

Retirees enjoy KTV as young play elsewhere

Peng Honghua, 76, felt like a star after she finished singing a piece of Yueju Opera, a form native to Guangdong province, and heard the applause of her audience. She was partying with friends at a karaoke bar in Guangzhou.

Every Friday afternoon, she and her friends and neighbors meet for karaoke, or KTV, near her home, all of them retirees.

"I would feel uncomfortable if I couldn't sing songs with them every week," she said.

More elderly people like Peng now visit KTV or music cafes regularly, to relax and meet friends. Previously viewed as entertainment for younger age groups, the venues are finding steady customers in the gray-haired crowd.

An employee at a KTV venue in Guangzhou's Tianhe district, who only gave her surname, Li, said senior citizens have become the primary customers at her business, particularly in the daytime.

"Senior citizens usually represent about 80 percent of the KTV visitors from 10 am to 5 pm on weekdays," she said.

Many KTV operators in the city are offering elderly customers discounts in the morning and afternoon. A KTV bar manager in Guangzhou's Liwan district, who insisted on anonymity, said a senior spends an average of only about 50 yuan (\$8) to sing for an entire morning or afternoon at the venue on weekdays. "And we offer a free buffet lunch," he added.

Businesses are reaching out to seniors because they are losing younger patrons. The manager in Liwan said the pace of business across the city has slowed since the central and local governments banned using public funds to visit luxury entertainment venues in 2012.

And those who once were willing to spend their own money at a KTV venue are gradually losing interest. "People now have more choices to entertain themselves than before," the manager said.

A businesswoman surnamed Chen who sold her KTV business in September after eight years' operation in Nanping, Fujian province, said the business is becoming difficult.

"The minimum cost for a room a night is 1,000 yuan including beer and snacks. In earlier times, all the rooms were full at night. But not anymore," she said. "Now, only those targeting low-end customers—at usually 200 to 500 yuan a night, and less than 200 yuan in the daytime—are still operating in my city."

The gray-haired singing enthusiasts now need only pay a fraction of the high

price charged before to enjoy high-quality karaoke systems in a well-decorated room.

Chen Zhanwen, 61, a former business executive in Guangzhou who retired last year, said he and his wife meet their retired friends at KTV often.

“In addition to enjoying singing, I exchange views on domestic and international issues with friends and talk about life in retirement,” he said.