

Hong Kong Xiqu Overview 2020



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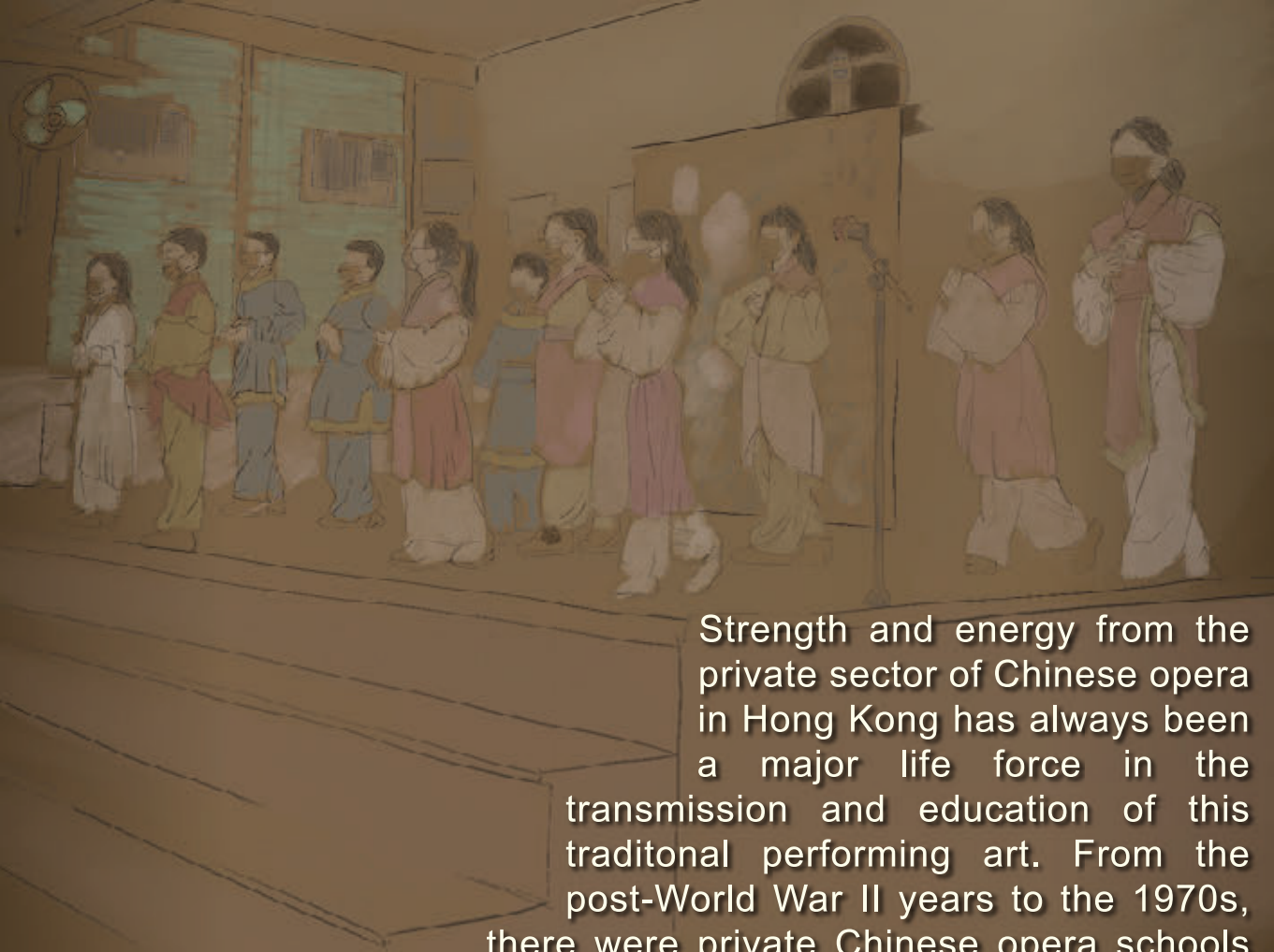
Passing on the

Art of Chinese Opera

in Hong Kong

Contributions of the Private Sector

CHAN Yee Lam



Strength and energy from the private sector of Chinese opera in Hong Kong has always been a major life force in the transmission and education of this traditional performing art. From the post-World War II years to the 1970s,

there were private Chinese opera schools run by Fen Ju Hua and Yu Jim Yuen in Peking opera; Chan Fei Nong, Yam Kim Fai and Pak Suet Sin in Cantonese opera. These master performers trained many talents keeping the art form alive. In the last decade, there have emerged numerous large and small private Chinese opera schools, troupes, organizations devoting to Chinese opera education especially for young people. Chan Yee Lam selected a handful of the more prominent private schools and overviewed their organization structure, forms of training, activities, and student sources to reflect on their contributions to the transmission of the art in the last 20 years. Attention was paid to the 2020 pandemic's impact on these private groups' survival. Chan summarized their technological tackling of the challenges, marking aspects of how the transmission of Chinese opera was still being managed in the time of COVID-19.

Other than nurturing the arts and skills of the practitioners, cultural and appreciation development of audience is equally important for the heritage of Chinese opera. Take for example the development of modern Peking opera, the flourishing of the various schools of performing arts is the result of the collective contribution from opera lovers, such that repertoires catering for the disposition and strength of the performing artists have been developed. There are even Peking opera fans and connoisseurs who had made significant achievements as top professional actors and created their own school of Peking opera performance; e.g., Wang Xiaonong and Yu Zhenfei. Hence, popular and professional Chinese opera training is of particular importance. On the one hand it inspires the interests of the younger generations, encourages them to work towards a career in the performing arts; on the other hand, it is also an ongoing audience development endeavor.

The modern format of Chinese opera training in group classes is for the development of professional actors that need to be trained at a tender age. In the last two decades, the provision of local Cantonese training programs is no longer limited to the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (Barwo) and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) with training professional actors as the objective.



There are private organizations that offer Cantonese operatic training as well as classes for interests. They also provide opportunities for Cantonese opera lovers to perform on stage. Since the 1900's, Cantonese opera training classes for children

have been available. Take for example the Cha Duk Chang Children's Cantonese Opera Association and the Love and Faith Cantonese Opera Laboratory. Through the learning process, children's knowledge and interest in Cantonese opera are enhanced. In the 1990s, the Education Department set up taskforces to explore the possibility of integrating the teaching of Cantonese opera in primary and secondary school education. Teaching materials were developed and workshops were organized. In 2000, the Hong Kong Schools Music and Speech Association in collaboration with the Education Bureau, the Lions Club of Metropolitan Hong Kong and Lam Kar Sing Foundation, introduced the Hong Kong School Cantonese Opera Promotion Project, under which Cantonese operatic singing competitions, training workshops for teachers and students were organized. Given the recognition and attention of the formal education system, in addition to training school teachers, there have been increasing demand for teachers and collaborative programs and activities from Cantonese opera professionals outside the education system. Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing as extracurricular activities became more popular. Since 2003, cultural organizations from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau have been working together to apply for the inscription of Cantonese opera as UNESCO's world class intangible cultural heritage, both the Cantonese opera industry and the education sectors become even more active in the promotion of Cantonese opera. In 2006–2009 the University of Hong Kong implemented the Seed Project of Cantonese Opera – Integrate Cantonese opera in Education in collaboration with 11 secondary schools. In 2009, Cantonese opera was inscribed onto UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

of Humanity. In the same year, Barwo revamped its curriculum, and added a four-year youth training program targeting youngsters of 13-20 years of age.

There are numerous organizations that provide Cantonese opera or Cantonese operatic singing training to children or adolescents, among them Yeung Ming Cantonese Opera Troupe, Kim Sum Cantonese Opera Association, Cha Duk Chang Children's Cantonese Opera Association, Love and Faith Cantonese Opera Laboratory, The Rainbow Fairy Cantonese Opera Laboratory, Susan Arts World, Sing Fai Cantonese Opera Promotion Association Ltd, Opera Artist Club, Emily Music Forum. They were founded by Cantonese opera actors, Cantonese operatic singing teachers, and some of them former teachers of primary and secondary schools. Among these organizations, some take Cantonese operatic singing and promotion as their core business, while some are Cantonese opera professionals who teach on the side. In addition to Cantonese opera, there are also Peking and Kunqu opera organizations that provide performance planning, arts education and promotion, take for example Jingkun Theatre and Ying Kam Sha Kunqu Society. Some of these organizations have their own rehearsal venues, while others rent their studios.

In addition to offering their own courses, some of them also, as contractors, provide extracurricular programs and arts promotion projects for the LCSD, Education Bureau, schools and social organizations. Among these schemes are the LCSD's Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme, Artist-in-Residence Scheme, and 18dART – Community Arts Scheme. Chinese opera is an integrated art which calls for both singing and acting, actors are required to acquire the

“four skills and five methods”. Training programs provided by different organizations are not structurally the same due to various factors like the characteristics of the regional opera genre, the credentials of the teachers, the training objectives and the length of the program. Some programs include body movement and Cantonese operatic singing training; some consist of three subjects (i.e., basic training, acting and singing), and some do not provide specific hours for specific training areas. Since Peking and Kunqu operas are highly stylized and the acting are intense, the training process and the repertoire to be learned are more closely related than other genres. Normally, the training organizations organize annual performances for their students, and there are “reporting performances” for collaborated outreach program as well. Since the introduction of Cantonese operatic singing in the Hong Kong Schools Speech Festival in 2000, and Cantonese operatic singing examinations, coupled with the children and youth Cantonese operatic singing / Cantonese opera competitions organized by private entities, students these days have more opportunities to be assessed and to learn from each other.

Since the early 2020, with the unexpected global outbreak of COVID-19 which is still haunting the world at present, Hong Kong has expectedly not been absolved. The private Chinese opera organizations have to face never-before-seen setback. In the past two decades, privately-run Chinese opera schools and groups have input much to nurturing younger generations of Cantonese opera lovers and performers, with varying orientations and objectives depending on each organization’s resources. The following survey on selected organizations provides a review of Chinese

opera training and promotion rendered by the private sector in Hong Kong and their survival conditions under COVID-19 in 2020.

Sing Fai Cantonese Opera Promotion Association

Sing Fai Cantonese Opera Promotion Association provides Cantonese opera training to children and adolescents, it has become increasingly well-known in recent years.

Sing Fai was founded by Fong Suet Ying in 2003, and became a non-profit charitable organization in 2008. Formerly an English teacher, Fong resigned from her teaching position in 2013 to devote herself full-time to the promotion of Cantonese opera. Currently she is President-cum-instructor of Sing Fai. Sing Fai had no regular training venue at the beginning, and Fong's own property was used later on as venue. According to the information on Sing Fai's website, currently it provides six Cantonese opera training classes for children and adolescents, including beginner and intermediate classes for children, and class for adolescents. The classes are approximately two hours per week, with one session for body movement training and one for singing. The hours are adjusted according to the level and age of the students. Every year the association presents a children's performance of Cantonese opera excerpts (as charity fundraising show for the Haven of Hope Christian Service) or the annual Sing Fai Children Cantonese Opera show. Other than the regular weekly routine



training and the annual performance, students selected to the top rank will receive special training to participate in the Sing Fai Overseas Performance Scheme to perform abroad.

As for teachers, in addition to Fong Suet Ying, according to the website of Sing Fai, teachers for the basic skills class are Yang Jianhua, Chung Cheuk Wah, and Fong Suet Ying; teacher for Cantonese operatic singing is Yeung Lai Hung, the teaching assistants are Yeung Kim Wah, Siu Kiu, Yip Chak Hei, Wong On Ching, Cheung Nga Wing, Wong Wan Yee, Yip Hei Ning.

Notably, Yang Jianhua is a renowned Cantonese opera director invited by Sing Fai to take up the position as Artistic Director since 2009. Yang began learning Cantonese opera at a young age. He followed Jiang Shixu, Lu Lingyun to learn Peking opera, and later He Jianqiu to learn the Southern School of stage fighting. At sixteen, he joined the Guangdong Cantonese Opera Theatre to learn Cantonese opera from Luo Pinchao. Yang is recipient of Outstanding Actor Award at the Guangdong Province Youth Show in 1958. In 1954 at the Eastern China Chinese Opera Showcases, four opera genres staged works with *Halting the Horse* as theme (the four regional operatic versions staged were Liuqinxi opera *Halting the Horse*, Yang opera *Eighth Sister Fighting in the Inn*, Sizhou opera *Halting the Horse*, Kunqu opera *Jiao Guangpu Halting the Horse*). Among them, the Kunqu version had the most outstanding playscript and performance, which since then this play has become the basis of adaptation for other opera genres. The Guangdong Cantonese Opera Troupe also has its own adaptation, in which Yang played the role of Jiao Guangpu, and created his own skill of “horizontal bridge style sleeping posture on chair

back”. In 1969, Yang moved to Hong Kong and worked in the film industry as martial actor and martial arts director. Later he was invited by Bak Suet Sin as instructor and martial arts director of the Chor Fung Ming Cantonese Opera Troupe. Yang has a tremendous wealth of experience in the art of Cantonese opera as actor-teacher. In 2019 he received the Medal of Honor from the Hong Kong SAR Government for his contribution to Cantonese opera.

The result of Sing Fai’s teaching efforts has been recognized by society at large as well as the HKSAR Government. Other than invitations from charity organizations and international events to perform, it has also been invited to perform at the Government House and at the celebration of the anniversary of the HKSAR, not to mention at the occasion of President Xi Jinping’s visit to the West Kowloon Cultural District. In 2018, Sing Fai was invited to take part in the National Basic Level Chinese Opera Troupes Showcase in Beijing. In 2019, Sing Fai was invited to Singapore to perform at a Cantonese opera charity show. In the same year two students from Sing Fai, Chung Tin Yui and Tang Hang Ying, won first prize in the children’s category of the Hong Kong Children and Youth Cantonese Opera Excerpts Open Competition.

Kim Sum Cantonese Opera Association

Kim Sum Cantonese Opera Association was founded in May 26, 1994 by Cantonese opera performer Leung Sum Yee. Formerly known as Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Performing Arts Studio, the studio was reorganized in 1996, renamed as Kim Sum

Cantonese Opera Association. According to the website of Kim Sum, activities of Kim Sum include Cantonese opera training, Cantonese opera script study and singing classes, children and adolescents Cantonese opera training, secondary and primary school Cantonese operatic singing workshops, performances and entertainment for seniors. Leung takes up multiple roles at Kim Sum, including administration, artistic consultant, instructor of Cantonese opera and Cantonese operatic singing. Before Kim Sum was founded, Leung was research assistant at the Cantonese Opera Research Project of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where her work included collecting Cantonese opera related materials and conducting onsite research on ritual drama. Leung helped collect a lot of materials regarding ritual drama set pieces and individual scenes. It is a pity that not all the research materials have been published. At the early stage of Kim Sum, Leung collaborated with Bernice Au Man Fung on several new Cantonese opera works, including *Killing the Dog* (2000), *Mistake of the Kite* (2001), *Fish Basket Bodhisattva* (2002), *The Rhododendron Mountain*, and modern Cantonese opera *Bloody Mary*. Since then, Leung has been focusing on the promotion and teaching of Cantonese opera.

Kim Sum has received grants from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and has been commissioned by arts promotion schemes such as the Intermediary Scheme, Arts Ambassadors-in-School Scheme, as well as receiving invitations from annual performance event and audience development schemes like the District Cantonese Opera Parade, Arts Groups-in-Residence Scheme, Community Cultural Ambassadors Scheme, School Arts Animator Scheme, and School Performing

Arts in Practice Scheme. In addition to its annual performance, Kim Sum also organizes demonstration shows and graduation performances for students of the various schemes. Kim Sum is also active in many events such as the Hong Kong Heritage Museum Theatre, the Cantonese Opera Day, and activities at the Hong Kong Book Fair.

Kim Sum's adult classes provide three hours of basic skills and acting training every week, three hours of singing every other week. The children and adolescents' Cantonese opera training programs consist of three sessions: basic training, acting (rehearsal) and singing, over four hours per week on the average: one-and-a-half hours of basic training for children's classes, and two hours for youth; two hours of acting, and two hours of singing every other week. There are also non-regular courses for students of children and adolescents' programs, including advanced level equestrian movements course, Cantonese opera set-piece basics, and advanced Cantonese opera percussion. In terms of the teaching staff, other than Leung herself, Kim Sum also engages Peking opera teachers for basic training. Over the years, teachers for acting included Wong Ka Ling, Chow Li Li, Chang Fuk Hong, Kwan Shi Chun, Choi Chi Wei. Training for singing was accompanied by renowned Cantonese music leader Ko Yun Kuen. These Peking opera teachers have also taught at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts and Barwo's Cantonese Opera Academy of Hong Kong. Kim Sum's Cantonese opera training for children and adolescents has produced tremendous results. Despite Kim Sum is not known for award winning students in Cantonese operatic singing competitions, over the years it has produced many

rising stars in the Cantonese opera arena, take for example Kwan Hoi Shan, Wong Kit Ching, Leung Chi Kei, Ng Sin Hang, and Chan Ting Bong. Wong Kit Ching and Chan Ting Bong have been awarded the Art Rookie Award of the Hong Kong Arts Development Award.

The LCSD has contracted many audience development activities to Kim Sum, including the Community Arts Pilot Scheme in Wan Chai District 2019, the School Arts Animateur Scheme activities 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, the schools served include Sau Ming Primary School, Jordan Valley St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Toi Shan Association Primary School, Free Methodist Mei Lam Primary School, SRBCEPSA Lee Yat Ngok Memorial School, Jordan Road Government Primary School, Hing Tak School, as well as the 11th Arts Ambassadors-in-School Scheme of Hong Kong Arts Development Council. The 2019 annual performance of Kim Sum took place at the Ko Shan Theatre on August 22-23, where the full-length play *Two Heroes Occupy the City of Chor* and play excerpts were staged.

Emily Music Forum

Emily Music Forum was founded by Wong Yee Man, Yim Woon Choi and Chan Bik Lin in 1997, with Wong Yee Man as artistic director and principal instructor. The forum is mainly for teaching Cantonese operatic singing, it offers adults as well as adolescent Cantonese operatic singing classes. It had also been contracted by the LCSD as Community Cultural Ambassador. The forum organizes annual Cantonese operatic singing concerts, as well as special adolescents Cantonese

operatic singing concerts. Other than performing in Hong Kong, the institute have also performed in Guangzhou and Macau. Their young students have also gone abroad for exchange activities. In 2000 and 2005, they were invited to perform in Singapore by the Chinese Theatre Circle.

A veteran of Cantonese operatic singing in Hong Kong, Wong Yee Man herself teaches the Cantonese operatic singing class. She was the 2nd prize winner in the 1982 Hong Kong Cantonese Operatic Singing Competition in the female voice solo category, and recorded the albums *Dream of the West Chamber* and *Hiding in the Million Military*. In 2002 Wong was awarded the Award for Young Artist (Chinese opera) of the Hong Kong Arts Development Awards. Wong also teaches at the Music Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the School of Chinese Opera of the HKAPA. Specialized in Cantonese operatic singing, Wong is well versed in vocal teaching and is inspirational to her students for making further advancement. Wong's students have achieved outstanding results and won many awards in the Hong Kong Schools Cantonese Operatic Singing Competition.

In addition to the Cantonese operatic singing classes, the forum also offers body movement classes taught by Peking opera teacher Yang Ming to young students. Students learn body movements as well as set-piece performance conventions. Yang is a veteran of Peking and Kunqu opera, and was actor and director at the Hubei Peking Opera Troupe. He was taught by many renowned Peking and Kunqu opera masters in different role-types. Yang has also written reviews and columns for newspapers and magazines in China, Hong

Kong, Macau and Taiwan. He has been invited by the Hong Kong Public Library and several local schools to speak at Chinese opera seminars. Yang has also authored a book of Peking and Kunqu reviews *Traces of Dreams on the Red Carpet: Yang Ming's Critical Writings on Peking and Kunqu Operas* (2001). Yang has a long-term collaboration with Emily Music Forum. He has adapted repertoires of Peking and Kunqu operas to enrich Cantonese opera. The repertoires that Yang have transposed included *Farewell My Concubine*, *Sending off Madam Jing at Night*, *Hacking the Hua Mountain in Anger*, *Miss Chan Chasing the Boat*, *Luk Man Lung with Two Spears*, *Picking up the Jade Bangle*, *The Broken Bridge*.

The forum has laid a solid foundation and inspired interests in the arts of Chinese opera for its adolescent students, many of them have further advanced their art and have built a career in Chinese opera related fields, among them Ng Lap Hei, Ng Kwok Wah, Shum Pak Chuen, Yu Chung Yan. Ng Lap Hei, Ng Kwok Wah and Shum Pak Chuen are currently active young actors in Cantonese opera. Ng Lap Hei and Ng Kwok Wah also studied at the Jingkun Theatre (see below), and respectively completed the training course for youths at Barwo's academy and the Chinese opera diploma at the HKAPA. Yu Chung Yan has won championship three consecutive times at the Hong Kong Schools Cantonese Operatic Singing Competition. She is now a Cantonese operatic singing instructor, and teaches part-time at the HKAPA.

Emily Music Forum held two major concerts in mid-2019, a new talents' concert and its 22nd anniversary concert, It also co-organized a Cantonese operatic singing concert with Hon Wah College Alumni Association.

Jingkun Theatre

Jingkun Theatre was established by Hong Kong Peking and Kunqu opera artist Tang Yuen Ha in 1986. Its core business includes performance planning, arts promotion, performing arts courses, overseas exchanges. At its early stage, Jingkun created several new plays including *The Big Clock Tower*, a Peking opera adaption of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, a Peking opera adaptation of Jin Yong's novel of the same title. Jingkun has been contractor of several Chinese Opera Festival events in collaboration with many opera troupes and masters, take for example the *Plum Blossom Award Winning Showcase* (2010) and *Three Stars in Peking Opera* (2011) with the Peking Opera Theatre of Hubei; *Yu Zhenfei and His Artistic Lineage* (2012) with the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe; collaboration with the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre (2014) and Shandong Peking Opera Theatre (2015); *Three Maestros in Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera* (2017). In 2019, Jingkun presented *The Fragrance of Chrysanthemums and Orchids* at the LCSD's annual Chinese Opera Festival with veteran artists Hou Shaokui, Li Yusheng, Cai Zhengren, and Pei Yanling.

Jingkun has been commissioned or subvented by government departments and public bodies for arts promotion and audience development projects, such as the Home Affairs Bureau's Arts Capacity Development Funding Program (2013-2015, 2017); the Artists-in-Residence Scheme (2003-2005), Cultural Ambassador Scheme (2008-2009), Experience Scheme for Senior Secondary

Students (2011-2013) of the LCSD; 3-Year Grant Scheme of the HKADC. Jingkun also collaborated with universities, primary and secondary schools to promote Chinese opera. Jingkun has collaborated with several units of the Chinese University of Hong Kong: the Peking and Kunqu Opera Experience (2011-2012) and the Jingkun Theatre Workshop (2014-2015) of the Office of Arts Administrator's Artist-in-Residence Scheme; the arts appreciation guide of Lee Woo Sing College 2013 weekly assembly, the performing arts media seminar of the Master of Cultural Management program; and the 60th anniversary celebration show of the United College in 2016. The City University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Lingnan University have also invited Jingkun for demonstrations, guided appreciation and workshops.

Jingkun has also been very successful in promotion and exchange activities outside Hong Kong. It took part in the Chinese Peking Opera Festival (2001) in Nanjing and the Chinese Kunqu Festival (2006) in Suzhou; in 2007 Jingkun was invited to participate in the 3rd Chinese Opera Festival in Paris, to give demonstrative performances and workshops in universities in the UK and Australia, such as University of London, York University, and The Australian National University.

Other than the workshops and courses of the outreach program, Jingkun also offers training programs in Peking and Kunqu opera singing and classical repertoire rehearsals, mostly taught by Tang Yuen Ha and Geng Tianyuen and invited artists. Tang, the founder-cum-Artistic Director of Jingkun, was taught by several renowned Peking and Kunqu masters from mainland China. She has received multiple awards including the 8th China Theatre Plum Blossom Award,

2008 Hong Kong Arts Development Award (Chinese opera), and 2010 HKSAR Government Medal of Honour. In 2016, Tang received her PhD from The Australian National University. Geng Tianyuan is currently director-in-residence, actor and instructor of Jingkun Theatre. Geng graduated in 1971 from the National School of Chinese Theatre Arts (later known as National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts), specialized in male roles. Geng has received multiple awards including the 1995 Shangdong Province 1st Class Director Award, the 6th Wenhua Award for Director, and the 2007 Best Actor Award at the 3rd Paris Chinese Opera Festival. He has adapted and directed major repertoires of Jingkun, such as *The Peony Pavilion*, *Wu Song and Pan Jinlian*, *Wu Long Yuan*, *Jin Yunu*. In recent years Geng also directs Cantonese opera works. In 2012, Geng received the Master of Arts in Chinese Culture from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Jingkun's training and outreach programs have cultivated a group of local youngsters interested in Chinese opera. From 2016 to 2018, it staged three times the *Jingkun Theatre: Hong Kong Young Actors Showcase*. Among the young actors of Jingkun are Ng Sin Hang, Ng Kwok Wah, Ng See Wing and Ng Lap Hei, who have already been trained for a long time in other opera troupes. Cheung Ching Man and Chow Cheuk Yan were inspired by the CUHK artist-in-residence scheme which had sparked their interest in the performance of Peking and Kunqu opera. They have set up the Facebook account *Jingkun Hong Kong Girls* to introduce the art of Peking and Kunqu opera to the public. The 2019 Chinese Opera Festival invited the two to perform Kunqu excerpts from *Legend of the White Snake*, *The Jade Hairpins* and *The Peony Pavilion*. The

Chinese Opera Festival is studded with nationally renowned professional opera troupes and artists, the opportunity for young actors to perform is an indicator of the ambition of Jingkun. In 2019, Jingkun organized the Jing Kun Opera Art Tour with the CUHK, a project comprised of Peking and Kunqu opera seminars, workshops and study tour in Shandong. Among all the local Chinese opera organizations, Jingkun has the most collaborations with the tertiary education sector.

Ying Kam Sha Kunqu Society

Ying Kam Sha Kunqu Society was established in 2006 by renowned Kunqu artist Ying Kam Sha. She teaches at the School of Chinese Opera, HKAPA. Ying is winner of the 24th Chinese Theatre Plum Blossom Award. She joined the Zhejiang Kunqu Troupe in 1978, studied under several Kunqu artists: Yao Chuaxiang, Shen Shihua, Zhou Xuewen, Wang Zhiquan, and Wang Fengmei, specialized in the young female as well as the woman warrior role-types. She was awarded the Xiaobaihua Excellence Award , and 1st Class Young Actor Award in the Zhejiang Province. Ying moved to Hong Kong in 1986, worked as voice actor at HKTVB and taught Chinese opera on the side. She has taught Kunqu body movements in many institutions including the Hong Kong Chinese Arts Promotion Centre, the City University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Cantonese Opera Academy of Hong Kong. In 2006, Ying joined the HKAPA and set up her Ying Kam Sha Kunqu Society. Other than teaching young actors,

students and Chinese opera lovers, Ying have also been asked to give advice by veteran Cantonese opera performing artists, for example Ng Kwan Lai, Chan Ho Kau, Mui Suet See, Tang Mei Ling, to name a few.

Since setting up her own society, Ying has given more Kunqu performances than before. In recent years, she performed in abridged versions of Kunqu plays in collaboration with former Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre young male role actor Wen Yuhang, who now lives in Taiwan. In 2013, Ying participated in the production of *The Jade Hairpin* staged by Lanting Kun Opera Troupe of Taiwan; in 2016, she took up the leading role in the *The Purple Hairpin* presented at the LCSD's Chinese Opera Festival. In 2019, Ying was invited to perform *The Jade Hairpin* at the International Theatre Festival at the Great China Theatre in Shanghai, and *The Butterfly Dream* in Beijing at the Lang-yuan Vintage.

Known as “the mother of all Chinese theatre,” Kunqu is the most highly regarded regional opera by the higher education sector. In 1988, renowned Kunqu actor Yu Zhenfei became the first Chinese opera artist to receive an honorary doctorate from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Since then, the promotion of Kunqu has become closely related with tertiary education institutes in Hong Kong, and Ying has become dedicated to the promotion and education of Kunqu. Before the Kunqu society was established, Ying was invited to teach by Yang Kui of the Hong Kong Chinese Arts Promotion Centre, who was inspired by Kunqu performances and seminars at the Sir Run Run Shaw Hall when she was a student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The small class teaching laid the foundation for Ying to open her own Kunqu society. In

addition to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Ying has been invited by the Chinese Civilization Centre of the City University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Department of Chinese Culture to give seminars and workshops. Recently, Lee Woo Sing College of the Chinese University invited Ying to teach Kunqu singing and body movements for general education course “Experience Kunqu and Peking Opera.” The HKAPA Extension and Continuing Education for Life also offered a short course “Experience Kunqu” for the general public to gain some understanding of Kunqu.

In the past two decades, Chinese opera training classes offered in the market flourished despite the very different structures of the classes. Some students joined the Chinese opera profession, some worked in Chinese opera-related institutions. Many Chinese opera teachers are Peking or Kunqu teachers from mainland China. It is not uncommon to see young actors nurtured from these classes run by the private sector and studied under multiple teachers. Relatively more students at institutions founded by Peking and Kunqu artists are Cantonese opera actors with a view to enhance their art, while some students are from tertiary education institutions. One notable thing is that accreditation is increasingly important in Chinese opera education. Since the HKAPA started its Cantonese opera programs, some young actors have been getting bachelor degrees. There are also practitioners aiming at achieving a higher degree. Take for example, veteran artists like Tang Yuen Ha and Geng Tianyuan; younger artists like Tse Hiu Yu, Leung Fei Tung, Yuen Hok Wai are also working towards or already have their master’s degrees. At the same time the Cantonese Operatic

Singing Examination and various competitions and exchanges have also become means of recognition.

2020: COVID-19

2020, the year of COVID-19, disrupted everything. In addition to the closure of performing arts venues and subsequent suspension of almost all Chinese opera shows, training programs and educational also suffered a heavy blow. The associations and groups reviewed above were victimized. Parents were much worried about their children's health and heavily reduced their kids' social activities of all kinds. Chinese opera classes, for one tactic, was to conduct small classes. Income source was much reduced. Those private Chinese opera organizations did try online teaching. However, just like the other performing arts, the effectiveness of teaching singing, movements, and acting interactions were cut critically. As for teaching venues, some of the organizations do have their own premises to keep some classes going. For those who had not and relied on collaboration with the LCSD, the HKADC, or schools and universities, things all went unpredictable and out of control.

2020, beginning from 29 January, the LCSD closed temporarily all their leisure and cultural venues and facilities, not mentioning cancelling all scheduled events. It was not until 1 June that its venues were reopened in a limited manner: only organizations could apply for using the venues, no live audience admitted. From 15 July another wave of COVID-19 made the LCSD closed the venues again. They were reopened once more on 14 September, but still no live audience until 1 October

with a cap of only 50% of the related venue's capacity. As for the activities at other facilities only a maximum of four participants including the instructor were allowed. 2 December, live audience was still prohibited and participants were required proof of negative COVID test. From 9 December until mid-February 2021, all performing venues were lockdown, seriously affecting the LCSD's various regular community performing arts projects, including audience development projects, workshops, training classes, demonstrations, graduation performances and others.

Throughout 2020, performance venues were only in use for about four months, with number of participants limited to a certain percentage of the original capacity. A small number of the various activities moved to online whereas the majority was mostly cancelled or postponed. For instance, Kim Sum Cantonese Opera Association's undertaking of the LCSD's 2019-2020 Community Performing Arts Pilot Scheme (Wan Chai District) had to be extended for another 12 months to be completed. The scheme's various events including performances, guided activities, beginning and advanced acting courses for young students scheduled in 2020 were mostly postponed.

The promotional and educational work for Chinese opera has mostly been collaborative effort with schools and universities, covering projects funded or presented by the LCSD, HKADC, Quality Education Fund. The 2020 COVID pandemic compelled the Education Bureau to on and off suspend and reopen schools several times during the year (and that extended to 2021), reducing school children's face-to-face classes to only around 100 days, and some school days were half-day. Back-to-school after the lunar new year break

was delayed while the summer break began earlier than usual.

In such dire situations, Chinese opera training and promotion in schools were mostly retracted or rescheduled. Kim Sum also took up the LCSD's 2019-2020 School Performing Arts in Practice Scheme which consisted a variety of activities: interactive Cantonese opera theatre; introduction to select-scene-plays; 30 classes of performance workshop of singing, acting, and acrobatics; makeup and costume workshop; community shows; graduation performances. Due to the pandemic, all in-school activities were stopped. Theatre workshops and lectures were conducted online. SRBCEPSA Lee Yat Ngok Memorial School and Jordan Road Government Primary School switched to online the Cantonese opera activities after the school was resumed in June 2020. Toi Shan Association Primary School postponed the Cantonese opera lectures to July and conducted online. It is likely that after an extended period of school suspension and it was approaching term end when schools resumed face-to-face teaching that wrapping up for all the year-end examinations were already too complicated and time was tight, so much as that art activities had to make way for academic work. The School Performing Arts in Practice Scheme's Cantonese opera graduation performance at SRBCEPSA Lee Yat Ngok Memorial School was first postponed from its originally scheduled date of 12 July and then the performance was pre-recorded for later viewing instead of a live show. And the graduation performance at Jordan Road Government Primary School was even delayed until March 2021; while the originally planned community performance was also switched to pre-recorded close-door performance with the video

to be delivered to related social welfare organizations for scheduling video shows. Cantonese opera activities that need live interactive and experience had to be re-placed to the Internet in recorded form. The affective outcomes and learning effectiveness were pitifully damaged.

2020's COVID lockdown had a severe negative impact on the joint projects between privately run Chinese opera organizations and schools. The same happened to the students who were to take classes at those organizations. Kim Sum's classes for primary and secondary students could only restart after the Education Bureau's announcement of school resumption on 27 June. Sing Fai Cantonese Opera Promotion Association put up a student recruitment advertisement on its Facebook page on 24 June. Sing Fai also announced that because of the Education Bureau's yet to be announced date for school resumption, its annual public performance by students scheduled from 17 to 19 July would be cancelled. Sing Fai's annual collaboration with Haven of Hope Christian Service, a show of Cantonese opera excerpts, were changed from live theatre to a YouTube livestream performance on 25 October.

The Jingkun Theatre and Ying Kam Sha Kunqu Society has often had frequent collaborated workshops and annual performances with mainland Chinese artists, in addition to their local shows and activities. COVID-19



made cross-region work extremely difficult. Jingkun's scheduled 2020 Transmission of Peking and Kunqu Opera project included a masterclass on classic plays to be taught by Lu Yongchang and Cai Zhengren, as well as lectures and symposium with the two masters as keynote speakers. The project had to be postponed to 2021, yet the events with mainland Chinese artists' participation are still in suspension at the time of writing. Ying Kam Sha's Kunqu students had annual performance in August every year in collaboration with mainland Chinese artists. The 2020 pandemic prevented mainland actors and backstage from travelling to Hong Kong. Under this circumstance, even if local performance venues would be open, Ying's shows would not have been realized.

The 2020 COVID-19 year was so hard-hitting that the mitigating responses taken by the private Chinese opera organizations could only prevent their livelihood from a total standstill. The alternative modes such as virtual classes were a far cry from face-to-face in-class activities in terms of learning outcomes. As the pandemic was such a sudden impact, the Chinese opera industry's digital technological competence was not always up to the challenge. Some company's online live streaming was not satisfactory regarding visual quality and stability of web signal transmission. It might be due to a lack of pre-streaming testing; some practitioners might not be aware of possible problems in doing live streaming. The good news is that the private organizations in question often work with government units and schools, and could therefore conduct relatively up to the mark digital rendering of performance and teaching. At the same time, while the LCSD in 2020 cancelled the Chinese Opera Festival, the International

Arts Festival, and the New Vision Arts Festival, it provided the “WeWeWebWeb Carnival” online platform and the “ReNew Vision” interactive website for the latter two festivals to showcase local artists’ new creative works, enabling audiences to still experience culture and the arts although virtually and at the same time in touch with new information. However, the LCSD did not offer related digital platforms for the 2020 Chinese Opera Festival. After 2020, Barwo, the Cantonese opera union of this city, formally in English the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, launched its own Barwo Channel: Cantonese Opera Online School, contributing to the transmission of the traditional performing art a virtual educational platform with extensive scale and substantial content.

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