

# REVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATUS AND DIGITAL PRACTICES OF GUANGZHOU CENTENNIAL MUSICIAN THEMATIC ARCHIVES\*

Yuan Yuan<sup>1</sup> and Varangkana Niyomrit<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup>Academy of Arts and Philosophy, Shinawatra University, Thailand

Corresponding Author's Email: varangkana.n@siu.ac.th

Received 10 December 2025; Revised 21 December 2025; Accepted 23 December 2025

## Abstract

Visual narrative research has reshaped contemporary thinking on archival concepts and construction models, creating new opportunities for the digital practice of thematic art archives. This paper reviews the current status of artistic archival resources related to Guangzhou musicians from 1919 to 2019, alongside relevant developments in music data storage and thematic database building. Under the frameworks of information visualization, multi-dimensional visual narrative, and interactive environments, it outlines practical pathways, methodological considerations, and transformation mechanisms for developing musician-focused digital thematic archives. The paper further proposes a practice-oriented model centered on knowledge mapping, social memory, and resource management to support the integration, presentation, and social dissemination of Guangzhou's centennial musical culture. As a narrative and

Citation:



\* Yuan Yuan and Varangkana Niyomrit. (2026). Review Of The Current Status And Digital Practices Of Guangzhou Centennial Musician Thematic Archives.

Modern Academic Development and Promotion Journal, 4(1), 523-535.;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.>

<https://so12.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/MADPIADP/>

conceptual review, the study emphasizes integrative synthesis and applied modeling rather than empirical system evaluation.

**Keywords:** Cantonese/Guangzhou music, Centennial musicians, Thematic art archives, Digital archives, Visual narrative, Information visualization

## Introduction

Over the past decade, the digital turn in archives and cultural heritage has accelerated a shift from preservation-oriented repositories to user-oriented knowledge environments. Within this transition, visualization and narrative frameworks have increasingly been used to reorganize complex cultural materials into accessible, interpretable, and socially shareable forms. Narrative visualization research suggests that story-structured information design can help audiences navigate large historical datasets by integrating evidence, sequence, and interactivity, thereby strengthening comprehension and cultural engagement beyond conventional catalog-based access (Segel & Heer, 2010). For music-related holdings in particular, the value of digitization also depends on long-term strategies for sound preservation, format migration, and sustainable access (Bamberger & Brylawski, 2010).

Guangzhou's musicians across 1919–2019 embody a distinctive century-long trajectory of Lingnan modern music, shaped by local traditions, institutional development, media transformation, and cross-regional circulation. Existing scholarship and source-oriented compilations on Cantonese music and its key figures—especially studies of translocal flows between Guangzhou and Shanghai and historical recordings—have demonstrated the richness of this cultural network but also implied a persistent problem of dispersed evidence across texts, scores, recordings, press materials, and personal archives (Cheng, 2007; Ruan, 2008). These conditions make Guangzhou's centennial musician legacy an ideal domain for thematic archival integration that can link people, works, events,

places, and media formats within a coherent cultural memory structure (Zheng, 2009).

Against this backdrop, this paper reviews the current status and digital practices of Guangzhou centennial musician thematic archives and considers how art-themed archival principles may be combined with digital technology and visual communication to enhance public access and scholarly use. By aligning archival organization with “time, space, and emotion” as narrative coordinates, the review outlines a practice-oriented pathway for transforming scattered historical records into structured, experience-oriented digital archives. It further proposes a conceptual model centered on knowledge mapping, social memory, and resource management, aiming to support both systematic research and wider cultural dissemination of Guangzhou’s musical heritage over the past century. Beyond routine digitization and metadata aggregation, the proposed pathway highlights narrative/semantic linking and experience-oriented access as core added value for musician-themed thematic archives. Methodologically, the paper adopts a narrative and conceptual review stance, synthesizing representative literature, practices, and design logics rather than reporting user studies or implementation evaluation.

## Body of Knowledge

This section synthesizes historical, conceptual, and technical strands to frame a practice-oriented review of Guangzhou centennial musician thematic archives.

### 1. Three nodes, connecting the music of Guangzhou for a century

In 1919, a year marked by cultural revival, the slogan of the May Fourth Movement echoed across the emerging path of new cultural development. In this year, Xiao Youmei obtained a doctoral degree from the Leipzig National

Conservatory of Music in Germany and founded the Music Research Association as well as the Music Department of the National Women's University at Peking University, opening a new chapter in Chinese music education. In the same period, Qiu Hetou compiled his first Guangdong music collection, *Essential Reading of Chord Songs*, and later completed *New Compilation of Qinxue*, which became an essential reference for music practitioners. Yan Laolie, a veteran of Cantonese music, established the "Chinese Music Concert" at No. 6 North Sichuan Road in Shanghai. Together with Lv Wencheng, Gan Shiyu, and others, he created and adapted nearly a hundred Cantonese pieces such as *Step by Step High*, *Rain Beats Bana*, and *Fishing Song Evening Singing*. Meanwhile, He Liutang's compositions (e.g., *Dragon Racing for Brocade* and *Seven Stars Accompanying the Moon*) flourished in Guangdong music creation. Viewed from a translocal perspective, these developments also foreshadowed the later circulation and re-contextualization of Guangdong music within Shanghai's urban musical networks (Cheng, 2007; Huang, 2007).

In 1949, a year remembered for the founding of the People's Republic of China, the institutional environment surrounding regional music traditions expanded and reorganized. Lv Wencheng—renowned for transforming the erhu into the gaohu—recorded *Cantonese Era Song* with lyrics by Zhu Dinghe at Harmony Records, consolidating his influence on modern Cantonese music. His most famous works include *Happy Companion* and *Fishing Song Evening Singing*. In the same year, the Nanfeng Yue Music Society in Tianjin broadcast Guangdong music via radio, while Zou Ke printed and edited the *Guangdong Opera Collection* for the "Gongfan Concert," published by the People's Music Publishing House. Many Guangdong music clubs jointly initiated the "Nanlian Concert" with Xu Ren, Zhao Jinzhu, and others, transforming pieces such as *Sai Long Shoujin* and *Embroidered Red Shoes* into ethnic orchestral performances. Meanwhile, Huang Jinpei's contribution to the *Encyclopedia of China* (Music and Dance) supported the academic consensus that "Guangdong music" had formed

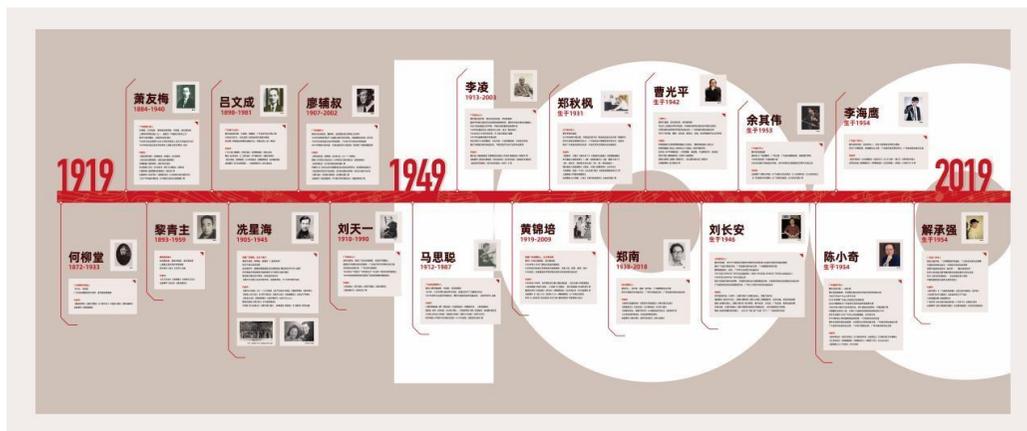
an independent instrumental genre with clearer scholarly boundaries. Biographical and repertory-based materials on leading figures such as Lv Wencheng provide further evidence for the centrality of individual musicians in shaping this mid-century canon (Ye & Lin, 2006).

The year 2019 reflected renewed determination and confidence in linking Chinese practice with Chinese theory, while rooting creation in public cultural life. Conductor Ye Yongshi led the 27th Guangzhou New Year Concert at the Xinghai Concert Hall, while a concert commemorating the 80th anniversary of Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata* drew large-scale online attention, indicating the increasing integration of live performance, digital broadcasting, and public memory. In the same year, the State Council released the development outline for the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area, and Liu Chang'an created *I Love the Great Pearl River, I Love Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao* to contribute new musical expressions to regional cultural imaginations. Zheng Qiufeng was awarded the title of “Lifelong Achievement Music Artist” by national arts organizations, and his song *I Love You, China* resonated across commemorative events. These contemporary signals suggest that a thematic archive of Guangzhou musicians must not only preserve historical records but also accommodate the expanding media ecology of performance documentation and social dissemination.

## **2. Three concepts, summarizing the basis for the construction of archives**

The various monographs, audio-visual works, instrument scores, and other artistic achievements left by Guangzhou musicians over the past century (Figure 1) have laid a solid foundation for research and cultural development in the region. Art may be understood as the act of creating beauty and the essence of an artist's creative pursuit. Musicians are like a river; the production of melodies

and notes resembles a current pressing against a dam. The inherent tension in this creative process continually pushes the boundaries of both form and meaning, enabling music to convey the deeper essence of artistic life.



**Figure 1** Design Scheme for Visualization Display of Guangzhou Centennial Music Information (Source: Constructed by the author)

This review aims to build digital archives for musicians in Guangzhou by combining thematic archival approaches with digital technology and visual design, thereby enhancing users' reading and exploration experiences. It also seeks to provide design, construction, and application services that highlight the cultural symbols of the Lingnan region. The research thus defines, traces, and summarizes three key concepts: "art-themed archives," "digital archives," and "archival visual narrative."

Firstly, regarding the definition of "art-themed archives," China's archival terminology emphasizes that archives are valuable records formed by state institutions, social organizations, or individuals, whose management relies on provenance, original order, and authenticity as the basis for constructing historical memory. For social practices with multiple participants and complex information structures, thematic archives can better support deep information development

and showcase the service advantages of digital resources. Art archives typically appear in the form of thematic archives, referring to valuable historical records—texts, charts, audio-visual materials, and physical objects—generated through artistic creation, performance, education, research, cultural exchange, and social-cultural activities. The inclusion of “Art Archives” in the *National Basic Professional Archives Catalogue (First Batch)* in 2011 also clarified its institutional significance in China’s cultural development. However, specialized archives focusing on Guangzhou’s music culture remain limited, while case data integration, metadata aggregation, and social application are still relatively scattered. This study therefore emphasizes the multi-form integration of Guangzhou musicians’ centennial archival metadata and the construction of a structured thematic system that can support later semantic linking and knowledge-based services.

Secondly, with the development of cultural ecology and digital media technologies, the public’s communication practices and cognitive expectations regarding music culture have expanded. Social users now increasingly expect networked access, resource sharing, service proliferation, and timely delivery of cultural resources. Digital archives offer functions of recording, preservation, viewing, retrieval, and sharing, enabling traditional text-based archives to evolve toward intelligent services. In this study, digital technologies such as retrieval and summarization, field interviews, audio-visual storage, AI-assisted reading, and interactive experience are incorporated to construct a multidimensional Guangzhou music archive structure ordered by “time, space, and emotion.” This approach responds to recurrent challenges in maintaining sustainable access to recorded sound, while also improving the presentation of dynamic audio-visual resources within thematic art archives (Bamberger & Brylawski, 2010). At the interface and collection level, visualization-oriented strategies for digital

collections further justify the importance of user-centered representation and exploratory reading pathways in such projects (Glowacka-Musial, 2020).

Thirdly, the concept of “archival visual narrative” serves as the methodological bridge connecting archival authenticity with public interpretability. Narratology studies how stories are constructed and communicated; with the expansion of narrative media, narrative structures have evolved from linear time-based sequences to multidimensional configurations involving language, text, image, and interactive formats. As true records of social activities and carriers of group memory, digital thematic archives possess the conditions for multi-dimensional visual narrative. In practice, they can activate historical scenes, character spirits, and musical contexts through the integration of visual narrative theory and digital tools, thereby supporting identity, empathy, and cultural recognition. Recent research on narrative visualization and interactive spatial storytelling further reinforces the feasibility of this shift from catalog logic to narrative logic in complex cultural datasets (Segel & Heer, 2010; Thöny et al., 2018).

### **3. Three stages of accumulation and inheritance of music art**

This section analyzes the evolution of digital music archives under conditions of digital-intelligence empowerment, media expansion, and changing communication environments, outlining three stages of accumulation and inheritance. Rather than treating these stages as purely technological shifts, this review emphasizes their implications for how music heritage is collected, stabilized, and re-activated in contemporary archival systems.

The first stage is the “materialization collection” phase based on early recording technologies. The initial attempts to record sound in the nineteenth century, followed by the rapid development of phonographic and audiovisual tools, expanded the material foundations for preserving music as cultural evidence. During this period, field recordings and cross-cultural research practices also reshaped the selection of collection tools and the choice of storage carriers

for music heritage. The introduction of recording technologies to China in the early twentieth century, together with the institutional preservation and later scholarly recognition of early wax-cylinder and record collections, gradually enriched the historical archive of sound-based cultural dissemination and prepared the ground for subsequent digitization.

The second stage centers on the early “digital transformation” of collected data. The digitization of early recordings and the establishment of institutional platforms enabled endangered sound materials to be preserved in more stable formats and accessed through public databases. This stage also signaled a shift from physical preservation to expanded public visibility, allowing historical recordings to enter broader scholarly and cultural circuits. At the global level, the UNESCO *Memory of the World* framework strengthened the recognition of major recorded-sound collections as part of shared human heritage, providing an important reference context for evaluating the cultural value and public responsibility of music archives.

The third stage involves “database integration,” gradually formed through the mutual reinforcement of Internet infrastructures and database technologies. The emergence of large-scale platforms and specialized music resource libraries in China has enriched both cataloging standards and multi-level classification logic, offering valuable reference experience for metadata normalization and cross-resource discovery. Building on these developments, knowledge-graph-enhanced approaches are increasingly viewed as effective means for linking people, works, places, instruments, genres, and historical periods, thus improving both research efficiency and narrative accessibility (Dou et al., 2018; Fan & Wang, 2022; Huang et al., 2023). For Guangzhou centennial musician thematic archives, this trend provides a practical rationale for moving from dispersed multimodal

records toward structured data ecosystems that support semantic association, topic-based navigation, and experience-oriented cultural interpretation.

#### **4. Three-dimensional narrative, musicians' new Cantonese music voice**

This study first creates narrative activities linking original archives, archive creators, archive service recipients, and related subjects and objects based on application needs. It integrates the visual narrative of digital archives through the dimensions of “time,” “space,” and “emotion” to achieve interactive experiences with users. Based on the completed resource framework, the archive data layer is divided into five partition architectures: “Centennial History,” “Music Memories of Guangzhou,” “Yue Yin Qin Yun,” “Music Education Base,” and “Cultural and Creative Music.” Through static text curation, data-visualization construction, and interactive information integration, musician archive resources can be summarized and reorganized to form narrative associations.

In the practice of visual narrative design, the multi-dimensional reconstruction of narrative subjects, event development, and spatial scenes is carried out according to the characteristics of musicians and musical works, thereby enhancing users' sensory and interpretive experiences. At the interface level, recent research on advanced interactive digital storytelling in heritage applications supports the feasibility of combining archival evidence with experience-oriented narrative design (Rizvić et al., 2024). Meanwhile, knowledge-graph visualization studies suggest that well-designed semantic interfaces can help users navigate distributed cultural resources via relational paths rather than isolated items, which aligns with this study's intent to integrate Guangzhou musicians' data into coherent story structures (Khoo et al., 2024; Hyvönen, 2022). In combination with the visual identification system of the digital archives, the WeChat official account interaction system, and the cultural and creative product experience system, the visual order of the digital archives is thus established,

enabling social application services that highlight Guangzhou music stories and new-era musical voices. This dissemination-oriented layer also indicates engagement channels beyond institutional access portals, supporting broader audience reach and public participation in music heritage interpretation.

## Conclusions

This paper reviews the construction of a digital archive for Guangzhou musicians and integrates perspectives from archival studies, design studies, and visual communication to organize and interpret relevant music literature, artistic histories, and representative works. By moving from non-existent to existent and from scattered to integrated, the proposed approach clarifies how thematic art archives may be transformed into structured, experience-oriented digital resources, and how “time, space, and emotion” can function as a feasible narrative order for organizing multi-format musical heritage.

The spirit of appreciating origins, reflecting on the past, and seeking renewal is embedded in the century-long musical practices of representative figures such as He Liutang, Li Qingzhu, Lv Wencheng, Li Ling, Xian Xinghai, Liao Fushu, Ma Sicong, Zheng Qiufeng, Liu Chang’an, and Chen Xiaoqi. It is precisely through their continuous cultural negotiation and artistic innovation that Guangzhou’s musical legacy has formed a distinctive historical style, providing rich social memory resources and a firm foundation for the further refinement of centennial musician thematic archives in the digital era. As a narrative review, this paper provides a conceptual and practice-oriented reference rather than an empirical evaluation.

## References

- Bamberger, R., & Brylawski, S. (2010). *The state of recorded sound preservation in the United States: A national legacy at risk in the digital age*. Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).
- Cheng, M. B. (2007). The trans-locality of local cultures in modern China: Cantonese opera, Yue music, and Cantonese songs in 1920s–1930s Shanghai. *Modern Chinese History Studies*, (2), 1–17.
- Dou, J., Qin, J., Jin, Z., & Li, Z. (2018). Knowledge graph based on domain ontology and natural language processing technology for Chinese intangible cultural heritage. *Journal of Visual Languages & Computing*, 48, 19–28.
- Fan, T., & Wang, H. (2022). Research of Chinese intangible cultural heritage knowledge graph construction and attribute value extraction with graph attention network. *Information Processing & Management*, 59(6), 102753.
- Glowacka-Musial, M. (2020). Visualization and digital collections. *Library Technology Reports*, 56(5), 1–38.
- Huang, Y. Y., Wang, S., & Li, T. (2023). Using knowledge graphs and deep learning algorithms to enhance digital cultural heritage management. *npj Heritage Science*, 9, 11–22.
- Huang, T. Y. (2007). New sounds of Guangdong in Republican Shanghai: Exchanges between Guangdong musicians and Jiangnan musicians. *Taiwan Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 3(1), 25–47.
- Hyvönen, E. (2022). Digital humanities on the Semantic Web: Sampo model and portal series. *Semantic Web*, 13(2), 233–249.
- Khoo, C. S. G., Tan, E. A. L., Ng, S.-G., Chan, C.-F., Stanley-Baker, M., & Cheng, W.-N. (2024). Knowledge graph visualization interface for digital heritage collections: Design issues and recommendations. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 43(1), 1–18.

- Rizvić, S., Boskovic, D., & Mijatovic, B. (2024). Advanced interactive digital storytelling in digital heritage applications. *Digital Applications in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage*, 33, e00334.
- Ruan, H. (2008). *Guoyue and the city: Jiangnan silk-and-bamboo music and Cantonese music in Shanghai*. Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Press.
- Segel, E., & Heer, J. (2010). Narrative visualization: Telling stories with data. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, 16(6), 1139–1148.
- Thöny, M., Schnürer, R., Sieber, R., & Hurni, L. (2018). Storytelling in interactive 3D geographic visualization systems. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, 7(8), 309.
- Ye, L. Y., & Lin, Y. (2006). Short biography of Lv Wencheng. In *Collection of Guangdong music by Lv Wencheng*. Guangzhou: Guangzhou Press.
- Zheng, W. T. (Ed.). (2009). *Legacy of Cantonese music: A collection of historical recordings and materials*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.