

Research on Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage between Professional and Non-Professional Groups: A Case Study of China's Kunqu Opera

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Abstract

Non-professional groups, consisting of members gathering together out of the same hobby, have long been deemed as auxiliary power in the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Being widely considered as less important than professional groups, non-professional ones seem to mostly function like governments, IGOs, NGOs, among other things, to indirectly help professionals inherit ICH almost by practicing this heritage as a way of dissemination to build a better social environment friendly towards ICH to live well. However, their role in the direct and faithful inheritance of ICH can be underestimated, or even ignored. In this paper, China's Kunqu Opera is taken as an example, one professional group (Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe) and one non-professional group (Shanghai Kunqu Study Society) are chosen to do some comparative analyses in pronunciation, melody, literary form of lyrics, and performing scenes of this art. It is concluded that even though not living off this art, non-professional groups could inherit some traditional factors of Kunqu Opera to a larger degree than professional ones, especially in pronunciation and melody. And one major reason can be summarized that non-professional groups, who cherish the art's tradition heavily, don't need to cater to the mass-market and most modern audience, who are highly influenced by modernization and globalization so that they can preserve these traditional factors carefully by studying, practicing as well as imparting them to other amateurs seriously. Thus, paying more attention to their role in the inheritance of ICH is not only sensible but also essential.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, inheritance, non-professional groups, Kunqu Opera

1. Introduction

Especially for highly complicated performing arts, even though professional groups are major intangible cultural heritage (ICH) bearers, the role of non-professional groups in the inheritance of living heritages shouldn't be overlooked. Nevertheless, they haven't attracted enough attention. As a traditional performing art with a history of more than 400 years, China's Kunqu Opera is a kind of comprehensive art with large complexity, which was proclaimed as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 by UNESCO. In order to safeguard this ancient living heritage nationwide, China's government launched the National Operational Plan for the Program of Rescuing, Protecting and Supporting Kunqu Opera (国家昆曲艺术抢救、保护和扶持工程实施方案) in 2005, which is also the first national protection policy for this art as the beginning of a string of related ones.

However, after taking an overall view of the entire text of this policy, non-professional-groups-related words couldn't be found, the same as following policies about this art. According to a report conducted in 2016 about Kunqu Opera societies, which are almost run and made up of amateurs who practice this art as interest, in Suzhou City and Beijing City, except societies on campus, most ones have no fixed venues or sufficient funds. What's more, contrary to professional groups' dominance in media coverage, non-professional ones fail to receive adequate media resources (Liu, Li, & Shang, 2017). Nevertheless, in spite of these disadvantages, Kunqu Opera societies cherish and inherit some ancient traditions of this art largely, and even larger than professional groups.

In this research, one professional group (Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe 上海昆剧团) and one non-professional

group (Shanghai Kunqu Study Society 上海昆曲研习社)'s inheritance of Kunqu Opera will be compared in pronunciation, melody (kunqiang 昆腔), literary form of lyrics (qupai style 曲牌体) and performing scenes of this art. Different from one former research aiming to figure out Kunqu Opera's core factors by comparing two styles of this art developing in divergent social environments, the Chinese mainland and Taiwan (Zhao & Uekita, 2020), this article chooses two groups of dissimilar professional levels in the same city. In other words, the two groups here are in the same social environment, facing the same social changes.

Additionally, as non-professional groups, which are singing-centered, seldom perform this art on stage and relevant materials are limited, dance will not be analyzed in this paper. Comparison analyses mainly focus on the singing of these two kinds of groups. Several songs from representative group members will be put under observation.

Discussions about the inheritance of Kunqu Opera in these two groups will be conducted in four factors: pronunciation, especially the obedience to the original pronunciation system, a mix of Suzhou dialect and official language with Zhongzhou rhymes (苏州官话中州韵); melody (kunqiang 昆腔), which is believed to have some traditional rules within it; literary form of lyrics (qupai style 曲牌体), whose rules have been summarized in some reference books and performing scenes of this art.

2. Literature Review

The role of non-professional groups in the inheritance and protection of ICH hasn't been discussed sufficiently in previous researches. These groups are often deemed as less important supporting characters for ICH.

Yuan (2017) summarized the interference of government, academia, mass media, and other civic organizations in the protection of ICH and claimed that formal ICH bearers are the very main part of protecting practices. Meanwhile, as supporters, other participants' involvement is indispensable in concrete practices, since bearers are not as vigorous as before in times of globalization nowadays. Zhu (2007) investigated the present conditions of art education in several of China's colleges and universities, then pointed out that setting up ICH studying groups on campus is advantageous to safeguarding ICH, especially beneficial to the process of integrating traditional ICH into modern society. Zhang (2007) emphasized the importance of cultural space for the protection of ICH, claimed that ICH bearers are the key part of protecting practices but not the whole, bearers have to cooperate with governmental, commercial, and civil organizations to realize effective protection.

Sun (2012) conducted a survey in Suzhou City on varying kinds of Kunqu Opera's protection organizations, including official and civil ones, and concluded that since each organization has its own merits and demerits, they should strengthen mutual collaboration in order to promote the safeguarding of this art. In Sun's study, non-professional groups are a major means to help disseminate this heritage. Tang (2015) completed a general investigation of Kunqu Opera societies around the Chinese mainland currently and declared that since these societies are rich in flexibility, they are effectively helping this art to reach every part and every generation of the country. Wang (2013) reviewed the development of Kunqu Opera from 1912 to 1949 in Tianjin City, where even though professional groups didn't exist Kunqu-Opera-related activities were still frequently held, then indicated that civil societies played a vital role in the friendly-environment-building process.

Former researchers almost define the function of ICH non-professional groups as assistance for professional ones. However, this image could be enriched through deeper study about them, which will be discussed in this article.

3. Method

3.1 Literature Study

A literature study was conducted from books, journals, video, and audio materials to get basic information about the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, mainly aiming to figure out their similarities and differences in pronunciation, melody, literary form of lyrics, and performing scenes of this opera.

What's more, unlike the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, which has its own formal textbooks like *Sulu Music Scripts* (粟庐曲谱), *Zhenfei Music Scripts* (振飞曲谱), *300 Selected Scenes of Kunqu Opera* (昆曲精编教材 300种) and so on, the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society has no commonly used music scripts as members learned this art from respective masters and often adjust their way of singing according to new understandings about Kunqu Opera. Therefore, records, which can be found in the book *Collection of China's Opera Music: Jiangsu Province* (中国戏曲音乐集成 江苏卷), of a singing version in 1979 from the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society are selected to do the comparison analyses about melody and literary form of lyrics. And the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe's version is from its textbook: *Zhenfei Music Scripts* (振飞曲谱), which was first published in 1982.

3.2 Online Interview

As the continuing of the Covid-19 pandemic till now, fieldwork has become hard to conduct. Instead, online interviews were held in order to accomplish this research.

Members of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society have been interviewed several times through WeChat and Weibo since April this year for the purpose of making clear their views and practices about the inheritance of Kunqu Opera. What's more, professionals affiliated to Kunqu Opera Museum of China (中国昆曲博物馆) and other related researchers were also interviewed through WeChat from January this year to acquire better comprehension about Kunqu Opera's pronunciation, melody, the literary form of lyrics, and performing scenes.

3.3 Data Analysis

In order to accurately judge degrees of inherited traditions about pronunciation and melody in these two groups, factor-based quantitative comparison analysis (Zhao & Uekita, 2020) will be applied in this article, if one group inherits a higher proportion of tradition, this group can be interpreted as more traditional. Two widely used reference books of pronunciation, *Yun Xue Li Zhu* (韵学骊珠) and *Qu Yun Yi Tong* (曲韵易通) will be consulted to make the relevant judgment. As for the literary form of lyrics and performing scenes, qualitative analysis will be employed mainly.

4. Comparison of Four Factors between Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Shanghai Kunqu Study Society

4.1 Pronunciation

Although various dialects are approved in the singing of Kunqu Opera as a result of its wide-spreading from Suzhou area to other parts of China during its long history, its original pronunciation system, a mix of Suzhou dialect and official language with Zhongzhou rhymes (苏州官话中州韵), is still studied and insisted on by some Kunqu Opera practitioners. One major reference book about the ancient phonetic system is *Yun Xue Li Zhu* (韵学骊珠), which was written in Qing dynasty (1644-1912) by Suzhou local Shen Chenglin (沈乘麐). What's more, in order to popularize the ancient pronunciation system, a Kunqu Opera researcher, Xiang Yuancun (项远村), wrote a popular version of the former book for modern people to consult, which is called *Qu Yun Yi Tong* (曲韵易通) and was first published in 1963. In this research, these two books will be used to judge which group's pronunciation is closer to the original one.

Even though non-professional groups' information is limited, as senior members of the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society often teach this art at Shanghai's universities, and members from Kunqu study societies on campus are keen to record their teachers' singing as well as make it open to the public, some relevant materials are accessible. In this article, an album, consisting of four songs made by members of Shanghai's Fudan University Kunqu Study Society recording the singing of their teacher Liu Xuntu (柳萱图), a late senior member of the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, will be applied to do the comparison analyses. In this album, there are 8 Chinese characters in three songs that are obviously pronounced different from professional artists in the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe.

Table 1. Eight differently pronounced Chinese characters between Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Shanghai Kunqu Study Society in three songs and their observance of original sounds

Chinese Characters	Source (Song)	Original Sounds	Version 1	Version 2
茶	Yi Jiang Feng (一江风)	/ts ^h a/	/tʂ ^h a/	/ts ^h a/
蓝	Yi Jiang Feng (一江风)	/lam/	/lan/	/lam/
顿	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/tuɔŋ/	/tuən/	/tuɔŋ/
阱	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/ts ^h ɪŋ/	/tɕɪŋ/	/ts ^h ɪŋ/
全	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/ts ^h yan/	/tɕ ^h qœn/	/ts ^h yan/
堪	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/k ^h am/	/k ^h an/	/k ^h am/
暗	Yan Zi Le (颜子乐)	/am/	/an/	/am/
南	Yan Zi Le (颜子乐)	/nam/	/nan/	/nam/
Observance			0%	100%

Note. Version 1 is from the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Version 2 is from the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society. Original Sounds of the eight Chinese characters are collated according to *Yun Xue Li Zhu* (韵学骊珠) and *Qu Yun Yi Tong* (曲韵易通). "Observance" means the degree of similarity between singers' pronunciation of the eight Chinese characters and the original sounds. Observance = the number of Chinese characters pronounced as original sounds / Eight. The Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe's singing of the song *Yi Jiang Feng* (一江风)

from the scene *Open the Envelope* (拆书), a part of the play *The Story of the Western Chamber* (西楼记), and the song *Tai Shi Yin* (太师引) from the scene *Pretend to Be Jealous* (乔醋), a part of the play *The Story of the Golden Bird* (金雀记), and the song *Yan Zi Le* (颜子乐) from the scene *Picking Up the Painting* (拾画), a part of the play *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) as well as the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society's member, Liu Xuntu (柳萱图)'s album can be separately found on

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Zx411C7fG/?spm_id_from=333.788.b_7265636f5f6c697374.9,

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1aa4y1e7jK/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.4,

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV19s411p7nB?from=search&seid=5622323048614898244>

and <https://www.ximalaya.com/xiqu/7247667/>.

As Table 1 shows, in the non-professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society's version, the eight Chinese characters are all pronounced as original sounds. However, in the professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe's version, every character is pronounced in another way.

Actually, professional groups' pronunciation has been criticized for adjusting to modern Mandarin nowadays for a long time. Partly because of the Chinese mainland's dramatic social change, especially the Cultural Revolution which spanned 10 years from 1966 to 1976, the number of Kunqu Opera's enthusiasts dived to an extremely low level. The former leader and a major artist of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, Cai Zhengren (蔡正仁) once quoted a figure in his article that according to incomplete statistics there were less than 300 enthusiasts of Kunqu Opera in Shanghai city in the 1980s (Cai, 1992), which could only fill a small drama theater. In contrast to the decreasing number, Shanghai's population was increasing continuously and reached 11,859,748 in 1982 based on a report of China's sixth national population census (National Bureau of Statistics, 1982). In other words, approximately only one out of 40,000 citizens were Kunqu Opera enthusiasts in Shanghai at that time. And the scene of desolation was highly perceivable in other cities of China as well. Cai also depicted his experience of performing in Dalian city in 1990, part of the audience began to leave the theater when they knew the next program was Kunqu Opera, and the bulk of them already left when Cai and his partners finished their performance.

Therefore, it is understandable that artists may think they have to cater to the modern audience's taste and habits for the survival of this art and themselves. As a result, Kunqu Opera's pronunciation system has been changed, among other things. Here, the eight Chinese characters' pronunciation of artists from the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe will be compared with sounds of modern Mandarin to verify the hypothesis.

Table 2. Comparison of the pronunciation of eight Chinese Characters between Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Modern Mandarin

Chinese Characters	Source (Song)	Modern Mandarin	Version 1
茶	Yi Jiang Feng (一江风)	/tʂʰa/	/tʂʰa/
蓝	Yi Jiang Feng (一江风)	/lan/	/lan/
顿	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/tuən/	/tuən/
阱	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/teɪŋ/	/teɪŋ/
全	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/teʰtɕeŋ/	/teʰtɕeŋ/
堪	Tai Shi Yin (太师引)	/kʰan/	/kʰan/
暗	Yan Zi Le (颜子乐)	/an/	/an/
南	Yan Zi Le (颜子乐)	/nan/	/nan/
Similarity			100%

Note. Version 1 is from the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe. "Similarity" means the degree of similarity between singers' pronunciation of the eight Chinese characters and modern Mandarin sounds. Similarity = the number of Chinese characters pronounced as modern Mandarin sounds / Eight.

As Table 2 shows, about the eight Chinese characters, artists from the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe choose the pronunciation of modern Mandarin, rather than the traditional phonetic system, in their singing of the traditional art Kunqu Opera, which is hard to be viewed as an optimistic phenomenon for the safeguarding of this ancient intangible heritage.

4.2 Melody (Kunqiang)

4.2.1 Basic Rules about Melody in Kunqu Opera

As a key factor that helps to shape Kunqu Opera, the melody of this art has its characteristics. In this research,

comparative analyses of this factor between the two groups will be focused on musical notes, or to be exact, musical pitches changing.

Unlike modern Mandarin which has four tones, ancient Chinese, not later than the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), had eight tones particularly in southern China: Yin Ping (阴平), Yang Ping (阳平), Yin Shang (阴上), Yang Shang (阳上), Yin Qu (阴去), Yang Qu (阳去), Yin Ru (阴入) and Yang Ru (阳入). And musician Wei Liangfu (魏良辅 1489-1586), who was born in Ming dynasty and was considered as the father of Kunqu Opera, once pointed out in his article *Nan Ci Yin Zheng* (南词引正) that melody should change in accordance with lyrics' tones, which means the trends of musical pitches changing should be in line with the trends of lyrics' tonal values' changing (Luo, 2001).

Table 3. Trends of tonal values' changing of Chinese characters in Kunqu Opera

Tones	Yin Ping (阴平)	Yang Ping (阳平)	Yin Shang (阴上) Yang Shang (阳上)	Yin Qu (阴去) Yang Qu (阳去)
Trends of Tonal Values' Changing	→	↗	↘↗	↗↘

Note. This table is summarized from the relevant explanation of Xie (2019). Since characters of Yin Ru (阴入) and Yang Ru (阳入) are pronounced extremely shortly, the trends of their tonal values' changing are usually invisible.

Figure 1



Figure 1. An example of melody which can express the tone of Yang Ping (阳平) in Kunqu Opera

Figure 2



Figure 2. An example of melody which can express the tone of Yin Shang (阴上) and Yang Shang (阳上) in Kunqu Opera

Figure 3



Figure 3. An example of melody which can express the tone of Yin Qu (阴去) and Yang Qu (阳去) in Kunqu Opera.

As illustrated in table 3, except Yin Ru (阴入) and Yang Ru (阳入), every tone has its own trends of tonal values' changing. And the trends of musical pitch's changing should observe tones' changing trends. For example, if a Chinese character belongs to Yin Shang (阴上) tone, when artists sing this character in Kunqu Opera, the corresponding musical pitch should also change like “↘↗”, just as Figure 2 shows. Sometimes one character's melody is too long and fluctuates heavily, if the front part of the melody is consistent with this character's tone, the melody can also be considered as complying with related rules of kunqiang, too. And in some other cases, one character's melody is too short to show its tone, if the next character's first note is helpful to show the tone, it's also acceptable. As for Yin Ru (阴入) and Yang Ru (阳入), they are pronounced extremely shortly. In order to express this feature, artists usually pause for a while after singing this tone, which means a rest on sheet music. In addition, as Yin Ping (阴平) tone is not so distinctive and always can be showed in a single note, this tone will not be discussed here.

4.2.2 Comparison between the Two Groups on Melody

The song *Yi Jiang Feng* (一江风) from the scene *Open the Envelope* (拆书), a part of the play *The Story of the Western Chamber* (西楼记) will be analyzed here to tell the inheritance of traditional rules by the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society. The sheet music of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera

Troupe can be found in their textbook *Zhenfei Music Scripts* (振飞曲谱), and the one of the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society is recorded in the book *Collection of China's Opera Music: Jiangsu Province* (中国戏曲音乐集成·江苏卷). Among lyrics of the song, even though “Qiao (桥)” and “Shui (谁)” are Yang Ping (阳平) tones, which should be sung as “↗” originally, since “Q” (/tɕʰ) and “Sh” (/ʃ/) are voiced sounds (浊音), they could also be sung as “↘↗” (Yu, 1982) and deemed following traditional rules.

Table 4. Comparison of melodies' observance of lyrics' tonal values' changing trends between Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Shanghai Kunqu Study Society in the song “Yi Jiang Feng” (一江风)

	Yang Ping (阳平)	Yin Shang (阴上) Yang Shang (阳上)	Yin Qu (阴去) Yang Qu (阳去)	Yin Ru (阴入) Yang Ru (阳入)	Total
Characters	16	8	12	2	38
Version 1	14	4	11	0	29
Observance 1	88%	50%	92%	0%	76%
Version 2	12	8	12	1	33
Observance 2	75%	100%	100%	50%	87%

Note. Version 1 is from the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe. Observance 1 means Version 1's observance of traditional rules. Observance 1 = Version 1 / Characters. Version 2 is from the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society. Observance 2 means Version 2's observance of traditional rules. Observance 2 = Version 2 / Characters.

As Table 4 shows, except in Yang Ping (阳平) tone, Observance 2 is higher than Observance 1, which means in terms of melody, the non-professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, sung lyrics of the song *Yi Jiang Feng* (一江风) in line with traditional rules generally at a higher degree than the professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe. The Shanghai Kunqu Study Society inherits more tradition of Kunqu Opera in the aspect of melody.

4.3 Literary Form of Lyrics (Qupai Style)

Differences in lyrics between the two groups are limited. The song *Yi Jiang Feng* (一江风) is taken as an example here. The following is its translation, and the Chinese version is from the book *Jicheng Music Scripts* (集成曲谱), which was first published in 1925 by The Commercial Press and widely considered as conforming to rules of qupai style then.

Table 5. Translation of Lyrics of the song Yi Jiang Feng (一江风)

Sentence	Chinese	English
1	意阑珊	I feel very sad.
2	几度荒茶饭	I even lost my appetite.
3	坐起惟长叹	I could only sigh long and heavily.
4	记西楼	I still remember that day in western chamber.
5	唤转声声	She sang beautifully.
6	扶病而歌	Even though she was ill.
7	遂把红丝绡	We fell in love with each other.
8	蓝桥咫尺间	We were so close.
9	蓝桥咫尺间	We were so close.
10	谁知风浪翻	How could we know there came a bolt from the blue suddenly!
11	常言好事多磨难	Well, as the saying goes that the road to happiness is full of hardships.

In the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe's version, only one character “Huan (唤)”, the first one in sentence 5, is replaced by “Wan (宛)”, the other lyrics are the same as *Jicheng Music Scripts*. And the same as “Huan (唤)”, “Wan (宛)” is an oblique tone (仄声) as well. In short, sentence 5 was revised according to traditional rules of qupai style.

In the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society's version, only one character “Ta (他)” is added at the beginning of sentence 6, the other contents are all the same as *Jicheng Music Scripts*. In Kunqu Opera, the adding of characters especially at the beginning of a sentence is acceptable for the purpose of expressing strong emotion (Yu, 2016). In other words, the singer changed sentence 6 based on traditional rules of qupai style.

To sum up, the two groups both inherit tradition about literary form of lyrics faithfully.

4.4 Performing Scenes

Generally speaking, nowadays professional groups and non-professional ones have different performing scenes.



Figure 4. A general performing scene of professional Kunqu Opera groups, a screenshot of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe

Source: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1qK4y1U7M1/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.1



Figure 5. A general performing scene of non-professional Kunqu Opera groups, a screenshot of the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1a4411W7t6?from=search&seid=7795543738567158244>

As Figure 4 shows, professional Kunqu Opera groups, just like the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, usually perform on stage wearing costumes and make-up, while non-professional ones, as the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, normally sit around a table to sing wearing everyday clothes without make-up like Figure 5 shows. Since Kunqu Opera was born as a kind of song at the very beginning, and the majority of practitioners then were scholars and musicians who sang it together around a table (Tang, 2017), non-professional groups at present still inherit the tradition loyally.

Thanks to the further critical literary and artistic creation of this art from scholar Liang Chenyu (梁辰鱼 1521-1594), who wrote the first opera work of the musical genre, the stage-performing art Kunqu Opera started to take shape. Professional Kunqu Opera troupes also came into being later and practice the art in the same way as professional ones do nowadays (Zhou, 2009). In short, current professional groups have also inherited traditional performing scenes till now.

5. Conclusion

Non-professional groups of intangible cultural heritage have long been considered as less important than professional ones when it comes to the inheritance of tradition. However, especially for highly complicated arts, that general perception may not be the truth. In this research, an elaborate comprehensive stage-performing art Kunqu Opera, which is more than 400 years old, was taken as an example to do some comparative analyses quantitatively and qualitatively between one professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, and one non-professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, to re-recognize the importance of non-professional groups in the inheritance of tradition about pronunciation, melody, literary form of lyrics and performing scenes of this art.

For the pronunciation of Kunqu Opera, even though several dialects and some phonetic systems summarized by

a few experts of this art are acceptable, there are traditionally acknowledged standards recorded in the book *Yun Xue Li Zhu* (韵学骊珠), which was written in Qing dynasty (1644-1912) by Suzhou local Shen Chenglin (沈乘麀). In this research, eight differently pronounced Chinese characters between the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society in three songs—*Yi Jiang Feng* (一江风) from the play *The Story of the Western Chamber* (西楼记), *Tai Shi Yin* (太师引) from the play *The Story of the Golden Bird* (金雀记) and *Yan Zi Le* (颜子乐) from the play *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭)—were checked against the pronunciation in *Yun Xue Li Zhu*. As a result, the non-professional group pronounced 100% in line with traditional standards. In contrast, the professional group pronounced 100% the same as modern Mandarin, which is obviously divergent from traditional standards. Therefore, it can be concluded that the non-professional group inherits more tradition in the pronunciation of Kunqu Opera than the professional one, which modernized its pronunciation.

About the melody (kunqiang) of this art, as the father of Kunqu Opera, Wei Liangfu (魏良辅 1489-1586), once pointed out that melody should change in accordance with lyrics' tones, which means musical pitch should fluctuate along with the changing of lyrics' tonal values. In this paper, melodies of the song *Yi Jiang Feng* (一江风) in two versions, professional and non-professional ones, were examined to confirm their observance of traditional rules. Except for the tone Yang Ping (阳平), melodies in the non-professional version abide by traditional practice at a larger degree than the ones in the professional version: 100% > 50% in tones Yin Shang (阴上) and Yang Shang (阳上), 100% > 92% in tones Yin Qu (阴去) and Yang Qu (阳去), 50% > 0% in tones Yin Ru (阴入) and Yang Ru (阳入). Thus, the non-professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society inherits more tradition of Kunqu Opera in the aspect of melody than the professional group.

Speaking of the opera's literary form of lyrics (qupai style), the two versions both have minor changes compared to a version published in 1925 in *Jicheng Music Scripts* (集成曲谱), which was widely considered as conforming to rules of qupai style then. However, these changes all observe rules of the literary style not only in tones but also in sentence structures. In short, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society both inherit the tradition of qupai style faithfully.

As to performing scenes, since the art was born as a kind of song sung by amateurs around a table originally and developed into a stage-performing art later, both the professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, which generally practices the art on stage, and the non-professional group, the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, which normally practice the art around a table, inherit the tradition of performing scenes well about this art.

In conclusion, different from general perceptions, non-professional groups of Kunqu Opera, like the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, could inherit some traditional factors of this art, especially pronunciation and melody, to a larger degree than professional ones, like the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, thus non-professional groups' importance in the inheritance of this opera should be valued for the purpose of realizing more effective safeguarding of this intangible cultural heritage.

6. Discussion

In order to confirm the results of this research, more analyses based on a larger scale of Kunqu Opera works performed by more artists from the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and other professional groups, as well as more members from the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society and other non-professional groups are necessary in the future.

Additionally, according to interviews with members of the Shanghai Kunqu Study Society, no financial pressure could be a direct reason for them to be able to respect Kunqu Opera's tradition greatly. Since they don't have to cater to the mass-market and most modern audience, who are highly influenced by modernization and globalization, to earn a living, they could feel free to preserve the traditional artistic rules they cherish heavily by studying, practicing as well as imparting them to other amateurs seriously. And further researches need to deepen current understandings about why (direct and indirect reasons) and how non-professional Kunqu Opera groups could inherit some traditional factors more faithfully than professional ones, which can be enlightening for professional ones to improve their inheritance of this heritage.

What's more, other highly complicated performing arts, like Peking Opera and Sichuan Opera for instance, also need to be analyzed on the inheritance between professional and non-professional groups in order to enhance current safeguarding practices.

As for other performing arts as well as more intangible cultural heritages, even though not every heritage has its own non-professional groups, their existence should be paid attention to seriously. And in order to safeguard intangible cultural heritages more effectively, these groups' inheritance and influence on living heritages are worth studying carefully.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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