

# Teaching Practice of Taizhou Opera, China

**Zhang Xueqi and Nicha Pattananon**

Bangkokthonburi University, Bangkok, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: nicha.musiced@gmail.com

\*\*\*\*\*

## Abstracts

Taizhou local opera is the "living cultural relic" that best represents Taizhou culture. Allowing Taizhou's local opera to be gradually weakened or lost is irresponsible to local culture and an unreasonable abandonment of national culture. Taizhou local operas contain rich cultural information reflecting the thoughts, emotions, ethics, and values the Chinese nation has condensed in them for thousands of years. Exploring the repertoire, performance forms, and performing arts of existing Taizhou local operas is conducive to maintaining the diversity of Chinese opera art. The inheritance of national cultural information in the existing local operas of Taizhou is conducive to our application of local culture in education. It is the inescapable responsibility of every descendant of the Yellow Emperor. This article aims to present the teaching practice of Taizhou opera in China.

**Keywords:** Teaching Practice; Taizhou Opera; China

## Introduction

Taizhou local opera has a history of over 400 years. In this 400-year history, if it is just old-fashioned and unchanging, it will only be eliminated by the times and unable to meet the needs of today's audience. Moreover, the decline of local Taizhou opera today has made it out of touch with the younger youth, only some of whom understand it. This stems from the fact that there are too few subjects in Taizhou's local opera that express the real life of modern times and need to attract the attention of young people more. In today's rapidly developing world, with all the new things surrounding us, the only way that Taizhou local opera can keep up with the times is to change its own drawn-out rhythms and old-fashioned singing style and keep adding elements of modern music.

Moreover, even if our culture is good, without publicity, its spread is limited to the region where it originated. In the past, Taizhou's local opera gradually faded out of the stage. They withdrew from the cultural performance industry because of the departure of many performers. In the long thirty years in between, Taizhou local opera remained silent. With the development of the times, until 2005, Taizhou local opera finally ushered in an opportunity to re-form a troupe called: Taizhou Sea Oriental Local Opera Troupe and re-recruit performers. In 2005, the troupe was reorganized and called the Taizhou Sea Oriental Regional Opera Troupe and recruited new performers to carry on the tradition and make changes in line with the new era. The changes that have been made in Taizhou local opera over the years are evident to all, firstly, it has been shown on CCTV several times, allowing more people across the country to see our Taizhou opera culture, and it is also making changes in the Taizhou local opera theatre itself. The singing skills of each character in Taizhou are diverse and rich and have played an important role in history. However, there needs to be a timelier academic summary and sorting so that the topic research will

---

<sup>1</sup>Received: March 31 2023; Revised: April 11 2023; Accepted: April 14 2023

compensate for this lack of convenience.

## **Opera teaching**

The research on opera education at the basic education level can be broadly divided into two categories. The main body of the first category is research from the perspective of music teachers or schools: In his essay on Hanyu Pinyin and the Teaching of Opera, Liu Rongchang (1965:1) suggests that Hanyu Pinyin has played a great role in various aspects and also an effective tool for correcting pronunciation in the teaching of opera. Drama is a form of artistic synthesis that reflects the play's plot, characters, and ideological content. The language of drama plays an extremely important role. Li Fuchun (1985:1) points out that opera is a highly integrated art in his paper on some problems in teaching the fundamentals of opera performance. Its basic means of expression are singing, reciting, acting, and acting. Because of this artistic characteristic, when we train opera performers, we must train them from an early age to lay a good foundation. A good foundation is very important for the growth and development of an actor, so the responsibility of teachers who teach at this stage is also extremely important.

Jia Zhansheng (1988:1), in his dissertation on the teaching method of demonstration in the teaching of opera performance, points out that throughout the ages, good teaching results have always been accompanied by scientific teaching methods. Therefore, to improve teaching effectiveness, people are constantly searching for more effective teaching methods. In teaching opera, the demonstration method has been the main method of imparting knowledge and skills, has accompanied the development of countless artists, and is still of great practical value today. Zhou Xiaoyan (1994:1) proposed in his dissertation that opera vocal music is integral to national vocal music. With the demands of the times and the continuous development of reform and opening up, opera vocal music, as a new discipline, has entered the classrooms of opera students in art colleges. The teacher's task is to help these students establish the correct vocal perception and vocal method while maintaining their traditional rhythm in opera singing.

In his essay on the importance of teacher dominance in teaching opera performance, Li Nansheng (1996:1) focuses on teachers and notes that the current source of teachers in opera schools is actors who have turned to teach. They have a wealth of stage experience, and many have achieved great success performing on stage. However, there need to be more pedagogical skills. Education is a science and requires considerable skill. To make the best use of their intelligence, they must master the art of education, be familiar with the laws of teaching, have basic knowledge of pedagogy, psychology, and education, and base their work on science.

Zhou Guoxiong (1998:1) suggests that the difficulty in teaching Chinese opera lies in stimulating students' interest and awareness in learning from the perspective of classroom reception psychology and that the main ways to solve this problem are to close the distance between the aesthetic subject and the aesthetic object in the classroom, to show the special flavor of Chinese opera in depth, and to strengthen students' sense of inquiry and creative thinking.

- how to judge the period of changing sound,
- how to train sound through scientific methods, and
- how to take good care of students from psychology and physiology during the period of changing the sound.

Meanwhile, the wish how to promote the success of boy students in drama performance is expressed in the paper.

In her article, Gui Chen (2017:1) states that modern high school students have too little exposure to opera, high school students have too much pressure, and cultural courses often take over the music curriculum, further reducing the insufficient amount of music teaching time.

The article by Wei Yongzhen (2018: 130-132) gives another aspect to the view that the music teacher's literacy and teaching ability greatly impact the outcome of teaching opera. In turn, the teacher's literacy in opera covers a wide range of aspects, such as the ability to master opera knowledge and basic opera skills, organize opera activities, and evaluate opera. In order to address these issues, she mentions in her article the many ways in which she envisages focusing on enhancing the professionalism of music teachers in the teaching of opera through collective lesson preparation, teaching and research activities, opera clubs, and rehearsals of large-scale opera programs.

In an article by Zhu Jiangjiang (2018:1), she also expresses her concern about the lack of literacy among music teachers in opera at this stage. Her views mainly focus on classroom teaching, where the content is monotonous and simple, and the teaching is limited to the textbook. It lacks extension, and the teaching methods must be updated to stimulate students' interest in learning effectively.

Zhou Yuna (2018: 39-42.) takes a broader perspective, arguing that the lack of opera literacy among music teachers is a widespread phenomenon and that education departments around the world should address this situation by offering remedial lecture classes in opera for teachers, sending professional opera practitioners to train teachers, or directly hiring opera practitioners as external teachers to engage in relevant opera teaching on campus, among other methods to focus on this challenge.

There are more than 300 kinds of operas in China. Due to the influence of various factors, traditional opera music has gradually been neglected by the people. Endangered opera music urgently needs to be protected and inherited. Li Xia (2019:1) emphasized that education is the most beneficial way to inherit opera culture. We have the responsibility and duty to inherit and develop opera culture in implementing education, so that opera culture can truly enter the campus. To develop while inheriting, and to be inherited while developing? Stimulating students' interest in opera is the premise, changing concepts is fundamental, innovative teaching methods are the key, and building an opera platform is the guarantee.

Wu Dan (2019:1) mainly starts with opera itself and some external changes of opera, explores the continuous adjustment and enrichment of the content of opera teaching, pays attention to the docking of traditional and modern culture, the characteristics of the spread and survival of opera, and strengthens the deeper integration of opera and humanistic quality education.

Duan Xiaoli (2020:1) explored the relationship between national vocal music teaching and opera learning. As a traditional art in China, opera has formed a variety of operas. Its performance methods are also rich and colorful, and opera singing is the most important part of opera. With the long-term development of opera in China, it has accumulated a wealth

of professional skills. After being summarised and evaluated by the artists and theorists of successive dynasties, a complete art system has been formed. Development is very important.

Yue Penghui (2022:1) emphasized teachers' self-learning awareness. Opera education pays attention to oral teaching. Every class is a practical class. Students must complete practical operations under the teacher's teaching and guidance—a concentrated expression of experience, stage experience, and other abilities. However, more is needed to improve the above three professional experiences. Teachers should not only strengthen the research on performance theory and teaching theory but also integrate the ideological and political content of the course into professional teaching to properly carry out students' ideological and political education.

In order to make more scholars understand traditional Chinese opera art and promote the development of my country's excellent traditional culture protection and inheritance. She stressed that opera culture is one of the representatives of China's excellent traditional culture. Introducing local opera culture into college music education can not only enrich the humanistic spirit of the campus and improve the cultural quality of students but also improve the moral cultivation of college students and deepen students' understanding of opera art. To understand and promote the heritage of excellent traditional culture.

The second category of this article is research on students' learning in music class: Teacher Wei Chenchen (2020:1) put forward her views based on her teaching experience. In the article, she took her Henan Opera class as an example, and the rhythm of Henan Opera is hesitant. It is slow, the libretto is dialectical and difficult to understand, and the school needs to pay more attention to opera education, which leads to low enthusiasm for learning. Teacher Lu Wenyue (2020:1) believes that students generally do not love opera because they lack understanding and appreciation of our country's traditional opera culture, and school education does not do enough to cultivate and promote opera culture, resulting in a large number of students lacking awareness of opera culture's common sense.

Luo Xiaomei & Zhang Juan (2019:1) conducted a one-semester flipped classroom teaching practice research with a preschool teacher training college as a pilot point, aiming to provide a reference for the teaching reform of other courses in colleges and universities and to promote physical education teaching further. The reform provides a reference.

When traditional opera teaching limits the thinking of teaching, applying science and technology to education, and injecting new blood into traditional education, virtual reality technology opens a new chapter for traditional opera teaching. It promotes the development of Chinese opera culture.

Jiang Luxin (2022:1) is based on the background of mixed teaching on the network teaching platform, which is student-centered, emphasizing students' active exploration of knowledge, active discovery, and active construction of the meaning of the knowledge learned. Taking the basic theoretical course as an example, we will sort out and summarize the course mixed teaching content development, activity design organization, assessment, and evaluation based on Chaoxing Learning Pass, in order to improve the quality of classroom teaching, improve the level of course construction, and serve education, teaching, and technical skills personnel training.

Sun Xiaojie (2022:1) focused on constructing harmony discipline in opera colleges and discussed improving the quality of harmony teaching and talent training. She believes that teaching opera should not only be based on the actual needs of the development of higher

opera education but also closely follow the guiding ideology of building a high-level characteristic opera art college in the context of the new era and new mission.

The development of opera education in colleges and universities is an important way to realize the inheritance, protection, and development of traditional opera art in the new era, and it is also an important measure for colleges and universities to improve the quality of talent training. This paper briefly explains the significance of opera education in colleges and universities, analyses the current development status of opera education in colleges and universities, and points out some existing problems.

It is relatively easy to see from the articles written by various scholars that there are some difficulties in their teaching process. The phenomena of opera education in the schools or cities where these scholars work and their feelings about teaching are similar to those of Taizhou College in Zhejiang Province, where the researcher is based. The daily teaching situation is very similar. It can be seen that the common problems in the teaching of music and opera can be summarized as follows:

- Teachers' knowledge of opera urgently needs to be improved.
- Their teaching ability needs to be more consistent.
- Students' awareness of opera could be higher.
- Their interest in learning could be stronger.
- Their motivation to learn could be stronger.

As China pays more and more attention to the inheritance of China's excellent traditional culture, improving the quality of music education is imperative. The collection and analysis of the research results provide a solid and realistic basis for the writing of this article and give many new ideas for the research process.

## **Research on the integration of opera into the classroom**

"Comprehensive Investigation and Research on the "Travel into the Classroom" Activity" points out that the introduction of opera into the classroom can not only help students inherit traditional opera but also promote the improvement of its comprehensive quality. It puts forward the principle of developing opera at the right time and place and proposes training methods for music teachers. "Exploration and Thinking on the Ways of Chinese Opera Entering the Classroom under the Background of Core Literacy" is based on the cultivation of students' core literacy and explores the ways of Chinese opera entering the classroom. "Let the Flowers of Chinese Opera Bloom in the Hearts of Students-My' Views on Chinese Opera Entering the Classroom" mentioned that opera song can build a bridge for Chinese opera to enter the classroom. "My Opinion on Entering Chinese Opera into the Classroom" believes that the introduction of Chinese opera into the classroom should gradually increase the proportion of Chinese opera in school music education. "Discussion and Countermeasures on Some Difficult Issues of Entering Opera Music into the Classroom," some problems of introducing opera into the classroom were mentioned, and the media was used to raise awareness of opera among the whole people.



Figure 1, Taizhou Opera Luantan Campus Tour



Figure 2, Students learn Taizhou opera on the spot

## Taizhou Opera

As an advanced cultural province, many local operas in Zhejiang are essential in promoting the inheritance of China's excellent traditional culture. However, with the changes in people's lifestyles, the development of local operas is facing serious challenges. In recent years, the Zhejiang Provincial Government has strengthened the protection of traditional operas. Many local theatre troupes have carried out innovative practices, actively created high-quality products, and inherited and developed excellent traditional culture. In order to successfully explore a way for the survival and development of local opera, many scholars have researched Taizhou opera. The specific research directions can be divided into musicology, opera development, traditional local opera, Lingshi Temple, opera singing, singing characteristics, media communication strategies, all-media communication, characteristics research, and military drama. In their article on the dramatic brick carvings of the Ling Shi Pagoda and the spread of Taizhou opera, Wang Zhonghe & Lu Huilai (1990:1) point out that Taizhou may be a remote area, but it has an ancient history and a splendid culture. In Taizhou's towns and villages, the performers' music and dances and hundreds of

operas have been performed for a long time. It is generally believed that opera originated from singing and dancing and that a wide range of folk music and dance activities laid the foundation for the formation of opera in Taizhou.

On 12 July 1996, Ye Hui, a reporter for the *Guangming Daily*, published an article entitled 'Experts Call for Saving Taizhou's Local Opera,' resonating with the community and setting a precedent for calls to save Taizhou's local opera.

Based on fieldwork, Cao Wenhai (2010:1) explores the historical origins of the Taizhou repertoire, the formation of vocal cadences, vocal language and characteristics, orchestral accompaniment, and the incorporation of new musical elements. Xi Huimin, Zhang Yanbin & Xiong Rui (2015:1) discuss and study the development and evolution of Taizhou regional opera from the *Senju* opera to the *Taizhou* opera and write an article on the development of the opera from the *Senju* opera to the *Taizhou* opera.

"A Study of Taizhou Jumbles Based on Fieldwork" is a comprehensive study of Taizhou jumbles based on first-hand information obtained from fieldwork. The thesis is divided into five areas: interview transcripts, historical development, accompaniment lineage, morphology, and pressing issues. Among them, the study of musical forms is representative of the results of the same type. The author argues that the *Taizhou* jumble is mainly in the form of a tune, with melodies shifting from one-fourth to the next, resulting in the sense of tonal instability and polyphony based on concordant chords and discordant intervals, with a clear division of labor in terms of range, timbre and melodic progression. The rhythm is divided into four forms: with and without a board, with one board and one eye, with one board and three eyes, and with a loose board. In addition, the author finds that the problems faced by the *Taizhou* repertoire, such as the difficulty in cultivating talents, the lack of workforce, the limited audience, and the loss of repertoire, are key factors limiting the development of the genre and calls for the strengthening of protection and inheritance.

"A Study on the Transition and Development Trend of the *Taizhou* Rebellion" points out that the *Taizhou* Rebellion has a constant repertoire throughout the year, mainly singing *Gaoqiang*, *Kunqiang*, and *Huangpi*, and is a multi-voice repertoire that fuses various vocal varieties from the *Taizhou* region.

In his essay on *Taizhou* repertoire, Qian Yingji (2015:1) suggests that *Taizhou* theatre is characterized by a penchant for scandalous performance, with stories interpreted in a comedic and ironic manner and rendered through a variety of vivid performance techniques. The singing and recitation of *Taizhou*'s *Jumble Bomb* are all in the local village language and slang, and every hand and footstep are in harmony with the smoke and fire of the common grassroots.

In a study of the singing characteristics of *Zhejiang* local operas - taking *Wu* opera, *Yong* opera, and *Taizhou* opera as examples, Yu Shanying (2015:1) researches the singing vocal methods, tone quality and timbre, and line bite of the *Sheng* and *Dan* characters of *Wu* opera, *Yong* opera, and *Taizhou* opera, the main local opera genres in *Zhejiang* Province, and summarizes the singing. This study provides some reference for the better inheritance and preservation of these ancient and dazzling operatic singing arts.

Inheritance of "Taizhou opera" alive mentioned in the article that creators of *Taizhou* opera music should insist on creative transformation and innovative development and actively open up the youth market. The cultural gap has led to the fact that only a few young people love opera. There is an urgent need to strengthen the general education and popularization of opera in schools so that opera art can become an exciting course in primary and secondary

schools, an elective course in ordinary colleges, and a compulsory course in art colleges so that opera culture can penetrate the campus. On the other hand, practitioners also need to make efforts in publicity and promotion. They should extensively use social media, VR, AR, and other technologies to innovate communication channels and break the opera barriers with young people.

In his article, Zhang Yifeng (2021:1) takes Taizhou Folk Opera as an example and uses the concept of all-media communication to establish a five-in-one all-media communication matrix of Taizhou Folk Opera, including its platform, traditional media, social media, video websites, and music websites, to meet the needs of the inheritance and development of traditional local opera.

'The Development of Opera from the Senjun Opera to the Taizhou Jampo,' a comparative study of the brick carvings unearthed during the renovation of the Lingshi Pagoda in 1987 and the records in Tokyo's Menghua Lu, concludes that the Senjun Opera was once popular in Taizhou during the Tang Dynasty and that the history of the Taizhou Jampo can be traced back to the Senjun Opera of the Tang Dynasty, which is a further development of the Senjun Opera. However, the study could be further strengthened by discussing the inheritance relationship between Nanju Opera, Senjun Opera, and Jumbled Bomb, describing their characteristics and the differences between the three types of opera.

'The Protection and Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of the Taizhou Jampo' discuss the development of the Taizhou Jampo, its future development path, and the protection and development of intangible cultural heritage. He argues that the Taizhou Jampo should be inherited and developed simultaneously, suggesting that the intangible cultural heritage can be studied, excavated, and rescued with the help of appropriate technological means. He emphasizes that conservators should be fully aware of the popular nature of ICH conservation and development. They should first address the issue of inheritors and advocate market-based development based on national conditions, formulating measures from a practical perspective to preserve the original flavor as much as possible.

'A Study on Taizhou's First Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Taizhou Chaoshu' discusses the uniqueness of Taizhou Chaoshu's singing, language, musical instruments, orchestra, and performing arts. It argues that the troupe's institution and inadequate funding are the reasons that limit the development of Taizhou's repertory bomb and suggests countermeasures, the most important of which is scientific planning.

'Research on the Realistic Dilemma and Conservation Strategies of the Taizhou Troubled Bomb' also mentions the current situation of the lack of success of the Taizhou troubled bomb, the uncertainty of the troupe system, and the lack of planning by the government and enterprises, and argues that more efforts should be made to promote it, update the traditional repertoire, attach importance to school education, and innovate the troupe system. The article suggests that it is feasible for excellent traditional culture to enter schools and for young people to participate in excellent traditional culture. However, the specific implementation steps could be further developed (Zhao, 2014:1).

## Conclusion

Most existing research results provide useful insights into Taizhou Luantan from the perspective of inheritance and protection. Among them, the suggestions for inheriting intangible cultural heritage are relatively macroscopic. The research on the teaching of Luantan opera in Taizhou still needs to be completed and scattered. These remaining problems provide the research space for this paper.

In order to promote traditional Chinese culture, Taizhou College has already introduced Taizhou Opera as an elective course for music students. It is actively engaged in opera teaching activities and practices, with some success, recognition, and acceptance by many students. From the results of the interviews, we know that most students have taken this course. In terms of the ease with which local opera creates a sense of identity and affinity for students, both local and international students are interested in learning about Taizhou opera as drama. Music teachers who introduce traditional Chinese opera to students from this region are more likely to develop a sense of affinity and identity, which makes teaching and learning easier. As a comprehensive art, opera is closely linked to many aspects of Chinese culture. It has several commonalities with theatre forms such as opera, drama, and dance. However, it is much more integrated, using such art forms as music, dance, stage art, and the highly characteristic forms of martial arts, recitation, and performance. The opera's history, performance characteristics, and stage features contain a wealth of knowledge of various aspects of national aesthetic thought, philosophical thought, and Chinese literary features. In further analysis, the various local operas contain local, regional, folk, and dialect cultures. These individual characteristics of opera cannot be found in other types of art.

## References

Cao, W. (2010). Exploring the Music of Taizhou Jumbling Opera in the Perspective of Ethnomusicology. *Sichuan Theatre*, (03).

Duan, X. (2020). Exploration of learning and reference from opera in the teaching of national vocal music, *Drama House*, (02).

Gui, C. (2017). *Exploration of effective teaching methods for opera music in high school music appreciation*, Central China Normal University.

Jia, Z. (1988). On the Demonstration Teaching Method in the Teaching of Opera Performance. *Art of Chinese Opera*, (02).

Jiang, L. (2022). Exploring the practice of blended teaching based on Chao Xing Learning Pass: A case study of a higher-level opera performance theory foundation course, *Chemical Fibre and Textile Technology*, 51(03).

Li, X. (2019). How to bring opera culture to school so that students can really love and understand opera: the case of Handan region, *Northern Music*, 39(24).

Li, F. (1985). Talking about Several Problems in the Basic Teaching of Opera Performance. *Opera Art*, (03).

Li, N. (1996). Experimenting with the importance of teacher dominance in teaching opera performance. *The Art of Huangmei Opera*, (01).

Liu, R. (1965). Chinese Pinyin and Opera Teaching. *Text Reform*, (08).

Lu, W. *A study on the teaching practice of drama in high school music classroom*, Hebei Normal University, 2020.

Luo, X., & Zhang, J. (2019). Research on the construction and practice of flipped classroom teaching mode of Chinese opera exercises in colleges and universities from the perspective of MOOC, *Sports Science and Technology*, 40(05).

Qian, Y. (2015). The development of opera from joining the army to Luantan in Taizhou, *Zhejiang Today*, (04).

Sun, X. (2022). Harmony teaching reform and practice in opera art colleges - An example of harmony teaching in the Chinese Academy of Opera, *Contemporary Music*, (12).

Wang, Z., & Lu, H. 1990). On the dramatic brick carvings of the Ling Shi Pagoda and the spread of Taizhou opera, *Southeast Culture*, (06).

Wei, C. (2020). A Study on the Teaching Practice of Yu Opera in Primary School Music Classroom, Northwest Normal University, 2020.

Wei, Y. (2018). Improving the ability of teachers' opera teaching and research in the inheritance of Huangmei Opera on campus, *Science and Education Wenhui (Mid-day Issue)*, 443(12), 130-132.

Wu, D. (2019). The reform of opera teaching in colleges and universities in the post-drama era, *Popular Literature*, (23).

Xi, H., Zhang, Y., & Xiong, R. (2015). The development of opera from enlisted opera to Taizhou opera, *Popular Literature*, (08).

Yu, S. (2015). The singing characteristics of Zhejiang local operas - taking Wu opera, Yong opera and Taizhou jumblebomb as examples, *Art Education*, (10).

Yue, P. (2022). Analysis on the "Ecological Chain" Mode of Opera Performance Teaching, *Chinese Peking Opera*, (02.)

Zhang, Y. (2021). Research on the all-media communication strategy of local traditional opera Taking Taizhou Luantan as an example, *Chinese Journal of Multimedia and Network Teaching (first ten days)*, (06).

Zhao, Y. (2014). Taizhou Research on Luantan's Realistic Dilemma and Protection Strategies, *Drama House*, (09).

Zhou, G. (1998). Difficulties in Chinese Opera Teaching and Their Solutions. *Journal of South China Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, (01).

Zhou, X. (1994). On the teaching method of demonstration in the teaching of opera performance. *Art Education*, (03).

Zhou, Y. (2018). The dilemma and breakthrough of opera in primary and secondary school classrooms, *Modern Primary and Secondary Education*, 34(10), 39-42.

Zhu, J. (2019). *A study on music teachers' teaching ability in opera in three general high schools in Guilin*, Guangxi Normal University.