



Ivy Fong Suet-ying, chairwoman of Sing Fai Cantonese Opera Troupe, directs some of the group's younger performers at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Photo: Will Clem

## Singing the praises of a Chinese tradition

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**Will Clem**

A Hong Kong Institute of Education academic has called for Cantonese opera to be taught in primary and secondary schools to prevent the art form dying out.

"If we cannot promote Cantonese opera in Hong Kong, the place where Cantonese is spoken, then it has no future," said Leung Bo-wah, assistant professor of music in the institute's

Department of Creative Arts and Physical Education.

Dr Leung said there was room to incorporate Cantonese opera in the new music curriculum but there was little awareness among teachers.

"Teachers have a duty to promote this to students as it is part of our cultural heritage," Dr Leung said. "But most lack confidence in their own ability to teach it and their students' ability to learn."

His comments follow calls last week from Cantonese opera professionals for a development council to be established to ensure the art form's survival.

Dr Leung was speaking at a rehearsal by young Cantonese opera performers at the institute on Sunday, ahead of a three-day Lunar New Year carnival next weekend.

"I invited this troupe here to demonstrate to our trainee teachers just

what young performers can achieve," he said. "Some of these children sound as good as adults."

Ivy Fong Suet-ying, chairwoman of Sing Fai Cantonese Opera Troupe, said opera gave students a stronger sense of their cultural identity.

"They will feel proud of the fact they are Chinese," she said.

"It is easier to get primary school students interested. Young children do not think of things as being old-

fashioned because everything is new to them," she said. "However, some of our secondary students have become real opera buffs. Performing has boosted their self-confidence enormously."

Eight-year-old Hung Tsz-ching said she had been entranced with the opera since her mother first brought her to a performance four years ago.

"The costumes and makeup are so beautiful," she said.