

A Study on the Pathway for Collaborative Construction and Sharing of Cantonese Opera Documentary Resources in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area: Postprint

Authors: Liao Yu

Date: 2024-03-28T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area constitutes an important component of the national development strategy in the new era, while Cantonese opera serves as a crucial cultural carrier that connects the emotions and shared memories of the people in the Greater Bay Area. The joint construction and sharing of Cantonese opera literature resources in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area represents both an inherent requirement for adapting to the development of the times and a significant measure for advancing cultural development in the Greater Bay Area.

[Method/Process] This study takes 36 cultural and scientific research institutions across 11 cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as research subjects, investigating the distribution status and regional characteristics of Cantonese opera literature resources in the Greater Bay Area through literature research, online investigation, and working sessions.

[Results/Conclusion] The current Cantonese opera literature resources in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area are characterized by abundant resources, comprehensive types, high documentary value, uneven distribution, urgent need for protection, and underutilization. This article proposes practical pathways for the joint construction and sharing of Cantonese opera literature resources in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area from perspectives including establishing sharing mechanisms, building sharing platforms, strengthening institutional collaboration, and developing joint brands.

Full Text

Research on the Path of Co-construction and Sharing of Cantonese Opera Literature Resources in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

Liao Yu

Dongguan Library, Dongguan 523000, China

Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] The construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) represents a vital component of China's national development strategy in the new era. Cantonese opera serves as a crucial cultural carrier that connects the emotions and shared memories of people across the GBA. The co-construction and sharing of Cantonese opera literature resources is not only an inherent requirement for adapting to contemporary developmental needs but also a significant measure for advancing cultural development within the region. [Method/Process] This study investigates 36 cultural and research institutions across 11 cities in the GBA, examining the distribution and regional characteristics of Cantonese opera literature resources through literature review, online research, and work conferences. [Result/Conclusion] Current Cantonese opera literature resources in the GBA are characterized by rich accumulation, comprehensive types, high literary value, uneven distribution, urgent need for protection, and insufficient utilization. This paper proposes a practical pathway for co-construction and sharing from four perspectives: establishing a sharing mechanism, building a sharing platform, strengthening institutional collaboration, and developing joint branding.

Keywords: Cantonese opera; literature resources; co-construction and sharing; Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

Classification Number: G253

DOI: 10.31193/SSAP.J.ISSN.2096-6695.2024.01.05

0 Introduction

As a world-class intangible cultural heritage, Cantonese opera represents a treasure of Lingnan culture and an important cultural carrier connecting the emotions and shared memories of people in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (hereinafter referred to as the GBA). In 2019, the State Council issued the "Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area," which explicitly called for supporting the promotion of Lingnan culture represented by Cantonese opera, dragon boat racing, martial arts, and lion dancing to highlight its unique cultural charm, and for jointly advancing the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture in building a cultural Bay Area [1]. Cantonese opera literature serves as a historical record of Cantonese opera's development and plays a vital role in understanding its historical landscape, revealing its artistic charac-

teristics, providing exchange information, and expanding research perspectives. In 2019, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Public Library Alliance was established [2] (hereinafter referred to as the Alliance). To promote the construction of excellent traditional culture in the GBA and support research on Lingnan's historical culture, the Alliance launched a comprehensive survey of Cantonese opera literature in 2021, jointly compiling a catalog to understand the current status of these resources, deeply excavate and organize them, and facilitate their co-construction, sharing, protection, and inheritance.

1.1 Survey Content and Scope

To effectively compile this union catalog of Cantonese opera literature, the Alliance conducted a survey covering collections of Cantonese opera books, audiovisual products, playbills, posters, newspapers, and periodicals. The survey scope was limited to collections that support Cantonese opera research, post-graduate education, and international exchange within the GBA, encompassing major public library systems across 11 cities (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Jiangmen, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhongshan, Zhaoqing, Hong Kong, and Macau), regional research institutions such as the Guangdong Provincial Art Institute, Guangzhou Literature and Art Creation Research Institute, Guangzhou Cantonese Opera Development Center, and the Chinese Music Archive of the Music Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, as well as cultural institutions like the Hong Xiannu Art Center, Cantonese Opera Art Museum, and Hong Kong Museum of History. A total of 36 cultural and research institutions were surveyed, covering the main Cantonese opera literature collection units in the GBA.

1.2 Research Methods

This study primarily employed general statistical methods, reference book and bibliography verification, online database investigation, and work conferences. On March 25, 2021, the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province convened a work conference on the joint cataloging of Cantonese opera literature in the GBA, with public library systems from nine regions (excluding Hong Kong and Macau) in attendance. The conference required each regional public library system to be responsible for statistics on Cantonese opera literature resources within its own system (including districts and counties) and for data collection from local Cantonese opera cultural research institutions. Dongguan Library was tasked with collecting and aggregating book-related data for Cantonese opera literature resources across the GBA. In addition to data submitted by various regions through this conference, this study also conducted supplementary investigations through online databases and bibliography verification, with statistics for Hong Kong's Cantonese opera literature collections primarily obtained through online queries and bibliography verification methods.

2.1 Distribution of Cantonese Opera Literature Resources in the GBA

The survey found that as of December 2022, Cantonese opera literature resources in the GBA are extremely abundant but highly unevenly distributed. Hong Kong has the largest collection, accounting for 51% of the total, followed by Guangzhou at 20.53%, with Dongguan also holding a considerable collection. The distribution proportion across the 11 GBA cities is shown in [Figure 1: see original paper], and the collection quantities are detailed in .

2.2.1 Current Status of Cantonese Opera Literature Resources in Guangzhou

As Guangzhou is the political, economic, scientific, cultural, and educational center of Guangdong Province, its libraries and cultural research institutions have grown rapidly alongside the province's overall development. Leveraging the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province and the Guangzhou Library system, along with numerous Cantonese opera research institutions, cultural organizations, and folk groups, Guangzhou boasts rich Cantonese opera literature resources comprising 20.53% of the GBA's total, making it one of China's most active regions for Cantonese opera culture. In recent years, as a core area for the origin, growth, inheritance, and prosperity of Cantonese opera, Guangzhou has been committed to promoting its revitalization, formulating policies such as the "Overall Work Plan for Further Revitalizing Cantonese Opera (2014-2018)" and the "Guangzhou Work Plan for Further Revitalizing Cantonese Opera (2019-2021)" [3]. Guangzhou hosts 15 influential Cantonese opera research and cultural institutions, including the Guangdong Provincial Art Institute, Guangzhou Literature and Art Creation Research Institute, Cantonese Opera China Protection Center, Guangzhou Dadian Research Center, Cantonese Opera and Cantonese Music Culture Studio of the Center for Historical Anthropology at Sun Yat-sen University, Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage Studies at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangdong Cantonese Opera House, Guangzhou Cantonese Opera House Co., Ltd., Guangzhou Cantonese Opera Development Center, Hong Xiannu Art Center, Cantonese Opera Art Museum (Guangzhou), Guangdong Cantonese Opera Prosperity Foundation, Guangdong Bahe Guild, Guangzhou Cantonese Opera Revitalization Foundation, and Guangdong Cantonese Opera Workers Association. Due to survey limitations, the research team only obtained data from 10 of these units, as shown in .

2.2.2 Current Status of Cantonese Opera Literature Resources in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is an important region for Cantonese opera's popularity and a major performance center. Historical records indicate that traveling Cantonese opera troupes were already performing in Hong Kong by the mid-19th century [4]. With rapid socio-economic development, numerous Cantonese opera groups

and famous performers have gathered in Hong Kong. Over the past century, Hong Kong's stable social environment has facilitated the flourishing of Cantonese opera culture and the effective preservation of its literature. The Hong Kong SAR Government attaches great importance to Cantonese opera's development, establishing the Cantonese Opera Development Advisory Committee and Cantonese Opera Development Fund to support research, promotion, and sustainable development. These initiatives encourage the establishment of Cantonese opera museums and archives, support scholarly research, and promote the publication of Cantonese opera works and periodicals, fostering robust growth in Cantonese opera literature resource construction [5]. Hong Kong hosts numerous Cantonese opera research institutions, cultural organizations, and folk groups, with rich collections at the University of Hong Kong's Centre of Asian Studies, Chinese Music Archive of the Music Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Chinese Opera Information Centre of the Music Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Museum of History, Hong Kong Film Archive, and Hong Kong Heritage Museum [6-8]. According to survey statistics, Cantonese opera literature materials at Hong Kong's university libraries and cultural institutions total 27,769 items, accounting for 51% of the GBA's total and ranking first in the region. Beyond its quantitative advantage, Hong Kong's Cantonese opera literature resources also feature rich and diverse types, as shown in .

2.2.3 Current Status of Cantonese Opera Literature Resources in Dongguan

Dongguan is renowned as the "Hometown of Cantonese Opera and Quyi," with a long history of opera culture and continuous Cantonese opera inheritance for centuries, producing numerous famous Dongguan-born Cantonese opera performers. As Dongguan's economy has developed, the number and scale of private opera clubs (sihuoju) have expanded. As of December 2022, Dongguan has over 400 private opera clubs, the largest number in Guangdong Province, becoming an important force in enriching public cultural life and promoting Cantonese opera art. In addition to these clubs, Dongguan boasts three national-level "Hometowns of Chinese Quyi"—Daojiao, Machong, and Zhongtang—further enhancing its reputation as a "Quyi Hometown."

In 2004, Dongguan Library began planning a Cantonese opera-themed library, which officially opened in 2005. By collecting, organizing, and developing Cantonese opera literature and materials, it provides services including literature consultation, video-on-demand, exhibitions, and impromptu performances. Through nearly two decades of effort, it has gradually become a comprehensive Cantonese opera literature center in Guangdong Province integrating collection, organization, display, and research functions. As of December 2022, it has collected over 8,000 types and more than 10,000 items of various materials, including Cantonese opera books, periodicals, newspapers, playbills, muyu books (wooden fish books), scripts, musical scores, and audio-visual materials [9]. In

both variety and quantity, Dongguan Library's Cantonese opera literature collection stands out as exceptional.

Beyond the Dongguan Library system, other cultural institutions in Dongguan such as the Dongguan Cultural Center, Dongguan Cantonese Opera Development Center, Dongguan Museum, and Dongguan Exhibition Hall also collect Cantonese opera-related literature. Thanks to the broad vision of Dongguan's municipal government and cultural decision-makers, combined with the city's profound local Cantonese opera culture, Dongguan's Cantonese opera literature resources are abundant, totaling 9,350 items (see), accounting for 17.17% of the GBA's total. Dongguan's Cantonese opera literature resources are led by public libraries, with printed materials and promotional documents comprising the majority.

2.2.4 Current Status of Cantonese Opera Literature Resources in Other Areas

Historical records indicate that Foshan is the birthplace of Cantonese opera, where the earliest Cantonese opera guild—the Qionghui Guild Hall—was established [10]. Foshan has a strong Cantonese opera atmosphere, and the Guangdong Cantonese Opera Museum was established there as early as 2004. According to statistics, Foshan's public library system holds 789 Cantonese opera literature items, while the Guangdong Cantonese Opera Museum's official website records over 3,000 Cantonese opera literature and cultural relics in its collection [11]. Evidently, Foshan has also achieved modest success in collecting Cantonese opera literature resources, representing 6.96% of the GBA's total.

Beyond Foshan, Macau, Zhongshan, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Jiangmen, Zhaoqing, and Huizhou each hold small quantities of Cantonese opera literature resources. Generally speaking, these areas have fewer institutions engaged in Cantonese opera literature research, postgraduate education, and international exchange, resulting in limited Cantonese opera literature resources.

2.3.1 Resource Enrichment and Comprehensive Types

Cantonese opera resources broadly include both artifacts and literature. Artifacts encompass costumes, stage props, musical instruments, and facial makeup, while literature includes books, scripts, playbills, posters, performance outlines, newspapers, periodicals, musical scores, oral histories, muyu books, dragon boat songs, and audio-visual products. The survey found that the GBA holds over 50,000 Cantonese opera literature items, demonstrating both richness and comprehensive typology. The survey also revealed that each collection institution's functional positioning is closely related to its collection types. Public library systems primarily collect books and audio-visual products; for instance, Dongguan Library collects Cantonese opera books, performance outlines, playbills, musical scores, and scripts. Research institutions such as the Guangdong Provincial Art Institute, Guangzhou Literature and Art Creation Research Institute, and

the Chinese Music Archive of the Chinese University of Hong Kong hold relatively rich collections of scripts and audio-visual materials. Performance institutions like Guangdong Cantonese Opera House and Guangzhou Cantonese Opera House Co., Ltd. possess more script materials. Cultural institutions with exhibition functions, such as the Cantonese Opera Art Museum, Hong Xiannu Art Center, Hong Kong Museum of History, and Hong Kong Heritage Museum, hold larger proportions of artifacts like costumes, stage props, musical instruments, facial makeup, and Cantonese opera clay sculptures.

2.3.2 High Literature Value

Cantonese opera literature constitutes a historical record of the culture's generation, accumulation, and development, representing its accumulated 沉淀 and possessing significant historical research value, artistic aesthetic value, and folk culture value. The survey found that the Guangdong Provincial Art Institute, Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, and Guangdong Cantonese Opera House hold rich collections of Republican-era Cantonese opera scripts and muyu books, which are rare opera literature resources nationwide. The Hong Kong Heritage Museum and Hong Kong Central Library also hold many rare Cantonese opera historical documents, particularly clay plate and typeset scripts, performance contracts, payment receipts, crew lists from red boat troupes, salary lists, and costume box inventories, which are extremely valuable for researching Cantonese opera culture during the Republican period [12]. Dongguan Library's collection of playbills is particularly notable, holding not only Republican-era playbills but also over a thousand playbills from the new century, providing important materials for researching Cantonese opera rituals, scripts, performers, and theaters.

2.3.3 Uneven Resource Distribution

At the regional level, Cantonese opera literature resources in the GBA exhibit significant uneven distribution. Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Dongguan, with their profound Cantonese opera cultural heritage, account for nearly 90% of the total resources, while other cities hold relatively small amounts. Moreover, Hong Kong and Guangzhou have long emphasized the development of Cantonese opera cultural research, boasting strong research capabilities. At the disciplinary research level, differences in the Cantonese opera cultural field lead to obvious disparities in the quantity and quality of research outcomes transformed into literature. Hong Kong has long been a center for Cantonese opera performance and research. In 1890, Hong Kong's Sheung Wan district opened its first theater—the Po Hing Theatre—after which Cantonese opera gradually gained popularity [13]. Since the 1990s, Hong Kong Cantonese opera has achieved remarkable results under government and industry support, expanded university education, and social collaboration, continuously broadening the scope and depth of Cantonese opera research [14]. Guangzhou's Cantonese opera research is reflected in university music courses that cultivate students' performance and application

abilities, the promotion of “troupe-academy collaboration” where master artists guide students, and international exchange programs that conduct comprehensive comparisons of overseas Cantonese folk music versions, gradually enriching and deepening Cantonese opera research [15].

2.3.4 Urgent Need for Resource Protection

With a history of several centuries, Cantonese opera’s historical documents constitute an important component of its literature resources. The survey found that preservation conditions for Cantonese opera literature in the GBA are poor, with a considerable portion of historical documents suffering from paper aging, fragmented originals, blurred and illegible text, inability to meet borrowing and reproduction needs, and even complete loss of mechanical strength—crumbling at a touch and 濒临毁灭, creating alarming preservation conditions. Even Republican-era Cantonese opera literature faces severe acidification and aging damage, placing it on the brink of loss. Cantonese opera historical documents have essentially reached their preservation limit, and combined with poor early storage conditions and serious damage, their current state is deeply concerning, requiring urgent rescue protection.

In 2009, Cantonese opera was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity through a joint application by Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau. In recent years, Cantonese opera has increasingly become an important bond for exchange among the three regions [16]. However, with changing times, once-thriving Cantonese opera has gradually declined, and the impact of multicultural waves has dealt a severe blow to its cultural development and continuity. For Cantonese opera culture’s inheritance and development, literature resources form the foundation for innovation and development, and only through proper protection and effective utilization can they fully play their important role in scientific research, teaching, and social development.

2.3.5 Insufficient Resource Utilization

Collection, organization, and cataloging of Cantonese opera literature across GBA institutions are conducted independently without coordination, with inadequate digital organization and rare establishment and development of Cantonese opera literature databases. Regarding access and acquisition, Cantonese opera historical literature is scarce and precious due to its age, with most institutions focusing solely on collection and protection of these rare documents, and only a handful conducting various research and cultural exhibition activities. In terms of knowledge sharing and dissemination, although modern information technology provides convenience for resource sharing, practical operations are hindered by policy regulations, benefit distribution, and platform barriers, resulting in poor openness and mobility of Cantonese opera literature resources, with large amounts of valuable materials not being effectively disseminated or

utilized.

3.1 Strengthen Policy Guidance and Establish a Sound Co-construction and Sharing Mechanism

Co-construction and sharing of Cantonese opera literature resources is an important strategy for enhancing knowledge dissemination efficiency and optimizing resource allocation in the information age. These efforts should be incorporated into the GBA's cultural construction strategy, relying on the region's Cantonese opera inheritance, collection resources, and talent-technology advantages to jointly discuss the transformation and development of Cantonese opera literature work and achieve resource integration and sharing. On one hand, focusing on building a new pattern of co-construction and sharing for GBA Cantonese opera culture in the new era, regulations and policies favorable to resource sharing should be formulated to improve the policy and institutional system for deep GBA cooperation, encouraging and promoting libraries, research institutions, and universities at all levels to participate in co-construction and sharing projects to break information silos. On the other hand, focusing on promoting interconnectivity and shared platforms for GBA Cantonese opera literature resources, key cooperation content should be implemented, strengthening the construction of a reasonable use environment under copyright protection legal frameworks, and comprehensively optimizing the development environment for cooperation.

3.2 Strengthen Resource Integration and Build a GBA Cantonese Opera Literature Resource Sharing Platform

In recent years, China has systematically created an independent intellectual property rights-based literature interconnectivity standard and technical system, widely promoted and applied nationwide, opening a new pattern for literature information construction, leading leapfrog development in literature information interconnectivity levels, and strongly supporting improvements in literature information service capabilities, service levels, and service model innovation. On June 11, 2015, the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, Hong Kong Central Library, and Macao Central Library officially launched the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Ancient Books and Republican-era Literature Online Resource Sharing Platform [17]. GBA Cantonese opera literature resources should also avoid becoming information silos, seeking common ground while reserving differences and complementing each other's exclusive advantageous resources to maximize the utilization of characteristic resources. A unified, open, and standardized GBA Cantonese opera literature resource sharing service platform should be constructed to achieve cross-regional and cross-disciplinary functions such as resource retrieval, acquisition, and delivery, serving Cantonese opera cultural talent cultivation, teaching and research, and economic and cultural development in the GBA.

The Shanghai Literature Resource Co-construction and Sharing Cooperation Network, formed under active government promotion and comprising library and information institutions from public, research, university, and intelligence systems across the entire region [18], represents a successful model for literature resource co-construction and sharing. The GBA Cantonese opera literature resource sharing platform can draw on Shanghai's successful experience to promote an alliance of library and information institutions from public, research, university, intelligence, and cultural systems across GBA cities, conduct comprehensive review and deep integration of existing Cantonese opera literature resources, accelerate upgrades to interconnectivity infrastructure systems, services, and functions, promote the construction of various standard systems, build a co-construction and sharing platform, and facilitate GBA Cantonese opera literature resource co-construction and sharing.

3.3 Strengthen Institutional Collaboration and Promote Long-term Operation of GBA Cantonese Opera Literature Resource Co-construction and Sharing

Promoting sustainable development is a common responsibility and unremitting pursuit of all social sectors. Strengthening institutional collaboration and promoting coordinated resource construction is the only path to achieving long-term operation and sustainable development of GBA Cantonese opera literature resource co-construction and sharing. With increasing national and social attention to Cantonese opera, exchanges and cooperation in Cantonese opera art and literature have gradually gained attention. In recent years, Guangzhou's Hong Xiannu Art Center has strengthened cooperation with Guangzhou Library, developing Cantonese opera study activities with certain effectiveness. The 2019 launch of the "Cantonese Opera Performance Art Encyclopedia" also promoted Cantonese opera culture and research development and cooperation in the GBA [19].

Since Cantonese opera literature resource collection units involve extensive departments, exploring and establishing a long-term operation mechanism for resource co-construction and sharing, including benefit distribution and management operation mechanisms, constitutes important content for ensuring sustainable operation. GBA Cantonese opera literature resource construction should focus on win-win cooperation under literature services and cultural industry integration development, accelerating the improvement of the co-construction and sharing platform through organizational, spatial, talent, organization, and utilization coordination, and promoting comprehensive, multi-level, and three-dimensional GBA Cantonese opera literature resource construction.

3.4 Strengthen Joint Brand Building and Promote the Formation of an Ecosystem for GBA Cantonese Opera Literature Resource Co-construction and Sharing

Focusing on building a new pattern for the GBA cultural circle in the new era, strengthening Cantonese opera culture exchange and cooperation, and guided by user needs, the overall advantages should be leveraged to jointly promote GBA Cantonese opera literature resource co-construction and sharing. On one hand, user education for the GBA Cantonese opera literature resource sharing platform should be strengthened to improve users' Cantonese opera cultural information literacy and sharing awareness. Through training, lectures, and online tutorials, knowledge about Cantonese opera literature resource retrieval, utilization, and intellectual property respect should be popularized to cultivate users' habits of actively participating in co-construction and sharing activities, forming a sound literature service ecosystem. On the other hand, the depth of literature service elements should be expanded, literature service promotion concepts innovated, and cross-boundary integration and aggregation of GBA literature service brand elements promoted to jointly build iconic GBA Cantonese opera literature resource services, enhancing the spillover effects of GBA Cantonese opera culture.

4 Conclusion

With the deep integration and coordination of the GBA and gradually enhanced cultural exchange and cooperation, Cantonese opera has become an important cultural 名片 for telling the story of the GBA' s shared roots and common heritage, ushering in new development opportunities, and Cantonese opera literature resources have consequently attracted new attention, importance, and development opportunities. Only through conducting surveys and research on GBA Cantonese opera literature resources, removing ideological obstacles and regional barriers, strengthening collaboration among collection units, and promoting co-construction and sharing can we achieve maximized utilization of GBA Cantonese opera literature resources and maximized social benefits, thereby promoting the construction of a “Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cultural Circle” in the new era.

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