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## **Teacher-Artist Partnership in Teaching Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong Schools: Student Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to examine how and why students transform in terms of learning motivation in learning the Cantonese opera with a teacher-artist partnership approach in Hong Kong schools. An artist and seven teachers from four schools collaborated to teach the genre for eight weeks. Students' learning motivation changes in Cantonese opera was measured by a set of pre- and post-learning questionnaires. Qualitative data were drawn from class observations and focus group interviews with teachers and students. Results indicate that students' motivation in learning the genre has been changed. The statistical analysis suggests that, while primary students had significantly increased their motivation in learning Cantonese opera, the secondary students' motivation had not increased. Attributions include age differences, self-consciousness, intrinsic value and socio-cultural impact. However, the partnership was found to be an appropriate and effective approach in teaching the ethnic genre for its "role supplementation" between the teacher and the artist.

## **Background**

Promoting the Chinese identity in schools through arts learning has been encouraged by the Hong Kong government since the 1990s. Facing the music curriculum reform that began in 2003 (Curriculum Development Institute, 2003), teaching Cantonese opera has been one of the major initiatives because it is a regional Chinese art form that serves as a good platform for learning Chinese culture in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, including Chinese genres in the school music curriculum has always been a difficult task in Hong Kong schools. According to a survey implemented by the Curriculum Development Institute (1998) of the Education Department, music teachers rarely taught Chinese music, including Cantonese opera, in schools. In addition, the younger generation might find it outdated and old-fashioned and would thus not be keen in learning. In general, Cantonese opera, like other traditional Chinese cultural arts, has been marginalized in the field of arts and culture in the Hong Kong community.

In the international realm, teaching traditional ethnic and multicultural music has been a common practice. Teaching traditional ethnic music is considered to be an effective method of cultural transmission (Clark, 2005; Sheridan & Byrne, 2008). However, there is a dilemma in which Hong Kong students prefer Western art and popular music to traditional Chinese music (Ho & Law, 2006). In the USA, for example, which is regarded as a multicultural country that accepts and encourages the teaching and learning of multicultural music, only 0.23% of the program in a four-year music education undergraduate program in the USA consisted of non-Western music, while more than 92% of the music taught in this program is Western art music (Wang & Humphreys, 2009).

Based on the current circumstance, this paper reports part of a study examining the impact of employing a teacher-artist partnership in teaching Cantonese opera in Hong Kong schools. The paper focuses on the possible motivational transformation of students and explore how and why the students change their motivation levels toward learning the indigenous genre. An in-depth understanding of students' attributions on how they perceive learning Chinese traditional music generated from this study may provide implications on resolving the current dilemma.

### ***Cantonese opera***

Cantonese opera has been popular in the Guangdong (Canton) Province since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It is one of more than 350 regional opera genres in China (Zoeng, 1982) using Cantonese (the dialect used in Guangdong Province) as the language of singing and

dialogues. There are two main functions of Cantonese opera: ritual (e.g., celebrating the birth of Chinese gods) and entertainment (Yee, 1998). Since Hong Kong was originally part of Guangdong Province, Cantonese opera was very popular in this region in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many famous actors and actresses performed in Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s. However, since the introduction of Western pop music and movies in the 1970s, Cantonese opera began to experience a decline in popularity in Hong Kong (Chan, 1991). This has resulted in the declining interest to appreciate and learn the genre among the young generation in recent decades.

### ***Nature of teacher-artist partnership***

Partnership between the teacher and the artist is established when arts teachers find themselves incapable and lacking the confidence to produce authentic artistic experiences for their students. Professional artists are thus invited to collaborate with the teachers in schools to work with students in art making and experience. According to Gradel (2001), teaching artists can be involved in different levels and activities ranging from performing and exhibiting, interacting with audience, creating context for learners to participate, working in residency in classrooms, engaging with schools and teachers to plan instruction and assessment, and to develop programs. In order to achieve an effective level of teacher development, programs should be created with long-term follow-up which generate situations that encourage collegiality, foster agreement among participants on the goals of the program, acknowledge participants' beliefs and practices, and make use of outside facilitators such as the participating artists (Richardson, 2003).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study employs the cultural-historical theory of learning as a theoretical framework. Cultural influences have been regarded to be critical in affecting the content and course of human development and learning. According to Oers (2009), "individual developmental courses may differ enormously depending on the system in which they are positioned" (p. 4). Rogoff (2003) argued that human development is comprehended in the light of cultural practices.

In the field of music education, Butler et al. (2007) proposed a conceptual model featuring issues of teaching multicultural music in the classroom using five primary categories: teacher, student, content, instruction, and context. Among all, students' age, gender, cultural values, cultural identity, cultural style, musical experiences and preferences, beliefs, and expectations are critical in learning effectiveness. Specifically, students' age, gender and ethnic group identity are critical in affecting the development of their musical preferences (LeBlanc, 1987).

Other variables including learning style preference and racial identity may affect their learning of ethnic music.

The frameworks aforementioned reflect that elements related to students' culture and cultural values, such as cultural identity, cultural context, cultural beliefs and expectation remain a critical attribution to their musical preferences and their learning motivation. Based on these frameworks, this article will explore possible student transformation of learning the Cantonese opera under the partnership with attention on students' cultural identities, cultural beliefs, expectations and their surrounding cultural contexts.

### ***Student transformation***

Student transformation with different innovations has been fertile in various disciplines. For instance, in the field of English composition, Alexander (2009) suggested that complex computer games may contribute to student transformation in literacy. In science education, while using flow charting as a planning tool, students would transform to define problems in a more holistic way, and demonstrate more insightful and integrated approaches to their use of tools (Norton, et al., 2007). And Chen (1999) argued that the Physical Education curriculum was not improving because negative social changes had denied students' access to necessary social capital for successful learning, and thus called for a transformation in students rather than reproduction of knowledge.

Studies on student transformation as a result of teacher-artist partnership are rather limited. One study was undertaken on the issue of students' vocational choices. Abeles (2004) examined the vocational choices of fourth grade students from 11 elementary schools in the US which participated in three different partnerships between the schools and orchestral groups and compared the result with students from four other schools that did not participate in any partnership. Results indicated that there were significant differences between students from partnership schools and students from the non-partnership ones. The former selected music vocation more frequently than the latter. It was attributed to the fact that the students from partnership schools were more familiar with instrumental music through their direct encounter and experiences with the orchestral groups. The partnership between schools and the orchestral groups was regarded to be an effective way of elevating students' interest in instrumental music through direct contact with musicians. The employment of school-artist partnership as a positive intervention in promoting student motivation in music learning seems to be rather effective. From the existing literature it is worthwhile to seek similar effects by collaborating professional artists of indigenous genres with teachers in teaching the genre.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The ultimate goal of the partnership, like other educational devices, is to improve the quality of students' learning. However, student transformation in partnership approach is rarely studied. Targeting the issue of lack of learning motivation and interest toward traditional ethnic music, the aim of this study was to examine how and why students changed their learning motivation after learning the genre in a partnership approach between the music teacher and an artist in teaching Cantonese opera in class. The objectives of the study were to determine if students would change their motivation in learning Cantonese opera after the program, and to identify the reasons behind such changes if any. The findings would be significant for teachers to reconsider how to employ and design a teacher-artist partnership approach to motivate students in learning the genre. Implications will be drawn for the purpose of enhancing the process of teaching ethnic music with such an approach for other regions or countries.

### **Method**

This study employed a mixed approach of both qualitative and quantitative methods. A pre- and post-activity questionnaire survey was employed to study the motivation changes of students after they had undertaken eight weeks of the program employing the teacher-artist partnership method. Paired sample t-tests were used to measure the possible changes in motivation. However, the statistics could not provide in-depth understanding of how and why students were motivated to learn. In order to understand the attributions of the questionnaire findings, a number of semi-structured focus group interviews with students as well as observation of video recordings of class teaching were implemented.

### ***Participants***

Two primary and two secondary schools were invited to participate in this study. The sample group consisted of 696 students, broken down into 354 primary and 342 secondary students from the schools involved in the study. The schools were considered to be convenient samples as they volunteered to be subjects in the study. They received the endorsement of their principals and parents to participate in the study. Five primary and two secondary music teachers from the schools participated in the project. All the teachers were females, with a minimum teaching experience of three years.

Mr. Wong, a Cantonese opera practitioner and tutor, was invited to participate as the artist of the project. Mr. Wong had been a full-time tutor teaching Cantonese opera singing for more than 10 years before he established his own studio. Before being involved in teaching, he was a stage performer of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong for several years. In addition, he taught

Cantonese opera singing in the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, which offered certificate programs for nurturing professional artists of the genre. He was often invited by individual organizations, including textbook publishers and tertiary institutions, to offer workshops on Cantonese opera singing. Thus, he is considered to be both a Cantonese opera artist/performer and an experienced tutor in this subject.

### ***Procedures***

The project was financially sponsored by a local non-government organization which promoted Cantonese opera. The recruitment of participating schools was open. Consequently two primary and two secondary schools had applied to participate in the project. The participating teachers were first invited to participate in four teacher workshops in order to develop their basic skills and knowledge. Afterwards, they designed their teaching plans with the assistance of Mr. Wong before partnership teaching for eight weeks. After teaching, a series of focus group interviews with students and teachers and a questionnaire survey were conducted.

### *Teaching in Partnership*

Before teaching, the artist liaised with the teachers in designing the teaching contents and method. In this process, the researchers left the autonomy to the teachers and the artist in making decisions concerning the teaching including timing, content, and methods.

The artist then visited the four participating schools and collaborated with the teachers in class teaching within eight weeks. A research assistant was hired to visit and videotape each and every class during the teaching period. The videotaping of class teaching and interviews were permitted by the school principals. The first author visited each school twice and observed all the video recordings for analysis.

### *Questionnaire Survey*

A set of pre- and post-activity questionnaires were developed to measure the possible changes in motivation on learning Cantonese opera before and after the implementation of the eight-week teaching. The questionnaire comprised six motivational constructs based on the Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1995, 1997) and the Expectancy-value Theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). These constructs included: 1) expectancy, 2) intrinsic value, 3) attainment value, 4) utility value, 5) perceived cost, and 6) self-efficacy. Expectancy refers to the subject's task-specific beliefs and ability beliefs. Intrinsic value refers to the enjoyment of doing the specific task, while attainment value is defined as the importance of doing well in a specific domain by a subjective judgment of an individual. Utility value is regarded as how the individuals can benefit from participating and learning the specific domain in the future. Perceived cost refers

to the perceived loss that the individuals will bear, including time and effort spent if one is engaged in the domain learning.

Different questions were derived to investigate the feedback in each measure. Students were requested to report their level of motivation in a series of five-point semantic differential scales. To ensure that the students could understand the questions, the questionnaires were written in Chinese which was the mother-tongue of the students. In order to maintain high level of reliability, the questionnaire was piloted by 5 primary and 4 secondary students before implementation. Minor revisions in wording were made before sending to all schools for the survey. The questionnaires were collected and data were compiled and analyzed. The SPSS 17.0 software was employed to analyze the raw data. Mean scores and their standard deviations were calculated and compared by a series of paired sample t-tests to measure the possible motivational differences of students before and after learning.

### *Observation*

In order to maintain a naturalistic setting of the class, an unobtrusive observation (Angrosino, 2008) was employed as one of the data collection methods in this study. The research assistant, who was to take video recordings, was introduced to the students by the teachers and attended each and every class so that the students were familiar with her. Her strategy of video recording was to first observe the general situation of teaching and learning, and to focus on specific issues related to student motivation in learning the Cantonese opera. She might use the zooming device of the video camera to focus on individual students for closer observation with higher level of specificity on motivation. These strategies were employed in order to preserve a naturalistic setting of the classroom as far as possible.

The first author reviewed all the video recordings of each and every class and made observation notes, which were given to the research assistant for validating the data so that the categorization of issues will be validated through a researcher triangulation (Denzin, 1970). The objectivity was also maintained by repeated reviews of the video recordings by the second author.

The researchers aimed to observe to what extent the students were motivated in learning the Cantonese opera during the class. Attention was paid to the student behaviors reflecting their learning motivation and their reaction on the delivery of teaching by the teacher and the artist. The observation data is considered to underpin the findings of the questionnaire survey by providing qualitative evidence. Observation data was analyzed once they were collected. A coding process was done after reviewing each piece of video recording.

*Interviews with Teachers and Students*

After the collaborative teaching and the questionnaire surveys, groups of four to five voluntary students from each school were invited to attend a series of semi-structured interviews in focus groups conducted by the first author. In addition, the secondary teachers were interviewed individually while the primary teachers were interviewed in groups. The conversations were tape recorded and transcribed. The semi-structured format of the interview was employed because it “allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

The main aim of the interviews was to seek in-depth reasons that might impact on transformation of the students that could not be observed (Patton, 1990). The content of the interviews included students’ respective perceptions on learning the Cantonese opera, as well as how and why they enjoyed learning the genre. Students were also asked to provide their views on the partnership teaching in schools and their learning experience of Cantonese opera. The teachers were asked to provide an account of their musical background and their expectation on their students’ learning of the genre. Analysis of the interviews was done by a content analysis encoding and decoding the categories aforementioned.

**Results***Reliability of the Questionnaire*

Reliability analysis was done on both the Pretest and Posttest data. The inter-item reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha) coefficients for the six scales are presented in Table 1. All scales had alpha reliability coefficients of between 0.765 to 0.936 with p-value less than 0.01. It shows that the scales were highly reliable and the questionnaire was appropriate to measure students’ self-efficacy and motivation in Cantonese Opera. It is observed that the reliability coefficients for Posttest data are generally higher than the corresponding values for Pretest data. These increases across various scales indicate that the students changed, to a varying extent, their perception of Cantonese Opera after teaching.

*Table 1.* Reliability of Scales of Questionnaire

<i>Pre-post Scales</i>	<i>Pretest Alphas</i>	<i>Posttest Alphas</i>
Expectancy of task-specific and ability beliefs	0.893	0.904
Attainment value	0.844	0.862
Intrinsic value	0.896	0.897
Utility value	0.894	0.936
Perceived cost	0.882	0.885
Self-efficacy	0.765	0.772



### **Motivation Changes after Eight Weeks of Teaching**

A total of 146 Primary 4 (year 4, aged 9-10), 208 Primary 6 (year 6, aged 11-12), 141 Secondary 2 (year 8, aged 13-14), and 201 Secondary 3 (year 9, aged 14-15) students participated in the questionnaire survey. Table 2 shows the mean scores of their self-reported motivation in the six constructs.

*Table 2.* Results of paired sample t-tests on the motivation measures of both primary and secondary students

	<b>Primary students (n=354)</b>				<b>Secondary students (n=342)</b>			
	Mean	Mean difference	t	p	Mean	Mean difference	T	p
<b>Expectancy</b>		.300	3.438	0.001***		.071	1.012	0.312
Pre-test	2.781				2.651			
Post-test	3.081				2.721			
<b>Intrinsic Value</b>		.548	5.803	0.000***		-.141	-	0.065
Pre-test	2.558				2.854		1.848	
Post-test	3.106				2.714			
<b>Attainment Value</b>		.242	2.723	0.007**		.085	1.229	0.220
Pre-test	2.972				2.814			
Post-test	3.214				2.899			
<b>Utility Value</b>		.151	1.673	0.095		-.025	-.355	0.723
Pre-test	2.946				2.651			
Post-test	3.097				2.626			
<b>Perceived Cost</b>		.304	5.066	0.000***		.156	2.709	0.007**
Pre-test	2.573				2.516			
Post-test	2.877				2.673			
<b>Self-efficacy</b>		.300	3.599	0.000***		-.044	-.603	0.547
Pre-test	2.650				2.647			
Post-test	2.949				2.603			

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

\*\*\* $p < .001$

As shown in Table 2, there are a number of observations that can be made on both groups (primary and secondary) after eight weeks of learning:

1. Primary students had significantly increased their expectations, while the secondary students had no significant changes;
2. Primary students had significantly increased their intrinsic values, while the secondary students had no significant changes;
3. Primary students had significantly increased their attainment values, while the secondary students had no significant changes;
4. Both primary and secondary students had no significant changes on their utility values;

5. Both primary and secondary students had significantly changed their perceptions of difficulty (cost) in learning Cantonese opera (they thought that learning was not so difficult as they had originally thought); and
6. Primary students had significantly increased their self-efficacy, while the secondary students had no changes.

### ***Class Observations***

The main goal of class observation was to seek evidence of students' motivation in learning Cantonese opera. Three vignettes were selected from the video recordings to reflect the students' motivation in primary and secondary school settings.

#### ***Vignette 1***

In a secondary 3 (aged 14-15) class, the artist taught the class to sing a selected excerpt. He started by inviting the class to sing with the teacher playing the melody on the piano as an accompaniment. The artist was counting the tempo of the excerpt using hand signs, while singing with the students with his verbal encouragement and reminders. The students appeared to be shy and hesitant to sing. Their voices were very low in terms of both volume and pitch. Most students were looking at the sheet music without singing, while many boys even bowed down their heads. Most of them appeared to be unconfident in singing the excerpt.

#### ***Vignette 2***

The same excerpt taught in the secondary 3 class was used in teaching a primary 4 (aged 9-10) class. The teacher played an audio recording of the excerpt for the students with lyrics provided. One of the boys sang with the recording with high concentration. Although the excerpt was sung by a female character, the boy seemed to ignore this issue and was enjoying his singing.

#### ***Vignette 3***

After listening, the same primary class was invited to sing the excerpt together and the artist used the violin to accompany the class singing. The music score with lyrics was projected on a screen so that every student could see the lyrics and sing together. All the students appeared to be concentrating on singing and their voices demonstrated a special vocal style used in Cantonese opera which included glissando-like melodic lines.

There were apparent differences in the levels of participation between the primary and secondary classes described above. In the secondary class, students appeared to be hesitant to sing, and most of them tried to hide their faces while singing. The vocal sound was weak and in a rather low voice, which was considered to be inappropriate in the authentic style. A common scene found in the secondary classroom was that students were listening passively to the teacher and the artist (see Figure 1). In contrast, the primary students appeared to be much more confident in singing the genre. They showed their enjoyment through the sufficient volume of singing and imitation of the appropriate singing style. In another scene, primary students were taught to learn about a specific movement employed in Cantonese opera. Those students neither showed shyness nor hesitance in learning the movement (see Figure 2).



Figure 1. Teacher-artist partnership in a secondary classroom



Figure 2. Primary students learning a specific movement used in Cantonese Opera

### ***Interviews with Teachers and Students***

This section describes the results of analyzing the qualitative data from the interviews with teachers and students in the next section. The data covers the teachers' musical background, teachers' expectation on students' learning, teachers' view on learning the Cantonese opera, and students' perception of their learning of Cantonese opera under the partnership. The transcript quotes were given identification codes for reference. For example, (F/T/Pri/1) indicates a female (F) teacher (T) teaching in a primary (Pri) school and the number indicates the identity of that teacher. (M/S/Sec/2) indicates a male (M) student (S) in a secondary (Sec) school who was student number 2 in the focus group interview.

#### ***Teachers' Musical Background.***

Most of the participating teachers started out by learning Western art music. All of them admitted that Cantonese opera was new to them. They admitted being familiar with the genre when they were very young during the times when their parents or grandparents listened to the radio or watched television:

I started to learn the piano since primary 5, and I entered the College of Education and started on the clarinet as my second instrument. I learnt the oboe and piano, too. I took a Master's program in Music when I was teaching, and that's all of my learning in music. [Have you learnt about Chinese music?] Very limited. (F/T/Sec/2).

One of the teachers, however, admitted that she had changed, to a certain extent, her perception and attitude toward Cantonese opera. She started to accept this genre due to an understanding of the genre:

I think I have learnt something [about Cantonese opera]. I have listened to it more frequently, but I am still not very fond of it. I still like Western music more. But since I know more, my appraising capability has been uplifted. I don't resist the genre as before. I can finish appraising the whole opera. I would convince myself that I am a music teacher and there is no reason that I should not know about it. (F/T/Sec/1)

The quotation from this teacher suggests that changing an attitude on musical preferences can be difficult. However, the key to the change of attitude was the cognitive development of the teachers on the genre. When the teacher has developed a higher level of understanding of the genre, her competence on understanding would be enhanced, which might lead to a positive change.

### *Teachers' Expectations*

Both secondary teachers admitted that they had very modest expectations on students' attitudes toward Cantonese opera:

Actually my expectation is very low – I just hope that my students would not hate Cantonese opera (F/T/Sec/2)

I hope my students would possess a positive attitude toward Cantonese opera. I don't ask for a very keen attitude, but at least they don't resist [to appraise the genre], and could increase their knowledge about it. (F/T/Sec/1)

### *Teachers' View on Students' Perception toward Cantonese Opera*

According to the teachers, the students' disinterest in learning Cantonese opera was due to different reasons, including the intrinsic value of Cantonese opera, unfamiliarity with the genre, a mindset that the genre represented something outdated and old-fashioned, and other physical and psychological reasons:

I think they would say that it [the Cantonese opera] is something very boring. Our position is to make them not to feel boredom and resistance... Thus, we taught a little in every aspect – we worried that teaching too much might make them feel bored. (F/T/Pri/1)

The children think Cantonese opera is unpleasant – it is due to the fact that they have gotten used to the Western harmony. They thought the sound is not harmonized, and that it is unpleasant... But if we start to teach the children not only Western music but also Chinese music at a very early stage, I think they would minimize their level of resistance because of this early encounter with Chinese music. (F/T/Pri/3)

The students would think that it [the Cantonese opera] is old-fashioned. It is important to change their mindset... It is always the elderly people who sing Cantonese opera; this makes them think that singing Cantonese opera belongs to the older generation. For instance, when I asked them if they had seen that before, they said that they would change the channel immediately if they find it on the TV. (F/T/Sec/2)

Mr. Wong [the artist] started to teach with me in April when the project began. He was very busy at that time thus he stopped for a while, until late May he came back for our lessons. They [the students] said, “Hurray, no Cantonese opera class!” At the beginning they didn’t like to sing and I understood later, those boys in secondary 3 were in their period of voice change, and those girls were too shy to commit in singing. (F/T/Sec/2)

### ***Interviews with Students***

#### *Students’ Thoughts about Cantonese Opera*

Primary students were found to be too shy to provide detailed and elaborative answers on their perceptions. However, most of them appeared to have a positive mindset in learning the genre:

I think Cantonese opera is very interesting. (F/S/Pri/2)

I’d like to do and to know [about the genre]. (F/S/Pri/3)

Those stories are very attractive. After learning the story, I hope to learn it [singing]. (F/S/Pri/1)

I think [the story] is very good, very creative. (F/S/Pri/4)

Because the others would think that it is old-fashioned, so we can be outstanding [when we learn the Cantonese opera]. (M/S/Pri/5)

Some primary students expressed that they appreciated the Chinese culture found in the Cantonese opera: “But I think... it [Cantonese opera] can reflect our Chinese culture... it is very meaningful.” (F/S/Pri/5). Learning the Chinese musical genre may prompt the students to learn about the Chinese culture.

Secondary students were more elaborative on this issue. Some of them felt that the genre could be interesting: “Before learning, I thought it was the hobby of the elderly – for time killing. But after learning, I think some were quite interesting since we can learn something about Chinese history and language” (F/S/Sec/1). Learning the Chinese musical genre seemed to be an alternative way for these students in understanding more about Chinese history and language, which are offered in all schools in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, some students admitted that they were not familiar with the genre, which was a reason for their uninterested manner. In addition, the special nature of the genre, such as the usage of high pitches was another issue that they were not familiar with and did not understand: “Because I have not encountered Cantonese opera, I don’t quite like it; it is very noisy and sounds like screaming.” (M/S/Sec/3)

We didn’t learn about it since we were very young. Suddenly, we have to learn it and to change the voice, it would be difficult for us to get used to it. For instance, we learnt to sing in the Western opera style, and now we are asked to sing in this style. It would be difficult for us to adapt. (F/S/Sec/2)

One of the secondary students related this issue to her future career:

Because I am not very keen on it, I won’t learn it wholeheartedly. You want me to learn? It’s ok. But if you want me to learn it with much effort, or make it as my future career, I won’t do it. (F/S/Sec/3)

One of the secondary students admitted that she didn’t understand the meaning of the lyrics due to the usage of ancient Chinese language employed in the traditional Cantonese opera libretto:

Yes, but... some of the wordings... I couldn’t understand some of the wordings...it seems too difficult for me... I just don’t understand, no matter how good it is... it is most important to understand what they were singing [in order to like it]. (F/S/Sec/2)

And it was echoed by a primary student: “my grandpa brought me to the Cantonese opera... it seems very boring... they [the actors and actresses] spoke in different ways... I don’t understand, I just have to read the subtitles so that I can understand.” (M/S/Pri/7)

In addition, some secondary students thought that the genre seems to be “old fashioned” and “superstitious”: “These are those things happening long time ago... there are superstitious things related to the Cantonese opera, you know...such as... ‘baai sun’ [worship gods]... we just don’t like those things.” (F/S/Sec/6)

### *Students’ Thoughts About Including Cantonese Opera in the Music Curriculum*

When students were asked to elaborate on the issue of including Cantonese opera in the school music curriculum, they tended to think that the Western culture seemed to be more valued by the schools and the community, which served as a major constraint for students to learn about Chinese culture:

With the examination system of Hong Kong and the students’ expectations, all are expecting the teachers to be experts in Western music. Chinese music is not so valued. You can see so many people learning the piano and the violin but few learning the Zheng. Therefore, I think it is normal to see a [music] teacher who doesn’t know Chinese instruments; but a bit weird if he or she doesn’t play a Western instrument. After all, this is Hong Kong. We expect the teachers could do these. (M/S/Sec/1)

In the Hong Kong curriculum, it is compulsory to teach the recorder in primary schools, and singing... Most of them are English songs... and Western music history. We normally have Western music first and then Chinese music. She [the music teacher] has tried to balance these, and now Cantonese opera also. It seems that it [the Cantonese opera] was taught in a superficial level. (F/S/Sec/2)

When the primary students were asked if Cantonese opera should be included in the school curriculum, all the students responded positively. When they were asked if they thought that the female singing voice in the Cantonese opera style was too high and weird, they said, “No, it was really pleasant,” while others nodded in agreement. They added that they would love to have more time learning it and they would like to try to wear the costumes for performance. Two primary students even proposed some concrete methods to teach the genre:



I suggest that when learning, let them [students] understand the story first but don't tell them this is about Cantonese opera. Just tell them it is a story, don't tell them 'it is a story from the Cantonese opera'. Otherwise their response would not be good. But if you say 'just tell you a story', then they will say 'Good, we can have stories in the music lessons.' (F/S/Pri/4)

Or we can say 'do you know the story of "Princess Cheung Ping"? Do you know this story?' The students must talk about this with their peers. And then, you can say, "now I am going to tell you another similar story." Afterwards, you finally say "this is a story from the Cantonese opera". I think it would make a difference. (F/S/Pri/3)

### *Students' Perception on the Partnership*

Students were asked about their perceptions on the collaboration between the teacher and the artist. It is reported by the students that some teachers were not confident and competent enough to teach Cantonese opera even though they had attended the workshops. Thus, they had to rely on the assistance of the artist:

Miss C [the teacher] said that she was incompetent in Cantonese opera. Therefore, she just stayed at the back of the music room. She would only ask us if we could remember the content taught in the last lesson... only these kinds of questions... Actually she didn't teach anything... Miss C got much information... because she found them on the Web, and she has the Powerpoint... And I think listening a bit is not enough. Miss C valued our singing, and listening to the original melody, teaching music history... But when teaching Cantonese opera, her focus was on the instruments, and there was insufficient listening materials and other relevant information. (F/S/Sec/2)

One of the primary students reflected that the artist made a difference in introducing the genre in a special way: "Originally I didn't like it too much... it was very complicated. However, once Mr. Wong brought us many instruments and music and we sang and I found it very funny." (M/S/Pri/7)

For secondary students, whether or not the lesson was "boring" was regarded to be very important in motivating students to learn: "Mr. Wong [the artist] sometimes taught in a boring way. I felt it even though I was interested [in the genre]... if teachers teach in a boring way, I would rather learn by searching for information on the Web." (F/S/Sec/2)

Positive opinions focused on the mutual supplementation of the strengths and weaknesses of both parties were also reported:

It would be possibly better to have one more teacher [in the class]. As our music teacher recognized that she was not strong in teaching Cantonese opera, if we have one more teacher, we can be helped. (M/S/Sec/1)

It would be better to be taught by two teachers... can be supplemented... sometimes if something is missing, [the other teacher] can supplement the missing parts. (F/S/Sec/3)

Mr. Wong had the performing experience. He can tell us how to give a signal... the advantage [to have him] was that, say for example, after explaining that we did not thoroughly understand, he would demonstrate for us... he can really teach us and make us understand. (F/S/Sec/5)

[If students are taught by the music teacher only,] no way. Our music teacher understands us more. That's ok. But she can facilitate while the invited teacher [the artist] is teaching. That means her position is to facilitate, and the invited teacher can teach more. Our teacher can only manage the classroom, or maybe she can provide some more explanation. She is familiar with us and understands our thoughts. (F/S/Sec/2)

He [the artist] often demonstrated to us, but he wouldn't ask us to come out and do it. Generally it was Ms. K [the teacher] who said, "How about if someone comes out to do it?" then we would do it. He wouldn't ask us... that is, he just did it by himself and we looked at him. If we understand, then he won't supplement. (F/S/Sec/3)

Our music teacher was not as strong as Mr. Wong in Cantonese opera. Therefore, a good way is to have our teacher teaching with her method but Mr. Wong can supplement. (F/S/Pri/7)

I think the difference between our teacher and Mr. Wong is that our teacher is better in teaching, and I would understand more from her, just like her teaching of doh, re, mi, fa; Mr. Wong does not seem to know how to teach. (F/S/Pri/5)

The responses from the primary students were straightforward. Some of the primary students found that they could learn more easily with two teachers:

It is good to have two teachers in class. For example, the music teacher's explanation was clear, which makes it easy for us to understand. Mr. Wong also explained some, which can make us understand more. (F/S/Pri/2)

I think if there are two teachers, they can teach half of the class. If there is only one teacher, she cannot take care of the whole class, and she may not know she is wrong...It might be troublesome when she finds out she was wrong and had to make amendments. (F/S/Pri/6)

However, some students thought that two teachers in the same classroom might create confusion:

Sometimes, when they [both teacher and artist] taught different things, I became confused. Sometimes, one of them might say, singing needs to be an octave higher... They say it in different ways... I could be confused. (F/S/Pri/5)

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine how and why students changed their learning motivation after learning the genre in a partnership approach. The findings from the questionnaire survey indicate that there are differences between primary and secondary students with regard to their perceptions and motivational changes in learning the genre. Primary students have significantly uplifted their motivation toward learning Cantonese opera in terms of intrinsic value, attainment value, expectancy, self-efficacy, and perceived cost. In other words, they feel that learning Cantonese opera is more interesting and more important, but is not as difficult as they have thought before participating in the project. In addition, after the program, they become more confident in learning the genre and expected that they could learn successfully. This finding reflects a very positive learning motivation among primary students and, to a certain extent, the success of the partnership approach.

Secondary students have shown very limited significant changes in their motivations. The only significant change is that they think Cantonese opera is not as difficult as they have thought before participating in the program. However, after learning through the partnership, they have not changed other motivational constructs toward learning the genre. They remain rather uninterested in perceiving the genre as before; and they have not shown an increased level of expectancy in learning Cantonese opera. They do not think learning the genre is important in their lives and they do not expect that they could learn the genre very well. In addition, the mean scores ranging from 2.516 to 2.899 in a five-point scale reflect that they tend to possess a negative perception toward learning Cantonese opera.

### *Age Difference*

Apparently, the differences of motivational changes between the primary and secondary students are related to their different ages, which affect their self-consciousness, and level of intrinsic values toward the genre.

### *Self-Consciousness*

The first attribution for the differences between the primary and secondary students' motivation changes is considered to be the self-consciousness derived from the age difference. Teenagers normally possess a higher level of self-consciousness than younger ages. Self-consciousness implies a "self" to be discovered and the possibility that people can sustain a "sense of self" across time and place (Warin & Muldoon, 2009). One of the attributions of self-consciousness is regarded to be shyness (Lund, 2008). According to the interview evidence, the adolescents in secondary schools found singing Cantonese opera weird as it is not a common activity in their peer groups. Singing the Cantonese opera with such a high voice is also considered to be different from what they perceive to be normal in other genres such as Canto-pop music. Thus singing the Cantonese opera involves a high level of shyness for those adolescents. In contrast, primary students have lower level of self-consciousness which enables them to enjoy singing and learning the genre. This is evident from the video recording that most of the primary students sing in a high voice in an active and positive manner.

### *Intrinsic Value*

As observed in the classroom and from the interviews, many primary students were interested in learning the genre due to different reasons. They liked the Chinese stories which were mainly traditional folklores. For the primary students, Cantonese opera was an exotic genre which raised their curiosity for learning. According to the interviews, some primary students like the genre because it reflects the Chinese culture and tradition. Based on the video clip, the primary students appear to enjoy the genre and they can follow the audio recording to sing in an active and positive manner. All these reflect that most of the primary students possess a rather positive perception toward the Cantonese opera.

### *Utility Value*

Secondary students were not totally negative toward the Cantonese opera as some of them found it interesting. However, they tend to think more about the utility value of learning the genre. As they are older than those primary students, they may have to consider more about their academic study and future career after leaving school. Some secondary students like it because they can learn about Chinese history and language in an alternative and more

interesting way; while some others dislike it because they think learning the genre would hardly be related to their future career. In this aspect, the primary students do not have such concern.

### ***Socio-cultural Identity***

One of the extrinsic factors affecting the students' motivation toward learning the genre is the socio-cultural identity. It was found in the interviews that many students admitted that the Cantonese opera had an "old-fashioned" outlook and it belonged to the elderly. Cantonese opera comprised a major source of entertainment for the Hong Kong people before the emergence of modern amusements such as the television. The elderly people therefore had a history of appreciating and understanding the genre. The fact that most of the Cantonese opera audiences consisted of the elderly has had an impact on secondary students' cultural perceptions of the genre. The teenagers feel that this genre is only for the elderly but not for the younger ones. Those adolescents who are interested in that genre might be viewed as "abnormal" or "old-fashioned" and be excluded from their peers and social groups. In addition, secondary students have a broader range of entertainment choices nowadays. They need not consider an "old-fashioned" Chinese art as a hobby.

Another issue raised by the students is the "superstitious" outlook of Cantonese opera. Traditionally, the authentic performance context of Cantonese opera was related to worshipping Chinese gods (Chan, 1991). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cantonese opera troupes were mainly hired to perform by different towns in Southern China in religious events such as worship ceremonies for Chinese gods' birthdays and celebrating Chinese New Year. This kind of performance is known as "ritual performance for the deities as a charitable and pious deed" (Chan, 1991, p. 2). Until modern day Hong Kong, this tradition has been continuing. As Hong Kong people, the ritual performances of Cantonese opera are commonly seen in different districts. Therefore it is understandable to see that the students are responsive to the ritual phenomenon of the genre. They may believe that enjoying and pursuing Cantonese opera may bring them a superstitious image.

The Hong Kong teenagers seem to be "cultural outsiders" (Behnam, 2003) where Cantonese opera is concerned. They do not possess a strong cultural identity as "Chinese citizens" but only as "Hong Kong people". As a result, they may regard Cantonese opera to be an exotic musical genre rather than a traditional heritage from their motherland. In addition, the superstitious image of the genre might have developed a negative perception in these Hong Kong students' mind. These issues are considered to be a hindrance to the secondary students, who are in their adolescent stage, to understand and accept the Cantonese opera as a kind of Chinese cultural art.

### ***Partnership Impact***

Despite the differences shown above, both primary and secondary students possess a similar view of the partnership approach of teaching. They have identified the role differentiation of the teacher and the artist during teaching. The music teacher tends to be capable in classroom management and pedagogy, such as how to keep the learning pace and maintain learning interest, while the artist focuses on performance practices through demonstration and provision of in-depth subject knowledge on the genre. Based on the differentiation, the teacher and the artist have formulated a relationship of mutual supplementation. For instance, when the teacher is unsure about the correct and authentic performance practice and rationale, she tends to ask for help from the artist. On the other hand, when the artist relies on his own demonstration and talks about the subject matter, the teacher may ask the students to respond and engage in the practice, which would deepen the students' level of understanding. This strategy of learning by doing is commonly used by teachers but always ignored by the artist who has no formal pedagogical training.

The mutual supplementation between the teacher and the artist is seen as a positive reinforcement in motivating students to learn. It can be imagined that the teacher teaching the genre alone may only rely on passive listening and knowledge transfer through lecturing. As a result, learning will be passive and limited to mainly cognitive but not skill-based learning. Students will merely know about the genre with superficial facts and may have limited listening experience. In contrast, if the artist is hired to teach the class by himself, students may learn the genre by practice with pertinent knowledge. However, since the artist is not trained in professional pedagogy, he may not be competent in engaging students to learn by employing relevant and effective teaching methods. The partnership of the teacher and the artist is therefore regarded to be a better way of fully utilizing the competencies of both parties in teaching a genre which has been proven to raise difficulties in engaging students' interests.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study aims to examine a partnership approach through collaboration between music teachers and artists in teaching Cantonese opera in class within the Hong Kong context. The study also aims to evaluate and examine students' transformation after being involved in a teacher-artist partnership teaching program. The findings indicate different motivational changes of primary and secondary students in terms of learning the genre through the partnership approach. While primary students tend to accept Cantonese opera as a component of their music curriculum, the secondary students tend to remain unchanged in their learning motivation as shown through their largely negative perceptions.

The attributions of the phenomenon, based on the qualitative data, include students' age difference, intrinsic value toward the genre, and socio-cultural identity. In particular, attributions of secondary students' negative feedback are related to the age difference and socio-cultural identity of the adolescents. Students' self identity as Chinese citizens needs to be addressed by the teachers when teaching the ethnic genre.

Given that the teachers' personal attitudes have an impact on students' motivation, the professional development of teachers must therefore be further developed. Before the partnership teaching, the participating teachers were involved in a total of 12 hours of teacher workshops. This was considered to be insufficient for outsiders to obtain a basic knowledge of the genre in terms of skills, cognition, and attitude. As suggested by the literature (e.g., Morrow, 2003; Richardson, 2003), the continuous and long-term professional development of teachers is absolutely necessary to uplift the subject knowledge and increase the teachers' level of commitment in teaching this artistic discipline. In addition, according to Uptis et al. (1999), there are three levels of teacher transformation. As observed in this study, most of the teachers have only achieved a low level of transformation (i.e., necessary conditions which include taking personal risks to learn about the Cantonese opera and connection with their prior experiences of music learning). Due to the limited time of the workshops and preparations for teaching, they have not developed a higher level of transformation, such as sustained learning of the genre and teacher-initiated curriculum design and changes. In the long run, it is implied that school teachers in Hong Kong should aim at a sustained partnership and continuous professional development so that they can continue to proceed to a higher level of teacher transformation. The Cantonese opera as a cultural heritage should be much valued by teachers and then transmitted to their students. The traditional ethnic music can be a musical and cultural icon of the school music program (Clark, 2005).

To encourage secondary students to overcome their self-consciousness, it is the main direction for teachers to maintain the intrinsic motivation of learning Cantonese opera by employing a safe environment in which the teacher is the first person who demonstrates how he/she enjoys and pursues the genre by singing, understanding, and teaching the genre.

Finally, cultivating students' cultural values and identities should be the top priority of music teachers' agenda. Since primary students tend to accept the cultural genre more than the secondary students, it is suggested that indigenous music should be introduced to the students in earlier ages. Facing the future, music teachers should seriously consider how to involve their students in Chinese traditional genres in order to enhance their cultural values and identities.

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