

## An Investigation of the Musical Singing Style and Accompaniment for “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China

Yanxi Chen, Sarawut Choatchamrat, Sanchai Duangbung\*

College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Mahasarakham Province, Thailand

Corresponding author: Sanchai Duangbung, E-mail: sanchai.d@msu.ac.th

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: November 01, 2024

Accepted: March 05, 2025

Published: March 31, 2025

Volume: 13 Issue: 2

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the musical singing style and accompaniment characteristics of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao in China, along with its societal role and protection policies. As an integral part of traditional Chinese culture, Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao boasts a long history and distinctive artistic appeal. The study aims to (1) examine its historical development and influencing factors, (2) analyze its musical singing style and accompaniment characteristics, and (3) evaluate its societal significance while proposing effective preservation strategies. Through a literature review, field research, and data analysis, the findings reveal that Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao originated in Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, deeply influenced by the local social, cultural, and historical context. Its musical singing style is characterized by a beautiful melody and flexible rhythm, while its social role includes preserving and promoting traditional Chinese culture, enriching public cultural life, fostering cultural exchange, and cultivating patriotism. To ensure its sustainability, this study recommends strengthening legislative and policy support at the national level, promoting cultural and educational initiatives at the societal level, and fostering a new generation of Pingtan artists to enhance artistic inheritance and innovation.

**Key words:** Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, Musical Singing Style, Accompaniment Characteristics, Social Role

## INTRODUCTION

### Research Background

Suzhou Pingtan is a general term for Suzhou Pinghua and Suzhou Tanci, a traditional form of storytelling drama that uses the Wu dialect to narrate stories. Pinghua is commonly referred to as the “big book,” while Tanci is known as the “small book” (Zhang & Karin, 2023). Originating and gaining popularity in the Wu dialect-speaking regions, including southeastern Jiangsu, northern Zhejiang, and Shanghai, Suzhou Pingtan took shape during the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty. It encompasses Tanci (which integrates speaking, singing, and instrumental accompaniment) and Pinghua (which consists solely of speaking without singing), both of which were popular during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Commonly recognized as a form of storytelling, Suzhou Pingtan is a traditional folk art performed in the Suzhou dialect and is often referred to as the “flower of Jiangnan folk art” (Zhang & Karin, 2024).

Over time, Suzhou Pingtan evolved into various schools, one of which is the female Pingtan School “Li Diao,” established in the 1950s. The performance techniques and artistic innovations of “Li Diao” marked a significant departure from previous Pingtan traditions (Zhou, 2007). The renowned Pingtan artist Xu Lixian played a pivotal role in shaping “Li

Diao” by incorporating elements from other Pingtan schools and integrating musical influences from related art forms, leading to a refined and distinctive musical style (Li et al., 2024). Xu Lixian’s musical designs introduced modern elements such as choruses and duets, enhancing the musical singing characteristics of “Li Diao” and making it a model for many contemporary artists.

Pingtan in Suzhou, China, is a form of folk art with a rich history and deep cultural significance, while “Li Diao” stands as an important musical style within Pingtan. Created by Xu Lixian in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, “Li Diao” is distinguished by its unique musical characteristics and singing techniques. The melody of “Li Diao” is expressive, beautifully intricate, and emotionally evocative. In terms of singing techniques, it emphasizes vocal softness and emotional expression, with artists employing real-to-falsetto transitions and delicate emotional nuances to convey meaning. Additionally, “Li Diao” is performed in the Wu dialect, giving it a strong regional identity.

The instrumental accompaniment in Pingtan primarily includes traditional instruments such as the Pipa, Sanxian, and Erhu. In “Li Diao” performances, accompaniment is typically delicate and harmonized with the singing, rather than overpowering it. The instrumental techniques used include

plucking, picking, rolling, and kneading, producing diverse musical effects. The accompaniment arrangement in “Li Diao” is relatively simple, designed to complement and enhance the vocal performance rather than compete with it (He & Sornyai, 2023). The musical characteristics of “Li Diao” are particularly notable for their smooth, melodious structure and well-organized musical form. For example, compositions such as “Sigh” and “New Mulan Ci,” created by Xu Lixian, exhibit layered melody structures and climactic progression. Unlike traditional Pingtan singing, which allows for improvised melodic variations, “Li Diao” follows a fixed tune and musical score, incorporating ornamental flourishes that create a rich and aesthetically appealing sound.

The artistic contributions of Xu Lixian elevated “Li Diao” to a high level of musical aesthetics, characterized by euphemistic expression, refreshing melodies, and musical fluidity. This style has not only gained widespread admiration among Pingtan audiences and performers but has also been praised within the music community (Bender, 1998). The fixed structure and embellishment techniques of “Li Diao” differentiate it from traditional Pingtan singing, which is more adaptable to the demands of narration. The three-sighs-in-one singing technique and ornamental phrasing in “Li Diao” create a harmonious blend of high-pitched intensity and soft elegance, offering listeners a unique musical aesthetic experience.

Suzhou Pingtan, which originated in Suzhou, is widely performed across the Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai regions. However, due to dialect limitations, its reach was historically confined to a small geographical area, spanning Jiaying in the south to Wujin in the north (Yu, 2024), the heart of the Wu-speaking Jiangnan region. In recent years, the advancement of the Internet and digital media has significantly impacted the dissemination of Suzhou Pingtan, including “Li Diao.” Once a dominant cultural influence in the Yangtze River Delta region, its audience base has dwindled due to shifting media consumption habits. Furthermore, the increasing diversity of artistic and cultural preferences among younger generations—particularly those born in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s—has led to a decline in the Pingtan market and a loss of skilled performers, posing a serious challenge to the preservation and continuation of Suzhou Pingtan and “Li Diao.”

### Research Objectives

1. To examine the historical development and performance forms of “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China.
2. To analyze the musical singing style and instrumental accompaniment of “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China.
3. To explore the social role and preservation strategies of “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China.

### Research Questions

1. What are the background and influencing factors in the historical development of “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China?
2. What are the musical singing styles and accompaniment characteristics of “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China?

3. What is the societal role of “Pingtan Li Diao” in Suzhou, China, and how can effective preservation policies be developed?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the aesthetics of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao by reviewing relevant literature to gather the most comprehensive information for this thesis. The literature review includes an analysis of various documents as follows.

#### General Knowledge of Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, China

Jiangsu Province, as a cultural powerhouse, has a profound historical heritage and rich regional cultures, including Wu Culture, Jinling Culture, Huaiyang Culture, and Chu-Han Culture. The province, with a permanent population of 85.15 million as of 2022 (Xue, 2021), is home to 13 national historical and cultural cities, reflecting its deep historical and artistic traditions. The establishment of Jiangsu dates back to the early Qing Dynasty, and its name derives from Jiangning Prefecture and Suzhou Prefecture. The region has played a crucial role in the birth and development of Chinese civilization, contributing significantly to various forms of traditional art.

Suzhou, a major city in Jiangsu Province, historically known as Gusu and Pingjiang, is a key cultural and economic center in the Yangtze River Delta region. It has a permanent population of 12.911 million, with an urbanization rate of 82.12% as of 2022 (Li, 2017). Suzhou’s historical depth and artistic heritage have made it a major hub for traditional Chinese storytelling arts, particularly Pingtan. With its unique folk customs and deep-rooted cultural traditions, Suzhou provides rich creative resources for Suzhou Pingtan, enhancing its local identity and artistic significance. Additionally, the close connection between Jiangsu’s cultural treasures and traditional music ensures that Suzhou Pingtan continues to evolve while preserving its authenticity. This relationship between regional history, folklore, and musical performance highlights the cultural value and artistic richness of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, making it a distinctive and significant traditional art form.

#### General Knowledge of Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, China

Jiangsu Province, as a cultural powerhouse, has a profound historical heritage and rich regional cultures, including Wu Culture, Jinling Culture, Huaiyang Culture, and Chu-Han Culture. The province, with a permanent population of 85.15 million as of 2022 (Xue, 2021), is home to 13 national historical and cultural cities, reflecting its deep historical and artistic traditions. The establishment of Jiangsu dates back to the early Qing Dynasty, and its name derives from Jiangning Prefecture and Suzhou Prefecture. The region has played a crucial role in the birth and development of Chinese civilization, contributing significantly to various forms of traditional art.

Suzhou, a major city in Jiangsu Province, historically known as Gusu and Pingjiang, is a key cultural and economic center in the Yangtze River Delta region. It has a permanent population of 12.911 million, with an urbanization rate of 82.12% as of 2022 (Li, 2017). Suzhou's historical depth and artistic heritage have made it a major hub for traditional Chinese storytelling arts, particularly Pingtan. With its unique folk customs and deep-rooted cultural traditions, Suzhou provides rich creative resources for Suzhou Pingtan, enhancing its local identity and artistic significance. Additionally, the close connection between Jiangsu's cultural treasures and traditional music ensures that Suzhou Pingtan continues to evolve while preserving its authenticity. This relationship between regional history, folklore, and musical performance highlights the cultural value and artistic richness of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, making it a distinctive and significant traditional art form (Beibei, 2024). Figure 1 shows the map of Jiangsu Province.

### Overview of Suzhou Pingtan

Suzhou Pingtan is a local storytelling and musical performance art that originated in Suzhou, utilizing the Wu dialect to narrate stories through two distinct forms: Suzhou Pinghua (spoken storytelling without singing) and Suzhou Tanci (a combination of speaking, singing, and instrumental accompaniment). The two art forms are collectively known as Pingtan, a standardized term that emerged due to their close historical and artistic connections (Lin, 2016). While Suzhou Pinghua predominantly recounts grand historical events such as wars and dynastic changes, earning it the nickname "big book," Suzhou Tanci focuses on more personal and emotional narratives, often revolving around love and moral restoration, making it the "small book" in comparison. As an auditory and folk art, Pingtan is performed in bookstores, book halls, or book gardens, where storytellers, regardless of gender, are respectfully referred to as "Mr. Storyteller."

The distinction of "Suzhou Pingtan" from other regional forms of Pinghua and Tanci is essential, as similar genres exist in places such as Yangzhou, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Changsha, and Guizhou. The term "Suzhou Pingtan" was officially adopted to prevent ambiguity and establish it as a unique genre (Lin, 2016). The close integration of Suzhou Pinghua and Suzhou Tanci developed due to their shared use of the Suzhou dialect, common performance spaces, and guild-based organizational structures, all of which contributed to their fusion into a single artistic tradition. This connection was further institutionalized after the founding



Figure 1. Map of Jiangsu Province (Rodman, 2023)

of the People's Republic of China, when the government's cultural department formally grouped them under the unified term "Suzhou Pingtan" and established professional ensembles such as the Suzhou Pingtan Troupe, Shanghai Pingtan Troupe, and Jiangsu Pingtan Troupe (Ma et al., 2021). This consolidation ensured the systematic preservation, promotion, and continued evolution of Suzhou Pingtan as a recognized and influential cultural art form.

### Genres and Li Diao in Suzhou Pingtan

Suzhou Pingtan is a traditional storytelling and musical art form that combines Pinghua (spoken storytelling) and Tanci (a combination of singing, speaking, and instrumental accompaniment), performed in the Suzhou dialect. Over time, Suzhou Pingtan has evolved into multiple distinct musical genres, including Ma Diao, Xu Diao, Shen Xue Diao, Yu Diao, Zhou Diao, Yang Diao, and Li Diao. Among these, Ma Diao is the most widely spread, known for its rhythmic chanting rather than its musicality. Xu Diao introduces a balance of real and falsetto voices, while Shen Diao and Xi Diao emphasize clarity, articulation, and contrasting vocal styles. Other genres, such as Zhou Diao and Yu Diao, incorporate melodic ornamentations, while Yang Diao utilizes dramatic vocal variations and a free-flowing structure (Wu, 2013).

One of the most significant developments in Pingtan music is the emergence of Li Diao, a female Tanci genre formed in the 1950s by Xu Lixian. Compared to earlier singing styles, Li Diao introduced major innovations in vocal techniques, musical arrangement, and expressive elements. Xu Lixian blended traditional Pingtan structures with influences from folk songs, opera, and modern musical elements such as choral singing and duets, creating a distinct and influential musical identity (Wu, 2013). The expressive depth of Li Diao, particularly its ability to shape female characters in performance, has made it one of the most studied Pingtan genres.

The development of Li Diao was deeply influenced by social and political changes in China. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government sought to reform and standardize traditional arts, leading to the establishment of official Pingtan troupes and the increased status of female Pingtan artists (He, 2011). These reforms transformed Pingtan artists from mere entertainers into "socialist literary and art workers," elevating their professional and social standing. Xu Lixian's contributions to Pingtan during this period were critical, as she pioneered innovative musical techniques and introduced themes reflecting tragedy, femininity, and societal struggles, deeply aligning her work with the aesthetics of Chinese tragic literature (Chen, 1987; Wang, 2009).

The artistic legacy of Li Diao, particularly through Xu Lixian's performances and compositions, continues to influence modern Pingtan music. Many of her works, including "New Mulan Ci," "Poems on Red Leaves," and "Daiyu Buries Flowers," embody a melancholic and deeply expressive musical style, which has become a defining characteristic of Li Diao (Wang, 2009). As a result, Li Diao remains one of the most significant and enduring genres in the Suzhou



Pingtan tradition, continuing to inspire new generations of artists and audiences.

### **Theory Used in Research**

The analysis of Li Diao in this study is grounded in three primary theoretical frameworks: Western music analysis theory, ethnomusicology, and aesthetics of singing characteristics. Western music analysis theory emphasizes fundamental musical elements such as melody and rhythm, examining the horizontal progression of melodies and the vertical relationships within harmonic and rhythmic structures (Wang, 2005; Wu, 2011). This approach is essential in understanding Li Diao’s unique melodic construction and rhythmic flow.

Ethnomusicology, as an interdisciplinary field, explores the relationship between music and culture, incorporating perspectives from both musicology and ethnology (Merriam, 1964). This framework is particularly relevant in analyzing Li Diao’s cultural connotations, historical influences, and its integration with folk traditions (Wu, 2011).

Additionally, the aesthetics of singing characteristics provides insight into the expressive and artistic aspects of Li Diao, focusing on the emotional depth, ornamental techniques, and performance aesthetics that define its unique singing style. This perspective highlights the interaction between performers and audiences and the symbolic meanings embedded in musical expressions (Wu, 2011).

By integrating these three theoretical perspectives, this study offers a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of Li Diao, examining its structural, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions to better understand its artistic value and significance in Suzhou Pingtan.

### **Documents and Related Studies**

Existing research on Li Diao in Suzhou Pingtan covers a wide range of academic perspectives, primarily focusing on its musical skills, artistic characteristics, vocal techniques, and processes of transmission and innovation. Studies on the musical techniques of Li Diao highlight the evolution of its melody, rhythmic variations, and fusion with other singing styles. Researchers such as Shi (2016), Zhang (2015), and Webster-Cheng (2008) emphasize how Xu Lixian, the creator of Li Diao, incorporated diverse musical influences, reshaping traditional Tanci by introducing chanting and allegro-style folk elements, thereby making Li Diao distinct from earlier Pingtan genres.

From an artistic perspective, scholars including Pan (2014), Pan (2014), and Wu (2013) analyze the aesthetic elements of Li Diao, noting its delicate yet expressive melodic structure, deep emotional appeal, and innovative use of accompaniment. These studies indicate that Li Diao’s unique singing techniques, such as rhythmic variations and ornamentation, set it apart as a modernized Pingtan genre while maintaining traditional storytelling aesthetics.

Research on Li Diao’s vocal techniques (Chen & Wu, 1990; Lian, 1994; Zhang, 1982) reveals that Xu Lixian carefully designed vocal accents and inflections to enhance emotional expressiveness and narrative depth. The integration of

traditional Suzhou dialect phonetics with Li Diao’s unique melodic phrasing further distinguishes it from other Tanci schools. Studies on Li Diao’s transmission and innovation (Witzleben, 1987; Zhou, 2000) discuss how Li Diao’s influence extends beyond Pingtan, inspiring adaptations in other performance arts, including Erhu compositions and contemporary Pingtan works.

While academic research on Li Diao is extensive, most existing studies focus primarily on its musical structure, technical aspects, and historical development. However, research on the aesthetics of Li Diao—particularly its emotional depth, audience perception, and cultural symbolism—remains largely unexplored. Future studies should aim to bridge this gap by examining Li Diao’s aesthetic significance and its role in shaping the artistic identity of contemporary Pingtan.

### **METHOD**

This study employs a comprehensive research methodology that includes site selection, key informant interviews, music selection, data collection, and analysis to examine the historical development, musical characteristics, and societal role of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao. The research is conducted within the timeframe of December 2022 to July 2023, using Suzhou, China, as the primary research site due to its rich Pingtan heritage. Key informants, including renowned Pingtan artists and educators, provide expert insights into the art form. The selection of representative musical pieces is guided by expert recommendations, ensuring the inclusion of traditional, North-South tunes, and songs that integrate local Suzhou musical characteristics. Research tools include interviews, field observations, and multimedia recordings, supplemented by a structured interview form to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection follows three main objectives: (1) literature research to trace historical development, (2) in-depth interviews and observations to analyze the musical singing style and accompaniment, and (3) expert consultations to evaluate Li Diao’s societal impact and preservation strategies. The collected data is managed through handwritten records, digital archives, and audio-visual recordings and analyzed using a categorical classification approach. The study’s findings are presented in data proportions, complemented by relevant theoretical discussions. The research is structured across seven chapters, covering the introduction, literature review, research methodology, musical components, aesthetic analysis, societal role and preservation strategies, and conclusions. This methodological approach ensures a holistic understanding of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, integrating historical, musical, and socio-cultural perspectives.

### **RESULTS**

This section presents the research findings on Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, focusing on its historical evolution, performance forms, musical characteristics, and broader cultural significance. Through an in-depth analysis of historical records, music theory, and performance practices, this study

highlights the contributions of key figures, particularly Xu Lixian, in shaping and modernizing the genre while overcoming societal barriers. The historical development of Pingtan Li Diao is explored by tracing its origins and transformation across different periods, with special attention to the challenges faced by female artists in a traditionally male-dominated field. The musical characteristics of Pingtan Li Diao are analyzed through four representative pieces—"Chai Toufeng (钗头凤)," "Jia (家)," "Tan Qinshui He (探清水河)," and "Qin Huai Jing (秦淮景)"—examining their melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, vocal techniques, and instrumental accompaniment. The study also discusses the social role of Pingtan Li Diao as a medium for cultural preservation, public engagement, and national identity formation. Lastly, protection policies for this intangible cultural heritage are evaluated, considering governmental support, community participation, and individual contributions, with recommendations for sustainable development and transmission in the modern era.

### The Historical Development and Performance Forms of "Pingtan Li Diao" in Suzhou, China

Xu Lixian, the founder of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, demonstrated exceptional musical talent and perseverance, shaping a distinctive "Li Diao" singing style that has become a remarkable contribution to Chinese folk art culture. The performance form of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao integrates the essence of traditional Chinese culture with the regional characteristics of Jiangnan water towns, creating a unique artistic expression. It features various traditional Chinese instruments, including the pipa, sanxian, erhu, and yueqin, which enhance its rich musical texture and expressive depth.

#### *The founder of suzhou pingtan li diao*

Xu Lixian, recognized as the founder of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao, played a pivotal role in shaping and modernizing this traditional art form (Figure 2). Born into poverty in 1928, she was adopted into the "Qian Family Class," a pioneering institution that trained female Pingtan artists, breaking the rigid male dominance in the Pingtan world. Despite



Figure 2. Lixian Xu

enduring rigorous training and societal discrimination, Xu Lixian's perseverance and talent enabled her to emerge as a leading performer. Before the 1940s, female Tanci artists faced strict societal restrictions and were often excluded from public performances due to deep-rooted patriarchal norms. The "Guangyu Society," a male-dominated Pingtan guild, strictly prohibited female participation, reinforcing barriers to women's entry into the field. However, the "Qian Family Class" and later the "Puyu Society" challenged these conventions, gradually securing opportunities for female artists, though they still faced oppression and exploitation within their training environments.

Xu Lixian's breakthrough came in 1945 at the age of 17, when she delivered a stunning performance of "Deep Night" on the grand stage in Suzhou, marking the beginning of her rise to prominence. Despite initially adhering to traditional Pingtan repertoires, she later embraced innovative techniques, drawing inspiration from folk songs, opera, and contemporary melodies, which ultimately led to the creation of "Li Diao"—a distinct female-led Pingtan genre. Her involvement in works such as "The Robe of the House," "Crying and Laughing Marriage," and "Baoyu Night Detective" showcased her ability to reinterpret classic narratives with emotional depth and artistic refinement.

A key aspect of Xu Lixian's artistic evolution was her exposure to diverse musical influences, including civilized drama, folk ditties, and Peking opera, which broadened her musical perspective and enriched her creative output. This multidisciplinary approach laid the foundation for her eventual establishment of "Li Diao," a genre that combined traditional Pingtan structures with modern musical elements, allowing for greater emotional expressiveness and artistic flexibility. Through her groundbreaking contributions, Xu Lixian not only revolutionized female participation in Suzhou Pingtan but also cemented her legacy as one of the most influential figures in Chinese folk music.

#### *Development of suzhou pingtan li diao*

The development of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao can be divided into three key phases: the initial period, the development period, and the boom period. During the initial period (1949–1964), after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Pingtan underwent significant government-led reforms, leading to the disbandment of traditional private Pingtan groups, including the "Qian Family Class." Despite challenges, this period was the golden era of Xu Lixian's creative work, as she developed her distinctive Li Diao singing style. With government support, she joined the Shanghai People's Pingtan Working Group in 1953, shifting from self-employment to a collective system and significantly expanding her repertoire. She integrated new themes into her performances, transitioning from traditional romantic and historical narratives to politically aligned works, such as "New Mulan Ci," which reflected the ideological transformation of Pingtan.

The development period (1964–1976) was marked by political suppression during the Cultural Revolution, leading to a forced transformation of Pingtan into "Pingge" and

“Pingxi opera,” incorporating elements of model operas. Many traditional works were banned, and folk artists faced severe restrictions. Despite the political constraints, Xu Lixian adapted to the changes, incorporating Peking opera techniques into her performances while maintaining the core expressive elements of Pingtan. However, this period significantly hindered artistic creativity and disrupted the natural evolution of Pingtan music.

The boom period (post-1976) saw a revival of traditional Pingtan following the end of the Cultural Revolution. Xu Lixian’s artistic innovation flourished once again, shifting from a melancholic singing style to a more dynamic and expressive approach. Her final works demonstrated unparalleled artistic maturity, despite her declining health. Even after being diagnosed with tongue base cancer, she refused surgery to continue performing, culminating in her final masterpiece, “Difficult to Travel,” completed from her hospital bed in 1984. Xu Lixian’s lifelong dedication to Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao established her legacy as a pioneering force in the evolution of Chinese folk music, ensuring its continuity and artistic expansion.

### **Performance forms of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao**

The performance forms of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao incorporate a diverse range of musical instruments, performer attire, and expressive techniques that together shape its unique artistic identity. The primary instruments used in Li Diao performances include the pipa, sanxian, erhu, and yueqin, each contributing distinct musical elements. The pipa, regarded as the “Father of Pingtan,” serves as the lead instrument, providing both melodic guidance and rhythmic support. The sanxian adds bright tones and strong rhythmic accents, while the erhu brings emotional depth with its soft yet expressive sound. The yueqin, one of the earliest instruments used in Pingtan, enhances the performance’s rhythmic texture. Additionally, small-sized instruments such as xiaosanxian, xiaopipa, and xiaoyueqin are often incorporated for greater flexibility and variety in musical expression.

In terms of performance presentation, Pingtan artists traditionally wear “long shirts” or “cheongsams,” maintaining an elegant and dignified appearance. Essential props such as “eye-catching fans,” “folding fans,” and “silk head handkerchiefs” are used to enhance storytelling and character portrayal. The Li Diao singing style, pioneered by Xu Lixian, is known for its ability to depict deep emotions, particularly themes of love, passion, sacrifice, and tragedy. At the same time, it incorporates elements of humor and strength, demonstrating a balance between softness and intensity. Over time, innovative attempts have expanded Li Diao’s instrumental range, integrating guzheng, guqin, da ruan, ethnic percussion, and even electronic keyboards in the 1980s. These continuous innovations suggest that, if Xu Lixian were alive today, Li Diao would likely evolve even further, embracing new musical forms and contemporary themes while preserving its rich traditional essence.

### **The Musical Singing Style and Accompaniment for “Pingtan Li Diao”**

This study employed a descriptive research method to align with the second research objective, focusing on the singing style and accompaniment of *Pingtan Li Diao*. Through fieldwork and in-depth interviews conducted in Suzhou, Jiangsu, four representative pieces were selected: “Chai Toufeng (钗头凤),” “Jia (家),” “Tan Qinshui He (探清水河),” and “Qing Huaijing (秦淮景).” A significant amount of video and audio recordings were collected for analysis, examining key aspects such as melodic structure, melodic contour, rhythmic structure, cadential patterns, vocal style, accompaniment, and the interaction between singing and instrumentation.

#### ***Chai toufeng* (钗头凤)**

The analysis of “Chai Toufeng (钗头凤)” in *Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao* highlights its rich melodic structure, intricate rhythmic patterns, expressive vocal style, and detailed accompaniment techniques. The song, rooted in a historical love story and later adapted into *Pingtan Li Diao*, follows a structured progression through multiple sections, each contributing to the narrative depth and emotional expression. Figure 3 illustrates “Chaitou Feng” Inscription at Shen Garden, Shaoxing, Zhejiang.

The melodic structure demonstrates a balance between ascending and descending lines, with variations in phrase lengths that align with the natural rhythm of the lyrics. The B Gong mode remains the tonal foundation, and cadential patterns—ranging from perfect cadences for resolution to half cadences for continuity—further shape the musical flow (Figure 4).

The vocal style is lyrical and expressive, utilizing ornamentation such as vibrato, slides, and grace notes to enhance emotional delivery. The singer employs a smooth, legato phrasing, carefully controlling dynamics to emphasize shifts in intensity (Figure 5).

The accompaniment, led by pipa and sanxian, provides harmonic and rhythmic support, ensuring a balanced interaction between the voice and instrumentation. The call-and-response patterns between the singer and instruments enhance expressive depth, while unison playing at key moments reinforces the structural coherence of the piece (Figure 6).

Overall, the performance of “Chai Toufeng” exemplifies the musical and expressive complexity of *Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao*, blending traditional aesthetics, vocal techniques, and instrumental interactions to create a compelling storytelling experience.

#### ***Jia* (家)**

The song “Jia (家)” in *Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao* embodies deep emotional themes of family duty, love, and sacrifice, reflecting the internal conflict between Confucian obligations and personal desires. The lyrics narrate the protagonist’s struggle, torn between his duty as the eldest grandson and his love for Mei, highlighting the tension between tradition and emotion, a recurring theme in *Pingtan* storytelling.





Figure 3. “Chaitou Feng” Inscription—Shen garden, Shaoxing, Zhejiang

Chaitou Feng(钹头风)

Transcription by Yanxi Chen  
from fieldwork in July 2023

♩ = 100

Tenor

Soprano

Pipa

Sanxian

Phase 1-11

Figure 4. “Chaitou Feng” Intro

Musically, “Jia” (Figure 7) follows a structured formal progression, divided into Intro, Sections A-D, and an Ending, which align with the narrative development. The melodic structure adheres to the B Gong mode pentatonic scale, maintaining stability and continuity. The melodic contour balances ascending lines to build tension and descending lines for resolution, with occasional leaps for emphasis. Rhythmic patterns remain steady and fluid, primarily utilizing eighth and quarter notes, with syncopation introducing expressive variations at key moments. Figure 8 shows “Jia” Section A.

The vocal style is highly expressive, with smooth legato phrasing, ornamentation such as grace notes and slides, and dynamic contrast to convey the emotional depth of the lyrics. The accompaniment, led by pipa and sanxian, provides harmonic and rhythmic support, reinforcing tonic and dominant relationships while maintaining a delicate balance to let the vocal line take prominence. Interaction between singing and accompaniment includes call-and-response effects, harmonic reinforcement at cadences, and unison playing for climactic resolutions. Figure 9 shows “Jia” Section B.

The ending section provides a final resolution, characterized by simplified melodic movement, a descending contour, and longer note values, reinforcing the sense of closure both musically and emotionally. Overall, “Jia” exemplifies the rich storytelling and expressive depth of *Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao*, blending traditional aesthetics, emotional intensity, and intricate musical interplay to create a compelling narrative performance.

**Tan Qin Shui He (探清水河)**

The Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao rendition of “Tan Qin Shui He (探清水河)” preserves the tragic love story of the original

2

Phase 1 Full Score Phase 2

Tenor

Soprano

Pipa

Sanxian

Phase 1

Phase 2

Figure 5. “Chaitou Feng” section A

Figure 6. “Chaitou Feng” section B

Figure 7. “Jia” section Intro

Beijing folk song while incorporating the soft and melodic Wu dialect, creating a unique artistic blend. This version enhances the narrative depth and expressive performance typical of *Pingtán*, allowing audiences to experience both the melancholy and musical beauty of the piece.

Musically, “Tan Qin Shui He” follows a structured progression, divided into Intro, Section A (repeated three times), and an Ending, all in B Gong mode, a pentatonic scale that provides tonal stability. The melodic structure is fluid and stepwise, ensuring a smooth and expressive delivery. The melodic contour gently rises and falls, mirroring the emotional intensity of the lyrics, with occasional leaps (thirds or fourths) to highlight dramatic moments. Rhythmically, the song maintains a steady pulse with eighth and quarter notes, while moments of syncopation add tension and depth, aligning with key emotional shifts in the lyrics. Figure 10 presents “Tan Qin Shui He” Section Intro.

The vocal style is lyrical and expressive, featuring legato phrasing, subtle ornamentation (grace notes, vibrato), and dynamic control to convey the emotional nuances of the story. The accompaniment, provided by pipa and sanxian, plays a supportive role, reinforcing harmonic stability and rhythmic structure while subtly interacting with the vocal

line. Call-and-response techniques between the voice and accompaniment enhance the dialogue-like performance, and dynamic coordination ensures that the accompaniment adjusts in intensity to match the singer’s emotional delivery. Figure 11 shows “Tan Qin Shui He” Section A.

The ending section provides a sense of closure, with the melody resolving on the tonic (B), using descending contours and slower rhythmic values to finalize the emotional journey. Overall, “Tan Qin Shui He” in Suzhou *Pingtán* Li Diao showcases a refined balance between storytelling, vocal expression, and instrumental support, maintaining the poetic tragedy of the original song while enriching it with the delicate artistry of Suzhou *Pingtán* performance.

### *Qin Huai Jing* (秦淮景)

The Suzhou *Pingtán* Li Diao rendition of “Qin Huai Jing (秦淮景)” is an adaptation of the Jiangnan folk tune *Wuxi Jing*, blending cultural transmission with musical innovation. This adaptation retains the essence of the original song while incorporating new contemporary meanings, depicting the historical and scenic beauty of the Qinhuai River in Nanjing. Through the expressive and refined singing style of Suzhou *Pingtán*, the piece evokes a gentle and graceful mood—melancholic yet not sorrowful—aligning with its cinematic and poetic themes. Figure 12 shows “Qin Huai Jing” Section Intro.

Structurally, “Qin Huai Jing” follows a formal progression divided into Intro, Section A (repeated), and an Ending, all set in B Gong mode, a pentatonic scale that provides tonal stability and fluidity. The melodic structure is smooth and lyrical, emphasizing stepwise motion with occasional ascensions and descensions that align with the emotional intensity of the lyrics. The rhythm remains steady, primarily relying on quarter and eighth notes, while subtle syncopations add expressive depth to key moments in the narrative. Figure 13 shows “Qin Huai Jing” Section A measures 15-20.

The vocal style in this piece is delicate and flowing, featuring legato phrasing, subtle ornamentation (grace notes,



Figure 8. “Jia” section A

Figure 9. “Jia” section B

Figure 10. “Tan Qin Shui He” section Intro

vibrato), and controlled dynamic shifts to enhance the emotional storytelling. The accompaniment, provided by pipa and sanxian, serves a harmonic and rhythmic support role, frequently mirroring the vocal melody, reinforcing cadences, and engaging in subtle call-and-response interactions.

The accompaniment adjusts dynamically to match the intensity of the vocal line, ensuring a cohesive performance. Figure 14 shows “Qin Huai Jing” Section A measures 15-34.

The ending section provides closure, with the melody resolving on the tonic (B) through descending contours

**探清水河(Tang Qin Shui He)**

Transcription by Yanxi Chen  
from fieldwork in July 2023

1

Tenor:  $\text{♩} = 120$   
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15  
 柳叶尖上尖 柳叶儿就遮满了天 在其  
 liu ye jian shangjian liu ye er ju zhe man le tian zai qi

Pipa

Sanxian

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30  
 位这个明阿公 细听我来言 咱此事哎 出在了京西蓝靛厂啊  
 wei zhe ge ming a gong xi ting wo lai yan na ci shi ai chu zai le jing xi lan dian chang a

2

31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45  
 蓝靛厂火器营 有一个宋老三  
 lan dian chang huo qi yin you yi gesong lao san

Figure 11. “Tan Qin Shui He” section A

**秦淮景 (Qin Huai Jing)**

Transcription by Yanxi Chen  
from fieldwork in July 2023

soprano:  $\text{♩} = 100$   
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12  
 我有一段情 呀 唱给那诸公  
 wo you yi duanqing ya chang gei na zhu.gong

Pipa

Sanxian

Figure 12. “Qin Huai Jing” section Intro

and slowed rhythmic values, reinforcing the reflective and poetic nature of the piece. Overall, “Qin Huai Jing” in Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao successfully blends traditional folk

influences with the refined artistry of Pingtan performance, preserving its historical significance while delivering an immersive musical and emotional experience.

2

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

soprano: 听 ting 诸公 zhu gong 各位 ge wei 静呀 jing ya 静静 jing jing 心呀 xin ya 让我么 rang wo me

pipa:

Sanxian:

Figure 13. “Qin Huai Jing” section A measures 15-20

2

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

soprano: 听 ting 诸公 zhu gong 各位 ge wei 静呀 jing ya 静静 jing jing 心呀 xin ya 让我么 rang wo me

pipa:

Sanxian:

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36

soprano: 唱一支秦淮景 ya 细细那个道 lai 唱给诸公 chang gei zhu gong

pipa:

Sanxian:

Figure 14. “Qin Huai Jing” section A measures 15-34

### The Social Role and Protection Policy of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao

Protecting and developing Suzhou Pingtan and Li Diao music requires policy support and cultural transmission at the national level, promotion and community participation at the social level, as well as individual learning and participation in performances. Through these measures, we can promote the transmission and development of Pingtan Li Diao, protect this unique art form, and make it shine with new vitality in the new era.

#### The social role of suzhou pingtan Li Diao

Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao plays a vital role in inheriting and promoting traditional Chinese culture, enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the public, fostering cultural exchange and integration, and cultivating patriotic sentiment.

#### Inheritance and promotion of traditional chinese culture

As a folk art deeply rooted in the Jiangnan region, Suzhou Pingtan embodies China’s rich cultural heritage. Its unique performance style, combining storytelling, singing, acting,

and instrumental accompaniment, highlights the artistic creativity and aesthetic beauty of Chinese traditions. The diverse melodies and performance forms not only preserve history but also reflect the wisdom and artistry of the Chinese people.

#### Enrichment of public cultural life

Pingtan serves as a living cultural heritage that actively engages with audiences. Scholars and performers emphasize the importance of innovation in preserving the art form, ensuring that it adapts to contemporary tastes while maintaining its traditional essence. The integration of modern storytelling and multimedia elements has helped Pingtan attract younger audiences and sustain its relevance in modern society.

#### Promotion of cultural exchange and integration

Pingtan has become a significant medium for cultural exchange, strengthening regional and international understanding of Chinese traditions. Experts highlight how the transmission of Pingtan beyond Jiangsu contributes to cultural integration and inspires artistic innovations. As a result,



Pingtan serves not only as a bridge between generations but also as a platform for cultural dialogue, enhancing mutual appreciation and respect.

#### *Cultivation of patriotic sentiment*

Pingtan’s repertoire includes historical narratives that instill national pride and foster a deeper appreciation of China’s cultural and historical legacy. Through storytelling, audiences gain insight into patriotic themes, national defense awareness, and the resilience of the Chinese people. Moreover, Pingtan plays a role in reinforcing core socialist values, contributing to cultural confidence and national unity.

Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao is not merely a performing art; it is a vital cultural asset that continues to shape Chinese identity. Its preservation and development rely on policy support, social participation, and artistic innovation, ensuring its lasting significance in the cultural landscape of China and beyond.

#### **Protection policy for Suzhou pingtan Li Diao**

The protection and development of Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao require a multi-level approach encompassing national policy support, social participation, and individual commitment.

#### *National level*

The government plays a crucial role in safeguarding Pingtan Li Diao through policy formulation, financial support, and cultural transmission initiatives. Policies should focus on encouraging innovation while preserving traditional aesthetics, supporting research institutions, and providing funding for artists. Additionally, the integration of Pingtan into the education system can foster a new generation of artists and audiences. Intellectual property protection must be strengthened to safeguard artistic creations, ensuring legal frameworks support the rights of Pingtan performers and composers. International cultural exchanges further enhance Pingtan’s global visibility, fostering mutual appreciation of traditional arts.

#### *Social level*

Public awareness and appreciation of Pingtan Li Diao can be strengthened through social media, television, and cultural events. Community participation, such as organizing performances, lectures, and workshops in schools and cultural centers, helps bring the art form closer to the people. Enterprises also play a significant role in supporting Pingtan by funding performances, organizing cultural events, and developing innovative business models that integrate Pingtan into modern entertainment formats.

#### *Individual level*

The survival of Pingtan Li Diao depends on passionate individuals who actively engage in learning, performing, and promoting the art. Aspiring artists should pursue systematic

training and immerse themselves in both traditional and innovative performance techniques. Participation in performances not only hones skills but also ensures that Pingtan continues to reach new audiences. Promotion through social media and real-life interactions further enhances awareness and appreciation, keeping Pingtan relevant in contemporary society.

Protecting Suzhou Pingtan Li Diao requires a collaborative effort from governments, communities, enterprises, and individuals. With comprehensive policy support, cultural promotion, and active participation, Pingtan Li Diao can continue to thrive in the modern era, preserving its artistic essence while adapting to new social and technological landscapes.

## **DISCUSSION**

The artistic characteristics of Li Diao in Suzhou Pingtan are defined by its melodious and fluid nature, reflecting the elegance of Jiangnan’s water towns. Its rhythm blends traditional patterns with flexible improvisation, adding liveliness and dynamic expression to performances (Zhang & Karin, 2024). The timbre of Li Diao is enriched by the distinct sounds of Pingtan instruments, such as the crisp plucking of the Sanxian and Pipa, the soft resonance of the Dongxiao, and the expressive vocal techniques of Pingtan artists. Together, these elements create the unique charm of Li Diao, making it a crucial part of Jiangnan culture and an integral component of Suzhou Pingtan (Shi, 2016).

Musically, Li Diao stands out due to its use of the Suzhou dialect, which enhances the lyrical expressiveness and regional authenticity of the performance. Its singing style is characterized by intricate vocal embellishments, delicate phrasing, and dynamic variations, showcasing the technical finesse of Pingtan artists. Performance-wise, Li Diao combines vocal artistry with expressive body language, making it not just a musical experience but also a visually engaging art form. The strong sense of authenticity in its delivery further amplifies its artistic impact, reinforcing the deep emotional connections between the performer and the audience (Bender, 1999).

Beyond its artistic and musical significance, Li Diao plays a vital role in preserving and promoting traditional Chinese culture. It contributes to enriching public cultural life, fostering cross-cultural exchange, and cultivating a sense of national identity and patriotism. To safeguard this invaluable intangible heritage, researchers advocate for comprehensive protection measures, including stronger legal frameworks, increased financial and institutional support, educational initiatives, and talent cultivation programs. By implementing these strategies, Li Diao can continue to thrive in modern society, ensuring that its artistic and cultural legacy remains a vibrant part of China’s musical and historical heritage (Zhang & Karin, 2023).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explores Suzhou Pingtan’s Li Diao, focusing on its artistic composition, music theory, social functions, and

protection strategies. Li Diao is distinguished by its smooth melodies, flexible rhythms, intricate timbres, and expressive performance techniques that emphasize emotional authenticity. The use of the Suzhou dialect enhances its lyrical richness, while its integration of traditional and modern musical elements reflects its evolving artistic vitality. Beyond its musical significance, Li Diao plays a vital role in preserving Chinese cultural heritage, enriching public life, fostering cultural exchange, and cultivating patriotism. To ensure its preservation, this study proposes a three-tiered approach: national-level policy and financial support, societal promotion through education and public engagement, and individual efforts in talent cultivation and artistic innovation. These measures will help sustain Li Diao as a living cultural tradition while adapting it to contemporary audiences.

## RECOMMENDATION

### National Level

It is recommended to strengthen the protection and support of Suzhou Pingtan's Li Diao art by formulating relevant policies and regulations, providing financial and resource support, and organizing nationwide promotional activities.

### Societal Level

Encouraging all sectors of society to participate in the preservation and transmission of *Li Diao* is essential. This can be achieved through organizing seminars, workshops, and training courses, as well as promoting interdisciplinary collaborative research.

### Personal Level

Pingtan artists and enthusiasts are encouraged to actively engage in the transmission and practice of *Li Diao*, continuously enhance their artistic skills, and nurture a new generation of *Li Diao* performers.

In conclusion, as an integral part of China's rich traditional culture, the aesthetic value of Suzhou Pingtan's *Li Diao* music requires further exploration and preservation. It is hoped that the findings and discussions of this study will provide valuable insights for the continued transmission and development of *Li Diao*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As our time at this school comes to an end, we reflect on a journey filled with both challenges and joy, and we are deeply grateful to those who have supported us along the way. First and foremost, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our mentor, whose academic rigor, invaluable guidance, and unwavering encouragement have profoundly shaped our learning experience. We are also immensely thankful to our families, whose love and support have been our greatest strength, and to our friends and classmates, who have walked this path with us, offering their kindness and camaraderie. Additionally, we appreciate the school and its staff

for providing an enriching learning environment that has allowed us to grow academically and personally. The completion of this thesis is not the end but a new beginning, and we will continue to strive forward with dedication and perseverance. To all who have accompanied, encouraged, and supported us, we sincerely thank you.

## REFERENCES

- Beibei, H. (2024). Research on Jiangnan folk music elements in contemporary ethnic instrumental music. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 6(4), 62-70. <https://doi.org/10.25236/FAR.2024.060411>
- Bender, M. (1998). *Suzhou pingtan wenxuan, disan ce* [Selected writings on Suzhou Pingtan storytelling, Volume Three]. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1178767>
- Bender, M. (1999). Shifting and performance in Suzhou Chantefable. In V. Boerdahl (Ed.), *The eternal storyteller: Oral literature in modern China* (pp. 181-196). Taylor & Francis.
- Chen, S. (1987). The development of refrains in "Li Diao". *Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts (Music and Performance Edition)*, 2, 20-25.
- Chen, S., & Wu, S. (1990). Xu Lixian, founder of Pingtan "Li Diao." *Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts (Music and Performance Edition)*, 3, 53-54, 57.
- He, Q. (2011). High ranking party bureaucrats and oral performing literature: The case of Chen Yun and Pingtan in the People's Republic of China. *CHINOPEL*, 30(1), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1179/chi.2011.30.1.77>
- He, X., & Sornyai, P. (2023). *Analysis of Nanying performance art in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China* (Doctoral dissertation, Mahasarakham University).
- Li, J. (2017). *Suzhou city situation research: 2015-2016*. Suzhou University Press.
- Li, Y. K., Loo, F. C., Osman, S., & Yao, P. Y. (2024). Exploring the multidimensional construction of cultural identity through music elements of Chinese Suzhou Pingtan. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(6). <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i6/21585>
- Lian, B. (1994). In memory of Tanci artist Xu Lixian. *People's Music*, 21, 48-49.
- Lin, Q. (2016). *Research on Suzhou suburban dialects*. Suzhou University Press.
- Ma, Y., Pan, J., & Ke, J. (2021). *Suzhou Wu cultural place names protection list*. Suzhou University Press.
- Merriam, A. P. (1964). *The anthropology of music*. Northwestern University Press.
- Pan, S. (2014). "Beautiful Tune" is a piece of music. *Chinese Actors*, 41 (5), 37-38.
- Pan, X. (2014). Analysis of Xu Lixian and the art of "Li Diao." *Journal of Suzhou Institute of Education*, 04, 40-44.
- Rodman. (2023). *中国地图矢量AI和PSD空白版*. <https://www.91dangke.com/design/6PJ0oV.html>
- Shi, Y. (2016). *Performing local identity in a contemporary urban society: A study of Ping-tan narrative*

- vocal tradition in Suzhou, China [Doctoral dissertation]. Durham University.
- Wang, J. (2009). “New Mulan Ci,” the opening chapter of the “Li Diao” classic *Hua Mulan Pingtan*. *Shanghai Drama*, 7, 46-47.
- Wang, Y., & Qiao, J. (2005). *Introduction to musicology*. Higher Education Press.
- Webster-Cheng, S. J. (2008). *Composing, revising, and performing Suzhou ballads: A study of political control and artistic freedom in Tanci, 1949–1964* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Pittsburgh.
- Witzleben, J. L. (1987). *Silk and bamboo: Jiangnan sizhu instrumental ensemble music in Shanghai*. University of Pittsburgh.
- Wu, G. (2011). *Introduction to ethnomusicology*. CNKI.
- Wu, Z. (2013). Xu Lixian: The life song of a famous Pingtan master. *Archives Spring and Autumn*, 8, 50-52.
- Xue, L. (2021). *Introduction to Jiangsu local traditional music*. Nanjing University Press.
- Yu, H. O. N. G. (2024). The evolution of mass media and Shanghai-style Suzhou Pingtan in modern Shanghai. *Journalism*, 14(4), 215-226. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2160-6579/2024.04.001>
- Zhang, H. (1982). On the music art of “Li Diao.” *People’s Music*, 7, 52-55.
- Zhang, J. (2015). Listening to “Li Diao”: Love the house and the crow—Private thoughts and monologues about “Selected Songs of Xu Lixian.” *Quyiyi*, 5, 32-34.
- Zhang, Q., & Karin, K. (2023). *The transmission process of “Suzhou Pingtan” Chinese opera in Jiangsu, China* [Doctoral dissertation]. Mahasarakham University.
- Zhang, Q., & Karin, K. (2024). Strengthening education and literacy through the transmission process of Suzhou Pingtan Chinese Opera in Jiangsu, China. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 12(1), 86-95. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.12n.1p.86>
- Zhou, L. (2000). *Suzhou Pingtan*. Suzhou University Press.
- Zhou, L. (2007). *Suzhou Pingtan art theory*. Gu Wuxuan Publishing House.