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An Investigation into the Characteristic Features of Cantonese Opera

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Abstract:

This article examines those qualities of Cantonese opera which distinguish it from other types of Chinese opera, and advances a theory to suggest that the distinction derives from the tonal richness of the Cantonese dialect. This richness allows the span of musical tones or pitches of Cantonese opera to be wider than that of other Chinese operas, thus presenting a greater artistic experience for the audience. The special qualities of Cantonese opera are better appreciated when placed alongside other types of Chinese opera. For this reason, this article includes some introductory remarks concerning the evaluation of Chinese lyric style, the special status of the Cantonese language, and most importantly the specific links between vocal style and the tonal structure of Cantonese. Additional remarks outline musical and acoustical reasons in support of the theory.

Key words: Chinese music, Cantonese, opera, tones, Tang poetry

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PRELIMINARY

In this article, for want of a better term, the expression 'Western music' refers to the style of music which originated and developed in Europe and is now familiar globally, from the Americas to Australasia. It is distinguished by a tonal structure founded on harmony and modulation.

Both Chinese and Western music has a musical vocabulary of twelve differently pitched notes (*lü* 吕) to the octave (*qing yin* 清音) but whereas Western music may use any of these twelve notes in the course of a single composition, a piece of Chinese music generally restricts itself to a basic (pentatonic) pattern of just five notes, although together they may be transposed at any pitch. Thus, the popular song 'Happy Birthday to you' is a western-style composition because the melody requires seven different pitches instead of the five notes of a pentatonic melody, despite the fact that the tune could readily be performed on a Chinese instrument.

1. CHINESE OPERA - INTRODUCTION

The term '*ju*' (劇) commonly translated as 'Chinese opera' refers to the distinctive form of Chinese artistic performance involving instrumental music, singing, acting, balletic and other athletic skills. The expression '*li yuan*' (梨園) literally 'Pear Garden', refers not just to Chinese opera as a concept, but also to the various professions and skills involved in it. The unusual name derives from the Tang dynasty custom of setting aside part of a garden for theatrical entertainments. For references to Chinese opera, see articles (Chan 1992; Kuo 1998; Gudnasan 2001; Sheng 2008).

Broadly speaking, there are two styles of Chinese opera, '*Mun*' (in Mandarin *Wen* 文) and '*Mo*' (*Wu* 武), the 'literary' and 'martial' styles. *Mun* actors play in an intellectual, urbane or cultured manner while the *Mo* actors hold swords, ride on

horses and fight against enemies. Even their costumes are distinctive, those of the military *Mo* being more colourful and heavier than those of the *Mun*.

2. TYPES OF CHINESE OPERA

Chinese opera has several distinctive types which usually draw on the regional culture of the location where they originated. The style with which non-Chinese are most likely to be acquainted with is Peking opera, known to Chinese speakers as '***Jing-ju***' (京劇 literally 'Metropolitan Opera' short for Beijing-ju). ***Jing-ju*** was in the representative list of 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' of the United Nations in 2010.

Several other regional styles of Chinese Opera are nationally recognized as examples of 'intangible cultural heritage', among them '***Za-ju***' (雜劇 '*mixed' opera*') from Northern China. The form was popular during the Yuan Dynasty (ca. 1280 AD) although there are references to it from centuries earlier.

Another style, '***Kun-qu***' (崑 曲 *qu* rather than *ju*) '*Kun Mountain songs*' hails from Kunshan close to the Suzhou region. Popular during the Ming Dynasty (ca. 1400), *Kun-qu* is one of the oldest types of Chinese opera still performed today. It was also included in the representative list of 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' of the United Nations in 2008.

The '***Hu-ju***' style (滬劇) from the Shanghai region (*Hu* being an alternative name for Shanghai) flourished during the Qing dynasty (ca. 1750).

In 2009, '***Yue-ju***' (粵劇) Cantonese opera, was additionally recognized as 'an intangible heritage of culture and humanity' by the United Nations. At present only three types of Chinese opera are listed as 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' by the United Nations.

According to the author W. Y. Wun (Wun 2013), although ***Jing-ju***, ***Kun-qu*** and other regional operatic forms were held in high regard during the early twentieth century, Cantonese opera was considered to be inferior. Wun suggests that this was because the people of southern China were less likely to be as classically-educated as those living close to the Yangtze River region, and consequently the lyrics of Cantonese opera tended to be sound crude when compared with the 'high styles' of the accepted forms.

This attitude changed with the advent of the most famous writer of Cantonese opera, Tang Di-sheng (唐滌生) (1917-1959), whose four signature operas, 帝女花 (*The Flower Princess*); 紫釵記 (*The Story of the Purple Hairpin*); 牡丹亭驚夢 (*Dreams of the Peony Pavilion*); and 再世紅梅記 (*The Re-incarnation of the Plum flower*), attained a very high level of elegant and polished language. The last mentioned work is still considered the most refined of all in terms of the literary quality; indeed the author himself believed it to be his top masterpiece, after which he would not be able to write another. The remark was sadly prescient; he fainted at the theatre in Hong Kong during the work's première during the evening of 14th September, 1959 and died the next morning. Extensive studies of his works, mostly in Chinese, have been undertaken, particularly Chen (2007).

3. POPULARITY OF CANTONESE OPERA

Cantonese opera is popular not only in China's southern regions such as Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong, and Macau, but also further afield in south-eastern Asia, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia. Indeed, a growing interest in Cantonese opera can be found in cities throughout the world wherever there is a significant Cantonese population, for example Vancouver B.C., Toronto, San Francisco, Sydney and London.

Comprehensive studies of Cantonese opera have been undertaken, mainly in Hong Kong but elsewhere as well. A book covering different aspects of Cantonese opera extensively appeared during the 1980s (Yung 1989.) A PhD thesis of University of Washington (Ferguson 1988) studied the various ingredients of Cantonese opera mainly in the Guangzhou area. An MPhil thesis was compiled on the lyrics of Cantonese operas in early decades of the twentieth century (Lam 1997.) An undergraduate final year project dissertation paid more attention to the sound spectrum of Cantonese opera (Wong 2010.)

It is now so easy to disseminate sound and song through electronic media that it has become a popular assumption that what passes for Cantonese opera is merely of a succession of songs; whereas the true art of Cantonese opera also encompasses literature, music, acting, drama, costume, martial arts, and acrobatics as well as the songs.

Although occasional staged 'concert performances' of Cantonese opera present the musical content, the essential nature of Cantonese opera lies in the relation of historical tales through various kinds of stage performance while expounding the philosophy, traditions and culture of ancient China. Performances of Cantonese operas in Hong Kong set the narratives in historical times, such as the Song (宋朝 960-1279 AD) or Ming (明朝 1368-1644 AD) Dynasties, whereas in Guangzhou a trend has moved towards the portrayal of modern events in contemporary settings. While these maintain the fabric of historical legend as the main style, they are virtually staged dramas which are sung instead of spoken. Productions of this genre, however, have not proved as popular in Hong Kong and south-eastern Asian countries.

The distinctive feature of Cantonese opera which sets it apart from other regional styles is intrinsic only to Cantonese speech and unattainable in any other major Chinese dialect. In order to understand why this aspect of Cantonese opera should

be so distinctive, it is necessary to review the roots and development of Chinese literary style.

4. THE BEGINNINGS OF CHINESE LYRIC STYLE

The poems of ancient China, such as those collected in the Poetry Classic, '*Shi Jing*' (詩經) dating from the 10th to 7th centuries BC were typically composed in four-character '*ju'* (句). The word *ju* is usually translated as 'sentence' or 'phrase' but as it is also used for what English speakers would immediately recognize as a 'line' of verse; the word 'line' is a convenient translation. Educated Chinese speakers today are likely to be familiar with the opening lines of a famous poem in the *Shi Jing*, shown in Table 1

Table 1 Opening Lines of a famous poem in the *Shi Jing*

Chinese version	**Pronunciation in Putonghua**	**English translation**
關關雎鳩	guan guan ju jiu	Caw, caw, call the ospreys
在河之洲	zai he zhi zhou	On the island in the stream
窈窕淑女	yao tiao shu nu	Where there is a pretty girl
君子好逑	jun zi hao qiu	The nobleman can love and dream

The fact that the four-character line is such an integral feature of ancient Chinese poetry is the reason why so many familiar Chinese idioms and proverbs have this idiomatic form; it has even permeated into English, such as the imitation-Chinese jocular greeting 'Long time no see! – 很久沒見'. By the Han Dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD), poems constructed with five-character lines evolved and became a popular form of poetic construction. While other poem structures with 3-character, 4-character, 6-character and 7-character lines also appeared, these were not so widely used at that time.

A feature of Cantonese opera, also be found in types of opera beyond Guangdong (Canton), is the convention that the narrative avoids any direct description of a person, object, or

event, instead preferring indirect allusion. For example, a flower may represent a lady, while the destruction of the flower by strong wind and rain suggests that the lady is under duress, or controlled by a powerful husband. This explains why Chinese operas have never broken away separated from classical Chinese literature. Indeed "*shi*" poems (詩), mainly in the Tang Dynasty style (618-907 AD); "*ci*" poems (詞), mainly Song Dynasty style (960 - 1278 AD); and "*qu*" lyrics (曲), mainly Yuan Dynasty style (1279-1368 AD) permeate the libretti so noticeably, since only those operas in which the words being sung are reminiscent of beautiful literature are considered commendable. This feature is perhaps in some way a continuation of the second and third styles of writing in *Shi Jing*, i.e. 比 (using another object to describe the target) and 興 (talking about something else first to introduce the target.)

5. RHYME AND VOWEL PITCH

A key feature of the poetry defined in Chinese literature as 'ancient style' is rhyme. This may not seem remarkable because rhyme is generally considered such an integral quality of poetry that it is difficult to realise that rhyme is not an inevitable factor. The great epic poetry of Ancient Greece, for example, does not use rhyme. Nevertheless, Chinese rhyming schemes have another dimension which creates additional problems for the aspiring poet; this is the factor of linguistic tone, or intonation, (discussed more fully in Section 7, below) must also match.

Rhyme results when the closing syllables of paired lines of verse have matched vowel sounds. It is important to emphasize that at whatever pitch a syllable is spoken or sung (i.e., the *fundamental pitch*), the ear distinguishes different vowels by a *supplementary musical pitch* which is produced by the shape of the mouth and cheeks when the syllable is uttered. That is to say, if the syllables 'ah' or 'oh' are spoken or sung at

the same *fundamental* pitch, then no matter what the fundamental pitch of the voice, there will be a supplementary sound produced by the shape of the mouth and cheeks when the syllable is uttered. The number of possible vowel sounds is as limitless as the colours of the spectrum, but five will suffice for the purpose of a simple demonstration.

If the words: ***Wolf, Dog, Cat, Pet, Pig*** are whispered aloud in succession the listener will discern an evident rise in the pitch of the hissing produced as the words are uttered. No matter what the pitch of the voice when speaking *or singing* the word, the recognition of the word depends on the pitch of the *overtone* accompanying of the vowel. That is to say, whenever a word is sung or spoken, two pitches are produced: one produced by the voice at any chosen pitch, high or low, and a secondary supplementary breathed sound entirely dependent on the shape of the mouth and cheeks to determine the vowel. These secondary vowel pitches remain the same whether the speaker or singer is a man, boy, woman, or girl, despite the great difference in the original voice pitch.

The five notes of ancient Chinese music had curious names: 宮 (Gong, '*Palace*'); 商 (Shang, '*Commerce*'); 角 (Jue, '*Angle*'); 徵 (Ji, '*Fulfilment*'); and 羽 (Yü, '*Feathers*'); yet if these old Chinese names are uttered voicelessly in succession, the same rise in pitch of the overtones can be perceived. Thus, a rhyme results when the final syllables of paired lines of verse *produce matching secondary pitches.* It appears that the old Chinese names for the notes of the pentatonic scale were chosen to represent the vowel sounds which produced the secondary pitches. It is important to stress that these secondary pitches are quite independent of linguistic intonation, the attribute of Chinese and many other languages where the change of intonation changes the actual meaning of a syllable as significantly as the change of a vowel or consonant. The association of the vowel sounds with the Chinese names of the

notes has been elaborated by the second author of this article in French (Walters 2016).

6. EXPLANATION OF THE WORD 'TONE' AS A MUSICAL TERM

In the context of musical theory, the word 'tone' has several meanings. In its widest sense, it might mean any musical sound, but tone can also mean the distinctive quality of the sound (timbre) produced by a particular voice or instrument, while more precisely it refers to a musical 'interval', or measure of the difference in pitch between two musical notes. For example, in acoustic terminology, the difference in pitch between the two musical notes 'A' and 'B' in Western notation, or 宮 (*gong*) and 商 (*shang*) in classical Chinese notation, is one tone; that between 宮(*gong*) and 角 (*jue)* is two tones, whereas the interval between any two notes which have the same name (in either Chinese or Western nomenclature) but are pitched an octave apart (*qing yin* 清音) encompasses six tones. Unfortunately, in the context of the Chinese language, 'tone' has a completely different meaning.

7. EXPLANATION OF THE WORD 'TONE' (INTONATION) AS A LINGUISTIC TERM

In Chinese and many other languages, a word is comprised not only of consonants and vowels, but also 'tones.' Accordingly, in the following paragraphs, to avoid confusion between the musical and linguistic use of the word 'tone', the term 'intonation' is used to mean 'tone' in the linguistic sense where the context may not otherwise be clear.

Intonation adds another creative consideration in the composition of poetry which is to be set to music, as distinct from being recited in speech. Many rhymes involve a time component, the word 'cat' for example being a short sound, but

'cart' a long one. Intonation also has a time factor. Instead of a syllable being uttered as a single pitched sound, the vowel sound may rise or fall during its enunciation. In non-tonal languages, a change in intonation may change the emphasis, focus of attention, or mood, perhaps turning a plain fact into a question, or even an indication of disbelief. In a tonal language, however, a different intonation would change the actual meaning of the word; so that 'ma' in Cantonese could mean mother (媽), horse (馬), hemp (麻), or several other things according to the intonation.

During the Southern Dynasty (420 - 589 AD), the renowned scholar and poet *Shen Yue* (沈約), (441 - 513 AD) in all likelihood inspired by the influence of the Sanskrit language, recognized and classified the four principal tones of Chinese speech in his time as: level (平); (2) rising (上); (3) departing (去); and (4) entering (入). Speech tones are therefore likely to affect the artistic creation of a phrase of music; in setting a lyric to music, if a phrase contained a syllable that in speech would be spoken in a rising tone, it would be inappropriate to match it to a musical phrase that fell, as this could change the tone and therefore meaning of the word.

The recognition of these four tones revolutionized the composition of classical poetry, and the rhythm of intonation became more elegant. By the Tang Dynasty, a relatively 'modern style' poetry evolved. Here, the expression 'modern style' is purely relative historically, distinguishing poetry of the Tang period from the 'ancient style' of earlier times, that is to say, from the periods of the Spring and Autumn Annals (770 - 403 BC), the Warring States (403 - 221 BC), the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC), and up to the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD). Consequently, 'modern style' is not used in the present-day sense of free verse lacking rhyme, meter, or scansion, but instead, far from being 'free-style', it is possibly the most rigorously structured poetic form in China's long literary history.

8. STRUCTURE OF 'MODERN STYLE' TANG POETRY

'Modern style' poems originated from the Tang Dynasty could be either pentasyllabic with lines of five characters, or else heptasyllabic, with lines of seven characters, although within the poem itself variations are sometimes allowed, but not encouraged. A rough analogy could be made with the familiar Japanese *haiku* poetry constructed with three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. Tang Dynasty 'modern' poetry however had many further constraints: each character in a line is subject to strict rules regarding correct intonation, and additionally, it was the standard requirement that the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 6th lines should close with a rhyme. The use of rhyme at the end of the 1st line is flexible, depending on the format. For example, for a pentasyllabic poem with five characters per line, instead of the first line ending with a rhyme, the first two lines would form a couplet with parallel imagery. Although further discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this study, more information in English can be found in recent publications by the first of the present authors (So and Chan 2011, So and Wong 2011).

Additional rules dictate the lengths of the poems themselves. Both pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic poems could be either '*lüshi*' (律詩 regulated poetry) with eight lines or more, or '*jueshi*' (絕詩 shortened poetry) with four lines only. The *lüshi* style also requires that there is parallelism between the second and third couplets, and that is to say, the third and fourth lines should form a parallel couplet as should the fifth and sixth lines.

By the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 AD), a new poetic form, '*ci*' (詞 poems with short and long lines), had emerged from the 'modern style' poetry of the Tang. In *ci,* even though the numbers of lines as well as the line lengths are variable, there were still strict rules which governed not only the intonation of every character within each line, but also the

rhymes which concluded particular lines. The article by the first author of this present study (So and Chan 2011) also touches on the discussion of *ci* briefly.

Historical sources suggest that all *ci* written in the Song Dynasty were sung, but unfortunately no records of musical scores exist. By the Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1368 AD), the structure of *ci* had evolved into '*qu*' (曲 songs). The adoption of the *ci* and *qu* forms for the libretti of Chinese opera can account for its evolution during the Song and Yuan dynasties. In the lyrics of Cantonese opera, although the lines may be of variable length, pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic lines preponderate. The last character of every line is often a rhyme, and there is greater use of rhyming couplets with parallelism. Additionally, attention to linguistic tone has to be more stringent in order for it to match the melodic notes.

9. THE CHARACTERISTIC TONAL FEATURES OF CANTONESE

The main factor which distinguishes the different styles of Chinese opera lies in the structure of the regional Chinese languages and dialects in which they are performed. Any attempt to recall the dialects of earlier times would merely be speculative, but of course it is possible to compare and consider the two commonest languages of present-day China, Mandarin (Putonghua) and Cantonese. Cantonese has a distinctive quality which distinguishes it from other dialects of modern China. This feature has had a marked impact on the construction of musical melody and rhythm in Cantonese opera, leading ultimately to the emotional reaction of the audience.

It will be recalled that the scholar *Shen Yue* identified the four intonations used in classical poetry as: level (平); rising (上); departing (去); and entering (入). Although modern Mandarin also has four intonations (tones), they are not identical to those defined by *Shen Yue*. The Mandarin tones are

1st - high; 2nd - high rising; 3rd - low dipping; and 4th - high falling. Broadly speaking, both the 1st and 2nd tones (high and high rising) of Mandarin correspond to the level tone (平) of *Shen Yue*; the Mandarin 3rd tone (low dipping) corresponds to *Shen Yue*'s rising tone (上); and the Mandarin 4th tone (high falling) corresponds to the departing tone (去) of *Shen Yue*.

Unfortunately, such correspondences are not always consistent. In particular, *Shen Yue*'s 'entering tone' (入) does not exist in Mandarin. Eight hundred or so 'entering tone' characters have been assimilated into the present four tones of Mandarin and as a consequence, Mandarin speakers cannot readily discern which characters originally possessed an entering tone.

Moreover, as mentioned before, in Tang poems, every character of every line needs to follow a strict rule, and that is the discrimination of either 'level' (平) or 'oblique' (仄) tone. *Shen Yue*'s rising, departing and entering tones are all classified as 'oblique' tones. In other words, a poet speaking Mandarin has much more difficulty in identifying whether a character belongs to a 'level' tone or an 'oblique' tone when writing a Tang-styled poem.

By contrast, Cantonese has as many as nine different tones. Eight of these, in two sequences, high and low, usually denoted as 'yin' and 'yang' respectively, follow the original scheme of *Shen Yue*, (level – rising – departing – entering). In addition, there is an occasional ninth 'mid-entering' tone. To summarise, the nine intonations of Cantonese are:

i) yin level; yin rising; yin departing; yin entering;

ii) yang level; yang rising; yang departing; yang entering; and finally

iii) mid-entering.

The consequence of this is that when poems from the Tang or Song dynasties are recited in Cantonese (which retains the historic entering tone) rather than Mandarin, the perception is

that the enunciation is closer to that of the original text. A skilful Cantonese speaker can easily discriminate the nine tones of every voice, or at least which are "level" and "oblique" tones, when a Tang styled poem is to be written. In brief, the wider spectrum of linguistic tones in the Cantonese language is closer to the range of tones which were recorded by *Shen Yue* in the fifth century.

10. LOW LEVEL INTONATION IN CANTONESE

Apart from Cantonese, 'low level' intonation is almost non-existent in any of the present-day major Chinese dialects. The expressions 'high' (yin) and 'low' (yang) here refer quite literally to the actual pitch of the voice, 'high pitch' meaning that the pitch of the syllable, whether spoken or sung, is relatively higher than the usual pitch of the voice, no matter whether this is normally high (as for a woman or child) or deep, as a man's voice. In this respect, intonation, high or low, is relative to the speaker's voice, and differs from the vowel's *secondary* pitch, which is a constant, irrespective of the vocal fundamental pitch.

In Cantonese, among the many common words which have a 'low level' intonation are 'dragon' [龍]; 'goose' [鵝]; 'pond' [塘]; 'yellow' [黃]; 'meet' [逢]; 'lotus' [荷 or 蓮], 'bright' [明], 'sun' [陽], 'spring water' [泉], and 'river' [河 or 流] to name but a few. Significantly, because all these words have colourful imagery, they are frequently found in the lyrics of Cantonese opera when the librettist needs to use words of 'low level' pitch. By contrast, in ***Jing-ju*** (Peking opera) or ***Kun-qu***, a high pitch is consistently maintained throughout the whole work. The consequence is that in Cantonese opera, the available range of melodic phrases is considerably greater, so allowing for a greater emotional spectrum. Additionally, a larger repertoire of musical phrases can be absorbed into the musical score of a Cantonese opera, a theory having been first proposed by the authors in English in 2013 (So and Walters 2013).

11. TIMBRE

The acoustics of musical sounds are able to provide yet another explanation why Cantonese opera, with its substantial 'low level' intonation, may be perceived as aesthetically superior to other genres. It has already been shown that a sung syllable has three distinctive attributes:

i) the original pitch of the sound produced by the voice,
ii) the supplementary pitch which determines the vowel, and
iii) a variation in pitch due to the linguistic intonation.

There is yet another factor: timbre. This is the quality which defines an instrument's distinctive sound, and distinguishes the sound of a trumpet, say, from that of a guitar, or even one guitar from another, even though they may be playing the same note. Understanding why timbres differ may explain the reason behind the perceived wider emotional gamut of Cantonese opera.

All sound is produced by its source vibrating, such as a column of air in wind instruments, in stringed instruments by the string itself, or the whole body in chimes and percussion. But as the source vibrates to produce the basic sound, the vibration simultaneously sets in motion several other higher pitched vibrations (harmonics), which are related to the principal sound in definite mathematical proportions. When there are few harmonics, the sound is perceived as clear and pure; a richer, fuller sound results when several harmonics are heard together. If the original sound is high, its attendant harmonics may be so high *that they are beyond the range of audibility*.

The human range of hearing generally lies between 20 Hz and 20,000 Hz (Rosen 2013) but varies considerably, and noticeably reduces with age. The elderly, and those who are frequently exposed to sound of high amplitude tend to lose their

perception to higher frequencies (DHEW of the United States Government 1965). As a greater array of audible harmonics is produced when the fundamental pitch is low, it follows that instruments or voices which produce low notes are able to produce a greater range of overtones which are still audible to the human ear.

Thus it is clear that when a syllable with a low-pitch linguistic intonation is uttered, momentarily the vocal quality of that sound is richer and fuller than is attained by syllables which have a high intonation. Thus, although the appreciation of the arts is highly subjective, there is an underlying physical reason to explain why Cantonese opera can make a different emotional impression on its audience. That being so, the aspiring writer of a libretto and the composer of the musical score for a Cantonese opera face additional creative difficulties in the need to respect the obligation that a low pitched musical note must always be associated with a 'lower-level' linguistic tone.

12. EXAMPLE OF A LYRIC FROM A CANTONESE OPERA

The following example of a lyric text from a Cantonese opera is the song 恨悠悠 (*Heng Yu Yu*), with lyrics by 蘇翁 (Su Weng), and set to music by馮華 (Fung Hua), depicted in a table form in Table 2. It is also known that in Cantonese, the musical score usually comes first, followed by scripts. This lyric text in Table 2 amply demonstrates the liberal use of 'low-level' tones, as in the opening line and various positions of rhymes which are used to great effect to match the sense of the sun setting in the western sky, while a series of low falling tones highlights the dramatic irony of the troublesome brightness of the full moon.

The English words, freely translated, can only give a sense of the meaning of the lyrics, and make no attempt to convey the rhythm or lyrical nature of the original. In the table

below, Chinese characters which have a 'lower-level' linguistic tone in Cantonese are underlined, and those characters which form rhymes are identified in bold and italicised. A rhyming character, in Cantonese opera, may not necessarily be of "level" tone, either high or low, as required in the 'modern style" Tang poems. The extensive use of 'lower-level' tone characters and their appropriateness to the sense of the lyric are clearly shown.

Table 2 An Example of a Song in Cantonese Opera Style

Chinese version	English translation
恨悠***悠***,	Hatred, for so long, for so long.
相思如***扣*** 。	Your image is fastened to me like a clasp.
一頁頁,	Page after page
情史枉空***留***。	Of the history of a love is abandoned.
望斷夕陽,	I gaze at the setting sun,
怎斷愁絲千萬***縷*** 。	But cannot escape the worries which bind me with ten thousand strands of silk.
斜陽殘照 西風下,	The sun dips as the wind blows from the west.
惆悵怎忍***受*** 。	How can I bear such heartache!
明月難常***有***。	The constant brightness of the Moon is troubling,
良夜亦難***求***。	But does not drive away a troubled night.
誰伴歡笑誰伴***愁***。	From someone plagued by laughter, and someone plagued by care.
簾外驚聽花影動,	From beyond the curtain comes the startling sound of a flower's creeping shadow; [*which tells me*]
還道秋客泛歸***舟***。	Already on his way, in Autumn, he returns by boat.
誰料凝眸處,	Who could guess why I gaze there so steadfastly?
殘夢徒添恨悠***悠***。	The shattered fragments of a dream only increase that hatred for longer, for longer.

13. CONCLUSION

This article starts with a very brief introduction to different types of Chinese operas and then comes to Cantonese opera. The foundation of Cantonese opera, classical Chinese literature including *shi*, *ci* and *qu*, is discussed. Then, the nine tones of the same voice of Cantonese are described, which closely follow the four tones discovered in around 500 AD based on inspiration from Sanskrit. And that explains it is more

appropriate to read Tang poems and Song *ci*'s etc. in Cantonese. The most important feature of Cantonese, the existence of 'lower-level' or 'yang-level' tone, is discussed, leading to a wider choice of musical scores in Cantonese opera. The musical and linguistic theories behind the argument are put forward. Because of the extensive use of 'lower-level' tone characters with beautiful imagery and the mandatorily associated lower pitched musical notes, audience can have a better emotional feeling when listening to Cantonese opera due to the wider audible range of harmonics. This theory was newly proposed by the authors who have had a long history of interest in Cantonese opera. The article is ended with an exemplar song in Cantonese opera with substantial meaning in the love story and adoption of 'lower-level' tone characters.

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