

# **Construing the Vocal Music Guidebook from Cantonese Opera for Teaching Student at Zhan Jiang University of Science and Technology in Western Guangdong Province**

**Li Zhu,**  
**Chutasiri Yodwised and Sanga Kumjudpanpai**  
Bangkokthonburi University, Thailand  
Corresponding Author, E-mail: Zhul2491@gmail.com

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to explore effective methods and guiding principles for Cantonese Opera teaching. Based on an introduction to the background of Cantonese Opera teaching and research, the study defines its objectives and research questions. Multiple research methods, including literature review, interviews, observation, IOC surveys, and expert evaluations, are employed to analyze the research outcomes related to Cantonese Opera teaching and music education both domestically and internationally. The study involves the development of a Cantonese Opera teaching guide tailored for vocal performance students in higher education, followed by experimental teaching and expert analysis and evaluation. The guidebook includes fundamental theoretical knowledge of Cantonese Opera, vocal and performance techniques, stage divisions, classic Cantonese Opera teaching repertoire, and mechanisms for teaching evaluation and feedback. Experimental teaching is conducted according to the established guidebook. Finally, several Cantonese Opera teaching cases are provided as research references, and the study concludes with a summary and discussion of the findings, limitations, and future prospects.

**Keywords:** Cantonese opera; Vocal music; Guidebook; Teaching; Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology; Western Guangdong province

## **Introduction**

In the southern part of the China, Cantonese opera, as a regional traditional drama with rich cultural connotations and a unique performance style, has a long history and is deeply loved by the people. A treasure of Chinese traditional culture, Cantonese opera stands out in the field of theatrical arts with its distinctive musical style and performance forms, possessing high artistic value and cultural significance. However, with the rapid development of modern society, the tradition of Cantonese opera is gradually fading from the historical stage, and its heritage faces severe challenges. Therefore, especially in the western Guangdong LingNan region, strengthening the protection, inheritance, and development of Cantonese opera becomes particularly important (Xu, 2012). This study will delve into the Cantonese opera education in private colleges in the western part of Guangdong, focusing on the vocal music department of Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology. It aims to provide valuable guidance and reference for the protection and inheritance of Cantonese opera culture, as well as to promote the enhancement of drama programs in higher education institutions and cultural

heritage in the western part of Guangdong. Cantonese opera is one of the traditional regional opera genres in Guangdong Province, originating in the Guangfu region and later spreading to western Guangdong. Western Guangdong includes areas such as Yangjiang, Jiangmen, Zhanjiang, and Maoming. As one of its birthplaces, western Guangdong has always been an important region for the inheritance of Cantonese opera, carrying a rich tradition of Cantonese opera. The history of Cantonese opera in western Guangdong can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty. During the Qing period, due to the convenient Pearl River waterway, Cantonese opera quickly spread beyond the Guangfu region, with Zhanjiang in western Guangdong becoming part of its inheritance (Sun, 2024). Local merchants, scholars, and literati actively engaged in the performance and inheritance of Cantonese opera, gradually solidifying its roots in western Guangdong. In the process of Cantonese opera inheritance in western Guangdong, there have been multiple developments and reforms. On one hand, the traditions of local opera have been preserved, and on the other hand, local folk cultural elements have been integrated, giving Cantonese opera a unique style in this region. The cultural traditions and historical heritage of western Guangdong provide rich material for Cantonese opera performances, often incorporating local customs, sentiments, and historical legends, giving Cantonese opera a distinct regional flavor in its performances. Due to social changes and cultural impacts, the inheritance of Cantonese opera in western Guangdong still faces significant pressure. In terms of inheritance, the traditional apprenticeship system continues to be prevalent, where young artists learn the art by apprenticing to experienced practitioners. Through rigorous training and practical experience, these apprentices gradually become the successors of Cantonese opera. Experienced artists pass down the performance skills, vocal styles, and acting techniques, ensuring the continuity of Cantonese opera in western Guangdong. However, this oral transmission method has limitations, highlighting the importance of the development of Cantonese opera education in vocal music departments at universities to better protect and inherit this cultural treasure (Liu, 2023)

### **Research Objectives**

- 1) To study knowledge about Cantonese opera.
- 2) To construct Cantonese opera guidebook for teaching.
- 3) To use the Cantonese opera Teaching Guidebook to teach voice students.
- 4) To evaluate the effectiveness of teaching.

### **Research Methodology**

A mixed research methods was used, with qualitative research to collect data, quantitative research to study experimental teaching, and then finally expert evaluation of the findings.

## Conceptual Framework

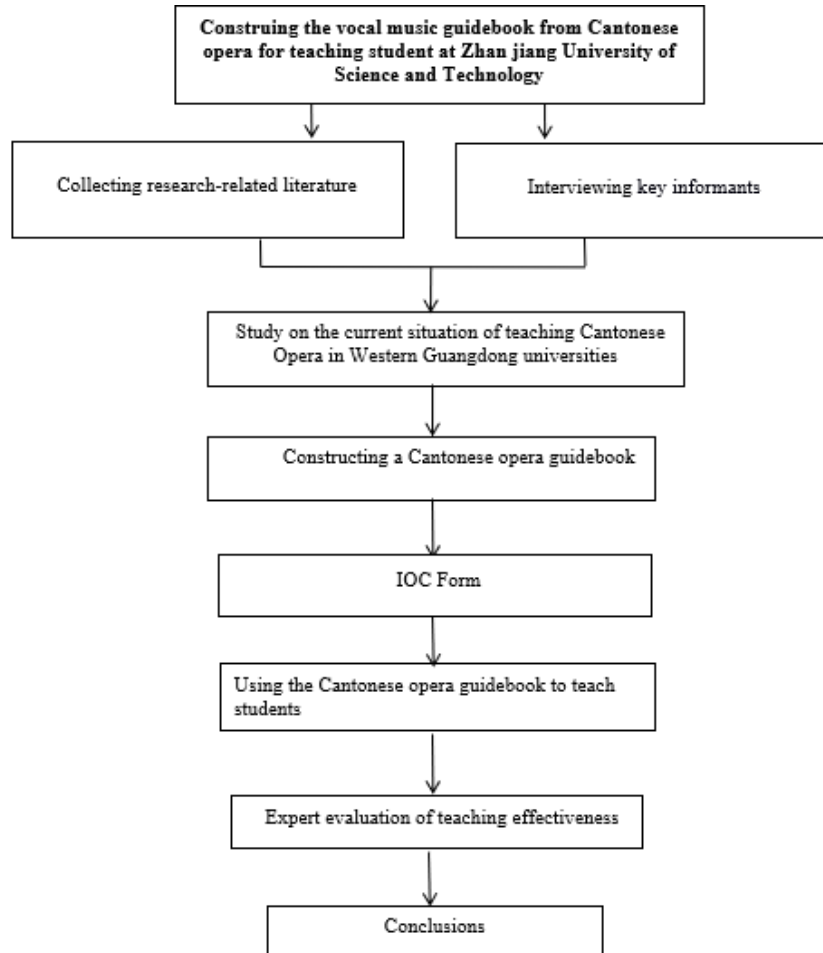


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

## Research Findings

### 1. The knowledge about Cantonese Opera

Through interviews with key informants on Cantonese Opera, the researchers selected a series of knowledge suitable for beginners in Cantonese Opera for third-year vocal music students at Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology. By reviewing relevant literature and research, they compiled a "Cantonese Opera Guidebook." The content includes fundamental Cantonese Opera theory, Cantonese Opera singing, movement techniques, and classic Cantonese Opera repertoire. Finally, formative tests, summative tests, and performance tests were conducted to evaluate the students' learning outcomes.

### 2. Constructing a Cantonese Opera guidebook for teaching

By learning Cantonese Opera teaching methods and strategies from experts, the researchers concluded that the Cantonese Opera Guidebook should integrate theory with practice, comprehensively covering the fundamental theoretical knowledge of Cantonese Opera, basic singing techniques, and basic performance skills. The guidebook emphasizes the

importance of training in fundamental skills and the significance of musical performance, as well as how to apply techniques to singing classic Cantonese Opera repertoire. It should be compiled by combining traditional and modern teaching concepts, aiming to cultivate students' research in both theoretical and practical performance studies. This helps improve their understanding and application of this knowledge, stimulates their enthusiasm for performance, enhances their skills in the opera arts, and protects and preserves Cantonese Opera culture.

The guidebook is divided into four parts:

1. Chapter One: Basic Theoretical Knowledge of Cantonese Opera
2. Chapter Two: Cantonese Opera Singing Training
3. Chapter Three: Cantonese Opera Stance Training
4. Chapter Four: Classical Cantonese Opera Repertoire

This guidebook is designed to help students enter the world of Cantonese Opera, learn the basic singing techniques, and provide a comprehensive foundational study guide for beginners.

### **3. Using the Cantonese Opera Teaching Guidebook to teach vocal music students.**

When using the "Cantonese Opera Guidebook" in the classroom at Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology, the teaching process is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the basic theoretical knowledge of Cantonese Opera; the second part focuses on the study of Cantonese Opera singing techniques; the third part is dedicated to learning the stance and movements of Cantonese Opera performance; and the fourth part involves the study of classical Cantonese Opera repertoire, along with group practice and individual guidance. During the Cantonese Opera teaching process, the teacher first introduces the foundational theory of Cantonese Opera, providing students with a solid theoretical background. Then, students learn singing techniques, mastering the correct vocal methods and singing styles. The third part focuses on performance movements, helping students understand and execute the gestures and postures typical of Cantonese Opera. Finally, students engage with classical Cantonese Opera repertoire and improve their singing and performance skills through group practice and individual guidance. In group practice, students are divided into teams to collaborate, discuss, and support each other, enhancing their ability to perform together. During individual guidance, the teacher provides personalized feedback and suggestions based on each student's specific needs, helping them overcome individual challenges in singing and performance, thereby achieving personalized skill development.

### **4. Evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching**

At Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology, 10 third-year university students participated in formative tests, summative tests, and performance tests to verify the effectiveness of the Cantonese Opera Guidebook. The students took three formative tests in the 5th, 10th, and 15th weeks, followed by a summative test and performance test in the 16th week. Summary: The Cantonese Opera Guidebook has high practical value and can be applied to Cantonese Opera teaching. Experts gave positive evaluations of the students' overall achievements, further proving the effectiveness of the teaching materials and the applicability of the teaching methods. It shows that the guidebook created by the researcher can help students comprehensively understand and master the art of Cantonese Opera singing, and its effectiveness has been recognized by experts. The students' performance data indicates that the guidebook provides a systematic learning path, helping them improve their singing and performance skills, while also offering strong support to teachers, making it a valuable

reference tool in Cantonese Opera education. The researcher will continue to improve and refine the guidebook to meet the higher needs of students and teachers.

## **Discussion**

In constructing the Cantonese Opera teaching guidebook at Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology, the researcher conducted in-depth studies and practical research aimed at exploring effective strategies and methods for Cantonese Opera teaching to promote the inheritance and development of this Chinese cultural treasure (Mo, 2016). Through literature review, expert interviews, empirical research, and teaching practices, this study yielded rich research results. In this section, we will engage in an in-depth discussion of the research findings and compare them with relevant studies to contribute to the theory and practice of Cantonese Opera education.

First, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills. The researcher discovered that integrating theoretical knowledge, such as Cantonese Opera's historical and cultural background, artistic characteristics, and performance techniques, with practical training significantly enhances students' understanding of Cantonese Opera. The results show that embedding the theoretical and cultural context into teaching not only helps students gain a deeper understanding of Cantonese Opera but also solidifies their theoretical foundation. This leads to greater confidence in Cantonese Opera culture, enhancing students' comprehension of its artistic expression (Huang, 2023). As Cantonese Opera culture is an essential component of education, filled with traditional aesthetics and historical significance, students gain a more profound appreciation for the Chinese customs, ideologies, and cultural values represented within Cantonese Opera, fostering greater cultural identity and pride.

Second, the innovative integration of body movements into Cantonese Opera teaching significantly improves students' artistic expression and learning outcomes. Body movement is a core aspect of Cantonese Opera, conveying characters' emotions, personalities, and contexts through precise gestures and postures. Introducing body movement training into the curriculum helps students better express the emotions and nuances of Cantonese Opera in their performances, improving their overall stage presence. Body movement is closely linked to Cantonese Opera's music, singing, and rhythm, requiring performers to synchronize their movements with the music. This improves students' coordination and sensitivity to rhythm and melody, enhancing their comprehensive performance ability. The study also indicates that actual performances and participation allow students to experience the charm of Cantonese Opera, leading to a noticeable increase in their interest and engagement. Many students, initially unfamiliar with Cantonese Opera, gradually developed an interest and actively participated in class and practice activities, demonstrating the appeal and feasibility of Cantonese Opera education in universities, enriching students' cultural literacy and artistic experience (Cai, 2024).

Lastly, this study explored evaluation methods for Cantonese Opera teaching. The results show that effective assessment should include expert interviews, empirical research, and teaching practices. The study found that testing students' technical skills, expressiveness, and character understanding are important indicators of learning outcomes (Yao et al., 2019). However, the study further suggests that combining expert evaluation, audience feedback, and students' self-reflection provides a more comprehensive assessment of their learning, offering new insights into Cantonese Opera teaching evaluation.

## **2. Comparison with Other Relevant Studies**

Compared to other studies, this research has the following features:

**Systematic and Comprehensive:** Unlike previous studies that focus on specific aspects of Cantonese Opera, this project provides a more comprehensive teaching framework, covering all stages from theory to practice. The research emphasizes the importance of systematic teaching models in curriculum design. By setting clear objectives and steps, the students not only mastered theoretical knowledge but also improved their practical performance abilities through multiple practice tests.

**Innovative Teaching Methods:** The innovative teaching methods used in this study yielded positive results. A variety of teaching methods, such as theoretical explanations, video appreciation, practical performances, and on-site observations, enabled students to deeply understand the artistic appeal of Cantonese Opera. Particularly in terms of teaching methods and tools, this research focuses more on modern technological aids, which differs from traditional research that leans towards theoretical analysis or single teaching methods, thereby improving the efficiency and quality of teaching.

**Practicality of the Guidebook:** The Cantonese Opera guidebook compiled in this research has high practical value. It is not only applicable to Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology but also serves as a reference for other schools interested in developing Cantonese Opera courses.

## **Recommendations**

### **Practical Recommendations**

General Suggestions Regarding the Limitations of the Study on the Construction of a Cantonese Opera Teaching Guidebook at Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology :

**Small Sample Size:** The participants in this study were primarily from Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology, resulting in a small sample size. This may not fully reflect the learning needs and responses of students from different backgrounds and cultural environments. Future research should expand the sample size to cover more universities and regions, thus enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

**Limited Teaching Time:** Cantonese Opera, as a traditional art form, requires a significant amount of time to learn and master. However, the limited time frame of the semester in this study restricted students' ability to deeply engage with and accumulate experience in Cantonese Opera performance. This may have affected the comprehensiveness of the final evaluation results. In the future, it is recommended to extend the teaching duration, allowing students more practice and performance opportunities.

**Depth of Teaching Content:** There may be some insufficiencies in the depth and breadth of Cantonese Opera knowledge covered. It is suggested to further delve into the historical origins of Cantonese Opera, the characteristics of different schools, and the meanings of classic works. Constantly enriching the teaching content will help students gain a more comprehensive understanding of Cantonese Opera's artistic charm.

**Teaching Staff:** There may be a shortage of specialized Cantonese Opera teachers. Strengthening the construction of the teaching team is recommended, as the teaching ability and professional level of instructors need improvement. Organizing training and exchange activities for teachers to learn advanced teaching concepts and methods will enhance their professional competence. Cooperation with Cantonese Opera research institutions, opera troupes, and experts should be encouraged, bringing in professional Cantonese Opera teachers or inviting renowned Cantonese Opera masters as visiting professors to improve teaching quality and enrich resources.

**Diversification of Teaching Methods:** The teaching methods used in this study may still be relatively traditional, with insufficient student participation and interaction. It is suggested to introduce modern teaching technologies, such as multimedia resources (e.g., virtual reality, online courses, audio, animations), to enhance the visual appeal and engagement of teaching. Developing online platforms that allow students to learn anytime, anywhere, is also recommended.

**Increased Practice Opportunities:** Cantonese Opera is a highly practical art that requires abundant practice and stage experience. Currently, students' practice opportunities are mainly limited to school stages and practical exams, which are insufficient. It is recommended to increase and expand practice courses and off-campus performance opportunities, as well as to organize Cantonese Opera competitions, performances, and club activities to enhance students' practical skills and participation.

### **1. Recommendation for future research**

**Continuous Updates to the Teaching Guidebook:** With the development of Cantonese Opera and ongoing research, the content of the teaching guidebook should be continuously updated and improved to keep it current. Paying attention to the latest developments and research results in the field of Cantonese Opera, and incorporating them into the teaching content promptly, will ensure that the guidebook remains relevant.

**Incorporating Modern Technology:** Fully utilizing modern technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can create immersive learning environments for students. These technologies will allow students to experience the finer details of Cantonese Opera performance more intuitively, increasing the appeal and interactivity of the learning process.

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Future Cantonese Opera education could collaborate with other disciplines, such as history, cultural studies, and performing arts, to help students understand the cultural background and artistic value of Cantonese Opera from a broader perspective. This not only enhances the diversity of teaching but also attracts students from various majors to engage in Cantonese Opera learning.

**Enhancing Inter-university Cooperation and Exchange:** Collaborating with Cantonese Opera teaching teams from other universities to share teaching experiences and resources will promote the development of Cantonese Opera education. Organizing students to participate in inter-university Cantonese Opera competitions and performances can broaden their horizons and improve their performance skills.

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