there are many CDS of Cantonese nursery rhymes on the market, including reciting and singing, but the demand is very small. There are two main reasons for this: first, nursery rhymes are not recognized enough by the society and cannot arouse people's resonance; Second, the production of songs with a single melody, old tunes without innovation, can not attract attention.

The research on nursery rhymes at home and abroad generally focuses on the educational research issues such as the music education of nursery rhymes, the moral education of nursery rhymes, the play of nursery rhymes, and the relationship between nursery rhymes and nursery rhymes. These studies all show that Cantonese nursery rhymes, as the unique local characteristics of Guangdong and Lingnan culture, have attracted people's attention. Among the scores and books of Cantonese nursery rhymes, there is the earliest "Guangzhou Nursery rhymes A Collection" written by Liu Wanzhang in 1928, published by the publishing Department of National Sun Yat-sen University, which collected 100 popular Cantonese nursery rhymes. However, the book only has text without music score, and the font is traditional Chinese, which is no longer suitable for the language and culture needs of modern society. After that, there were the 1982 Chinese Folk Song Collection · Guangdong Volume · Han Section and the 2005 edition of Chinese Folk Song Collection · Guangdong Volume, which included folk songs of various places in Guangdong based on real people singing and scoring, but not specifically for nursery rhymes, and the score and lyrics had their own sources.



From the perspective of argumentations, existing studies have focused on the promotion of Cantonese nursery rhymes to children's comprehensive quality, while less attention has been paid to the acceptance and application of Cantonese nursery rhymes in different cultural backgrounds (Smith, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Brown, 2016). The exploration and research on the practice teaching of Guangfu nursery rhymes in colleges and universities are still few, and the way is relatively simple. There is no research literature on Cantonese nursery rhymes in normal colleges and universities.

## Conclusion

Many scholars and experts in China have a high sense of mission and responsibility for the inheritance of folk music culture, and have gone deep into the folk rescue, excavation and sorting out very valuable first-hand data, especially in the history of folk music, folk music classification, folk music form, folk music characteristics and other aspects of a large number of in-depth research work. The main representative scholars are: Fan Zuyin, Geng Shenglian, Xie Jiaying, Guan Jianhua, Wang Yaohua, Luo Qin, Qiao Jianzhong, Xiao Mei, etc.

The inheritance of folk music culture is a mission entrusted by history to the contemporary era, which is an important event related to the national movement and national policy. Based on this, relevant institutions have organized academic seminars for many times to study the inheritance of folk music culture, reached a consensus on the urgency and practical significance of inheritance, proposed the concepts of "mother tongue music education" and "bilingual music education", and seriously considered and deeply studied from the aspects of inheritance subjects and inheritance modes. In theory, the promotion of national music culture inheritance has made a positive exploration.

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